

WALDEN

by Henry David Thoreau

Introduction: Some American writers of the 1800s celebrated their country's past and its way of life. Others warned their fellow citizens of potential dangers they saw in American habits and attitudes. Henry David Thoreau was a writer of the second type. In *Walden*, a book he wrote about living alone in the Massachusetts woods for a year, Thoreau urged Americans not to get too caught up in the growing complexity of life in the mid-19th century.

I went to the woods because I wished to live deliberately, to face only the essential facts of life, and to see if I could not learn what life had to teach, and not, when I came to die, discover that I had not lived. I did not wish to live what was not life. I wanted to live deep, and suck out the marrow of life, to live sturdily and naturally.

Simplicity, simplicity, simplicity! I say, let your affairs be as two or three, and not a hundred or a thousand. Simplify, simplify. Instead of three meals a day, if it be necessary, eat but one, and instead of a hundred possessions, own five.

The nation itself, with all its so-called "improvements", is an unwieldy and overgrown establishment. It is cluttered and tripped up by its own traps, ruined by luxury and heedless expense, by lack of purpose and a worthy aim. And the only cure for it, and for us, is in a more simple life and elevation of purpose.

Life lives too fast. Men think that it is essential that the nation have commerce, and luxury, and talk through a telegraph, and ride 30 miles an hour by rail. But whether we should live like ants or like men is never discussed.

Some ask, if we do not forge rails and devote days and nights to the work, who will build the railroads? And if railroads are not built, how shall we get to where we are going?

But if we stay at home and mind ourselves, perhaps we will find that we are already precisely where we are meant to be...