Jan. 1. There are many words which are genuine and indigenous and have their root in our natures, not made by scholars, and as well understood by the illiterate as others. There are also a great many words which are spurious and artificial, and can only be used in a bad sense, since the thing they signify is not fair and substantial,—such as the church, the judiciary, to impeach, etc., etc. They who use them do not stand on solid ground. It is in vain to try to preserve them by attaching other words to them as the true church, etc. It is like towing a sinking ship with a canoe.

I have lately been surveying the Walden woods so extensively and minutely that I now see it mapped in my mind’s eye—as, indeed, on paper—as so many men’s wood-lots, and am aware when I walk there that I am at a given moment passing from such a one’s wood-lot to such another’s. I fear this particular dry knowledge may affect my imagination and fancy, that it will not be easy to see so much wildness and native vigor there as formerly. No thicket will seem so unexplored now that I know that a stake and stones may be found in it. In these respects those Maine woods differed essentially from ours. There you are never
reminded that the wilderness which you are threading is, after all, some villager's familiar wood-lot from which his ancestors have sledded their fuel for generations, or some widow's thirds, minutely described in some old deed, which is recorded, of which the owner has got a plan, too, and old bound marks may be found every forty rods if you will search. What a history this Concord wilderness which I affect so much may have had! How many old deeds describe it,—some particular wild spot,—how it passed from Cole to Robinson, and Robinson to Jones, and Jones finally to Smith, in course of years! Some have cut it over three times during their lives, and some burned it and sowed it with rye, and built walls and made a pasture of it, perchance. All have renewed the bounds and reblazed the trees many times. Here you are not reminded of these things.

'T is true then, the map informs you that you stand on land granted by the State to such an academy, or on Bingham's Purchase, but these names do not impose on you for you see nothing to remind you of the academy or of Bingham.

Jan. 3. Sunday. I see a flock of F. hyemalis this afternoon, the weather is hitherto so warm.

About, in his lively "Greece and the Greeks," says, "These are the most exquisite delights to be found in Greece, next to, or perhaps before, the pleasure of admiring the masterpieces of art,—a little cool water under a genial sun." I have no doubt that this is true.

1 [Maine Woods, p. 168; Riv. 206, 207.]

2 [Maine Woods, pp. 168, 169; Riv. 207.]

Jan. 4. P. M.—The weather still remarkably warm; the ice too soft for skating. I go through by the Andromeda Ponds and down river from Fair Haven. I am encouraged by the sight of men fishing in Fair Haven Pond, for it reminds me that they have animal spirits for such adventures. I am glad to be reminded that any go a-fishing. When I get down near to Cardinal Shore, the sun near setting, its light is wonderfully reflected from a narrow edging of yellowish stubble at the edge of the meadow ice and foot of the hill, an edging only two or three feet wide, and the stubble but a few inches high. (I am looking east.) It is remarkable because the ice is but a dull lead-color (it is so soft and sodden), reflecting no light, and the hill beyond is a dark russet, here and there patched with snow.
but this narrow intermediate line of stubble is all aglow. I get its true color and brightness best when I do not look directly at it, but a little above it toward the hill, seeing it with the lower part of my eye more truly and abstractly. It is as if all the rays slid over the ice and lodged against and were reflected by the stubble. It is surprising how much sunny light a little straw that survives the winter will reflect.

The channel of the river is open part of the way. The *Coriaceae* and some quite young willow shoots are the red-barked twigs so conspicuous now along the riversides.

That bright and warm reflection of sunlight from the insignificant edging of stubble was remarkable. I was coming down-stream over the meadows, on the ice, within four or five rods of the eastern shore. The sun on my left was about a quarter of an hour above the horizon. The ice was soft and sodden, of a dull lead-color, quite dark and reflecting no light as I looked eastward, but my eyes caught by accident a singular sunny brightness reflected from the narrow border of stubble only three or four inches high (and as many feet wide perhaps) which rose along the edge of the ice at the foot of the hill. It was not a mere brightening of the bleached stubble, but the warm and yellow light of the sun, which, it appeared, it was peculiarly fitted to reflect. It was that amber light from the west which we sometimes witness after a storm, concentrated on this stubble, for the hill beyond was merely a dark russet spotted with snow. All the yellow rays seemed to be reflected by this insignificant stubble alone, and when I looked more generally a little above it, seeing it with the under part of my eye, it appeared yet more truly and more bright; the reflected light made its due impression on my eye, separated from the proper color of the stubble, and it glowed almost like a low, steady, and serene fire. It was precisely as if the sunlight had mechanically slid over the ice, and lodged against the stubble. It will be enough to say of something warmly and sunnily bright that it glowed like lit stubble. It was remarkable that, looking eastward, this was the only evidence of the light in the west.

Here and there in the meadow, etc., near springy places, you see where the thinner ice has been pushed up tentwise (\[\text{\textless}\] or \[\text{\textgreater}\]) and cracked, either for want of room, two fields crowding together, or expanding with heat from below.

-Jan. 5. P. M. — I see one of those fuzzy winter caterpillars, black at the two ends and brown-red in middle, crawling on a rock by the Hunt’s Bridge causeway.

Mr. Hosmer is loading hay in his barn. It is meadow-hay, and I am interested in it chiefly as a botanist. If meadow-hay is of less worth in the market, it is more interesting to the poet. In this there is a large proportion of *Osmunda regalis*. But I fear that in the long run it is not so interesting to the cattle to contemplate and chew this as English hay and clover. How completely a load of hay in the winter revives the memory of past summers! Summer in us is only
Jan. 5. A little dried like it. The rowen in Hosmer's barn has a finer and greener look than the first crop. And so the ferns in coal remind us of summer still longer past.

