

New Hampshire by Robert Frost

I met a lady from the South who said  
(You won't believe she said it, but she said it):  
"None of my family ever worked, or had  
A thing to sell." I don't suppose the work  
Much matters. You may work for all of me.  
I've seen the time I've had to work myself.  
The having anything to sell is what  
Is the disgrace in man or state or nation.

I met a traveller from Arkansas  
Who boasted of his state as beautiful  
For diamonds and apples. "Diamonds  
And apples in commercial quantities?"  
I asked him, on my guard. "Oh yes," he answered,  
Off his. The time was evening in the Pullman.  
"I see the porter's made your bed," I told him.

I met a Californian who would  
Talk California—a state so blessed,  
He said, in climate none had ever died there  
A natural death, and Vigilance Committees  
Had had to organize to stock the graveyards  
And vindicate the state's humanity.  
"Just the way Steffanson runs on," I murmured,  
"About the British Arctic. That's what comes  
Of being in the market with a climate."

I met a poet from another state,  
A zealot full of fluid inspiration,  
Who in the name of fluid inspiration,  
But in the best style of bad salesmanship,  
Angrily tried to make me write a protest  
(In verse I think) against the Volstead Act.  
He didn't even offer me a drink  
Until I asked for one to steady *him*.  
This is called having an idea to sell.

It never could have happened in New Hampshire.

The only person really soiled with trade  
I ever stumbled on in old New Hampshire  
Was someone who had just come back ashamed  
From selling things in California.  
He'd built a noble mansard roof with balls  
On turrets like Constantinople, deep  
In woods some ten miles from a railroad station,  
As if to put forever out of mind  
The hope of being, as we say, received.  
I found him standing at the close of day

Robert Frost

Inside the threshold of his open barn,  
Like a lone actor on a gloomy stage—  
And recognized him through the iron grey  
In which his face was muffled to the eyes  
As an old boyhood friend, and once indeed  
A drover with me on the road to Brighton.  
His farm was "grounds," and not a farm at all;  
His house among the local sheds and shanties  
Rose like a factor's at a trading station.  
And he was rich, and I was still a rascal.  
I couldn't keep from asking impolitely,  
Where had he been and what had he been doing?  
How did he get so? (Rich was understood.)  
In dealing in "old rags" in San Francisco.  
Oh it was terrible as well could be.  
We both of us turned over in our graves.

Just specimens is all New Hampshire has,  
One each of everything as in a show-case  
Which naturally she doesn't care to sell.

She had one President (pronounce him Purse,  
And make the most of it for better or worse.  
He's your one chance to score against the state).  
She had one Daniel Webster. He was all  
The Daniel Webster ever was or shall be.  
She had the Dartmouth needed to produce him.

I call her old. She has one family  
Whose claim is good to being settled here  
Before the era of colonization,  
And before that of exploration even.  
John Smith remarked them as he coasted by  
Dangling their legs and fishing off a wharf  
At the Isles of Shoals, and satisfied himself  
They weren't Red Indians but veritable  
Pre-primitives of the white race, dawn people,  
Like those who furnished Adam's sons with wives;  
However uninnocent they may have been  
In being there so early in our history.  
They'd been there then a hundred years or more.  
Pity he didn't ask what they were up to  
At that date with a wharf already built,  
And take their name. They've since told me their name—  
Today an honored one in Nottingham.

As for what they were up to more than fishing—  
Suppose they weren't behaving Puritanly,  
The hour had not yet struck for being good,  
Mankind had not yet gone on the Sabbatical.  
It became an explorer of the deep  
Not to explore too deep in others' business.

Robert Frost

Did you but know of him, New Hampshire has  
One real reformer who would change the world  
So it would be accepted by two classes,  
Artists the minute they set up as artists,  
Before, that is, they are themselves accepted,  
And boys the minute they get out of college.  
I can't help thinking those are tests to go by.

And she has one I don't know what to call him,  
Who comes from Philadelphia every year  
With a great flock of chickens of rare breeds  
He wants to give the educational  
Advantages of growing almost wild  
Under the watchful eye of hawk and eagle—  
Dorkings because they're spoken of by Chaucer,  
Sussex because they're spoken of by Herrick.

