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THOREAU DESCRIBES HIMSELF

Fig. 1. Daguerreotype taken at Benjamin D. Maxham's Daguerrean Palace, Worcester, Massachusetts, on June 18, 1856. Reproduced from *The Writings of Henry D. Thoreau*. The Walden Woods Project Collection at the Thoreau Institute at Walden Woods. Courtesy of the Walden Woods Project.

I have never got over my surprise that I should have been born into the most estimable place in all the world, and in the very nick of time, too.

Written December 5, 1856, in his *Journal*, vol. IX, p. 160

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.

Walden, p. 84

It is my own way of living that I complain of as well as yours.

"Huckleberries," p. 30

I should not talk so much about myself if there were any body else whom I knew as well.

Walden, p. 3

One woman whom I visit sometimes thinks I am conceited and yet wonders that I do not visit her oftener.

Written January 31, 1852, in his *Journal*, vol. 4, p. 312

If I am not I, who will be?

A Week on the Concord and Merrimack Rivers, p. 156

I am not thou—Thou art not I.

Written October 10, 1851, in his *Journal*, vol. 4, p. 137

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

Written August 28, 1841, in his *Journal*, vol. 1, p. 324

What have I to do with plows? I cut another furrow than you see.

Written April 7, 1841, in his *Journal*, vol. 1, p. 297

If corn fails, my crop fails not, and what are drought and rain to me?

A Week on the Concord and Merrimack Rivers, p. 54

My profession is to be always on the alert to find God in nature—to know his lurking places. To attend all the oratorios—the operas in nature.

Written September 7, 1851, in his *Journal*, vol. 4, p. 55

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.

Walden, pp. 19–20

I go forth to make new demands on life.

Written March 15, 1852, in his *Journal*, vol. 4, p. 390

My greatest skill has been to want but little.

Written July 19, 1851, in his *Journal*, vol. 3, p. 315

I have seen a bunch of violets in a glass vase, tied loosely with a straw, which reminded me of myself.—

I am a parcel of vain strivings tied
By a chance bond together,
Dangling this way and that, their links
Were made so loose and wide,
Methinks,
For milder weather.

A Week on the Concord and Merrimack Rivers, p. 383

I cannot tell you what I am more than a ray of the summer's sun. What I am—I am—and say not. Being is the great explainer.

Written February 26, 1841, in his *Journal*, vol. 1, p. 273

I must confess there is nothing so strange to me as my own body. I love any piece of nature, almost, better.

Written February 21, 1842, in his *Journal*, vol. 1, p. 365

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.

"Resistance to Civil Government" in *Reform Papers*, p. 74

From time to time I overlook the promised land but I do not feel that I am travelling toward it.

Written after July 29, 1850, in his *Journal*, vol. 3, p. 97

For years I marched as to a music in comparison with which the military music of the streets is noise & discord. I was daily intoxicated and yet no man could call me intemperate.

Written July 16, 1851, in his *Journal*, vol. 3, p. 306

I would rather sit on a pumpkin and have it all to myself, than be crowded on a velvet cushion.

Walden, p. 37

I am of the nature of Stone. It takes the summer's sun to warm it.

Written December 21, 1851, in his *Journal*, vol. 4, p. 213

My acquaintances sometimes imply that I am too cold but each thing is warm enough for its kind.

Written December 21, 1851, in his *Journal*, vol. 4, p. 213

If my curve is large, why bend it to a smaller circle?

Written July 19, 1851, in his *Journal*, vol. 3, p. 313

It is impossible for me to be interested in what interest men generally. Their pursuits & interests seem to me

frivolous. When I am most myself & see the clearest men are least to be seen.

Written April 24, 1852, in his *Journal*, vol. 4, p. 487

Now if there are any who think that I am vain glorious—that I set myself up above others and crow over their low estate—let me tell them that I could tell a pitiful story respecting myself as well as them. If my spirits held out to do it, I could encourage them with a sufficient list of failures & could flow as humbly as the very gutters themselves. I could enumerate a list of as rank offences as ever reached the nostrils of heaven.

Written February 10, 1852, in his *Journal*, vol. 4, p. 340

I was not born to be forced. I will breathe after my own fashion.

"Resistance to Civil Government" in *Reform Papers*, pp. 80–81

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 have 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.

Walden, p. 17

You shall have your affairs, I will have mine. You will spend this afternoon in setting up your neighbor's stove, and be paid for it; I will spend it in gathering the

few berries of the *Vaccinium Oxycoccus* which Nature produces here, before it is too late, and *be paid for it also* after another fashion. I have always reaped unexpected and incalculable advantages from carrying out at last, however tardily, any little enterprise which my genius suggested to me long ago as a thing to be done,—some step to be taken, however slight, out of the usual course.

Written August 30, 1856, in his *Journal*, vol. IX, p. 36

In youth before I lost any of my senses, I can remember that I was all alive and inhabited my body with inexpressible satisfaction, both its weariness & its refreshment were sweet to me. This earth was the most glorious musical instrument, and I was audience to its strains.

Written July 16, 1851, in his *Journal*, vol. 3, pp. 305–306

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 practice resignation, unless it was quite necessary.

Walden, pp. 90–91

My actual life is unspeakably mean, compared with what I know and see that it might be.

Written on Staten Island to Lidian Emerson, June 20, 1843, in *The Correspondence of Henry David Thoreau*, p. 120

My actual life is a fact in view of which I have no occasion to congratulate myself, but for my faith and aspiration I have respect.

To H.G.O. Blake, March 27, 1848, in *The Correspondence of Henry David Thoreau*, p. 216

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.

Walden, p. 323

Methinks my seasons revolve more slowly than those of nature. I am differently timed.

Written July 19, 1851, in his *Journal*, vol. 3, p. 313

It behoves me . . . to speak out of the rarest part of myself.

To H.G.O. Blake, November 20, 1849, in *The Correspondence of Henry David Thoreau*, p. 250

I believe that it is in my power to elevate myself this very hour above the common level of my life.

To H.G.O. Blake, April 10, 1853, in *The Correspondence of Henry David Thoreau*, p. 303

Here I am 34 years old, and yet my life is almost wholly unexpanded. How much is in the germ! There is such an interval between my ideal and the actual in many instances that I may say I am unborn.

Written July 19, 1851, in his *Journal*, vol. 3, p. 313

I have sworn no oath. I have no designs on society—or nature—or God. I am simply what I am, or I begin to be that.

To H.G.O. Blake, March 27, 1848, in *The Correspondence of Henry David Thoreau*, p. 216

I believe in the forest, and in the meadow, and in the night in which the corn grows.

"Walking" in *Excursions*, p. 202

I had three chairs in my house; one for solitude, two for friendship, three for society.

Walden, p. 140

I enjoy more drinking water at a clear spring than out of a goblet at a gentleman's table. I like best the bread which I have baked, the garment which I have made, the shelter which I have constructed, the fuel which I have gathered.

Written October 20, 1855, in his *Journal*, vol. VII, p. 503

I trust that you realize what an exaggerator I am,—that I lay myself out to exaggerate whenever I have an opportunity,—pile Pelion upon Ossa, to reach heaven so. Expect no trivial truth from me, unless I am on the witness-stand. I will come as near to lying as you can drive a coach-and-four.

