



THE PERSONALITY OF THOREAU

BY F. B. SANBORN

IT is thought that the wonderful increase of interest in Thoreau, developed during the past few years, and the constantly widening circle of his admirers, will render timely the publication of the volume announced under the above heading.

Of the author's peculiar fitness for the treatment of the subject it is hardly necessary to speak. Mr. Sanborn's well-known intimacy not only with Thoreau but also with his friends gives him an advantage no other living writer possesses. From the store of his memory he has drawn a fund of reminiscences of Thoreau, the *man*, and this sketch of a unique individuality, with its modest but conscious integrity, is sure to delight the readers and admirers of the great Concord "Poet-Naturalist."

Several verses by Thoreau will find their first publication in this volume. A beautiful passage beginning

"Say to what earth does this sweet cold belong
That asks no duties and no conscience?"

originally written as the conclusion of "A Winter's Walk,"

one of Thoreau's papers printed in *The Dial*, Emerson, then the editor, for some reason omitted. This will now first be given to the public.

It is the intention of the publisher to make this volume acceptable alike to the general reader and the lover of choice books. A full-page etching by Sidney L. Smith and facsimiles of Thoreau's manuscript will appear as illustrations. The book is to be printed at the Merrymount Press, and great care will be given to the selection of type and its arrangement. The paper is made specially for the book in France, and is the same as that used by the *Imprimerie Nationale*, Paris, in the production of some of the books issued by the French Government for the recent Exposition; the type (a special fresh casting for this volume) is an imported Scotch modern-face, in use about 1840—Thoreau's period. The aim is to produce a volume which shall be artistically beautiful, without undue display or the exploiting of novel "features." A specimen page is shown on the following sheet.

The Edition will be limited as follows: *500 copies on toned French hand-made paper at \$3.00 net; 15 copies on Japanese vellum at \$12.50 net.* All Orders will be entered in the precise order of their receipt.

CHARLES E. GOODSPEED, PUBLISHER,
NUMBER 5^A PARK STREET, BOSTON, MASSACHUSETTS.

THOREAU

the children parch corn by the parlor fire. When Emerson said to his young visitor, that "he was always looking out for new poets and orators, and was sure the new generation of young men would contain some,"—Thoreau quaintly said that "he had found one in the Concord woods, —only it had feathers, and had never been to Harvard College; still it had a voice and an aerial inclination,—and little more was needed." "Let us cage it," said Emerson. "That is the way the world always spoils its poets," was Thoreau's characteristic reply.

He was a poet himself, and something more. Ellery Channing gave him his true title,— "Poet-Naturalist." He was neither exclusively or definitely, but a fusion of the two; and his outward man was rather the searching naturalist, at home in the forest or by the stream, than the typical poet of our youthful dreams, to whose aspect there goes something of ideal beauty and lightsome caprice. When I first saw Thoreau, in the College yard at Cambridge, striding along the path, away from my room in Holworthy,

**THE PERSONALITY OF
THOREAU**

BY F. B. SANBORN



BOSTON
CHARLES E. GOODSPEED
1901

AL3639.07.5

*

13

v

Copyright, 1901, by F. B. SANBORN

HARVARD COLLEGE LIBRARY
FROM THE LIBRARY OF
NORTON PERKINS
NOVEMBER 11, 1925

Πολλῷ γ' ἀμείνων τοὺς πέλας φρενοῦν ἔφους
Ἦ σαυτόν· ἔργῳ κόν λόγῳ τεκμαίρομαι

OCEANUS TO PROMETHEUS

Far better thou art to advise those near
Than thyself; by deed and not by word I judge

THOREAU'S VERSION OF ÆSCHYLUS

THE PERSONALITY OF THOREAU

As I recall the seven years and a month during which I knew Henry Thoreau; seeing him every day during much of that period, from March 25, 1855, to his death in early May, 1862,—unless he or I were absent from Concord,—and visiting with him many of those spots in the wide township which his pen has pictured for the delight of many readers; a great regret is felt that no written record was made of those conversations and walks. But it did not occur to his friends in those years before the Civil War that he would so soon pass from our sight; nor, in fact, did many of us then appreciate, to the full, his remarkable gifts and their rare and original quality. We had come to know him first, perhaps, from Emerson's description of his younger friend; at any rate, we had earlier and more affectionately admired Emerson; and some of us were not free from that delusion, sedulously propa-

THE PERSONALITY OF

gated in Cambridge, that he was a mimic of Emerson's more original powers. So far as I can now recollect, the very first mention that I heard of Thoreau's personality, in the years when I was studying for college, yet had then read all that Emerson had published, except the uncollected *Dial* papers, was this jest, repeated by my dearest friend,—that somebody had seen the author of the *Week* in the street at Cambridge, and, recognizing him, had said to his companion, "There is Thoreau,—look at him! he is getting up a nose like Emerson's." We both laughed, of course, and remembered that Lowell in his *Fable for Critics* had jested to the same effect:—

"There comes Channing, for instance; to see him's rare sport,
Tread in Emerson's tracks with legs painfully short;
He follows as close as a stick to a rocket,
His fingers exploring the prophet's each pocket.
Fie, for shame, brother bard! with good fruit of your own,
Can't you let Neighbor Emerson's orchards alone?
Besides,—'t is no use,—you'll not find e'en a core;
Thoreau has picked up all the windfalls before:
When they send him a dishful, and ask him to try 'em,
He never suspects how the sly rogues came by 'em;
He wonders why 't is there are none such *his* trees on,
And thinks 'em the best he has tasted this season."

THOREAU

True, Lowell, who printed this anonymously in 1848, left the two Concord names blank; but those who read what the younger friends of Emerson had then published—Channing two volumes of verse and some prose in the *Dial*, and Thoreau his *Week on the Concord and Merrimack Rivers* in part, in the *Dial*, with other papers, a few original verses, and some translations from the Greek—could not doubt for whom these shafts of satire were meant. The points of resemblance between the written style of Channing or of Thoreau and that of Emerson, whether in verse or prose, were very few; but a like-mindedness existed among the three, and careless or prejudiced observers, like young Russell Lowell, fancied resemblances and borrowings where none could afterwards be seen. Even so did others fancy a resemblance between Emerson and Carlyle, which Lowell, in the same *Fable*, was quick to deny:—

“There are persons, mole-blind to the soul’s make and style,
Who insist on a likeness ’twixt him and Carlyle.”

Now and then, after reading Carlyle, Thoreau’s

THE PERSONALITY OF

early style would seem to be influenced by the eccentric, imaginative Scotchman—that churl of genius whose picturesque, involved periods were at first repellent, but soon became attractive. But to Emerson's manner of writing, very hard to imitate, or even to parody skilfully, Thoreau never even remotely approached—except in penmanship. There, indeed, one might see a resemblance, so that it is sometimes difficult, with two manuscripts before me, of Emerson and of Thoreau, to see at a glance which is which. A little attention, however, shows Emerson's pen-strokes to be both bolder and more delicate, while Thoreau's are a little harder to decipher.

I had heard Emerson lecture, and visited him at Concord several times before I ever saw Thoreau. More fortunate was my friend John Albee (whose *Remembrances of Emerson* is so fine a tribute); for in his first call at Emerson's house he found the Walden hermit domesticated there (in May, 1852),—now adding zest to the talk in the Study, and again helping the

THOREAU

children parch corn by the parlor fire. When Emerson said to his young visitor that "he was always looking out for new poets and orators, and was sure the new generation of young men would contain some," Thoreau quaintly said that "he had found one in the Concord woods—only it had feathers, and had never been to Harvard College; still it had a voice and an aërial inclination—and little more was needed." "Let us cage it," said Emerson. "That is the way the world always spoils its poets," was Thoreau's characteristic reply.

