

From the Journals of Henry David Thoreau

Texts selected for a community reading at Commonweal

October 30, 2016

Joanne Kyger

I feel myself uncommonly prepared for *some* literary work, but I can select no work. I am prepared not so much for contemplation, as for forceful expression. I am braced both physically and intellectually. It is not so much the music as the marching to the music that I feel.

Our ecstatic states appear to yield so little fruit. In calmer seasons, when our talent is active, the memory of those rarer moods comes to color our picture. Thus, no life or experience goes unreported at last; if it be not solid gold it is gold-leaf, which gilds the furniture of the mind. It is an experience of infinite beauty on which we unfailingly draw. Our moments of inspiration are not lost though we have no particular poem to show for them; those experiences have left an indelible impression, and we are ever reminded of them.

We are receiving our portion of the infinite. The art of life! I do not remember any page which will tell me how to spend this afternoon. I do not so much wish to know how to economize time as how to spend it.

How to live. How to get the most life. How to extract its honey from the flower of the world. That is my every day business. I am 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 and wax. I am like a bee searching the live long day for the sweets of nature. We are surrounded by a rich and fertile mystery. May we not probe it, pry into it, employ ourselves about it, a little?

Stuart Chapman

Just after sunrise this morning I noticed Hayden walking beside his team, which was slowly drawing a heavy hewn stone swung under the axle, surrounded by an atmosphere of industry, his day's work begun. Honest, peaceful industry, conserving the world, which all men respect, which society has consecrated. A reproach to all sluggards and idlers. Honest, manly toil. His brow has commenced to sweat. Honest as the day is long. One of the sacred band doing the needful but irksome drudgery. The day went by, and at evening I passed a rich man's yard, who keeps many servants and foolishly spends much money while he adds nothing to the common stock, and there I saw Hayden's stone lying beside a whimsical structure intended to adorn this mansion, and the dignity forthwith departed from Hayden's labor in my eyes. How much of the industry of the boor, traced to the end, is found thus to be subserving some rich man's foolish enterprise! There is a coarse, boisterous, money-making fellow in the north part of town who is going to build a retaining wall under the hill along the edge of his meadow. The powers have put this into his head to keep him out of mischief, and he wishes me to spend three weeks digging there with him. Now if I do this, the community will commend me as an industrious and hardworking man; but as I choose to devote myself to labors which yield more real profit, though but little money, they regard me as a loafer. But as I do not need this police of meaningless labor to regulate me,

and do not see anything absolutely praiseworthy in his undertaking, however amusing it may be to him, I prefer to finish my education at a different school.

Wendy vanden Heuvel

I noticed a few small peculiar-looking huckleberries hanging on the bushes, and tasting them, perceived they are a new kind to me. I seemed to have reached a new world, so wild a place that the very huckleberries grew hairy and are inedible.

What's the need of visiting far-off mountains and bogs, if half an hour's walk will carry me into such wildness and novelty? But why shouldn't wild plants grow here as well as in Labrador? Is Nature so easily tamed? Is she not as primitive and vigorous here as anywhere? I see that there are some places within twenty miles of Boston just as wild and primitive and unfrequented as any in Labrador, as unaltered by man. I have no doubt that for a moment I experience exactly the same sensations as if I were alone in a bog in Labrador, and it saves me the trouble of getting there. I felt a shock, a thrill, an agreeable surprise in one instant, for, no doubt, all the possible inferences were drawn with a rush in my mind—I could be in Labrador and supping at home in an hour! This beat the railroad! That wild hairy huckleberry, inedible as it was, was equal to a domain secured to me and reaching to the south seas. That was an unexpected harvest. I hope you have gathered as much, neighbor, from your corn and potato fields as I have got from my huckleberries. I have got in my huckleberries, I shall be ready for Thanksgiving. It

is in vain to dream of a wildness distant from ourselves. There is none such. It is the bog in our brain and bowels, the primitive vigor of Nature in us, that inspires that dream. I shall never find in the wilds of Labrador any greater wildness than in some recess right here in Concord.

A cold white horizon sky in the north, forerunner of the fall of the year. I go to bed and dream of cranberry-pickers. With windows partly closed, with concentrated thought, I dream. I get my new experiences still, not at the opera listening to the Swedish Nightingale, but in the swamp listening to the native wood thrush. It feeds your spirit, now in the season of white twilights, when frosts are apprehended and edible berries are mostly gone.

If I could, I would worship the parings of my nails. I would improve every opportunity to wonder and worship, as a sunflower welcomes the light. The more thrilling, wonderful, divine objects I behold in a day, the more expanded and immortal I become.

Oren Slozberg

My themes shall not be far-fetched. I will tell of homely every-day phenomena and adventures. Friends! Society! It seems to me that I have an abundance of it, there is so much I rejoice and sympathize with. And men that I never speak to but only know and think of.

I love the winter, with its imprisonment and its cold, for it compels the prisoner to try new fields and resources. I love having the river closed up for a season and a pause put to my boating, to be obliged to get my boat in. I shall launch it again in the spring with so much more pleasure.

I love best to have each thing in its season only, and enjoy doing without at all other times. It is the greatest of all advantages to enjoy no advantage at all. I find it invariably true, the poorer I am, the richer I am. What you consider my disadvantage, I consider my advantage. While you are pleased to get knowledge and culture in many ways, I am delighted to think that I am getting rid of them. 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.

Kathy Bustamante

I see no birds, but hear one or two tree sparrows. I am reminded of the incredible phenomenon of small birds in winter. Amid the cold powdery snow there will come twittering a flock of delicate crimson-tinged birds, to sport and feed on the seeds and buds now just right for them on the sunny side of a wood, as if were high midsummer to them. These crimson aerial creatures have wings which would bear them quickly to the regions of summer, but here is all the summer they want. What a rich contrast! Tropical colors, crimson breasts, all against cold white snow! Such etherealness, such delicacy in their forms, such ripeness in their colors, in this stern

and barren season. I am struck by the perfect confidence of success of nature.

There is no question about the existence of these delicate creatures, their adaptedness to their circumstances.

When some rare northern bird like the pine grosbeak is seen thus far south in the winter, he dazzles us with his beauty. The woods and fields, now somewhat solitary, being deserted by their more tender summer residents, are now frequented by these rich but delicately tinted and hardy northern immigrants of the air. I had a vision of these birds as I stood in the swamps. I saw this familiar—*too* familiar—fact at a different angle, and I was charmed and haunted by it. It is only necessary to behold the least fact or phenomenon from a point a hair's breadth away from our habitual path or routine, to be overcome and enchanted by its beauty and significance. Only what we have touched and worn is trivial. To perceive freshly, with fresh senses, is to be inspired.

We get only transient and partial glimpses of the beauty of the world. From the right point of view, every storm and every drop in it is a rainbow. Beauty and music are not mere traits and exceptions. They are the rule and character. It is the exception that we see and hear.

David Strathairn (from "Civil Disobedience")

I have paid no poll-tax for six years. I was put into a jail once on this account, for one night; and, as I stood considering the walls of solid stone, two or three feet

thick, the door of wood and iron a foot thick, and the iron grating which strained the light, I could not help being struck with the foolishness of that institution which treated me as if I were mere flesh and blood and bones to be locked up. I wondered that it should have concluded at length that this was the best use it could put me to, and had never thought to avail itself of my services in some way. I saw that, if there was a wall of stone between me and my townsmen, there was a still more difficult one to break through before *they* could get to be as free as I was. I did not for a moment feel confined, and the walls seemed a great waste of stone and mortar. I felt as if I alone of all my townsmen had paid my tax. They plainly did not know how to treat me, for they thought that my chief desire was to stand the other side of that stone wall. I could not but smile to see how industriously they locked the door on my meditations; they were really all that was dangerous. As they could not reach me, they had resolved to punish my body; just as boys, if they cannot come at some person against whom they have a spite, will abuse his dog. I saw that the State was half-witted, that it was timid and that it did not know its friends from its foes. I lost all my remaining respect for it, and pitied it.

