

RALPH WALDO EMERSON
1803-1882

From *Nature* (1836)

Introduction

Our age is **retrospective**. It builds the **sepulchres** of the fathers. It writes **biographies, histories, and criticism**. The foregoing generations beheld God and nature face to face; we, **through their eyes**. Why should not we also enjoy an **original** relation to the universe? Why should not we have a poetry and philosophy of **insight** and not of tradition, and a religion by **revelation** to us, and not the history of theirs? **Embosomed** for a season in nature, whose floods of life stream around and through us, and invite us by the powers they supply, to action proportioned to nature, why should we grope among the dry bones of the past,¹ or put the living generation into masquerade out of its faded wardrobe? The sun shines to-day also. **There is more wool and flax in the fields**. There are **new** lands, **new** men, **new** thoughts. Let us demand our own works and laws and worship.

Undoubtedly we have no questions to ask which are unanswerable. We must trust the perfection of the creation so far, as to believe that whatever curiosity the order of things has awakened in our minds, the order of things can satisfy. **Every man's condition is a solution in hieroglyphic to those inquiries he would put**. He acts it as life, before he apprehends it as truth. In like manner, nature is already, in its forms and tendencies, describing its own design. Let us interrogate the great apparition, that shines so peacefully around us. Let us inquire, to what end is nature? [...]

¹ An echo of Ezekiel 37.1-14, especially 37.4, where God tells Ezekiel to "Prophesy upon these bones, and say unto them, O ye dry bones, hear the word of the Lord." Emerson had left the ministry but was still writing as a prophet.

Chapter I. Nature

To go into **solitude**, a man needs to retire as much from his chamber as from society. I am not solitary whilst I read and write, though nobody is with me. **But if a man would be alone, let him look at the stars**. The rays that come from those heavenly worlds, will separate between him and what he touches. One might think the atmosphere was made transparent with this design, to give man, in the heavenly bodies, the perpetual presence of the sublime. Seen in the streets of cities, how great they are! If the stars should appear one night in a thousand years, how would men believe and adore; and preserve for many generations the remembrance of the city of God which had been shown! But **every night** come out these envoys of beauty, and light the universe with their admonishing smile.

[...] To speak truly, **few adult persons can see nature**. Most persons **do not see** the sun. At least they have **a very superficial seeing**. The sun illuminates only the eye of the man, but shines into the eye and **the heart of the child**. The lover of nature is he whose **inward and outward senses** are still truly adjusted to each other; who has retained **the spirit of infancy** even into the era of manhood.² His intercourse with heaven and earth, becomes part of his daily food. In the presence of nature, a wild delight runs through the man, in spite of real sorrows. Nature says, -- he is my creature, and maugre all his impertinent griefs, he shall be glad with me. Not the sun or the summer alone, but every hour and season yields its tribute of delight; for every hour and change corresponds to and authorizes a different state of the mind, from breathless noon to grimmest midnight. Nature is a setting that fits equally well a comic or a mourning piece. In good health, the air is a cordial of incredible virtue. Crossing a bare common, in snow puddles, at twilight, under a clouded sky, without having in my thoughts any occurrence of special good fortune, **I have enjoyed a perfect exhilaration. I am glad to the brink of fear**. In the woods too, a man

² **An echo of Samuel Taylor Coleridge's *Biographia Literaria*, ch. 4, in which Coleridge defines the character and privilege of genius as the ability to carry the feelings of childhood into the powers of adulthood.**

casts off his years, as the snake his slough, and at what period soever of life, **is always a child**. In the woods, is **perpetual youth**. Within these plantations of God, **a decorum and sanctity reign**, a perennial festival is dressed, and the guest sees not how he should tire of them in a thousand years. In the woods, we return to reason and faith. There I feel that nothing can befall me in life, -- no disgrace, no calamity, (leaving me my eyes,) which nature cannot repair. Standing on the bare ground, -- my head bathed by the blithe air, and uplifted into infinite space, -- all mean egotism vanishes. **I become a transparent eye-ball; I am nothing; I see all**; the currents of the Universal Being circulate through me; I am part or particle of God. **The name of the nearest friend sounds then foreign and accidental**: to be brothers, to be acquaintances, -- master or servant, is then a trifle and a disturbance. I am the lover of uncontained and immortal beauty. In the wilderness, I find something more dear and connate than in streets or villages. In the tranquil landscape, and especially in the distant line of the horizon, man beholds somewhat as beautiful as his own nature.

