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I

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March 2. Wednesday. P. M. — To Cassandra Ponds and down river.

It is a remarkably cold day for March, and the river, etc., are frozen as solidly as in the winter and there is no water to be seen upon the ice, as usually in a winter day, apparently because it has chiefly run out from beneath on the meadows and left the ice, for often, as you walk over the meadows, it sounds hollow under your tread.

I see in the Deep Cut, on the left-hand, or east, side, just beyond the clay, a ravine lately begun, in a slightly different manner from the Clamshell one. The water running down the steep sand-bank (which is some thirty or thirty-five feet high), it being collected from the field above, had worn a channel from four to six inches wide, gradually, through the frozen crust of the sand, which was one to two feet thick, and, reaching the loose unfrozen sand beneath, had washed it downward, and out through the narrow channel lower

down, until quite a cavern was formed, whose bottom was eight or ten feet below the surface, while it was five or six feet wide. But within a few days the crust, thawing, had fallen in, and so the cavern, with its narrow "crack," or skylight, was turned into an open ravine, and there is no telling where the mischief will end.

The willow catkins by the railroad where you first come in sight of the [*sic*] have now all (on one or two bushes) crept out about an eighth of an inch, giving to the bushes already a very pretty appearance when you stand on the sunny side, the silvery-white specks contrasting with the black scales. Seen along the twigs, they are somewhat like small pearl buttons on a waistcoat. Go and measure to what length the silvery willow catkins have crept out beyond their scales, if you would know what time o' the year it is by Nature's clock.

As I go through the Cassandra Ponds, I look round on the young oak woods still clad with rustling leaves as in winter, with a feeling as if it were their last rustle before the spring, but then I reflect how far away still is the time when the new buds swelling will cause these leaves to fall. We thus commonly antedate the spring more than any other season, for we look forward to it with more longing. We talk about spring as at hand before the end of February, and yet it will be two good months, one sixth part of the whole year, before we can go a-maying. There may be a whole month of solid and uninterrupted winter yet, plenty of ice and good sleighing. We may not even see the bare ground, and hardly the water, and yet we sit down and warm our spirits an-

nually with this distant prospect of spring. As if a man were to warm his hands by stretching them toward the rising sun and rubbing them. We listen to the February cock-crowing and turkey-gobbling as to a first course, or prelude.

The bluebird which some woodchopper or inspired walker is said to have seen in that sunny interval between the snow-storms is like a speck of clear blue sky seen near the end of a storm, reminding us of an ethereal region and a heaven which we had forgotten. Princes and magistrates are often styled serene, but what is their turbid serenity to that ethereal serenity which the bluebird embodies? His Most Serene Birdship! His soft warble melts in the ear, as the snow is melting in the valleys around. The bluebird comes and with his warble drills the ice and sets free the rivers and ponds and frozen ground. As the sand flows down the slopes a little way, assuming the forms of foliage where the frost comes out of the ground, so this little rill of melody flows a short way down the concave of the sky. The sharp whistle of the blackbird, too, is heard like single sparks or a shower of them shot up from the swamps and seen against the dark winter in the rear.¹

Under the alders at Well Meadow I see a few skunk-cabbage spathes fairly open on the side, and these may bloom after a day or two of pleasant weather. But for the most part, here and generally elsewhere, the spathes are quite small, slender, and closed as yet, or frost-bitten. The caltha leaves have grown decidedly. They

¹ [Channing, pp. 286, 287.]

make nearly a handful in one place, above the surface of the springy water, the leaves not yet quite flatted out, but curled up into a narrow ellipse. They barely peep above the water. Also what I take to be a kind of cress is quite fresh-looking, as if it had grown a little there. The chrysosplenium may have looked as it does, even under the snow, or all winter (?). It already, at any rate, makes pretty (dirty) green beds, about level with the surface of the water. These plants (*i. e.* first ones) are earlier than any pads, for the brooks, and ditches even, are generally frozen over still, firmly.