He was a poet himself, and something more. Ellery Channing gave him his true title,— "Poet-Naturalist." He was neither exclusively or definitely, but a fusion of the two; and his outward man was rather the searching naturalist, at home in the forest or by the stream, than the typical poet of our youthful dreams, to whose aspect there goes something of ideal beauty and lightsome caprice. When I first saw Thoreau, in the College yard at Cambridge, striding along the path, away from my room in Holworthy,

THE PERSONALITY OF

where he had left a copy of *Walden* for me, I knew him not, but was struck with his short and rustic appearance, and that peculiar stride which all who have walked with him remember. Channing has best described it (as he has most of Thoreau's traits) by picturing him "with limbs that were rather longer than usual—or of which he made a longer use." I surmised who it might be, having heard from Mr. Sibley, at the College Library, that Thoreau was making one of his visits to obtain books. The date was late in January, 1855, and the occasion of his call was to show his appreciation of the long review of his two books (all the volumes he published in his lifetime) which my friend, Edwin Morton of Plymouth, had written at Clarke's Island the summer before, and I had printed in the *Harvard Magazine*, as one of its editors. I wrote to him a few days after, telling him who his favorable reviewer was, and speaking of my purpose of visiting Concord, where I was soon to take up my residence. In reply he said, after his withdrawing manner:—

THOREAU

“I shall be glad to see you whenever you come to Concord, and I will suggest nothing to discourage your coming, so far as I am concerned; trusting that you know what it is to take a partridge on the wing.”

Thoreau in his youth, like most country boys, had known how to “take a partridge on the wing” with his gun; and my good friend, Edward Hoar (brother of the Senator), used to accompany him, as a younger boy, on these gunning and fishing excursions. But long before I met Thoreau he had renounced the gun—substituting for it a spy-glass, with which to study the bird, and name it “without a gun,” as Emerson advised. Nor did he fish much, if at all, after his residence at Walden, where he occasionally made his supper on fish caught with his own hook in Walden or Fair Haven Bay, the other side of the Walden woods from his cabin.

When I went to live in Concord, late in March, 1855, Ellery Channing, who has lived in my house for the past ten years, was living in his own, opposite the Thoreau family, alone, save for an

THE PERSONALITY OF

elderly Irishwoman, his housekeeper; and he had several rooms vacant. Mr. Emerson therefore took me there, to see if I might become his tenant for three rooms, enough for myself and my sister, who then lived with me. Ann Carney became our housekeeper, too, when the arrangement was made; but not thinking herself equal to the preparation of dinners, I also obtained leave to dine at the table of Mrs. Thoreau, Henry's mother, who occupied, with her son, daughter, and husband, the house afterwards bought by Louisa Alcott for her father and sister, and which descended to her nephew, Frederick Pratt, who now lives there. In a portion of the house were also living two of Henry Thoreau's aunts, Mrs. Dunbar and Miss Louisa Dunbar; and his two aunts on the Thoreau side, Jane and Maria Thoreau, were frequent visitors, though living in Cambridge or Boston. I therefore soon became intimate with the whole family, and, before the death of Sophia Thoreau, in 1876, I occupied the house with my family, living there four years, and until it was sold to Miss Alcott, in 1877.

THOREAU

In a wing of this capacious dwelling was the shop where the Thoreau lead-pencils had been made, perhaps, in former years; but this room, which I never visited while John Thoreau, the father, lived, was devoted, in my time, to the storing and shipping of a fine-ground plumbago for electrotyping—a business that had been taken up when the pencil industry became unprofitable. It was the family bread-winner for years, and yielded a modest income, supplemented by Henry's receipts for land-surveying, lecturing, and writing magazine articles. As late as 1850 he was making pencils; for, in his Journal for November 20, 1853, he writes, of an earlier period: "I was obliged to manufacture \$1,000 worth of pencils, and slowly dispose of, and finally sacrifice them, in order to pay an assumed debt of \$100." The plumbago, both for pencils and for electrotyping, was ground at a small mill in Acton (the next town west of Concord), where the Thoreaus had the secret of obtaining the finest-ground mineral; sent to the two-story shop attached to the dwelling-house, and there

THE PERSONALITY OF

prepared for the market and shipped. Little was said of this business, although its existence was generally known; and it would not have been good manners to make inquiries about it, though in course of time Sophia spoke of it to me and others. It passed from the Thoreaus to the brothers, Marshall and Warren Miles, and has been carried on by the latter in recent years, but with less profit than in the time of the Thoreaus, who finally gave it up about 1870. After Mrs. Thoreau's death a weird story was invented about her ghost being seen in the pencil-shop.

This house is called by Thoreau in his *Journal* of 1855 "the Yellow House (re-formed)," and was entered by the family (from the "Texas" house, built by Thoreau and his father in 1844) late in August, 1850. Most of the walks recorded in the published *Journals* were therefore taken from this dwelling; the *Journals* before 1850 having been much used up in writing two books, *The Week* and *Walden*, or in the articles in the *Dial* and other magazines before 1852. Henry occupied it for nearly twelve years; his

THOREAU

room, when I knew him, was rather small, with sloping ceilings, in the attic, looking toward the southwest, which was his favorite view. In this were his bookshelves, made by himself out of river-driftwood, toilsomely gathered in his large green boat, which he kept moored when not in use at the foot of Ellery Channing's garden, that ran to the river, and had a great shelter of willows for shade and fastenings. His small library was on these and his earlier-made shelves; his Indian arrow-heads and natural history collections were in this room, and the lengthening series of his Journals. His furniture was plain and not extensive,—a bed, bureau, and two chairs—all carefully kept in order by himself or his sister Sophia, who often accompanied him in his boat, but was not robust enough for long walks. These walks and sails were mostly in the afternoon, for, like Emerson, he devoted the mornings to his books and papers; his evenings were much at the service of his friends, unless some task of writing, lecturing, or mapping his extensive land-surveys kept him busy by lamplight. We dined at one

THE PERSONALITY OF

or thereabout; his father, a silent, courteous, and slightly deaf man, sitting at the head of the table in the cheerful dining-room, where Sophia had a small conservatory for her plants; his mother at the foot, and Henry at his father's left hand, facing me on the other side. There we carried on long conversations upon every conceivable topic—generally directed by Henry towards the subjects about which he was then reading or exploring; but often interrupted by the lively gossip of Mrs. Thoreau—the most “sociable” and neighborly of dames, in her lace cap with long strings—or by the dramatic narratives of Sophia, who had all the liveliness of her mother, with a more modern culture, and without the occasional tartness that flavored her mother's remarks on persons and things. John Thoreau, the father, who died four years later (in 1859), was a cheerful but unobtrusive person, who was often said to have assumed deafness a little more than needful, in order not to hear too much of his wife's rambles and resources of indignation, against this or that townsman who had transgressed her strict

THOREAU

rules of honesty and decorum. Noticing this silence and deafness, at one of the large melon-parties which Mrs. Thoreau annually gave,—feasting the guests on choice melons which Henry had raised in their two-acre garden,—that indecorous wit, William Robinson (better known as “Warrington”), who had been a schoolmate of John and Henry Thoreau, came up to me and whispered, pointing to our host:—

“The silent organ loudest chants
The Master’s requiem.”

There was usually some boarder or visitor in the family; just before I came it had been Thomas Cholmondeley, the English idealist, who fell in love with Thoreau and supplied him with a small library of Oriental books, some of which descended to me, by the kindness of Sophia. Before Cholmondeley, who visited Concord again in 1859, during the last illness of Henry’s father, there had been that engraver and incipient crayon artist, S. W. Rowse, of Maine, who made the first portrait of Henry that has survived,—a rather weak crayon head, among the first that

THE PERSONALITY OF

Rowse had done, but valuable as preserving the shape of his face before he wore a beard. When the Thoreau aunts came, they remained some weeks—a great contrast between the gentle and grave Miss Jane, who resembled her brother John, and, like him, was rather deaf and silent, and genteel and vivacious Miss Maria, who outlived all the family, though absent from Concord, and from whom, it was clear, Sophia, the niece, had received the traditions of the English family and something of their bearing. On the Thoreau side they were French and English,—the two races having mingled in the Channel Islands,—with a sprinkling of Scotch ancestry; while on the Dunbar side they were Scotch and English, filtered through many generations of New England colonists, some of whom took the English or Tory side in the Revolution of Washington and the Adamses.