The greatest delight which the fields and woods minister, is the suggestion of an occult relation between man and the vegetable. I am not alone and unacknowledged. They nod to me, and I to them. The waving of the boughs in the storm, is new to me and old. It takes me by surprise, and yet is not unknown. Its effect is like that of a higher thought or a better emotion coming over me, when I deemed I was thinking justly or doing right.

Yet it is certain that the power to produce this delight, does not reside in nature, but in man, or in a harmony of both. It is necessary to use these pleasures with great temperance. For, nature is not always tricked in holiday attire, but the same scene which yesterday breathed perfume and glittered as for the frolic of the nymphs, is overspread with melancholy today. **Nature always wears the colors of the spirit**. To a man laboring under calamity, the heat of his own fire hath sadness in it. Then, there is a kind of contempt of the landscape felt by him who has just lost by death a dear friend. The sky is less grand as it shuts down over less worth in the population.

“Days”

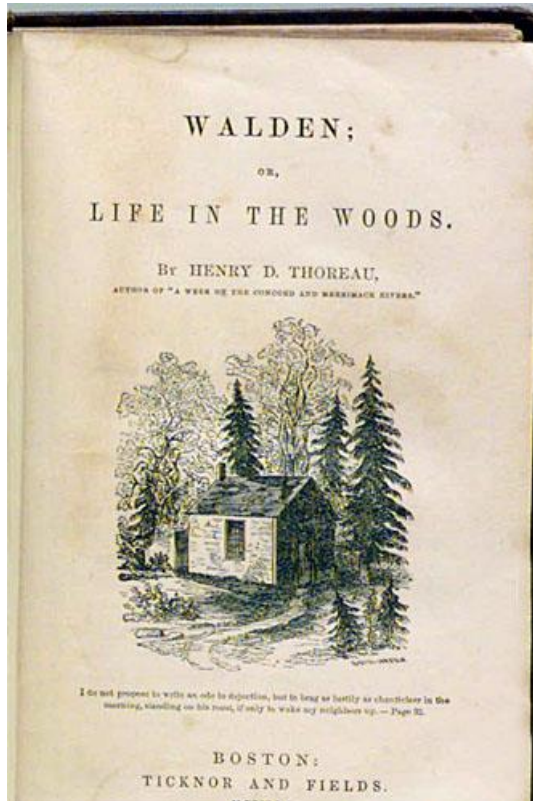
Daughters of Time, the hypocritic Days,
Muffled and dumb like barefoot dervishes,³
And marching single in an endless file,
Bring diadems and faggots in their hands.
To each they offer gifts after his will,
Bread, kingdoms, stars, and sky that holds them all.
I, in my pleached garden, watched the pomp,
Forgot my morning wishes, hastily
Took a few herbs and apples, and the Day
Turned and departed silent. I, too late,
Under her solemn fillet⁴ saw the scorn.

³ a member of any of various Muslim ascetic orders, as the Sufis, some of which carry on ecstatic observances, such as energetic dancing and whirling or vociferous chanting or shouting.

⁴ a narrow band of ribbon or the like worn around the head, usually as an ornament; headband.

HENRY DAVID THOREAU
1817-1862

From *Walden, or Life in the Woods* (1854)⁵



⁵ Thoreau began writing *Walden* early in 1846, some months after he began living at Walden Pond, and by late 1847, when he moved back into the village of Concord, he had drafted roughly half the book. Between 1852 and 1854 he rewrote the manuscript several times and substantially enlarged it.