To H.G.O. Blake, April 10, 1853, in *The Correspondence of Henry David Thoreau*, p. 304

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.

Walden, p. 71

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.

Walden, pp. 216–217

I wish so to live ever as to derive my satisfactions and inspirations from the commonest events, every-day phenomena, so that what my senses hourly perceive, my daily walk, the conversation of my neighbors, may inspire me, and I may dream of no heaven but that which lies about me.

Written March 11, 1856, in his *Journal*, vol. VIII, p. 204

I only know myself as a human entity—the scene, so to speak, of thoughts & affections—and am sensible of a certain doubleness by which I stand as remote from

myself as from another. However intense my experience I am conscious of the presence & 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.

Written August 8, 1852, in his *Journal*, vol. 5, p. 290

I feel that my life is very homely, my pleasures very cheap. Joy and sorrow, success and failure, grandeur and meanness, and indeed most of the words in the English language do not mean for me what they do for my neighbors.

Written October 18, 1856, in his *Journal*, vol. IX, p. 121

For many years I was self appointed inspector of snowstorms & rainstorms and did my duty faithfully—though I never received one cent for it.

Written after February 22, 1846, in his *Journal*, vol. 2, p. 227

I am so wedded to my way of spending a day,—require such broad margins of leisure, and such a complete wardrobe of old clothes,—that I am ill fitted for going abroad. Pleasant is it sometimes to sit at home, on a single egg all day, in your own nest, though it may prove at last to be an egg of chalk.

To Daniel Ricketson, September 27, 1855, in *Familiar Letters*, p. 262

I take all these walks to every point of the compass, and it is always harvest-time with me. I am always

gathering my crop from these woods and fields and waters, and no man is in my way or interferes with me. My crop is not their crop. To-day I see them gathering in their beans and corn, and they are a spectacle to me, but are soon out of my sight. I am not gathering beans and corn. Do they think there are no fruits but such as these? I am a reaper; I am not a gleaner.

Written October 14, 1857, in his *Journal*, vol. X, pp. 93–94

I spend the forenoon in my chamber writing or arranging my papers & in the afternoon I walk forth into the fields & woods. I turn aside perchance into some withdrawn untrodden swamp & find there bilberries large & fair awaiting me in inexhaustible abundance—for I have no tame garden.

Written August 9, 1853, in his *Journal*, vol. 6, p. 293

How to live—How to get the most life! as if you were to teach the young hunter how to entrap his game. How to extract its honey from the flower of the world. That is my every day business. I am as busy as a bee about it. I ramble over all fields on that errand and am never so happy as when I feel myself heavy with honey & wax. I am like a bee searching the livelong day for the sweets of nature.

Written September 7, 1851, in his *Journal*, vol. 4, p. 53

I love a broad margin to myself.

Walden, p. 111

I perceive that I am dealt with by superior powers.

Written July 16, 1851, in his *Journal*, vol. 3, p. 306

I feel blessed. I love my life.

Written November 1, 1851, in his *Journal*, vol. 4, p. 159

My life partakes of infinity.

Written March 15, 1852, in his *Journal*, vol. 4, p. 390

he thus suggests far more than the sharp & definite practical mind.

Written March 9, 1853, in his *Journal*, vol. 6, p. 101

Alcott spent the day with me yesterday. He spent the day before with Emerson. He observed that he had got his wine & now he had come after his venison.

Written August 10, 1853, in his *Journal*, vol. 6, p. 294

John Brown

A man of rare common sense and directness of speech, as of action; a transcendentalist above all, a man of ideas and principles,—that was what distinguished him. Not yielding to a whim or transient impulse, but carrying out the purpose of a life.

"A Plea for Captain John Brown" in *Reform Papers*, p. 115

Think of him of—his rare qualities! such a man as it takes ages to make, and ages to understand; no mock hero, nor the representative of any party. A man such as the sun may not rise upon again in this benighted land. To whose making went the costliest material, the finest adamant; sent to be the redeemer of those in captivity. And the only use to which you can put him is to hang him at the end of a rope!

"A Plea for Captain John Brown" in *Reform Papers*, p. 136

I rejoice that I live in this age—that I am his contemporary.

"A Plea for Captain John Brown" in *Reform Papers*, p. 126

Thomas Carlyle

We believe that Carlyle has, after all, more readers, and is better known to-day for this very originality of style, and that posterity will have reason to thank him for emancipating the language, in some measure, from the fetters which a merely conservative, aimless, and pedantic literary class had imposed upon it, and setting an example of greater freedom and naturalness.

"Thomas Carlyle and His Works" in *Early Essays and Miscellanies*, pp. 232–233

Carlyle is not a *seer*, but a brave looker-on and *reviewer*; not the most free and catholic observer of men and events, for they are likely to find him preoccupied, but unexpectedly free and catholic when they fall within the focus of his lens.

"Thomas Carlyle and His Works" in *Early Essays and Miscellanies*, p. 246

Thomas De Quincey and Charles Dickens

De Quincey & Dickens have not moderation enough. They never stutter—they flow too readily.

Written September 8, 1851, in his *Journal*, vol. 4, p. 63

Mary Moody Emerson

The wittiest & most vivacious woman that I know—certainly that woman among my acquaintance whom it is most profitable to meet—the least frivolous who will most surely provoke to good conversation and the expression of what is in you. She is singular among

women at least in being really & perseveringly interested to know what thinkers think. She relates herself surely to the intellectual where she goes.

It is perhaps her greatest praise & peculiarity that she more surely than any other woman gives her companion occasion to utter his best thought.

In spite of her own biases she can entertain a large thought with hospitality and is not prevented by any intellectuality in it as women commonly are. In short she is a genius.

Written November 13, 1851, in his *Journal*, vol. 4, pp. 183–184

Talking with Miss Mary Emerson this evening, she said, "It was not the fashion to be so original when I was young." She is readier to take my view—look through my eyes for the time—than any young person that I know in the town.

Written January 26, 1856, when Mary Moody Emerson was eighty-two, in his *Journal*, vol. VIII, p. 146

Ralph Waldo Emerson

Emerson has special talents unequalled.

. . . His personal influence upon young persons greater than any man's.

Written winter 1845–1846, in his *Journal*, vol. 2, p. 224

Of Emerson's Essays I should say that they were not poetry—that they were not written exactly at the right crisis though inconceivably near to it.

Written December 2, 1846, in his *Journal*, vol. 2, p. 355

I doubt if Emerson could trundle a wheel barrow through the streets because it would be out of character.

Written January 30, 1852, in his *Journal*, vol. 4, p. 304

Emerson is too grand for me.

Written January 31, 1852, in his *Journal*, vol. 4, p. 309

Nathaniel Hawthorne

They say that Mr Pierce the presidential candidate was in town last 5th of July, visiting Hawthorne whose college chum he was, and that Hawthorne is writing a life of him for electioneering purposes.

To his sister, Sophia, July 13, 1852, in *The Correspondence of Henry David Thoreau*, p. 283

Thomas Wentworth Higginson

Heard Higginson lecture tonight on Mohammed. Why did I not like it better? Can I deny that it was good? . . . I did not like it then, because it did not make me like it—it did not carry me away captive. He is not simple enough. For the most part the manner overbore choked off & stifled.