Such was the household in which Henry Thoreau spent the most of his time when not pursuing his outdoor studies, which were unremitting, or his labors with the chain and theodolite, which

THOREAU

also were considerable for the last decade of his life. His domestic manners were perfect, and it is hardly too much to say that his whole family adored him. They had early seen how superior was this reserved and observant boy to most of those about him; how original, industrious, and compliant he was in all the fortunes and attitudes of the Thoreau household. A slight pang went through the heart of the aunts, no doubt, who were Trinitarians, when they found that their dear nephew was not even a Unitarian, but had "signed off" from the old First Parish of the Bulkeleyes, Emersons, and Ripleys, without taking his lot with the seceding "Orthodox," of whom they were. But the heresy of one so dear and independent did not grieve them as that of others would have done, not even when he had joined the Sunday "Walden Pond Association" and refused to pay taxes, because he would thus be supporting American slavery. They paid the small tax, to release him from the Concord jail, to which he went rather proudly, during his Walden hermit-life; and they all became Aboli-

THE PERSONALITY OF

tionists themselves, aiding such fugitive slaves as came that way, and sitting at the same table with Frederick Douglass and other colored orators, who came to Concord to warn the stiffly conservative town that either slavery or the Union must give way.

With other vagaries of the period—non-resistance, total abstinence, vegetarian diet, etc.—Thoreau had no great sympathy. His theory of food seemed to be to eat moderately of what could most simply sustain life in the latitude where he found himself, and to be intemperate in nothing, not even in temperance. He drank tea, and, I think, coffee, but made no use of tobacco, though not scolding his intimates for their indulgence in that soothing and seductive weed. His rule was that of the English prescription, though he would have phrased it differently: "To live on sixpence a day and earn it." He paid his way wherever he might be—always giving his mother the price of his board when he lived with her—and abhorring debt in all forms.

I have heard it intimated by that class of

THOREAU

malignants who take pride in belittling every superior man, and every beautiful woman,—the same who assert that Thoreau never made a pencil, and never caught a fish,—that when he retired to Walden to write his first book, with less interruption from his attached friends and loving household, he was mainly supported by a dole of doughnuts and gingerbread from the “Texas” house on the outskirts of the village, near the railroad station, whither the family had retired to their own garden and orchard, from the great publicity of Deacon Parkman’s ancient house on the main street, at the corner of the new Sudbury road. I cannot deny this, for it was ten years before my residence in the village. But whatever truth there may be in the myth, I am sure by the knowledge I gradually gained of Thoreau’s character, that he returned an equivalent for anything he may have received from the affection of his relatives. Justice and the moral law were at the basis of his nature; so much so that he sometimes gave offence by insisting on exact accounts and short settlements.

THE PERSONALITY OF

The condescension with which this family of small means and upright hearts was sometimes patronized by the wealthy vulgar would naturally be resented, sometimes with dignity, sometimes, perhaps, with tartness. As in every New England village, Concord had its due share of meddling neighbors and unseasonable gossips. These took advantage of the singularities and extravagances of the early Transcendental period to report various tales, never very well authenticated, of the oddities of the Emerson, Alcott, Thoreau, and Channing households, not a few of which came to my ears while a student in college, and intimate with Bostonians who did not always understand the principles upon which the new Brotherhood fashioned their daily lives. But when I came to see the families for myself, it was easy to account for the myths and deny the allegations. This fact, now quite unimportant, is mentioned here only to explain some of the wild tales which even yet circulate in distant communities.

Entering upon this daily intimacy with Tho-

THOREAU

reau, I soon began, as the spring opened, to take walks with him and his most intimate friends, out of his own family,—Emerson and Ellery Channing. Each guided me to the places he most valued in the wide variety of Concord's rural scenery, which Thoreau has so well portrayed in his prose, and Emerson and Channing in their verse. Emerson escorted me to Walden and Baker Farm and Fair Haven Hill; Thoreau to distant Conantum, where, on Lee's Cliff, grew the earliest columbines and saxifrage, and the rare tower-mustard and slippery-elm. Channing soon carried me to White Pond and Bateman's, and the wild Estabrook country beloved by all the walking fraternity; and to Mason's Pasture and the Blood Cottage, where two old sisters of the town astronomer lived among their noble oak-trees, long since cut and partly consumed in my open fires. As June came along Thoreau led me to the meadows under Annursnac, where bloomed the buck-bean, and the painted cup showed its ruddy tips, and some rare violets nestled in the moist grass. At autumn this great

THE PERSONALITY OF

hillside was the place to seek the fringed gentian, and from its summit we saw Monadnoc and the Peterboro Hills to best advantage. Then there were the peach orchards of Lincoln, not yet destroyed by bad seasons and some insect pest; the search for wild grapes in September; and the Assabet, with its leaning hemlocks and willowy island, and convenient bathing-place on the way to Bateman's Pond, was a near attraction, in Thoreau's green boat or my own clumsy one, which soon gave place to a light skiff, good either for the rivers or for Walden, where it finally went to decay. As I now read the published or the unpublished Journals, with their close, inimitable word-pictures of this scenery of land and water and sky, they recall the happy years when such companionship was possible, and the long conversations to which these excursions gave rise. Alcott had not yet come back to Concord from his flitting, after the sale of his "Wayside" house to Hawthorne, and when he did return he was no zealous walker; and Hawthorne was still in Europe, not returning till 1860.

THOREAU

My school, which had numbered but seventeen pupils the first term in 1855, began and continued to grow, and I sought to interest Thoreau in giving to my boys and girls some of the beautiful knowledge he was gathering in the woods and on the rivers. I had almost brought him to the point of saying that he would meet a class once a week, and either address them indoors or take them on one of his walks; when, upon reflection, he hastened round to say to me that he must withdraw his acceptance of my invitation. His chosen tasks, indeed, in this year (1858) had become so pressing that he felt he could not spare one day in the week to go back to his old profession of teaching, which he and his brother John had pursued in Concord for a few years after 1838, with marked success. Moreover, the threatening aspect of national affairs after the election of Buchanan as President, in 1857, had induced both of us to take extreme views of the need of action to prevent the Southern plague of slavery from being spread over the entire country, under the iniquitous decision of

THE PERSONALITY OF

Chief Justice Taney and the majority of the Supreme Court. Early in 1857 I had brought John Brown, the Kansas hero, to Concord, where he addressed a public meeting, and was introduced to Thoreau and Emerson; and his conversations with them, while not disclosing the details of his desperate plan of attacking slavery by force on its own ground, had prepared them to become his champions, when he was wounded and captured in Virginia, in October, 1859. Already, too, before that startling event, grave fears for the health of Thoreau had been felt, and efforts made to induce him to take a journey for the sake of throwing off the impending disease of which he died in 1862. Thus I was not surprised to receive Thoreau's refusal to add to his cares by lecturing in my Concord school.

However, I am "getting ahead of my story," as one of Thoreau's farmer-friends might say. For it may here be noticed that while the village population might have this or that opinion of the rustical philosopher, might sniff at his eccentricities or misreport his way of life, the

THOREAU

farmers and wood-cutters understood him. On their ground he was one of them; he measured their fields, heard their stories and questions, gave them as good ones, and was as affable with them as he was sometimes repellent to the mere cultivated shallowness of schools and cities. It was no small recommendation to their society, which he much frequented in his walks, that his clothes were not of the fashionable cut, though his dialect was grave and measured beyond that of the parson, and approaching the formality of the village squire, Samuel Hoar, father of the Senator. It was seasoned with humor, to be sure, which is so native to the true Yankee, and thus has sometimes misled dull hearers or readers, who supposed Thoreau was testifying under oath when he might be merely testing or quizzing you. When he came to make his first evening call on my sister Sarah and myself, in Channing's house, across the road from his father's, I noted in my diary of April 11, 1855, not only the odd resemblance of his tones and gestures to some of Emerson's (the real ground

THE PERSONALITY OF

for suspecting him of imitation, though it was unconscious in Thoreau), but his plain dress and the "beard in the throat" (what was afterwards termed "the Robinson halo" when worn by a Governor of Massachusetts), which afterwards became the full beard of his later portrait. After a few more weeks of acquaintance with him, I ventured to note more fully his outward aspect, as thus:—

"He is a little under size, with a huge Emersonian nose, bluish gray eyes, and a ruddy weather-beaten face. He dresses very plainly, wears his collar turned over, like Mr. Emerson's, and often an old dress-coat, very broad in the skirts, and by no means a fit. He walks about with a brisk, rustic air, and never seems tired."

