VI

DECEMBER, 1858

(ÆT. 41)

Dec. 2. When I first saw that snow-cloud it stretched low along the northwest horizon, perhaps one quarter round and half a dozen times as high as the mountains, and was remarkably horizontal on its upper edge, but that edge was obviously for a part of the way very thin, composed of a dusky mist which first suggested snow. When, soon after, it had risen and advanced and was plainly snowing, it was as if some great dark machine was sifting the snow upon the mountains. There was at the same time the most brilliant of sunsets, the clearest and crispiest of winter skies. We have had every day since similar slight flurries of snow, we being in their midst.

Dec. 3. P. M. — To Walden.

A deliciously mild afternoon, though the ground is covered with snow. The cocks crowed this morning as of yore.

I carry hatchet and rake in order to explore the Pout's Nest for frogs and fish, — the pond not being frozen. A small part of that chink of the 26th is not yet frozen, and is crowded with pollywogs, mostly of large size, and very many have legs more or less developed. With my small iron rake, about a foot long by

four inches wide, I jerk on to the ice at one jerk forty-five pollywogs, and more than as many more fall into the water. Many of the smallest pollywogs have bright copper-red bellies, prettily spotted, while the large are commonly pale-yellow, either clear or spotted. Many are dying. They have crowded so thickly along the open chink three or four inches wide by the side of a boat in the ice that, when I accidentally rock it, about a hundred are washed out on to the ice. One salamander among them, and four of the new breams, much larger, darker, and richer-colored than any I had found. I have often seen pollywogs in small numbers in the winter, in spring-holes, etc., but never such crowding to air-holes in the ice. All that is peculiar in this case is that this small pond has recently been cut off from the main pond by the falling of the water and that it is crowded with vegetable matter, chiefly target-weed, so that apparently the stagnant water has not only killed the breams and perch (of which last I find three dead) but many pollywogs, and compels others to seek the surface.

As I return home by the Shanty Field and the railroad, I cannot help contrasting this evening with the 30th (on Fair Haven Hill-side). Now there is a genial, soft air, and in the west many clouds of purplish dove-color. I walk with unbuttoned coat, taking in the influences of the hour. Coming through the pitch pines east of the Shanty Field, I see the sun through the pines very yellow and warm-looking, and every twig of the pines and every weed is lit with yellow light (not silvery). The other night the few cloudy islets about [the] setting sun (where it had set) were glitteringly bright afar through the cold air. Now (when I get to the causeway) all the west is suffused with an extremely rich, warm purple or rose-color, while the edges of what were dove-colored clouds have a warm saffron glow, finally deepening to rose or damask when the sun has set. The other night there was no reddening of the clouds after sunset, no afterglow, but the glittering clouds were almost immediately snapped up in the crisped air.

I improve every opportunity to go into a grist-mill, any excuse to see its cobweb-tapestry. I put questions to the miller as an excuse for staying, while my eye rests delighted on the cobwebs above his head and perchance on his hat.

The salamander above named, found in the water of the Pout's Nest, is the *Salamandra symmetrica*.[1] It is some three inches long, brown (not dark-brown) above and yellow with small dark spots beneath, and the same spots on the sides of the tail; a row of very minute vermilion spots, not detected but on a close examination, on each side of the back; the tail is waved on the edge (upper edge, at least); has a pretty, bright eye. Its tail, though narrower, reminds me of the pollywog. Why should not it lose its tail as well as that?[2]

The largest of the four breams (*vide* November 26th) two and nine twentieths inches long, by one inch broad and nine twentieths thick. The back, sides forward, tail, and anal fin black or blackish or very dark; the trans-

[1] Probably *dorsalis*. *Vide* Apr. 18, 1859.