Written January 21, 1852, in his *Journal*, vol. 4, p. 274

Henry James, Sr.

I have been to see Henry James, and like him very much. It was a great pleasure to meet him. It makes humanity seem more erect and respectable. I never

was more kindly and faithfully catechised. It made me respect myself more to be thought worthy of such wise questions.

To Ralph Waldo Emerson, after having met Henry James, Sr., June 8, 1843, in *The Correspondence of Henry David Thoreau*, p. 110

Horace Mann

Dr. Bartlett handed me a paper to-day, desiring me to subscribe for a statue to Horace Mann. I declined, and said that I thought a man ought not any more to take up room in the world after he was dead. We shall lose one advantage of a man's dying if we are to have a statue of him forthwith.

Written September 18, 1859, in his *Journal*, vol. XII, p. 335

George Minott

Minot is perhaps the most poetical farmer—who most realizes to me the poetry of the farmer's life—that I know. He does nothing (with haste and drudgery) but as if he loved it. He makes the most of his labor and takes infinite satisfaction in every part of it. He is not looking forward to the sale of his crops or any pecuniary profit, but he is paid by the constant satisfaction which his labor yields him. He has not too much land to trouble him—too much work to do—no hired man nor boy—but simply to amuse himself & live. He cares not so much to raise a large crop as to do his work well.

Written October 4, 1851, in his *Journal*, vol. 4, pp. 116–117

Wendell Phillips

It is so rare and encouraging to listen to an orator, who is content with another alliance than with the popular party, or even with the sympathising school of the martyrs, who can afford sometimes to be his own auditor if the mob stay away, and hears himself without reproof, that we feel ourselves in danger of slandering all mankind by affirming, that here is one, who is at the same time an eloquent speaker and a righteous man.

"Wendell Phillips Before Concord Lyceum" in *Reform Papers*, p. 61

Daniel Webster

I should have liked to see Dan. Webster walking about Concord, I suppose the town shook every step he took— But I trust there were some sturdy Concordians who were not tumbled down by the jar, but represented still the upright town.

To his mother, August 29, 1843, in *The Correspondence of Henry David Thoreau*, p. 135

The story is that Webster had appointed to meet some Plymouth gentlemen at Manomet and spend the day fishing with them. After the fishing was [over], he set out to return to Duxbury in his sailboat with Peterson, as he had come, and on the way they saw the seaserpent, which answered to the common account of this creature. It passed directly across their bows only six or seven rods off and then disappeared. On the sail homeward, Webster having had time to reflect on what

had occurred, at length said to Peterson, "For God's sake, never say a word about this to any one, for if it should be known that I should have seen the sea-serpent, I should never hear the last of it, but wherever I went should have to tell the story to every one I met."

Written June 14, 1857, in his *Journal*, vol. IX, p. 416

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.

"Resistance to Civil Government" in *Reform Papers*, p. 87

Walt Whitman

As for the sensuality in Whitman's "Leaves of Grass," I do not so much wish that it was not written, as that men and women were so pure that they could read it without harm.

Written December 2, 1856, in his *Journal*, vol. IX, p. 149

He is apparently the greatest democrat the world has seen. Kings and aristocracy go by the board at once, as they have long deserved to. A remarkably strong though coarse nature, of a sweet disposition, and much prized by his friends.

To H.G.O. Blake, from Eagleswood, New Jersey, November 19, 1856, in *The Correspondence of Henry David Thoreau*, p. 441

That Walt Whitman, of whom I wrote to you, is the most interesting fact to me at present. I have just read his 2nd edition (which he gave me) and it has done me

more good than any reading for a long time. . . . There are 2 or 3 pieces in the book which are disagreeable to say the least, simply sensual. He does not celebrate love at all. It is as if the beasts spoke.

To H.G.O. Blake, from Eagleswood, New Jersey, December 7, 1856, in *The Correspondence of Henry David Thoreau*, p. 444

THOREAU DESCRIBED BY HIS CONTEMPORARIES

Do not dissect a man till he is dead.

Written September 14, 1841, in his *Journal*, vol. 1, p. 333

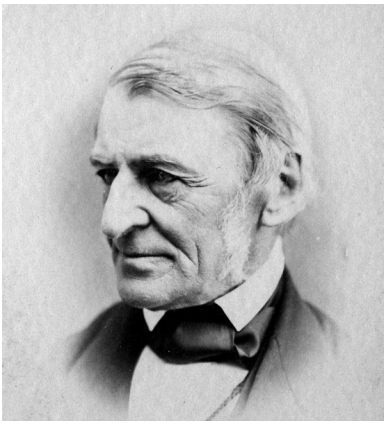

Fig. 19. Ralph Waldo Emerson. Photographic copy by Alfred W. Hosmer. The Paul Brooks Collection at the Thoreau Institute at Walden Woods. Courtesy of the Walden Woods Project.

Physical Characteristics

My first interview with him was so peculiar that I will venture to state it. . . . I perceived a man walking towards me bearing an umbrella in one hand and a leather travelling-bag in the other. So unlike my ideal Thoreau, whom I had fancied, from the robust nature of his mind and habits of life, to be a man of unusual vigor and size, that I did not suspect, although I had

expected him in the morning, that the slight, quaint-looking person before me was the Walden philosopher. There are few persons who had previously read his works that were not disappointed by his personal appearance.

Daniel Ricketson in *Daniel Ricketson and His Friends*, p. 11

In height, he was about the average; in his build, spare, with limbs that were rather longer than usual, or of which he made a longer use. His face, once seen, could not be forgotten. The features were quite marked: the nose aquiline or very Roman, like one of the portraits of Caesar (more like a beak, as was said); large, over-hanging brows above the deepest set blue eyes that could be seen, in certain lights, and in others gray,—eyes expressive of all shades of feeling, but never weak or near-sighted; the forehead not unusually broad or high, full of concentrated energy and purpose; the mouth with prominent lips, pursed up with meaning and thought when silent, and giving out when open a stream of the most varied and unusual and instructive sayings. His hair was a dark brown, exceedingly abundant, fine and soft; and for several years he wore a comely beard. His whole figure had an active earnestness, as if he had no moment to waste. The clenched hand betokened purpose.

William Ellery Channing in *Thoreau: The Poet-Naturalist*, p. 25

He came into the room a quaint, stump figure of a man, whose effect of long trunk and short limbs was heightened by his fashionless trousers being let down

too low. He had a noble face, with tossed hair, a distraught eye, and a fine aquilinity of profile, which made me think at once of Don Quixote and of Cervantes; but his nose failed to add that foot to his stature which Lamb says a nose of that shape will always give a man.

William Dean Howells in *Literary Friends and Acquaintance: A Personal Retrospect of American Authorship*, p. 59

He is as ugly as sin, long-nosed, queer-mouthed, and with uncouth and somewhat rustic, although courteous manners, corresponding very well with such an exterior. But his ugliness is of an honest and agreeable fashion, and becomes him much better than beauty.

Nathaniel Hawthorne, September 1, 1842, in *The American Notebooks*, pp. 353–354

We used to bother him a good deal calling him "the fine scholar with a big nose."

