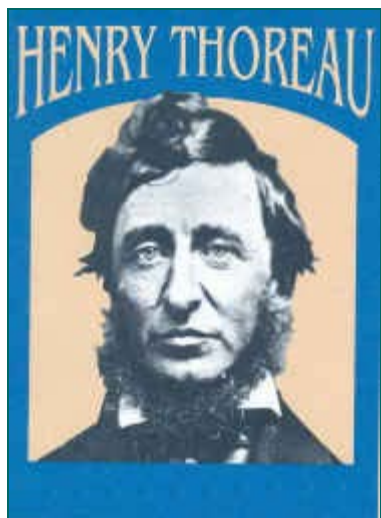


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A READER'S JOURNAL

The Journal of Henry David Thoreau, Vol. 3
by
Henry David Thoreau
Volume 3, September 1851 to April 1852

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A Book Review by Bobby Matherne ©2003

Reading from Thoreau's journal can have interesting effects on one. One morning I came into the living room where Del was working at a

table. It was a time when I had been reading from the third volume of Thoreau's Journal dealing with the last half of Dec, 1851. The influence of Thoreau's way of thinking and speaking must have come over me because, as I stood in front of the coffee pot to pour myself a fresh cup of coffee, I spoke these words which elicited a grunt of enjoyment from Del:

**"Now, As such,
I raise my body up
And pour myself a second cup."**

In his introduction to this volume, Walter Harding writes:

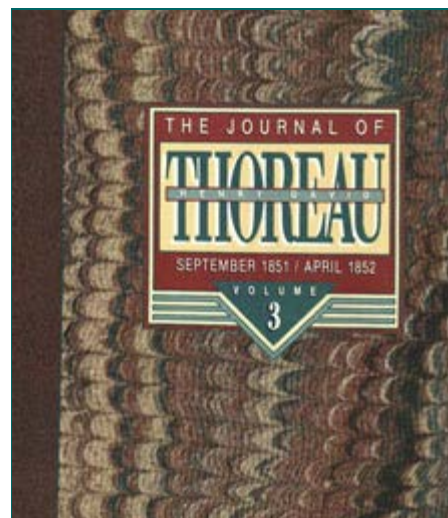
[page vii] For some unknown reason Thoreau seems to have done less professional writing this winter, at least in his journal, although we do come across a few work pieces for "Walking," " Wild Apples," "Life without Principle," and "Yankee in Canada." Surprisingly, perhaps, we find him writing at some length on the craft of writing and on a journal as a work of art. Among the most memorable pieces in the volume is a moving account of the felling of a magnificent pine tree on Fair Haven's shore and a witty and delightful account of an adventure with a woodchuck.

There you have a synopsis of the eclectic nature of Thoreau's journal — you never know what the next bend in the path or the page will bring to light in his words. You simply walk along with Thoreau as his constant companion, just you and him in the woods when his frequent companions, Ellery Channing (C.) and his pup, are absent. He looks, talks about what he sees, and you look there also. In these walks, you walk alongside Thoreau as a blind companion, whose only vistas are those of the imaginations that your able guide conjures up in you.

[page 5] The poet must keep himself unstained and aloof. Let him perambulate the bounds of Imagination's provinces, the realms of faery, and not the insignificant boundaries of towns. The excursions of the imagination are so boundless, the limits of towns are so petty.

One of the joys of Thoreau's walks we can no longer enjoy because the instrument of the melody has been denuded of its strings, and the frets and tensioners have been dismantled. I speak of the telegraph harp — Thoreau's phrase for the music emitted by the wires strung between telegraph poles. I will accumulate for you a collection of his words on the telegraph harp from this volume below.

[page 11] Sept. 22. Yesterday and to-day the stronger winds of autumn have begun to blow, and the



telegraph harp has sounded loudly. I heard it especially in the Deep Cut this afternoon, the tone varying with the tension of different parts of the wire. The sound proceeds from near the posts, where the vibration is apparently more rapid. I put my ear to one of the posts, and it seemed to me as if every pore of the wood was filled with music, labored with the strain, — as if every fibre was affected and being seasoned or timed, rearranged according to a new and more harmonious law. Every swell and change or inflection of tone pervaded and seemed to proceed from the wood, the divine tree or wood, as if its very substance was transmuted. What a recipe for preserving wood, perchance, — to keep it from rotting, — to fill its pores with music! How this wild tree from the forest, stripped of its bark and set up here, rejoices to transmit this music! When no music proceeds from the wire, on applying my ear I hear the hum within the entrails of the wood, — the oracular tree acquiring, accumulating the prophetic fury.

