

## CHAPTER 5

## Henry David Thoreau: Philosopher

From the forest and wilderness come the tonics and barks which brace mankind.

Henry David Thoreau, 1851

ON APRIL 23, 1851 Henry David Thoreau, slight and stooped, ascended the lecture platform before the Concord Lyceum. "I wish," he began, "to speak a word for Nature, for absolute freedom and wildness." Thoreau promised his statement would be extreme in an effort to answer the numerous champions of civilization. "Let me live where I will," he declared, "on this side is the city, on that the wilderness, and ever I am leaving the city more and more, and withdrawing into the wilderness." Near the end of the address, he concentrated his message in eight words: "in Wildness is the preservation of the World."<sup>1</sup>

Americans had not heard the like before. Previous discussion of wilderness had been mostly in terms of Romantic or nationalistic clichés. Thoreau tossed these aside in an effort to approach the significance of the wild more closely. In so doing he came to grips with issues which others had only faintly discerned. At the same time he cut the channels in which a large portion of thought about wilderness subsequently flowed.

The complex of attitudes toward man, nature, and God known as Transcendentalism was one of the major factors conditioning Thoreau's ideas regarding wilderness. In the tradition of Idealists such as Plato and Kant, the American Transcendentalists postu-

1. Thoreau, "Walking" in *Excursions, The Writings of Henry David Thoreau*, Riverside edition (11 vols. Boston, 1893) 9, 251, 267, 275. For the circumstances of the lecture see Walter Harding, *The Days of Henry Thoreau* (New York, 1935), p. 286, and Harding, "A Check List of Thoreau's Lectures," *Bulletin of the New York Public Library*, 52 (1948), 82. This was the first occasion Thoreau delivered the paper in question, and since he revised it shortly before his death, the quoted portions may not have been the exact words spoken at the Lyceum. For evidence that they are very close, however, see the fragment of lecture text quoted in Harding, p. 315.

lated the existence of a reality higher than the physical. The core of Transcendentalism was the belief that a correspondence or parallelism existed between the higher realm of spiritual truth and the lower one of material objects. For this reason natural objects assumed importance because, if rightly seen, they reflected universal spiritual truths. It was this belief that led Ralph Waldo Emerson to declare in his manifesto of 1836 that "nature is the symbol of the spirit . . . the world is emblematic."<sup>2</sup> Six years later Thoreau offered another interpretation: "let us not underrate the value of a fact; it will one day flower in a truth." Nature mirrored the currents of higher law emanating from God. Indeed, the natural world might be more than a reflector, as Thoreau implied when he asked: "is not Nature, rightly read, that of which she is commonly taken to be the symbol merely?"<sup>3</sup>

Transcendentalists had a definite conception of man's place in a universe divided between object and essence. His physical existence rooted him to the material portion, like all natural objects, but his soul gave him the potential to *transcend* this condition. Using intuition or imagination (as distinct from rational understanding), man might penetrate to spiritual truths. In the same manner he could discover his own correspondence with the divine being and appreciate his capacity for moral improvement. Every individual, the Transcendentalists emphasized, possessed this ability, but the process of insight was so difficult and delicate that it was seldom exercised. The great majority was indifferent, yet even those who sought higher truths intuitively found them in frustratingly brief flashes. Nonetheless, Thoreau pointed out, "man cannot afford to be a naturalist to look at Nature directly. . . . He must look through and beyond her."<sup>4</sup>

As a way of thinking about man and nature, Transcendentalism

2. Emerson, "Nature" in *Nature, Addresses and Lectures, The Works of Ralph Waldo Emerson*, Standard Library edition (14 vols. Boston, 1883) 1, 31, 38. The best secondary studies of Transcendentalism concern Emerson: Sherman Paul, *Emerson's Angle of Vision: Man and Nature in the American Experience* (Cambridge, Mass., 1952); Stephen E. Whicher, *Freedom and Fate: An Inner Life of Ralph Waldo Emerson* (Philadelphia, 1953); Vivian C. Hopkins, *Spires of Form: A Study of Emerson's Esthetic Theory* (Cambridge, Mass., 1951); and Philip L. Nicoloff, *Emerson on Race and History* (New York, 1961).