[2] See one with much larger vermilion spots, Apr. 18, 1859. Are they not larger in the spring?

verse dark bars few and indistinct except in middle of fish; sides toward tail yellowish-olive. Rear of abdomen has violet reflections (and about base of anal fin). Operculums tinged, streaked, and spotted with golden, coppery, greenish, and violet reflections. A vertical dark mark or line, corresponding to the stripes, through the eye. Iris copper-color or darker. The others, about two inches long, are differently colored, not so dark, more olive, and distinctly barred. The smallest are the lightest-colored, but the larger on the whole richer, as well as darker. The fins, especially the dorsal, caudal, and anal, are remarkably pretty, in color a fine network of light and dark. The lower jaw extends about three fortieths of an inch beyond the upper. The rich dark, almost black, back, with dark-barred sides alternating with yellowish olive, and the fine violet-purple reflections from the sides of the abdomen, like the nacre of a shell, as coin-like they lie flat in a basin, — such jewels they swam between the stems (clothed in transparent jelly) of the target-weed.

R. W. E. saw quite a flock of ducks in the pond (Walden) this afternoon.

Dec. 5. Some sugar maples, both large and small, have still, like the larger oaks, a few leaves about the larger limbs near the trunk.

P. M. — To Walden.

Snowed yesterday afternoon, and now it is three or four inches deep and a fine mizzle falling and freezing to the twigs and stubble, so that there is quite a glaze. The stiffened ice-coated weeds and grasses on

the causeway recall past winters. These humble withered plants, which have not of late attracted your attention, now arrest it by their very stiffness and exaggerated size. Some grass culms eighteen inches or two feet high, which nobody noticed, are an inexhaustible supply of slender ice-wands set in the snow. The grasses and weeds bent to the crusty surface form arches of various forms. It is surprising how the slenderest grasses can support such a weight, but the culm is buttressed by another icy culm or column, and the load gradually taken on. In the woods the drooping pines compel you to stoop. In all directions they are bowed down, hanging their heads. The large yellowish leaves of the black oak (young trees) are peculiarly conspicuous, rich and warm, in the midst of this ice and snow, and on the causeway the yellowish bark of the willows gleams warmly through the ice. The birches are still upright, and their numerous parallel white ice-rods remind me of the recent gossamer-like gleams which they reflected.

How singularly ornamented is that salamander! Its brightest side, its yellow belly, sprinkled with fine dark spots, is turned downward. Its back is indeed ornamented with two rows of bright vermilion spots, but these can only be detected on the very closest inspection, and poor eyes fail to discover them even then, as I have found.

Dec. 6. Go out at 9 A. M. to see the glaze. It is already half fallen, melting off. The dripping trees and wet falling ice will wet you through like rain in the woods. It is a lively sound, a busy tinkling, the inces-

sant brattling and from time to time rushing, crashing sound of this falling ice, and trees suddenly erecting themselves when relieved of their loads. It is now perfect only on the north sides of woods which the sun has not touched or affected. Looking at a dripping tree between you and the sun, you may see here or there one or another rainbow color, a small brilliant point of light. Yesterday it froze as it fell on my umbrella, converting the cotton cloth into a thick stiff glazed sort of oilcloth, so that it was impossible to shut it.

Dec. 7. To Boston.

At Natural History Rooms.

The egg of *Turdus solitarius* is light-bluish with pale-brown spots. This is apparently mine which I call hermit thrush, though mine is [*sic*] redder and distincter brown spots.

The egg of *Turdus brunneus* (called hermit thrush) is a clear blue.

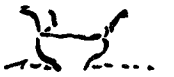
The rail's egg (of Concord, which I have seen) is not the Virginia rail's, which is smaller and nearly pure white, nor the clapper rail's, which is larger. Is it the sora rail's (of which there is no egg in this collection)?

My egg found in R. W. E.'s garden is not the white-throated sparrow's egg.

Dr. Bryant calls my seringo (*i. e.* the faint-noted bird) Savannah sparrow. He says Cooper's hawk is just like the sharp-shinned, only a little larger commonly. He could not tell them apart. Neither he nor Brewer can identify eggs always. Could match some gulls' eggs out of another basket full of a different species as well as out of the same basket.

Dec. 9. At New Bedford.

See a song sparrow and a pigeon woodpecker. Dr. Bryant tells of the latter picking holes in blinds, and also in his barn roof and sides in order to get into it; holes in the window sashes or casings as if a nail had been driven into them.

