Walden, by Henry David Thoreau

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WALDEN & ON THE DUTY OF CIVIL DISOBEDIENCE

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WALDEN

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Economy

When I wrote the following pages, or rather the bulk of them, I lived alone, in the woods, a mile from any neighbor, in a house which I had built myself, on the shore of Walden Pond, in Concord, Massachusetts, and earned my living by the labor of my hands only. I lived there two years and two months. At present I am a sojourner in civilized life again.

I should not obtrude my affairs so much on the notice of my readers if very particular inquiries had not been made by my townsmen concerning my mode of life, which some would call impertinent, though they do not appear to me at all impertinent, but, considering the circumstances, very natural and pertinent. Some have asked what I got to eat; if I did not feel lonesome; if I was not afraid; and the like. Others have been curious to learn what portion of my income I devoted to charitable purposes; and some, who have large families, how many poor children I maintained. I will therefore ask those of my readers who feel no particular interest in me to pardon me if I undertake to answer some of these
questions in this book. In most books, the I, or first person, is
omitted; in this it will be retained; that, in respect to egotism,
is the main difference. We commonly do not remember that it is,
after all, always the first person that is speaking. I should not
talk so much about myself if there were anybody else whom I knew as
well. Unfortunately, I am confined to this theme by the narrowness
of my experience. Moreover, I, on my side, require of every writer,
first or last, a simple and sincere account of his own life, and not
merely what he has heard of other men's lives; some such account as
he would send to his kindred from a distant land; for if he has
lived sincerely, it must have been in a distant land to me. Perhaps
these pages are more particularly addressed to poor students. As
for the rest of my readers, they will accept such portions as apply
to them. I trust that none will stretch the seams in putting on the
clothing, for it may do good service to him whom it fits.
I would fain say something, not so much concerning the Chinese
and Sandwich Islanders as you who read these pages, who are said to
live in New England; something about your condition, especially your
outward condition or circumstances in this world, in this town, what
it is, whether it is necessary that it be as bad as it is, whether
it cannot be improved as well as not. I have travelled a good deal
in Concord; and everywhere, in shops, and offices, and fields, the
inhabitants have appeared to me to be doing penance in a thousand
remarkable ways. What I have heard of Bramins sitting exposed to
four fires and looking in the face of the sun; or hanging suspended,
with their heads downward, over flames; or looking at the heavens
over their shoulders "until it becomes impossible for them to resume
their natural position, while from the twist of the neck nothing but
liquids can pass into the stomach”; or dwelling, chained for life, at the foot of a tree; or measuring with their bodies, like caterpillars, the breadth of vast empires; or standing on one leg on the tops of pillars -- even these forms of conscious penance are hardly more incredible and astonishing than the scenes which I daily witness. The twelve labors of Hercules were trifling in comparison with those which my neighbors have undertaken; for they were only twelve, and had an end; but I could never see that these men slew or captured any monster or finished any labor. They have no friend Iolaus to burn with a hot iron the root of the hydra’s head, but as soon as one head is crushed, two spring up.

I see young men, my townsmen, whose misfortune it is to have inherited farms, houses, barns, cattle, and farming tools; for these are more easily acquired than got rid of. Better if they had been born in the open pasture and suckled by a wolf, that they might have seen with clearer eyes what field they were called to labor in. Who made them serfs of the soil? Why should they eat their sixty acres, when man is condemned to eat only his peck of dirt? Why should they begin digging their graves as soon as they are born? They have got to live a man’s life, pushing all these things before them, and get on as well as they can. How many a poor immortal soul have I met well-nigh crushed and smothered under its load, creeping down the road of life, pushing before it a barn seventy-five feet by forty, its Augean stables never cleansed, and one hundred acres of land, tillage, mowing, pasture, and woodlot! The portionless, who struggle with no such unnecessary inherited encumbrances, find it labor enough to subdue and cultivate a few cubic feet of flesh.

But men labor under a mistake. The better part of the man is
soon plowed into the soil for compost. By a seeming fate, commonly
called necessity, they are employed, as it says in an old book,
laying up treasures which moth and rust will corrupt and thieves
break through and steal. It is a fool's life, as they will find
when they get to the end of it, if not before. It is said that
Deucalion and Pyrrha created men by throwing stones over their heads
behind them:--

Inde genus durum sumus, experiensque laborum,
Et documenta damus qua simus origine nati.

Or, as Raleigh rhymes it in his sonorous way,--

"From thence our kind hard-hearted is, enduring pain and care,
Approving that our bodies of a stony nature are."

So much for a blind obedience to a blundering oracle, throwing the
stones over their heads behind them, and not seeing where they fell.
Most men, even in this comparatively free country, through mere
ignorance and mistake, are so occupied with the factitious cares and
superfluously coarse labors of life that its finer fruits cannot be
plucked by them. Their fingers, from excessive toil, are too clumsy
and tremble too much for that. Actually, the laboring man has not
leisure for a true integrity day by day; he cannot afford to sustain
the manliest relations to men; his labor would be depreciated in the
market. He has no time to be anything but a machine. How can he
remember well his ignorance -- which his growth requires -- who has
so often to use his knowledge? We should feed and clothe him
gratuitously sometimes, and recruit him with our cordials, before we
judge of him. The finest qualities of our nature, like the bloom on
fruits, can be preserved only by the most delicate handling. Yet we
do not treat ourselves nor one another thus tenderly.
Some of you, we all know, are poor, find it hard to live, are
sometimes, as it were, gasping for breath. I have no doubt that
some of you who read this book are unable to pay for all the dinners
which you have actually eaten, or for the coats and shoes which are
fast wearing or are already worn out, and have come to this page to
spend borrowed or stolen time, robbing your creditors of an hour.
It is very evident what mean and sneaking lives many of you live,
for my sight has been whetted by experience; always on the limits,
trying to get into business and trying to get out of debt, a very
ancient slough, called by the Latins aes alienum, another’s brass,
for some of their coins were made of brass; still living, and dying,
and buried by this other’s brass; always promising to pay, promising
to pay, tomorrow, and dying today, insolvent; seeking to curry
favor, to get custom, by how many modes, only not state-prison
offenses; lying, flattering, voting, contracting yourselves into a
nutshell of civility or dilating into an atmosphere of thin and
vaporous generosity, that you may persuade your neighbor to let you
make his shoes, or his hat, or his coat, or his carriage, or import
his groceries for him; making yourselves sick, that you may lay up
something against a sick day, something to be tucked away in an old
date, or in a stocking behind the plastering, or, more safely, in
the brick bank; no matter where, no matter how much or how little.
I sometimes wonder that we can be so frivolous, I may almost say, as to attend to the gross but somewhat foreign form of servitude called Negro Slavery, there are so many keen and subtle masters that enslave both North and South. It is hard to have a Southern overseer; it is worse to have a Northern one; but worst of all when you are the slave-driver of yourself. Talk of a divinity in man! Look at the teamster on the highway, wending to market by day or night; does any divinity stir within him? His highest duty to fodder and water his horses! What is his destiny to him compared with the shipping interests? Does not he drive for Squire Make-a-stir? How godlike, how immortal, is he? See how he cowers and sneaks, how vaguely all the day he fears, not being immortal nor divine, but the slave and prisoner of his own opinion of himself, a fame won by his own deeds. Public opinion is a weak tyrant compared with our own private opinion. What a man thinks of himself, that it is which determines, or rather indicates, his fate.

Self-emancipation even in the West Indian provinces of the fancy and imagination -- what Wilberforce is there to bring that about? Think, also, of the ladies of the land weaving toilet cushions against the last day, not to betray too green an interest in their fates! As if you could kill time without injuring eternity. The mass of men lead lives of quiet desperation. What is called resignation is confirmed desperation. From the desperate city you go into the desperate country, and have to console yourself with the bravery of minks and muskrats. A stereotyped but unconscious despair is concealed even under what are called the games and amusements of mankind. There is no play in them, for this comes after work. But it is a characteristic of wisdom not to do
When we consider what, to use the words of the catechism, is the chief end of man, and what are the true necessaries and means of life, it appears as if men had deliberately chosen the common mode of living because they preferred it to any other. Yet they honestly think there is no choice left. But alert and healthy natures remember that the sun rose clear. It is never too late to give up our prejudices. No way of thinking or doing, however ancient, can be trusted without proof. What everybody echoes or in silence passes by as true to-day may turn out to be falsehood to-morrow, mere smoke of opinion, which some had trusted for a cloud that would sprinkle fertilizing rain on their fields. What old people say you cannot do, you try and find that you can. Old deeds for old people, and new deeds for new. Old people did not know enough once, perchance, to fetch fresh fuel to keep the fire a-going; new people put a little dry wood under a pot, and are whirled round the globe with the speed of birds, in a way to kill old people, as the phrase is. Age is no better, hardly so well, qualified for an instructor as youth, for it has not profited so much as it has lost. One may almost doubt if the wisest man has learned anything of absolute value by living. Practically, the old have no very important advice to give the young, their own experience has been so partial, and their lives have been such miserable failures, for private reasons, as they must believe; and it may be that they have some faith left which belies that experience, and they are only less young than they were. I have lived some thirty years on this planet, and I have yet to hear the first syllable of valuable or even earnest advice from my seniors. They have told me nothing, and probably cannot tell me
anything to the purpose. Here is life, an experiment to a great extent untried by me; but it does not avail me that they have tried it. If I have any experience which I think valuable, I am sure to reflect that this my Mentors said nothing about.

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. Some things are really necessaries of life in some circles, the most helpless and diseased, which in others are luxuries merely, and in others still are entirely unknown.

The whole ground of human life seems to some to have been gone over by their predecessors, both the heights and the valleys, and all things to have been cared for. According to Evelyn, "the wise Solomon prescribed ordinances for the very distances of trees; and the Roman praetors have decided how often you may go into your neighbor's land to gather the acorns which fall on it without trespass, and what share belongs to that neighbor." Hippocrates has even left directions how we should cut our nails; that is, even with the ends of the fingers, neither shorter nor longer. Undoubtedly the very tedium and ennui which presume to have exhausted the variety and the joys of life are as old as Adam. But man's capacities have never been measured; nor are we to judge of what he can do by any precedents, so little has been tried. Whatever have been thy failures hitherto, "be not afflicted, my child, for who shall assign to thee what thou hast left undone?"
We might try our lives by a thousand simple tests; as, for
instance, that the same sun which ripens my beans illumines at once
a system of earths like ours. If I had remembered this it would
have prevented some mistakes. This was not the light in which I
hoed them. The stars are the apexes of what wonderful triangles!
What distant and different beings in the various mansions of the
universe are contemplating the same one at the same moment! Nature
and human life are as various as our several constitutions. Who
shall say what prospect life offers to another? Could a greater
miracle take place than for us to look through each other’s eyes for
an instant? We should live in all the ages of the world in an hour;
ay, in all the worlds of the ages. History, Poetry, Mythology! -- I
know of no reading of another’s experience so startling and
informing as this would be.
The greater part of what my neighbors call good I believe in my
soul to be bad, and if I repent of anything, it is very likely to be
my good behavior. What demon possessed me that I behaved so well?
You may say the wisest thing you can, old man -- you who have lived
seventy years, not without honor of a kind -- I hear an irresistible
voice which invites me away from all that. One generation abandons
the enterprises of another like stranded vessels.
I think that we may safely trust a good deal more than we do.
We may waive just so much care of ourselves as we honestly bestow
elsewhere. Nature is as well adapted to our weakness as to our
strength. The incessant anxiety and strain of some is a well-nigh
incurable form of disease. We are made to exaggerate the importance
of what work we do; and yet how much is not done by us! or, what if
we had been taken sick? How vigilant we are! determined not to live
by faith if we can avoid it; all the day long on the alert, at night
we unwillingly say our prayers and commit ourselves to
uncertainties. So thoroughly and sincerely are we compelled to
live, reverencing our life, and denying the possibility of change.
This is the only way, we say; but there are as many ways as there
can be drawn radii from one centre. All change is a miracle to
contemplate; but it is a miracle which is taking place every
instant. Confucius said, “To know that we know what we know, and
that we do not know what we do not know, that is true knowledge.”
When one man has reduced a fact of the imagination to be a fact to
his understanding, I foresee that all men at length establish their
lives on that basis.
Let us consider for a moment what most of the trouble and
anxiety which I have referred to is about, and how much it is
necessary that we be troubled, or at least careful. It would be
some advantage to live a primitive and frontier life, though in the
midst of an outward civilization, if only to learn what are the
gross necessaries of life and what methods have been taken to obtain
them; or even to look over the old day-books of the merchants, to
see what it was that men most commonly bought at the stores, what
they stored, that is, what are the grossest groceries. For the
improvements of ages have had but little influence on the essential
laws of man’s existence; as our skeletons, probably, are not to be
distinguished from those of our ancestors.
By the words, necessary of life, I mean whatever, of all that
man obtains by his own exertions, has been from the first, or from
long use has become, so important to human life that few, if any,
whether from savageness, or poverty, or philosophy, ever attempt to
do without it. To many creatures there is in this sense but one necessary of life, Food. To the bison of the prairie it is a few inches of palatable grass, with water to drink; unless he seeks the Shelter of the forest or the mountain's shadow. None of the brute creation requires more than Food and Shelter. The necessaries of life for man in this climate may, accurately enough, be distributed under the several heads of Food, Shelter, Clothing, and Fuel; for not till we have secured these are we prepared to entertain the true problems of life with freedom and a prospect of success. Man has invented, not only houses, but clothes and cooked food; and possibly from the accidental discovery of the warmth of fire, and the consequent use of it, at first a luxury, arose the present necessity to sit by it. We observe cats and dogs acquiring the same second nature. By proper Shelter and Clothing we legitimately retain our own internal heat; but with an excess of these, or of Fuel, that is, with an external heat greater than our own internal, may not cookery properly be said to begin? Darwin, the naturalist, says of the inhabitants of Tierra del Fuego, that while his own party, who were well clothed and sitting close to a fire, were far from too warm, these naked savages, who were farther off, were observed, to his great surprise, "to be streaming with perspiration at undergoing such a roasting." So, we are told, the New Hollander goes naked with impunity, while the European shivers in his clothes. Is it impossible to combine the hardiness of these savages with the intellectualness of the civilized man? According to Liebig, man's body is a stove, and food the fuel which keeps up the internal combustion in the lungs. In cold weather we eat more, in warm less. The animal heat is the result of a slow combustion, and disease and
death take place when this is too rapid; or for want of fuel, or
from some defect in the draught, the fire goes out. Of course the
vital heat is not to be confounded with fire; but so much for
analogy. It appears, therefore, from the above list, that the
expression, animal life, is nearly synonymous with the expression,
animal heat; for while Food may be regarded as the Fuel which keeps
up the fire within us -- and Fuel serves only to prepare that Food
or to increase the warmth of our bodies by addition from without --
Shelter and Clothing also serve only to retain the heat thus
generated and absorbed.
The grand necessity, then, for our bodies, is to keep warm, to
keep the vital heat in us. What pains we accordingly take, not only
with our Food, and Clothing, and Shelter, but with our beds, which
are our night-clothes, robbing the nests and breasts of birds to
prepare this shelter within a shelter, as the mole has its bed of
grass and leaves at the end of its burrow! The poor man is wont to
complain that this is a cold world; and to cold, no less physical
than social, we refer directly a great part of our ails. The
summer, in some climates, makes possible to man a sort of Elysian
life. Fuel, except to cook his Food, is then unnecessary; the sun
is his fire, and many of the fruits are sufficiently cooked by its
rays; while Food generally is more various, and more easily
obtained, and Clothing and Shelter are wholly or half unnecessary.
At the present day, and in this country, as I find by my own
experience, a few implements, a knife, an axe, a spade, a
wheelbarrow, etc., and for the studious, lamplight, stationery, and
access to a few books, rank next to necessaries, and can all be
obtained at a trifling cost. Yet some, not wise, go to the other
side of the globe, to barbarous and unhealthy regions, and devote
themselves to trade for ten or twenty years, in order that they may
live -- that is, keep comfortably warm -- and die in New England at
last. The luxuriously rich are not simply kept comfortably warm,
but unnaturally hot; as I implied before, they are cooked, of course
a la mode.
Most of the luxuries, and many of the so-called comforts of
life, are not only not indispensable, but positive hindrances to the
elevation of mankind. With respect to luxuries and comforts, the
wisest have ever lived a more simple and meagre life than the poor.
The ancient philosophers, Chinese, Hindoo, Persian, and Greek, were
a class than which none has been poorer in outward riches, none so
rich in inward. We know not much about them. It is remarkable that
we know so much of them as we do. The same is true of the more
modern reformers and benefactors of their race. None can be an
impartial or wise observer of human life but from the vantage ground
of what we should call voluntary poverty. Of a life of luxury the
fruit is luxury, whether in agriculture, or commerce, or literature,
or art. There are nowadays professors of philosophy, but not
philosophers. Yet it is admirable to profess because it was once
admirable to live. To be a philosopher is not merely to have subtle
thoughts, nor even to found a school, but so to love wisdom as to
live according to its dictates, a life of simplicity, independence,
magnanimity, and trust. It is to solve some of the problems of
life, not only theoretically, but practically. The success of great
scholars and thinkers is commonly a courtier-like success, not
kingly, not manly. They make shift to live merely by conformity,
practically as their fathers did, and are in no sense the
progenitors of a noble race of men. But why do men degenerate ever?
What makes families run out? What is the nature of the luxury which enervates and destroys nations? Are we sure that there is none of it in our own lives? The philosopher is in advance of his age even in the outward form of his life. He is not fed, sheltered, clothed, warmed, like his contemporaries. How can a man be a philosopher and not maintain his vital heat by better methods than other men?
When a man is warmed by the several modes which I have described, what does he want next? Surely not more warmth of the same kind, as more and richer food, larger and more splendid houses, finer and more abundant clothing, more numerous, incessant, and hotter fires, and the like. When he has obtained those things which are necessary to life, there is another alternative than to obtain the superfluities; and that is, to adventure on life now, his vacation from humbler toil having commenced. The soil, it appears, is suited to the seed, for it has sent its radicle downward, and it may now send its shoot upward also with confidence. Why has man rooted himself thus firmly in the earth, but that he may rise in the same proportion into the heavens above? -- for the nobler plants are valued for the fruit they bear at last in the air and light, far from the ground, and are not treated like the humbler esculents, which, though they may be biennials, are cultivated only till they have perfected their root, and often cut down at top for this purpose, so that most would not know them in their flowering season.
I do not mean to prescribe rules to strong and valiant natures, who will mind their own affairs whether in heaven or hell, and perchance build more magnificently and spend more lavishly than the richest, without ever impoverishing themselves, not knowing how they
live -- if, indeed, there are any such, as has been dreamed; nor to
those who find their encouragement and inspiration in precisely the
present condition of things, and cherish it with the fondness and
enthusiasm of lovers -- and, to some extent, I reckon myself in this
number; I do not speak to those who are well employed, in whatever
circumstances, and they know whether they are well employed or not;
-- but mainly to the mass of men who are discontented, and idly
complaining of the hardness of their lot or of the times, when they
might improve them. There are some who complain most energetically
and inconsolably of any, because they are, as they say, doing their
duty. I also have in my mind that seemingly wealthy, but most
terribly impoverished class of all, who have accumulated dross, but
know not how to use it, or get rid of it, and thus have forged their
own golden or silver fetters.

If I should attempt to tell how I have desired to spend my life
in years past, it would probably surprise those of my readers who
are somewhat acquainted with its actual history; it would certainly
astonish those who know nothing about it. I will only hint at some
of the enterprises which I have cherished.

In any weather, at any hour of the day or night, I have been
anxious to improve the nick of time, and notch it on my stick too;
to stand on the meeting of two eternities, the past and future,
which is precisely the present moment; to toe that line. You will
pardon some obscurities, for there are more secrets in my trade than
in most men's, and yet not voluntarily kept, but inseparable from
its very nature. I would gladly tell all that I know about it, and
never paint "No Admittance" on my gate.

I long ago lost a hound, a bay horse, and a turtle dove, and am
still on their trail. Many are the travellers I have spoken
concerning them, describing their tracks and what calls they
answered to. I have met one or two who had heard the hound, and the
tramp of the horse, and even seen the dove disappear behind a cloud,
and they seemed as anxious to recover them as if they had lost them
themselves.

To anticipate, not the sunrise and the dawn merely, but, if
possible, Nature herself! How many mornings, summer and winter,
before yet any neighbor was stirring about his business, have I been
about mine! No doubt, many of my townsmen have met me returning
from this enterprise, farmers starting for Boston in the twilight,
or woodchoppers going to their work. It is true, I never assisted
the sun materially in his rising, but, doubt not, it was of the last
importance only to be present at it.

So many autumn, ay, and winter days, spent outside the town,
trying to hear what was in the wind, to hear and carry it express!
I well-nigh sunk all my capital in it, and lost my own breath into
the bargain, running in the face of it. If it had concerned either
of the political parties, depend upon it, it would have appeared in
the Gazette with the earliest intelligence. At other times watching
from the observatory of some cliff or tree, to telegraph any new
arrival; or waiting at evening on the hill-tops for the sky to fall,
that I might catch something, though I never caught much, and that,
manna-wise, would dissolve again in the sun.

For a long time I was reporter to a journal, of no very wide
circulation, whose editor has never yet seen fit to print the bulk
of my contributions, and, as is too common with writers, I got only
my labor for my pains. However, in this case my pains were their
own reward.

For many years I was self-appointed inspector of snow-storms and rain-storms, and did my duty faithfully; surveyor, if not of highways, then of forest paths and all across-lot routes, keeping them open, and ravines bridged and passable at all seasons, where the public heel had testified to their utility.

I have looked after the wild stock of the town, which give a faithful herdsman a good deal of trouble by leaping fences; and I have had an eye to the unfrequented nooks and corners of the farm; though I did not always know whether Jonas or Solomon worked in a particular field to-day; that was none of my business. I have watered the red huckleberry, the sand cherry and the nettle-tree, the red pine and the black ash, the white grape and the yellow violet, which might have withered else in dry seasons.

In short, I went on thus for a long time (I may say it without boasting), faithfully minding my business, till it became more and more evident that my townsmen would not after all admit me into the list of town officers, nor make my place a sinecure with a moderate allowance. My accounts, which I can swear to have kept faithfully, I have, indeed, never got audited, still less accepted, still less paid and settled. However, I have not set my heart on that.

Not long since, a strolling Indian went to sell baskets at the house of a well-known lawyer in my neighborhood. "Do you wish to buy any baskets?" he asked. "No, we do not want any," was the reply. "What!" exclaimed the Indian as he went out the gate, "do you mean to starve us?" Having seen his industrious white neighbors so well off -- that the lawyer had only to weave arguments, and, by some magic, wealth and standing followed -- he had said to himself:
I will go into business; I will weave baskets; it is a thing which I can do. Thinking that when he had made the baskets he would have done his part, and then it would be the white man's to buy them. He had not discovered that it was necessary for him to make it worth the other's while to buy them, or at least make him think that it was so, or to make something else which it would be worth his while to buy. I too had woven a kind of basket of a delicate texture, but I had not made it worth any one's while to buy them. Yet not the less, in my case, did I think it worth my while to weave them, and instead of studying how to make it worth men's while to buy my baskets, I studied rather how to avoid the necessity of selling them. The life which men praise and regard as successful is but one kind. Why should we exaggerate any one kind at the expense of the others?

Finding that my fellow-citizens were not likely to offer me any room in the court house, or any curacy or living anywhere else, but I must shift for myself, I turned my face more exclusively than ever to the woods, where I was better known. I determined to go into business at once, and not wait to acquire the usual capital, using such slender means as I had already got. My purpose in going to Walden Pond was not to live cheaply nor to live dearly there, but to transact some private business with the fewest obstacles; to be hindered from accomplishing which for want of a little common sense, a little enterprise and business talent, appeared not so sad as foolish.

I have always endeavored to acquire strict business habits; they are indispensable to every man. If your trade is with the Celestial Empire, then some small counting house on the coast, in some Salem
harbor, will be fixture enough. You will export such articles as
the country affords, purely native products, much ice and pine
timber and a little granite, always in native bottoms. These will
be good ventures. To oversee all the details yourself in person; to
be at once pilot and captain, and owner and underwriter; to buy and
sell and keep the accounts; to read every letter received, and write
or read every letter sent; to superintend the discharge of imports
night and day; to be upon many parts of the coast almost at the same
time -- often the richest freight will be discharged upon a Jersey
shore; -- to be your own telegraph, unweariedly sweeping the
horizon, speaking all passing vessels bound coastwise; to keep up a
steady despatch of commodities, for the supply of such a distant and
exorbitant market; to keep yourself informed of the state of the
markets, prospects of war and peace everywhere, and anticipate the
tendencies of trade and civilization -- taking advantage of the
results of all exploring expeditions, using new passages and all
improvements in navigation; -- charts to be studied, the position of
reefs and new lights and buoys to be ascertained, and ever, and
ever, the logarithmic tables to be corrected, for by the error of
some calculator the vessel often splits upon a rock that should have
reached a friendly pier -- there is the untold fate of La Prouse;
-- universal science to be kept pace with, studying the lives of all
great discoverers and navigators, great adventurers and merchants,
from Hanno and the Phoenicians down to our day; in fine, account of
stock to be taken from time to time, to know how you stand. It is a
labor to task the faculties of a man -- such problems of profit and
loss, of interest, of tare and tret, and gauging of all kinds in it,
as demand a universal knowledge.
I have thought that Walden Pond would be a good place for business, not solely on account of the railroad and the ice trade; it offers advantages which it may not be good policy to divulge; it is a good port and a good foundation. No Neva marshes to be filled; though you must everywhere build on piles of your own driving. It is said that a flood-tide, with a westerly wind, and ice in the Neva, would sweep St. Petersburg from the face of the earth.

As this business was to be entered into without the usual capital, it may not be easy to conjecture where those means, that will still be indispensable to every such undertaking, were to be obtained. As for Clothing, to come at once to the practical part of the question, perhaps we are led oftener by the love of novelty and a regard for the opinions of men, in procuring it, than by a true utility. Let him who has work to do recollect that the object of clothing is, first, to retain the vital heat, and secondly, in this state of society, to cover nakedness, and he may judge how much of any necessary or important work may be accomplished without adding to his wardrobe. Kings and queens who wear a suit but once, though made by some tailor or dressmaker to their majesties, cannot know the comfort of wearing a suit that fits. They are no better than wooden horses to hang the clean clothes on. Every day our garments become more assimilated to ourselves, receiving the impress of the wearer's character, until we hesitate to lay them aside without such delay and medical appliances and some such solemnity even as our bodies. No man ever stood the lower in my estimation for having a patch in his clothes; yet I am sure that there is greater anxiety, commonly, to have fashionable, or at least clean and unpatched clothes, than to have a sound conscience. But even if the rent is
not mended, perhaps the worst vice betrayed is improvidence. I
sometimes try my acquaintances by such tests as this -- Who could
wear a patch, or two extra seams only, over the knee? Most behave
as if they believed that their prospects for life would be ruined if
they should do it. It would be easier for them to hobble to town
with a broken leg than with a broken pantaloon. Often if an
accident happens to a gentleman’s legs, they can be mended; but if a
similar accident happens to the legs of his pantaloons, there is no
help for it; for he considers, not what is truly respectable, but
what is respected. We know but few men, a great many coats and
breeches. Dress a scarecrow in your last shift, you standing
shiftless by, who would not sooner salute the scarecrow? Passing a
cornfield the other day, close by a hat and coat on a stake, I
recognized the owner of the farm. He was only a little more
weather-beaten than when I saw him last. I have heard of a dog that
barked at every stranger who approached his master’s premises with
clothes on, but was easily quieted by a naked thief. It is an
interesting question how far men would retain their relative rank if
they were divested of their clothes. Could you, in such a case,
tell surely of any company of civilized men which belonged to the
most respected class? When Madam Pfeiffer, in her adventurous
travels round the world, from east to west, had got so near home as
Asiatic Russia, she says that she felt the necessity of wearing
other than a travelling dress, when she went to meet the
authorities, for she “was now in a civilized country, where ...
people are judged of by their clothes.” Even in our democratic New
England towns the accidental possession of wealth, and its
manifestation in dress and equipage alone, obtain for the possessor
almost universal respect. But they yield such respect, numerous as
they are, are so far heathen, and need to have a missionary sent to
them. Beside, clothes introduced sewing, a kind of work which you
may call endless; a woman's dress, at least, is never done.

A man who has at length found something to do will not need to
get a new suit to do it in; for him the old will do, that has lain
dusty in the garret for an indeterminate period. Old shoes will
serve a hero longer than they have served his valet -- if a hero
ever has a valet -- bare feet are older than shoes, and he can make
them do. Only they who go to soires and legislative balls must
have new coats, coats to change as often as the man changes in them.

But if my jacket and trousers, my hat and shoes, are fit to worship
God in, they will do; will they not? Who ever saw his old clothes
-- his old coat, actually worn out, resolved into its primitive
elements, so that it was not a deed of charity to bestow it on some
poor boy, by him perchance to be bestowed on some poorer still, or
shall we say richer, who could do with less? I say, beware of all
enterprises that require new clothes, and not rather a new wearer of
clothes. If there is not a new man, how can the new clothes be made
to fit? If you have any enterprise before you, try it in your old
clothes. All men want, not something to do with, but something to
do, or rather something to be. Perhaps we should never procure a
new suit, however ragged or dirty the old, until we have so
conducted, so enterprised or sailed in some way, that we feel like
new men in the old, and that to retain it would be like keeping new
wine in old bottles. Our moulting season, like that of the fowls,
must be a crisis in our lives. The loon retires to solitary ponds
to spend it. Thus also the snake casts its slough, and the
caterpillar its wormy coat, by an internal industry and expansion; for clothes are but our outmost cuticle and mortal coil. Otherwise we shall be found sailing under false colors, and be inevitably cashiered at last by our own opinion, as well as that of mankind. We don garment after garment, as if we grew like exogenous plants by addition without. Our outside and often thin and fanciful clothes are our epidermis, or false skin, which partakes not of our life, and may be stripped off here and there without fatal injury; our thicker garments, constantly worn, are our cellular integument, or cortex; but our shirts are our liber, or true bark, which cannot be removed without girdling and so destroying the man. I believe that all races at some seasons wear something equivalent to the shirt. It is desirable that a man be clad so simply that he can lay his hands on himself in the dark, and that he live in all respects so compactly and preparedly that, if an enemy take the town, he can, like the old philosopher, walk out the gate empty-handed without anxiety. While one thick garment is, for most purposes, as good as three thin ones, and cheap clothing can be obtained at prices really to suit customers; while a thick coat can be bought for five dollars, which will last as many years, thick pantaloons for two dollars, cowhide boots for a dollar and a half a pair, a summer hat for a quarter of a dollar, and a winter cap for sixty-two and a half cents, or a better be made at home at a nominal cost, where is he so poor that, clad in such a suit, of his own earning, there will not be found wise men to do him reverence? When I ask for a garment of a particular form, my tailoress tells me gravely, "They do not make them so now," not emphasizing the "They" at all, as if she quoted an authority as impersonal as
the Fates, and I find it difficult to get made what I want, simply
because she cannot believe that I mean what I say, that I am so
rash. When I hear this oracular sentence, I am for a moment
absorbed in thought, emphasizing to myself each word separately that
I may come at the meaning of it, that I may find out by what degree
of consanguinity They are related to me, and what authority they
may have in an affair which affects me so nearly; and, finally, I am
inclined to answer her with equal mystery, and without any more
emphasis of the "they" -- "It is true, they did not make them so
recently, but they do now." Of what use this measuring of me if she
does not measure my character, but only the breadth of my shoulders,
as it were a peg to bang the coat on? We worship not the Graces,
nor the Parcae, but Fashion. She spins and weaves and cuts with
full authority. The head monkey at Paris puts on a traveller's cap,
and all the monkeys in America do the same. I sometimes despair of
getting anything quite simple and honest done in this world by the
help of men. They would have to be passed through a powerful press
first, to squeeze their old notions out of them, so that they would
not soon get upon their legs again; and then there would be some one
in the company with a maggot in his head, hatched from an egg
deposited there nobody knows when, for not even fire kills these
things, and you would have lost your labor. Nevertheless, we will
not forget that some Egyptian wheat was handed down to us by a
mummy.

On the whole, I think that it cannot be maintained that dressing
has in this or any country risen to the dignity of an art. At
present men make shift to wear what they can get. Like shipwrecked
sailors, they put on what they can find on the beach, and at a
little distance, whether of space or time, laugh at each other’s masquerade. Every generation laughs at the old fashions, but follows religiously the new. We are amused at beholding the costume of Henry VIII, or Queen Elizabeth, as much as if it was that of the King and Queen of the Cannibal Islands. All costume off a man is pitiful or grotesque. It is only the serious eye peering from and the sincere life passed within it which restrain laughter and consecrate the costume of any people. Let Harlequin be taken with a fit of the colic and his trappings will have to serve that mood too. When the soldier is hit by a cannonball, rags are as becoming as purple.

The childish and savage taste of men and women for new patterns keeps how many shaking and squinting through kaleidoscopes that they may discover the particular figure which this generation requires today. The manufacturers have learned that this taste is merely whimsical. Of two patterns which differ only by a few threads more or less of a particular color, the one will be sold readily, the other lie on the shelf, though it frequently happens that after the lapse of a season the latter becomes the most fashionable. Comparatively, tattooing is not the hideous custom which it is called. It is not barbarous merely because the printing is skin-deep and unalterable.

I cannot believe that our factory system is the best mode by which men may get clothing. The condition of the operatives is becoming every day more like that of the English; and it cannot be wondered at, since, as far as I have heard or observed, the principal object is, not that mankind may be well and honestly clad, but, unquestionably, that corporations may be enriched. In the long
run men hit only what they aim at. Therefore, though they should fail immediately, they had better aim at something high.

As for a Shelter, I will not deny that this is now a necessary of life, though there are instances of men having done without it for long periods in colder countries than this. Samuel Laing says that "the Laplander in his skin dress, and in a skin bag which he puts over his head and shoulders, will sleep night after night on the snow ... in a degree of cold which would extinguish the life of one exposed to it in any woollen clothing." He had seen them asleep thus. Yet he adds, "They are not hardier than other people." But, probably, man did not live long on the earth without discovering the convenience which there is in a house, the domestic comforts, which phrase may have originally signified the satisfactions of the house more than of the family; though these must be extremely partial and occasional in those climates where the house is associated in our thoughts with winter or the rainy season chiefly, and two thirds of the year, except for a parasol, is unnecessary. In our climate, in the summer, it was formerly almost solely a covering at night. In the Indian gazettes a wigwam was the symbol of a day's march, and a row of them cut or painted on the bark of a tree signified that so many times they had camped. Man was not made so large limbed and robust but that he must seek to narrow his world and wall in a space such as fitted him. He was at first bare and out of doors; but though this was pleasant enough in serene and warm weather, by daylight, the rainy season and the winter, to say nothing of the torrid sun, would perhaps have nipped his race in the bud if he had not made haste to clothe himself with the shelter of a house. Adam and Eve, according to the fable, wore the bower before other
clothes. Man wanted a home, a place of warmth, or comfort, first of warmth, then the warmth of the affections.

We may imagine a time when, in the infancy of the human race, some enterprising mortal crept into a hollow in a rock for shelter. Every child begins the world again, to some extent, and loves to stay outdoors, even in wet and cold. It plays house, as well as horse, having an instinct for it. Who does not remember the interest with which, when young, he looked at shelving rocks, or any approach to a cave? It was the natural yearning of that portion, any portion of our most primitive ancestor which still survived in us. From the cave we have advanced to roofs of palm leaves, of bark and boughs, of linen woven and stretched, of grass and straw, of boards and shingles, of stones and tiles. At last, we know not what it is to live in the open air, and our lives are domestic in more senses than we think. From the hearth the field is a great distance. It would be well, perhaps, if we were to spend more of our days and nights without any obstruction between us and the celestial bodies, if the poet did not speak so much from under a roof, or the saint dwell there so long. Birds do not sing in caves, nor do doves cherish their innocence in dovecots. However, if one designs to construct a dwelling-house, it behooves him to exercise a little Yankee shrewdness, lest after all he find himself in a workhouse, a labyrinth without a clue, a museum, an almshouse, a prison, or a splendid mausoleum instead. Consider first how slight a shelter is absolutely necessary. I have seen Penobscot Indians, in this town, living in tents of thin cotton cloth, while the snow was nearly a foot deep around them, and I thought that they would be glad to have it deeper to keep out the
wind. Formerly, when how to get my living honestly, with freedom left for my proper pursuits, was a question which vexed me even more than it does now, for unfortunately I am become somewhat callous, I used to see a large box by the railroad, six feet long by three wide, in which the laborers locked up their tools at night; and it suggested to me that every man who was hard pushed might get such a one for a dollar, and, having bored a few auger holes in it, to admit the air at least, get into it when it rained and at night, and hook down the lid, and so have freedom in his love, and in his soul be free. This did not appear the worst, nor by any means a despicable alternative. You could sit up as late as you pleased, and, whenever you got up, go abroad without any landlord or house-lord dogging you for rent. Many a man is harassed to death to pay the rent of a larger and more luxurious box who would not have frozen to death in such a box as this. I am far from jesting. Economy is a subject which admits of being treated with levity, but it cannot so be disposed of. A comfortable house for a rude and hardy race, that lived mostly out of doors, was once made here almost entirely of such materials as Nature furnished ready to their hands. Gookin, who was superintendent of the Indians subject to the Massachusetts Colony, writing in 1674, says, “The best of their houses are covered very neatly, tight and warm, with barks of trees, slipped from their bodies at those seasons when the sap is up, and made into great flakes, with pressure of weighty timber, when they are green.... The meaner sort are covered with mats which they make of a kind of bulrush, and are also indifferently tight and warm, but not so good as the former.... Some I have seen, sixty or a hundred feet long and thirty feet broad.... I have often lodged in their
wigwams, and found them as warm as the best English houses." He adds that they were commonly carpeted and lined within with well-wrought embroidered mats, and were furnished with various utensils. The Indians had advanced so far as to regulate the effect of the wind by a mat suspended over the hole in the roof and moved by a string. Such a lodge was in the first instance constructed in a day or two at most, and taken down and put up in a few hours; and every family owned one, or its apartment in one.

In the savage state every family owns a shelter as good as the best, and sufficient for its coarser and simpler wants; but I think that I speak within bounds when I say that, though the birds of the air have their nests, and the foxes their holes, and the savages their wigwams, in modern civilized society not more than one half the families own a shelter. In the large towns and cities, where civilization especially prevails, the number of those who own a shelter is a very small fraction of the whole. The rest pay an annual tax for this outside garment of all, become indispensable summer and winter, which would buy a village of Indian wigwams, but now helps to keep them poor as long as they live. I do not mean to insist here on the disadvantage of hiring compared with owning, but it is evident that the savage owns his shelter because it costs so little, while the civilized man hires his commonly because he cannot afford to own it; nor can he, in the long run, any better afford to hire. But, answers one, by merely paying this tax, the poor civilized man secures an abode which is a palace compared with the savage's. An annual rent of from twenty-five to a hundred dollars (these are the country rates) entitles him to the benefit of the improvements of centuries, spacious apartments, clean paint and
paper, Rumford fire-place, back plastering, Venetian blinds, copper pump, spring lock, a commodious cellar, and many other things. But how happens it that he who is said to enjoy these things is so commonly a poor civilized man, while the savage, who has them not, is rich as a savage? If it is asserted that civilization is a real advance in the condition of man -- and I think that it is, though only the wise improve their advantages -- it must be shown that it has produced better dwellings without making them more costly; and the cost of a thing is the amount of what I will call life which is required to be exchanged for it, immediately or in the long run. An average house in this neighborhood costs perhaps eight hundred dollars, and to lay up this sum will take from ten to fifteen years of the laborer's life, even if he is not encumbered with a family -- estimating the pecuniary value of every man's labor at one dollar a day, for if some receive more, others receive less; -- so that he must have spent more than half his life commonly before his wigwam will be earned. If we suppose him to pay a rent instead, this is but a doubtful choice of evils. Would the savage have been wise to exchange his wigwam for a palace on these terms?

It may be guessed that I reduce almost the whole advantage of holding this superfluous property as a fund in store against the future, so far as the individual is concerned, mainly to the defraying of funeral expenses. But perhaps a man is not required to bury himself. Nevertheless this points to an important distinction between the civilized man and the savage; and, no doubt, they have designs on us for our benefit, in making the life of a civilized people an institution, in which the life of the individual is to a great extent absorbed, in order to preserve and perfect that of the
race. But I wish to show at what a sacrifice this advantage is at present obtained, and to suggest that we may possibly so live as to secure all the advantage without suffering any of the disadvantage. What mean ye by saying that the poor ye have always with you, or that the fathers have eaten sour grapes, and the children's teeth are set on edge?

"As I live, saith the Lord God, ye shall not have occasion any more to use this proverb in Israel.

"Behold all souls are mine; as the soul of the father, so also the soul of the son is mine: the soul that sinneth, it shall die."

When I consider my neighbors, the farmers of Concord, who are at least as well off as the other classes, I find that for the most part they have been toiling twenty, thirty, or forty years, that they may become the real owners of their farms, which commonly they have inherited with encumbrances, or else bought with hired money -- and we may regard one third of that toil as the cost of their houses -- but commonly they have not paid for them yet. It is true, the encumbrances sometimes outweigh the value of the farm, so that the farm itself becomes one great encumbrance, and still a man is found to inherit it, being well acquainted with it, as he says. On applying to the assessors, I am surprised to learn that they cannot at once name a dozen in the town who own their farms free and clear. If you would know the history of these homesteads, inquire at the bank where they are mortgaged. The man who has actually paid for his farm with labor on it is so rare that every neighbor can point to him. I doubt if there are three such men in Concord. What has been said of the merchants, that a very large majority, even ninety-seven in a hundred, are sure to fail, is equally true of the
farmers. With regard to the merchants, however, one of them says pertinently that a great part of their failures are not genuine pecuniary failures, but merely failures to fulfil their engagements, because it is inconvenient; that is, it is the moral character that breaks down. But this puts an infinitely worse face on the matter, and suggests, beside, that probably not even the other three succeed in saving their souls, but are perchance bankrupt in a worse sense than they who fail honestly. Bankruptcy and repudiation are the springboards from which much of our civilization vaults and turns its somersets, but the savage stands on the unelastic plank of famine. Yet the Middlesex Cattle Show goes off here with eclat annually, as if all the joints of the agricultural machine were suent.

The farmer is endeavoring to solve the problem of a livelihood by a formula more complicated than the problem itself. To get his shoestrings he speculates in herds of cattle. With consummate skill he has set his trap with a hair spring to catch comfort and independence, and then, as he turned away, got his own leg into it. This is the reason he is poor; and for a similar reason we are all poor in respect to a thousand savage comforts, though surrounded by luxuries. As Chapman sings,

"The false society of men --
-- for earthly greatness
All heavenly comforts rarefies to air."

And when the farmer has got his house, he may not be the richer
but the poorer for it, and it be the house that has got him. As I understand it, that was a valid objection urged by Momus against the house which Minerva made, that she "had not made it movable, by which means a bad neighborhood might be avoided"; and it may still be urged, for our houses are such unwieldy property that we are often imprisoned rather than housed in them; and the bad neighborhood to be avoided is our own scurvy selves. I know one or two families, at least, in this town, who, for nearly a generation, have been wishing to sell their houses in the outskirts and move into the village, but have not been able to accomplish it, and only death will set them free.

Granted that the majority are able at last either to own or hire the modern house with all its improvements. While civilization has been improving our houses, it has not equally improved the men who are to inhabit them. It has created palaces, but it was not so easy to create noblemen and kings. And if the civilized man's pursuits are no worthier than the savage's, if he is employed the greater part of his life in obtaining gross necessaries and comforts merely, why should he have a better dwelling than the former?

But how do the poor minority fare? Perhaps it will be found that just in proportion as some have been placed in outward circumstances above the savage, others have been degraded below him. The luxury of one class is counterbalanced by the indigence of another. On the one side is the palace, on the other are the almshouse and "silent poor." The myriads who built the pyramids to be the tombs of the Pharaohs were fed on garlic, and it may be were not decently buried themselves. The mason who finishes the cornice of the palace returns at night perchance to a hut not so good as a
wigwam. It is a mistake to suppose that, in a country where the usual evidences of civilization exist, the condition of a very large body of the inhabitants may not be as degraded as that of savages. I refer to the degraded poor, not now to the degraded rich. To know this I should not need to look farther than to the shanties which everywhere border our railroads, that last improvement in civilization; where I see in my daily walks human beings living in sties, and all winter with an open door, for the sake of light, without any visible, often imaginable, wood-pile, and the forms of both old and young are permanently contracted by the long habit of shrinking from cold and misery, and the development of all their limbs and faculties is checked. It certainly is fair to look at that class by whose labor the works which distinguish this generation are accomplished. Such too, to a greater or less extent, is the condition of the operatives of every denomination in England, which is the great workhouse of the world. Or I could refer you to Ireland, which is marked as one of the white or enlightened spots on the map. Contrast the physical condition of the Irish with that of the North American Indian, or the South Sea Islander, or any other savage race before it was degraded by contact with the civilized man. Yet I have no doubt that that people's rulers are as wise as the average of civilized rulers. Their condition only proves what squalidness may consist with civilization. I hardly need refer now to the laborers in our Southern States who produce the staple exports of this country, and are themselves a staple production of the South. But to confine myself to those who are said to be in moderate circumstances.

Most men appear never to have considered what a house is, and
are actually though needlessly poor all their lives because they think that they must have such a one as their neighbors have. As if one were to wear any sort of coat which the tailor might cut out for him, or, gradually leaving off palm-leaf hat or cap of woodchuck skin, complain of hard times because he could not afford to buy him a crown! It is possible to invent a house still more convenient and luxurious than we have, which yet all would admit that man could not afford to pay for. Shall we always study to obtain more of these things, and not sometimes to be content with less? Shall the respectable citizen thus gravely teach, by precept and example, the necessity of the young man's providing a certain number of superfluous glow-shoes, and umbrellas, and empty guest chambers for empty guests, before he dies? Why should not our furniture be as simple as the Arab's or the Indian's? When I think of the benefactors of the race, whom we have apotheosized as messengers from heaven, bearers of divine gifts to man, I do not see in my mind any retinue at their heels, any carload of fashionable furniture. Or what if I were to allow -- would it not be a singular allowance? -- that our furniture should be more complex than the Arab's, in proportion as we are morally and intellectually his superiors! At present our houses are cluttered and defiled with it, and a good housewife would sweep out the greater part into the dust hole, and not leave her morning's work undone. Morning work! By the blushes of Aurora and the music of Memnon, what should be man's morning work in this world? I had three pieces of limestone on my desk, but I was terrified to find that they required to be dusted daily, when the furniture of my mind was all undusted still, and threw them out the window in disgust. How, then, could I have a furnished house?
I would rather sit in the open air, for no dust gathers on the
grass, unless where man has broken ground.

It is the luxurious and dissipated who set the fashions which
the herd so diligently follow. The traveller who stops at the best
houses, so called, soon discovers this, for the publicans presume
him to be a Sardanapalus, and if he resigned himself to their tender
mercies he would soon be completely emasculated. I think that in
the railroad car we are inclined to spend more on luxury than on
safety and convenience, and it threatens without attaining these to
become no better than a modern drawing-room, with its divans, and
ottomans, and sun-shades, and a hundred other oriental things, which
we are taking west with us, invented for the ladies of the harem and
the effeminate natives of the Celestial Empire, which Jonathan
should be ashamed to know the names of. I would rather sit on a
pumpkin and have it all to myself than be crowded on a velvet
cushion. I would rather ride on earth in an ox cart, with a free
circulation, than go to heaven in the fancy car of an excursion
train and breathe a malaria all the way.

The very simplicity and nakedness of man's life in the primitive
ages imply this advantage, at least, that they left him still but a
sojourner in nature. When he was refreshed with food and sleep, he
contemplated his journey again. He dwelt, as it were, in a tent in
this world, and was either threading the valleys, or crossing the
plains, or climbing the mountain-tops. But lo! men have become the
tools of their tools. The man who independently plucked the fruits
when he was hungry is become a farmer; and he who stood under a tree
for shelter, a housekeeper. We now no longer camp as for a night,
but have settled down on earth and forgotten heaven. We have
adopted Christianity merely as an improved method of agri-culture.

We have built for this world a family mansion, and for the next a
family tomb. The best works of art are the expression of man's
struggle to free himself from this condition, but the effect of our
art is merely to make this low state comfortable and that higher
state to be forgotten. There is actually no place in this village
for a work of fine art, if any had come down to us, to stand, for
our lives, our houses and streets, furnish no proper pedestal for
it. There is not a nail to hang a picture on, nor a shelf to
receive the bust of a hero or a saint. When I consider how our
houses are built and paid for, or not paid for, and their internal
economy managed and sustained, I wonder that the floor does not give
way under the visitor while he is admiring the gewgaws upon the
mantelpiece, and let him through into the cellar, to some solid and
honest though earthy foundation. I cannot but perceive that this
so-called rich and refined life is a thing jumped at, and I do not
get on in the enjoyment of the fine arts which adorn it, my
attention being wholly occupied with the jump; for I remember that
the greatest genuine leap, due to human muscles alone, on record, is
that of certain wandering Arabs, who are said to have cleared
twenty-five feet on level ground. Without factitious support, man
is sure to come to earth again beyond that distance. The first
question which I am tempted to put to the proprietor of such great
impropriety is, Who bolsters you? Are you one of the ninety-seven
who fail, or the three who succeed? Answer me these questions, and
then perhaps I may look at your bawbles and find them ornamental.
The cart before the horse is neither beautiful nor useful. Before
we can adorn our houses with beautiful objects the walls must be
stripped, and our lives must be stripped, and beautiful housekeeping
and beautiful living be laid for a foundation: now, a taste for the
beautiful is most cultivated out of doors, where there is no house
and no housekeeper.

Old Johnson, in his "Wonder-Working Providence," speaking of the
first settlers of this town, with whom he was contemporary, tells us
that "they burrow themselves in the earth for their first shelter
under some hillside, and, casting the soil aloft upon timber, they
make a smoky fire against the earth, at the highest side." They did
not "provide them houses," says he, "till the earth, by the Lord's
blessing, brought forth bread to feed them," and the first year's
crop was so light that "they were forced to cut their bread very
thin for a long season." The secretary of the Province of New
Netherland, writing in Dutch, in 1650, for the information of those
who wished to take up land there, states more particularly that
"those in New Netherland, and especially in New England, who have no
means to build farmhouses at first according to their wishes, dig a
square pit in the ground, cellar fashion, six or seven feet deep, as
long and as broad as they think proper, case the earth inside with
wood all round the wall, and line the wood with the bark of trees or
something else to prevent the caving in of the earth; floor this
cellar with plank, and wainscot it overhead for a ceiling, raise a
roof of spars clear up, and cover the spars with bark or green sods,
so that they can live dry and warm in these houses with their entire
families for two, three, and four years, it being understood that
partitions are run through those cellars which are adapted to the
size of the family. The wealthy and principal men in New England,
in the beginning of the colonies, commenced their first
dwelling-houses in this fashion for two reasons: firstly, in order not to waste time in building, and not to want food the next season; secondly, in order not to discourage poor laboring people whom they brought over in numbers from Fatherland. In the course of three or four years, when the country became adapted to agriculture, they built themselves handsome houses, spending on them several thousands."

In this course which our ancestors took there was a show of prudence at least, as if their principle were to satisfy the more pressing wants first. But are the more pressing wants satisfied now? When I think of acquiring for myself one of our luxurious dwellings, I am deterred, for, so to speak, the country is not yet adapted to human culture, and we are still forced to cut our spiritual bread far thinner than our forefathers did their wheaten. Not that all architectural ornament is to be neglected even in the rudest periods; but let our houses first be lined with beauty, where they come in contact with our lives, like the tenement of the shellfish, and not overlaid with it. But, alas! I have been inside one or two of them, and know what they are lined with.

Though we are not so degenerate but that we might possibly live in a cave or a wigwam or wear skins today, it certainly is better to accept the advantages, though so dearly bought, which the invention and industry of mankind offer. In such a neighborhood as this, boards and shingles, lime and bricks, are cheaper and more easily obtained than suitable caves, or whole logs, or bark in sufficient quantities, or even well-tempered clay or flat stones. I speak understandingly on this subject, for I have made myself acquainted with it both theoretically and practically. With a little more wit
we might use these materials so as to become richer than the richest
now are, and make our civilization a blessing. The civilized man is
a more experienced and wiser savage. But to make haste to my own
experiment.

Near the end of March, 1845, I borrowed an axe and went down to
the woods by Walden Pond, nearest to where I intended to build my
house, and began to cut down some tall, arrowy white pines, still in
their youth, for timber. It is difficult to begin without
borrowing, but perhaps it is the most generous course thus to permit
your fellow-men to have an interest in your enterprise. The owner
of the axe, as he released his hold on it, said that it was the
apple of his eye; but I returned it sharper than I received it. It
was a pleasant hillside where I worked, covered with pine woods,
through which I looked out on the pond, and a small open field in
the woods where pines and hickories were springing up. The ice in
the pond was not yet dissolved, though there were some open spaces,
and it was all dark-colored and saturated with water. There were
some slight flurries of snow during the days that I worked there;
but for the most part when I came out on to the railroad, on my way
home, its yellow sand heap stretched away gleaming in the hazy
atmosphere, and the rails shone in the spring sun, and I heard the
lark and pewee and other birds already come to commence another year
with us. They were pleasant spring days, in which the winter of
man's discontent was thawing as well as the earth, and the life that
had lain torpid began to stretch itself. One day, when my axe had
come off and I had cut a green hickory for a wedge, driving it with
a stone, and had placed the whole to soak in a pond-hole in order to
swell the wood, I saw a striped snake run into the water, and he lay
on the bottom, apparently without inconvenience, as long as I stayed there, or more than a quarter of an hour; perhaps because he had not yet fairly come out of the torpid state. It appeared to me that for a like reason men remain in their present low and primitive condition; but if they should feel the influence of the spring of springs arousing them, they would of necessity rise to a higher and more ethereal life. I had previously seen the snakes in frosty mornings in my path with portions of their bodies still numb and inflexible, waiting for the sun to thaw them. On the 1st of April it rained and melted the ice, and in the early part of the day, which was very foggy, I heard a stray goose groping about over the pond and cackling as if lost, or like the spirit of the fog. So I went on for some days cutting and hewing timber, and also studs and rafters, all with my narrow axe, not having many communicable or scholar-like thoughts, singing to myself, --

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

I hewed the main timbers six inches square, most of the studs on two sides only, and the rafters and floor timbers on one side, leaving the rest of the bark on, so that they were just as straight and much stronger than sawed ones. Each stick was carefully
mortised or tenoned by its stump, for I had borrowed other tools by this time. My days in the woods were not very long ones; yet I usually carried my dinner of bread and butter, and read the newspaper in which it was wrapped, at noon, sitting amid the green pine boughs which I had cut off, and to my bread was imparted some of their fragrance, for my hands were covered with a thick coat of pitch. Before I had done I was more the friend than the foe of the pine tree, though I had cut down some of them, having become better acquainted with it. Sometimes a rambler in the wood was attracted by the sound of my axe, and we chatted pleasantly over the chips which I had made.

By the middle of April, for I made no haste in my work, but rather made the most of it, my house was framed and ready for the raising. I had already bought the shanty of James Collins, an Irishman who worked on the Fitchburg Railroad, for boards. James Collins' shanty was considered an uncommonly fine one. When I called to see it he was not at home. I walked about the outside, at first unobserved from within, the window was so deep and high. It was of small dimensions, with a peaked cottage roof, and not much else to be seen, the dirt being raised five feet all around as if it were a compost heap. The roof was the soundest part, though a good deal warped and made brittle by the sun. Doorsill there was none, but a perennial passage for the hens under the door board. Mrs. C. came to the door and asked me to view it from the inside. The hens were driven in by my approach. It was dark, and had a dirt floor for the most part, dank, clammy, and aguish, only here a board and there a board which would not bear removal. She lighted a lamp to show me the inside of the roof and the walls, and also that the
board floor extended under the bed, warning me not to step into the cellar, a sort of dust hole two feet deep. In her own words, they were "good boards overhead, good boards all around, and a good window" -- of two whole squares originally, only the cat had passed out that way lately. There was a stove, a bed, and a place to sit, an infant in the house where it was born, a silk parasol, gilt-framed looking-glass, and a patent new coffee-mill nailed to an oak sapling, all told. The bargain was soon concluded, for James had in the meanwhile returned. I to pay four dollars and twenty-five cents tonight, he to vacate at five tomorrow morning, selling to nobody else meanwhile: I to take possession at six. It were well, he said, to be there early, and anticipate certain indistinct but wholly unjust claims on the score of ground rent and fuel. This he assured me was the only encumbrance. At six I passed him and his family on the road. One large bundle held their all -- bed, coffee-mill, looking-glass, hens -- all but the cat; she took to the woods and became a wild cat, and, as I learned afterward, trod in a trap set for woodchucks, and so became a dead cat at last. I took down this dwelling the same morning, drawing the nails, and removed it to the pond-side by small cartloads, spreading the boards on the grass there to bleach and warp back again in the sun. One early thrush gave me a note or two as I drove along the woodland path. I was informed treacherously by a young Patrick that neighbor Seeley, an Irishman, in the intervals of the carting, transferred the still tolerable, straight, and drivable nails, staples, and spikes to his pocket, and then stood when I came back to pass the time of day, and look freshly up, unconcerned, with spring thoughts, at the devastation; there being a dearth of work, as he said. He
was there to represent spectatordom, and help make this seemingly insignificant event one with the removal of the gods of Troy.

I dug my cellar in the side of a hill sloping to the south, where a woodchuck had formerly dug his burrow, down through sumach and blackberry roots, and the lowest stain of vegetation, six feet square by seven deep, to a fine sand where potatoes would not freeze in any winter. The sides were left shelving, and not stoned; but the sun having never shone on them, the sand still keeps its place.

It was but two hours' work. I took particular pleasure in this breaking of ground, for in almost all latitudes men dig into the earth for an equable temperature. Under the most splendid house in the city is still to be found the cellar where they store their roots as of old, and long after the superstructure has disappeared posterity remark its dent in the earth. The house is still but a sort of porch at the entrance of a burrow.

At length, in the beginning of May, with the help of some of my acquaintances, rather to improve so good an occasion for neighborliness than from any necessity, I set up the frame of my house. No man was ever more honored in the character of his raisers than I. They are destined, I trust, to assist at the raising of loftier structures one day. I began to occupy my house on the 4th of July, as soon as it was boarded and roofed, for the boards were carefully feather-edged and lapped, so that it was perfectly impervious to rain, but before boarding I laid the foundation of a chimney at one end, bringing two cartloads of stones up the hill from the pond in my arms. I built the chimney after my hoeing in the fall, before a fire became necessary for warmth, doing my cooking in the meanwhile out of doors on the ground, early in the
morning: which mode I still think is in some respects more
c convenient and agreeable than the usual one. When it stormed before
my bread was baked, I fixed a few boards over the fire, and sat
under them to watch my loaf, and passed some pleasant hours in that
way. In those days, when my hands were much employed, I read but
little, but the least scraps of paper which lay on the ground, my
holder, or tablecloth, afforded me as much entertainment, in fact
answered the same purpose as the Iliad.