Jan. 6. The first snow-storm of much importance. By noon it may be six inches deep.

P. M. — Up railroad to North River.

The main stream, barely skimmed over with snow, which has sunk the thin ice and is saturated with water, is of a dull-brown color between the white fields.

I detect a very tall and slender tupelo by its thorny-looking twigs. It is close by a white oak, at the yellow gerardia up railroad. It is nearly fifty feet high and only one foot through at the ground. I derive a certain excitement, not to be refused, even from going through Dennis's Swamp on the opposite side of the railroad, where the poison-dogwood abounds. This simple-stemmed bush is very full of fruit, hanging in loose, dry, pale-green drooping panicles. Some of them are a foot long. It impresses me as the most fruitful shrub thereabouts. I cannot refrain from plucking it and bringing home some pretty sprigs. Other fruits there are which belong to the hard season, the enduring panicled andromeda and a few partly decayed prinos berries. I walk amid the bare midrib of cinnamon ferns, with at most a terminal leaflet, and here and there I see a little dark water at the bottom of a dimple in the snow, over which the snow has not yet been able to prevail.

I was feeling very cheap, nevertheless, reduced to make the most of dry dogwood berries. Very little evidence of God or man did I see just then, and life not as rich and inviting an enterprise as it should be, when my attention was caught by a snowflake on my coat-sleeve. It was one of those perfect, crystalline, star-shaped ones, six-rayed, like a flat wheel with six spokes, only the spokes were perfect little pine trees in shape, arranged around a central spangle. This little object, which, with many of its fellows, rested unmelting on my coat, so perfect and beautiful, reminded me that Nature had not lost her pristine vigor yet, and why should man lose heart? Sometimes the pines were worn and had lost their branches, and again it appeared as if several stars had impinged on one another at various angles, making a somewhat spherical mass. These little wheels came down like the wrecks of chariots from a battle waged in the sky. There were mingled with these starry flakes small downy pellets also. This was at mid-afternoon, and it has not quite ceased snowing yet (at 10 p. m.). We are rained and snowed on with gems. I confess that I was a little encouraged, for I was beginning to believe that Nature was poor and mean, and I was now convinced that she turned off as good work as ever. What a world we live in! Where are the jewellers' shops? There is nothing handsomer than a snowflake and a dewdrop. I may say that the maker of the world exhausts his skill with each snowflake and dewdrop that he sends down. We think that the one mechanically coheres and that the other simply flows together and falls, but in truth they are the product of cuthu-
siasm, the children of an ecstasy, finished with the artist's utmost skill.\footnote{Channing, pp. 72, 73.}

The North River is not frozen over. I see tree sparrows twittering and moving with a low creeping and jerking motion amid the Chenopodium in a field, upon the snow, so chubby or puffed out on account of the cold that at first I took them for the arctic birds, but soon I see their bright-chestnut crowns and clear white bars; as the poet says, "a thousand feeding like one," \footnote{"There are forty feeding like one." — Wordsworth.} — though there are not more than a dozen here.

Jan. 7. The storm is over, and it is one of those beautiful winter mornings when a vapor is seen hanging in the air between the village and the woods. Though the snow is only some six inches deep, the yards appear full of those beautiful crystals (star or wheel shaped flakes), lying light, as a measure is full of grain.

9 A. M. — To Hill.

It snowed so late last night, and so much has fallen from the trees, that I notice only one squirrel, and a fox, and perhaps partridge track, into which the snow has blown. The fox has been beating the bush along walls and fences. The surface of the snow in the woods is thickly marked by the snow which has fallen from the trees on it. The mice have not been forth since the snow, or perhaps in some places where they have, their tracks are obliterated.

By 10:30 A. M. it begins to blow hard, the snow comes down from the trees in fine showers, finer far than ever it falls direct from the sky, completely obscuring the view through the aisles of the wood, and in open fields it is rapidly drifting. It is too light to make good sleighing.

By 10 o'clock I notice a very long level stratum of cloud not very high in the southeastern sky, — all the rest being clear, — which I suspect to be the vapor from the sea. This lasts for several hours.

These are true mornings of creation, original and poetic days, not mere repetitions of the past. There is no lingering of yesterday's fogs, only such a mist as might have adorned the first morning.

P. M. — I see some tree sparrows feeding on the fine grass seed above the snow, near the road on the hillside below the Dutch house. They are flitting along one at a time, their feet commonly sunk in the snow, uttering occasionally a low sweet warble and seemingly as happy there, and with this wintry prospect before them for the night and several months to come, as any man by his fireside. One occasionally hops or flies toward another, and the latter suddenly jerks away from him. They are reaching or hopping up to the fine grass, or oftener picking these seeds from the snow. At length the whole ten have collected within a space a dozen feet square, but soon after, being alarmed, they utter a different and less musical chirp and flit away into an apple tree.

Jan. 8. P. M. — To that small meadow just above the Boaz Brown meadow.
Going through the swamp, the snow balled so as to raise me three inches higher than usual.


P. M. — To Deep Cut.

The wind is southwest, and the snow is very moist, with large flakes. Looking toward Trillium Wood, the nearer flakes appear to move quite swiftly, often making the impression of a continuous white line. They are also seen to move directly and nearly horizontally, but the more distant flakes appear to loiter in the air, as if uncertain how they will approach the earth, or even to cross the course of the former, and are always seen as simple and distinct flakes. I think that this difference is simply owing to the fact that the former pass quickly over the field of view, while the latter are much longer in it.

This moist snow has affected the yellow sulphur parmelias and others. They have all got a green hue, and the fruit of the smallest lichen looks fresh and fair. And the wet willow bark is a brighter yellow.