March 3. Going to Acton this morning, I saw some sparrows on the wall, which I think must have been the *F. hyemalis* (?).

P. M. — Up river to Nut Meadow Brook.

It is nearly as cold as yesterday. The piers of the bridge by the railroad bridge are adorned with very handsome salver or waiter shaped ice three or four feet in diameter (bottom upward), the crenate edges all around being adorned with bell-shaped pendants (produced by



the melting (?) or perchance the water dashed against them).

Going by the solidago oak at Clamshell Hill bank, I heard a faint rippling note and, looking up, saw about fifteen snow buntings sitting in the top of the oak, all with their breasts toward me, — sitting so still and quite white, seen against the white cloudy sky, they did not look like birds but the ghosts of birds, and their

boldness, allowing me to come quite near, enhanced this impression. These were almost as white as snow-balls, and from time [to time] I heard a low, soft rippling note from them. I could see no features, but only the general outline of plump birds in white. It was a very spectral sight, and after I had watched them for several minutes, I can hardly say that I was prepared to see them fly away like ordinary buntings when I advanced further. At first they were almost concealed by being almost the same color with the cloudy sky.



I see in that ditch (call it Grassy Ditch) near John Hosmer's second spring south of Nut Meadow Brook much grass which has lately grown an inch or more and lies flat on the water. Is it the *Glyceria fluitans*? It is somewhat frost-bitten too. It fills the ditch like moss, as seen at a little distance. It must be a very springy ditch to be thus open entirely. Also, pretty near the spring, I see a tuft of carex (?) whose stiff glaucous points have risen several inches above the surface.

See two small water-bugs at the spring; none elsewhere.

I see apparently some callitriche, fresh, in the spring.

We recross the river at Grindstone Meadow, but probably cannot to-morrow or next day there. The ice is spotted with dark crescents, — we tread on the white parts, — and it is puffed up along the middle, being at least six inches high in the middle where we cross.

All the lower part of steep southern slopes of hills is now commonly bare, — though the snow may be pretty deep on the brow, — especially the springy bases where the skunk-cabbage, etc., grow.

How imperceptibly the first springing takes place! In some still, muddy springs whose temperature is more equable than that of the brooks, while brooks and ditches are generally thickly frozen and concealed and the earth is covered with snow, and it is even cold, hard, and nipping winter weather, some fine grass which fills the water like a moss begins to lift its tiny spears or blades above the surface, which directly fall flat for half an inch or an inch along the surface, and on these (though many are frost-bitten) you may measure the length to which the spring has advanced, — has *sprung*. Very few indeed, even of botanists, are aware of this growth. Some of it appears to go on even under ice and snow, or, in such a place as I have described, if it is also sheltered by alders, or the like, you may see (as March 2d) a little green crescent of caltha leaves,  raised an inch or so above the water,  with leaves but partially unrolled and looking as if it would withdraw beneath the surface again at night. This, I think, must be the most conspicuous and forward greenness of the spring. The small reddish radical leaves of the dock, too, are observed flat on the moist ground as soon as the snow has melted there, as if they had grown beneath it.

The mossy bank along the south side of Hosmer's second spring ditch is very interesting. There are many coarse, hair-like masses of that green and brown moss on its edge, hanging over the ditch, alternating with withered-looking cream-colored sphagnum tinged with rose-color, in protuberances, or mammæ, a foot across on the perpendicular side of the ditch. Cast water

on their cheeks, and they become much more reddish, yet hardly so interesting. This is while the top of the bank and all the hillside above is covered deep with snow. The pretty fingers of the *Lycopodium clavatum*, peeping out here and there amid the snow and hanging down the ditch-side, contrasting with the snow, are very interesting.

Channing tells me he has met with a sassafras tree in New Bedford woods, which, according to a string which he put round it, is eleven and three quarters feet in circumference at about three feet from the ground. They consider them very good for rails there, they are so light and durable.

