

FROM

Spring

One attraction in coming to the woods to live was that I should have leisure and opportunity to see the spring come in. The ice in the pond at length begins to be honey-combed, and I can set
190 my heel in it as I walk. Fogs and rains and warmer suns are gradually melting the snow; the days have grown sensibly longer; and I see how I shall get through the winter without adding to my woodpile, for large fires are no longer necessary. I am on the alert for the first signs of spring, to hear the chance
195 note of some arriving bird, or the striped squirrel's chirp, for his stores must be now nearly exhausted, or see the woodchuck venture out of his winter quarters. . . .

The change from storm and winter to serene and mild weather, from dark and sluggish hours to bright and elastic ones, is a
200 memorable crisis which all things proclaim. It is seemingly instantaneous at last. Suddenly an influx of light filled my house, though the evening was at hand, and the clouds of winter still overhung it, and the eaves were dripping with sleety
205 rain. I looked out the window, and lo! where yesterday was cold gray ice there lay the transparent pond already calm and full of hope as in a summer evening, reflecting a summer evening sky in its bosom, though none was visible overhead, as if it had intelligence with some remote horizon. . . .

191 sensibly: noticeably.

200 crisis: turning point.

FROM

Conclusion

I left the woods for as good a reason as I went there. Perhaps it
210 seemed to me that I had several more lives to live, and could not spare any more time for that one. It is remarkable how easily and insensibly we fall into a particular route, and make a beaten track for ourselves. I had not lived there a week before
215 my feet wore a path from my door to the pond-side; and though it is five or six years since I trod it, it is still quite distinct. It is true, I fear that others may have fallen into it, and so helped to keep it open. The surface of the earth is soft and impressible by the feet of men; and so with the paths which the mind travels. How worn and dusty, then, must be the highways of the world,
220 how deep the ruts of tradition and conformity! I did not wish to take a cabin passage, but rather to go before the mast and on

209-211 Why does Thoreau leave the woods?

220-223 On a sailing ship, passengers stayed in private compartments near the middle of the ship, while the crew shared living quarters at the front ("before the mast"). What is Thoreau comparing here? How does he want to live his life?



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the deck of the world, for there I could best see the moonlight
amid the mountains. I do not wish to go below now.

I learned this, at least, by my experiment; that if one
advances confidently in the direction of his dreams, and endeavors
to live the life which he has imagined, he will meet with a
success unexpected in common hours. He will put some things
behind, will pass an invisible boundary; new, universal, and
more liberal laws will begin to establish themselves around and
within him; or the old laws be expanded, and interpreted in his
favor in a more liberal sense, and he will live with the license of
a higher order of beings. In proportion as he simplifies his life,
the laws of the universe will appear less complex, and solitude
will not be solitude, nor poverty poverty, nor weakness weak-
ness. If you have built castles in the air, your work need not be
lost; that is where they should be. Now put the foundations
under them. . . .

Why should we be in such desperate haste to succeed, and in such desperate enterprises? If a man does not keep pace with his companions, perhaps it is because he hears a different drummer. Let him step to the music which he hears, however measured or far away. It is not important that he should mature as soon as an appletree or an oak. Shall he turn his spring into summer? If the condition of things which we were made for is not yet, what were any reality which we can substitute? We will not be shipwrecked on a vain reality. Shall we with pains erect a heaven of blue glass over ourselves, though when it is done we shall be sure to gaze still at the true ethereal heaven far above, as if the former were not? . . .

However mean your life is, meet it and live it; do not shun it and call it hard names. It is not so bad as you are. It looks poorest when you are richest. The fault-finder will find faults even in paradise. Love your life, poor as it is. You may perhaps have some pleasant, thrilling, glorious hours, even in a poorhouse. The setting sun is reflected from the windows of the almshouse as brightly as from the rich man's abode; the snow melts before its door as early in the spring. I do not see but a quiet mind may live as contentedly there, and have as cheering thoughts, as in a palace. The town's poor seem to me often to live the most independent lives of any. May be they are simply great enough to receive without misgiving. Most think that they are above being supported by the town; but it oftener happens that they are not above supporting themselves by dishonest means, which should be more disreputable. Cultivate poverty like a garden herb, like sage. Do not trouble yourself much to get new things, whether clothes or friends. Turn the old; return to them. Things do not change; we change. Sell your clothes and keep your thoughts. God will see that you do not want society. If I were confined to a corner of a garret all my days, like a spider, the world would be just as large to me while I had my thoughts about me. The philosopher said: "From an army of three divisions one can take away its general, and put it in disorder; from the man the most abject and vulgar one cannot take away his thought." Do not seek so anxiously to be developed, to subject yourself to many influences to be played on; it is all dissipation. Humility like darkness reveals the heavenly lights. The shadows of poverty and meanness gather around us, "and lo! creation widens to our view." We are often reminded that if there were bestowed on us

