

EIPHANIES

Compiled by Michael Colebrook

A collection of accounts of transformative experiences involving encounters with the natural world, taken from the writings of:

Thomas Berry

Robert Burns

Annie Dillard

Aldo Leopold

John Muir

Brian Swimme

Henry David Thoreau

William Wordsworth

Val Plumwood [link, together with a quote from John Muir]

Thomas Berry

The Great Work (Bell Tower, 1999), pp. 12-13.

The house, not yet finished, was situated on a slight incline. Down below was a small creek and there across the creek was a meadow. It was an early afternoon in late May when I first wandered down the incline, crossed the creek, and looked out over the scene.

The field was covered with white lilies rising above the thick grass. A magic moment, this experience gave to my life something that seems to explain my thinking at a more profound level than almost any other experience I can remember. It was not only the lilies. It was the singing of the crickets and the woodlands in the distance and the clouds in a clear sky. It was not something conscious that happened just then. I went on about my life as any young person might do.

Perhaps it was not simply this moment that made such a deep impression upon me. Perhaps it was a sensitivity that was developed throughout my childhood. Yet as the years pass this moment returns to me, and whenever I think about my basic life attitude and the whole trend of my mind and the causes to which I have given my efforts, I seem to come back to this moment and the impact it has had on my feeling for what is real and worthwhile in life.

This early experience, it seems, has become normative for me throughout the entire range of my thinking. Whatever preserves and enhances this meadow in the natural cycles of its transformation is good; whatever opposes this meadow or negates it is not good. My life orientation is that simple. It is also that pervasive. It applies in economics and political orientation as well as in education and religion.

Robert Burns

On a Mouse, on Turning her up in her Nest, with the Plough.

Duncan Wu. *Romanticism: An Anthology* (Blackwell, 1998), p.133.

Wee, sleeket, cowran, tim'rous beastie,
Oh what a panic's in thy breastie!
Thou need na start awa sae hasty
Wi' bickering brattle!

I wad be laith to rin an' chase thee
Wi' murd'ring pattle!

I'm truly sorry man's dominion
Has broken nature's social union,
An' justifies that ill opinion
Which makes thee startle
At me, thy poor earth-born companion
An' fellow mortal!

I doubt na, whyles, but thou may thieve;
What then! Poor beastie, thou maun live!
A daimen-icker in a thrave"
'S a sma' request:
I'll get a blessin wi' the lave,"
An' never miss't!

Thy wee-bit housie, too, in ruin!
It's silly wa's the win's are strewin!
An' naething, now, to big a new ane
O' foggage green!
An' bleak December's winds ensuin,
Baith snell an' keen!

Thou saw the fields laid bare an' wast,
An' weary winter comin fast,
An' cozie here, beneath the blast,
Thou thought to dwell;
Till crash! the cruel coulter passed
Out through thy cell.

That wee-bit heap o' leaves an' stibble
Has cost thee monie a weary nibble!
Now thou's turned out, for a' thy trouble,
But house or hald,
To thole the winter's sleety dribble,
An' cranreuch cauld!

But mousie, thou art no thy-lane
In proving foresight may be vain:
The best-laid schemes o' mice an' men
Gang aft agley,
An' lea'e us nought but grief an' pain
For promised joy!

Still, thou art blessed compared wi' me!
The present only toucheth thee:
But och! I backward cast my e'e
On prospects drear!

An' forward, though I canna see,
I guess an' fear!

Annie Dillard

Pilgrim at Tinker Creek (HarperPerennial, 1988), pp. 5-8, extracts.

A couple of summers ago I was walking along the edge of the island to see what I could see in the water, and mainly to scare frogs. Frogs have an inelegant way of taking off from invisible positions on the bank just ahead of your feet, in dire panic, emitting a froggy 'Yike!' and splashing into the water. At the end of the island I noticed a small green frog. He was exactly half in and half out of the water, and he didn't jump.

He didn't jump; I crept closer. At last I knelt on the island's winter killed grass, staring at the frog in the creek just four feet away. He was a very small frog with wide, dull eyes. And just as I looked at him, he slowly crumpled and began to sag. The spirit vanished from his eyes as if snuffed. His skin emptied and drooped. I watched the taut, glistening skin on his shoulders ruck, and rumple; it was a monstrous and terrible thing. I gaped bewildered, appalled. An oval shadow hung in the water behind the drained frog; then the shadow glided away.

I had read about the giant water bug, but never seen one. It is an enormous, heavy-bodied brown beetle. It eats insects, tadpoles, fish, and frogs. Its grasping forelegs are mighty and hooked inward. It seizes its victims with these legs, hugs it tight and takes one bite. Through the puncture it shoots the poisons that dissolve the victim's body - all but the skin - and through it the giant water bug sucks out the victim's body. I had been kneeling on the island grass, I stood up and brushed my knees. I couldn't catch my breath.

That it's rough out there and chancy is no surprise. Every live creature is a survivor on a kind of emergency bivouac. But we are also created. In the Koran, Allah asks, 'The heaven and the earth and all in between, thinkest thou I made them in jest?. It's a good question. What do we think of the created universe, spanning an unthinkable void with an unthinkable profusion of forms? If the giant water bug was not made in jest, was it then made in earnest? 'God is subtle', Einstein said. 'but not malicious.'

Again Einstein said that 'nature conceals her mystery by means of her essential grandeur, not by her cunning.'

Cruelty is a mystery, and the waste of pain. But if we describe a world to compass these things, a world that is a long, brute game, then we bump against another mystery: the inrush of power and light, the canary that sings on the skull. Unless all ages and races of men have been deluded by the same mass hypnotist, there seems to be such a thing as beauty, a grace wholly gratuitous. About five years ago I saw a mockingbird make a straight vertical descent from the roof of a four story building. It was an act as careless and spontaneous as the curl of a stem or the kindling of a star.

The mockingbird took a single step into the air and dropped. His wings were still, folded against his sides. Just a breath before he would have been dashed to the ground, he unfurled his wings with exact deliberate care, revealing the broad white bars of white, spread his elegant tail, and so floated onto the grass. The fact of his free fall was like the old philosophical conundrum about the tree that falls in the forest. The answer must be, I think, that beauty and grace are performed whether or not we will or sense them. The least we can do is try to be there.

Aldo Leopold.

A Sand County Almanac (OUP, 1949), pp. 129-132

.A deep chesty bawl echoes from rimrock to rimrock, rolls down the mountain, and fades into the far blackness of the night. It is an outburst of wild defiant sorrow, and of contempt for all the adversities of the world.

Every living thing (and perhaps many a dead one as well) pays heed to that call. To the deer it is a reminder of the way of all flesh, to the pine a forecast of midnight scuffles and of blood upon the snow, to the coyote a promise of gleanings to come, to the cowman a threat of red ink at the bank, to the hunter a challenge of fang against bullet. Yet behind these obvious and immediate hopes and fears there lies a deeper meaning, known only to the mountain itself.

Only the mountain has lived long enough to listen objectively to the howl of a wolf.

Those unable to decipher the hidden meaning know nevertheless that it is there, for it is felt in all wolf country, and distinguishes that country from all other land. It tingles in the spine of all who hear wolves by night, or who scan their tracks by day. Even without sight or sound of wolf, it is implicit in a hundred small events: the midnight whinny of a pack horse, the rattle of rolling rocks, the bound of a fleeing deer, the way shadows lie under the spruces. Only the ineducable tyro can fail to sense the presence or absence of wolves, or the fact that mountains have a secret opinion about them.

My own conviction on this score dates from the day I saw a wolf die. We were eating lunch on a high rimrock, at the foot of which a turbulent river elbowed its way. We saw what we thought was a doe fording the torrent, her breast awash in white water. When she climbed the bank toward us and shook out her tail, we realized our error: it was a wolf. A half-dozen others, evidently grown pups, sprang from the willows and all joined in a welcoming melee of wagging tails and playful maulings. What was literally a pile of wolves writhed and tumbled in the center of an open fiat at the foot of our rimrock.

In those days we had never heard of passing up a chance to kill a wolf. In a second we were pumping lead into the pack, but with more excitement than accuracy: how to aim a steep downhill shot is always confusing. When our rifles were empty, the old wolf was down, and a pup was dragging a leg into impassable slide-rocks.

We reached the old wolf in time to watch a fierce green fire dying in her eyes. I realized then, and have known ever since, that there was something new to me in those eyes- something known only to her and to the mountain. I was young then, and full of trigger-itch; I thought that because fewer wolves meant more deer, that no wolves would mean hunters' paradise. But after seeing the green fire die, I sensed that neither the wolf nor the mountain agreed with such a view.

Since then I have lived to see state after state extirpate its wolves. I have watched the face of many a newly wolfless mountain, and seen the south-facing slopes wrinkle with a maze of new deer trails. I have seen every edible bush and seedling browsed, first to anaemic desuetude, and then to death. I have seen every edible tree defoliated to the height of a saddlehorn. Such a mountain looks as if someone had given God a new pruning shears, and forbidden Him all other exercise. In the end the starved bones of the hoped-for deer herd, dead of its own too-much, bleach with the bones of the dead sage, or molder under the high-lined junipers.

I now suspect that just as a deer herd lives in mortal fear of its wolves, so does a mountain live in mortal fear of its deer. And perhaps with better cause, for while a buck pulled down by wolves can be replaced in two or three years, a range pulled down by too many deer may fail of replacement in as many decades

John Muir

Gifford, Terry. (Ed.) *John Muir. His Life and Letters and Other Writings* (Bâton Wicks, 1996), pp 70-71.

I set off on the first of my long lonely excursions, botanising in glorious freedom around the Great Lakes and wandering through innumerable tamarac and arbor-vitae swamps, and forests of maple, basswood, ash, elm, balsam, fir, pine, spruce, hemlock, rejoicing in their bound wealth and strength and beauty, climbing the trees, revelling in their flowers and fruit like bees in beds of goldenrods, glorying in the fresh cool beauty and charm, of the bog and meadow heathworts, grasses, carices, ferns, mosses, liverworts displayed in boundless profusion. The rarest and most beautiful of the flowering plants I discovered on this first grand excursion was *Calypso borealis* (the Hider of the North). I had been fording streams more and more difficult to cross and wading bogs and swamps that seemed more and more extensive and more difficult to force one's way through. Entering one of these great tamarac and arbor-vitae swamps one morning, holding a general though very crooked course by compass, struggling through tangled drooping branches and over and under broad heaps of fallen trees, I began to fear that I would not be able to reach dry ground before dark, and therefore would have to pass the night in the swamp...

But when the sun was getting low and everything seemed most bewildering and discouraging, I found beautiful *Calypso* on the mossy bank of a stream, growing not in the ground but on a bed of yellow mosses in which its small white bulb had found a soft nest and from which its one leaf and one newer sprung. The flower was white and made the impression of the utmost simple purity like a snowflower. No other bloom was near it, for the bog a short distance below the surface was still frozen, and the water was ice cold. It seemed the most spiritual of all the flower people I had ever met. I sat down beside it and fairly cried for joy.

It seems wonderful that so frail and lowly a plant has such power over human hearts. This *Calypso* meeting happened some forty-five years ago, and it was more memorable and impressive than any of my meetings with human beings excepting, perhaps, Emerson and one or two others...

How long I sat beside *Calypso* I don't know. Hunger and weariness vanished, and only after the sun was low in the west I plashed on through the swamp, strong and exhilarated as if never more to feel any mortal care.

Brian Swimme

Fangs and Feasts. (*Interchange*, Summer 1998).

I am at a futurist conference in Brazil. Although I am as concerned as anyone about the future of the world, what's really on my mind this morning is my own personal future. We are leaving tomorrow for a week-long trek in the rainforest, and I have a growing anxiety about the snakes I might meet out there.

How are humans to relate to wild animals? How are we to understand them? To engage with them? As our boat glides up the Amazon River, I have a lot of time to ponder such questions. With dolphins leaping out of the river and brilliant green parrots screaming out of the trees, there are many extraordinary occasions for reflecting on wildlife.

Our first human response, beginning over 50,000 years ago, was to adore animals. The snake was dangerous certainly, would kill you perhaps, but the snake was also thought to be divine, a central piece in the cosmological meaning of the world. The snake should be revered and worshipped. Of course, there are still some people who remain convinced that the proper relationship of humans to animals is a worshipful one, but such people are fast disappearing, for another way of dealing with animals has appeared in human history, and this way has come to dominate.

The guide motions to me. I have been dragging my hand in the river water and he wants me to stop. At least I think he does; we don't share a language so it is all gestures. We drift slowly through the trees. The swollen river has flooded the surrounding forest, so we make our way

through the trees by boat. One of the branches sweeps into the boat, and as it moves towards my face, I see a piece of its bark move. Squinting, concentrating on this spot, I suddenly realize that I am breathing on a spider as large as the entire palm of my hand. With rapid feathery movements, it rushes at me, then stops. I am dumb, transfixed. As we move further on, I see that the tree is swarming with them; they are trapped by the rising waters - creatures angry, desperate, bursting with agitation.