Talk about reading! — a good reader! It depends on how he is heard. There may be elocution and pronunciation (recitation, say) to satiety, but there can be no good reading unless there is good hearing also. It takes two at least for this game, as for love, and they must coöperate. The lecturer will read best those parts of his lecture which are best heard. Sometimes, it is true, the faith and spirits of the reader may run a little ahead and draw after the good hearing, and at other times the good hearing runs ahead and draws on the good reading. The reader and the hearer are a team not to be harnessed tandem, the poor wheel horse supporting the burden of the shafts, while the leader runs pretty much at will, while the lecture lies passive in the painted curricie behind. I saw some men unloading molasses-hogsheads from a truck at a depot the other day, rolling them up an inclined plane. The truckman stood behind and shoved, after putting a

couple of ropes one round each end of the hoghead, while two men standing in the depot steadily pulled at the ropes. The first man was the lecturer, the last was the audience. It is the duty of the lecturer to team his hoghead of sweets to the depot, or Lyceum, place the horse, arrange the ropes, and shove; and it is the duty of the audience to take hold of the ropes and pull with all their might. The lecturer who tries to read his essay without being abetted by a good hearing is in the predicament of a teamster who is engaged in the Sisyphean labor of rolling a molasses-hoghead up an inclined plane alone, while the freight-master and his men stand indifferent with their hands in their pockets. I have seen many such a hoghead which had rolled off the horse and gone to smash, with all its sweets wasted on the ground between the truckman and the freight-house, — and the freight-masters thought that the loss was not theirs.

Read well! Did you ever know a full well that did not yield of its refreshing waters to those who put their hands to the windlass or the well-sweep? Did you ever suck cider through a straw? Did you ever know the cider to push out of the straw when you were not sucking, — unless it chanced to be in a complete ferment? An audience will draw out of a lecture, or enable a lecturer to read, only such parts of his lecture as they like. A lecture is like a barrel half full of some palatable liquor. You may tap it at various levels, — in the sweet liquor or in the froth or in fixed air above. If it is pronounced good, it is partly to the credit of the hearers; if bad, it is partly their fault. Some-

times a lazy audience refuses to coöperate and pull on the ropes with a will, simply because the hoghead is full and therefore heavy, when if it were empty, or had only a little sugar adhering to it, they would whisk it up the slope in a jiffy. The lecturer, therefore, desires of his audience a long pull, a strong pull, and all pull together. I have seen a sturdy truckman, or lecturer, who had nearly broken his back with shoving his lecture up such an inclined plane while the audience were laughing at him, at length, as with a last effort, set it a-rolling in amid the audience and upon their toes, scattering them like sheep and making them cry out with pain, while he drove proudly away. Rarely it is a very heavy freight of such hogheads stored in a vessel's hold that is to be lifted out and deposited on the public wharf, and this is accomplished only after many a hearty pull all together and a good deal of heave-yo-ing.

March 4. Began to snow last evening, and it is now (early in the morning) about a foot deep, and raining.

P. M. — To E. Hosmer Spring. Down Turnpike and back by E. Hubbard's Close.

We stood still a few moments on the Turnpike below Wright's (the Turnpike, which had no wheel-track beyond Tuttle's and no track at all beyond Wright's), and listened to hear a spring bird. We heard only the jay screaming in the distance and the cawing of a crow. What a perfectly New England sound is this voice of the crow! If you stand perfectly still anywhere in the outskirts of the town and listen, stilling the almost

incessant hum of your own personal factory, this is perhaps the sound which you will be most sure to hear rising above all sounds of human industry and leading your thoughts to some far bay in the woods where the crow is venting his disgust. This bird sees the white man come and the Indian withdraw, but it withdraws not. Its untamed voice is still heard above the tinkling of the forge. It sees a race pass away, but it passes not away. It remains to remind us of aboriginal nature.

I find near Hosmer Spring in the wettest ground, which has melted the snow as it fell, little flat beds of light-green moss, soft as velvet, which have recently pushed up, and lie just above the surface of the water. They are scattered about in the old decayed trough. (And there are still more and larger at Brister's Spring.) They are like little rugs or mats and are very obviously of fresh growth, such a green as has not been dulled by winter, a very fresh and living, perhaps slightly glaucous, green. The myosotis and bitter cress are hardly clean and fresh enough for a new growth.¹ The radical leaves of the *Ranunculus repens* are conspicuous, but the worse for the wear; but the golden saxifrage has in one or two places decidedly and conspicuously grown, like the cowslip at Well Meadow and still more, rising in dense beds a half to three quarters of an inch above the water, the leaves, like those of the cowslip, only partly concealed and flattened out. This distinguishes the fresh-springing leaves of these two. Probably there is more of the chrysosplenium thus ad-

¹ But the last *is*, at Well Meadow. *Vide* [Mar. 5].

vanced in Concord than of the caltha.¹ I see none of the last here.

The surface of the snow thus rapidly melting and sinking (there are commonly some inches of water under it, the rain having soaked through), though still very fresh and pure white, is all cracked, as it were, like that of some old toadstools. It has sunk so much that every inequality in the surface of the ground beneath is more distinctly shown than when bare. The ruts of old wood-paths are represented in the surface a foot above, and the track of the man and of the dog that ran by the side of the team (in the old snow), — the *thread*, in short, of every valley. The surface of the snow, though so recent, is therefore, on account of the rain, very diversified. On steep slopes it is regularly furrowed, apparently by water that has flowed down it.

In the brook in Hubbard's Close I see the grass pushing up from the bottom four or five inches long and waving in the current, which has not yet reached the surface.

C. thinks this is called a *sap* snow, because it comes after the sap begins to flow.

The story goes that at the Social Club the other night Cyrus Stow, hearing that the lecture before the Lyceum by Alger was to be on "The Sophistry of Ennui" and not knowing what that was, asked in good faith if it went by wind or water.

March 5. Going down-town this forenoon, I heard a white-bellied nuthatch on an elm within twenty feet,

¹ There is also at Well Meadow on the 5th.

uttering peculiar notes and more like a song than I remember to have heard from it.¹ There was a chickadee close by, to which it may have been addressed. It was something like *to-what what what what what*, rapidly repeated, and not the usual *gnah gnah*; and this instant it occurs to me that this may be that earliest spring note which I hear, and have referred to a woodpecker! (This is before I have chanced to see a bluebird, blackbird, or robin in Concord this year.) It is the spring note of the nuthatch. It paused in its progress about the trunk or branch and uttered this lively but peculiarly inarticulate song, an awkward attempt to warble almost in the face of the chickadee, as if it were one of its kind. It was thus giving vent to the spring within it. If I am not mistaken, it is what I have heard in former springs or winters long ago, fabulously early in the season, when we men had but just begun to anticipate the spring, — for it would seem that we, in our anticipations and sympathies, include in succession the moods and expressions of all creatures. When only the snow had begun to melt and no rill of song had broken loose, a note so dry and fettered still, so inarticulate and half thawed out, that you might (and would commonly) mistake for the tapping of a woodpecker. As if the young nuthatch in its hole had listened only to the tapping of woodpeckers and learned that music, and now, when it would sing and give vent to its spring ecstacy and it can modulate only some notes like that, that is its theme still. That is its ruling idea of song and music, — only a little clangor and liquidity added

¹ Also the 21st March.

to the tapping of the woodpecker. It was the handle by which my thoughts took firmly hold on spring.

This herald of spring is commonly unseen, it sits so close to the bark.


P. M. — Up river to Well Meadow.

The snow melts and sinks very rapidly. This spring snow is peculiarly white and blinding. The inequalities of the surface are peculiar and interesting when it has sunk thus rapidly. I see crows walking about on the ice half covered with snow in the middle of the meadows, where there is no grass, apparently to pick up the worms and other insects left there since the midwinter freshet. We see one or two little gnats or mosquitoes in the air.