Asked a sailor at the wharf how he distinguished a whaler. He said by the "davits," large upright timbers with sheaves curving over the sides, thus:  to hold up the boats (a merchantman has only a few and small at the stern); also by the place for the man to stand at masthead (crosstrees, I should say they were) and look out for whales, which you do not see on a merchant-ship; *i. e.*, the crosstrees of the latter are very slight, of the whaler somewhat like this: 

Dec. 11. P. M. — To Walden.

An overcast afternoon and rather warm. The snow on the ground in pastures brings out the warm red in leafy oak woodlands by contrast. These are what Thomson calls "the tawny copse." So that they suggest both shelter and warmth. All browns, indeed, are warmer now than a week ago. These oak woodlands half a mile off, commonly with pines intermingled, look like warm coverts for birds and other wild animals. How much warmer our woodlands look and *are* for

these withered leaves that still hang on! Without them the woods would be dreary, bleak, and wintry indeed. Here is a manifest provision for the necessities of man and the brutes. These leaves remain to keep us warm, and to keep the earth warm about their roots. While the oak leaves look redder and warmer, the pines look much darker since the snow has fallen (the hemlocks darker still). A mile or two distant they are dark-brown, or almost black, as, still further, is all woodland, and in the most distant horizon have a blue tinge like mountains, from the atmosphere. The boughs of old and bare oak woods are gray and in harmony with the white ground, looking as if snowed on.

Already, in hollows in the woods and on the sheltered sides of hills, the fallen leaves are collected in small heaps on the snow-crust, simulating bare ground and helping to conceal the rabbit and partridge, etc. They are not equally diffused, but collected together here and there as if for the sake of society.

I find at the Pout's Nest, now quite frozen over, air-holes and all, twenty-two pollywogs frozen in and dead within a space of two and a half feet square, also a minnow — apparently a young shiner, but it has a dark longitudinal line along side (about an inch and a half long) — with the bream.[1]

The terminal shoots of the small scarlet oaks are still distinctly red, though withered.

A "swirl," applied to leaves suddenly caught up by a sort of whirlwind, is a good word enough, methinks.

Walden is about one-third skimmed over. It is frozen

[1] *Vide* 25th.

nearly half the way out from the northerly shore, excepting a very broad open space on the northwest shore and a considerable space at the pines at the northeast end; but the ice, thin as it is, extends quite across from the northwest side to the southwest cape (west side of the railroad bay) by an isthmus only two or three rods wide in its narrowest part. It is evident that whether a pond shall freeze this side or that first depends much on the wind. If it is small and lies like Walden between hills, I should expect that in perfectly calm weather it would freeze soonest along the south shore, but in this case there was probably wind from the north or northwest, and the more sheltered and smooth north side froze first. The warmth reflected from the pines at the northeast corner may account for the open water there, but I cannot account for the open space of the northwest end.[1] It is remarkable that the south edge of the ice projects southward in a cape corresponding to the deep triangular bay in the south side, though it is in the middle of the pond, and there is even a rude correspondence elsewhere along the edge of the ice to the opposite shore. This might seem to indicate that the ice to some extent formed first over deepest water.

When the ice was melting and the trees dripping, on the morning of the 6th, I noticed that the snow was discolored, — stained yellow by this drip, — as if the trees were urinating.

[1] It must be because it is there open to the rake of the north wind, the shore being flat and gently sloping backward a long way, while the protection of Heywood's Peak may account for the ice-isthmus being met by the break-wind of the west railroad cape.

The large scarlet oak in the cemetery has leaves on the lower limbs near the trunk just like the large white oaks now. So has the largest black oak which I see. Others of both, and all, kinds are bare.

Some, being offended, think sharp and satirical things, which yet they are not prepared consciously to utter. But in some unguarded moment these things escape from them, when they are as it were unconscious. They betray their thoughts, as it were by talking in their sleep, for the truth will out, under whatever veil of civility.

Dec. 12 P. M. — Up river on ice to Fair Haven Hill.

