1935

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http://hdl.handle.net/2144/6135

Boston University
BOSTON UNIVERSITY
GRADUATE SCHOOL

Thesis

THE RECIPROCAL RELATIONS OF EMERSON AND THOREAU
AND THE IMPACT OF THOREAU'S IDEAS ON OUR TIMES

by

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(Ed.B., Brown University, 1932)

submitted in partial fulfilment of the
requirements for the degree of
Master of Arts

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Statement of the Problem

The relation of two such important men in American literature as Emerson and Thoreau, intimate friends, both living in Concord in the comradery of the Transcendental epoch, and holding in common the same fundamental ideas, became naturally enough a subject for a good deal of discussion. At first it was believed that Thoreau imitated Emerson, for Emerson was fourteen years his senior and already a man of letters when Thoreau graduated from college. But as Thoreau's individual qualities came to be appreciated, the charge of imitation was denied. Thoreau came more and more to gain champions, until some even maintained that he had arrived independently at all his ideas and denied that Emerson had had any effect on his literary product save a most superficial tinge. Thus the end of ninety years found Emerson's influence on Thoreau still a moot question.

The impact of Thoreauvian ideas upon our times reveals Thoreau as a thinker whose ideas are valid for the twentieth century, whose doctrine of individualism is worthwhile for this industrial age. That his philosophy is alive and significant, is evidenced by the far-reaching results of Thoreau's teachings in their influence upon present-day India.
Method of Procedure

I first examined the Journals of Emerson and Thoreau. Here are revealed the personalities of each, here is seen the identity of their fundamental ideas, here is a record of their esteem and friendship, and here appears some evidence that Thoreau rejects Emerson's influence. Part III of my thesis gives a comparison of certain references in the Journals bearing on the reciprocal relations of Emerson and Thoreau, particularly in later life.

Next I went through the critical material on Emerson and Thoreau. Part IV of the thesis is a survey of this critical opinion, traced chronologically according to publication and consisting, as far as possible, in definite quotation. Part V gives present tendencies in literary criticism of Thoreau, with a contrast of English and American criticism in support of the thesis that Thoreau is not an echo of Emerson, but has proved himself to be an independent thinker.

The third step in the research was an investigation of the fundamental ideas expressed in Thoreau's college themes and his commencement part. These are compared with Emerson's lectures of this period and "Nature" which was published in September, 1836.
The last part of the thesis is the result of a study of Thoreau's present-day influence, particularly with regard to his influence on Gandhi and the "passive resistance" movement in India. Quotations are given from Thoreau's "Essay on Civil Disobedience" to substantiate this position. Indirectly, the influence of Thoreau's teachings upon the labor movement in England is touched upon.
I. **Biographical Relation of Emerson and Thoreau**

Concord, Massachusetts was the birthplace of the two men. Here Emerson was born in 1803 and fourteen years later, Henry David Thoreau. Concord was the oldest interior town in the state and was a center of trade, a seat of justice, and the throbbing heart in the political and intellectual life of the times. And yet it was a quiet town dotted with rambling white farm houses, most of them the homes of sturdy, industrious farmers. Beyond the village itself lay much uncultivated territory along the Concord and Assabet Rivers, a peaceful and pleasant New England countryside with meadows, woodlands, and distant mountains. And there was Walden which cannot be forgotten because it entered so intimately into the lives of Emerson and Thoreau.

There was no great contrast between wealth and poverty in the Concord of the early nineteenth century. The culture of the upper classes and the frugality of the lower united in the preference for a simple way of living. Democracy was the prevailing note. Here was more than the usual amount of village tradition- "perpetuity and hereditary transmission of everything that by nature and good sense can be inherited." Ancient customs survived in daily collision

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2. Ibid; p 38
or in friendly contact with new ideas of every conceivable form of liberalism. The Thoreau family engaged actively in the anti-slavery agitation. The household became a sort of headquarters for fugitive slaves. One of the earliest memories of young Henry was that of the terrified faces and cruelly scarred bodies of these slaves.

The leading village personages of Thoreau's early years were Samuel Hoar, and Dr. Ripley who had baptized Henry and always took a kindly interest in his welfare. Judging from the journals, neither of them seems to have touched Thoreau's life as closely as they had Emerson's.

The most powerful, formative influence over Emerson was that of his aunt, Mary Moody Emerson. In Emerson's Journals the names of his father and mother appear but seldom. That of his Aunt Mary appears repeatedly, and in such terms as unmistakably to indicate that he largely owed the direction of his youthful mind to her. In a very real sense he was the spiritual child of this woman.

To Thoreau, though not so directly as to Emerson, came the influence of this remarkable woman. One of the very few personalities mentioned in Thoreau's Journals is that of Miss Mary Moody Emerson. Under the date of November 13, 1851

2. Russell, Phillips: Emerson- The Wisest American
   New York, 1929, p 19
he writes:

"Just spent a couple of hours (8-10) with Miss Mary Emerson at Holbrook. The Wittiest and most vivacious woman that I know, certainly that woman among my acquaintance whom it is most profitable to meet, the least frivolous who will most surely provoke to good conversation and the expression of what is in you.... It is perhaps her greatest praise and peculiarity that she, more surely than any other woman, gives her companion occasion to utter his best thought.... I never talked with any other woman who I thought accompanied me so far in describing a poetic experience." 1

Thoreau had prepared for college in the Concord Schools and at the age of sixteen entered Harvard. His means of paying tuition were even more slender than Emerson's had been. Emerson, upon the recommendation of Dr. Ripley, had written to President Quincy, asking that the promising youth might be assisted by a grant from the college funds.

Thoreau even more than Emerson seems to have obtained the greater part of his college education from the Harvard library which he counselled Emerson's son Edward in later years "was the best gift Harvard had to offer."

His college days came in the period when Romanticism was beginning to find a foothold in American thought. In Emerson's college days it had been largely a rumor. In the beginning of Thoreau's senior year Emerson's "Nature" was published which Dr. Hedge calls "the first document of the remarkable outburst of Romanticism on Puritan Ground."

1. Shepard, Odell: Heart of Thoreau's Journals; 1927; p 98
2. Sanborn, F.B.: Henry D. Thoreau; 1888, p 51
3. Emerson, E.W.: Thoreau as Remembered; 1917, p 18
4. Cabot: Memoirs of Ralph W. Emerson; 1887, p 244
Although Emerson and Thoreau were fellow townsmen, they did not meet until after Thoreau had left Harvard College. Their close acquaintance began in 1837. "It originated in this way: A lady connected with Mr. Emerson's family was visiting at Mrs. Thoreau's while Henry was in college, and the conversation turned on a lecture lately read in Concord by Mr. Emerson. Miss Helen Thoreau surprised the visitor by saying, 'My brother Henry has a passage in his diary containing the same things that Mr. Emerson has said.' This remark being questioned, the diary was produced, and, sure enough, the thought of the two passages was found to be very similar. The incident being reported to Mr. Emerson, he desired the lady to bring Henry Thoreau to see him, which was soon done, and the intimacy began."

Thoreau was soon admitted to the small and sacred circle of those persons who were invited to ramble with the author of "Nature" and to come to his home to participate in Sunday evening meetings. In Thoreau, Emerson found that of which his brother Charles' death had deprived him—eyes; he also found in him a friend who fitted in between Alcott, who was made on Emerson's own pattern, and Margaret Fuller, who was his antithesis. He admired Thoreau for his ability to do things with his hands, for his simplicity and clear perception.

   New York, 1929; p 147
In 1840, while teaching school in Concord, Thoreau seems to have been fully admitted into that circle of which Emerson, Alcott, and Margaret Fuller were the leaders. This famous Transcendentalist group included such personages as James Freeman Clark, George Ripley, Frederick Hedge, Orestes Brownson, Theodore Parker, and Jones Very, the Salem poet. Dr. Clark affirms that no two of the club thought alike; but their similarity of ideals was enough to make them stimulating company for one another. They expressed their Transcendentalism through literary criticism and literature, theology, philosophy, and social reform. The Dial, the mouthpiece of the Club, was published from 1840-1844, first with Margaret Fuller as editor and later with Emerson.

Emerson and Thoreau lived at the height of the expression of Romanticism in the nineteenth century, were affected by its preliminary trends, and in turn gave it some of its greatest significance by their own writings. So far as the influence of Romanticism goes, Thoreau's ideas are practically those of Emerson— in other words, the major premises of the Transcendentalist Movement—faith in the worth of man's intuition as a criterion of Truth, and communion with God through Nature.

1. Cabot; Memoirs of Ralph Waldo Emerson; vol. 1, p 246
Thoreau lived in Emerson's home from 1841 to 1843 as a helper and caretaker of his home and children, his planter and builder. Again, after his sojourn at Walden, Thoreau spent some time in the Emerson in 1847–48. The two men read the same books, walked the same streets, talked to the same persons, for many years—and that at a time when Concord practised a sort of communism in the realm of ideas.

The relation of two such important men in American literature as Emerson and Thoreau, intimate friends, both living in Concord in the comradery of the Transcendental epoch, became naturally enough a subject for a good deal of discussion. Turning to the writings of the two men, one finds, amid much similarity of thought and expression which is easily explicable as the result of common influences playing upon them both, a difference in philosophy which is radical and wide-spreading. Some of the parallels and divergences in their thought will be taken up in the second and third parts of the thesis.
II. A Comparison of Selected Passages from the College Themes of Thoreau and Emerson’s Essay on “Nature”

Thoreau’s Early Life and Training

Henry David Thoreau was born July 12, 1817, the summer of the year that Emerson was to enter college. His paternal grandfather was a Frenchman and his grandmother on his father’s side a Scotchwoman. His mother was Cynthia Dunbar, a minister’s daughter of Keene, New Hampshire, who added her strain of New England Yankee to his ancestry. She was a tall, handsome, high-spirited woman. The father of the four Thoreau children, Helen, John, Henry, and Sophia, was a short, deaf, kindly man who seemed to be always busy.

Both John Thoreau, Senior, and his wife Cynthia were greatly interested in Botany and genuine nature lovers. They were noticed by the neighbors year after year studying flowers by the Assabet River, Fairhaven, Lee’s Hill, and in the Walden vicinity. As soon as each one of the four children was old enough to walk it was initiated into a study of Natural History which the two boys continued as long as they lived.

1. Sanborn, F. B.: Life of Henry David Thoreau; p 8
2. Emerson, Journal for January 25, 1843
3. Emerson, E. W.; Thoreau as Remembered by a Young Friend; p 124
Partly because of extreme poverty and partly perhaps because Mrs. Thoreau had heard rumors of new food reforms which were soon to be advocated, the diet of the Thoreau family was almost purely vegetarian and fruitarian. One visitor says of the appetizing wholesomeness of their meals, "Their living was a revelation to me. I think they were twenty years ahead of the times in Concord." The family enjoyed a quiet distinction of their own in Concord through some innate quality of fine independence which was quite apart from social position or wealth.

From his parents Thoreau learned the harmony of plain living and high thinking, a great deal of his knowledge and interest in Nature studies, a love for Concord hills and woods and rivers, a knack of doing things in the garden and about the house, industry, and the pride of independence.

It is not until after the publication of "Nature" in Thoreau's senior year that marked parallels to Emerson appear in Thoreau's compositions; it is not until Thoreau's senior year, moreover, that there is to be found any really original thinking. He could write good imaginative prose, was apt in skilful narration, and had a literary appreciation which he

1. Emerson, E. W.; Thoreau as Remembered by a Young Friend; p 126
2. Sanborn; Henry David Thoreau; pp 30-31
developed with marked critical ability.

Just how much Emerson's life, lectures, or book on "Nature" had influenced Thoreau's thinking in the Harvard years is a matter of conjecture. Certainly they were all of the sort which would naturally appeal to him. But, however much unconsciously they may have colored his ideas, Henry Thoreau had too much sturdy independence of his own to be a conscious imitator of anyone, then or later in the years of close association.

Nature, in which he had found aesthetic pleasure is now acquiring new significance for Thoreau, it seems; philosophy is now an individual concern--he is to "take an original view of things"; he is now to be student and critic of life as well as of literature. He has been directed to his own road and is already well on his way; wherever it leads him, there he will try his literary powers.

He graduated in 1837 and it is to the point to note that the Thoreau of twenty years in his part at Harvard Commencement idealized the very sort of life he afterwards was to lead. An extract from Thoreau's speech is of significance:

1. Sanborn, F. B.; Entries in 1835 Journal; Boston, 1882; pp 152-4
2. Sanborn, F. B.; Life of Henry David Thoreau; Boston, 1917; p 139
3. Emerson, E. W.; Thoreau as Remembered by a Young Friend; p 19
"Let men true to their natures cultivate the moral affections, lead manly and independent lives.... The order of things should be somewhat reversed. The seventh should be men's day of toil, wherein to earn his living by the sweat of his brow; and the other six his Sabbath of the affections and the soul,—in which to range this widespread garden, and drink in the soft influence and sublime revelations of Nature."

In this commencement oration, as in the themes, is seen something of the influence of Emerson, illustrated in the following selections which are compared with "Nature":—
"Man thinks faster and freer than ever before. He, moreover, moves faster and freer. He is more restless because he is more independent than ever. The winds and the waves are not enough for him; he must needs ransack the bowels of the earth, that he may make for himself a highway of iron over its surface." 1

"Indeed, could one examine this beehive of ours from an observatory among the stars, he would perceive an unwonted degree of bustle in these later ages." 2

"There would be hammering and chipping in one quarter; baking and brewing, buying and selling, money-changing and speechmaking in another. What impression would he receive from so general and impartial a survey. Would it appear to him that mankind used this world as not abusing it?" 3

"He (man) no longer waits for favoring gales, but by means of steam, he realizes the fable of Aeolus's bag, and carries the two and thirty winds in the boiler of his boat. To diminish friction, he paves the road with iron bars, and, mounting a coach with a shipload of men, animals, and merchandise behind him, he darts through the country from town to town." 1

"By the aggregate of these aids, how is the face of the world changed from the era of Noah to that of Napoleon!" 2

"...his operations taken together are so insignificant, a little chipping, baking, patching, and washing, that in an impression so great as that of the world in the human mind, they do not vary the result." 3

1. Writings of Henry David Thoreau; Walden Edition; vol. 6; Familiar Letters, edited by F.B. Sanborn
2. Ibid p 8
3. Ibid pp 8-9

1. Essays and Poems of Emerson; New York, 1921; p 6
2. Ibid p 6
3. Ibid p 2
"Doubtless he would first be struck with the profuse beauty of our art; he would never tire of admiring its varied zones and seasons, with their changes of living. He could but notice that restless animal for whose sake it was contrived." 1

"But where he found one man to admire with him his fair dwelling place, the ninety and nine would be scraping together a little of the gilded dust upon its surface." 2

"The misery of man appears like childish petulance, when we explore the steady and prodigal provision that has been made for his support and delight on this green ball which floats him through the heavens. What angels invented these splendid ornaments, these rich conveniences, this ocean of air above, this ocean of water beneath, this firmament of earth between, this zodiac of lights, this tent of dropping clouds, this striped coat of climates, this fourfold year?" 1

"To speak truly, few adult persons can see nature. .....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

