

**HENRY THOREAU,
AS REMEMBERED BY
A YOUNG FRIEND**

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Henry Thoreau, As Remembered by a Young Friend by Edward Waldo Emerson

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PREFACE

I CAN remember Mr. Thoreau as early as I can remember anybody, excepting my parents, my sisters, and my nurse. He had the run of our house, and on two occasions was man of the house during my father's long absences. He was to us children the best kind of an older brother. He soon became the guide and companion of our early expeditions afield, and, later, the advisor of our first camping trips. I watched with him one of the last days of his life, when I was about seventeen years old.

Twenty-seven years ago I was moved to write a lecture, now taking form in this book, because I was troubled at the want of knowledge and understanding, both in Concord and among his readers at large, not only of his character, but of

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the events of his life, — which he did not tell to everybody, — and by the false impressions given by accredited writers who really knew him hardly at all. Mr. Lowell's essay on Thoreau is by no means worthy of the subject, and has unhappily prejudiced many persons against him.

When I undertook to defend my friend, I saw that I must at once improve my advantage of being acquainted, as a country doctor, with many persons who would never put 'pen to a line, but knew much about him — humble persons whom the literary men would never find out, like those who helped in the pencil mill, or in a survey, or families whom he came to know well and value in his walking over every square rod of Concord, or one of the brave and humane managers of the Underground Railroad, of which Thoreau was an operative. Also I had the good fortune to meet or correspond

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with six of the pupils of Thoreau and his brother John, all of whom bore witness to the very remarkable and interesting character of the teachers and their school.

Indeed, a half-century in advance of his time was Thoreau's attitude in many matters, as the change in thought and life in New England fifty years after his death shows. Of course, the people of that day went to temperance picnics, went fishing and huckleberrying and picked flowers, and enjoyed outdoors to that extent, and a very few took walks in the woods; but Thoreau, by the charm of his writings, led many young people to wood walks and river journeys, without gun or rod, but for the joy of out-of-doors in all the seasons in their splendor. A whole literature of this kind has sprung up since his day, unquestionably inspired by him. Nature study is in all the schools. The interesting and original methods of

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teaching during the last thirty years recall those of the brothers; and where is corporal punishment?

As to the pencil business. I wish to show his dutiful and respectful attitude toward his family, and the important part he bore in improving their lead-pencil business and putting it for the time beyond competition in this country, giving them a good maintenance; although "his life was too valuable to him to put into lead-pencils." Suppose he had done so?

I wish to show that Thoreau, though brusque on occasions, was refined, courteous, kind and humane; that he had a religion and lived up to it.

"If you build castles in the air," he said, "that is where they should be. Now put the foundations under them."

EDWARD WALDO EMERSON

CONCORD May 1917