3. Thoreau, "The Natural History of Massachusetts" in *Writings*, 9, 160; Thoreau, *A Week on the Concord and Merrimack Rivers, Writings*, 1, 504.

4. *The Journal of Henry David Thoreau*, eds. Bradford Torrey and Francis H. Allen (14 vols. Boston, 1906) 5, 45.

had important implications for the meaning of the American wilderness. The doctrine climaxed and gave forceful expression to older ideas about the presence of divinity in the natural world. While rejecting the deists' assumption of the power of reason, Transcendentalists agreed with them that nature was the proper source of religion. They were even more in accord with English Romantic poets such as William Wordsworth who believed in moral "impulses" emanating from fields and woods. In theory, at least, Transcendentalists left little room for the earlier ideas about the amorality of wild country. Instead, the wilderness, in contrast to the city, was regarded as the environment where spiritual truths were least blunted. Making the point explicit, Emerson wrote: "in the wilderness, I find something more dear and connate than in the streets or villages . . . in the woods we return to reason and faith."<sup>5</sup>

The Transcendental conception of man added indirectly to the attractiveness of wilderness. Instead of the residue of evil in every heart, which Calvinism postulated, Emerson, Thoreau, and their colleagues discerned a spark of divinity. Under the prod of Calvin, Puritans feared the innate sinfulness of human nature would run rampant if left to itself in the moral vacuum of wilderness. Men might degenerate to beasts or worse on stepping into the woods. Transcendentalists, on the contrary, saw no such danger in wild country because they believed in man's basic goodness. Reversing Puritan assumptions, they argued that one's chances of attaining moral perfection and knowing God were *maximized* by entering wilderness. The fears which the first New Englanders experienced in contact with the primeval forest gave way in their Concord descendants to confidence—in wilderness and in man.

A second factor shaping Thoreau's attitude toward wilderness was his opinion of civilization. By mid-century American life had acquired a bustling tempo and materialistic tone that left Thoreau and many of his contemporaries vaguely disturbed and insecure. To be sure, the official faith in progress ran strong. Yet the idea that a technological civilization and the pursuit of progress was disrupting older, better patterns of living could not be entirely set aside. A mechanized way of life seemed on the verge of overwhelming innocence, simplicity, and good taste.<sup>6</sup> "Things are in the saddle,"

5. Emerson, "Nature" in *Works*, 1, 15, 16.

6. Marx, *Machine in the Garden*; Marvin Meyers, *The Jacksonian Persuasion: Politics and Belief* (Stanford, Cal., 1957); and William R. Taylor, *Cavalier and*

quipped Emerson, "and ride mankind."<sup>7</sup> Thoreau lamented his inability to buy a blank notebook for recording thoughts; the only ones the merchants in Concord offered were ledgers ruled for dollars and cents. At the Harvard commencement of 1837 he spoke about "the commercial spirit" as a virus infecting his age.<sup>8</sup> The development of Thoreau's wilderness philosophy is most meaningful when juxtaposed to this sense of discontent with his society.