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1. Writings of Henry David Thoreau; Walden Edition; vol. 6; Familiar Letters, edited by F. B. Sanborn; p 9
2. Ibid p 9

1. Essays and Poems of Emerson; New York, 1921 p 6
2. Ibid p 4
"We are to look chiefly for the origin of the commercial spirit, and the power that still cherishes and sustains it, in a blind and unmanly love of wealth. Wherever this exists, it is too severe to become the ruling spirit; and, as a natural consequence, it infuses into all our thoughts and affections a degree of its own selfishness; we become selfish in our patriotism, selfish in our domestic relations, selfish in our religion...." 1

"At present, man applies to nature but half his force. He works on the world with his understanding alone. He lives in it, and masters it by a penury-wisdom; and he that works most in it, is but a half-man, and whilst his arms are strong and his digestion good, his mind is imbruted, and he is a selfish savage." 1

"The order of things should be somewhat reversed; the seventh should be man's day of toil, wherein to earn his living by the sweat of his brow; and the other six his Sabbath of the affections and the soul,—in which to range this widespread garden, and drink in the soft influences and sublime revelations of Nature." 2

"Every rational creature has all nature for his dowry and estate. It is his, if he will. He may divest himself of it, he may creep into a corner, and abdicate his kingdom, as most men do, but he is entitled to the world by his constitution." 2

1. Writings of Henry David Thoreau; Walden Edition; vol. 6; Familiar Letters, edited by F. B. Sanborn; p 9
2. Ibid p 9

1. Essays and Poems of. Emerson; New York, 1941; p 40
2. Ibid p 10
"The spirit we are considering is not altogether and without exception bad. We rejoice in it as one more indication of the entire and universal freedom that characterizes the age in which we live,—an indication that the human race is making one more advance in that infinite series of progressions that awaits it. We glory in those very excesses which are a source of anxiety to the wise and good; as an evidence that man will not always be the slave of matter,—but ere long, casting off those earth-born desires which identify him with the brute, shall pass the days of his sojourn in this nether paradise, as becomes the Lord of creation." 1

"It is essential to a true theory of nature and of man, that it should have somewhat progressive....1 Who can set bounds to the possibilities of man?....2 Meantime, in the thick darkness, there are not wanting gleams of a better light,—occasional examples of the action of man upon "nature with his entire force,—with reason as well as understanding..... These are examples of Reason's momentary grasp of the sceptre; the exertions of a power which exists not in time or spaces, but an instantaneous instreaming causing power....3 The immobility or bruteness of nature is the absence of spirit..... A correspondent revolution in things will attend the influx of the spirit..... The kingdom of man over nature, which cometh not with observation,—a dominion such as now is beyond his dream of God,—he shall enter without more wonder than the blind man feels who is gradually restored to perfect sight." 4

1. Writings of Henry David Thoreau; Walden Edition; vol. 6; Familiar Letters, edited by F. B. Sanborn; pp 9-10

1. Essays and Poems of Emerson; New York, 1921; p 33
2. Ibid p 35
3. Ibid p 40
4. Ibid p 42-3
III. Comparison of References in the Journals of Thoreau and Emerson

A curious witness to the comparative dominance of Thoreau in their relationship is to be found in their journals. There are over sixty important references to Thoreau in Emerson's Journals; while in Thoreau's Journal there are only between twenty and thirty really significant references to Emerson, most of them very brief. Further, it ought to be noted, Thoreau's references to Emerson are often ironic and entirely lack the tone of discipleship. Emerson, however, ordinarily quotes a choice remark from Thoreau and commends it. Thoreau is clearly something of a marvel to Emerson, though a perplexing and often a positively irritating marvel. Emerson admires and praises Thoreau in his magnanimous fashion, only causing Thoreau to complain:

"I should value E's. praise more, which is always so discriminating, if there were not some alloy of patronage and hence of flattery about (it)." 1

Emerson probably felt no condescension in the matter at all, but Thoreau was jealous of his complete independence. He could not endure following any master lest he lose himself.

Of the Transcendental Emersonian attitude toward Nature and God, not a great deal takes permanent lodgment in Thoreau. To be sure, Thoreau says in his Journal as late as 1851:

"My profession is to be always on the alert to find God in nature, to know his lurking-places, to attend all the oratorios, the operas, in nature." 1

Other equally vivid passages might be cited to enforce the point that Thoreau sought and expected to find his God in Nature. But instead of bringing a conviction that Thoreau was clinging to Emersonian teaching, these passages may more plausibly be interpreted as individual Thoreauvian doctrine. Nature seems to be Thoreau's only road to God; whereas Nature is one road, but not the straightest road to the Over-Soul. The truest knowledge of God always reached Emerson through intuition— or, in its most perfect manifestation, through a mystic experience. Now Thoreau did not fully share this mystic communion of the Transcendentalists. In the section of Walden named "Solitude", Thoreau records what was very likely his nearest approach to a mystical experience. He tells of a few terrible moments of loneliness when he first went to live alone at Walden, and then explains how a glow of

reassurance—not attaining to ecstasy—came over him. In the
journal for 1856, Thoreau again tells of being
"expanded, and infinitely and divinely related
for a brief season." 1

He remarks revealingly, in 1857, that men are all infidels
"except in the rarest moments when they are
lifted above themselves by an ecstasy." 2

The interesting phrase is "in the rarest moments," for the fourteen volumes of his Journal bear witness that such
moments were so infrequent in Thoreau's experience that it is
doubtful whether or not he deserves the name of genuine Tran-
scendentalist. While Emerson and Alcott do not give full
accounts of mystical trances (such as those of Jonathan Ed-
wards, for example), they contrive to make their readers con-
tinually aware of their reception of intuitional revelations.
Emerson is obviously reaching for communion with God through
Nature in his daily walks.

"To put the matter bluntly, God is not a preoccu-
pation of Thoreau. Something else fills his mind so complete-
ly most of the time that God is shut out:—by God, I mean, of
course, the Transcendental God, the Emersonian Over-Soul." 3

1. Journal VIII, p 284; "The Writings of Thoreau"; 20 vols.;
Boston and New York; 1906
2. Ibid; p 217
Literature"; vol. IV.; November 1932, p 243
Thoreau does not often dwell directly upon the divine as he probably would have done, if he had found himself the recipient of frequent mystical messages. Such revelations he seems to have respected and desired. They were the final seal upon a Transcendentalist. The messages appear, however, not to have come constantly enough to control the daily life of Thoreau, and his attention may be expected to have centered itself elsewhere. It was too difficult for a man of Thoreau's temperament to follow Emerson into the mystic realm of the Over-Soul. Hence the deep-laid divergence of their attitudes.

The way in which each man responded to Nature may be partly foreseen by one who appreciates their attitudes toward God. In Thoreau, there is a sort of struggle between what may be called his acquired Emersonian tendency to look chiefly through Nature to the underlying Over-Soul, and what was possibly his native— at least his inbred— tendency to look at Nature or to look into Nature with no wish to pass through to that divinity.

Emerson loved God and Thoreau loved Nature. Still, Emerson may have lavished considerable incidental love upon Nature, partly impelled by Thoreau; and Thoreau may have dwelt with occasional enthusiasm upon the super-sensuous Over-Soul.
What did Thoreau reveal when he wrote at the age of twenty-four the following justification of himself?

"I seem to see somewhat more of my kith and kin in the lichens on the rocks than in any books. It does seem as if mine were a peculiarly wild nature, which so yearns towards all wildness. I know of no redeeming qualities in me but a sincere love for some things, and when I am reproved I have to fall back on to this ground."  

There is little room for doubt that these "things" which he loved so sincerely that they seemed sufficient warrant for his unconventional life were natural objects which stimulated first of all Thoreau's acute senses. His imagination was alert to make the most of the rich sensuous material at its disposal; and his intellect, even, seemed to operate with greater ease among sensations than among unsensuous abstractions. When Emerson noted in his journal, the year after Thoreau's death, the vigor of the images by which the latter enforced his thoughts, Emerson was on the verge of expressing the very reality in Thoreau.

"He has muscle, and ventures on and performs feats which I am forced to decline. In reading him, I find the same thought, the same spirit that is in me, but he takes a step beyond, and illustrates by excellent images that which I should have conveyed in a sleepy generality."  

1. Journal I, p 296; "The Writings of Thoreau"; 20 vols.; Boston and New York; 1908
2. Journals of Ralph Waldo Emerson; vol. IX, p 522; Boston and New York; 1908-1914
Thoreau was not "performing feats" by his "excellent images", he was thinking according to his own constitution. What might have been a stylistic feat to Emerson was native to Thoreau and perhaps uncalculated. No wonder he loved what his senses brought to perception, for his senses brought him more and deeper information than our senses ordinarily bring to us about what we call the world of Nature. The region of thought is, thus, to Thoreau a place not remote from the world of the concrete, but necessarily and intimately attached to that world. While Thoreau's constitution in this way set him apart from Emerson, it seemed to make him only the more fascinating and significant to Emerson. In this connection, a student of their journals and essays comes first to feel Thoreau bulking large on the Emersonian horizon; while, to Thoreau, Emerson seems retreating and always less engrossing.

Representative passages from Emerson's journal lucidly expressing his wonder at Thoreau are not difficult to find. Emerson is, however, struck more by the way in which Thoreau deals successfully and practically with every-day persons and things, his self-dependence in face of the physical world, his capacities for action and for doing things-- more struck with all this than with what is perhaps the basis of it-- Thoreau's genius for apprehending the world sensuously.
For example, Emerson writes in his journal for 1838 (the second year of his association with Thoreau):

"My good Henry made this else solitary afternoon sunny with his simplicity and clear perception." 1

In an entry of 1839, there is a tone of more specific approbation:

"My brave Henry here who is content to live now, and feels no shame in not studying any profession, for he does not postpone his life, but lives already,- pours contempt on these cry-babies of routine and Boston." 2

Among the many references, from 1838 till 1843, Emerson reveals in his journal an unflawed admiration for Thoreau. Then, when Emerson was forty and Thoreau twenty-six, creeps in the first note of discontent from Emerson. For instance, in 1844, Emerson notes in his journal:

"Henry Thoreau's conversation consisted of a continual coining of the present moment into a sentence and offering it to me. I compared it to a boy, who, from the universal snow lying on the earth, gathers up a little in his hand, rolls it into a ball, and flings it at me." 3

Before considering the discord between Emerson and Thoreau, the three early publications of Emerson in which he seems most deliberately to be commending the qualities of Thoreau demand attention. "The American Scholar" was an address delivered in 1837, the year in which Emerson became acquainted

1. Journals of Ralph Waldo Emerson; Vol. IV., p 397; Boston and New York; 1908-1914
2. Ibid, Vol. V., p 208
3. Journals of Ralph Waldo Emerson; Vol. VI., p 515; Boston, 1911
with Thoreau. Now Emerson's first reference to Thoreau in his journal appears in 1838, and, is to be sure, very interesting.

"I delight much in my young friend (Thoreau), who seems to have as free and erect a mind as any I have ever met."  1

Strong as this praise may be, it offers no evidence that Thoreau could have been in Emerson's mind the preceding year as a sort of model for "The American Scholar" who attains to the truth of profound thought only by the way of action. The probability is that Emerson described his ideal American in 1837, only to have the incredible good fortune to find his ideal come to life in young Thoreau, right there in Concord. Thoreau incarnated some of Emerson's most precious dreams; he might almost be called Emerson's truest wish-fulfillment.

Emerson's address of January 25, 1841, was written in the period when the relations between himself and Thoreau were more cordial (if we are to accept the evidence of the journals, especially Emerson's journal) than in the later years. It is necessary to recall only one or two passages of the great address of 1841 to see how relevant Thoreau probably was to the development of Emerson's ideas.

1. Journals of Ralph Waldo Emerson; Vol. IV., p 395; Boston and New York; 1908-1914.
"The young man, on entering life, finds the way to lucrative employments blocked with abuses. The ways of trade are grown selfish to the borders of theft and supple to the borders (if not beyond the borders) of fraud. The employments are not intrinsically unfit for a man, or less genial to his faculties, but these are now in their general course so vitiated by derelictions and abuses at which all connive, that it requires more vigor and resources than can be expected of every young man, to right himself in them; he is lost in them; he cannot move hand or foot in them. Has he genius and virtue? the less does he find them fit for him to grow in, and if he would thrive in them, he must sacrifice all the brilliant dreams of boyhood and youth as dreams;"

"..... and must take on him the harness of routine and obsequiousness. If not so minded, nothing is left him but to begin the world anew, as he does who puts the spade into the ground for food. 2 ..... It happens therefore, that all such ingenuous souls as feel within themselves the irrepressible strivings of a noble aim, who by the law of their nature must act simply, find these ways of trade unfit for them, and they come forth from it....." 3

Never again did Emerson quite so eloquently recommend the basic ideas of Thoreau's life. Were they Emerson's ideas or Thoreau's? They became Thoreau's more truly than Emerson's-- wherever they originated-- because, according to Emerson's own requirement, Thoreau acted the part which Emerson merely sketched.

".....he only is a sincere learner, he only can become a master, who learns the secrets of labor, and who

1. Journals of Ralph Waldo Emerson; Vol. I., p 230-231
   Boston and New York; 1908-1914
2. Ibid I, p 231
3. Ibid I, p 233
It would appear that Thoreau is the man, the inspiration, the subject.

That Thoreau was less preoccupied than Emerson with thoughts of God is soon felt by the student; that he ordinarily viewed nature rather sensuously and concretely where Emerson viewed it as the veil through which God was half-visible is not difficult to discover. The two men were also frequently at odds in their attitude toward, and opinions of, mankind.

Compared with himself, why should Thoreau not find most men stupid and many of them knavish? This attitude which Thoreau based on observation and experience harmonized badly with the abstract goodness of man that followed from Emerson's ideas about the Over-Soul in men. To be sure, Thoreau indicated that property and certain other institutions twisted and tormented men out of their natural shape; yet in his contacts with individuals, he seems to have been little inclined to palliate human failings.

With these several divergences in ideas, taste, and preoccupation, the event is what might be foretold. The journals reveal a discord between them that Emerson dwells upon occasionally after about 1843, and that colors more or less

1. Journals of Ralph Waldo Emerson; Vol. I., p 241;
   Boston and New York; 1908-1914
nearly every one of the sparse references to Emerson by Thoreau.

"Emerson was the troubled and outraged admirer of Thoreau even after Thoreau's death—as appears in the measured praise of Emerson's funeral address upon Thoreau. Thoreau was the one who withdrew and opposed and argued and rejected the friendship or rather the powerful influence of Emerson. That censure should fall upon Thoreau for this need not be maintained. He probably found himself Emerson's equal in the realm of thought, and it could not have escaped him, that thought became true wisdom with him, because he was magnificently able to put his thoughts into practice. By this test, he was Emerson's ideal and thus vastly his superior. Emerson's comparative inability to observe nature accurately—while it made Thoreau a precious companion to him—may have made him seem inferior to Thoreau. Emerson's all-embracing benignity must also have irked the man who studied 'men and muskrats' almost indifferently."

