

I wish to speak a word for Nature, for absolute freedom and wildness, as contrasted with a freedom and culture merely civil—to regard man as an inhabitant, or a part and parcel of Nature, rather than a member of society. I wish to make an extreme sacrifice, if so I may make an emphatic one, for there are enough champions of civilization: the minister and the school committee and every one of you will take care of that.

I have met with but one or two persons in the course of my life who understood the art of Walking, that is, of taking walks—who had a genius, so to speak, for sauntering; which word is beautifully derived "from idle people who roved about the country, in the Middle Ages, and asked charity, under pretence of going *a la Sainte Tere*," to the Holy Land, till the children exclaimed, "There goes a *Sainte Tere*," a Saunterer, a Holy-Lander. They who never go to the Holy Land in their walks, as they pretend, are indeed mere idlers and vagabonds: but they who do go there are saunterers in the good sense, such as I mean. Some, however, would derive the word from *sans terre*, without land or home, which, therefore, in the good sense,



will mean, having no particular home, but equally at home everywhere. For this is the secret of successful sauntering. He who sits still in a house all the time may be the greatest vagrant of all; but the saunterer, in the good sense, is no more vagrant than the meandering river, which is all the while sedulously seeking the shortest course to the sea. But I prefer the first, which, indeed, is the most probable derivation. For every walk is a sort of crusade, preached by some Peter the Hermit in us, to go forth and reconquer this Holy Land from the hands of the Infidels.

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

To come down to my own experience, my companion and I, for I sometimes have a companion, take pleasure in fancying ourselves knights of a new, or rather an old, order—not Equestrians or Cavaliers, not Riders or Riders, but Walkers, a still more ancient and honorable class, I trust.

The chivalric and heroic spirit which once belonged to

HENRY DAVID THOREAU
(1892-1940)
American writer and naturalist who wrote, "I wanted to live deep and suck out all the marrow of life." He is best known for his book *Walden*, which detailed his choice to live simply in nature for two years.



The Rider seems now to reside in, or perchance to have subsided into, the Walker—not the Knight, but Walker, Errant. He is a sort of fourth estate, outside of Church and State and People.

We have felt that we almost alone heretofore practiced this noble art; though, to tell the truth, at least, if their own assertions are to be received, most of my townsmen would claim to walk sometimes, as I do, but they cannot. No wealth can buy the requisite leisure, freedom, and independence which are the capital in this profession. It comes only by the grace of God. It requires a direct dispensation from Heaven to become a walker. You must be born into the family of the Walkers, *ambulator nascitur, non fit*. Some of my townsmen, it is true, can remember and have described to me some walks which they took ten years ago, in which they were so blessed as to lose themselves for half an hour in the woods; but I know very well that they have confined themselves to the highway ever since, whatever pretensions they may make to belong to this select class. No doubt they were elevated for a moment as by the reminiscence of a previous state of existence, when even they were foresters and outlaws.

"When he came to green wode,
In a merry morning,
There he wrote the notes small
Of bydes merry synnynge."
"It is late gone, sayd Robyn,
That I was last here!"

I think that I cannot preserve my health and spirits, unless I spend four hours a day at least—and it is commonly more than that—sauntering through the woods and over the hills and fields, absolutely free from all worldly engagements. You may safely say, A penny for your thoughts, or a thousand pounds. When sometimes I am reminded that the mechanics and shopkeepers stay in their shops not only all the forenoon, but all the afternoon too, sitting with crossed legs, so many of them—as if the legs were made to sit upon, and not to stand or walk upon—I think that they deserve some credit for not having all their time spent in my chamber for a single day with- out acquiring some rust, and when sometimes I have stolen forth for a walk at the eleventh hour or four o'clock in the afternoon, too late to redeem the day, when the shades of night were already beginning to be mingled with the day-light, have felt as if I had committed some sin to be atoned for—I confess that I am astonished at the power of exertion, to say nothing of the moral insensibility, of my neighbors who confine themselves to shops and offices the whole day for weeks and months, and years almost together. I know not what manner of stuff they are of—sitting there now at three o'clock in the afternoon, as if it were three o'clock in the morning. Bonaparte may talk of the three-o'clock-in-the-morning courage, but it is nothing to the courage which can sit down cheerfully at this hour