It would be worth the while to build still more deliberately
than I did, considering, for instance, what foundation a door, a
window, a cellar, a garret, have in the nature of man, and perchance
never raising any superstructure until we found a better reason for
it than our temporal necessities even. There is some of the same
fitness in a man's building his own house that there is in a bird's
building its own nest. Who knows but if men constructed their
dwellings with their own hands, and provided food for themselves and
families simply and honestly enough, the poetic faculty would be
universally developed, as birds universally sing when they are so
engaged? But alas! we do like cowbirds and cuckoos, which lay their
eggs in nests which other birds have built, and cheer no traveller
with their chattering and unmusical notes. Shall we forever resign
the pleasure of construction to the carpenter? What does
architecture amount to in the experience of the mass of men? I
never in all my walks came across a man engaged in so simple and
natural an occupation as building his house. We belong to the
community. It is not the tailor alone who is the ninth part of a
man; it is as much the preacher, and the merchant, and the farmer.
Where is this division of labor to end? and what object does it
finally serve? No doubt another may also think for me; but it is
not therefore desirable that he should do so to the exclusion of my
thinking for myself.

True, there are architects so called in this country, and I have
heard of one at least possessed with the idea of making
architectural ornaments have a core of truth, a necessity, and hence
a beauty, as if it were a revelation to him. All very well perhaps
from his point of view, but only a little better than the common
dilettantism. A sentimental reformer in architecture, he began at
the cornice, not at the foundation. It was only how to put a core
of truth within the ornaments, that every sugarplum, in fact, might
have an almond or caraway seed in it -- though I hold that almonds
are most wholesome without the sugar -- and not how the inhabitant,
the indweller, might build truly within and without, and let the
ornaments take care of themselves. What reasonable man ever
supposed that ornaments were something outward and in the skin
merely -- that the tortoise got his spotted shell, or the shell-fish
its mother-o'-'pearl tints, by such a contract as the inhabitants of
Broadway their Trinity Church? But a man has no more to do with the
style of architecture of his house than a tortoise with that of its
shell: nor need the soldier be so idle as to try to paint the
precise color of his virtue on his standard. The enemy will find it
out. He may turn pale when the trial comes. This man seemed to me
to lean over the cornice, and timidly whisper his half truth to the
rude occupants who really knew it better than he. What of
architectural beauty I now see, I know has gradually grown from
within outward, out of the necessities and character of the
indweller, who is the only builder -- out of some unconscious
truthfulness, and nobleness, without ever a thought for the appearance and whatever additional beauty of this kind is destined to be produced will be preceded by a like unconscious beauty of life. The most interesting dwellings in this country, as the painter knows, are the most unpretending, humble log huts and cottages of the poor commonly; it is the life of the inhabitants whose shells they are, and not any peculiarity in their surfaces merely, which makes them picturesque; and equally interesting will be the citizen's suburban box, when his life shall be as simple and as agreeable to the imagination, and there is as little straining after effect in the style of his dwelling. A great proportion of architectural ornaments are literally hollow, and a September gale would strip them off, like borrowed plumes, without injury to the substantials. They can do without architecture who have no olives nor wines in the cellar. What if an equal ado were made about the ornaments of style in literature, and the architects of our bibles spent as much time about their cornices as the architects of our churches do? So are made the belles-lettres and the beaux-arts and their professors. Much it concerns a man, forsooth, how a few sticks are slanted over him or under him, and what colors are daubed upon his box. It would signify somewhat, if, in any earnest sense, he slanted them and daubed it; but the spirit having departed out of the tenant, it is of a piece with constructing his own coffin -- the architecture of the grave -- and "carpenter" is but another name for "coffin-maker." One man says, in his despair or indifference to life, take up a handful of the earth at your feet, and paint your house that color. Is he thinking of his last and narrow house? Toss up a copper for it as well. What an abundance of leisure be
must have! Why do you take up a handful of dirt? Better paint your house your own complexion; let it turn pale or blush for you. An enterprise to improve the style of cottage architecture! When you have got my ornaments ready, I will wear them.

Before winter I built a chimney, and shingled the sides of my house, which were already impervious to rain, with imperfect and sappy shingles made of the first slice of the log, whose edges I was obliged to straighten with a plane.

I have thus a tight shingled and plastered house, ten feet wide by fifteen long, and eight-feet posts, with a garret and a closet, a large window on each side, two trap doors, one door at the end, and a brick fireplace opposite. The exact cost of my house, paying the usual price for such materials as I used, but not counting the work, all of which was done by myself, was as follows; and I give the details because very few are able to tell exactly what their houses cost, and fewer still, if any, the separate cost of the various materials which compose them:--

Boards ....................... $ 8.03+, mostly shanty boards.
Refuse shingles for roof sides ... 4.00
Laths ......................... 1.25
Two second-hand windows
with glass ..................... 2.43
One thousand old brick ........... 4.00
Two casks of lime ............... 2.40 That was high.
Hair ............................ 0.31 More than I needed.
Mantle-tree iron ............... 0.15
Nails ......................... 3.90
Hinges and screws ............ 0.14
Latch .......................... 0.10
Chalk .......................... 0.01
Transportation ............... 1.40 I carried a good part ------ on my back.

In all ......................... $28.12+

These are all the materials, excepting the timber, stones, and sand, which I claimed by squatter's right. I have also a small woodshed adjoining, made chiefly of the stuff which was left after building the house.

I intend to build me a house which will surpass any on the main street in Concord in grandeur and luxury, as soon as it pleases me as much and will cost me no more than my present one.

I thus found that the student who wishes for a shelter can obtain one for a lifetime at an expense not greater than the rent which he now pays annually. If I seem to boast more than is becoming, my excuse is that I brag for humanity rather than for myself; and my shortcomings and inconsistencies do not affect the truth of my statement. Notwithstanding much cant and hypocrisy -- chaff which I find it difficult to separate from my wheat, but for which I am as sorry as any man -- I will breathe freely and stretch myself in this respect, it is such a relief to both the moral and physical system; and I am resolved that I will not through humility become the devil's attorney. I will endeavor to speak a good word for the truth. At Cambridge College the mere rent of a student's
room, which is only a little larger than my own, is thirty dollars
each year, though the corporation had the advantage of building
thirty-two side by side and under one roof, and the occupant suffers
the inconvenience of many and noisy neighbors, and perhaps a
residence in the fourth story. I cannot but think that if we had
more true wisdom in these respects, not only less education would be
needed, because, forsooth, more would already have been acquired,
but the pecuniary expense of getting an education would in a great
measure vanish. Those conveniences which the student requires at
Cambridge or elsewhere cost him or somebody else ten times as great
a sacrifice of life as they would with proper management on both
sides. Those things for which the most money is demanded are never
the things which the student most wants. Tuition, for instance, is
an important item in the term bill, while for the far more valuable
education which he gets by associating with the most cultivated of
his contemporaries no charge is made. The mode of founding a
college is, commonly, to get up a subscription of dollars and cents,
and then, following blindly the principles of a division of labor to
its extreme -- a principle which should never be followed but with
circumspection -- to call in a contractor who makes this a subject
of speculation, and he employs Irishmen or other operatives actually
to lay the foundations, while the students that are to be are said
to be fitting themselves for it; and for these oversights successive
generations have to pay. I think that it would be better than this,
for the students, or those who desire to be benefited by it, even to
lay the foundation themselves. The student who secures his coveted
leisure and retirement by systematically shirking any labor
necessary to man obtains but an ignoble and unprofitable leisure,
defrauding himself of the experience which alone can make leisure
fruitful. "But," says one, "you do not mean that the students
should go to work with their hands instead of their heads?" I do
not mean that exactly, but I mean something which he might think a
good deal like that; I mean that they should not play life, or study
it merely, while the community supports them at this expensive game,
but earnestly live it from beginning to end. How could youths
better learn to live than by at once trying the experiment of
living? Methinks this would exercise their minds as much as
mathematics. If I wished a boy to know something about the arts and
sciences, for instance, I would not pursue the common course, which
is merely to send him into the neighborhood of some professor, where
anything is professed and practised but the art of life; -- to
survey the world through a telescope or a microscope, and never with
his natural eye; to study chemistry, and not learn how his bread is
made, or mechanics, and not learn how it is earned; to discover new
satellites to Neptune, and not detect the motes in his eyes, or to
what vagabond he is a satellite himself; or to be devoured by the
monsters that swarm all around him, while contemplating the monsters
in a drop of vinegar. Which would have advanced the most at the end
of a month -- the boy who had made his own jackknife from the ore
which he had dug and smelted, reading as much as would be necessary
for this -- or the boy who had attended the lectures on metallurgy
at the Institute in the meanwhile, and had received a Rodgers'
penknife from his father? Which would be most likely to cut his
fingers?... To my astonishment I was informed on leaving college
that I had studied navigation! -- why, if I had taken one turn down
the harbor I should have known more about it. Even the poor student
studies and is taught only political economy, while that economy of living which is synonymous with philosophy is not even sincerely professed in our colleges. The consequence is, that while he is reading Adam Smith, Ricardo, and Say, he runs his father in debt irretrievably.

As with our colleges, so with a hundred "modern improvements"; there is an illusion about them; there is not always a positive advance. The devil goes on exacting compound interest to the last for his early share and numerous succeeding investments in them.

Our inventions are wont to be pretty toys, which distract our attention from serious things. They are but improved means to an unimproved end, an end which it was already but too easy to arrive at; as railroads lead to Boston or New York. We are in great haste to construct a magnetic telegraph from Maine to Texas; but Maine and Texas, it may be, have nothing important to communicate. Either is in such a predicament as the man who was earnest to be introduced to a distinguished deaf woman, but when he was presented, and one end of her ear trumpet was put into his hand, had nothing to say. As if the main object were to talk fast and not to talk sensibly. 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. After all, the man whose horse trots a mile in a minute does not carry the most important messages; he is not an evangelist, nor does he come round eating locusts and wild honey. I doubt if Flying Childers ever carried a peck of corn to mill.

One says to me, "I wonder that you do not lay up money; you love
to travel; you might take the cars and go to Fitchburg today and see
the country." But I am wiser than that. I have learned that the
swiftest traveller is he that goes afoot. I say to my friend,
Suppose we try who will get there first. The distance is thirty
miles; the fare ninety cents. That is almost a day's wages. I
remember when wages were sixty cents a day for laborers on this very
road. Well, I start now on foot, and get there before night; I have
travelled at that rate by the week together. You will in the
meanwhile have earned your fare, and arrive there some time
tomorrow, or possibly this evening, if you are lucky enough to get a
job in season. Instead of going to Fitchburg, you will be working
here the greater part of the day. And so, if the railroad reached
round the world, I think that I should keep ahead of you; and as for
seeing the country and getting experience of that kind, I should
have to cut your acquaintance altogether.
Such is the universal law, which no man can ever outwit, and
with regard to the railroad even we may say it is as broad as it is
long. To make a railroad round the world available to all mankind
is equivalent to grading the whole surface of the planet. Men have
an indistinct notion that if they keep up this activity of joint
stocks and spades long enough all will at length ride somewhere, in
next to no time, and for nothing; but though a crowd rushes to the
depot, and the conductor shouts "All aboard!" when the smoke is
blown away and the vapor condensed, it will be perceived that a few
are riding, but the rest are run over -- and it will be called, and
will be, "A melancholy accident." No doubt they can ride at last
who shall have earned their fare, that is, if they survive so long,
but they will probably have lost their elasticity and desire to
travel by that time. This spending of the best part of one's life
earning money in order to enjoy a questionable liberty during the
least valuable part of it reminds me of the Englishman who went to
India to make a fortune first, in order that he might return to
England and live the life of a poet. He should have gone up garret
at once. "What!" exclaim a million Irishmen starting up from all
the shanties in the land, "is not this railroad which we have built
a good thing?" Yes, I answer, comparatively good, that is, you
might have done worse; but I wish, as you are brothers of mine, that
you could have spent your time better than digging in this dirt.
Before I finished my house, wishing to earn ten or twelve
dollars by some honest and agreeable method, in order to meet my
unusual expenses, I planted about two acres and a half of light and
sandy soil near it chiefly with beans, but also a small part with
potatoes, corn, peas, and turnips. The whole lot contains eleven
acres, mostly growing up to pines and hickories, and was sold the
preceding season for eight dollars and eight cents an acre. One
farmer said that it was "good for nothing but to raise cheeping
squirrels on." I put no manure whatever on this land, not being the
owner, but merely a squatter, and not expecting to cultivate so much
again, and I did not quite hoe it all once. I got out several cords
of stumps in plowing, which supplied me with fuel for a long time,
and left small circles of virgin mould, easily distinguishable
through the summer by the greater luxuriance of the beans there.
The dead and for the most part unmerchantable wood behind my house,
and the driftwood from the pond, have supplied the remainder of my
fuel. I was obliged to hire a team and a man for the plowing,
though I held the plow myself. My farm outgoes for the first season
were, for implements, seed, work, etc., $14.72+. The seed corn was
given me. This never costs anything to speak of, unless you plant
more than enough. I got twelve bushels of beans, and eighteen
bushels of potatoes, beside some peas and sweet corn. The yellow
corn and turnips were too late to come to anything. My whole income
from the farm was
$ 23.44
Deducting the outgoes ............ 14.72+

There are left .................. $ 8.71+

beside produce consumed and on hand at the time this estimate was
made of the value of $4.50 -- the amount on hand much more than
balancing a little grass which I did not raise. All things
considered, that is, considering the importance of a man's soul and
of today, notwithstanding the short time occupied by my experiment,
nay, partly even because of its transient character, I believe that
that was doing better than any farmer in Concord did that year.
The next year I did better still, for I spaded up all the land
which I required, about a third of an acre, and I learned from the
experience of both years, not being in the least awed by many
celebrated works on husbandry, Arthur Young among the rest, that if
one would live simply and eat only the crop which he raised, and
raise no more than he ate, and not exchange it for an insufficient
quantity of more luxurious and expensive things, he would need to
cultivate only a few rods of ground, and that it would be cheaper to
spade up that than to use oxen to plow it, and to select a fresh
spot from time to time than to manure the old, and he could do all
his necessary farm work as it were with his left hand at odd hours
in the summer; and thus he would not be tied to an ox, or horse, or
cow, or pig, as at present. I desire to speak impartially on this
point, and as one not interested in the success or failure of the
present economical and social arrangements. I was more independent
than any farmer in Concord, for I was not anchored to a house or
farm, but could follow the bent of my genius, which is a very
crooked one, every moment. Beside being better off than they
already, if my house had been burned or my crops had failed, I
should have been nearly as well off as before.
I am wont to think that men are not so much the keepers of herds
as herds are the keepers of men, the former are so much the freer.
Men and oxen exchange work; but if we consider necessary work only,
the oxen will be seen to have greatly the advantage, their farm is
so much the larger. Man does some of his part of the exchange work
in his six weeks of haying, and it is no boy's play. Certainly no
nation that lived simply in all respects, that is, no nation of
philosophers, would commit so great a blunder as to use the labor of
animals. True, there never was and is not likely soon to be a
nation of philosophers, nor am I certain it is desirable that there
should be. However, I should never have broken a horse or bull and
taken him to board for any work he might do for me, for fear I
should become a horseman or a herdsman merely; and if society seems
to be the gainer by so doing, are we certain that what is one man's
gain is not another's loss, and that the stable-boy has equal cause
with his master to be satisfied? Granted that some public works
would not have been constructed without this aid, and let man share
the glory of such with the ox and horse; does it follow that he
could not have accomplished works yet more worthy of himself in that
case? When men begin to do, not merely unnecessary or artistic, but
luxurious and idle work, with their assistance, it is inevitable
that a few do all the exchange work with the oxen, or, in other
words, become the slaves of the strongest. Man thus not only works
for the animal within him, but, for a symbol of this, he works for
the animal without him. Though we have many substantial houses of
brick or stone, the prosperity of the farmer is still measured by
the degree to which the barn overshadows the house. This town is
said to have the largest houses for oxen, cows, and horses
hereabouts, and it is not behindhand in its public buildings; but
there are very few halls for free worship or free speech in this
county. It should not be by their architecture, but why not even by
their power of abstract thought, that nations should seek to
commemorate themselves? How much more admirable the Bhagvat-Geeta
than all the ruins of the East! Towers and temples are the luxury
of princes. A simple and independent mind does not toil at the
bidding of any prince. Genius is not a retainer to any emperor, nor
is its material silver, or gold, or marble, except to a trifling
extent. To what end, pray, is so much stone hammered? In Arcadia,
when I was there, I did not see any hammering stone. Nations are
possessed with an insane ambition to perpetuate the memory of
themselves by the amount of hammered stone they leave. What if
equal pains were taken to smooth and polish their manners? One
piece of good sense would be more memorable than a monument as high
as the moon. I love better to see stones in place. The grandeur of
Thebes was a vulgar grandeur. More sensible is a rod of stone wall
that bounds an honest man's field than a hundred-gated Thebes that has wandered farther from the true end of life. The religion and civilization which are barbaric and heathenish build splendid temples; but what you might call Christianity does not. Most of the stone a nation hammers goes toward its tomb only. It buries itself alive. As for the Pyramids, there is nothing to wonder at in them so much as the fact that so many men could be found degraded enough to spend their lives constructing a tomb for some ambitious booby, whom it would have been wiser and manlier to have drowned in the Nile, and then given his body to the dogs. I might possibly invent some excuse for them and him, but I have no time for it. As for the religion and love of art of the builders, it is much the same all the world over, whether the building be an Egyptian temple or the United States Bank. It costs more than it comes to. The mainspring is vanity, assisted by the love of garlic and bread and butter. Mr. Balcom, a promising young architect, designs it on the back of his Vitruvius, with hard pencil and ruler, and the job is let out to Dobson & Sons, stonecutters. When the thirty centuries begin to look down on it, mankind begin to look up at it. As for your high towers and monuments, there was a crazy fellow once in this town who undertook to dig through to China, and he got so far that, as he said, he heard the Chinese pots and kettles rattle; but I think that I shall not go out of my way to admire the hole which he made. Many are concerned about the monuments of the West and the East -- to know who built them. For my part, I should like to know who in those days did not build them -- who were above such trifling. But to proceed with my statistics.

By surveying, carpentry, and day-labor of various other kinds in
the village in the meanwhile, for I have as many trades as fingers,

I had earned $13.34. The expense of food for eight months, namely,

from July 4th to March 1st, the time when these estimates were made,

though I lived there more than two years -- not counting potatoes, a

little green corn, and some peas, which I had raised, nor

considering the value of what was on hand at the last date -- was

Rice .................... $ 1.73 1/2

Molasses ................. 1.73 Cheapest form of the

saccharine.

Rye meal ................. 1.04 3/4

Indian meal .............. 0.99 3/4 Cheaper than rye.

Pork ..................... 0.22

All experiments which failed:

Flour .................... 0.88 Costs more than Indian meal,

both money and trouble.

Sugar .................... 0.80

Lard ..................... 0.65

Apples ................... 0.25

Dried apple .............. 0.22

Sweet potatoes .......... 0.10

One pumpkin ............ 0.06

One watermelon ........... 0.02

Salt ..................... 0.03

Yes, I did eat $8.74, all told; but I should not thus unblushingly

publish my guilt, if I did not know that most of my readers were
equally guilty with myself, and that their deeds would look no better in print. The next year I sometimes caught a mess of fish for my dinner, and once I went so far as to slaughter a woodchuck which ravaged my bean-field -- effect his transmigration, as a Tartar would say -- and devour him, partly for experiment's sake; but though it afforded me a momentary enjoyment, notwithstanding a musky flavor, I saw that the longest use would not make that a good practice, however it might seem to have your woodchucks ready dressed by the village butcher.

Clothing and some incidental expenses within the same dates, though little can be inferred from this item, amounted to

$8.40-3/4

Oil and some household utensils ....... 2.00

So that all the pecuniary outgoes, excepting for washing and mending, which for the most part were done out of the house, and their bills have not yet been received -- and these are all and more than all the ways by which money necessarily goes out in this part of the world -- were

House .................................. $28.12+
Farm one year ........................... 14.72+
Food eight months ...................... 8.74
Clothing, etc., eight months ........... 8.40-3/4
Oil, etc., eight months ............... 2.00
In all ............................ $ 61.99-3/4

I address myself now to those of my readers who have a living to get. And to meet this I have for farm produce sold

$ 23.44
Earned by day-labor .................... 13.34
------
In all ............................ $ 36.78,

which subtracted from the sum of the outgoes leaves a balance of
$25.21 3/4 on the one side -- this being very nearly the means with which I started, and the measure of expenses to be incurred -- and on the other, beside the leisure and independence and health thus secured, a comfortable house for me as long as I choose to occupy it.

These statistics, however accidental and therefore uninstructive they may appear, as they have a certain completeness, have a certain value also. Nothing was given me of which I have not rendered some account. It appears from the above estimate, that my food alone cost me in money about twenty-seven cents a week. It was, for nearly two years after this, rye and Indian meal without yeast, potatoes, rice, a very little salt pork, molasses, and salt; and my drink, water. It was fit that I should live on rice, mainly, who love so well the philosophy of India. To meet the objections of
some inveterate cavillers, I may as well state, that if I dined out occasionally, as I always had done, and I trust shall have opportunities to do again, it was frequently to the detriment of my domestic arrangements. But the dining out, being, as I have stated, a constant element, does not in the least affect a comparative statement like this.

I learned from my two years’ experience that it would cost incredibly little trouble to obtain one’s necessary food, even in this latitude; that a man may use as simple a diet as the animals, and yet retain health and strength. I have made a satisfactory dinner, satisfactory on several accounts, simply off a dish of purslane (Portulaca oleracea) which I gathered in my cornfield, boiled and salted. I give the Latin on account of the savoriness of the trivial name. And pray what more can a reasonable man desire, in peaceful times, in ordinary noons, than a sufficient number of ears of green sweet corn boiled, with the addition of salt? Even the little variety which I used was a yielding to the demands of appetite, and not of health. Yet men have come to such a pass that they frequently starve, not for want of necessaries, but for want of luxuries; and I know a good woman who thinks that her son lost his life because he took to drinking water only.

The reader will perceive that I am treating the subject rather from an economic than a dietetic point of view, and he will not venture to put my abstemiousness to the test unless he has a well-stocked larder.

Bread I at first made of pure Indian meal and salt, genuine hoe-cakes, which I baked before my fire out of doors on a shingle or the end of a stick of timber sawed off in building my house; but it
was wont to get smoked and to have a piny flavor, I tried flour also; but have at last found a mixture of rye and Indian meal most convenient and agreeable. In cold weather it was no little amusement to bake several small loaves of this in succession, tending and turning them as carefully as an Egyptian his hatching eggs. They were a real cereal fruit which I ripened, and they had to my senses a fragrance like that of other noble fruits, which I kept in as long as possible by wrapping them in cloths. I made a study of the ancient and indispensable art of bread-making, consulting such authorities as offered, going back to the primitive days and first invention of the unleavened kind, when from the wildness of nuts and meats men first reached the mildness and refinement of this diet, and travelling gradually down in my studies through that accidental souring of the dough which, it is supposed, taught the leavening process, and through the various fermentations thereafter, till I came to "good, sweet, wholesome bread," the staff of life. Leaven, which some deem the soul of bread, the spiritus which fills its cellular tissue, which is religiously preserved like the vestal fire -- some precious bottleful, I suppose, first brought over in the Mayflower, did the business for America, and its influence is still rising, swelling, spreading, in cerealian billows over the land -- this seed I regularly and faithfully procured from the village, till at length one morning I forgot the rules, and scalded my yeast; by which accident I discovered that even this was not indispensable -- for my discoveries were not by the synthetic but analytic process -- and I have gladly omitted it since, though most housewives earnestly assured me that safe and wholesome bread without yeast might not be, and elderly people prophesied a speedy
decay of the vital forces. Yet I find it not to be an essential
ingredient, and after going without it for a year am still in the
land of the living; and I am glad to escape the trivialness of
carrying a bottleful in my pocket, which would sometimes pop and
discharge its contents to my discomfiture. It is simpler and more
respectable to omit it. Man is an animal who more than any other
can adapt himself to all climates and circumstances. Neither did I
put any sal-soda, or other acid or alkali, into my bread. It would
seem that I made it according to the recipe which Marcus Porcius
Cato gave about two centuries before Christ. "Panem depsticium sic
facito. Manus mortariumque bene lavato. Farinam in mortarium
indito, aquae paulatim addito, subigitque pulchre. Ubi bene
subegeris, defingito, coquitoque sub testu." Which I take to mean,
-- "Make kneaded bread thus. Wash your hands and trough well. Put
the meal into the trough, add water gradually, and knead it
thoroughly. When you have kneaded it well, mould it, and bake it
under a cover," that is, in a baking kettle. Not a word about
leaven. But I did not always use this staff of life. At one time,
owing to the emptiness of my purse, I saw none of it for more than a
month.

Every New Englander might easily raise all his own breadstuffs
in this land of rye and Indian corn, and not depend on distant and
fluctuating markets for them. Yet so far are we from simplicity and
independence that, in Concord, fresh and sweet meal is rarely sold
in the shops, and hominy and corn in a still coarser form are hardly
used by any. For the most part the farmer gives to his cattle and
hogs the grain of his own producing, and buys flour, which is at
least no more wholesome, at a greater cost, at the store. I saw
that I could easily raise my bushel or two of rye and Indian corn,
for the former will grow on the poorest land, and the latter does
not require the best, and grind them in a hand-mill, and so do
without rice and pork; and if I must have some concentrated sweet, I
found by experiment that I could make a very good molasses either of
pumpkins or beets, and I knew that I needed only to set out a few
maples to obtain it more easily still, and while these were growing
I could use various substitutes beside those which I have named.
"For," as the Forefathers sang.--

"we can make liquor to sweeten our lips
Of pumpkins and parsnips and walnut-tree chips."

Finally, as for salt, that grossest of groceries, to obtain this
might be a fit occasion for a visit to the seashore, or, if I did
without it altogether, I should probably drink the less water. I do
not learn that the Indians ever troubled themselves to go after it.
Thus I could avoid all trade and barter, so far as my food was
concerned, and having a shelter already, it would only remain to get
clothing and fuel. The pantaloons which I now wear were woven in a
farmer's family -- thank Heaven there is so much virtue still in
man; for I think the fall from the farmer to the operative as great
and memorable as that from the man to the farmer; -- and in a new
country, fuel is an encumbrance. As for a habitat, if I were not
permitted still to squat, I might purchase one acre at the same
price for which the land I cultivated was sold -- namely, eight
dollars and eight cents. But as it was, I considered that I
enhanced the value of the land by squatting on it.

There is a certain class of unbelievers who sometimes ask me such questions as, if I think that I can live on vegetable food alone; and to strike at the root of the matter at once -- for the root is faith -- I am accustomed to answer such, that I can live on board nails. If they cannot understand that, they cannot understand much that I have to say. For my part, I am glad to bear of experiments of this kind being tried; as that a young man tried for a fortnight to live on hard, raw corn on the ear, using his teeth for all mortar. The squirrel tribe tried the same and succeeded.

The human race is interested in these experiments, though a few old women who are incapacitated for them, or who own their thirds in mills, may be alarmed.

My furniture, part of which I made myself -- and the rest cost me nothing of which I have not rendered an account -- consisted of a bed, a table, a desk, three chairs, a looking-glass three inches in diameter, a pair of tongs and andirons, a kettle, a skillet, and a frying-pan, a dipper, a wash-bowl, two knives and forks, three plates, one cup, one spoon, a jug for oil, a jug for molasses, and a japanned lamp. None is so poor that he need sit on a pumpkin. That is shiftlessness. There is a plenty of such chairs as I like best in the village garrets to be had for taking them away. Furniture!

Thank God, I can sit and I can stand without the aid of a furniture warehouse. What man but a philosopher would not be ashamed to see his furniture packed in a cart and going up country exposed to the light of heaven and the eyes of men, a beggarly account of empty boxes? That is Spaulding's furniture. I could never tell from inspecting such a load whether it belonged to a so-called rich man
or a poor one; the owner always seemed poverty-stricken. Indeed, the more you have of such things the poorer you are. Each load looks as if it contained the contents of a dozen shanties; and if one shanty is poor, this is a dozen times as poor. Pray, for what do we move ever but to get rid of our furniture, our exuviae: at last to go from this world to another newly furnished, and leave this to be burned? It is the same as if all these traps were buckled to a man's belt, and he could not move over the rough country where our lines are cast without dragging them -- dragging his trap. He was a lucky fox that left his tail in the trap. The muskrat will gnaw his third leg off to be free. No wonder man has lost his elasticity. How often he is at a dead set! "Sir, if I may be so bold, what do you mean by a dead set?" If you are a seer, whenever you meet a man you will see all that he owns, ay, and much that he pretends to disown, behind him, even to his kitchen furniture and all the trumpery which he saves and will not burn, and he will appear to be harnessed to it and making what headway he can. I think that the man is at a dead set who has got through a knot-hole or gateway where his sledge load of furniture cannot follow him. I cannot but feel compassion when I hear some trig, compact-looking man, seemingly free, all girded and ready, speak of his "furniture," as whether it is insured or not. "But what shall I do with my furniture?" -- My gay butterfly is entangled in a spider's web then. Even those who seem for a long while not to have any, if you inquire more narrowly you will find have some stored in somebody's barn. I look upon England today as an old gentleman who is travelling with a great deal of baggage, trumpery which has accumulated from long housekeeping, which he has not the courage to
burn; great trunk, little trunk, bandbox, and bundle. Throw away
the first three at least. It would surpass the powers of a well man
nowadays to take up his bed and walk, and I should certainly advise
a sick one to lay down his bed and run. When I have met an
immigrant tottering under a bundle which contained his all --
looking like an enormous wen which had grown out of the nape of his
neck -- I have pitied him, not because that was his all, but because
he had all that to carry. If I have got to drag my trap, I will
take care that it be a light one and do not nip me in a vital part.
But perchance it would be wisest never to put one's paw into it.
I would observe, by the way, that it costs me nothing for
curtains, for I have no gazers to shut out but the sun and moon, and
I am willing that they should look in. The moon will not sour milk
nor taint meat of mine, nor will the sun injure my furniture or fade
my carpet; and if he is sometimes too warm a friend, I find it still
better economy to retreat behind some curtain which nature has
provided, than to add a single item to the details of housekeeping.
A lady once offered me a mat, but as I had no room to spare within
the house, nor time to spare within or without to shake it, I
declined it, preferring to wipe my feet on the sod before my door.
It is best to avoid the beginnings of evil.
Not long since I was present at the auction of a deacon's
effects, for his life had not been ineffectual:--

"The evil that men do lives after them."

As usual, a great proportion was trumpery which had begun to
accumulate in his father's day. Among the rest was a dried
tapeworm. And now, after lying half a century in his garret and
other dust holes, these things were not burned; instead of a
bonfire, or purifying destruction of them, there was an auction, or
increasing of them. The neighbors eagerly collected to view them,
bought them all, and carefully transported them to their garrets and
dust holes, to lie there till their estates are settled, when they
will start again. When a man dies he kicks the dust.
The customs of some savage nations might, perchance, be
profitably imitated by us, for they at least go through the
semblance of casting their slough annually; they have the idea of
the thing, whether they have the reality or not. Would it not be
well if we were to celebrate such a "busk," or "feast of first
fruits," as Bartram describes to have been the custom of the
Mucclasse Indians? "When a town celebrates the busk," says he,
"having previously provided themselves with new clothes, new pots,
pans, and other household utensils and furniture, they collect all
their worn out clothes and other despicable things, sweep and
cleanse their houses, squares, and the whole town of their filth,
which with all the remaining grain and other old provisions they
cast together into one common heap, and consume it with fire. After
having taken medicine, and fasted for three days, all the fire in
the town is extinguished. During this fast they abstain from the
gratification of every appetite and passion whatever. A general
amnesty is proclaimed; all malefactors may return to their town."
"On the fourth morning, the high priest, by rubbing dry wood
together, produces new fire in the public square, from whence every
habitation in the town is supplied with the new and pure flame."
They then feast on the new corn and fruits, and dance and sing for three days, "and the four following days they receive visits and rejoice with their friends from neighboring towns who have in like manner purified and prepared themselves."

The Mexicans also practised a similar purification at the end of every fifty-two years, in the belief that it was time for the world to come to an end.

I have scarcely heard of a truer sacrament, that is, as the dictionary defines it, "outward and visible sign of an inward and spiritual grace," than this, and I have no doubt that they were originally inspired directly from Heaven to do thus, though they have no Biblical record of the revelation.

For more than five years I maintained myself thus solely by the labor of my hands, and I found that, by working about six weeks in a year, I could meet all the expenses of living. The whole of my winters, as well as most of my summers, I had free and clear for study. I have thoroughly tried school-keeping, and found that my expenses were in proportion, or rather out of proportion, to my income, for I was obliged to dress and train, not to say think and believe, accordingly, and I lost my time into the bargain. As I did not teach for the good of my fellow-men, but simply for a livelihood, this was a failure. I have tried trade but I found that it would take ten years to get under way in that, and that then I should probably be on my way to the devil. I was actually afraid that I might by that time be doing what is called a good business.

When formerly I was looking about to see what I could do for a living, some sad experience in conforming to the wishes of friends being fresh in my mind to tax my ingenuity, I thought often and
seriously of picking huckleberries; that surely I could do, and its small profits might suffice -- for my greatest skill has been to want but little -- so little capital it required, so little distraction from my wonted moods, I foolishly thought. While my acquaintances went unhesitatingly into trade or the professions, I contemplated this occupation as most like theirs; ranging the hills all summer to pick the berries which came in my way, and thereafter carelessly dispose of them; so, to keep the flocks of Admetus. I also dreamed that I might gather the wild herbs, or carry evergreens to such villagers as loved to be reminded of the woods, even to the city, by hay-cart loads. But I have since learned that trade curses everything it handles; and though you trade in messages from heaven, the whole curse of trade attaches to the business. As I preferred some things to others, and especially valued my freedom, as I could fare hard and yet succeed well, I did not wish to spend my time in earning rich carpets or other fine furniture, or delicate cookery, or a house in the Grecian or the Gothic style just yet. If there are any to whom it is no interruption to acquire these things, and who know how to use them when acquired, I relinquish to them the pursuit. Some are "industrious," and appear to love labor for its own sake, or perhaps because it keeps them out of worse mischief; to such I have at present nothing to say. Those who would not know what to do with more leisure than they now enjoy, I might advise to work twice as hard as they do -- work till they pay for themselves, and get their free papers. For myself I found that the occupation of a day-laborer was the most independent of any, especially as it required only thirty or forty days in a year to support one. The laborer's day ends with the going down of the
sun, and he is then free to devote himself to his chosen pursuit, independent of his labor; but his employer, who speculates from month to month, has no respite from one end of the year to the other.

In short, I am convinced, both by faith and experience, that to maintain one’s self on this earth is not a hardship but a pastime, if we will live simply and wisely; as the pursuits of the simpler nations are still the sports of the more artificial. It is not necessary that a man should earn his living by the sweat of his brow, unless he sweats easier than I do.

One young man of my acquaintance, who has inherited some acres, told me that he thought he should live as I did, if he had the means. 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. 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 is by a mathematical point only that we are wise, as the sailor or the fugitive slave keeps the polestar in his eye; but that is sufficient guidance for all our life. We may not arrive at our port within a calculable period, but we would preserve the true course.

Undoubtedly, in this case, what is true for one is truer still for a thousand, as a large house is not proportionally more expensive than a small one, since one roof may cover, one cellar
underlie, and one wall separate several apartments. But for my part, I preferred the solitary dwelling. Moreover, it will commonly be cheaper to build the whole yourself than to convince another of the advantage of the common wall; and when you have done this, the common partition, to be much cheaper, must be a thin one, and that other may prove a bad neighbor, and also not keep his side in repair. The only co-operation which is commonly possible is exceedingly partial and superficial; and what little true co-operation there is, is as if it were not, being a harmony inaudible to men. If a man has faith, he will co-operate with equal faith everywhere; if he has not faith, he will continue to live like the rest of the world, whatever company he is joined to. To co-operate in the highest as well as the lowest sense, means to get our living together. I heard it proposed lately that two young men should travel together over the world, the one without money, earning his means as he went, before the mast and behind the plow, the other carrying a bill of exchange in his pocket. It was easy to see that they could not long be companions or co-operate, since one would not operate at all. They would part at the first interesting crisis in their adventures. Above all, as I have implied, the man who goes alone can start today; but he who travels with another must wait till that other is ready, and it may be a long time before they get off.

But all this is very selfish, I have heard some of my townsmen say. I confess that I have hitherto indulged very little in philanthropic enterprises. I have made some sacrifices to a sense of duty, and among others have sacrificed this pleasure also. There are those who have used all their arts to persuade me to undertake
the support of some poor family in the town; and if I had nothing to
do -- for the devil finds employment for the idle -- I might try my
hand at some such pastime as that. However, when I have thought to
indulge myself in this respect, and lay their Heaven under an
obligation by maintaining certain poor persons in all respects as
comfortably as I maintain myself, and have even ventured so far as
to make them the offer, they have one and all unhesitatingly
preferred to remain poor. While my townsmen and women are devoted
in so many ways to the good of their fellows, I trust that one at
least may be spared to other and less humane pursuits. You must
have a genius for charity as well as for anything else. As for
Doing-good, that is one of the professions which are full.
Moreover, I have tried it fairly, and, strange as it may seem, am
satisfied that it does not agree with my constitution. Probably I
should not consciously and deliberately forsake my particular
calling to do the good which society demands of me, to save the
universe from annihilation; and I believe that a like but infinitely
greater steadfastness elsewhere is all that now preserves it. But I
would not stand between any man and his genius; and to him who does
this work, which I decline, with his whole heart and soul and life,
I would say, Persevere, even if the world call it doing evil, as it
is most likely they will.
I am far from supposing that my case is a peculiar one; no doubt
many of my readers would make a similar defence. At doing something
-- I will not engage that my neighbors shall pronounce it good -- I
do not hesitate to say that I should be a capital fellow to hire;
but what that is, it is for my employer to find out. What good I
do, in the common sense of that word, must be aside from my main
path, and for the most part wholly unintended. Men say, 
practically, Begin where you are and such as you are, without aiming 
mainly to become of more worth, and with kindness aforethought go 
about doing good. If I were to preach at all in this strain, I 
should say rather, Set about being good. As if the sun should stop 
when he had kindled his fires up to the splendor of a moon or a star 
of the sixth magnitude, and go about like a Robin Goodfellow, 
peeping in at every cottage window, inspiring lunatics, and tainting 
meats, and making darkness visible, instead of steadily increasing 
his genial heat and beneficence till he is of such brightness that 
no mortal can look him in the face, and then, and in the meanwhile 
too, going about the world in his own orbit, doing it good, or 
rather, as a truer philosophy has discovered, the world going about 
him getting good. When Phaeton, wishing to prove his heavenly birth 
by his beneficence, had the sun’s chariot but one day, and drove out 
of the beaten track, he burned several blocks of houses in the lower 
streets of heaven, and scorched the surface of the earth, and dried 
up every spring, and made the great desert of Sahara, till at length 
Jupiter hurled him headlong to the earth with a thunderbolt, and the 
sun, through grief at his death, did not shine for a year.
There is no odor so bad as that which arises from goodness 
tainted. It is human, it is divine, carrion. If I knew for a 
certainty that a man was coming to my house with the conscious 
design of doing me good, I should run for my life, as from that dry 
and parching wind of the African deserts called the simoom, which 
fills the mouth and nose and ears and eyes with dust till you are 
suffocated, for fear that I should get some of his good done to me 
-- some of its virus mingled with my blood. No -- in this case I
would rather suffer evil the natural way. A man is not a good man
to me because he will feed me if I should be starving, or warm me if
I should be freezing, or pull me out of a ditch if I should ever
fall into one. I can find you a Newfoundland dog that will do as
much. Philanthropy is not love for one’s fellow-man in the broadest
sense. Howard was no doubt an exceedingly kind and worthy man in
his way, and has his reward; but, comparatively speaking, what are a
hundred Howards to us, if their philanthropy do not help us in our
best estate, when we are most worthy to be helped? I never heard of
a philanthropic meeting in which it was sincerely proposed to do any
good to me, or the like of me.

The Jesuits were quite balked by those Indians who, being burned
at the stake, suggested new modes of torture to their tormentors.
Being superior to physical suffering, it sometimes chanced that they
were superior to any consolation which the missionaries could offer;
and the law to do as you would be done by fell with less
persuasiveness on the ears of those who, for their part, did not
care how they were done by, who loved their enemies after a new
fashion, and came very near freely forgiving them all they did.

Be sure that you give the poor the aid they most need, though it
be your example which leaves them far behind. If you give money,
spend yourself with it, and do not merely abandon it to them. We
make curious mistakes sometimes. Often the poor man is not so cold
and hungry as he is dirty and ragged and gross. It is partly his
taste, and not merely his misfortune. If you give him money, he
will perhaps buy more rags with it. I was wont to pity the clumsy
Irish laborers who cut ice on the pond, in such mean and ragged
clothes, while I shivered in my more tidy and somewhat more
fashionable garments, till, one bitter cold day, one who had slipped into the water came to my house to warm him, and I saw him strip off three pairs of pants and two pairs of stockings ere he got down to the skin, though they were dirty and ragged enough, it is true, and that he could afford to refuse the extra garments which I offered him, he had so many intra ones. This ducking was the very thing he needed. Then I began to pity myself, and I saw that it would be a greater charity to bestow on me a flannel shirt than a whole slop-shop on him. There are a thousand hacking at the branches of evil to one who is striking at the root, and it may be that he who bestows the largest amount of time and money on the needy is doing the most by his mode of life to produce that misery which he strives in vain to relieve. It is the pious slave-breeder devoting the proceeds of every tenth slave to buy a Sunday's liberty for the rest. Some show their kindness to the poor by employing them in their kitchens. Would they not be kinder if they employed themselves there? You boast of spending a tenth part of your income in charity; maybe you should spend the nine tenths so, and done with it. Society recovers only a tenth part of the property then. Is this owing to the generosity of him in whose possession it is found, or to the remissness of the officers of justice?

Philanthropy is almost the only virtue which is sufficiently appreciated by mankind. Nay, it is greatly overrated; and it is our selfishness which overrates it. A robust poor man, one sunny day here in Concord, praised a fellow-townsman to me, because, as he said, he was kind to the poor; meaning himself. The kind uncles and aunts of the race are more esteemed than its true spiritual fathers and mothers. I once heard a reverend lecturer on England, a man of
learning and intelligence, after enumerating her scientific, literary, and political worthies, Shakespeare, Bacon, Cromwell, Milton, Newton, and others, speak next of her Christian heroes, whom, as if his profession required it of him, he elevated to a place far above all the rest, as the greatest of the great. They were Penn, Howard, and Mrs. Fry. Every one must feel the falsehood and cant of this. The last were not England's best men and women; only, perhaps, her best philanthropists.

I would not subtract anything from the praise that is due to philanthropy, but merely demand justice for all who by their lives and works are a blessing to mankind. I do not value chiefly a man's uprightness and benevolence, which are, as it were, his stem and leaves. Those plants of whose greenness withered we make herb tea for the sick serve but a humble use, and are most employed by quacks. I want the flower and fruit of a man; that some fragrance be wafted over from him to me, and some ripeness flavor our intercourse. His goodness must not be a partial and transitory act, but a constant superfluity, which costs him nothing and of which he is unconscious. This is a charity that hides a multitude of sins.

The philanthropist too often surrounds mankind with the remembrance of his own castoff griefs as an atmosphere, and calls it sympathy. We should impart our courage, and not our despair, our health and ease, and not our disease, and take care that this does not spread by contagion. From what southern plains comes up the voice of wailing? Under what latitudes reside the heathen to whom we would send light? Who is that intemperate and brutal man whom we would redeem? If anything ail a man, so that he does not perform his functions, if he have a pain in his bowels even -- for that is the
seat of sympathy -- he forthwith sets about reforming -- the world.

Being a microcosm himself, he discovers -- and it is a true
discovery, and he is the man to make it -- that the world has been
eating green apples; to his eyes, in fact, the globe itself is a
great green apple, which there is danger awful to think of that the
children of men will nibble before it is ripe; and straightway his
drastic philanthropy seeks out the Esquimau and the Patagonian, and
embraces the populous Indian and Chinese villages; and thus, by a
few years of philanthropic activity, the powers in the meanwhile
using him for their own ends, no doubt, he cures himself of his
dyspepsia, the globe acquires a faint blush on one or both of its
cheeks, as if it were beginning to be ripe, and life loses its
crudity and is once more sweet and wholesome to live. I never
dreamed of any enormity greater than I have committed. I never
knew, and never shall know, a worse man than myself.
I believe that what so saddens the reformer is not his sympathy
with his fellows in distress, but, though he be the holiest son of
God, is his private ail. Let this be righted, let the spring come
to him, the morning rise over his couch, and he will forsake his
generous companions without apology. My excuse for not lecturing
against the use of tobacco is, that I never chewed it, that is a
penalty which reformed tobacco-chewers have to pay; though there are
things enough I have chewed which I could lecture against. If you
should ever be betrayed into any of these philanthropies, do not let
your left hand know what your right hand does, for it is not worth
knowing. Rescue the drowning and tie your shoestrings. Take your
time, and set about some free labor.

Our manners have been corrupted by communication with the
saints. Our hymn-books resound with a melodious cursing of God and enduring Him forever. One would say that even the prophets and redeemers had rather consoled the fears than confirmed the hopes of man. There is nowhere recorded a simple and irrepressible satisfaction with the gift of life, any memorable praise of God.

All health and success does me good, however far off and withdrawn it may appear; all disease and failure helps to make me sad and does me evil, however much sympathy it may have with me or I with it.

If, then, we would indeed restore mankind by truly Indian, botanic, magnetic, or natural means, let us first be as simple and well as Nature ourselves, dispel the clouds which hang over our own brows, and take up a little life into our pores. Do not stay to be an overseer of the poor, but endeavor to become one of the worthies of the world.

I read in the Gulistan, or Flower Garden, of Sheik Sadi of Shiraz, that "they asked a wise man, saying: Of the many celebrated trees which the Most High God has created lofty and umbrageous, they call none azad, or free, excepting the cypress, which bears no fruit; what mystery is there in this? He replied, Each has its appropriate produce, and appointed season, during the continuance of which it is fresh and blooming, and during their absence dry and withered; to neither of which states is the cypress exposed, being always flourishing; and of this nature are the azads, or religious independents. -- Fix not thy heart on that which is transitory; for the Dijlah, or Tigris, will continue to flow through Bagdad after the race of caliphs is extinct: if thy hand has plenty, be liberal as the date tree; but if it affords nothing to give away, be an azad, or free man, like the cypress."
COMPLEMENTAL VERSES

The Pretensions of Poverty

Thou dost presume too much, poor needy wretch,
To claim a station in the firmament
Because thy humble cottage, or thy tub,
Nurses some lazy or pedantic virtue
In the cheap sunshine or by shady springs,
With roots and pot-herbs; where thy right hand,
Tearing those humane passions from the mind,
Upon whose stocks fair blooming virtues flourish,
Degradeth nature, and benumbeth sense,
And, Gorgon-like, turns active men to stone.
We not require the dull society
Of your necessitated temperance,
Or that unnatural stupidity
That knows nor joy nor sorrow; nor your forc'd
Falsely exalted passive fortitude
Above the active. This low abject brood,
That fix their seats in mediocrity,
Become your servile minds; but we advance
Such virtues only as admit excess,
Brave, bounteous acts, regal magnificence,
All-seeing prudence, magnanimity
That knows no bound, and that heroic virtue
For which antiquity hath left no name,
But patterns only, such as Hercules,
Achilles, Theseus. Back to thy loath'd cell;
And when thou seest the new enlighten'd sphere,
Study to know but what those worthies were.

T. CAREW

Where I Lived, and What I Lived For

At a certain season of our life we are accustomed to consider
every spot as the possible site of a house. I have thus surveyed
the country on every side within a dozen miles of where I live. In
imagination I have bought all the farms in succession, for all were
to be bought, and I knew their price. I walked over each farmer's
premises, tasted his wild apples, discoursed on husbandry with him,
took his farm at his price, at any price, mortgaging it to him in my
mind; even put a higher price on it -- took everything but a deed of
it -- took his word for his deed, for I dearly love to talk --
cultivated it, and him too to some extent, I trust, and withdrew
when I had enjoyed it long enough, leaving him to carry it on. This
experience entitled me to be regarded as a sort of real-estate
broker by my friends. Wherever I sat, there I might live, and the
landscape radiated from me accordingly. What is a house but a
sedes, a seat? -- better if a country seat. I discovered many a
site for a house not likely to be soon improved, which some might
have thought too far from the village, but to my eyes the village
was too far from it. Well, there I might live, I said; and there I
did live, for an hour, a summer and a winter life; saw how I could
let the years run off, buffet the winter through, and see the spring
come in. The future inhabitants of this region, wherever they may place their houses, may be sure that they have been anticipated. An afternoon sufficed to lay out the land into orchard, wood-lot, and pasture, and to decide what fine oaks or pines should be left to stand before the door, and whence each blasted tree could be seen to the best advantage; and then I let it lie, fallow, perchance, for a man is rich in proportion to the number of things which he can afford to let alone.

My imagination carried me so far that I even had the refusal of several farms -- the refusal was all I wanted -- but I never got my fingers burned by actual possession. The nearest that I came to actual possession was when I bought the Hollowell place, and had begun to sort my seeds, and collected materials with which to make a wheelbarrow to carry it on or off with; but before the owner gave me a deed of it, his wife -- every man has such a wife -- changed her mind and wished to keep it, and he offered me ten dollars to release him. Now, to speak the truth, I had but ten cents in the world, and it surpassed my arithmetic to tell, if I was that man who had ten cents, or who had a farm, or ten dollars, or all together. However, I let him keep the ten dollars and the farm too, for I had carried it far enough; or rather, to be generous, I sold him the farm for just what I gave for it, and, as he was not a rich man, made him a present of ten dollars, and still had my ten cents, and seeds, and materials for a wheelbarrow left. I found thus that I had been a rich man without any damage to my poverty. But I retained the landscape, and I have since annually carried off what it yielded without a wheelbarrow. With respect to landscapes,
"I am monarch of all I survey,
My right there is none to dispute."

I have frequently seen a poet withdraw, having enjoyed the most valuable part of a farm, while the crusty farmer supposed that he had got a few wild apples only. Why, the owner does not know it for many years when a poet has put his farm in rhyme, the most admirable kind of invisible fence, has fairly impounded it, milked it, skimmed it, and got all the cream, and left the farmer only the skimmed milk.

The real attractions of the Hollowell farm, to me, were: its complete retirement, being, about two miles from the village, half a mile from the nearest neighbor, and separated from the highway by a broad field; its bounding on the river, which the owner said protected it by its fogs from frosts in the spring, though that was nothing to me; the gray color and ruinous state of the house and barn, and the dilapidated fences, which put such an interval between me and the last occupant; the hollow and lichen-covered apple trees, nayed by rabbits, showing what kind of neighbors I should have; but above all, the recollection I had of it from my earliest voyages up the river, when the house was concealed behind a dense grove of red maples, through which I heard the house-dog bark. I was in haste to buy it, before the proprietor finished getting out some rocks, cutting down the hollow apple trees, and grubbing up some young birches which had sprung up in the pasture, or, in short, had made any more of his improvements. To enjoy these advantages I was ready
to carry it on; like Atlas, to take the world on my shoulders -- I
never heard what compensation he received for that -- and do all
those things which had no other motive or excuse but that I might
pay for it and be unmolested in my possession of it; for I knew all
the while that it would yield the most abundant crop of the kind I
wanted, if I could only afford to let it alone. But it turned out
as I have said.

All that I could say, then, with respect to farming on a large
scale -- I have always cultivated a garden -- was, that I had had my
seeds ready. Many think that seeds improve with age. I have no
doubt that time discriminates between the good and the bad; and when
at last I shall plant, I shall be less likely to be disappointed.

But I would say to my fellows, once for all, As long as possible
live free and uncommitted. It makes but little difference whether
you are committed to a farm or the county jail.

Old Cato, whose "De Re Rustica" is my "Cultivator," says -- and
the only translation I have seen makes sheer nonsense of the passage
-- "When you think of getting a farm turn it thus in your mind, not
to buy greedily; nor spare your pains to look at it, and do not
think it enough to go round it once. The oftener you go there the
more it will please you, if it is good." I think I shall not buy
greedily, but go round and round it as long as I live, and be buried
in it first, that it may please me the more at last.

The present was my next experiment of this kind, which I purpose
to describe more at length, for convenience putting the experience
of two years into one. As I have said, I do not propose to write an
ode to dejection, but to brag as lustily as chanticleer in the
morning, standing on his roost, if only to wake my neighbors up.
When first I took up my abode in the woods, that is, began to spend my nights as well as days there, which, by accident, was on Independence Day, or the Fourth of July, 1845, my house was not finished for winter, but was merely a defence against the rain, without plastering or chimney, the walls being of rough, weather-stained boards, with wide chinks, which made it cool at night. The upright white hewn studs and freshly planed door and window casings gave it a clean and airy look, especially in the morning, when its timbers were saturated with dew, so that I fancied that by noon some sweet gum would exude from them. To my imagination it retained throughout the day more or less of this auroral character, reminding me of a certain house on a mountain which I had visited a year before. This was an airy and unplastered cabin, fit to entertain a travelling god, and where a goddess might trail her garments. The winds which passed over my dwelling were such as sweep over the ridges of mountains, bearing the broken strains, or celestial parts only, of terrestrial music. The morning wind forever blows, the poem of creation is uninterrupted; but few are the ears that hear it. Olympus is but the outside of the earth everywhere.

The only house I had been the owner of before, if I except a boat, was a tent, which I used occasionally when making excursions in the summer, and this is still rolled up in my garret; but the boat, after passing from hand to hand, has gone down the stream of time. With this more substantial shelter about me, I had made some progress toward settling in the world. This frame, so slightly clad, was a sort of crystallization around me, and reacted on the builder. It was suggestive somewhat as a picture in outlines. I
did not need to go outdoors to take the air, for the atmosphere within had lost none of its freshness. It was not so much within doors as behind a door where I sat, even in the rainiest weather. The Harivansa says, “An abode without birds is like a meat without seasoning.” Such was not my abode, for I found myself suddenly neighbor to the birds; not by having imprisoned one, but having caged myself near them. I was not only nearer to some of those which commonly frequent the garden and the orchard, but to those smaller and more thrilling songsters of the forest which never, or rarely, serenade a villager -- the wood thrush, the veery, the scarlet tanager, the field sparrow, the whip-poor-will, and many others.

I was seated by the shore of a small pond, about a mile and a half south of the village of Concord and somewhat higher than it, in the midst of an extensive wood between that town and Lincoln, and about two miles south of that our only field known to fame, Concord Battle Ground; but I was so low in the woods that the opposite shore, half a mile off, like the rest, covered with wood, was my most distant horizon. For the first week, whenever I looked out on the pond it impressed me like a tarn high up on the side of a mountain, its bottom far above the surface of other lakes, and, as the sun arose, I saw it throwing off its nightly clothing of mist, and here and there, by degrees, its soft ripples or its smooth reflecting surface was revealed, while the mists, like ghosts, were stealthily withdrawing in every direction into the woods, as at the breaking up of some nocturnal conventicle. The very dew seemed to hang upon the trees later into the day than usual, as on the sides of mountains.
This small lake was of most value as a neighbor in the intervals
of a gentle rain-storm in August, when, both air and water being
perfectly still, but the sky overcast, mid-afternoon had all the
serenity of evening, and the wood thrush sang around, and was heard
from shore to shore. A lake like this is never smoother than at
such a time; and the clear portion of the air above it being,
shallow and darkened by clouds, the water, full of light and
reflections, becomes a lower heaven itself so much the more
important. From a hill-top near by, where the wood had been
recently cut off, there was a pleasing vista southward across the
pond, through a wide indentation in the hills which form the shore
there, where their opposite sides sloping toward each other
suggested a stream flowing out in that direction through a wooded
valley, but stream there was none. That way I looked between and
over the near green hills to some distant and higher ones in the
horizon, tinged with blue. Indeed, by standing on tiptoe I could
catch a glimpse of some of the peaks of the still bluer and more
distant mountain ranges in the northwest, those true-blue coins from
heaven's own mint, and also of some portion of the village. But in
other directions, even from this point, I could not see over or
beyond the woods which surrounded me. It is well to have some water
in your neighborhood, to give buoyancy to and float the earth. One
value even of the smallest well is, that when you look into it you
see that earth is not continent but insular. This is as important
as that it keeps butter cool. When I looked across the pond from
this peak toward the Sudbury meadows, which in time of flood I
distinguished elevated perhaps by a mirage in their seething valley,
like a coin in a basin, all the earth beyond the pond appeared like
a thin crust insulated and floated even by this small sheet of
interverting water, and I was reminded that this on which I dwelt
was but dry land.

Though the view from my door was still more contracted, I did
not feel crowded or confined in the least. There was pasture enough
for my imagination. The low shrub oak plateau to which the opposite
shore arose stretched away toward the prairies of the West and the
steppes of Tartary, affording ample room for all the roving families
of men. “There are none happy in the world but beings who enjoy
freely a vast horizon” -- said Damodara, when his herds required new
and larger pastures.

Both place and time were changed, and I dwelt nearer to those
parts of the universe and to those eras in history which had most
attracted me. Where I lived was as far off as many a region viewed
nightly by astronomers. We are wont to imagine rare and delectable
places in some remote and more celestial corner of the system,
behind the constellation of Cassiopeia's Chair, far from noise and
disturbance. I discovered that my house actually had its site in
such a withdrawn, but forever new and unprofaned, part of the
universe. If it were worth the while to settle in those parts near
to the Pleiades or the Hyades, to Aldebaran or Altair, then I was
really there, or at an equal remoteness from the life which I had
left behind, dwindled and twinkling with as fine a ray to my nearest
neighbor, and to be seen only in moonless nights by him. Such was
that part of creation where I had squatted;

"There was a shepherd that did live,
And held his thoughts as high
As were the mounts whereon his flocks
Did hourly feed him by."

What should we think of the shepherd's life if his flocks always wandered to higher pastures than his thoughts?

Every morning was a cheerful invitation to make my life of equal simplicity, and I may say innocence, with Nature herself. I have been as sincere a worshipper of Aurora as the Greeks. I got up early and bathed in the pond; that was a religious exercise, and one of the best things which I did. They say that characters were engraven on the bathing tub of King Tchingthang to this effect:

"Renew thyself completely each day; do it again, and again, and forever again." I can understand that. Morning brings back the heroic ages. I was as much affected by the faint hum of a mosquito making its invisible and unimaginable tour through my apartment at earliest dawn, when I was sitting with door and windows open, as I could be by any trumpet that ever sang of fame. It was Homer's requiem; itself an Iliad and Odyssey in the air, singing its own wrath and wanderings. There was something cosmical about it; a standing advertisement, till forbidden, of the everlasting vigor and fertility of the world. The morning, which is the most memorable season of the day, is the awakening hour. Then there is least somnolence in us; and for an hour, at least, some part of us awakes which slumbers all the rest of the day and night. Little is to be expected of that day, if it can be called a day, to which we are not awakened by our Genius, but by the mechanical nudgings of some
servitor, are not awakened by our own newly acquired force and aspirations from within, accompanied by the undulations of celestial music, instead of factory bells, and a fragrance filling the air -- to a higher life than we fell asleep from; and thus the darkness bear its fruit, and prove itself to be good, no less than the light. That man who does not believe that each day contains an earlier, more sacred, and auroral hour than he has yet profaned, has despaired of life, and is pursuing a descending and darkening way. After a partial cessation of his sensuous life, the soul of man, or its organs rather, are reinvigorated each day, and his Genius tries again what noble life it can make. All memorable events, I should say, transpire in morning time and in a morning atmosphere. The Vedas say, "All intelligences awake with the morning." Poetry and art, and the fairest and most memorable of the actions of men, date from such an hour. All poets and heroes, like Memnon, are the children of Aurora, and emit their music at sunrise. To him whose elastic and vigorous thought keeps pace with the sun, the day is a perpetual morning. It matters not what the clocks say or the attitudes and labors of men. Morning is when I am awake and there is a dawn in me. Moral reform is the effort to throw off sleep. Why is it that men give so poor an account of their day if they have not been slumbering? They are not such poor calculators. If they had not been overcome with drowsiness, they would have performed something. The millions are awake enough for physical labor; but only one in a million is awake enough for effective intellectual exertion, only one in a hundred millions to a poetic or divine life. To be awake is to be alive. I have never yet met a man who was quite awake. How could I have looked him in the face?
We must learn to reawaken and keep ourselves awake, not by mechanical aids, but by an infinite expectation of the dawn, which does not forsake us in our soundest sleep. I know of no more encouraging fact than the unquestionable ability of man to elevate his life by a conscious endeavor. It is something to be able to paint a particular picture, or to carve a statue, and so to make a few objects beautiful; but it is far more glorious to carve and paint the very atmosphere and medium through which we look, which morally we can do. To affect the quality of the day, that is the highest of arts. Every man is tasked to make his life, even in its details, worthy of the contemplation of his most elevated and critical hour. If we refused, or rather used up, such paltry information as we get, the oracles would distinctly inform us how this might be done.