Thoreau began to formulate his conception of the value of the wild from self-examination. In his twenty-third year, 1841, he wrote to a friend: "I grow savager and savager every day, as if fed on raw meat, and my tameness is only the repose of untamableness." A few months later he confessed in his journal that "it does seem as if mine were a peculiarly wild nature, which so yearns toward all wildness." Wandering through the Concord countryside, he delighted in discovering Indian arrowheads, wild apple trees, and animals of the deep woods such as the lynx. They were evidence "that all is not garden and cultivated field crops, that there are square rods in Middlesex County as purely primitive as they were a thousand years ago . . . little oases of wildness in the desert of our civilization." For Thoreau the presence of this wild country was of utmost importance. "Our lives," he pointed out in 1849 in his first book, "need the relief of [the wilderness] where the pine flourishes and the jay still screams."<sup>9</sup> When Thoreau could not find enough wildness near Concord, he journeyed to Maine and Canada. Just being "on the verge of the uninhabited, and, for the most part, unexplored wilderness stretching toward Hudson's Bay" braced Thoreau; the very names "Great Slave Lake" and "Esquimaux" cheered and encouraged him. While admitting his love for Concord, Thoreau made clear how glad he was "when I discover, in oceans and wilderness far away, the materials out of which a million Concord can be made—indeed unless I discover them, I am lost myself."<sup>10</sup>

*Yankee: The Old South and American National Character* (New York, 1961) base their conclusions on similar estimations of American anxiety at this time.

7. Emerson, "Ode, Inscribed to W. H. Channing," *Poems* (4th ed. Boston, 1847), p. 119.

8. Reginald L. Cook, *Passage to Walden* (Boston, 1949), pp. 99-100.

9. Thoreau, *Familiar Letters, Writings*, 6, 36; Torrey and Allen, eds., *Journal*, 1, 296; 9, 44; Thoreau, *Week, Writings*, 1, 223.

10. Thoreau, "A Yankee in Canada" in *Writings*, 9, 52; Thoreau, "Natural History" in *Writings*, 9, 129-30; Torrey and Allen, eds., *Journal*, 2, 46.

Unlike many Romantic contemporaries, Thoreau was not satisfied merely to announce his passion for wilderness. He wanted to understand its value. The 1851 talk to the Concord Lyceum offered an opportunity to defend the proposition that "the forest and wilderness" furnish "the tonics and barks which brace mankind." Thoreau grounded his argument on the idea that wildness was the source of vigor, inspiration, and strength. It was, in fact, the essential "raw-material of life."<sup>11</sup> Human greatness of any kind depended on tapping this primordial vitality. Thoreau believed that to the extent a culture, or an individual, lost contact with wildness it became weak and dull.

This was difficult to explain to the Lyceum that April afternoon. Seeking illustration in the history of creative writing, Thoreau maintained that "in literature it is only the wild that attracts us." What appealed about Hamlet, the Iliad, and the Scripture was "the uncivilized free and wild thinking." These books were "as wildly natural and primitive, mysterious and marvellous, ambrosial and fertile, as a fungus or a lichen."<sup>12</sup> Contemporary poets and philosophers, Thoreau added, would likewise profit by maintaining contact with a wild base. As an inexhaustible fertilizer of the intellect, it had no peer.

Thoreau also appealed to his audience's knowledge of ancient history. Empires had risen and declined according to the firmness of their wild roots. For Thoreau it was not a "meaningless fable" that Rome's founders had been suckled by a wolf, but a metaphorical illustration of a fundamental truth. "It was because the children of the Empire were not suckled by the wolf," he reasoned, "that they were conquered and displaced by the children of the northern forests who were." "In short," he told the Lyceum in conclusion, "all good things are wild, and free."<sup>13</sup>

For Thoreau wilderness was a reservoir of wildness vitally important for keeping the spark of the wild alive in man. He prized it,

11. Thoreau, "Walking" in *Writings*, 9, 275, 277.

12. I am citing the more dramatic statement of these ideas in Torrey and Allen, eds., *Journal*, 2, 97, on which the similar passage in "Walking" (*Writings*, 9, 283) was based.

