

During the upward progress of the age, and the advance of a more enlightened Christianity, the writers of this volume have gained more elevated views of the true mission of woman—of the dignity and importance of her distinctive duties, and of the true happiness which will be the reward of a right appreciation of this mission and a proper performance of these duties. . . .

What, then, is the end designed by the family state which Jesus Christ came into this world to secure?

It is to provide for the raising of our race to the highest possible intelligence, virtue, and happiness, by means of the self-sacrificing labors of the wise and good and this with chief reference to a future immortal existence.

The distinctive feature of the family is self-sacrificing labor of the stronger and wiser members to raise the weaker and more ignorant to equal advantages. The father undergoes toil and self-denial to provide a home, and then the mother becomes a self-sacrificing laborer to train its inmates. The useless, troublesome infant is served in the humblest offices; while both parents unite in training it to an equality with themselves in every advantage. Soon the older children become helpers to raise the younger to a level with their own. When any are sick, those who are well become self-sacrificing ministers. When the parents are old and useless, the children become their self-sacrificing servants.

Thus the discipline of the family state is one of daily self-devotion of the stronger and wiser to elevate and support the weaker members. Nothing could be more contrary to its first principles than for the older and more capable children to combine to secure to themselves the highest advantages, enforcing the drudgeries on the younger, at the sacrifice of their equal culture.

Jesus Christ came to teach the fatherhood of God and consequent brotherhood of man. He came as the "firstborn Son" of God and the Elder Brother of man, to teach by example the self-sacrifice by which the great family of man is to be raised to equality of advantages as children of God. For this end, he "humbled himself from the highest to the lowest place. He chose for his birthplace the most despised village; for his parents the lowest in rank; for his trade, to labor with his hands as a carpenter being "subject to his parents" thirty years. And, what is very significant, his trade was that which prepares the family home, as if he would teach that the great duty of man is labor—to provide for and train weak and ignorant creatures. Jesus Christ worked with his hands nearly thirty years, and preached less than three. And he taught that his kingdom is exactly opposite to that of the world, where all are striving for the highest positions. "Whoso will be great shall be your minister and whoso will be chiefest shall be servant of all."

The family state, then, is the aptest earthly illustration of the heavenly Kingdom, and in it woman is its chief minister. Her great mission is self-denial, in training its members to self-sacrificing labors for the ignorant and weak; if not her own children, then the neglected children of her Father in heaven. She is to rear all under her care to lay up treasures, not on earth, but in heaven. All the pleasures of this life end here; but those who train immortal minds are to reap the fruit of their labor through eternal ages.

To man is appointed the out-door labor—to till the earth, dig the mines, toil in the foundries, traverse the ocean, transport merchandise, labor in manufactures, construct houses, conduct civil, municipal, and state affairs, and all the heavy work

D Transcendentalism and Earthly Utopias

which, most of the day, excludes him from the comforts of a home. But the great stimulus to all these toils, implanted in the heart of every true man, is the desire for a home of his own, and the hopes of parenthood. Every man who truly lives for immortality responds to the beautiful, "Children are a heritage from the Lord; blessed is the man that hath his quiver full of them." The more a father and mother live under the influence of that "immortality which Christ had brought to light," the more is the blessedness of rearing a family understood and appreciated. Every child trained aright is to dwell forever in exalted bliss with those that gave it life and trained it for heaven.

1. Ralph Waldo Emerson Chides the Reformers (1844)

Dissatisfied Europeans let off steam in the 1840s in a series of armed revolts; dissatisfied Americans let off steam in various reformist protests. Every brain was seemingly gnawed by a "private maggot." Ralph Waldo Emerson—poet, essayist, transcendentalist, and ever-popular lecturer—delivered this famous discourse on the New England reformers in 1844. A nonconformist himself, he had resigned his Unitarian pastorate in Boston after disagreeing with his congregation over the sacrament of the Lord's Supper. What might have linked the phenomena that Emerson describes and the southern spirit of political nullification? Did Emerson oppose all reform?

What a fertility of projects for the salvation of the world!

One apostle thought all men should go to farming, and another that no man should buy or sell, that the use of money was the cardinal evil, another that the mischief was in our diet, that we eat and drink damnation. These made unleavened bread and were foes to the death to fermentation.

It was in vain urged by the housewife that God made yeast as well as dough, and loves fermentation just as dearly as he loves vegetation; that fermentation develops the saccharine element in the grain, and makes it more palatable and more digestible. No, they wish the pure wheat, and will die but it shall not ferment. Stop, dear nature, these incessant advances of thine; let us scotch these ever-rolling wheels!

