

IX

APRIL, 1857

(ÆT. 39)

April 1. 8 A. M. — Up Assabet.

See an *Emys guttata* sunning on the bank. I had forgotten whether I ever saw it in this river. Hear a phoebe, and this morning the tree sparrows sing very sweetly about Keyes's arbor-vitæ and Cheney's pines and apple trees. Crow blackbirds. I think it must have been these I saw the 29th of March. Checkerberreries very fair and abundant now near Muhlenbergii Brook, contrasting with the red-brown leaves. They are not commonly touched by the frost. I see children picking spring cranberries in the meadows. It is a true April evening, feeling and looking as if it would [rain], and already I hear a robin or two singing their evening song.

April 2. Go to New Bedford.

A great change in the weather. I set out apple trees yesterday, but in the night it was very cold, with snow, which is now several inches deep. On the sidewalk in Cambridge I see a toad, which apparently hopped out from under a fence last evening, frozen quite hard in a sitting posture. Carried it into Boston in my pocket, but could not thaw it into life.

The other day as I came to the front of the house I

caught sight of a genuine wayfaring man, an oldish countryman, with a frock and a bundle strapped to his back, who was speaking to the butcher, just then driving off in his cart. He was a gaunt man with a flashing eye, as if half crazy with travel, and was complaining, "You see it shakes me so, I would rather travel the common road." I supposed that he referred to the railroad, which the butcher had recommended for shortness. I was touched with compassion on observing the butcher's apparent indifference, as, jumping to his seat, he drove away before the traveller had finished his sentence, and the latter fell at once into the regular wayfarer's gait, bending under his pack and holding the middle of the road with a teetering gait.

On my way to New Bedford, see within a couple of rods of the railroad, in some country town, a boy's box trap set for some muskrat or mink by the side of a little pond. The lid was raised, and I could see the bait on its point.

A black snake was seen yesterday in the Quaker burying-ground here.

April 3. In Ricketson's shanty. R. has seen white-bellied swallows more than a week. I walk down the side of the river and see Walton's ice-boat left on the bank.

Hear R. describing to Alcott his bachelor uncle James Thornton. When he awakes in the morning he lights the fire in his stove (all prepared) with a match on the end of a stick, without getting up. When he gets up he first attends to his ablutions, being personally

very clean, cuts off a head of tobacco to clean his teeth with, eats a hearty breakfast, sometimes, it was said, even buttering his sausages. Then he goes to a relative's store and reads the *Tribune* till dinner, sitting in a corner with his back to those who enter. Goes to his boarding-house and dines, eats an apple or two, and then in the afternoon frequently goes about the solution of some mathematical problem (having once been a schoolmaster), which often employs him a week.¹

April 4. Saturday. Walk down the shore of the river. A Dutchman pushes out in his skiff after quahogs. He also took his eel-spear, thinking to try for eels if he could not get quahogs, for, owing to the late cold weather, they might still be buried in the mud. I saw him raking up the quahogs on the flats at high (?) tide, in two or three feet of water. He used a sort of coarse, long-pronged hoe. Keeps anchoring on the flats and searches for a clam on the bottom with his eye, then rakes it up and picks it off his rake.

Am not sure what kind of large gulls I see there, some more white, some darker, methinks, than the herring gull.

R. tells me that he found dead in his piazza the south side of his house, the 23d of last January, the snow being very deep and the thermometer -12° at sunrise, a warbler, which he sent to Brewer. I read Brewer's note to him, in which he said that he took it to be the *Sylvicola coronata* and would give it to the Natural

¹ [Daniel Ricketson and his Friends, p. 350.]

History Society, thinking it remarkable that it was found at that time. B. says that he discovered "for the first time its nest in the heart of Nova Scotia near Parrsboro mountains [I think last season].¹ It was the only *new* egg of that trip. Yet I felt well repaid, for 'no other white man had ever before seen that egg to know it,' as Audubon says of another species."

Caught a croaking frog in some smooth water in the railroad gutter. Above it was a uniform (perhaps olive?) brown, without green, and a yellowish line along the edge of the lower jaws. It was, methinks, larger than a common *Rana palustris*. Near by was its spawn, in very handsome spherical masses of transparent jelly, two and a half to three inches in diameter, suspended near the surface of some weed, as goldenrod or aster, and consisting of globules about a third of an inch in diameter, with a black or dark centre as big as a large shot. Only these black centres were visible at a little distance in the water, and so much the more surprising and interesting is the translucent jelly when you lift it to the light. It even suggested the addition of cream and sugar, for the table. Yet this pool must have been frozen over last night! What frog can it be?²

April 5. Sunday. Arthur R. has been decking a new Vineyard boat which he has bought, and making a curb about the open part.

P. M. — Walked round by the ruins of the factory. See in many places the withered leaves of the aletris in

¹ [The brackets are Thoreau's.]

² *Vide* Apr. 4th, 1857. *R. sylvatica*.

rather low ground, about the still standing withered stems. It was well called husk-root by the squaw.

Arthur says that he just counted, at 9.30 P. M., twenty toads that had hopped out from under the wall on to the sidewalk near the house. This, then, is apparently the way with the toads. They very early hop out from under walls on to sidewalks in the warmer nights, long before they are heard to ring, and are often frozen and then crushed there. Probably single ones ring earlier than I supposed. I hear the croaking frogs at 9.30 P. M., also the *speed speed* over R.'s meadow, which I once referred to the snipe, but R. says is the woodcock, whose other strain he has already heard.

April 6. P. M. — To New Bedford Library.