Thoreau's strictures upon Emerson can be represented by two or three quotations from his journals after 1850. He was a very exacting critic, and it may be well to quote one favorable mention of Emerson as foil to the later condemnation

1. Moore, John Brooks; Thoreau Rejects Emerson; p 251; American Literature; November, 1932;
or faint praise. Though undated, the following extract can be rather confidently assigned to the middle twenties of Thoreau's life.

"Emerson has special talents unequalled. The divine in man has no more easy, methodically distinct expression. His personal influence upon young persons (is) greater than any man's. In his world every man would be a poet, Love would reign, Beauty would take place, Man and Nature would harmonize." 1

In 1852, there are obvious signs that Thoreau no longer feels the deference toward Emerson that he used to feel. We recall that once Emerson's disapproval had been enough to make Thoreau destroy his early verses. The friends (if we can believe Thoreau's journal) no longer inspire one another; fresh thoughts do not spring up between them; instead, disagreements and arguments. Thoreau condemns Emerson for what he is not, no longer praising him for what he is; and Emerson is nettled at the persistent opposition from a friend so much younger and one whom he wishes to esteem highly.

Later in the year 1852, while Thoreau was still thirty-five and Emerson was forty-nine, Thoreau voices a

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complaint of significance:

"One must not complain that his friend is cold, for heat is generated between them."

"I doubt if Emerson could trundle a wheelbarrow through the streets, because it would be out of character. One needs to have a comprehensive character."

The next year matters were still worse between them.

"Talked, or tried to talk, with R.W.E. Lost my time—nay, almost my identity. He, assuming a false opposition where there was no difference of opinion, talked to the wind—told me what I knew—and I lost my time trying to imagine myself somebody else to oppose him."

Lest anyone should suppose that the benevolent Emerson was unaware of Thoreau's discontent with him, or unaware of his systematic conflict in conversation, here is Emerson's own report on Thoreau three weeks later:

"Henry is military. He seemed stubborn and implacable; always manly and wise, but rarely sweet. One would say that, as Webster could never speak without an antagonist, so Henry does not feel himself except in opposition. He wants a fallacy to expose, a blunder to pillory, requires a little sense of victory, a roll of the drums, to call his powers into full exercise."

Edward Emerson in commenting on this passage says:

"This was the way he (Thoreau) appeared to his friend, older than he by fourteen years, for whom he had a high regard and reverence, as appears in his letters, in which, however, he allowed himself to be more human than in face to face speech. It is possible that he was on his guard not to be over-influenced."

2. Ibid.; III, p 250
3. Ibid., V, p 186
4. Journals of Ralph Waldo Emerson; Vol. VIII, p 375; Boston and New York; 1906-1914
5. Journals of Ralph Waldo Emerson; Vol. VIII, p 375
But this kindly surmise takes no account of some derisive references to Emerson in Thoreau's journal of this period, references indicating that Thoreau was in no danger of being over-influenced.

There are no references after 1858 to Emerson in Thoreau's journal which can be taken to indicate a genuine cordial exchange of ideas between the two. The signs point to an association supported mainly by a common taste for nature, not by the exchange of ideas.

The corroboration of Thoreau's rejection of, or at least his withdrawal from, Emerson, is to be found, of course in Emerson's journal.

"Thoreau wants a little ambition in his mixture. Fault of this, instead of being the head of American engineers, he is captain of a huckleberry party." 1

Here Emerson pretty completely loses touch with Thoreau.

Emerson speaks the praises of Thoreau in many passages of the Journal, long years after Thoreau was clearly the one who withdrew as though he felt nothing more were to be gained by the association, more self-sufficient than the author of Self-Reliance. But the passages of irritation crop up occasionally in the later journals of Emerson. In 1856

1. Journals of Ralph Waldo Emerson; Vol. VIII., p 228; Boston and New York; 1908-1914
occurs an overt condemnation of Thoreau, which seems to mark
a change in their relation to one another.

"If I knew only Thoreau, I should think co-operation
of good men impossible. Must we always talk for vic-
tory, and never once for truth, for comfort, and joy?
Centrality he has, and penetration, strong understand-
ing, and the higher gifts,—the insight of the real,
or from the real, and the moral rectitude that belongs
to it; but all this and all his resources of wit and
invention are lost to me, in every experiment, year
after year, that I make, to hold intercourse with his
mind." 1

This might well be taken to mark the expiration of
their Transcendental friendship, the intercourse of mind with
mind which each of them had always cherished as his explicit
ideal human relationship.

"Thoreau, for any signs that I can discover, chose
to remain in his last year essentially out of Emerson's reach,
perhaps not intentionally so much as through an indifference
of slow growth. Some say that Thoreau was jealous of the
great man with whom he was so long associated. I believe in-
cipient jealousies might be discovered, but they hardly
account for the intellectual schism in the Church of Walden.
The readers of Thoreau's journal have long noted that the
later volumes read frequently more like the records of a
naturalist than the reflections of a philosopher. It is not

1. Journals of Ralph Waldo Emerson; Vol. LX, 15-16;
Boston and New York; 1908-1914
impossible that philosophically Thoreau had hardened—perhaps
all that side of things was settled to his satisfaction—and
if it was a satisfaction to have settled philosophy, it prob-
ably was because it left him free to study the sense phenom-
ena of the world. Objects of sense he loved, and who shall
say confidently that the sensuous life was not Thoreau's most
private and passionate approach to thought? Feeling the trees
or rocks might have been Thoreau's way of thinking."

1. Moore, John Brooks; Thoreau Rejects Emerson; p 256;
American Literature; November, 1933;
IV. A Survey of Critical Opinion on Thoreau's Relation to Emerson

One of the most disputed and unsettled points in the abundant criticism on Thoreau has been his relation to Emerson and Emerson's consequent influence upon him.

From the very earliest years of their intimacy, the reciprocal relation of the two men aroused the interest of their acquaintances, and, from the time of Thoreau's first publications, this same question was brought into critical discussion. Emerson had established his reputation; Thoreau, coming half a generation after him, was a beginner—a beginner who was writing from the same fundamental texts and who was living in close association with the older man. The inevitable critical reaction was that he was an echo, while on the other hand those who knew him well rallied to him to declare his independent character.

Emerson himself was Thoreau's greatest champion. He made it plain to all his friends that he considered Thoreau "a 1 man of original genius and character."

In his Biographical Sketch of Thoreau, reprinted from the funeral oration, he emphasized Thoreau's independence and peculiar gifts which had lacked appreciation. Other friends

1. e.g. in letter to W.H. Furness, August 6, 1847
   Records of a Lifelong Friendship; Boston, 1910
spoke up against the ranking of Thoreau as an echo: G.W. Curtis wrote in 1862 that "He was a man of singular rectitude, independence, and sagacity. Mr. Emerson says of him that no one was so entirely uninfluenced by the ordinary motives of human action."

The next year, in an article on Thoreau written in England, Moncure D. Conway said, "It soon became plain that what these (Emerson and others of the Concord group) were endeavouring to put into literature, Thoreau was aiming to put into individual life; not consciously, perhaps, but because he must be the product of the intellectual as well as the physical elements surrounding him there at his first or second birth." These writers took Emerson's influence for granted and pointed out the difference between the two men, which was equally real to them. Let us now consider the criticism of the period beginning with the publication of Lowell's essay in 1865.

From Lowell's Essay on Thoreau 1865 to 1882

The independent worth of Thoreau—which had been proclaimed by Emerson in his biographical sketch and in his

1. Curtis, George William; in Editor's Easy Chair, Harper's Monthly; New York, 1862; vol. 25; p 270
2. Conway, Moncure D.; Frazer's Magazine: London, April, 1866; vol. 73; p 452
every reference to Thoreau, and which had been championed by
such men as Curtis and Conway, who had had some acquaintance
with the two—was hidden by a cloud which it would take some
years to evaporate when Lowell, critic of established reputa-
tion as he was, wrote his Essay on Thoreau. This first appeared
as a review of the "Letters to Various Persons," in the North
American Review, October, 1865. Lowell’s essay was given wider
circulation when he published it in 1871 in the volume "My
Study Windows."

Thoreau is called by Lowell in this essay a pistillate
plant, "kindled to fruitage by the Emersonian pollen"; his writ-
ings are but "strawberries" from Emerson’s "own garden"; more-
over, his books are "instructive chiefly as showing how consid-
erable a crop may be raised on a comparatively narrow close of
mind." The personal qualities of sweetness, sincerity, and no-
bleness which Lowell granted Thoreau could not soften the im-
pression of these remarks. They were memorable, and falling on
minds lacking any real understanding of Thoreau, they prolonged
an impression that he was but an echo of Emerson or an imperfect
imitation of him.

Hence, when Mr. Sanborn brought together Ellery

1. Lowell, James Russell: My Study Windows; Boston, 1871;
p 199
Channing's serial biography into one volume "Henry Thoreau, the Poet Naturalist", in 1873, Channing's denial of Thoreau's imitation had little effect. "The same year (that of his commencement, 1837)," writes Channing, "brought him into relation with a literary man (Emerson) by which his mind may have been first soberly impregnated with that love of letters that accompanied him, but of whom he was no servile copyist." But Channing himself was considered erratic and as much an offshoot of Emerson as Thoreau. In a review of the biography in "The Nation" it is pointed out that Emerson's influence had a bad result in creating a cult of orphic imitation to which both Thoreau and Channing belonged-- "a school of writers about as bad as often infests the literature of any country---- Of Thoreau and his biographer, Mr. Wm. Ellery Channing, it might be said that the one was the most self-willed and conceited of the orphic school, while the other has shown himself the most wilful."

A new idea of Emerson's influence on Thoreau, equally unappreciative, was brought forth in the next Thoreau biography written by an Englishman, H.A. Page, but first published in Boston in 1877. The new idea was that Emerson spoiled Thoreau as a scientist. "It is patent," writes Page, "that

1. Channing, William Ellery; Thoreau, the Poet Naturalist 1902 edition; Boston; p 259
2. "Mr. Wm. Ellery Channing's Thoreau;" The Nation; January 8, 1874; vol. 28; New York; pp 29-30
Thoreau's peculiar gifts led him to deal with outward things. ... Emerson's teaching developed a certain self-conscious and theorizing tendency far from natural to Thoreau.

In the review of Page's "Thoreau, His Life and Aims" by Thomas Hughes in "Eclectic Magazine", January 1878, the reviewer declares that so far as appears on the face of this Memoir, the influence of the master seems to have worked for good only. He adds, "We are too grateful for Thoreau as he was to wish that the times or his teachers had made him anything else." Thoreau's determination to live simply, rather than his love for birds and beasts and trees and sunsets, seems to have been the motive of his life in the woods--but, whatever the motive the result is fascinating.

On the other hand, that same year, 1877, there appeared in the "Dublin University Magazine" an article in which the writer deals with Thoreau individually as a thinker, Emerson being numbered among his friends, but no mention made of any influence. In that year, too, John Burroughs, who had been recording his own experiences as a "poet-naturalist", admittedly under Emersonian inspiration, granted Thoreau in

1. Page, H. A.; (pseud. A.H.Japp); Thoreau; His Life and Aims; London, 1878; p 262
2. Hughes, Thomas; Eclectic Magazine; January, 1878; London; vol. 90; p 116
3. Collins, Mabel; Thoreau; Hermit and Thinker; Dublin University Magazine; Dublin; November, 1877; vol.90; p 614
4. Burroughs, John; Writings; Preface Wake-Robin; Boston, 1871; vol. 1
the volume "Birds and Poets" "a niche by himself" in American literature.

Henry James Jr. also pointed out Thoreau's independence in his life of Hawthorne, published in 1879. "I said, a little way back," he writes, "that the New England Transcendental movement had suffered in the estimation of the world at large, from not having (putting Emerson aside) produced any superior talents. But any references to it would be ungenerous which should omit to pay a tribute, in passing, to the author of 'Walden'.....He was Emerson's independent moral man made flesh--living for the ages, and not for Saturday and Sunday; for the Universe, and not for Concord. In fact, however, Thoreau lived for Concord very effectually." This quotation does not necessarily deny Emerson's influence, but the criticism is worthwhile because it comes from a writer like Henry James Jr. and from such a work as "Hawthorne" in the "Men of Letters Series." The criticisms quoted in this part of the thesis are not one-sided nor biased in favor of Thoreau. I have tried to choose from the critical opinion of men who were representative of their decade and who were also recognized as literary critics.

But the influence of Lowell had not disappeared.

1. Burroughs, John; Writings; Preface Wake-Robin; Boston, 1879; vol. 3; p 163
2. James, Henry Jr.; Hawthorne "Men of Letters Series; New York; 1879; pp 93-4
Bifford's Magazine, January 1877, published a virulent criticism of Thoreau in an article on Emerson by George Stuart Jr. which called forth the condemnation of Emerson.

In June, 1878, an article entitled "Thoreau and New England Transcendentalism", utterly hostile to Transcendentalism, characterizes Thoreau as under "the mystic spell" of Emerson, which drew him into philosophy, "about which dear old Thoreau never knew anything at all practical!" Also Francis H. Underwood, in his "Hand-Book of English Literature" 1879 speaks of Thoreau as an unconscious imitator and quotes Lowell as an authority on him.

The peak of this lack of appreciation of Thoreau was reached in 1880 when Robert Louis Stevenson published his "Henry David Thoreau: His Character and Opinions." In it he did not bring against Thoreau the charge of imitation, but he attacked him virulently as a "skulker", and suggests that a most casual remark of Emerson influenced his whole later style.

This essay was included in the volume "Familiar Studies of Men and Books" in 1882. It was an important essay coming from Stevenson's pen, probably heightening existing prejudice against Thoreau.

1. Allen, F.H.; Bibliography of Thoreau; Boston; 1908; p 123
2. O'Connor, J.V.; "Thoreau and New England Transcendentalism"; The Catholic World; New York; vol. 27; pp 284-300
3. Underwood, Francis H.; Hand-Book of English Literature; Boston; 1879; p 414
4. Stevenson, Robert Louis; Familiar Studies; New York; 1909 edition; p 117
The years 1880 to 1882 saw published defences of Thoreau by his friends Higginson, Sanborn, and Conway. Higginson writes in his work, "Short Studies of American Authors", "The impression that Thoreau was but a minor Emerson will in time pass away, like the early classification of Emerson as a second-hand Carlyle. All three were the children of their time, and had its family likeness." Conway writes in "Emerson at Home and Abroad", "He (Thoreau) once said to me that he had found in Emerson a world where truths existed with the same perfection as the objects he studied in external nature, his ideas real and exact as antennae and stamina. It was nature spiritualized. I also found that Thoreau had entered deeply Emerson's secret, and was the most complete incarnation of the earlier idealism of the Sage. But because this influence was in the least part personal, the resemblance of Thoreau to Emerson was as superficial as a leaf-like creature to a leaf. Thoreau was quite as original as Emerson. He was not an imitation of any mortal; his thoughts and expressions are suggestions of a Thoreau principle at work in the universe."

From Sanborn's Biography 1882 to 1890

This was important, for it gained a place as the first

1. Higginson, T.W.; Short Studies of American Authors; Boston, 1880; pp 22-21
2. Conway, Moncure D.; Emerson at Home and Abroad; Boston, 1882; pp 273-29
authoritative biography, and, gathering together the facts, laid the foundation for scholarly criticism. It is apparent in the contemporary and subsequent criticism that Sanborn's biography had more fundamental effect than any other account since Lowell's. Always Thoreau is being placed as a copy beside Emerson, found wanting where he is different, praised where he is the same. Scattered in Sanborn's biography are his accounts of the relations between Emerson and Thoreau. Thoreau's friendship with Emerson was, he says "the most important, if not the most intimate, of all his friendships, and that out of which the others mainly grew."