Alfred Munroe, August 8, 1877, quoted in Kenneth Walter Cameron's "Thoreau's Schoolmate, Alfred Munroe, Remembers Concord" (*American Transcendental Quarterly* 36), p. 20

He was short of stature, well built, and such a man as I have fancied Julius Caesar to have been. Every movement was full of courage and repose; the tones of his voice were those of Truth herself; and there was in his eye the pure bright blue of the New England sky, as there was sunshine in his flaxen hair. He had a particularly strong aquiline-Roman nose, which somehow reminded me of the prow of a ship.

Moncure D. Conway in "Thoreau" (*Fraser's Magazine for Town and Country*, April 1866), p. 461

The touch of his hand was moist and indifferent, as if he had taken up something when he saw your hand coming, and caught your grasp upon it.

John Weiss, a Harvard classmate, in "Thoreau" (Christian Examiner, July 1865), p. 97

Henry retained a particular pronunciation of the letter *r*, with a decided French accent. He says, "September is the first month with a *burr* in it;" and his speech always had an emphasis, a *burr* in it.

William Ellery Channing in *Thoreau: The Poet-Naturalist*, p. 2

He seemed rather less than the medium height, well-proportioned, and noticeably straight and erect. His shoulders were not square but sloping, like those of Mr. Emerson. His head was not large, nor did it strike me as handsome: it was covered with a full growth of rather dark hair somewhat carelessly brushed after no particular style. His face was very striking whether seen in the front or profile view. Large perceptive eyes—blue, I think, large and prominent nose; his mouth concealed by a full dark beard, worn natural but not untrimmed; these features pervaded by a wise, serious and dignified look. The expression of his countenance was not severe or commanding, but it certainly gave no hint of shallowness or trifling.

In speech he was deliberate and positive. The emphatic words seemed to "hang fire" or to be held back for an instant as if to gather force and weight. Although he resembled Emerson in this, there was no appearance of affectation about it; he appeared to be looking

at his thought all the time he was selecting and uttering his words.

E. Harlow Russell in an account reported in the *Leominster (Mass.) Daily Enterprise*, December 28, 1899, as quoted in Walter Harding's *Thoreau: Man of Concord*, p. 97

I like to see him come in, he always smells of the pine woods.

James T. Fields in Annie Adams Fields's *James T. Fields: Biographical Notes and Personal Sketches*, p. 102

Henry was the purest-looking man that ever lived.

Mabel Loomis Todd in *The Thoreau Family Two Generations Ago*, p. 19

Conduct and Character

He had a way of his own, and he didn't care much about money; but if there ever was a gentleman alive, he was one.

Barney Mullins, quoted in David Starr Jordan's "Thoreau and John Brown" (*The Current*, April 9, 1887), p. 454

You would find him well worth knowing; he is a man of thought and originality, with a certain iron-poker-ishness, an uncompromising stiffness in his mental character which is interesting, though it grows rather wearisome on close and frequent acquaintance.

Nathaniel Hawthorne to Henry Wadsworth Longfellow, November 21, 1848, quoted in *Final Memorials of Henry Wadsworth Longfellow*, edited by Samuel Longfellow, p. 29

I knew Thoreau well when we were schoolboys together. He was considered by most of us boys as rather

stupid, and unsympathetic, though by no means a poor scholar. I suppose we thought him stupid because he did not join heartily in our plays. I cannot recollect that he ever played with us at all. He seemed to have no fun in him.

Alfred Munroe, August 8, 1877, quoted in Kenneth Walter Cameron's "Thoreau's Schoolmate, Alfred Munroe, Remembers Concord" (*American Transcendental Quarterly* 36), p. 20

In college Mr. Thoreau had made no great impression. He was far from being distinguished as a scholar. He was not known to have any literary tastes; was never a contributor to the college periodical, the "Harvardiana"; was not, I think, interested, certainly not conspicuous, in any of the literary or scientific societies of the undergraduates, and, withal, was of an unsocial disposition, and kept himself much aloof from his classmates. At the time we graduated, I doubt whether any of his acquaintances regarded him as giving promise of future distinction.

David Green Haskins in *Ralph Waldo Emerson: His Maternal Ancestors*, pp. 119–120

Those who thought of Thoreau as cold or indifferent little understood the depth of feeling that lay beneath his undemonstrative exterior. During his father's illness his devotion was such that Mrs. Thoreau in recalling it said, "If it hadn't been for my husband's illness, I should never have known what a tender heart Henry had." He mourned deeply for this beloved

brother. He laid aside his flute and for years refused to speak his name. A friend told me that twelve years later Thoreau started, turned pale, and could hardly overcome his emotion when some reference to John was made.

Mary Hosmer Brown in *Memories of Concord*, p. 92

Mr. Thorow dined with us yesterday. He is a singular character—a young man with much of wild original nature still remaining in him; and so far as he is sophisticated, it is in a way and method of his own.

Nathaniel Hawthorne, September 1, 1842, in *The American Notebooks*, pp. 353–354

He always reminded me of an eagle, ready to soar to great heights or to swoop down on anything he considered evil.

Anonymous woman, who was his hostess on occasion in Worcester, as reported in Annie R. Marble's *Thoreau: His Home, Friends and Books*, p. 152

Perhaps Thoreau talked rather like one who was accustomed to be listened to than to listen, though this was by no means prominent, and there was not the slightest lack of courtesy in his manner. . . . He gave you a chance to talk, attended to what you said, and then made his reply, but did not come to very close quarters with you or help you out with your thought after the manner of skilled and practiced conversers. Emerson says of him that "he coldly and fully stated his opinion without affecting to believe that it was the

opinion of the company." Thoreau was always interesting, often entertaining, but never what you would call charming.

E. Harlow Russell in an account reported in the *Leominster (Mass.) Daily Enterprise*, December 28, 1899, as quoted in Walter Harding's *Thoreau: Man of Concord*, pp. 97–98

Thoreau, the Concord hermit, who lived by himself in the woods, used to come smiling up to his neighbors, to announce that the bluebirds had arrived, with as much interest in the fact as other men take in messages by the Atlantic cable. On certain days, he made long pilgrimages to find

"The sweet rhodora in the wood,"

welcoming the lonely flower like a long-absent friend. He gravely informed us once, that frogs were much more confiding in the spring, than later in the season; for then, it only took an hour to get well acquainted with one of the speckled swimmers, who liked to be tickled with a blade of grass, and would feed from his hand in the most sociable manner.

Louisa May Alcott in "Merry's Monthly Chat with his Friends" (*Merry's Museum*, March 1869), p. 147

In walking, he made a short cut if he could, and when sitting in the shade or by the wall-side seemed merely the clearer to look forward into the next piece of activity.

Ellery Channing in *Thoreau: The Poet Naturalist*, p. 25

I told Thoreau that he would have to come along with me, and he went without any trouble and was locked up. When his tax was paid by some one . . . I told him he was free to go but he would not, until finally I said, "Henry, if you will not go of your own accord I shall put you out, for you cannot stay here any longer." He was the only prisoner that I ever had that did not want to leave when he could.