I went to the woods because I wished to live deliberately, to front only the essential facts of life, and see if I could not learn what it had to teach, and not, when I came to die, discover that I had not lived. I did not wish to live what was not life, living is so dear; nor did I wish to practise resignation, unless it was quite necessary. I wanted to live deep and suck out all the marrow of life, to live so sturdily and Spartan-like as to put to rout all that was not life, to cut a broad swath and shave close, to drive life into a corner, and reduce it to its lowest terms, and, if it proved to be mean, why then to get the whole and genuine meanness of it, and publish its meanness to the world; or if it were sublime, to know it by experience, and be able to give a true account of it in my next excursion. For most men, it appears to me, are in a strange uncertainty about it, whether it is of the devil or of God, and have
somewhat hastily concluded that it is the chief end of man here to
"glorify God and enjoy him forever."

Still we live meanly, like ants; though the fable tells us that
we were long ago changed into men; like pygmies we fight with
cranes; it is error upon error, and clout upon clout, and our best
virtue has for its occasion a superfluous and evitable wretchedness.
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. Our
life is like a German Confederacy, made up of petty states, with its
boundary forever fluctuating, so that even a German cannot tell you
how it is bounded at any moment. The nation itself, with all its
so-called internal improvements, which, by the way are all external
and superficial, is just such an unwieldy and overgrown
establishment, cluttered with furniture and tripped up by its own
traps, ruined by luxury and heedless expense, by want of calculation
and a worthy aim, as the million households in the land; and the
only cure for it, as for them, is in a rigid economy, a stern and
more than Spartan simplicity of life and elevation of purpose. It lives too fast. Men think that it is essential that the Nation have commerce, and export ice, and talk through a telegraph, and ride thirty miles an hour, without a doubt, whether they do or not; but whether we should live like baboons or like men, is a little uncertain. If we do not get out sleepers, and forge rails, and devote days and nights to the work, but go to tinkering upon our lives to improve them, who will build railroads? And if railroads are not built, how shall we get to heaven in season? But if we stay at home and mind our business, who will want railroads? We do not ride on the railroad; it rides upon us. Did you ever think what those sleepers are that underlie the railroad? Each one is a man, an Irishman, or a Yankee man. The rails are laid on them, and they are covered with sand, and the cars run smoothly over them. They are sound sleepers, I assure you. And every few years a new lot is laid down and run over; so that, if some have the pleasure of riding on a rail, others have the misfortune to be ridden upon. And when they run over a man that is walking in his sleep, a supernumerary sleeper in the wrong position, and wake him up, they suddenly stop the cars, and make a hue and cry about it, as if this were an exception. I am glad to know that it takes a gang of men for every five miles to keep the sleepers down and level in their beds as it is, for this is a sign that they may sometime get up again. Why should we live with such hurry and waste of life? We are determined to be starved before we are hungry. Men say that a stitch in time saves nine, and so they take a thousand stitches today to save nine tomorrow. As for work, we haven't any of any consequence. We have the Saint Vitus' dance, and cannot possibly
keep our heads still. If I should only give a few pulls at the
parish bell-rop[e, 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, since burn it must, and we, be it known, did
not set it on fire -- or to see it put out, and have a hand in it,
if that is done as handsomely; yes, even if it were the parish
church itself. Hardly a man takes a half-hour's nap after dinner,
but when he wakes he holds up his head and asks, "What's the news?"
as if the rest of mankind had stood his sentinels. Some give
directions to be waked every half-hour, doubtless for no other
purpose; and then, to pay for it, they tell what they have dreamed.
After a night's sleep the news is as indispensable as the breakfast.
"Pray tell me anything new that has happened to a man anywhere on
this globe" -- and he reads it over his coffee and rolls, that a man
has had his eyes gouged out this morning on the Wachito River; never
dreaming the while that he lives in the dark unfathomed mammoth cave
of this world, and has but the rudiment of an eye himself.
For my part, I could easily do without the post-office. I think
that there are very few important communications made through it.
To speak critically, I never received more than one or two letters
in my life -- I wrote this some years ago -- that were worth the
postage. The penny-post is, commonly, an institution through which
you seriously offer a man that penny for his thoughts which is so
often safely offered in jest. And I am sure that I never read any
memorable news in a newspaper. If we read of one man robbed, or murdered, or killed by accident, or one house burned, or one vessel wrecked, or one steamboat blown up, or one cow run over on the Western Railroad, or one mad dog killed, or one lot of grasshoppers in the winter -- we never need read of another. One is enough. If you are acquainted with the principle, what do you care for a myriad instances and applications? To a philosopher all news, as it is called, is gossip, and they who edit and read it are old women over their tea. Yet not a few are greedy after this gossip. There was such a rush, as I hear, the other day at one of the offices to learn the foreign news by the last arrival, that several large squares of plate glass belonging to the establishment were broken by the pressure -- news which I seriously think a ready wit might write a twelve-month, or twelve years, beforehand with sufficient accuracy. As for Spain, for instance, if you know how to throw in Don Carlos and the Infanta, and Don Pedro and Seville and Granada, from time to time in the right proportions -- they may have changed the names a little since I saw the papers -- and serve up a bull-fight when other entertainments fail, it will be true to the letter, and give us as good an idea of the exact state or ruin of things in Spain as the most succinct and lucid reports under this head in the newspapers: and as for England, almost the last significant scrap of news from that quarter was the revolution of 1649; and if you have learned the history of her crops for an average year, you never need attend to that thing again, unless your speculations are of a merely pecuniary character. If one may judge who rarely looks into the newspapers, nothing new does ever happen in foreign parts, a French revolution not excepted.
What news! how much more important to know what that is which was never old! "Kieou-he-yu (great dignitary of the state of Wei) sent a man to Khoung-tseu to know his news. Khoung-tseu caused the messenger to be seated near him, and questioned him in these terms: What is your master doing? The messenger answered with respect: My master desires to diminish the number of his faults, but he cannot come to the end of them. The messenger being gone, the philosopher remarked: What a worthy messenger! What a worthy messenger!" The preacher, instead of vexing the ears of drowsy farmers on their day of rest at the end of the week -- for Sunday is the fit conclusion of an ill-spent week, and not the fresh and brave beginning of a new one -- with this one other draggle-tail of a sermon, should shout with thundering voice, "Pause! Avast! Why so seeming fast, but deadly slow?"

Shams and delusions are esteemed for soundest truths, while reality is fabulous. If men would steadily observe realities only, and not allow themselves to be deluded, life, to compare it with such things as we know, would be like a fairy tale and the Arabian Nights' Entertainments. If we respected only what is inevitable and has a right to be, music and poetry would resound along the streets. When we are unhurried and wise, we perceive that only great and worthy things have any permanent and absolute existence, that petty fears and petty pleasures are but the shadow of the reality. This is always exhilarating and sublime. By closing the eyes and slumbering, and consenting to be deceived by shows, men establish and confirm their daily life of routine and habit everywhere, which still is built on purely illusory foundations. Children, who play life, discern its true law and relations more clearly than men, who
fail to live it worthily, but who think that they are wiser by experience, that is, by failure. I have read in a Hindoo book, that "there was a king's son, who, being expelled in infancy from his native city, was brought up by a forester, and, growing up to maturity in that state, imagined himself to belong to the barbarous race with which he lived. One of his father's ministers having discovered him, revealed to him what he was, and the misconception of his character was removed, and he knew himself to be a prince. So soul," continues the Hindoo philosopher, "from the circumstances in which it is placed, mistakes its own character, until the truth is revealed to it by some holy teacher, and then it knows itself to be Brahme." I perceive that we inhabitants of New England live this mean life that we do because our vision does not penetrate the surface of things. We think that that is which appears to be. If a man should walk through this town and see only the reality, where, think you, would the "Mill-dam" go to? If he should give us an account of the realities he beheld there, we should not recognize the place in his description. Look at a meeting-house, or a court-house, or a jail, or a shop, or a dwelling-house, and say what that thing really is before a true gaze, and they would all go to pieces in your account of them. Men esteem truth remote, in the outskirts of the system, behind the farthest star, before Adam and after the last man. In eternity there is indeed something true and sublime. But all these times and places and occasions are now and here. God himself culminates in the present moment, and will never be more divine in the lapse of all the ages. And we are enabled to apprehend at all what is sublime and noble only by the perpetual instilling and drenching of the reality that surrounds us. The
universe constantly and obediently answers to our conceptions; whether we travel fast or slow, the track is laid for us. Let us spend our lives in conceiving then. The poet or the artist never yet had so fair and noble a design but some of his posterity at least could accomplish it. 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? Let us not be upset and overwhelmed in that terrible rapid and whirlpool called a dinner, situated in the meridian shallows. Weather this danger and you are safe, for the rest of the way is down hill. With unrelaxed nerves, with morning vigor, sail by it, looking another way, tied to the mast like Ulysses. If the engine whistles, let it whistle till it is hoarse for its pains. If the bell rings, why should we run? 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 gauge, not a Nilometer, but a Realometer, that future
ages might know how deep a freshet of shams and appearances had
gathered from time to time. If you stand right fronting and face to
face to a fact, you will see the sun glimmer on both its surfaces,
as if it were a cimeter, and feel its sweet edge dividing you
through the heart and marrow, and so you will happily conclude your
mortal career. 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.

Time is but the stream I go a-fishing in. I drink at it; but
while I drink I see the sandy bottom and detect how shallow it is.
Its thin current slides away, but eternity remains. I would drink
deep; fish in the sky, whose bottom is pebbly with stars. I
cannot count one. I know not the first letter of the alphabet. I
have always been regretting that I was not as wise as the day I was
born. The intellect is a cleaver; it discerns and rifts its way
into the secret of things. I do not wish to be any more busy with
my hands than is necessary. My head is hands and feet. I feel all
my best faculties concentrated in it. My instinct tells me that my
head is an organ for burrowing, as some creatures use their snout
and fore paws, and with it I would mine and burrow my way through
these hills. I think that the richest vein is somewhere hereabouts;
so by the divining-rod and thin rising vapors I judge; and here I
will begin to mine.

Reading
With a little more deliberation in the choice of their pursuits, all men would perhaps become essentially students and observers, for certainly their nature and destiny are interesting to all alike. In accumulating property for ourselves or our posterity, in founding a family or a state, or acquiring fame even, we are mortal; but in dealing with truth we are immortal, and need fear no change nor accident. The oldest Egyptian or Hindoo philosopher raised a corner of the veil from the statue of the divinity; and still the trembling robe remains raised, and I gaze upon as fresh a glory as he did, since it was I in him that was then so bold, and it is he in me that now reviews the vision. No dust has settled on that robe; no time has elapsed since that divinity was revealed. That time which we really improve, or which is improvable, is neither past, present, nor future.

My residence was more favorable, not only to thought, but to serious reading, than a university; and though I was beyond the range of the ordinary circulating library, I had more than ever come within the influence of those books which circulate round the world, whose sentences were first written on bark, and are now merely copied from time to time on to linen paper. Says the poet Mr Udd, "Being seated, to run through the region of the spiritual world; I have had this advantage in books. To be intoxicated by a single glass of wine; I have experienced this pleasure when I have drunk the liquor of the esoteric doctrines." I kept Homer's Iliad on my table through the summer, though I looked at his page only now and then. Incessant labor with my hands, at first, for I had my house to finish and my beans to hoe at the same
time, made more study impossible. Yet I sustained myself by the
prospect of such reading in future. I read one or two shallow books
of travel in the intervals of my work, till that employment made me
ashamed of myself, and I asked where it was then that I lived.

The student may read Homer or AEschylus in the Greek without
danger of dissipation or luxuriousness, for it implies that he in
some measure emulate their heroes, and consecrate morning hours to
their pages. The heroic books, even if printed in the character of
our mother tongue, will always be in a language dead to degenerate
times; and we must laboriously seek the meaning of each word and
line, conjecturing a larger sense than common use permits out of
what wisdom and valor and generosity we have. The modern cheap and
fertile press, with all its translations, has done little to bring
us nearer to the heroic writers of antiquity. They seem as
solitary, and the letter in which they are printed as rare and
curious, as ever. It is worth the expense of youthful days and
costly hours, if you learn only some words of an ancient language,
which are raised out of the trivialness of the street, to be
perpetual suggestions and provocations. It is not in vain that the
farmer remembers and repeats the few Latin words which he has heard.

Men sometimes speak as if the study of the classics would at length
make way for more modern and practical studies; but the adventurous
student will always study classics, in whatever language they may be
written and however ancient they may be. For what are the classics
but the noblest recorded thoughts of man? They are the only oracles
which are not decayed, and there are such answers to the most modern
inquiry in them as Delphi and Dodona never gave. We might as well
omit to study Nature because she is old. To read well, that is, to
read true books in a true spirit, is a noble exercise, and one that
will task the reader more than any exercise which the customs of the
day esteem. It requires a training such as the athletes underwent,
the steady intention almost of the whole life to this object. Books
must be read as deliberately and reservedly as they were written.
It is not enough even to be able to speak the language of that
nation by which they are written, for there is a memorable interval
between the spoken and the written language, the language heard and
the language read. The one is commonly transitory, a sound, a
tongue, a dialect merely, almost brutish, and we learn it
unconsciously, like the brutes, of our mothers. The other is the
maturity and experience of that; if that is our mother tongue, this
is our father tongue, a reserved and select expression, too
significant to be heard by the ear, which we must be born again in
order to speak. The crowds of men who merely spoke the Greek and
Latin tongues in the Middle Ages were not entitled by the accident
of birth to read the works of genius written in those languages; for
these were not written in that Greek or Latin which they knew, but
in the select language of literature. They had not learned the
nobler dialects of Greece and Rome, but the very materials on which
they were written were waste paper to them, and they prized instead
a cheap contemporary literature. But when the several nations of
Europe had acquired distinct though rude written languages of their
own, sufficient for the purposes of their rising literatures, then
first learning revived, and scholars were enabled to discern from
that remoteness the treasures of antiquity. What the Roman and
Grecian multitude could not hear, after the lapse of ages a few
scholars read, and a few scholars only are still reading it.
However much we may admire the orator's occasional bursts of eloquence, the noblest written words are commonly as far behind or above the fleeting spoken language as the firmament with its stars is behind the clouds. There are the stars, and they who can may read them. The astronomers forever comment on and observe them. They are not exhalations like our daily colloquies and vaporous breath. What is called eloquence in the forum is commonly found to be rhetoric in the study. The orator yields to the inspiration of a transient occasion, and speaks to the mob before him, to those who can hear him; but the writer, whose more equable life is his occasion, and who would be distracted by the event and the crowd which inspire the orator, speaks to the intellect and health of mankind, to all in any age who can understand him.

No wonder that Alexander carried the Iliad with him on his expeditions in a precious casket. A written word is the choicest of relics. It is something at once more intimate with us and more universal than any other work of art. It is the work of art nearest to life itself. It may be translated into every language, and not only be read but actually breathed from all human lips; -- not be represented on canvas or in marble only, but be carved out of the breath of life itself. The symbol of an ancient man's thought becomes a modern man's speech. Two thousand summers have imparted to the monuments of Grecian literature, as to her marbles, only a maturer golden and autumnal tint, for they have carried their own serene and celestial atmosphere into all lands to protect them against the corrosion of time. Books are the treasured wealth of the world and the fit inheritance of generations and nations.

Books, the oldest and the best, stand naturally and rightfully on
the shelves of every cottage. They have no cause of their own to
plead, but while they enlighten and sustain the reader his common
sense will not refuse them. Their authors are a natural and
irresistible aristocracy in every society, and, more than kings or
emperors, exert an influence on mankind. When the illiterate and
perhaps scornful trader has earned by enterprise and industry his
coveted leisure and independence, and is admitted to the circles of
wealth and fashion, he turns inevitably at last to those still
higher but yet inaccessible circles of intellect and genius, and is
sensible only of the imperfection of his culture and the vanity and
insufficiency of all his riches, and further proves his good sense
by the pains which he takes to secure for his children that
intellectual culture whose want he so keenly feels; and thus it is
that he becomes the founder of a family.

Those who have not learned to read the ancient classics in the
language in which they were written must have a very imperfect
knowledge of the history of the human race; for it is remarkable
that no transcript of them has ever been made into any modern
tongue, unless our civilization itself may be regarded as such a
transcript. Homer has never yet been printed in English, nor
AESchylus, nor Virgil even -- works as refined, as solidly done, and
as beautiful almost as the morning itself; for later writers, say
what we will of their genius, have rarely, if ever, equalled the
elaborate beauty and finish and the lifelong and heroic literary
labors of the ancients. They only talk of forgetting them who never
knew them. It will be soon enough to forget them when we have the
learning and the genius which will enable us to attend to and
appreciate them. That age will be rich indeed when those relics
which we call Classics, and the still older and more than classic
but even less known Scriptures of the nations, shall have still
further accumulated, when the Vaticans shall be filled with Vedas
and Zendavestas and Bibles, with Homers and Dantes and Shakespeares,
and all the centuries to come shall have successively deposited
their trophies in the forum of the world. By such a pile we may
hope to scale heaven at last.
The works of the great poets have never yet been read by
mankind, for only great poets can read them. They have only been
read as the multitude read the stars, at most astrologically, not
astronomically. Most men have learned to read to serve a paltry
convenience, as they have learned to cipher in order to keep
accounts and not be cheated in trade; but of reading as a noble
intellectual exercise they know little or nothing; yet this only is
reading, in a high sense, not that which lulls us as a luxury and
suffers the nobler faculties to sleep the while, but what we have to
stand on tip-toe to read and devote our most alert and wakeful hours
to.
I think that having learned our letters we should read the best
that is in literature, and not be forever repeating our a-b-abs, and
words of one syllable, in the fourth or fifth classes, sitting on
the lowest and foremost form all our lives. Most men are satisfied
if they read or hear read, and perchance have been convicted by the
wisdom of one good book, the Bible, and for the rest of their lives
vegetate and dissipate their faculties in what is called easy
reading. There is a work in several volumes in our Circulating
Library entitled "Little Reading," which I thought referred to a
town of that name which I had not been to. There are those who,
like cormorants and ostriches, can digest all sorts of this, even
after the fullest dinner of meats and vegetables, for they suffer
nothing to be wasted. If others are the machines to provide this
provender, they are the machines to read it. They read the nine
thousandth tale about Zebulon and Sophronia, and how they loved as
none had ever loved before, and neither did the course of their true
love run smooth -- at any rate, how it did run and stumble, and get
up again and go on! how some poor unfortunate got up on to a
steeple, who had better never have gone up as far as the belfry; and
then, having needlessly got him up there, the happy novelist rings
the bell for all the world to come together and hear, O dear! how he
did get down again! For my part, I think that they had better
metamorphose all such aspiring heroes of universal noveldom into man
weather-cocks, as they used to put heroes among the constellations,
and let them swing round there till they are rusty, and not come
down at all to bother honest men with their pranks. The next time
the novelist rings the bell I will not stir though the meeting-house
burn down. "The Skip of the Tip-Toe-Hop, a Romance of the Middle
Ages, by the celebrated author of `Tittle-Tol-Tan,' to appear in
monthly parts; a great rush; don't all come together." All this
they read with saucer eyes, and erect and primitive curiosity, and
with unwearied gizzard, whose corrugations even yet need no
sharpening, just as some little four-year-old bencher his two-cent
gilt-covered edition of Cinderella -- without any improvement, that
I can see, in the pronunciation, or accent, or emphasis, or any more
skill in extracting or inserting the moral. The result is dulness
of sight, a stagnation of the vital circulations, and a general
deliquium and sloughing off of all the intellectual faculties. This
sort of gingerbread is baked daily and more sedulously than pure wheat or rye-and-Indian in almost every oven, and finds a surer market.

The best books are not read even by those who are called good readers. What does our Concord culture amount to? There is in this town, with a very few exceptions, no taste for the best or for very good books even in English literature, whose words all can read and spell. Even the college-bred and so-called liberally educated men here and elsewhere have really little or no acquaintance with the English classics; and as for the recorded wisdom of mankind, the ancient classics and Bibles, which are accessible to all who will know of them, there are the feeblest efforts anywhere made to become acquainted with them. I know a woodchopper, of middle age, who takes a French paper, not for news as he says, for he is above that, but to "keep himself in practice," he being a Canadian by birth; and when I ask him what he considers the best thing he can do in this world, he says, beside this, to keep up and add to his English.

This is about as much as the college-bred generally do or aspire to do, and they take an English paper for the purpose. One who has just come from reading perhaps one of the best English books will find how many with whom he can converse about it? Or suppose he comes from reading a Greek or Latin classic in the original, whose praises are familiar even to the so-called illiterate; he will find nobody at all to speak to, but must keep silence about it. Indeed, there is hardly the professor in our colleges, who, if he has mastered the difficulties of the language, has proportionally mastered the difficulties of the wit and poetry of a Greek poet, and has any sympathy to impart to the alert and heroic reader; and as
for the sacred Scriptures, or Bibles of mankind, who in this town
can tell me even their titles? Most men do not know that any nation
but the Hebrews have had a scripture. A man, any man, will go
considerably out of his way to pick up a silver dollar; but here are
golden words, which the wisest men of antiquity have uttered, and
whose worth the wise of every succeeding age have assured us of; --
and yet we learn to read only as far as Easy Reading, the primers
and class-books, and when we leave school, the "Little Reading," and
story-books, which are for boys and beginners; and our reading, our
conversation and thinking, are all on a very low level, worthy only
of pygmies and manikins.

I aspire to be acquainted with wiser men than this our Concord
soil has produced, whose names are hardly known here. Or shall I
hear the name of Plato and never read his book? As if Plato were my
townsman and I never saw him -- my next neighbor and I never heard
him speak or attended to the wisdom of his words. But how actually
is it? His Dialogues, which contain what was immortal in him, lie
on the next shelf, and yet I never read them. We are underbred and
low-lived and illiterate; and in this respect I confess I do not
make any very broad distinction between the illiterateness of my
townsman who cannot read at all and the illiterateness of him who
has learned to read only what is for children and feeble intellects.
We should be as good as the worthies of antiquity, but partly by
first knowing how good they were. We are a race of tit-men, and
soar but little higher in our intellectual flights than the columns
of the daily paper.

It is not all books that are as dull as their readers. There
are probably words addressed to our condition exactly, which, if we
could really hear and understand, would be more salutary than the
morning or the spring to our lives, and possibly put a new aspect on
the face of things for us. How many a man has dated a new era in
his life from the reading of a book! The book exists for us,
perchance, which will explain our miracles and reveal new ones. The
at present unutterable things we may find somewhere uttered. These
same questions that disturb and puzzle and confound us have in their
turn occurred to all the wise men; not one has been omitted; and
each has answered them, according to his ability, by his words and
his life. Moreover, with wisdom we shall learn liberality. The
solitary hired man on a farm in the outskirts of Concord, who has
had his second birth and peculiar religious experience, and is
driven as he believes into the silent gravity and exclusiveness by
his faith, may think it is not true; but Zoroaster, thousands of
years ago, travelled the same road and had the same experience; but
he, being wise, knew it to be universal, and treated his neighbors
accordingly, and is even said to have invented and established
worship among men. Let him humbly commune with Zoroaster then, and
through the liberalizing influence of all the worthies, with Jesus
Christ himself, and let "our church" go by the board.
We boast that we belong to the Nineteenth Century and are making
the most rapid strides of any nation. But consider how little this
village does for its own culture. I do not wish to flatter my
townsmen, nor to be flattered by them, for that will not advance
either of us. We need to be provoked -- goaded like oxen, as we
are, into a trot. We have a comparatively decent system of common
schools, schools for infants only; but excepting the half-starved
Lyceum in the winter, and latterly the puny beginning of a library
suggested by the State, no school for ourselves. We spend more on
almost any article of bodily aliment or ailment than on our mental
aliment. It is time that we had uncommon schools, that we did not
leave off our education when we begin to be men and women. It is
time that villages were universities, and their elder inhabitants
the fellows of universities, with leisure -- if they are, indeed, so
well off -- to pursue liberal studies the rest of their lives.
Shall the world be confined to one Paris or one Oxford forever?
Cannot students be boarded here and get a liberal education under
the skies of Concord? Can we not hire some Abelard to lecture to
us? Alas! what with foddering the cattle and tending the store, we
are kept from school too long, and our education is sadly neglected.
In this country, the village should in some respects take the place
of the nobleman of Europe. It should be the patron of the fine
arts. It is rich enough. It wants only the magnanimity and
refinement. It can spend money enough on such things as farmers and
traders value, but it is thought Utopian to propose spending money
for things which more intelligent men know to be of far more worth.
This town has spent seventeen thousand dollars on a town-house,
thank fortune or politics, but probably it will not spend so much on
living wit, the true meat to put into that shell, in a hundred
years. The one hundred and twenty-five dollars annually subscribed
for a Lyceum in the winter is better spent than any other equal sum
raised in the town. If we live in the Nineteenth Century, why
should we not enjoy the advantages which the Nineteenth Century
offers? Why should our life be in any respect provincial? If we
will read newspapers, why not skip the gossip of Boston and take the
best newspaper in the world at once? -- not be sucking the pap of
"neutral family" papers, or browsing "Olive Branches" here in New England. Let the reports of all the learned societies come to us, and we will see if they know anything. Why should we leave it to Harper & Brothers and Redding & Co. to select our reading? As the nobleman of cultivated taste surrounds himself with whatever conduces to his culture -- genius -- learning -- wit -- books -- paintings -- statuary -- music -- philosophical instruments, and the like; so let the village do -- not stop short at a pedagogue, a parson, a sexton, a parish library, and three selectmen, because our Pilgrim forefathers got through a cold winter once on a bleak rock with these. To act collectively is according to the spirit of our institutions; and I am confident that, as our circumstances are more flourishing, our means are greater than the nobleman's. New England can hire all the wise men in the world to come and teach her, and board them round the while, and not be provincial at all. That is the uncommon school we want. Instead of noblemen, let us have noble villages of men. If it is necessary, omit one bridge over the river, go round a little there, and throw one arch at least over the darker gulf of ignorance which surrounds us.

Sounds

But while we are confined to books, though the most select and classic, and read only particular written languages, which are themselves but dialects and provincial, we are in danger of forgetting the language which all things and events speak without metaphor, which alone is copious and standard. Much is published,
but little printed. The rays which stream through the shutter will
be no longer remembered when the shutter is wholly removed. No
method nor discipline can supersede the necessity of being forever
on the alert. What is a course of history or philosophy, or poetry,
no matter how well selected, or the best society, or the most
admirable routine of life, compared with the discipline of looking
always at what is to be seen? Will you be a reader, a student
merely, or a seer? Read your fate, see what is before you, and walk
on into futurity.

I did not read books the first summer; I hoed beans. Nay, I
often did better than this. There were times when I could not
afford to sacrifice the bloom of the present moment to any work,
whether of the head or hands. I love a broad margin to my life.

Sometimes, in a summer morning, having taken my accustomed bath, I
sat in my sunny doorway from sunrise till noon, rapt in a revery,
amidst the pines and hickories and sumachs, in undisturbed solitude
and stillness, while the birds sing around or flitted noiseless
through the house, until by the sun falling in at my west window, or
the noise of some traveller's wagon on the distant highway, I was
reminded of the lapse of time. I grew in those seasons like corn in
the night, and they were far better than any work of the hands would
have been. They were not time subtracted from my life, but so much
over and above my usual allowance. I realized what the Orientals
mean by contemplation and the forsaking of works. For the most
part, I minded not how the hours went. The day advanced as if to
light some work of mine; it was morning, and lo, now it is evening,
and nothing memorable is accomplished. Instead of singing like the
birds, I silently smiled at my incessant good fortune. As the
sparrow had its trill, sitting on the hickory before my door, so had
I my chuckle or suppressed warble which he might hear out of my
nest. My days were not days of the week, bearing the stamp of any
heathen deity, nor were they minced into hours and fretted by the
ticking of a clock; for I lived like the Puri Indians, of whom it is
said that "for yesterday, today, and tomorrow they have only one
word, and they express the variety of meaning by pointing backward
for yesterday forward for tomorrow, and overhead for the passing
day." This was sheer idleness to my fellow-townsmen, no doubt; but
if the birds and flowers had tried me by their standard, I should
not have been found wanting. A man must find his occasions in
himself, it is true. The natural day is very calm, and will hardly
reprove his indolence.

I had this advantage, at least, in my mode of life, over those
who were obliged to look abroad for amusement, to society and the
theatre, that my life itself was become my amusement and never
ceased to be novel. It was a drama of many scenes and without an
end. If we were always, indeed, getting our living, and regulating
our lives according to the last and best mode we had learned, we
should never be troubled with ennui. Follow your genius closely
enough, and it will not fail to show you a fresh prospect every
hour. Housework was a pleasant pastime. When my floor was dirty, I
rose early, and, setting all my furniture out of doors on the grass,
bed and bedstead making but one budget, dashed water on the floor,
and sprinkled white sand from the pond on it, and then with a broom
scrubbed it clean and white; and by the time the villagers had
broken their fast the morning sun had dried my house sufficiently to
allow me to move in again, and my meditations were almost
uninterrupted. It was pleasant to see my whole household effects out
on the grass, making a little pile like a gypsy's pack, and my
three-legged table, from which I did not remove the books and pen
and ink, standing amid the pines and hickories. They seemed glad to
get out themselves, and as if unwilling to be brought in. I was
sometimes tempted to stretch an awning over them and take my seat
there. It was worth the while to see the sun shine on these things,
and hear the free wind blow on them; so much more interesting most
familiar objects look out of doors than in the house. A bird sits
on the next bough, life-everlasting grows under the table, and
blackberry vines run round its legs; pine cones, chestnut burs, and
strawberry leaves are strewn about. It looked as if this was the
way these forms came to be transferred to our furniture, to tables,
chairs, and bedsteads -- because they once stood in their midst.
My house was on the side of a hill, immediately on the edge of
the larger wood, in the midst of a young forest of pitch pines and
hickories, and half a dozen rods from the pond, to which a narrow
footpath led down the hill. In my front yard grew the strawberry,
blackberry, and life-everlasting, johnswort and goldenrod, shrub
oaks and sand cherry, blueberry and groundnut. Near the end of May,
the sand cherry (Cerasus pumila) adorned the sides of the path with
its delicate flowers arranged in umbels cylindrically about its
short stems, which last, in the fall, weighed down with good sized
and handsome cherries, fell over in wreaths like rays on every side.
I tasted them out of compliment to Nature, though they were scarcely
palatable. The sumach (Rhus glabra) grew luxuriantly about the
house, pushing up through the embankment which I had made, and
growing five or six feet the first season. Its broad pinnate
tropical leaf was pleasant though strange to look on. The large
buds, suddenly pushing out late in the spring from dry sticks which
had seemed to be dead, developed themselves as by magic into
graceful green and tender boughs, an inch in diameter; and
sometimes, as I sat at my window, so heedlessly did they grow and
tax their weak joints, I heard a fresh and tender bough suddenly
fall like a fan to the ground, when there was not a breath of air
stirring, broken off by its own weight. In August, the large masses
of berries, which, when in flower, had attracted many wild bees,
gradually assumed their bright velvety crimson hue, and by their
weight again bent down and broke the tender limbs.

As I sit at my window this summer afternoon, hawks are circling
about my clearing; the tantivy of wild pigeons, flying by two and
threes athwart my view, or perching restless on the white pine
boughs behind my house, gives a voice to the air; a fish hawk
dimples the glassy surface of the pond and brings up a fish; a mink
steals out of the marsh before my door and seizes a frog by the
shore; the sedge is bending under the weight of the reed-birds
flitting hither and thither; and for the last half-hour I have heard
the rattle of railroad cars, now dying away and then reviving like
the beat of a partridge, conveying travellers from Boston to the
country. For I did not live so out of the world as that boy who, as
I hear, was put out to a farmer in the east part of the town, but
ere long ran away and came home again, quite down at the heel and
homesick. He had never seen such a dull and out-of-the-way place;
the folks were all gone off; why, you couldn't even hear the
whistle! I doubt if there is such a place in Massachusetts now:--
"In truth, our village has become a butt
For one of those fleet railroad shafts, and o'er
Our peaceful plain its soothing sound is -- Concord."

The Fitchburg Railroad touches the pond about a hundred rods
south of where I dwell. I usually go to the village along its
causeway, and am, as it were, related to society by this link. The
men on the freight trains, who go over the whole length of the road,
bow to me as to an old acquaintance, they pass me so often, and
apparently they take me for an employee; and so I am. I too would
fain be a track-repairer somewhere in the orbit of the earth.
The whistle of the locomotive penetrates my woods summer and
winter, sounding like the scream of a hawk sailing over some
farmer's yard, informing me that many restless city merchants are
arriving within the circle of the town, or adventurous country
traders from the other side. As they come under one horizon, they
shout their warning to get off the track to the other, heard
sometimes through the circles of two towns. Here come your
groceries, country; your rations, countrymen! Nor is there any man
so independent on his farm that he can say them nay. And here's
your pay for them! screams the countryman's whistle; timber like
long battering-rams going twenty miles an hour against the city's
walls, and chairs enough to seat all the weary and heavy-laden that
dwell within them. With such huge and lumbering civility the
country hands a chair to the city. All the Indian huckleberry hills
are stripped, all the cranberry meadows are raked into the city. Up
comes the cotton, down goes the woven cloth; up comes the silk, down
goes the woollen; up come the books, but down goes the wit that
writes them.

When I meet the engine with its train of cars moving off with
planetary motion -- or, rather, like a comet, for the beholder knows
not if with that velocity and with that direction it will ever
revisit this system, since its orbit does not look like a returning
curve -- with its steam cloud like a banner streaming behind in
golden and silver wreaths, like many a downy cloud which I have
seen, high in the heavens, unfolding its masses to the light -- as
if this traveling demigod, this cloud-compeller, would ere long take
the sunset sky for the livery of his train; when I hear the iron
horse make the hills echo with his snort like thunder, shaking the
earth with his feet, and breathing fire and smoke from his nostrils
(what kind of winged horse or fiery dragon they will put into the
new Mythology I don't know), it seems as if the earth had got a race
now worthy to inhabit it. If all were as it seems, and men made the
elements their servants for noble ends! If the cloud that hangs
over the engine were the perspiration of heroic deeds, or as
beneficent as that which floats over the farmer's fields, then the
elements and Nature herself would cheerfully accompany men on their
errands and be their escort.

I watch the passage of the morning cars with the same feeling
that I do the rising of the sun, which is hardly more regular.

Their train of clouds stretching far behind and rising higher and
higher, going to heaven while the cars are going to Boston, conceals
the sun for a minute and casts my distant field into the shade, a
celestial train beside which the petty train of cars which hugs the
earth is but the barb of the spear. The stabler of the iron horse
was up early this winter morning by the light of the stars amid the
mountains, to fodder and harness his steed. Fire, too, was awakened
thus early to put the vital heat in him and get him off. If the
enterprise were as innocent as it is early! If the snow lies deep,
they strap on his snowshoes, and, with the giant plow, plow a furrow
from the mountains to the seaboard, in which the cars, like a
following drill-barrow, sprinkle all the restless men and floating
merchandise in the country for seed. All day the fire-steed flies
over the country, stopping only that his master may rest, and I am
awakened by his tramp and defiant snort at midnight, when in some
remote glen in the woods he fronts the elements incased in ice and
snow; and he will reach his stall only with the morning star, to
start once more on his travels without rest or slumber. Or
perchance, at evening, I hear him in his stable blowing off the
superfluous energy of the day, that he may calm his nerves and cool
his liver and brain for a few hours of iron slumber. If the
enterprise were as heroic and commanding as it is protracted and
unwearied!

Far through unfrequented woods on the confines of towns, where
once only the hunter penetrated by day, in the darkest night dart
these bright saloons without the knowledge of their inhabitants;
this moment stopping at some brilliant station-house in town or
city, where a social crowd is gathered, the next in the Dismal
Swamp, scaring the owl and fox. The startings and arrivals of the
cars are now the epochs in the village day. They go and come with
such regularity and precision, and their whistle can be heard so
far, that the farmers set their clocks by them, and thus one
well-conducted institution regulates a whole country. Have not men improved somewhat in punctuality since the railroad was invented? Do they not talk and think faster in the depot than they did in the stage-office? There is something electrifying in the atmosphere of the former place. I have been astonished at the miracles it has wrought; that some of my neighbors, who, I should have prophesied, once for all, would never get to Boston by so prompt a conveyance, are on hand when the bell rings. To do things "railroad fashion" is now the byword; and it is worth the while to be warned so often and so sincerely by any power to get off its track. There is no stopping to read the riot act, no firing over the heads of the mob, in this case. We have constructed a fate, an Atropos, that never turns aside. (Let that be the name of your engine.) Men are advertised that at a certain hour and minute these bolts will be shot toward particular points of the compass; yet it interferes with no man's business, and the children go to school on the other track. We live the steadier for it. We are all educated thus to be sons of Tell. The air is full of invisible bolts. Every path but your own is the path of fate. Keep on your own track, then.

What recommends commerce to me is its enterprise and bravery. It does not clasp its hands and pray to Jupiter. I see these men every day go about their business with more or less courage and content, doing more even than they suspect, and perchance better employed than they could have consciously devised. I am less affected by their heroism who stood up for half an hour in the front line at Buena Vista, than by the steady and cheerful valor of the men who inhabit the snowplow for their winter quarters; who have not merely the three-o'cloke-in-the-morning courage, which Bonaparte
thought was the rarest, but whose courage does not go to rest so
early, who go to sleep only when the storm sleeps or the sinews of
their iron steed are frozen. On this morning of the Great Snow,
perchance, which is still raging and chilling men's blood, I bear
the muffled tone of their engine bell from out the fog bank of their
chilled breath, which announces that the cars are coming, without
long delay, notwithstanding the veto of a New England northeast
snow-storm, and I behold the plowmen covered with snow and rime,
their heads peering, above the mould-board which is turning down
other than daisies and the nests of field mice, like bowlders of the
Sierra Nevada, that occupy an outside place in the universe.
Commerce is unexpectedly confident and serene, alert,
adventurous, and unwearied. It is very natural in its methods
withal, far more so than many fantastic enterprises and sentimental
experiments, and hence its singular success. I am refreshed and
expanded when the freight train rattles past me, and I smell the
stores which go dispensing their odors all the way from Long Wharf
to Lake Champlain, reminding me of foreign parts, of coral reefs,
and Indian oceans, and tropical climes, and the extent of the globe.
I feel more like a citizen of the world at the sight of the
palm-leaf which will cover so many flaxen New England heads the next
summer, the Manilla hemp and cocoanut husks, the old junk, gunny
bags, scrap iron, and rusty nails. This carload of torn sails is
more legible and interesting now than if they should be wrought into
paper and printed books. Who can write so graphically the history
of the storms they have weathered as these rents have done? They
are proof-sheets which need no correction. Here goes lumber from
the Maine woods, which did not go out to sea in the last freshet,
risen four dollars on the thousand because of what did go out or was
split up; pine, spruce, cedar -- first, second, third, and fourth
qualities, so lately all of one quality, to wave over the bear, and
moose, and caribou. Next rolls Thomaston lime, a prime lot, which
will get far among the hills before it gets slacked. These rags in
bales, of all hues and qualities, the lowest condition to which
cotton and linen descend, the final result of dress -- of patterns
which are now no longer cried up, unless it be in Milwaukee, as
those splendid articles, English, French, or American prints,
ginghams, muslins, etc., gathered from all quarters both of fashion
and poverty, going to become paper of one color or a few shades
only, on which, forsooth, will be written tales of real life, high
and low, and founded on fact! This closed car smells of salt fish,
the strong New England and commercial scent, reminding me of the
Grand Banks and the fisheries. Who has not seen a salt fish,
thoroughly cured for this world, so that nothing can spoil it, and
putting, the perseverance of the saints to the blush? with which you
may sweep or pave the streets, and split your kindlings, and the
teamster shelter himself and his lading against sun, wind, and rain
behind it -- and the trader, as a Concord trader once did, hang it
up by his door for a sign when he commences business, until at last
his oldest customer cannot tell surely whether it be animal,
vegetable, or mineral, and yet it shall be as pure as a snowflake,
and if it be put into a pot and boiled, will come out an excellent
dun-fish for a Saturday's dinner. Next Spanish hides, with the
tails still preserving their twist and the angle of elevation they
had when the oxen that wore them were careering over the pampas of
the Spanish Main -- a type of all obstinacy, and evincing how almost
hopeless and incurable are all constitutional vices. I confess, that practically speaking, when I have learned a man's real disposition, I have no hopes of changing it for the better or worse in this state of existence. As the Orientals say, "A cur's tail may be warmed, and pressed, and bound round with ligatures, and after a twelve years' labor bestowed upon it, still it will retain its natural form." The only effectual cure for such inveteracies as these tails exhibit is to make glue of them, which I believe is what is usually done with them, and then they will stay put and stick.

Here is a hogshead of molasses or of brandy directed to John Smith, Cuttingsville, Vermont, some trader among the Green Mountains, who imports for the farmers near his clearing, and now perchance stands over his bulkhead and thinks of the last arrivals on the coast, how they may affect the price for him, telling his customers this moment, as he has told them twenty times before this morning, that he expects some by the next train of prime quality. It is advertised in the Cuttingsville Times.

While these things go up other things come down. Warned by the whizzing sound, I look up from my book and see some tall pine, hewn on far northern hills, which has winged its way over the Green Mountains and the Connecticut, shot like an arrow through the township within ten minutes, and scarce another eye beholds it; going

"to be the mast

Of some great ammiral."

And hark! here comes the cattle-train bearing the cattle of a
thousand hills, shepcots, stables, and cow-yards in the air, 
drovers with their sticks, and shepherd boys in the midst of their 
flocks, all but the mountain pastures, whirled along like leaves 
blown from the mountains by the September gales. The air is filled 
with the bleating of calves and sheep, and the hustling of oxen, as 
if a pastoral valley were going by. When the old bell-wether at the 
head rattles his bell, the mountains do indeed skip like rams and 
the little hills like lambs. A carload of drovers, too, in the 
midst, on a level with their droves now, their vocation gone, but 
still clinging to their useless sticks as their badge of office. 
But their dogs, where are they? It is a stampede to them; they are 
quite thrown out; they have lost the scent. Methinks I hear them 
barking behind the Peterboro' Hills, or panting up the western slope 
of the Green Mountains. They will not be in at the death. Their 
vocation, too, is gone. Their fidelity and sagacity are below par 
now. They will slink back to their kennels in disgrace, or 
perchance run wild and strike a league with the wolf and the fox. 
So is your pastoral life whirled past and away. But the bell rings, 
and I must get off the track and let the cars go by;--

What's the railroad to me? 
I never go to see 
Where it ends. 
It fills a few hollows, 
And makes banks for the swallows, 
It sets the sand a-blowing, 
And the blackberries a-growing,
but I cross it like a cart-path in the woods. I will not have my
eyes put out and my ears spoiled by its smoke and steam and hissing.

Now that the cars are gone by and all the restless world with
them, and the fishes in the pond no longer feel their rumbling, I am
more alone than ever. For the rest of the long afternoon, perhaps,
my meditations are interrupted only by the faint rattle of a
carriage or team along the distant highway.

Sometimes, on Sundays, I heard the bells, the Lincoln, Acton,
Bedford, or Concord bell, when the wind was favorable, a faint,
sweet, and, as it were, natural melody, worth importing into the
wilderness. At a sufficient distance over the woods this sound
acquires a certain vibratory hum, as if the pine needles in the
horizon were the strings of a harp which it swept. All sound heard
at the greatest possible distance produces one and the same effect,
a vibration of the universal lyre, just as the intervening
atmosphere makes a distant ridge of earth interesting to our eyes by
the azure tint it imparts to it. There came to me in this case a
melody which the air had strained, and which had conversed with
every leaf and needle of the wood, that portion of the sound which
the elements had taken up and modulated and echoed from vale to
vale. The echo is, to some extent, an original sound, and therein
is the magic and charm of it. It is not merely a repetition of what
was worth repeating in the bell, but partly the voice of the wood;
the same trivial words and notes sung by a wood-nymph.

At evening, the distant lowing of some cow in the horizon beyond
the woods sounded sweet and melodious, and at first I would mistake
it for the voices of certain minstrels by whom I was sometimes
serenaded, who might be straying over hill and dale; but soon I was
not unpleasantly disappointed when it was prolonged into the cheap
and natural music of the cow. I do not mean to be satirical, but to
express my appreciation of those youths' singing, when I state that
I perceived clearly that it was akin to the music of the cow, and
they were at length one articulation of Nature.
Regularly at half-past seven, in one part of the summer, after
the evening train had gone by, the whip-poor-wills chanted their
vespers for half an hour, sitting on a stump by my door, or upon the
ridge-pole of the house. They would begin to sing almost with as
much precision as a clock, within five minutes of a particular time,
referred to the setting of the sun, every evening. I had a rare
opportunity to become acquainted with their habits. Sometimes I
heard four or five at once in different parts of the wood, by
accident one a bar behind another, and so near me that I
distinguished not only the cluck after each note, but often that
singular buzzing sound like a fly in a spider's web, only
proportionally louder. Sometimes one would circle round and round
me in the woods a few feet distant as if tethered by a string, when
probably I was near its eggs. They sang at intervals throughout the
night, and were again as musical as ever just before and about dawn.
When other birds are still, the screech owls take up the strain,
like mourning women their ancient u-lu-lu. Their dismal scream is
truly Ben Jonsonian. Wise midnight hags! It is no honest and blunt
tu-whit tu-who of the poets, but, without jesting, a most solemn
graveyard ditty, the mutual consolations of suicide lovers
remembering the pangs and the delights of supernal love in the
infernal groves. Yet I love to hear their wailing, their doleful
responses, trilled along the woodside; reminding me sometimes of
music and singing birds; as if it were the dark and tearful side of
music, the regrets and sighs that would fain be sung. They are the
spirits, the low spirits and melancholy forebodings, of fallen souls
that once in human shape night-walked the earth and did the deeds of
darkness, now expiating their sins with their wailing hymns or
threnodies in the scenery of their transgressions. They give me a
new sense of the variety and capacity of that nature which is our
common dwelling. Oh-o-o-o-o that I never had been bor-r-r-r-n!
sighs one on this side of the pond, and circles with the
restlessness of despair to some new perch on the gray oaks. Then --
that I never had been bor-r-r-r-n! echoes another on the farther
side with tremulous sincerity, and -- bor-r-r-r-n! comes faintly
from far in the Lincoln woods.
I was also serenaded by a hooting owl. Near at hand you could
fancy it the most melancholy sound in Nature, as if she meant by
this to stereotype and make permanent in her choir the dying moans
of a human being -- some poor weak relic of mortality who has left
hope behind, and howls like an animal, yet with human sobs, on
entering the dark valley, made more awful by a certain gurgling
melodiousness -- I find myself beginning with the letters gl when I
try to imitate it -- expressive of a mind which has reached the
gelatinous, mildewy stage in the mortification of all healthy and
courageous thought. It reminded me of ghouls and idiots and insane
howlings. But now one answers from far woods in a strain made
really melodious by distance -- Hoo hoo hoo, hoorer hoo; and indeed
for the most part it suggested only pleasing associations, whether
heard by day or night, summer or winter.

I rejoice that there are owls. Let them do the idiotic and
maniakal hooting for men. It is a sound admirably suited to swamps
and twilight woods which no day illustrates, suggesting a vast and
undeveloped nature which men have not recognized. They represent
the stark twilight and unsatisfied thoughts which all have. All day
the sun has shone on the surface of some savage swamp, where the
single spruce stands hung with usnea lichens, and small hawks
circulate above, and the chickadee lisps amid the evergreens, and
the partridge and rabbit skulk beneath; but now a more dismal and
fitting day dawns, and a different race of creatures awakes to
express the meaning of Nature there.

Late in the evening I heard the distant rumbling of wagons over
bridges -- a sound heard farther than almost any other at night --
the baying of dogs, and sometimes again the lowing of some
disconsolate cow in a distant barn-yard. In the mean-while all the
shore rang with the trump of bullfrogs, the sturdy spirits of
ancient wine-bibbers and wassailers, still unrepentant, trying to
sing a catch in their Stygian lake -- if the Walden nymphs will
pardon the comparison, for though there are almost no weeds, there
are frogs there -- who would fain keep up the hilarious rules of
their old festal tables, though their voices have waxed hoarse and
solemnly grave, mocking at mirth, and the wine has lost its flavor,
and become only liquor to distend their paunches, and sweet
intoxication never comes to drown the memory of the past, but mere
saturation and waterloggedness and distention. The most aldermanic,
with his chin upon a heart-leaf, which serves for a napkin to his
drooling chaps, under this northern shore quaffs a deep draught of
the once scorned water, and passes round the cup with the
ejaculation tr-r-r-oonk, tr-r-r-oonk, tr-r-r-oonk! and straightway
comes over the water from some distant cove the same password
repeated, where the next in seniority and girth has gulped down to
his mark; and when this observance has made the circuit of the
shores, then ejaculates the master of ceremonies, with satisfaction,
tr-r-r-oonk! and each in his turn repeats the same down to the least
distended, leakiest, and flabbiest paunched, that there be no
mistake; and then the howl goes round again and again, until the sun
disperses the morning mist, and only the patriarch is not under the
pond, but vainly bellowing troonk from time to time, and pausing for
a reply.

I am not sure that I ever heard the sound of cock-crowing from
my clearing, and I thought that it might be worth the while to keep
a cockerel for his music merely, as a singing bird. The note of
this once wild Indian pheasant is certainly the most remarkable of
any bird's, and if they could be naturalized without being
domesticated, it would soon become the most famous sound in our
woods, surpassing the clangor of the goose and the hooting of the
owl; and then imagine the cackling of the hens to fill the pauses
when their lords' clarions rested! No wonder that man added this
bird to his tame stock -- to say nothing of the eggs and drumsticks.

To walk in a winter morning in a wood where these birds abounded,
their native woods, and hear the wild cockerels crow on the trees,
clear and shrill for miles over the resounding earth, drowning the
feebler notes of other birds -- think of it! It would put nations
on the alert. Who would not be early to rise, and rise earlier and
earlier every successive day of his life, till he became unspeakably
healthy, wealthy, and wise? This foreign bird's note is celebrated by the poets of all countries along with the notes of their native songsters. All climates agree with brave Chanticleer. He is more indigenous even than the natives. His health is ever good, his lungs are sound, his spirits never flag. Even the sailor on the Atlantic and Pacific is awakened by his voice; but its shrill sound never roused me from my slumbers. I kept neither dog, cat, cow, pig, nor hens, so that you would have said there was a deficiency of domestic sounds; neither the churn, nor the spinning-wheel, nor even the singing of the kettle, nor the hissing of the urn, nor children crying, to comfort one. An old-fashioned man would have lost his senses or died of ennui before this. Not even rats in the wall, for they were starved out, or rather were never baited in -- only squirrels on the roof and under the floor, a whip-poor-will on the ridge-pole, a blue jay screaming beneath the window, a hare or woodchuck under the house, a screech owl or a cat owl behind it, a flock of wild geese or a laughing loon on the pond, and a fox to bark in the night. Not even a lark or an oriole, those mild plantation birds, ever visited my clearing. No cockerels to crow nor hens to cackle in the yard. No yard! but unfenced nature reaching up to your very sills. A young forest growing up under your meadows, and wild sumachs and blackberry vines breaking through into your cellar; sturdy pitch pines rubbing and creaking against the shingles for want of room, their roots reaching quite under the house. Instead of a scuttle or a blind blown off in the gale -- a pine tree snapped off or torn up by the roots behind your house for fuel. Instead of no path to the front-yard gate in the Great Snow -- no gate -- no front-yard -- and no path to the civilized world.
This is a delicious evening, when the whole body is one sense, and imbibes delight through every pore. I go and come with a strange liberty in Nature, a part of herself. As I walk along the stony shore of the pond in my shirt-sleeves, though it is cool as well as cloudy and windy, and I see nothing special to attract me, all the elements are unusually congenial to me. The bullfrogs trump to usher in the night, and the note of the whip-poor-will is borne on the rippling wind from over the water. Sympathy with the fluttering alder and poplar leaves almost takes away my breath; yet, like the lake, my serenity is rippled but not ruffled. These small waves raised by the evening wind are as remote from storm as the smooth reflecting surface. Though it is now dark, the wind still blows and roars in the wood, the waves still dash, and some creatures lull the rest with their notes. The repose is never complete. The wildest animals do not repose, but seek their prey now; the fox, and skunk, and rabbit, now roam the fields and woods without fear. They are Nature's watchmen -- links which connect the days of animated life.

When I return to my house I find that visitors have been there and left their cards, either a bunch of flowers, or a wreath of evergreen, or a name in pencil on a yellow walnut leaf or a chip. They who come rarely to the woods take some little piece of the forest into their hands to play with by the way, which they leave, either intentionally or accidentally. One has peeled a willow wand,
woven it into a ring, and dropped it on my table. I could always
tell if visitors had called in my absence, either by the bended
twigs or grass, or the print of their shoes, and generally of what
sex or age or quality they were by some slight trace left, as a
flower dropped, or a bunch of grass plucked and thrown away, even as
far off as the railroad, half a mile distant, or by the lingering
odor of a cigar or pipe. Nay, I was frequently notified of the
passage of a traveller along the highway sixty rods off by the scent
of his pipe.

There is commonly sufficient space about us. Our horizon is
never quite at our elbows. The thick wood is not just at our door,
nor the pond, but somewhat is always clearing, familiar and worn by
us, appropriated and fenced in some way, and reclaimed from Nature.
For what reason have I this vast range and circuit, some square
miles of unfrequented forest, for my privacy, abandoned to me by
men? My nearest neighbor is a mile distant, and no house is visible
from any place but the hill-tops within half a mile of my own. I
have my horizon bounded by woods all to myself; a distant view of
the railroad where it touches the pond on the one hand, and of the
fence which skirts the woodland road on the other. But for the most
part it is as solitary where I live as on the prairies. It is as
much Asia or Africa as New England. I have, as it were, my own sun
and moon and stars, and a little world all to myself. At night
there was never a traveller passed my house, or knocked at my door,
more than if I were the first or last man; unless it were in the
spring, when at long intervals some came from the village to fish
for pouts -- they plainly fished much more in the Walden Pond of
their own natures, and baited their hooks with darkness -- but they
soon retreated, usually with light baskets, and left “the world to
darkness and to me,” and the black kernel of the night was never
profaned by any human neighborhood. I believe that men are
generally still a little afraid of the dark, though the witches are
all hung, and Christianity and candles have been introduced.
Yet I experienced sometimes that the most sweet and tender, the
most innocent and encouraging society may be found in any natural
object, even for the poor misanthrope and most melancholy man.
There can be no very black melancholy to him who lives in the midst
of Nature and has his senses still. There was never yet such a
storm but it was AEolian music to a healthy and innocent ear.
Nothing can rightly compel a simple and brave man to a vulgar
sadness. While I enjoy the friendship of the seasons I trust that
nothing can make life a burden to me. The gentle rain which waters
my beans and keeps me in the house today is not drear and
melancholy, but good for me too. Though it prevents my hoeing them,
it is of far more worth than my hoeing. If it should continue so
long as to cause the seeds to rot in the ground and destroy the
potatoes in the low lands, it would still be good for the grass on
the uplands, and, being good for the grass, it would be good for me.
Sometimes, when I compare myself with other men, it seems as if I
were more favored by the gods than they, beyond any deserts that I
am conscious of; as if I had a warrant and surety at their hands
which my fellows have not, and were especially guided and guarded.
I do not flatter myself, but if it be possible they flatter me. I
have never felt lonesome, or in the least oppressed by a sense of
solitude, but once, and that was a few weeks after I came to the
woods, when, for an hour, I doubted if the near neighborhood of man
was not essential to a serene and healthy life. To be alone was something unpleasant. But I was at the same time conscious of a slight insanity in my mood, and seemed to foresee my recovery. In the midst of a gentle rain while these thoughts prevailed, I was suddenly sensible of such sweet and beneficent society in Nature, in the very pattering of the drops, and in every sound and sight around my house, an infinite and unaccountable friendliness all at once like an atmosphere sustaining me, as made the fancied advantages of human neighborhood insignificant, and I have never thought of them since. Every little pine needle expanded and swelled with sympathy and befriended me. I was so distinctly made aware of the presence of something kindred to me, even in scenes which we are accustomed to call wild and dreary, and also that the nearest of blood to me and humanest was not a person nor a villager, that I thought no place could ever be strange to me again.

"Mourning untimely consumes the sad;
Few are their days in the land of the living,
Beautiful daughter of Toscar."

Some of my pleasantest hours were during the long rain-storms in the spring or fall, which confined me to the house for the afternoon as well as the forenoon, soothed by their ceaseless roar and pelting; when an early twilight ushered in a long evening in which many thoughts had time to take root and unfold themselves. In those driving northeast rains which tried the village houses so, when the maids stood ready with mop and pail in front entries to keep the
deluge out, I sat behind my door in my little house, which was all entry, and thoroughly enjoyed its protection. In one heavy thunder-shower the lightning struck a large pitch pine across the pond, making a very conspicuous and perfectly regular spiral groove from top to bottom, an inch or more deep, and four or five inches wide, as you would groove a walking-stick. I passed it again the other day, and was struck with awe on looking up and beholding that mark, now more distinct than ever, where a terrific and resistless bolt came down out of the harmless sky eight years ago. Men frequently say to me, "I should think you would feel lonesome down there, and want to be nearer to folks, rainy and snowy days and nights especially." I am tempted to reply to such -- This whole earth which we inhabit is but a point in space. How far apart, think you, dwell the two most distant inhabitants of yonder star, the breadth of whose disk cannot be appreciated by our instruments? Why should I feel lonely? is not our planet in the Milky Way? This which you put seems to me not to be the most important question. What sort of space is that which separates a man from his fellows and makes him solitary? I have found that no exertion of the legs can bring two minds much nearer to one another. What do we want most to dwell near to? Not to many men surely, the depot, the post-office, the bar-room, the meeting-house, the school-house, the grocery, Beacon Hill, or the Five Points, where men most congregate, but to the perennial source of our life, whence in all our experience we have found that to issue, as the willow stands near the water and sends out its roots in that direction. This will vary with different natures, but this is the place where a wise man will dig his cellar.... I one evening overtook one of my townsmen, who
has accumulated what is called "a handsome property" -- though I never got a fair view of it -- on the Walden road, driving a pair of cattle to market, who inquired of me how I could bring my mind to give up so many of the comforts of life. I answered that I was very sure I liked it passably well; I was not joking. And so I went home to my bed, and left him to pick his way through the darkness and the mud to Brighton -- or Bright-town -- which place he would reach some time in the morning.