13. Thoreau, "Walking" in *Writings*, 9, 275, 287. Thomas Cole's 1836 series "The Course of Empire" (see Chapter 4) and James Fenimore Cooper's *The Crater* (1847) express the same idea in the media of art and fiction. Cooper, in fact, clearly drew on Cole for his conception: Donald A. Ringe, "James Fenimore Cooper and Thomas Cole: An Analogous Technique," *American Literature*, 30 (1958), 26-36.

as he wrote in an 1856 letter, "chiefly for its intellectual value."<sup>14</sup> More than once he referred to the "tonic" effect of wild country on his spirit.<sup>15</sup> "There at last," he remarked in 1857, "my nerves are steadied, my senses and my mind do their office." Thoreau, the Transcendentalist, believed that in the wilderness he found "some grand, serene, immortal, infinitely encouraging, though invisible, companion, and walked with him." As an author Thoreau also knew the forest's value. Using his trips to the Maine woods as a case in point, he contended that "not only for strength, but for beauty, the poet must, from time to time, travel the logger's path and the Indian's trail, to drink at some new and more bracing fountain of the Muses, far in the recesses of the wilderness."<sup>16</sup> The crucial environment was within. Wilderness was ultimately significant to Thoreau for its beneficial effect on thought.

Much of Thoreau's writing was only superficially about the natural world. Following Emerson's dictum that "the whole of nature is a metaphor of the human mind," he turned to it repeatedly as a figurative tool.<sup>17</sup> Wilderness symbolized the unexplored qualities and untapped capacities of every individual. The burden of his message was to penetrate the "wildness . . . in our brain and bowels, the primitive vigor of Nature in us." In *Walden* (1854) he exhorted his reader to "be . . . the Lewis and Clark and Frobisher of your own streams and oceans; explore your own higher latitudes." The essential frontier, in Thoreau's estimation, had no geographic location but was found "wherever a man fronts a fact."<sup>18</sup> But going to the outward, physical wilderness was highly conducive to an inward journey. Wild country offered the necessary freedom and solitude. Moreover, it offered life stripped down to essentials. Because of

14. As quoted from an unpublished letter of Oct. 20, 1856 in Sherman Paul, *The Shores of America: Thoreau's Inward Exploration* (Urbana, Ill., 1958), p. 415.

15. Thoreau, *Walden*, *Writings*, 2, 489, is one instance.

16. Torrey and Allen, eds., *Journal*, 9, 209; Thoreau, *The Maine Woods*, *Writings*, 3, 212.

17. Emerson, "Nature" in *Works*, 1, 38. For guidelines in the following analysis I have used Fussell, *Frontier*, pp. 175-231; Foerster, *Nature*, pp. 69-142; Clough, *Necessary Earth*, pp. 78 ff.; R. W. B. Lewis, *The American Adam: Innocence, Tragedy, and Tradition in the Nineteenth Century* (Chicago, 1955), pp. 20-27; F. O. Matthiesson, *American Renaissance: Art and Expression in the Age of Emerson and Whitman* (New York, 1941), pp. 153 ff.; and Lawrence Willson, "The Transcendentalist View of the West," *Western Humanities Review*, 14 (1960), 183-91. The best general treatment of Thoreau's mind is Paul, *Shores of America*.

18. Torrey and Allen, eds., *Journal*, 9, 43; Thoreau, *Walden*, *Writings*, 2, 495; Thoreau, *Week*, *Writings*, 1, 401.

this rawness, wilderness was the best environment in which to "settle ourselves, and work and wedge our feet downward through the mud and slush of opinion, and prejudice, and tradition, and delusion . . . through Paris and London, through New York and Boston . . . till we come to a hard bottom and rocks in place, which we call *reality*." With this in mind Thoreau sought Walden Pond. "I went to the woods," he declared, "because I wished to live deliberately." A decade after the Walden interlude Thoreau still felt the necessity from time to time to "go off to some wilderness where I can have a better opportunity to play life."<sup>19</sup> And "playing" life in Thoreau's terms meant living it with the utmost seriousness.