To read this journal is to learn how Thoreau acquired his prophetic fury: by walking, watching, and listening, even at times with his ear placed against the stripped trees that acted as the frets of the telegraph harp. Read next how his imagination takes him and us far from the petty limits of his time and town, and ours. (Continued from above quote.)

[page 11, 12] Sept. 22. The resounding wood! how much the ancients would have made of it! To have a harp on so great a scale, girdling the very earth, and played on by the winds of every latitude and longitude, and that harp were, as it were, the manifest blessing of heaven on a work of man's! Shall we not add a tenth Muse to the immortal Nine? And that the invention thus divinely honored and distinguished — on which the Muse has condescended to smile — is this magic medium of communication for mankind!

The telegraph was the Internet of Thoreau's time. It interconnected the world in a way never dreamed to be possible before. Instantaneous communication between far flung realms became possible. It occurs to me that Samuel Morse and others whose inventions led to the marvelous telegraph never envisioned their work as being put to use as a musical instrument! (Continued from above quote.)

[page 12] Sept. 22. To read that the ancients stretched a wire round the earth, attaching it to the trees of the forest, by which they sent messages by one named Electricity, father of Lightning and Magnetism, swifter than Mercury, the stern commands of war and news of peace, and that the winds caused this wire to vibrate so that it emitted harp-like and æolian music in all the lands through which it passed, as if to express the satisfaction of the gods in this invention. Yet this is fact, and we have attributed the invention to no god.

I would think these above passages alone would be ample answer to anyone who would ask the question, "Why should I read Thoreau's journal?" The fourteen volume set can be daunting to even begin reading, but compare that to the task of the first men to string a wire between the first telegraph poles — would they have even attempted it if they thought long on the job ahead of them to wire the entire Earth?

[page 71] Oct. 14. There was but little wind this morning, yet I heard the telegraph harp. It does not require a strong wind to wake its strings; it depends more on its direction and the tension of the wire apparently. A gentle but steady breeze will often call forth its finest strains, when a strong but unsteady gale, blowing at the wrong angle withal, fails to elicits any melodious sound.

I could not help but think of the different effect people have on others: the gentle but steady person directing their thoughts to another will call forth the other's finest music, but a blustery person, bellowing one way and then another, coming from the wrong angle, will fail to make any harmonious impression of the other. Thoreau is definitely of the former sort.

[page 247] Jan. 29. I am often reminded that if I had bestowed on me the wealth of Croesus, my aims must still be the same and my means essentially the same. . . . The snow is nearly gone from the railroad causeway. Few are the days when the telegraph harp rises into a pure, clear melody. Though the wind may blow strong or soft, in this or that direction, naught will you hear but a low hum or murmur, or even a buzzing sound; but at length, when some undistinguishable zephyr

blows, when the conditions not easy to be detected arrive, it suddenly and unexpectedly rises into melody, as if a god had touched it, and fortunate is the walker who chances to be within hearing.

And again near the end of this volume, he is transported into thoughts of Greek poetry and the gods by the sounds of the telegraph harp. It is sad to think that, in a short 150 years, an invention of man that brought this man so much delight has disappeared from the Earth.

[page 342] March 9. When I hear the telegraph harp, I think I must read the Greek poets. This sound is like a brighter color, red, or blue, or green, where all was dull white or black. It prophesies finer senses, a finer life, a golden age. It is the poetry of the railroad, the heroic and poetic thoughts which the Irish laborers had at their toil now got expression, — that which has made the world mad so long. Or is it the gods expressing their delight at this invention?

Such was Thoreau's descriptive ability that he could even conjure up for us readers a vision of deep darkness.

[page 14] Sept 24. Last night was exceedingly dark. I could not see the sidewalk in the street, but only felt it with my feet. I was obliged to whistle to warn travellers of my nearness, and then I would suddenly find myself abreast of them without having seen anything or heard their footsteps. It was cloudy and rainy weather combined with the absence of the moon. So dark a night that, if a farmer who had come in a-shopping had spent but an hour after sunset in some shop, he might find himself a prisoner in the village for the night. Thick darkness.