Sam Staples in "An Evening with Thoreau" as reported in the *Concord High School Voice*, November 15, 1895, p. 23

I do not remember of ever seeing him laugh outright, but he was ever ready to smile at anything that pleased him; and I never knew him to betray any tender emotion except on one occasion, when he was narrating to me the death of his only brother, John Thoreau, from lockjaw, strong symptoms of which, from his sympathy with the sufferer, he himself experienced. At this time his voice was choked, and he shed tears, and went to the door for air. The subject was of course dropped, and never recurred to again.

Daniel Ricketson in *Daniel Ricketson and His Friends*, p. 14

Henry T has built him a house of one room a little distance from Walden pond & in view of the public road. There he lives—cooks, eats, studies & sleeps & is quite happy. He has many visitors, whom he receives with pleasure & does his best to entertain.

Prudence Ward, January 20, 1846, as reported in Henry Seidel Canby's *Thoreau*, p. 216

Mr. Emerson . . . has a friend with him of the name of Henry Thoreau who has come to live with him and be his working-man this year. H. T. is three and twenty, has been through college and kept a school, is very fond of classic studies, and an earnest thinker yet intends being a farmer. He has a great deal of practical sense, and as he has bodily strength to boot, he may look to be a successful and happy man. He has a boat which he made himself, and rows me out on the pond.

Margaret Fuller to her brother, Richard, May 25, 1841, in *The Letters of Margaret Fuller*, vol. 2, p. 210

If I knew only Thoreau, I should think coöperation of good men impossible. Must we always talk for victory, and never once for truth, for comfort, and joy? Centrality he has, and penetration, strong understanding, and the higher gifts,—the insight of the real, or from the real, and the moral rectitude that belongs to it; but all this and all his resources of wit and invention are lost to me, in every experiment, year after year, that I make, to hold intercourse with his mind. Always some weary captious paradox to fight you with, and the time and temper wasted.

Ralph Waldo Emerson, written 1856 in *The Journals of Ralph Waldo Emerson*, vol. 8, pp. 15–16

The undersigned very cheerfully hereby introduces to public notice the bearer, Mr. David Henry Thoreau, as a teacher in the higher branches of useful literature. He is a native of this town, and a graduate of Harvard University. He is well disposed and well qualified to

instruct the rising generation. His scholarship and moral character will bear the strictest scrutiny. He is modest and mild in his disposition and government, but not wanting in energy of character and fidelity in the duties of his profession. It is presumed his character and usefulness will be appreciated more highly as an acquaintance with him shall be cultivated. Cordial wishes for his success, reputation, and usefulness attend him, as an instructor and gentleman.

Ezra Ripley to the "Friends of Education," May 1, 1838, quoted in Franklin B. Sanborn's *Henry D. Thoreau*, pp. 57–58

We boys used to visit him on Saturday afternoons at his house by Walden, and he would show us interesting things in the woods near by. I did not see the philosophical side. He was never stern or pedantic, but natural and very agreeable, friendly,—but a person you would never feel inclined to fool with. A face that you would long remember. Though short in stature, and inconspicuous in dress, you would not fail to notice him in the street, as more than ordinary.

Edward Emerson in *Henry Thoreau as Remembered by a Young Friend*, p. 129

I recall an occasion when little Edward Emerson, carrying a basket of fine huckleberries, had a fall and spilt them all. Great was his distress, and our offers of berries could not console him for the loss of those gathered by himself. But Thoreau came, put his arm around the troubled child, and explained to him that if the

crop of huckleberries was to continue it was necessary that some should be scattered. Nature had provided that little boys should now and then stumble and sow the berries. We shall have a grand lot of bushes and berries on this spot, and we shall owe them to you. Edward began to smile.

Moncure D. Conway in *Autobiography: Memoirs and Experiences*, vol. 1, p. 148

I love Henry, but do not like him.

Elizabeth Hoar, as reported by Ralph Waldo Emerson in 1843 in *The Journals of Ralph Waldo* Emerson, vol. 6, p. 371

He seemed to know what he knew—by no means, I think, the most common of characteristics.

John Witt Randall to Francis Ellingwood Abbot, January 9, 1857, in *Poems of Nature and Life*, p. 109

Anecdotes

Think of it, he stood half an hour today to hear the frogs croak, and he would'nt read the life of Chalmers.

Thoreau's aunt, Maria Thoreau, as recorded by Thoreau on March 28, 1853, in his *Journal*, vol. 6, p. 41

On my birthday, in the early summer, just before I went to take my examination for Harvard, my father and mother invited Thoreau and Channing, both, but especially Thoreau, friends from my babyhood, to dine with us. When we left the table and were passing into the parlour, Thoreau asked me to come with him to our East door—our more homelike door, facing the

orchard. It was an act of affectionate courtesy, for he had divined my suppressed state of mind and remembered that first crisis in his own life, and the wrench that it seemed in advance, as a gate leading out into an untried world. With serious face, but with a very quiet, friendly tone of voice, he reassured me, told me that I should be really close to home; very likely should pass my life in Concord. It was a great relief.

Edward Emerson in *Henry Thoreau as Remembered by a Young Friend*, p. 147

I liked Thoreau, though he was morbid. I do not think it was so much a love of woods, streams, and hills that made him live in the country, as from a morbid dislike of humanity. I remember Thoreau saying once, when walking with him in my favorite Brooklyn—"What is there in the people? Pshaw! what do you (a man who sees as well as anybody) see in all this cheering political corruption?"

Walt Whitman as reported in Anne Gilchrist's *Anne Gilchrist: Her Life and Writings*, edited by Herbert Harlakenden Gilchrist, p. 237

Once, when I was nearly seven years old, Thoreau came to the Wayside to make a survey of our land, bringing his surveying apparatus on his shoulder. I watched the short, dark, unbeautiful man with interest and followed him about, all over the place, never losing sight of a movement and never asking a question or uttering a word. The thing must have lasted a couple of hours; when we got back, Thoreau remarked to my

father: "Good boy! Sharp eyes, and no tongue!" On that basis I was admitted to his friendship; a friendship or comradeship which began in 1852 and was to last until his death in 1862.

Julian Hawthorne in *The Memoirs of Julian Hawthorne*, p. 114

Thoreau had his own odd ways. Once he got to the house while I was out—went straight to the kitchen where my dear mother was baking some cakes—took the cakes hot from the oven. He was always doing things of the plain sort—without fuss. I liked all that about him. But Thoreau's great fault was disdain—disdain for men (for Tom, Dick and Harry): inability to appreciate the average life—even the exceptional life: it seemed to me a want of imagination. He couldn't put his life into any other life—realize why one man was so and another man was not so: was impatient with other people on the street and so forth. We had a hot discussion about it—it was a bitter difference: it was rather a surprise to me to meet in Thoreau such a very aggravated case of superciliousness. It was egotistic—not taking that word in its worst sense. . . . Yet he was a man you would have to like—an interesting man, simple, conclusive. When I was at Emerson's Mrs. Emerson told me Thoreau stayed with her during one of Emerson's trips abroad. She said that Thoreau, though odd, was good, equable, assiduous, likeable, throughout. . . . When I lived in Brooklyn—in the suburbs—probably two miles distant from the ferries—

though there were cheap cabs, I always walked to the ferry to get over to New York. Several times when Thoreau was there with me we walked together.