When Thomas Cholmondeley was first in America, in 1854, he wore almost constantly a kind of corduroy, which so struck Thoreau's fancy as a serviceable material that he had clothes of that sort made, and wore them for a time. His garments were usually cut by the village tailor, and made up by Miss Mary Mi-

THOREAU

not, sister of Emerson's neighbor, George Minot, farmer and sportsman, whom Channing has celebrated under the name of "Angelo." It was she, I take it, who in January, 1854, made his new coat, of which he spoke in a letter or two to his friend Blake, whom he was proposing to visit. December 22, 1853, Thoreau wrote:—

"I think of coming to see you as soon as I get a new coat, if I have money enough left. I will write to you again about it." (January 21, 1854.) "My coat is at last done, and my mother and sister allow that I am *so far* in a condition to go abroad. I feel as if I had gone abroad the moment I put it on. It is, as usual, a production strange to me, the wearer,—invented by some Count d'Orsay; and the maker of it was not acquainted with any of my real depressions or elevations. He only measured a peg to hang it on, and might have made the loop big enough to go over my head. It requires a not quite innocent indifference, not to say insolence, to wear it. Ah! the process by which we get our coats is not what it should be. Now our gar-

THE PERSONALITY OF

ments are typical of our conformity to the ways of the world, *i. e.* of the devil.”

I fear that Count d’Orsay would have found a conformity to the devil in most of Thoreau’s garments. They were made and worn for use, not for show, and have been described in more detail by Channing than Thoreau himself ever wasted upon things so external.

“In our victimizing climate he was fitted for storms or bad walking; his coat must contain special convenience for a walker with a note-book and spy-glass. Two things he must have,—his clothes must fit, and the pockets be made with reference to his pursuits. In fact, he had a measure for his pockets. They must accommodate his note-book and spy-glass,—the former was a cover for some folded papers, on which he took his outdoor notes; and this was never omitted, in rain or shine. He acquired great skill in conveying by a few lines or strokes a long story for his written Journal,—it might be pages. All measurements with the foot-rule that he carried, or the surveyor’s tape, went

THOREAU

down in this note-book. To his memory he never trusted for a fact, but to the page and the pencil. He wished to have his suits cut after his fashion, not after the tailor's fashion, because it was he who was to wear them, not the tailor."

It was by this precision in noting down the facts on the spot, and afterwards expanding the account by the aid of memory and fancy (in both which faculties he excelled), that he was able to give the admirable descriptions of Nature's scene-painting in the Concord fields and woodlands. The same accuracy aided him in making exact plots of the acres he surveyed and measured, all over the town, and in Haverhill, in Plymouth, at the Hillside park of his friend Marston Watson, and for Marcus Spring at Eagleswood in New Jersey,—an expedition which I remember well, because it was on his return to Concord that he described his visit to Horace Greeley at Chappaqua, and his appreciation of Walt Whitman, whom he visited in Brooklyn. No doubt, also, he surveyed for Emerson the fourteen acres on the north shore of Walden,

THE PERSONALITY OF

in 1844, where the next year he set up his cabin, and lived for more than two years, as he wrote to his friend Greeley, "in a good shingled and plastered house, entirely of my own building,—earning only what I wanted, and sticking to my proper work." He added, "For two years and two months all my expenses amounted to but twenty-seven cents a week,—and I fared gloriously in all respects."

I have happened to find, among the many papers of Thoreau's that have accumulated in my portfolios during the twenty years that I have been one of his biographers, the following calculation, entered on the back of one of his poems, and showing what he owed and paid his father for board and borrowings during the winter months before he went to live at Mr. Emerson's in the spring of 1841:—

"Dec. 8, 1840,—Owe Father	\$41.73.
Paid, Dec. 17,	5.00.
" Jan. 1, 1841,	15.00.
Borrowed, Feb. 2nd,	1.35.
Paid, Feb. 8th,	10.00.

Settled up to March 22nd, 1841."

THOREAU

What the board rate was does not appear, nor how the indebtedness of some ninety dollars in all was met; but in part, probably, by work done in the pencil-shop. Thoreau's view of the poverty and hand-work of the literary man was well expressed in the letter to Greeley above quoted. He said:—

“Scholars are apt to think themselves privileged to complain, as if their lot was a particularly hard one. How much have we heard of knowledge under difficulties,—of poets starving in garrets, depending on the patronage of the wealthy, and finally dying mad! It is time that men sang another song. There is no reason why the scholar, who professes to be a little wiser than the mass of men, should not do his work in the dirt occasionally, and by means of his superior wisdom make much less suffice for him. A wise man will not be unfortunate,—how then would you know but he was a fool?”

During my acquaintance with Thoreau, as before, he lived up to his principles in this respect, though he was at last able to treat himself a

THE PERSONALITY OF

little more generously, and had no thought of retiring into the woods again. That experiment was ended; it had answered its purpose,—had enabled him quietly to collect and edit one book, and to gather the materials for the second, which was promised when the *Week* was given, to the few readers it could find, by James Munroe in 1849. Whoever has a copy of that rare first edition, now selling for many times its original price, will find at the end of the volume this announcement in 1849:—

Will soon be published:

WALDEN OR LIFE IN THE WOODS. By Henry D. Thoreau.

It was five years before this rash promise was fulfilled, and much longer than that before the copies of the *Week* were all sold. One day as I entered the front hall of the Thoreau house for my noonday dinner, I saw under the stairs a pile of books; and when we met at the table, Henry said, "I have added several hundred volumes to my library lately, all of my own composition." In fact, he had received from his first publisher the last parcel of his unsold *Week*,

THOREAU

and for a year or two afterwards he sold them himself upon orders through the mail. As I remember, this was in the spring of 1855, and when he became a contributor to the new *Atlantic Monthly*, a few years later, the publishers of *Walden*, which had been from the first a moderately successful book in the market, took the unsold *Week* off the author's hands. Editors were shy of Thoreau for many years after he began to write for the magazines; or, if they accepted his manuscript, were slow of payment, and often insisted on shortening it. Even Emerson, when editing the *Dial* in 1843, and joyfully printing there Thoreau's *Winter Walk*, one of his best sketches of the Concord woodlands, cut off at the end these admirable verses, which I hold in the author's handwriting, just as he had sent the pages for printing:—

“Pray, to what earth does this sweet cold belong,
Which asks no duties and no conscience?
The moon goes up by leaps her cheerful path,
In some far summer stratum of the sky,
While stars with their cold shine bedot her way.
The fields gleam mildly back upon the sky,

THE PERSONALITY OF

And far and near upon the leafless shrubs
The snow dust still emits a silvery light.

“Under the hedge, where drift-banks are their screen,
The titmice now pursue their downy dreams,
As often in the sweltering summer nights
The bee doth drop asleep in the flower-cup,
When evening overtakes him with his load.

“By the brooksides, in the still genial night,
The more adventurous wanderer may hear
The crystals shoot and form, and Winter slow
Increase his rule by gentlest summer means.”

To which Thoreau added this suggestive prose, carrying the imagination of the reader into far foreign climes, as his wont was:—

“From our comfortable pillows, we lend our warm sympathy to the Siberian traveller, on whose morning route the sun is rising, and in imagination frequent the encampment of the lonely fur-trader on Lake Winnipeg; and climb the Ural or the Jura, or range the Andes and the Rocky Mountains, or traverse the shaggy solitudes of the glaciers,—in our dreams hugging the furs about us. Or perhaps we have visions of Greece and Italy, the Ægean Sea

THOREAU

and the Sicilian coast; or anticipate the coming in of spring like a pomp through the gate of a city.”

This passage, written as early as 1842, shows, as also do Thoreau's college “themes” when he was under twenty, how early he possessed that grace of style which most writers toil for in vain. I have been accustomed to impute this quality to the admixture of French and Scotch blood in his inheritance, both those nations having, by long descent, graceful rhetoric, without conscious art, far beyond the Anglo-Saxon, with all his vigor and resource. Thoreau had the vigor of one side of his long pedigree, and the grace of the other. As he went on writing he contrived to bring the magic of style more and more into his pages, and thus to equalize what had been at first (as with most young authors) an unequal and fitful manner of expressing his profound thought. How profound and forecasting this thought was, on a subject greatly debated since September, 1835, when, in his Junior year at Harvard College, at the age of eighteen, he considered “The

THE PERSONALITY OF

Comparative Moral Policy of Severe and Mild Punishments," may be seen by this passage from his Forensic on that topic:—

“The end of all punishment is the welfare of the State,—the good of community at large,—not the suffering of an individual. It matters not to the lawgiver what a man deserves, for to say nothing of the impossibility of settling this point, it would be absurd to pass laws against prodigality, want of charity, and many other faults of the same nature, as if a man was to be frightened into a virtuous life, though these in a great measure constitute a vicious one. We leave this to a higher tribunal. So far only as public interest is concerned, is punishment justifiable,—if we overstep this bound our conduct becomes criminal. Let us observe in the first place the effects of severity. Does the rigor of the punishment increase the dread operating upon the mind to dissuade us from the act? It certainly does if it be unavoidable. But where death is a general punishment, though some advantage may seem to arise from the severity, yet this will invariably

THOREAU

be more than counterbalanced by the uncertainty attending the execution of the law.”