The verb 'realize' is obviously based on the idea of to 'make real' and yet notice in this next passage of Thoreau's that his usage seems un-natural to our ear, but closer to the original meaning of the word. Today it appears as the fourth most common definition in my Cassel's Concise dictionary, "to present as real."

[page 41] Oct. 4. Minott is, perhaps, the most poetical farmer — who most realizes to me the poetry of the farmer's life — that I know.

Thoreau seems content to walk abroad within the limits of his small town, Concord, and its outskirts, to take in the sights of the day, of the season, of the year, and requires little more than that. If we doubt this to be true, his very words will betray this so.

[page 58] Found another gouge on Dennis's Hill. To have found the Indian gouges and tasted sweet acorns, — is it not enough for one afternoon?

Unless one has walked the woods of New England during the fall of the year, one will not know the pleasures of wild apples. These never make it to stores because the gatherer thinks them not worth the picking. But to a hungry walker, ah, that's another story.

[page 83] Oct. 31. The wild apples are now getting palatable. I find a few left on distant trees, which the farmer thinks it not worth his while to gather. He thinks that he has better in his barrels, but he is mistaken, unless he has a walker's appetite and imagination, neither of which can he have.

Thoreau tells us that "a man is not capable of reporting truth; he must be drenched and saturated with it first." In other words, truth is not something that can pass through us untouched as a seed passes through a chickadee as it flies and starts a new plant.

[page 85, 86] Nov. 1. First of all a man must see, before he can say. Statements are made but partially. Things are said with reference to certain conventions or existing institutions, not absolutely. A fact truly and absolutely stated is taken out of the region of common sense and acquires a mythologic or universal significance. Say it and have done with it. Express it without expressing yourself. See not with the eye of science, which is barren, nor of youthful poetry, which is impotent. But taste the world and digest it. It would seem as if things got said but rarely and by chance. As you *see*, so at length will you *say*. When facts are seen superficially, they are seen as they

lie in relation to certain institutions, perchance. But I would have them expressed as more deeply seen, with deeper references; so that the hearer or reader cannot recognize them or apprehend their significance from the platform of common life, but it will be necessary that he be in a sense translated in order to understand them; when the truth respecting his things shall naturally exhale from a man like the odor of the muskrat from the coat of the trapper.

The things we can learn from these deep words only the heart can know. And Thoreau's words run deep, like the perennial native flowering plants of his New England they sink deep into the sand, a sand in which he says his bones will gladly lie.

[page 97] Nov. 8. When I saw the bare sand at Cochituate I felt my relation to the soil. These are my sands not yet run out. Not yet will the fates turn the glass. This air have I taint with my decay. In this clean sand my bones will gladly lie. Like *Viola pedata*, I shall be ready to bloom again here in my Indian summer days. Here ever springing, never dying, with perennial root I stand; for the winter of the land is warm to me. While the flower blooms again as in the spring, shall I pine? When I see her sands exposed, thrown up from beneath the surface, it touches me inwardly, it reminds me of my origin; for I am such a plant, so native to New England, methinks, as springs from the sand cast up from below.

In this next passage Thoreau compares himself with Ellery Channing who sometimes takes out his notebook and tries in vain to write as Thoreau does. Eventually he gives up and draws a sketch of the landscape or something. He tells Thoreau that he will leave the facts to him, and Thoreau responds in his journal thus:

[page 99] Nov. 9. I, too, would fain set down something beside facts. Facts should only be as the frame to my pictures; they should be material to the mythology which I am writing; not facts to assist men to make money, farmers to farm profitably, in any common sense; facts to tell who I am, and where I have been or what I have thought: as now the bell rings for evening meeting, and its volumes of sound, like smoke which rises from where a cannon is fired, make the tent in which I dwell.

My son and his wife named their first two children after natural objects; the son, Walden, and the daughter, Sierra. Thoreau quotes Stoever's "Life of Linnæus" saying that it is a "custom not unfrequent in Sweden, to take fresh appellations from natural objects."