Thus the State never intentionally confronts a man's sense, intellectual or moral, but only his body, his senses. It is not armed with superior wit or honesty, but with superior physical strength. I was not born to be forced. I will breathe after my own fashion. Let us see who is the strongest. They only can force me who obey a higher law than I.

When an acorn and a chestnut fall side by side, one does not remain inert to make way for the other, but both obey their own laws, and spring and grow and flourish as best they can, till one, perchance, overshadows and destroys the other. If a plant cannot live according to its nature, it dies; and so a man.

Lexi Rome

The Library a wilderness of books. The volumes of the fifteenth, sixteenth, and seventeenth centuries, which lie so near on the shelf, are rarely opened, are effectually forgotten and not implied by our literature and newspapers. When I looked into Samuel Purchas's *Pilgrimage*, it affected me like looking into an impassable swamp, ten feet deep with sphagnum, where the monarchs of the forest, covered with mosses and stretched along the ground, were making haste to become peat. Those old books suggested a certain fertility, as if they were making a humus for new literatures to spring in. I heard the bellowing of bullfrogs and the hum of mosquitoes reverberating through the thick embossed covers when I had closed the book. Decayed literature makes the richest of all soils.

How does it happen that I don't find the works of like-minded naturalists and poets in the country, in the fields and woods? Those who have expressed the purest and deepest love of nature have not recorded it on the bark of the trees with the lichens; they have left no memento of it there. If I would read their books, I must go to the city — so strange and repulsive both to them and to me— and deal

with men and institutions with whom I have no sympathy. When I have just been there on this errand, it seems too great a price to pay for access even to the works of Homer, or Chaucer, or Linnæus. I have sometimes imagined a library, *i.e.* a collection of the works of true poets, philosophers, naturalists, etc., deposited not in a brick or marble edifice in a crowded and dusty city, guarded by cold-blooded and methodical officials and preyed on by bookworms, in which you own no share, and are not likely to, but rather far away in the depths of a primitive forest, like the ruins of Central America. There you can trace a series of crumbling alcoves, the older books protecting the most modern from the elements, partially buried by the luxuriance of nature, which the heroic student could reach only after adventures in the wilderness amid wild beasts and wild men. That, to my imagination, seems a fitter place for these interesting relics than the well-preserved edifice, with its well-preserved officials on the side of a city's square. More terrible than lions and tigers these Cerberuses.

Michael Rafferty

For a year or two past, my publisher has been writing from time to time to ask what disposition should be made of the copies of "A Week on the Concord and Merrimack Rivers" he still has on hand, and at last suggesting that he had use for the room they occupied in his cellar. So I had them all sent to me here, and they have arrived today by express, filling the man's wagon, —706 copies out of an

edition of 1000 which I bought of Munroe 4 years ago and have been ever since paying for, and have not quite paid for yet. The wares are sent to me at last, and I have an opportunity to examine my purchase. They are something more substantial than fame, as my back knows, which has borne them up two flights of stairs to a place similar to that to which they trace their origin. Of the the remaining 290 and odd, 75 were given away, the rest sold. I have now a library of nearly 900 volumes, over 700 of which I wrote myself. Is it not well that the author should behold the fruits of his labor? My works are piled up on one side of my chamber, half as high as my head, my *opera omnia*. his is authorship, these are the work of my brain. There was just one piece of good luck in the venture. The unbound were tied up by the printer four years ago in stout paper wrappers and inscribed, —

H.D. Thoreau

Concord River

50 copies.

So Munroe had only to cross out “River” and write “Massachusetts” and deliver them to the express man at once. I can see now what I write for, the result of my labors.

Nevertheless, in spite of this result, sitting beside the inert mass of my works, I take up my pen tonight to record what thought or experience I may have had, with as much satisfaction as ever. Indeed, I believe that this result is more

inspiring and better for me than if a thousand had bought my wares. It affects my privacy less and leaves me freer.

Lizzy Grace

I just put a fugitive slave who has taken the name of Henry Williams into the cars for Canada. He escaped from Stafford County, Virginia, to Boston last October; has been at Shadrach's place; had been corresponding through an agent with his master, who is his father, about buying himself— his master asking \$600, but he having been able to raise only \$500. He heard that there was a writ out for him, he was a fugitive, and was informed by his fellow-servants and his employer that Auggie Burns and others of the police had come looking for him when he was out. Accordingly, he fled to Concord last night on foot, bringing a letter to our family from Mr. Lovejoy of Cambridge. He lodged with us, and waited in the house till funds were collected with which to forward him. An intelligent and very well-behaved man. I intended to dispatch him at noon through to Burlington, but when I went to buy his ticket I saw someone at the depot who looked and behaved so much like a Boston policeman that I did not venture that time.

The slave said that he could guide himself by many other stars than the north star, whose rising and setting he knew. They steered for the north star even when it had got round and appeared to them to be in the south. They frequently followed the telegraph poles when there was no railroad. The slaves bring many

superstitions from Africa. Fugitives sometimes carry a clump of turf in their hats superstitiously, thinking their success depends on it.

Jan Broek

Saw a very large white ash tree, three and a half feet in diameter, which was struck by lightning at about 4pm on the 22nd. The lightning apparently struck the top of the tree and scorched the bark and leaves for ten or fifteen feet downward, then began to strip off the bark and enter the wood, making a ragged narrow furrow or crack, till, reaching one of the upper limbs, it apparently divided, descending on both sides and entering deeper and deeper into the wood. At the first general branching, it had got full possession of the tree in its center and tossed off the main limbs, making holes in the ground where they struck; and so it went down in the midst of the trunk to the earth, where it apparently exploded, rending the trunk into six segments, whose tops, ten or twenty feet long, were rayed out on every side, leaving the ground bare directly under where the tree had stood, though they were all still fastened to the earth by their roots. The main body of the tree was completely stripped of bark, which was cast in every direction two hundred feet; and large pieces of the inside of the tree, fifteen feet long, were hurtled with tremendous force in various directions, one into the side of a shed, smashing it, another burying itself in a wood-pile. The heart of the tree lay by itself.

The lightning appeared to have gone off through the roots through the earth, making a furrow like a plow, passing through the cellar of the neighboring house about thirty feet distant, scorching the tin milk-pans and throwing dirt into the milk, coming back out the back side of the house and splitting some planks there. The windows in the house were broken and the inhabitants knocked down by the concussion. All this was accomplished in an instant by a kind of fire out of the heavens called lightning, or a thunderbolt, accompanied by a crashing sound. For what purpose? The ancients called it Jove's bolt, with which he punished the guilty, and we moderns understand it no better. There was displayed a Titanic force, some of that force which made and can unmake the world. Is this of the character of a wild beast, or is it guided by intelligence and mercy? If we trust our natural impressions, it is a manifestation of brutish force or vengeance, more or less tempered with justice. Yet it is our own consciousness of sin, probably, which suggests the idea of vengeance. Why should trees be struck? It is not enough to say because they are in the way. All the phenomenon of nature need to be seen from the point of view of wonder and awe, like lightning; and, on the other hand, the lightning itself needs to be regarded with serenity, as the most familiar and innocent phenomena are. Men are probably nearer to the essential truth in their superstitions than in their science.

Judith Shaw

I love Nature because she is not man, but a retreat from him. None of his institutions control or pervade her. There a different kind of right prevails. In her midst I can be glad with an entire gladness. If this world were all man, I could not stretch myself, I should lose all hope. He is constraint, she is freedom to me. He makes me wish for another world. She makes me content with this.

I have a room all to myself; it is nature. It is a place beyond the jurisdiction of human governments. There is a prairie beyond your laws. Nature is a prairie for outlaws. There are two worlds, the post-office and nature. I know them both. I continually forget mankind and their institutions.

Live in each season as it passes; breathe the air, drink the drink, taste the fruit, and resign yourself to the influences of each. In August live on berries, not dried meats, as if you were on shipboard making your way through a waste ocean or in a northern desert. Be blown on by all the winds. Open all your pores and bathe in all the tides of nature, in all her streams and oceans, at all seasons.

“Nature” is but another name for health, and the seasons are but different states of health.

