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It must have been at least five years ago that Eliot Porter first mentioned to me that he might make at some future time a series of photographs to accompany selected passages from the writings of Thoreau. He asked casually if I would like to write a brief forward and I replied--just as casually--that I would, of course, consider it a privilege. Faced with a fait accompli I almost wish ~~that~~ I had not been so casual. ~~If the phrase "needs no introduction" ever applied, it applies now.~~ Thoreau and Porter can speak for themselves.

Here, sensitively and with complete understanding, is presented through the medium of a new art that very world of American Nature which Thoreau, practising one of the oldest of arts, taught us to see better than anyone ever had before. Mr. Porter makes no attempt merely to document the selected passages. To have done so would have been to produce no more than merely documentary illustrations. Instead--and guided by sure artistic instinct--he has realized that the way actually to add to what Thoreau had written was to catch Thoreau's spirit, to see with his eye and his emphasis the kind of thing he saw and loved. As a result Mr. Porter's pictures are more truly in the spirit of Thoreau than any others I have ever seen.

What this means, first of all, is ^{to discover} discovering how new and beautiful the familiar can be if we actually see it as though we had never seen it before. Other writers and other photographers are prone to seek out the unusual, the grandiose and the far away. They shock us into awareness by flinging into our faces the obviously stupendous. When they are successful in their attempt they inspire us that special sense of surprise, wonder, and a kind of pleasing ^{"awe"} terror which the eighteenth century defined as ~~awe~~. But the effect they produce is at the opposite pole from that aimed at and achieved by Thoreau.

John Muir is our great poet of the awesome aspects of the American scene. His subject matter compliments that of Thoreau. But there could hardly be celebrants of nature more different. Thoreau's theme is not the remote and stupendous but the daily and hourly miracle of the unusually unnoticed beauty that is close at hand. He does not range the world seeking out the ~~obviously~~ sensational. The chickadee and the violet are to him as striking as the flame tree or the bird of paradise. What we need is, he felt, not the unfamiliar but the power to realize that the familiar becomes unfamiliar once we really look at it, and that every aspect of the natural world is in its own way "awful."

One ^{phase} ~~aspect~~ of the romantic revival of interest ⁱⁿ nature was concerned especially with the "awesome" aspects. Byron illustrated this new interest when he wrote with ^a characteristically flamboyant rhetorical flourish his description of a thunderstorm in the Alps:

(margins even) And this was in the night! Most glorious night
Thou wert not meant for slumber. Oh, let me be
A sharer in thy fierce and far delight.
A portion of the tempest and of thee.

Thoreau is far closer to Wordsworth and Wordsworth's even more familiar "The meanest flower that ^{grows} ~~grows~~..." What one ^{will} ~~would~~ find in Mr. Porter's pictures is the world of calm beauty at which one must look twice to find the awesomeness which is, nevertheless, there.

He with his camera ^{is} like Thoreau with his notebook and his "spyglass"—has "Traveled a good deal in Concord," and roundabout. The result is the very New England Thoreau saw more than one hundred years ago. Though the area still left to Nature has shrunk, what remains is what Thoreau saw, loved and celebrated.

Even in his time he was aware that his beloved Concord had been more tamed than he would have liked to see it. "When I consider that the nobler animals have been exterminated here--the cougar, the panther, lynx, wolverine, wolf, bear, moose, the deer, the beaver, the turkey, etc., etc.--I cannot but feel as if I lived in a tame, and as it were, emasculated country...I take infinite pains to know all the phenomena of spring, for instance, thinking that I have here the entire form, and then, to my chagrin, I hear that it is but an imperfect copy that I possess and read, that my ancestors have torn out many of the first leaves and grandest passages, and mutilated it in many places." The process continues. Yet it may very well be that fewer animals and plants have actually disappeared completely since Thoreau's time than during the century which preceded him. It is the area left to them which has been most drastically curtailed. One must hunt longer to find what he found more readily. But as Mr. Porter's pictures show, most of the kind of thing he saw can still be seen.

How much longer that will be true is a question. Thoreau wondered that the village bell did not sound the knell when another tree was cut down. The

trees continue to fall and any bell which is rung is less likely to be a knell than a celebration of Progress. "The squirrel has leaped to another tree, the hawk has circled further off, and is settled now upon a new eyrie, but the woodman is preparing to lay his axe at the root of that also."

(Double Space)

So much for the subject matter of Mr. Porter's pictures. In what sense does their spirit and intention correspond to that of Thoreau?