Crossing the fields west of our Texas house, I see an immense flock of snow buntings, I think the largest that I ever saw. There must be a thousand or two at least. There is but three inches, at most, of crusted and dry frozen snow, and they are running amid the weeds which rise above it. The weeds are chiefly *Juncus tenuis* (?), but its seeds are apparently gone. I find, however, the glumes of the piper grass scattered about where they have been. The flock is at first about equally divided into two parts about twenty rods apart, but birds are incessantly flitting across the interval to join the pioneer flock, until all are united. They are very restless, running amid the weeds and continually changing their ground. They will suddenly rise again a few seconds after they have alighted, as if alarmed, but after a short wheel settle close by. Flying from you, in some positions, you see only or chiefly the black part of their bodies, and then, as they wheel, the white comes into

view, contrasted prettily with the former, and in all together at the same time. Seen flying higher against a cloudy sky they look like large snowflakes. When they rise all together their note is like the rattling of nuts in a bag, as if a whole binful were rolled from side to side. They also utter from time to time — *i. e.*, individuals do — a clear rippling note, perhaps of alarm, or a call. It is remarkable that their notes above described should resemble the lesser redpolls! Away goes this great wheeling, rambling flock, rolling through the air, and you cannot easily tell where they will settle. Suddenly the pioneers (or a part not foremost) will change their course when in full career, and when at length they know it, the rushing flock on the other side will be fetched about as it were with an undulating jerk, as in the boys' game of snap-the-whip, and those that occupy the place of the snapper are gradually off after their leaders on the new tack. As far as I observe, they confine themselves to upland, not alighting in the meadows. Like a snow-storm they come rushing down from the north. The extremities of the wings are black, while the parts next their bodies are black [*sic*]. They are unusually abundant now.

See a shrike on a dead pine at the Cliffs.

The pitch pines have not done falling, considerable having fallen on the snow.

The river meadows, where they were not cut, are conspicuous brown-straw-colored now,— in the sun almost a true straw-color. November lingers still there.

I should like to know where all those snowbirds will

roost to-night, for they will probably roost together. And what havoc an owl might make among them![1]

Dec. 13. P. M. — To Walden.

There is a fine mizzling rain, which rests in small drops on your coat, but on most surfaces is turning to a glaze. Yet it is not cold enough for gloves even, and I think that the freezing may be owing to the fineness of the rain, and that, if it should rain much harder, even though it were colder, it would not freeze to what it fell on. It freezes on the railroad rails when it does not on the wooden sleepers. Already I begin to see, on the storm side of every twig and culm, a white glaze (reflecting the snow or sky), rhyming with the vegetable core. And on those fine grass heads which are bent over in the path the fine dew-like drops are frozen separately like a string of beads, being not yet run together. There is little if any wind, and the fine rain is visible only against a dark ground.

There is not so much ice in Walden as on the 11th.

A damp day brings out the color of oak leaves, somewhat as of lichens. They are of a brighter and deeper leather-color, richer and more wholesome, hanging more straightly down than ever. They look peculiarly clean and wholesome, their tints brought out and their lobes more flattened out, and they show to great advantage, these trees hanging still with leather-colored leaves in this mizzling rain, seen against the misty sky.

[1] Melvin tells me that he saw a thousand feeding a long time in the Great Meadows, — he thinks on the seeds of the wool-grass (!!), — about same time.

They are again as it were full-veined with some kind of brown sap.

Dec. 14. I see at Derby's shop a barred owl (*Strix nebulosa*), taken in the woods west of the factory on the 11th, found (with its wing broke [*sic*]) by a wood-chopper. It measures about three and a half feet in alar extent by eighteen to twenty inches long, or *nearly* the same as the cat owl, but is small and without horns. It is very mild and quiet, bears handling perfectly well, and only snaps its bill with a loud sound at the sight of a cat or dog. It is apparently a female, since it is large and has white spots on the wings. The claws are quite dark rather than dark horn-color. It hopped into the basin of the scales, and I was surprised to find that it weighed only one pound and one ounce. It may be thin-fleshed on account of its broken wing, but how light-bodied these fliers are! It has no yellow iris like the cat owl, and has the bristles about its yellow bill which the other has not. It has a very smooth and handsome round head, a brownish gray. Solemnity is what they express, — fit representatives of the night.

Dec. 18. P. M. — To Walden.