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At the donne here."
Mye lyrie a lyell for to shone

in the afternoon over against one's self whom you have known all the morning, to starve out a garrison to whom you are bound by such strong ties of sympathy. I wonder that about this time, or say between four and five o'clock in the afternoon, too late for the morning papers and too early for the evening ones, there is not a general explosion heard up and down the street, scattering a legion of antiquated and house-bred notions and whims to the four winds for an airing—and so the evil cure itself.

How womankind, who are confined to the house still more than men, stand it I do not know; but I have ground to suspect that most of them do not stand it at all. When, early in a summer afternoon, we have been shaking the dust of the village from the skirts of our garments, making haste past those houses with purely Doric or Gothic fronts, which have such an air of repose about them, my companion whispers that probably about these times their occupants are all gone to bed. Then it is that I appreciate the beauty and the glory of architecture, which itself never turns in, but forever stands out and erect, keeping watch over the slumberers.

No doubt temperament, and, above all, age, have a good deal to do with it. As a man grows older, his ability to sit still and follow indoor occupations increases. He grows vespertinal in his habits as the evening of life approaches, till at last he comes forth only just before sundown, and gets all the walk that he requires in half an hour.

But the walking of which I speak has nothing in it akin to taking exercise, as it is called, as the sick take medicine

at stated hours—as the swinging of dumbbells or chairs, but it is itself the enterprise and adventure of the day. If you would get exercise, go in search of the springs of life. Think of a man's swinging dumbbells for his health, when those springs are bubbling up in far-off pastures unsought by him!

Moreover, you must walk like a camel, which is said to be the only beast which ruminates when walking. When a traveler asked Wordsworth's servant to show him her master's study, she answered, "Here is his library, but his study is out of doors."

Living much out of doors, in the sun and wind, will no doubt produce a certain roughness of character—will cause a thicker cuticle to grow over some of the finer qualities of our nature, as on the face and hands, or as severe manual labor robs the hands of some of their delicacy of touch. So, staying in the house, on the other hand, may produce a softness and smoothness, not to say thinness of skin, accompanied by an increased sensibility to certain impressions. Perhaps we should be more susceptible to some influences important to our intellectual and moral growth if the sun had shone and the wind blown on us a little less; and no doubt it is a nice matter to proportion rightly the thick and thin skin. But methinks that is a scurf that will fall off fast enough—that the natural remedy is to be found in the proportion which the night bears to the day, the winter to the summer, thought to experience. There will be so much the more air and sunshine in our thoughts. The callous palms of the laborer are conversant

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WALKING
Henry David Thoreau

I can easily walk ten, fifteen, twenty, any number of miles in my vicinity which have no inhabitant. From many and then the meadow and the woods. There are square the milk do: first along by the river, and then the brook, house, without crossing at my own door, without going by any miles, commencing at my own door, without going by any I can easily walk ten, fifteen, twenty, any number of that the Prince of Darkness was his surveyor. where a stake had been driven, and, looking nearer, I saw had found his bounds without a doubt, three little stones, middle of a boggy stygian fen, surrounded by devils, and he of paradise. I looked again, and saw him standing in the and fro, but was looking for an old posthole in the middle place around him, and he did not see the angels going to veyor looking after his bounds, while heaven had taken middle of the parterre, and some worldly miser with a sur- I saw the fences half consumed, their ends lost in the would begin by burning the fences and let the forest stand space. I pass from it as from a beanfield into the forest, and it is forgotten. In one half hour I can walk off to some por- tion of the earth's surface where a man does not stand from one year's end to another, and there, consequently, politics are not, for they are but as the cigar smoke of a The village is the place to which the roads tend, a sort of expansion of the highway, as a lake of a river. It is the body of which roads are the arms and legs—a vital or cler. The word is from the Latin *villa*, which together with *via*, a way, or more anciently *ued* and *vella*, Varro derives from *vehio*, to carry, because the villa is the place to and from which things are carried. They who got their living by teaming were said *villanum facere*. Hence, too, the Latin word *villus* and our vile; also *villain*. This suggests what kind of degeneracy villagers are liable to. They are