Photography is the most modern but at the same time the least "modernistic" of the arts. ~~Proponents~~ ^{Proponents} of abstraction, surrealism and the rest have long been accustomed to say that the camera has relieved the painter of ^{cl} ~~his~~ former function, ^{namely} ~~mainly~~ that of representation. Whether or not to be so relieved is actually a boon there are still some to question. But there is no doubt about the fact that the photographer does deal in representations of the actual, whether it be the actuality of an external Nature or the actuality of a human portrait. Yet it is very far from true that he need be merely mechanical, that he can have no personal vision. ^{He} ~~He~~ cannot, like the painter, impose upon Nature a pattern or design which isn't there. But he can select and frame his picture in such a way as to reveal the pattern and design which the merely casual observer has failed to see, either because he did not look closely enough or because it was confused by adjacent irrelevancies. The more the painter invents, the farther he takes us from the world which actually exists and to that extent he may even encourage us in an alienation from the real. The master photographer, on the other hand, discovers rather than invents and in that way he may (as Mr. Porter so strikingly does) second Thoreau in Thoreau's most insistent injunction, namely, Be not among those who have eyes that see not and ears that hear not.

It was no small task to select from the twenty volumes of Thoreau's published writings passages both so interesting in themselves and so susceptible ^{to} as supplement and illumination by companion photographs as are ^{these} those he had presented. Comparatively few of even ^{and those} those who profess an admiration for Thoreau's spirit have read one-tenth of what he left behind in the Journal from which he ^{quarried} ~~gathered~~ his major published work ^{from} and which he might have drawn several others. Many of his most brilliant passages of description and comment are buried in a text much of which became more pedestrian as the years went by. But Mr. Porter has ranged through the whole corpus and selected with so sure an insight those passages which are both remarkable in themselves and most suitable for his special undertaking, ^{that} ~~but~~ this volume is, among other things, one of the best anthologies ever compiled. His book is something to be read as well as looked at and there is no student of ~~the~~ ^{his} author so well ~~adversed~~ ^{versed} that he will not get new insights from it.

Admirers of Walden and of the enormously rich Journal have found in them many different things: a theory of economics, a defense of nonconformity, a definition of the good life and a defense of Thoreau's most persistent contention, namely, that human existence should be, not a duty or a burden, not a mere means to an end, but a self-justifying aesthetic joy. Puritan in certain respects he was, but in this last mentioned ~~of his~~ ^{as} attitude he was among the most ^{defiant} ~~defined~~ of anti-puritans when he proclaimed that God had not sent him into this world without some spending money. ^{he} With none of these aspects of Thoreau's philosophy is Mr. Porter concerned, except perhaps by inference. What he does, however, illustrate ^{namely} so vividly is the conviction which underlies all the others, ^{he} ~~namely~~ the conviction that the source of the joy Thoreau sought, and of the wisdom he hoped to acquire, as well as the

justification for his neglect of what others called the serious business of life, is the fact that "this curious world which we inhabit is more wonderful than it is convenient; more beautiful than it is useful; it is more to be admired and enjoyed than used." ~~(Architectural)~~

Emanuel Kant propounded the theory that the magic of art depends in large part upon the various means which it uses to isolate the thing represented from all ordinary desires and duties in such a way that the only reaction possible to it is pure contemplation. We cannot pick the painted flower nor embrace the woman whom the artist has placed upon canvas. We can only look, see, and realize them. It was thus that Thoreau wished to contemplate rather than use Nature and it is thus that we can enjoy Mr. Porter's photographs.

(Double Space)
To say this is by no means to say that Thoreau was a mere esthete, one, that is, to whom natural beauty means only line, and shape and color. In fact ^{some} while the most heartfelt expressions of the scorn ^{of} which he was capable is directed against those who, like the once popular English analyst of the picturesque, William Gilpin, saw in Nature nothing except a picture. Gilpin talked, he said, "as if there ^{was} some food for the soul in mere light and shadow." He had, for example, undertaken to explain how a sleek well-fed horse might, no less than a shaggy one, be picturesque. "It is not his smooth, and shining coat that makes him so. It is the apparent interruption of that smoothness by a variety of shades, and colors, which produces the effect." And Thoreau comments thus: "Not the slightest reference to the fact that this surface, with its lights and shades, belongs to a horse and not to a bag of wind. The same reasoning would apply equally well to one of his hind quarters hung bottom upwards in a butcher's stall...I should say that no arrangement of light and shadow without reference to the object, actual or suggested,

so lit and shaded can interest us powerfully, any more than paint itself can charm us." Gilpin had no fellow feeling, no sense of warmth.