The pond is merely frozen a little about the edges. I see various little fishes lurking under this thin, transparent ice, close up to the edge or shore, especially where the shore is flat and water shoal. They are little shiners[1] with the dark longitudinal stripe, about an inch and a half long, perch, and one pickerel about a foot long. They are all a peculiar rich-brown color seen thus

[1] ? ? *Vide* 25th.

through the ice. They love to get up as close to the shore as possible, and when you walk along you scare them out. I cast a stone on the ice over a perch six inches long, thinking only to stun it, but killed it so. The ice is about one inch thick. I notice that it is firmly frozen to the shore, so that there is no rise and fall as when it was water, or at least nothing equal to that, but the ice has been cracked with a great many parallel cracks six inches to a foot from the shore. Yet apparently no water has oozed out there.

Minott tells how he used to love to walk through swamps where great white pines grew and hear the wind sough in their tops. He recalls this now as he crouches over his stove, but he adds that it was dangerous, for even a small dead limb broken off by the wind and falling from such a height would kill a man at once.

Dec. 20. Walden is frozen over, except two small spots, less than half an acre in all, in middle.

Dec. 22. P. M. — To Walden.

I see in the cut near the shanty-site quite a flock of *F. hyemalis* and goldfinches together, on the snow and weeds and ground. Hear the well-known mew and watery twitter of the last and the drier *chilt chilt* of the former. These burning yellow birds with a little black and white on their coat-flaps look warm above the snow. There may be thirty goldfinches, very brisk and pretty tame. They hang head downwards on the weeds. I hear of their coming to pick sunflower seeds in Melvin's garden these days.

The pond is no more frozen than on the 20th. I see where a rabbit has hopped across it in the slosh last night, making a track larger than a man's ordinarily is.

Dec. 23. P. M. — To Eddy Bridge.

Colder last night. Walden undoubtedly frozen at last, — what was left to freeze.[1]

See a shrike on the top of an oak. It sits still, pluming itself. At first, when it was flying, I thought it a hairy woodpecker.

How perfectly at home the musquash is on our river. And then there is an abundance of clams, a wholesome diet for him, to be had for the diving for them. I do not know that he has any competition in this chase, unless it is an occasional otter. The clams are a sizable fish and in time of scarcity would not be contemptible food for man.

Dec. 24. Those two places in middle of Walden not frozen over yet, though it was quite cold last night!

See another shrike this afternoon, — the fourth this winter! It looks much smaller than a jay.

Dec. 25. P. M. — Up river on ice to Fair Haven Pond and across to Walden.

The ground is still for the most part bare. Such a December is at least as hard a month to get through as November. You come near eating your heart now.

There is a good deal of brown or straw-color in the landscape now, especially in the meadows, where the

[1] No.

ranker grasses, many of them uncut, still stand. They are bleached a shade or two lighter. Looking from the sun, there is a good deal of warm sunlight in them. I see where one farmer has been getting this withered sedge on the ice within a day or two for litter, in a meadow which had not been cut. Of course he could not cut very close.

The ice on the river is about half covered with light snow, it being drifted thus, as usual, by the wind. (On Walden, however, which is more sheltered, the ice is uniformly covered and white.) I go running and sliding from one such snow-patch to another. It is easiest walking on the snow, which gives a hold to my feet, but I walk feebly on the ice. It is so rough that it is but poor sliding withal.

I see, in the thin snow along by the button-bushes and willows just this side of the Hubbard bridge, a new track to me, looking even somewhat as if made by a row of large rain-drops, but it is the track of some small animal. The separate tracks are at most five eighths of an inch in diameter, nearly round, and one and three quarters to two inches apart, varying perhaps half an inch from a straight line, thus: Sometimes they are three or four inches apart. The size is but little larger than that of a mouse, but it is never thus, or like a mouse. Goodwin, to whom I described it, did not know what it could be.

The sun getting low now, say at 3.30, I see the ice green, southeast.

Goodwin says that he once had a partridge strike a twig or limb in the woods as she flew, so that she fell and he secured her.

Going across to Walden, I see that the fuzzy purple wool-grass is now bleached to a dark straw-color without any purple.