See a large light-colored hawk circling a long time over Fair Haven Hill, and another, probably its mate, starts away from Holden Wood and circles toward it. The last being nearest, I distinguished that its wings were black tipped. (I have no glass.) What can they be? I think that I have seen the same in previous springs. They are too light-colored for hen-hawks, and for a pair of marsh hawks, — being apparently alike. Then the fish hawk is said by the books not to get here nearly so early, and, beside, they would not circle about *so much* over the hill. The goshawk, which I next think of, has no black tip to wings that I can learn. May it not be the winter hawk of Wilson? for he says its primaries are black at the tips, and that [it] is lighter than the red-shouldered, of same species.

At the same time I see a crow going north or north-east, high over Fair Haven Hill, and, two or three

minutes after, two more, and so many more at intervals of a few minutes. This is apparently their spring movement. Turkeys gobble in some distant farmyard at the same time. At length the sun is seen to have come out and to be shining on the oak leaves on the south side of Bear Garden Hill, and its light appears to be exactly limited to them.

I saw on the ice, quite alive, some of those black water-beetles,  which apparently had been left above by a rise of the river. Were they a *Gyrinus*?¹

When I was last at Well Meadow, I saw where apparently a dozen hounds had all crossed the brook at exactly one point, leaving a great trail in the slosh above the ice, though there was but one track of a man. It reminded me of a buffalo-trail. Every half-mile, as you go up the river, you come to the tracks of one or two dogs which have recently crossed it without any man.

Those skunk-cabbage buds which are most advanced have cast off their outmost and often frost-bitten sheaths, and the spathe is broader and slightly opened (some three quarters of an inch or more already) and has acquired brighter and more variegated colors. The outside of the spathe shows some ripeness in its colors and markings, like a melon-rind, before the spadix begins to bloom. I find that many of the most forward spathes, etc., have been destroyed since I was here three days ago. Some animal has nibbled away a part of the spathes (or sometimes only a hole in it) — and

¹ No.

I see the fragments scattered about — and then eaten out the whole of the spadix. Indeed, but few forward ones are left. Is this a mouse or musquash? or a bird? The spadix is evidently a favorite titbit to some creature.

That more entire-leaved plant amid the early skunk-cabbage which I called a cress on the 3d has the bitter taste of cress. The common cress has in one place grown considerably, and is fresh and clean and very good to eat. I wonder that I do not see where some creatures have eaten it.

The sweet-gale brush seen in a mass at a little distance is considerably darker than the alders above it. This will do for the sweet-gale maze in November.

The cowslip there is very prominently flower-budded, lifting its yellow flower-buds above water in one place. The leaves are quite inconspicuous when they first come up, being rolled up tightly.

March 6. Sunday. P. M. — To Yellow Birch Swamp.

We go through the swamp near Bee-Tree, or Oak, Ridge, listening for blackbirds or robins and, in the old orchards, for bluebirds. Found between two of the little birches in the path (where they grow densely), in Indigo-bird Sprout-land, a small nest suspended between one and two feet above the ground, between two of the little birches. This is where I have seen the indigo-bird in summer, and the nest apparently answers to Wilson's account of that bird's, being fastened with saliva to the birch on each side. Wilson

says it is "built in a low bush . . . suspended between two twigs, one passing up each side." This is about the diameter of a hair-bird's nest within, composed chiefly of fine bark-shreds looking like grass and one or two strips of grape-vine bark, and very securely fastened to the birch on each side by a whitish silk or cobweb and saliva. It is thin, the lining being probably gone.

There is a very picturesque large black oak on the Bee-Tree Ridge, of this form:—



The genista is not evergreen, having turned brown, though it is still quite leafy. I could not find a single green shoot. It is correctly represented in Loudon's "Arboretum," in '44, as "a deciduous under-shrub." Yet in his "Encyclopædia," in '55, it is represented as "an evergreen shrub."

Measured a thorn which, at six inches from the ground, or the smallest place below the branches, — for it branches soon, — was two feet three inches in circumference. Cut off a barberry on which I counted some twenty-six rings, the broadest diameter being about three and a half inches. Both these were on the west side the Yellow Birch Swamp.