Although Henry Thoreau would have been, in any place or time of the world's drama, a personage of note, "It must be admitted," observes Sanborn, "in regard to his career and his unique literary gift, that they were affected, and in some sort fashioned by the influences of the very time and place in which he found himself at the opening of life. It was the sunrise of New England Transcendentalism in which he first looked upon the spiritual world; when Carlyle in England, Alcott, Emerson, and Margaret Fuller in Massachusetts, were preparing their contemporaries in America for that modern Renaissance which has

been so fruitful, for the last forty years, in high thought, vital religion, pure literature, and great deeds."

But Sanborn points out that Thoreau brought to his intellectual tasks an originality as marked as Emerson's, if not so brilliant and star-like--a patience far greater than his, and a proud independence that makes him the most solitary of modern thinkers.

Salt's Biography 1890 and the Following Decade

In 1890 was published in London one of the most widely influential pieces of Thoreau literature--Henry S. Salt's "Life of Henry David Thoreau." Salt is unimportant as a source, for he got his facts at second-hand and is even unsound in places, but he had the literary appreciation to write an important piece of criticism. It was an artistic whole which was able to make an impression such as Sanborn's had been unable to do. (It was again published in 1896, in abridged form.)

2. Salt, Henry S.; Life of Henry David Thoreau; London, 1890;
Salt says on the matter of influence, "Concord... became... one of the centres of the transcendental movement.... it is not surprising, therefore, that a mind already naturally predisposed to idealism should have been strongly affected by the congenial gospel of an inner intellectual awakening..... and it was doubtless in great part owing to the same influence that he felt so marked a disinclination to settle down in the ordinary groove of business."

Salt tells the story of Thoreau's meeting with Emerson and continues, "The value to Thoreau of the admission into the Emersonian circle, exactly at the time when he was able to derive from it the most advantage and encouragement, can hardly be over-estimated; for not only did it draw out the latent energies of his character, but gave him an opportunity of expressing and publishing his own thoughts (in the Dial)."

"Thoreau's regard for Emerson and Mrs. Emerson was very deep, and it was natural that a young man, even when possessed of Thoreau's strength of character should be lastingly influenced by so commanding a personality as

1. Salt, Henry S.; Life of Henry David Thoreau; London, 1896; p 34
2. Ibid; p 42
3. Ibid; p 42
Emerson's.... The change in Thoreau was not due only to the stimulating influence of Emerson's personality, though, that doubtless was the immediate means of effecting his awakening. Underneath the sluggish and torpid demeanour of his life at the University there had been developing, as his schoolmates afterwards recognized, the strong, stern qualities which were destined to make his character remarkable..... so with regard to his social and ethical opinions, it would have been strange if the youth of twenty-five had not been in some degree affected and influenced by the philosopher of forty; but the freshness and originality of his genius, in all essential respects, is none the less incontestable..... the subordination of Thoreau as a mere pupil and follower of Emerson is not warranted by the facts of their relationship. The greater practicalness of Thoreau is frankly recognized by Emerson himself in a passage in his diary."

"And here I would hazard the suggestion", writes Salt, "(though well aware that it must at present seem fantastic) that Thoreau's genius will eventually be at least as

1. Salt, Henry S.; Life of Henry David Thoreau; London, 1896; p 51
2. Ibid; p 51
3. (Emerson, Ralph Waldo; Emerson's Journal; vol. 9, p 522, also (Salt, Henry S.; Life of Henry David Thoreau; London, 1896; p 154
highly valued as Emerson's. No sane critic could for a moment doubt the mighty influence which Emerson's great and beneficent intellect wielded among his contemporaries, or dream of comparing Thoreau with him as a nineteenth century power. But the world will realize that it was no mere Emersonian disciple, but a master mind and heart of hearts who left that burning message to his fellowmen."

Salt's biography was widely reviewed and highly praised, though little comment was made about what Salt had said concerning Thoreau's relations with Emerson.

There followed a period of considerable writing on Thoreau, none of which, except Sanborn's article in "Forum", added much of significance down to the years 1901-2 when, in the "Personality of Thoreau", Sanborn sought, as he had in the "Forum" article, to clear away some misunderstandings. Below are quoted the various comments on the influence of Emerson on Thoreau published in this period 1890-1902:—

"He (Thoreau) was a close student of Nature and original in his interpretations." (No mention of Emerson's influence)

1. Salt, Henry S.; Life of Henry David Thoreau: London, 1890; p 194
2. Sanborn, F. B.; Thoreau and Emerson; April, 1897; vol. 123, pp 218-20
3. Stedman, Edmund Clarence and Hutchinson, Ellen Mackay; A Library of American Literature; New York; 1890; vol. 11, p 595
"Thoreau's immediate environment was severely 'transcendental', as he was born, lived, and died in Concord; and there of course Emerson was the 'deus ex machina'—quite an addition to any environment. Thoreau enjoyed an unusual intimacy with Emerson, having lived quite a while in his family; and this I presume gave Mr. Lowell the opportunity to call Thoreau 'a pistillate plant kindled to fruitage by the Emersonian pollen'... So far as concerns environment, if Thoreau got a stimulus from it he was also a stimulus in it. As a diamond cuts diamond, so the attrition of mind against mind brings out the facets of character, and the process that shaped Thoreau also gave shape to others."

"Thoreau, an original and solitary spirit, born amid the same influences as Emerson, but of different temperament, resolved to go out into the world, to absorb Nature and the Health of Nature."

"Thoreau stands for two conditions which neither Emerson nor Lowell nor any great man of letters or science or of political economy has ever dreamed of displaying upon his banner: Simplicity and Sincerity..... Thoreau had no

1. Jones, Samuel Arthur; Thoreau; A Glimpse; The Unitarian; January, February and March 1890; 1903 edition; Concord; pp 5, 7
2. Ellis, Havelock; The New Spirit; London, 1892; p 90
predecessor and can have no successor. He was the product of conditions that can never again arise, for to expect another Concord with its galaxy of intellectual giants is utterly vain."

"Nor may it be charged that his (Thoreau's) works are strawberries from Emerson's garden. His were essentially wild fruits of the earth.... His books have an individual tang and a sub-acidulous freshness."

"Thoreau has secured a safe position as one of the more original and graceful prose writers of America. His relation to Hawthorne, and still more, of course, to Emerson, is obvious and respectable."

"Evidently young Thoreau had felt the uplifting power of Wordsworth's plain living and high thinking." (No mention of Emerson's influence).

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1. Abbott, Charles C.; Thoreau; Lippincott's Monthly Magazine; June, 1885; Philadelphia; vol. 35; pp 853-855
2. Ellwanger, George H.; "Idyllists of the Country Side"; New York, 1835; "The Sphere of Thoreau"; p 182
3. Thoreau's Verses; Saturday Review; London; January 18, 1896; vol. 81; p 55
4. Irish, Frank V.; American and British Authors; Columbus, Ohio; 1896; p 134
"Thoreau, with all his individuality, undoubtedly owed much to Emerson."

"People used to say that Thoreau imitated Emerson.... I think there is nothing in it. Thoreau's style is certainly fresh and original. His tastes and thoughts are his own."

"That young mind which Emerson found so 'free and erect', needed to get away for a season even from Emerson himself, to realize its own quality and function..... Thoreau is still the Only. Not the best of his disciples, not John Burroughs, can reach his upper notes..... he reported, after all, less of this world than of the other."

"Thoreau-- whom Lowell and even his neighbors set aside as a mere imitator of Emerson-- is still growing in international fame."

1. Howe, M. A. DeWolfe; American Bookman VIII; "Emerson and Concord"; The Bookman; New York; November 1897; p 211
2. Hoar, George F.; "The Life of a Boy Sixty Years Ago"; Youth's Companion; Boston; March 34, 1896; vol. 78, part 1, p 139
3. Bates, Katherine Lee; American Literature; New York; 1898 (1897); pp 261, 265
4. Higginson, Thomas Wentworth; Cheerful Yesterdays; Boston; 1899 (1898); p 170
"His originality as a writer was already apparent and soon after attracted the attention of Mr. Emerson, and the other transcendentalists who were just coming on the stage. Emerson was as yet almost unknown. He had published his first volume 'Nature', but it had attracted little attention except among a little Boston Coterie..... That Thoreau was affected by their atmosphere is doubtless true, but it is undeniable that his originality is as marked as theirs, and that he did his thinking on independent lines. In his very first writings there were passages which were said to resemble Emerson, and which proved to have been written before he had read the essays he seemed to imitate. We can now perceive that the time was ripe for such utterance as theirs, and that it sprung up of itself in different quarters of the world, like seed that has been sown broadcast."

"Thoreau knew Emerson; he had lived in the same house with him; but even Emerson's companionship was less stimulating to him than Nature's own."

"There was between Thoreau and Emerson that genuine kinship of spirit whose depth and fullness made mere kinship of blood seem shallow and impertinent. But this natural likeness

1. Griswold, Hattie Tyng; Personal Sketches of Recent Authors; Chicago; 1899 (1898); pp 300-301
2. Torrey, Bradford; Thoreau's Attitude Toward Nature; Atlantic Monthly; Boston; November, 1899; vol. 84; p 707
has led to a mistaken and foolishly iterated charge that Thoreau either consciously or unconsciously imitated Emerson in the peculiar direction of his thought and in his manner of expression. Never was a charge more unwarrantable. Of the two men, Thoreau was the more essentially original. Emerson's love of nature was an acquired taste; with Thoreau it was born and bred in the bone. He did not play at philosophy and discourse the wisdom of the sages from a down cushion; he lived what he talked. These men faced different ways. Perhaps it is safe to say that if either of these men owed an inspiration to the other beyond that of a friendship based on similar ideals, it was Emerson, not Thoreau, who was the debtor. Unconsciously Thoreau sat to Emerson for a model of the excellence so frequently lauded in his essays...and in our admiration of the artist it is an absurdity to accuse the model of lack of originality because he resembles the portrait.

The variety of opinion in this decade reveals the subjectiveness on which it is based. The last quotation is indicative of a new impression which is to be reiterated now that the "echo" idea is being rejected, but when examined, this latest extreme has the same subjective basis as the extreme it opposes. Thoreau is now rallying some advocates

1. Fisher, Mary; A General Survey of American Literature; Chicago, 1899; pp 297-300
as reckless as some of Emerson's.

From Sanborn's "Personality of Thoreau" and
A. R. Marble's Biography 1801-2 to 1866

Sanborn attempted in 1901, in his "Personality of
Thoreau" to give the death blow to the charge of imitation as
well as to some other deep-rooted misconceptions.

"The points of resemblance between the written style
of Channing or of Thoreau and that of Emerson, whether in
verse or prose were very few; but like-mindedness existed a-
mong the three, and careless or prejudiced observers, like
young Russell Lowell, fancied resemblance where none could
afterwards be seen ..... But to Emerson's manner of writing,
very hard to imitate, or even parody skillfully, Thoreau never
even remotely approached ..... except in penmanship."

The review of this book in The Nation commented on
this point as follows: - "We have at the outset a rejection of
the too common notion that Thoreau was a deliberate copy, which
only succeeded in being a caricature, of Emerson. Their minds
were of one family, but of external resemblance there was
little beyond that of handwriting. Still, can Lowell and
others have been so much mistaken here as Mr. Sanborn thinks?

1. Sanborn, F.B.; The Personality of Thoreau; Boston, 1901;
   pp 23-4
2. Ibid pp1-4
It is true, as he says, that it is difficult to copy Emerson, but it is less difficult to take on something of his form through vital sympathy; ... Thoreau may sometimes have done so without impeaching his originality and without justifying the least possible reproach."

Annie Russell Marble's "Thoreau, His Home, Friends, and Books" was the most extensive treatment since Salts's and her comment on the influence of Emerson significant in the history of Thoreau criticism because it was the product of an intensive study of the Thoreau material, much in manuscript, available in 1902. Mrs. Marble attempts to study the influence on Thoreau from many angles. She writes, "...it is unjust to Thoreau to assert that his philosophy was only a spectacular presentation of Emerson's doctrines of individualism, already published in Nature, Self-Reliance, Friendship, and other essays ... With similarity of mental outlook, devoted to the same forms of nature-communion and classic literature, environed by the same waves of philosophical teaching and local influence, the correlations and similitudes of thought are entirely consistent with absolute independence of character."

1. Review of Sanborn's The Personality of Thoreau; The Nation; New York, February 6, 1902; vol. 74, p 114
2. Marble, Annie Russell; Thoreau, His Home, Friends, and Books; Introduction; p 195; New York; 1902
3. Ibid p 195
"...No one can question the stimulative effect, emotionally and mentally, of Thoreau's early friendship with Emerson and residence in his home. The time is past, however, to accept the theory that his genius was reflected light from Emerson or that his fame has been due to the association of the two names."

"...Clearly, Emerson at no time regarded Thoreau as his imitator or unconscious reflector. He always emphasized the peculiar and original ability of his friend."

The review of the book in "The Critic", points out the tenet that "correlations and similitudes of thought" found in the writings of Thoreau and Emerson do not prove Thoreau an imitator, but are the natural result of like causes operating upon men of similar outlook."

The Thoreau criticism and comment continued from many quarters, dealing more charily now with Emerson's influence. In an article on Thoreau in "Country Life in America", February 1904, Oliver Bronson Capen points out "two conceptions about Thoreau that are very prevalent. One is the notion that he was a hermit, true or quack. The other is that he was a poor imitation of Emerson. These notions have been echoed

1. Marble, Annie Russell; Thoreau, His Home, Friends, and Books; Introduction; New York: 1902; pp 223-4
2. Ibid p 226
3. The Critic; December 1902; vol.41, p 513
and re-echoed by the critics, most of whom have taken their cue from Lowell's later estimate of Thoreau."

From the Publication of the Journals in 1806 to 1810

In 1806, with the publication of his Journals in fourteen volumes, Thoreau became known as never before. Especially did the Journals show that Thoreau's philosophy had a larger place in proportion to his observation of nature than formerly believed. This made Emerson's influence again an important question— a question which was for the most part dodged by refuting the charge (being made by no critic, as far as I have been able to determine, in these years) that Thoreau was an imitation.

"In our view, whatever there was in Thoreau of professed transcendentalism was due largely to the influence of Emerson. But that he was a mere imitator,— that his work, his thoughts, his philosophy, is a mere reflection of the great light shed by his brilliant contemporary— it is impossible to believe. Though the two were alike in many superficial respects, they were poles apart in many essentials. Emerson himself has warmly resented the idea that Thoreau was only a

1. Capen, Oliver Bronson; "Country Homes of Famous Americans"; IV. Henry David Thoreau in Country Life in America; vol. 6; February 1904; p XVI
disciple, and as stoutly maintained that his friend was an original genius."

"The poetic element in Thoreau is easily seen; not so easily his philosophic wisdom and originality. This grows more and more striking as we are allowed to read more in the Journals," says Sanborn in The Dial, October 16, 1906.