1. ECONOMY⁶

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

I should not obtrude my affairs so much on the notice of my readers **if very particular inquiries had not been made by my townsmen concerning my mode of life**, which some would call impertinent, though they do not appear to me at all impertinent, but, considering the circumstances, very natural and pertinent. Some have asked what I got to eat; if I did not feel lonesome; if I was not afraid; and the like. Others have been curious to learn what portion of my income I devoted to charitable purposes; and some, who have large families, how many poor children I maintained. I will therefore ask those of my readers who feel no particular interest in me to pardon me if I undertake to answer some of these questions in this book. In most books, the I, or first person, is omitted; in this it will be retained; that, in respect to egotism, is the main difference. We commonly do not remember that it is, after all, always the first person that is speaking. I should not talk so much about myself if there were anybody else whom I knew as well. Unfortunately, I am confined to this theme by the narrowness of my experience. Moreover, **I, on my side, require of every writer, first or last, a simple and sincere account of his own life, and not merely what he has heard of other men's lives**; some such account as he would send to his kindred from a distant land; for if he has lived sincerely, it must have been in a distant land to me. Perhaps these pages are more particularly addressed to poor students. As for the rest of my readers, they will accept such portions as apply to them. I trust that none will

⁶ As Thoreau explains later in the chapter, the title means something like “philosophy of living.”

stretch the seams in putting on the coat, for it may do good service to him whom it fits.

I see young men, my townsmen, whose misfortune it is to have inherited farms, houses, barns, cattle, and farming tools; for these are more easily acquired than got rid of. Better if they had been born in the open pasture and suckled by a wolf, that they might have seen with clearer eyes what field they were called to labor in. Who made them serfs of the soil? [...] But men labor under a mistake. The better part of the man is soon plowed into the soil for compost. By a seeming fate, commonly called necessity, they are employed, as it says in an old book, laying up treasures which moth and rust will corrupt and thieves break through and steal.⁷ It is a fool's life, as they will find when they get to the end of it, if not before. [...]

Most men, even in this comparatively free country, through mere ignorance and mistake, are so occupied with the factitious cares and superfluously coarse labors of life that its finer fruits cannot be plucked by them. Their fingers, from excessive toil, are too clumsy and tremble too much for that. Actually, the laboring man has not leisure for a true integrity day by day; he cannot afford to sustain the manliest relations to men; his labor would be depreciated in the market. He has no time to be anything but a machine. [...]

I sometimes wonder that we can be so frivolous, I may almost say, as to attend to the gross but somewhat foreign form of servitude called Negro Slavery, there are so many keen and subtle masters that enslave both North and South. It is hard to have a Southern overseer; it is worse to have a Northern one; but worst of all when you are the slave-driver of yourself. [...]

The mass of men lead lives of quiet desperation. What is called resignation is confirmed desperation. From the desperate city you go into the desperate country, and have to console yourself with the bravery of minks and muskrats. A stereotyped but unconscious despair is concealed even under what are called the games and amusements of

mankind. There is no play in them, for this comes after work. But it is a characteristic of wisdom not to do desperate things. [...]

The greater part of what my neighbors call good I believe in my soul to be bad, and if I repent of anything, it is very likely to be my good behavior. What demon possessed me that I behaved so well? You may say the wisest thing you can, old man- you who have lived seventy years, not without honor of a kind- I hear an irresistible voice which invites me away from all that. One generation abandons the enterprises of another like stranded vessels. [...]

Let us consider for a moment what most of the trouble and anxiety which I have referred to is about, and how much it is necessary that we be troubled, or at least careful. It would be some advantage to live a primitive and frontier life, though in the midst of an outward civilization, if only to learn what are the gross necessities of life and what methods have been taken to obtain them; or even to look over the old day-books of the merchants, to see what it was that men most commonly bought at the stores, what they stored, that is, what are the grossest groceries. For the improvements of ages have had but little influence on the essential laws of man's existence: as our skeletons, probably, are not to be distinguished from those of our ancestors.

By the words, necessary of life, I mean whatever, of all that man obtains by his own exertions, has been from the first, or from long use has become, so important to human life that few, if any, whether from savageness, or poverty, or philosophy, ever attempt to do without it. To many creatures there is in this sense but one necessary of life, Food. To the bison of the prairie it is a few inches of palatable grass, with water to drink; unless he seeks the Shelter of the forest or the mountain's shadow. None of the brute creation requires more than Food and Shelter. The necessities of life for man in this climate may, accurately enough, be distributed under the several heads of Food, Shelter, Clothing, and Fuel; for not till we have secured these are we prepared to entertain the true problems of life with freedom and a prospect of success. [...]