Others attacked the system of agriculture, the use of animal manures in farming, and the tyranny of man over brute nature [animals]. These abuses polluted his food. The ox must be taken from the plow, and the horse from the cart; the hundred acres of the farm must be spaded. And the man must walk, wherever boats and locomotives will not carry him.

Even the insect world was to be defended—that had been too long neglected, and a society for the protection of ground-worms, slugs, and mosquitoes was to be incorporated without delay.

R. W. Emerson, *Complete Works* (Boston: Houghton, Mifflin and Company, 1884), vol. 3, pp. 240-243.

With these, appeared the adepts of homoeopathy, of hydropathy, of mesmerism of phrenology, and their wonderful theories of the Christian miracle! Others assailed particular vocations, as that of the lawyer, that of the merchant, of the manufacturer, of the clergyman, of the scholar. Others attacked the institution of marriage as the fountain of social evils. Others devoted themselves to the worrying of churches, and meetings for public worship, and the ferule forms of antinomianism among the elder Puritans seemed to have their match in the plenty of the new harvest of reform.

With this din of opinion and debate, there was a keener scrutiny of institutions and domestic life than any we had known. There was sincere protesting against existing evils, and there were changes of employment dictated by conscience.

In politics, for example, it is easy to see the progress of dissent. The country is full of rebellion; the country is full of kings. Hands off! Let there be no control and no interference in the administration of the affairs of this kingdom of me. Hence the growth of the doctrine and of the party of Free Trade, and the willingness to try that experiment in the face of what appear inconceivable facts.

I confess the motto of the *Globe* newspaper is so attractive to me that I can seldom find much appetite to read what is below it in its columns: "The world is governed too much." So the country is frequently affording solitary examples of resistance to the government, solitary nullifiers who throw themselves on their reserved rights; nay, who have reserved all their rights; who reply to the [san] assessor and to the clerk of the court that they do not know the state, and embarrass the courts of law by nonjuring [refusing to take an oath] and the commander-in-chief of the militia by nonresistance.

2. The "Paradise" at Brook Farm (c. 1846)

Of the numerous communal schemes of the 1840s, Brook Farm (1841-1847) attractively combined "plain living with high thinking." Pooling their poverty, the members were to share the intellectual feast, while contributing enough manual labor to keep the enterprise going. But the sandy soil, combined with inexperienced in farming, contributed to their undoing. Nathaniel Hawthorne, who extracted a perceptive novel from the adventure (*The Blithedale Romance*) recorded in his diary: "Mr. Ripley put a four-pronged instrument into my hands, which he gave me to understand was called a pitchfork, and he and Mr. Farley being armed with similar weapons, we all commenced a gallant attack upon a heap of manure." The following description was written some years later by Robert Carter, a well-known writer who enjoyed the friendship of nearly all the literary giants of his generation. How does Carter explain the purposes of Brook Farm and the general causes of its failure?

At Brook Farm the disciples of the "Newness" (transcendentalism) gathered to the number, I think, of about a hundred. Among them were [George] Ripley, the founder of the institution, Charles A. Dana, W. H. Channing, J. S. Dwight, Warren

¹The belief that Christian faith alone, not obedience to moral law, ensures salvation. *Century Illustrated Monthly Magazine*, 39 (1899): 127-128.

Burton, Nathaniel Hawthorne, G. W. Curtis, and his brother Burrill Curtis. The place was a farm of two hundred acres of good land, eight miles from Boston, in the town of West Roxbury, and was of much natural beauty, with a rich and varied landscape. The avowed object of the association was to realize the Christian ideal of life by making such industrial, social, and educational arrangements as would promote economy, combine leisure for study with healthful and honest toil, avert collisions of caste, equalize refinements, diffuse courtesy, and sanctify life more completely than is possible in the isolated household mode of living.

It is a remarkable feature of this establishment that it was wholly indigenous, a genuine outgrowth of the times in New England, and not at all derived from Fourierism (French cooperative socialism), as many supposed. Fourier was, in fact, not known to its founders until Brook Farm had been a year or two in operation. They then began to study him, and fell finally into some of his fantasies, to which in part is to be ascribed the ruin of the institution.

Of the life of Brook Farm I do not intend to say much, for I was there only one day, though I knew nearly all the members. It was a delightful gathering of men and women of superior cultivation, who led a charming life for a few years, jabbing in its fields and phantandering in its pleasant woods. It was a little too much of a picnic for serious profit, and the young men and maidens were rather unduly addicted to moonlight wanderings in the pine-grove, though it is creditable to the sound moral training of New England that little or no harm came of these wanderings—at least not to the maidens. So far as the relation of the sexes is concerned, the Brook Farmers, in spite of their free manners, were as pure, I believe, as any other people.