"Of all the writers in the Concord group, Thoreau will be held hereafter as the most original, where all were original in their own way. He was less dependent than Emerson or Hawthorne or Alcott on the books he had read and the traditions he received; more indebted to Nature and his own free thoughts. The ten volumes before me prove this and those which come after will hardly change the verdict."

Paul Elmer More wrote a review of the Journals in the New York Evening Post, which appeared November 3 and 10, 1906 and was reprinted under the title "Thoreau and German Romanticism." In his review he says that the Journal "is the mirror of a life, the record of romanticism striving to work itself out in actual character, and shows thus, as clearly as in the greater writings of Emerson, wherein the originality of the Concord School really lies."

1. Sanborn, F. B.; Thoreau in Twenty Volumes; The Dial; October 16, 1906; Chicago; vol. 41; p 232
2. Ibid; p 234
3. More, Paul Elmer; reprinted essay "Shelburne Essay's, Fifth Series; New York, 1908; p 128
George Edward Woodberry in his life of Emerson, says, "It is true that there was a bend of intellectual likeness, almost identity, between him (Thoreau) and Emerson; but he had his individuality, too, combative and unconformed; original and hardy, and by it whatever he had received from Emerson was stamped his own."

In June 1908 Salt wrote an article entitled "Thoreau in Twenty Volumes", reprinted the next month in The Living Age, in which he said, "It has taken fifty years to do it, but we are at last beginning to get rid of certain false notions concerning Thoreau by which the minds of his readers have been obsessed, notably the stubborn conviction that he was a mere disciple and imitator of Emerson, whereas in fact, though deeply indebted to Emerson in his youth, his mature intellect was wholly independent and self-centered."

W. P. Trent and John Erskine's little volume "Great American Writers," (1912) makes the following comment—"The Transcendentalist who stood nearest to Emerson was Henry David Thoreau, whose reputation not improbably will finally equal or surpass Emerson's. It has long been his fortune to be known

1. Woodberry, George Edward; Ralph Waldo Emerson; New York, 1907; p 97
2. Salt, Henry S.; Thoreau in Twenty Volumes; Fortnightly Review; London; vol. 83, n.s.
3. The Living Age; July 18, 1908; Boston; vol. 258; p 138
only by one book, but now that his whole work is available in his Journals, the vigor of his intellect is likely to get its long delayed acknowledgment..... His Transcendentalism is more practical, his thinking generally more solid, than Emerson's, and in scholarship he was Emerson's superior. That he has enjoyed a certain obscurity is due to his own indifference to the public, not to any lack of appreciation on the part of Emerson or his other friends."


The years 1916-17 brought forth three extended studies of Thoreau. The first of these was "Henry David Thoreau; A Critical Study" by Mark Van Doren. He writes, "What Emerson preached in smiling benignity, his disciple Thoreau lived and described with amazing thoroughness, with set lips..... Even if he were insignificant in that he took all his ideas from Emerson, he would still be significant in that he reduced them to their practicable and visible essence..... Emerson...... understood that Thoreau's bent was independent of his own

1. Trent, W. P. and Erskine, John; Great American Writers; New York; 1912; pp 126-7
2. Van Doren, Mark; Henry David Thoreau; A Critical Study; Boston; 1916; p 10
influence and declared that 'his determination on Natural History was organic.' If Emerson studied Nature to know himself, Thoreau wedded Nature to know himself."

The next year (1917) Emerson's son published a reminiscence entitled "Henry Thoreau, As Remembered by a Young Friend". This he had written because he "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 the events of his life... which he did not tell to everybody--- and the false impressions given by accredited writers who really knew him hardly at all."

Touching on Emerson's influence, he wrote that Thoreau's "thoughtfulness in childhood, his independent course in college themes and early Journals prove him no copy of another. His close association... with the mature Emerson may have tinged his early writings, and some superficial trick of manner or of speech unconsciously acquired... But this is all that can be granted. Entire independence, strong individuality were Thoreau's distinguishing traits, and his foible was not subservience, but combative ness in conversation. Conscious

1. Van Doren, Mark; Henry David Thoreau; A Critical Study; Boston; 1916; p 28
2. Emerson, Edward W.; Henry Thoreau, As Remembered by a Young Friend; Boston; 1917
3. Ibid pp v-vi
imitation is not to be thought of as a possibility of this strong spirit."

That same year (1917) was published Sanborn's final volume on Thoreau and an important one. Sanborn's statement (in this edition) of his own opinion on Emerson's influence is that Thoreau "was a student in Emerson's school, a brother to Emerson's thought; but never an imitator of him or other men."

From this time on Thoreau has come definitely into his own. There is a larger proportion of articles written about him with little or no reference to Emerson, - in fact a tendency to turn arbitrarily from Emerson.

Norman Foerster, who writes much on Thoreau in this period, says in an article in "The Nation", "Obscure and contentedly 'unsuccessful' while his friend was the anointed leader of a spiritual, social, and literary movement, he has since his death steadily advanced in popular and critical favor, until now he stands almost side by side with the shining leader himself."

The new phase of opinion is exemplified in the

1. Emerson, Edward W.; Henry Thoreau, As Remembered by a Young Friend; Boston; 1917; pp 28-3
2. Sanborn, Frank B.; The Life of Henry David Thoreau; Boston; 1917
3. Ibid p 494
4. Foerster, Norman; The Humanism of Thoreau; The Nation; New York, July 5, 1917; vol. 105
following excerpt from "The Point of View" in Scribner's, March 1920, "If it had not been for the reputation and popularity of his friend Emerson, as the chief sage and philosopher of his time, it is probable that Thoreau would have been more widely recognized as one of the wisest of our American thinkers and commentators on life.... But to the few who knew him and the real quality of his mind he was a sage, a thinker on life's everyday problems, with a very definite outlook, and a shrewd 1 capacity for sizing up human beings."

Odell Shepard in Scribner's Magazine, September 1920, states his belief that Thoreau had been in that breathless audience which heard Emerson's address on the 'American Scholar' at Harvard in the year of Thoreau's graduation--one of those young men who listened 'as if a prophet were proclaiming to them "Thus saith the Lord,"' and who resolved that they, too, should be in the noble phrase of the speaker, 'delegated minds'. No man went from that room, not even the speaker himself, who adhered more closely in later life to the spirit and letter of the Address than did Thoreau."

Later in the same article, Odell Shepard observes with penetration, "Two things must be done for Thoreau before he can take his due place as one of the three or four most original

1. Thoreau on "The Kindly Relations"; Scribner's Monthly; New York; vol. 67; p 379
2. Shepard, Odell; The Paradox of Thoreau; Scribner's Monthly; New York; September, 1920; vol. 68; p 338
men of letters America has produced. The first of these is to get him out of the Emersonian shadow. (The second thing is not relevant to this thesis). Superficial readers learning that both the Concord writers were 'transcendentalists', but that Emerson was in some vague way the American leader of the school, remembering that Thoreau was Emerson's junior..... lived some time in Emerson's house..... built his Walden cabin on Emerson's land..... in his youth resembled Emerson even in voice and manner, have drawn the natural conclusion that Thoreau shone with only lunar light. It is as impossible to confute as it is to justify this specious conclusion on 'a priori' grounds..... The simple fact is that Emerson rendered Thoreau the highest service any teacher can give by setting the young man free-- to go his own way. For this, and for the lifelong stimulus of Emerson's presence, Thoreau gave his friend the loving reverence which all men gave, and which was inevitable."

John Burroughs writes again on Thoreau in 1922 that he "was in so many ways so characteristically Emersonian that one wonders what influence it was in the place or time that gave them both, with their disparity of ages, so nearly the same stamp..... He (Thoreau) was undoubtedly deeply and permanently influenced by Emerson both in his mental habits and in

1. Shepard, Odell; The Paradox of Thoreau: Scribner's Monthly; New York; September, 1920; vol. 68; p 338
his manner of life, yet the main part of him was original and unadulterated Thoreau."

In an article on Emerson in the Publications of the Modern Language Association for 1922, Norman Foerster writes, "Emerson owed as much to Thoreau in respect to the material world as Thoreau owed to him in respect to the world of the spirit."

William Lyon Phelps writes in October 1923, "America never produced a more original writer than Henry David Thoreau. Today, sixty years after his death two things are clear: First, the essential nobility of his character; second, the steady advance of his literary reputation. He was an original philosopher, who had observed much and meditated deeply, and whose actions were the fruit of silent hours. Thoreau is Emerson's greatest pupil. Living in Emerson's household two years, it was inevitable that he should bear the stamp of that powerful mind, the most profound mind in America. But his chief imitation of Emerson was in his absolute originality and independence, qualities common to both teacher and pupil. Emerson was an inspiration rather than a model."

1. Burroughs, John; Works: vol. 23, "Emerson and His Journals"; Boston; p 21
2. Foerster, Norman; Modern Language Association; Menasha, Wisconsin; 1922; vol. 37
3. Phelps, William Lyon; Makers of American Literature—Henry David Thoreau—Natural Philosopher; Philadelphia, Ladies' Home Journal; October, 1923; vol. 40; p 28 and p 216
In 1924 an interesting biography of Thoreau was written across the water, Leon Bazalgette's "Henry Thoreau, Bachelor of Nature". Bazalgette utilized the material of Sanborn's 1917 biography, but in a purely interpretive manner, allowing free play of the imagination on the facts. It is significant to note the weight he gives to the inspiration of Emerson. The author visualizes the occasion of the Historical Address in 1835 thus: "What seized him, exalted him, (Thoreau) was not so much the oration itself, as the sight of the lecturer, his expression, his eyes, the indefinable charm of his words..... This man spoke as one inspired, with a simplicity, a nobility that carried you away." Bazalgette attributes to Thoreau the wish that he, himself, could write pages that had a little of that subtle and luminous quality, that he could become one of those people who have something to say and know how to say it.

When Odell Shepard published "The Heart of Thoreau's Journals" he pointed out in the introduction what he believed to be the relation of Thoreau to Emerson. It was this: "Thoreau, "as the most sympathetic listener to Emerson's speech on 'The American Scholar', had chosen at twenty to be 'Man Thinking'".

1. Bazalgette, Leon; Henry Thoreau, Bachelor of Nature; New York; 1924
2. Ibid; p 72
3. Shepard, Odell: The Heart of Thoreau's Journals; Boston; 1927; p viii
Henry Seidel Canby, reviewing the book writes, "One questioned nature and the other man, but what makes a good life was the common purpose of their inquiries. I advance no foolish comparison of merit and influence...."

That same year was published the most recent biography of Thoreau, J. Brooks Atkinson's "Henry Thoreau, the Cosmic Yankee" in which he writes, "although Thoreau and Emerson travelled the same road, exchanging their intellectual baggage freely and straining their eyes for the same holy city, the truth seems to be that they were two men, citizens in their own right, one broad and tranquil, the other deep and passionate.... Since Emerson and Thoreau lived side by side harmoniously, and loved each other deeply withal, it behooves us lesser disciples to make good that same wisdom by keeping Thoreau and Emerson even now on a non-competitive basis."

Russell Blankenship commenting upon the relations between Emerson and Thoreau in "American Literature" published in 1931 says: "Although the relations of Emerson and Thoreau were close and long continued, still it is a mistake to consider the younger man only a weak echo of the older. Certainly there was a reciprocal influence existing between them.

1. Canby, Henry Seidel; Thoreau, the Great Eccentric; Saturday Review of Literature; November 26, 1927; New York; vol. 4; pp 337-8
2. Atkinson, J. Brooks: Henry Thoreau, the Cosmic Yankee; New York; 1927; p 58
3. Ibid; p 60
Each influenced the other, but Thoreau was possessed of too original a nature and too acute a mind to become a mere copy of any one..... Without the influence of Emerson, Thoreau would not have had his conscious connection with transcendentalism, but he would have been the same poet, the same mystical lover of nature, and the same implacable foe of society."

In his analytical study of the relations of the two men, the author expresses the result of his observations with acumens when he says: "This reciprocal influence existing between the two men probably can never be disentangled. It was the custom of the older historians and critics of American literature to speak of Thoreau disparagingly, as one of the 'minor men of Concord', or as a rustic imitator of Emerson. Such characterizations are no longer attempted. To-day we realize that he was a major figure in our literature. His style alone would compel such an appraisal, even if he had no other claims to eminence, and other claims he has in plenty. But with the elevation of Thoreau's position the problem of his relations with Emerson become more difficult of solution, for so long as he was only a minor figure it would suffice to admit that all his good qualities were a reflection of his friend. To say that the problem is a tangled one is stating only half the

1. Blankenship, Russell: American Literature; New York; 1931; pp 308-9
truth. It has been proposed to settle the difficulty by acknowledging Emerson to have been an original thinker and Thoreau an original doer. This suggestion seriously raises the question if Emerson was not as much stimulated by the life of Thoreau as Thoreau was by the utterances of Emerson.

Blankenship gives an excellent critique of Thoreau's prose style in the following excerpt: "As a literary figure Thoreau occupies a high position because of his excellent prose style. A finer vehicle could not have been perfected for its intended use. It abounds in the most specific words imaginable, in wit, and in crystal clarity..... Thoreau avoids the disjointed oracular style of Emerson that seems to be a string of epigrams. If the epigram comes, he does not scorn it, but he fills up the space to the next pithy utterance with a prose so well-ordered that the reader unconsciously floats along with the stream of thought."

1. Blankenship, Russell: American Literature; New York; 1931; p 309
2. Ibid; p 311
V. Present Tendencies in Literary Criticism of Thoreau

**English and American Criticism of Thoreau Contrasted**

Thoreau has drawn out the comments of many critics, both English and American, and many different kinds of both. Because he is a complex figure—too complex for some who would explain him—this criticism has been even ludicrously diverse. There has been, too, as Mr. Salt reminds us, a tendency in both England and America to label and classify the man by standards which did not happen to be his. To naturalists he was all naturalist, to ethical critics he was moralist and philosopher, to literary historians he was (or was not) a master of prose and verse.

That Thoreau was "an imitator of Emerson and to be criticized as such" was the point which American critics dwelt on for long—the accusation from which Thoreau's later critics had to defend him. Indeed, they had not only to clear him of all the charges which Lowell had made, but the strictures which Emerson had allowed to slip into his "Memorial Address"; at least that is what American critics made it their business to do down to the end of the last century. Only when American critics ceased insisting on, or denying this charge of imitation, did they turn their whole attention to a genuine consideration of Thoreau as an author.
The best Lowell could say of Thoreau in his poem, "Fable for Critics" was:

"There comes ----, for instance; to see him's rare sport. Tread in Emerson's tracks with legs painfully short; How he jumps, how he strains, and gets red in the face To keep step with the mystagogue's natural pace! He follows as close as a stick to a rocket. His fingers exploring his prophet's each pocket. Fie, for shame, brother bard! With good fruit of your own Can't you let neighbor Emerson's orchard alone?"

It is notorious that none of Thoreau's virtues would seem to have been apparent to Lowell when he wrote his famous essay on Thoreau in the North American Review— that essay which has variously been denounced as "a masterpiece of hostile innuendo", a satire "by one whose gifts render such obtuseness well-nigh unpardonable," "the product of a mind from which poetry and youth had evaporated."