Hanford Woods

I am inclined to think bathing almost one of the necessities of life, but it is surprising how indifferent some are to it. What a coarse, foul, busy life we lead compared even with the South-Sea Islanders. Truant boys steal away to bathe, but the farmers, who most need it, rarely dip their bodies into the streams or ponds.

Minot was telling me last night that he had thought of bathing when he had done his hoeing—of taking some soap and going down to Walden and giving himself a good scrubbing—but something prevented it and now he'll go unwashed to the harvesting, even till the next hoeing is over.

Bathing is an undescribed luxury. To feel the wind blow on your body, the water flow on you and lave you, is a rare physical enjoyment this hot day. The water is remarkably warm here, especially in the shallows, warm to the hand. The pond water being so warm made the water of the brook feel very cold. I could feel it with my feet; and when I thrust my arm down where it was only two feet deep, my arm was in the warm water of the pond, but my hand in the cold water of the brook.

Now for another fluvial walk.

There is always a current of air above the water, blowing up or down the course of the river, so that this is the coolest highway. Divesting yourself of all clothing but your shirt and hat, to protect your exposed parts from the sun, you are prepared for the fluvial excursion. You choose what depth you like, tucking your toga higher or lower as you take the deep middle of the road or the shallow sidewalks.

I wonder if any Roman emperor ever indulged in such luxury as this—of walking up and down a river in torrid weather with only a hat to shade his head? What were the baths of Caracalla to this?

Alethea Patton

A clear, cold, windy afternoon. The cat crackles with electricity when you stroke her, and the fur rises up to the touch.

This is November of the hardest kind—bare frozen ground covered with pale brown or straw-colored herbage, a strong, cold, cutting northwest wind which makes me seek to cover my ears, a perfectly clear and cloudless sky. The cattle in the fields have a cold, shrunken, shaggy look, their hair standing out every way, as if with electricity, like the cat's. Ditches and pools are fast skimming over, and a few slate-colored snowbirds, with thick, shuffling twitter, and fine-chipping tree sparrows flit from bush to bush in the otherwise deserted pastures. This month taxes a walker's resources more than any. For my part, I should sooner think of going into quarters in November than in the winter. If you do feel any fire at this season out of doors, you may depend on it, it is your own. Not only the fingers cease to do their office, but there is often the benumbing of the faculties generally. You can hardly screw up your courage to take a walk when all is thus tightly locked or frozen up and so little is to be seen in field or wood. Nature has herself become like the few fruits which she still affords, a very thick-shelled nut with a shrunken meat within. I am obliged to go abroad, willfully and against my inclinations at first. The prospect looks so barren, so many springs are frozen up, not a flower perchance, but few birds left, not a companion abroad in all these

fields for me, I am slow to go forth. I seem to anticipate a fruitless walk. I think to myself hesitatingly, Shall I go there, or there, or there? and cannot make up my mind to any route, all seems so unpromising, mere surface-walking and fronting the cold wind, so that I have to force myself to it often and at random. But then I am often unexpectedly compensated, and the thinnest yellow light of November is more warming and exhilarating than any wine they tell of; and then the mite which November contributes becomes equal in value to the bounty of July. I may meet with something which interests me, and immediately it is as warm as in July.

Mike Sell

In my experience I have found nothing so truly impoverishing as what is called wealth. With the command of greater means than you have before possessed, you inevitably acquire a more expensive habit of living, and even the very same necessaries and comforts cost you more than they once did. Instead of gaining, you have lost some independence, and if your income should be suddenly lessened, you would find yourself poor, though possessed of the some means which once made you rich. Within the last five years I have had the command of a little more money than in the previous five years, for I have sold some books and been paid for some lectures; yet I am not a whit better fed or clothed or warmed or sheltered, not a whit richer, except that I have been less concerned about my living. But perhaps my life has been the less serious for it, and, to balance it, I feel now

that there is the possibility of failure. Before, I was much likelier to take the town upon my shoulders. They would say that I had gained an independence, but I think I have lost some of my independence. If you wish to give a man a sense of poverty, give him a thousand dollars. The next hundred dollars he gets will not be worth more than the ten dollars he used to get.

Aenor Sawyer

In a printed letter from Washington the other day, the secretary for the Association for the Advancement of Science requests me, as he probably has thousands of others, to fill in the blank space concerning certain questions, among which the most important one was what branch of science I was specially interested in, using the term "science" in the most comprehensive sense possible. Though I could state to a select few that department of human inquiry which engages me, and should be rejoiced at an opportunity to do so, I felt that it would be to make myself the laughing-stock of the scientific community to describe or attempt to describe to them that branch of science which specially interests me, inasmuch as they do not believe in a science which deals with the higher law. So I was obliged to speak to their condition and to describe to them that poor part of me which alone they can understand. The fact is I am a mystic, a transcendentalist, and a natural philosopher to boot. Now I think of it, I should have told them at once that I was a

transcendentalist. That would have been the shortest way of telling them that they would not understand my explanations.

How absurd that, though I probably stand as near to nature as any of them, and am by constitution as good an observer as most, yet a true account of my relation to nature should excite their ridicule only! If it had been the secretary of an association of which Plato or Aristotle was the president, I should not have hesitated to describe my studies at once and particularly.

Burr Heneman

Ah, the pickerel of Walden! when I see them lying on the ice, or in the well which the fisherman cuts in the ice, making a little hole to admit the water, I am always surprised by their rare beauty, as if they were fabulous fishes, they are so foreign to the streets, even to the woods, foreign as Arabia to our Concord life. They possess a quite dazzling and transcendent beauty which separates them by a wide interval from the cadaverous cod and haddock whose fame is trumpeted in our streets. They are not green like the pines, nor gray like the stones, nor blue like the sky; but they have, to my eyes, if possible, yet rarer colors, like flowers and precious stones, as if they were the pearls, the animalized crystals of the Walden water. They, of course, are Walden all over and all through; are themselves small Waldens in the animal kingdom, Waldenses. It is surprising that they are caught here — that in this deep and capacious spring, far beneath the rattling teams and chaises and tinkling

sleighs that travel the Walden road, this great gold and emerald fish swims. I never chanced to see its kind in any market; it would be the cynosure of all eyes there. Easily, with a few convulsive quirks, they give up their watery ghosts, like a mortal translated before his time to the thin air of heaven.

Susan Woods

I got my boat in. It made me sweat to wheel it home through to the snow, I am so unused to the work of late.

Then I walked up the railroad. The clear straw-colored grass and some weeds contrasting with the snow it rises above. I saw little in this walk. I saw Melvin's lank bluish-white black-spotted hound, and Melvin with his gun near, going home at evening. He follows hunting, praise be to him, as regularly in our tame fields as the farmers follow farming. Persistent Genius! How I respect him and thank him for him! I trust the lord will provide us with another Melvin when he is gone. How good of him to follow his own bent, and not continue at the sabbath-school all his days! What a wealth he thus becomes in the neighborhood! Few know how to take the census. I thank my stars for Melvin. I think of him with gratitude when I am going to sleep, grateful that he exists— that Melvin who is such a trial to his mother. Yet he is agreeable to *me* as a tinge of russet on the hillside. I would fain give thanks morning and evening for my blessing. Awkward,

gawky, loose-hung, dragging his legs after him. He is my contemporary and neighbor. He is one tribe, I am another, and we are not at war.

I saw but little in my walk. Saw no bird, only a crow's track in the snow.

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.

Steve Heilig

Two hundred years ago is about as great an antiquity as we can comprehend or often have to deal with. It is nearly as good as two thousand to our imaginations. It carries us back to the days of Aborigines and the Pilgrims; beyond the limits of oral testimony, to history which begins already to be enameled with a gloss of fable, and we do not quite believe what we read; to a strange style of writing and spelling and of expression; to those ancestors whose names we do not know, and to whom we are related only as we are to the race generally. It is the age of our very oldest houses and cultivated trees.

When we read the history of the world, centuries look cheap to us and we find we had doubted if the hundred years preceding the life of Herodotus seemed as great an antiquity to him as a hundred years does to us. We are inclined to think of all Romans who lived within five hundred years BC as *contemporaries* of each other. Yet Time moved at the same deliberate pace as now.