Any prospect of awakening or coming to life to a dead man makes indifferent all times and places. The place where that may occur is always the same, and indescribably pleasant to all our senses. For the most part we allow only outlying and transient circumstances to make our occasions. They are, in fact, the cause of our distraction. Nearest to all things is that power which fashions their being. Next to us the grandest laws are continually being executed. Next to us is not the workman whom we have hired, with whom we love so well to talk, but the workman whose work we are. "How vast and profound is the influence of the subtile powers of Heaven and of Earth!"

"We seek to perceive them, and we do not see them; we seek to hear them, and we do not hear them; identified with the substance of things, they cannot be separated from them."

"They cause that in all the universe men purify and sanctify their hearts, and clothe themselves in their holiday garments to offer sacrifices and oblations to their ancestors. It is an ocean of subtile intelligences. They are everywhere, above us, on our left, on our right; they environ us on all sides."

We are the subjects of an experiment which is not a little
interesting to me. Can we not do without the society of our gossips
a little while under these circumstances -- have our own thoughts to
cheer us? Confucius says truly, "Virtue does not remain as an
abandoned orphan; it must of necessity have neighbors."

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
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.
I find it wholesome to be alone the greater part of the time.
To be in company, even with the best, is soon wearisome and
dissipating. I love to be alone. I never found the companion that
was so companionable as solitude. We are for the most part more
lonely when we go abroad among men than when we stay in our
chambers. A man thinking or working is always alone, let him be
where he will. Solitude is not measured by the miles of space that
intervene between a man and his fellows. The really diligent
student in one of the crowded hives of Cambridge College is as
solitary as a dervish in the desert. The farmer can work alone in
the field or the woods all day, hoeing or chopping, and not feel
lonesome, because he is employed; but when he comes home at night he
cannot sit down in a room alone, at the mercy of his thoughts, but
must be where he can "see the folks," and recreate, and, as he
thinks, remunerate himself for his day's solitude; and hence he
wonders how the student can sit alone in the house all night and
most of the day without ennui and "the blues"; but he does not
realize that the student, though in the house, is still at work in
his field, and chopping in his woods, as the farmer in his, and in
turn seeks the same recreation and society that the latter does,
though it may be a more condensed form of it.

Society is commonly too cheap. We meet at very short intervals,
not having had time to acquire any new value for each other. We
meet at meals three times a day, and give each other a new taste of
that old musty cheese that we are. We have had to agree on a
certain set of rules, called etiquette and politeness, to make this
frequent meeting tolerable and that we need not come to open war.

We meet at the post-office, and at the sociable, and about the
fireside every night; we live thick and are in each other's way, and
stumble over one another, and I think that we thus lose some respect
for one another. Certainly less frequency would suffice for all
important and hearty communications. Consider the girls in a
factory -- never alone, hardly in their dreams. It would be better
if there were but one inhabitant to a square mile, as where I live.
The value of a man is not in his skin, that we should touch him.
I have heard of a man lost in the woods and dying of famine and exhaustion at the foot of a tree, whose loneliness was relieved by the grotesque visions with which, owing to bodily weakness, his diseased imagination surrounded him, and which he believed to be real. So also, owing to bodily and mental health and strength, we may be continually cheered by a like but more normal and natural society, and come to know that we are never alone.

I have a great deal of company in my house; especially in the morning, when nobody calls. Let me suggest a few comparisons, that some one may convey an idea of my situation. I am no more lonely than the loon in the pond that laughs so loud, or than Walden Pond itself. What company has that lonely lake, I pray? And yet it has not the blue devils, but the blue angels in it, in the azure tint of its waters. The sun is alone, except in thick weather, when there sometimes appear to be two, but one is a mock sun. God is alone -- but the devil, he is far from being alone; he sees a great deal of company; he is legion. I am no more lonely than a single mullein or dandelion in a pasture, or a bean leaf, or sorrel, or a horse-fly, or a bumblebee. I am no more lonely than the Mill Brook, or a weathercock, or the north star, or the south wind, or an April shower, or a January thaw, or the first spider in a new house.

I have occasional visits in the long winter evenings, when the snow falls fast and the wind howls in the wood, from an old settler and original proprietor, who is reported to have dug Walden Pond, and stoned it, and fringed it with pine woods; who tells me stories of old time and of new eternity; and between us we manage to pass a cheerful evening with social mirth and pleasant views of things, even without apples or cider -- a most wise and humorous friend,
whom I love much, who keeps himself more secret than ever did Goffe
or Whalley; and though he is thought to be dead, none can show where
he is buried. An elderly dame, too, dwells in my neighborhood,
invisible to most persons, in whose odorous herb garden I love to
stroll sometimes, gathering simples and listening to her fables; for
she has a genius of unequalled fertility, and her memory runs back
farther than mythology, and she can tell me the original of every
fable, and on what fact every one is founded, for the incidents
occurred when she was young. A ruddy and lusty old dame, who
delights in all weathers and seasons, and is likely to outlive all
her children yet.
The indescribable innocence and beneficence of Nature -- of sun
and wind and rain, of summer and winter -- such health, such cheer,
they afford forever! and such sympathy have they ever with our race,
that all Nature would be affected, and the sun's brightness fade,
and the winds would sigh humanely, and the clouds rain tears, and
the woods shed their leaves and put on mourning in midsummer, if any
man should ever for a just cause grieve. Shall I not have
intelligence with the earth? Am I not partly leaves and vegetable
mould myself?
What is the pill which will keep us well, serene, contented?
Not my or thy great-grandfather's, but our great-grandmother
Nature's universal, vegetable, botanic medicines, by which she has
kept herself young always, outlived so many old Parrs in her day,
and fed her health with their decaying fatness. For my panacea,
instead of one of those quack vials of a mixture dipped from Acheron
and the Dead Sea, which come out of those long shallow
black-schooner looking wagons which we sometimes see made to carry
bottles, let me have a draught of undiluted morning air. Morning air! If men will not drink of this at the fountainhead of the day, why, then, we must even bottle up some and sell it in the shops, for the benefit of those who have lost their subscription ticket to morning time in this world. But remember, it will not keep quite till noonday even in the coolest cellar, but drive out the stopples long ere that and follow westward the steps of Aurora. I am no worshipper of Hygeia, who was the daughter of that old herb-doctor AEsculapius, and who is represented on monuments holding a serpent in one hand, and in the other a cup out of which the serpent sometimes drinks; but rather of Hebe, cup-bearer to Jupiter, who was the daughter of Juno and wild lettuce, and who had the power of restoring gods and men to the vigor of youth. She was probably the only thoroughly sound-conditioned, healthy, and robust young lady that ever walked the globe, and wherever she came it was spring.

Visitors

I think that I love society as much as most, and am ready enough to fasten myself like a bloodsucker for the time to any full-blooded man that comes in my way. I am naturally no hermit, but might possibly sit out the sturdiest frequenter of the bar-room, if my business called me thither.

I had three chairs in my house; one for solitude, two for friendship, three for society. When visitors came in larger and unexpected numbers there was but the third chair for them all, but they generally economized the room by standing up. It is surprising
how many great men and women a small house will contain. I have had
twenty-five or thirty souls, with their bodies, at once under my
roof, and yet we often parted without being aware that we had come
very near to one another. Many of our houses, both public and
private, with their almost innumerable apartments, their huge halls
and their cellars for the storage of wines and other munitions of
peace, appear to be extravagantly large for their inhabitants. They
are so vast and magnificent that the latter seem to be only vermin
which infest them. I am surprised when the herald blows his summons
before some Tremont or Astor or Middlesex House, to see come
creeping out over the piazza for all inhabitants a ridiculous mouse,
which soon again slinks into some hole in the pavement.
One inconvenience I sometimes experienced in so small a house,
the difficulty of getting to a sufficient distance from my guest
when we began to utter the big thoughts in big words. You want room
for your thoughts to get into sailing trim and run a course or two
before they make their port. The bullet of your thought must have
overcome its lateral and ricochet motion and fallen into its last
and steady course before it reaches the ear of the hearer, else it
may plow out again through the side of his head. Also, our
sentences wanted room to unfold and form their columns in the
interval. Individuals, like nations, must have suitable broad and
natural boundaries, even a considerable neutral ground, between
them. I have found it a singular luxury to talk across the pond to
a companion on the opposite side. In my house we were so near that
we could not begin to hear -- we could not speak low enough to be
heard; as when you throw two stones into calm water so near that
they break each other's undulations. If we are merely loquacious
and loud talkers, then we can afford to stand very near together, cheek by jowl, and feel each other's breath; but if we speak reservedly and thoughtfully, we want to be farther apart, that all animal heat and moisture may have a chance to evaporate. If we would enjoy the most intimate society with that in each of us which is without, or above, being spoken to, we must not only be silent, but commonly so far apart bodily that we cannot possibly hear each other's voice in any case. Referred to this standard, speech is for the convenience of those who are hard of hearing; but there are many fine things which we cannot say if we have to shout. As the conversation began to assume a loftier and grander tone, we gradually shoved our chairs farther apart till they touched the wall in opposite corners, and then commonly there was not room enough. My "best" room, however, my withdrawing room, always ready for company, on whose carpet the sun rarely fell, was the pine wood behind my house. Thither in summer days, when distinguished guests came, I took them, and a priceless domestic swept the floor and dusted the furniture and kept the things in order.

If one guest came he sometimes partook of my frugal meal, and it was no interruption to conversation to be stirring a hasty-pudding, or watching the rising and maturing of a loaf of bread in the ashes, in the meanwhile. But if twenty came and sat in my house there was nothing said about dinner, though there might be bread enough for two, more than if eating were a forsaken habit; but we naturally practised abstinence; and this was never felt to be an offence against hospitality, but the most proper and considerate course. The waste and decay of physical life, which so often needs repair, seemed miraculously retarded in such a case, and the vital vigor
stood its ground. I could entertain thus a thousand as well as
twenty; and if any ever went away disappointed or hungry from my
house when they found me at home, they may depend upon it that I
sympathized with them at least. So easy is it, though many
housekeepers doubt it, to establish new and better customs in the
place of the old. You need not rest your reputation on the dinners
you give. For my own part, I was never so effectually deterred from
frequenting a man's house, by any kind of Cerberus whatever, as by
the parade one made about dining me, which I took to be a very
polite and roundabout hint never to trouble him so again. I think I
shall never revisit those scenes. I should be proud to have for the
motto of my cabin those lines of Spenser which one of my visitors
inscribed on a yellow walnut leaf for a card:--

"Arrived there, the little house they fill,
Ne looke for entertainment where none was;
Rest is their feast, and all things at their will:
The noblest mind the best contentment has."

When Winslow, afterward governor of the Plymouth Colony, went
with a companion on a visit of ceremony to Massasoit on foot through
the woods, and arrived tired and hungry at his lodge, they were well
received by the king, but nothing was said about eating that day.

When the night arrived, to quote their own words -- "He laid us on
the bed with himself and his wife, they at the one end and we at the
other, it being only planks laid a foot from the ground and a thin
mat upon them. Two more of his chief men, for want of room, pressed
by and upon us; so that we were worse weary of our lodging than of our journey." At one o'clock the next day Massasoit "brought two fishes that he had shot," about thrice as big as a bream. "These being boiled, there were at least forty looked for a share in them; the most eat of them. This meal only we had in two nights and a day; and had not one of us bought a partridge, we had taken our journey fasting." Fearing that they would be light-headed for want of food and also sleep, owing to "the savages' barbarous singing, (for they use to sing themselves asleep,)" and that they might get home while they had strength to travel, they departed. As for lodging, it is true they were but poorly entertained, though what they found an inconvenience was no doubt intended for an honor; but as far as eating was concerned, I do not see how the Indians could have done better. They had nothing to eat themselves, and they were wiser than to think that apologies could supply the place of food to their guests; so they drew their belts tighter and said nothing about it. Another time when Winslow visited them, it being a season of plenty with them, there was no deficiency in this respect. As for men, they will hardly fail one anywhere. I had more visitors while I lived in the woods than at any other period in my life; I mean that I had some. I met several there under more favorable circumstances than I could anywhere else. But fewer came to see me on trivial business. In this respect, my company was winnowed by my mere distance from town. I had withdrawn so far within the great ocean of solitude, into which the rivers of society empty, that for the most part, so far as my needs were concerned, only the finest sediment was deposited around me. Beside, there were wafted to me evidences of unexplored and uncultivated
continents on the other side.

Who should come to my lodge this morning but a true Homeric or Paphlagonian man -- he had so suitable and poetic a name that I am sorry I cannot print it here -- a Canadian, a woodchopper and post-maker, who can hole fifty posts in a day, who made his last supper on a woodchuck which his dog caught. He, too, has heard of Homer, and, "if it were not for books," would "not know what to do rainy days," though perhaps he has not read one wholly through for many rainy seasons. Some priest who could pronounce the Greek itself taught him to read his verse in the Testament in his native parish far away; and now I must translate to him, while he holds the book, Achilles' reproof to Patroclus for his sad countenance. --

"Why are you in tears, Patroclus, like a young girl?"

"Or have you alone heard some news from Phthia?
They say that Menoetius lives yet, son of Actor,
And Peleus lives, son of AEacus, among the Myrmidons,
Either of whom having died, we should greatly grieve."

He says, "That's good." He has a great bundle of white oak bark under his arm for a sick man, gathered this Sunday morning. "I suppose there's no harm in going after such a thing to-day," says he. To him Homer was a great writer, though what his writing was about he did not know. A more simple and natural man it would be hard to find. Vice and disease, which cast such a sombre moral hue over the world, seemed to have hardly any existance for him. He was about twenty-eight years old, and had left Canada and his father's
house a dozen years before to work in the States, and earn money to
buy a farm with at last, perhaps in his native country. He was cast
in the coarsest mould; a stout but sluggish body, yet gracefully
carried, with a thick sunburnt neck, dark bushy hair, and dull
sleepy blue eyes, which were occasionally lit up with expression.
He wore a flat gray cloth cap, a dingy wool-colored greatcoat, and
cowhide boots. He was a great consumer of meat, usually carrying
his dinner to his work a couple of miles past my house -- for he
chopped all summer -- in a tin pail; cold meats, often cold
woodchucks, and coffee in a stone bottle which dangled by a string
from his belt; and sometimes he offered me a drink. He came along
early, crossing my bean-field, though without anxiety or haste to
get to his work, such as Yankees exhibit. He wasn't a-going to hurt
himself. He didn't care if he only earned his board. Frequently he
would leave his dinner in the bushes, when his dog had caught a
woodchuck by the way, and go back a mile and a half to dress it and
leave it in the cellar of the house where he boarded, after
deliberating first for half an hour whether he could not sink it in
the pond safely till nightfall -- loving to dwell long upon these
themes. He would say, as he went by in the morning, "How thick the
pigeons are! If working every day were not my trade, I could get
all the meat I should want by hunting-pigeons, woodchucks, rabbits,
partridges -- by gosh! I could get all I should want for a week in
one day."

He was a skilful chopper, and indulged in some flourishes and
ornaments in his art. He cut his trees level and close to the
ground, that the sprouts which came up afterward might be more
vigorous and a sled might slide over the stumps; and instead of
leaving a whole tree to support his corded wood, he would pare it away to a slender stake or splinter which you could break off with your hand at last.

He interested me because he was so quiet and solitary and so happy withal; a well of good humor and contentment which overflowed at his eyes. His mirth was without alloy. Sometimes I saw him at his work in the woods, felling trees, and he would greet me with a laugh of inexpressible satisfaction, and a salutation in Canadian French, though he spoke English as well. When I approached him he would suspend his work, and with half-suppressed mirth lie along the trunk of a pine which he had felled, and, peeling off the inner bark, roll it up into a ball and chew it while he laughed and talked. Such an exuberance of animal spirits had he that he sometimes tumbled down and rolled on the ground with laughter at anything which made him think and tickled him. Looking round upon the trees he would exclaim -- "By George! I can enjoy myself well enough here chopping; I want no better sport." Sometimes, when at leisure, he amused himself all day in the woods with a pocket pistol, firing salutes to himself at regular intervals as he walked.

In the winter he had a fire by which at noon he warmed his coffee in a kettle; and as he sat on a log to eat his dinner the chickadees would sometimes come round and alight on his arm and peck at the potato in his fingers; and he said that he "liked to have the little fellers about him."

In him the animal man chiefly was developed. In physical endurance and contentment he was cousin to the pine and the rock. I asked him once if he was not sometimes tired at night, after working all day; and he answered, with a sincere and serious look,
"Gorrappit, I never was tired in my life." But the intellectual and what is called spiritual man in him were slumbering as in an infant. He had been instructed only in that innocent and ineffectual way in which the Catholic priests teach the aborigines, by which the pupil is never educated to the degree of consciousness, but only to the degree of trust and reverence, and a child is not made a man, but kept a child. When Nature made him, she gave him a strong body and contentment for his portion, and propped him on every side with reverence and reliance, that he might live out his threescore years and ten a child. He was so genuine and unsophisticated that no introduction would serve to introduce him, more than if you introduced a woodchuck to your neighbor. He had got to find him out as you did. He would not play any part. Men paid him wages for work, and so helped to feed and clothe him; but he never exchanged opinions with them. He was so simply and naturally humble -- if he can be called humble who never aspires -- that humility was no distinct quality in him, nor could he conceive of it. Wiser men were demigods to him. If you told him that such a one was coming, he did as if he thought that anything so grand would expect nothing of himself, but take all the responsibility on itself, and let him be forgotten still. He never heard the sound of praise. He particularly reverenced the writer and the preacher. Their performances were miracles. When I told him that I wrote considerably, he thought for a long time that it was merely the handwriting which I meant, for he could write a remarkably good hand himself. I sometimes found the name of his native parish handsomely written in the snow by the highway, with the proper French accent, and knew that he had passed. I asked him if he ever wished to write
his thoughts. He said that he had read and written letters for
those who could not, but he never tried to write thoughts -- no, he
could not, he could not tell what to put first, it would kill him,
and then there was spelling to be attended to at the same time!
I heard that a distinguished wise man and reformer asked him if
he did not want the world to be changed; but he answered with a
chuckle of surprise in his Canadian accent, not knowing that the
question had ever been entertained before, "No, I like it well
enough." It would have suggested many things to a philosopher to
have dealings with him. To a stranger he appeared to know nothing
of things in general; yet I sometimes saw in him a man whom I had
not seen before, and I did not know whether he was as wise as
Shakespeare or as simply ignorant as a child, whether to suspect him
of a fine poetic consciousness or of stupidity. A townsman told me
that when he met him sauntering through the village in his small
close-fitting cap, and whistling to himself, he reminded him of a
prince in disguise.
His only books were an almanac and an arithmetic, in which last
he was considerably expert. The former was a sort of cyclopaedia to
him, which he supposed to contain an abstract of human knowledge, as
indeed it does to a considerable extent. I loved to sound him on
the various reforms of the day, and he never failed to look at them
in the most simple and practical light. He had never heard of such
things before. Could he do without factories? I asked. He had
worn the home-made Vermont gray, he said, and that was good. Could
he dispense with tea and coffee? Did this country afford any
beverage beside water? He had soaked hemlock leaves in water and
drank it, and thought that was better than water in warm weather.
When I asked him if he could do without money, he showed the convenience of money in such a way as to suggest and coincide with the most philosophical accounts of the origin of this institution, and the very derivation of the word pecunia. If an ox were his property, and he wished to get needles and thread at the store, he thought it would be inconvenient and impossible soon to go on mortgaging some portion of the creature each time to that amount. He could defend many institutions better than any philosopher, because, in describing them as they concerned him, he gave the true reason for their prevalence, and speculation had not suggested to him any other. At another time, hearing Plato's definition of a man -- a biped without feathers -- and that one exhibited a cock plucked and called it Plato's man, he thought it an important difference that the knees bent the wrong way. He would sometimes exclaim, "How I love to talk! By George, I could talk all day!" I asked him once, when I had not seen him for many months, if he had got a new idea this summer. "Good Lord" -- said he, "a man that has to work as I do, if he does not forget the ideas he has had, he will do well. May be the man you hoe with is inclined to race; then, by golly, your mind must be there; you think of weeds." He would sometimes ask me first on such occasions, if I had made any improvement. One winter day I asked him if he was always satisfied with himself, wishing to suggest a substitute within him for the priest without, and some higher motive for living. "Satisfied!" said he; "some men are satisfied with one thing, and some with another. One man, perhaps, if he has got enough, will be satisfied to sit all day with his back to the fire and his belly to the table, by George!" Yet I never, by any manoeuvring, could get him to take
the spiritual view of things; the highest that he appeared to
conceive of was a simple expediency, such as you might expect an
animal to appreciate; and this, practically, is true of most men.
If I suggested any improvement in his mode of life, he merely
answered, without expressing any regret, that it was too late. Yet
he thoroughly believed in honesty and the like virtues.
There was a certain positive originality, however slight, to be
detected in him, and I occasionally observed that he was thinking
for himself and expressing his own opinion, a phenomenon so rare
that I would any day walk ten miles to observe it, and it amounted
to the re-origination of many of the institutions of society.
Though he hesitated, and perhaps failed to express himself
distinctly, he always had a presentable thought behind. Yet his
thinking was so primitive and immersed in his animal life, that,
though more promising than a merely learned man's, it rarely ripened
to anything which can be reported. He suggested that there might be
men of genius in the lowest grades of life, however permanently
humble and illiterate, who take their own view always, or do not
pretend to see at all; who are as bottomless even as Walden Pond was
thought to be, though they may be dark and muddy.
Many a traveller came out of his way to see me and the inside of
my house, and, as an excuse for calling, asked for a glass of water.
I told them that I drank at the pond, and pointed thither, offering
to lend them a dipper. Far off as I lived, I was not exempted from
the annual visitation which occurs, methinks, about the first of
April, when everybody is on the move; and I had my share of good
luck, though there were some curious specimens among my visitors.
Half-witted men from the almshouse and elsewhere came to see me; but
I endeavored to make them exercise all the wit they had, and make their confessions to me; in such cases making wit the theme of our conversation; and so was compensated. Indeed, I found some of them to be wiser than the so-called overseers of the poor and selectmen of the town, and thought it was time that the tables were turned. With respect to wit, I learned that there was not much difference between the half and the whole. One day, in particular, an inoffensive, simple-minded pauper, whom with others I had often seen used as fencing stuff, standing or sitting on a bushel in the fields to keep cattle and himself from straying, visited me, and expressed a wish to live as I did. He told me, with the utmost simplicity and truth, quite superior, or rather inferior, to anything that is called humility, that he was "deficient in intellect." These were his words. The Lord had made him so, yet he supposed the Lord cared as much for him as for another. "I have always been so," said he, "from my childhood; I never had much mind; I was not like other children; I am weak in the head. It was the Lord's will, I suppose." And there he was to prove the truth of his words. He was a metaphysical puzzle to me. I have rarely met a fellowman on such promising ground -- it was so simple and sincere and so true all that he said. And, true enough, in proportion as he appeared to humble himself was he exalted. I did not know at first but it was the result of a wise policy. It seemed that from such a basis of truth and frankness as the poor weak-headed pauper had laid, our intercourse might go forward to something better than the intercourse of sages.

I had some guests from those not reckoned commonly among the town's poor, but who should be; who are among the world's poor, at
any rate; guests who appeal, not to your hospitality, but to your
hospitality; who earnestly wish to be helped, and preface their
appeal with the information that they are resolved, for one thing,
ever to help themselves. I require of a visitor that he be not
actually starving, though he may have the very best appetite in the
world, however he got it. Objects of charity are not guests. Men
who did not know when their visit had terminated, though I went
about my business again, answering them from greater and greater
remoteness. Men of almost every degree of wit called on me in the
migrating season. Some who had more wits than they knew what to do
with; runaway slaves with plantation manners, who listened from time
to time, like the fox in the fable, as if they heard the hounds
a-baying on their track, and looked at me beseechingly, as much as
to say, --

"O Christian, will you send me back?

One real runaway slave, among the rest, whom I helped to forward
toward the north star. Men of one idea, like a hen with one
chicken, and that a duckling; men of a thousand ideas, and unkempt
heads, like those hens which are made to take charge of a hundred
chickens, all in pursuit of one bug, a score of them lost in every
morning's dew -- and become frizzled and mangy in consequence; men
of ideas instead of legs, a sort of intellectual centipede that made
you crawl all over. One man proposed a book in which visitors
should write their names, as at the White Mountains; but, alas! I
have too good a memory to make that necessary.
I could not but notice some of the peculiarities of my visitors.

Girls and boys and young women generally seemed glad to be in the woods. They looked in the pond and at the flowers, and improved their time. Men of business, even farmers, thought only of solitude and employment, and of the great distance at which I dwelt from something or other; and though they said that they loved a ramble in the woods occasionally, it was obvious that they did not. Restless committed men, whose time was an taken up in getting a living or keeping it; ministers who spoke of God as if they enjoyed a monopoly of the subject, who could not bear all kinds of opinions; doctors, lawyers, uneasy housekeepers who pried into my cupboard and bed when I was out -- how came Mrs. -- to know that my sheets were not as clean as hers? -- young men who had ceased to be young, and had concluded that it was safest to follow the beaten track of the professions -- all these generally said that it was not possible to do so much good in my position. Ay! there was the rub. The old and infirm and the timid, of whatever age or sex, thought most of sickness, and sudden accident and death; to them life seemed full of danger -- what danger is there if you don't think of any? -- and they thought that a prudent man would carefully select the safest position, where Dr. B. might be on hand at a moment's warning. To them the village was literally a community, a league for mutual defence, and you would suppose that they would not go a-huckleberrying without a medicine chest. The amount of it is, if a man is alive, there is always danger that he may die, though the danger must be allowed to be less in proportion as he is dead-and-alive to begin with. A man sits as many risks as he runs. Finally, there were the self-styled reformers, the greatest bores of
all, who thought that I was forever singing,--

This is the house that I built;
This is the man that lives in the house that I built;

but they did not know that the third line was,

These are the folks that worry the man
That lives in the house that I built.

I did not fear the hen-harriers, for I kept no chickens; but I feared the men-harriers rather.
I had more cheering visitors than the last. Children come a-berrying, railroad men taking a Sunday morning walk in clean shirts, fishermen and hunters, poets and philosophers; in short, all honest pilgrims, who came out to the woods for freedom's sake, and really left the village behind, I was ready to greet with--
"Welcome, Englishmen! welcome, Englishmen!" for I had had communication with that race.

The Bean-Field

Meanwhile my beans, the length of whose rows, added together, was seven miles already planted, were impatient to be hoed, for the earliest had grown considerably before the latest were in the
ground; indeed they were not easily to be put off. What was the meaning of this so steady and self-respecting, this small Herculean labor, I knew not. I came to love my rows, my beans, though so many more than I wanted. They attached me to the earth, and so I got strength like Antaeus. But why should I raise them? Only Heaven knows. This was my curious labor all summer -- to make this portion of the earth's surface, which had yielded only cinquefoil, blackberries, johnswort, and the like, before, sweet wild fruits and pleasant flowers, produce instead this pulse. What shall I learn of beans or beans of me? I cherish them, I hoe them, early and late I have an eye to them; and this is my day's work. It is a fine broad leaf to look on. My auxiliaries are the dews and rains which water this dry soil, and what fertility is in the soil itself, which for the most part is lean and effete. My enemies are worms, cool days, and most of all woodchucks. The last have nibbled for me a quarter of an acre clean. But what right had I to oust johnswort and the rest, and break up their ancient herb garden? Soon, however, the remaining beans will be too tough for them, and go forward to meet new foes.

When I was four years old, as I well remember, I was brought from Boston to this my native town, through these very woods and this field, to the pond. It is one of the oldest scenes stamped on my memory. And now to-night my flute has waked the echoes over that very water. The pines still stand here older than I; or, if some have fallen, I have cooked my supper with their stumps, and a new growth is rising all around, preparing another aspect for new infant eyes. Almost the same johnswort springs from the same perennial root in this pasture, and even I have at length helped to clothe
that fabulous landscape of my infant dreams, and one of the results of my presence and influence is seen in these bean leaves, corn blades, and potato vines.

I planted about two acres and a half of upland; and as it was only about fifteen years since the land was cleared, and I myself had got out two or three cords of stumps, I did not give it any manure; but in the course of the summer it appeared by the arrowheads which I turned up in hoeing, that an extinct nation had anciently dwelt here and planted corn and beans ere white men came to clear the land, and so, to some extent, had exhausted the soil for this very crop.

Before yet any woodchuck or squirrel had run across the road, or the sun had got above the shrub oaks, while all the dew was on, though the farmers warned me against it -- I would advise you to do all your work if possible while the dew is on -- I began to level the ranks of haughty weeds in my bean-field and throw dust upon their heads. Early in the morning I worked barefooted, dabbling like a plastic artist in the dewy and crumbling sand, but later in the day the sun blistered my feet. There the sun lighted me to hoe beans, pacing slowly backward and forward over that yellow gravelly upland, between the long green rows, fifteen rods, the one end terminating in a shrub oak copse where I could rest in the shade, the other in a blackberry field where the green berries deepened their tints by the time I had made another bout. Removing the weeds, putting fresh soil about the bean stems, and encouraging this weed which I had sown, making the yellow soil express its summer thought in bean leaves and blossoms rather than in wormwood and piper and millet grass, making the earth say beans instead of grass
-- this was my daily work. As I had little aid from horses or

cattle, or hired men or boys, or improved implements of husbandry, I

was much slower, and became much more intimate with my beans than

usual. But labor of the hands, even when pursued to the verge of

drudgery, is perhaps never the worst form of idleness. It has a

constant and imperishable moral, and to the scholar it yields a

classic result. A very agricola laboriosus was I to travellers

bound westward through Lincoln and Wayland to nobody knows where;

they sitting at their ease in gigs, with elbows on knees, and reins

loosely hanging in festoons; I the home-staying, laborious native of

the soil. But soon my homestead was out of their sight and thought.

It was the only open and cultivated field for a great distance on

either side of the road, so they made the most of it; and sometimes

the man in the field heard more of travellers' gossip and comment

than was meant for his ear: "Beans so late! peas so late!" -- for I

continued to plant when others had begun to hoe -- the ministerial

husbandman had not suspected it. "Corn, my boy, for fodder; corn

for fodder." "Does he live there?" asks the black bonnet of the

gray coat; and the hard-featured farmer reins up his grateful dobbin

to inquire what you are doing where he sees no manure in the furrow,

and recommends a little chip dirt, or any little waste stuff, or it

may be ashes or plaster. But here were two acres and a half of

furrows, and only a hoe for cart and two hands to draw it -- there

being an aversion to other carts and horses -- and chip dirt far

away. Fellow-travellers as they rattled by compared it aloud with

the fields which they had passed, so that I came to know how I stood

in the agricultural world. This was one field not in Mr. Coleman's

report. And, by the way, who estimates the value of the crop which
nature yields in the still wilder fields unimproved by man? The crop of English hay is carefully weighed, the moisture calculated, the silicates and the potash; but in all dells and pond-holes in the woods and pastures and swamps grows a rich and various crop only unreaped by man. Mine was, as it were, the connecting link between wild and cultivated fields; as some states are civilized, and others half-civilized, and others savage or barbarous, so my field was, though not in a bad sense, a half-cultivated field. They were beans cheerfully returning to their wild and primitive state that I cultivated, and my hoe played the Rans des Vaches for them. Near at hand, upon the topmost spray of a birch, sings the brown thrasher -- or red mavis, as some love to call him -- all the morning, glad of your society, that would find out another farmer's field if yours were not here. While you are planting the seed, he cries -- "Drop it, drop it -- cover it up, cover it up -- pull it up, pull it up, pull it up." But this was not corn, and so it was safe from such enemies as he. You may wonder what his rigmarole, his amateur Paganini performances on one string or on twenty, have to do with your planting, and yet prefer it to leached ashes or plaster. It was a cheap sort of top dressing in which I had entire faith.

As I drew a still fresher soil about the rows with my hoe, I disturbed the ashes of unchronicled nations who in primeval years lived under these heavens, and their small implements of war and hunting were brought to the light of this modern day. They lay mingled with other natural stones, some of which bore the marks of having been burned by Indian fires, and some by the sun, and also bits of pottery and glass brought hither by the recent cultivators
of the soil. When my hoe tinkled against the stones, that music
echoed to the woods and the sky, and was an accompaniment to my
labor which yielded an instant and immeasurable crop. It was no
longer beans that I hoed, nor I that hoed beans; and I remembered
with as much pity as pride, if I remembered at all, my acquaintances
who had gone to the city to attend the oratorios. The nighthawk
circled overhead in the sunny afternoons -- for I sometimes made a
day of it -- like a mote in the eye, or in heaven's eye, falling
from time to time with a swoop and a sound as if the heavens were
rent, torn at last to very rags and tatters, and yet a seamless cope
remained; small imps that fill the air and lay their eggs on the
ground on bare sand or rocks on the tops of hills, where few have
found them; graceful and slender like ripples caught up from the
pond, as leaves are raised by the wind to float in the heavens; such
kindredship is in nature. The hawk is aerial brother of the wave
which he sails over and surveys, those his perfect air-inflated
wings answering to the elemental unfledged pinions of the sea. Or
sometimes I watched a pair of hen-hawks circling high in the sky,
alternately soaring and descending, approaching, and leaving one
another, as if they were the embodiment of my own thoughts. Or I
was attracted by the passage of wild pigeons from this wood to that,
with a slight quivering winnowing sound and carrier haste; or from
under a rotten stump my hoe turned up a sluggish portentous and
outlandish spotted salamander, a trace of Egypt and the Nile, yet
our contemporary. When I paused to lean on my hoe, these sounds and
sights I heard and saw anywhere in the row, a part of the
inexhaustible entertainment which the country offers.

On gala days the town fires its great guns, which echo like
popguns to these woods, and some waifs of martial music occasionally
penetrate thus far. To me, away there in my bean-field at the other
end of the town, the big guns sounded as if a puffball had burst;
and when there was a military turnout of which I was ignorant, I
have sometimes had a vague sense all the day of some sort of itching
and disease in the horizon, as if some eruption would break out
there soon, either scarlatina or canker-rash, until at length some
more favorable puff of wind, making haste over the fields and up the
Wayland road, brought me information of the “trainers.” It seemed
by the distant hum as if somebody’s bees had swarmed, and that the
neighbors, according to Virgil’s advice, by a faint tintinnabulum
upon the most sonorous of their domestic utensils, were endeavoring
to call them down into the hive again. And when the sound died
quite away, and the hum had ceased, and the most favorable breezes
told no tale, I knew that they had got the last drone of them all
safely into the Middlesex hive, and that now their minds were bent
on the honey with which it was smeared.
I felt proud to know that the liberties of Massachusetts and of
our fatherland were in such safe keeping; and as I turned to my
hoeing again I was filled with an inexpressible confidence, and
pursued my labor cheerfully with a calm trust in the future.
When there were several bands of musicians, it sounded as if all
the village was a vast bellows and all the buildings expanded and
collapsed alternately with a din. But sometimes it was a really
noble and inspiring strain that reached these woods, and the trumpet
that sings of fame, and I felt as if I could spit a Mexican with a
good relish -- for why should we always stand for trifles? -- and
looked round for a woodchuck or a skunk to exercise my chivalry
upon. These martial strains seemed as far away as Palestine, and reminded me of a march of crusaders in the horizon, with a slight tantivy and tremulous motion of the elm tree tops which overhang the village. This was one of the great days; though the sky had from my clearing only the same everlastingly great look that it wears daily, and I saw no difference in it.

It was a singular experience that long acquaintance which I cultivated with beans, what with planting, and hoeing, and harvesting, and threshing, and picking over and selling them -- the last was the hardest of all -- I might add eating, for I did taste. I was determined to know beans. When they were growing, I used to hoe from five o'clock in the morning till noon, and commonly spent the rest of the day about other affairs. Consider the intimate and curious acquaintance one makes with various kinds of weeds -- it will bear some iteration in the account, for there was no little iteration in the labor -- disturbing their delicate organizations so ruthlessly, and making such invidious distinctions with his hoe, levelling whole ranks of one species, and sedulously cultivating another. That's Roman wormwood -- that's pigweed -- that's sorrel -- that's piper-grass -- have at him, chop him up, turn his roots upward to the sun, don't let him have a fibre in the shade, if you do he'll turn himself t' other side up and be as green as a leek in two days. A long war, not with cranes, but with weeds, those Trojans who had sun and rain and dews on their side. Daily the beans saw me come to their rescue armed with a hoe, and thin the ranks of their enemies, filling up the trenches with weedy dead. Many a lusty crest -- waving Hector, that towered a whole foot above his crowding comrades, fell before my weapon and rolled in the dust.
Those summer days which some of my contemporaries devoted to the fine arts in Boston or Rome, and others to contemplation in India, and others to trade in London or New York, I thus, with the other farmers of New England, devoted to husbandry. Not that I wanted beans to eat, for I am by nature a Pythagorean, so far as beans are concerned, whether they mean porridge or voting, and exchanged them for rice; but, perchance, as some must work in fields if only for the sake of tropes and expression, to serve a parable-maker one day. It was on the whole a rare amusement, which, continued too long, might have become a dissipation. Though I gave them no manure, and did not hoe them all once, I hoed them unusually well as far as I went, and was paid for it in the end, "there being in truth," as Evelyn says, "no compost or laetation whatsoever comparable to this continual motion, repastination, and turning of the mould with the spade." "The earth," he adds elsewhere, "especially if fresh, has a certain magnetism in it, by which it attracts the salt, power, or virtue (call it either) which gives it life, and is the logic of all the labor and stir we keep about it, to sustain us; all dungings and other sordid temperings being but the vicars succedaneous to this improvement." Moreover, this being one of those "worn-out and exhausted lay fields which enjoy their sabbath," had perchance, as Sir Kenelm Digby thinks likely, attracted "vital spirits" from the air. I harvested twelve bushels of beans. But to be more particular, for it is complained that Mr. Coleman has reported chiefly the expensive experiments of gentlemen farmers, my outgoes were,--


For a hoe ................................... $ 0.54
Plowing, harrowing, and furrowing .......... 7.50 Too much.
Beans for seed ............................... 3.12+
Potatoes for seed ............................ 1.33
Peas for seed ................................. 0.40
Turnip seed ................................. 0.06
White line for crow fence .................... 0.02
Horse cultivator and boy three hours ......... 1.00
Horse and cart to get crop ................... 0.75
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In all ..................................... $14.72+

My income was (patrem familias vendacem, non emacem esse
opportet), from

Nine bushels and twelve quarts of beans sold .. $16.94
Five " large potatoes ..................... 2.50
Nine " small .............................. 2.25
Grass ........................................... 1.00
Stalks .......................................... 0.75
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In all ..................................... $23.44
Leaving a pecuniary profit,
as I have elsewhere said, of .............. $ 8.71+

This is the result of my experience in raising beans: Plant the
common small white bush bean about the first of June, in rows three feet by eighteen inches apart, being careful to select fresh round and unmixed seed. First look out for worms, and supply vacancies by planting anew. Then look out for woodchucks, if it is an exposed place, for they will nibble off the earliest tender leaves almost clean as they go; and again, when the young tendrils make their appearance, they have notice of it, and will shear them off with both buds and young pods, sitting erect like a squirrel. But above all harvest as early as possible, if you would escape frosts and have a fair and salable crop; you may save much loss by this means.

This further experience also I gained: I said to myself, I will not plant beans and corn with so much industry another summer, but such seeds, if the seed is not lost, as sincerity, truth, simplicity, faith, innocence, and the like, and see if they will not grow in this soil, even with less toil and manurance, and sustain me, for surely it has not been exhausted for these crops. Alas! I said this to myself; but now another summer is gone, and another, and another, and I am obliged to say to you, Reader, that the seeds which I planted, if indeed they were the seeds of those virtues, were wormeaten or had lost their vitality, and so did not come up. Commonly men will only be brave as their fathers were brave, or timid. This generation is very sure to plant corn and beans each new year precisely as the Indians did centuries ago and taught the first settlers to do, as if there were a fate in it. I saw an old man the other day, to my astonishment, making the holes with a hoe for the seventieth time at least, and not for himself to lie down in! But why should not the New Englander try new adventures, and not lay so much stress on his grain, his potato and grass crop, and
his orchards -- raise other crops than these? Why concern ourselves so much about our beans for seed, and not be concerned at all about a new generation of men? We should really be fed and cheered if when we met a man we were sure to see that some of the qualities which I have named, which we all prize more than those other productions, but which are for the most part broadcast and floating in the air, had taken root and grown in him. Here comes such a subtile and ineffable quality, for instance, as truth or justice, though the slightest amount or new variety of it, along the road.

Our ambassadors should be instructed to send home such seeds as these, and Congress help to distribute them over all the land. We should never stand upon ceremony with sincerity. We should never cheat and insult and banish one another by our meanness, if there were present the kernel of worth and friendliness. We should not meet thus in haste. Most men I do not meet at all, for they seem not to have time; they are busy about their beans. We would not deal with a man thus plodding ever, leaning on a hoe or a spade as a staff between his work, not as a mushroom, but partially risen out of the earth, something more than erect, like swallows alighted and walking on the ground:--

"And as he spake, his wings would now and then
Spread, as he meant to fly, then close again --"

so that we should suspect that we might be conversing with an angel.

Bread may not always nourish us; but it always does us good, it even takes stiffness out of our joints, and makes us supple and buoyant,
when we knew not what ailed us, to recognize any generosity in man
or Nature, to share any unmixed and heroic joy.

Ancient poetry and mythology suggest, at least, that husbandry
was once a sacred art; but it is pursued with irreverent haste and
heedlessness by us, our object being to have large farms and large
crops merely. We have no festival, nor procession, nor ceremony,
not excepting our cattle-shows and so-called Thanksgivings, by which
the farmer expresses a sense of the sacredness of his calling, or is
reminded of its sacred origin. It is the premium and the feast
which tempt him. He sacrifices not to Ceres and the Terrestrial
Jove, but to the infernal Plutus rather. By avarice and
selfishness, and a grovelling habit, from which none of us is free,
of regarding the soil as property, or the means of acquiring
property chiefly, the landscape is deformed, husbandry is degraded
with us, and the farmer leads the meanest of lives. He knows Nature
but as a robber. Cato says that the profits of agriculture are
particularly pious or just (maximeque pius quaestus), and according
to Varro the old Romans “called the same earth Mother and Ceres, and
thought that they who cultivated it led a pious and useful life, and
that they alone were left of the race of King Saturn.”

We are wont to forget that the sun looks on our cultivated
fields and on the prairies and forests without distinction. They
all reflect and absorb his rays alike, and the former make but a
small part of the glorious picture which he beholds in his daily
course. In his view the earth is all equally cultivated like a
garden. Therefore we should receive the benefit of his light and
heat with a corresponding trust and magnanimity. What though I
value the seed of these beans, and harvest that in the fall of the
year? This broad field which I have looked at so long looks not to me as the principal cultivator, but away from me to influences more genial to it, which water and make it green. These beans have results which are not harvested by me. Do they not grow for woodchucks partly? The ear of wheat (in Latin spica, obsolete speca, from spe, hope) should not be the only hope of the husbandman; its kernel or grain (granum from gerendo, bearing) is not all that it bears. How, then, can our harvest fail? Shall I not rejoice also at the abundance of the weeds whose seeds are the granary of the birds? It matters little comparatively whether the fields fill the farmer’s barns. The true husbandman will cease from anxiety, as the squirrels manifest no concern whether the woods will bear chestnuts this year or not, and finish his labor with every day, relinquishing all claim to the produce of his fields, and sacrificing in his mind not only his first but his last fruits also.

The Village

After hoeing, or perhaps reading and writing, in the forenoon, I usually bathed again in the pond, swimming across one of its coves for a stint, and washed the dust of labor from my person, or smoothed out the last wrinkle which study had made, and for the afternoon was absolutely free. Every day or two I strolled to the village to hear some of the gossip which is incessantly going on there, circulating either from mouth to mouth, or from newspaper to newspaper, and which, taken in homoeopathic doses, was really as refreshing in its way as the rustle of leaves and the peeping of
frogs. As I walked in the woods to see the birds and squirrels, so
I walked in the village to see the men and boys; instead of the wind
among the pines I heard the carts rattle. In one direction from my
house there was a colony of muskrats in the river meadows; under the
grove of elms and buttonwoods in the other horizon was a village of
busy men, as curious to me as if they had been prairie-dogs, each
sitting at the mouth of its burrow, or running over to a neighbor's
to gossip. I went there frequently to observe their habits. The
village appeared to me a great news room; and on one side, to
support it, as once at Redding & Company's on State Street, they
kept nuts and raisins, or salt and meal and other groceries. Some
have such a vast appetite for the former commodity, that is, the
news, and such sound digestive organs, that they can sit forever in
public avenues without stirring, and let it simmer and whisper
through them like the Etesian winds, or as if inhaling ether, it
only producing numbness and insensitivity to pain -- otherwise it
would often be painful to bear -- without affecting the
consciousness. I hardly ever failed, when I rambled through the
village, to see a row of such worthies, either sitting on a ladder
sunning themselves, with their bodies inclined forward and their
eyes glancing along the line this way and that, from time to time,
with a voluptuous expression, or else leaning against a barn with
their hands in their pockets, like caryatides, as if to prop it up.
They, being commonly out of doors, heard whatever was in the wind.
These are the coarsest mills, in which all gossip is first rudely
digested or cracked up before it is emptied into finer and more
delicate hoppers within doors. 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. Signs were hung out on all sides to allure him; some to catch him by the appetite, as the tavern and victualling cellar; some by the fancy, as the dry goods store and the jeweller's; and others by the hair or the feet or the skirts, as the barber, the shoemaker, or the tailor. Besides, there was a still more terrible standing invitation to call at every one of these houses, and company expected about these times. For the most part I escaped wonderfully from these dangers, either by proceeding at once boldly and without deliberation to the goal, as is recommended to those who run the gauntlet, or by keeping my thoughts on high things, like Orpheus, who, "loudly singing the praises of the gods to his lyre, drowned the voices of the Sirens, and kept out of danger." Sometimes I bolted suddenly, and nobody could tell my whereabouts, for I did not stand much about gracefulness, and never hesitated at a gap in a fence. I was even accustomed to make an irruption into some houses, where I was well entertained, and after learning the kernels and very last sieveful of news -- what had subsided, the prospects of
war and peace, and whether the world was likely to hold together much longer -- I was let out through the rear avenues, and so escaped to the woods again.

It was very pleasant, when I stayed late in town, to launch myself into the night, especially if it was dark and tempestuous, and set sail from some bright village parlor or lecture room, with a bag of rye or Indian meal upon my shoulder, for my snug harbor in the woods, having made all tight without and withdrawn under hatches with a merry crew of thoughts, leaving only my outer man at the helm, or even tying up the helm when it was plain sailing. I had many a genial thought by the cabin fire "as I sailed." I was never cast away nor distressed in any weather, though I encountered some severe storms. It is darker in the woods, even in common nights, than most suppose. I frequently had to look up at the opening between the trees above the path in order to learn my route, and, where there was no cart-path, to feel with my feet the faint track which I had worn, or steer by the known relation of particular trees which I felt with my hands, passing between two pines for instance, not more than eighteen inches apart, in the midst of the woods, invariably, in the darkest night. Sometimes, after coming home thus late in a dark and muggy night, when my feet felt the path which my eyes could not see, dreaming and absent-minded all the way, until I was aroused by having to raise my hand to lift the latch, I have not been able to recall a single step of my walk, and I have thought that perhaps my body would find its way home if its master should forsake it, as the hand finds its way to the mouth without assistance. Several times, when a visitor chanced to stay into evening, and it proved a dark night, I was obliged to conduct him to
the cart-path in the rear of the house, and then point out to him
the direction he was to pursue, and in keeping which he was to be
guided rather by his feet than his eyes. One very dark night I
directed thus on their way two young men who had been fishing in the
pond. They lived about a mile off through the woods, and were quite
used to the route. A day or two after one of them told me that they
wandered about the greater part of the night, close by their own
premises, and did not get home till toward morning, by which time,
as there had been several heavy showers in the meanwhile, and the
leaves were very wet, they were drenched to their skins. I have
heard of many going astray even in the village streets, when the
darkness was so thick that you could cut it with a knife, as the
saying is. Some who live in the outskirts, having come to town
a-shopping in their wagons, have been obliged to put up for the
night; and gentlemen and ladies making a call have gone half a mile
out of their way, feeling the sidewalk only with their feet, and not
knowing when they turned. It is a surprising and memorable, as well
as valuable experience, to be lost in the woods any time. Often in
a snow-storm, even by day, one will come out upon a well-known road
and yet find it impossible to tell which way leads to the village.
Though he knows that he has travelled it a thousand times, he cannot
recognize a feature in it, but it is as strange to him as if it were
a road in Siberia. By night, of course, the perplexity is
infinitely greater. In our most trivial walks, we are constantly,
though unconsciously, steering like pilots by certain well-known
beacons and headlands, and if we go beyond our usual course we still
carry in our minds the bearing of some neighboring cape; and not
till we are completely lost, or turned round -- for a man needs only
to be turned round once with his eyes shut in this world to be lost
-- do we appreciate the vastness and strangeness of nature. Every
man has to learn the points of compass again as often as be awakes,
whether from sleep or any abstraction. 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.

One afternoon, near the end of the first summer, when I went to
the village to get a shoe from the cobbler's, I was seized and put
into jail, because, as I have elsewhere related, I did not pay a tax
to, or recognize the authority of, the State which buys and sells
men, women, and children, like cattle, at the door of its
senate-house. I had gone down to the woods for other purposes.
But, wherever a man goes, men will pursue and paw him with their
dirty institutions, and, if they can, constrain him to belong to
their desperate odd-fellow society. It is true, I might have
resisted forcibly with more or less effect, might have run "amok"
against society; but I preferred that society should run "amok"
against me, it being the desperate party. However, I was released
the next day, obtained my mended shoe, and returned to the woods in
season to get my dinner of huckleberries on Fair Haven Hill. I was
never molested by any person but those who represented the State. I
had no lock nor bolt but for the desk which held my papers, not even
a nail to put over my latch or windows. I never fastened my door
night or day, though I was to be absent several days; not even when
the next fall I spent a fortnight in the woods of Maine. And yet my
house was more respected than if it had been surrounded by a file of
soldiers. The tired rambler could rest and warm himself by my fire,
the literary amuse himself with the few books on my table, or the curious, by opening my closet door, see what was left of my dinner, and what prospect I had of a supper. Yet, though many people of every class came this way to the pond, I suffered no serious inconvenience from these sources, and I never missed anything but one small book, a volume of Homer, which perhaps was improperly gilded, and this I trust a soldier of our camp has found by this time. I am convinced, that if all men were to live as simply as I then did, thieving and robbery would be unknown. These take place only in communities where some have got more than is sufficient while others have not enough. The Pope's Homers would soon get properly distributed.

"Nec bella fuerunt,
Faginus astabat dum scyphus ante dapes."

"Nor wars did men molest,
When only beechen bowls were in request."

"You who govern public affairs, what need have you to employ punishments? Love virtue, and the people will be virtuous. The virtues of a superior man are like the wind; the virtues of a common man are like the grass -- I the grass, when the wind passes over it, bends."

The Ponds
Sometimes, having had a surfeit of human society and gossip, and worn out all my village friends, I rambled still farther westward than I habitually dwell, into yet more unfrequented parts of the town, "to fresh woods and pastures new," or, while the sun was setting, made my supper of huckleberries and blueberries on Fair Haven Hill, and laid up a store for several days. The fruits do not yield their true flavor to the purchaser of them, nor to him who raises them for the market. There is but one way to obtain it, yet few take that way. If you would know the flavor of huckleberries, ask the cowboy or the partridge. It is a vulgar error to suppose that you have tasted huckleberries who never plucked them. A huckleberry never reaches Boston; they have not been known there since they grew on her three hills. The ambrosial and essential part of the fruit is lost with the bloom which is rubbed off in the market cart, and they become mere provender. As long as Eternal Justice reigns, not one innocent huckleberry can be transported thither from the country's hills.

Occasionally, after my hoeing was done for the day, I joined some impatient companion who had been fishing on the pond since morning, as silent and motionless as a duck or a floating leaf, and, after practising various kinds of philosophy, had concluded commonly, by the time I arrived, that he belonged to the ancient sect of Coenobites. There was one older man, an excellent fisher and skilled in all kinds of woodcraft, who was pleased to look upon my house as a building erected for the convenience of fishermen; and I was equally pleased when he sat in my doorway to arrange his lines. Once in a while we sat together on the pond, he at one end
of the boat, and I at the other; but not many words passed between
us, for he had grown deaf in his later years, but he occasionally
hummed a psalm, which harmonized well enough with my philosophy.

Our intercourse was thus altogether one of unbroken harmony, far
more pleasing to remember than if it had been carried on by speech.

When, as was commonly the case, I had none to commune with, I used
to raise the echoes by striking with a paddle on the side of my
boat, filling the surrounding woods with circling and dilating
sound, stirring them up as the keeper of a menagerie his wild
beasts, until I elicited a growl from every wooded vale and
hillside.

In warm evenings I frequently sat in the boat playing the flute,
and saw the perch, which I seem to have charmed, hovering around me,
and the moon travelling over the ribbed bottom, which was strewed
with the wrecks of the forest. Formerly I had come to this pond
adventurously, from time to time, in dark summer nights, with a
companion, and, making a fire close to the water's edge, which we
thought attracted the fishes, we caught pouts with a bunch of worms
strung on a thread, and when we had done, far in the night, threw
the burning brands high into the air like skyrockets, which, coming
down into the pond, were quenched with a loud hissing, and we were
suddenly groping in total darkness. Through this, whistling a tune,
we took our way to the haunts of men again. But now I had made my
home by the shore.

Sometimes, after staying in a village parlor till the family had
all retired, I have returned to the woods, and, partly with a view
to the next day's dinner, spent the hours of midnight fishing from a
boat by moonlight, serenaded by owls and foxes, and hearing, from
time to time, the creaking note of some unknown bird close at hand. These experiences were very memorable and valuable to me -- anchored in forty feet of water, and twenty or thirty rods from the shore, surrounded sometimes by thousands of small perch and shiners, dimpling the surface with their tails in the moonlight, and communicating by a long flaxen line with mysterious nocturnal fishes which had their dwelling forty feet below, or sometimes dragging sixty feet of line about the pond as I drifted in the gentle night breeze, now and then feeling a slight vibration along it, indicative of some life prowling about its extremity, of dull uncertain blundering purpose there, and slow to make up its mind. At length you slowly raise, pulling hand over hand, some horned pout squeaking and squirming to the upper air. It was very queer, especially in dark nights, when your thoughts had wandered to vast and cosmogonial themes in other spheres, to feel this faint jerk, which came to interrupt your dreams and link you to Nature again. It seemed as if I might next cast my line upward into the air, as well as downward into this element, which was scarcely more dense. Thus I caught two fishes as it were with one hook.

The scenery of Walden is on a humble scale, and, though very beautiful, does not approach to grandeur, nor can it much concern one who has not long frequented it or lived by its shore; yet this pond is so remarkable for its depth and purity as to merit a particular description. It is a clear and deep green well, half a mile long and a mile and three quarters in circumference, and contains about sixty-one and a half acres; a perennial spring in the midst of pine and oak woods, without any visible inlet or outlet except by the clouds and evaporation. The surrounding hills
abruptly from the water to the height of forty to eighty feet,
though on the southeast and east they attain to about one hundred
and one hundred and fifty feet respectively, within a quarter and a
third of a mile. They are exclusively woodland. All our Concord
waters have two colors at least; one when viewed at a distance, and
another, more proper, close at hand. The first depends more on the
light, and follows the sky. In clear weather, in summer, they
appear blue at a little distance, especially if agitated, and at a
great distance all appear alike. In stormy weather they are
sometimes of a dark slate-color. The sea, however, is said to be
blue one day and green another without any perceptible change in the
atmosphere. I have seen our river, when, the landscape being
covered with snow, both water and ice were almost as green as grass.
Some consider blue "to be the color of pure water, whether liquid or
solid." But, looking directly down into our waters from a boat,
they are seen to be of very different colors. Walden is blue at one
time and green at another, even from the same point of view. Lying
between the earth and the heavens, it partakes of the color of both.
Viewed from a hilltop it reflects the color of the sky; but near at
hand it is of a yellowish tint next the shore where you can see the
sand, then a light green, which gradually deepens to a uniform dark
green in the body of the pond. In some lights, viewed even from a
hilltop, it is of a vivid green next the shore. Some have referred
this to the reflection of the verdure; but it is equally green there
against the railroad sandbank, and in the spring, before the leaves
are expanded, and it may be simply the result of the prevailing blue
mixed with the yellow of the sand. Such is the color of its iris.
This is that portion, also, where in the spring, the ice being
warmed by the heat of the sun reflected from the bottom, and also
transmitted through the earth, melts first and forms a narrow canal
about the still frozen middle. Like the rest of our waters, when
much agitated, in clear weather, so that the surface of the waves
may reflect the sky at the right angle, or because there is more
light mixed with it, it appears at a little distance of a darker
blue than the sky itself; and at such a time, being on its surface,
and looking with divided vision, so as to see the reflection, I have
discerned a matchless and indescribable light blue, such as watered
or changeable silks and sword blades suggest, more cerulean than the
sky itself, alternating with the original dark green on the opposite
sides of the waves, which last appeared but muddy in comparison. It
is a vitreous greenish blue, as I remember it, like those patches of
the winter sky seen through cloud vistas in the west before sundown.
Yet a single glass of its water held up to the light is as colorless
as an equal quantity of air. It is well known that a large plate of
glass will have a green tint, owing, as the makers say, to its
"body," but a small piece of the same will be colorless. How large
a body of Walden water would be required to reflect a green tint I
have never proved. The water of our river is black or a very dark
brown to one looking directly down on it, and, like that of most
ponds, imparts to the body of one bathing in it a yellowish tinge;
but this water is of such crystalline purity that the body of the
bather appears of an alabaster whiteness, still more unnatural,
which, as the limbs are magnified and distorted withal, produces a
monstrous effect, making fit studies for a Michael Angelo.
The water is so transparent that the bottom can easily be
discerned at the depth of twenty-five or thirty feet. Paddling over
it, you may see, many feet beneath the surface, the schools of perch and shiners, perhaps only an inch long, yet the former easily distinguished by their transverse bars, and you think that they must be ascetic fish that find a subsistence there. Once, in the winter, many years ago, when I had been cutting holes through the ice in order to catch pickerel, as I stepped ashore I tossed my axe back on to the ice, but, as if some evil genius had directed it, it slid four or five rods directly into one of the holes, where the water was twenty-five feet deep. Out of curiosity, I lay down on the ice and looked through the hole, until I saw the axe a little on one side, standing on its head, with its helve erect and gently swaying to and fro with the pulse of the pond; and there it might have stood erect and swaying till in the course of time the handle rotted off, if I had not disturbed it. Making another hole directly over it with an ice chisel which I had, and cutting down the longest birch which I could find in the neighborhood with my knife, I made a slip-noose, which I attached to its end, and, letting it down carefully, passed it over the knob of the handle, and drew it by a line along the birch, and so pulled the axe out again.

