



Walden and On the Duty of Civil Disobedience

Henry David Thoreau

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When the Noted philosopher Henry David Thoreau wrote today's one of the most sought after classics, Walden, he had nothing but only criticism from almost all of his countrymen in America. When it was first published in 1854 as Walden; or, Life in the Woods, it found only a few purchasers. Later, it helped many renowned persons on their struggles to achieve their goals. Mahatma Gandhi, Martin Luther King Jr., Kennedy and Leo Tolstoy are a few of many noted persons who got directions and enlightenment from this book. Walden is a reflection upon simple living in natural surroundings with personal declaration of independence, a social experiment, a voyage of spiritual discovery, a satire, and a manual for self-reliance. It emphasizes the importance of solitude, contemplation, and closeness to nature in transcending the "desperate" existence that, he argues, is the lot of most people. The book is not a traditional autobiography, but combines autobiography with a social critique of contemporary Western culture's consumerist and materialist attitudes and its distance from and destruction of nature. The book is not simply a criticism of society, but also an attempt to engage creatively with the better aspects of contemporary culture, is suggested both by Thoreau's proximity to Concord society and by his admiration for classical literature. Henry David Thoreau was born in Concord, Massachusetts, in 1817 in a the "modest New England family" of John Thoreau (a pencil maker) and Cynthia Dunbar. His paternal grandfather was born in Jersey. His maternal grandfather, Asa Dunbar, led Harvard's 1766 student "Butter Rebellion", the first recorded student protest in the Colonies. Henry David Thoreau studied at Harvard College between 1833 and 1837. He lived in Hollis Hall and took courses in rhetoric, classics, philosophy, mathematics, and science. He was a member of the Institute of 1770 (now the Hasty Pudding Club). Thoreau returned to Concord and first worked as teacher and then in his family's pencil factory, which he continued to do for most of his adult life. On July 24 or July 25, 1846, Thoreau ran into the local tax collector, Sam Staples, who asked him to pay six years of delinquent poll taxes. Thoreau refused because of his opposition to the Mexican-American War and slavery, and he spent a night in jail because of this refusal. Aware he was dying, Thoreau's last words were "Now comes good sailing", followed by two lone words, "moose" and "Indian". He died on May 6, 1862 at age 44. Bronson Alcott planned the service and read selections from Thoreau's works, and Channing presented a hymn. Emerson wrote the eulogy spoken at his funeral. Originally buried in the Dunbar family plot, he and members of his immediate family were eventually moved to Sleepy Hollow Cemetery (N42° 27' 53.7" W71° 20' 33") in Concord, Massachusetts.



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