⁷ Matthew 6.19.

As for Clothing, to come at once to the practical part of the question, perhaps we are led oftener by the love of novelty and a regard for the opinions of men, in procuring it, than by **a true utility**. Let him who has work to do **recollect that the object of clothing is, first, to retain the vital heat**, and secondly, **in this state of society, to cover nakedness**, and he may judge how much of any necessary or important work may be accomplished without adding to his wardrobe. Kings and queens who wear a suit but once, though made by some tailor or dressmaker to their majesties, cannot know the comfort of wearing a suit that fits. They are no better than wooden horses to hang the clean clothes on. **Every day our garments become more assimilated to ourselves, receiving the impress of the wearer's character**, until we hesitate to lay them aside without such delay and medical appliances and some such solemnity even as our bodies. **No man ever stood the lower in my estimation for having a patch in his clothes**; yet I am sure that **there is greater anxiety, commonly, to have fashionable, or at least clean and unpatched clothes, than to have a sound conscience**. But even if the rent is not mended, perhaps the worst vice betrayed is improvidence. I sometimes try my acquaintances by such tests as this- Who could wear a patch, or two extra seams only, over the knee? Most behave as if they believed that their prospects for life would be ruined if they should do it. It would be easier for them to hobble to town with a broken leg than with a broken pantaloon. Often if an accident happens to a gentleman's legs, they can be mended; but if a similar accident happens to the legs of his pantaloons, there is no help for it; for he considers, not what is truly respectable, but what is respected. [...]

In the savage state every family owns a shelter as good as the best, and sufficient for its coarser and simpler wants; but I think that I speak within bounds when I say that, though the birds of the air have their nests, and the foxes their holes, and the savages their wigwams, **in modern civilized society not more than one half the families own a shelter**. In the large towns and cities, where civilization especially prevails, the number of those who own a shelter is a very small fraction

of the whole. The rest pay an annual tax for **this outside garment** of all, become indispensable summer and winter, which would buy a village of Indian wigwams, but now **helps to keep them poor** as long as they live. I do not mean to insist here on the disadvantage of hiring compared with owning, but it is evident that **the savage owns his shelter because it costs so little**, while the civilized man hires his commonly because he cannot afford to own it; nor can he, in the long run, any better afford to hire. But, answers one, by merely paying this tax, the poor civilized man secures an abode which is a palace compared with the savage's. An annual rent of from twenty-five to a hundred dollars (these are the country rates) entitles him to the benefit of the improvements of centuries, spacious apartments, clean paint and paper, Rumford fireplace,⁸ back plastering, Venetian blinds, copper pump, spring lock, a commodious cellar, and many other things. But how happens it that he who is said to enjoy these things is so commonly a poor civilized man, while the savage, who has them not, is rich as a savage? If it is asserted that civilization is a real advance in the condition of man- and I think that it is, though only the wise improve their advantages- it must be shown that it has produced better dwellings without making them more costly; and **the cost of a thing is the amount of what I will call life which is required to be exchanged for it, immediately or in the long run**. An average house in this neighborhood costs perhaps eight hundred dollars, and to lay up this sum will take from **ten to fifteen years of the laborer's life**, even if he is not encumbered with a family- estimating the pecuniary value of every man's labor at one dollar a day, for if some receive more, others receive less;- so that he must have spent more than half his life commonly before his wigwam will be earned. If we suppose him to pay a rent instead, this is but a doubtful choice of evils. Would the savage have been wise to exchange his wigwam for a palace on these terms? [...]

⁸ Benjamin Thompson, Count Rumford (1753-1814), devised a shelf inside the chimney to prevent smoke from being carried back into a room by downdrafts.