The shore is composed of a belt of smooth rounded white stones like paving-stones, excepting one or two short sand beaches, and is so steep that in many places a single leap will carry you into water over your head; and were it not for its remarkable transparency, that would be the last to be seen of its bottom till it rose on the opposite side. Some think it is bottomless. It is nowhere muddy, and a casual observer would say that there were no weeds at all in it; and of noticeable plants, except in the little meadows recently overflowed, which do not properly belong to it, a closer scrutiny
does not detect a flag nor a bulrush, nor even a lily, yellow or 
white, but only a few small heart-leaves and potamogetons, and 
perhaps a water-target or two; all which however a bather might not 
perceive; and these plants are clean and bright like the element 
they grow in. The stones extend a rod or two into the water, and 
then the bottom is pure sand, except in the deepest parts, where 
there is usually a little sediment, probably from the decay of the 
leaves which have been wafted on to it so many successive falls, and 
a bright green weed is brought up on anchors even in midwinter. 
We have one other pond just like this, White Pond, in Nine Acre 
Corner, about two and a half miles westerly; but, though I am 
acquainted with most of the ponds within a dozen miles of this 
centre I do not know a third of this pure and well-like character. 
Successive nations perchance have drank at, admired, and fathomed 
it, and passed away, and still its water is green and pellucid as 
ever. Not an intermitting spring! Perhaps on that spring morning 
when Adam and Eve were driven out of Eden Walden Pond was already in 
existence, and even then breaking up in a gentle spring rain 
accompanied with mist and a southerly wind, and covered with myriads 
of ducks and geese, which had not heard of the fall, when still such 
pure lakes sufficed them. Even then it had commenced to rise and 
fall, and had clarified its waters and colored them of the hue they 
now wear, and obtained a patent of Heaven to be the only Walden Pond 
in the world and distiller of celestial dews. Who knows in how many 
unremembered nations' literatures this has been the Castalian 
Fountain? or what nymphs presided over it in the Golden Age? It is 
a gem of the first water which Concord wears in her coronet. 
Yet perchance the first who came to this well have left some
trace of their footsteps. I have been surprised to detect encircling the pond, even where a thick wood has just been cut down on the shore, a narrow shelf-like path in the steep hillside, alternately rising and falling, approaching and receding from the water's edge, as old probably as the race of man here, worn by the feet of aboriginal hunters, and still from time to time unwittingly trodden by the present occupants of the land. This is particularly distinct to one standing on the middle of the pond in winter, just after a light snow has fallen, appearing as a clear undulating white line, unobscured by weeds and twigs, and very obvious a quarter of a mile off in many places where in summer it is hardly distinguishable close at hand. The snow reprints it, as it were, in clear white type alto-relievo. The ornamented grounds of villas which will one day be built here may still preserve some trace of this.

The pond rises and falls, but whether regularly or not, and within what period, nobody knows, though, as usual, many pretend to know. It is commonly higher in the winter and lower in the summer, though not corresponding to the general wet and dryness. I can remember when it was a foot or two lower, and also when it was at least five feet higher, than when I lived by it. There is a narrow sand-bar running into it, with very deep water on one side, on which I helped boil a kettle of chowder, some six rods from the main shore, about the year 1824, which it has not been possible to do for twenty-five years; and, on the other hand, my friends used to listen with incredulity when I told them, that a few years later I was accustomed to fish from a boat in a secluded cove in the woods, fifteen rods from the only shore they knew, which place was long since converted into a meadow. But the pond has risen steadily for
two years, and now, in the summer of '52, is just five feet higher
than when I lived there, or as high as it was thirty years ago, and
fishing goes on again in the meadow. This makes a difference of
level, at the outside, of six or seven feet; and yet the water shed
by the surrounding hills is insignificant in amount, and this
overflow must be referred to causes which affect the deep springs.
This same summer the pond has begun to fall again. It is remarkable
that this fluctuation, whether periodical or not, appears thus to
require many years for its accomplishment. I have observed one rise
and a part of two falls, and I expect that a dozen or fifteen years
hence the water will again be as low as I have ever known it.
Flint's Pond, a mile eastward, allowing for the disturbance
occasioned by its inlets and outlets, and the smaller intermediate
ponds also, sympathize with Walden, and recently attained their
greatest height at the same time with the latter. The same is true,
as far as my observation goes, of White Pond.
This rise and fall of Walden at long intervals serves this use
at least; the water standing at this great height for a year or
more, though it makes it difficult to walk round it, kills the
shrubs and trees which have sprung up about its edge since the last
rise -- pitch pines, birches, alders, aspens, and others -- and,
falling again, leaves an unobstructed shore; for, unlike many ponds
and all waters which are subject to a daily tide, its shore is
cleanest when the water is lowest. On the side of the pond next my
house a row of pitch pines, fifteen feet high, has been killed and
tipped over as if by a lever, and thus a stop put to their
encroachments; and their size indicates how many years have elapsed
since the last rise to this height. By this fluctuation the pond
asserts its title to a shore, and thus the shore is shorn, and the
trees cannot hold it by right of possession. These are the lips of
the lake, on which no beard grows. It licks its chaps from time to
time. When the water is at its height, the alders, willows, and
maples send forth a mass of fibrous red roots several feet long from
all sides of their stems in the water, and to the height of three or
four feet from the ground, in the effort to maintain themselves; and
I have known the high blueberry bushes about the shore, which
commonly produce no fruit, bear an abundant crop under these
circumstances.

Some have been puzzled to tell how the shore became so regularly
paved. My townsmen have all heard the tradition -- the oldest
people tell me that they heard it in their youth -- that anciently
the Indians were holding a pow-wow upon a hill here, which rose as
high into the heavens as the pond now sinks deep into the earth, and
they used much profanity, as the story goes, though this vice is one
of which the Indians were never guilty, and while they were thus
engaged the hill shook and suddenly sank, and only one old squaw,
named Walden, escaped, and from her the pond was named. It has been
conjectured that when the hill shook these stones rolled down its
side and became the present shore. It is very certain, at any rate,
that once there was no pond here, and now there is one; and this
Indian fable does not in any respect conflict with the account of
that ancient settler whom I have mentioned, who remembers so well
when he first came here with his divining-rod, saw a thin vapor
rising from the sward, and the hazel pointed steadily downward, and
he concluded to dig a well here. As for the stones, many still
think that they are hardly to be accounted for by the action of the
waves on these hills; but I observe that the surrounding hills are remarkably full of the same kind of stones, so that they have been obliged to pile them up in walls on both sides of the railroad cut nearest the pond; and, moreover, there are most stones where the shore is most abrupt; so that, unfortunately, it is no longer a mystery to me. I detect the paver. If the name was not derived from that of some English locality -- Saffron Walden, for instance -- one might suppose that it was called originally Walled-in Pond. The pond was my well ready dug. For four months in the year its water is as cold as it is pure at all times; and I think that it is then as good as any, if not the best, in the town. In the winter, all water which is exposed to the air is colder than springs and wells which are protected from it. The temperature of the pond water which had stood in the room where I sat from five o’clock in the afternoon till noon the next day, the sixth of March, 1846, the thermometer having been up to 65° or 70° some of the time, owing partly to the sun on the roof, was 42°, or one degree colder than the water of one of the coldest wells in the village just drawn. The temperature of the Boiling Spring the same day was 45°, or the warmest of any water tried, though it is the coldest that I know of in summer, when, beside, shallow and stagnant surface water is not mingled with it. Moreover, in summer, Walden never becomes so warm as most water which is exposed to the sun, on account of its depth. In the warmest weather I usually placed a pailful in my cellar, where it became cool in the night, and remained so during the day; though I also resorted to a spring in the neighborhood. It was as good when a week old as the day it was dipped, and had no taste of the pump. Whoever camps for a week in summer by the shore of a
pond, needs only bury a pail of water a few feet deep in the shade of his camp to be independent of the luxury of ice.

There have been caught in Walden pickerel, one weighing seven pounds -- to say nothing of another which carried off a reel with great velocity, which the fisherman safely set down at eight pounds because he did not see him -- perch and pouts, some of each weighing over two pounds, shiners, chivins or roach (Leuciscus pulchellus), a very few breams, and a couple of eels, one weighing four pounds -- I am thus particular because the weight of a fish is commonly its only title to fame, and these are the only eels I have heard of here; -- also, I have a faint recollection of a little fish some five inches long, with silvery sides and a greenish back, somewhat dace-like in its character, which I mention here chiefly to link my facts to fable. Nevertheless, this pond is not very fertile in fish. Its pickerel, though not abundant, are its chief boast. I have seen at one time lying on the ice pickerel of at least three different kinds: a long and shallow one, steel-colored, most like those caught in the river; a bright golden kind, with greenish reflections and remarkably deep, which is the most common here; and another, golden-colored, and shaped like the last, but peppered on the sides with small dark brown or black spots, intermixed with a few faint blood-red ones, very much like a trout. The specific name reticulatus would not apply to this; it should be guttatus rather. These are all very firm fish, and weigh more than their size promises. The shiners, pouts, and perch also, and indeed all the fishes which inhabit this pond, are much cleaner, handsomer, and firmer-fleshed than those in the river and most other ponds, as the water is purer, and they can easily be distinguished from them.
Probably many ichthyologists would make new varieties of some of them. There are also a clean race of frogs and tortoises, and a few mussels in it; muskrats and minks leave their traces about it, and occasionally a travelling mud-turtle visits it. Sometimes, when I pushed off my boat in the morning, I disturbed a great mud-turtle which had secreted himself under the boat in the night. Ducks and geese frequent it in the spring and fall, the white-bellied swallows (Hirundo bicolor) skim over it, and the peetweets (Totanus macularius) "teeter" along its stony shores all summer. I have sometimes disturbed a fish hawk sitting on a white pine over the water; but I doubt if it is ever profaned by the wind of a gull, like Fair Haven. At most, it tolerates one annual loon. These are all the animals of consequence which frequent it now.

You may see from a boat, in calm weather, near the sandy eastern shore, where the water is eight or ten feet deep, and also in some other parts of the pond, some circular heaps half a dozen feet in diameter by a foot in height, consisting of small stones less than a hen's egg in size, where all around is bare sand. At first you wonder if the Indians could have formed them on the ice for any purpose, and so, when the ice melted, they sank to the bottom; but they are too regular and some of them plainly too fresh for that. They are similar to those found in rivers; but as there are no suckers nor lampreys here, I know not by what fish they could be made. Perhaps they are the nests of the chivin. These lend a pleasing mystery to the bottom.

The shore is irregular enough not to be monotonous. I have in my mind's eye the western, indented with deep bays, the bolder northern, and the beautifully scalloped southern shore, where
successive capes overlap each other and suggest unexplored coves between. The forest has never so good a setting, nor is so distinctly beautiful, as when seen from the middle of a small lake amid hills which rise from the water's edge; for the water in which it is reflected not only makes the best foreground in such a case, but, with its winding shore, the most natural and agreeable boundary to it. There is no rawness nor imperfection in its edge there, as where the axe has cleared a part, or a cultivated field abuts on it. The trees have ample room to expand on the water side, and each sends forth its most vigorous branch in that direction. There Nature has woven a natural selvage, and the eye rises by just gradations from the low shrubs of the shore to the highest trees. There are few traces of man's hand to be seen. The water laves the shore as it did a thousand years ago.

A lake is the landscape's most beautiful and expressive feature. It is earth's eye; looking into which the beholder measures the depth of his own nature. The fluvial trees next the shore are the slender eyelashes which fringe it, and the wooded hills and cliffs around are its overhanging brows.

Standing on the smooth sandy beach at the east end of the pond, in a calm September afternoon, when a slight haze makes the opposite shore-line indistinct, I have seen whence came the expression, "the glassy surface of a lake." When you invert your head, it looks like a thread of finest gossamer stretched across the valley, and gleaming against the distant pine woods, separating one stratum of the atmosphere from another. You would think that you could walk dry under it to the opposite hills, and that the swallows which skim over might perch on it. Indeed, they sometimes dive below this
line, as it were by mistake, and are undeceived. As you look over
the pond westward you are obliged to employ both your hands to
defend your eyes against the reflected as well as the true sun, for
they are equally bright; and if, between the two, you survey its
surface critically, it is literally as smooth as glass, except where
the skater insects, at equal intervals scattered over its whole
extent, by their motions in the sun produce the finest imaginable
sparkle on it, or, perchance, a duck plumes itself, or, as I have
said, a swallow skims so low as to touch it. It may be that in the
distance a fish describes an arc of three or four feet in the air,
and there is one bright flash where it emerges, and another where it
strikes the water; sometimes the whole silvery arc is revealed; or
here and there, perhaps, is a thistle-down floating on its surface,
which the fishes dart at and so dimple it again. It is like molten
glass cooled but not congealed, and the few motes in it are pure and
beautiful like the imperfections in glass. You may often detect a
yet smoother and darker water, separated from the rest as if by an
invisible cobweb, boom of the water nymphs, resting on it. From a
hilltop you can see a fish leap in almost any part; for not a
pickerel or shiner picks an insect from this smooth surface but it
manifestly disturbs the equilibrium of the whole lake. It is
wonderful with what elaborateness this simple fact is advertised --
this piscine murder will out -- and from my distant perch I
distinguish the circling undulations when they are half a dozen rods
in diameter. You can even detect a water-bug (Gyrinus) ceaselessly
progressing over the smooth surface a quarter of a mile off; for
they furrow the water slightly, making a conspicuous ripple bounded
by two diverging lines, but the skaters glide over it without
rippling it perceptibly. When the surface is considerably agitated
there are no skaters nor water-bugs on it, but apparently, in calm
days, they leave their havens and adventurously glide forth from the
shore by short impulses till they completely cover it. It is a
soothing employment, on one of those fine days in the fall when all
the warmth of the sun is fully appreciated, to sit on a stump on
such a height as this, overlooking the pond, and study the dimpling
circles which are incessantly inscribed on its otherwise invisible
surface amid the reflected skies and trees. Over this great expanse
there is no disturbance but it is thus at once gently smoothed away
and assuaged, as, when a vase of water is jarred, the trembling
circles seek the shore and all is smooth again. Not a fish can leap
or an insect fall on the pond but it is thus reported in circling
dimples, in lines of beauty, as it were the constant welling up of
its fountain, the gentle pulsing of its life, the heaving of its
breast. The thrills of joy and thrills of pain are
undistinguishable. How peaceful the phenomena of the lake! Again
the works of man shine as in the spring. Ay, every leaf and twig
and stone and cobweb sparkles now at mid-afternoon as when covered
with dew in a spring morning. Every motion of an oar or an insect
produces a flash of light; and if an oar falls, how sweet the echo!
In such a day, in September or October, Walden is a perfect
forest mirror, set round with stones as precious to my eye as if
fewer or rarer. Nothing so fair, so pure, and at the same time so
large, as a lake, perchance, lies on the surface of the earth. Sky
water. It needs no fence. Nations come and go without defiling it.
It is a mirror which no stone can crack, whose quicksilver will
never wear off, whose gilding Nature continually repairs; no storms,
no dust, can dim its surface ever fresh; -- a mirror in which all
impurity presented to it sinks, swept and dusted by the sun's hazy
brush -- this the light dust-cloth -- which retains no breath that
is breathed on it, but sends its own to float as clouds high above
its surface, and be reflected in its bosom still.
A field of water betrays the spirit that is in the air. It is
continually receiving new life and motion from above. It is
intermediate in its nature between land and sky. On land only the
grass and trees wave, but the water itself is rippled by the wind.
I see where the breeze dashes across it by the streaks or flakes of
light. It is remarkable that we can look down on its surface. We
shall, perhaps, look down thus on the surface of air at length, and
mark where a still subtler spirit sweeps over it.
The skaters and water-bugs finally disappear in the latter part
of October, when the severe frosts have come; and then and in
November, usually, in a calm day, there is absolutely nothing to
ripple the surface. One November afternoon, in the calm at the end
of a rain-storm of several days' duration, when the sky was still
completely overcast and the air was full of mist, I observed that
the pond was remarkably smooth, so that it was difficult to
distinguish its surface; though it no longer reflected the bright
tints of October, but the sombre November colors of the surrounding
hills. Though I passed over it as gently as possible, the slight
undulations produced by my boat extended almost as far as I could
see, and gave a ribbed appearance to the reflections. But, as I was
looking over the surface, I saw here and there at a distance a faint
glimmer, as if some skater insects which had escaped the frosts
might be collected there, or, perchance, the surface, being so
smooth, betrayed where a spring welled up from the bottom. Paddling
gently to one of these places, I was surprised to find myself
surrounded by myriads of small perch, about five inches long, of a
rich bronze color in the green water, sporting there, and constantly
rising to the surface and dimpling it, sometimes leaving bubbles on
it. In such transparent and seemingly bottomless water, reflecting
the clouds, I seemed to be floating through the air as in a balloon,
and their swimming impressed me as a kind of flight or hovering, as
if they were a compact flock of birds passing just beneath my level
on the right or left, their fins, like sails, set all around them.
There were many such schools in the pond, apparently improving the
short season before winter would draw an icy shutter over their
broad skylight, sometimes giving to the surface an appearance as if
a slight breeze struck it, or a few rain-drops fell there. When I
approached carelessly and alarmed them, they made a sudden splash
and rippling with their tails, as if one had struck the water with a
brushy bough, and instantly took refuge in the depths. At length
the wind rose, the mist increased, and the waves began to run, and
the perch leaped much higher than before, half out of water, a
hundred black points, three inches long, at once above the surface.
Even as late as the fifth of December, one year, I saw some dimples
on the surface, and thinking it was going to rain hard immediately,
the air being fun of mist, I made haste to take my place at the oars
and row homeward; already the rain seemed rapidly increasing, though
I felt none on my cheek, and I anticipated a thorough soaking. But
suddenly the dimples ceased, for they were produced by the perch,
which the noise of my oars had seared into the depths, and I saw
their schools dimly disappearing; so I spent a dry afternoon after
An old man who used to frequent this pond nearly sixty years ago, when it was dark with surrounding forests, tells me that in those days he sometimes saw it all alive with ducks and other water-fowl, and that there were many eagles about it. He came here a-fishing, and used an old log canoe which he found on the shore. It was made of two white pine logs dug out and pinned together, and was cut off square at the ends. It was very clumsy, but lasted a great many years before it became water-logged and perhaps sank to the bottom. He did not know whose it was; it belonged to the pond. He used to make a cable for his anchor of strips of hickory bark tied together. An old man, a potter, who lived by the pond before the Revolution, told him once that there was an iron chest at the bottom, and that he had seen it. Sometimes it would come floating up to the shore; but when you went toward it, it would go back into deep water and disappear. I was pleased to hear of the old log canoe, which took the place of an Indian one of the same material but more graceful construction, which perchance had first been a tree on the bank, and then, as it were, fell into the water, to float there for a generation, the most proper vessel for the lake. I remember that when I first looked into these depths there were many large trunks to be seen indistinctly lying on the bottom, which had either been blown over formerly, or left on the ice at the last cutting, when wood was cheaper; but now they have mostly disappeared.

When I first paddled a boat on Walden, it was completely surrounded by thick and lofty pine and oak woods, and in some of its coves grape-vines had run over the trees next the water and formed all.
bowers under which a boat could pass. The hills which form its shores are so steep, and the woods on them were then so high, that, as you looked down from the west end, it had the appearance of an amphitheatre for some land of sylvan spectacle. I have spent many an hour, when I was younger, floating over its surface as the zephyr willed, having paddled my boat to the middle, and lying on my back across the seats, in a summer forenoon, dreaming awake, until I was aroused by the boat touching the sand, and I arose to see what shore my fates had impelled me to; days when idleness was the most attractive and productive industry. Many a forenoon have I stolen away, preferring to spend thus the most valued part of the day; for I was rich, if not in money, in sunny hours and summer days, and spent them lavishly; nor do I regret that I did not waste more of them in the workshop or the teacher's desk. But since I left those shores the woodchoppers have still further laid them waste, and now for many a year there will be no more rambling through the aisles of the wood, with occasional vistas through which you see the water. My Muse may be excused if she is silent henceforth. How can you expect the birds to sing when their groves are cut down?

Now the trunks of trees on the bottom, and the old log canoe, and the dark surrounding woods, are gone, and the villagers, who scarcely know where it lies, instead of going to the pond to bathe or drink, are thinking to bring its water, which should be as sacred as the Ganges at least, to the village in a pipe, to wash their dishes with! -- to earn their Walden by the turning of a cock or drawing of a plug! That devilish Iron Horse, whose ear-rending neigh is heard throughout the town, has muddied the Boiling Spring with his foot, and he it is that has browsed off all the woods on
Walden shore, that Trojan horse, with a thousand men in his belly, introduced by mercenary Greeks! Where is the country's champion, the Moore of Moore Hill, to meet him at the Deep Cut and thrust an avenging lance between the ribs of the bloated pest?

Nevertheless, of all the characters I have known, perhaps Walden wears best, and best preserves its purity. Many men have been likened to it, but few deserve that honor. Though the woodchoppers have laid bare first this shore and then that, and the Irish have built their sties by it, and the railroad has infringed on its border, and the ice-men have skimmed it once, it is itself unchanged, the same water which my youthful eyes fell on; all the change is in me. It has not acquired one permanent wrinkle after all its ripples. It is perennially young, and I may stand and see a swallow dip apparently to pick an insect from its surface as of yore. It struck me again tonight, as if I had not seen it almost daily for more than twenty years -- Why, here is Walden, the same woodland lake that I discovered so many years ago; where a forest was cut down last winter another is springing up by its shore as lustily as ever; the same thought is welling up to its surface that was then; it is the same liquid joy and happiness to itself and its Maker, ay, and it may be to me. It is the work of a brave man surely, in whom there was no guile! He rounded this water with his hand, deepened and clarified it in his thought, and in his will bequeathed it to Concord. I see by its face that it is visited by the same reflection; and I can almost say, Walden, is it you?

It is no dream of mine,
To ornament a line;
I cannot come nearer to God and Heaven
Than I live to Walden even.
I am its stony shore,
And the breeze that passes o'er;
In the hollow of my hand
Are its water and its sand,
And its deepest resort
Lies high in my thought.

The cars never pause to look at it; yet I fancy that the
engineers and firemen and brakemen, and those passengers who have a
season ticket and see it often, are better men for the sight. The
engineer does not forget at night, or his nature does not, that he
has beheld this vision of serenity and purity once at least during
the day. Though seen but once, it helps to wash out State Street
and the engine's soot. One proposes that it be called "God's Drop."
I have said that Walden has no visible inlet nor outlet, but it
is on the one hand distantly and indirectly related to Flint's Pond,
which is more elevated, by a chain of small ponds coming from that
quarter, and on the other directly and manifestly to Concord River,
which is lower, by a similar chain of ponds through which in some
other geological period it may have flowed, and by a little digging,
which God forbid, it can be made to flow thither again. If by
living thus reserved and austere, like a hermit in the woods, so
long, it has acquired such wonderful purity, who would not regret
that the comparatively impure waters of Flint's Pond should be
mingled with it, or itself should ever go to waste its sweetness in
the ocean wave?

Flint's, or Sandy Pond, in Lincoln, our greatest lake and inland
sea, lies about a mile east of Walden. It is much larger, being
said to contain one hundred and ninety-seven acres, and is more
fertile in fish; but it is comparatively shallow, and not remarkably
pure. A walk through the woods thither was often my recreation. It
was worth the while, if only to feel the wind blow on your cheek
freely, and see the waves run, and remember the life of mariners. I
went a-chestnutting there in the fall, on windy days, when the nuts
were dropping into the water and were washed to my feet; and one
day, as I crept along its sedgy shore, the fresh spray blowing in my
face, I came upon the mouldering wreck of a boat, the sides gone,
and hardly more than the impression of its flat bottom left amid the
rushes; yet its model was sharply defined, as if it were a large
decayed pad, with its veins. It was as impressive a wreck as one
could imagine on the seashore, and had as good a moral. It is by
this time mere vegetable mould and undistinguishable pond shore,
through which rushes and flags have pushed up. I used to admire the
ripple marks on the sandy bottom, at the north end of this pond,
made firm and hard to the feet of the wader by the pressure of the
water, and the rushes which grew in Indian file, in waving lines,
corresponding to these marks, rank behind rank, as if the waves had
planted them. There also I have found, in considerable quantities,
curious balls, composed apparently of fine grass or roots, of
pipewort perhaps, from half an inch to four inches in diameter, and
perfectly spherical. These wash back and forth in shallow water on
a sandy bottom, and are sometimes cast on the shore. They are
either solid grass, or have a little sand in the middle. At first
you would say that they were formed by the action of the waves, like
a pebble; yet the smallest are made of equally coarse materials,
half an inch long, and they are produced only at one season of the
year. Moreover, the waves, I suspect, do not so much construct as
wear down a material which has already acquired consistency. They
preserve their form when dry for an indefinite period.

Flint's Pond! Such is the poverty of our nomenclature. What
right had the unclean and stupid farmer, whose farm abutted on this
sky water, whose shores he has ruthlessly laid bare, to give his
name to it? Some skin-flint, who loved better the reflecting
surface of a dollar, or a bright cent, in which he could see his own
brazen face; who regarded even the wild ducks which settled in it as
trespassers; his fingers grown into crooked and bony talons from the
long habit of grasping harpy-like; -- so it is not named for me. I
go not there to see him nor to hear of him; who never saw it, who
never bathed in it, who never loved it, who never protected it, who
never spoke a good word for it, nor thanked God that He had made it.
Rather let it be named from the fishes that swim in it, the wild
fowl or quadrupeds which frequent it, the wild flowers which grow by
its shores, or some wild man or child the thread of whose history is
interwoven with its own; not from him who could show no title to it
but the deed which a like-minded neighbor or legislature gave him --
him who thought only of its money value; whose presence perchance
cursed all the shores; who exhausted the land around it, and would
fain have exhausted the waters within it; who regretted only that it
was not English hay or cranberry meadow -- there was nothing to
redeem it, forsooth, in his eyes -- and would have drained and sold
it for the mud at its bottom. It did not turn his mill, and it was
no privilege to him to behold it. I respect not his labors, his
farm where everything has its price, who would carry the landscape,
who would carry his God, to market, if he could get anything for
him; who goes to market for his god as it is; on whose farm nothing
grows free, whose fields bear no crops, whose meadows no flowers,
whose trees no fruits, but dollars; who loves not the beauty of his
fruits, whose fruits are not ripe for him till they are turned to
dollars. Give me the poverty that enjoys true wealth. Farmers are
respectable and interesting to me in proportion as they are poor --
poor farmers. A model farm! where the house stands like a fungus in
a muckheap, chambers for men horses, oxen, and swine, cleansed and
uncleansed, all contiguous to one another! Stocked with men! A
great grease-spot, redolent of manures and buttermilk! Under a high
state of cultivation, being manured with the hearts and brains of
men! As if you were to raise your potatoes in the churchyard! Such
is a model farm.
No, no; if the fairest features of the landscape are to be named
after men, let them be the noblest and worthiest men alone. Let our
lakes receive as true names at least as the Icarian Sea, where
"still the shore" a "brave attempt resounds."
Goose Pond, of small extent, is on my way to Flint's; Fair
Haven, an expansion of Concord River, said to contain some seventy
acres, is a mile southwest; and White Pond, of about forty acres, is
a mile and a half beyond Fair Haven. This is my lake country.
These, with Concord River, are my water privileges; and night and
day, year in year out, they grind such grist as I carry to them.
Since the wood-cutters, and the railroad, and I myself have
profaned Walden, perhaps the most attractive, if not the most beautiful, of all our lakes, the gem of the woods, is White Pond; -- a poor name from its commonness, whether derived from the remarkable purity of its waters or the color of its sands. In these as in other respects, however, it is a lesser twin of Walden. They are so much alike that you would say they must be connected under ground. It has the same stony shore, and its waters are of the same hue. As at Walden, in sultry dog-day weather, looking down through the woods on some of its bays which are not so deep but that the reflection from the bottom tinges them, its waters are of a misty bluish-green or glaucous color. Many years since I used to go there to collect the sand by cartloads, to make sandpaper with, and I have continued to visit it ever since. One who frequents it proposes to call it Virid Lake. Perhaps it might be called Yellow Pine Lake, from the following circumstance. About fifteen years ago you could see the top of a pitch pine, of the kind called yellow pine hereabouts, though it is not a distinct species, projecting above the surface in deep water, many rods from the shore. It was even supposed by some that the pond had sunk, and this was one of the primitive forest that formerly stood there. I find that even so long ago as 1792, in a "Topographical Description of the Town of Concord," by one of its citizens, in the Collections of the Massachusetts Historical Society, the author, after speaking of Walden and White Ponds, adds, "In the middle of the latter may be seen, when the water is very low, a tree which appears as if it grew in the place where it now stands, although the roots are fifty feet below the surface of the water; the top of this tree is broken off, and at that place measures fourteen inches in diameter." In the spring of '49 I
talked with the man who lives nearest the pond in Sudbury, who told
me that it was he who got out this tree ten or fifteen years before.
As near as he could remember, it stood twelve or fifteen rods from
the shore, where the water was thirty or forty feet deep. It was in
the winter, and he had been getting out ice in the forenoon, and had
resolved that in the afternoon, with the aid of his neighbors, he
would take out the old yellow pine. He sawed a channel in the ice
toward the shore, and hauled it over and along and out on to the ice
with oxen; but, before he had gone far in his work, he was surprised
to find that it was wrong end upward, with the stumps of the
branches pointing down, and the small end firmly fastened in the
sandy bottom. It was about a foot in diameter at the big end, and
he had expected to get a good saw-log, but it was so rotten as to be
fit only for fuel, if for that. He had some of it in his shed then.
There were marks of an axe and of woodpeckers on the butt. He
thought that it might have been a dead tree on the shore, but was
finally blown over into the pond, and after the top had become
water-logged, while the butt-end was still dry and light, had
drifted out and sunk wrong end up. His father, eighty years old,
could not remember when it was not there. Several pretty large logs
may still be seen lying on the bottom, where, owing to the
undulation of the surface, they look like huge water snakes in
motion.
This pond has rarely been profaned by a boat, for there is
little in it to tempt a fisherman. Instead of the white lily, which
requires mud, or the common sweet flag, the blue flag (Iris
versicolor) grows thinly in the pure water, rising from the stony
bottom all around the shore, where it is visited by hummingbirds in
June; and the color both of its bluish blades and its flowers and especially their reflections, is in singular harmony with the glaucous water.

White Pond and Walden are great crystals on the surface of the earth, Lakes of Light. If they were permanently congealed, and small enough to be clutched, they would, perchance, be carried off by slaves, like precious stones, to adorn the heads of emperors; but being liquid, and ample, and secured to us and our successors forever, we disregard them, and run after the diamond of Kohinoor. They are too pure to have a market value; they contain no muck. How much more beautiful than our lives, how much more transparent than our characters, are they! We never learned meanness of them. How much fairer than the pool before the farmers door, in which his ducks swim! Hither the clean wild ducks come. Nature has no human inhabitant who appreciates her. The birds with their plumage and their notes are in harmony with the flowers, but what youth or maiden conspires with the wild luxuriant beauty of Nature? She flourishes most alone, far from the towns where they reside. Talk of heaven! ye disgrace earth.

Baker Farm

Sometimes I rambled to pine groves, standing like temples, or like fleets at sea, full-rigged, with wavy boughs, and rippling with light, so soft and green and shady that the Druids would have forsaken their oaks to worship in them; or to the cedar wood beyond Flint's Pond, where the trees, covered with hoary blue berries,
spiring higher and higher, are fit to stand before Valhalla, and the 
creeping juniper covers the ground with wreaths full of fruit; or to 
swamps where the usnea lichen hangs in festoons from the white 
spruce trees, and toadstools, round tables of the swamp gods, cover 
the ground, and more beautiful fungi adorn the stumps, like 
butterflies or shells, vegetable winkles; where the swamp-pink and 
dogwood grow, the red alderberry glows like eyes of imps, the 
waxwork grooves and crushes the hardest woods in its folds, and the 
wild holly berries make the beholder forget his home with their 
beauty, and he is dazzled and tempted by nameless other wild 
forbidden fruits, too fair for mortal taste. Instead of calling on 
some scholar, I paid many a visit to particular trees, of kinds 
which are rare in this neighborhood, standing far away in the middle 
of some pasture, or in the depths of a wood or swamp, or on a 
hilltop; such as the black birch, of which we have some handsome 
specimens two feet in diameter; its cousin, the yellow birch, with 
its loose golden vest, perfumed like the first; the beech, which has 
so neat a bole and beautifully lichen-painted, perfect in all its 
details, of which, excepting scattered specimens, I know but one 
small grove of sizable trees left in the township, supposed by some 
to have been planted by the pigeons that were once baited with 
beechnuts near by; it is worth the while to see the silver grain 
sparkle when you split this wood; the bass; the hornbeam; the Celtis 
occidentalis, or false elm, of which we have but one well-grown; 
some taller mast of a pine, a shingle tree, or a more perfect 
hemlock than usual, standing like a pagoda in the midst of the 
woods; and many others I could mention. These were the shrines I 
visited both summer and winter.
Once it chanced that I stood in the very abutment of a rainbow's arch, which filled the lower stratum of the atmosphere, tinged the grass and leaves around, and dazzling me as if I looked through colored crystal. It was a lake of rainbow light, in which, for a short while, I lived like a dolphin. If it had lasted longer it might have tinged my employments and life. As I walked on the railroad causeway, I used to wonder at the halo of light around my shadow, and would fain fancy myself one of the elect. One who visited me declared that the shadows of some Irishmen before him had no halo about them, that it was only natives that were so distinguished. Benvenuto Cellini tells us in his memoirs, that, after a certain terrible dream or vision which he had during his confinement in the castle of St. Angelo a resplendent light appeared over the shadow of his head at morning and evening, whether he was in Italy or France, and it was particularly conspicuous when the grass was moist with dew. This was probably the same phenomenon to which I have referred, which is especially observed in the morning, but also at other times, and even by moonlight. Though a constant one, it is not commonly noticed, and, in the case of an excitable imagination like Cellini's, it would be basis enough for superstition. Beside, he tells us that he showed it to very few. But are they not indeed distinguished who are conscious that they are regarded at all?

I set out one afternoon to go a-fishing to Fair Haven, through the woods, to eke out my scanty fare of vegetables. My way led through Pleasant Meadow, an adjunct of the Baker Farm, that retreat of which a poet has since sung, beginning,--
"Thy entry is a pleasant field,
Which some mossy fruit trees yield
Partly to a ruddy brook,
By gliding musquash undertook,
And mercurial trout,
Darting about."

I thought of living there before I went to Walden. I "hooked" the apples, leaped the brook, and scared the musquash and the trout. It was one of those afternoons which seem indefinitely long before one, in which many events may happen, a large portion of our natural life, though it was already half spent when I started. By the way there came up a shower, which compelled me to stand half an hour under a pine, piling boughs over my head, and wearing my handkerchief for a shed; and when at length I had made one cast over the pickerelweed, standing up to my middle in water, I found myself suddenly in the shadow of a cloud, and the thunder began to rumble with such emphasis that I could do no more than listen to it. The gods must be proud, thought I, with such forked flashes to rout a poor unarmed fisherman. So I made haste for shelter to the nearest hut, which stood half a mile from any road, but so much the nearer to the pond, and had long been uninhabited:--

"And here a poet builded,
In the completed years,
For behold a trivial cabin
That to destruction steers."

So the Muse fables. But therein, as I found, dwelt now John Field, an Irishman, and his wife, and several children, from the broad-faced boy who assisted his father at his work, and now came running by his side from the bog to escape the rain, to the wrinkled, sibyl-like, cone-headed infant that sat upon its father's knee as in the palaces of nobles, and looked out from its home in the midst of wet and hunger inquisitively upon the stranger, with the privilege of infancy, not knowing but it was the last of a noble line, and the hope and cynosure of the world, instead of John Field's poor starveling brat. There we sat together under that part of the roof which leaked the least, while it showered and thundered without. I had sat there many times of old before the ship was built that floated his family to America. An honest, hard-working, but shiftless man plainly was John Field; and his wife, she too was brave to cook so many successive dinners in the recesses of that lofty stove; with round greasy face and bare breast, still thinking to improve her condition one day; with the never absent mop in one hand, and yet no effects of it visible anywhere. The chickens, which had also taken shelter here from the rain, stalked about the room like members of the family, too humanized, methought, to roast well. They stood and looked in my eye or pecked at my shoe significantly. Meanwhile my host told me his story, how hard he worked "bogging" for a neighboring farmer, turning up a meadow with a spade or bog hoe at the rate of ten dollars an acre and the use of the land with manure for one year, and his little broad-faced son
worked cheerfully at his father's side the while, not knowing how
poor a bargain the latter had made. I tried to help him with my
experience, telling him that he was one of my nearest neighbors, and
that I too, who came a-fishing here, and looked like a loafer, was
getting my living like himself; that I lived in a tight, light, and
clean house, which hardly cost more than the annual rent of such a
ruin as his commonly amounts to; and how, if he chose, he might in a
month or two build himself a palace of his own; that I did not use
tea, nor coffee, nor butter, nor milk, nor fresh meat, and so did
not have to work to get them; again, as I did not work hard, I did
not have to eat hard, and it cost me but a trifle for my food; but
as he began with tea, and coffee, and butter, and milk, and beef, he
had to work hard to pay for them, and when he had worked hard he had
to eat hard again to repair the waste of his system -- and so it was
as broad as it was long, indeed it was broader than it was long, for
he was discontented and wasted his life into the bargain; and yet he
had rated it as a gain in coming to America, that here you could get
tea, and coffee, and meat every day. But the only true America is
that country where you are at liberty to pursue such a mode of life
as may enable you to do without these, and where the state does not
endeavor to compel you to sustain the slavery and war and other
superfluous expenses which directly or indirectly result from the
use of such things. For I purposely talked to him as if he were a
philosopher, or desired to be one. I should be glad if all the
meadows on the earth were left in a wild state, if that were the
consequence of men's beginning to redeem themselves. A man will not
need to study history to find out what is best for his own culture.
But alas! the culture of an Irishman is an enterprise to be
undertaken with a sort of moral bog hoe. I told him, that as he worked so hard at bogging, he required thick boots and stout clothing, which yet were soon soiled and worn out, but I wore light shoes and thin clothing, which cost not half so much, though he might think that I was dressed like a gentleman (which, however, was not the case), and in an hour or two, without labor, but as a recreation, I could, if I wished, catch as many fish as I should want for two days, or earn enough money to support me a week. If he and his family would live simply, they might all go a-huckleberrying in the summer for their amusement. John heaved a sigh at this, and his wife stared with arms a-kimbo, and both appeared to be wondering if they had capital enough to begin such a course with, or arithmetic enough to carry it through. It was sailing by dead reckoning to them, and they saw not clearly how to make their port so; therefore I suppose they still take life bravely, after their fashion, face to face, giving it tooth and nail, not having skill to split its massive columns with any fine entering wedge, and rout it in detail; -- thinking to deal with it roughly, as one should handle a thistle. But they fight at an overwhelming disadvantage -- living, John Field, alas! without arithmetic, and failing so.

"Do you ever fish?" I asked. "Oh yes, I catch a mess now and then when I am lying by; good perch I catch. -- "What's your bait?"

"I catch shiners with fishworms, and bait the perch with them."

"You'd better go now, John," said his wife, with glistening and hopeful face; but John demurred.

The shower was now over, and a rainbow above the eastern woods promised a fair evening; so I took my departure. When I had got without I asked for a drink, hoping to get a sight of the well
bottom, to complete my survey of the premises; but there, alas! are shallows and quicksands, and rope broken withal, and bucket irrecoverable. Meanwhile the right culinary vessel was selected, water was seemingly distilled, and after consultation and long delay passed out to the thirsty one -- not yet suffered to cool, not yet to settle. Such gruel sustains life here, I thought; so, shutting my eyes, and excluding the motes by a skilfully directed undercurrent, I drank to genuine hospitality the heartiest draught I could. I am not squeamish in such cases when manners are concerned.

As I was leaving the Irishman's roof after the rain, bending my steps again to the pond, my haste to catch pickerel, wading in retired meadows, in sloughs and bog-holes, in forlorn and savage places, appeared for an instant trivial to me who had been sent to school and college; but as I ran down the hill toward the reddening west, with the rainbow over my shoulder, and some faint tinkling sounds borne to my ear through the cleansed air, from I know not what quarter, my Good Genius seemed to say -- Go fish and hunt far and wide day by day -- farther and wider -- and rest thee by many brooks and hearth-sides without misgiving. Remember thy Creator in the days of thy youth. Rise free from care before the dawn, and seek adventures. Let the noon find thee by other lakes, and the night overtake thee everywhere at home. There are no larger fields than these, no worthier games than may here be played. Grow wild according to thy nature, like these sedges and brakes, which will never become English bay. Let the thunder rumble; what if it threaten ruin to farmers' crops? That is not its errand to thee.

Take shelter under the cloud, while they flee to carts and sheds. Let not to get a living be thy trade, but thy sport. Enjoy the
land, but own it not. Through want of enterprise and faith men are where they are, buying and selling, and spending their lives like serfs.

O Baker Farm!

"Landscape where the richest element
Is a little sunshine innocent." ...

"No one runs to revel
On thy rail-fenced lea." ...

"Debate with no man hast thou,
With questions art never perplexed,
As tame at the first sight as now,
In thy plain russet gabardine dressed." ...

"Come ye who love,
And ye who hate,
Children of the Holy Dove,
And Guy Faux of the state,
And hang conspiracies
From the tough rafters of the trees!"

Men come tamely home at night only from the next field or street, where their household echoes haunt, and their life pines because it breathes its own breath over again; their shadows, morning and evening, reach farther than their daily steps. We should come home from far, from adventures, and perils, and discoveries every day, with new experience and character.

Before I had reached the pond some fresh impulse had brought out
John Field, with altered mind, letting go "bogging" ere this sunset.  

But he, poor man, disturbed only a couple of fins while I was  
catching a fair string, and he said it was his luck; but when we  
changed seats in the boat luck changed seats too. Poor John Field!  
-- I trust he does not read this, unless he will improve by it --  
thinking to live by some derivative old-country mode in this  
primitive new country -- to catch perch with shiners. It is good  
bait sometimes, I allow. With his horizon all his own, yet he a  
poor man, born to be poor, with his inherited Irish poverty or poor  
life, his Adam's grandmother and boggy ways, not to rise in this  
world, he nor his posterity, till their wading webbed bog-trotting  
feet get talaria to their heels.

Higher Laws

As I came home through the woods with my string of fish,  
trailing my pole, it being now quite dark, I caught a glimpse of a  
woodchuck stealing across my path, and felt a strange thrill of  
savage delight, and was strongly tempted to seize and devour him  
raw; not that I was hungry then, except for that wildness which he  
represented. Once or twice, however, while I lived at the pond, I  
found myself ranging the woods, like a half-starved hound, with a  
strange abandonment, seeking some kind of venison which I might  
devour, and no morsel could have been too savage for me. The  
 wildest scenes had become unaccountably familiar. I found in  
myself, and still find, an instinct toward a higher, or, as it is  
named, spiritual life, as do most men, and another toward a
primitive rank and savage one, and I reverence them both. I love
the wild not less than the good. The wildness and adventure that
are in fishing still recommended it to me. I like sometimes to take
rank hold on life and spend my day more as the animals do. Perhaps
I have owed to this employment and to hunting, when quite young, my
closest acquaintance with Nature. They early introduce us to and
detain us in scenery with which otherwise, at that age, we should
have little acquaintance. Fishermen, hunters, woodchoppers, and
others, spending their lives in the fields and woods, in a peculiar
sense a part of Nature themselves, are often in a more favorable
mood for observing her, in the intervals of their pursuits, than
philosophers or poets even, who approach her with expectation. She
is not afraid to exhibit herself to them. The traveller on the
prairie is naturally a hunter, on the head waters of the Missouri
and Columbia a trapper, and at the Falls of St. Mary a fisherman.
He who is only a traveller learns things at second-hand and by the
halves, and is poor authority. We are most interested when science
reports what those men already know practically or instinctively,
for that alone is a true humanity, or account of human experience.
They mistake who assert that the Yankee has few amusements,
because he has not so many public holidays, and men and boys do not
play so many games as they do in England, for here the more
primitive but solitary amusements of hunting, fishing, and the like
have not yet given place to the former. Almost every New England
boy among my contemporaries shouldered a fowling-piece between the
ages of ten and fourteen; and his hunting and fishing grounds were
not limited, like the preserves of an English nobleman, but were
more boundless even than those of a savage. No wonder, then, that
he did not oftener stay to play on the common. But already a change is taking place, owing, not to an increased humanity, but to an increased scarcity of game, for perhaps the hunter is the greatest friend of the animals hunted, not excepting the Humane Society. Moreover, when at the pond, I wished sometimes to add fish to my fare for variety. I have actually fished from the same kind of necessity that the first fishers did. Whatever humanity I might conjure up against it was all factitious, and concerned my philosophy more than my feelings. I speak of fishing only now, for I had long felt differently about fowling, and sold my gun before I went to the woods. Not that I am less humane than others, but I did not perceive that my feelings were much affected. I did not pity the fishes nor the worms. This was habit. As for fowling, during the last years that I carried a gun my excuse was that I was studying ornithology, and sought only new or rare birds. But I confess that I am now inclined to think that there is a finer way of studying ornithology than this. It requires so much closer attention to the habits of the birds, that, if for that reason only, I have been willing to omit the gun. Yet notwithstanding the objection on the score of humanity, I am compelled to doubt if equally valuable sports are ever substituted for these; and when some of my friends have asked me anxiously about their boys, whether they should let them hunt, I have answered, yes -- remembering that it was one of the best parts of my education -- make them hunters, though sportsmen only at first, if possible, mighty hunters at last, so that they shall not find game large enough for them in this or any vegetable wilderness -- hunters as well as fishers of men. Thus far I am of the opinion of Chaucer's nun, who
"yave not of the text a pulled hen
That saith that hunters ben not holy men."

There is a period in the history of the individual, as of the race,
when the hunters are the "best men," as the Algonquins called them.
We cannot but pity the boy who has never fired a gun; he is no more
humane, while his education has been sadly neglected. This was my
answer with respect to those youths who were bent on this pursuit,
trusting that they would soon outgrow it. No humane being, past the
thoughtless age of boyhood, will wantonly murder any creature which
holds its life by the same tenure that he does. The hare in its
extremity cries like a child. I warn you, mothers, that my
sympathies do not always make the usual philanthropic distinctions.
Such is oftenest the young man's introduction to the forest, and
the most original part of himself. He goes thither at first as a
hunter and fisher, until at last, if he has the seeds of a better
life in him, he distinguishes his proper objects, as a poet or
naturalist it may be, and leaves the gun and fish-pole behind. The
mass of men are still and always young in this respect. In some
countries a hunting parson is no uncommon sight. Such a one might
make a good shepherd's dog, but is far from being the Good Shepherd.
I have been surprised to consider that the only obvious employment,
except wood-chopping, ice-cutting, or the like business, which ever
to my knowledge detained at Walden Pond for a whole half-day any of
my fellow-citizens, whether fathers or children of the town, with
just one exception, was fishing. Commonly they did not think that
they were lucky, or well paid for their time, unless they got a long
string of fish, though they had the opportunity of seeing the pond
all the while. They might go there a thousand times before the
sediment of fishing would sink to the bottom and leave their purpose
pure; but no doubt such a clarifying process would be going on all
the while. The Governor and his Council faintly remember the pond,
for they went a-fishing there when they were boys; but now they are
too old and dignified to go a-fishing, and so they know it no more
forever. Yet even they expect to go to heaven at last. If the
legislature regards it, it is chiefly to regulate the number of
hooks to be used there; but they know nothing about the hook of
hooks with which to angle for the pond itself, impaling the
legislature for a bait. Thus, even in civilized communities, the
embryo man passes through the hunter stage of development.
I have found repeatedly, of late years, that I cannot fish
without falling a little in self-respect. I have tried it again and
again. I have skill at it, and, like many of my fellows, a certain
instinct for it, which revives from time to time, but always when I
have done I feel that it would have been better if I had not fished.
I think that I do not mistake. It is a faint intimation, yet so are
the first streaks of morning. There is unquestionably this instinct
in me which belongs to the lower orders of creation; yet with every
year I am less a fisherman, though without more humanity or even
wisdom; at present I am no fisherman at all. But I see that if I
were to live in a wilderness I should again be tempted to become a
fisher and hunter in earnest. Beside, there is something
essentially unclean about this diet and all flesh, and I began to
see where housework commences, and whence the endeavor, which costs
so much, to wear a tidy and respectable appearance each day, to keep
the house sweet and free from all ill odors and sights. Having been
my own butcher and scullion and cook, as well as the gentleman for
whom the dishes were served up, I can speak from an unusually
complete experience. The practical objection to animal food in my
case was its uncleanness; and besides, when I had caught and cleaned
and cooked and eaten my fish, they seemed not to have fed me
essentially. It was insignificant and unnecessary, and cost more
than it came to. A little bread or a few potatoes would have done
as well, with less trouble and filth. Like many of my
contemporaries, I had rarely for many years used animal food, or
tea, or coffee, etc.; not so much because of any ill effects which I
had traced to them, as because they were not agreeable to my
imagination. The repugnance to animal food is not the effect of
experience, but is an instinct. It appeared more beautiful to live
low and fare hard in many respects; and though I never did so, I
went far enough to please my imagination. I believe that every man
who has ever been earnest to preserve his higher or poetic faculties
in the best condition has been particularly inclined to abstain from
animal food, and from much food of any kind. It is a significant
fact, stated by entomologists -- I find it in Kirby and Spence --
that "some insects in their perfect state, though furnished with
organs of feeding, make no use of them"; and they lay it down as "a
general rule, that almost all insects in this state eat much less
than in that of larvae. The voracious caterpillar when transformed
into a butterfly ... and the gluttonous maggot when become a fly"
content themselves with a drop or two of honey or some other sweet
liquid. The abdomen under the wings of the butterfly still
represents the larva. This is the tidbit which tempts his
insectivorous fate. The gross feeder is a man in the larva state;
and there are whole nations in that condition, nations without fancy
or imagination, whose vast abdomens betray them.
It is hard to provide and cook so simple and clean a diet as
will not offend the imagination; but this, I think, is to be fed
when we feed the body; they should both sit down at the same table.
Yet perhaps this may be done. The fruits eaten temperately need not
make us ashamed of our appetites, nor interrupt the worthiest
pursuits. But put an extra condiment into your dish, and it will
poison you. It is not worth the while to live by rich cookery.
Most men would feel shame if caught preparing with their own hands
precisely such a dinner, whether of animal or vegetable food, as is
every day prepared for them by others. Yet till this is otherwise
we are not civilized, and, if gentlemen and ladies, are not true men
and women. This certainly suggests what change is to be made. It
may be vain to ask why the imagination will not be reconciled to
flesh and fat. I am satisfied that it is not. Is it not a reproach
that man is a carnivorous animal? True, he can and does live, in a
great measure, by preying on other animals; but this is a miserable
way -- as any one who will go to snaring rabbits, or slaughtering
lambs, may learn -- and he will be regarded as a benefactor of his
race who shall teach man to confine himself to a more innocent and
wholesome diet. Whatever my own practice may be, I have no doubt
that it is a part of the destiny of the human race, in its gradual
improvement, to leave off eating animals, as surely as the savage
tribes have left off eating each other when they came in contact
with the more civilized.
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 followed his genius till it misled him. Though the result were bodily weakness, yet perhaps no one can say that the consequences were 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. The greatest gains and values are farthest from being appreciated. We easily come to doubt if they exist. We soon forget them. They are the highest reality. Perhaps the facts most astounding and most real are never communicated by man to man. The true harvest of my daily life is somewhat as intangible and indescribable as the tints of morning or evening. It is a little star-dust caught, a segment of the rainbow which I have clutched.

Yet, for my part, I was never unusually squeamish; I could sometimes eat a fried rat with a good relish, if it were necessary. I am glad to have drunk water so long, for the same reason that I prefer the natural sky to an opium-eater's heaven. I would fain keep sober always; and there are infinite degrees of drunkenness. I believe that water is the only drink for a wise man; wine is not so noble a liquor; and think of dashing the hopes of a morning with a cup of warm coffee, or of an evening with a dish of tea! Ah, how
I low I fall when I am tempted by them! Even music may be
intoxicating. Such apparently slight causes destroyed Greece and
Rome, and will destroy England and America. Of all ebriosity, who
does not prefer to be intoxicated by the air he breathes? I have
found it to be the most serious objection to coarse labors long
continued, that they compelled me to eat and drink coarsely also.
But to tell the truth, I find myself at present somewhat less
particular in these respects. I carry less religion to the table,
ask no blessing; not because I am wiser than I was, but, I am
obliged to confess, because, however much it is to be regretted,
with years I have grown more coarse and indifferent. Perhaps these
questions are entertained only in youth, as most believe of poetry.
My practice is "nowhere," my opinion is here. Nevertheless I am far
from regarding myself as one of those privileged ones to whom the
Ved refers when it says, that "he who has true faith in the
Omnipresent Supreme Being may eat all that exists," that is, is not
bound to inquire what is his food, or who prepares it; and even in
their case it is to be observed, as a Hindoo commentator has
remarked, that the Vedant limits this privilege to "the time of
distress."

Who has not sometimes derived an inexpressible satisfaction from
his food in which appetite had no share? I have been thrilled to
think that I owed a mental perception to the commonly gross sense of
taste, that I have been inspired through the palate, that some
berries which I had eaten on a hillside had fed my genius. "The
soul not being mistress of herself," says Thseng-tseu, "one looks,
and one does not see; one listens, and one does not hear; one eats,
and one does not know the savor of food." He who distinguishes the
true savor of his food can never be a glutton; he who does not
cannot be otherwise. A puritan may go to his brown-bread crust with
as gross an appetite as ever an alderman to his turtle. Not that
food which entereth into the mouth defileth a man, but the appetite
with which it is eaten. It is neither the quality nor the quantity,
but the devotion to sensual savors; when that which is eaten is not
a viand to sustain our animal, or inspire our spiritual life, but
food for the worms that possess us. If the hunter has a taste for
mud-turtles, muskrats, and other such savage tidbits, the fine lady
indulges a taste for jelly made of a calf's foot, or for sardines
from over the sea, and they are even. He goes to the mill-pond, she
to her preserve-pot. The wonder is how they, how you and I, can
live this slimy, beastly life, eating and drinking.
Our whole life is startlingly moral. There is never an
instant's truce between virtue and vice. Goodness is the only
investment that never fails. In the music of the harp which
trembles round the world it is the insisting on this which thrills
us. The harp is the travelling patterer for the Universe's
Insurance Company, recommending its laws, and our little goodness is
all the assessment that we pay. Though the youth at last grows
indifferent, the laws of the universe are not indifferent, but are
forever on the side of the most sensitive. Listen to every zephyr
for some reproof, for it is surely there, and he is unfortunate who
does not hear it. We cannot touch a string or move a stop but the
charming moral transfixes us. Many an irksome noise, go a long way
off, is heard as music, a proud, sweet satire on the meanness of our
lives.
We are conscious of an animal in us, which awakens in proportion
as our higher nature slumbers. It is reptile and sensual, and perhaps cannot be wholly expelled; like the worms which, even in life and health, occupy our bodies. Possibly we may withdraw from it, but never change its nature. I fear that it may enjoy a certain health of its own; that we may be well, yet not pure. The other day I picked up the lower jaw of a hog, with white and sound teeth and tusks, which suggested that there was an animal health and vigor distinct from the spiritual. This creature succeeded by other means than temperance and purity. "That in which men differ from brute beasts," says Mencius, "is a thing very inconsiderable; the common herd lose it very soon; superior men preserve it carefully." Who knows what sort of life would result if we had attained to purity? If I knew so wise a man as could teach me purity I would go to seek him forthwith. "A command over our passions, and over the external senses of the body, and good acts, are declared by the Ved to be indispensable in the mind's approximation to God." Yet the spirit can for the time pervade and control every member and function of the body, and transmute what in form is the grossest sensuality into purity and devotion. The generative energy, which, when we are loose, dissipates and makes us unclean, when we are continent invigorates and inspires us. Chastity is the flowering of man; and what are called Genius, Heroism, Holiness, and the like, are but various fruits which succeed it. Man flows at once to God when the channel of purity is open. By turns our purity inspires and our impurity casts us down. He is blessed who is assured that the animal is dying out in him day by day, and the divine being established. Perhaps there is none but has cause for shame on account of the inferior and brutish nature to which he is allied. I
fear that we are such gods or demigods only as fauns and satyrs, the
divine allied to beasts, the creatures of appetite, and that, to
some extent, our very life is our disgrace.--

"How happy's he who hath due place assigned
To his beasts and disafforested his mind!

. . . . .
Can use this horse, goat, wolf, and ev'ry beast,
And is not ass himself to all the rest!
Else man not only is the herd of swine,
But he's those devils too which did incline
Them to a headlong rage, and made them worse."

All sensuality is one, though it takes many forms; all purity is
one. It is the same whether a man eat, or drink, or cohabit, or
sleep sensually. They are but one appetite, and we only need to see
a person do any one of these things to know how great a sensualist
he is. The impure can neither stand nor sit with purity. When the
reptile is attacked at one mouth of his burrow, he shows himself at
another. If you would be chaste, you must be temperate. What is
chastity? How shall a man know if he is chaste? He shall not know
it. We have heard of this virtue, but we know not what it is. We
speak conformably to the rumor which we have heard. From exertion
come wisdom and purity; from sloth ignorance and sensuality. In the
student sensuality is a sluggish habit of mind. An unclean person
is universally a slothful one, one who sits by a stove, whom the sun
shines on prostrate, who repose without being fatigued. If you
would avoid uncleanness, and all the sins, work earnestly, though it be at cleaning a stable. Nature is hard to be overcome, but she must be overcome. What avails it that you are Christian, if you are not purer than the heathen, if you deny yourself no more, if you are not more religious? I know of many systems of religion esteemed heathenish whose precepts fill the reader with shame, and provoke him to new endeavors, though it be to the performance of rites merely.

I hesitate to say these things, but it is not because of the subject -- I care not how obscene my words are -- but because I cannot speak of them without betraying my impurity. We discourse freely without shame of one form of sensuality, and are silent about another. We are so degraded that we cannot speak simply of the necessary functions of human nature. In earlier ages, in some countries, every function was reverently spoken of and regulated by law. Nothing was too trivial for the Hindoo lawgiver, however offensive it may be to modern taste. He teaches how to eat, drink, cohabit, void excrement and urine, and the like, elevating what is mean, and does not falsely excuse himself by calling these things trifles.

Every man is the builder of a temple, called his body, to the god he worships, after a style purely his own, nor can he get off by hammering marble instead. We are all sculptors and painters, and our material is our own flesh and blood and bones. Any nobleness begins at once to refine a man's features, any meanness or sensuality to imbrute them.

John Farmer sat at his door one September evening, after a hard day's work, his mind still running on his labor more or less.
Having bathed, he sat down to re-create his intellectual man. It was a rather cool evening, and some of his neighbors were apprehending a frost. He had not attended to the train of his thoughts long when he heard some one playing on a flute, and that sound harmonized with his mood. Still he thought of his work; but the burden of his thought was, that though this kept running in his head, and he found himself planning and contriving it against his will, yet it concerned him very little. It was no more than the scurf of his skin, which was constantly shuffled off. But the notes of the flute came home to his ears out of a different sphere from that he worked in, and suggested work for certain faculties which slumbered in him. They gently did away with the street, and the village, and the state in which he lived. A voice said to him -- Why do you stay here and live this mean moiling life, when a glorious existence is possible for you? Those same stars twinkle over other fields than these. -- But how to come out of this condition and actually migrate thither? All that he could think of was to practise some new austerity, to let his mind descend into his body and redeem it, and treat himself with ever increasing respect.

Brute Neighbors

Sometimes I had a companion in my fishing, who came through the village to my house from the other side of the town, and the catching of the dinner was as much a social exercise as the eating of it.

Hermit. I wonder what the world is doing now. I have not heard
so much as a locust over the sweet-fern these three hours. The pigeons are all asleep upon their roosts -- no flutter from them.

Was that a farmer's noon horn which sounded from beyond the woods just now? The hands are coming in to boiled salt beef and cider and Indian bread. Why will men worry themselves so? He that does not eat need not work. I wonder how much they have reaped. Who would live there where a body can never think for the barking of Bose?