Given his ideas about the value of wilderness, it was inevitable that Thoreau should take up the nationalists' defense of American scenery. Some of his statements were trite ("our understanding more comprehensive and broader, like our plains") but occasionally he penetrated to new levels of meaning. Having linked Rome's initial greatness with the fact that Romulus and Remus were suckled by a wolf, Thoreau reasoned that "America is the she wolf to-day."<sup>20</sup> The immigrants who left a tame, civilized Europe partook of the vigor of a wild New World and held the future in their hands. England, for instance, was effete, sterile, and moribund because "the wild man in her became extinct." America, on the other hand, had wilderness in abundance and, as a consequence, an unequalled cultural and moral potential. "I believe," Thoreau wrote, "that Adam in paradise was not so favorably situated on the whole as is the backwoodsman in America." Yet with typical caution he added that it "remains to be seen how the western Adam in the wilderness will turn out."<sup>21</sup>

While Thoreau was unprecedented in his praise of the American wilderness, his enthusiasm was not undiluted; some of the old antipathy and fear lingered even in *his* thought. Encountering the Maine woods underscored it. Thoreau left Concord in 1846 for the first of three trips to northern Maine. His expectations were high because he hoped to find genuine, primeval America. But contact

19. Thoreau, *Walden, Writings*, 2, 143, 154; Torrey and Allen, eds., *Journal*, 7, 519.

20. Thoreau, "Walking" in *Writings*, 9, 273, 275.

21. Torrey and Allen, eds., *Journal*, 2, 144, 152-53. On the Adamic theme in American letters, which was in part inspired by the virgin continent, see Lewis, *American Adam*.

with real wilderness in Maine affected him far differently than had the idea of wilderness in Concord. Instead of coming out of the woods with a deepened appreciation of the wilds, Thoreau felt a greater respect for civilization and realized the necessity of balance.

The wilderness of Maine shocked Thoreau. He reported it as "even more grim and wild than you had anticipated, a deep and intricate wilderness." Climbing Mt. Katahdin, he was struck by its contrast to the kind of scenery he knew around Concord. The wild landscape was "savage and dreary" and instead of his usual exultation in the presence of nature, he felt "more lone than you can imagine." It seemed as if he were robbed of his capacity for thought and transcendence. Speaking of man's situation in wilderness, he observed: "vast, Titanic, inhuman Nature has got him at disadvantage, caught him alone, and pilfers him of some of his divine faculty. She does not smile on him as in the plains." To Thoreau, clinging to the bare rocks of Katahdin's summit, wilderness seemed "a place for heathenism and superstitious rites—to be inhabited by men nearer of kin to the rocks and wild animals than we." On the mountain, Transcendental confidence in the symbolic significance of natural objects faltered. Wilderness seemed a more fitting environment for pagan idols than for God. "What is this Titan that has possession of me?", a near-hysterical Thoreau asked on Katahdin. "*Who are we? where are we?*"<sup>22</sup> Identity itself had vanished. It was a rude awakening for a man who in another mood had wondered "what shall we do with a man who is afraid of the woods, their solitude and darkness? What salvation is there for him?"<sup>23</sup>

The Maine experience also sharpened Thoreau's thinking about the savage and civilized conditions of man. In his youth he saw the good as being almost entirely on the side of the former. A college essay, "Barbarism and Civilization," argued for the Indian's superiority since he maintained constant contact with nature's educational and moral influence. In his journal a few years later Thoreau praised the savage because he stood "free and unconstrained in Nature, is her inhabitant and not her guest, and wears her easily and

22. Thoreau, *Maine Woods, Writings*, 3, 82, 85-86, 94-95, 107. Secondary comment on Thoreau in Maine may be found in Fannie Hardy Ekstrom, "Thoreau's 'Maine Woods,'" *Atlantic Monthly*, 102 (1908), 242-50; Ethel Seybold, *Thoreau: The Quest and the Classics* (New Haven, Conn., 1951), p. 65; John G. Blair and Augustus Trowbridge, "Thoreau on Katahdin," *American Quarterly*, 12 (1960), 508-17; and Paul, *Shores of America*, pp. 359 ff.