Some chickadees come flitting close to me, and one utters its spring note, phe-be, for which I feel under obligations to him.


The north side of Walden is a warm walk in sunny weather. If you are sick and despairing, go forth in winter and see the red alder catkins dangling at the extremities of the twigs, all in the wintry air, like long, hard mulberries, promising a new spring and the fulfillment of all our hopes. We prize any tenderness, any softening, in the winter — catkins, birds' nests, insect life, etc., etc. The most I get, perchance, is the sight of a mulberry-like red catkin which I know has a dormant life in it, seemingly greater than my own.


4.30 P. M. — At Jonathan Buffum's, Lynn. Lecture in John B. Alley's parlor. Mr. J. Buffum describes to me ancient wolf-traps, made probably by the early settlers in Lynn, perhaps after an Indian model; one some two miles from the shore near Saugus, another more northerly; holes say seven feet deep, about as long, and some three feet wide, stoned up very smoothly, and perhaps converging a little, so that the wolf could not get out. Tradition says that a wolf and a squaw were one morning found in the same hole, staring at each other.

Jan. 14. Mr. Buffum says that in 1817 or 1819 he saw the sea-serpent at Swampscott, and so did several hundred others. He was to be seen off and on for some time. There were many people on the beach the first time, in carriages partly in the water, and the serpent came so near that they, thinking that he might come ashore, involuntarily turned their horses to the shore.
as with a general consent, and this movement caused him to shear off also. The road from Boston was lined with people directly, coming to see the monster. Prince came with his spy-glass, saw, and printed his account of him. Buffum says he has seen him twenty times, once alone, from the rocks at Little Nahant, when he passed along close to the shore just beneath the surface, and within fifty or sixty feet of him, so that he could have touched him with a very long pole, if he had dared to. Buffum is about sixty, and it should be said, as affecting the value of his evidence, that he is a firm believer in Spiritualism.

This forenoon I rode to Nahant with Mr. Buffum. All the country bare. A fine warm day; neither snow nor ice, unless you search narrowly for them. On the way we pass Mr. Alonzo Lewis's cottage. On the top of each of his stone posts is fastened a very perfectly egg-shaped pebble of sienite from Kettle Cove, fifteen to eighteen inches long and of proportionate diameter. I never saw any of that size so perfect. There are some fifteen of them about his house, and on one flatter, circular one he has made a dial, by which I learned the hour (9.30 a.m.). Says he was surveying once at Kettle Cove, where they form a beach a third of a mile long and two to ten feet deep, and he brought home as many as his horse could draw. His house is clapboarded with hemlock bark; now some twenty years old. He says that he built it himself.

Called at the shop where lately Samuel Jillson, now of Feltonville, set up birds,—for he is a taxidermist and very skillful: kills his own birds and with blow-guns, which he makes and sells, some seven feet long, of glass, using a clay ball. Is said to be a dead shot at six rods!

Warm and fall-like as it is, saw many snow buntings at the entrance to the beach. Saw many black ducks (so Lewis said: may they not have been velvet ducks, i.e. coot?) on the sea. Heard of a flock of geese (!) (may they not have been brant, or some other species?), etc.; ice (?) divers. On the south side of Little Nahant a large mass of fine pudding-stone. Nahant is said to have been well-wooded, and furnished timber for the wharves of Boston, i.e. to build them. Now a few willows and balm-of-Gileads are the only trees, if you except two or three small cedars. They say others will not grow on account of wind. The rocks are porphyry, with dykes of dark greenstone in it, and, at the extremity of Nahant, argillaceous slate, very distinctly stratified, with fossil corallines in it (?), looking like shells. Egg Rock, it seems, has a fertile garden on the top.

P. M.—Rode with J. Buffum, Parker Pillsbury, and Mr. Mudge, a lawyer and geologist of Lynn, into the northwest part of Lynn, to the Danvers line. After a mile or two, we passed beyond the line of the porphyry into the sienite. The sienite is more rounded. Saw some furrows in sienite. On a ledge of sienite in the woods, the rocky woods near Danvers line, saw many boulders of sienite, part of the same flock of which Ship Rock (so called) in Danvers is one. One fifteen feet long, ten wide, and five or six deep rested on four somewhat rounded (at least water-worn) stones,
eighteen inches in diameter or more, so that you could crawl under it, on the top of a cliff, and projected about eight feet over it. — just as it was dropped by an ice-berg. A fine broad-backed ledge of sienite just beyond, north or northwest, from which we saw Wachusett, Watatic, Monadnock, and the Peterboro Hills.

Also saw where one Boyse (if that is the spelling), a miller in old times, got out millstones in a primitive way, so said an old man who was chopping there. He pried or cracked off a piece of the crust of the ledge, lying horizontal, some sixteen or eighteen inches thick, then made a fire on it about its edges, and, pouring on water, cracked or softened it, so that he could break off the edges and make it round with his sledge. Then he picked a hole through the middle and hammered it as smooth as he could, and it was done. But this old man said that he had heard old folks say that the stones were so rough in old times that they made a noise like thunder as they revolved, and much grit was mixed with the meal.

Returning down a gully, I thought I would look for a new plant and found at once what I suppose to be Genista tinctoria, dyers'-green-weed,— the stem is quite green, with a few pods and leaves left. It is said to have become naturalized on the hills of Essex County. Close by was a mass of sienite some seven or eight feet high, with a cedar some two inches thick springing from a mere crack in its top.

Visited Jordan's or the Lynn Quarry (of sienite) on our return, more southerly. The stone cracks very squarely and into very large masses. In one place was a dyke of dark greenstone, of which, joined to the sienite, I brought off two specimens, q. v. The more yellowish and rotten surface stone, lying above the hard and gray, is called the sap by the quarrymen.

From these rocks and wooded hills three or four miles inland in the northwest edge of Lynn, we had an extensive view of the ocean from Cape Ann to Scituate, and realized how the aborigines, when hunting, berrying, might perchance have looked out thus on the early navigators sailing along the coast, — thousands of them, — when they little suspected it, — how patent to the inhabitants their visit must have been. A vessel could hardly have passed within half a dozen miles of the shore, even, — at one place only, in pleasant weather, — without being seen by hundreds of savages.

Mudge gave me Saugus jasper, graywacke, amygdaloid (greenstone with nodules of feldspar), asbestos, hornstone (?); Buffum some porphyry, epidote, argillaceous slate from end of Nahant.

Mr. Buffum tells me that they never eat the sea-clams without first taking out “the worm,” as it is called, about as large as the small end of a pipe-stem. He supposes it is the penis.

Jan. 15. At Natural History Rooms, Boston.

Looked at the little grebe. Its feet are not webbed with lobes on the side like the coot, and it is quite white beneath. Saw the good-sized duck — velvet duck, with white spot on wing — which is commonly called “coot” on salt water. They have a living young bald eagle in the cellar. Talked with Dr. Kneeland. They
have a golden eagle from Lexington, which K. obtained two or three years since, the first Dr. Cabot has heard of in Massachusetts. Speaking to him of my night-warbler, he asked if it uttered such a note, making the note of the myrtle-bird, _ah, te-te-te te-te-te te-te-te_, exactly, and said that that was the note of the white-throated sparrow, which he heard at Lake Superior, at night as well as by day. Vide his report, July 15, 1857.

Same afternoon, saw Dr. Durkee in Howard Street. He has not seen the common glow-worm, and called his a variety of _Lampyris noctiluca_. Showed to Agassiz, Gould, and Jackson, and it was new to them. They thought it a variety of the above. His were luminous throughout, mine only in part of each segment.

Saw some beautiful painted leaves in a shop window, — maple and oak.


The common birch fungus, which is horizontal and turned downward, splits the bark as it pushes out very simply, thus: 

I see a large downy owl’s feather adhering to a sweet-fern twig, looking like the down of a plant blowing in the wind. This is near where I have found them before, on Conantum, above first Cliff. They would be very ornamental to a bonnet, so soft and fine with their reflections that the eye hardly rests on the down.

1 [Concerning Thoreau’s confusion as to the authorship of this song of the white-throated sparrow, see Journal, vol. v. p. 119.]

2 Vide 26th

1858] A MILD WINTER [Jan. 18. At the Dugan Desert, I notice, under the overhanging or nearly horizontal small white oaks and shrub oaks about the edge, singular little hollows in the sand, evidently made by drops of rain or melting snow falling from the same part of the twig, a foot or two, on the same spot a long time. They are very numerous under every such low horizontal bough, on an average about three quarters of an inch apart or more. They are a third of an inch wide and a quarter to even three quarters of an inch deep; made some days ago evidently.

The _F. hyemalis_ about. I hear that the Emerson children found ladies’-delights out yesterday.

_Jan. 19. F. hyemalis._

_Jan. 23. Saturday._ The wonderfully mild and pleasant weather continues. The ground has been bare since the 11th. This morning was colder than before. I have not been able to walk up the North Branch this winter, nor along the channel of the South Branch at any time.

_P. M._ — To Saw Mill Brook.

A fine afternoon. There has been but little use for gloves this winter, though I have been surveying a great deal for three months. The sun, and cockcrow, bare ground, etc., etc., remind me of March.

Standing on the bridge over the Mill Brook on the Turnpike, there being but little ice on the south side, I see several small water-bugs (Gyrinus) swimming about, as in the spring.
I see the terminal shield fern very fresh, as an evergreen, at Saw Mill Brook, and (I think it is) the marginal fern and *Lycopodium lucidulum*.

I go up the brook, walking on it most of the way, surprised to find that it will bear me. How it falls from rock to rock, as down a flight of stairs, all through that rocky wood, from the swamp which is its source to the Everett farm! The bays or more stagnant parts are thickest frozen, the channel oftest open, and here and there the water has overflowed the ice and covered it with a thickening mass of glistening spiculae. The white markings on the under side are very rich and varied,—the currency of the brook, the impression of its fleeting bubbles even. It comes out of a meadow of about an acre.

I go near enough to Flint’s Pond, about 4 r., to hear it thundering. In summer I should not have suspected its presence an eighth of a mile off through the woods, but in such a jointerday as this its peaks and betrays itself.

Returning through Britton’s field, I notice the stumps of chestnuts cut a dozen years ago. This tree grows rapidly, and one layer seems not to adhere very firmly to another. I can easily count the concentric circles of growth on these old stumps as I stand over them, for they are worn into conspicuous furrows along the lines of the pores of the wood. One or more rings often gape an eighth of an inch or more, at about their twenty-fourth or twenty-fifth year, when the growth, in three or four cases that I examined, was most rapid.

Looking toward the woods in the horizon, it is seen to be very hazy.

At Ditch Pond I hear what I suppose to be a fox barking, an exceedingly husky, hoarse, and ragged note, prolonged perhaps by the echo, like a feeble puppy, or even a child endeavoring to scream, but choked with fear, yet it is on a high key. It sounds so through the wood, while I am in the hollow, that I cannot tell from which side it comes. I hear it bark forty or fifty times at least. It is a peculiar sound, quite unlike any other woodland sound that I know.

Walden, I think, begins to crack and boom first on the south side, which is first in the shade, for I hear it cracking there, though it is still in the sun around me. It is not so sonorous and like the dumping of frogs as I have heard it, but more like the cracking of crockery. It suggests the very brittlest material, as if the globe you stood on were a hollow sphere of glass and might fall to pieces on the slightest touch. Most shivering, splintery, screeching cracks these are, as if the ice were no thicker than a tumbler, though it is probably nine or ten inches. Methinks my weight sinks it and helps to crack sometimes.

Who can doubt that men are by a certain fate what they are, contending with unseen and unimagined difficulties, or encouraged and aided by equally mysterious auspicious circumstances? Who can doubt this essential and innate difference between man and man, when he considers a whole race, like the Indian, inevitably and resignedly passing away in spite of our efforts to Christianize and educate them? Indi-
individuals accept their fate and live according to it, as
the Indian does. Everybody notices that the Indian
retains his habits wonderfully,—is still the same
man that the discoverers found. The fact is, the his-
tory of the white man is a history of improvement, that
of the red man a history of fixed habits of stagnation.

To insure health, a man's relation to Nature must
come very near to a personal one; he must be con-
scious of a friendliness in her; when human friends
fail or die, she must stand in the gap to him. I cannot
conceive of any life which deserves the name, unless
there is a certain tender relation to Nature. This it
is which makes winter warm, and supplies society
in the desert and wilderness. Unless Nature sympathizes
with and speaks to us, as it were, the most fertile and
blooming regions are barren and dreary.

Mrs. William Monroe told Sophia last evening that
she remembered her (Sophia's) grandfather very well,
that he was taller than Father, and used to ride out
to their house—she was a Stone and lived where she
and her husband did afterward, now Darius Merriam's
— when they made cheeses, to drink the whey, being
in consumption. She said that she remembered Grand-
mother too, Jennie Burns, how she came to the school-
room (in Middle Street (?), Boston) once, leading her
little daughter Elizabeth, the latter so small that she
could not tell her name distinctly, but spoke thick and
lispingly, — "Elizabeth Orrock Thorau." ¹

The dog is to the fox as the white man to the red.
The former has attained to more clearness in his bark;
¹ Vide Feb. 7th.
it is more ringing and musical, more developed; he
explodes the vowels of his alphabet better; and beside
he has made his place so good in the world that he can
run without skulking in the open field. What a smother-
ered, ragged, feeble, and unmusical sound is the bark
of the fox! It seems as if he scarcely dared raise his
voice lest it should catch the ear of his tame cousin
and inveterate foe.

I observe that the ice of Walden is heaved up more
than a foot over that bar between the pond and
Cyrus Hubbard's basin. The gravelly bank or bar
itself is also heaved up considerably where exposed.
So that I am inclined to think that such a tilting is simply
the result of a thawing beneath and not merely of a
crowding or pressure on the two sides.

I do not see that I can live tolerably without affec-
tion for Nature. If I feel no softening toward the rocks,
what do they signify?

I do not think much of that chemistry that can ex-
tract corn and potatoes out of a barren [soil], but rather
of that chemistry that can extract thoughts and senti-
ments out of the life of a man on any soil. It is in vain
to write on the seasons unless you have the seasons in
you.

The river is broadly open, as usual this winter. You
can hardly say that we have had any sleighing at all
this winter, though five or six inches of snow lay on
the ground five days after January 6th. But I do not
quite like this warm weather and bare ground at this
season. What is a winter without snow and ice in this latitude? The bare earth is unsightly. This winter is but unburied summer.

At that gully or ravine in the Clamshell bank, ... as if made firm in spots by the saliva of the bird. There is a low oven-like expansion at the end, and a good deal of stubble for the nest. I find in one an empty black cherry stone and the remains of a cricket or two. Probably a mouse left them there.

I see two of those black and red-brown fuzzy caterpillars in a mullein leaf on this bare edge-hill, which could not have blown from any tree, I think. They apparently take refuge in such places. One on the railroad causeway where it is high, in the open meadow.

I see a couple of broken small turtle eggs here which have been trodden out of the banks by cows going to drink in the river.

At Hosmer's tub spring a small frog is active!

At Nut Meadow Brook the small-sized water-bugs are as abundant and active as in summer. I see forty or fifty circling together in the smooth and sunny bays all along the brook. This is something new to me. What must they think of this winter? It is like a child waked up and set to playing at midnight. Methinks they are more ready to dive to the bottom when disturbed than usual. At night, of course, they dive to the bottom and bury themselves, and if in the morning they perceive no curtain of ice drawn over their sky, and the pleasant weather continues, they gladly rise again and resume their gyrations in some sunny bay amid the alders and the stubble. I think that I never noticed them more numerous, but the fact is I never looked for them so particularly. But I fear for their nervous systems, lest this be too much activity, too much excitement. The sun falling thus warmly for so long on the open surface of the brook tempts them upward gradually, till there is a little group gyrating there as in summer. What a funny way they have of going to bed! They do not take a light and retire up-stairs; they go below. Suddenly it is heels up and heads down, and they go down to their muddy bed and let the unresting stream flow over them in their dreams. They go to bed in another element. What a deep slumber must be theirs, and what dreams, down in the mud there! What a funny way they have of going to bed! They do not take a light and retire up-stairs; they go below. Suddenly it is heels up and heads down, and they go down to their muddy bed and let the unresting stream flow over them in their dreams. They go to bed in another element. What a deep slumber must be theirs, and what dreams, down in the mud there! So the insect life is not withdrawn far off, but a warm sun would soon entice it forth. Sometimes they seem to have a little difficulty in making the plunge. Maybe they are too dry to slip under. I saw one floating on its back, and it struggled a little while before it righted itself. Suppose you were to plot the course of one for a day; what kind of a figure would it
make? Probably this feat too will one day be performed by science, that maid of all work. I see one chasing a mote, and the wave the creature makes always causes the mote to float away from it. I would like to know what it is they communicate to one another, they who appear to value each other's society so much. How many water-bugs make a quorum? How many hundreds does their Fourier think it takes to make a complete bug? Where did they get their backs polished so? They will have occasion to remember this year, that winter when we were waked out of our annual sleep! What is their precise hour for retiring?