Mr. Ingraham, the librarian, says that he once saw frog-spawn in New Bedford the 4th of March. Take out Emmons's Report on the insects injurious to vegetation in New York. See a plate of the *Colias Philodice*, or common sulphur-yellow butterfly, male and female of different tinge. *Areoda lanigera* is apparently the common yellow dor-bug. Arthur has *Tabanus*, the great horse-fly. Emmons says of *Scutelleridæ*: "The disagreeable smelling bugs that frequent berry bushes and strawberry vines belong here. . . . Of this family the genus *Pentatoma* is one of the most common and feeds upon the juice of plants. Sometimes it has only to pass over a fruit, to impart to it its offensive odor." The one represented looks like the huckleberry one.

April 7. Tuesday. Went to walk in the woods. When I had got half a mile or more away in the woods alone, and was sitting on a rock, was surprised to be joined by R.'s large Newfoundland dog Ranger, who had smelled me out and so tracked me. Would that I could add his woodcraft to my own! He would trot along before me as far as the winding wood-path allowed me to see him, and then, with the shortest possible glance over his shoulder, ascertain if I was following. At a fork in the road he would pause, look back at me, and deliberate which course I would take.

At sundown I went out to gather bayberries to make tallow of. Holding a basket beneath, I rubbed them off into it between my hands, and so got about a quart, to which were added enough to make about three pints. They are interesting little gray berries clustered close about the short bare twigs, just below the last year's growth. The berries have little prominences, like those of an orange, encased with tallow, the tallow also filling the interstices, down to the nut.

They require a great deal of boiling to get out all the tallow. The outmost case soon melted off, but the inmost part I did not get even after many hours of boiling. The oily part rose to the top, making it look like a savory black broth, which smelled just like balm or other herb tea. I got about a quarter of a pound by weight from these say three pints of berries, and more yet remained. Boil a great while, let it cool, then skim off the tallow from the surface; melt again and strain it. What I got was more yellow than what I have seen in the shops. A small portion cooled in the form

of small corns (nuggets I called them when I picked them out from amid the berries), flat hemispherical, of a very pure lemon yellow, and these needed no straining. The berries were left black and massed together by the remaining tallow.¹

Cat-briar (*Smilax*) they call here "the devil's wrapping yarn." I see several emperor moth cocoons, with small eggs on the back, apparently of the ichneumon-fly, that has destroyed the nymph.

April 8. I discovered one convenient use the bayberries served, — that if you got your hands pitched in pine woods, you had only to rub a parcel of these berries between your hands to start the pitch off. Arthur said the shoemakers at the Head of the River used the tallow to rub the soles of their shoes with to make them shine. I gathered a quart in about twenty minutes with my hands. You might gather them much faster with a suitable rake and a large shallow basket, or if one were clearing a field he could cut the bushes and thresh them in a heap.

April 9. Thursday. A. M. — To the cove south of the town.

See them haul two seines. They caught chiefly alewives, from sixty to a hundred at a haul, seine twelve to fifteen feet wide. There were also caught with the alewives, skates, two or three "drums" (like flatfish, only the mouth twisted the other way and not good), flatfish, smelts, sculpins, five-fingers, and a lobster with

¹ [*Cape Cod*, p. 103; *Riv.* 121, 122.]

red claws. This was what the seine would catch in making a large circuit. It seemed to be pretty hard work hauling it in, employing two or three men or boys at each end. A fisherman said that they caught the first alewife the 28th of March there.

Picked up many handsome scallop shells beyond the ice-houses, with wormy-shaped parasites on them.

April 10. Friday. Rain.

D. R.'s shanty is about half a dozen rods southwest of his house (which may be forty rods from the road), nearly between his house and barn; is twelve by fourteen feet, with seven-foot posts, with common pent-roof. In building it, he directed the carpenter to use Western boards and timber, though some Eastern studs (spruce?) were inserted. He had already occupied a smaller shanty at "Woodlee" about a mile south. The roof is shingled and the sides made of matched boards and painted a light clay-color with chocolate(?) colored blinds. Within, it is not plastered and is open to the roof, showing the timbers and rafters and rough boards and cross-timbers overhead as if ready for plastering. The door is at the east end with a small window on each side of it; a similar window on each side the building, and one at the west end, the latter looking down the garden walk. In front of the last window is a small box stove with a funnel rising to a level with the plate, and there inserted in a small brick chimney which rests on planks. On the south side the room, against the stove, is a rude settle with a coarse cushion and pillow; on the opposite side, a large low

desk, with some book-shelves above it; on the same side, by the window, a small table covered with books; and in the northeast corner, behind the door, an old-fashioned secretary, its pigeonholes stuffed with papers. On the opposite side as you enter, is place for fuel, which the boy leaves each morning, a place to hang greatcoats. There were two small pieces of carpet on the floor, and Ricketson or one of his guests swept out the shanty each morning. There was a small kitchen clock hanging in the southwest corner and a map of Bristol County behind the settle.