I notice that a fox has taken pretty much my own course along the Andromeda Ponds. The sedge which grows in tufts  eighteen or twenty inches high there is generally recurving, thus: —

I see that the shiners which Goodwin is using for bait to-day have no longitudinal dark bar or line on their sides, such as those minnows of the 11th and 18th had. Yet I thought that by the position of their fins, etc., the latter could not be the banded minnow.

Walden at length skimmed over last night, *i. e.* the two holes that remained open. One was very near the middle and deepest part, the other between that and the railroad.

Now that the sun is setting, all its light seems to glance over the snow-clad pond and strike the rocky shore under the pitch pines at the northeast end. Though the bare rocky shore there is only a foot or a foot and a half high as I look, it reflects so much light that the rocks are singularly distinct, as if the pond showed its teeth.

I stayed later to hear the pond crack, but it did not much. How full of soft, pure light the western sky now, after sunset! I love to see the outlines of the pines against it. Unless you watch it, you do not know when the sun goes down. It is like a candle extinguished

without smoke. A moment ago you saw that glittering orb amid the dry oak leaves in the horizon, and now you can detect no trace of it. In a pensive mood I enjoy the complexion of the winter sky at this hour.

Those small sphagnous mountains in the Andromeda Ponds are grotesque things. Being frozen, they bear me up like moss-clad rocks and make it easy getting through the water-brush.

But for all voice in that serene hour I hear an owl hoot. How glad I am to hear him rather than the most eloquent man of the age!

I saw a few days ago the ground under a swamp white oak in the river meadow quite strewn with brown dry galls about as big as a pea and quite round, like a small fruit which had fallen from it.

Dec. 26. P. M. — To Jenny Dugan's.

I walk over the meadow above railroad bridge, where the withered grass rises above the ice, the river being low. I notice that water has oozed out over the edge of this ice or next the meadow's edge on the west, not having come from the river but evidently from springs in the bank. This thin water is turned to a slush of crystals as thick as mortar nearly, and will soon be solid ice.

Call at a farmer's this Sunday afternoon, where I surprise the well-to-do masters of the house lounging in very ragged clothes (for which they think it necessary to apologize), and one of them is busy laying the supper-table (at which he invites me to sit down at last), bringing up cold meat from the cellar and a lump of butter

on the end of his knife, and making the tea by the time his mother gets home from church. Thus sincere and homely, as I am glad to know, is the actual life of these New England men, wearing rags indoors there which would disgrace a beggar (and are not beggars and paupers they who *could be* disgraced so?) and doing the indispensable work, however humble. How much better and more humane it was than if they had imported and set up among their Penates a headless torso from the ruins of Ireland! I am glad to find that our New England life has a genuine humane core to it; that inside, after all, there is so little pretense and brag. Better than that, methinks, is the hard drinking and quarrelling which we must allow is not uncommon there. The middle-aged son sits there in the old unpainted house in a ragged coat, and helps his old mother about her work when the field does not demand him.

Dec. 27. Talk of fate! How little one can know what is fated to another! — what he can do and what he can not do! I doubt whether one can give or receive any very pertinent advice. In all important crises one can only consult his genius. Though he were the most shiftless and craziest of mortals, if he still recognizes that he has any genius to consult, none may presume to go between him and her [*sic*]. They, methinks, are poor stuff and creatures of a miserable fate who can be advised and persuaded in very important steps. Show me a man who consults his genius, and you have shown me a man who cannot be advised. You may know what a thing costs or is worth to you; you can

never know what it costs or is worth to me. All the community may scream because one man is born who will not do as it does, who will not conform because conformity to him is death, — he is so constituted. They know nothing about his case; they are fools when they presume to advise him. The man of genius knows what he is aiming at; nobody else knows. And he alone knows when something comes between him and his object. In the course of generations, however, men will excuse you for not doing as they do, if you will bring enough to pass in your own way.

Dec. 28. P. M. — To Walden.

The earth is bare. I walk about the pond looking at the shores, since I have not paddled about it much of late years. What a grand place for a promenade! Methinks it has not been so low for ten years, and many alders, etc., are left dead on its brink. The high blueberry appears to bear this position, alternate wet and dry, as well as any shrub or tree. I see winterberries still abundant in one place.