Thoreau worked from time to time as a surveyor to earn some money, but he always longed to be back home with his thoughts. In this next passage we can listen to a man wax lyrical about his passion for thinking as he returns home from almost thirty days of surveying, "living coarsely," as he called it.

[page 133] Dec. 12. . . . and to-night, for the first time, [I] had made a fire in my chamber and endeavored to return to myself. I wished to ally myself to the powers that rule the universe. I wished to dive into some deep stream of thoughtful and devoted life, which meandered through retired and fertile meadows far from towns. I wished to do again, or for once, things quite congenial to my highest inmost and most sacred nature, to lurk in crystalline thought like the trout under verdurous banks, where stray mankind should only see my bubble come to the surface. I wished to live, ah! as far away as a man can think. I wished for leisure and quiet to let my life flow in its proper channels, with its proper currents . . . I am thinking by what long discipline and at what cost a man learns to speak simply at last.

As I read this next passage I recall when earlier Thoreau admonished the reader not to "see with the eye of science, which is barren." Here he tells us how we are to see if we are to see truly — it is a spiritual seeing, a spiritual eye that assists the natural eye.

[page 137] Dec. 13. We do, indeed, see through and through each other, through the veil of the body, and see the real form and character in spite of the garment. Any coarseness or tenderness is seen and felt under whatever garb. How nakedly men appear to us! for the spiritual assists the natural

eye.

In the next passage is another curious usage of an otherwise familiar word. If I were to give you the definition of "improve" as meaning "to increase the value of," you would agree with that definition, but given that, notice how strange to the ear its usage in the following passage falls on the ear:

[page 140] Dec. 17. Improve every opportunity to express yourself in writing, as if it were your last.

Thoreau, when he was alone, was in the best of company: to him, to be poor in company was to be rich in spirit. In these next two passages he speaks out of a hundred and fifty plus years in the past to express something that I have observed and felt in my own life.

[page 142] Dec. 18. My acquaintances will sometimes wonder why I will impoverish myself by living aloof from this or that company, but greater would be the impoverishment if I should associate with them.

[page 250] Jan. 30 Friday. I feel as if I were gradually parting company with certain friends, just as I perceive familiar objects successively disappear when I am leaving my native town in the cars.

Thoreau measured a pine tree that was to be felled: it was four feet in diameter and about one hundred feet long. This was truly an old growth tree during a time when old growth trees could be chopped at will on one's own property; no laws fettered or stopped the choice of the owner of such an old growth tree to chop it away and leave "the space it occupied in upper air vacant for the next two centuries." It is a curious anomaly 150 years later that the owner of an old growth tree is barred by law from killing it, but the owner of a new growth human being in her womb is not barred by law from killing it. How long will the space occupied in upper air remain vacant where that human being would else have lived?

When I set forth to write down my thoughts and publish them, I settled upon the name Good Mountain Press for the publishing company. I live in southern Louisiana where the nearest mountain is a long day's drive away, almost 500 miles, the land here is as flat as the water-filled wetlands and marshes that surrounds it. But I have seen mountains, the Great Smokies, the high Sierras, and on any summer day, a mountain of greater majesty than any of those fabled mountains may float near to where I sit writing at this minute. These are the mountains I call the "good mountains" — they bring panoramic vistas of white — and if they float overhead, in the darkness of day, they pour cooling and refreshing water on the grass and gardens while electrifying and sparkling the air into as bracing a mixture as any mountaintop air. Thoreau knew also about good mountains and writes of them in this next passage.

[page 181] Jan. 11. What need to travel? There are no sierras equal to the clouds in the sunset sky. And are not these substantial enough? In a low or level country, perchance, the forms of the clouds supply the place of mountains and precipices to the eye, the grosser atmosphere makes a mountainous country in the sky.

Rudolf Steiner said that the brain is the manure of the human being, where the excrement of our thought activity resides. Also winter is the time for harvesting thoughts stored up in the summer. Notice how this resonates with Thoreau's thoughts on the similarity between the work of the farmer and the scholar.