The west and northwest side is well-nigh covered with slips of paper, on which are written some sentence or paragraph from R.'s favorite books. I noticed, among the most characteristic, Dibdin's "Tom Tackle," a translation of Anacreon's "Cicada," lines celebrating tobacco, Milton's "How charming is divine philosophy," etc., "Inveni requiem: Spes et Fortuna valet. Nil mihi vobiscum est: ludite nunc alios" (is it Petrarch?) (this is also over the door), "Mors aequo pulsat," etc., some lines of his own in memory of A. J. Downing, "Not to be in a hurry," over the desk, and many other quotations celebrating retirement, country life, simplicity, humanity, sincerity, etc., etc., from Cowper and other English poets, and similar extracts from newspapers. There were also two or three advertisements, — one of a cattle-show exhibition, another warning not to kill birds contrary to law (he being one of the subscribers ready to enforce the act), advertisement of a steamboat on Lake Winnepiscogee, etc., cards of his business friends. The size of different

brains from *Hall's Journal of Health*, and "Take the world easy." A sheet of blotted blotting-paper tacked up, and of Chinese character from a tea-chest. Also a few small pictures and pencil sketches, the latter commonly caricatures of his visitors or friends, as "The Trojan" (Channing) and "Van Best." I take the more notice of these particulars because his peculiarities are so commonly unaffected. He has long been accustomed to put these scraps on his walls and has a basketful somewhere, saved from the old shanty. Though there were some quotations which had no right there, I found all his peculiarities faithfully expressed, — his humanity, his fear of death, love of retirement, simplicity, etc.

The more characteristic books were Bordley's "Husbandry," Drake's "Indians," Barber's "Historical Collections," Zimmermann on Solitude, Bigelow's "Plants of Boston, etc.," Farmer's "Register of the First Settlers of New England," Marshall's "Gardening," Nicol's "Gardener," John Woolman, "The Modern Horse Doctor," Downing's "Fruits, etc.," "The Farmer's Library," "Walden," Dymond's Essays, Job Scott's Journal, Morton's Memorial, Bailey's Dictionary, Downing's "Landscape Gardening, etc.," "The Task," Nuttall's Ornithology, Morse's Gazetteer, "The Domestic Practice of Hydropathy," "John Bunce," Dwight's Travels, Virgil, Young's "Night Thoughts," "History of Plymouth," and other "*Shanty Books*."

There was an old gun, hardly safe to fire, said to be loaded with an inextractable charge, and also an old sword over the door, also a tin sign "D. Ricketson's

Office" (he having set up for a lawyer once) and a small crumpled horn there. I counted more than twenty rustic canes scattered about, a dozen or fifteen pipes of various patterns, mostly the common, two spy-glasses, an open paper of tobacco, an Indian's jaw dug up, a stuffed blue jay and pine grosbeak, and a rude Indian stone hatchet, etc., etc. There was a box with fifteen or twenty knives, mostly very large and old-fashioned jack-knives, kept for curiosity, occasionally given away to a boy or friend. A large book full of pencil sketches to be inspected by whomsoever, containing countless sketches of his friends and acquaintances and himself and of wayfaring men whom he had met, Quakers, etc., etc., and now and then a vessel under full sail or an old-fashioned house, sketched on a peculiar pea-green paper. A pail of water stands behind the door, with a peculiar tin cup for drinking made in France.¹

April 11. Saturday. 8 P. M. — Went to the Head of the River to see them catch smelts. The water there is fresh when the tide is out. They use nets five or six feet square, stretched from the ends of crossed semi-circular hoops, at the ends of poles about twelve feet long. The net bags down when raised. There were twenty or thirty fishermen standing close together, half on each side of the narrow river, each managing one of these nets, while a good part of the village appeared to be collected on the bridge. The tide was then coming in, but the best time is when it is going out. A fisher-

¹ [Daniel Ricketson and his Friends, pp. 350-351.]

man told me that the smelt run up in the night only. These fishers stood just below a two-arched bridge. The tide was coming up between the arches, while the fresh water which the smelt preferred was running down next the shore on each side. The smelt were ascending in these streams of fresh water on each side. The shore for half a dozen rods on each side was lined with fishers, each wielding a single net. This man told me that the smelt had been running up about one month and were now about done. The herring had been seen for a fortnight. They will run this month and all the next. The former leave off when the latter begin. Shad have not been caught yet. They come after herring. Eels, too, are occasionally caught now, going up from the deeper river below. These fishes spawn in the little pond just above the bridge. They let the net rest on the bottom and every two or three minutes lift it up. They get thirty or many more smelt sometimes at one lift and catch other fish in the same way, even bass, sea perch, pickerel, eels, and sometimes a trout. The shad make a ripple like a harrow, and you know when to raise the net. The villagers were talking across the stream, calling each other by their Christian names. Even mothers mingled with the fishermen, looking for their children. It suggested how much we had lost out of Concord River without realizing it. This is the critical season of a river, when it is fullest of life, its flowering season, the wavelets or ripples on its surface answering to the scales of the fishes beneath.

I saw the herring on sticks at the doors of many shops in New Bedford.

I saw the myrtle-bird here about a week ago.

If salmon, shad, and alewives were pressing up our river now, as formerly they were, a good part of the villagers would thus, no doubt, be drawn to the brink at this season. Many inhabitants of the neighborhood of the ponds in Lakeville, Freetown, Fairhaven, etc., have petitioned the legislature for permission to connect Little Quitticus Pond with the Acushnet River by digging, so that the herring can come up into it. The very fishes in countless schools are driven out of a river by the *improvements* of the civilized man, as the pigeon and other fowls out of the air. I can hardly imagine a greater change than this produced by the influence of man in nature. Our Concord River is a dead stream in more senses than we had supposed. In what sense now does the spring ever come to the river, when the sun is not reflected from the scales of a single salmon, shad, or alewife? No doubt there is *some* compensation for this loss, but I do not at this moment see clearly what it is. That river which the aboriginal and indigenous fishes have not deserted is a more primitive and interesting river to me. It is as if some vital quality were to be lost out of a man's blood and it were to circulate more lifelessly through his veins. We are reduced to a few migrating (?) suckers, perchance.

