

Cabot, in his memoir of Emerson remarks; "Thoreau had a grave measured way of speaking, and a carriage of the head which reminded one of Emerson, and seemed like unconscious imitation. And in his writing, there is often something that suggests this. Emerson always denied the imitation, and declared Thoreau to be the most independent and original of men. Yet the coincidence in manner, perhaps, interfered with his doing entire justice to Thoreau's peculiar quality. In his biographical sketch he extols Thoreau's practical abilities, his accomplishments as a naturalist, surveyor, and woodsman, praises his wit, and has a good word for his poems, but says not a word of that by which he will be remembered,—that flavor of the wild woods, or at least of unkenpt nature, which he imparts."

And, says Emerson: "I told H. T. that his freedom is in the form, but he does not disclose new matter. I am familiar with all his thoughts; they are mine, quite originally dressed. But if the question be what new ideas he has thrown into circulation, he has not yet told what that is which he was created to say." In a somewhat cynical way, Lowell describes Thoreau as "a pistillate plant kindled to fruitage by the Emersonian pollen." But, of course, it was no easy task to resist the overpowering influence of the greater mind, which controlled Margaret Fuller and Nathaniel Hawthorne, strong-headed as those geniuses were. George William Curtis thought that Thoreau's knowledge was original. "He has a fine ear, and a sharp eye in the woods and fields; and he added to his knowledge the wisdom of the most ancient times and of the best literature." It was, perhaps, Thoreau's misfortune as well as his advantage, that he lived as the contemporary and associate of Emerson. He learned to think like him. They talked of the same themes. They read the same books, and they rambled together through the same haunts.

The Emersonian color tinges many of the writings of Thoreau, consciously or unconsciously. Lowell, in his "Fable for Critics," shows how public opinion ran in the year '48, though it must be confessed that Lowell was not a sympathetic guide. He wrote:

"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 the prophet's each pocket.
Fie, for shame, brother bard; with good fruit of your own,
Can't you let neighbor Emerson's orchards alone?"

The great event in Thoreau's life occurred in 1845, when he seceded from the world, and went to live by the shores of Walden Pond, and built himself a frame house, with his own hands. For two years he lived in solitude, devoting himself to study, the investigation of the habits of animals, natural history pursuits, and the performance of such labor as he deemed necessary. The story of that adventure is curious. He had nothing when he began it, save a borrowed axe, which he obtained from Alcott, and a few dollars in money. He was a squatter in every sense of the word. He settled on somebody's land, cut down a few pines, hewed timber, and bought an old shanty, for the sake of the boards, from James Collins, an Irish laborer on the adjacent Fitchburg Railroad. At the raising of his house boards, he was assisted by Emerson, George William Curtis, and other friends. He began building in the spring. By the opening of winter, as the result of his own labor, he had secured a tight, shingled and plastered house, 10 feet wide by 15 feet long, and 8 feet posts, with a garret and a closet, a large window on each side, two trap doors, one door at the end, and a brick fire-place opposite. The cost of this establishment is thus set down by the builder himself, and his remarks on the same appear in the margin: