

Thoreau's Flute

Louisa May Alcott



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THOREAU'S FLUTE

[A POEM BY]

LOUISA M. ALCOTT



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¶ I WENT to the woods because I wished to live deliberately to front only the essential facts of life & see if I could learn what it had to teach, & not, when I came to die, discover that I had not lived. I did not wish to live what was not life, living is so dear; nor did I wish to practice resignation unless it was quite necessary. I wanted to live deep and suck out all the marrow of life, to live so sturdily and Sparta-like as to put to rout all that was not life, to cut a broad swathe and shave close, to drive life into a corner, & reduce it to its lowest terms, and if it proved

to be mean, why then to get the whole and genuine meanness of it, and publish its meanness to the World; or if it were sublime, to know it by experience & be able to give a true account of it in my next excursion. . .

HENRY DAVID THOREAU



THOREAU'S FLUTE

By LOUISA M. ALCOTT

*We, sighing, said, "Our Pan is dead;
His pipe hangs mute beside the river;—
Around it wistful sunbeams quiver,
But Music's airy voice is fled.
Spring mourns as for untimely frost;
The bluebird chants a requiem;
The willow-blossom waits for him;—
The Genius of the wood is lost."*

*Then from the flute, untouched by hands,
There came a low, harmonious breath:
"For such as he there is no death;—
His life the eternal life commands;
Above man's aims his nature rose:
The wisdom of a just content
Made one small spot a continent,
And tuned to poetry life's prose.*

*"Haunting the hills, the stream, the wild,
Swallow and aster, lake and pine,
To him grew human or divine,—
Fit mates for this large-hearted child
Such homage Nature ne'er forgets,
And yearly on the coverlid
'Neath which her darling lieth hid
Will write his name in violets.*

*"To him no vain regrets belong,
Whose soul, that finer instrument,*

*Gave to the world no poor lament,
But wood-notes ever sweet and strong.
O lonely friend! he still will be
A potent presence, though unseen,—
Steadfast, sagacious, and serene:
Seek not for him,—he is with thee."*

September, 1863



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DECEMBER, 1950

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