[page 207] Jan. 20. The farmers nowadays can cart out peat and muck over the frozen meadows. Somewhat analogous, methinks, the scholar does; drives in with tight-braced energy and winter cheer on to his now firm meadowy grounds, and carts, hauls off, the virgin loads of fertilizing soil which he threw up in the warm, soft summer. . . . When I see the farmer driving into his barn-yard with a load of muck, whose blackness contrasts strangely with the white snow, I have the thoughts which I have described. He is doing like myself. My barn-yard is my journal.

Farther down, he talks of free flowing thoughts in winter time and compares ideas to fishes.

[page 232] Jan. 26. When the thermometer is down to 20 degrees, the streams of thought tinkle

underneath like the rivers under the ice. Thought like the ocean is nearly of one temperature. Ideas, — are they the fishes of thought?

How did the Jesuit missionaries convert so many native Americans to their faith? Was it their message or their manner that did the trick? Thoreau leaves us no doubt that for him it was their manner: their sincerity.

[page 218] Jan. 22. That in the preaching or mission of the Jesuits in Canada which converted the Indians was their sincerity. They could not be suspected of sinister motives. The savages were not poor observers and reasoners. The priests were, therefore, sure of success, for they had paid the price of it. We resist no true invitations; they are irresistible.

Once more Thoreau offers advice to writers, "Use and commit to life what you cannot commit to memory."

[page 221] Jan. 24. If thou art a writer, write as if thy time were short, for it is indeed short at the longest. Improve each occasion when thy soul is reached. Drain the cup of inspiration to its last dregs.

To go off half-cocked is such a familiar phrase, one forgets that it is a metaphor, in fact, a flintlock metaphor. In speaking of men he called the salt of the earth, Thoreau says, "They did not go off at half-cock."

In this next passage he wonders aloud if writing in a journal were not a better form than essays. At least in the journal, one encounters the ideas in their natural environment, the kind of environment Thoreau wandered in, rather than in the potted plant greenhouses of essays.

[page 239] Jan. 27. I do not know but thoughts written down thus in a journal might be printed in the same form with greater advantage than if the related ones were brought together into separate essays. They are now allied to life, and are seen by the reader not to be far-fetched. It is more simple, less artful. I feel that in the other case I should have no proper frame for my sketches. Mere facts and names and dates communicate more than we suspect. Whether the flower looks better in the nosegay than in the meadow where it grew and we had to wet our feet to get it! Is the scholastic air any advantage?

This resonates with me as I consider whether at some point, the ideas I have written into "[A Reader's Journal](#)" might be better sprinkled into assorted essays or books. Each of my reviews I see as a journey into understanding and I endeavor to live my life as someone on a journey, eating hasty pudding and journey cake, quenching my thirst at the nearest brook, and being waited on by my simple desires.

[page 240] Jan. 28. Our life should be so active and progressive as to be a journey. Our meals should all be of journey-cake and hasty pudding. We should be more alert, see the sun rise, not keep fashionable hours, enter a house, our own house, as a khan, a caravansary. At noon I did not dine; I ate my journey-cake. I quenched my thirst at a spring or a brook. As I sat at the table the hospitality was so perfect and the repast so sumptuous that I seemed to be breaking my fast upon a bank in the midst of an arduous journey, that the water seemed to be a living spring, the napkins grass, the conversation free as the winds; and the servants that waited on us were our simple desires.

When I came to write my first book, it was a book of poetry, and I gave it the name, "[Flowers of Shanidar](#)" after the remnants of flowers found in the Shanidar cave in northern Iraq some 600 centuries later in the form of pollen grains. Each chapter was named after a [flower](#): rose mallows, hollyhocks, shamrocks, hyacinths, and violets. The first passage below talks of the poetry of flowers, the second two of the prose of flowers.

[page 252] Jan. 30. But after all, where is the flower lore? for the first book, and not the last, should contain the poetry of flowers.

[page 257] Jan. 31. Botanies, instead of being the poetry, are the prose, of flowers. I do not mean to

underrate Linnæus's admirable nomenclature, much of which is itself poetry.

[page 281] Feb. 6. The artificial system has been very properly called the dictionary, and the natural method, the grammar of the science of botany, by botanists themselves. But are we to have nothing but grammars and dictionaries in this literature? Are there no works written in the language of flowers?