And oh, the housekeeping! to keep bright the devil's door-knobs, and scour his tubs this bright day! Better not keep a house. Say, some hollow tree; and then for morning calls and dinner-parties! Only a woodpecker tapping. Oh, they swarm; the sun is too warm there; they are born too far into life for me. I have water from the spring, and a loaf of brown bread on the shelf. -- Hark! I hear a rustling of the leaves. Is it some ill-fed village hound yielding to the instinct of the chase? or the lost pig which is said to be in these woods, whose tracks I saw after the rain? It comes on apace; my sumachs and sweetbriers tremble. -- Eh, Mr. Poet, is it you? How do you like the world to-day?

Poet. See those clouds; how they hang! That's the greatest thing I have seen to-day. There's nothing like it in old paintings, nothing like it in foreign lands -- unless when we were off the coast of Spain. That's a true Mediterranean sky. I thought, as I have my living to get, and have not eaten to-day, that I might go a-fishing. That's the true industry for poets. It is the only trade I have learned. Come, let's along.

Hermit. I cannot resist. My brown bread will soon be gone. I will go with you gladly soon, but I am just concluding a serious meditation. I think that I am near the end of it. Leave me alone,
then, for a while. But that we may not be delayed, you shall be
digging the bait meanwhile. Angleworms are rarely to be met with in
these parts, where the soil was never fattened with manure; the race
is nearly extinct. The sport of digging the bait is nearly equal to
that of catching the fish, when one's appetite is not too keen; and
this you may have all to yourself today. I would advise you to set
in the spade down yonder among the ground-nuts, where you see the
johnswort waving. I think that I may warrant you one worm to every
three sods you turn up, if you look well in among the roots of the
grass, as if you were weeding. Or, if you choose to go farther, it
will not be unwise, for I have found the increase of fair bait to be
very nearly as the squares of the distances.
Hermit alone. Let me see; where was I? Methinks I was nearly
in this frame of mind; the world lay about at this angle. Shall I
go to heaven or a-fishing? If I should soon bring this meditation
to an end, would another so sweet occasion be likely to offer? I
was as near being resolved into the essence of things as ever I was
in my life. I fear my thoughts will not come back to me. If it
would do any good, I would whistle for them. When they make us an
offer, is it wise to say, We will think of it? My thoughts have
left no track, and I cannot find the path again. What was it that I
was thinking of? It was a very hazy day. I will just try these
three sentences of Confutsee; they may fetch that state about again.
I know not whether it was the dumps or a budding ecstasy. Mem.
There never is but one opportunity of a kind.
Poet. How now, Hermit, is it too soon? I have got just
thirteen whole ones, beside several which are imperfect or
undersized; but they will do for the smaller fry; they do not cover
up the hook so much. Those village worms are quite too large; a shiner may make a meal off one without finding the skewer.

Hermit. Well, then, let's be off. Shall we to the Concord?

There's good sport there if the water be not too high.

Why do precisely these objects which we behold make a world?

Why has man just these species of animals for his neighbors; as if nothing but a mouse could have filled this crevice? I suspect that Pilpay & Co. have put animals to their best use, for they are all beasts of burden, in a sense, made to carry some portion of our thoughts.

The mice which haunted my house were not the common ones, which are said to have been introduced into the country, but a wild native kind not found in the village. I sent one to a distinguished naturalist, and it interested him much. When I was building, one of these had its nest underneath the house, and before I had laid the second floor, and swept out the shavings, would come out regularly at lunch time and pick up the crumbs at my feet. It probably had never seen a man before; and it soon became quite familiar, and would run over my shoes and up my clothes. It could readily ascend the sides of the room by short impulses, like a squirrel, which it resembled in its motions. At length, as I leaned with my elbow on the bench one day, it ran up my clothes, and along my sleeve, and round and round the paper which held my dinner, while I kept the latter close, and dodged and played at bopeep with it; and when at last I held still a piece of cheese between my thumb and finger, it came and nibbled it, sitting in my hand, and afterward cleaned its face and paws, like a fly, and walked away.

A phoebe soon built in my shed, and a robin for protection in a
pine which grew against the house. In June the partridge (Tetrao umbellus), which is so shy a bird, led her brood past my windows, from the woods in the rear to the front of my house, clucking and calling to them like a hen, and in all her behavior proving herself the hen of the woods. The young suddenly disperse on your approach, at a signal from the mother, as if a whirlwind had swept them away, and they so exactly resemble the dried leaves and twigs that many a traveler has placed his foot in the midst of a brood, and heard the whir of the old bird as she flew off, and her anxious calls and mewing, or seen her trail her wings to attract his attention, without suspecting their neighborhood. The parent will sometimes roll and spin round before you in such a dishabille, that you cannot, for a few moments, detect what kind of creature it is. The young squat still and flat, often running their heads under a leaf, and mind only their mother's directions given from a distance, nor will your approach make them run again and betray themselves. You may even tread on them, or have your eyes on them for a minute, without discovering them. I have held them in my open hand at such a time, and still their only care, obedient to their mother and their instinct, was to squat there without fear or trembling. So perfect is this instinct, that once, when I had laid them on the leaves again, and one accidentally fell on its side, it was found with the rest in exactly the same position ten minutes afterward. They are not callow like the young of most birds, but more perfectly developed and precocious even than chickens. The remarkably adult yet innocent expression of their open and serene eyes is very memorable. All intelligence seems reflected in them. They suggest not merely the purity of infancy, but a wisdom clarified by
experience. Such an eye was not born when the bird was, but is
doveal with the sky it reflects. The woods do not yield another
such a gem. The traveller does not often look into such a limpid
well. The ignorant or reckless sportsman often shoots the parent at
such a time, and leaves these innocents to fall a prey to some
prowling beast or bird, or gradually mingle with the decaying leaves
which they so much resemble. It is said that when hatched by a hen
they will directly disperse on some alarm, and so are lost, for they
never hear the mother's call which gathers them again. These were
my hens and chickens.

It is remarkable how many creatures live wild and free though
secret in the woods, and still sustain themselves in the
neighborhood of towns, suspected by hunters only. How retired the
otter manages to live here! He grows to be four feet long, as big
as a small boy, perhaps without any human being getting a glimpse of
him. I formerly saw the raccoon in the woods behind where my house
is built, and probably still heard their whinpering at night.
Commonly I rested an hour or two in the shade at noon, after
planting, and ate my lunch, and read a little by a spring which was
the source of a swamp and of a brook, oozing from under Brister's
Hill, half a mile from my field. The approach to this was through a
succession of descending grassy hollows, full of young pitch pines,
into a larger wood about the swamp. There, in a very secluded and
shaded spot, under a spreading white pine, there was yet a clean,
firm sward to sit on. I had dug out the spring and made a well of
clear gray water, where I could dip up a pailful without roiling it,
and thither I went for this purpose almost every day in midsummer,
when the pond was warmest. Thither, too, the woodcock led her
brood, to probe the mud for worms, flying but a foot above them down the bank, while they ran in a troop beneath; but at last, spying me, she would leave her young and circle round and round me, nearer and nearer till within four or five feet, pretending broken wings and legs, to attract my attention, and get off her young, who would already have taken up their march, with faint, wiry peep, single file through the swamp, as she directed. Or I heard the peep of the young when I could not see the parent bird. There too the turtle doves sat over the spring, or fluttered from bough to bough of the soft white pines over my head; or the red squirrel, coursing down the nearest bough, was particularly familiar and inquisitive. You only need sit still long enough in some attractive spot in the woods that all its inhabitants may exhibit themselves to you by turns. I was witness to events of a less peaceful character. One day when I went out to my wood-pile, or rather my pile of stumps, I observed two large ants, the one red, the other much larger, nearly half an inch long, and black, fiercely contending with one another. Having once got hold they never let go, but struggled and wrestled and rolled on the chips incessantly. Looking farther, I was surprised to find that the chips were covered with such combatants, that it was not a duellum, but a bellum, a war between two races of ants, the red always pitted against the black, and frequently two red ones to one black. The legions of these Myrmidons covered all the hills and vales in my wood-yard, and the ground was already strewn with the dead and dying, both red and black. It was the only battle which I have ever witnessed, the only battle-field I ever trod while the battle was raging; internecine war; the red republicans on the one hand, and the black imperialists on the
other. On every side they were engaged in deadly combat, yet without any noise that I could hear, and human soldiers never fought so resolutely. I watched a couple that were fast locked in each other's embraces, in a little sunny valley amid the chips, now at noonday prepared to fight till the sun went down, or life went out. The smaller red champion had fastened himself like a vice to his adversary's front, and through all the tumblings on that field never for an instant ceased to gnaw at one of his feelers near the root, having already caused the other to go by the board; while the stronger black one dashed him from side to side, and, as I saw on looking nearer, had already divested him of several of his members. They fought with more pertinacity than bulldogs. Neither manifested the least disposition to retreat. It was evident that their battle-cry was "Conquer or die." In the meanwhile there came along a single red ant on the hillside of this valley, evidently full of excitement, who either had despatched his foe, or had not yet taken part in the battle; probably the latter, for he had lost none of his limbs; whose mother had charged him to return with his shield or upon it. Or perchance he was some Achilles, who had nourished his wrath apart, and had now come to avenge or rescue his Patroclus. He saw this unequal combat from afar -- for the blacks were nearly twice the size of the red -- he drew near with rapid pace till be stood on his guard within half an inch of the combatants; then, watching his opportunity, he sprang upon the black warrior, and commenced his operations near the root of his right fore leg, leaving the foe to select among his own members; and so there were three united for life, as if a new kind of attraction had been invented which put all other locks and cements to shame. I should
not have wondered by this time to find that they had their
respective musical bands stationed on some eminent chip, and playing
their national airs the while, to excite the slow and cheer the
dying combatants. I was myself excited somewhat even as if they had
been men. The more you think of it, the less the difference. And
certainly there is not the fight recorded in Concord history, at
least, if in the history of America, that will bear a moment's
comparison with this, whether for the numbers engaged in it, or for
the patriotism and heroism displayed. For numbers and for carnage
it was an Austerlitz or Dresden. Concord Fight! Two killed on the
patriots' side, and Luther Blanchard wounded! Why here every ant
was a Buttrick -- "Fire! for God's sake fire!" -- and thousands
shared the fate of Davis and Hosmer. There was not one hireling
there. I have no doubt that it was a principle they fought for, as
much as our ancestors, and not to avoid a three-penny tax on their
tea; and the results of this battle will be as important and
memorable to those whom it concerns as those of the battle of Bunker
Hill, at least.

I took up the chip on which the three I have particularly
described were struggling, carried it into my house, and placed it
under a tumbler on my window-sill, in order to see the issue.
Holding a microscope to the first-mentioned red ant, I saw that,
though he was assiduously gnawing at the near fore leg of his enemy,
having severed his remaining feeler, his own breast was all torn
away, exposing what vitals he had there to the jaws of the black
warrior, whose breastplate was apparently too thick for him to
pierce; and the dark carbuncles of the sufferer's eyes shone with
ferocity such as war only could excite. They struggled half an hour
longer under the tumbler, and when I looked again the black soldier
had severed the heads of his foes from their bodies, and the still
living heads were hanging on either side of him like ghastly
trophies at his saddle-bow, still apparently as firmly fastened as
ever, and he was endeavoring with feeble struggles, being without
feelers and with only the remnant of a leg, and I know not how many
other wounds, to divest himself of them; which at length, after half
an hour more, he accomplished. I raised the glass, and he went off
over the window-sill in that crippled state. Whether he finally
survived that combat, and spent the remainder of his days in some
Hotel des Invalides, I do not know; but I thought that his industry
would not be worth much thereafter. I never learned which party was
victorious, nor the cause of the war; but I felt for the rest of
that day as if I had had my feelings excited and harrowed by
witnessing the struggle, the ferocity and carnage, of a human battle
before my door.

Kirby and Spence tell us that the battles of ants have long been
celebrated and the date of them recorded, though they say that Huber
is the only modern author who appears to have witnessed them.

"AEneas Sylvius," say they, "after giving a very circumstantial
account of one contested with great obstinacy by a great and small
species on the trunk of a pear tree," adds that "this action was
fought in the pontificate of Eugenius the Fourth, in the presence of
Nicholas Pistoriensis, an eminent lawyer, who related the whole,
history of the battle with the greatest fidelity." A similar
engagement between great and small ants is recorded by Olaus Magnus,
in which the small ones, being victorious, are said to have buried
the bodies of their own soldiers, but left those of their giant
enemies a prey to the birds. This event happened previous to the expulsion of the tyrant Christiern the Second from Sweden." The battle which I witnessed took place in the Presidency of Polk, five years before the passage of Webster's Fugitive-Slave Bill. Many a village Bose, fit only to course a mud-turtle in a victualling cellar, sported his heavy quarters in the woods, without the knowledge of his master, and ineffectually smelled at old fox burrows and woodchucks' holes; led per chance by some slight cur which nimbly threaded the wood, and might still inspire a natural terror in its denizens; -- now far behind his guide, barking like a canine bull toward some small squirrel which had treed itself for scrutiny, then, cantering off, bending the bushes with his weight, imagining that he is on the track of some stray member of the jerbilla family. Once I was surprised to see a cat walking along the stony shore of the pond, for they rarely wander so far from home. The surprise was mutual. Nevertheless the most domestic cat, which has lain on a rug all her days, appears quite at home in the woods, and, by her sly and stealthy behavior, proves herself more native there than the regular inhabitants. Once, when berrying, I met with a cat with young kittens in the woods, quite wild, and they all, like their mother, had their backs up and were fiercely spitting at me. A few years before I lived in the woods there was what was called a "winged cat" in one of the farm-houses in Lincoln nearest the pond, Mr. Gilian Baker's. When I called to see her in June, 1842, she was gone a-hunting in the woods, as was her wont (I am not sure whether it was a male or female, and so use the more common pronoun), but her mistress told me that she came into the neighborhood a little more than a year before, in April, and was
finally taken into their house; that she was of a dark brownish-gray color, with a white spot on her throat, and white feet, and had a large bushy tail like a fox; that in the winter the fur grew thick and flattened out along her sides, forming stripes ten or twelve inches long by two and a half wide, and under her chin like a muff, the upper side loose, the under matted like felt, and in the spring these appendages dropped off. They gave me a pair of her "wings," which I keep still. There is no appearance of a membrane about them. Some thought it was part flying squirrel or some other wild animal, which is not impossible, for, according to naturalists, prolific hybrids have been produced by the union of the marten and domestic cat. This would have been the right kind of cat for me to keep, if I had kept any; for why should not a poet's cat be winged as well as his horse?

In the fall the loon (Colymbus glacialis) came, as usual, to moult and bathe in the pond, making the woods ring with his wild laughter before I had risen. At rumor of his arrival all the Mill-dam sportsmen are on the alert, in gigs and on foot, two by two and three by three, with patent rifles and conical balls and spy-glasses. They come rustling through the woods like autumn leaves, at least ten men to one loon. Some station themselves on this side of the pond, some on that, for the poor bird cannot be omnipresent; if he dive here he must come up there. But now the kind October wind rises, rustling the leaves and rippling the surface of the water, so that no loon can be heard or seen, though his foes sweep the pond with spy-glasses, and make the woods resound with their discharges. The waves generously rise and dash angrily, taking sides with all water-fowl, and our sportsmen must beat a
retreat to town and shop and unfinished jobs. But they were too
often successful. When I went to get a pail of water early in the
morning I frequently saw this stately bird sailing out of my cove
within a few rods. If I endeavored to overtake him in a boat, in
order to see how he would manoeuvre, he would dive and be completely
lost, so that I did not discover him again, sometimes, till the
latter part of the day. But I was more than a match for him on the
surface. He commonly went off in a rain.

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, but when he came up I was
nearer than before. 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. So long-winded was he and so unweariable, that when he had swum farthest he would immediately plunge again, nevertheless; and then no wit could divine where in the deep pond, beneath the smooth surface, he might be speeding his way like a fish, for he had time and ability to visit the bottom of the pond in its deepest part. It is said that loons have been caught in the New York lakes eighty feet beneath the surface, with hooks set for trout -- though Walden is deeper than that. How surprised must the fishes be to see this ungainly visitor from another sphere speeding his way amid their schools! Yet he appeared to know his course as surely under water as on the surface, and swam much faster there. 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. It was surprising to see how
serenely he sailed off with unruffled breast when he came to the surface, doing all the work with his webbed feet beneath. His usual note was this demoniac laughter, yet somewhat like that of a water-fowl; but occasionally, when he had balked me most successfully and come up a long way off, he uttered a long-drawn unearthly howl, probably more like that of a wolf than any bird; as when a beast puts his muzzle to the ground and deliberately howls. This was his looning -- perhaps the wildest sound that is ever heard here, making the woods ring far and wide. I concluded that he laughed in derision of my efforts, confident of his own resources. Though the sky was by this time overcast, the pond was so smooth that I could see where he broke the surface when I did not hear him. His white breast, the stillness of the air, and the smoothness of the water were all against him. At length having come up fifty rods off, he uttered one of those prolonged howls, as if calling on the god of loons to aid him, and immediately there came a wind from the east and rippled the surface, and filled the whole air with misty rain, and I was impressed as if it were the prayer of the loon answered, and his god was angry with me; and so I left him disappearing far away on the tumultuous surface.

For hours, in fall days, I watched the ducks cunningly tack and veer and hold the middle of the pond, far from the sportsman; tricks which they will have less need to practise in Louisiana bayous. When compelled to rise they would sometimes circle round and round and over the pond at a considerable height, from which they could easily see to other ponds and the river, like black motes in the sky; and, when I thought they had gone off thither long since, they would settle down by a slanting flight of a quarter of a mile on to
a distant part which was left free; but what beside safety they got

by sailing in the middle of Walden I do not know, unless they love

its water for the same reason that I do.

House-Warming

In October I went a-graping to the river meadows, and loaded

myself with clusters more precious for their beauty and fragrance

than for food. There, too, I admired, though I did not gather, the

cranberries, small waxen gems, pendants of the meadow grass, pearly

and red, which the farmer plucks with an ugly rake, leaving the

smooth meadow in a snarl, heedlessly measuring them by the bushel

and the dollar only, and sells the spoils of the meads to Boston and

New York; destined to be jammed, to satisfy the tastes of lovers of

Nature there. So butchers rake the tongues of bison out of the

prairie grass, regardless of the torn and drooping plant. The

barberry’s brilliant fruit was likewise food for my eyes merely; but

I collected a small store of wild apples for coddling, which the

proprietor and travellers had overlooked. When chestnuts were ripe

I laid up half a bushel for winter. It was very exciting at that

season to roam the then boundless chestnut woods of Lincoln -- they

now sleep their long sleep under the railroad -- with a bag on my

shoulder, and a stick to open burs with in my hand, for I did not

always wait for the frost, amid the rustling of leaves and the loud

reproofs of the red squirrels and the jays, whose half-consumed nuts

I sometimes stole, for the burs which they had selected were sure to

contain sound ones. Occasionally I climbed and shook the trees.
They grew also behind my house, and one large tree, which almost overshadowed it, was, when in flower, a bouquet which scented the whole neighborhood, but the squirrels and the jays got most of its fruit; the last coming in flocks early in the morning and picking the nuts out of the burs before they fell, I relinquished these trees to them and visited the more distant woods composed wholly of chestnut. These nuts, as far as they went, were a good substitute for bread. Many other substitutes might, perhaps, be found.

Digging one day for fishworms, I discovered the ground-nut (Apios tuberosa) on its string, the potato of the aborigines, a sort of fabulous fruit, which I had begun to doubt if I had ever dug and eaten in childhood, as I had told, and had not dreamed it. I had often since seen its crumpled red velvety blossom supported by the stems of other plants without knowing it to be the same.

Cultivation has well-nigh exterminated it. It has a sweetish taste, much like that of a frost-bitten potato, and I found it better boiled than roasted. This tuber seemed like a faint promise of Nature to rear her own children and feed them simply here at some future period. In these days of fatted cattle and waving grain-fields this humble root, which was once the totem of an Indian tribe, is quite forgotten, or known only by its flowering vine; but let wild Nature reign here once more, and the tender and luxurious English grains will probably disappear before a myriad of foes, and without the care of man the crow may carry back even the last seed of corn to the great cornfield of the Indian's God in the southwest, whence he is said to have brought it; but the now almost exterminated ground-nut will perhaps revive and flourish in spite of frosts and wildness, prove itself indigenous, and resume its ancient
importance and dignity as the diet of the hunter tribe. Some Indian
Ceres or Minerva must have been the inventor and bestower of it; and
when the reign of poetry commences here, its leaves and string of
nuts may be represented on our works of art.
Already, by the first of September, I had seen two or three
small maples turned scarlet across the pond, beneath where the white
stems of three aspens diverged, at the point of a promontory, next
the water. Ah, many a tale their color told! And gradually from
week to week the character of each tree came out, and it admired
itself reflected in the smooth mirror of the lake. Each morning the
manager of this gallery substituted some new picture, distinguished
by more brilliant or harmonious coloring, for the old upon the
walls.
The wasps came by thousands to my lodge in October, as to winter
quarters, and settled on my windows within and on the walls
overhead, sometimes deterring visitors from entering. Each morning,
when they were numbed with cold, I swept some of them out, but I did
not trouble myself much to get rid of them; I even felt complimented
by their regarding my house as a desirable shelter. They never
molested me seriously, though they bedded with me; and they
gradually disappeared, into what crevices I do not know, avoiding
winter and unspeakable cold.
Like the wasps, before I finally went into winter quarters in
November, I used to resort to the northeast side of Walden, which
the sun, reflected from the pitch pine woods and the stony shore,
made the fireside of the pond; it is so much pleasanter and
wholesomer to be warmed by the sun while you can be, than by an
artificial fire. I thus warmed myself by the still glowing embers
which the summer, like a departed hunter, had left.

When I came to build my chimney I studied masonry. My bricks, being second-hand ones, required to be cleaned with a trowel, so that I learned more than usual of the qualities of bricks and trowels. The mortar on them was fifty years old, and was said to be still growing harder; but this is one of those sayings which men love to repeat whether they are true or not. Such sayings themselves grow harder and adhere more firmly with age, and it would take many blows with a trowel to clean an old wiseacre of them.

Many of the villages of Mesopotamia are built of second-hand bricks of a very good quality, obtained from the ruins of Babylon, and the cement on them is older and probably harder still. However that may be, I was struck by the peculiar toughness of the steel which bore so many violent blows without being worn out. As my bricks had been in a chimney before, though I did not read the name of Nebuchadnezzar on them, I picked out its many fireplace bricks as I could find, to save work and waste, and I filled the spaces between the bricks about the fireplace with stones from the pond shore, and also made my mortar with the white sand from the same place. I lingered most about the fireplace, as the most vital part of the house. Indeed, I worked so deliberately, that though I commenced at the ground in the morning, a course of bricks raised a few inches above the floor served for my pillow at night; yet I did not get a stiff neck for it that I remember; my stiff neck is of older date.

I took a poet to board for a fortnight about those times, which caused me to be put to it for room. He brought his own knife, though I had two, and we used to scour them by thrusting them into the earth. He shared with me the labors of cooking. I was pleased
to see my work rising so square and solid by degrees, and reflected, that, if it proceeded slowly, it was calculated to endure a long time. The chimney is to some extent an independent structure, standing on the ground, and rising through the house to the heavens; even after the house is burned it still stands sometimes, and its importance and independence are apparent. This was toward the end of summer. It was now November.

The north wind had already begun to cool the pond, though it took many weeks of steady blowing to accomplish it, it is so deep.

When I began to have a fire at evening, before I plastered my house, the chimney carried smoke particularly well, because of the numerous chinks between the boards. Yet I passed some cheerful evenings in that cool and airy apartment, surrounded by the rough brown boards full of knots, and rafters with the bark on high overhead. My house never pleased my eye so much after it was plastered, though I was obliged to confess that it was more comfortable. Should not every apartment in which man dwells be lofty enough to create some obscurity overhead, where flickering shadows may play at evening about the rafters? These forms are more agreeable to the fancy and imagination than fresco paintings or other the most expensive furniture. I now first began to inhabit my house, I may say, when I began to use it for warmth as well as shelter. I had got a couple of old fire-dogs to keep the wood from the hearth, and it did me good to see the soot form on the back of the chimney which I had built, and I poked the fire with more right and more satisfaction than usual. My dwelling was small, and I could hardly entertain an echo in it; but it seemed larger for being a single apartment and remote from neighbors. All the attractions of a house were
concentrated in one room; it was kitchen, chamber, parlor, and
keeping-room; and whatever satisfaction parent or child, master or
servant, derive from living in a house, I enjoyed it all. Cato

says, the master of a family (patremfamilias) must have in his

rustic villa "cellam oleariam, vinariam, dolia multa, uti lubeat
caritatem expectare, et rei, et virtuti, et gloriae erit," that is,

"an oil and wine cellar, many casks, so that it may be pleasant to
expect hard times; it will be for his advantage, and virtue, and
glory." I had in my cellar a firkin of potatoes, about two quarts

of peas with the weevil in them, and on my shelf a little rice, a
jug of molasses, and of rye and Indian meal a peck each.

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 traveller 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 house-keeping; 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 bakes your bread, and the necessary furniture and utensils are the chief ornaments; 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 you without stamping. A house whose inside is as open and manifest as a bird's nest, and you cannot go in at the front door and out at the back without seeing some of its inhabitants; where to be a guest is to be presented with the freedom of the house, and not to be carefully excluded from seven eighths of it, shut up in a particular cell, and told to make yourself at home there -- in solitary confinement. Nowadays the host does not admit you to his hearth, but has got the mason to build one for yourself somewhere in his alley, and hospitality is the art of keeping you at the greatest distance. There is as much secrecy about the cooking as if he had a design to poison you. I am aware that I have been on many a man's premises, and might have been legally ordered off, but I am not aware that I have been in many men's houses. I might visit in my old clothes a king and queen who lived simply in such a house as I have described, if I were going their way; but backing out of a modern palace will be all that I shall desire to learn, if ever I am caught in one.
It would seem as if the very language of our parlors would lose all its nerve and degenerate into palaver wholly, our lives pass at such remoteness from its symbols, and its metaphors and tropes are necessarily so far fetched, through slides and dumb-waiters, as it were; in other words, the parlor is so far from the kitchen and workshop. The dinner even is only the parable of a dinner, commonly. As if only the savage dwelt near enough to Nature and Truth to borrow a trope from them. How can the scholar, who dwells away in the North West Territory or the Isle of Man, tell what is parliamentary in the kitchen?

However, only one or two of my guests were ever bold enough to stay and eat a hasty-pudding with me; but when they saw that crisis approaching they beat a hasty retreat rather, as if it would shake the house to its foundations. Nevertheless, it stood through a great many hasty-puddings.

I did not plaster till it was freezing weather. I brought over some whiter and cleaner sand for this purpose from the opposite shore of the pond in a boat, a sort of conveyance which would have tempted me to go much farther if necessary. My house had in the meanwhile been shingled down to the ground on every side. In lathing I was pleased to be able to send home each nail with a single blow of the hammer, and it was my ambition to transfer the plaster from the board to the wall neatly and rapidly. I remembered the story of a conceited fellow, who, in fine clothes, was wont to lounge about the village once, giving advice to workmen. Venturing one day to substitute deeds for words, he turned up his cuffs, seized a plasterer's board, and having loaded his trowel without mishap, with a complacent look toward the lathing overhead, made a
and straightway, to his complete discomfiture, received the whole contents in his ruffled bosom. I admired anew the economy and convenience of plastering, which so effectually shuts out the cold and takes a handsome finish, and I learned the various casualties to which the plasterer is liable. I was surprised to see how thirsty the bricks were which drank up all the moisture in my plaster before I had smoothed it, and how many pailfuls of water it takes to christen a new hearth. I had the previous winter made a small quantity of lime by burning the shells of the Unio fluviatilis, which our river affords, for the sake of the experiment; so that I knew where my materials came from. I might have got good limestone within a mile or two and burned it myself, if I had cared to do so.

The pond had in the meanwhile skimmed over in the shadiest and shallowest coves, some days or even weeks before the general freezing. The first ice is especially interesting and perfect, being hard, dark, and transparent, and affords the best opportunity that ever offers for examining the bottom where it is shallow; for you can lie at your length on ice only an inch thick, like a skater insect on the surface of the water, and study the bottom at your leisure, only two or three inches distant, like a picture behind a glass, and the water is necessarily always smooth then. There are many furrows in the sand where some creature has travelled about and doubled on its tracks; and, for wrecks, it is strewn with the cases of caddis-worms made of minute grains of white quartz. Perhaps these have creased it, for you find some of their cases in the furrows, though they are deep and broad for them to make. But the ice itself is the object of most interest, though you must improve
the earliest opportunity to study it. If you examine it closely the
morning after it freezes, you find that the greater part of the
bubbles, which at first appeared to be within it, are against its
under surface, and that more are continually rising from the bottom;
while the ice is as yet comparatively solid and dark, that is, you
see the water through it. These bubbles are from an eightieth to an
eighth of an inch in diameter, very clear and beautiful, and you see
your face reflected in them through the ice. There may be thirty or
forty of them to a square inch. There are also already within the
ice narrow oblong perpendicular bubbles about half an inch long,
sharp cones with the apex upward; or oftener, if the ice is quite
fresh, minute spherical bubbles one directly above another, like a
string of beads. But these within the ice are not so numerous nor
obvious as those beneath. I sometimes used to cast on stones to try
the strength of the ice, and those which broke through carried in
air with them, which formed very large and conspicuous white bubbles
beneath. One day when I came to the same place forty-eight hours
afterward, I found that those large bubbles were still perfect,
though an inch more of ice had formed, as I could see distinctly by
the seam in the edge of a cake. But as the last two days had been
very warm, like an Indian summer, the ice was not now transparent,
showing the dark green color of the water, and the bottom, but
opaque and whitish or gray, and though twice as thick was hardly
stronger than before, for the air bubbles had greatly expanded under
this heat and run together, and lost their regularity; they were no
longer one directly over another, but often like silvery coins
poured from a bag, one overlapping another, or in thin flakes, as if
occupying slight cleavages. The beauty of the ice was gone, and it
was too late to study the bottom. Being curious to know what
position my great bubbles occupied with regard to the new ice, I
broke out a cake containing a middling sized one, and turned it
bottom upward. The new ice had formed around and under the bubble,
so that it was included between the two ices. It was wholly in the
lower ice, but close against the upper, and was flattish, or perhaps
slightly lenticular, with a rounded edge, a quarter of an inch deep
by four inches in diameter; and I was surprised to find that
directly under the bubble the ice was melted with great regularity
in the form of a saucer reversed, to the height of five eighths of
an inch in the middle, leaving a thin partition there between the
water and the bubble, hardly an eighth of an inch thick; and in many
places the small bubbles in this partition had burst out downward,
and probably there was no ice at all under the largest bubbles,
which were a foot in diameter. I inferred that the infinite number
of minute bubbles which I had first seen against the under surface
of the ice were now frozen in likewise, and that each, in its
dergree, had operated like a burning-glass on the ice beneath to melt
and rot it. These are the little air-guns which contribute to make
the ice crack and whoop.

At length the winter set in good earnest, just as I had finished
plastering, and the wind began to howl around the house as if it had
not had permission to do so till then. Night after night the geese
came lumbering in the dark with a clangor and a whistling of wings,
even after the ground was covered with snow, some to alight in
Walden, and some flying low over the woods toward Fair Haven, bound
for Mexico. Several times, when returning from the village at ten
or eleven o'clock at night, I heard the tread of a flock of geese,
or else ducks, on the dry leaves in the woods by a pond-hole behind
my dwelling, where they had come up to feed, and the faint honk or
quack of their leader as they hurried off. In 1845 Walden froze
entirely over for the first time on the night of the 22d of
December, Flint's and other shallower ponds and the river having
been frozen ten days or more; in '46, the 16th; in '49, about the
31st; and in '50, about the 27th of December; in '52, the 5th of
January; in '53, the 31st of December. The snow had already covered
the ground since the 25th of November, and surrounded me suddenly
with the scenery of winter. I withdrew yet farther into my shell,
and endeavored to keep a bright fire both within my house and within
my breast. My employment out of doors now was to collect the dead
wood in the forest, bringing it in my hands or on my shoulders, or
sometimes trailing a dead pine tree under each arm to my shed. An
old forest fence which had seen its best days was a great haul for
me. I sacrificed it to Vulcan, for it was past serving the god
Terminus. How much more interesting an event is that man's supper
who has just been forth in the snow to hunt, nay, you might say,
steal, the fuel to cook it with! His bread and meat are sweet.
There are enough fagots and waste wood of all kinds in the forests
of most of our towns to support many fires, but which at present
warm none, and, some think, hinder the growth of the young wood.
There was also the driftwood of the pond. In the course of the
summer I had discovered a raft of pitch pine logs with the bark on,
pinned together by the Irish when the railroad was built. This I
hauled up partly on the shore. After soaking two years and then
lying high six months it was perfectly sound, though waterlogged
past drying. I amused myself one winter day with sliding this
piecemeal across the pond, nearly half a mile, skating behind with
one end of a log fifteen feet long on my shoulder, and the other on
the ice; or I tied several logs together with a birch withe, and
then, with a longer birch or alder which had a book at the end,
dragged them across. Though completely waterlogged and almost as
heavy as lead, they not only burned long, but made a very hot fire;
nay, I thought that they burned better for the soaking, as if the
pitch, being confined by the water, burned longer, as in a lamp.

Gilpin, in his account of the forest borderers of England, says
that "the encroachments of trespassers, and the houses and fences
thus raised on the borders of the forest," were "considered as great
nuisances by the old forest law, and were severely punished under
the name of purprestures, as tending ad terrorem ferarum -- ad
nocumentum forestae, etc.," to the frightening of the game and the
detriment of the forest. But I was interested in the preservation
of the venison and the vert more than the hunters or woodchoppers,
and as much as though I had been the Lord Warden himself; and if any
part was burned, though I burned it myself by accident, I grieved
with a grief that lasted longer and was more inconsolable than that
of the proprietors; nay, I grieved when it was cut down by the
proprietors themselves. I would that our farmers when they cut down
a forest felt some of that awe which the old Romans did when they
came to thin, or let in the light to, a consecrated grove (lucum
conlucare), that is, would believe that it is sacred to some god.

The Roman made an expiatory offering, and prayed, Whatever god or
goddess thou art to whom this grove is sacred, be propitious to me,
my family, and children, etc.

It is remarkable what a value is still put upon wood even in
this age and in this new country, a value more permanent and
universal than that of gold. After all our discoveries and
inventions no man will go by a pile of wood. It is as precious to
us as it was to our Saxon and Norman ancestors. If they made their
bows of it, we make our gun-stocks of it. Michaux, more than thirty
years ago, says that the price of wood for fuel in New York and
Philadelphia "nearly equals, and sometimes exceeds, that of the best
wood in Paris, though this immense capital annually requires more
than three hundred thousand cords, and is surrounded to the distance
of three hundred miles by cultivated plains." In this town the
price of wood rises almost steadily, and the only question is, how
much higher it is to be this year than it was the last. Mechanics
and tradesmen who come in person to the forest on no other errand,
are sure to attend the wood auction, and even pay a high price for
the privilege of gleaning after the woodchopper. It is now many
years that men have resorted to the forest for fuel and the
materials of the arts: the New Englander and the New Hollander, the
Parisian and the Celt, the farmer and Robin Hood, Goody Blake and
Harry Gill; in most parts of the world the prince and the peasant,
the scholar and the savage, equally require still a few sticks from
the forest to warm them and cook their food. Neither could I do
without them.

Every man looks at his wood-pile with a kind of affection. I
love to have mine before my window, and the more chips the better to
remind me of my pleasing work. I had an old axe which nobody
claimed, with which by spells in winter days, on the sunny side of
the house, I played about the stumps which I had got out of my
bean-field. As my driver prophesied when I was plowing, they warmed
me twice -- once while I was splitting them, and again when they
were on the fire, so that no fuel could give out more heat. As for
the axe, I was advised to get the village blacksmith to “jump” it;
but I jumped him, and, putting a hickory helve from the woods into
it, made it do. If it was dull, it was at least hung true.

A few pieces of fat pine were a great treasure. It is
interesting to remember how much of this food for fire is still
concealed in the bowels of the earth. In previous years I had often
gone prospecting over some bare hillside, where a pitch pine wood
had formerly stood, and got out the fat pine roots. They are almost
indestructible. Stumps thirty or forty years old, at least, will
still be sound at the core, though the sapwood has all become
vegetable mould, as appears by the scales of the thick bark forming
a ring level with the earth four or five inches distant from the
heart. With axe and shovel you explore this mine, and follow the
marrowy store, yellow as beef tallow, or as if you had struck on a
vein of gold, deep into the earth. But commonly I kindled my fire
with the dry leaves of the forest, which I had stored up in my shed
before the snow came. Green hickory finely split makes the
woodchopper's kindlings, when he has a camp in the woods. Once in a
while I got a little of this. When the villagers were lighting
their fires beyond the horizon, I too gave notice to the various
wild inhabitants of Walden vale, by a smoky streamer from my
chimney, that I was awake.--

Light-winged Smoke, Icarian bird,
Melting thy pinions in thy upward flight,
Lark without song, and messenger of dawn,
Circling above the hamlets as thy nest;
Or else, departing dream, and shadowy form
Of midnight vision, gathering up thy skirts;
By night star-veiling, and by day
Darkening the light and blotting out the sun;
Go thou my incense upward from this hearth,
And ask the gods to pardon this clear flame.

Hard green wood just cut, though I used but little of that,
answered my purpose better than any other. I sometimes left a good
fire when I went to take a walk in a winter afternoon; and when I
returned, three or four hours afterward, it would be still alive and
glowing. My house was not empty though I was gone. It was as if I
had left a cheerful housekeeper behind. It was I and Fire that
lived there; and commonly my housekeeper proved trustworthy. One
day, however, as I was splitting wood, I thought that I would just
look in at the window and see if the house was not on fire; it was
the only time I remember to have been particularly anxious on this
score; so I looked and saw that a spark had caught my bed, and I
went in and extinguished it when it had burned a place as big as my
hand. But my house occupied so sunny and sheltered a position, and
its roof was so low, that I could afford to let the fire go out in
the middle of almost any winter day.

The moles nested in my cellar, nibbling every third potato, and
making a snug bed even there of some hair left after plastering and
of brown paper; for even the wildest animals love comfort and warmth
as well as man, and they survive the winter only because they are so careful to secure them. Some of my friends spoke as if I was coming to the woods on purpose to freeze myself. The animal merely makes a bed, which he warms with his body, in a sheltered place; but man, having discovered fire, boxes up some air in a spacious apartment, and warms that, instead of robbing himself, makes that his bed, in which he can move about divested of more cumbersome clothing, maintain a kind of summer in the midst of winter, and by means of windows even admit the light, and with a lamp lengthen out the day. Thus he goes a step or two beyond instinct, and saves a little time for the fine arts. Though, when I had been exposed to the rudest blasts a long time, my whole body began to grow torpid, when I reached the genial atmosphere of my house I soon recovered my faculties and prolonged my life. But the most luxuriously housed has little to boast of in this respect, nor need we trouble ourselves to speculate how the human race may be at last destroyed. It would be easy to cut their threads any time with a little sharper blast from the north. We go on dating from Cold Fridays and Great Snows; but a little colder Friday, or greater snow would put a period to man's existence on the globe.

The next winter I used a small cooking-stove for economy, since I did not own the forest; but it did not keep fire so well as the open fireplace. Cooking was then, for the most part, no longer a poetic, but merely a chemic process. It will soon be forgotten, in these days of stoves, that we used to roast potatoes in the ashes, after the Indian fashion. The stove not only took up room and scented the house, but it concealed the fire, and I felt as if I had lost a companion. You can always see a face in the fire. The
laborer, looking into it at evening, purifies his thoughts of the
dross and earthiness which they have accumulated during the day.
But I could no longer sit and look into the fire, and the pertinent
words of a poet recurred to me with new force.--

"Never, bright flame, may be denied to me
Thy dear, life imaging, close sympathy.
What but my hopes shot upward e'er so bright?
What but my fortunes sunk so low in night?
Why art thou banished from our hearth and hall,
Thou who art welcomed and beloved by all?
Was thy existence then too fanciful
For our life's common light, who are so dull?
Did thy bright gleam mysterious converse hold
With our congenial souls? secrets too bold?
Well, we are safe and strong, for now we sit
Beside a hearth where no dim shadows flit,
Where nothing cheers nor saddens, but a fire
Warms feet and hands -- nor does to more aspire;
By whose compact utilitarian heap
The present may sit down and go to sleep,
Nor fear the ghosts who from the dim past walked,
And with us by the unequal light of the old wood fire talked."

Former Inhabitants and Winter Visitors
I weathered some merry snow-storms, and spent some cheerful
winter evenings by my fireside, while the snow whirled wildly
without, and even the hooting of the owl was hushed. For many weeks
I met no one in my walks but those who came occasionally to cut wood
and sled it to the village. The elements, however, abetted me in
making a path through the deepest snow in the woods, for when I had
once gone through the wind blew the oak leaves into my tracks, where
they lodged, and by absorbing the rays of the sun melted the snow,
and so not only made a my bed for my feet, but in the night their
dark line was my guide. For human society I was obliged to conjure
up the former occupants of these woods. Within the memory of many
of my townsmen the road near which my house stands resounded with
the laugh and gossip of inhabitants, and the woods which border it
were notched and dotted here and there with their little gardens and
dwellings, though it was then much more shut in by the forest than
now. In some places, within my own remembrance, the pines would
scrape both sides of a chaise at once, and women and children who
were compelled to go this way to Lincoln alone and on foot did it
with fear, and often ran a good part of the distance. Though mainly
but a humble route to neighboring villages, or for the woodman's
team, it once amused the traveller more than now by its variety, and
lingered longer in his memory. Where now firm open fields stretch
from the village to the woods, it then ran through a maple swamp on
a foundation of logs, the remnants of which, doubtless, still
underlie the present dusty highway, from the Stratton, now the
Alms-House Farm, to Brister's Hill.
East of my bean-field, across the road, lived Cato Ingraham,
slave of Duncan Ingraham, Esquire, gentleman, of Concord village,
who built his slave a house, and gave him permission to live in
Walden Woods; -- Cato, not Uticensis, but Concordiensis. Some say
that he was a Guinea Negro. There are a few who remember his little
patch among the walnuts, which he let grow up till he should be old
and need them; but a younger and whiter speculator got them at last.
He too, however, occupies an equally narrow house at present.
Cato's half-obliterated cellar-hole still remains, though known to
few, being concealed from the traveller by a fringe of pines. It is
now filled with the smooth sumach (Rhus glabra), and one of the
earliest species of goldenrod (Solidago stricta) grows there
luxuriantly.
Here, by the very corner of my field, still nearer to town,
Zilpha, a colored woman, had her little house, where she spun linen
for the townsfolk, making the Walden Woods ring with her shrill
singing, for she had a loud and notable voice. At length, in the
war of 1812, her dwelling was set on fire by English soldiers,
prisoners on parole, when she was away, and her cat and dog and hens
were all burned up together. She led a hard life, and somewhat
inhumane. One old frequenter of these woods remembers, that as he
passed her house one noon he heard her muttering to herself over her
gurgling pot -- "Ye are all bones, bones!" I have seen bricks amid
the oak copse there.
Down the road, on the right hand, on Brister's Hill, lived
Brister Freeman, "a handy Negro," slave of Squire Cummings once --
there where grow still the apple trees which Brister planted and
tended; large old trees now, but their fruit still wild and ciderish
to my taste. Not long since I read his epitaph in the old Lincoln
burying-ground, a little on one side, near the unmarked graves of
some British grenadiers who fell in the retreat from Concord --
where he is styled "Sippio Brister" -- Scipio Africanus he had some
title to be called -- "a man of color," as if he were discolored.

It also told me, with staring emphasis, when he died; which was but
an indirect way of informing me that he ever lived. With him dwelt
Fenda, his hospitable wife, who told fortunes, yet pleasantly --
large, round, and black, blacker than any of the children of night,
such a dusky orb as never rose on Concord before or since.

Farther down the hill, on the left, on the old road in the
woods, are marks of some homestead of the Stratton family; whose
orchard once covered all the slope of Brister's Hill, but was long
since killed out by pitch pines, excepting a few stumps, whose old
roots furnish still the wild stocks of many a thrifty village tree.

Nearer yet to town, you come to Breed's location, on the other
side of the way, just on the edge of the wood; ground famous for the
pranks of a demon not distinctly named in old mythology, who has
acted a prominent and astounding part in our New England life, and
deserves, as much as any mythological character, to have his
biography written one day; who first comes in the guise of a friend
or hired man, and then robs and murders the whole family --
New-England Rum. But history must not yet tell the tragedies
enacted here; let time intervene in some measure to assuage and lend
an azure tint to them. Here the most indistinct and dubious
tradition says that once a tavern stood; the well the same, which
tempered the traveller's beverage and refreshed his steed. Here
then men saluted one another, and heard and told the news, and went
their ways again.

Breed's hut was standing only a dozen years ago, though it had
long been unoccupied. It was about the size of mine. It was set on
fire by mischievous boys, one Election night, if I do not mistake.

I lived on the edge of the village then, and had just lost myself
over Davenant's "Gondibert," that winter that I labored with a
lethargy -- which, by the way, I never knew whether to regard as a
family complaint, having an uncle who goes to sleep shaving himself,
and is obliged to sprout potatoes in a cellar Sundays, in order to
keep awake and keep the Sabbath, or as the consequence of my attempt
to read Chalmers' collection of English poetry without skipping. It
fairly overcame my Nervii. I had just sunk my head on this when the
bells rung fire, and in hot haste the engines rolled that way, led
by a straggling troop of men and boys, and I among the foremost, for
I had leaped the brook. We thought it was far south over the woods
-- we who had run to fires before -- barn, shop, or dwelling-house,
or all together. "It's Baker's barn," cried one. "It is the Codman
place," affirmed another. And then fresh sparks went up above the
wood, as if the roof fell in, and we all shouted "Concord to the
rescue!" Wagons shot past with furious speed and crushing loads,
bearing, perchance, among the rest, the agent of the Insurance
Company, who was bound to go however far; and ever and anon the
engine bell tinkled behind, more slow and sure; and rearmost of all,
as it was afterward whispered, came they who set the fire and gave
the alarm. Thus we kept on like true idealists, rejecting the
evidence of our senses, until at a turn in the road we heard the
crackling and actually felt the heat of the fire from over the wall,
and realized, alas! that we were there. The very nearness of the
fire but cooled our ardor. At first we thought to throw a frog-pond
on to it; but concluded to let it burn, it was so far gone and so
worthless. So we stood round our engine, jostled one another, expressed our sentiments through speaking-trumpets, or in lower tone referred to the great conflagrations which the world has witnessed, including Bascom's shop, and, between ourselves, we thought that, were we there in season with our "tub," and a full frog-pond by, we could turn that threatened last and universal one into another flood. We finally retreated without doing any mischief -- returned to sleep and "Gondibert." But as for "Gondibert," I would except that passage in the preface about wit being the soul's powder -- "but most of mankind are strangers to wit, as Indians are to powder."

It chanced that I walked that way across the fields the following night, about the same hour, and hearing a low moaning at this spot, I drew near in the dark, and discovered the only survivor of the family that I know, the heir of both its virtues and its vices, who alone was interested in this burning, lying on his stomach and looking over the cellar wall at the still smouldering cinders beneath, muttering to himself, as is his wont. He had been working far off in the river meadows all day, and had improved the first moments that he could call his own to visit the home of his fathers and his youth. He gazed into the cellar from all sides and points of view by turns, always lying down to it, as if there was some treasure, which he remembered, concealed between the stones, where there was absolutely nothing but a heap of bricks and ashes. The house being gone, he looked at what there was left. He was soothed by the sympathy which my mere presence, implied, and showed me, as well as the darkness permitted, where the well was covered up; which, thank Heaven, could never be burned; and he groped long
about the wall to find the well-sweep which his father had cut and mounted, feeling for the iron hook or staple by which a burden had been fastened to the heavy end -- all that he could now cling to -- to convince me that it was no common "rider." I felt it, and still remark it almost daily in my walks, for by it hangs the history of a family.

Once more, on the left, where are seen the well and lilac bushes by the wall, in the now open field, lived Nutting and Le Grosse.

But to return toward Lincoln.

Farther in the woods than any of these, where the road approaches nearest to the pond, Wyman the potter squatted, and furnished his townsmen with earthenware, and left descendants to succeed him. Neither were they rich in worldly goods, holding the land by sufferance while they lived; and there often the sheriff came in vain to collect the taxes, and "attached a chip," for form's sake, as I have read in his accounts, there being nothing else that he could lay his hands on. One day in midsummer, when I was hoeing, a man who was carrying a load of pottery to market stopped his horse against my field and inquired concerning Wyman the younger. He had long ago bought a potter's wheel of him, and wished to know what had become of him. I had read of the potter's clay and wheel in Scripture, but it had never occurred to me that the pots we use were not such as had come down unbroken from those days, or grown on trees like gourds somewhere, and I was pleased to hear that so fictile an art was ever practiced in my neighborhood.

The last inhabitant of these woods before me was an Irishman, Hugh Quoil (if I have spelt his name with coil enough), who occupied Wyman's tenement -- Col. Quoil, he was called. Rumor said that he
had been a soldier at Waterloo. If he had lived I should have made
him fight his battles over again. His trade here was that of a
ditcher. Napoleon went to St. Helena; Quoil came to Walden Woods.
All I know of him is tragic. He was a man of manners, like one who
had seen the world, and was capable of more civil speech than you
could well attend to. He wore a greatcoat in midsummer, being
affected with the trembling delirium, and his face was the color of
carmine. He died in the road at the foot of Brister's Hill shortly
after I came to the woods, so that I have not remembered him as a
neighbor. Before his house was pulled down, when his comrades
avoided it as "an unlucky castle," I visited it. There lay his old
clothes curled up by use, as if they were himself, upon his raised
plank bed. His pipe lay broken on the hearth, instead of a bowl
broken at the fountain. The last could never have been the symbol
of his death, for he confessed to me that, though he had heard of
Brister's Spring, he had never seen it; and soiled cards, kings of
diamonds, spades, and hearts, were scattered over the floor. One
black chicken which the administrator could not catch, black as
night and as silent, not even croaking, awaiting Reynard, still went
to roost in the next apartment. In the rear there was the dim
outline of a garden, which had been planted but had never received
its first hoeing, owing to those terrible shaking fits, though it
was now harvest time. It was overrun with Roman wormwood and
beggar-ticks, which last stuck to my clothes for all fruit. The
skin of a woodchuck was freshly stretched upon the back of the
house, a trophy of his last Waterloo; but no warm cap or mittens
would he want more.
Now only a dent in the earth marks the site of these dwellings,
with buried cellar stones, and strawberries, raspberries,
thimble-berries, hazel-bushes, and sumachs growing in the sunny
sward there; some pitch pine or gnarled oak occupies what was the
chimney nook, and a sweet-scented black birch, perhaps, waves where
the door-stone was. Sometimes the well dent is visible, where once
a spring oozed; now dry and tearless grass; or it was covered deep
-- not to be discovered till some late day -- with a flat stone
under the sod, when the last of the race departed. What a sorrowful
act must that be -- the covering up of wells! coincident with the
opening of wells of tears. These cellar dents, like deserted fox
burrows, old holes, are all that is left where once were the stir
and bustle of human life, and "fate, free will, foreknowledge
absolute," in some form and dialect or other were by turns
discussed. But all I can learn of their conclusions amounts to just
this, that "Cato and Brister pulled wool"; which is about as
edifying as the history of more famous schools of philosophy.
Still grows the vivacious lilac a generation after the door and
lintel and the sill are gone, unfolding its sweet-scented flowers
each spring, to be plucked by the musing traveller; planted and
tended once by children's hands, in front-yard plots -- now standing
by wallsides in retired pastures, and giving place to new-rising
forests; -- the last of that stirp, sole survivor of that family.
Little did the dusky children think that the puny slip with its two
eyes only, which they stuck in the ground in the shadow of the house
and daily watered, would root itself so, and outlive them, and house
itself in the rear that shaded it, and grown man's garden and
orchard, and tell their story faintly to the lone wanderer a
half-century after they had grown up and died -- blossoming as fair,
and smelling as sweet, as in that first spring. I mark its still
tender, civil, cheerful lilac colors.

But this small village, germ of something more, why did it fail
while Concord keeps its ground? Were there no natural advantages --
no water privileges, forsooth? Ay, the deep Walden Pond and cool
Brister's Spring -- privilege to drink long and healthy draughts at
these, all unimproved by these men but to dilute their glass. They
were universally a thirsty race. Might not the basket,
stable-broom, mat-making, corn-parching, linen-spinning, and pottery
business have thrived here, making the wilderness to blossom like
the rose, and a numerous posterity have inherited the land of their
fathers? The sterile soil would at least have been proof against a
low-land degeneracy. Alas! how little does the memory of these
human inhabitants enhance the beauty of the landscape! Again,
perhaps, Nature will try, with me for a first settler, and my house
raised last spring to be the oldest in the hamlet.

I am not aware that any man has ever built on the spot which I
occupy. Deliver me from a city built on the site of a more ancient
city, whose materials are ruins, whose gardens cemeteries. The soil
is blanched and accursed there, and before that becomes necessary
the earth itself will be destroyed. With such reminiscences I
repeopled the woods and lulled myself asleep.

At this season I seldom had a visitor. When the snow lay
deepest no wanderer ventured near my house for a week or fortnight
at a time, but there I lived as snug as a meadow mouse, or as cattle
and poultry which are said to have survived for a long time buried
in drifts, even without food; or like that early settler's family in
the town of Sutton, in this State, whose cottage was completely
covered by the great snow of 1717 when he was absent, and an Indian found it only by the hole which the chimney's breath made in the drift, and so relieved the family. But no friendly Indian concerned himself about me; nor needed he, for the master of the house was at home. The Great Snow! How cheerful it is to hear of! When the farmers could not get to the woods and swamps with their teams, and were obliged to cut down the shade trees before their houses, and, when the crust was harder, cut off the trees in the swamps, ten feet from the ground, as it appeared the next spring.

In the deepest snows, the path which I used from the highway to my house, about half a mile long, might have been represented by a meandering dotted line, with wide intervals between the dots. For a week of even weather I took exactly the same number of steps, and of the same length, coming and going, stepping deliberately and with the precision of a pair of dividers in my own deep tracks -- to such routine the winter reduces us -- yet often they were filled with heaven's own blue. But no weather interfered fatally with my walks, or rather my going abroad, for I frequently tramped eight or ten miles through the deepest snow to keep an appointment with a beech tree, or a yellow birch, or an old acquaintance among the pines; when the ice and snow causing their limbs to droop, and so sharpening their tops, had changed the pines into fir trees; wading to the tops of the highest hills when the show was nearly two feet deep on a level, and shaking down another snow-storm on my head at every step; or sometimes creeping and floundering thither on my hands and knees, when the hunters had gone into winter quarters.

One afternoon I amused myself by watching a barred owl (Strix nebulosa) sitting on one of the lower dead limbs of a white pine,
close to the trunk, in broad daylight, I standing within a rod of
him. He could hear me when I moved and cronched the snow with my
feet, but could not plainly see me. When I made most noise he would
stretch out his neck, and erect his neck feathers, and open his eyes
wide; but their lids soon fell again, and he began to nod. I too
felt a slumberous influence after watching him half an hour, as he
sat thus with his eyes half open, like a cat, winged brother of the
cat. There was only a narrow slit left between their lids, by which
be preserved a pennisular relation to me; thus, with half-shut eyes,
looking out from the land of dreams, and endeavoring to realize me,
vague object or mote that interrupted his visions. At length, on
some louder noise or my nearer approach, he would grow uneasy and
sluggishly turn about on his perch, as if impatient at having his
dreams disturbed; and when he launched himself off and flapped
through the pines, spreading his wings to unexpected breadth, I
could not hear the slightest sound from them. Thus, guided amid the
pine boughs rather by a delicate sense of their neighborhood than by
sight, feeling his twilight way, as it were, with his sensitive
pinions, he found a new perch, where he might in peace await the
dawning of his day.

As I walked over the long causeway made for the railroad through
the meadows, I encountered many a blustering and nipping wind, for
nowhere has it freer play; and when the frost had smitten me on one
cheek, heathen as I was, I turned to it the other also. Nor was it
much better by the carriage road from Brister's Hill. For I came to
town still, like a friendly Indian, when the contents of the broad
open fields were all piled up between the walls of the Walden road,
and half an hour sufficed to obliterate the tracks of the last
traveller. And when I returned new drifts would have formed, through which I floundered, where the busy northwest wind had been depositing the powdery snow round a sharp angle in the road, and not a rabbit's track, nor even the fine print, the small type, of a meadow mouse was to be seen. Yet I rarely failed to find, even in midwinter, some warm and springly swamp where the grass and the skunk-cabbage still put forth with perennial verdure, and some harder bird occasionally awaited the return of spring.

Sometimes, notwithstanding the snow, when I returned from my walk at evening I crossed the deep tracks of a woodchopper leading from my door, and found his pile of whittlings on the hearth, and my house filled with the odor of his pipe. Or on a Sunday afternoon, if I chanced to be at home, I heard the cronching of the snow made by the step of a long-headed farmer, who from far through the woods sought my house, to have a social "crack"; one of the few of his vocation who are "men on their farms"; who donned a frock instead of a professor's gown, and is as ready to extract the moral out of church or state as to haul a load of manure from his barn-yard. We talked of rude and simple times, when men sat about large fires in cold, bracing weather, with clear heads; and when other dessert failed, we tried our teeth on many a nut which wise squirrels have long since abandoned, for those which have the thickest shells are commonly empty.

The one who came from farthest to my lodge, through deepest snows and most dismal tempests, was a poet. A farmer, a hunter, a soldier, a reporter, even a philosopher, may be daunted; but nothing can deter a poet, for he is actuated by pure love. Who can predict his comings and goings? His business calls him out at all hours,
even when doctors sleep. We made that small house ring with
boisterous mirth and resound with the murmur of much sober talk,
making amends then to Walden vale for the 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 forth-coming 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.

I should not forget that during my last winter at the pond there
was another welcome visitor, who at one time came through the
village, through snow and rain and darkness, till he saw my lamp
through the trees, and shared with me some long winter evenings.
One of the last of the philosophers -- Connecticut gave him to the
world -- he peddled first her wares, afterwards, as he declares, his
brains. These he peddles still, prompting God and disgracing man,
bearing for fruit his brain only, like the nut its kernel. I think
that he must be the man of the most faith of any alive. His words
and attitude always suppose a better state of things than other men
are acquainted with, and he will be the last man to be disappointed
as the ages revolve. He has no venture in the present. But though
comparatively disregarded now, when his day comes, laws unsuspected
by most will take effect, and masters of families and rulers will
come to him for advice.

"How blind that cannot see serenity!"
A true friend of man; almost the only friend of human progress. An Old Mortality, say rather an Immortality, with unwearied patience and faith making plain the image engraven in men's bodies, the God of whom they are but defaced and leaning monuments. With his hospitable intellect he embraces children, beggars, insane, and scholars, and entertains the thought of all, adding to it commonly some breadth and elegance. I think that he should keep a caravansary on the world's highway, where philosophers of all nations might put up, and on his sign should be printed, "Entertainment for man, but not for his beast. Enter ye that have leisure and a quiet mind, who earnestly seek the right road." He is perhaps the sanest man and has the fewest crotchets of any I chance to know; the same yesterday and tomorrow. Of yore we had sauntered and talked, and effectually put the world behind us; for he was pledged to no institution in it, freeborn, ingenuus. Whichever way we turned, it seemed that the heavens and the earth had met together, since he enhanced the beauty of the landscape. A blue-robed man, whose fittest roof is the overarching sky which reflects his serenity. I do not see how he can ever die; Nature cannot spare him.