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

But how do the poor minority fare? Perhaps it will be found that just in proportion as some have been placed in outward circumstances above the savage, others have been degraded below him. **The luxury of one class is counterbalanced by the indigence of another.** On the one side is the palace, on the other are the almshouse and "silent poor."⁹ **The myriads who built the pyramids** to be the tombs of the Pharaohs were fed on garlic, and it may be were not decently buried themselves. **The mason who finishes the cornice of the palace** returns at night perchance to a hut not so good as a wigwam. **It is a mistake to suppose that, in a country where the usual evidences of civilization exist, the condition of a very large body of the inhabitants may not be as degraded as that of savages.** I refer to the degraded poor, not now to the degraded rich. **To know this I should not need to look farther than to the shanties which everywhere border our railroads, that last improvement in civilization;** where I see in my daily walks human beings living in sties, and all winter with an open door, for the sake of light, without any visible, often imaginable, wood-pile, and **the forms of both old and young are permanently contracted by the long habit of shrinking from cold and misery, and the development of all their limbs and faculties is checked.** It certainly is fair to look at **that class by whose labor the works which distinguish this generation are accomplished.** Such too, to a greater or less extent, is the condition of the operatives of every denomination in **England,** which is **the great workhouse of the world.**

⁹ The poor of Concord who received public charity secretly to retain their dwellings and not go to the poorhouse.

Or I could refer you to Ireland, which is marked as one of the white or enlightened spots on the map.¹⁰ **Contrast the physical condition of the Irish with that of the North American Indian, or the South Sea Islander, or any other savage race before it was degraded by contact with the civilized man. [...]**

The very simplicity and nakedness of man's life in the primitive ages imply this advantage, at least, that they left him still but a sojourner in nature. When he was refreshed with food and sleep, he contemplated his journey again. He dwelt, as it were, in a tent in this world, and was either threading the valleys, or crossing the plains, or climbing the mountain-tops. But lo! **men have become the tools of their tools.** The man who independently plucked the fruits when he was hungry is become a farmer; and he who stood under a tree for shelter, a housekeeper. We now no longer camp as for a night, but have settled down on earth and forgotten heaven. [...] Before we can adorn our houses with beautiful objects the walls must be stripped, and our lives must be stripped, and beautiful housekeeping and beautiful living be laid for a foundation: now, a taste for the beautiful is most cultivated out of doors, where there is no house and no housekeeper. [...]

What of architectural beauty I now see, I know has gradually grown from within outward, out of the necessities and character of the indweller, who is the only builder- out of some unconscious truthfulness, and nobleness, without ever a thought for the appearance and whatever additional beauty of this kind is destined to be produced will be preceded by a like unconscious beauty of life. **The most interesting dwellings in this country, as the painter knows, are the most unpretending, humble log huts and cottages of the poor commonly; it is the life of the inhabitants whose shells they are, and not any peculiarity in their surfaces merely, which makes them picturesque;** and equally interesting will be the citizen's suburban box, when his life shall be as

¹⁰ Thoreau refers to the habit some cartographers had of leaving unexplored terrain in a dark color; other cartographers left unexplored areas white.

simple and as agreeable to the imagination, and there is as little straining after effect in the style of his dwelling. A great proportion of architectural ornaments are literally hollow, and a September gale would strip them off, like borrowed plumes, without injury to the substantial. [...]

2. Where I Lived, and What I Lived For

[...] I went to the woods because I wished to live deliberately, to front only the essential facts of life, and see if I could not learn what it had to teach, and not, when I came to die, discover that I had not lived. I did not wish to live what was not life, **living is so dear**, nor did I wish to practise resignation, unless it was quite necessary. I wanted to live deep and suck out all the marrow of life, to live so sturdily and **Spartan-like** as to put to rout all that was not life, to cut a broad swath and shave close, to drive life into a corner, and reduce it to its lowest terms, and, if it proved to be mean, why then to get the whole and genuine meanness of it, and publish its meanness to the world; or if it were sublime, to know it by experience, and be able to give a true account of it in my next **excursion**. For most men, it appears to me, are in a strange uncertainty about it, whether it is of the devil or of God, and have somewhat hastily concluded that it is the chief end of man here to "glorify God and enjoy him forever."¹¹

Still we live meanly, like ants; though the fable tells us that we were long ago changed into men;¹² like pygmies we fight with cranes; it is error upon error, and clout upon clout, and our best virtue has for its occasion a superfluous and evitable wretchedness. Our life is frittered away by detail. An honest man has hardly need to count more than his ten fingers, or in extreme cases he may add his ten toes, and lump the rest. **Simplicity, simplicity, simplicity!** I say, let your affairs be as two

¹¹ From the Shorter Catechism in the *New England Primer*.