How is it that what is actually present and transpiring is commonly perceived by the understanding without halo or the blue enamel or intervening air? But let it be past or to come, and it is at once idealized. It is not simply the understanding now, but the imagination, that takes cognizance. The imagination requires a long range. It is the faculty of the poet to see present things as if distant or universally significant.

You can't read any genuine history— as that of Herodotus—without perceiving that our interests depends not on the subject but on the man—on the manner on which he treats the subject and the importance he gives it. A feeble writer and without genius must have what he thinks a great theme, which we are already interested in through the accounts of others, but a genius—a Shakespeare for instance—would make the history of his parish more interesting than another's history of the world.

Whenever men have lived there is a story to be told, and it depends chiefly on the storyteller or historian whether that is interesting or not. You are simply a witness on the stand to tell what you know about your neighbors and neighborhood.

Nicolette Hahn Niman (from "Civil Disobedience")

It is for no particular item in the tax-bill that I refuse to pay it. I simply wish to refuse allegiance to the State, to withdraw and stand aloof from it effectually. I

do not care to trace the course of my dollar but I am concerned to trace the effects of my allegiance. In fact, I quietly declare war with the State, after my fashion.

The authority of government, even such as I am willing to submit to, is still an impure one: to be strictly just, it must have the sanction and consent of the governed. It can have no pure right over my person and property but what I concede to it. The progress from an absolute to a limited monarchy, from a limited monarchy to a democracy, is a progress toward a true respect for the individual. Is a democracy, such as we know it, the last improvement possible in government? Is it not possible to take a step further towards recognizing and organizing the rights of man? There will never be a really free and enlightened State until the State comes to recognize the individual as a higher and independent power, from which all its own power and authority are derived, and treats him accordingly. I please myself with imagining a State at least which can afford to be just to all men, and to treat the individual with respect as a neighbor; which even would not think it inconsistent with its own repose if a few were to live aloof from it, not meddling with it, nor embraced by it, who fulfilled all the duties of neighbors and fellow-men. A State which bore this kind of fruit would prepare the way for a still more perfect and glorious State, which also I have imagined, but not yet anywhere seen.

Peter Martinelli

To Fair Haven, bee-hunting.

A fine clear day after the coolest night we have had. We were earnest to go this week, before the flowers were gone, and we feared a frosty night might make the bees slow to come forth.

After we got to the Baker Farm, the first thing was to find some flowers and catch some honey-bees. We followed up the bank of the brook for some distance, but the goldenrods were all dried up there, and the asters on which we expected to find them were very scarce. We had no better luck at Clematis Brook. Not a honey-bee could we find. We concluded we were too late, and the weather too cold.

We set out to return after eating our lunch. By the roadside at Walden, on the sunny hillside sloping to the pond, we saw a large mass of goldenrod and aster, comparatively fresh. We found it to be resounding with the hum of bees. (It was about 1 o'clock.) There were far more flowers than we had seen elsewhere. Here were bees in great numbers, both bumble-bees and honey-bees, as well as butterflies and wasps and flies. So, pouring a mixture of honey and water onto an empty honeycomb in a tin box, and holding the lid of the tin box in one hand, we proceeded to catch the honey-bees by shutting them in suddenly between the lid of the tin box and the large circular bottom of a wooden box, cutting off the flower-stem with the edge of the lid at the same time. Then the wooden box was wholly removed, and the bees were left feeding or sucking up the honey in broad daylight. In from two or three minutes one bee had loaded himself and commenced leaving

the box. He would buzz round a foot or more, and then sometimes, finding that he was too heavily loaded, alight again on the box to empty himself or clean his feet. Then, starting once more, he would begin to circle around irregularly, at first in a small circle only a foot or two in diameter, as if to examine the premises that he might know them again, till, at length, rising higher and higher and circling wider and wider and swifter and swifter, till his orbit was ten or twelve feet in diameter and as much from the ground. It was very difficult to follow him, especially if you looked against a wood or the hill. You had to lie low to fetch him against the sky; then, in a minute or less from his first starting, he darts off in a bee-line, that is, as far as I could see him looking against the sky (and you had to follow his whole career very attentively indeed to see when and where he went off at a tangent), in a waving or sinuous line, toward his nest.

We sent forth as many as a dozen bees, which flew in about three directions, but all toward the village, or where we knew there were hives. They did not fly absolutely straight, but within three or four feet of the same course for as far as we could see. Those belonging to one hive all had to digress to get around an apple tree. In less than half an hour the first returned to the box and so they all came back, one after another, loaded themselves and departed; but now they went off with very little preliminary circling, as if assured of their course. Furnished with little boxes of red, blue, green, yellow and white paint, in dry powder, we sprinkled a little of the red powder on the back of one with a stick while he was feeding—

gave him a little dab—and it settled down amid the fuzz of his back and gave him a distinct red jacket. He went off like most of them toward some hives about three quarters of a mile distant, and we observed the time of his departure. In just twenty-two minutes the red jacket came back, with enough of the powder still on his back to mark him plainly. He may have gone more than three-quarters of a mile. At any rate, he had a head-wind to contend with while laden. They fly swiftly and surely to their nests, never resting by the way, and I was surprised at the distance to which the village bees go for flowers.

The rambler in the most remote woods and pastures little thinks that the bees which are humming so industriously on the rare wild flowers he is plucking for his herbarium are, like himself, ramblers from the village, perhaps from his own yard, come to get their honey for his hives. I feel the richer for this experience. It taught me that even the insects in my path are not loafers, but have their special errands. Not merely and vaguely in this world, but in this hour, each is about its business. If then, there are any sweet flowers still lingering on the hillside, it is known to the bees both of the forest and the village.

Our red jacket had performed the voyage in safety; no bird had picked him up. Now is the time to hunt bees and take them up, when the combs are full of honey and before the flowers are so scarce that they begin to consume the honey they have stored. In 1723 Paul Dudley wrote the Royal Society that the Indians had no word for bee, calling it the “Englishman’s fly.”

Sharyle Patton

Indigenous animals are inexhaustibly interesting to us. How much more, then, the indigenous man of America! If wild men, so much more like ourselves than they are unlike, have inhabited these shores before us, we wish to know particularly what manner of men they were, how they live here, their relation to nature, their arts and their customs, their fancies and superstitions. They paddled over these waters, they wandered in these woods, and they had their fancies and their beliefs connected with the sea and the forest, which concern us quite as much as the fables of Oriental nations do. Some have spoken slightingly of the Indians, as a race possessing so little skill and wit, so low in the scale of humanity, and so brutish that they hardly deserve to be remembered, using only the terms “miserable,” “pitiful,” and the like. It frequently happens that the historian, though he professes more humanity than the trapper, mountain man, or gold-digger really exhibits and practices a similar inhumanity, wielding a pen instead of a rifle.

One tells you with more contempt than pity that the Indian had no religion, and this, to all the shallow-brained and bigoted, seems to mean something important. Pray, how much more religion has the historian? It is the spirit of humanity which animates both so-called savages and civilized nations, working through a man, that interests us most, and not the man expressing himself. The

thought of a so-called savage tribe is generally far more *just* than a single civilized man.

Bernardo Lopez

My first botany, as I remember, was Bigelow's "Plants of Boston and Vicinity," which I began to use about twenty years ago, looking chiefly for the popular names and the short references to the localities of plants, even without any regard to the plant. I also learned the names of many, but without using any system, and forgot them soon. I was not inclined to pluck flowers; preferred to leave them where they were, liked them best there. I was never in the least interested in plants in the house. But from year to year we look at Nature with new eyes. About half a dozen years ago I found myself attending to plants with more method, looking out the name of each one and remembering it. I began to bring them home in my hat, a straw one with a scaffold lining to it, which I called my botany-box. I never used any other, and when some whom I visited were evidently surprised at its dilapidated look, as I deposited it on their front entry table, I assured them it was not so much my hat as my botany-box. I remember gazing with interest at the swamps about those days and wondering if I could ever attain to such familiarity with plants that I should know the species of every twig and leaf in them, that I should be acquainted with every plant, summer and winter, that I saw.