Having each some shingles of thought well dried, we sat and whittled them, trying our knives, and admiring the clear yellowish grain of the pumpkin pine. We waded so gently and reverently, or we pulled together so smoothly, that the fishes of thought were not scared from the stream, nor feared any angler on the bank, but came and went grandly, like the clouds which float through the western sky, and the mother-o'-pearl flocks which sometimes form and
dissolve there. There we worked, revising mythology, rounding a
fable here and there, and building castles in the air for which
earth offered no worthy foundation. Great Looker! Great Expecter!
to converse with whom was a New England Night's Entertainment. Ah!
such discourse we had, hermit and philosopher, and the old settler I
have spoken of -- we three -- it expanded and racked my little
house; I should not dare to say how many pounds' weight there was
above the atmospheric pressure on every circular inch; it opened its
seams so that they had to be calked with much dulness thereafter to
stop the consequent leak; -- but I had enough of that kind of oakum
already picked.

There was one other with whom I had "solid seasons," long to be
remembered, at his house in the village, and who looked in upon me
from time to time; but I had no more for society there.

There too, as everywhere, I sometimes expected the Visitor who
never comes. The Vishnu Purana says, "The house-holder is to remain
at eventide in his courtyard as long as it takes to milk a cow, or
longer if he pleases, to await the arrival of a guest." I often
performed this duty of hospitality, waited long enough to milk a
whole herd of cows, but did not see the man approaching from the
town.

Winter Animals

When the ponds were firmly frozen, they afforded not only new
and shorter routes to many points, but new views from their surfaces
of the familiar landscape around them. When I crossed Flint's Pond,
after it was covered with snow, though I had often paddled about and
skated over it, it was so unexpectedly wide and so strange that I
could think of nothing but Baffin's Bay. The Lincoln hills rose up
around me at the extremity of a snowy plain, in which I did not
remember to have stood before; and the fishermen, at an
indeterminable distance over the ice, moving slowly about with their
wolfish dogs, passed for sealers, or Esquimaux, or in misty weather
loomed like fabulous creatures, and I did not know whether they were
giants or pygmies. I took this course when I went to lecture in
Lincoln in the evening, travelling in no road and passing no house
between my own hut and the lecture room. In Goose Pond, which lay
in my way, a colony of muskrats dwelt, and raised their cabins high
above the ice, though none could be seen abroad when I crossed it.
Walden, being like the rest usually bare of snow, or with only
shallow and interrupted drifts on it, was my yard where I could walk
freely when the snow was nearly two feet deep on a level elsewhere
and the villagers were confined to their streets. There, far from
the village street, and except at very long intervals, from the
jingle of sleigh-bells, I slid and skated, as in a vast moose-yard
well trodden, overhung by oak woods and solemn pines bent down with
snow or bristling with icicles.
For sounds in winter nights, and often in winter days, I heard
the forlorn but melodious note of a hooting owl indefinitely far;
such a sound as the frozen earth would yield if struck with a
suitable plectrum, the very lingua vernacula of Walden Wood, and
quite familiar to me at last, though I never saw the bird while it
was making it. I seldom opened my door in a winter evening without
hearing it; Hoo hoo hoo, hoorer, hoo, sounded sonorously, and the
first three syllables accented somewhat like how der do; or
sometimes hoo, hoo only. One night in the beginning of winter,
before the pond froze over, about nine o'clock, I was startled by
the loud honking of a goose, and, stepping to the door, heard the
sound of their wings like a tempest in the woods as they flew low
over my house. They passed over the pond toward Fair Haven,
seemingly deterred from settling by my light, their commodore
honking all the while with a regular beat. Suddenly an unmistakable
cat-owl from very near me, with the most harsh and tremendous voice
I ever heard from any inhabitant of the woods, responded at regular
intervals to the goose, as if determined to expose and disgrace this
intruder from Hudson's Bay by exhibiting a greater compass and
volume of voice in a native, and boo-hoo him out of Concord horizon.
What do you mean by alarming the citadel at this time of night
consecrated to me? Do you think I am ever caught napping at such an
hour, and that I have not got lungs and a larynx as well as
yourself? Boo-hoo, boo-hoo, boo-hoo! It was one of the most
thrilling discords I ever heard. And yet, if you had a
discriminating ear, there were in it the elements of a concord such
as these plains never saw nor heard.
I also heard the whooping of the ice in the pond, my great
bed-fellow in that part of Concord, as if it were restless in its
bed and would fain turn over, were troubled with flatulency and had
dreams; or I was waked by the cracking of the ground by the frost,
as if some one had driven a team against my door, and in the morning
would find a crack in the earth a quarter of a mile long and a third
of an inch wide.
Sometimes I heard the foxes as they ranged over the snow-crust,
in moonlight nights, in search of a partridge or other game, barking raggedly and demoniacally like forest dogs, as if laboring with some anxiety, or seeking expression, struggling for light and to be dogs outright and run freely in the streets; for if we take the ages into our account, may there not be a civilization going on among brutes as well as men? They seemed to me to be rudimental, burrowing men, still standing on their defence, awaiting their transformation. Sometimes one came near to my window, attracted by my light, barked a vulpine curse at me, and then retreated.

Usually the red squirrel (Sciurus Hudsonius) waked me in the dawn, coursing over the roof and up and down the sides of the house, as if sent out of the woods for this purpose. In the course of the winter I threw out half a bushel of ears of sweet corn, which had not got ripe, on to the snow-crust by my door, and was amused by watching the motions of the various animals which were baited by it.

In the twilight and the night the rabbits came regularly and made a hearty meal. All day long the red squirrels came and went, and afforded me much entertainment by their manoeuvres. One would approach at first warily through the shrub oaks, running over the snow-crust by fits and starts like a leaf blown by the wind, now a few paces this way, with wonderful speed and waste of energy, making inconceivable haste with his "trotters," as if it were for a wager, and now as many paces that way, but never getting on more than half a rod at a time; and then suddenly pausing with a ludicrous expression and a gratuitous somerset, as if all the eyes in the universe were eyed on him -- for all the motions of a squirrel, even in the most solitary recesses of the forest, imply spectators as much as those of a dancing girl -- wasting more time in delay and
circumspection than would have sufficed to walk the whole distance
-- I never saw one walk -- and then suddenly, before you could say

Jack Robinson, he would be in the top of a young pitch pine, winding
up his clock and chiding all imaginary spectators, soliloquizing and
talking to all the universe at the same time -- for no reason that I
could ever detect, or he himself was aware of, I suspect. At length
he would reach the corn, and selecting a suitable ear, frisk about
in the same uncertain trigonometrical way to the topmost stick of my
wood-pile, before my window, where he looked me in the face, and
there sit for hours, supplying himself with a new ear from time to
time, nibbling at first voraciously and throwing the half-naked cobs
about; till at length he grew more dainty still and played with his
food, tasting only the inside of the kernel, and the ear, which was
held balanced over the stick by one paw, slipped from his careless
grasp and fell to the ground, when he would look over at it with a
ludicrous expression of uncertainty, as if suspecting that it had
life, with a mind not made up whether to get it again, or a new one,
or be off; now thinking of corn, then listening to hear what was in
the wind. So the little impudent fellow would waste many an ear in
a forenoon; till at last, seizing some longer and plumper one,
considerably bigger than himself, and skilfully balancing it, he
would set out with it to the woods, like a tiger with a buffalo, by
the same zig-zag course and frequent pauses, scratching along with
it as if it were too heavy for him and falling all the while, making
its fall a diagonal between a perpendicular and horizontal, being
determined to put it through at any rate; -- a singularly frivolous
and whimsical fellow; -- and so he would get off with it to where he
lived, perhaps carry it to the top of a pine tree forty or fifty
rods distant, and I would afterwards find the cobs strewn about the woods in various directions.

At length the jays arrive, whose discordant screams were heard long before, as they were warily making their approach an eighth of a mile off, and in a stealthy and sneaking manner they flit from tree to tree, nearer and nearer, and pick up the kernels which the squirrels have dropped. Then, sitting on a pitch pine bough, they attempt to swallow in their haste a kernel which is too big for their throats and chokes them; and after great labor they disgorge it, and spend an hour in the endeavor to crack it by repeated blows with their bills. They were manifestly thieves, and I had not much respect for them; but the squirrels, though at first shy, went to work as if they were taking what was their own.

Meanwhile also came the chickadees in flocks, which, picking up the crumbs the squirrels had dropped, flew to the nearest twig and, placing them under their claws, hammered away at them with their little bills, as if it were an insect in the bark, till they were sufficiently reduced for their slender throats. A little flock of these titmice came daily to pick a dinner out of my woodpile, or the crumbs at my door, with faint flitting lisping notes, like the tinkling of icicles in the grass, or else with sprightly day day day, or more rarely, in spring-like days, a wiry summery phe-be from the woodside. They were so familiar that at length one alighted on an armful of wood which I was carrying in, and pecked at the sticks without fear. I once had a sparrow alight upon my shoulder for a moment while I was hoeing in a village garden, and I felt that I was more distinguished by that circumstance than I should have been by any epaulet I could have worn. The squirrels
also grew at last to be quite familiar, and occasionally stepped
upon my shoe, when that was the nearest way.

When the ground was not yet quite covered, and again near the
end of winter, when the snow was melted on my south hillside and
about my wood-pile, the partridges came out of the woods morning and
evening to feed there. Whichever side you walk in the woods the
partridge bursts away on whirring wings, jarring the snow from the
dry leaves and twigs on high, which comes sifting down in the
sunbeams like golden dust, for this brave bird is not to be scared
by winter. It is frequently covered up by drifts, and, it is said,
"sometimes plunges from on wing into the soft snow, where it remains
concealed for a day or two." I used to start them in the open land
also, where they had come out of the woods at sunset to "bud" the
wild apple trees. They will come regularly every evening to
particular trees, where the cunning sportsman lies in wait for them,
and the distant orchards next the woods suffer thus not a little. I
am glad that the partridge gets fed, at any rate. It is Nature's
own bird which lives on buds and diet drink.

In dark winter mornings, or in short winter afternoons, I
sometimes heard a pack of hounds threading all the woods with
hounding cry and yelp, unable to resist the instinct of the chase,
and the note of the hunting-horn at intervals, proving that man was
in the rear. The woods ring again, and yet no fox bursts forth on
to the open level of the pond, nor following pack pursuing their
Actaeon. And perhaps at evening I see the hunters returning with a
single brush trailing from their sleigh for a trophy, seeking their
inn. They tell me that if the fox would remain in the bosom of the
frozen earth he would be safe, or if be would run in a straight line
away no foxhound could overtake him; but, having left his pursuers
far behind, he stops to rest and listen till they come up, and when
he runs he circles round to his old haunts, where the hunters await
him. Sometimes, however, he will run upon a wall many rods, and
then leap off far to one side, and he appears to know that water
will not retain his scent. A hunter told me that he once saw a fox
pursued by hounds burst out on to Walden when the ice was covered
with shallow puddles, run part way across, and then return to the
same shore. Ere long the hounds arrived, but here they lost the
scent. Sometimes a pack hunting by themselves would pass my door,
and circle round my house, and yelp and hound without regarding me,
as if afflicted by a species of madness, so that nothing could
divert them from the pursuit. Thus they circle until they fall upon
the recent trail of a fox, for a wise hound will forsake everything
else for this. One day a man came to my hut from Lexington to
inquire after his hound that made a large track, and had been
hunting for a week by himself. But I fear that he was not the wiser
for all I told him, for every time I attempted to answer his
questions he interrupted me by asking, “What do you do here?” He
had lost a dog, but found a man.
One old hunter who has a dry tongue, who used to come to bathe
in Walden once every year when the water was warmest, and at such
times looked in upon me, told me that many years ago he took his gun
one afternoon and went out for a cruise in Walden Wood; and as he
walked the Wayland road he heard the cry of hounds approaching, and
ere long a fox leaped the wall into the road, and as quick as
thought leaped the other wall out of the road, and his swift bullet
had not touched him. Some way behind came an old hound and her
three pups in full pursuit, hunting on their own account, and
disappeared again in the woods. Late in the afternoon, as he was
resting in the thick woods south of Walden, he heard the voice of
the hounds far over toward Fair Haven still pursuing the fox; and on
they came, their hounding cry which made all the woods ring sounding
nearer and nearer, now from Well Meadow, now from the Baker Farm.
For a long time he stood still and listened to their music, so sweet
to a hunter's ear, when suddenly the fox appeared, threading the
solemn aisles with an easy coursing pace, whose sound was concealed
by a sympathetic rustle of the leaves, swift and still, keeping the
round, leaving his pursuers far behind; and, leaping upon a rock
amid the woods, he sat erect and listening, with his back to the
hunter. For a moment compassion restrained the latter's arm; but
that was a short-lived mood, and as quick as thought can follow
thought his piece was levelled, and whang! -- the fox, rolling over
the rock, lay dead on the ground. The hunter still kept his place
and listened to the hounds. Still on they came, and now the near
woods resounded through all their aisles with their demoniac cry.
At length the old hound burst into view with muzzle to the ground,
and snapping the air as if possessed, and ran directly to the rock;
but, spying the dead fox, she suddenly ceased her hounding as if
struck dumb with amazement, and walked round and round him in
silence; and one by one her pups arrived, and, like their mother,
were sobered into silence by the mystery. Then the hunter came
forward and stood in their midst, and the mystery was solved. They
waited in silence while he skinned the fox, then followed the brush
a while, and at length turned off into the woods again. That
evening a Weston squire came to the Concord hunter's cottage to
inquire for his hounds, and told how for a week they had been
hunting on their own account from Weston woods. The Concord hunter
told him what he knew and offered him the skin; but the other
declined it and departed. He did not find his hounds that night,
but the next day learned that they had crossed the river and put up
at a farmhouse for the night, whence, having been well fed, they
took their departure early in the morning.

The hunter who told me this could remember one Sam Nutting, who
used to hunt bears on Fair Haven Ledges, and exchange their skins
for rum in Concord village; who told him, even, that he had seen a
moose there. Nutting had a famous foxhound named Burgoyne -- he
pronounced it Bugine -- which my informant used to borrow. In the
"Wast Book" of an old trader of this town, who was also a captain,
town-clerk, and representative, I find the following entry. Jan.
18th, 1742-3, "John Melven Cr. by 1 Grey Fox 0--2--3"; they are not
now found here; and in his ledger, Feb, 7th, 1743, Hezekiah Stratton
has credit "by 1/2 a Catt skin 0--1--4+"; of course, a wild-cat, for
Stratton was a sergeant in the old French war, and would not have
got credit for hunting less noble game. Credit is given for
deer skins also, and they were daily sold. One man still preserves
the horns of the last deer that was killed in this vicinity, and
another has told me the particulars of the hunt in which his uncle
was engaged. The hunters were formerly a numerous and merry crew
here. I remember well one gaunt Nimrod who would catch up a leaf by
the roadside and play a strain on it wilder and more melodious, if
my memory serves me, than any hunting-horn.

At midnight, when there was a moon, I sometimes met with hounds
in my path prowling about the woods, which would skulk out of my
way, as if afraid, and stand silent amid the bushes till I had
passed.

Squirrels and wild mice disputed for my store of nuts. There
were scores of pitch pines around my house, from one to four inches
in diameter, which had been gnawed by mice the previous winter -- a
Norwegian winter for them, for the snow lay long and deep, and they
were obliged to mix a large proportion of pine bark with their other
diet. These trees were alive and apparently flourishing at
midsummer, and many of them had grown a foot, though completely
girdled; but after another winter such were without exception dead.
It is remarkable that a single mouse should thus be allowed a whole
pine tree for its dinner, gnawing round instead of up and down it;
but perhaps it is necessary in order to thin these trees, which are
wont to grow up densely.

The hares (Lepus Americanus) were very familiar. One had her
form under my house all winter, separated from me only by the
flooring, and she startled me each morning by her hasty departure
when I began to stir -- thump, thump, thump, striking her head
against the floor timbers in her hurry. They used to come round my
door at dusk to nibble the potato parings which I had thrown out,
and were so nearly the color of the ground that they could hardly be
distinguished when still. Sometimes in the twilight I alternately
lost and recovered sight of one sitting motionless under my window.
When I opened my door in the evening, off they would go with a
squeak and a bounce. Near at hand they only excited my pity. One
evening one sat by my door two paces from me, at first trembling
with fear, yet unwilling to move; a poor wee thing, lean and bony,
with ragged ears and sharp nose, scant tail and slender paws. It
looked as if Nature no longer contained the breed of nobler bloods, but stood on her last toes. Its large eyes appeared young and unhealthy, almost dropsical. I took a step, and lo, away it scud with an elastic spring over the snow-crust, straightening its body and its limbs into graceful length, and soon put the forest between me and itself -- the wild free venison, asserting its vigor and the dignity of Nature. Not without reason was its slenderness. Such then was its nature. (Lepus, levipes, light-foot, some think.)

What is a country without rabbits and partridges? They are among the most simple and indigenous animal products; ancient and venerable families known to antiquity as to modern times; of the very hue and substance of Nature, nearest allied to leaves and to the ground -- and to one another; it is either winged or it is legged. It is hardly as if you had seen a wild creature when a rabbit or a partridge bursts away, only a natural one, as much to be expected as rustling leaves. The partridge and the rabbit are still sure to thrive, like true natives of the soil, whatever revolutions occur. If the forest is cut off, the sprouts and bushes which spring up afford them concealment, and they become more numerous than ever. That must be a poor country indeed that does not support a hare. Our woods teem with them both, and around every swamp may be seen the partridge or rabbit walk, beset with twiggy fences and horse-hair snares, which some cow-boy tends.

The Pond in Winter

After a still winter night I awoke with the impression that some
question had been put to me, which I had been endeavoring in vain to
answer in my sleep, as what -- how -- when -- where? But there was
dawning Nature, in whom all creatures live, looking in at my broad
windows with serene and satisfied face, and no question on her lips.
I awoke to an answered question, to Nature and daylight. The snow
lying deep on the earth dotted with young pines, and the very slope
of the hill on which my house is placed, seemed to say, Forward!
Nature puts no question and answers none which we mortals ask. She
has long ago taken her resolution. "O Prince, our eyes contemplate
with admiration and transmit to the soul the wonderful and varied
spectacle of this universe. The night veils without doubt a part of
this glorious creation; but day comes to reveal to us this great
work, which extends from earth even into the plains of the ether."
Then to my morning work. First I take an axe and pail and go in
search of water, if that be not a dream. After a cold and snowy
night it needed a divining-rod to find it. Every winter the liquid
and trembling surface of the pond, which was so sensitive to every
breath, and reflected every light and shadow, becomes solid to the
depth of a foot or a foot and a half, so that it will support the
heaviest teams, and perchance the snow covers it to an equal depth,
and it is not to be distinguished from any level field. Like the
marmots in the surrounding hills, it closes its eyelids and becomes
dormant for three months or more. Standing on the snow-covered
plain, as if in a pasture amid the hills, I cut my way first through
a foot of snow, and then a foot of ice, and open a window under my
feet, where, kneeling to drink, I look down into the quiet parlor of
the fishes, pervaded by a softened light as through a window of
ground glass, with its bright sanded floor the same as in summer;
there a perennial waveless serenity reigns as in the amber twilight sky, corresponding to the cool and even temperament of the inhabitants. Heaven is under our feet is well as over our heads. Early in the morning, while all things are crisp with frost, men come with fishing-reels and slender lunch, and let down their fine lines through the snowy field to take pickerel and perch; wild men, who instinctively follow other fashions and trust other authorities than their townsfolk, and by their goings and comings stitch towns together in parts where else they would be ripped. They sit and eat their luncheon in stout fear-naughts on the dry oak leaves on the shore, as wise in natural lore as the citizen is in artificial. They never consulted with books, and know and can tell much less than they have done. The things which they practice are said not yet to be known. Here is one fishing for pickerel with grown perch for bait. You look into his pail with wonder as into a summer pond, as if he kept summer locked up at home, or knew where she had retreated. How, pray, did he get these in midwinter? Oh, he got worms out of rotten logs since the ground froze, and so he caught them. His life itself passes deeper in nature than the studies of the naturalist penetrate; himself a subject for the naturalist. The latter raises the moss and bark gently with his knife in search of insects; the former lays open logs to their core with his axe, and moss and bark fly far and wide. He gets his living by barking trees. Such a man has some right to fish, and I love to see nature carried out in him. The perch swallows the grub-worm, the pickerel swallows the perch, and the fisher-man swallows the pickerel; and so all the chinks in the scale of being are filled. When I strolled around the pond in misty weather I was sometimes
amused by the primitive mode which some ruder fisherman had adopted.
He would perhaps have placed alder branches over the narrow holes in
the ice, which were four or five rods apart and an equal distance
from the shore, and having fastened the end of the line to a stick
to prevent its being pulled through, have passed the slack line over
a twig of the alder, a foot or more above the ice, and tied a dry
oak leaf to it, which, being pulled down, would show when he had a
bite. These alders loomed through the mist at regular intervals as
you walked half way round the pond.
Ah, the pickerel of Walden! when I see them lying on the ice, or
in the well which the fisherman cuts in the ice, making a little
hole to admit the water, I am always surprised by their rare beauty,
as if they were fabulous fishes, they are so foreign to the streets,
even to the woods, foreign as Arabia to our Concord life. They
possess a quite dazzling and transcendent beauty which separates
them by a wide interval from the cadaverous cod and haddock whose
fame is trumpeted in our streets. They are not green like the
pines, nor gray like the stones, nor blue like the sky; but they
have, to my eyes, if possible, yet rarer colors, like flowers and
precious stones, as if they were the pearls, the animalized nuclei
or crystals of the Walden water. They, of course, are Walden all
over and all through; are themselves small Waldens in the animal
kingdom, Waldenses. It is surprising that they are caught here --
that in this deep and capacious spring, far beneath the rattling
teams and chaises and tinkling sleighs that travel the Walden road,
this great gold and emerald fish swims. I never chanced to see its
kind in any market; it would be the cynosure of all eyes there.
Easily, with a few convulsive quirks, they give up their watery
ghosts, like a mortal translated before his time to the thin air of heaven.

As I was desirous to recover the long lost bottom of Walden Pond, I surveyed it carefully, before the ice broke up, early in '46, with compass and chain and sounding line. There have been many stories told about the bottom, or rather no bottom, of this pond, which certainly had no foundation for themselves. It is remarkable how long men will believe in the bottomlessness of a pond without taking the trouble to sound it. I have visited two such Bottomless Ponds in one walk in this neighborhood. Many have believed that Walden reached quite through to the other side of the globe. Some who have lain flat on the ice for a long time, looking down through the illusive medium, per chance with watery eyes into the bargain, and driven to hasty conclusions by the fear of catching cold in their breasts, have seen vast holes "into which a load of hay might be driven," if there were anybody to drive it, the undoubted source of the Styx and entrance to the Infernal Regions from these parts. Others have gone down from the village with a "fifty-six" and a wagon load of inch rope, but yet have failed to find any bottom; for while the "fifty-six" was resting by the way, they were paying out the rope in the vain attempt to fathom their truly immeasurable capacity for marvellousness. But I can assure my readers that Walden has a reasonably tight bottom at a not unreasonable, though at an unusual, depth. I fathomed it easily with a cod-line and a stone weighing about a pound and a half, and could tell accurately when the stone left the bottom, by having to pull so much harder before the water got underneath to help me. The greatest depth was exactly one hundred and two feet; to which may be added the five
feet which it has risen since, making one hundred and seven. This is a remarkable depth for so small an area; yet not an inch of it can be spared by the imagination. What if all ponds were shallow? Would it not react on the minds of men? I am thankful that this pond was made deep and pure for a symbol. While men believe in the infinite some ponds will be thought to be bottomless.

A factory-owner, hearing what depth I had found, thought that it could not be true, for, judging from his acquaintance with dams, sand would not lie at so steep an angle. But the deepest ponds are not so deep in proportion to their area as most suppose, and, if drained, would not leave very remarkable valleys. They are not like cups between the hills; for this one, which is so unusually deep for its area, appears in a vertical section through its centre not deeper than a shallow plate. Most ponds, emptied, would leave a meadow no more hollow than we frequently see. William Gilpin, who is so admirable in all that relates to landscapes, and usually so correct, standing at the head of Loch Fyne, in Scotland, which he describes as "a bay of salt water, sixty or seventy fathoms deep, four miles in breadth," and about fifty miles long, surrounded by mountains, observes, "If we could have seen it immediately after the diluvian crash, or whatever convulsion of nature occasioned it, before the waters gushed in, what a horrid chasm must it have appeared!"

"So high as heaved the tumid hills, so low
Down sunk a hollow bottom broad and deep,
Capacious bed of waters."
But if, using the shortest diameter of Loch Fyne, we apply these proportions to Walden, which, as we have seen, appears already in a vertical section only like a shallow plate, it will appear four times as shallow. So much for the increased horrors of the chasm of Loch Fyne when emptied. No doubt many a smiling valley with its stretching cornfields occupies exactly such a “horrid chasm,” from which the waters have receded, though it requires the insight and the far sight of the geologist to convince the unsuspecting inhabitants of this fact. Often an inquisitive eye may detect the shores of a primitive lake in the low horizon hills, and no subsequent elevation of the plain have been necessary to conceal their history. But it is easiest, as they who work on the highways know, to find the hollows by the puddles after a shower. The amount of it is, the imagination give it the least license, dives deeper and soars higher than Nature goes. So, probably, the depth of the ocean will be found to be very inconsiderable compared with its breadth.

As I sounded through the ice I could determine the shape of the bottom with greater accuracy than is possible in surveying harbors which do not freeze over, and I was surprised at its general regularity. In the deepest part there are several acres more level than almost any field which is exposed to the sun, wind, and plow. In one instance, on a line arbitrarily chosen, the depth did not vary more than one foot in thirty rods; and generally, near the middle, I could calculate the variation for each one hundred feet in any direction beforehand within three or four inches. Some are
accustomed to speak of deep and dangerous holes even in quiet sandy ponds like this, but the effect of water under these circumstances is to level all inequalities. The regularity of the bottom and its conformity to the shores and the range of the neighboring hills were so perfect that a distant promontory betrayed itself in the soundings quite across the pond, and its direction could be determined by observing the opposite shore. Cape becomes bar, and plain shoal, and valley and gorge deep water and channel.

When I had mapped the pond by the scale of ten rods to an inch, and put down the soundings, more than a hundred in all, I observed this remarkable coincidence. Having noticed that the number indicating the greatest depth was apparently in the centre of the map, I laid a rule on the map lengthwise, and then breadthwise, and found, to my surprise, that the line of greatest length intersected the line of greatest breadth exactly at the point of greatest depth, notwithstanding that the middle is so nearly level, the outline of the pond far from regular, and the extreme length and breadth were got by measuring into the coves; and I said to myself, Who knows but this hint would conduct to the deepest part of the ocean as well as of a pond or puddle? Is not this the rule also for the height of mountains, regarded as the opposite of valleys? We know that a hill is not highest at its narrowest part.

Of five coves, three, or all which had been sounded, were observed to have a bar quite across their mouths and deeper water within, so that the bay tended to be an expansion of water within the land not only horizontally but vertically, and to form a basin or independent pond, the direction of the two capes showing the course of the bar. Every harbor on the sea-coast, also, has its bar
at its entrance. In proportion as the mouth of the cove was wider compared with its length, the water over the bar was deeper compared with that in the basin. Given, then, the length and breadth of the cove, and the character of the surrounding shore, and you have almost elements enough to make out a formula for all cases.

In order to see how nearly I could guess, with this experience, at the deepest point in a pond, by observing the outlines of a surface and the character of its shores alone, I made a plan of White Pond, which contains about forty-one acres, and, like this, has no island in it, nor any visible inlet or outlet; and as the line of greatest breadth fell very near the line of least breadth, where two opposite capes approached each other and two opposite bays receded, I ventured to mark a point a short distance from the latter line, but still on the line of greatest length, as the deepest. The deepest part was found to be within one hundred feet of this, still farther in the direction to which I had inclined, and was only one foot deeper, namely, sixty feet. Of course, a stream running through, or an island in the pond, would make the problem much more complicated.

If we knew all the laws of Nature, we should need only one fact, or the description of one actual phenomenon, to infer all the particular results at that point. Now we know only a few laws, and our result is vitiated, not, of course, by any confusion or irregularity in Nature, but by our ignorance of essential elements in the calculation. Our notions of law and harmony are commonly confined to those instances which we detect; but the harmony which results from a far greater number of seemingly conflicting, but really concurring, laws, which we have not detected, is still more
wonderful. The particular laws are as our points of view, as, to
the traveller, a mountain outline varies with every step, and it has
an infinite number of profiles, though absolutely but one form.
Even when cleft or bored through it is not comprehended in its
entireness.
What I have observed of the pond is no less true in ethics. It
is the law of average. Such a rule of the two diameters not only
guides us toward the sun in the system and the heart in man, but
draws lines through the length and breadth of the aggregate of a
man's particular daily behaviors and waves of life into his coves
and inlets, and where they intersect will be the height or depth of
his character. Perhaps we need only to know how his shores trend
and his adjacent country or circumstances, to infer his depth and
concealed bottom. If he is surrounded by mountainous circumstances,
an Achillean shore, whose peaks overshadow and are reflected in his
bosom, they suggest a corresponding depth in him. But a low and
smooth shore proves him shallow on that side. In our bodies, a bold
projecting brow falls off to and indicates a corresponding depth of
thought. Also there is a bar across the entrance of our every cove,
or particular inclination; each is our harbor for a season, in which
we are detained and partially land-locked. These inclinations are
not whimsical usually, but their form, size, and direction are
determined by the promontories of the shore, the ancient axes of
elevation. When this bar is gradually increased by storms, tides,
or currents, or there is a subsidence of the waters, so that it
reaches to the surface, that which was at first but an inclination
in the shore in which a thought was harbored becomes an individual
lake, cut off from the ocean, wherein the thought secures its own
conditions -- changes, perhaps, from salt to fresh, becomes a sweet
sea, dead sea, or a marsh. At the advent of each individual into
this life, may we not suppose that such a bar has risen to the
surface somewhere? It is true, we are such poor navigators that our
thoughts, for the most part, stand off and on upon a harborless
coast, are conversant only with the bights of the bays of poesy, or
steer for the public ports of entry, and go into the dry docks of
science, where they merely refit for this world, and no natural
currents concur to individualize them.

As for the inlet or outlet of Walden, I have not discovered any
but rain and snow and evaporation, though perhaps, with a
thermometer and a line, such places may be found, for where the
water flows into the pond it will probably be coldest in summer and
warmest in winter. When the ice-men were at work here in '46-7, the
cakes sent to the shore were one day rejected by those who were
stacking them up there, not being thick enough to lie side by side
with the rest; and the cutters thus discovered that the ice over a
small space was two or three inches thinner than elsewhere, which
made them think that there was an inlet there. They also showed me
in another place what they thought was a "leach-hole," through which
the pond leaked out under a hill into a neighboring meadow, pushing
me out on a cake of ice to see it. It was a small cavity under ten
feet of water; but I think that I can warrant the pond not to need
soldering till they find a worse leak than that. One has suggested,
that if such a "leach-hole" should be found, its connection with the
meadow, if any existed, might be proved by conveying some, colored
powder or sawdust to the mouth of the hole, and then putting a
strainer over the spring in the meadow, which would catch some of
the particles carried through by the current.

While I was surveying, the ice, which was sixteen inches thick, undulated under a slight wind like water. It is well known that a level cannot be used on ice. At one rod from the shore its greatest fluctuation, when observed by means of a level on land directed toward a graduated staff on the ice, was three quarters of an inch, though the ice appeared firmly attached to the shore. It was probably greater in the middle. Who knows but if our instruments were delicate enough we might detect an undulation in the crust of the earth? When two legs of my level were on the shore and the third on the ice, and the sights were directed over the latter, a rise or fall of the ice of an almost infinitesimal amount made a difference of several feet on a tree across the pond. When I began to cut holes for sounding there were three or four inches of water on the ice under a deep snow which had sunk it thus far; but the water began immediately to run into these holes, and continued to run for two days in deep streams, which wore away the ice on every side, and contributed essentially, if not mainly, to dry the surface of the pond; for, as the water ran in, it raised and floated the ice. This was somewhat like cutting a hole in the bottom of a ship to let the water out. When such holes freeze, and a rain succeeds, and finally a new freezing forms a fresh smooth ice over all, it is beautifully mottled internally by dark figures, shaped somewhat like a spider's web, what you may call ice rosettes, produced by the channels worn by the water flowing from all sides to a centre. Sometimes, also, when the ice was covered with shallow puddles, I saw a double shadow of myself, one standing on the head of the other, one on the ice, the other on the trees or hillside.
While yet it is cold January, and snow and ice are thick and solid, the prudent landlord comes from the village to get ice to cool his summer drink; impressively, even pathetically, wise, to foresee the heat and thirst of July now in January -- wearing a thick coat and mittens! when so many things are not provided for. It may be that he lays up no treasures in this world which will cool his summer drink in the next. He cuts and saws the solid pond, unroofs the house of fishes, and carts off their very element and air, held fast by chains and stakes like corded wood, through the favoring winter air, to wintry cellars, to underlie the summer there. It looks like solidified azure, as, far off, it is drawn through the streets. These ice-cutters are a merry race, full of jest and sport, and when I went among them they were wont to invite me to saw pit-fashion with them, I standing underneath.

In the winter of ’46-7 there came a hundred men of Hyperborean extraction swoop down on to our pond one morning, with many carloads of ungainly-looking farming tools -- sleds, plows, drill-barrows, turf-knives, spades, saws, rakes, and each man was armed with a double-pointed pike-staff, such as is not described in the New-England Farmer or the Cultivator. I did not know whether they had come to sow a crop of winter rye, or some other kind of grain recently introduced from Iceland. As I saw no manure, I judged that they meant to skim the land, as I had done, thinking the soil was deep and had lain fallow long enough. They said that a gentleman farmer, who was behind the scenes, wanted to double his money, which, as I understood, amounted to half a million already; but in order to cover each one of his dollars with another, he took off the only coat, ay, the skin itself, of Walden Pond in the midst of a
hard winter. They went to work at once, plowing, barrowing, rolling, furrowing, in admirable order, as if they were bent on making this a model farm; but when I was looking sharp to see what kind of seed they dropped into the furrow, a gang of fellows by my side suddenly began to hook up the virgin mould itself, with a peculiar jerk, clean down to the sand, or rather the water -- for it was a very springy soil -- indeed all the terra firma there was -- and haul it away on sleds, and then I guessed that they must be cutting peat in a bog. So they came and went every day, with a peculiar shriek from the locomotive, from and to some point of the polar regions, as it seemed to me, like a flock of arctic snow-birds. But sometimes Squaw Walden had her revenge, and a hired man, walking behind his team, slipped through a crack in the ground down toward Tartarus, and he who was so brave before suddenly became but the ninth part of a man, almost gave up his animal heat, and was glad to take refuge in my house, and acknowledged that there was some virtue in a stove; or sometimes the frozen soil took a piece of steel out of a plowshare, or a plow got set in the furrow and had to be cut out.

To speak literally, a hundred Irishmen, with Yankee overseers, came from Cambridge every day to get out the ice. They divided it into cakes by methods too well known to require description, and these, being sledded to the shore, were rapidly hauled off on to an ice platform, and raised by grappling irons and block and tackle, worked by horses, on to a stack, as surely as so many barrels of flour, and there placed evenly side by side, and row upon row, as if they formed the solid base of an obelisk designed to pierce the clouds. They told me that in a good day they could get out a
thousand tons, which was the yield of about one acre. Deep ruts and
"cradle-holes" were worn in the ice, as on terra firma, by the
passage of the sleds over the same track, and the horses invariably
ate their oats out of cakes of ice hollowed out like buckets. They
stacked up the cakes thus in the open air in a pile thirty-five feet
high on one side and six or seven rods square, putting hay between
the outside layers to exclude the air; for when the wind, though
never so cold, finds a passage through, it will wear large cavities,
leaving slight supports or studs only here and there, and finally
topple it down. At first it looked like a vast blue fort or
Valhalla; but when they began to tuck the coarse meadow hay into the
crevices, and this became covered with rime and icicles, it looked
like a venerable moss-grown and hoary ruin, built of azure-tinted
marble, the abode of Winter, that old man we see in the almanac --
his shanty, as if he had a design to estivate with us. They
calculated that not twenty-five per cent of this would reach its
destination, and that two or three per cent would be wasted in the
cars. However, a still greater part of this heap had a different
destiny from what was intended; for, either because the ice was
found not to keep so well as was expected, containing more air than
usual, or for some other reason, it never got to market. This heap,
made in the winter of '46-7 and estimated to contain ten thousand
tons, was finally covered with hay and boards; and though it was
unroofed the following July, and a part of it carried off, the rest
remaining exposed to the sun, it stood over that summer and the next
winter, and was not quite melted till September, 1848. Thus the
pond recovered the greater part.
Like the water, the Walden ice, seen near at hand, has a green
tint, but at a distance is beautifully blue, and you can easily tell it from the white ice of the river, or the merely greenish ice of some ponds, a quarter of a mile off. Sometimes one of those great cakes slips from the ice-man's sled into the village street, and lies there for a week like a great emerald, an object of interest to all passers. I have noticed that a portion of Walden which in the state of water was green will often, when frozen, appear from the same point of view blue. So the hollows about this pond will, sometimes, in the winter, be filled with a greenish water somewhat like its own, but the next day will have frozen blue. Perhaps the blue color of water and ice is due to the light and air they contain, and the most transparent is the bluest. Ice is an interesting subject for contemplation. They told me that they had some in the ice-houses at Fresh Pond five years old which was as good as ever. Why is it that a bucket of water soon becomes putrid, but frozen remains sweet forever? It is commonly said that this is the difference between the affections and the intellect. Thus for sixteen days I saw from my window a hundred men at work like busy husbandmen, with teams and horses and apparently all the implements of farming, such a picture as we see on the first page of the almanac; and as often as I looked out I was reminded of the fable of the lark and the reapers, or the parable of the sower, and the like; and now they are all gone, and in thirty days more, probably, I shall look from the same window on the pure sea-green Walden water there, reflecting the clouds and the trees, and sending up its evaporations in solitude, and no traces will appear that a man has ever stood there. Perhaps I shall hear a solitary loon laugh as he dives and plumes himself, or shall see a lonely fisher
in his boat, like a floating leaf, beholding his form reflected in
the waves, where lately a hundred men securely labored.

Thus it appears that the sweltering inhabitants of Charleston
and New Orleans, of Madras and Bombay and Calcutta, drink at my
well. In the morning I bathe my intellect in the stupendous and
cosmogonical philosophy of the Bhagvat-Geeta, since whose composition
years of the gods have elapsed, and in comparison with which our
modern world and its literature seem puny and trivial; and I doubt
if that philosophy is not to be referred to a previous state of
existence, so remote is its sublimity from our conceptions. I lay
down the book and go to my well for water, and lo! there I meet the
servant of the Bramin, priest of Brahma and Vishnu and Indra, who
still sits in his temple on the Ganges reading the Vedas, or dwells
at the root of a tree with his crust and water jug. I meet his
servant come to draw water for his master, and our buckets as it
were grate together in the same well. The pure Walden water is
mingled with the sacred water of the Ganges. With favoring winds it
is wafted past the site of the fabulous islands of Atlantis and the
Hesperides, makes the periplus of Hanno, and, floating by Ternate
and Tidore and the mouth of the Persian Gulf, melts in the tropic
gales of the Indian seas, and is landed in ports of which Alexander
only heard the names.

Spring

The opening of large tracts by the ice-cutters commonly causes a
pond to break up earlier; for the water, agitated by the wind, even
in cold weather, wears away the surrounding ice. But such was not
the effect on Walden that year, for she had soon got a thick new
garment to take the place of the old. This pond never breaks up so
soon as the others in this neighborhood, on account both of its
greater depth and its having no stream passing through it to melt or
wear away the ice. I never knew it to open in the course of a
winter, not excepting that of '52-3, which gave the ponds so severe
a trial. It commonly opens about the first of April, a week or ten
days later than Flint's Pond and Fair Haven, beginning to melt on
the north side and in the shallower parts where it began to freeze.
It indicates better than any water hereabouts the absolute progress
of the season, being least affected by transient changes of
temperature. A severe cold of a few days duration in March may very
much retard the opening of the former ponds, while the temperature
of Walden increases almost uninterruptedly. A thermometer thrust
into the middle of Walden on the 6th of March, 1847, stood at 32x,
or freezing point; near the shore at 33x; in the middle of Flint's
Pond, the same day, at 32+x; at a dozen rods from the shore, in
shallow water, under ice a foot thick, at 36x. This difference of
three and a half degrees between the temperature of the deep water
and the shallow in the latter pond, and the fact that a great
proportion of it is comparatively shallow, show why it should break
up so much sooner than Walden. The ice in the shallowest part was
at this time several inches thinner than in the middle. In
midwinter the middle had been the warmest and the ice thinnest
there. So, also, every one who has waded about the shores of the
pond in summer must have perceived how much warmer the water is
close to the shore, where only three or four inches deep, than a
little distance out, and on the surface where it is deep, than near
the bottom. In spring the sun not only exerts an influence through
the increased temperature of the air and earth, but its heat passes
through ice a foot or more thick, and is reflected from the bottom
in shallow water, and so also warms the water and melts the under
side of the ice, at the same time that it is melting it more
directly above, making it uneven, and causing the air bubbles which
it contains to extend themselves upward and downward until it is
completely honeycombed, and at last disappears suddenly in a single
spring rain. Ice has its grain as well as wood, and when a cake
begins to rot or "comb," that is, assume the appearance of
honeycomb, whatever may be its position, the air cells are at right
angles with what was the water surface. Where there is a rock or a
log rising near to the surface the ice over it is much thinner, and
is frequently quite dissolved by this reflected heat; and I have
been told that in the experiment at Cambridge to freeze water in a
shallow wooden pond, though the cold air circulated underneath, and
so had access to both sides, the reflection of the sun from the
bottom more than counterbalanced this advantage. When a warm rain
in the middle of the winter melts off the snow-ice from Walden, and
leaves a hard dark or transparent ice on the middle, there will be a
strip of rotten though thicker white ice, a rod or more wide, about
the shores, created by this reflected heat. Also, as I have said,
the bubbles themselves within the ice operate as burning-glasses to
melt the ice beneath.

The phenomena of the year take place every day in a pond on a
small scale. Every morning, generally speaking, the shallow water
is being warmed more rapidly than the deep, though it may not be
made so warm after all, and every evening it is being cooled more rapidly until the morning. The day is an epitome of the year. The night is the winter, the morning and evening are the spring and fall, and the noon is the summer. The cracking and booming of the ice indicate a change of temperature. One pleasant morning after a cold night, February 24th, 1850, having gone to Flint's Pond to spend the day, I noticed with surprise, that when I struck the ice with the head of my axe, it resounded like a gong for many rods around, or as if I had struck on a tight drum-head. The pond began to boom about an hour after sunrise, when it felt the influence of the sun's rays slanted upon it from over the hills; it stretched itself and yawned like a waking man with a gradually increasing tumult, which was kept up three or four hours. It took a short siesta at noon, and boomed once more toward night, as the sun was withdrawing his influence. In the right stage of the weather a pond fires its evening gun with great regularity. But in the middle of the day, being full of cracks, and the air also being less elastic, it had completely lost its resonance, and probably fishes and muskrats could not then have been stunned by a blow on it. The fishermen say that the "thundering of the pond" scares the fishes and prevents their biting. The pond does not thunder every evening, and I cannot tell surely when to expect its thundering; but though I may perceive no difference in the weather, it does. Who would have suspected so large and cold and thick-skinned a thing to be so sensitive? Yet it has its law to which it thunders obedience when it should as surely as the buds expand in the spring. The earth is all alive and covered with papillae. The largest pond is as sensitive to atmospheric changes as the globule of mercury in its
One attraction in coming to the woods to live was that I should have leisure and opportunity to see the Spring come in. The ice in the pond at length begins to be honeycombed, and I can set my heel in it as I walk. Fogs and rains and warmer suns are gradually melting the snow; the days have grown sensibly longer; and I see how I shall get through the winter without adding to my wood-pile, for large fires are no longer necessary. I am on the alert for the first signs of spring, to hear the chance note of some arriving bird, or the striped squirrel's chirp, for his stores must be now nearly exhausted, or see the woodchuck venture out of his winter quarters. On the 13th of March, after I had heard the bluebird, song sparrow, and red-wing, the ice was still nearly a foot thick. As the weather grew warmer it was not sensibly worn away by the water, nor broken up and floated off as in rivers, but, though it was completely melted for half a rod in width about the shore, the middle was merely honeycombed and saturated with water, so that you could put your foot through it when six inches thick; but by the next day evening, perhaps, after a warm rain followed by fog, it would have wholly disappeared, all gone off with the fog, spirited away. One year I went across the middle only five days before it disappeared entirely. In 1845 Walden was first completely open on the 1st of April; in '46, the 25th of March; in '47, the 8th of April; in '51, the 28th of March; in '52, the 18th of April; in '53, the 23d of March; in '54, about the 7th of April.

Every incident connected with the breaking up of the rivers and ponds and the settling of the weather is particularly interesting to us who live in a climate of so great extremes. When the warmer days
come, they who dwell near the river hear the ice crack at night with a startling whoop as loud as artillery, as if its icy fetters were rent from end to end, and within a few days see it rapidly going out. So the alligator comes out of the mud with quakings of the earth. One old man, who has been a close observer of Nature, and seems as thoroughly wise in regard to all her operations as if she had been put upon the stocks when he was a boy, and he had helped to lay her keel -- who has come to his growth, and can hardly acquire more of natural lore if he should live to the age of Methuselah -- told me -- and I was surprised to hear him express wonder at any of Nature's operations, for I thought that there were no secrets between them -- that one spring day he took his gun and boat, and thought that he would have a little sport with the ducks. There was ice still on the meadows, but it was all gone out of the river, and he dropped down without obstruction from Sudbury, where he lived, to Fair Haven Pond, which he found, unexpectedly, covered for the most part with a firm field of ice. It was a warm day, and he was surprised to see so great a body of ice remaining. Not seeing any ducks, he hid his boat on the north or back side of an island in the pond, and then concealed himself in the bushes on the south side, to await them. The ice was melted for three or four rods from the shore, and there was a smooth and warm sheet of water, with a muddy bottom, such as the ducks love, within, and he thought it likely that some would be along pretty soon. After he had lain still there about an hour he heard a low and seemingly very distant sound, but singularly grand and impressive, unlike anything he had ever heard, gradually swelling and increasing as if it would have a universal and memorable ending, a sullen rush and roar, which seemed to him
all at once like the sound of a vast body of fowl coming in to
settle there, and, seizing his gun, he started up in haste and
excited; but he found, to his surprise, that the whole body of the
ice had started while he lay there, and drifted in to the shore, and
the sound he had heard was made by its edge grating on the shore --
at first gently nibbled and crumbled off, but at length heaving up
and scattering its wrecks along the island to a considerable height
before it came to a standstill.

At length the sun’s rays have attained the right angle, and warm
winds blow up mist and rain and melt the snowbanks, and the sun,
dispersing the mist, smiles on a checkered landscape of russet and
white smoking with incense, through which the traveller picks his
way from islet to islet, cheered by the music of a thousand tinkling
rills and rivulets whose veins are filled with the blood of winter
which they are bearing off.

Few phenomena gave me more delight than to observe the forms
which thawing sand and clay assume in flowing down the sides of a
deep cut on the railroad through which I passed on my way to the
village, a phenomenon not very common on so large a scale, though
the number of freshly exposed banks of the right material must have
been greatly multiplied since railroads were invented. The material
was sand of every degree of fineness and of various rich colors,
commonly mixed with a little clay. When the frost comes out in the
spring, and even in a thawing day in the winter, the sand begins to
flow down the slopes like lava, sometimes bursting out through the
snow and overflowing it where no sand was to be seen before.

Innumerable little streams overlap and interlace one with another,
exhibiting a sort of hybrid product, which obeys half way the law of
currents, and half way that of vegetation. As it flows it takes the forms of sappy leaves or vines, making heaps of pulpy sprays a foot or more in depth, and resembling, as you look down on them, the laciniated, lobed, and imbricated thalluses of some lichens; or you are reminded of coral, of leopard's paws or birds' feet, of brains or lungs or bowels, and excrements of all kinds. It is a truly grotesque vegetation, whose forms and color we see imitated in bronze, a sort of architectural foliage more ancient and typical than acanthus, chiccory, ivy, vine, or any vegetable leaves; destined perhaps, under some circumstances, to become a puzzle to future geologists. The whole cut impressed me as if it were a cave with its stalactites laid open to the light. The various shades of the sand are singularly rich and agreeable, embracing the different iron colors, brown, gray, yellowish, and reddish. When the flowing mass reaches the drain at the foot of the bank it spreads out flatter into strands, the separate streams losing their semi-cylindrical form and gradually becoming more flat and broad, running together as they are more moist, till they form an almost flat sand, still variously and beautifully shaded, but in which you can trace the original forms of vegetation; till at length, in the water itself, they are converted into banks, like those formed off the mouths of rivers, and the forms of vegetation are lost in the ripple marks on the bottom.

The whole bank, which is from twenty to forty feet high, is sometimes overlaid with a mass of this kind of foliage, or sandy rupture, for a quarter of a mile on one or both sides, the produce of one spring day. What makes this sand foliage remarkable is its springing into existence thus suddenly. When I see on the one side
the inert bank -- for the sun acts on one side first -- and on the
other this luxuriant foliage, the creation of an hour, I am affected
as if in a peculiar sense I stood in the laboratory of the Artist
who made the world and me -- had come to where he was still at work,
sporting on this bank, and with excess of energy strewing his fresh
designs about. I feel as if I were nearer to the vitals of the
globe, for this sandy overflow is something such a foliaceous mass
as the vitals of the animal body. You find thus in the very sands
an anticipation of the vegetable leaf. No wonder that the earth
expresses itself outwardly in leaves, it so labors with the idea
inwardly. The atoms have already learned this law, and are pregnant
by it. The overhanging leaf sees here its prototype. Internally,
whether in the globe or animal body, it is a moist thick lobe, a
word especially applicable to the liver and lungs and the leaves of
fat (jnai, labor, lapsus, to flow or slip downward, a lapsing;
jiais, globus, lobe, globe; also lap, flap, and many other words);
externally a dry thin leaf, even as the f and v are a pressed and
dried b. The radicals of lobe are lb, the soft mass of the b
(single lobed, or B, double lobed), with the liquid l behind it
pressing it forward. In globe, glb, the guttural g adds to the
meaning the capacity of the throat. The feathers and wings of birds
are still drier and thinner leaves. Thus, also, you pass from the
lumpish grub in the earth to the airy and fluttering butterfly. The
very globe continually transcends and translates itself, and becomes
winged in its orbit. Even ice begins with delicate crystal leaves,
as if it had flowed into moulds which the fronds of waterplants have
impressed on the watery mirror. The whole tree itself is but one
leaf, and rivers are still vaster leaves whose pulp is intervening
earth, and towns and cities are the ova of insects in their axils.

When the sun withdraws the sand ceases to flow, but in the
morning the streams will start once more and branch and branch again
into a myriad of others. You here see perchance how blood-vessels
are formed. If you look closely you observe that first there pushes
forward from the thawing mass a stream of softened sand with a
drop-like point, like the ball of the finger, feeling its way slowly
and blindly downward, until at last with more heat and moisture, as
the sun gets higher, the most fluid portion, in its effort to obey
the law to which the most inert also yields, separates from the
latter and forms for itself a meandering channel or artery within
that, in which is seen a little silvery stream glancing like
lightning from one stage of pulpy leaves or branches to another, and
ever and anon swallowed up in the sand. It is wonderful how rapidly
yet perfectly the sand organizes itself as it flows, using the best
material its mass affords to form the sharp edges of its channel.
Such are the sources of rivers. In the silicious matter which the
water deposits is perhaps the bony system, and in the still finer
soil and organic matter the fleshy fibre or cellular tissue. What
is man but a mass of thawing clay? The ball of the human finger is
but a drop congealed. The fingers and toes flow to their extent
from the thawing mass of the body. Who knows what the human body
would expand and flow out to under a more genial heaven? Is not the
hand a spreading palm leaf with its lobes and veins? The ear may be
regarded, fancifully, as a lichen, umbilicaria, on the side of the
head, with its lobe or drop. The lip -- labium, from labor (?) --
laps or lapses from the sides of the cavernous mouth. The nose is a
manifest congealed drop or stalactite. The chin is a still larger
drop, the confluent dripping of the face. The cheeks are a slide
from the brows into the valley of the face, opposed and diffused by
the cheek bones. Each rounded lobe of the vegetable leaf, too, is a
thick and now loitering drop, larger or smaller; the lobes are the
fingers of the leaf; and as many lobes as it has, in so many
directions it tends to flow, and more heat or other genial
influences would have caused it to flow yet farther.
Thus it seemed that this one hillside illustrated the principle
of all the operations of Nature. The Maker of this earth but
patented a leaf. What Champollion will decipher this hieroglyphic
for us, that we may turn over a new leaf at last? This phenomenon
is more exhilarating to me than the luxuriance and fertility of
vineyards. True, it is somewhat excrementitious in its character,
and there is no end to the heaps of liver, lights, and bowels, as if
the globe were turned wrong side outward; but this suggests at least
that Nature has some bowels, and there again is mother of humanity.
This is the frost coming out of the ground; this is Spring. It
precedes the green and flowery spring, as mythology precedes regular
poetry. I know of nothing more purgative of winter fumes and
indigestions. It convinces me that Earth is still in her
swaddling-clothes, and stretches forth baby fingers on every side.
Fresh curls spring from the baldest brow. There is nothing
inorganic. These foliaceous heaps lie along the bank like the slag
of a furnace, showing that Nature is "in full blast" within. The
earth is not a mere fragment of dead history, stratum upon stratum
like the leaves of a book, to be studied by geologists and
antiquaries chiefly, but living poetry like the leaves of a tree,
which precede flowers and fruit -- not a fossil earth, but a living
earth; compared with whose great central life all animal and
vegetable life is merely parasitic. Its throes will heave our
exuviae from their graves. You may melt your metals and cast them
into the most beautiful moulds you can; they will never excite me
like the forms which this molten earth flows out into. And not only
it, but the institutions upon it are plastic like clay in the hands
of the potter.

Ere long, not only on these banks, but on every hill and plain
and in every hollow, the frost comes out of the ground like a
dormant quadruped from its burrow, and seeks the sea with music, or
migrates to other climes in clouds. Thaw with his gentle persuasion
is more powerful than Thor with his hammer. The one melts, the
other but breaks in pieces.

When the ground was partially bare of snow, and a few warm days
had dried its surface somewhat, it was pleasant to compare the first
tender signs of the infant year just peeping forth with the stately
beauty of the withered vegetation which had withstood the
winter -- life-everlasting, goldenrods, pinweeds, and graceful wild
grasses, more obvious and interesting frequently than in summer
even, as if their beauty was not ripe till then; even cotton-grass,
cat-tails, mulleins, johnswort, hard-hack, meadow-sweet, and other
strong-stemmed plants, those unexhausted granaries which entertain
the earliest birds -- decent weeds, at least, which widowed Nature
wears. I am particularly attracted by the arching and sheaf-like
top of the wool-grass; it brings back the summer to our winter
memories, and is among the forms which art loves to copy, and which,
in the vegetable kingdom, have the same relation to types already in
the mind of man that astronomy has. It is an antique style, older
than Greek or Egyptian. Many of the phenomena of Winter are
suggestive of an inexpressible tenderness and fragile delicacy. We
are accustomed to hear this king described as a rude and boisterous
tyrant; but with the gentleness of a lover he adorns the tresses of
Summer.
At the approach of spring the red squirrels got under my house,
two at a time, directly under my feet as I sat reading or writing,
and kept up the queerest chuckling and chirruping and vocal
pirouetting and gurgling sounds that ever were heard; and when I
stamped they only chirruped the louder, as if past all fear and
respect in their mad pranks, defying humanity to stop them. No, you
don't -- chickaree -- chickaree. They were wholly deaf to my
arguments, or failed to perceive their force, and fell into a strain
of invective that was irresistible.
The first sparrow of spring! The year beginning with younger
hope than ever! The faint silvery warblings heard over the
partially bare and moist fields from the bluebird, the song sparrow,
and the red-wing, as if the last flakes of winter tinkled as they
fell! What at such a time are histories, chronologies, traditions,
and all written revelations? The brooks sing carols and glees to
the spring. The marsh hawk, sailing low over the meadow, is already
seeking the first slimy life that awakes. The sinking sound of
melting snow is heard in all dells, and the ice dissolves apace in
the ponds. The grass flames up on the hillsides like a spring fire
-- "et primitus oritur herba imbribus primoribus evocata" -- as if
the earth sent forth an inward heat to greet the returning sun; not
yellow but green is the color of its flame; -- the symbol of
perpetual youth, the grass-blade, like a long green ribbon, streams
from the sod into the summer, checked indeed by the frost, but anon
pushing on again, lifting its spear of last year's hay with the
fresh life below. It grows as steadily as the rill oozes out of the
ground. It is almost identical with that, for in the growing days
of June, when the rills are dry, the grass-blades are their
channels, and from year to year the herds drink at this perennial
green stream, and the mower draws from it betimes their winter
supply. So our human life but dies down to its root, and still puts
forth its green blade to eternity.

Walden is melting apace. There is a canal two rods wide along
the northerly and westerly sides, and wider still at the east end.
A great field of ice has cracked off from the main body. I hear a
song sparrow singing from the bushes on the shore -- olit, olit,
olit -- chip, chip, chip, che char -- che wiss, wiss, wiss. He too
is helping to crack it. How handsome the great sweeping curves in
the edge of the ice, answering somewhat to those of the shore, but
more regular! It is unusually hard, owing to the recent severe but
transient cold, and all watered or waved like a palace floor. But
the wind slides eastward over its opaque surface in vain, till it
reaches the living surface beyond. It is glorious to behold this
ribbon of water sparkling in the sun, the bare face of the pond full
of glee and youth, as if it spoke the joy of the fishes within it,
and of the sands on its shore -- a silvery sheen as from the scales
of a leuciscus, as it were all one active fish. Such is the
contrast between winter and spring. Walden was dead and is alive
again. But this spring it broke up more steadily, as I have said.
The change from storm and winter to serene and mild weather,
from dark and sluggish hours to bright and elastic ones, is a
memorable crisis which all things proclaim. It is seemingly
instantaneous at last. Suddenly an influx of light filled my house,
though the evening was at hand, and the clouds of winter still
overhung it, and the eaves were dripping with sleety rain. I looked
out the window, and lo! where yesterday was cold gray ice there lay
the transparent pond already calm and full of hope as in a summer
evening, reflecting a summer evening sky in its bosom, though none
was visible overhead, as if it had intelligence with some remote
horizon. I heard a robin in the distance, the first I had heard for
many a thousand years, methought, whose note I shall not forget for
many a thousand more -- the same sweet and powerful song as of yore.
O the evening robin, at the end of a New England summer day! If I
could ever find the twig he sits upon! I mean he; I mean the twig.
This at least is not the Turdus migratorius. The pitch pines and
shrub oaks about my house, which had so long drooped, suddenly
resumed their several characters, looked brighter, greener, and more
erect and alive, as if effectually cleansed and restored by the
rain. I knew that it would not rain any more. You may tell by
looking at any twig of the forest, ay, at your very wood-pile,
whether its winter is past or not. As it grew darker, I was
startled by the honking of geese flying low over the woods, like
weary travellers getting in late from Southern lakes, and indulging
at last in unrestrained complaint and mutual consolation. Standing
at my door, I could bear the rush of their wings; when, driving
toward my house, they suddenly spied my light, and with hushed
clamor wheeled and settled in the pond. So I came in, and shut the
door, and passed my first spring night in the woods.
In the morning I watched the geese from the door through the
mist, sailing in the middle of the pond, fifty rods off, so large
and tumultuous that Walden appeared like an artificial pond for
their amusement. But when I stood on the shore they at once rose up
with a great flapping of wings at the signal of their commander, and
when they had got into rank circled about over my head, twenty-nine
of them, and then steered straight to Canada, with a regular honk
from the leader at intervals, trusting to break their fast in
muddier pools. A "plump" of ducks rose at the same time and took
the route to the north in the wake of their noisier cousins.
For a week I heard the circling, groping clangor of some
solitary goose in the foggy mornings, seeking its companion, and
still peopling the woods with the sound of a larger life than they
could sustain. In April the pigeons were seen again flying express
in small flocks, and in due time I heard the martins twittering over
my clearing, though it had not seemed that the township contained so
many that it could afford me any, and I fancied that they were
peculiarly of the ancient race that dwelt in hollow trees ere white
men came. In almost all climes the tortoise and the frog are among
the precursors and heralds of this season, and birds fly with song
and glancing plumage, and plants spring and bloom, and winds blow,
to correct this slight oscillation of the poles and preserve the
equilibrium of nature.
As every season seems best to us in its turn, so the coming in
of spring is like the creation of Cosmos out of Chaos and the
realization of the Golden Age.--

"Eurus ad Auroram Nabathaeaque regna recessit,
Persidaque, et radiis juga subdita matutinis."