April 12. Sunday. I think I hear the bay-wing here.

April 13. Monday. To Middleborough ponds. There was no boat on Little Quitticus: so we could

not explore it. Set out to walk round it, but, the water being high, — higher than anciently even, on account of dams, — we had to go round a swamp at the south end, about Joe's Rocks, and R. gave it up. I went to Long Pond and waited for him. Saw a strange turtle, much like a small snapping turtle or very large *Sternotherus odoratus*, crawling slowly along the bottom next the shore. Poked it ashore with a stick. It had a peculiarly square snout, two hinges to the sternum and both parts movable. Was very sluggish; would not snap nor bite. Looked old, being mossy above on the edge, and the scales greenish and eaten beneath. The flesh slate-colored.¹

¹ [The following (written on the back of a lottery circular!) is pasted into the Journal:]

The Freetown Turtle compared with Storer's *Sternotherus*.

Answers to the generic description, except perhaps that the posterior valve of the sternum is movable.

Compared with the *S. odoratus*.

There is no peculiar scent to it. The upper shell is flattened on the dorsal ridge for the width of the dorsal plates and is not carinated there. (I find one as flat, and others are not carinated.) Color out of water a dirty brown. The marginal plates are a little narrower.

The sternum (as well as that of my *S. odoratus*) is apparently composed of 11 instead of 9 plates, the anterior portion being composed of 5 instead of 3 plates. The posterior portion is distinctly movable, much more than the *odoratus*, and it is quite rounded on the sides.

Irides not distinct. It appears as if blind. No yellow lines whatever on the head or neck. Jaws not dark-brown, but bluish-slate, as is the skin generally.

My two *S. odoratus* are 3½ inches long by 2½ wide and 1½ inches high, being highest behind. The Freetown turtle is 4 inches long by 2½ and 1½ high, being highest forward. It has much green moss (?) on the rear and marginal plates, and the scales of the sternum are

I saw that it was new and wished to bring it away, but had no paper to wrap it in. So I peeled a white birch, getting a piece of bark about ten inches long. I noticed that the birch sap was flowing. This bark at once curled back so as to present its yellow side outward. I rolled it about the turtle and folded the ends back and tied it round with a strip of birch bark, making a very nice and airy box for the creature, which would not be injured by moisture, far better than any paper, and so I brought it home to Concord at last. As my coat hung in R.'s shanty, over a barrel of paper, the morning that I came away the turtle made a little noise, scratching the birch bark in my pocket. R. observed, "There is a mouse in that barrel. What would you do about it?" "Oh, let him alone," said I, "he'll get out directly." "They often get among my papers," he added. "I guess I'd better set the barrel outdoors." I did not explain, and perhaps he experimented on the barrel after my departure.¹

As I sat on the shore there, waiting for R., I saw many mosquitoes flying low over the water close to the sandy shore.

greenish and worn or carious. It is quite sluggish. Otherwise it apparently answers to Storer's *S. odoratus*.

Get a sternotherus May 13th within ¼ inch as long and about as flat above. *Vide* July 20th, 1857.

¹ [*Daniel Ricketson and his Friends*, pp. 354, 355. The editors insert the following note: —

"This might appear like a practical joke, but we are inclined to think it was out of consideration for Father's sensitiveness regarding all dumb animals that Mr. Thoreau kept him 'in the dark' as to his specimen, fearing he might be disturbed."]

The turtle when I first saw him was slowly and tremblingly pacing along the bottom, rather toward the shore, with its large head far out on its outstretched neck. From its *size* and general color and aspect, I did not doubt at first that it was a snapping turtle, notwithstanding the season.

April 14. Tuesday. Rains all day.

April 15. Wednesday. Leave New Bedford.

I had been surprised to find the season more backward, *i. e.* the vegetation, in New Bedford than in Concord. I could find no alder and willow and hazel catkins and no caltha and saxifrage so forward as in Concord. The ground was a uniform russet when I left, but when I had come twenty miles it was visibly greener, and the greenness steadily increased all the way to Boston. Coming to Boston, and also to Concord, was like coming from early spring to early summer. It was as if a fortnight at least had elapsed. Yet New Bedford is much warmer in the winter. Why is it more backward than Concord? The country is very flat and exposed to southerly winds from the sea, which, to my surprise, were raw and chilly. Also the soil is wet and cold, unlike our warm sandy soil, which is dry the day after a rain-storm. Perhaps, as the ground is more bare in the winter, vegetation suffers more after all. One told me that there was more cloudy weather than here. It seemed to me that there was a deficiency of warm hollows and sheltered places behind hills and woods, which abound with us. On such cliffs as they have facing the south, vege-

tation was much more backward than in like positions with us, apparently owing to sea-turns and chilly south winds.

April 16. At Concord.

Get birch sap, — two bottles yellow birch and five of black birch, — now running freely, though not before I left Concord. Meanwhile I hear the note of the pine warbler. Last night was very cold, and some ditches are frozen this morning. This is Fast-Day. I think if you should tap all the trees in a large birch swamp, you would make a stream large enough to turn a mill.

About a month ago, at the post-office, Abel Brooks, who is pretty deaf, sidling up to me, observed in a loud voice which all could hear, "Let me see, your society is pretty large, ain't it?" "Oh, yes, large enough," said I, not knowing what he meant. "There 's Stewart belongs to it, and Collier, he 's one of them, and Emerson, and my boarder" (Pulsifer), "and Channing, I believe, I think he goes there." "You mean the *walkers*; don't you?" "Ye-es, I call you the Society. All go to the woods; don't you?" "Do you miss any of your wood?" I asked. "No, I hain't worried any yet. I believe you 're a pretty clever set, as good as the average," etc., etc.