Walt Whitman as reported in Horace Traubel's *With Walt Whitman in Camden (March 28–July 14, 1888)*, pp. 212–213

He tried to place me geographically after he had given me a chair not quite so far off as Ohio, though still across the whole room, for he sat against one wall, and I against the other; but apparently he failed to pull himself out of his revery by the effort, for he remained in a dreamy muse, which all my attempts to say something fit about John Brown and Walden Pond seemed only to deepen upon him. . . . I do not remember that Thoreau spoke of his books or of himself at all, and when he began to speak of John Brown, it was not the warm, palpable, loving, fearful old man of my conception, but a sort of John Brown type, a John Brown ideal, a John Brown principle, which we were somehow (with long pauses between the vague, orphic phrases) to cherish, and to nourish ourselves upon.

William Dean Howells in *Literary Friends and Acquaintance: A Personal Retrospect of American Authorship*, p. 59

I have seen children catch him by the hand, as he was going home from school, to walk with him and hear more.

Dr. Thomas Hosmer as quoted in Edward Emerson's *Henry Thoreau as Remembered by a Young Friend* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1917), p. 128

Mr. Thoreau was always most modest and yet chivalrous in his treatment of women of high or low degree.

Edward Waldo Emerson and Waldo Emerson Forbes in Ralph Waldo Emerson's *The Journals of Ralph Waldo Emerson*, vol. 6, p. 371

One of our girls said, that Henry never went through the kitchen without coloring.

Ralph Waldo Emerson, written 1843, in *The Journals of Ralph Waldo Emerson*, vol. 6, p. 371

I remember being startled by a remark of Mr. Emerson's as we were one day walking beside Walden Pond. . . . As I ventured to comment upon the singular contiguity of the village to what might be termed the fringe of this trackless solitude, the "Sage of Concord" turned to me with a sweet but peculiar smile. "Yes," he said, "we sometimes rang the dinner bell at the lower end of the garden and we were always glad when Henry heard it and came up."

Ralph Waldo Emerson as related by Bret Harte in "A Few Words about Mr. Lowell" (*The New Review*, September 1891), pp. 199–200

I have a keen recollection of the first time I met Henry David Thoreau. It was upon a beautiful day in July, 1847, that Mrs. Alcott told us we were to visit Walden. We started merrily a party of seven, Mr. and Mrs. Alcott, the four girls and myself, for the woods of oak and pine that encircled the picturesque little lake called

Walden Pond. We found Thoreau in his cabin, a plain little house of one room containing a wood stove.

He gave us gracious welcome, asking us within. . . . He was talking to Mr. Alcott of the wild flowers in Walden woods when, suddenly stopping, he said: "Keep very still and I will show you my family." Stepping quickly outside the cabin door, he gave a low and curious whistle; immediately a woodchuck came running towards him from a nearby burrow. With varying note, yet still low and strange, a pair of gray squirrels were summoned and approached him fearlessly. With still another note several birds, including two crows, flew towards him, one of the crows nestling upon his shoulder. I remember it was the crow resting close to his head that made the most vivid impression upon me, knowing how fearful of man this bird is. He fed them all from his hand, taking food from his pocket, and petted them gently before our delighted gaze; and then dismissed them by different whistling, always strange and low and short, each little wild thing departing instantly at hearing its special signal.

Then he took us five children upon the Pond in his boat, ceasing his oars after a little distance from the shore and playing the flute he had brought with him, its music echoing over the still and beautifully clear water.

Frederick L. H. Willis in *Alcott Memoirs*, pp. 91–92

He played with much expression on the flute, and in his early years sang in a pleasing voice, although he

had no special training in music. After his brother's death he could not be induced to sing. The musical quality of his voice made him a charming reader.

S. E. Rena, February 12, 1896, to the editor of the Boston *Transcript*, as quoted in Kenneth Walter Cameron's *The New England Writers and the Press*, p. 262

Thoreau used to amuse us by gently raising fish out of the water.

Moncure D. Conway in *Life of Nathaniel Hawthorne*, p. 165

Personally, he was odd, in all senses of the term. He was bilious in constitution and in temper, with a disposition somewhat prone to suspicion and jealousy, and defiant, rather than truly independent, in spirit. He had a searching, watchful, unconciliating eye, a long, stealthy tread and an alert but not graceful figure. His heart was neither warm nor large, and he certainly did not share that "enthusiasm for humanity" which was the fashionable profession in his day. His habits were solitary and unsocial; yet secretly he was highly sensitive to the opinion of his fellow-men, and would perhaps have mingled more freely with them, but for a perception that there was no vehement demand for his company. The art of pleasing was not innate in him, and he was too proud to cultivate it. Rather than have it appear that society could do without him, he resolved to make haste and banish society; for a couple of years he actually lived alone in a hut built by himself, on the shores of Walden Pond, near Concord: all his life he kept out of people's way,—you

were more apt to see his disappearing coat-tails than his face.

Julian Hawthorne in *American Literature*, p. 146

Thoreau was a good deal of a wag in a quiet humorous way. He once put cloth bandages on the claws of Mrs. Emerson's hens, that good lady having been sorely tried by her fowls invading the family flower patch. I guess Mrs. Emerson invented the notion of gloving her hens, and Thoreau carried out her instructions to the letter, and then went off and had his laugh out.

An "old Concordian" in "Thoreau Gloving Mrs. Emerson's Hens" in *The Minneapolis Tribune*, ca. 1890, as quoted in Walter Harding's *Thoreau: Man of Concord*, p. 72

On a summer morning about fourteen years ago I went with Mr. Emerson and was introduced to Thoreau. I was then connected with Divinity College at Cambridge, and my new acquaintance was interested to know what we were studying there at the time. "Well, the Scriptures." "But *which*?" he asked, not without a certain quiet humor playing about his serious blue eye. . . . When I went to the house next morning, I found them all (Thoreau was then living in his father's house) in a state of excitement by reason of the arrival of a fugitive negro from the South, who had come fainting to their door about daybreak and thrown himself on their mercy. Thoreau took me in to see the poor wretch, whom I found to be a man with whose face as that of a slave in the South I was familiar. The negro was much terrified at seeing me, supposing that I was

one of his pursuers. Having quieted his fears by the assurance that I too, though in a different sense, was a refugee from the bondage he was escaping, and at the same time been able to attest the negro's genuineness, I sat and watched the singularly tender and lowly devotion of the scholar to the slave. He must be fed, his swollen feet bathed, and he must think of nothing but rest. Again and again this coolest and calmest of men drew near to the trembling negro, and bade him feel at home, and have no fear that any power should again wrong him. He could not walk that day, but must mount guard over the fugitive, for slave-hunters were not extinct in those days; and so I went away after a while, much impressed by many little traits that I had seen as they had appeared in this emergency, and not much disposed to cavil at their source, whether Bible or Bhaghavat.

Moncure D. Conway in "Thoreau" (*Fraser's Magazine for Town and Country*, April 1866), pp. 460–461

He was a man of rare courage, physically and intellectually. In the way of the former, he arrested two young fellows with horse and wagon on the lonely road leading to his hermitage at Walden pond, who were endeavoring to entrap a young woman on her way home, and took them to the village; whether they were brought to court I do not remember, and may not have given an exact account of the affair, but it is circumstantially correct.