I see stretching from side to side of this smooth brook, where it is three or four feet wide, apparently an invisible waving line like a cobweb, against which the water is heaped up a very little. This line is constantly swayed to and fro, as by the current or wind bellying forward here and there. I try repeatedly to catch and break it with my hand and let the water run free, but still, to my surprise, I clutch nothing but fluid, and the imaginary line keeps its place. Is it the fluctuating edge of a lighter, perhaps more oily, fluid, overflowing a heavier? I see several such lines. It is somewhat like the slightest conceivable smooth fall over a dam. I must ask the water-bug that glides across it.

Ah, if I had no more sins to answer for than a water-bug! They are the only small water-bugs that I see. They are earlier in the spring and apparently harder.

I walked about the long pond-hole beyond the wooded moraine. There are pinos bushes with much moss on them, such as grows on the button-bush around.
winter, but these bugs are much the most susceptible to the genial influences.

In fact, there was a succession of these invisible cables or booms stretched across the stream, though it ran quite swiftly.

I noticed at Walden yesterday that, when the ice cracked, one part was frequently left an eighth of an inch, perhaps, higher than another, and afterward frozen to it in this position. You could both see and with your feet feel the inequality.

**Jan. 25. Monday.** A warm, moist day. Thermometer at 6.30 p.m. at 49°.

What a rich book might be made about buds, including, perhaps, sprouts! — the impregnable, vivacious willow catkins, but half asleep under the armor of their black scales, sleeping along the twigs; the birch and oak sprouts, and the rank and lusty dogwood sprouts; the round red buds of the blueberries; the small pointed red buds, close to the twig, of the panicled andromeda; the large yellowish buds of the swamp-pink, etc. How healthy and vivacious must he be who would treat of these things!

You must love the crust of the earth on which you dwell more than the sweet crust of any bread or cake. You must be able to extract nutriment out of a sand-heap. You must have so good an appetite as this, else you will live in vain.

The creditor is servant to his debtor, especially if he is about paying his due. I am amused to see what airs men take upon themselves when they have money to pay me. No matter how long they have deferred it, they imagine that they are my benefactors or patrons, and send me word graciously that *if I will come to their houses* they will pay me, when it is their business to come to me.

**Jan. 26.** A warm rain from time to time.

P. M. — To Clintonia Swamp down the brook.

When it rains it is like an April shower. The brook is quite open, and there is no snow on the banks or fields. From time to time I see a trout glance, and sometimes, in an adjoining ditch, quite a school of other fishes, but I see no tortoises. In a ditch I see very light-colored and pretty large lizards moving about, and I suspect I may even have heard a frog drop into the water once or twice. I like to sit still under my umbrella and meditate in the woods in this warm rain.

On the side-hill at the swamp, I see how the common horizontal birch fungus is formed. I see them in all stages and of all sizes on a dead Betula alba, both on the upper and under sides, but always facing the ground. At first you perceive the bark merely raised into a nub and perhaps begun to split, and, removing a piece of the bark, you [find] a fibrous whitish germ like a mildew in the bark, as it were of a fungus beneath, in the bark and decayed wood. Next you will see the fungus pushed out like a hernia, about the size as well as form of a pea. At first it is of a nearly uniform convex and homogeneous surface, above and below, but very soon, or while yet no larger than a pea,
it begins to show a little horizontal flat disk, always on the under side, which you would not suspect without examining it, and the upper surface already begins to be water. So it goes on, pushing out through the bark further and further, spreading and flattening out more and more, till it has attained its growth, with a more or less elongated neck to its peninsula. The fungus as it grows fills the rent in the bark very closely, and the edges of the bark are recurved, lip-like. They commonly break off at the junction of the true bark with the wood, bringing away some of the woody fibre. Apparently the spongy decayed bark and wood is their soil.

This is a lichen day. The white lichens, partly encircling aspens and maples, look as if a painter had touched their trunks with his brush as he passed.

The yellow birch tree is peculiarly interesting. It might be described as a tree whose trunk or bole was covered with golden and silver shavings glued all over it and dangling in curls. The edges of the curls, like a line of breakers, form commonly diagonal lines up and down the tree, corresponding to the twist of the nerve or grain.

Nature loves gradation. Trees do not spring abruptly from the earth. Mosses creep up over the insteps of the trees and endeavor to reclaim them. Hence the propriety of lacing over the instep.

Is not the moccasin a more picturesque and fitter sort of shoe than ours in which to move amid the herbage?

How protean is life! One may eat and drink and sleep and digest, and do the ordinary duties of a man, and have no excuse for sending for a doctor, and yet he may have reason to doubt if he is as truly alive or his life is as valuable and divine as that of an oyster. He may be the very best citizen in the town, and yet it shall occur to him to prick himself with a pin to see if he is alive. It is wonderful how quiet, harmless, and ineffective a living creature may be. No more energy may it have than a fungus that lifts the bark of a decaying tree. I raised last summer a squash which weighed 123 1/2 pounds. If it had fallen on me it would have made as deep and lasting an impression as most men do. I would just as lief know what it thinks about God as what most men think, or are said to think. In such a squash you have already got the bulk of a man. My man, perchance, when I have put such a question to him, opes his eyes for a moment, essays in vain to think, like a rusty firelock out of order, then calls for a plate of that same squash to eat and goes to sleep, as it is called,—and that is no great distance to go, surely.