239-242 This is one of the most famous passages in Thoreau's writings. The "different drummer" evolved from one of his journal entries describing an 1839 river voyage when he had fallen asleep to the sound of someone's beating a drum "alone in the silence and the dark." The phrase "marching to the beat of a different drummer" became popular in the nonconformist 1960s. What does it mean to hear a different drummer?

255 almshouse: poorhouse.

255-260 What similarities between poverty and wealth does Thoreau find? What benefits of poverty does Thoreau see?

WORDS **misgiving** (mĭs-gĭv'ĭng) *n.* a feeling of doubt, mistrust, or uncertainty
 TO **disreputable** (dĭs-rĕp'yə-tĕ-bəl) *adj.* lacking respectability of character or behavior
 KNOW **abject** (ăb'jĕkt') *adj.* low; contemptible; wretched
vulgar (vŭl'gär) *adj.* coarse; common
dissipation (dĭs'ə-pä'shən) *n.* a reckless waste of resources; wastefulness



the wealth of Croesus, our aims must still be the same, and our means essentially the same. Moreover, if you are restricted in your range by poverty, if you cannot buy books and newspapers, for instance, you are but confined to the most significant and vital experiences; you are compelled to deal with the material which yields the most sugar and the most starch. It is life near the bone where it is sweetest. You are defended from being a trifler. No man loses ever on a lower level by magnanimity on a higher. Superfluous wealth can buy superfluities only. Money is not required to buy one necessary of the soul. . . .

The life in us is like the water in the river. It may rise this year higher than man has ever known it, and flood the parched uplands; even this may be the eventful year, which will drown out all our muskrats. It was not always dry land where we dwell. I see far inland the banks which the stream anciently washed, before science began to record its freshets. Every one has heard the story which has gone the rounds of New England, of a strong and beautiful bug which came out of the dry leaf of an old table of apple-tree wood, which had stood in a farmer's kitchen for sixty years, first in Connecticut, and afterward in Massachusetts,—from an egg deposited in the living tree many years earlier still, as appeared by counting the annual layers beyond it; which was heard gnawing out for several weeks, hatched perchance by the heat of an urn. Who does not feel his faith in a resurrection and immortality strengthened by hearing of this? Who knows what beautiful and winged life, whose egg has been buried for ages under many concentric layers of wood-
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ness in the dead dry life of society, deposited at first in the alburnum of the green and living tree, which has been gradually converted into the semblance of its well-seasoned tomb,—heard perchance gnawing out now for years by the astonished family of man, as they sat round the festive board,—may unexpectedly come forth from amidst society's most trivial and handselled furniture, to enjoy its perfect summer life at last!

I do not say that John or Jonathan will realize all this; but such is the character of that morrow which mere lapse of time can never make to dawn. The light which puts out our eyes is darkness to us. Only that day dawns to which we are awake. There is more day to dawn. The sun is but a morning star. ❖

WORDS
TO
KNOW
magnanimity (măg'nə-nĭm'ĭ-tē) *n.* generosity

279 **Croesus** (krē'sēs): a king of Lydia (now part of Turkey) in the sixth century B.C. who became legendary for his great wealth.

299–317 What is the message of this famous parable of the "strong and beautiful bug"?

312 **alburnum** (ăl-bŭr'nem): the part of a tree's trunk through which sap flows.

316 **handselled**: cheap; discounted; bought from a traveling salesman.

318 **John or Jonathan**: the common man. Thoreau's use of familiar given names here is similar to that in the expression "every Tom, Dick, and Harry."