She has a touch of gold. New Hampshire gold—  
You may have heard of it. I had a farm  
Offered me not long since up Berlin way  
With a mine on it that was worked for gold;  
But not gold in commercial quantities.  
Just enough gold to make the engagement rings  
And marriage rings of those who owned the farm.  
What gold more innocent could one have asked for?

One of my children ranging after rocks  
Lately brought home from Andover or Canaan  
A specimen of beryl with a trace  
Of radium. I know with radium  
The trace would have to be the merest trace  
To be below the threshold of commercial,  
But trust New Hampshire not to have enough  
Of radium or anything to sell.

A specimen of everything, I said.  
She has one witch—old style. She lives in Colebrook.  
(The only other witch I ever met  
Was lately at a cut-glass dinner in Boston.  
There were four candles and four people present.  
The witch was young, and beautiful (new style),  
And open-minded. She was free to question  
Her gift for reading letters locked in boxes.  
Why was it so much greater when the boxes  
Were metal than it was when they were wooden?  
It made the world seem so mysterious.  
The S'ciety for Psychical Research  
Was cognizant. Her husband was worth millions.  
I think he owned some shares in Harvard College.)

—  
Rudyard Kipling

New Hampshire *used* to have at Salem  
A company we called the White Corpuscles,  
Whose duty was at any hour of night  
To rush in sheets and fool's caps where they smelled  
A thing the least bit doubtfully perscented  
And give someone the Skipper Ireson's Ride.  
One each of everything as in a show-case.  
More than enough land for a specimen  
You'll say she has, but there there enters in  
Something else to protect her from herself.  
There quality makes up for quantity.  
Not even New Hampshire farms are much for sale.  
The farm I made my home on in the mountains  
I had to take by force rather than buy.  
I caught the owner outdoors by himself  
Raking up after winter, and I said,  
"I'm going to put you off this farm: I want it."  
"Where are you going to put me? In the road?"  
"I'm going to put you on the farm next to it."  
"Why won't the farm next to it do for you?"  
"I like this better." It was really better.

Apples? New Hampshire has them, but unsprayed.  
With no suspicion in stem-end or blossom-end  
Of vitriol or arsenate of lead,  
And so not good for anything but cider.  
Her unpruned grapes are flung like lariats  
Far up the birches out of reach of man.

A state producing precious metals, stones,  
And—writing; none of these except perhaps  
The precious literature in quantity  
Or quality to worry the producer  
About disposing of it. Do you know,  
Considering the market, there are more  
Poems produced than any other thing?  
No wonder poets sometimes have to *seem*  
So much more business-like than business men.  
Their wares are so much harder to get rid of.

She's one of the two best states in the Union.  
Vermont's the other. And the two have been  
Yoke-fellows in the sap-yoke from of old  
In many Marches. And they lie like wedges,  
Thick end to thin end and thin end to thick end,  
And are a figure of the way the strong  
Of mind and strong of arm should fit together,  
One thick where one is thin and vice versa.  
New Hampshire raises the Connecticut  
In a trout hatchery near Canada,  
But soon divides the river with Vermont.  
Both are delightful states for their absurdly

Raw Frost

Small towns—Lost Nation, Bungey, Muddy Boo,  
Poplin, Still Corners (so called not because  
The place is silent all day long, nor yet  
Because it boasts a whisky still—because  
It set out once to be a city and still  
Is only corners, cross-roads in a wood).  
And I remember one whose name appeared  
Between the pictures on a movie screen  
Election night once in Franconia,  
When everything had gone Republican  
And Democrats were sore in need of comfort:  
Easton goes Democratic, Wilson 4  
Hughes 2. And everybody to the saddest  
Laughed the loud laugh, the big laugh at the little.  
New York (five million) laughs at Manchester,  
Manchester (sixty or seventy thousand) laughs  
At Littleton (four thousand), Littleton  
Laughs at Franconia (seven hundred), and  
Franconia laughs, I fear,—did laugh that night—  
At Easton. What has Easton left to laugh at,  
And like the actress exclaim, "Oh my God" at?  
There's Bungey; and for Bungey there are towns,  
Whole townships named but without population.