23. Torrey and Allen, eds., *Journal*, 2, 100.

gracefully."<sup>24</sup> But what he saw in Maine raised questions about the validity of these primitivistic assumptions. The Indians appeared to be "sinister and slouching fellows" who made but a "coarse and imperfect use . . . of Nature." The savage was hardly the "child of nature" he once supposed.<sup>25</sup> In an entry in his journal for July 1, 1852, Thoreau condensed his critique in the idea that roses "bloomed in vain while only wild men roamed." It was, rather, the philosopher or poet (Thoreau thought himself his own best example) who appreciated the higher values and experienced the greatest benefits of wilderness. Yet for the most part, civilized men ignored these things. In the outdoors their eyes were fixed on material gain or trivial sport. "For one that comes with a pencil to sketch or sing, a thousand come with an axe or rifle," Thoreau lamented. The lesson he drew was that "savages have their high and low estates and so have civilized nations."<sup>26</sup>

The problem now was clear: was it possible "to combine the hardiness of these savages with the intellectualness of the civilized man?" Put another way, could men live so as "to secure all the advantage [of civilization] without suffering any of the disadvantage?" The answer for Thoreau lay in a combination of the good inherent in wildness with the benefits of cultural refinement. An excess of either condition must be avoided. The vitality, heroism, and toughness that came with a wilderness condition had to be balanced by the delicacy, sensitivity, and "intellectual and moral growth" characteristic of civilization. "The natural remedy," he continued, "is to be found in the proportion which the night bears to the day, the winter to the summer, thought to experience."<sup>27</sup>

The ideal man occupied such a middling position, drawing on both the wild and the refined.<sup>28</sup> Thoreau used his own life as a case

24. F. B. Sanborn, *The Life of Henry David Thoreau* (Boston, 1917), pp. 180-83; Torrey and Allen, eds., *Journal*, 1, 253.

25. Thoreau, *Maine Woods, Writings*, 3, 105. Pearce, *Savages of America*, pp. 148-50, contends that Thoreau was a primitivist. On the other hand, John Aldrich Christie, *Thoreau as World Traveler*, American Geographical Society Special Publication, 37 (New York, 1965), pp. 211-30, supports the present position that Thoreau saw little to be admired in the purely savage state.

26. Torrey and Allen, eds., *Journal*, 4, 166; Thoreau, *Maine Woods, Writings*, 3, 162; Torrey and Allen, eds., *Journal*, 3, 301.

27. Thoreau, *Walden, Writings*, 2, 23; Torrey and Allen, eds., *Journal*, 3, 301; Thoreau, "Walking" in *Writings*, 9, 258.

28. John W. Ward, *Andrew Jackson: Symbol for an Age* (New York, 1955), pp. 30-45, discussed this point with reference to Jackson, a man regarded as occupying

in point. In *Walden* he reported recognizing in himself "an instinct toward a higher, or, as it is named, spiritual life . . . and another toward a primitive, rank and savage one." Rejoicing in both, Thoreau strove to make himself, as his bean field at the Pond, "half-cultivated." "I would not," he explained, "have . . . every part of a man cultivated, any more than I would have every acre of earth." Some of each, of course, should be controlled and tilled, but along with the tame must be blended some wildness or wilderness as a strength-giving fertilizer. As long as its potency was partially diluted, superb crops could grow. Emerson aided his Concord neighbor in expressing the idea: "in history the great moment is when the savage is just ceasing to be a savage. . . . Everything good in nature and the world is in that moment of transition, when the swarthy juices still flow plentifully from nature, but their astringency or acidity is got out by ethics or humanity." Thoreau extended the metaphor to the question of American nationalism. In terms of culture, the Old World was an exhausted field; the New a wild peat bog. Yet this was no reason for smugness. America needed "some of the sand of the Old World to be carted on to her rich but as yet unassimilated meadows" as a precondition for cultural greatness.<sup>29</sup> Again the answer lay in balancing the wild and the cultivated.