1. Lowell, James Russell: "A Fable for Critics"; New York; 1848
2. Salt, Henry S.; The Life of Henry David Thoreau; London; 1896; p 191
3. Emerson, Edward Waldo: Henry Thoreau as Remembered by a Young Friend; Boston, 1917; p 9
4. Macy, John; The Spirit of American Literature; New York; 1908; p 171
As a plain instance of criticism which begets criticism, came Robert Louis Stevenson's essay in England many years later. In a piece of beautifully written disparagement, Stevenson, after using many words, delivered his dictum in one: "Thoreau was a skulker." It is only fair to say that after a fierce attack by Dr. Alexander H. Japp (H.A. Page) in the Spectator Stevenson recanted and apologized (in an introduction to the 1891 edition of Familiar Studies) for much that he had written of Thoreau.

Stevenson's was the essay of a romantic who was constitutionally unable to approach the point of view of Thoreau or conceive its passionate sincerity. Lowell, perhaps, did not wish to understand. But these attacks, immeasurably influential on later criticism of Thoreau, have survived, if only for their own excellence as marvels of skilful invective. Yet considerably before Stevenson's essay in the Cornhill, American and English criticism of Henry Thoreau had taken separate ways.

"In England, criticism of Thoreau early took an entirely different direction from the start, for Emerson did

1. Familiar Studies of Men and Books; New York; 1891; p 137
not loom so large in that country as in his own. No one was concerned with who did, or did not, ape him. Nor were Thoreau's virtues or faults as a writer deemed worthy any protracted discussion. It was Thoreau's thoughts and the actions by which he interpreted and extended them, that really mattered."

A review of *Walden* by George Eliot was the first critical notice of Thoreau to appear in England:

"In a volume called 'Walden': or 'Life in the Woods' - published last year but quite interesting enough for us to break our rule by a retrospective notice- we have a bit of pure American life (not the go-ahead species, but its opposite pole) animated by that energetic yet calm spirit of innovation, that practical as well as theoretic independence of formulae, which is peculiar to some of the finer American minds. The writer tells us how he chose, for some years, to be a stoic of the woods; how he built his house; how he earned the necessaries of his simple life by cultivating a bit of ground. He tells his system of diet, his studies, his reflections, and his observations of natural phenomena. These last are not only made with a keen eye but have their interest enhanced by passing through the medium of a deep poetic sensibility; and, indeed, we feel throughout the book, the presence of a refined as well as a hardy mind. People—very wise in their own eyes—who would have every man's life ordered according to a particular pattern, and who are intolerant of every existence the utility of which is not palpable to them, may pooh-pooh Mr. Thoreau and this episode in his history, as impracticable and dreamy. Instead of contesting this opinion ourselves, we will let Mr. Thoreau speak for himself. There is plenty of sturdy sense mingled with his unworldliness."

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1. Wood, James Playsted: *English and American Criticism of Thoreau; The New England Quarterly; December 1936; Vol.VI; No. 1, pp 737-8

2. Westminster Review, IX; January 1856; pp302-303
"These were the qualities that appealed to British critics. It was not surprising, perhaps, that Thoreau's unusual ideas and practices should receive more attention in the older and more conservative country of the two, or that they should seem to some of the critics bizarre—phenomena, in short, characteristically "American". 1

As early as 1874 there were other English critics who recognized what Thoreau stood for and the philosophic and practical value of his ideas. A writer in the British Quarterly Review for that year found that Thoreau's stature was heroic. He was one of the most vigorous and independent of men.

"His cutting brusqueness of which even his dearest friends sometimes made mention arose out of the seriousness and severity of his nature, which abhorred all triviality and vain conversation, and which, combined with such keen imagination and fiery hatred of wrong as characterized him, is always a main ingredient in heroism." 2

It was no cowardly withdrawal (such as Lowell and Stevenson had professed to see) which took Thoreau to Walden, but an idea the very opposite to the one which had inspired Rousseau. Thoreau went to the woods not to escape men, but to fit himself for life with them. He went to the woods in order to act;—to act in such a way that he might stand independent, free, and vigorous, ever afterward.

The conservative Spectator, like the British Quarterly, was quick to recognize Thoreau as "An Apostle of Freedom."

1. Wood, James Paysted: English and American Criticism of Thoreau; The New England Quarterly; December, 1933; Vol. VI, No. 1, pp 737-8
2. British Quarterly Review; LIX January 1874; pp 94-101; "Henry Thoreau, the Poet-Naturalist"
and to find it Thoreau's peculiar merit that he was a philosopher in action as well as in word:

"The life of Thoreau during the two years he passed at Walden was liberty expressed in the clearest language. He could live gaily on what most men would call starvation. By this means he was able to reconcile his keen intellectual craving, and his still keener love of nature, with the law of existence." 1

But a second Spectator article in 1885 displayed some of the scorn not uncharacteristic of English critical periodicals in treating of the literary qualities of American authors:

"He was not a philosopher, he was not a thinker, as the word is generally understood. He wrote nothing by which he will long be remembered......He is not great in soul or mind." 2

Nevertheless, this article, too, emphasized Thoreau's basic qualities. What attracted readers to Thoreau was not his style, but his courageous fight for freedom. In 1886 Thoreau's most appreciative critic, Mr. Henry S. Salt, admirably contradicted the Spectator's censure:

"He was in the truest sense an original writer; his work is absolutely unique. Walden alone is sufficient to win him a place among the immortals, for it is incomparable alike in matter and style and deserves to be a sacred book in the library of every cultured and thoughtful man." 3

Once again, it should be noticed, Thoreau's ideas were to be of chief importance. Thoreau was depicted as a

1. Spectator LIV (February 17, 1883) p 240
2. Spectator LVIII (January 24, 1885) p 122
3. Salt, Henry S.: Temple Bar Magazine LXXVIII; November,1886; p 382
fearless thinker of native shrewdness and penetration who, testing the worth of much that is called indispensable to artificial life, rejected a good part as superfluous and even damaging. Writing some years later in the Fortnightly Review this same critic declared that if recognition had come slowly to Thoreau and he was not yet acknowledged as a thinker, where he had already been received as a writer, it was "plainly because the message brought by him was in some respects a disturbing one and unwelcome to the majority of those who heard it."

Consistently, then, English critics have recognized in Thoreau a thinker—a man whose ideas and practices of liberty and independence, whose moral judgments were important. All the time that American writers were haggling over the eccentricities of his personality, maligning or defending him for speaking with an accent that resembled Emerson's, the English had seized on the essentials of his thought and life. In 1888 the Encyclopaedia Britannica opened its account of Thoreau with the statement that he was "one of the most strongly-marked individualities of modern times." It described him as having striven to gain an absolute independency in thought and action.

1. "Widening Influence of Thoreau"; Current Literature; XIV; August, 1908; p 170
In 1917 the *London Times Literary Supplement* devoted its first two pages to the Thoreau centenary, the critic reverting to what England had always recognized as Thoreau's distinctive achievement. It was "to lay bare what was within him—to let life take its own way unhindered by artificial constraint."

A recent bit of comment on Thoreau from the hand of an English reviewer writing for an American magazine is noteworthy. Perhaps the influence of Stevenson is not yet dead, in spite of his apology; for the essay simmers with disparagement—in Stevenson's vein if hardly in Stevenson's style:

"Thoreau is cried up as being one of the greatest American writers. In reality he was an awkward, nervous, self-conscious New Englander who, together with an authentic taste for oriental and classical literature, developed a singular liking for his own home woods..... He does not strike me as an original thinker ..... Mysticism, that obstinately recurring form of human self-deception, is in his case even more unsatisfactory than usual, while his descriptions of nature that have everywhere won such applause, are seldom out of the ordinary."  

This writer found the *naiveté* of Thoreau's mind incredible. Much of his writing was sheer affectation; his very best was a poor second best. "Thoreau ", concludes Mr. Powys with a certain unpretentious eloquence, "was a great reader of books in the ancient tradition, but he was neither a profound

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1. Powys, Llewellyn; "Thoreau; A Disparagement"; the *Bookman*; LXIX; August, 1929; p 163
thinker nor a great writer, and that is the truth."

The Twentieth Century Thoreau

But Americans (American critics, at least), are beginning to turn their attention to Thoreau. Recognition for Thoreau's literary merits developed much sooner in this country than in England. In the United States Thoreau had been accorded recognition as a writer first by Lowell, which seems strange; then by Emerson, which was important; and later by Hawthorne, which was gratifying. Because as some critics were perceptive and some slavish, that recognition waited. Interest in Thoreau's books fell off for a time—William Dean Howells was compelled to refer to Thoreau in 1900 as "an author who has fallen into that abeyance awaiting all authors, great or small, at some time or another." Howells rightly believed that the situation could only be temporary. A ten-volume edition of Thoreau's works had been issued in 1893, and another in twenty volumes appeared in 1908. By this time Thoreau was receiving tribute from many quarters. This did not mean, however, that, as in Britain, Thoreau was being seriously considered as a thinker.

1. Powys, Llewellyn; "Thoreau; A Disparagement"; the Bookman; LXIX; August, 1929; p 163
2. Howells, William Dean; Literary Friends and Acquaintances; Boston, 1900; p 57
3. N.Y. Tribune; November 25, 1893; E.K. Dunton; "An Old and New Estimate of Thoreau"; Dial, XXXIII; December, 1902; p 464; William Lyon Phelps; Howells; James; Bryant; and Other Essayists; New York, 1924; p 66
Twenty years later, it was Thoreau's ideas that critics in this country were considering. In 1920 the New York Times referred to him as an "Individualist of Individualists." Now he was one who had chosen his own way of life, followed it, and enjoyed it — a man who thought for himself and expressed his thought in his own manner. The world of 1920 had too few such men. He had for too long been overshadowed by Emerson. He was more to be thought of as an individual in his own right. In 1927 Mr. J. Brooks Atkinson published his stimulating Henry Thoreau, the Cosmic Yankee, describing Thoreau as a thinker whose ideas were valid for the twentieth century, as well as treating of him as a mystic and a poet. Thoreau's philosophy, he urged, was alive and significant for a new period in American ideas and deeds.

Solitude, simplicity, independence,— these are the essentials of Thoreau's teaching, and American critics are uniting to find them peculiarly palatable.

As late as 1928 John Cournos wrote:

"Thoreau very early saw the futility of the vast energy expended by man for material ends; perhaps the frugality of his own nature— he was a mixture of Norman and Scotch stocks— gave him the power to see more clearly than other men how, as humanity worked harder, its wants piled up, and its

1. New York Times; September 12, 1920
2. New York Times; January 30, 1921
once humble habitations became relative mansions, repositories of numerous useless furniture and gawgs; thus the human mind floundered in the confusion of its possessions."

Long before, the British reviewers had recognized this capital desire for independence of people and things in Thoreau at a time when the Spectator dubbed him "Apostle of Freedom".

Still another American critic thought Thoreau's methods of insuring himself possession of his own soul, despite the pressure of social and economic forces, valuable for the lives of twentieth-century men, living in American cities. And last, but not least, a New York Lawyer held him up, in 1930, to the graduating class of one of the foremost women's colleges as an example of a free individual, exhorting his listeners to be themselves individuals despite the world of mass and machinery in which they lived.

Dr. Canby's critical study—the latest major critical study of Thoreau to appear in the United States—considered him almost entirely as a thinker whose strong doubts concerning the final efficaciousness of our industrial order are being proved only too well-founded.

1. "A Comparison of Gaugin with Thoreau"; A Modern Plutarch; Indianapolis, 1928; p 71
2. Hubbell, George Shelton; "Walden Revisited"; Sewanee Review; XXXVII; July-September, 1929; p 283-294
3. Fosdick, Raymond E.; "Individualism in the Machine Age"; New York Times; June 22, 1930
"Although appreciation of Thoreau's literary qualities came sooner from American than from English critics, it came generously, if tardily. English criticism was marked from the beginning by the firmer grasp on the essentials of Thoreau's thought."

1. Wood, James Playsted: English and American Criticism of Thoreau; The New England Quarterly; December, 1933; Vol. VI., No. 1
VI. Thoreau's Present-day Influence, Specifically in Government

Essay on Civil Disobedience

Thoreau is our great social rebel, our foremost protestor against the tyranny of institutions. Nor did his protest stop short of a flat repudiation of the political state. In a very real sense Thoreau was the spiritual and intellectual heir of the great liberals of the preceding age, Rousseau, William Godwin, Paine and Jefferson, writers whose belief in the fundamental goodness of man led them to advocate a state whose powers would be reduced to the minimum. It remained for Thoreau to give a practical demonstration of transcendental political theory.

In only one reform was Thoreau interested. That was the abolition of slavery—The Mexican War precipitated the crisis. Thoreau thought—quite correctly, it seems—that the slave power was the instigator of the war. Massachusetts as a member of the federal union was equally guilty with the slave states, for it had sent its own state troops to the battle field. Thereupon Thoreau refused to pay his poll tax. For his refusal he was placed in jail, much to the consternation of his neighbors who only advocated the doctrine that their practical friend was putting into practice. After spending one night in
jail, Thoreau was released. One of his friends paid the tax, greatly to the disgust of the prisoner.

Soon after this episode Thoreau wrote his famous essay "On Civil Disobedience" to set forth his views on the political state. This little work is the most explicit statement of philosophical anarchism ever penned by a well-known American. Accepting the theory of Jefferson that that state is best which governs least, Thoreau carries that proposition to its logical conclusion and declares that that state is best which governs not at all.

"When men are prepared for it, that will be the kind of government which they will have..... How does it become a man to behave toward this American government to-day? I answer, that he cannot without disgrace be associated with it. I cannot for a minute recognize that political organization as my government which is the slave's also.....It is not a man's duty, as a matter of course, to devote himself to the eradication of any, even the most enormous wrong; he may still properly have other concerns to engage him; but it is his duty, at least to wash his hands of it."

The essay on "Civil Disobedience" stresses the right of the citizen to rebel against majority laws. Thoreau drew the attention of his native village, Concord, Massachusetts, to himself when he spent a night in the local jail rather than
pay the poll tax, which he persistently fought. In "Civil Disobedience" he wrote:

"I did not for a moment feel confined, and the walls seemed a great waste of stone and mortar. I could but smile to see how industriously they locked the door on my meditation, which followed them out again without let or hindrance, and they were really all that was dangerous. As they could not reach me, they had resolved to punish my body..... I saw that the State was half-witted..... and that it did not know its friends from its foes, and 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."

Thoreau accepted in both his thought and conduct the principle of the Declaration of Independence that liberty is an inalienable right of man. He constantly emphasized the freedom of the individual and believed that since the majority not only could be wrong, but often was, the minority should not be coerced by superior numerical strength. His "Civil Disobedi- ence" amounts to a treatise on the theme that revolution is justified when the wrong administration of a government makes revolt more beneficial than compliance with its laws. The right of resistance, he pointed out, did not perish in 1775.

"Must the citizen ever for a moment, or in the least degree, resign his conscience to the legislator?" he asked.