It would be hard for a twentieth-century penologist to state more concisely the principles upon which Mr. Brockway, the great reformer of prisons in America, proceeded half a century later, at the Elmira Reformatory (which became under his direction the model prison of the world), in the substitution of Prison Science for the antiquated Prison Discipline.

Original as he was, it may be said that young Thoreau had read widely, before he began to write for publication, in the small libraries of Concord and the much more important library of his College, of which he was ever a sedulous visitor when within reach of its shelves. This is very true; but he read to confirm or illustrate his original impressions, or to supply himself with facts (which he always valued highly even when they might seem trivial to others); he did not read, as so many do, to furnish himself with thoughts. But how wide was his self-assigned course of reading in poetry, philosophy, and his-

THE PERSONALITY OF

tory, among the ancient classics, was revealed to me by a list of such books which I found among his papers of the *Dial* period and which included fifty ancient authors. Among them were all the Greek poets, which he read in the original; most of the Latin poets down to Claudian, also read in the original; the Greek historians and orators, either in Greek or in translations; Plato, Aristotle, Theophrastus, Plutarch, Lucian, and Epicetetus, in the original or translated; Seneca, Pliny, Tacitus and Josephus, Augustine, Boethius, and the *Fables* ascribed to Æsop, but transmitted by Phædrus and Babrius. In the list is Stanley's quaint *History of Philosophy* and a French version of the *Morals* of Confucius. But let the list speak for itself, as here it stands in the handwriting of the earnest student.

It would not be safe to say that Thoreau had read all these authors before he was thirty, but he certainly had read and translated some of the most difficult. When I knew him, at thirty-eight, he read Latin and French as readily as English, Greek without difficulty, German, Ital-

THOREAU

ian, and Spanish a little, and had some knowledge of the languages of the American Indians. He was a much better scholar, in the classical sense, than Emerson, Channing, or Hawthorne, and could have competed with Lowell at the same age. He wrote Latin prose easily, almost with elegance; but Latin verse he never attempted,—that criterion of English scholarship.

When I first heard Thoreau lecture, as he did every year at the Concord Lyceum, and frequently at Worcester and elsewhere, I did not find his spoken essays so interesting as his conversations. He had few of the arts of the orator, in which Emerson and Phillips excelled; his presence on the platform was not inspiring, nor was his voice specially musical, though he had a musical ear and a real love of melody. But for the thought and humor in his lectures, they would have been reckoned dull,—and that was the impression often made. He appeared to best advantage reading them in a small room; or when, as with the John Brown Address, he was

THE PERSONALITY OF

mightily stirred by the emotions that a life so heroic excited in his fearless heart. At the age of forty, or thereabout, I heard him sing his favorite song, *Tom Bowline*, by Dibdin, which to Thoreau was a reminiscence of his brother John, so early lost and so dearly loved. The voice was unpractised and rather harsh, but the sentiment made the song interesting, and, as it is now seldom heard, I may give it.

“Here a sheer hulk lies poor Tom Bowline,
The darling of our crew;
No more he'll hear the tempest howlin',
For Death has broached him to.
His form was of the manliest beauty,
His heart was kind and soft;
Faithful below he did his duty,
But now he's gone aloft.

“Tom never from his word departed,
His virtues were so rare;
His friends were many and true-hearted,
His Poll was kind and fair:
And then he'd sing so blithe and jolly,
Ah, many's the time and oft!
But mirth is turned to melancholy,
For Tom has gone aloft.

THOREAU

“Yet shall poor Tom find pleasant weather,
When He who all commands,
Shall give, to call life's crew together,
The word to pipe all hands.
Thus Death, who kings—and tars—despatches,
In vain Tom's life has doffed;
For though his body's under hatches,
His soul is gone aloft.”

I never heard Henry speak of this brother except by the parable of this sea-song; his death was a most painful memory, as his life had been sweet and useful, with equal independence of mind, but a less pugnacious turn than his younger brother. Mrs. Thoreau, born Cynthia Dunbar, at Keene, New Hampshire, survived all her brothers and sisters, though the youngest, and all her children except Sophia, and she outlived her husband by thirteen years. Her children's record of birth and death is this:—

HELEN, born October 22, 1812, died June 14, 1849;

JOHN, born (date unknown), 1815, died January 11, 1842;

HENRY DAVID (at first called DAVID HENRY), born July 12, 1817, died May 6, 1862;

SOPHIA ELIZABETH, born June 24, 1819, died October 7, 1876.

Their youngest aunt, Maria Thoreau, died in

THE PERSONALITY OF

December, 1881, at upwards of eighty years of age.

Henry's favorite instrument was the flute, which his father had played before him; he was accompanied on the piano sometimes by one of his sisters; but the best place for hearing its pastoral note was on some hillside, or the edge of wood or stream; and Emerson took pleasure in its strains upon those excursions to the Cliffs, or Walden, which were so frequent in the youth of the musician. He seldom played in my time, but the tradition of his melodies survived like that of the Sicilian Bion, whose few poems Thoreau read, and whose funeral lament by Moschus was the model for Alcott's monody in memory of Emerson and Thoreau, under the Grecian names of Ion and Hylas.

A friend who walked more miles with Thoreau than any other, and far more than I ever did, has made a record of his purpose in walking, which was certainly true of the years when I knew him, and must have been so always, in some degree; though when he and his brother

THOREAU

John were teaching their private school, in the old building of the "Concord Academy" (which Ellery Channing after Thoreau's death owned and occupied for a quarter-century as a dwelling), it was Henry's custom to take his pupils out walking one day in the week for exercise and pleasure, and to give them a taste for natural history. Thoreau's comrade says:—

"It was his custom to go abroad a portion of each day in the year, and he rarely failed. During many years he used the afternoon for walking, and usually set forth about half-past two, returning at half-past five. This (three hours) was the average length of his walk; and as he got over the ground rapidly, if desirable (his step being very long for so short a man), he had time enough to visit all the ordinary points of interest in his neighborhood. He did not walk with any view to health, or exercise, or amusement; no, the walk, with him, was for work—it had a serious purpose; witness the thirty volumes of Journals left by him, and mostly going back only to 1850. Though in no narrow view, he was a natu-

THE PERSONALITY OF

ralist; and the idea he conceived was this,—upon a small territory, such as the township of Concord, some thirty square miles, he might construct a chart or calendar, which should chronicle the phenomena of the seasons in their order, and give their general average for the year. This was one of the various plans he had in mind during his walks. His habit demanded complete accuracy, the utmost finish, and that nothing should be taken on hearsay, believing that Nature would only so in perfection be reported. It is obvious how vast a work this was, and that he could only have completed some portion of it in a long lifetime. His calendar embraced cold and heat, rain and snow, ice and water; he had his gauges on the river, which he consulted winter and summer; he knew the temperature of all the springs in the town; he measured the snows when remarkable. All unusual changes of weather, with novel skies, storms, views, found place in his notes.

“This analysis involved a large outlay of walking and long-continued labor of detail,—noting the flowering and seeding of all plants (the num-

THOREAU

ber very great), when the first flowers come, and when the plant ceases to flower,—together with kindred labor on the leaves. Of rare plants, many of which occur only in one known locality, a careful report was indispensable. The habits of animals, the arrival and departure of birds, made him another column. This work is great and long continued, and can only be performed by an experienced ornithologist; the record must be of years, for an average. It was one of his favorite modes to divide the year into as many seasons as possible; herein he was a very fine observer,—his names for the changes from month to month are admirable. He said he was in the habit of setting traps for catching the facts. Few objects impressed him more than the forms of birds, and a few of his felicitous touches are worth citing. He speaks of a gull, ‘pure white, a wave of foam in the air,—all wing, like a birch-scale.’ He mistook two white ducks for ‘the foaming crest of a wave’; he sees a small duck that is ‘all neck and wings,—a winged rolling-pin’; snow-buntings he calls ‘winged snowballs.’