Telling Sanborn of this, he said that, when he first came to town and boarded at Holbrook's, he asked H. how many religious societies there were in town. H. said that there were three, — the Unitarian, the Orthodox, and the Walden Pond Society. I asked Sanborn

with which Holbrook classed himself. He said he believes that he put himself with the last.

April 17. Rain. It rains about every other day now for a fortnight past.

April 18. P. M. — To Conantum.

Hear the huckleberry-bird, also the seringo. The beaked hazel, if that is one just below the little pine at Blackberry Steep, is considerably later than the common, for I cannot get a whole twig fully out, though the common is too far gone to gather there. The catkins, too, are shorter.

April 20. Arbor-vitæ apparently in full bloom.

April 21. Tuesday. Mr. Loomis writes me that he saw two barn swallows in Cambridge April 1st! I have the *Corema Conradii* from Plymouth, in bloom.

It snows hard all day. If it did not melt so fast, would be a foot deep. As it is, is about three inches on a level.

April 22. Wednesday. Fair again.

To Great Sudbury Meadow by boat.

The river higher than before and rising. C. and I sail rapidly before a strong northerly wind, — no need of rowing upward, only of steering, — cutting off great bends by crossing the meadows. We have to roll our boat over the road at the stone bridge, Hubbard's causeway, (to save the wind), and at Pole Brook (to save

distance). It is worth the while to hear the surging of the waves and their gurgling under the stern, and to feel the great billows toss us, with their foaming yellowish crests. The world is not aware what an extensive navigation is now possible on our overflowed fresh meadows. It is more interesting and fuller of life than the sea bays and permanent ponds. A dozen gulls are circling over Fair Haven Pond, some very white beneath, with very long, narrow-pointed, black-tipped wings, almost regular semicircles like the new moon. As they circle beneath a white scud in this bright air, they are almost invisible against it, they are so nearly the same color. What glorious fliers! But few birds are seen; only a crow or two tectering along the water's edge looking for its food, with its large, clumsy head, and on unusually long legs, as if stretched, or its pants pulled up to keep it from the wet, and now flapping off with some large morsel in its bill; or robins in the same place; or perhaps the sweet song of the tree sparrows from the alders by the shore, or of a song sparrow or blackbird. The phœbe is scarcely heard. Not a duck do we see! All the shores have the aspect of winter, covered several inches deep with snow, and we see the shadows on the snow as in winter; but it is strange to see the green grass burning up through in warmer nooks under the walls.

We pause or lay to from time to time, in some warm, smooth lee, under the southwest side of a wood or hill, as at Hubbard's Second Grove and opposite Weir Hill, pushing through saturated snow like ice on the surface of the water. There we lie awhile amid the bare alders,

maples, and willows, in the sun, see the expanded sweet-gale and early willows and the budding swamp pyrus looking up drowned from beneath. As we lie in a broad field of meadow wrack, — floating cranberry leaves and finely bruised meadow-hay, — a wild medley. Countless spiders are hastening over the water. We pass a dozen boats sunk at their moorings, at least at one end, being moored too low.

Near Tall's Island, rescued a little pale or yellowish brown snake that was coiled round a willow half a dozen rods from the shore and was apparently chilled by the cold. Was it not Storer's "little brown snake?" It had a flat body. Frank Smith lives in a shanty on the hill near by.

At the Cliff Brook I see the skunk-cabbage leaves not yet unrolled, with their points gnawed off. Some very fresh brown fungi on an alder, tender and just formed one above another, flat side up, while those on the birch are white and flat side down. They soon dry white and hard. This melting snow makes a great crop of fungi.

Turritis stricta, nearly out (in two or three days).

Observed the peculiar dark lines on a birch (*Betula populifolia*) at the insertion of the branches, regular cones like volcanoes in outline, the part included grayish-brown and wrinkled, edged by broad heavy dark lines. There are as many of these very regular cones on the white ground of a large birch as there are branches. They are occasioned by the two currents of growth, that of the main trunk and that of the branch (which last commenced several inches lower near the centre of the tree),



meeting and being rucked or turned up at the line of contact like a surge, exposing the edges of the inner bark there, decayed and dark, while the bark within the lines approaches the darker color of the limb. The larger were six or seven inches high by as much in width at the bottom. You observe the same manner of growth in other trees. That portion of the bark below the limb obeys the influence of the limb and endeavors to circle about it, but soon encounters the growth of the main stem. There are interesting figures on the stem of a large white birch, arranged spirally about it.

The river has risen several inches since morning, so that we push over Hubbard Bridge causeway, where we stuck in the morning.

April 23. I saw at Ricketson's a young woman, Miss Kate Brady, twenty years old, her father an Irishman, a worthless fellow, her mother a smart Yankee. The daughter formerly did sewing, but now keeps school for a livelihood. She was born at the Brady house, I think in Freetown, where she lived till twelve years old and helped her father in the field. There she rode horse to plow and was knocked off the horse by apple tree boughs, kept sheep, caught fish, etc., etc. I never heard a girl or woman express so strong a love for nature. She purposes to return to that lonely ruin, and dwell there alone, since her mother and sister will not accompany her; says that she knows all about farming and keeping sheep and spinning and weaving, though it would puzzle her to shingle the old house. There she thinks she can "live free." I was pleased to hear

of her plans, because they were quite cheerful and original, not professedly reformatory, but growing out of her love for "Squire's Brook and the Middleborough ponds." A strong love for outward nature is singularly rare among both men and women. The scenery immediately about her homestead is quite ordinary, yet she appreciates and can use that part of the universe as no other being can. Her own sex, so tamely bred, only jeer at her for entertaining such an idea, but she has a strong head and a love for good reading, which may carry her through. I would by no means discourage, nor yet particularly encourage her, for I would have her so strong as to succeed in spite of all ordinary discouragements.