For his own part in regard to wilderness Thoreau felt he lived "a sort of border life." Occasionally he sought the wilds for nourishment and the opportunity to exercise his savage instinct, but at the same time he knew he could not remain permanently. "A civilized man . . . must at length pine there, like a cultivated plant, which clasps its fibres about a crude and undissolved mass of peat." For an optimum existence Thoreau believed, one should alternate between wilderness and civilization, or, if necessary, choose for a permanent residence "partially cultivated country."<sup>30</sup> The essential requirement was to maintain contact with both ends of the spectrum.

the optimum midpoint between the Britisher and the Indian and consequently able to defeat both in battle. Charles L. Sanford has made a similar analysis of ideal American character: *Quest for Paradise*, pp. viii, 28 ff., 135 ff.

29. Thoreau, *Walden, Writings*, 2, 246, 327; Thoreau, "Walking" in *Writings*, 9, 292; Emerson, "Power" in *Essays: Second Series, Works*, 3, 71; Torrey and Allen, eds., *Journal*, 2, 147.

30. Thoreau, "Walking" in *Writings*, 9, 296-97; Thoreau, *Maine Woods, Writings*, 3, 210-11.

Thoreau knew wildness (the "animal in us") as man's most valuable quality, but only when checked and utilized by his "higher nature."<sup>31</sup> Since he idealized a balance, it always distressed him to have someone ask after a lecture: "'would you have us return to the savage state? etc. etc.'"<sup>32</sup> But others in his generation understood what Thoreau meant by proportioning. A fellow Transcendentalist, Charles Lane, advocated in the *Dial* an "amalgamation" of life in the wilderness and in civilization. "To unite the advantages of the two modes," he felt, "has doubtless been the aim of many." Orestes Brownson's perfected society strove to make possible "all the individual freedom of the savage state with all the order and social harmony of the highest degree of civilization." Cooper's Leatherstocking inspired the same idea in Francis Parkman. For the Boston historian there was "something admirably felicitous in the conception of this hybrid offspring of civilization and barbarism." In Parkman's opinion Natty Bumppo joined "uprightness, kindness, innate philosophy, and the truest moral perceptions" with "the wandering instincts and hatred of restraint which stamp the Indian." In 1850 Cooper himself discussed his famous protagonist as inclined to tread the middle way between "civilization" and "savage life." Leatherstocking represented "the better qualities of both conditions, without pushing either to extremes."<sup>33</sup>

In providing a philosophic defense of the half-savage, Thoreau gave the American idealization of the pastoral a new foundation. Previously most Americans had revered the rural, agrarian condition as a release both from wilderness and from high civilization. They stood, so to speak, with both feet in the center of the spectrum of environments.<sup>34</sup> Thoreau, on the other hand, arrived at the middle by straddling. He rejoiced in the extremes and, by keeping a foot in each, believed he could extract the best of both worlds.

31. Thoreau, *Walden, Writings*, 2, 341.

32. As quoted in Walter Harding, "Thoreau on the Lecture Platform," *New England Quarterly*, 34 (1951), 369.

33. Lane, "Life in the Woods," *Dial*, 4 (1844), 422; *The Works of Orestes A. Brownson*, ed. Henry F. Brownson (20 vols. Detroit, 1882-1907) 15, 60; Parkman, "The Works of James Fenimore Cooper," *North American Review*, 74 (1852), 151; *James Fenimore Cooper: Representative Selections*, ed. Robert Spiller (New York, 1936), pp. 306-07.

34. Marx, *Machine in the Garden*; Richard Hofstadter, *The Age of Reform* (New York, 1960), pp. 23-59; and Smith, *Virgin Land*, pp. 123 ff. examine the American attraction to the pastoral or what Marx calls "the middle landscape" (p. 113).

The rural was the point of equilibrium between the poles. According to Thoreau, wildness and refinement were not fatal extremes but equally beneficent influences Americans would do well to blend. With this concept Thoreau led the intellectual revolution that was beginning to invest wilderness with attractive rather than repulsive qualities.