Daniel Ricketson in *Daniel Ricketson and His Friends*, pp. 252–253

Death

As long he could possibly sit up, he insisted on his chair at the family-table, and said, "It would not be social to take my meals alone."

William Ellery Channing in *Thoreau: The Poet-Naturalist*, p. 323

You ask for some particulars relating to Henry's illness. I feel like saying that Henry was never affected, never reached by it. I never before saw such a manifestation of the power of spirit over matter. Very often I have heard him tell his visitors that he enjoyed existence as well as ever. He remarked to me that there was as much comfort in perfect disease as in perfect health, the mind always conforming to the condition of the body. The thought of death, he said, could not begin to trouble him. His thoughts had entertained him all his life, and did still.

When he had wakeful nights, he would ask me to arrange the furniture so as to make fantastic shadows on the wall, and he wished his bed was in the form of a shell, that he might curl up in it. He considered occupation as necessary for the sick as for those in health, and has accomplished a vast amount of labor during the past few months in preparing some papers for the press. He did not cease to call for his manuscripts till the last day of his life.

During his long illness I never heard a murmur escape him, or the slightest wish expressed to remain with us; his perfect contentment was truly wonderful. None of his friends seemed to realize how very ill he was, so full of life and good cheer did he seem. One

friend, as if by way of consolation, said to him, "Well, Mr. Thoreau, we must all go." Henry replied, "When I was a very little boy I learned that I must die, and I set that down, so of course I am not disappointed now. Death is as near to you as it is to me."

There is very much that I should like to write you about my precious brother, had I time and strength. I wish you to know how very gentle, lovely, and submissive he was in all his ways. His little study bed was brought down into our front parlor, when he could no longer walk with our assistance, and every arrangement pleased him. The devotion of his friends was most rare and touching; his room was made fragrant by the gift of flowers from young and old; fruit of every kind which the season afforded, and game of all sorts was sent him. It was really pathetic, the way in which the town was moved to minister to his comfort. Total strangers sent grateful messages, remembering the good he had done them. All this attention was fully appreciated and very gratifying to Henry; he would sometimes say, "I should be ashamed to stay in this world after so much had been done for me, I could never repay my friends." And they so remembered him to the last. Only about two hours before he left us, Judge Hoar called with a bouquet of hyacinths fresh from his garden, which Henry smelled and said he liked, and a few minutes after he was gone, another friend came with a dish of his favorite jelly. I can never be grateful enough for the gentle, easy exit which was granted him. At seven o'clock Tuesday morning he became restless and desired to be moved; dear mother,

Aunt Louisa, and myself were with him; his self-possession did not forsake him. A little after eight he asked to be raised quite up, his breathing grew fainter and fainter, and without the slightest struggle, he left us at nine o'clock.

Sophia Thoreau to Daniel Ricketson, May 20, 1862, as quoted by Daniel Ricketson in *Daniel Ricketson and His Friends*, pp. 141–143

It may interest you to hear of the last visit which I with Blake made at his (Thoreau's) house a short time before he died. . . . We found him pretty low, but well enough to be up in his chair. He seemed glad to see us. Said we had not come much too soon. We spent some hours with him in his mother's parlor, which overlooks the river that runs all through his life. There was a beautiful snowstorm going on the while which I fancy inspired him, and his talk was up to the best I ever heard from him,—the same depth of earnestness and the same infinite depth of fun going on at the same time.

I wish I could recall some of the things he said. I do remember some few answers he made to questions from Blake. Blake asked him how the future seemed to him. "Just as uninteresting as ever," was his characteristic answer. A little while after he said, "You have been skating on this river; perhaps I am going to skate on some other." And again, "Perhaps I am going up country." He stuck to nature to the last.

Theo Brown to Daniel Ricketson, January 19, 1868, as quoted in Daniel Ricketson's *Daniel Ricketson and His Friends*, pp. 213–214

Sam Staples yesterday had been to see Henry Thoreau. "Never spent an hour with more satisfaction. Never saw a man dying with so much pleasure and peace." Thinks that very few men in Concord know Mr. Thoreau; finds him serene and happy.

Sam Staples, as reported by Ralph Waldo Emerson on March 24, 1862, in *The Journals of Ralph Waldo Emerson*, vol. 9, p. 413

Some boys of the vicinity were in the habit of bringing game for him to eat, presenting it at the kitchen door, and then gently withdrawing so as not to disturb the sick man. On one occasion he was told of it soon after their leaving, when he earnestly inquired: "Why did you not invite them in? I want to thank them for so much that they are bringing me." And then adding, thoughtfully: "Well, I declare; I don't believe they are going to let me go after all."

Sophia Thoreau in 1863 as related by Calvin Greene in "Memories of Thoreau: Unpublished Anecdotes of New England's Anti-Puritan Author and Naturalist" (*The Truth Seeker*, November 20, 1897), p. 144

Some Final Assessments

Why should any one wish to have a sentence of Henry Thoreau's put in print?"

George Frisbie Hoar, when asked by Thomas Wentworth Higginson to intercede with Sophia Thoreau in getting some of Thoreau's unpublished writings posthumously printed, as reported in Thomas Wentworth Higginson's "George Frisbie Hoar" (*Proceedings of the American Academy of Arts and Sciences*, vol. 40, 1905), p. 762

I loved to hear him talk, but I did not like his books so well, though I often read them and took what I liked. They do not do him justice. I liked to see Thoreau rather in his life. . . . He loved to talk, like all his family, but not to gossip: he kept the talk on a high plane. He was cheerful and pleasant.

Mrs. Minot Pratt as reported in Edward Emerson's *Henry Thoreau as Remembered by a Young Friend*, p. 80

Henry Thoreau we all remember as a man of genius, and of marked character, known to our farmers as the most skilful of surveyors, and indeed better acquainted with their forests and meadows and trees than themselves, but more widely known as the writer of some of the best books which have been written in this country, and which, I am persuaded, have not yet gathered half their fame.

Ralph Waldo Emerson, at the opening of the Concord Free Public Library, 1873, in *Miscellanies*, p. 500

I read his books & manuscripts always with a new surprise at the range of his topics & the novelty & depth of his thought. A man of large reading, of quick perception, of great practical courage & ability,—who grew greater every day, &, had his short life been prolonged would have found few equals to the power & wealth of his mind.

Ralph Waldo Emerson to George Stewart, Jr., January 22, 1877, in *The Letters of Ralph Waldo Emerson*, vol. 6, p. 303

His soul was made for the noblest society; he had in a short life exhausted the capabilities of this world; wherever there is knowledge, wherever there is virtue, wherever there is beauty, he will find a home.