Free of the tree branches, the guide smiles at me. He shrugs his shoulders as if to say, "I tried to warn you." My skin is as agitated as if the spiders are now swarming over me. I don't know what the guide sees in my face, but he quickly looks away. I look back at the tree, trying to understand. Something has awakened. I don't know what - a horror, a thrill, a terror, a vitality. I was close enough to see the eyes of the spider. I felt I could see the spider taking me in with its eyes. God takes a seat behind me in the boat. "The spiders wanted to eat you. If even one of them had bitten you, you would have become fatally sick. Your guide would have thrown you into the river and fled."

"He would have taken me to a hospital."

"He would have fled for his life"

"He's not stupid. If he tried to save you the spiders would have gotten him too."

"You sound disappointed."

"I'm of mixed feelings. How terrible would it be to have you eliminated? You who are so critical of your ancestors for enslaving plants and animals, how are you different? Their activities pale compared to yours. They worked clumsily with whole creatures, but you dig your fingers into the genetic treasures themselves so that you can control life's essence directly. When will you be satisfied? When the whole world is in your image?"

The boat hits ground. We step immediately into an all-enveloping wilderness, one that surrounds me with a totality that I have previously felt only in the presence of the night sky. Our guide walks to a particular tree, steps back, and slices into it with his machete. In the wound a line of white fluid bubbles forth. Using mime, he indicates that this is the poison the local people use for the points of arrows. Nearby is a plant with large spikes coming off its stalk. He plucks one, squeezes it to its tip, and shows me an oozing milky fluid. He points back to the poisonous tree and I interpret it as a warning: if I trip and fall into one of these thorny plants, I will have some major health challenges out here a thousand miles from any hospital. I am amazed by the poisons, but I am even more astounded by this man. He leads the way through such dangers wearing nothing but shorts. He has even taken off his shoes. In this vulnerable condition he enters the forest.

We come upon a tree that ignites a unique response from the guide: he shrieks, throws his machete to one side, and scrambles up the tree. After much rustling of branches, his smiling face emerges from the leaves near the top and he tosses something to me - a yellow globular object. When it hits my hands I find myself thinking a strange thought: I am holding the Amazon.

I marvel at this oblong yellow object. I'm supposed to eat it. He is watching me, and in this moment I realise something that is utterly obvious, so obvious it has escaped my attention all my life.

For decades I have been eating things that appear to have been manufactured in the back rooms of Safeways. You go through those swinging doors next to the milk cartons and come upon stacks of yellow cereal boxes, and crate upon crate of precisely constructed tomatoes. It seems they are all assembled in the back rooms of grocery stores, or built by agri-businesses that replace soil with carpets of plastic-coated nutrients, or made in factories that manufacture a strange synthetic stuff capable of maintaining human life at some minimal level. But what I now hold in my hands has been created by the Amazon River and by the rainforest, by its trees and monkeys and soils and snakes and wind and fish. I hold a yellow globular object that baffles me,

one that sits nameless in my palm, outside my language, outside my understanding. No government body has examined it. No corporate manager has shaped its marketability. No haulage firm's cost-efficient network has transported it. No advertiser has debased it with a media campaign. It sits inside a mystery as palpable as its sun-yellow color.

I tear the skin off and sink my teeth into its living yellow flesh. An animal that has been grown by communities of life very far from here now meshes mouth and teeth with the Amazon rainforest. How marvellous, this tingling in my throat. How marvellous, these tears welling in my eyes. When my mouth mates with this gift, something awakens in me. That which is wild has awakened that which is wild.

I moan a remembering. Has my life been dedicated to constructing full-body snake suits? Have all my efforts been to shield myself from these depths? Has my education, my training, my professional goals - have all these been in service of the agenda to defang the terrible beauty of the world? I who have been so terrified of becoming food for the forest come to see a simple truth - that all existence concerns eating and being eaten, and that this applies on more than the simplistic, literal level.

