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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 cameAnd caught me splitting wood in the yard,And one of them put me off my aimBy hailing cheerily “Hit them hard!”I knew pretty well why he dropped behindAnd 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 hitFell splinterless as a cloven rock.The blows that a life of self-controlSpares to strike for the common goodThat 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 dayWhen 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 alightAnd fronts the wind to unruffle a plumeHis song so pitched as not to exciteA single flower as yet to bloom.It is snowing a flake: and he half knewWinter 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 lookIn 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 forgetThe lurking frost in the earth beneathThat will steal forth after the sun is setAnd show on the water its crystal teeth.The time when most I loved my taskThese two must make me love it moreBy coming with what they came to ask.You’d think I never had felt beforeThe weight of an axhead poised aloft,The grip on earth of outspread feet.The life of muscles rocking softAnd 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 stayAnd all their logic would fill my head:As that I had no right to playWith what was another man’s work for gain.My right might be love but theirs was need.And where the two exist in twainTheirs was the better right — agreed.But yield who will to their separation,My object in living is to uniteMy avocation and my vocationAs 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 doneFor heaven and the future’s sakes. |