One of the things I hated about high school and college English courses was having to write on chosen themes. The next passage by Thoreau attracts me very much and I yield willingly and often to its invitation:

[page 253] Jan. 30. Do nothing merely out of good resolution. Discipline yourself only to yield to love; suffer yourself to be attracted. It is in vain to write on chosen themes. We must wait till they have kindled a flame in our minds. There must be the copulating and generating force of love behind our every effort destined to be successful. The cold resolve gives birth to, begets, nothing. The theme that seeks me, not I it. The poet's relation to his theme is the relation of lovers.

One cannot forget the state of technology of a time when reading an author of the distant past. Living in a time before snapshots could capture the evanescent, the quick, and the moving aspects of a scene, Thoreau talks of oxen as being good for a picture, which in his time, meant a hand-drawn sketch, for which stillness is required.

[page 253] Jan. 30. A pretty forest scene, seeing oxen, so patient and stationary, good for pictures, standing on ice, — a piece of still life.

In this next passage he offers writerly advice, again using a farmer metaphor to drive home his point. This is reminiscent of the adage, "Strike while the iron is hot." — a blacksmith metaphor, no doubt, as iron cannot be shaped by striking with a hammer unless it is glowing hot.

[page 293] Feb. 10. Write while the heat is in you. When the farmer burns a hole in his yoke, he carries the hot iron quickly from the fire to the wood, for every moment it is less effectual to penetrate (pierce) it. It must be used instantly, or it is useless. The writer who postpones the recording of his thoughts uses an iron which has cooled to burn a hole with. He cannot inflame the minds of his audience.

He tells us that his surname "Thoreau" apparently comes from "Thorer" which was one of the most popular names of the Northmen. He goes on to do a brief genealogy, from which he decides that from one branch of his family were descended all the kings of England and from the other branch, himself.

[page 304] Feb. 14. Perhaps I am descended from the Northman named "Thorer the Dog-footed." Thorer Hund — "he was the most powerful man in the North" — to judge from his name belonged to the same family.

Recently I heard a Cajun story in which a hunter, out of bullets, fired a peach stone at an alligator which swam off into the swamp. When the hunter returned years later, he plucked a peach from a tree near the same spot, and as he ate the peach, the tree swam off into the swamp. Note the similarity to the story in the next passage.

[page 306] Feb. 16. I should say that the horned animals approached nearer to the vegetable. The deer that run in the woods, as the moose for instance, carry perfect trees on their heads. The French call them *bois*. No wonder there are fables of centaurs and the like. No wonder there is a story of a hunter who, when his bullets failed, fired cherry-stones into the heads of his game and so trees sprouted out of them, and the hunter refreshed himself with the cherries.

This next story tells of a fabled dice game with an incredible ending. It indicates the result of enormous will-power in a man who would not give up, no matter what the odds against him.

[page 315] Feb. 20. Fate will go all lengths to aid her protégés. When the Swedish king and Olaf,

king of Norway, threw for lots for the possession of a farm, "the Swedish king threw two sixes, and said King Olaf need scarcely throw. He replied, while shaking the dice in his hand, 'Although there be two sixes on the dice, it would be easy, sire, for God Almighty to let them turn up in my favor.' Then he threw, and had sixes also. Now the Swedish king threw again, and had again two sixes. Olaf, king of Norway, then threw, and had six upon one dice, and the other split in two, so as to make seven eyes in all upon it; and the farm was adjudged to the king of Norway."

Thoreau lived during a time when Indians had only recently disappeared from the New England scene, and yet he felt their presence constantly as he walked abroad.

[page 334] March 4. I love that the rocks should appear to have some spots of blood on them, Indian blood at the least; to be convinced that the earth has been crowded with men, living, enjoying, suffering, that races passed away have stained the rocks with their blood, that the mould I tread on has been animated, aye, humanized. I am the more at home. I farm the dust of my ancestors, though the chemist's analysis may not detect it. I go forth to redeem the meadows they have become. I compel them to take refuge in turnips.

He was a scholar of lichens, those fungi that attach themselves to the outside of tree trunks and rocks. He mused about one study of nature that did not require one to leave one's home to achieve.

[page 340] March 7. The student of lichens has his objects of study brought to his study on his fuel without any extra expense.

On a spring day, he throws off his overcoat and goes out to find the air full of bluebirds. "The bluebird carries the sky upon his back." He sings a paean to a Spring day, to the Ides of March.

