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| **Two Tramps in Mud Time** |
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| **Robert Frost (1934)** |
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| Out of the mud two strangers came And caught me splitting wood in the yard, And one of them put me off my aim By hailing cheerily “Hit them hard!” I knew pretty well why he dropped behind And let the other go on a way. I knew pretty well what he had in mind: He wanted to take my job for pay.  Good blocks of beech it was I split, As large around as the chopping block; And every piece I squarely hit Fell splinterless as a cloven rock. The blows that a life of self-control Spares to strike for the common good That day, giving a loose to my soul, I spent on the unimportant wood.  The sun was warm but the wind was chill. You know how it is with an April day When the sun is out and the wind is still, You’re one month on in the middle of May. But if you so much as dare to speak, A cloud comes over the sunlit arch, A wind comes off a frozen peak, And you’re two months back in the middle of March.  A bluebird comes tenderly up to alight And fronts the wind to unruffle a plume His song so pitched as not to excite A single flower as yet to bloom. It is snowing a flake: and he half knew Winter was only playing possum. Except in color he isn’t blue, But he wouldn’t advise a thing to blossom.  The water for which we may have to look In summertime with a witching wand, In every wheel rut’s now a brook, In every print of a hoof a pond. Be glad of water, but don’t forget The lurking frost in the earth beneath That will steal forth after the sun is set And show on the water its crystal teeth.  The time when most I loved my task These two must make me love it more By coming with what they came to ask. You’d think I never had felt before The weight of an axhead poised aloft, The grip on earth of outspread feet. The life of muscles rocking soft And smooth and moist in vernal heat.  Out of the woods two hulking tramps (From sleeping God knows where last night, But not long since in the lumber camps.) They thought all chopping was theirs of right. Men of the woods and lumberjacks, They judged me by their appropriate tool. Except as a fellow handled an ax, They had no way of knowing a fool.  Nothing on either side was said. They knew they had but to stay their stay And all their logic would fill my head: As that I had no right to play With what was another man’s work for gain. My right might be love but theirs was need. And where the two exist in twain Theirs was the better right — agreed.  But yield who will to their separation, My object in living is to unite My avocation and my vocation As my two eyes make one in sight. Only where love and need are one, And the work is play for mortal stakes, Is the deed ever really done For heaven and the future’s sakes. |