That rocky shore under the pitch pines which so reflects the light, is only three feet wide by one foot high; yet there even to-day the ice is melted close to the edge, and just off this shore the pickerel are most abundant. This is the warm and sunny side to which any one — man, bird, or quadruped — would soonest resort in cool weather. I notice a few chickadees there in the edge of the pines, in the sun, lisping and twittering cheerfully to one another, with a reference to me, I think, — the cunning and innocent little birds. One a

little further off utters the phœbe note. There is a foot more or less of clear open water at the edge here, and, seeing this, one of these birds hops down as if glad to find any open water at this season, and, after drinking, it stands in the water on a stone up to its belly and dips its head and flirts the water about vigorously, giving itself a good washing. I had not suspected this at this season. No fear that it will catch cold.

The ice cracks suddenly with a shivering jar like crockery or the brittlest material, such as it is. And I notice, as I sit here at this open edge, that each time the ice cracks, though it may be a good distance off toward the middle, the water here is very much agitated. The ice is about six inches thick.

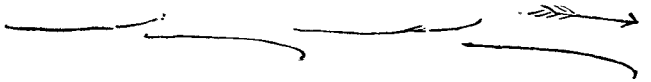
Aunt Jane says that she was born on Christmas Day, and they called her a Christmas gift, and she remembers hearing that her Aunt Hannah Orrock was so disconcerted by the event that she threw all the spoons outdoors, when she had washed them, or with the dishwater.

Father says that he and his sisters (except Elizabeth) were born in Richmond Street, Boston, between Salem and Hanover Streets, on the spot where a bethel now stands, on the left hand going from Hanover Street. They had milk of a neighbor, who used to drive his cows to and from the Common every day.

Dec. 29. P. M. — Skate to Israel Rice's.

I think more of skates than of the horse or locomotive as annihilators of distance, for while I am getting along with the speed of the horse, I have at the same time the

satisfaction of the horse and his rider, and far more adventure and variety than if I were riding. We never cease to be surprised when we observe how swiftly the skater glides along. Just compare him with one walking or running. The walker is but a snail in comparison, and the runner gives up the contest after a few rods. The skater can afford to follow all the windings of a stream, and yet soon leaves far behind and out of sight the walker who cuts across. Distance is hardly an obstacle to him. I observe that my ordinary track is like this:



the strokes being seven to ten feet long. The new stroke is eighteen or twenty inches one side of the old. The briskest walkers appear to be stationary to the skater. The skater has wings, *talaria*, to his feet. Moreover, you have such perfect control of your feet that you can take advantage of the narrowest and most winding and sloping bridge of ice in order to pass between the button-bushes and the open stream or under a bridge on a narrow shelf, where the walker cannot go at all. You can glide securely within an inch of destruction on this the most slippery of surfaces, more securely than you could walk there, perhaps, on any other material. You can pursue swiftly the most intricate and winding path, even leaping obstacles which suddenly present themselves.

I saw, on the ice off Pole Brook, a small caterpillar curled up as usual (over the middle of the river) but wholly a light yellow-brown. Just above south entrance

to Farrar Cut, a large hornets' nest thirty feet high on a maple over the river.

Heavy Haynes was fishing a quarter of a mile this side of Hubbard's Bridge. He had caught a pickerel, which the man who weighed it told me (he was apparently a brother of William Wheeler's, and I saw the fish at the house where it was) weighed four pounds and three ounces. It was twenty-six inches long. It was a very handsome fish,— dark-brown above, yellow and brown on the sides, becoming at length almost a clear golden yellow low down, with a white abdomen and reddish fins. They are handsome fellows, both the pikes in the water and tigers in the jungle. The shiner and the red-finned minnow (a dace) are the favorite bait for them.

What tragedies are enacted under this dumb icy platform in the fields! What an anxious and adventurous life the small fishes must live, liable at any moment to be swallowed by the larger. No fish of moderate size can go sculling along safely in any part of the stream, but suddenly there may come rushing out this jungle or that some greedy monster and gulp it down. Parent fishes, if they care for their offspring, how can they trust them abroad out of their sight? It takes so many young fishes a week to fill the maw of this large one. And the large ones! Heavy Haynes and Company are lying in wait for them.