Though I knew most of the flowers, and there were not in any particular swamp more than a half a dozen shrubs that I did not know, yet these made it seem like a maze of a thousand strange species to me, and I even thought of commencing at one end and looking it faithfully and laboriously through till I knew it all. I little thought that in a year or two I should have attained to that knowledge. Still, I never studied botany and do not today. Systematically, the most natural system is still so artificial. I wanted to know my plant neighbors, if possible—to get a little nearer to them. I soon found myself observing when they first blossomed and leafed, and I followed it up early and late, far and near, several years in succession, running to different sides of the town and into neighboring towns, often between twenty and thirty miles in a day. I often visited a particular plant four or five miles distant, half a dozen times within a fortnight, that I might know exactly when it opened, beside attending to a great many others in different directions, and some of them equally distant, at the same time. At the same time I had an eye for birds and whatever else might offer.

Aggie Murch

What a perfect chest the chestnut is packed in! With such wonderful care nature has secluded and defended these nuts, as if they were her most precious fruits, while diamonds are left to take care of themselves. First it bristles all over with sharp green prickles, some nearly half an inch long, like a hedgehog rolled into a

ball; these rest on a thick, stiff, bark-like rind, one sixteenth to one eighth of an inch thick, which, again, is most daintily lined with a kind of silvery fur or velvet plush one sixteenth of an inch thick, even rising in a ridge between the nuts, like the lining of a casket in which the most precious commodities are kept. The chest is packed quite full; half-developed nuts are the waste paper used in the packing, to fill the vacancies. At last frost comes to unlock this chest; it alone holds the true key.

Such is the cradle, thus daintily lined, in which they have been rocked in their infancy. See how tenderly it has been reared before its green and tender skin hardened into a shell. The light comes in and proceeds to paint the nuts that clear, handsome reddish brown which we call chestnut. Nowadays the brush that paints chestnut is very active. It is entering into every open bur over the stretching forest tops for hundreds of miles, without horse or ladder, putting on rapid coats of this wholesome color. Otherwise the boys would not think they had got perfect chestnuts. Within itself, each individual nut is lined with a reddish velvet, as if to preserve the seed from injury in falling, and from sudden damp and cold, and, within that a thin white skin enwraps the germ. Thus it is lining within lining —six coverings at least before you reach the contents!

I find my account in this-continued monotonous labor of picking chestnuts all the afternoon, brushing the leaves aside without looking up, absorbed in that, and forgetting things awhile. My eye is educated to discover anything on the

ground. It is probably much wholesomer to look at the ground than at the heavens. As I go stooping and brushing the leaves aside by the hour, I am not thinking of chestnuts merely, but I find myself humming a thought of more significance. The occupation affords a certain broad pause and opportunity to start again afterward, to turn over a new leaf.

Janet Visick

I hear someone thrumming a guitar. It reminds me of moments that I have lived. What a comment on our life is the least strain of music! It lifts me up above all the dust and mire of the universe. I soar or hover with clean skirts over the field of my life. It is ever life within life, in concentric spheres. When a strain of music is heard, the field where I am leading my humdrum life is seen to be the field of some unrecorded crusade or tournament, the thought of which excites in us an ecstasy of joy. the way in which I am affected by this faint strumming alerts me to the fact that there is still some health and immortality in the springs of me. What an elixir this sound is! I, who but lately lived under *a dish cover*, live now under the heavens. It releases me; it bursts my bonds. Perhaps all our lives are, comparatively speaking, a stereotyped despair; i.e., we never at any time realize the full grandeur of our destiny. We forever and ever, and habitually, underrate our fate. I am, of course, hopelessly ignorant and unbelieving until some divinity stirs within me. Ninety nine one hundredths of our lives we are mere hedgers and ditchers, but

from time to time we meet with reminders of our destiny. We hear kindred vibrations, music! and we put out our dormant feelers to the limits of the universe. We attain to a wisdom that passes understanding. The stable continents undulate, the hard and fixed becomes fluid. When I hear music I fear no danger, I am invulnerable, I see no foe. There are infinite degrees of life, from that which is next to sleep and death, to that which is forever awake and immortal.

Michael Pollan

I have come out this afternoon a-cranberrying, chiefly to gather some of the small cranberry, which Emerson says is the common cranberry of the north of Europe. I thought I should like to have a dish of this sauce of my own gathering on the table at Thanksgiving. I could hardly make up my mind to come this way, it seemed so poor an object to spend the afternoon on. I kept foreseeing a lame conclusion—how I should cross the great fields, and then retrace my steps no richer than before. In fact, I expected little of this walk, yet it did pass through my mind that somehow, on this very account (my small expectation), it would turn out well, as also the advantage of having some purpose, however small, to be accomplished—of letting your deliberate wisdom and foresight to some extent direct and control your steps. 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. Many of our days should be spent carrying out deliberately and faithfully the hundred little purposes which every man's genius must have suggested to him. Let not your life be wholly without an object, though it be only to ascertain the flavor of a cranberry, for it will not be only the quality of an insignificant berry that you will have tasted, but the flavor of your life to that extent, and it will be such a sauce as no wealth can buy.

Both a conscious and an unconscious life are good. Neither is good exclusively, for both have the same source. The wisely conscious life springs out of an unconscious suggestion. I have found my account in traveling in having prepared beforehand a list of questions which I would get answered, not trusting to my interest at the moment, and can then travel with the most profit. Indeed, it is by obeying the suggestions of a higher light within you that you escape from yourself and, in the transit, as it were with the unworn sides of your eye, travel totally new paths. What is that pretended life that does not take up a claim, that does not occupy ground, that sits on a bank looking over a bog, singing its desires?

However, it was not with such blasting expectations as these that I entered the swamp. I saw bags of cranberries just gathered and tied up on the banks of the swamp. They must have been raked out of the water, now so high, before they should rot. I left my shoes and stockings on the bank far off and waded a long way bare legged, to the soft open sphagnous center of the swamp. I waded quite round the swamp for an hour, my bare feet in the cold water beneath, and it was a relief to

place them on the warmer surface of the sphagnum. I filled one pocket with each variety, but sometimes, being confused, crossed hands and put them into the wrong pocket.

I enjoyed this cranberrying very much, notwithstanding the wet and cold, and the swamp seemed to be yielding its crop to me, for there are none else to pluck it or to value it. I am the only person in the township who regards them or knows them, and I do not regard them in the light of their pecuniary value. I have no doubt I felt richer wading there with my two pockets full, treading on wonders at every step, than any farmer going to market with a hundred bushels he has hired to be raked. I got further and further away from the town every moment, and my good genius seemed to have smiled on me, leading me hither, and then the sun suddenly came out clear and bright, but it did not warm my feet. I would gladly share my gains, take one or twenty into partnership and get this swamp with them, but I do not know an individual whom this berry cheers and nourishes as it does me. But I love them even better partly for that reason.

Melinda Griffith

I saw at Ricketson's a young woman, Miss Kate Brady, twenty years old, her father an Irishman, a worthless fellow, her mother a smart Yankee. The daughter formerly did sewing, but now keeps school for a livelihood. She was born at the Brady house, where she lived till twelve years old and helped her father in the field. There

she rode horse to plow and was knocked off the horse by apple tree boughs, kept sheep, caught fish, etc. I never heard a girl or woman express so strong a love for Nature. She purposes to return to that lonely ruin, and dwell there alone, since her mother and sister will not accompany her; says that she knows all about farming and keeping sheep and spinning and weaving, though it would puzzle her to shingle the old house. There she thinks she can “live free.” I was pleased to hear of her plans because they were quite cheerful and original, growing out of her love for Nature. A strong love for outward Nature is singularly rare among both men and women.

The scenery immediately about her homestead is quite ordinary, yet she appreciates and can use that part of the universe as no other being can. Her own sex, so tamely bred, only jeer at her for entertaining such an idea, but she has a strong head and a love for good reading, which may carry her through. I would by no means discourage, nor yet particularly encourage her, for I would have her so strong as to succeed in spite of all ordinary discouragements.