The slender black birches, with their catkinéd twigs gracefully drooping on all sides, are very pretty. Like the alders, with their reddish catkins, they express more life than most trees. Most trees look completely at rest, if not dead, now, but these look as if

the sap must be already flowing in them, — and in winter as well.

In woodland roads you see where the trees which were bent down by ice, and obstructed the way, were cut off the past winter; their tops lie on one side.

March 7. 6.30 A. M. — To Hill.

I come out to hear a spring bird, the ground generally covered with snow yet and the channel of the river only partly open. On the Hill I hear first the tapping of a small woodpecker. I then see a bird alight on the dead top of the highest white oak on the hilltop, on the topmost point. It is a shrike. While I am watching him eight or ten rods off, I hear robins down below, west of the hill. Then, to my surprise, the shrike begins to sing. It is at first a wholly ineffectual and inarticulate sound without any solid tone to it, a mere hoarse breathing, as if he were clearing his throat, unlike any bird that I know, — a shrill hissing. Then he uttered a kind of mew, a very decided mewing, clear and wiry, between that of a catbird and the note of the nuthatch, as if to lure a nuthatch within his reach; then rose into the sharpest, shrillest vibratory or tremulous whistling or chirruping on the very highest key. This high gurgling jingle was like some of the notes of a robin singing in summer. But they were very short spurts in all these directions, though there was all this variety. Unless you saw the shrike it would be hard to tell what bird it was. This variety of notes covered considerable time, but were sparingly uttered with intervals. It was a decided chinking sound — the

clearest strain — suggesting much ice in the stream. I heard this bird sing once before, but that was also in early spring, or about this time. It is said that they imitate the notes of the birds in order to attract them within their reach. Why, then, have I never heard them sing in the winter? (I have seen seven or eight of them the past winter quite near.) The birds which it imitated — if it imitated any this morning — were the catbird and the robin, neither of which probably would it catch, — and the first is not here to be caught. Hearing a peep, I looked up and saw three or four birds passing rather [*sic*], which suddenly descended and settled on this oak-top. They were robins, but the shrike instantly hid himself behind a bough and in half a minute flew off to a walnut and alighted, as usual, on its very topmost twig, apparently afraid of its visitors. The robins kept their ground, one alighting on the very point which the shrike vacated. Is not this, then, probably the spring note or pairing note or notes of the shrike?

The first note which I heard from the robins, far under the hill, was *sweet sweet*, suggesting a certain haste and alarm, and then a rich, hollow, somewhat plaintive *peep* or *peep-cep-cep*, as when in distress with young just flown. When you first see them alighted, they have a haggard, an anxious and hurried, look.

I hear several jays this morning.

I think that many of the nuts which we find in the crevices of bark, firmly wedged in, may have been placed there by jays, chickadees, etc., to be held fast while they crack them with their bills.

A lady tells me that she saw, last Cattle-Show Day, — — putting up a specimen of hairwork in a frame (by his niece) in the exhibition hall. I think it represented flowers, and underneath was written "this Hare was taken from 8 different heads." She made some sort of exclamation, betraying that there was some mistake in the writing, whereupon — — took it down and carried it off, but soon came back with a new description or label, "this hare was taken from 8 different heads," and thus it stood through the exhibition.

P. M. — To Ministerial Swamp.

I hear of two who saw bluebirds this morning, and one says he saw one yesterday.¹ This seems to have been the day of their general arrival here, but I have not seen one in Concord yet.

It is a good plan to go to some old orchard on the south side of a hill, sit down, and listen, especially in the morning when all is still. You can thus often hear the distant warble of some bluebird lately arrived, which, if you had been walking, would not have been audible to you. As I walk, these first mild spring days, with my coat thrown open, stepping over tinkling rills of melting snow, excited by the sight of the bare ground, especially the reddish subsoil, where it is exposed by a cutting, and by the few green radical leaves, I stand still, shut my eyes, and listen from time to time, in order to hear the note of some bird of passage just arrived.

