HENRY DAVID THOREAU

WALKING

THE MOTHER SOCIETY

PART 3

Henry David Thoreau
I saw the setting sun lighting up the opposite side of a stately pine wood. Its golden rays straggled through the noblest eaves, and so into some noble hall. It was impressive as were a few ancient and altogether admirable and shining family had settled there in that part of the land called Concord. This man, unknown to me—to whom the sun was servant—who had not gone into society in the village—who had not been called on. I saw their park, their pleasure ground, beyond the wood, in Spalding's cranberry meadow. Spalding furnished them with gables as they grew. Their house was not only to shelter the trees grew through it. I do not know whether they heard the sound of a suppressed laugh; or not. They seemed to recline on the sunbeams. They have sons and daughters. They are quite well. The farmer's cart path, which leads directly through the house, does not enter in the least part; but, as always, I go down the path, the path of my own way. The sunbeams, sunshine, and shade, were intermingled, a perfect shadow, a faint shadow, across the landscape of the mind, cast by the wings of some thought in its turmoil or its gentlest movement; but, looking up, we are unable to detect the substance of the thought itself. Our wings are turned to poetry. They no longer soar, and they attain only to a Shanghai and China-land grandeur. Those grate-ate thoughts, those grate-ate men you hear of

We hear the earth—how rarely we mount! Methinks we might elevate ourselves a little more. We might climb a tree, at least. I found my account in climbing a tree once.

It was a tall white pine, on the top of a hill, and though I got well pitched, I was well paid for it, for I discovered new countries in the horizon which I had never seen before. So much more of the earth and the heavens. I might have walked about the foot of the tree for three years and ten, and yet I certainly should never have seen them. But, above all, I discovered around me—it was near the end of June, on the banks of the Charles, and a delicate red clover blossoms, the delicate flower of the white pine. I looked heavenward. I carried straightaway to the village the topmost spire, and shone it to stranger juries who walked the streets—far it was court-week—and the farmers and lumber-dealers and woodchoppers and hunters, and not one had ever seen the like before, but they wondered at it at a startled cry. Tell of ancient architects finishing their works on the tops of columns as perfectly as on the lower and more visible parts. Nature has from the sunwarded the minute blossoms of the forest only towards the heavens, above men's heads and unobserved by them. We see only the flowers that are under our feet in the meadows. The pine have developed their delicate blossoms on the highest twigs of the oldest trees. Every summer for ages, as well as over the heads of Nature's red children as of her white ones; yet scarcely a farmer or hunter in the land has ever seen them.

Above all, we cannot afford not to live in the present. He is blest over all mortals who lose no moment of the passing life in remembering the past. Unless our philosophy

There may be an excess even of informing light, Niepce, a Frenchman, discovered “action,” that power in the sun's rays which produces a chemical effect: granite rocks, and stone structures, and stones, all alike destructively acted upon during the hours of sunshine, but, for provision no less wonderful, would soon perish under the delicate touch of the most subtle of the agencies of the universe. But he observed that “those bodies which underwent this change during the daylight possessed the power of restoring themselves to their original conditions during the hours of night, when this excitement was no longer influencing them.” Hence it has been inferred that “the hours of darkness are necessary to the inorganic creation as we know it and deep into the organic kingdom.” Not even does the moon shine every night, but gives place to darkness.

I would not have every man not purify every part of his cultivation, no more than I would not have every acre of earth cultivated: part of it must be left green, but the greater part will be meadow and forest, not only serving an immediate use, but preparing a mould against a distant future, by the annual decay of the vegetation which is supports.

There are other letters for the child to learn than these, which Cadmus invented. The Spaniards have a good term to express this wild and ready knowledge, *Grammata pataki*.