The enterprise failed pecuniarily, after seeming for some years to succeed. Fourierism brought it into disrepute, and finally a great wooden phalanstery (main building, in which the members had invested all their means, took fire, and burned to the ground just as it was completed. Upon this catastrophe the association scattered (in 1847, I think), and Brook Farm became the site of the town poorhouse.

3. Henry David Thoreau Praises Spiritual Wealth (1854)

Henry David Thoreau, a leading transcendentalist, had worn a green coat to the Harvard Chapel because the rules required black. He tried his hand at teaching, but when the authorities criticized his use of moral suasion, he whipped a dozen surprised pupils, just to show the absurdity of flogging, and forthwith resigned. While the Brook Farmers sought stimulation in association, he sought it in solitude. Building a hut on the shore of Walden Pond, near Concord, Massachusetts, he spent over two years in philosophical introspection and in communion with the wildlife, including fish and moles. His experiences unfold in his classic *Walden*, which was so realistic enough to become a textbook of the British Labour party. James Russell Lowell accused Thoreau of trying to make a virtue out of his indolence and other defects of character. Which of Thoreau's observations in *Walden* have been weakened or strengthened by the passage of over a hundred years? Which ones would we regard as absurd today?

¹H. D. Thoreau, *Walden* (Boston: Houghton, Mifflin and Company, 1893), pp. 110-111, 112, 498, 505-506, 510.

For more than five years I maintained myself thus solely by the labor of my hands, and I found that by working about six weeks in a year, I could meet all the expenses of living. The whole of my winters, as well as most of my summers, I had free and clear for study.

I have thoroughly tried schoolkeeping, and found that my expenses were in proportion, or rather out of proportion, to my income, for I was obliged to dress and train, not to say think and believe, accordingly, and I lost my time into the bargain. As I did not teach for the good of my fellow-men, but simply for a livelihood this was a failure.

I have tried trade. But I found that it would take ten years to get under way in that, and that then I should probably be on my way to the devil. I was actually afraid that I might by that time be doing what is called a good business.

When formerly I was looking about to see what I could do for a living, I thought often and seriously of picking huckleberries. That surely I could do, and my small profits might suffice—for my greatest skill has been to wait but little—so little capital it required, so little distraction from my wonted moods, I foolishly thought. While my acquaintances went unhesitatingly into trade or the professions, I contented this occupation as most like theirs; ranging the hills all summer to pick the berries which came in my way, and thereafter carelessly dispose of them. . . . But I have since learned that trade curses everything it handles; and though you trade in messages from heaven, the whole curse of trade attaches to the business. . . .

For myself, I found that the occupation of a day-laborer was the most independent of any, especially as it required only thirty or forty days in a year to support one. The laborer's day ends with the going down of the sun, and he is then free to devote himself to his chosen pursuit, independent of his labor. But his employer, who speculates from month to month, has no respite from one end of the year to the other. . . .

I left the woods for as good a reason as I went there. Perhaps it 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 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, 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 the deck of the world, for there I could best see the moonlight amid the mountains. I do not wish to go below now. . . .

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. Maybe they are simply great enough to receive without misgiving. Most think that they are above being supported by the town, but it often 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. . . .

Rather than love, than money, than fame, give me truth.

4. Emersonisms and Thoreauisms

The following pithy sayings are culled from the writings of Emerson and Thoreau, who were close transcendentalist friends and nonconformists. In what areas does there seem to be a close similarity in thinking? How many of these observations have been borne out by personalities or experiences in American history?

Government

The less government we have, the better—fewer laws, and the less confided power. (Emerson)

I heartily accept the motto "That government is best which governs least." Carried out, it finally amounts to this, which I also believe: "That government is best which governs not at all"; and when men are prepared for it, that will be the kind of government which they will have. (Thoreau)

Under a government which imprisons any unjustly, the true place for a just man is also a prison. * (Thoreau)

Of all debts men are least willing to pay the taxes. What a satire this [is] on government! (Emerson)

Reform

We are reformers in spring and summer in autumn and winter we stand by the old; reformers in the morning, conservatives at night. Reform is affirmative, conservatism negative; conservatism goes for comfort, reform for truth. (Emerson)

Every reform was once a private opinion. (Emerson)

Beware when the Great God lets loose a thinker on this planet. (Emerson)

There is no strong performance without a little fanaticism in the performer. (Emerson)

Every burned book enlightens the world. (Emerson)

Every reform is only a mask under cover of which a more terrible reform, which dares not yet name itself, advances. (Emerson)

¹⁴In 1845 Thoreau was jailed for refusing to pay his poll tax to a state (Massachusetts) that supported slavery. The tax, much to his disgust, was paid by an aunt. Legend has it that Emerson visited him in jail, saying, "Why are you here?" Thoreau allegedly replied, "Why are you not here?"