will carry me as strange a country as I expect ever to see. A single farmhouse which I had not seen before is some- times as good as the dominions of the King of Dahomey. There is in fact a sort of harmony discoverable between the capabilities of the landscape within a circle of ten miles' radius, or the limits of an afternoon walk, and the come quite familiar to you.

Nowadays almost all man's improvements, so called, as the building of houses, and the cutting down of the forest and of all large trees, simply deform the landscape, and make it more and more tame and cheap. A people who would begin by burning the fences and let the forest stand I saw the fences half consumed, their ends lost in the middle of the parterre, and some worldly miser with a sur- veyor looking after his bounds, while heaven had taken place around him, and he did not see the angels going to and fro, but was looking for an old posthole in the middle of paradise. I looked again, and saw him standing in the where a stake had been driven, and, looking nearer, I saw that the Prince of Darkness was his surveyor.

My vicinity affords many good walks; and though for so many years I have walked almost every day, and sometimes for several days together, I have not yet exhausted them. An absolutely new prospect is a great happiness, and I can still get this any afternoon. Two or three hours' walking

A hill I can see civilization and the abodes of man afar. The farmers and their works are scarcely more obvious than woodchucks and their burrows. Man and his affairs, church and state and school, trade and commerce, and manufac- tures and agriculture, even politics, the most alarming of them all—I am pleased to see how little space they occupy in the landscape. Politics is but a narrow field, and that still narrower highway yonder leads to it. I sometimes direct the traveler thither. If you would go to the political world, follow the great road—follow that marksmen, keep his dust in your eyes, and it will lead you straight to it; for it, too, has its place merely, and does not occupy all space. I pass from it as from a beanfield into the forest, and it is forgotten. In one half hour I can walk off to some por- tion of the earth's surface where a man does not stand from one year's end to another, and there, consequently, politics are not, for they are but as the cigar smoke of a The village is the place to which the roads tend, a sort of expansion of the highway, as a lake of a river. It is the body of which roads are the arms and legs—a vital or cler. The word is from the Latin *villa*, which together with *via*, a way, or more anciently *ued* and *vella*, Varro derives from *vehio*, to carry, because the villa is the place to and from which things are carried. They who got their living by teaming were said *villanum facere*. Hence, too, the Latin word *villus* and our vile; also *villain*. This suggests what kind of degeneracy villagers are liable to. They are

west, it is true, and it has good authority for this variation, but it always settles between west and south-southwest. The future lies that way to me, and the earth seems more unexhausted and richer on that side. The outline which would bound my walks would be, not a circle, but a parabola, or rather like one of those cometary orbits which have been thought to be non-returning curves, in this case opening westward, in which my house occupies the place of the sun. I turn round and round irresolute some- times for a quarter of an hour, until I decide, for a thou- sandth time, that I will walk into the southwest or west. Eastward I go only by force; but westward I go free. Thither no business leads me. It is hard for me to believe that I shall find fair landscapes or sufficient wildness and freedom behind the eastern horizon. I am not excited by the prospect of a walk thither; but I believe that the forest which I see in the western horizon stretches uninterr- ruptedly towards the setting sun, and there are no towns nor cities in it of enough consequence to disturb me. Let me live where I will, on this side is the city, on that the wilderness, and ever I am leaving the city more and more, and withdrawing into the wilderness. I should not lay so much stress on this fact, if I did not believe that something like this is the prevailing tendency of my countrymen. I must walk toward Oregon, and not toward Europe. And that way the nation is moving, and I may say that mankind progress from east to west. Within a few years we have wit- nessed the phenomenon of a southeastward migration, in the settlement of Australia; but this affects us as a retro-