Anything I can say about New Hampshire  
Will serve almost as well about Vermont,  
Excepting that they differ in their mountains.  
The Vermont mountains stretch extended straight;  
New Hampshire mountains curl up in a coil.

I had been coming to New Hampshire mountains.  
And here I am and what am I to say?  
Here first my theme becomes embarrassing.  
Emerson said, "The God who made New Hampshire  
Taunted the lofty land with little men."  
Another Massachusetts poet said,  
"I go no more to summer in New Hampshire.  
I've given up my summer place in Dublin."  
But when I asked to know what ailed New Hampshire,  
She said she couldn't stand the people in it,  
The little men (it's Massachusetts speaking).  
And when I asked to know what ailed the people,  
She said, "Go read your own books and find out."  
I may as well confess myself the author  
Of several books against the world in general.  
To take them as against a special state  
Or even nation's to restrict my meaning.  
I'm what is called a sensibilitist,  
Or otherwise an environmentalist.  
I refuse to adapt myself a mite  
To any change from hot to cold, from wet  
To dry, from poor to rich, or back again.

Roller Frost



I make a virtue of my suffering  
From nearly everything that goes on round me.  
In other words, I know wherever I am,  
Being the creature of literature I am,  
I shall not lack for pain to keep me awake.  
Kit Marlowe taught me how to say my prayers:  
"Why this is Hell, nor am I out of it."  
Samoa, Russia, Ireland I complain of,  
No less than England, France and Italy.  
Because I wrote my novels in New Hampshire  
Is no proof that I aimed them at New Hampshire.

When I left Massachusetts years ago  
Between two days, the reason why I sought  
New Hampshire, not Connecticut,  
Rhode Island, New York, or Vermont was this:  
Where I was living then, New Hampshire offered  
The nearest boundary to escape across.  
I hadn't an illusion in my hand-bag  
About the people being better there  
Than those I left behind. I thought they weren't.  
I thought they couldn't be. And yet they were.  
I'd sure had no such friends in Massachusetts  
As Hall of Windham, Gay of Atkinson,  
Bartlett of Raymond (now of Colorado),  
Harris of Derry, and Lynch of Bethlehem.  
The glorious bards of Massachusetts seem  
To want to make New Hampshire people over.  
They taunt the lofty land with little men.  
I don't know what to say about the people.  
For art's sake one could almost wish them worse  
Rather than better. How are we to write  
The Russian novel in America  
As long as life goes so unterribly?  
There is the pinch from which our only outcry  
In literature to date is heard to come.  
We get what little misery we can  
Out of not having cause for misery.  
It makes the guild of novel writers sick  
To be expected to be Dostoievskis  
On nothing worse than too much luck and comfort.  
This is not sorrow, though; it's just the vapors,  
And recognized as such in Russia itself  
Under the new régime, and so forbidden.  
If well it is with Russia, then feel free  
To say so or be stood against the wall  
And shot. It's Pollyanna now or death.  
This, then, is the new freedom we hear tell of;  
And very sensible. No state can build  
A literature that shall at once be sound  
And sad on a foundation of wellbeing.

Why Frost

To show the level of intelligence  
Among us; it was just a Warren farmer  
Whose horse had pulled him short up in the road  
By me, a stranger. This is what he said,  
From nothing but embarrassment and want  
Of anything more sociable to say:  
"You hear those hound-dogs sing on Moosilauke?  
Well they remind me of the hue and cry  
We've heard against the Mid-Victorians  
And never rightly understood till Bryan  
Retired from politics and joined the chorus.  
The matter with the Mid-Victorians  
Seems to have been a man named John L. Darwin."  
"Go 'long," I said to him, he to his horse.

I knew a man who failing as a farmer  
Burned down his farmhouse for the fire insurance,  
And spent the proceeds on a telescope  
To satisfy a life-long curiosity  
About our place among the infinities.  
And how was that for other-worldliness?

