

Morning View Kentucky  
20 April 1956

Sorry, Mr. McCarthy,

to bother you with another letter, but I must thank you for Thoreau. It is indeed a rich reward for three or four letters, which I enjoyed writing, and which took so little of my time.

I was the more delighted because my Thoreau -- two weary little student volumes, relics of Mother's college days -- had accidentally gone into the Give-Away box instead of the Keeper box in my last book weed-out. I cannot resist books, being forever lured into the purchase of ones I neither want nor like, or others which are not worth a second reading, consequently must occasionally sort through them and disencumber myself of the unwanted. I read the average book in about an hour, and, more often than not, wonder why I wasted the hour. Keep a few strangely assorted treasures for repeat reading -- King Lear apt to be found nestling beside Balchen's "War Below Zero. Thoreau is a keeper.

Only a few days ago, when the icy wind and wet, pelting snow had driven the silent birds into the shelter of scrubby hollows, I retreated indoors and thawed out with hot coffee and such splinters of Walden as I could unearth in anthologies and such.

I like Walden best, but read it in a most irreverent fashion that would infuriate the true Thoreau devotee. I skip. It annoys me that, in the midst of describing the pond at twilight, or the early morning birds, he plunges head-long into the Hate-Everybody campaign he was waging at the time. Shamelessly, I turn to the next bit of description.

Personally, I believe Thoreau's bitter condemnation of his fellow man during the Walden period was due to a protein and vitamin deficiency in the wild diet he maintained while there. He mellowed considerably after leaving. How amiable could you be on a daily fare that apparently consisted largely of bread, potatoes, melons, a few beans, and an infrequent fish?

Upon first reading Thoreau, I adopted one of his statements as my favorite quote. I have forgotten the exact wording, its general effect being, "If I do not march in step with other people, it is because I hear different drums." I like that.