wayworn by the travel that goes by and over them, without travelling themselves. Some do not walk at all; others walk in the highways; a few walk across lots. Roads are made for horses and men of business. I do not travel in them much, comparatively, or hivery stable or depot to which they lead. I am a good horse to travel, but not from choice a roadster. The land- scape-painter uses the figures of men to mark a road. He would not make that use of my figure. I walk out into a Nature such as the old prophets and poets, Menon, Moses, Homer, Chaucer, walked in. You may name it America, but it is not America; neither Americanus Vesputius, nor Columbus, nor the rest were the discoverers of it. There is America, so called, that I have seen. However, there are a few old roads that may be trodden with profit, as if they led somewhere now that they are nearly discontinued. There is the Old Marlborough Road, which does not go to Marlborough now, methinks, unless that is Marlborough where it carries me. I am the holder to speak of it here, because I presume that there are one or two such roads in every town. THE OLD MARLBOROUGH ROAD Where they once dug for money, But never found any; Where sometimes Martial Miles Singly lies, And Elijah Wood.

pleasure grounds, in which a few will take a narrow and exclusive pleasure only—when fences shall be multiplied, and mantraps and other engines invented to confine men to the *public* road, and walking over the surface of God's earth shall be construed to mean trespassing on some gentleman's grounds. To enjoy a thing exclusively is commonly to exclude yourself from the true enjoyment of it. Let us improve our opportunities, then, before the evil days come.

What is it that makes it so hard sometimes to determine whither we will walk? I believe that there is a subtle magnetism in Nature, which, if we unconsciously yield to it, will direct us aright. It is not indifferent to us which way we walk. There is a right way; but we are very liable from heedlessness and stupidity to take the wrong one. We would fain take that walk, never yet taken by us through this actual world, which is perfectly symbolical of the path which we love to travel in the interior and ideal world; and sometimes, no doubt, we find it difficult to choose our direction, because it does not yet exist distinctly in our idea.

When I go out of the house for a walk, uncertain as yet whither I will bend my steps, and submit myself to my instinct to decide for me, I find, strange and whimsical as it may seem, that I finally and inevitably settle southwest, towards some particular wood or meadow or deserted pasture or hill in that direction. My needle is slow to settle—varies a few degrees, and does not always point due south-

I fear for no good. No other man, Save Elisha Dugan,— O man of wild habits, Partidges and rabbits, Who has no cares Only to set snares, Who live all alone, Close to the bone, And where life is sweetest Constantly cares. When the spring stirrs my blood With the instinct to travel I can get enough gravel On the Old Marlborough Road. Nobody repairs it, For nobody wears it; It is a living way, As the Christians say. Not many there be Only the guests of the Irishman Quin. What is it, what is it, But a direction out there, And the bare possibility Of going somewhere? Great guideboards of stone, But travelers none; Cenotaphs of the towns Named on their crowns. It is worth going to see Where you might be.

What king Did the thing, I am still wondering; Set up how or when, By what selectmen, Gourgas or Lee, Clark or Darby? They're a great endeavor To be something forever; Blank tablets of stone, Where a traveler might groan, And in one sentence Grave all that is known; Which another might read, In his extreme need. I know one or two Lines that would do, Literature that might stand All over the land, Which a man could remember Till next December, And read again in the Spring, After the thawing, If with fancy unfurled You leave your abode, You may go round the world By the Old Marlborough Road.

At present, in this vicinity, the best part of the land is not private property; the landscape is not owned, and the walker enjoys comparative freedom. But possibly the day will come when it will be partitioned off into so-called