

Robert Frost Farm

Mending Wall

From “Mending Wall”

Something there is that doesn't love a wall,
That sends the frozen-ground-swell under it
And spills the upper boulders in the sun,
And makes gaps even two can pass abreast.
The gaps I mean,
No one has seen them made
or heard them made,
But at spring mending-time we find them there.
I let my neighbor know beyond the hill;
And on a day we meet to walk the line
And set the wall between us once again.
To each the boulders that have fallen to each.
Oh, just another kind of outdoor game,
One on a side. It comes to little more;
There where it is we do not need the wall:
He only says, “Good fences make good neighbors.”

*written in England 1913

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Mending Wall (continued)

To the south of the Frost farm lived Napoleon Guay, who at “spring mending time” always proposed a neighborly ritual of restoring the stone wall between his property and Frost’s; the ritual of putting back the rocks which had been knocked off during the winter and spring by “the frozen-ground-swell” under the wall. Replacing stones felled by gravity or frost heaves was not an uncommon task for practical New England farmers who wanted no dispute as to where the boundaries lay between he and his neighbor. It was actually Guay who kept repeating, with obvious poetic overtones, “Good fences make good neighbors.” The same neighbor also took great pride in making his own axe-helves, and he showed Frost that “the lines of a good helve/Were native to the grain before the knife Expressed them.” Neither man missed the poetry in that.

When Frost wrote “Mending Wall,” he was reminiscing about the regular excursions he and his neighbor made to repair this wall. Guay insisted on the task as a matter of tradition. Frost’s wry tone in the poem hints that he considered it a needless task. Yet years later, while reading a collection of his poems, he said: “I wrote the poem thinking of the old wall that I hadn’t mended in several years and which must be in a terrible condition. I wrote that poem in England when I was very homesick for my old wall in New England.”

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