THE PERSONALITY OF

The flight of the peewee gives him an impression we have all had, but who has thus described it? 'Their wings appear double as they fly by you.'

Many have noticed this felicity of description in Thoreau, but few can have known by what unwearied toil he gathered the materials for his fine passages. One of these, relating an incident in his June rambles two years before I went walking with him, has been so happily illustrated by Mr. Gleason, the amateur photographer who has most intelligently followed in Thoreau's footsteps all over Concord, that it may be here cited with the accompanying engraving: *The Redwing and Her Nest*.

"June 1, 1853. A redwing's nest, four eggs, low in a tuft of sedge in an open meadow. What Champollion can translate the hieroglyphics on these eggs? It is always writing of the same character, though much diversified. While the bird picks up the material and lays this egg, who determines the style of the marking? When you approach, away dashes the dark mother, betray-

THOREAU

ing her nest, and then chatters her anxiety from a neighboring bush, where she is soon joined by the red-shouldered male, who comes scolding over your head, chattering, and uttering a sharp 'phee phee-e.'"

Of his daily habit of walking, which was to him a pleasure as well as a toil, until his waning strength in his last year of life made it impossible to ramble abroad, the friend I have quoted said, what those who were his companions could well verify:—

“As the early morning represented to him the spring of the day, so did March, April, and May ever renew in him his never-changing, undying faith in a new life for all things. Thus he rejoiced greatly in the spring-song of birds,—the notes of our familiar blackbird

That comes before the swallow dares,

and picks the alder catkins and the drift along the river shore. Birds cheered him, too, in the solitudes of winter when deep snow lined the woods. He hears in mid-January ‘the cawing

THE PERSONALITY OF

of crows from their blessed eternal vacation, and at their long recess.' His seriousness and his fortitude were native; and he paddled his boat up and down the river into December, when the drops froze on the blade,—singing some cheery song, rejoicing with the muskrats, and listening to the icicles as they jarred against the stems of the button-bushes. In milder seasons, he was one of those who keep so much of the boy in them that he could not pass a berry without picking it. I frequently left him in the rear, picking his berries, while I sat looking at the landscape or admiring my berry-loving boy. Nor was I less pleased to see him sometimes cutting off a square of birch-bark, to construct a safe and handsome basket for his prize.

“As he declares of the strawberry that it emits and is an embodiment of ‘that vernal fragrance with which the air has teemed,’ so he represented the sweetness and purity of youth, which in him never grew old; nor did the delight he had in the great treasure-house of Nature,—in every bird and flower, in every animal, too, and every berry,

THOREAU

nut, seed, and lichen. With his simple habits and agility, he often saved us from a severe drenching in those sudden thunder-storms so common in this climate. With his trusty knife (of which he always carried two, one with a short stubbed blade) he would make a shelter before the storm could overhaul us. Taking the lower limbs of an oak for his rafters, and casting on a supply of long birches, with their butt-ends over the oak-boughs for cross-pieces, over this must be thatched all the bushes and branches contiguous. Thus he kept us dry in a deluge. He was so well balanced that the blaze of July and the zero of January came both to him as sweet and pleasant experiences—the gifts of Nature he deemed them. I never heard him discuss any matter of easterly wind, or rain, or snow. Climbing old Monadnoc's steep ascent, or wading all the day through in the soft sand on the back-side of Cape Cod, all his companions can bear witness that he was alive to the beauties and novelties of the scene, but too well-bred or economical to disclose that fatigue or drudgery

THE PERSONALITY OF

came to mar the values of the day. He never began to complain or grow sad; but he enjoyed what sadness he could find, and once replied to my question,—‘Melancholy is a good bass note to life—so low down, like Mr. Bigelow’s singing, that nobody has ever heard it.’ He was utterly resigned to the wish of Heaven, even to die, if it must be so, rather than there should be any struggle in his existence with those beautiful laws he had so long worshipped and obeyed.”

Faithful as this picture is, and heartily as he gave himself up to the study of Nature, it must not be supposed that this was all his life. His interest in social questions was deep and practical; and this brought him into a more active relation to the slavery problem than Emerson usually held. Their acquaintance with John Brown of Kansas happened first in this way, and was an incident of my dinners with the Thoreau family. In March, 1857, Brown, whom I had met in Boston, and had introduced to the Massachusetts Legislature, came afterwards to visit me in the Channing house at Concord. At noon, I took

THOREAU

him with me to dine, and the Thoreaus received him gladly, knowing his brave deeds in Kansas. Henry took to him with especial favor; their conversation at the table was animated, and when it was time for me to go, I left him there, describing to Henry his fights on the prairie. Hardly had I gone than Emerson appeared at the door to call on Thoreau, and, finding Brown there, was introduced to him, and had a conversation so interesting that he invited him to his house that night, to continue it. Accordingly I called at the Emerson house the next morning, with my chaise, to carry Brown across the county to another friend's where he was much at home,—the villa of George and Mary Stearns in Medford, near Tufts College. From the impressions obtained in those talks at Concord, and another interview in May, 1859, when Brown again, and for the last time, visited me, both Thoreau and Emerson drew that character of the hero which is so marked a feature of their speeches of October and November, 1859, in support of Brown and his cause,

THE PERSONALITY OF

The promptness and moral courage with which Thoreau made himself the champion of Brown after his capture at Harper's Ferry, and long before the popular voice declared him the people's hero, would have made our reclused hermit a famous leader in times of revolution, if he had ever chosen that path to fame. When the news from Virginia came, and the true character of Brown developed itself through the providential presence and uncensored accuracy of the reporter of the *New York Herald*, at his conversations with the magnates of the Old Dominion, Thoreau, already prepared by what he had seen of the man, was excited to an unwonted degree by the daily bulletins. He said of those thrilling days: "If any one who has seen Brown in Concord can now pursue any other train of thought, I do not know what he is made of. If he gets his usual allowance of sleep, I will warrant him to fatten easily, under any circumstances which do not touch his body or purse. I put a piece of paper and a pencil under my pillow, and when I could not sleep, I wrote in the dark." From

THOREAU

these notes he made up his "Plea for Captain John Brown," which he read to his townsmen in the church vestry where Wendell Phillips had confronted the conservatism of Concord many years before—summoning his audience himself, and not waiting to be invited. Then he hastened away to Worcester, to read it to his friends there, to whom he was in the habit of reading essays; finally, and all within a fortnight from the capture of Brown, he gave it to a great audience in Boston at the "Fraternity Lectures." What was noticeable in this impassioned address was the entire absence of any apology for the hero; quite the contrary was its tone:—

"For once we are lifted out of the dust of politics into the region of truth and manhood. No man in America has ever stood up so persistently and effectively for the dignity of human nature,—knowing himself for a man, and the equal of any and all governments. He could not have been tried by a jury of his peers, because his peers did not exist. When a man stands up serenely against the condemnation and vengeance

THE PERSONALITY OF

of mankind, the spectacle is a sublime one,—and we become criminals in comparison. Do yourselves the honor to recognize him. He needs none of your respect. I rejoice that I live in this age, that I am his contemporary. . . . When were the good and the brave ever in a majority? Would you have had him wait till that time came?—Till you and I came over to him?"

It was not many years before the country itself came over to Brown, and adopted his remedy for our national disease,—emancipation by force. But Thoreau has the distinction, which he shared with Emerson and Phillips, of having foreseen from the darkest hour the coming daylight of Freedom. He took part, as did Emerson, Alcott, and many of the Concord citizens, in the Memorial Service for Brown on the day of his execution,—aided in making up a ritual for it, and spoke briefly and effectively on that day, December 2, 1859. Not many days after he rendered a personal service to one of the fugitives from Harper's Ferry,—Francis Jackson Merriam, a grandson of that stanch Abolitionist,

THOREAU

Francis Jackson of Boston,—under conditions that are worth describing.