If anything at all a man so that he does not perform his functions, if he have a pain in his bowels . . . he forthwith sets about reforming—the world. (Thoreau)

Wealth

The greatest man in history [Jesus] was the poorest. (Emerson)

If a man own land, the land owns him. (Emerson)

Poverty consists in feeling poor. (Emerson)

I would rather sit on a pumpkin, and have it all to myself, than to be crowded on a velvet cushion. (Thoreau)

They take their pride in making their dinner cost much; I take my pride in making my dinner cost little. (Thoreau)

Men have become the tools of their tools. (Thoreau)

To inherit property is not to be born—it is to be stillborn, rather. (Thoreau)

That man is the richest whose pleasures are the cheapest. (Thoreau)

Great Men

To be great is to be misunderstood. (Emerson)

Shallow men believe in luck. (Emerson)

Every hero becomes a bore at last. (Emerson)

If the single man plant himself indomitably on his instincts, and there abide, the huge world will come around to him. (Emerson)

Great men are they who see that spiritual is stronger than any material force; that thoughts rule the world. (Emerson)

The true test of civilization is, not the census, nor the size of cities, nor the crops—no, but the kind of man the country turns out. (Emerson)

An institution is the lengthened shadow of one man. (Emerson)

There are men too superior to be seen except by a few, as there are notes too high for the scale of most ears. (Emerson)

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 he hears, however measured or far away. (Thoreau)

Living

Nothing can bring you peace but yourself. (Emerson)

The only gift is a portion of thyself. (Emerson)

Hitch your wagon to a star. (Emerson)

Nothing is so much to be feared as fear.* (Thoreau)

We do not quite forgive a giver. (Emerson)

Do not be too moral. You may cheat yourself out of much life so. Aim above morality. Be not simply good; be good for something. (Thoreau)

I never found the companion that was so companionable as solitude. (Thoreau)

The mass of men lead lives of quiet desperation. (Thoreau)

E Three Views of the Indians

1. Alexis de Tocqueville Predicts the Indians' Future (1835)

Alexis de Tocqueville, the remarkable French commentator whose observations of American life in the 1830s inspired his classic Democracy in America (1835), speculated in that book on "the present and probable future condition of the Indian tribes." Near present-day Memphis, he actually witnessed the westward migration of some Choctaw Indians in the year immediately following the Indian Removal Act of 1830, as described in the selection that follows. What features of white civilization did Tocqueville find most injurious to the traditional ways of Indian life? How accurate were his predictions about the Native Americans' future?

When the Indians were the sole inhabitants of the wilds whence they have since been expelled, their wants were few. Their arms were of their own manufacture, their only drink was the water of the brook, and their clothes consisted of the skins of animals, whose flesh furnished them with food.

The Europeans introduced among the savages of North America firearms, ardent spirits, and iron; they taught them to exchange for manufactured stuffs the rough garments that had previously satisfied their untutored simplicity. Having acquired new tastes, without the arts by which they could be gratified, the Indians were obliged to have recourse to the workmanship of the whites; but in return for their productions the savage had nothing to offer except the rich furs that still abounded in his woods. Hence the chase became necessary, not merely to provide for his subsistence, but to satisfy the frivolous desires of Europeans. He no longer hunted merely to obtain food, but to procure the only objects of barter which he could offer. While the wants of the natives were thus increasing, their resources continued to diminish.

From the moment when a European settlement is formed in the neighborhood of the territory occupied by the Indians, the beasts of chase take the alarm. Thousands of savages, wandering in the forests and destitute of any fixed dwelling, did not disturb them; but as soon as the continuous sounds of European labor are heard in their neighborhood, they begin to flee away and retire to the West, where their instinct teaches them that they will still find densers of immeasurable extent. "The buffalo is constantly receding," say Messrs. Clarke and Cass in their Report of the year 1829; "a few years since they approached the base of the Allegheny; and a few years hence they may even be rare upon the immense plains which extend to the base of the Rocky Mountains." I have been assured that this effect of the approach of the whites is often felt at two hundred leagues' distance from their frontier. Their influence is thus exerted over tribes whose name is unknown to them, and who suffer the evils of usurpation long before they are acquainted with the authors of their distress. . . .

*Perhaps Franklin D. Roosevelt's most famous saying, uttered in his inaugural address in 1933, was: "The only thing we have to fear is fear itself."

Pages 321-329 from *Democracy in America* by Alexis de Tocqueville. Edited by J. P. Mayer and Max Lerner. Translated by George Lawrence. English translation copyright © 1965 by Harper & Row, Publishers, Inc. Reprinted by permission of HarperCollins Publishers, Inc.