One bite of the Amazon rainforest and I am changed. A new urge constellates my life, something difficult to understand, difficult to articulate, a prayer surfacing in a dream. In each instant the universe swells into being and is as suddenly consumed - horrible, sublime mystery. Let me learn to become as wild as the pungent taste of this sparkling yellow mystery let me learn to be fed by and to feed the wilderness at the core of the universe. Let me live to assist in the work of bestowing upon future generations this wilderness which alone can awaken our true nature.

Henry David Thoreau

Maine Woods (<http://www.library.ucsb.edu/depts/thoreau/>), paras 70-77 extracts.

On the summit of Mount Ktaadn.

The mountain seemed a vast aggregation of loose rocks, as if some time it had rained rocks, and they lay as they fell on the mountain sides, nowhere fairly at rest, but leaning on each other, all rocking-stones, with cavities between, but scarcely any soil or smoother shelf. They were the raw materials of a planet dropped from an unseen quarry, which the vast chemistry of nature would anon work up, or work down, into the smiling and verdant plains and valleys of earth. This was an undone extremity of the globe... Some part of the beholder, even some vital part, seems to escape through the loose grating of his ribs as he ascends. He is more alone than you can imagine. There is less of substantial thought and fair understanding in him, than in the plains where men inhabit. His reason is dispersed and shadowy, more thin and subtle, like the air. 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. She seems to say sternly, why came ye here before your time? This ground is not prepared for you. Is it not enough that I smile in the valleys? I have never made this soil for thy feet, this air for thy breathing, these rocks for thy neighbors. I cannot pity nor fondle thee here, but forever relentlessly drive thee hence to where I am kind. Why seek me where I have not called thee, and then complain because you find me but a stepmother? Shouldst thou freeze or starve, or shudder thy life away, here is no shrine, nor altar, nor any access to my ear. .

And yet we have not seen pure Nature, unless we have seen her thus vast and drear and inhuman, though in the midst of cities. Nature was here something savage and awful, though beautiful. I looked with awe at the ground I trod on, to see what the Powers had made there, the form and fashion and material of their work. This was that Earth of which we have heard, made out of Chaos and Old Night. Here was no man's garden, but the unhandselled globe... It was Matter, vast, terrific, – not his Mother Earth that we have heard of, not for him to tread

on, or be buried in, – no, it were being too familiar even to let his bones lie there, – the home, this, of Necessity and Fate. There was there felt the presence of a force not bound to be kind to man... I stand in awe of my body, this matter to which I am bound has become so strange to me... What is this Titan that has possession of me? Talk of mysteries! – Think of our life in nature, – daily to be shown matter, to come in contact with it, – rocks, trees, wind on our cheeks! the solid earth! the actual world! the common sense! Contact! Contact! Who are we? where are we?

William Wordsworth

Prelude, Book I.

Duncan Wu. *Romanticism: An Anthology* (Blackwell, 1994), pp 292-294.

One evening (surely I was led by her)
I went alone into a shepherd's boat,
A skiff that to a willow-tree was tied
Within a rocky cave, its usual home:
'Twas by the shores of Patterdale, a vale
Wherein I was a stranger, thither come
A schoolboy-traveller at the holidays:
Forth rambled from the village inn alone
No sooner had I sight of this small skiff,
Discovered thus by unexpected chance,
Than I unloosed her tether and embarked.
The moon was up, the lake was shining clear
Among the hoary mountains; from the shore
I pushed, and struck the oars, and struck again
In cadence, and my little boat moved on
Even like a man who walks with stately step
Though bent on speed. It was an act of stealth
And troubled pleasure; nor without the voice
Of mountain-echoes did my boat move on,
Leaving behind her still on either side
Small circles glittering idly in the moon
Until they melted all into one track
Of sparkling light.

A rocky steep up rose
Above the cavern of the willow-tree,
And now, as suited one who proudly rowed
With his best skill, I fixed a steady view
Upon the top of that same craggy ridge,
The bound of the horizon, for behind
Was nothing but the stars and the grey sky.
She was an elfin pinnace; lustily
I dipped my oars into the silent lake,
And as I rose upon the stroke my boat
Went heaving through the water like a swan -
When, from behind that craggy steep (till then
The bound of the horizon), a huge cliff,
As if with voluntary power instinct,

Upreared its head. I struck and struck again,
And growing still in stature, the huge cliff
Rose up between me and the stars, and still,
With measured motion, like a living thing
Strode after me. With trembling hands I turned
And through the silent water stole my way
Back to the cavern of the willow-tree.
There in her mooring-place I left my bark,
And through the meadows homeward went with grave
And serious thoughts; and after I had seen
That spectacle, for many days my brain
Worked with a dim and undetermined sense
Of unknown modes of being. In my thoughts
There was a darkness - call it solitude
Or blank desertion; no familiar shapes
Of hourly objects, images of trees,
Of sea or sky, no colours of green fields,
But huge and mighty forms that do not live
Like living men moved slowly through my mind
By day, and were the trouble of my dreams.