"The East-Wind withdrew to Aurora and the Nabathean kingdom,
And the Persian, and the ridges placed under the morning rays.

. . . . . .

Man was born. Whether that Artificer of things,
The origin of a better world, made him from the divine seed;
Or the earth, being recent and lately sundered from the high
Ether, retained some seeds of cognate heaven."

A single gentle rain makes the grass many shades greener. So
our prospects brighten on the influx of better thoughts. We should
be blessed if we lived in the present always, and took advantage of
every accident that befell us, like the grass which confesses the
influence of the slightest dew that falls on it; and did not spend
our time in atoning for the neglect of past opportunities, which we
call doing our duty. We loiter in winter while it is already
spring. In a pleasant spring morning all men's sins are forgiven.
Such a day is a truce to vice. While such a sun holds out to burn,
the vilest sinner may return. Through our own recovered innocence
we discern the innocence of our neighbors. You may have known your
neighbor yesterday for a thief, a drunkard, or a sensualist, and
merely pitied or despised him, and despained of the world; but the
sun shines bright and warm this first spring morning, recreating the
world, and you meet him at some serene work, and see how it is
exhausted and debauched veins expand with still joy and bless the new day, feel the spring influence with the innocence of infancy, and all his faults are forgotten. There is not only an atmosphere of good will about him, but even a savor of holiness groping for expression, blindly and ineffectually perhaps, like a new-born instinct, and for a short hour the south hill-side echoes to no vulgar jest. You see some innocent fair shoots preparing to burst from his gnarled rind and try another year's life, tender and fresh as the youngest plant. Even he has entered into the joy of his Lord. Why the jailer does not leave open his prison doors -- why the judge does not dismiss his case -- why the preacher does not dismiss his congregation! It is because they do not obey the hint which God gives them, nor accept the pardon which he freely offers to all.

"A return to goodness produced each day in the tranquil and beneficent breath of the morning, causes that in respect to the love of virtue and the hatred of vice, one approaches a little the primitive nature of man, as the sprouts of the forest which has been felled. In like manner the evil which one does in the interval of a day prevents the germs of virtues which began to spring up again from developing themselves and destroys them.

"After the germs of virtue have thus been prevented many times from developing themselves, then the beneficent breath of evening does not suffice to preserve them. As soon as the breath of evening does not suffice longer to preserve them, then the nature of man does not differ much from that of the brute. Men seeing the nature of this man like that of the brute, think that he has never possessed the innate faculty of reason. Are those the true and
natural sentiments of man?"

"The Golden Age was first created, which without any avenger
Spontaneously without law cherished fidelity and rectitude.
Punishment and fear were not; nor were threatening words read
On suspended brass; nor did the suppliant crowd fear
The words of their judge; but were safe without an avenger.
Not yet the pine felled on its mountains had descended
To the liquid waves that it might see a foreign world,
And mortals knew no shores but their own.

. . . . .

There was eternal spring, and placid zephyrs with warm
Blasts soothed the flowers born without seed."

On the 29th of April, as I was fishing from the bank of the
river near the Nine-Acre-Corner bridge, standing on the quaking
grass and willow roots, where the muskrats lurk, I heard a singular
rattling sound, somewhat like that of the sticks which boys play
with their fingers, when, looking up, I observed a very slight and
graceful hawk, like a nighthawk, alternately soaring like a ripple
and tumbling a rod or two over and over, showing the under side of
its wings, which gleamed like a satin ribbon in the sun, or like the
pearly inside of a shell. This sight reminded me of falconry and
what nobleness and poetry are associated with that sport. The
Merlin it seemed to me it might be called: but I care not for its
name. It was the most ethereal flight I had ever witnessed. It did
not simply flutter like a butterfly, nor soar like the larger hawks,
but it sported with proud reliance in the fields of air; mounting
again and again with its strange chuckle, it repeated its free and
beautiful fall, turning over and over like a kite, and then
recovering from its lofty tumbling, as if it had never set its foot
on terra firma. It appeared to have no companion in the universe --
sporting there alone -- and to need none but the morning and the
ether with which it played. It was not lonely, but made all the
earth lonely beneath it. Where was the parent which hatched it, its
kindred, and its father in the heavens? The tenant of the air, it
seemed related to the earth but by an egg hatched some time in the
crevise of a crag; -- or was its native nest made in the angle of a
cloud, woven of the rainbow's trimmings and the sunset sky, and
lined with some soft midsummer haze caught up from earth? Its eyry
now some clifty cloud.
Beside this I got a rare mess of golden and silver and bright
cupreous fishes, which looked like a string of jewels. Ah! I have
penetrated to those meadows on the morning of many a first spring
day, jumping from hummock to hummock, from willow root to willow
root, when the wild river valley and the woods were bathed in so
pure and bright a light as would have waked the dead, if they had
been slumbering in their graves, as some suppose. There needs no
stronger proof of immortality. All things must live in such a
light. O Death, where was thy sting? O Grave, where was thy
victory, then?
Our village life would stagnate if it were not for the
unexplored forests and meadows which surround it. We need the tonic
of wildness -- to wade sometimes in marshes where the bittern and
the meadow-hen lurk, and hear the booming of the snipe; to smell the
whispering sedge where only some wilder and more solitary fowl
builds her nest, and the mink crawls with its belly close to the
ground. At the same time that we are earnest to explore and learn
all things, we require that all things be mysterious and
unexplorable, that land and sea be infinitely wild, unsurveyed and
unfathomed by us because unfathomable. We can never have enough of
nature. We must be refreshed by the sight of inexhaustible vigor,
vast and titanic features, the sea-coast with its wrecks, the
wilderness with its living and its decaying trees, the
thunder-cloud, and the rain which lasts three weeks and produces
freshets. We need to witness our own limits transgressed, and some
life pasturing freely where we never wander. We are cheered when we
observe the vulture feeding on the carrion which disgusts and
dishheartens us, and deriving health and strength from the repast.

There was a dead horse in the hollow by the path to my house, which
compelled me sometimes to go out of my way, especially in the night
when the air was heavy, but the assurance it gave me of the strong
appetite and inviolable health of Nature was my compensation for
this. I love to see that Nature is so rife with life that myriads
can be afforded to be sacrificed and suffered to prey on one
another; that tender organizations can be so serenely squashed out
of existence like pulp -- tadpoles which herons gobble up, and
tortoises and toads run over in the road; and that sometimes it has
rained flesh and blood! With the liability to accident, we must see
how little account is to be made of it. The impression made on a
wise man is that of universal innocence. Poison is not poisonous
after all, nor are any wounds fatal. Compassion is a very untenable
ground. It must be expeditious. Its pleadings will not bear to be
stereotyped.

Early in May, the oaks, hickories, maples, and other trees, just putting out amidst the pine woods around the pond, imparted a brightness like sunshine to the landscape, especially in cloudy days, as if the sun were breaking through mists and shining faintly on the hillsides here and there. On the third or fourth of May I saw a loon in the pond, and during the first week of the month I heard the whip-poor-will, the brown thrasher, the veery, the wood pewee, the chewink, and other birds. I had heard the wood thrush long before. The phoebe had already come once more and looked in at my door and window, to see if my house was cavern-like enough for her, sustaining herself on humming wings with clinched talons, as if she held by the air, while she surveyed the premises. The sulphur-like pollen of the pitch pine soon covered the pond and the stones and rotten wood along the shore, so that you could have collected a barrelful. This is the "sulphur showers" we bear of.

Even in Calidas' drama of Sacontala, we read of "rills dyed yellow with the golden dust of the lotus." And so the seasons went rolling on into summer, as one rambles into higher and higher grass. Thus was my first year's life in the woods completed; and the second year was similar to it. I finally left Walden September 6th, 1847.

Conclusion

To the sick the doctors wisely recommend a change of air and scenery. Thank Heaven, here is not all the world. The buckeye does
not grow in New England, and the mockingbird is rarely heard here. The wild goose is more of a cosmopolite than we; he breaks his fast in Canada, takes a luncheon in the Ohio, and plumes himself for the night in a southern bayou. Even the bison, to some extent, keeps pace with the seasons cropping the pastures of the Colorado only till a greener and sweeter grass awaits him by the Yellowstone. Yet we think that if rail fences are pulled down, and stone walls piled up on our farms, bounds are henceforth set to our lives and our fates decided. If you are chosen town clerk, forsooth, you cannot go to Tierra del Fuego this summer: but you may go to the land of infernal fire nevertheless. The universe is wider than our views of it.

Yet we should oftener look over the tafferel of our craft, like curious passengers, and not make the voyage like stupid sailors picking oakum. The other side of the globe is but the home of our correspondent. Our voyaging is only great-circle sailing, and the doctors prescribe for diseases of the skin merely. One hastens to southern Africa to chase the giraffe; but surely that is not the game he would be after. How long, pray, would a man hunt giraffes if he could? Snipes and woodcocks also may afford rare sport; but I trust it would be nobler game to shoot one's self.--

"Direct your eye right inward, and you'll find A thousand regions in your mind Yet undiscovered. Travel them, and be Expert in home-cosmography."
What does Africa -- what does the West stand for? Is not our own interior white on the chart? black though it may prove, like the coast, when discovered. Is it the source of the Nile, or the Niger, or the Mississippi, or a Northwest Passage around this continent, that we would find? Are these the problems which most concern mankind? Is Franklin the only man who is lost, that his wife should be so earnest to find him? Does Mr. Grinnell know where he himself is? Be rather the Mungo Park, the Lewis and Clark and Frobisher, of your own streams and oceans; explore your own higher latitudes -- with shiploads of preserved meats to support you, if they be necessary; and pile the empty cans sky-high for a sign. Were preserved meats invented to preserve meat merely? Nay, be a Columbus to whole new continents and worlds within you, opening new channels, not of trade, but of thought. Every man is the lord of a realm beside which the earthly empire of the Czar is but a petty state, a hummock left by the ice. Yet some can be patriotic who have no self-respect, and sacrifice the greater to the less. They love the soil which makes their graves, but have no sympathy with the spirit which may still animate their clay. Patriotism is a maggot in their heads. What was the meaning of that South-Sea Exploring Expedition, with all its parade and expense, but an indirect recognition of the fact that there are continents and seas in the moral world to which every man is an isthmus or an inlet, yet unexplored by him, but that it is easier to sail many thousand miles through cold and storm and cannibals, in a government ship, with five hundred men and boys to assist one, than it is to explore the private sea, the Atlantic and Pacific Ocean of one's being alone.
"Erret, et extremos alter scrutetur Iberos.
Plus habet hic vitae, plus habet ille viae."

Let them wander and scrutinize the outlandish Australians.
I have more of God, they more of the road.

It is not worth the while to go round the world to count the cats in Zanzibar. Yet do this even till you can do better, and you may perhaps find some "Symmes' Hole" by which to get at the inside at last. England and France, Spain and Portugal, Gold Coast and Slave Coast, all front on this private sea; but no bark from them has ventured out of sight of land, though it is without doubt the direct way to India. If you would learn to speak all tongues and conform to the customs of all nations, if you would travel farther than all travellers, be naturalized in all climes, and cause the Sphinx to dash her head against a stone, even obey the precept of the old philosopher, and Explore thyself. Herein are demanded the eye and the nerve. Only the defeated and deserters go to the wars, cowards that run away and enlist. Start now on that farthest western way, which does not pause at the Mississippi or the Pacific, nor conduct toward a wornout China or Japan, but leads on direct, a tangent to this sphere, summer and winter, day and night, sun down, moon down, and at last earth down too.

It is said that Mirabeau took to highway robbery "to ascertain what degree of resolution was necessary in order to place one's self
in formal opposition to the most sacred laws of society." He declared that "a soldier who fights in the ranks does not require half so much courage as a footpad" -- "that honor and religion have never stood in the way of a well-considered and a firm resolve."

This was manly, as the world goes; and yet it was idle, if not desperate. A saner man would have found himself often enough "in formal opposition" to what are deemed "the most sacred laws of society," through obedience to yet more sacred laws, and so have tested his resolution without going out of his way. It is not for a man to put himself in such an attitude to society, but to maintain himself in whatever attitude he find himself through obedience to the laws of his being, which will never be one of opposition to a just government, if he should chance to meet with such.

I left the woods for as good a reason as I went there. Perhaps it seemed to me that I had several more lives to live, and could not spare any more time for that one. It is remarkable how easily and insensibly we fall into a particular route, and make a beaten track for ourselves. I had not lived there a week before my feet wore a path from my door to the pond-side; and though it is five or six years since I trod it, it is still quite distinct. It is true, I fear, that others may have fallen into it, and so helped to keep it open. The surface of the earth is soft and impressible by the feet of men; and so with the paths which the mind travels. How worn and dusty, then, must be the highways of the world, how deep the ruts of tradition and conformity! I did not wish to take a cabin passage, but rather to go before the mast and on the deck of the world, for there I could best see the moonlight amid the mountains. I do not wish to go below now.
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.

It is a ridiculous demand which England and America make, that you shall speak so that they can understand you. Neither men nor toadstools grow so. As if that were important, and there were not enough to understand you without them. As if Nature could support but one order of understandings, could not sustain birds as well as quadrupeds, flying as well as creeping things, and hush and whoa, which Bright can understand, were the best English. As if there were safety in stupidity alone. I fear chiefly lest my expression may not be extravagant enough, may not wander far enough beyond the narrow limits of my daily experience, so as to be adequate to the truth of which I have been convinced. Extra vagance! it depends on how you are yarded. The migrating buffalo, which seeks new pastures in another latitude, is not extravagant like the cow which kicks over the pail, leaps the cowyard fence, and runs after her calf, in milking time. I desire to speak somewhere without bounds; like a
man in a waking moment, to men in their waking moments; for I am convinced that I cannot exaggerate enough even to lay the foundation of a true expression. Who that has heard a strain of music feared then lest he should speak extravagantly any more forever? In view of the future or possible, we should live quite laxly and undefined in front, our outlines dim and misty on that side; as our shadows reveal an insensible perspiration toward the sun. The volatile truth of our words should continually betray the inadequacy of the residual statement. Their truth is instantly translated; its literal monument alone remains. The words which express our faith and piety are not definite; yet they are significant and fragrant like frankincense to superior natures.

Why level downward to our dullest perception always, and praise that as common sense? The commonest sense is the sense of men asleep, which they express by snoring. Sometimes we are inclined to class those who are once-and-a-half-witted with the half-witted, because we appreciate only a third part of their wit. Some would find fault with the morning red, if they ever got up early enough. "They pretend," as I hear, "that the verses of Kabir have four different senses; illusion, spirit, intellect, and the exoteric doctrine of the Vedas"; but in this part of the world it is considered a ground for complaint if a man's writings admit of more than one interpretation. While England endeavors to cure the potato-rot, will not any endeavor to cure the brain-rot, which prevails so much more widely and fatally?

I do not suppose that I have attained to obscurity, but I should be proud if no more fatal fault were found with my pages on this score than was found with the Walden ice. Southern customers
objected to its blue color, which is the evidence of its purity, as
if it were muddy, and preferred the Cambridge ice, which is white,
but tastes of weeds. The purity men love is like the mists which
envelop the earth, and not like the azure ether beyond.
Some are dinning in our ears that we Americans, and moderns
generally, are intellectual dwarfs compared with the ancients, or
even the Elizabethan men. But what is that to the purpose? A
living dog is better than a dead lion. Shall a man go and hang
himself because he belongs to the race of pygmies, and not be the
biggest pygmy that he can? Let every one mind his own business, and
endeavor to be what he was made.

Why should we be in such desperate haste to succeed and in such
desperate enterprises? If a man does not keep pace with his
companions, perhaps it is because he hears a different drummer. Let
him step to the music which he hears, however measured or far away.
It is not important that he should mature as soon as an apple tree
or an oak. Shall he turn his spring into summer? If the condition
of things which we were made for is not yet, what were any reality
which we can substitute? We will not be shipwrecked on a vain
reality. Shall we with pains erect a heaven of blue glass over
ourselves, though when it is done we shall be sure to gaze still at
the true ethereal heaven far above, as if the former were not?
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 stock 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?
No face which we can give to a matter will stead us so well at last as the truth. This alone wears well. For the most part, we are not where we are, but in a false position. Through an infinity of our natures, we suppose a case, and put ourselves into it, and hence are in two cases at the same time, and it is doubly difficult to get out. In sane moments we regard only the facts, the case that is. Say what you have to say, not what you ought. Any truth is better than make-believe. Tom Hyde, the tinker, standing on the gallows, was asked if he had anything to say. "Tell the tailors," said he, "to remember to make a knot in their thread before they take the first stitch." His companion's prayer is forgotten.

However mean your life is, meet it and live it; do not shun it and call it hard names. It is not so bad as you are. It looks poorest when you are richest. The fault-finder will find faults even in paradise. Love your life, poor as it is. You may perhaps have some pleasant, thrilling, glorious hours, even in a poorhouse. The setting sun is reflected from the windows of the almshouse as brightly as from the rich man's abode; the snow melts before its door as early in the spring. I do not see but a quiet mind may live as contentedly there, and have as cheering thoughts, as in a palace. The town's poor seem to me often to live the most independent lives of any. Maybe they are simply great enough to receive without misgiving. Most think that they are above being supported by the town; but it oftener happens that they are not above supporting themselves by dishonest means, which should be more disreputable.

Cultivate poverty like a garden herb, like sage. Do not trouble yourself much to get new things, whether clothes or friends. Turn the old; return to them. Things do not change; we change. Sell
your clothes and keep your thoughts. God will see that you do not
want society. If I were confined to a corner of a garret all my
days, like a spider, the world would be just as large to me while I
had my thoughts about me. The philosopher said: "From an army of
three divisions one can take away its general, and put it in
disorder; from the man the most abject and vulgar one cannot take
away his thought." Do not seek so anxiously to be developed, to
subject yourself to many influences to be played on; it is all
dissipation. Humility like darkness reveals the heavenly lights.
The shadows of poverty and meanness gather around us, "and lo!
creation widens to our view." We are often reminded that if there
were bestowed on us the wealth of Croesus, our aims must still be
the same, and our means essentially the same. Moreover, if you are
restricted in your range by poverty, if you cannot buy books and
newspapers, for instance, you are but confined to the most
significant and vital experiences; you are compelled to deal with
the material which yields the most sugar and the most starch. It is
life near the bone where it is sweetest. You are defended from
being a trifler. No man loses ever on a lower level by magnanimity
on a higher. Superfluous wealth can buy superfluities only. Money
is not required to buy one necessary of the soul.
I live in the angle of a leaden wall, into whose composition was
poured a little alloy of bell-metal. Often, in the repose of my
mid-day, there reaches my ears a confused tintinnabulum from
without. It is the noise of my contemporaries. My neighbors tell
me of their adventures with famous gentlemen and ladies, what
notabilities they met at the dinner-table; but I am no more
interested in such things than in the contents of the Daily Times.
The interest and the conversation are about costume and manners chiefly; but a goose is a goose still, dress it as you will. They tell me of California and Texas, of England and the Indies, of the Hon. Mr. --- of Georgia or of Massachusetts, all transient and fleeting phenomena, till I am ready to leap from their court-yard like the Mameluke bey. I delight to come to my bearings -- not walk in procession with pomp and parade, in a conspicuous place, but to walk even with the Builder of the universe, if I may -- not to live in this restless, nervous, bustling, trivial Nineteenth Century, but stand or sit thoughtfully while it goes by. What are men celebrating? They are all on a committee of arrangements, and hourly expect a speech from somebody. God is only the president of the day, and Webster is his orator. I love to weigh, to settle, to gravitate toward that which most strongly and rightfully attracts me -- not hang by the beam of the scale and try to weigh less -- not suppose a case, but take the case that is; to travel the only path I can, and that on which no power can resist me. It affords me no satisfaction to commerce to spring an arch before I have got a solid foundation. Let us not play at kitty-benders. There is a solid bottom everywhere. We read that the traveller asked the boy if the swamp before him had a hard bottom. The boy replied that it had. But presently the traveller's horse sank in up to the girths, and he observed to the boy, "I thought you said that this bog had a hard bottom." "So it has," answered the latter, "but you have not got half way to it yet." So it is with the bogs and quicksands of society; but he is an old boy that knows it. Only what is thought, said, or done at a certain rare coincidence is good. I would not be one of those who will foolishly drive a nail into mere lath and
plastering; such a deed would keep me awake nights. Give me a hammer, and let me feel for the furring. Do not depend on the putty. Drive a nail home and clinch it so faithfully that you can wake up in the night and think of your work with satisfaction -- a work at which you would not be ashamed to invoke the Muse. So will help you God, and so only. Every nail driven should be as another rivet in the machine of the universe, you carrying on the work. Rather than love, than money, than fame, give me truth. I sat at a table where were rich food and wine in abundance, and obsequious attendance, but sincerity and truth were not; and I went away hungry from the inhospitable board. The hospitality was as cold as the ices. I thought that there was no need of ice to freeze them. They talked to me of the age of the wine and the fame of the vintage; but I thought of an older, a newer, and purer wine, of a more glorious vintage, which they had not got, and could not buy. The style, the house and grounds and "entertainment" pass for nothing with me. I called on the king, but he made me wait in his hall, and conducted like a man incapacitated for hospitality. There was a man in my neighborhood who lived in a hollow tree. His manners were truly regal. I should have done better had I called on him. How long shall we sit in our porticoes practising idle and musty virtues, which any work would make impertinent? As if one were to begin the day with long-suffering, and hire a man to hoe his potatoes; and in the afternoon go forth to practise Christian meekness and charity with goodness aforethought! Consider the China pride and stagnant self-complacency of mankind. This generation inclines a little to congratulate itself on being the last of an
illustrious line; and in Boston and London and Paris and Rome,
thinking of its long descent, it speaks of its progress in art and
science and literature with satisfaction. There are the Records of
the Philosophical Societies, and the public Eulogies of Great Men!
It is the good Adam contemplating his own virtue. “Yes, we have
done great deeds, and sung divine songs, which shall never die” --
that is, as long as we can remember them. The learned societies and
great men of Assyria -- where are they? What youthful philosophers
and experimentalists we are! There is not one of my readers who has
yet lived a whole human life. These may be but the spring months in
the life of the race. If we have had the seven-years’ itch, we have
not seen the seventeen-year locust yet in Concord. We are
acquainted with a mere pellicle of the globe on which we live. Most
have not delved six feet beneath the surface, nor leaped as many
above it. We know not where we are. Beside, we are sound asleep
nearly half our time. Yet we esteem ourselves wise, and have an
established order on the surface. Truly, we are deep thinkers, we
are ambitious spirits! As I stand over the insect crawling amid the
pine needles on the forest floor, and endeavoring to conceal itself
from my sight, and ask myself why it will cherish those humble
thoughts, and bide its head from me who might, perhaps, be its
benefactor, and impart to its race some cheering information, I am
reminded of the greater Benefactor and Intelligence that stands over
me the human insect.

There is an incessant influx of novelty into the world, and yet
we tolerate incredible dulness. I need only suggest what kind of
sermons are still listened to in the most enlightened countries.
There are such words as joy and sorrow, but they are only the burden
of a psalm, sung with a nasal twang, while we believe in the ordinary and mean. We think that we can change our clothes only. It is said that the British Empire is very large and respectable, and that the United States are a first-rate power. We do not believe that a tide rises and falls behind every man which can float the British Empire like a chip, if he should ever harbor it in his mind. Who knows what sort of seventeen-year locust will next come out of the ground? The government of the world I live in was not framed, like that of Britain, in after-dinner conversations over the wine.

The life in us is like the water in the river. It may rise this year higher than man has ever known it, and flood the parched uplands; even this may be the eventful year, which will drown out all our muskrats. It was not always dry land where we dwell. I see far inland the banks which the stream anciently washed, before science began to record its freshets. Every one has heard the story which has gone the rounds of New England, of a strong and beautiful bug which came out of the dry leaf of an old table of apple-tree wood, which had stood in a farmer's kitchen for sixty years, first in Connecticut, and afterward in Massachusetts -- from an egg deposited in the living tree many years earlier still, as appeared by counting the annual layers beyond it; which was heard gnawing out for several weeks, hatched perchance by the heat of an urn. Who does not feel his faith in a resurrection and immortality strengthened by hearing of this? Who knows what beautiful and winged life, whose egg has been buried for ages under many concentric layers of woodenness in the dead dry life of society, deposited at first in the alburnum of the green and living tree,
which has been gradually converted into the semblance of its
time-aged tomb -- heard perchance gnawing out now for years by
the astonished family of man, as they sat round the festive board --
may unexpectedly come forth from amidst society's most trivial and
handselled furniture, to enjoy its perfect summer life at last!
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.

ON THE DUTY OF CIVIL DISOBEEDIENCE

I heartily accept the motto, -- "That government is best which
governs least"; and I should like to see it acted up to more rapidly
and systematically. Carried out, it finally amounts to this, which
also I believe, -- "That government is best which governs not at
all"; and when men are prepared for it, that will be the kind of
government which they will have. Government is at best but an
expedient; but most governments are usually, and all governments are
sometimes, inexpedient. The objections which have been brought
against a standing army, and they are many and weighty, and deserve
to prevail, may also at last be brought against a standing
government. The standing army is only an arm of the standing
government. The government itself, which is only the mode which the
people have chosen to execute their will, is equally liable to be
abused and perverted before the people can act through it. Witness
the present Mexican war, the work of comparatively a few individuals
using the standing government as their tool; for, in the outset, the
people would not have consented to this measure.

This American government -- what is it but a tradition, though a
recent one, endeavoring to transmit itself unimpaired to posterity,
but each instant losing some of its integrity? It has not the
vitality and force of a single living man; for a single man can bend
it to his will. It is a sort of wooden gun to the people
themselves. But it is not the less necessary for this; for the
people must have some complicated machinery or other, and hear its
din, to satisfy that idea of government which they have.

Governments show thus how successfully men can be imposed on, even
impose on themselves, for their own advantage. It is excellent, we
must all allow. Yet this government never of itself furthered any
enterprise, but by the alacrity with which it got out of its way.

It does not keep the country free. It does not settle the West. It
does not educate. The character inherent in the American people has
done all that has been accomplished; and it would have done somewhat
more, if the government had not sometimes got in its way. For
government is an expedient by which men would fain succeed in
letting one another alone; and, as has been said, when it is most
expedient, the governed are most let alone by it. Trade and
commerce, if they were not made of India rubber, would never manage
to bounce over the obstacles which legislators are continually
putting in their way; and, if one were to judge these men wholly by
the effects of their actions, and not partly by their intentions,
they would deserve to be classed and punished with those mischievous
persons who put obstructions on the railroads.
But, to speak practically and as a citizen, unlike those who
call themselves no-government men, I ask for, not at once no
government, but at once a better government. Let every man make
known what kind of government would command his respect, and that
will be one step toward obtaining it.

After all, the practical reason why, when the power is once in
the hands of the people, a majority are permitted, and for a long
period continue, to rule, is not because they are most likely to be
in the right, nor because this seems fairest to the minority, but
because they are physically the strongest. But a government in
which the majority rule in all cases cannot be based on justice,
even as far as men understand it. Can there not be a government in
which majorities do not virtually decide right and wrong, but
conscience? -- in which majorities decide only those questions to
which the rule of expediency is applicable? 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. The only
obligation which I have a right to assume is to do at any time what
I think right. It is truly enough said that a corporation has no
conscience; but a corporation of conscientious men is a corporation
with a conscience. Law never made men a whit more just; and, by
means of their respect for it, even the well-disposed are daily made
the agents of injustice. A common and natural result of an undue
respect for law is, that you may see a file of soldiers, colonel,
captain, corporal, privates, powder-monkeys, and all, marching in
admirable order over hill and dale to the wars, against their wills,
ay, against their common sense and consciences, which makes it very steep marching indeed, and produces a palpitation of the heart.

They have no doubt that it is a damnable business in which they are concerned; they are all peaceably inclined. Now, what are they?

Men at all? or small movable forts and magazines, at the service of some unscrupulous man in power? Visit the Navy Yard, and behold a marine, such a man as an American government can make, or such as it can make a man with its black arts -- a mere shadow and reminiscence of humanity, a man laid out alive and standing, and already, as one may say, buried under arms with funeral accompaniments, though it may be

"Not a drum was heard, not a funeral note,
As his corse to the rampart we hurried;
Not a soldier discharged his farewell shot
O'er the grave where our hero we buried."

The mass of men serve the state thus, not as men mainly, but as machines, with their bodies. They are the standing army, and the militia, jailers, constables, posse comitatus, etc. In most cases there is no free exercise whatever of the judgment or of the moral sense; but they put themselves on a level with wood and earth and stones; and wooden men can perhaps be manufactured that will serve the purpose as well. Such command no more respect than men of straw or a lump of dirt. They have the same sort of worth only as horses and dogs. Yet such as these even are commonly esteemed good citizens. Others, as most legislators, politicians, lawyers, ministers, and office-holders, serve the state chiefly with their
heads; and, as they rarely make any moral distinctions, they are as likely to serve the devil, without intending it, as God. A very few, as heroes, patriots, martyrs, reformers in the great sense, and men, serve the state with their consciences also, and so necessarily resist it for the most part; and they are commonly treated as enemies by it. A wise man will only be useful as a man, and will not submit to be "clay," and "stop a hole to keep the wind away," but leave that office to his dust at least:--

"I am too high-born to be propertied,
To be a secondary at control,
Or useful serving-man and instrument
To any sovereign state throughout the world."

He who gives himself entirely to his fellow-men appears to them useless and selfish; but he who gives himself partially to them is pronounced a benefactor and philanthropist.

How does it become a man to behave toward this American government to-day? I answer, that he cannot without disgrace be associated with it. I cannot for an instant recognize that political organization as my government which is the slave's government also.

All men recognize the right of revolution; that is, the right to refuse allegiance to, and to resist, the government, when its tyranny or its inefficiency are great and unendurable. But almost all say that such is not the case now. But such was the case, they think, in the Revolution of '75. If one were to tell me that this
was a bad government because it taxed certain foreign commodities brought to its ports, it is most probable that I should not make an ado about it, for I can do without them. All machines have their friction; and possibly this does enough good to counterbalance the evil. At any rate, it is a great evil to make a stir about it. But when the friction comes to have its machine, and oppression and robbery are organized, I say, let us not have such a machine any longer. In other words, when a sixth of the population of a nation which has undertaken to be the refuge of liberty are slaves, and a whole country is unjustly overrun and conquered by a foreign army, and subjected to military law, I think that it is not too soon for honest men to rebel and revolutionize. What makes this duty the more urgent is the fact that the country so overrun is not our own, but ours is the invading army.

Paley, a common authority with many on moral questions, in his chapter on the "Duty of Submission to Civil Government," resolves all civil obligation into expediency; and he proceeds to say that "so long as the interest of the whole society requires it, that is, so long as the established government cannot be resisted or changed without public inconveniency, it is the will of God... that the established government be obeyed, and no longer.... This principle being admitted, the justice of every particular case of resistance is reduced to a computation of the quantity of the danger and grievance on the one side, and of the probability and expense of redressing it on the other." Of this, he says, every man shall judge for himself. But Paley appears never to have contemplated those cases to which the rule of expediency does not apply, in which a people, as well as an individual, must do justice, cost what it
may. If I have unjustly wrested a plank from a drowning man, I must
restore it to him though I drown myself. This, according to Paley,
would be inconvenient. But he that would save his life, in such a
case, shall lose it. This people must cease to hold slaves, and to
make war on Mexico, though it cost them their existence as a people.
In their practice, nations agree with Paley; but does any one
think that Massachusetts does exactly what is right at the present
crisis?

"A drab of state, a cloth-o'-silver slut,
To have her train borne up, and her soul trail in the dirt."

Practically speaking, the opponents to a reform in Massachusetts are
not a hundred thousand politicians at the South, but a hundred
thousand merchants and farmers here, who are more interested in
commerce and agriculture than they are in humanity, and are not
prepared to do justice to the slave and to Mexico, cost what it may.
I quarrel not with far-off foes, but with those who, near at home,
co-operate with, and do the bidding of those far away, and without
whom the latter would be harmless. We are accustomed to say, that
the mass of men are unprepared; but improvement is slow, because the
few are not materially wiser or better than the many. It is not so
important that many should be as good as you, as that there be some
absolute goodness somewhere; for that will leaven the whole lump.
There are thousands who are in opinion opposed to slavery and to the
war, who yet in effect do nothing to put an end to them; who,
esteeming themselves children of Washington and Franklin, sit down
with their hands in their pockets, and say that they know not what to do, and do nothing; who even postpone the question of freedom to the question of free-trade, and quietly read the prices-current along with the latest advices from Mexico, after dinner, and, it may be, fall asleep over them both. What is the price-current of an honest man and patriot to-day? They hesitate, and they regret, and sometimes they petition; but they do nothing in earnest and with effect. They will wait, well disposed, for others to remedy the evil, that they may no longer have it to regret. At most, they give only a cheap vote, and a feeble countenance and Godspeed, to the right, as it goes by them. There are nine hundred and ninety-nine patrons of virtue to one virtuous man; but it is easier to deal with the real possessor of a thing than with the temporary guardian of it.

All voting is a sort of gaming, like checkers or backgammon, with a slight moral tinge to it, a playing with right and wrong, with moral questions; and betting naturally accompanies it. The character of the voters is not staked. I cast my vote, perchance, as I think right; but I am not vitally concerned that that right should prevail. I am willing to leave it to the majority. Its obligation, therefore, never exceeds that of expediency. Even voting for the right is doing nothing for it. It is only expressing to men feebly your desire that it should prevail. A wise man will not leave the right to the mercy of chance, nor wish it to prevail through the power of the majority. There is but little virtue in the action of masses of men. When the majority shall at length vote for the abolition of slavery, it will be because they are indifferent to slavery, or because there is but little slavery left
to be abolished by their vote. They will then be the only slaves.

Only his vote can hasten the abolition of slavery who asserts his
own freedom by his vote.

I hear of a convention to be held at Baltimore, or elsewhere,
for the selection of a candidate for the Presidency, made up chiefly
of editors, and men who are politicians by profession; but I think,
what is it to any independent, intelligent, and respectable man what
decision they may come to? Shall we not have the advantage of his
wisdom and honesty, nevertheless? Can we not count upon some
independent votes? Are there not many individuals in the country
who do not attend conventions? But no: I find that the respectable
man, so called, has immediately drifted from his position, and
despairs of his country, when his country has more reason to despair
of him. He forthwith adopts one of the candidates thus selected as
the only available one, thus proving that he is himself available
for any purposes of the demagogue. His vote is of no more worth
than that of any unprincipled foreigner or hireling native, who may
have been bought. Oh for a man who is a man, and, as my neighbor
says, has a bone in his back which you cannot pass your hand
through! Our statistics are at fault: the population has been
returned too large. How many men are there to a square thousand
miles in this country? Hardly one. Does not America offer any
inducement for men to settle here? The American has dwindled into
an Odd Fellow -- one who may be known by the development of his
organ of gregariousness, and a manifest lack of intellect and
cheerful self-reliance; whose first and chief concern, on coming
into the world, is to see that the almshouses are in good repair;
and, before yet he has lawfully donned the virile garb, to collect a
fund for the support of the widows and orphans that may be; who, in short ventures to live only by the aid of the Mutual Insurance company, which has promised to bury him decently.

It is not a man's duty, as a matter of course, to devote himself to the eradication of any, even the most enormous wrong; he may still properly have other concerns to engage him; but it is his duty, at least, to wash his hands of it, and, if he gives it no thought longer, not to give it practically his support. If I devote myself to other pursuits and contemplations, I must first see, at least, that I do not pursue them sitting upon another man's shoulders. I must get off him first, that he may pursue his contemplations too. See what gross inconsistency is tolerated. I have heard some of my townsmen say, "I should like to have them order me out to help put down an insurrection of the slaves, or to march to Mexico; -- see if I would go"; and yet these very men have each, directly by their allegiance, and so indirectly, at least, by their money, furnished a substitute. The soldier is applauded who refuses to serve in an unjust war by those who do not refuse to sustain the unjust government which makes the war; is applauded by those whose own act and authority he disregards and sets at naught; as if the state were penitent to that degree that it hired one to scourge it while it sinned, but not to that degree that it left off sinning for a moment. Thus, under the name of Order and Civil Government, we are all made at last to pay homage to and support our own meanness. After the first blush of sin comes its indifference; and from immoral it becomes, as it were, unmoral, and not quite unnecessary to that life which we have made.

The broadest and most prevalent error requires the most
disinterested virtue to sustain it. The slight reproach to which
the virtue of patriotism is commonly liable, the noble are most
likely to incur. 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. Some are
petitioning the State to dissolve the Union, to disregard the
requisitions of the President. Why do they not dissolve it
themselves -- the union between themselves and the State -- and
refuse to pay their quota into its treasury? Do not they stand in
the same relation to the State, that the State does to the Union?
And have not the same reasons prevented the State from resisting the
Union, which have prevented them from resisting the State?
How can a man be satisfied to entertain an opinion merely, and
enjoy it? Is there any enjoyment in it, if his opinion is that he
is aggrieved? If you are cheated out of a single dollar by your
neighbor, you do not rest satisfied with knowing that you are
cheated, or with saying that you are cheated, or even with
petitioning him to pay you your due; but you take effectual steps at
once to obtain the full amount, and see that you are never cheated
again. Action from principle -- the perception and the performance
of right -- changes things and relations; it is essentially
revolutionary, and does not consist wholly with anything which was.
It not only divides states and churches, it divides families; ay, it
divides the individual, separating the diabolical in him from the
divine.
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? Men generally, under such a
government as this, think that they ought to wait until they have
persuaded the majority to alter them. They think that, if they
should resist, the remedy would be worse than the evil. But it is
the fault of the government itself that the remedy is worse than the
evil. It makes it worse. Why is it not more apt to anticipate and
provide for reform? Why does it not cherish its wise minority? Why
does it cry and resist before it is hurt? Why does it not encourage
its citizens to be on the alert to point out its faults, and do
better than it would have them? Why does it always crucify Christ,
and excommunicate Copernicus and Luther, and pronounce Washington
and Franklin rebels?
One would think, that a deliberate and practical denial of its
authority was the only offence never contemplated by government;
else, why has it not assigned its definite, its suitable and
proportionate, penalty? If a man who has no property refuses but
once to earn nine shillings for the State, he is put in prison for a
period unlimited by any law that I know, and determined only by the
discretion of those who placed him there; but if he should steal
ninety times nine shillings from the State, he is soon permitted to
go at large again.
If the injustice is part of the necessary friction of the
machine of government, let it go, let it go; perchance it will wear
smooth -- certainly the machine will wear out. If the injustice has
a spring, or a pulley, or a rope, or a crank, exclusively for
itself, then perhaps you may consider whether the remedy will not be
worse than the evil; but if it is of such a nature that it requires
you to be the agent of injustice to another, then, I say, break the
law. Let your life be a counter friction to stop the machine. What I have to do is to see, at any rate, that I do not lend myself to the wrong which I condemn.

As for adopting the ways which the State has provided for remedying the evil, I know not of such ways. They take too much time, and a man's life will be gone. I have other affairs to attend to. I came into this world, not chiefly to make this a good place to live in, but to live in it, be it good or bad. A man has not everything to do, but something; and because he cannot do everything, it is not necessary that he should do something wrong.

It is not my business to be petitioning the Governor or the Legislature any more than it is theirs to petition me; and if they should not hear my petition, what should I do then? But in this case the State has provided no way; its very Constitution is the evil. This may seem to be harsh and stubborn and unconciliatory; but it is to treat with the utmost kindness and consideration the only spirit that can appreciate or deserves it. So is an change for the better, like birth and death which convulse the body.

I do not hesitate to say, that those who call themselves Abolitionists should at once effectually withdraw their support, both in person and property, from the government of Massachusetts, and not wait till they constitute a majority of one, before they suffer the right to prevail through them. I think that it is enough if they have God on their side, without waiting for that other one. Moreover, any man more right than his neighbors constitutes a majority of one already.

I meet this American government, or its representative, the State government, directly, and face to face, once a year -- no more
-- in the person of its tax-gatherer; this is the only mode in which
a man situated as I am necessarily meets it; and it then says
distinctly, Recognize me; and the simplest, the most effectual, and,
in the present posture of affairs, the indispensaless mode of
treating with it on this head, of expressing your little
satisfaction with and love for it, is to deny it then. My civil
neighbor, the tax-gatherer, is the very man I have to deal with --
for it is, after all, with men and not with parchment that I quarrel
-- and he has voluntarily chosen to be an agent of the government.
How shall he ever know well what he is and does as an officer of the
government, or as a man, until he is obliged to consider whether he
shall treat me, his neighbor, for whom he has respect, as a neighbor
and well-disposed man, or as a maniac and disturber of the peace,
and see if he can get over this obstruction to his neighborliness
without a ruder and more impetuous thought or speech corresponding
with his action? I know this well, that if one thousand, if one
hundred, if ten men whom I could name -- if ten honest men only --
ay, if one HONEST man, in this State of Massachusetts, ceasing to
hold slaves, were actually to withdraw from this copartnership, and
be locked up in the county jail therefor, it would be the abolition
of slavery in America. For it matters not how small the beginning
may seem to be: what is once well done is done forever. But we love
better to talk about it: that we say is our mission. Reform keeps
many scores of newspapers in its service, but not one man. If my
esteemed neighbor, the State's ambassador, who will devote his days
to the settlement of the question of human rights in the Council
Chamber, instead of being threatened with the prisons of Carolina,
were to sit down the prisoner of Massachusetts, that State which is
so anxious to foist the sin of slavery upon her sister -- though at present she can discover only an act of inhospitality to be the ground of a quarrel with her -- the Legislature would not wholly waive the subject the following winter.

Under a government which imprisons any unjustly, the true place for a just man is also a prison. The proper place to-day, the only place which Massachusetts has provided for her freer and less desponding spirits, is in her prisons, to be put out and locked out of the State by her own act, as they have already put themselves out by their principles. It is there that the fugitive slave, and the Mexican prisoner on parole, and the Indian come to plead the wrongs of his race, should find them; on that separate, but more free and honorable ground, where the State places those who are not with her, but against her -- the only house in a slave State in which a free man can abide with honor. 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. Cast your whole vote, not a strip of paper merely, but your whole influence. 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. This is, in fact, the definition of a peaceable revolution, if any such is possible. If the tax-gatherer, or any other public officer, asks me, as one has done, "But what shall I do?" my answer is, "If you really wish to do anything, resign your office." When the subject has refused allegiance, and the officer has resigned his office, then the revolution is accomplished. But even suppose blood should flow. Is there not a sort of blood shed when the conscience is wounded? Through this wound a man's real manhood and immortality flow out, and he bleeds to an everlasting death. I see this blood flowing now.

I have contemplated the imprisonment of the offender, rather than the seizure of his goods -- though both will serve the same purpose -- because they who assert the purest right, and consequently are most dangerous to a corrupt State, commonly have not spent much time in accumulating property. To such the State renders comparatively small service, and a slight tax is wont to appear exorbitant, particularly if they are obliged to earn it by special labor with their hands. If there were one who lived wholly without the use of money, the State itself would hesitate to demand it of him. But the rich man -- not to make any invidious comparison -- is always sold to the institution which makes him rich.

Absolutely speaking, the more money, the less virtue; for money comes between a man and his objects, and obtains them for him; and it was certainly no great virtue to obtain it. It puts to rest many questions which he would otherwise be taxed to answer; while the only new question which it puts is the hard but superfluous one, how to spend it. Thus his moral ground is taken from under his feet. The opportunities of living are diminished in proportion as what are
called the "means" are increased. The best thing a man can do for
his culture when he is rich is to endeavor to carry out those
schemes which he entertained when he was poor. Christ answered the
Herodians according to their condition. "Show me the
tribute-money," said he; -- and one took a penny out of his pocket;
-- if you use money which has the image of Caesar on it, and which
he has made current and valuable, that is, if you are men of the
State, and gladly enjoy the advantages of Caesar's government, then
pay him back some of his own when he demands it; "Render therefore
to Caesar that which is Caesar's, and to God those things which are
God's" -- leaving them no wiser than before as to which was which;
for they did not wish to know.
When I converse with the freest of my neighbors, I perceive
that, whatever they may say about the magnitude and seriousness of
the question, and their regard for the public tranquillity, the long
and the short of the matter is, that they cannot spare the
protection of the existing government, and they dread the
consequences to their property and families of disobedience to it.
For my own part, I should not like to think that I ever rely on the
protection of the State. But, if I deny the authority of the State
when it presents its tax-bill, it will soon take and waste all my
property, and so harass me and my children without end. This is
hard. This makes it impossible for a man to live honestly, and at
the same time comfortably in outward respects. It will not be worth
the while to accumulate property; that would be sure to go again.
You must hire or squat somewhere, and raise but a small crop, and
eat that soon. You must live within yourself, and depend upon
yourself always tucked up and ready for a start, and not have many
affairs. A man may grow rich in Turkey even, if he will be in all respects a good subject of the Turkish government. Confucius said, "If a state is governed by the principles of reason, poverty and misery are subjects of shame; if a state is not governed by the principles of reason, riches and honors are the subjects of shame."

No: until I want the protection of Massachusetts to be extended to me in some distant Southern port, where my liberty is endangered, or until I am bent solely on building up an estate at home by peaceful enterprise, I can afford to refuse allegiance to Massachusetts, and her right to my property and life. It costs me less in every sense to incur the penalty of disobedience to the State than it would to obey. I should feel as if I were worth less in that case.

Some years ago, the State met me in behalf of the Church, and commanded me to pay a certain sum toward the support of a clergyman whose preaching my father attended, but never I myself. "Pay," it said, "or be locked up in the jail." I declined to pay. But, unfortunately, another man saw fit to pay it. I did not see why the schoolmaster should be taxed to support the priest, and not the priest the schoolmaster: for I was not the State's schoolmaster, but I supported myself by voluntary subscription. I did not see why the lyceum should not present its tax-bill, and have the State to back its demand, as well as the Church. However, at the request of the selectmen, I condescended to make some such statement as this in writing:-- "Know all men by these presents, that I, Henry Thoreau, do not wish to be regarded as a member of any incorporated society which I have not joined." This I gave to the town clerk; and he has it. The State, having thus learned that I did not wish to be regarded as a member of that church, has never made a like demand on
me since; though it said that it must adhere to its original
presumption that time. If I had known how to name them, I should
then have signed off in detail from all the societies which I never
signed on to; but I did not know where to find a complete list.

I have paid no poll-tax for six years. I was put into a jail
once on this account, for one night; and, as I stood considering the
walls of solid stone, two or three feet thick, the door of wood and
iron, a foot thick, and the iron grating which strained the light, I
could not help being struck with the foolishness of that institution
which treated me as if I were mere flesh and blood and bones, to be
locked up. I wondered that it should have concluded at length that
this was the best use it could put me to, and had never thought to
avail itself of my services in some way. I saw that, if there was a
wall of stone between me and my townsmen, there was a still more
difficult one to climb or break through, before they could get to be
as free as I was. I did not for a moment feel confined, and the
walls seemed a great waste of stone and mortar. I felt as if I
alone of all my townsmen had paid my tax. They plainly did not know
how to treat me, but behaved like persons who are underbred. In
every threat and in every compliment there was a blunder; for they
thought that my chief desire was to stand the other side of that
stone wall. I could not but smile to see how industriously they
locked the door on my meditations, which followed them out again
without let or hindrance, and they were really all that was
dangerous. As they could not reach me, they had resolved to punish
my body; just as boys, if they cannot come at some person against
whom they have a spite, will abuse his dog. I saw that the State
was half-witted, that it was timid as a lone woman with her silver
spoons, and that it did not know its friends from its foes, and I
lost all my remaining respect for it, and pitied it.

Thus the State never intentionally confronts a man's sense,
intellectual or moral, but only his body, his senses. It is not
armed with superior wit or honesty, but with superior physical
strength. I was not born to be forced. I will breathe after my own
fashion. Let us see who is the strongest. What force has a
multitude? They only can force me who obey a higher law than I.
They force me to become like themselves. I do not hear of men being
forced to have this way or that by masses of men. What sort of life
were that to live? When I meet a government which says to me, "Your
money or your life," why should I be in haste to give it my money?
It may be in a great strait, and not know what to do: I cannot help
that. It must help itself; do as I do. It is not worth the while
to snivel about it. I am not responsible for the successful working
of the machinery of society. I am not the son of the engineer. I
perceive that, when an acorn and a chestnut fall side by side, the
one does not remain inert to make way for the other, but both obey
their own laws, and spring and grow and flourish as best they can,
till one, perchance, overshadows and destroys the other. If a plant
cannot live according to its nature, it dies; and so a man.

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 room-mate 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 examined 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; for I found that even here there was a history and a gossip which never circulated beyond the walls of the jail.

Probably this is the only house in the town where verses are composed, which are afterward printed in a circular form, but not published. I was shown quite a long list of verses which were composed by some young men who had been detected in an attempt to escape, who avenged themselves by singing them.

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 travelling 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 to see my native village in the
light of the Middle Ages, and our Concord was turned into a Rhine
stream, and visions of knights and castles passed before me. They
were the voices of oldburghers that I heard in the streets. I was
an involuntary spectator and auditor of whatever was done and said
in the kitchen of the adjacent village-inn -- 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.

This is one of its peculiar institutions; for it is a shire town. 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.

When I came out of prison -- for some one interfered, and paid
that tax -- I did not perceive that great changes had taken place on
the common, such as he observed who went in a youth and emerged a
tottering and gray-headed man; and yet a change had to my eyes come
over the scene -- the town, and State, and country -- greater than any that mere time could effect. I saw yet more distinctly the State in which I lived. I saw to what extent the people among whom I lived could be trusted as good neighbors and friends; that their friendship was for summer weather only; that they did not greatly propose to do right; that they were a distinct race from me by their prejudices and superstitions, as the Chinamen and Malays are; that in their sacrifices to humanity, they ran no risks, not even to their property; that after all they were not so noble but they treated the thief as he had treated them, and hoped, by a certain outward observance and a few prayers, and by walking in a particular straight though useless path from time to time, to save their souls. This may be to judge my neighbors harshly; for I believe that many of them are not aware that they have such an institution as the jail in their village.

It was formerly the custom in our village, when a poor debtor came out of jail, for his acquaintances to salute him, looking through their fingers, which were crossed to represent the grating of a jail window, "How do ye do?" My neighbors did not thus salute me, but first looked at me, and then at one another, as if I had returned from a long journey. I was put into jail as I was going to the shoemaker's to get a shoe which was mended. When I was let out the next morning, I proceeded to finish my errand, and, having put on my mended shoe, joined a huckleberry party, who were impatient to put themselves under my conduct; and in half an hour -- for the horse was soon tackled -- was in the midst of a huckleberry field, on one of our highest hills, two miles off, and then the State was nowhere to be seen.
This is the whole history of "My Prisons."

I have never declined paying the highway tax, because I am as
desirous of being a good neighbor as I am of being a bad subject;
and as for supporting schools, I am doing my part to educate my
fellow-countrymen now. It is for no particular item in the tax-bill
that I refuse to pay it. I simply wish to refuse allegiance to the
State, to withdraw and stand aloof from it effectually. I do not
care to trace the course of my dollar, if I could, till it buys a
man or a musket to shoot one with -- the dollar is innocent -- but I
am concerned to trace the effects of my allegiance. In fact, I
quietly declare war with the State, after my fashion, though I will
still make what use and get what advantage of her I can, as is usual
in such cases.

If others pay the tax which is demanded of me, from a sympathy
with the State, they do but what they have already done in their own
case, or rather they abet injustice to a greater extent than the
State requires. If they pay the tax from a mistaken interest in the
individual taxed, to save his property, or prevent his going to
jail, it is because they have not considered wisely how far they let
their private feelings interfere with the public good.

This, then, is my position at present. But 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.

I think sometimes, Why, this people mean well; they are only
ignorant; they would do better if they knew how: why give your
neighbors this pain to treat you as they are not inclined to? But I
think, again, This is no reason why I should do as they do, or
permit others to suffer much greater pain of a different kind.

Again, I sometimes say to myself, When many millions of men, without
heat, without ill-will, without personal feeling of any kind, demand
of you a few shillings only, without the possibility, such is their
constitution, of retracting or altering their present demand, and
without the possibility, on your side, of appeal to any other
millions, why expose yourself to this overwhelming brute force? You
do not resist cold and hunger, the winds and the waves, thus
obstinately; you quietly submit to a thousand similar necessities.
You do not put your head into the fire. But just in proportion as I
regard this as not wholly a brute force, but partly a human force,
and consider that I have relations to those millions as so many
millions of men, and not of mere brute or inanimate things, I see
that appeal is possible, first and instantaneously, from them to the
Maker of them, and, secondly, from them to themselves. But, if I
put my head deliberately into the fire, there is no appeal to fire
or to the Maker of fire, and I have only myself to blame. If I
could convince myself that I have any right to be satisfied with men
as they are, and to treat them accordingly, and not according, in
some respects, to my requisitions and expectations of what they and
I ought to be, then, like a good Mussulman and fatalist, I should
endeavor to be satisfied with things as they are, and say it is the
will of God. And, above all, there is this difference between
resisting this and a purely brute or natural force, that I can
resist this with some effect; but I cannot expect, like Orpheus, to
change the nature of the rocks and trees and beasts.
I do not wish to quarrel with any man or nation. I do not wish
to split hairs, to make fine distinctions, or set myself up as
better than my neighbors. I seek rather, I may say, even an excuse for conforming to the laws of the land. I am but too ready to conform to them. Indeed, I have reason to suspect myself on this head; and each year, as the tax-gatherer comes round, I find myself disposed to review the acts and position of the general and State governments, and the spirit of the people, to discover a pretext for conformity.

"We must affect our country as our parents,
And if at any time we alienate
Our love or industry from doing it honor,
We must respect effects and teach the soul
Matter of conscience and religion,
And not desire of rule or benefit."

I believe that the State will soon be able to take all my work of this sort out of my hands, and then I shall be no better a patriot than my fellow-countrymen. Seen from a lower point of view, the Constitution, with all its faults, is very good; the law and the courts are very respectable; even this State and this American government are, in many respects, very admirable and rare things, to be thankful for, such as a great many have described them; but seen from a point of view a little higher, they are what I have described them; seen from a higher still, and the highest, who shall say what they are, or that they are worth looking at or thinking of at all?

However, the government does not concern me much, and I shall bestow the fewest possible thoughts on it. It is not many moments
that I live under a government, even in this world. If a man is
thought-free, fancy-free, imagination-free, that which is not never
for a long time appearing to be to him, unwise rulers or reformers
cannot fatally interrupt him.

I know that most men think differently from myself; but those
whose lives are by profession devoted to the study of these or
kindred subjects, content me as little as any. Statesmen and
legislators, standing so completely within the institution, never
distinctly and nakedly behold it. They speak of moving society, but
have no resting-place without it. They may be men of a certain
experience and discrimination, and have no doubt invented ingenious
and even useful systems, for which we sincerely thank them; but all
their wit and usefulness lie within certain not very wide limits.

They are wont to forget that the world is not governed by policy and
expediency. Webster never goes behind government, and so cannot
speak with authority about it. His words are wisdom to those
legislators who contemplate no essential reform in the existing
government; but for thinkers, and those who legislate for all time,
he never once glances at the subject. I know of those whose serene
and wise speculations on this theme would soon reveal the limits of
his mind's range and hospitality. Yet, compared with the cheap
professions of most reformers, and the still cheaper wisdom and
elocution of politicians in general, his are almost the only
sensible and valuable words, and we thank Heaven for him.

Comparatively, he is always strong, original, and, above all,
practical. Still, his quality is not wisdom, but prudence. The
lawyer's truth is not truth, but consistency or a consistent
expediency. Truth is always in harmony with herself, and is not
concerned chiefly to reveal the justice that may consist with
wrong-doing. He well deserves to be called, as he has been called,
the Defender of the Constitution. There are really no blows to be
given by him but defensive ones. He is not a leader, but a
follower. His leaders are the men of '87. "I have never made an
effort," he says, "and never propose to make an effort; I have never
countenanced an effort, and never mean to countenance an effort, to
disturb the arrangement as originally made, by which the various
States came into the Union." Still thinking of the sanction which
the Constitution gives to slavery, he says, "Because it was a part
of the original compact -- let it stand." Notwithstanding his
special acuteness and ability, he is unable to take a fact out of
its merely political relations, and behold it as it lies absolutely
to be disposed of by the intellect -- what, for instance, it
behoves a man to do here in America to-day with regard to slavery,
but ventures, or is driven, to make some such desperate answer as
the following, while professing to speak absolutely, and as a
private man -- from which what new and singular code of social
duties might be inferred? "The manner," says he, "in which the
governments of those States where slavery exists are to regulate it
is for their own consideration, under their responsibility to their
constituents, to the general laws of propriety, humanity, and
justice, and to God. Associations formed elsewhere, springing from
a feeling of humanity, or any other cause, have nothing whatever to
do with it. They have never received any encouragement from me, and
they never will."

They who know of no purer sources of truth, who have traced up
its stream no higher, stand, and wisely stand, by the Bible and the
Constitution, and drink at it there with reverence and humility; but they who behold where it comes trickling into this lake or that pool, gird up their loins once more, and continue their pilgrimage toward its fountain-head.

No man with a genius for legislation has appeared in America. They are rare in the history of the world. There are orators, politicians, and eloquent men, by the thousand; but the speaker has not yet opened his mouth to speak who is capable of settling the much-vexed questions of the day. We love eloquence for its own sake, and not for any truth which it may utter, or any heroism it may inspire. Our legislators have not yet learned the comparative value of free-trade and of freedom, of union, and of rectitude, to a nation. They have no genius or talent for comparatively humble questions of taxation and finance, commerce and manufacturers and agriculture. If we were left solely to the wordy wit of legislators in Congress for our guidance, uncorrected by the seasonable experience and the effectual complaints of the people, America would not long retain her rank among the nations. For eighteen hundred years, though perchance I have no right to say it, the New Testament has been written; yet where is the legislator who has wisdom and practical talent enough to avail himself of the light which it sheds on the science of legislation?

The authority of government, even such as I am willing to submit to -- for I will cheerfully obey those who know and can do better than I, and in many things even those who neither know nor can do so well -- is still an impure one: to be strictly just, it must have the sanction and consent of the governed. It can have no pure right over my person and property but what I concede to it. The progress
from an absolute to a limited monarchy, from a limited monarchy 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 least 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 fellow-men. 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.