"Why has every man a conscience, then? I think we should be men first and subjects afterward. It is not desirable to cul- tivate a respect for the law, so much as for the right. The only obligation which I have a right to assume is to do at any time what I think right."
Thoreau declared that the basis of civil obligation continued to be justice rather than expediency. He set out to disturb the complacency of the American voters with these words:

"Even voting for the right is doing nothing for it. It is only expressing to men feebly your desire that it should prevail. A wise man will not leave the right to the mercy of chance, nor wish it to prevail through the power of majority. There is but little virtue in the action of masses of men."

Instead of obeying all laws, Thoreau's good citizen would intentionally break unjust ones. His conduct, though illegal, would justify itself and the State would thereby be a step nearer to Thoreau's concluding thought in the essay:

"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."

It has been pointed out by Blankenship that when we get the full flavor of the radicalism expressed in "Civil Disobedience", we do not greatly wonder that most of Thoreau's commentators have neglected entirely to mention the essay. He regards this omission as inexcusable, no matter how worthy the intention of the commentators may have been. This essay puts the cap-stone on Thoreau's work because it states explicitly the social philosophy toward which his earlier life and work were tending. Thoreau was, as he said himself, "a poet, a mystic, and a transcendentalist", but above all he was a social philosopher who carried to its logical conclusion the pleasant
liberalism of Jefferson, Paine, Godwin, and Rousseau.

Influence on Gandhi and the "Passive Resistance" to Government in India

As early as 1907 Mahatma Gandhi came under the influence of Thoreau's teachings. The oppression of the Indian people was ever present in his mind; he sought for some way to deliver his people from the yoke of British dominion. The young lawyer was meditating upon passive resistance as a means of defense. In Thoreau's essay on "Civil Disobedience", he found his own ideas not only confirmed, but also clarified by a statement of principle that embodied firmness without violence in one's devotion to the truth. The word Satyagraha was coined to express the civil disobedience that has become the weapon of the Hindu nationalists.

In "Gandhi versus the Empire" by Haridas T. Muzumdar, the dedication on the fly leaf reads thus:

"Sacred to the Memory of the Almost Forgotten American Hero

Henry David Thoreau
Sage of the Walden, Author of The Essay on Civil Disobedience"

1. Blankenship, Russell: American Literature; New York; 1931; p 308
The author informs us that "the law student in London (Gandhi) derived inspiration not from legal tomes nor from the law dinners of the Inner Temple, but from the writings of Tolstoy, Ruskin, and Thoreau, from the Sermon on the Mount, and from the Bhagavad Gita."

In full accord with the Thoreauvian doctrine that under an unjust government the only respectable place for a self-respecting person to live in is the prison-house, Gandhi has repeatedly submitted to imprisonment. In 1930 he went back to prison after an interval of six years; in 1932 he returned to prison within less than a year. The teachings of Thoreau, as exemplified by Gandhi and his followers, are today the mainspring of India's non-violent revolution. While Henry David Thoreau is known to the American people as the author of Walden, to Gandhi and India he is known primarily as the author of the immortal essay on Civil Disobedience.

Fisher, in his fascinating story of Gandhi, writes: "On that balmy night, not so long ago, when Gandhi was arrested and taken from his bed on the roof of a Bombay house, it was discovered that he had on the table at his bedside a copy of Henry Thoreau's essay on Civil Disobedience. He took this book with him to prison, together with his few articles of...

1. Muzumdar, Haridas T.; Gandhi versus the Empire; New York; 1932; pp 17-18
2. Ibid; pp 41,343
clothing, and his spinning wheel. A curious friendship this, of ancient India for young America, still in its national swaddling clothes in the family of the ages! Yet the Indian peaceful revolution has taken many of its weapons from the minds and lips of Americans. In a very real sense the seeds of Indian revolution were planted in America." "Under a government which imprisons any unjustly, the true place for a just man is also a prison", Thoreau tells this Indian patriot again on his way to jail. "The only proper place which Massachusetts has provided for her freer, less desponding spirits is in her prisons, to be put out and locked out of the State by her own act, as they have already put themselves out by their own principles." Thoreau is, of course, writing of the American fugitive slave act which provided that any captured slave had to be returned to his white master...... "If the alternative is to keep all just men in prison, or to give up war and slavery, the State will not hesitate which to choose" goes on Thoreau. Then he gives Gandhi a practical hint, "If a thousand men were not to pay their tax bills this year, that would not be as violent and bloody a measure as it would be to pay them, and enable the State to commit violence and shed innocent blood. This, in fact, is a peaceful revolution,

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1. Fisher, Frederick R.; That Strange Little Brown Man—Gandhi; New York: 1932; p 72
2. Thoreau, Henry D.; Essay on Civil Disobedience; pp 370,371
if any such is possible." (Thoreau) This is exactly what Gandhi and the Indian Congress have advised the passive resistsers to do; to refuse to pay taxes...... which means prison and confiscation of property for them.

But Gandhi goes still farther along the path with Thoreau. "If the tax gatherer or any other public officer asks me, as one has done 'But what shall I do?' My answer is "If you really wish to do anything resign your office. When the subject has refused allegiance, and the officer has resigned his office, then the revolution is accomplished." 1

"It was Thoreau's reaction to slavery that caused him to coin an entirely new term 'Civil Disobedience'...... which was later to become the watchword of the Indian Revolution of today..... Gandhi had first got hold of Thoreau while a law student in London; and the writings of Thoreau introduced him to Emerson. It is curious that both these American protestants against slavery should have been students of Hindu culture." 2

In "Young India" by Mahatma Gandhi, the famous Indian in a section on Pure Civil Disobedience quotes Thoreau and comments as follows: "Wiseacres may laugh at the folly of

1. Fisher, Frederick E.; That Strange Little Brown Man-Gandhi; pp 72-73
2. Ibid p 77
allowing writs of attachment and paying for the collection of fines. Multiply such instances and imagine the consequence to the authorities of executing thousands of writs. Writs are possible when they are confined to a few recalcitrants. They are troublesome when they have to be executed against many high-souled persons who have done no wrong and who refuse payment to vindicate a principle. They may not attract much notice when isolated individuals resort to this method of protest. But clean examples have a curious method of multiplying themselves. They bear publicity and the sufferers instead of incurring odium receive congratulations."

"Men like Thoreau brought about the abolition of slavery by their personal examples. Says Thoreau: 'I know this well, that if one thousand, if one hundred, if ten men whom I could name,—if ten honest men only—aye, if one honest man, in this state of Massachusetts ceasing to hold slaves were actually to withdraw from this copartnership and be locked up in the country gaol therefor, it would be the abolition of slavery in America. For it matters not how small the beginning may seem to be, what is once well done is done for ever.' Again, he says, 'I have contemplated the imprisonment of the offender rather than seizure of his goods—though both will serve the

1. Mahatma Gandhi: Young India; (1919-1922); New York, 1984; p 931
same purpose, because they who assert the purest right and consequently are most dangerous to a corrupt State, commonly have not spent much time in accumulating property." Gandhi thus quoted Thoreau when he congratulated two eminent Indian patriots, Mr. Patel and Dr. Kanuga, who had suffered the confiscation of their goods and imprisonment "on the excellent example set by them in an excellent spirit and in an excellent cause."

Influence on the Labor Movement in England

In 1895 appeared Robert Blatchford's Merrie England. Of this book, which stirred the industrial reformers of England, over two million copies were sold. The influence of Thoreau permeated it plainly. As Mr. H.M. Tomlinson puts it: "most of the ardent young men who were disciples of Blatchford carried copies of Walden about in their pockets. Not only that, but literary societies were founded in English industrial districts and named after the title of Thoreau's most famous book. It would scarcely be too much to say that the first, and recent, British Labor government can be traced back to the youthful reformers who were so strongly influenced by Thoreau."

Early converts to the British Labor Party carried copies of Walden in their pockets and knew long passages by

1. Mahatma Gandhi: Young India (1919-1922) New York, 1924, p. 231
2. Tomlinson, H.M.: Two Americans and a Whale; Harpers, CLII; April, 1926; p. 260
heart, but it was not because they wanted to set up housekeeping on Wordsworth's Lakes. They saw that the idea of the book was not life in nature, but life for the sake of living, and how to live it. Living for them was a different problem from life in Thoreau's world, but the principle was the same,—to reform our ends and reconstruct our means so that each human being shall be able to live in his own best way. Thoreau challenges the industrial order because he asks the fundamental question, "Where are you going, what do you really want?" He questions accepted dogmas, he questions our political ideals, and he questions the activities that keep us from living.
VII. Conclusion

A tiny trickle of water ran down the mountainside. As one followed the trail, it was noticeable that other rivulets joined this little stream as it dashed along over the steep and rocky bed. It was surprising how the stream widened, how it gathered depth and power as it neared the foot of the mountain. Now it was a goodly river flowing across the brown plain toward the great ocean beyond. Like this stream, so has my interest in Thoreau grown.

Some years ago when I studied American Literature, my interest in Thoreau was but a tiny trickle; then as I studied more the stream of interest deepened and broadened. Two years ago I was privileged to visit Concord, to view the haunts of Emerson and Thoreau. I sat on the bank at Walden on a sunny spring day, drinking in the beauty of the lovely little lake fringed about with tall trees. The fragrance of the pines and the hum of insects made it easy to dream the hours away. In fancy I saw Thoreau's hut and the young man who went to Walden to think things through, to determine his own philosophy of life, to make a practical test of its validity for him. While the merchants of Concord bought and sold, while the farmers ploughed and reaped, he sat in the doorway of his cabin thinking. The moral courage, the hardening of purpose, the
strengthening of character, which this involved must be evident enough. Here was a life in which the physical daring of our early frontiersmen turned inward and became a sort of spiritual pioneering. After that day at Walden my little rivulet of interest in Thoreau broadened.

Next I took a seminar course on Emerson. There was ample opportunity for intensive study. I became deeply interested in the subject of the reciprocal relations of Emerson and Thoreau and for the past two years have continued research along this line. Thus the stream of interest has deepened as the work on this thesis has progressed.

Both Emerson and Thoreau were born and reached maturity in a period of transition (which is not unusual; for what period is not one of transition?) Economic and social changes came swiftly, as New England factory textiles replaced homespun, the blast furnace succeeded the blacksmith's shop, and the railroads opened the West's free acreage to settlers. As is usual in such cases, men's thoughts failed to keep pace with the process of change. When at last they awoke to the fact that the old life was falling about their ears and a new one was rushing in, they were filled with bewilderment and foreboding. The Past suddenly assumed a golden glamour; and they tried to recapture it and hold it. Then came Emerson, and later, Thoreau, writers who retained a wholesome virtue and
outlook on life.

To go back to Thoreau's childhood, his father and mother were the "right sort" for such a child. In the education of their children they placed the things of the spirit first. Thoreau's father and mother loved nature; they knew the woods and fields around Concord as they knew the interior of their own house, and it was in their company that Henry first learned to understand and love animal and plant life. It is not to be wondered at that later, Thoreau, like Wordsworth, believed in a spiritual reality in Nature.

Although Emerson and Thoreau were fellow townsmen they did not meet until after Thoreau's graduation from college in 1837. This is not strange, for one must remember that Thoreau was born just as Emerson was about to enter college. There followed the years when Thoreau was growing up in Concord, years when Emerson was developing his gift as a lecturer. Then came Thoreau's college days when he, too, came under the influence of Harvard tradition. Both men were affected by the Kantian idealism which permeated the teaching of such men as Channing and Jones Very. No doubt this accounts for the similarity of some of their central ideas as evidenced later in their Transcendentalism.

There seems to be a passive acceptance of the fall of
1837 as the initial point in the consideration of Emerson's influence on Thoreau. But I think one must go back of this date, at least to the beginning of Thoreau's college days. The fact cannot be overlooked that Thoreau probably knew Emerson, and knew him well, by reputation and by his lectures, before Emerson knew him. As I pursued the investigation of Emerson's influence on Thoreau, it seemed to me that if Thoreau had set forth while he was still in college those fundamental ideas he held in common with Emerson, then those early years were the crucial point of a consideration of Emerson's influence.

When Thoreau's college themes and his commencement part are compared with Emerson's lectures of this period and with his essay on "Nature" which was published in September, 1836,—three things are apparent. There are indications that Thoreau was impressed by the lectures; there are suggestions that Emerson was Thoreau's ideal; and, most important, there is tangible evidence of Thoreau's reading of "Nature" and of its influence upon him.

To deny Emerson's influence on Thoreau is, it seems to me, not only to do an injustice to Emerson, but to fail to understand Thoreau. I believe that Emerson influenced him most profoundly by the spring of Thoreau's senior year in college, 1837. I think that Thoreau responded to this influence because of his early life and training, in other words, because Thoreau
was what he was, because he held the same fundamental ideas.

One of Emerson's greatest powers was in the influence he exerted on men and women of the younger generation; his message was for them; his hope was in them; he captured their imaginations; he looked for them to do things he himself was unable to do. And just as when Emerson called for a poet to show him "the sublime presence of the highest spiritual cause lurking.....in these extremes and extremities of nature.....one design (which) unites and animates the farthest pinnacle and the lowest trench", Whitman came in answer; when Emerson in his earliest lectures and in "Nature" called for an independent thinker to take a fresh and original view of things, for a naturalist who would first satisfy all the demands of the spirit, Thoreau replied, "Here am I."

It was very hard to explain to a world which had not felt the need of such a thing that he was a "delegated mind". Thoreau made no explanations whatever, but went on thinking at the rate of a volume of Journal notes per year, keeping in the midst of the crowd, the independence of solitude. But I think one must admit that although Thoreau was deeply indebted to Emerson in his youth, his mature intellect was wholly independent and self-centered. Thoreau's eminently practical thought

1. The American Scholar: Essays and Poems of Emerson; New York, 1921; p 304
2. Ibid; p 41
was really concerned, in the last analysis, solely with definite human problems. The major question, how to live, was at the end of all his vistas.

In the comparison of references in the journals of the two men, particularly as they reveal the personalities of Emerson and Thoreau, we find tangible proof that Thoreau rejected, or at least withdrew from the Emersonian influence. The references quoted in this thesis give, in a general way, the relations between Thoreau and Emerson during their earlier years when acquaintance was ripening into friendship, and during their later years when they appear to have drifted apart.

Edward Emerson in commenting upon some passages in the journals bearing upon the relationship between his father and Thoreau, says that Thoreau was on his guard not to be over-influenced. That phrase "on his guard" is indicative, to me, of the character of the man, Thoreau. Entire independence and strong individualism were his distinguishing traits. Emerson's son wrote his book on Thoreau because he was troubled at the want of knowledge and understanding, both in Concord and among his readers at large, of his character and the false impressions given by accredited writers who really knew him hardly at all.

No one need hope to understand Thoreau who does not see that his limitations were, for the most part, self-imposed. In the case of his complete devotion to Concord, it was natural
that the environment should powerfully mould the man. Of this
man who might so easily have been a dull philosopher, Concord
made almost a poet by teaching him the uses and beauty of the
actual. Is there not a startling actuality in these words,
written in his Journal, which seem to crumple time and space?

"I am living this 27th of June, 1847—a dull,
cloudy day and no sun shining. The clink of
the smith's hammer sounds feebly over the roofs,
and the wind is sighing gently. The farmer is
ploughing in yonder fields, craftsmen are busy
in the shops, the trader stands up in the
counter, and all works go steadily forward."