¹² In a Greek fable Aeacus persuaded Zeus to turn ants into men. The Trojans are compared to cranes fighting with pygmies (*Iliad*, book 3).

or three, and not a hundred or a thousand; instead of a million count half a dozen, and keep your accounts on your thumb-nail. In the midst of this chopping sea of civilized life, such are the clouds and storms and quicksands and thousand-and-one items to be allowed for, that a man has to live, if he would not founder and go to the bottom and not make his port at all, by dead reckoning, and he must be a great calculator indeed who succeeds. **Simplify, simplify**. Instead of three meals a day, if it be necessary eat but one; instead of a hundred dishes, five; and reduce other things in proportion. [...]

Let us spend one day as deliberately as Nature, and not be thrown off the track by every nutshell and mosquito's wing that falls on the rails. Let us rise early and fast, or break fast, gently and without perturbation; let company come and let company go, let the bells ring and the children cry- determined to make a day of it. Why should we knock under and go with the stream? **Let us not be upset and overwhelmed in that terrible rapid and whirlpool called a dinner, situated in the meridian shallows**. Weather this danger and you are safe, for the rest of the way is down hill. With unrelaxed nerves, with morning vigor, sail by it, looking another way, tied to the mast like Ulysses.¹³ [...]

4. Sounds

[...] When I meet the **engine** with its train of cars moving off with planetary motion- or, rather, like a comet, for the beholder knows not if with that velocity and with that direction it will ever revisit this system, since its orbit does not look like a returning curve- with its steam cloud like a banner streaming behind in golden and silver wreaths, like many a downy cloud which I have seen, high in the heavens, unfolding its masses to the light- as if this traveling demigod, this cloud- compeller, would ere long take the sunset sky for the livery

¹³ A precaution Ulysses took to prevent his yielding to the call of the Sirens, sea nymphs whose singing lured ships to destruction.

of his train; when I hear the iron horse make the bills echo with his snort like thunder, shaking the earth with his feet, and breathing fire and smoke from his nostrils (what kind of winged horse or fiery dragon they will put into the new Mythology I don't know), it seems as if the earth had got a race now worthy to inhabit it. [...]

9. The Ponds

[...] When I first paddled a boat on Walden, it was completely surrounded by thick and lofty pine and oak woods, and in some of its coves grape-vines had run over the trees next the water and formed bowers under which a boat could pass. The hills which form its shores are so steep, and the woods on them were then so high, that, as you looked down from the west end, it had the appearance of an amphitheatre for some land of sylvan spectacle. I have spent many an hour, when I was younger, floating over its surface as the zephyr¹⁴ willed, having paddled my boat to the middle, and lying on my back across the seats, in a summer forenoon, dreaming awake, until I was aroused by the boat touching the sand, and I arose to see what shore my fates had impelled me to; days when idleness was the most attractive and productive industry. Many a forenoon have I stolen away, preferring to spend thus the most valued part of the day; for I was rich, if not in money, in sunny hours and summer days, and spent them lavishly; nor do I regret that I did not waste more of them in the workshop or the teacher's desk. But since I left those shores the woodchoppers have still further laid them waste, and now for many a year there will be no more rambling through the aisles of the wood, with occasional vistas through which you see the water. My Muse may be excused if she is silent henceforth. How can you expect the birds to sing when their groves are cut down? [...]

¹⁴ The mild west wind.

10. Baker Farm

[...] I tried to help him with my experience, telling him that he was one of my nearest neighbors, and that I too, who came a-fishing here, and looked like a loafer, was getting my living like himself; that I lived in a tight, light, and clean house, which hardly cost more than the annual rent of such a ruin as his commonly amounts to; and how, if he chose, he might in a month or two build himself a palace of his own; that I did not use tea, nor coffee, nor butter, nor milk, nor fresh meat, and so did not have to work to get them; again, as I did not work hard, I did not have to eat hard, and it cost me but a trifle for my food; but as he began with tea, and coffee, and butter, and milk, and beef, he had to work hard to pay for them, and when he had worked hard he had to eat hard again to repair the waste of his system- and so it was as broad as it was long, indeed it was broader than it was long, for he was discontented and wasted his life into the bargain; and yet he had rated it as a gain in coming to America, that here you could get tea, and coffee, and meat every day. But the only true America is that country where you are at liberty to pursue such a mode of life as may enable you to do without these, and where the state does not endeavor to compel you to sustain the slavery and war and other superfluous expenses which directly or indirectly result from the use of such things. [...]