[page 350, 351] March 15. My life partakes of infinity. The air is as deep as our natures. Is the drawing in of this vital air attended with not more glorious results than I witness? The air is a velvet cushion against which I press my ear. I go forth to make new demands on life. I wish to begin this summer well; to do something in it worthy of it and of me; to transcend my daily routine and that of my townsmen; to have my immortality now, that it be in the *quality* of my daily life; to pay the greatest price, the greatest tax, of any man in Concord, and enjoy the most!! I will give all I am for *my nobility*. I will pay all my days for *my success*. I pray that the life of this spring and summer may lie fair in my memory.

In this next piece, he likens a true farmer to a lichen, both of which leave a more cultivatable soil behind them than they first found when they arrived at a place.

[page 352] March 15. Most men find farming unprofitable; but there are some who can get their living anywhere. If you set them down on a bare rock they will thrive there. The true farmer is to those who come after him and take the benefit of his improvements, like the lichen which plants itself on the bare rock, and grows and thrives and cracks it and makes a vegetable mould, to the garden vegetable which grows in it.

In his description of a book by Gilpin, Thoreau seems to be writing about his own journal, enjoying in Gilpin what he most enjoys creating in his own writing: a book that reads like a walk in the woods.

[page 370] April 1. Gilpin's "Forest Scenery" is a pleasing book, so moderate, temperate, graceful, roomy, like a gladed wood; not condensed; with a certain religion in its manners and respect for the good of the past, rare in more recent books; and it is grateful to read after them. Somewhat spare indeed in the thoughts as in the sentences. Some of the cool wind in the copses converted into grammatical and graceful sentences, without heat. Not one of those humors come to a head which some modern books are, but some of the natural surface of a healthy mind.

When I lived for several years in California, one of the things I missed most about my native Louisiana was the

omnipresent clouds in the sky. I heard a story of a class in a high rise building on the UCLA campus that one night rushed to the windows because there was a rare thunderstorm outside, the kind that any summer afternoon might bring to the other side of the walls of this room in which I type these words. Ah, clouds! When every day is clear and dry, how can one enjoy a picnic when the delight of having a beautiful day for it is taken away by the monotonousness of the local atmosphere?

[page 387] April 3. The clouds are important to-day for their shadows. If it were not for them, the landscape would be one glare of light without variety. By their motion they still more vary the scene.

Before I had read this next passage I suppose I thought that it was the outside skin of the pig that was used for making footballs, which led to our coining of the word "pigskin" for football in the States. I see from Thoreau a deeper meaning: pigskin in the sense of a wine skin.

[page 401] April 11. Before my neighbor's pig is cold his boys have made a football of his bladder! So goes the world. No matter how much the boy snivels at first, he kicks the bladder with ecstasy.

Thoreau observed that it was possible for him to thrust his finger into many of the large stones of the railroad bridge's foundation which had turned into soft soil. He comments:

[page 406] April 12. A geologist is needed to tell you whether your stones will continue stones and not turn to earth.

I was reading this next passage in my kitchen, a little more cool than comfortable, and I had to agree with Thoreau's thoughts here as a storm raged outside his windows.

[page 408] April 13. But it is good now to stay in the house and read and write. We do not now go wandering all abroad and dissipated, but the imprisoning storm condenses our thoughts. I can hear the clock tick as not in pleasant weather. My life is enriched. I love to hear the wind howl. I have a fancy for sitting with my book or paper in some mean and apparently unfavorable place, in the kitchen, for instance, where the work is going on, rather a little cold than comfortable. My thoughts are of more worth, in such places than they would be in a well furnished and warmed studio.

In the movie, "The Deerhunter", there is a climactic scene in which Robert DeNiro has stalked for hours a large stag and finally has this magnificent five or six-year-old buck, a *hart*, in his telescopic sights and is unable to pull the trigger on such much beauty and majesty. He lets him go. That buck in the time of kings would have been designated a *hart-royal* and no one in the kingdom would have been allowed to kill him. It is one of the promises of the United States of America that every citizen is born a *hart-royal* and would it be so that they were conceived in liberty also.