Melvin would have sworn he heard a bluebird the other day if it had n’t been January. Some say that this particularly warm weather within a few days is the January thaw, but there is nothing to thaw. The sand-banks in the Deep Cut are as dry as in summer.

Some men have a peculiar taste for bad words, mouthing and licking them into lumpish shapes like the bear her cubs,—words like “tribal” and “ornamentation,” which drag a dead tail after them. They will pick you out of a thousand the still-born words, the falsettos, the wing-clipped and lame words, as if only the false
notes caught their cars. They cry encore to all the discords.

The cocks crow in the yard, and the hens cackle and scratch, all this winter. Eggs must be plenty.

Jan. 27. Wednesday. P. M. — To Hill and beyond.

It is so mild and moist as I saunter along by the wall east of the Hill that I remember, or anticipate, one of those warm rain-storms in the spring, when the earth is just laid bare, the wind is south, and the cladonia lichens are swollen and lusty with moisture, your foot sinking into them and pressing the water out as from a sponge, and the sandy places also are drinking it in. You wander indefinitely in a beaded coat, wet to the skin of your legs, sit on moss-clad rocks and stumps, and hear the lisping of migrating sparrows flitting amid the shrub oaks, sit long at a time, still, and have your thoughts. A rain which is as serene as fair weather, suggesting fairer weather than was ever seen. You could hug the clods that defile you. You feel the fertilizing influence of the rain in your mind. The part of you that is wettest is fullest of life, like the lichens. You discover evidences of immortality not known to divines. You cease to die. You detect some buds and sprouts of life. Every step in the old rye-field is on virgin soil.

And then the rain comes thicker and faster than before, thawing the remaining frost in the ground, detaining the migrating bird; and you turn your back to it, full of serene, contented thought, soothed by the steady dropping on the withered leaves, more at home for being abroad, more comfortable for being wet, sinking at each step deep into the thawing earth, gladly breaking through the gray rotting ice. The dullest sounds seem sweetly modulated by the air. You leave your tracks in fields of spring rye, searing the fox-colored sparrows along the wood-sides. You cannot go home yet; you stay and sit in the rain. You glide along the distant wood-side, full of joy and expectation, seeing nothing but beauty, hearing nothing but music, as free as the fox-colored sparrow, seeing far ahead, a courageous knight, a great philosopher, not indebted to any academy or college for this expansion, but chiefly to the April rain, which descendeth on all alike; not encouraged by men in your walks, not by the divines nor the professors, and to the law-giver an outlaw; not encouraged (even) when you are reminded of the government at Washington.

Time never passes so quickly and unaccountably as when I am engaged in composition, i. e. in writing down my thoughts. Clocks seem to have been put forward.

The ground being bare this winter, I attend less to buds and twigs. Snow covering the ground secures our attention to twigs, etc., which rise above it.

I notice a pretty large rock on the Lee farm, near the site of the old mill over the Assabet, which is quite white and bare, with the roots of a maple, cut down a few years ago, spreading over it, and a thin dark-green crust or mould, a mere patch of soil as big as a dollar, in one or two places on it. It is evident that that rock was covered as much as three inches deep with soil.
a few years since, for the old roots are two inches thick, and that it has been burnt and washed off since, leaving the surface bare and white. There are a few lichens started at one end.

As I came home day before yesterday, over the railroad causeway, at sunset, the sky was overcast, but beneath the edge of the cloud, far in the west, was a narrow stripe of clear amber sky coextensive with the horizon, which reached no higher than the top of Wachusett. I wished to know how far off the cloud was by comparing it with the mountain. It had somewhat the appearance of resting on the mountain, concealing a part of its summit. I did not suppose it did, because the clouds over my head were too high for that, but when I turned my head I saw the whole outline of the mountain distinctly. I could not tell how far the edge of the cloud was beyond it, but I think it likely that that amber light came to me through a low narrow skylight, the upper sash of whose frame was forty miles distant. The amount of it is that I saw a cloud more distant than the mountain.

Steadily the eternal rain falls,—drip, drip, drip,—the mist drives and clears your sight, the wind blows and warms you, sitting on that sandy upland by the edge of the wood that April day.

Jan. 28. Minott has a sharp ear for the note of any migrating bird. Though confined to his dooryard by the rheumatism, he commonly hears them sooner than the wildest rambler. Maybe he listens all day for them, or they come and sing over his house.—report themselves to him and receive their season ticket. He is never at fault. If he says he heard such a bird, though sitting by his chimney-side, you may depend on it. He can swear through glass. He has not spoiled his ears by attending lectures and caucuses, etc. The other day the rumor went that a flock of geese had been seen flying north over Concord, midwinter as it was, by the almanac. I traced it to Minott, and yet I was compelled to doubt. I had it directly that he had heard them within a week. I saw him,—I made haste to him. His reputation was at stake. He said that he stood in his shed,—it was one of the late warm, muggy, April-like mornings,—when he heard one short but distinct honk of a goose. He went into the house, he took his cane, he exerted himself, or that sound imparted strength to him. Lame as he was, he went up on to the hill,—he had not done it for a year,—that he might hear all around. He saw nothing, but he heard the note again. It came from over the brook. It was a wild goose, he was sure of it. And hence the rumor spread and grew. He thought that the back of the winter was broken,—if it had any this year,—but he feared such a winter would kill him too.