As a confidant of Brown in his Virginia plans (which Thoreau was not, nor Emerson, nor Phillips), I was every few days in receipt of some message relating to those concerned in them. Now it would be a visit from Colonel Charles Miller, Gerrit Smith's son-in-law, at Peterboro, New York, bringing me word of the secreting of compromising papers there, or in Ohio, the home of John Brown, Jr.; then a summons to Boston or Medford to confer with Dr. Howe, or John A. Andrew, or G. L. Stearns, in regard to our expected summons as witnesses. Receiving one morning a mysterious invitation to visit our good friend, Dr. David Thayer, living near Wendell Phillips, I posted down to Boston in the afternoon, expecting to see young Brown there. Instead of him it proved to be Merriam, who had left his safe retreat in Canada to urge upon Phillips, Wentworth Higginson, and myself the preparation of another attack on slavery, west of the Mississippi! It was a mad proposal, and the

THE PERSONALITY OF

young man, almost broken down, physically and mentally, by the sufferings of his flight through Maryland and Pennsylvania, was little better than insane. I would listen to no such folly, and told him, as Phillips had, that he must return without delay to Montreal, a price of thousands being then set on his head. He consented, and I gave him the time of the train which that night would have taken him swiftly through Concord on his way to Canada, returning home myself by an earlier train. In the early darkness of a December day I soon went out to call on my friend David Wasson, then living in the "Texas" house of the Thoreaus (built by Henry and his father in 1844), just south of the Fitchburg Railroad, not far from the Concord station. On my return, between seven and eight o'clock, my sister met me at the door of my house on the Sudbury road (where the next April an attempt was made to kidnap me for a witness before the Senate Committee of Mason of Virginia and Jefferson Davis), in some anxiety, to tell me that Merriam had taken by error the train that ran

THOREAU

no farther than Concord, and had found shelter in my house for the night. She had given him his supper and sent him to bed, telling him that he could not see me that night. I said, "Nor in the morning, either; for he must go to South Acton in time for the first train to Canada." I then made two other calls that busy evening: on Mr. Emerson, to ask the loan of his horse and covered wagon before seven the next morning, not wishing to hire a carriage at the stable; and on Mr. Thoreau, to ask him to go for the wagon, bring it to my door, and there take a passenger, Mr. Lockwood, who was to catch the Canada train at South Acton without fail. Both my friends consented, and asked no questions. In the morning I remained secluded in my chamber, while my sister gave Merriam his early breakfast, and had him in readiness when, punctually, Henry Thoreau appeared, in the Emerson carriage, for his passenger, and took him upon the back seat, to be less visible if met on the rather lonely road of four miles. I had said to Thoreau, "My friend's name is Lockwood, and

THE PERSONALITY OF

if he professes to have any other name you need not heed him." Neither the driver nor the driven knew who the other really was. Merriam was in his half-insane state of mind, and, though he wished to go to Canada, and had promised me to go, he could not keep to his purpose. He insisted to Thoreau that he must see Mr. Emerson before leaving Concord; he had important plans to lay before him; besides, he wished to consult him on some moral and religious doubts he had. Thoreau listened with his grave politeness, and drove the faster towards Acton. Merriam grew more positive and suspicious: "I never saw Mr. Emerson; perhaps may never have another chance; I must go there. Ah! perhaps you are Mr. Emerson; you look like one of his portraits." "No," said the imperturbable charioteer, and urged Dolly, the faithful mare, to a quicker gait; whereupon the impetuous Merriam cried, "Well, I am going back to Concord," and flung himself from the wagon. How Thoreau managed to get him back again he never told me; but I have always suspected some judicious force ex-

THOREAU

exercised on the slight youth, together with that earnest persuasive speech natural to the philosopher; for then they fell to discussing some moral question, and there was no more insurrection till they reached South Acton, where Thoreau saw his man on board the Canada train, and drove leisurely back to the Emerson house, returned Dolly and the carriage to James Burke, and walked back to his own late breakfast. On the way he called at my door to say that "Mr. Lockwood had taken passage for Montreal,"—where he safely arrived the next morning.

The matter was then dismissed, and no explanation asked or given either to Emerson or Thoreau; until, more than two years afterwards, during his last illness, in the spring of 1862, Thoreau inquired, in one of my calls, who my friend Lockwood was. Merriam at that time being out of risk of arrest, and, indeed, a soldier in the Union army (where he finally died), I told my neighbor the story. In turn, he gave me, with some amusement, the incidents just related; and not till then did he communicate to his mother

THE PERSONALITY OF

and sister the errand upon which he had gone that winter morning, to guard an unknown person from risks to which he was exposing himself. My reason for not seeing Merriam was, of course, to have no testimony concerning him to give in case of his capture, which seemed not unlikely from his thoughtlessness; and I never saw him afterwards. I gave shelter to another of the Harper's Ferry fugitives the next spring,—Charles Plumer Tidd, then going by the name of Plumer, who had ventured to Concord to see his old captain's daughter, Anne Brown, a pupil of mine at the time. In the excitement following my own arrest and release,—the latter by order of Chief Justice Shaw of the Massachusetts Supreme Court,—Thoreau, with other friends, was active in behalf of my sister during my brief absences; and indeed was apt at all neighborly service for his friends, or for the poor, to whom the Thoreaus were ever kind.

Emerson said of Thoreau at his funeral (held in the parish church at Emerson's desire, rather against the wish of his sister):—

THOREAU

“A truth-speaker he, capable of the most deep and strict conversation; a physician to the wounds of any soul; a friend, knowing not only the secret of friendship, but almost worshipped by those few persons who knew the deep value of his mind and great heart. His inexorable demand on all for exact truth gave an austerity which made this willing hermit more solitary even than he wished.”

In saying this Emerson may have been thinking of that short, painful period, about five years before his death, when Thoreau felt himself estranged from Emerson, so long his dearest friend, and gave expression to his sorrow in his Diary for February, 1857. In accounting for it he used this striking language, in certain moods and with certain qualifications, applicable to Emerson:—

“I perceive that some persons are enveloped and confined by a certain crust of manners, which, though it may sometimes be a fair and transparent enamel, yet only repels and saddens the beholder; since by its rigidity it seems to repress all further expansion. They are viewed at a

THE PERSONALITY OF

distance, like an insect under a tumbler. This is to stand upon your dignity. I say in my thought to my neighbor who was once my friend, 'It is no use to speak the truth to you; you will not hear it. What then shall I say to you? Why this doubleness, these compliments? They are the worst of lies: a lie is not worse between traders than a compliment between friends. . . . I have not yet known a friendship to cease, I think. I fear I have experienced its decaying. Morning, noon, and night I suffer a physical pain, an aching of the breast which unfits me for my tasks. It is perhaps most intense at evening.'

This last word is pathetic; it was at evening in those later years that he saw most of Emerson. The estrangement passed away, not without leaving some trace in the more sensitive heart of Thoreau. I once sought to explain this episode by the inscrutable working of heredity in these two friends of such diverse ancestry. To his inheritance Emerson owed his matchless propriety and decorum,—a sense of what was fitting in all the occasions of life, and a consideration

THOREAU

for the tastes and feelings of others, which made him unique among reformers. Thoreau inherited a trenchant individualism, scanty of respect for the merely conventional, and little disposed to make those concessions in small matters which the daily intercourse of life requires. At heart profoundly unselfish and courteous, he was on the surface brusque and pugnacious; and at times, in spite of his distinction, a little plebeian in his bearing, while Emerson was the gentle patrician. Whether true or not, this may serve as a clue to the incident. Among some notes of Emerson's table-talk, during my acquaintance both with him and Thoreau, I find this said of his friend, which may give the other side of the story: "My children think Henry rather snubs them. He said the *Linnæa borealis* did not flower in Concord, till E. carried it to him, gathered near one of our paths in the park. Why is he never frank? That was an excellent saying of Elizabeth Hoar's, 'I love Henry, but I can never like him.' What is so cheap as politeness? Never had I the least social pleasure with him, though

THE PERSONALITY OF

often the best conversation, in which he goes along accumulating one thing upon another so lavishly—when he is not pugnacious. And in matters practical he makes it worth my while to pay him surveyor's wages for doing other things" (the occasion being his planting a pine wood on Emerson's knoll near Walden); "he is so thoughtful, has such a conscience about it, and does so much more than he bargained to do. When he undertakes anything, you may be sure the thing will be done; he has the common sense of Shakespeare."