[page 414] April 15. Gilpin says of the stags in the New Forest, if one "be hunted by the king, and escape; or have his life given him for the sport he has afforded, he becomes from thence forth a *hart-royal*. — If he be hunted out of the forest, and there escape, the king hath sometimes honoured him with a royal proclamation; the purport of which is, to forbid any one to molest him, that he may have free liberty of returning to his forest. From that time on he becomes a *hart-royal proclaimed*."

One of the frequent questions I get as a writer is, "What books have you published?" It is as though writing without being in print is some sort of a vacant existence, which well-meaning friends expect you to fill with books in printed form to satisfy them.

[page 420] April 15. How many there are who advise you to print! How few who advise you to lead a more interior life! In the one case there is all the world to advise you, in the other there is none to advise you but yourself. Nobody ever advised me not to print but myself. The public persuades the author to print, as the meadow invites the brook to fall into it. Only he can be trusted with gifts who can present a face of bronze to expectations.

Coming upon the idea of another person does not have the same effect as having an idea drop into one out of the blue.

The former is like a gift of second hand shoes which may pinch or wear out quickly; the latter like a brand-new suit that tingles the skin when one first wears it.

[page 441, 442] April 19. I think that no man ever takes an original idea, or detects a principle, without experiencing an inexpressible, as quite infinite and sane, pleasure, which advertises him of the dignity of the truth that he has perceived.

The friends that advise one to print live on the surface themselves and cannot understand one who chooses to live the interior life. Thoreau pins them to his specimen board in this next passage:

[page 460] April 24. I know two species of men. The vast majority are men of society. They live on the surface; they are interested in the transient and fleeting; they are like driftwood on the flood. They ask forever and only the news, the froth and scum of the eternal sea. They use policy; they make up for want of matter with manner. They have many letters to write. Wealth and the approbation of men is to them success. The enterprises of society are something final and sufficing for them. The world advises them, and they listen to its advice. They live wholly the evanescent life, creatures of circumstance. It is of prime importance to them who is the president of the day. They have no knowledge of truth, but by an exceedingly dim and transient instinct, which stereotypes the church and some other institutions.

Below I have selected a number of short quotations from the journal which mostly stand on their own.

"The best manners is nakedness of manners." page 256

"Superfluous wealth can buy superfluities only. Money is not required to buy one necessary of the soul." page 258

"In the East, women religiously conceal that they have faces; in the West, that they have legs. In both cases they make it evident that they have but little brains." page 258

"The mason asks but a narrow shelf to spring his brick from; man requires only an infinitely narrower one to spring the arch of faith from." page 259

"If I could command the wealth of all the worlds by lifting my finger, I would not pay such a price for it." page 266

About the gold rush pioneers of California, he said:

"Did God direct us so to get our living, digging where we never planted, — and He would perchance reward us with lumps of gold? Page 267

Here he puts his finger on what I most disliked about California - the lack of clouds:

"The sky must have a few clouds, as the mind a few moods; nor is the evening less serene for them." page 272

"The forcible writer stands bodily behind his words with his experience. He does not make books out of books, but he has been *there* in person. Page 276

"Who will not confess that the necessity to get money has helped to ripen some of his schemes?" Page 282

"I know [gold] is very malleable, but not so malleable as wit. A grain of it will gild a great surface, but not much as a grain of wisdom." page 291

"If you would be wise, learn science and then forget it." page 456

To close out this review, I have chosen a passage which shows us the essence of Thoreau, how he inspects the world from all angles, high and low, round and about, and then writes of the world from all those angles so as to represent the truth "as roundly and solidly as a statue" so that we understand the world from all sides.

[page 464] April 25. It is related that Giorgio Barbarelli, Titian's friend, defending painting against the charge of being an incomplete art because it could exhibit but one side of a picture, laid a wager with some sculptor that he could represent the back, face, and both profiles of a man, without the spectator being obliged to walk round it as a statue. He painted "a warrior, who, having his back turned towards the spectator, stood looking at himself in a fountain, in whose limpid waters his full front figure was reflected. At the left of the warrior was suspended his suit of polished steel armor, in which was mirrored, with exact fidelity, the whole of his left side. At the right was painted a looking-glass, which reflected that side;" and thus he won the wager. So I would fain represent some truths as roundly and solidly as a statue, or as completely and in all their relations as Barbarelli his warrior, — so that you may see round them.

