

CHARM OF THOREAU

BY BAILEY MILLARD

When Charles F. Lummis crossed the Great Divide I said, "There went another disciple of Thoreau." I said this because I knew how much Lummis loved the Sage of Walden and what an influence his writings had upon him.

Lummis confessed that influence to me in an intimate talk I had with him in San Francisco years ago. Afterward he wrote: "Henry David Thoreau did more to put a soul under my ribs, or wherever a soul is supposed to be located, than any other philosopher." He held Thoreau to be a far greater moral teacher than Emerson.

So does Edwin Markham. One day while we were walking along a lonely Staten Island road he said he loved the island because Thoreau had once lived and written there. He said that when he visited Thoreau's grave,

with its high cairn of stones placed there, one by one, by many pilgrims to Concord, that he sat there a long time and "pondered upon the great soul that had passed that way and made the place immortal." As between the philosophy of Thoreau and that of Emerson, he preferred Thoreau's, as it was "deeper rooted in life."

John Muir loved Thoreau. I have heard him repeat from memory long passages from "Walden." Muir was like Thoreau—shy, aloof, full of the love of nature and none too fond of men and their "dirty institutions."

George Elliot owned to having been greatly influenced by the lonely Concord philosopher. She expressed high admiration for "Walden" in her letters.

Years after he had read Thoreau's most famous book Robert Louis Stevenson told of the great charm its author had exercised upon him. "I have scarce written sentences since I was introduced to him," he confessed, "but his influence might be somewhere detected by a close observer."

What Charles F. Lummis got out of Thoreau was what many of our keenest thinkers have derived—a finer appreciation of nature, a better ability to see through shams, a clearer sense of the top and bottom of things and, above all, the value of simplicity—not merely the sort of simplicity which, like Thoreau's, settles down in a cabin in the woods, but the kind which inheres in all noble natures, in palace or hovel. For, after all, in its truest sense, simplicity is a state of mind.