To return to a comparison of references in the Jour-
nals of Emerson and Thoreau, we note their Transcendental atti-
tudes toward God and Nature; we get the suggestion that Nature
seems to be Thoreau's only road to God;—whereas Nature is one
road, but not the straightest road, to the Over-Soul of Emerson.
It appears that the truest knowledge of God always reached Em-
erson through intuition—or, in its most perfect manifestation,
through a mystic experience. Thoreau does not often dwell di-
rectly upon the divine as he probably would have done, if he had
found himself the recipient of frequent mystical messages. The
way in which each man responded to Nature may be partly fore-
seen by one who appreciates their attitudes toward God. Em-
erson loved God and Thoreau loved Nature.

The two men were also frequently at odds in their
attitude toward, and opinions of, mankind. It seems as if
Thoreau's attitude, which was based on observation and experience, harmonized badly with the abstract goodness of man that followed from Emerson's ideas about the Over-Soul in men.

I think, with these several divergences in ideas, taste, and preoccupation, the event is what might be foretold. The journals reveal a discord between them that Emerson dwells upon occasionally after about 1843, and that colors more or less nearly every one of the sparse references to Emerson by Thoreau. In 1852, there are obvious signs that Thoreau no longer feels the deference toward Emerson that he used to feel. It would seem that their Transcendental friendship was drawing to the close which Emerson, in his essay on Friendship, contemplated as the necessary end of most friendships.

A survey of critical opinion on Thoreau's relation to Emerson is enlightening, not only with regard to the two men and their writings, but also with regard to literary criticism from decade to decade. It seems to me that the opinions expressed by the early critics on Emerson's influence were quite wholly based on impression; influence was taken for granted or denied on equally prejudiced grounds, or else the question declared unsolvable, without any attempt at analysis. It was difficult in those early days to get away from the notion which had been firmly implanted by Lowell's disparaging essay that Thoreau was "an echo", a "weak imitator" of Emerson.
The later critics, as far as I can discover, spent most of their time refuting the idea that Thoreau was an imitation of Emerson and this continued to the end of the century. There was little literary criticism, as such, of his writings.

At the turn of the century, intensive studies of Thoreau and his works made the contemporary criticism less subjective, and as these analytical studies became more objective they consequently became more valid as criticism. With the publication of his Journals in 1906 further opportunity was afforded to judge of the literary merits of his prose writings and also of Thoreau as an independent thinker in his philosophy and teachings.

English critics (with the exception of Stevenson, whose essay was largely the outgrowth of Lowell's satirical criticism) were not biased by any question of Emerson's influence and evaluated Thoreau on his own merits. The fact that these critics accepted Thoreau as an independent thinker, a philosopher who had something to say on life's problems and who said it well, has strengthened my conviction that the influence of Emerson on Thoreau has been over-estimated by many Americans, both critics and laymen.

The impact of Thoreauvian ideas upon our times is truly remarkable when one considers Thoreau's lifelong residence
in a New England village. His provincialism was not without elements of humor and whim, but it had much of wisdom also. Concord was a small enough part of the world for one to learn something about it in a lifetime, but it was typical of all the rest. The man who had studied religion in its meeting-house, law in its town hall, commerce on the Musketaquid, trade on Main Street, and society in its parlors, had not much to learn from wider travels. He had seen the elements. The great world could offer him nothing but repetition.

Despite his hatred of politics, he astonished the townsfolk with two of the most passionate political speeches that came out of the war—"Civil Disobedience" and "Slavery in Massachusetts." It is worthy of note that when he went to jail rather than pay a small tax to the national government which he thought was supporting slavery, he cheerfully paid a larger one for the maintenance of town roads.

One of the most amazing and far-reaching results of Thoreau's teachings, as set forth in his essay on "Civil Disobedience", is the influence upon present-day India. In this connection I should like to quote from "The Orient in American Transcendentalism" by Christy:

"Thoreau has travelled far indeed. That the thoughts of a Massachusetts villager who died in 1862 should leaven labor agitations in South Africa in 1907, gather indeterminable
momentum through subsequent years, and again become a potent factor in the Indian politics of more than a decade of the twentieth century, is a prophecy few of his contemporaries would have ventured to utter. That his force is not yet spent is becoming increasingly apparent to modern critics. The regard of Mahatma Gandhi for Thoreau is as flattering and sincere as any the latter ever gave the Hindus." 1

I think we must accept the fact that Thoreau has come into his own, when modern critics find that his doctrine of individualism is valid for this industrial age. Canby declares:

"We have sold our individualism to the radio, the newspaper, the weekly illustrated magazine, and the moving picture, and have accepted the ideology of a business world which believes that a man at hard labor is the noblest work of God. A Thoreauvian must think that there is more energy than health in American civilization, more noise than aim, more childish intent to pile block on block than philosophic consideration for the happiness of man. Yet like children we have learned something in our play..... The plain man has acquired civilized luxuries, if not civilized tastes. He has learned how to be comfortable, if not how to be happy. He has leisure if he wants it, and lacks only the knowledge and the will to control his own future according to ends that may be regarded as best...... We are ripe for a dose of Thoreau." 2

Thoreau is a thinker whose ideas are valid for the twentieth century; whose philosophy is alive and significant for a new period in American ideas and deeds. Solitude, simplicity, independence,—these are the essentials of Thoreau's

1. Christy, Arthur: The Orient in American Transcendentalism; New York, 1932; p 266
teaching. He held that it was every man's duty to live not according to the light that others held for him, but according to the light that was within him.

In conclusion let me recapitulate. There was a reciprocal relationship between Emerson and Thoreau. As a young man, Thoreau was profoundly influenced by Emerson. In the early days of their Transcendental friendship, there was the mystical communion of soul with soul; then followed the years of fellowship and the influence of mind on mind in their interchange of thought. During their later years the relation of body to body became more evident through the expression of the senses and the emotions. But one cannot make such distinctions as these, arbitrary, for throughout their lifelong friendship, there was the reciprocal relation of sense, mind, and spirit. As Blankenship has well said: "The reciprocal influence existing between the two men probably can never be disentangled."

In the impact of his ideas upon our times, we may yet learn that Thoreau was neither a naturalist nor an Emersonian echo; he may yet teach us something regarding the sources of a sound and enduring patriotism, something about economy, something of contentment; but even today, imperfectly understood as he still is, he must be considered as rather more than a picturesque figure. He helps us to be content with what we have

1. Blankenship, Russell: American Literature; New York; 1931; p 308
by making us see the glory of the near and familiar. I echo
the sentiment of Emerson when he says: "Henry Thoreau's lines
which pleased me so well were,—"

"I hearing get, who had but ears,
And sight, who had but eyes before;
I moments live, who lived but years,
And truth discern, who had but learning's lore."

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1. Journals of Ralph Waldo Emerson; Vol. VI., p 494
   Boston, 1911
VIII. Summary

Biographical Relation of Emerson and Thoreau

Concord, Massachusetts was the birthplace of Emerson and Thoreau. This quiet little town was important in the political and intellectual life of the times. Democracy was the prevailing note among the townsfolk. Among the leading personages of Concord were Samuel Hoar and Dr. Ripley, but they did not exert as much of an influence on these two men as did Emerson's aunt, Miss Mary Moody Emerson.

Both Emerson and Thoreau were educated at Harvard and were largely influenced by the Kantian idealism. They lived at the height of the expression of Romanticism in the nineteenth century. So far as the influence of Romanticism goes, Thoreau's ideas are practically those of Emerson—in other words, the major premises of the Transcendentalist Movement. Thoreau became one of this famous group and expressed himself through the mouthpiece of the Club,---The Dial.

He lived in Emerson's home before and after his sojourn at Walden. There were many interests that united Emerson and Thoreau, but there were some divergences in their thought which separated them.
A Comparison of Selected Passages from the College Themes of Thoreau and Emerson's Essay on "Nature"

A study of Thoreau's background reveals that from his earliest childhood he was interested in nature studies; that his parents fostered in him a love for the Concord hills and woods and rivers; that he learned from them the art of plain living and high thinking.

A comparison of some of Thoreau's college themes and his commencement part with "Nature" shows a similarity of thought and expression. But with his background and early training in mind, it seems only natural that Emerson's essay on "Nature" should make a deep impression upon the youthful Thoreau.

Comparison of References in the Journals of Thoreau and Emerson

A curious witness to the comparative dominance of Thoreau in their relationship is to be found in their journals. There are over sixty important references to Thoreau in Emerson's Journals; while in Thoreau's Journal there are only between twenty and thirty really significant references to Emerson, most of them very brief. Further, it ought to be noted, Thoreau's references to Emerson are often ironic and entirely
lack the tone of discipleship. Emerson, however, ordinarily quotes a choice remark from Thoreau and commends it.

The references quoted from the journals, stress the friendly relations between Emerson and Thoreau in their earlier years, but reveal a discord in their later intercourse. The quotations touch upon their Transcendental attitudes toward God, Man, and Nature.

A Survey of Critical Opinion on Thoreau's Relation to Emerson

This survey covers a period of about ninety years from 1847 to 1931. It begins with Emerson himself as Thoreau's greatest champion when he hails him as a man of original genius and character. During this early period, a few who knew him well declared his independent character. But the independent worth of Thoreau was obscured when Lowell, a critic of established reputation, wrote his Essay on Thoreau. This essay is memorable because it was immeasurably influential upon later criticism of Thoreau.

Channing's denial of Thoreau's imitation of Emerson had little effect as Channing himself was considered erratic and as much an off-shoot of Emerson as Thoreau. During this second period, Thoreau was regarded as being under "the mystic spell of Emerson", was thought of as "an unconscious imitator", and
Lowell was quoted as the authority. The peak of this lack of appreciation was reached in 1880 with the publication of Robert Louis Stevenson's essay on Thoreau. It was an important essay coming from Stevenson's pen, and heightened existing prejudice against Thoreau.

The next few years saw published defences of Thoreau by his friends Higginson, Sanborn, and Conway. Sanborn's biography, (1882) was important as the first authoritative biography and because it laid the foundation for scholarly criticism. It had more fundamental effect than any other account since Lowell's.

In 1890 was published in London one of the most widely influential pieces of Thoreau literature—Henry S. Salt's "Life of Henry David Thoreau." As a work of literary appreciation and criticism it made an impression such as Sanborn's had been unable to do.

There followed a period of considerable writing on Thoreau, none of which added much of significance down to the years 1901-2 when, in the "Personality of Thoreau", Sanborn attempted to give the death blow to the charge of imitation. The variety of opinion in the preceding decade reveals the subjectiveness on which it is based. But with the turn of the century a new impression of Thoreau is gaining ground.

Annie Russell Marble's comment on the influence of Emerson is significant in the history of Thoreau criticism
because it was the product of an intensive study of the Thoreau material. She says: "The time is past, however, to accept the theory that his genius was reflected light from Emerson or that his fame has been due to the association of the two names."

The Thoreau criticism and comment continued from many quarters, dealing more charily now with Emerson's influence. In 1906, with the publication of his Journals in fourteen volumes, Thoreau became known as never before. Especially did the Journals show that Thoreau's philosophy had a larger place in proportion to his observation of nature than formerly believed.

In June 1908 Salt wrote: "It has taken fifty years to do it, but we are at last beginning to get rid of certain false notions concerning Thoreau by which the minds of his readers have been obsessed, notably the stubborn conviction that he was a mere disciple and imitator of Emerson, whereas in fact, though deeply indebted to Emerson in his youth, his mature intellect was wholly independent and self-centered." 1

The years 1915-17 brought forth three extended studies of Thoreau by Mark Van Doren, E. W. Emerson, and F. B. Sanborn. From this time on Thoreau has come definitely into

---
his own. There is a larger proportion of articles written about him with little or no reference to Emerson, in fact there is a tendency to turn arbitrarily from Emerson. William Lyon Phelps in 1923 writes that America has never produced a more original writer than Henry David Thoreau and stresses the steady advance of his literary reputation. In "Henry Thoreau, the Cosmic Yankee", Atkinson advises that we, as lesser disciples, keep Thoreau and Emerson on a non-competitive basis.

Present Tendencies in Literary Criticism of Thoreau

Thoreau has drawn out the comments of many critics, both English and American. In America one thing was obvious from the first, namely that Thoreau was an imitator of Emerson and to be criticized as such. This had been pointed out twice by Lowell, and as a plain instance of criticism which begets criticism, came Robert Louis Stevenson's essay in England some years later.

That Thoreau was "an imitator of Emerson and to be criticized as such" was the point which American critics dwelt on for a long time—the accusation from which Thoreau's later critics had to defend him. Only when American critics ceased insisting on, or denying this charge of imitation, did they turn their whole attention to a genuine consideration of Thoreau as an author.
In England, criticism of Thoreau was not so much prejudiced by his association with Emerson, for the latter did notloom so large in that country as in his own. English critics were not so much interested in Thoreau's relations with Emerson, as in Thoreau's thoughts and the actions by which he interpreted and extended them. As early as 1874 there were English critics who recognized what Thoreau stood for and the philosophic and practical value of his ideas. He was regarded as "An Apostle of Freedom." Consistently, English critics have recognized in Thoreau a thinker—a man whose ideas and practices of liberty and independence, whose moral judgments were important.

But American critics are beginning to turn their attention to Thoreau. It is Thoreau's ideas that critics in this country are considering. In 1920 the New York Times referred to him as an "Individualist of Individualists." In 1927 Mr. J. Brooks Atkinson described Thoreau as a thinker whose ideas were valid for the twentieth century. Thoreau's philosophy, he urged, was alive and significant for a new period in American ideas and deeds. Solitude, simplicity, and independence are the essentials of Thoreau's teaching, and American critics are uniting in finding them peculiarly applicable for our times.
Thoreau's Present-day Influence,

Specifically in Government

Thoreau's essay on "Civil Disobedience" amounts to a treatise on the theme that revolution is justified when the wrong administration of a government makes revolt more beneficial than compliance with its laws. Thoreau declared that the basis of civil obligation continued to be justice rather than expediency.

Instead of obeying all laws, Thoreau's good citizen would intentionally break unjust ones. His conduct, though illegal, would justify itself and the State would thereby be a step nearer Thoreau's Transcendental political ideal: "In a really free and enlightened State, the State must recognize the individual as a higher and independent power, from which all its own power and authority are derived, and must treat him accordingly."

A copy of Thoreau's essay on "Civil Disobedience" came into the hands of Mahatma Gandhi, the young law student in London, in 1907. He was profoundly stirred by this essay, for in it, he found his own ideas confirmed and clarified by a statement of principle that embodied firmness without violence and devotion to truth. "Passive resistance" to government has become the weapon of the Hindu nationalists. Thoreau's teachings are today the mainspring of India's Non-Violent Revolution.
Early converts to the British Labor Party were strongly influenced by Thoreau and his teachings. In 1895 Robert Blatchford wrote on industrial conditions in England in a book called *Merrie England*. The influence of Thoreau permeated it plainly. The recent British Labor government can be traced back to the youthful reformers who were so deeply influenced by Thoreau. Thoreau challenges the industrial order because he asks the fundamental question, Where are you going, what do you really want? He questions accepted dogmas, he questions our political ideals, and he questions the activities that keep us from living.
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