There are few, if any, so coarse and insensible that

¹ Vide 9th.

they are not interested to hear that the bluebird has come. The Irish laborer has learned to distinguish him and report his arrival. It is a part of the news of the season to the lawyer in his office and the mechanic in his shop, as well as to the farmer. One will remember, perchance, to tell you that he saw one a week ago in the next town or county. Citizens just come into the country to live put up a bluebird box, and record in some kind of journal the date of the first arrival observed, — though it may be rather a late one. The farmer can tell you when he saw the first one, if you ask him within a week.

I see a great many of those glow-worm-like caterpillars observed in the feshet in midwinter, on the snowy ice in the meadows and fields now; also small beetles of various kinds, and other caterpillars. I think this unusual number is owing to that feshet, which washed them out of their winter quarters so long ago, and they have never got back to them. I also see — but their appearance is a regular early spring, or late winter, phenomenon — a great many of those slender black-bodied insects from one quarter to (with the feelers) one inch long, with six legs and long gray wings, two feelers before, and two forks or tails like feelers



behind. The last are sometimes concealed by the wings. This is what I have called for convenience *Perla*. They are crawling slowly about over the snow. I have no doubt that crows eat some of the above-named caterpillars, but do other birds?

The mystery of the life of plants is kindred with that of our own lives, and the physiologist must not presume to explain their growth according to mechanical laws, or as he might explain some machinery of his own making. We must not expect to probe with our fingers the sanctuary of any life, whether animal or vegetable. If we do, we shall discover nothing but surface still. The ultimate expression or fruit of any created thing is a fine effluence which only the most ingenuous worshipper perceives at a reverent distance from its surface even. The cause and the effect are equally evanescent and intangible, and the former must be investigated in the same spirit and with the same reverence with which the latter is perceived. Science is often like the grub which, though it may have nestled in the germ of a fruit, has merely blighted or consumed it and never truly tasted it. Only that intellect makes any progress toward conceiving of the essence which at the same time perceives the effluence. The rude and ignorant finger is probing in the rind still, for in this case, too, the angles of incidence and excidence [*sic*] are equal, and the essence is as far on the other side of the surface, or matter, as reverence detains the worshipper on this, and only reverence can find out this angle instinctively. Shall we presume to alter the angle at which God chooses to be worshipped?

Accordingly, I reject Carpenter's explanation of the fact that a potato vine in a cellar grows toward the light, when he says, "The reason obviously is, that, in consequence of the loss of fluid from the tissue of the stem, on the side on which the light falls, it is contracted,

whilst that of the other side remains turgid with fluid; the stem makes a bend, therefore, until its growing point becomes opposite to the light, and then increases in that direction." (C.'s "Vegetable Physiology," page 174.)

There is no ripeness which is not, so to speak, something ultimate in itself, and not merely a perfected means to a higher end. In order to be ripe it must serve a transcendent use. The ripeness of a leaf, being perfected, leaves the tree at that point and never returns to it. It has nothing to do with any other fruit which the tree may bear, and only the genius of the poet can pluck it.

The fruit of a tree is neither in the seed nor the timber, — the full-grown tree, — but it is simply the highest use to which it can be put.

March 8. A rainy day.

P. M. — To Hill in rain.

To us snow and cold seem a mere delaying of the spring. How far we are from understanding the value of these things in the economy of Nature!

The earth is still mostly covered with ice and snow. As usual, I notice large pools of greenish water in the fields, on an icy bottom, which cannot owe their greenness to the reflected blue mingled with the yellowish light at sundown, as I supposed in the case of the green ice and water in clear winter days, for I see the former now at midday and in a rain-storm, when no sky is visible. I think that these green pools over an icy bottom must be produced by the yellow or common earth-

stain in the water mingling with the blue which is reflected from the ice. Many pools have so large a proportion of this yellow tinge as not to look green but yellow. The stain, the tea, of withered vegetation — grass and leaves — and of the soil supplies the yellow tint.

