

H.D. Thoreau – February 3, 1841

The present seems never to get its due. It is the least obvious, neither before nor behind, but within us. All the past plays into this moment, and we are what we are. My aspiration is one thing, my reflection, another; but, over all, myself and condition — is and does. To men and nature I am each moment a finished tool, — a spade, a barrow, a pickaxe. This immense promise is no *efficient* quality. For all practical purposes I am done.

We are constantly invited to be what we are, as to something worthy and noble. I never waited but for myself to come round; none ever detained me, but I lagged or staggered after myself.

It steads us to be as true to children and boors, as to God himself. It is the only attitude which will meet all occasions. It will only make the earth yield her increase, — and by it do we effectually expostulate with the wind. If I run against a post, this is the remedy.

I would meet the morning and evening on very sincere ground. When the sun introduces me to a new day, I silently say to myself, “Let us be faithful all round. We will do justice and receive it.” Something like this is the secrete charm of Nature’s demeanor towards us, strict conscientiousness, and disregard of us when we have ceased to have regard for ourselves. So she can never offend us. How true she is, and never swerves. In her most genial moment, her laws are as steadfastly and relentlessly fulfilled (though the decalogue is rhymed and set to sweetest music), as in her sternest.

Any exhibition of affection, as an inadvertent word, or act, or look, seems premature, as if the time were not ripe for it, like the buds which the warm days near the end of winter cause to push out and unfold before the frosts are yet gone.

My life must seem as if it were passing on a higher level than that which I occupy. It must possess a dignity which will not allow me to be familiar.