It is very rare that I hear one express a strong and imperishable attachment to a particular scenery, or to the whole of nature, — I mean such as will control their whole lives and characters. Such seem to have a true home in nature, a hearth in the fields and woods, whatever tenement may be burned. The soil and climate is warm to them. They alone are naturalized, but most are tender and callow creatures that wear a house as their outmost shell and must get their lives insured when they step abroad from it. They are lathed and plastered in from all natural influences, and their delicate lives are a long battle with the dyspepsia. The others are fairly rooted in the soil, and are the noblest plant it bears, more hardy and natural than sorrel. The dead earth seems animated at the prospect of their coming, as if proud to be trodden on by them. It recognizes its lord. Children of the Golden Age. Hospitals and almshouses are not their destiny. When I

hear of such an attachment in a reasonable, a divine, creature to a particular portion of the earth, it seems as if then first the earth succeeded and rejoiced, as if it had been made and existed only for such a use. These various soils and reaches which the farmer plods over, which the traveller glances at and the geologist dryly describes, then first flower and bear their fruit. Does he chiefly own the land who coldly uses it and gets corn and potatoes out of it, or he who loves it and gets inspiration from it? How rarely a man's love for nature becomes a ruling principle with him, like a youth's affection for a maiden, but more enduring! All nature is my bride. That nature which to one is a stark and ghastly solitude is a sweet, tender, and genial society to another.

They told me at New Bedford that one of their whalers came in the other day with a black man aboard whom they had picked up swimming in the broad Atlantic, without anything to support him, but nobody could understand his language or tell where he came from. He was in good condition and well-behaved. My respect for my race rose several degrees when I heard this, and I thought they had found the true merman at last. "What became of him?" I inquired. "I believe they sent him to the State Almshouse," was the reply. Could anything have been more ridiculous? That he should be beholden to Massachusetts for his support who floated free where Massachusetts with her State Almshouse could not have supported herself for a moment. They should have dined him, then accompanied him to the nearest cape and bidden him good-by.

The State would do well to appoint an intelligent standing committee on such curious [*sic*], in behalf of philologists, naturalists, and so forth, to see that the proper disposition is made of such visitors.

April 24. Sail to Ball's Hill.

The water is at its height, higher than before this year. I see a few shad-flies on its surface. Scudding over the Great Meadows, I see the now red crescents of the red maples in their prime round about, above the gray stems. The willow osiers require to be seen endwise the rows, to get an intense color. The clouds are handsome this afternoon: on the north, some dark, windy clouds, with rain falling thus beneath: —



but it is chiefly wind; southward, those summer clouds in numerous isles, light above and dark-barred beneath. Now the sun comes out and shines on the pine hill west of Ball's Hill, lighting up the light-green pitch pines and the sand and russet-brown lichen-clad hill. That is a very New England landscape. Buttrick's yellow farmhouse near by is in harmony with it. The little fuzzy gnats are about. I see a vertical circular cobweb, more than a foot in diameter, nearly filled with them, and this revealed the existence of the swarms that had filled the air on all sides. If it had been as

many yards wide as it was inches, it would probably have been just as full.

Saw on a small oak slanting over water in a swamp, in the midst of a mass of cat-briar, about ten feet from the ground, a very large nest, of that hypnum (?) moss, in the form of an inverted cone, one foot across above and about eight inches deep, with a hole in the side very thick and warm; probably a mouse-nest, for there were mouse droppings within.

April 25. Saturday. P. M. — Down Turnpike to Smith's Hill and return by Goose Pond.

Saw a large old hollow log with the upper side [gone], which [made] me doubt if it was not a trough open at the ends, and suggested that the first trough was perhaps such a hollow log with one side split off and the ends closed.

It is cool and windy this afternoon. Some sleet falls, but as we sit on the east side of Smith's chestnut grove, the wood, though so open and leafless, makes a perfect lee for us, apparently by breaking the force of the wind. A dense but bare grove of slender chestnut trunks a dozen rods wide is a perfect protection against this violent wind, and makes a perfectly calm lee.

I find that I can very easily make a convenient box of the birch bark, at this season at least, when the sap is running, to carry a moss or other thing in safely. I have only to make three cuts and strip off a piece from a clear space some ten inches long, and then, rolling it up wrong side outward, as it naturally curls backward

as soon as taken off (the dry side shrinking, the moist swelling) and so keeps its place, I bend or fold the ends back on it, as if it were paper, and so close them, and, if I please, tie it round with a string of the same bark. This is resilient or elastic, and stands out from a plant, and also is not injured by moisture like paper. When the incision is made now, the crystalline drops of sap follow the knife down the tree. This box dries yellow or straw-colored, with large clouds of green derived from the inner bark. The inner bark of the *Betula populifolia* just laid bare is green with a yellow tinge; that of the *B. papyracea* is buff. The undermost layer of the outer bark of the last, next to the inner bark, is straw-colored and exceedingly thin and delicate, and smoother to the lips than any artificial tissue.