If I must choose which I would elevate—  
The people or the already lofty mountains,  
I'd elevate the already lofty mountains.  
The only fault I find with old New Hampshire  
Is that her mountains aren't quite high enough.  
I was not always so; I've come to be so.  
How, to my sorrow, how have I attained  
A height from which to look down critical  
On mountains? What has given me assurance  
To say what height becomes New Hampshire mountains,  
Or any mountains? Can it be some strength  
I feel as of an earthquake in my back  
To heave them higher to the morning star?  
Can it be foreign travel in the Alps?  
Or having seen and credited a moment  
The solid moulding of vast peaks of cloud  
Behind the pitiful reality  
Of Lincoln, Lafayette and Liberty?  
Or some such sense as says how high shall jet  
The fountain in proportion to the basin?  
No, none of these has raised me to my throne  
Of intellectual dissatisfaction,  
But the sad accident of having seen  
Our actual mountains given in a map  
Of early times as twice the height they are—  
Ten thousand feet instead of only five—  
Which shows how sad an accident may be.  
Five thousand is no longer high enough.  
Whereas I never had a good idea  
About improving people in the world,

Robert Frost

Here I am over-fertile in suggestion,  
And cannot rest from planning day or night  
How;high I'd thrust the peaks in summer snow  
To tap the upper sky and draw a flow  
Of frosty night air on the vale below  
Down from the stars to freeze the dew as starry.

The more the sensibilitist I am  
The more I seem to want my mountains wild;  
The way the wiry gang-boss liked the log-jam.  
After he'd picked the lock and got it started,  
He dodged a log that lifted like an arm  
Against the sky to break his back for him,  
Then came in dancing, skipping, with his life  
Across the roar and chaos, and the words  
We saw him say along the zigzag journey  
Were doubtless as the words we heard him say  
On coming nearer: "Wasn't she an /-deal  
Son-of-a-bitch? You bet she was an /-deal."

For all her mountains fall a little short,  
Her people not quite short enough for Art,  
She's still New Hampshire, a most restful state.

Lately in converse with a New York alec  
About the new school of the pseudo-phallic,  
I found myself in a close corner where  
I had to make an almost funny choice.  
"Choose you which you will be—a prude, or puke,  
Mewling and puking in the public arms."  
"Me for the hills where I don't have to choose."  
"But if you had to choose, which would you be?"  
I wouldn't be a prude afraid of nature.  
I know a man who took a double axe  
And went alone against a grove of trees;  
But his heart failing him, he dropped the axe  
And ran for shelter quoting Matthew Arnold:  
"Nature is cruel, man is sick of blood;  
There's been enough shed without shedding mine.  
Remember Bimam Wood! The wood's in flux!"  
He had a special terror of the flux  
That showed itself in dendrophobia.  
The only decent tree had been to mill  
And educated into boards, he said.  
He knew too well for any earthly use  
The line where man leaves off and nature starts,  
And never over-stepped it save in dreams.  
He stood on the safe side of the line talking;  
Which is sheer Matthew Arnoldism,  
The cult of one who owned himself "a foiled,  
Circuitous wanderer," and "took dejectedly  
His seat upon the intellectual throne."

Restful



Agreed in frowning on these improvised  
Altars the woods are full of nowadays,  
Again as in the days when Ahaz sinned  
By worship under green trees in the open.  
Scarcely a mile but that I come on one,  
A black-cheeked stone and stick of rain-washed charcoal.  
Even to say the groves were God's first temples  
Comes too near to Ahaz' sin for safety.  
Nothing not built with hands of course is sacred.  
But here is not a question of what's sacred;  
Rather of what to face or run away from.  
I'd hate to be a runaway from nature.  
And neither would I choose to be a puke  
Who cares not what he does in company,  
And, when he can't do anything, falls back  
On words, and tries his worst to make words speak  
Louder than actions, and sometimes achieves it.  
It seems a narrow choice the age insists on.  
How about being a good Greek, for instance?  
That course, they tell me, isn't offered this year.  
"Come, but this isn't choosing—puke or prude?"  
Well, if I have to choose one or the other,  
I choose to be a plain New Hampshire farmer  
With an income in cash of say a thousand  
(From say a publisher in New York City).  
It's restful to arrive at a decision,  
And restful just to think about New Hampshire.  
At present I am living in Vermont.

-Excerpt from *New Hampshire* (1923)

Robert Frost