12. Brute Neighbors

[...] I was witness to events of a less peaceful character. One day when I went out to my wood-pile, or rather my pile of stumps, I observed two large ants, the one red, the other much larger, nearly half an inch long, and black, fiercely contending with one another. Having once got hold they never let go, but struggled and wrestled and rolled on the chips incessantly. Looking farther, I was surprised to find that the chips were covered with such combatants, that it was not a *duellum*, but a *bellum*, a war between two races of ants, the red always pitted against the black, and frequently two red ones to one black. The legions of these

Myrmidons¹⁵ covered all the hills and vales in my woodyard, and the ground was already strewn with the dead and dying, both red and black. It was the only battle which I have ever witnessed, the only battle-field I ever trod while the battle was raging; internecine war; the red republicans on the one hand, and the black imperialists on the other. On every side they were engaged in deadly combat, yet without any noise that I could hear, and human soldiers never fought so resolutely. I watched a couple that were fast locked in each other's embraces, in a little sunny valley amid the chips, now at noonday prepared to fight till the sun went down, or life went out. The smaller red champion had fastened himself like a vice to his adversary's front, and through all the tumblings on that field never for an instant ceased to gnaw at one of his feelers near the root, having already caused the other to go by the board; while the stronger black one dashed him from side to side, and, as I saw on looking nearer, had already divested him of several of his members. They fought with more pertinacity than bulldogs. Neither manifested the least disposition to retreat. It was evident that their battle-cry was "Conquer or die." In the meanwhile there came along a single redant on the hillside of this valley, evidently full of excitement, who either had despatched his foe, or had not yet taken part in the battle; probably the latter, for he had lost none of his limbs; whose mother had charged him to return with his shield or upon it.¹⁶ Or perchance he was some Achilles, who had nourished his wrath apart, and had now come to avenge or rescue his Patroclus.¹⁷ He saw this unequal combat from afar- for the blacks were nearly twice the size of the red- he drew near with rapid pace till he stood on his guard within half an inch of the combatants; then, watching his opportunity, he sprang upon the black warrior, and commenced his operations near the root of his right fore leg, leaving the foe to select among his own

¹⁵ The Myrmidons were warriors from southern Thessaly who went to fight at Troy under their chieftain Achilles.

¹⁶ What a Spartan mother was supposed to say to a son going into battle.

¹⁷ In *The Iliad* Achilles sat out much of the Trojan War until the death of his friend Patroclus, which he revenged.

members; and so there were three united for life, as if a new kind of attraction had been invented which put all other locks and cements to shame. I should not have wondered by this time to find that they had their respective musical bands stationed on some eminent chip, and playing their national airs the while, to excite the slow and cheer the dying combatants. I was myself excited somewhat even as if they had been men. The more you think of it, the less the difference. And certainly there is not the fight recorded in Concord history, at least, if in the history of America, that will bear a moment's comparison with this, whether for the numbers engaged in it, or for the patriotism and heroism displayed. For numbers and for carnage it was an Austerlitz or Dresden.¹⁸ Concord Fight! Two killed on the patriots' side, and Luther Blanchard wounded! Why here every ant was a Buttrick- "Fire! for God's sake fire!"- and thousands shared the fate of Davis and Hosmer.¹⁹ There was not one hireling there. I have no doubt that it was a principle they fought for, as much as our ancestors, and not to avoid a three-penny tax on their tea; and the results of this battle will be as important and memorable to those whom it concerns as those of the battle of Bunker Hill, at least.

¹⁸ Important battles of the Napoleonic Wars.

¹⁹ Davis and Hosmer were the only two colonists killed at Concord on April 19, 1775; the others named were participants in the battle, which Thoreau knew about in great detail.