I was silent; I reflected; I drew into my mind all its members, like the tortoise; I abandoned myself to unseen guides. Suddenly the truth flashed on me, and I remembered that within a week I had heard of a box at the tavern, which had come by railroad express, containing three wild geese and directed to his neighbor over the brook. The April-like morning had
excited one so that he honked; and Minott’s reputation acquired new lustre.

He has a propensity to tell stories which you have no ears to hear, which you cut short and return unfinished upon him.

I notice much cotton-like down attached to the long curled-up seed-vessels of the Epilobium angustifolium, such as I think I have seen used in some birds’ nests.

It has been spitting a little snow to-day, and we were uncertain whether it would increase or turn to rain. Coming through the village at 11 A.M., the sky is completely overcast, and the (perhaps thin) clouds are very distinctly pink or reddish, somewhat as if reflecting a distant fire, but this phenomenon is universal all round and overhead. I suspect there is a red aurora borealis behind.

Jan. 29. P. M. — To Great Meadows at Copan.

It is considerably colder. I go through the northerly part of Beck Stow’s, north of the new road. For a great distance it is an exceedingly dense thicket of blueberry bushes, and the shortest way is to bend down bushes eight feet high and tread on them. The small red and yellow buds, the maze of gray twigs, the green and red sphagnum, the conspicuous yellowish buds of the swamp-pink with the diverging valves of its seed-vessels, the dried choke-berries still common, these and the like are the attractions.

The cranberry rising red above the ice is seen to be allied to the water andromeda, but is yet redder.

In the ditches on Holbrook’s meadow near Copan, I see a Rana palustris swimming, and much conferva greening all the water. Even this green is exhilarating, like a spring in winter. I am affected by the sight even of a mass of conferva in a ditch. I find some radical potamogeton leaves six inches long under water, which look as if growing.

Found some splendid fungi on old aspens used for a fence; quite firm; reddish-white above and bright-vermilion beneath, or perhaps more scarlet, reflecting various shades as it is turned. It is remarkable that the upper side of this fungus, which must, as here, commonly be low on decaying wood, so that we look down on it, is not bright-colored nor handsome, and it was only when I had broken it off and turned it over that I was surprised by its brilliant color. This intense vermilion (?) face, which would be known to every boy in the town if it were turned upward, faces the earth and is discovered only by the curious naturalist. Its ear is turned down, listening to the honest praises of the earth. It is like a light-red velvet or damask. These silent and motionless fungi, with their ears turned ever downward toward the earth, revealing their bright colors perchance only to the prying naturalist who turns them upward, remind me of the “Hear-all” of the story.

Jan. 30. P. M. — To Gowing’s Swamp.

I thought it would be a good time to rake in the mud of that central pool, and see what animal or vegetable life might be there, now that it is fro
that tortoises and frogs might be buried in the mud. The pool, where there is nothing but water and sphagnum to be seen and where you cannot go in the summer, is about two rods long and one and a half wide, with that large-seeded sedge in a border a rod wide about it. Only a third of this (on one side) appears as water now, the rest a level bed of green sphagnum frozen with the water, though rising three or four inches above the general level here and there. I cut a hole through the ice, about three inches thick, in what alone appeared to be water, and, after raking out some sphagnum, found that I could not fairly reach the mud and tortoises,—if there are any there,—though my rake was five feet and nine inches long; but with the sphagnum I raked up several kinds of bugs, or insects. I then cut a hole through the frozen sphagnum nearer the middle of the pool, though I supposed it would be a mere mass of sphagnum with comparatively little water, and more mud nearer the surface. To my surprise, I found clear water under this crust of sphagnum to about five feet in depth, but still I could not reach the mud with my rake through the more decayed sphagnum beneath.

I returned to the thicket and cut a maple about eighteen feet long. This dropped down five or six feet, and then, with a very slight pressure, I put it down the whole length. I then went to the thicket again, searched a long while for a suitable pole, and at last cut another maple thirty feet long and between four and five inches thick at the butt, sharpened and trimmed and carried it on my shoulder to the spot, and, rough as it was, it went down with very little pressure as much as twenty feet, and with a little more pressure twenty-six feet and one inch; and there I left it, for I had measured it first. If the top had not been so small that it bent in my hands, I could probably have forced it much further. I suspect that the depth of mud and water under where I walk in summer on the water andromeda, Andromeda Polifolia, Kalmia glauca, sphagnum, etc., is about the same. The whole swamp would flow off down an inclined plane. Of course there is room enough for frogs and turtles, safe from frost.

I noticed that the sap flowed very freely from one of the maples which I cut.

In the meanwhile the hole which I had first cut had skimmed over. I stooped to look at the ice-crystals. The thin skimming, which did not yet cover the whole surface, was minutely marked with feathers, as in the frost on windows in the morning. The crystallization was, as usual, in deep furrows, some a third of an inch wide and finely grained or channelled longitudinally. These commonly intersected each other so as to form triangles of various sizes, and it was remarkable that there was an elevated space between the sides of the triangles, which in some cases was not yet frozen, while you could see and feel the furrow where the crystals had shot on each side much lower. The water crystallizes in certain planes only.

It seems, then, that sphagnum will grow on the surface of water five feet deep.¹

¹ Vide [pp. 271, 272].
What means the maple sap flowing in pleasant days in midwinter, when you must wait so late in the spring for it, in warmer weather? It is a very encouraging sign of life now.

*Jan. 31.* I notice in one place that the last six or more inches of the smooth sumach's lusty twigs are dead and withered, not having been sufficiently matured, notwithstanding the favorable autumn. This is attaining one's growth through difficulties.

Saw one faint tinge of red on red ice pond-hole, six inches over.