Moreover, if Thoreau was no esthete, he was, if anything, still less a scientist—in the driest meaning of that term. It enraged him to buy a book on turtles and to find it nothing but anatomy. He did not, he protested, care to know the length of a hen hawk's intestines. And he had a deep sense of guilt when he once consented to send Agassiz ^{to} for pickling a specimen from his beloved Walden pond. If Nature was not a mere ^{abstraction} ~~obstruction~~ as he feared it was to neighbor Emerson, ^H neither was it something to be learned about rather than something to be learned from. On the one hand "it is not worthwhile to go around the world to count the cats in Zanzibar"; on the other "a man has not seen a thing until he has felt it." One cannot even begin to "love Nature" in any profitable sense until one has achieved an empathy, a sense of oneness ^{and of} participation. "Appreciation" means an identification, a sort of mystical experience, religious in the most fundamental sense of the term.

If the modern world is to learn from him what he has to teach it, it ^{Thoreau} must try to understand the what, why and wherefore of the life he led and of his conviction that the only good life possible ~~to man~~ is one "natural" in some sense that society has tended more and more to corrupt. What, one must still ask, does it mean to observe Nature, to live with Nature, and to learn from it? How does one go about doing any of these things and what is it that one may hope to learn?

The two themes which reappear so persistently seem at first sight strangely disparate. On the one hand was ^{Thoreau's} ~~his~~ search for what he called "wildness," on the

^{the search}
other for the "higher laws" ~~which~~ he never more than glimpsed but which he was sure Nature, even in her most savage aspects, was persistently whispering to him. The one search seems atavistic, the other transcendental, as though he were both going back to savagery and forward towards some higher mystical state. But the paradox is not unresolvable and in the resolution is the core of his faith.

Wildness, the merely natural and therefore almost animal life, is not ~~by sought~~ for its own sake. Thoreau was no mere romantic admirer of the noble savage, and in Walden itself he makes this plain by examining the deficiencies of the best natural man he had ever known, namely the woodchopper. But ^{the} ~~man~~ ^{human race} has lost ^{its} ~~his~~ way. The road upward from the savage does not lead to ^{the} ~~glittered~~ materialistic and desperate life such as that he sees his neighbors leading. To find the right road one must return in sympathy as well as in imagination to the origins. From them one might go forward again to a truly civilized, not a merely artificial, way of life. ^{Thoreau} ~~He~~ himself was aware that of his program he had achieved anything like full success only in what might be called its preliminary phases. He had simplified his life to the point where he had around it ^{the} ~~that~~ wide margin which permitted him to live, rather than merely to make a living. He had made himself an inspector of snowstorms and ^{he} ~~had~~ observed many natural phenomena. Certainly also he had achieved empathy— with both the wildness and the gentleness of Nature. Because of these successes he was sufficiently sure that he was on the right road confidently to advise others to take it. He had learned that it is not necessary to live by the sweat of one's brow "unless you sweat more easily than I do." He had found a happiness and contentment which was to him sure proof that his way of

life was approved of by whatever Gods may be. But of the higher laws he admitted that he had caught only whispered hints. That chapter of Walden called "~~higher~~ ^{Laws}" merely reaffirms his sympathy with wildness along with his feeling that we have only begun to transcend it. No full revelation comes. And in the last chapter he can only fall back upon the hope that "there is more day to dawn."

Just one hundred years ago ^{Thoreau} ~~he~~ died shortly after shocking a pious relative who had asked him if he had made his peace with God. "I am not aware that we ever quarreled." In the century which has passed since then no one has gone further than he along the road he chose and most have turned their backs even more irrevocably upon it. And whether or not ^{this} ~~that~~ is the reason, the fact remains that the mass of men lead lives ^{of a} ~~with~~ less and less quiet desperation. If those who believe in progress and define it as they do continue to have their way it will soon be impossible either to test his theory that Nature is the only proper context of human life or that in ~~that~~ ^{such} a context we ^{may} ~~might~~ ultimately learn the "higher laws." ^{well} One important function of a book like the present ~~one~~ ^{well} would have been performed if it persuades those who open it that some remnant of the beauties it calls our attention to is worth preserving.