Ralph Waldo Emerson in "Thoreau" (*Atlantic Monthly*, August 1862), p. 249

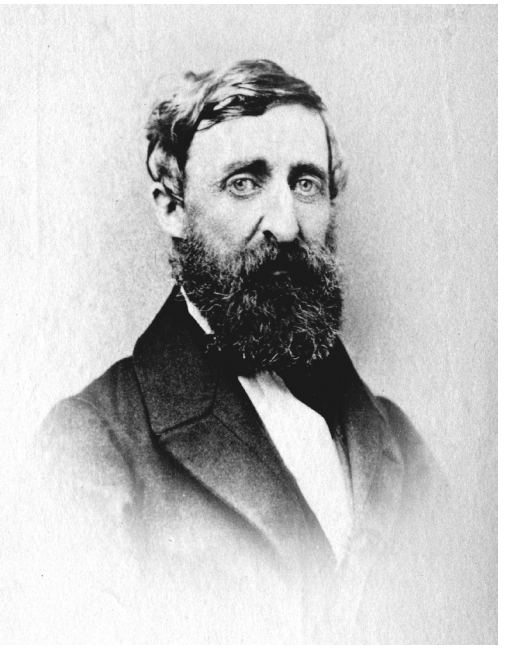

Fig. 20. Ambrotype by Edward Sidney Dunshee taken on August 21, 1861, in New Bedford, Massachusetts. Photographic copy by Alfred W. Hosmer. The Lewis C. Dawes Collection at the Thoreau Institute at Walden Woods. Courtesy of the Walden Woods Project.

APPENDIX

Misquotations and Misattributions

"In wilderness is the preservation of the world."

MISQUOTATION: correct quotation, from "Walking": "In Wildness is the preservation of the World."

Although this appeared in a few minor publications in the first half of the twentieth century, it was Perry Miller's 1957 anthology, *The American Transcendentalists, Their Prose and Poetry*, used in innumerable colleges and universities, that propagated the error.

"Use what talent you possess: the woods would be very silent if no birds sang except those that sang best."

MISATTRIBUTION: correct attribution unknown, although it has also been erroneously and extensively attributed to Henry Van Dyke (1852–1933). The first known use was in *The Ladies Repository: A Monthly Periodical, Devoted to Literature, Arts, and Religion* (September 1874), without attribution.

"Friends are kind to each other's hopes, they cherish each other's dreams."

MISQUOTATION: correct quotation, from the "Wednesday" chapter of *A Week on the Concord and Merrimack Rivers*: "The Friend asks no return but that his Friend will religiously accept and wear and not disgrace

his apotheosis of him. They cherish each other's hopes. They are kind to each other's dreams."

"Go confidently in the direction of your dreams. Live the life you have imagined. As you simplify your life, the laws of the universe will be simpler."

MISQUOTATION: correct quotation from *Walden*: "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."

"It is not enough to be busy. The question is: what are we busy about?"

VARIANT: "It is not enough to be busy. So are the ants. The question is: What are we busy about?"

MISQUOTATION: correct quotation from Thoreau's letter to H.G.O. Blake, November 16, 1857: "It is not enough to be industrious; so are the ants. What are you industrious about?"

"Many men fish all their lives without ever realizing that it is not the fish they are after."

VARIANT: "Many go fishing all their lives without knowing that it is not fish they are after."

MISQUOTATION: the closest parallel in a non-Thoreau text is from E.T. Brown's *Not without Prejudice: Essays on Assorted Subjects* (Melbourne: Cheshire, 1955), p. 142: "When they go fishing, it is not really fish they are after. It is a philosophic meditation." The actual misquotation in relation to Thoreau can be attrib-

uted to Michael Baughman's *A River Seen Right* (Lyons Press, 1995) p. 156, in which he wrote, clearly paraphrasing and not quoting: "I think it was in *Walden* where he wrote that a lot of men fish all their lives without ever realizing that fish isn't really what they're after."

Baughman may have been paraphrasing from Thoreau's Journal, January 26, 1853:

> It is remarkable that many men will go with eagerness to Walden Pond in the winter to fish for pickerel and yet not seem to care for the landscape. Of course it cannot be *merely* for the pickerel they may catch; there is some adventure in it; but any love of nature which they may feel is certainly very slight and indefinite. They call it going a-fishing, and so indeed it is, though perchance, their natures know better. Now I go a-fishing and a-hunting every day, but omit the fish and the game, which are the least important part. I have learned to do without them. They were indispensable only as long as I was a boy. I am encouraged when I see a dozen villagers drawn to Walden Pond to spend a day in fishing through the ice, and suspect that I have more fellows than I knew, but I am disappointed and surprised to find that they lay so much stress on the fish which they catch or fail to catch, and on nothing else, as if there were nothing else to be caught.

"Most men lead lives of quiet desperation and go to the grave with the song still in them."

MISQUOTATION: the first half of this quotation is a misquotation from Thoreau's *Walden*: "The mass of men lead lives of quiet desperation."

MISATTRIBUTION: the second half is misattributed to Thoreau and may be a misremembering of Oliver Wendell Holmes's (1809–1894) "The Voiceless":

Alas for those that never sing,
But die with all their music in them.

"Be true to your work, your word, and your friend."

MISATTRIBUTION: correct attribution is the poet, novelist, and editor John Boyle O'Reilly (1844–1890), although the words from his poem "Rules of the Road" should more correctly be quoted as: "Be true to your word and your work and your friend."

"If you would find yourself, look to the land from which you came and to which you go."

MISATTRIBUTION: correct attribution is Stewart Udall, who wrote in *The Quiet Crisis* (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1963), p. 190, regarding Thoreau: "To those who complain of the complexity of modern life, he might reply, 'If you want inner peace find it in solitude, not speed, and if you would find yourself, look to the land from which you came and to which you go.'"

"There is no value in life except what you choose to place upon it, and no happiness in any place except what you bring to it yourself."

MISATTRIBUTION: correct attribution is Lin Yutang (1895–1976) who wrote in *On the Wisdom of America* (New York: John Day, 1950) p. 446: "Thoreau once

thought the moon was larger over the United States than over the Old World, the sky bluer, the stars brighter, the thunder louder, the rivers longer, the mountains higher, the prairies vaster, and he mystically concluded that the spirit of man in America should be larger and more expansive 'else why was America discovered?' Thoreau was wrong, and Thoreau was right. There is no value in life except what you choose to place upon it, and no happiness in any place except what you bring to it yourself."

"What lies behind us and what lies before us are tiny matters compared to what lies within us."

MISATTRIBUTION: correct attribution is Henry Stanley Haskins (1875–1957) from his anonymously published *Meditations in Wall Street* (New York: William Morrow & Co., 1940), p. 131.

"You cannot dream yourself into a character; you must hammer and forge yourself one. Go out into life, you will find your chance there, and only there."

MISATTRIBUTION: correct attribution is the English historian James Anthony Froude (1818–1894) from his book *The Nemesis of Faith* (1849). The first line of this quotation appeared in Anna Cabot Lowell's *Seed-Grain for Thought and Discussion: A Compilation* (Boston: Ticknor and Fields, 1856), in which the quotation preceding this was by Thoreau.

"Libraries will get you through times of no money better than money will get you through times of no libraries."

VARIANT: "Books will get you through times of no money better than money will get you through times of no books."

MISATTRIBUTION: this misattribution is an adaption from a Gilbert Shelton *Fabulous Furry Freak Brothers* cartoon ("The Freaks Pull a Heist!"): "Dope will get you through times of no money better than money will get you through times of no dope." The "Libraries will get you through" version first appeared in *The Whole Earth Catalog* (1980 edition). The "Books will get you through" version was published by the American Library Association in the early 1980s.

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