Bluets numerous and fully out at the Smith hillside between trough and Saw Mill Brook Falls.

Got to-day unquestionable *Salix humilis* in the Britton hollow, north of his shanty, but all there that I saw (and elsewhere as yet) [are] pistillate. It is apparently now in prime, and apparently the next to bloom after the various larger and earlier ones, all which I must call as yet *S. discolor*. This *S. humilis* is small-catkin'd and loves a dry soil.

A correspondent of the *Tribune* of April 24th, 1857, who signs "Lyndeborough, N. H., April 15, 1857. J. Herrick," says that he taps his sugar maples four feet from the ground so that cattle may not disturb the buckets, and that the sap will run as freely from the topmost branch as from a root. "Any one may learn this fact from the red squirrel, who, by the way, is a

famous sugar maker, and knows when to tap a tree and where to do it. He performs his tapping in the highest perpendicular limbs or twigs, and leaves the sun and wind to do the evaporating, and in due season and pleasant weather you will see him come round and with great gusto gather his sirup into his stomach."

The dense, green, rounded beds of mosses in springs and old water-troughs are very handsome now,—intensely cold green cushions.

Again we had, this afternoon at 2 o'clock, those wild, scudding wind-clouds in the north, spitting cold rain or sleet, with the curved lines of falling rain beneath. The wind is so strong that the thin drops fall on you in the sunshine when the cloud has drifted far to one side. The air is peculiarly clear, the light intense, and when the sun shines slanting under the dark scud, the willows, etc., rising above the dark flooded meadows, are lit with a fine straw-colored light like the spirits of trees.

I see winkle fungi comparatively fresh, whose green and reddish-brown and pale-buff circles above turn to light and dark slate and white, and so finally fade all to white. The beds of fine mosses on bare yellow mouldy soil are now in fruit and very warmly red in the sun when seen a little from one side.

No pages in my Journal are so suggestive as those which contain a rude sketch.

Suppose we were to drink only the yellow birch sap and mix its bark with our bread, would not its yellow curls sprout from our foreheads, and our breath and persons exhale its sweet aroma? What sappy vigor

there would be in our limbs! What sense we should have to explore the swamps with!

April 26. Riordan's cock follows close after me while spading in the garden, and hens commonly follow the gardener and plowman, just as cowbirds the cattle in a pasture.

I turn up now in the garden those large leather-colored nymphs.

P. M. — Up Assabet to White Cedar Swamp.

See on the water over the meadow, north of the boat's place, twenty rods from the nearest shore and twice as much from the opposite shore, a very large striped snake swimming. It swims with great ease, and lifts its head a foot above the water, darting its tongue at us. A snake thus met with on the water appears far more monstrous, not to say awful and venomous, than on the land. It is always something startling and memorable to meet with a serpent in the midst of a broad water, careering over it. But why had this one taken to the water? Is it possible that snakes ever hibernate in meadows which are subject to be overflowed? This one when we approached swam toward the boat, apparently to rest on it, and when I put out my paddle, at once coiled itself partly around it and allowed itself to be taken on board. It did not hang down from the paddle like a dead snake, but stiffened and curved its body in a loose coil about it.

This snake was two feet and eleven inches long; the tail alone, seven and a quarter. There [were] one hundred and forty-five large abdominal plates, besides the

three smaller under the head, and sixty-five pairs of caudal scales. The central stripe on the back was not bright-yellow, as Storer describes, but a pale brown or clay-color; only the more indistinct lateral stripes were a greenish yellow, the *broad* dark-brown stripes being between; beneath greenish. Beneath the tail in centre, a dark, somewhat greenish line.

This snake was killed about 2 P. M.; *i. e.*, the head was perfectly killed then; yet the posterior half of the body was apparently quite alive and would curl strongly around the hand at 7 P. M. It had been hanging on a tree in the meanwhile.

I have the same objection to killing a snake that I have to the killing of any other animal, yet the most humane man that I know never omits to kill one.

I see a great many beetles, etc., floating and struggling on the flood.

We sit on the shore at Wheeler's fence, opposite Merriam's. At this season still we go seeking the sunniest, most sheltered, and warmest place. C. says this is the warmest place he has been in this year. We are in this like snakes that lie out on banks. In sunny and sheltered nooks we are in our best estate. There our thoughts flow and we flourish most. By and by we shall seek the shadiest and coolest place. How well adapted we are to our climate! In the winter we sit by fires in the house; in spring and fall, in sunny and sheltered nooks; in the summer, in shady and cool groves, or over water where the breeze circulates. Thus the average temperature of the year just suits us. Generally, whether in summer or winter, we are not sensible either of heat or cold.

A great part of our troubles are literally domestic or originate in the house and from living indoors. I could write an essay to be entitled "Out of Doors,"—undertake a crusade against houses. What a different thing Christianity preached to the house-bred and to a party who lived out of doors! Also a sermon is needed on economy of fuel. What right has my neighbor to burn ten cords of wood, when I burn only one? Thus robbing our half-naked town of this precious covering. Is he so much colder than I? It is expensive to maintain him in our midst. If some earn the salt of their porridge, are we certain that they earn the fuel of their kitchen and parlor? One man makes a little of the driftwood of the river or of the dead and refuse (unmarketable!) [wood] of the forest suffice, and Nature rejoices in him. Another, Herod-like, requires ten cords of the best of young white oak or hickory, and he is commonly esteemed a virtuous man. He who burns the most wood on his hearth is the least warmed by the sight of it growing. Leave the trim wood-lots to widows and orphan girls. Let men tread gently through nature. Let us religiously burn stumps and worship in groves, while Christian vandals lay waste the forest temples to build miles of meeting-houses and horse-sheds and feed their box stoves.