That nature which to one is a stark and ghastly solitude is a sweet, tender, and genial society to another.

Giovanni Singleton

Alone in distant woods or fields, I come to myself, I once more feel myself grandly related, and that cold and solitude are friends of mine. I suppose that this value, in

my case, is equivalent to what others get by churchgoing and prayer. I thus dispose of the superfluous and see things as they are, grand and beautiful. I have told many that I walk every day about half the daylight, but I think they do not believe it. I wish to get the Concord, the Massachusetts, the America, out of my head and be sane a part of every day. If there are missionaries for the heathen, why not send them to me? I wish to know something, I wish to be made better. I wish to forget, a considerable part of every day, all mean, narrow, trivial men (and this requires usually to forego and forget all personal relations so long), and therefore I come out to these solitudes, where the problem of existence is simplified. I enter some glade in the woods, perchance, where a few leaves and dry leaves alone lift themselves above the surface of the snow, and it is as if I had come to an open window. I see out and around myself. Our *skylights* are thus far away from the ordinary resorts of men. I am not satisfied with ordinary windows. I must have a true *skylight*. My true sky light is on the outside of the village. It is as if I always met in those places some grand, serene, immortal, infinitely encouraging, though invisible, companion, and walked with him. There at last my nerves are steadied, my senses and my mind do their office. I am aware that most of my neighbors would think it a hardship to be compelled to linger here one hour, especially this bleak day, and yet I receive this sweet and ineffable compensation for it. It is the most agreeable thing I do. Truly my coins are uncurrent with them.

Elia Haworth

Think what a change, unperceived by many, has within a month come over the landscape! Then, the general, universal, hue was green. Now see those brilliant scarlet and glowing yellow trees in the lowlands a mile off! Or see that crowd in the swamp half a mile through, all vying with one another, a blaze of glory. We are not prepared to believe that the earth would present to a bird's eye such distinct masses of bright color. A great painter is at work.

I have just read Ruskin's "Modern Painters." I am disappointed in not finding it a more out-of-door book, for I have heard that such was its character, but its title might have warned me. He does not describe Nature as Nature, but as Turner painted her, and though the work betrays that he has given a close attention to Nature, it appears to have been with an artist's and critic's design. How much is written about Nature as somebody has portrayed her, how little about Nature as she is, and chiefly concerns us, *i.e.* how much prose, how little poetry!

It has come to this, that the lover of art is one, and the lover of Nature another, though true art is but the expression of our love of nature. It is monstrous when one cares but little about trees but much about Corinthian columns, and yet this is exceedingly common.

Sean Thackrey

I have collected and split up now quite a pile of driftwood, perhaps half or three quarters of a tree. It is more amusing, not only to collect this with my boat and bring it up from the river on my back, but to split it also, than it would be to speak to a farmer for a load of wood and to saw and split that. Each stick I deal with has a history, and I read it as I am handling it, and, last of all, I remember my adventures in getting it, while it is burning in the winter evening. That is the most interesting part of its history. It has made part of a fence or a bridge, or has been rooted out of a clearing and bears the marks of fire on it. When I am splitting it, I study the effects of water on it, and, if it is a stump, the curiously winding grain by which it separates into so many prongs. I find that a dry oak stump will split pretty easily in the direction of its diameter, but not at right angles with it or along its circles of growth.

Some of my acquaintances have been wondering why I took all this pains, bringing some nearly three miles by water, and have suggested various reasons for it. In my despair of making them understand me I tell them that it is a profound secret, yet I did hint to them that one reason was that I wanted to get it. I take some satisfaction in eating my food, as well as in being nourished by it. I feel well at dinner-time as well as after it. The world will never find out why you don't love to have your bed tucked up for you, why you will be so perverse. I enjoy drinking water more 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.

A great part of our troubles are literally domestic or originate in the house and from living indoors. I could write an essay to be entitled "Out of Doors," and undertake a crusade against houses. What a different thing Christianity is when preached to the house-bred and to a party who live out of doors! A sermon is needed on economy of fuel. What right has neighbor to burn ten cords of wood, when I burn only one? Thus robbing our half-naked town of this precious covering. Is he so much colder than I? It is expensive to maintain him in our midst. One man makes a little of the driftwood of the river or of the dead and refuse of the forest, and Nature rejoices in him. Another, Herod-like, requires ten cords of the best young white oak or hickory, and he is commonly esteemed a virtuous man. He who burns the most wood on his hearth is the least warmed by the sight of it. Leave the trim wood-lots to widows and orphan girls. Let men tread gently through nature.

Anna Gade

Found a good stone jug, small size, floating in the water, stopple up. I drew the cork and smelled molasses and water, or something which it had contained.

Probably some hay-maker's jug left in the grass which the recent rise of the river has floated off. It will do to put with the white pitcher I found and keep flowers in.

Thus I get my furniture.

I deal so much with my fuel—what with finding it, loading it, conveying it home, sawing and splitting it— I get so many values out of it, am warmed in so many ways by it, when I feel it, I am reminded of all my adventures. I just put on a stick. I had my choice in the box of grey chestnut, a black snag of an oak stump, white pine top, grey and round, and stubs of limbs, or else splinters from an old bridge plank.

I feel disposed to get wood for any three or four of my neighbors who really want the fuel and will appreciate the act, now that I have supplied myself. There was a fat pine plank, heavy as lead, that I gave to my aunt for kindling.

I affect what would commonly be called a mean and miserable way of living. I thoroughly sympathize with all savages and gypsies in so far as they merely assert the original right of man to the productions of Nature and a place in her. The highest law gives a thing to him who can use it.

Frances McDormand

I do not know how to entertain someone who can't take long walks. The first thing that suggests itself is to get a horse to haul them, and that brings us at once into contact with stablers and dirty harnesses, and I do not get over my ride for a long time. I give up my forenoon to them and get along pretty well, the very elasticity of the air and promise of the day abetting me, but they are as heavy as dumplings by mid-afternoon. If they can't walk, why won't they take an honest nap and let me go

in the afternoon? They alarm me by an evident disposition to sit. In the midst of the most glorious Indian summer afternoon, there they sit, breaking their chairs and wearing out the house, with their backs to the light, taking no note of the lapse of time.

I had gone but little way on the old Carlisle Road when I saw Brooks Clark, who is now about eighty and bent like a bow, hastening along the road, barefooted, as usual, with an ax in his hand; was in haste perhaps on account of the cold wind on his bare feet. When he got up to me, I saw that besides the ax in one hand, he had his shoes in the other, filled with apples and a dead robin. He stopped and talked with me a few moments; said that we had had a noble autumn and might now expect some cold weather. I asked of he had found the robin dead. No, he said, he found it with its wing broken and killed it. He also added that he had found some apples in the woods, and as he hadn't anything to carry them in, he put them in his shoes. They were queer-looking trays to carry fruit in. How many he got in along toward the toes I don't know. I noticed too, that his pockets were stuffed with them. He appeared to have been out on a scout this gusty afternoon, to see what he could find, as the youngest boy might. It pleased me to see this cheery old man, with such a feeble hold on life, bent almost double, thus enjoying the evening of his days. Far be it from me to call it avarice or penury, this childlike delight in finding something in the woods or fields and carrying it home in the October evening, as a trophy to be added to his winter's store. Oh, no; he was happy to be

Nature's pensioner, and birdlike in picking up his living. Better his robin than your turkey, his shoes full of apples than your barrels full; his will be sweeter and suggest a better tale. Like an old squirrel shuffling to his hole with a nut.

This old man's cheeriness was worth a thousand of the church's sacraments. It was better than a prayerful mood. It proves to me old age as tolerable, as happy, as infancy. I was glad of an occasion to suspect that this afternoon he had not been "at work" but living somewhat after my own fashion—had been out to see what Nature had for him, and now was hastening home to a burrow he knew, where he could warm his old feet. If he had been a young man, he would probably have thrown away his apples and put on his shoes when he saw me coming, for shame. But old age is manlier; it has learned to live, makes fewer apologies. This seems a very manly man. I have known him within a few years building stone walls by himself, barefooted.