Wisdom and spirit of the universe,
Thou soul that art the eternity of thought,
That givest to forms and images a breath
And everlasting motion! - not in vain,
By day or star-light thus from my first dawn
Of childhood didst thou intertwine for me
The passions that build up our human soul,
Not with the mean and vulgar works of man,
But with high objects, with enduring things,
With life and nature, purifying thus
The elements of feeling and of thought,
And sanctifying by such discipline
Both pain and fear, until we recognize
A grandeur in the beatings of the heart.
Nor was this fellowship vouchsafed to me
With stinted kindness. In November days
When vapours rolling down the valleys made
A lonely scene more lonesome, among woods
At noon, and mid the calm of summer nights
When by the margin of the trembling lake
Beneath the gloomy hills I homeward went
In solitude, such intercourse was mine.
'Twas mine among the fields both day and night,
And by the waters all the summer long.

Val Plumwood's encounter with a crocodile is available in an article called *Being Prey*.
The whole article can be downloaded for a modest fee from:
www.utne.com

A substantial excerpt of the article can be found at:

www.aislingmagazine.com/aislingmagazine/articles/TAM30/ValPlumwood.html

John Muir also recounts an encounter with an alligator and, although it was much less traumatic, he expresses similar views to those of Val Plumwood:

It is from Chapter 5 of *A Thousand Mile Walk to the Gulf* and is available at:

www.sierraclub.org/john_muir_exhibit

Arrived at a place on the margin of a stagnant pool where an alligator had been rolling and sunning himself. "See," said a man who lived here, "see, what a track that is! He must have been a mighty big fellow. Alligators wallow like hogs and like to lie in the sun. I'd like a shot at that fellow." Here followed a long recital of bloody combats with the scaly enemy, in many of which he had, of course, taken an important part. Alligators are said to be extremely fond of negroes and dogs, and naturally the dogs and negroes are afraid of them.

Another man that I met to-day pointed to a shallow, grassy pond before his door. "There," said he, "I once had a tough fight with an alligator. He caught my dog. I heard him howling, and as he was one of my best hunters I tried hard to save him. The water was only about knee-deep and I ran up to the alligator. It was only a small one about four feet long, and was having trouble in its efforts to drown the dog in the shallow water. I scared him and made him let go his hold, but before the poor crippled dog could reach the shore, he was caught again, and when I went at the alligator with a knife, it seized my arm. If it had been a little stronger it might have eaten me instead of my dog."

I never in all my travels saw more than one, though they are said to be abundant in most of the swamps, and frequently attain a length of nine or ten feet. It is reported, also, that they are very savage, oftentimes attacking men in boats. These independent inhabitants of the sluggish waters of this low coast cannot be called the friends of man, though I heard of one big fellow that was caught young and was partially civilized and made to work in harness.

Many good people believe that alligators were created by the Devil, thus accounting for their all-consuming appetite and ugliness. But doubtless these creatures are happy and fill the place assigned them by the great Creator of us all. Fierce and cruel they appear to us, but beautiful in the eyes of God. They, also, are his children, for He hears their cries, cares for them tenderly, and provides their daily bread.

The antipathies existing in the Lord's great animal family must be wisely planned, like balanced repulsion and attraction in the mineral kingdom. How narrow we selfish, conceited creatures are in our sympathies! how blind to the rights of all the rest of creation! With what dismal irreverence we speak of our fellow mortals! Though alligators, snakes, etc., naturally repel us, they are not mysterious evils. They dwell happily in these flowery wilds, are part of God's family, unfallen, undepraved, and cared for with the same species of tenderness and love as is bestowed on angels in heaven or saints on earth.

I think that most of the antipathies which haunt and terrify us are morbid productions of ignorance and weakness. I have better thoughts of those alligators now that I have seen them at home. Honorable representatives of the great saurians of an older creation, may you long enjoy your lilies and rushes, and be blessed now and then with a mouthful of terror-stricken man by way of dainty!