The white cedar is apparently just out. The higher up the tree, the earlier. Towed home an oak log some eighteen feet long and more than a foot through, with a birch withe around it and another birch fastened to that.

Father says he saw a boy with a snapping turtle yesterday.

April 27. I hear the prolonged *che che che che che*, etc., of the chip-bird this morning as I go down the street. It is a true April morning with east wind, the sky overcast with wet-looking clouds, and already some drops have fallen. It will surely rain to-day, but when it will begin in earnest and how long it will last, none can tell. The gardener makes haste to get in his peas, getting his son to drop them. He who requires fair weather puts off his enterprises and resumes them in his mind many times in the forenoon, as the clouds fall lower and sprinkle the fields, or lift higher and show light streaks. He goes half a mile and is overtaken by thick sprinkling drops, falling faster and faster. He pauses and says to himself, this may be merely a shower, which will soon be over, or it may come to a steady rain and last all day. He goes a few steps further, thinking over the condition of a wet man, and then returns. Again it holds up and he regrets that he had not persevered; but the next hour it is stiller and darker, with mist beneath the investing cloud, and then commences a gentle, deliberate rain, which will probably last all day. So he puts on patience and the house.

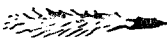
I dig up those reddish-brown dor-bugs in the garden. They stir a little.

Ricketson frequents his shanty by day and evening as much as his house, but does not sleep there, partly on account of his fear of lightning, which he cannot overcome. His timidity in this respect amounts to an idiosyncrasy. I was awaked there in a thunder-storm at midnight by Ricketson rushing about the house, calling to his sons to come down out of the attic where

they slept and bolting in to leave a light in my room. His fear of death is equally singular. The thought of it troubles him more perhaps than anything else. He says that he knows nothing about another life, he would like to stay here always. He does not know what to think of the Creator that made the lightning and established death.

April 28. A. M. — Surveying for Willard Farrar by Walden.

While standing by my compass over the supposed town bound beyond Wyman's, Farrar having just gone along northeast on the town line, I saw with the side of my eye some black creature crossing the road, reminding me of a black cat two thirds grown. Turning, I saw it plainly for half a minute. It crossed to my side about twenty-five feet off, apparently not observing me, and disappeared in the woods. It was perfectly black, for aught I could see (not brown), some eighteen or twenty inches or more in length from tip to tip, and I first thought of a large black weasel, then of a large black squirrel, then wondered if it could be a pine marten. I now try to think it a mink; yet it appeared *larger* and with a *shorter* body. It had a straight, low, bushy tail about two inches thick, short legs, and carried its tail and legs about on the same level. It was nearly, if not quite, as large as a muskrat. Has the mink such a tail?

Looking for an "old  pine stump" mentioned in a deed and digging into a hillock with our hands to discover it, we turned up, amid the reddish virgin mould, — quite turned to soil, — a large body

of short, chunked, yellowish ants, say five twelfths (?) of an inch long, with their white larvæ (?). I perceived at more than a foot distant a very strong penetrating scent, yet agreeable and very spicy. It reminded me at first of the cherry pectoral; but it was not that; it was very strong lemon-peel. The "Library of Entertaining Knowledge" says that the odor of the wood ant will suffocate a frog dropped among them. Are not these the American "wood ant"?

Icy cold northwest wind, and snow whitening the mountains.

April 29. Purple finch sings on R. W. E.'s trees.

P. M. — To Dugan Desert.

At Tarbell's watering-place, see a dandelion, its conspicuous bright-yellow disk in the midst of a green space on the moist bank. It is thus I commonly meet with the earliest dandelion set in the midst of some liquid green patch. It seems a sudden and decided progress in the season. On the pitch pines beyond John Hosmer's, I see old cones within two feet of the ground on the trunk, — sometimes a circle of them around it, — which must have been formed on the young tree some fifteen years ago. Sweet-fern at entrance of Ministerial Swamp. A partridge there drums incessantly. C. says it makes his heart beat with it, or he feels it in his breast.

I find that that clayey-looking soil on which the bæomyces grows is a very thin crust on common sand only.

I have seen that pretty little hair-cap moss (*Pogo-*

*natum brevicaulis?*¹) for a fortnight out at least; like little pine trees; the staminate pretty, cup-shaped and shorter.

A steel-blue-black flattish beetle, which, handled, imparted a very disagreeable carrion-like scent to fingers.

Miles's Pond is running off. The sweet-gale, willows, etc., which have been submerged and put back, begin to show themselves and are trying to catch up with their fellows.

I am surprised to see how some blackberry pastures and other fields are filling up with pines, trees which I thought the cows had almost killed two or three years ago; so that what was then a pasture is now a young wood-lot. A little snow still lies in the road in one place, the relic of the snow of the 21st.

April 30. Thursday. A. M. — Surveying for Farrar and Heywood by Walden.

Hear a kingfisher at Goose Pond. Hear again the same bird heard at Conantum April 18th, which I think must be the ruby-crowned wren. As we stood looking for a bound by the edge of Goose Pond, a pretty large hawk alighted on an oak close by us. It probably has a nest near by and was concerned for its young.

The larch plucked yesterday sheds pollen to-day in house, probably to-day abroad. Balm-of-Gilead plucked yesterday, *not yet* (nor on May 1st) in house.

¹ No.