Lucian Patton

Having stood quite still on the edge of the ditch close to the north edge of the maple swamp some time, and heard a slight rustling near me from time to time, I looked round and saw a mink under the bushes within a few feet. It was pure reddish-brown above, with a blackish and somewhat bushy tail, a blunt nose, and somewhat innocent-looking head. It crept along toward me and around me, in a semi-circle, snuffing the air, and pausing several times to look at me. Part of its

course when nearest me was in the water of the ditch. It then crawled away slowly, and I saw by the ripple where it had taken to the ditch again. Perhaps it was after a frog, like myself.

The naturalist accomplishes a great deal by patience, more perhaps than by activity. He must take his position, and then wait and watch. It is equally true of quadrupeds and reptiles. Sit still in the midst of their haunts.

Frogs are strange creatures. One would describe them as peculiarly wary and timid, another as equally bold and imperturbable. All that is required in studying them is patience. You will sometimes walk a long way along a ditch and hear twenty or more leap in one after another before you, as see where they rippled the water, without getting sight of one of them. You sit down on the bank and wait patiently for his reappearance. After a quarter of an hour or more he is sure to rise to the surface and put out his nose quietly without making a ripple, eying you steadily. At length he becomes as curious about you as you can be about him. He suddenly hops straight toward you, pausing within a foot, a takes and near and leisurely view of you. You might now scratch its nose with your finger and examine it to your heart's content, for it is become as imperturbable as it was shy before. You conquer them by superior patience and immovableness; not by quickness, but by slowness; not by heat but by coldness.

Fran to Lucian after his reading:

[“Why, one morning I went out in my field across there to the river, and there, beside that little old mud pond, was standing David Henry, but he wasn’t doin’ nothin’ but just standin’ there- lookin’ at that pond. And when I came back at noon, there he was standin’ with his hands behind him just lookin’ down into that pond. And after dinner when I came back again if there wasn’t David Henry standin’ there just like as if he had been there all day, gazin’ down into that pond, and I stopped and looked at him and I says, “David Henry, what air you a-doin’ ?” And he didn’t turn his head and he didn’t look at me. He kept on lookin’ down at that pond, and he said, as if he was thinkin’ about the stars and the heavens, “ Mister Murray, I’m a-studyin’ - the habits- of the bullfrog!”

And there that darn fool had been standin’ - the livelong day- a-studyin’ - the habits- of the bullfrog!”]

Walter Murch (from “Walking”)

What is it that makes it so hard sometimes to determine whither we will walk? I believe that there is a subtle magnetism in Nature, which, if we unconsciously yield to it, will direct us aright. It is not indifferent to us which way we walk. There is a right way; but we are very liable from heedlessness and stupidity to take the wrong one. We would fain take that walk, never yet taken by us through this actual world, which is perfectly symbolical of the path which we were to travel in the

interior and ideal world; and sometimes, no doubt, we find it difficult to choose our direction, because it does not yet exist distinctly in our idea.

When I go out of the house for a walk, uncertain as yet whither I will bend my steps, and submit myself to my instinct to decide for me, I find that I finally and inevitably settle southwest, toward some particular wood or meadow or deserted pasture or hill in that direction. The future lies that way to me, and the earth seems more unexhausted and richer on that side. The outline which would bound my walks would be not a circle, but a parabola, or rather like one of those cometary orbits which have been thought to be non-returning curves, in this case opening westward, in which my house occupies the place of the sun. I turn round and round irresolute sometime for a quarter of an hour, until I decide, for the thousandth time, that I will walk into the southwest or west. Eastward I go only by force; but westward I go free. Thither no business leads me. It is hard for me to believe that I shall find fair landscapes or sufficient wildness and freedom behind the eastern horizon. I am not excited by the prospect of a walk thither; but I believe that the forest which I see in the western horizon stretches uninterruptedly toward the setting sun, and that there are no towns or cities in it of enough consequence to disturb me. Let me live where I will, on this side is the city, on that the wilderness, and ever I am leaving the city more and more, and withdrawing into the wilderness. I should not lay so much stress on this fact if I did not believe that something like this is the prevailing tendency of my countrymen. I must walk

towards Oregon and not toward Europe. And that way the nation is moving, and I may say that mankind progress from east to west.

We go eastward to realize history and study the works of art and literature, retracing the steps of the race; we go westward as into the future, with a spirit of enterprise and adventure. I know not how significant it is that an individual should thus consent in his pettiest walk with the general movement of the race; but I know it something akin to the migratory instinct in birds and quadrupeds.

Gail Reitano

Another, the tenth of these memorable days. We have had some fog the last two or three nights, and this forenoon it was slow to disburse, but this afternoon it is warmer even than yesterday. I should like it better of it were not so warm. I am glad to reach the shade of Hubbard's Grove; the coolness is refreshing. These ten days are enough to make the reputation of any climate; a tradition of these days might be handed down to posterity. They deserve a notice in history, in the history of Concord. Was there ever such an autumn?

And yet there was never such a panic and hard times in the commercial world. The merchants and the banks are failing all over the country, but not the sand banks, solid and warm, streaked with bloody blackberry vines. You may run upon them as much as you please, even as the crickets do, and find their account in it. They are the stockholders in these banks, and I hear them creaking their content.

In these banks, too, and such as these, are my funds deposited, a fund of health and enjoyment. The prosperity and happiness of the crickets, and I trust my own, do not depend on whether the New York banks suspend or not. We do not rely on such slender security. To put your trust in such a bank is to be swallowed up and undergo suffocation. Invest instead, I say, in these country banks. Let your capital be simplicity and contentment. I have no sympathy with this miserable state of things, no compassion for it. Banks built of granite, after some Grecian or Roman style, with their porticoes and their safes of iron, are not so permanent, and cannot give me so good security for capital invested in them as the heads of withered goldenrod in the meadow. I do not suspect the solvency of these. I know who is their president and cashier.

Howard Dillon

It galls me to listen to the remarks of craven-hearted neighbors who speak disparagingly of John Brown because he resorted to violence, resisted the government, threw his life away! Such minds are not equal to the occasion. They preserve the so-called peace of their community by deeds of petty violence everyday. The remarks of my neighbors upon Brown's death and supposed fate, with very few exceptions, are "Served him right," "He is undoubtedly insane," "Died as the fool dieth;" and so they proceed to live their sane, and wise, and

altogether admirable lives, reading their Plutarch a little. A government that pretends to be Christian and crucifies a million Christs everyday!

Our foes are in our midsts and all about us. Hardly a house but is divided against itself. For our foe is the all but universal woodenness both of head and heart. Some eighteen hundred years ago Christ was crucified; this morning, perhaps, John Brown was hung. These are the two ends of the chain which I rejoice to know is not without its lengths.

I see now that it was necessary that the bravest and humanest man in all the country should be hung. Perhaps he saw it himself. If any leniency were shown him, any compromise made with him by the government, he might be suspected.

I rejoice that I live in the age, that I was his contemporary.

I do not wish to kill or to be killed, but I can foresee circumstances in which both of these things would be by me unavoidable.

This event advertises me that there is such a fact as death- the possibility of a man's dying. It seems as if no man has ever died in America; for in order to die you must first have lived.

It is the best news that America has ever heard.

It has already quickened the public pulse of the North; it has infused more, and more generous, blood into her veins and heart than any number of years of what is called commercial and political prosperity could. How many a man who was lately contemplating suicide has now something to live for!

There was remarkable sunset. The sunset sky reached quite from west to east, and it was the most varied in its forms and colors of any that I remember to have seen. At one time the clouds were mostly softly and delicately rippled, like the ripple marks on sand. But it was hard for me to see its beauty then, when my mind was filled with Captain Brown. So great a wrong as is fate implied overshadowed all beauty in the world.