It was Thoreau who called certain woodland pools "ripple lakes"; of one, well known to me, Mr. Gleason has given a fair view. Emerson greatly admired these ripples, and I have more than once visited with him the headland whence they are best seen in breezy autumn days, lying as it does but a little aside from a favorite walk of his and of Thoreau's and Channing's. It was in company with Channing, on a great pasture hill in Sudbury, that Thoreau met the Beautiful Heifer so delicately described in Channing's

THOREAU

biography. They were on a long, all-day walk. Channing could see nothing special in the creature, and said, "She is of a good breed, doubtless." In the first year of our acquaintance Thoreau said of Channing:—

"He sometimes in our walks takes out a note-book and begins to write as I do, but soon puts it up, after scrawling some sketch of the landscape. If I go on writing he says, 'You may have the facts; I keep to the ideal, the pure ideal; I am universal, and have nothing to do with the definite and particular.' He is the moodiest person I ever saw; as naturally whimsical as a cow is brindled. It would be a good discipline for him to write his verse in Latin, and not in the sublime slipshod style he now uses."

So plain spoken were these friends to and of each other. Channing once complained to Emerson that Concord contained "fantasts devoid of national opinion"; but that Thoreau was sufficiently broad to take a national view may be seen by these hitherto unprinted verses:—

THE PERSONALITY OF

OUR COUNTRY

COPIED FROM A POEM OF THOREAU'S WRITTEN ABOUT

1841

It is a noble country where we dwell,
Fit for a stalwart race to summer in ;
From Madawaska to Red River raft,
From Florid keys to the Missouri forks,
See what unwearied (and) copious streams
Come tumbling to the east and southern shore,
To find a man stand on their lowland banks :
Behold the innumerable rivers and the licks
Where he may drink to quench his summer's thirst,
And the broad corn and rice fields yonder, where
His hands may gather for his winter's store.

See the fair reaches of the northern lakes
To cool his summer with their inland breeze,
And the long slumbering Appalachian range
Offering its slopes to his unwearied knees !
See what a long-lipped sea doth clip the shores,
And noble strands where navies may find port ;
See Boston, Baltimore, and New York stand
Fair in the sunshine on the eastern sea,
And yonder too the fair green prairie.

See the red race with sullen step retreat,
Emptying its graves, striking the wigwam tent,
And where the rude camps of its brethren stand,
Dotting the distant green, their herds around ;
In serried ranks, and with a distant clang,

THOREAU

Their fowl fly o'er, bound to the northern lakes,
Whose plashing waves invite their webbed feet.

Such the fair reach and prospect of the land,
The journeying summer creeps from south to north
With wearied feet, resting in many a vale;
Its length doth tire the seasons to o'ercome,
Its widening breadth doth make the sea-breeze pause
And spend its breath against the mountain's side:
Still serene Summer paints the southern fields,
While the stern Winter reigns on northern hills.

Look nearer,—know the lineaments of each face,—
Learn the far-travelled race, and find here met
The so long gathering congress of the world!
The Afric race brought here to curse its fate,
Erin to bless,—the patient German too,
Th' industrious Swiss, the fickle, sanguine Gaul,
And manly Saxon, leading all the rest.
All things invite this earth's inhabitants
To rear their lives to an unheard-of height,
And meet the expectation of the land;
To give at length the restless race of man
A pause in the long westering caravan.

An examination of the manuscript will show where Thoreau has made slight pencil corrections; but these did not avail to make it pass the tests of the *Dial* editors, to whom it seems to have been sent, but never printed there. It

THE PERSONALITY OF

came to me, with other manuscripts from Mr. Emerson.

I was a sorrowing witness of the magnanimity and patience of his long last illness; saw him often, and had interesting confidences from him. His opposite neighbor, Ellery Channing,—opposite in many traits, as well as in residence,—has well said of this last period:—

“His illness might be passed over by some persons, but not by me; it was most impressive. To see one in middle life, with nerves and muscles and will of iron, torn apart piecemeal by that which was stronger than all, were enough to be described, if pen had the power to do it. It was a saying of his, not unfrequent, that he had lived and written as if to live forty years longer; his work was laid out for a long life. Therefore his resignation was great, true, and consistent; great, too, was his suffering. ‘I have no wish to live, except for my mother and sister,’ was one of his conclusions. But still, as always, work, work, work! During his illness he enlarged his calendar, made a list of birds, drew

THOREAU

greatly on his Journals; at the same time he was writing or correcting several articles for printing, till his strength was no longer sufficient even to move a pencil. Nevertheless, he did not relax, but had the papers still laid before him. I am not aware that anywhere in literature is a greater heroism; the motive, too, was sacred, for he was doing this that his family might reap the advantage. One of his noblest and ablest associates was a philosopher (Alcott) whose heart was like a land flowing with milk and honey; and it was affecting to see this venerable man kissing his brow, when the damps and sweat of death lay upon it, even if Henry knew it not. It seemed to me an extreme unction, in which a friend was the best priest."

Parker Pillsbury, the Boanerges of the Abolitionists, celebrated by Emerson in his essay on Eloquence, and there described as "a sturdy countryman, on whom neither money, nor politeness, nor hard words, nor eggs, nor blows, nor brickbats make any impression," was an intimate of the Thoreau family, and came down

THE PERSONALITY OF

from the New Hampshire Concord, where he died thirty years after Thoreau, to see his friend in his last days. In 1882 he gave me this account of the visit:—

“Yes, truly, ‘One world at a time’ was the very word, almost the last word to me, of our lamented Thoreau. And in tone too sweet and tender for me to suspect that he deemed my question impertinent, or even in questionable taste; as it would have been if dictated by idle curiosity, or, still worse, by religious spleen or sectarian bigotry. He was very weak and low; he saw but very few more setting suns. He sat pillowed in an easy chair. Behind him stood his patient, dear, devoted mother, with her fan in one hand, and phial of ammonia or cologne in the other, to sustain him in the warm morning. At a table near him, piled with his papers and other articles related to them and him, sat his sister, arranging them, as I understood, for Ticknor and Fields, who had been to Concord and bought the copyright.

“When I entered Thoreau was looking deathly

THOREAU

weak and pale. I saw my way but for the fewest words. I said, as I took his hand, 'I suppose this is the best you can do now.' He smiled and only nodded, and gasped a faint assent. 'The outworks,' I said, 'seem almost ready to give way.' Then a smile shone on his pale face, and with an effort he said, 'Yes,—but as long as she cracks she holds' (a common saying of boys skating).

"Then I spoke only once more to him, and cannot remember my exact words. But I think my question was substantially this: 'You seem so near the brink of the dark river, that I almost wonder how the opposite shore may appear to you.' Then he answered: 'One world at a time.' All this did not occupy more than two minutes, or three at farthest; he needed all his little remaining strength for more important work.

"Mrs. Thoreau told me subsequently that in revising for the press he was throwing out almost everything that tended to mirthfulness, as not becoming to the deep seriousness with which he then viewed human existence."

THE PERSONALITY OF

Yet with all that was grave and pathetic in these closing scenes there mingled much that was cheerful; for never did man approach the grave with more readiness and faith. He noted mistakes in his published books, and asked Channing to have one such in the *Week* corrected. He was then, thirteen days before death, quite himself; but said he could not fairly rouse himself for work,—could not see to correct his Alle-gash paper,—“it is in a knot I cannot untie.”

What Xenophon praises in Theramenes,—the smiling way in which he met his fate, drinking the poison of his penalty with a health to “the most excellent Critias,”—was equally noticeable in Thoreau. I cannot better close these imperfect memoranda of a long and inspiring friendship than by citing the words with which Emerson ended his funeral oration:—

“He, at least, is content. 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.”

THOREAU

Or, in the verse of Schiller, which Thoreau himself read at the funeral service for John Brown on the day of his execution, we may say:—

“ His life is bright, — bright without spot it was,
And cannot cease to be. No ominous hour
Knocks at his door with tidings of mishap:
Far off is he, above desire and fear,
No more submitted to the chance and change
Of the unsteady planets.”

THE END

A LIMITED EDITION of five hundred copies of this book was printed on French hand-made paper, and fifteen copies on Japan paper, by D. B. UPDIKE, THE MERRYMOUNT PRESS, BOSTON, in December, 1901. This is copy N^o. 6