Brenda Hillman

The thin snow now driving from the north and lodging on my coat consists of those beautiful star crystals, not cottony and chubby spokes, but thin and partly transparent crystals. About a tenth of an inch in diameter, they are perfect little wheels with six spokes, or rather with six perfect little leaflets, fern-like, with a distinct straight and slender midrib, coming from the center. On each side of each midrib there is a transparent thin blade with a crenellated edge. How full of the creative genius is the air in which these are generated! I should hardly admire more if real stars fell and lodged on my coat. Nature is full of genius, full of divinity, so that not a snowflake escapes its fashioning hand. Nothing is cheap and coarse, neither dewdrops nor snowflakes.

A divinity must have stirred within them before the crystals did thus shoot and set. Wheels of the storm-chariots. The same law that shapes the earth-star shapes the snow-star. As surely as the petals of a flower are fixed, each of these

countless snow-stars comes whirling to earth, pronouncing thus, with emphasis, the number six. Order, cosmos.

What a world we live in! where myriads of these little discs, so beautiful to the most prying eye, are whirled down on every travelers coat, the observant and the unobservant, and on the restless squirrel's fur, and on the far-stretching fields and forests, the wooded dells, and the mountain-tops. There they lie, like the wreck of chariot-wheels after a battle in the skies. Meanwhile the meadow mouse shoves them aside, the schoolboy casts them in his snowball, and the woodman's sled glides smoothly over them, these glorious spangles, the sweeping of heaven's floor. And they all sing, melting as they sing of the mysteries of the number six—six, six, six.

Michael Bernsohn

My difficulties with my friends are such as no frankness will settle. There is no precept in the New Testament that will assist me. My nature, it may be, is secret. Others can confess and complain; I cannot. It is not that I am too proud, but that is not what is wanted.

I feel sometimes as if I could say to my friends, "My friends, I am aware how I have outraged you, how I have seemingly preferred hate to love, seemingly treated others kindly and you unkindly." I can imagine how I might utter something never to be realized. But let me say frankly at the same time I feel, it may be with

too little regret, that I am under an awful necessity to be what I am. If truth were known, which I do not know, I have no concern with those friends whom I misunderstand or who misunderstand me.

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

My acquaintances sometimes imply that I am too cold; but each thing is warm enough of its kind. Is the stone too cold which absorbs the heat of the summer sun and does not part with it during the night? Cold! I am most sensible of warmth on winter days. It is not the warmth of fire that you would have, but everything is warm and cold according to its nature. It is not that I am too cold, but that our warmth and coldness are not of the same nature; when I am absolutely warmest, I may be coldest to you. You who find that I am cold find Nature cold. To me she is warm.

Jenepher Stowell

When I reached the upper end of this weedy sandbar, I noticed some light-colored object in mid-river near the other end of the sandbar. At first I thought of some large stake or board standing amid the weeds there, then of a fisherman in a brown holland sack, referring him to the shore beyond. I floated nearer and nearer till I saw plainly enough the motions of a person, whoever it was, and that it was no stake. Looking through my glass thirty or forty rods off, I thought certainly that I saw Channing, who had just bathed, making signals to me with his towel. I saw his

motions as he wiped himself, the movements of his elbow and his towel. Then I saw that the person was nearer and therefore smaller, that it stood on the sandbar in midstream in shallow water and must be some maiden in a bathing dress, for it was the color of brown holland, and a very peculiar kind of dress it seemed. But at about this time I discovered with my naked eye that it was a great blue heron standing in very shallow water amid the weeds of the sandbar and pluming itself. I had not noticed its legs at all, and its head, neck, and wings, being constantly moving, I had mistaken for arms, elbows, and the towels of a bather, and when it stood stiller its shapely body looked like a peculiar bathing dress.

Suddenly comes a second heron, flying low, and alights on the sandbar yet nearer to me, almost high and dry. They were my idea of the river, these two winged men.

You have not seen our weedy river, you do not know the significance of its weedy sandbars, until you have seen the blue heron wading and pluming itself on it. I see that it was made for these shallows, and they for it. Now that the heron has gone from the weedy shoal, the scene appears incomplete. Of course, the heron has sounded the depth of the water on every sandbar of the river that is fordable to it. The water there is not so many feet deep, but so many heron's tibia. Instead of a foot rule you should use a heron's leg for a measure.

How long we may have gazed on a particular scenery and think that we have seen and known it, when, at length, some bird or quadruped comes and takes

possession of it before our eyes, and imparts to it a wholly new character. The heron uses these shallows as I cannot. I give them up to him.

Robert Hass

I wish to speak a word for Nature, for absolute freedom and wildness, as contrasted with a freedom and culture merely civil—to regard man as an inhabitant, or a part and parcel of Nature, rather than a member of society. There are enough champions of civilization.

I have met with but one or two persons in the course of my life who understood the art of walking, that is, of taking walks—who had a genius, so to speak, for *sauntering*: which word is beautifully derived “from idle people who roved about the country in the Middle Ages asking for charity under pretence of going to *la Sainte-Terre*,” to the Holy Land, till the children exclaimed, “There goes a *Sainte-Terrer*,” a saunterer—a Holy Lander. They who never go to the Holy Land in their walks, as they pretend, are indeed mere idlers and vagabonds; but they who do go there are saunterers in the good sense, such as I mean. Some, however, would derive the word from *sans terre*, meaning without land or a home, which, therefore, will mean, having no particular home, but equally at home everywhere. For this is the secret of successful sauntering. He who sits still in a house all the time may be the greatest vagrant of all; but the saunterer is no more vagrant than the meandering river, which is all the while sedulously seeking the

shortest course to the sea. But I prefer the first, which, indeed, is the most probable derivation. For every walk is a sort of crusade to go forth and reconquer this Holy Land from the hands of the Infidels.

It is true, we are but faint-hearted crusaders, even the walkers, nowadays, who undertake no persevering, never-ending enterprises. Our expeditions are but tours, and come round again at evening to the old hearth-side from which we set out. Half the walk is but retracing our steps. We should go forth on the shortest walk in the spirit of undying adventure, never to return—prepared to send back our embalmed hearts only as relics to our desolate kingdoms. If you are ready to leave father and mother, and brother and sister, and wife and child and friends, and never see them again—if you have paid your debts, and made your will, and settled all your affairs, and are a free man, then you are ready for a walk.

I think that I cannot preserve my health and spirits, unless I spend four hours a day at least—and it is commonly more than that—sauntering through the woods and over the hills and fields, absolutely free from all worldly engagements. When sometimes I, who cannot stay in my chamber for a single day without acquiring some rust, am reminded that the mechanics and shopkeepers stay in their shops not only all the morning, but all the afternoon, too, sitting with crossed legs—as if the legs were made to sit upon, and not to stand or walk upon—I confess that I am astonished at the power of endurance, to say nothing of the moral insensibility, of my neighbors who confine themselves to shops and offices the whole day for

weeks and months, ay, and years almost together. I know not what manner of stuff they are of.

The walking of which I speak has nothing in it akin to taking exercise, as the sick take medicine at stated hours. You must walk like a camel, which is said to be the only beast which ruminates while walking. When a traveller asked Wordsworth's servant to show him her master's study, she answered, "Here is his library, but his study is out of doors."

My vicinity affords many good walks; and though for so many years I have walked almost every day, and sometimes for several days together, I have not yet exhausted them. An absolutely new prospect is a great happiness, and I can still get this any afternoon. Two or three hours' walking will carry me to as strange a country as I expect ever to see. A single farmhouse which I had not seen before is sometimes as good as the dominions of the King of Dahomey. There is in fact a sort of harmony between the capabilities of the landscape within a circle of ten miles' radius, or the limits of a afternoon walk, and the threescore years and ten of human life. It will never become quite familiar to you.

At present, in this vicinity, the best part of the land is not private property; the landscape is not owned, and the walker enjoys comparative freedom. But possibly the day will come when it will be partitioned off into so-called pleasure-grounds, in which few will take a narrow and exclusive pleasure only—when fences shall be multiplied and man-traps invented to confine men to the public

road, and walking over the surface of God's earth shall be construed to mean trespassing on some gentleman's grounds. Let us improve our opportunities then, before the evil days come.