But perhaps those patches of emerald sky, sky just tinged with green, which we sometimes see, far in the horizon or near it, are produced in the same way as I thought the green ice was, — some yellow glow reflected from a cloud mingled with the blue of the atmosphere.

One might say that the yellow of the earth mingled with the blue of the sky to make the green of vegetation.

I see, under the pitch pines on the southwest slope of the hill, the reddish bud-scales scattered on the snow which fell on the 4th, and also settled an inch into it, and, examining, I find that in a great many cases the buds have been eaten by some creature and the scales scattered about, or, being opened, have closed over a cavity. Many scales rest amid the needles. There is no track on the snow, which is soft, but the scales must have been dropped within a day or two. I see near one pine, however, the fresh track of a partridge and where one has squatted all night. Tracks might possibly have been obliterated by the rapid melting of the snow the last day or two. Yet I am inclined to think that these were eaten by the red squirrel; or was it the crossbill? for this is said to visit us in the winter. Have I ever seen a squirrel eat the pine buds?¹

There is a fine freezing rain with strong wind from the north; so I keep along under shelter of hills and

¹ Farmer does not know of squirrels eating pine buds.

woods, along their south sides, in my india-rubber coat and boots. Under the south edge of Woodis Park, in the low ground, I see many radical leaves of the *Solidago altissima* and another — I am pretty sure it is the *S. stricta* — and occasionally also of the *Aster undulatus*, and all are more or less lake beneath. The first, at least, have when bruised a strong scent. Some of them have recently grown decidedly. So at least several kinds of goldenrods and asters have radical leaves lake-colored at this season. The common strawberry leaves, too, are quite fresh and a handsome lake-color beneath in many cases. There are also many little rosettes of the radical leaves of the *Epilobium coloratum*, half brown and withered, with bright-green centres, at least. And even the under side of some mullein leaves is lake or crimson also.

There is but a narrow strip of bare ground reaching a few rods into the wood along the south edge, but the less ground there is bare, the more we make of it. Such a day as this, I resort where the partridges, etc., do — to the bare ground and the sheltered sides of woods and hills — and there explore the moist ground for the radical leaves of plants, while the storm blows overhead, and I forget how the time is passing. If the weather is thick and stormy enough, if there is a good chance to be cold and wet and uncomfortable, in other words to feel weather-beaten, you may consume the afternoon to advantage thus browsing along the edge of some near wood which would scarcely detain you at all in fair weather, and you will [be] as far away there as at the end of your longest fair-weather walk, and

come home as if from an adventure. There is no better fence to put between you and the village than a storm into which the villagers do not venture out.

I go looking for green radical leaves. What a dim and shadowy existence have now to our memories the fair flowers whose localities they mark! How hard to find any trace of the stem now, after it has been flattened under the snows of the winter! I go feeling with wet and freezing fingers amid the withered grass and the snow for these prostrate stems, that I may reconstruct the plant. But greenness so absorbs our attention that sometimes I do not see the former rising from the midst of those radical leaves when it almost puts my eyes out. The shepherd's-purse radical leaves are particularly bright.

I see there a dead white pine, some twenty-five feet high, which has been almost entirely stripped of its bark by the woodpeckers. Where any bark is left, the space between it and the wood is commonly closely packed with the gnawings of worms, which appear to have consumed the inner bark. But where the bark is gone, the wood also is eaten to some depth, and there are numerous holes penetrating deep into the wood. Over all this portion, which is almost all the tree, the woodpeckers have knocked off the bark and enlarged the holes in pursuit of the worms.

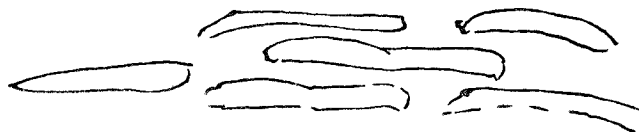
The fine rain with a strong north wind is now forming a glaze on my coat. When I get home the thermometer is at 29°. So a glaze seems to be formed when a fine rain is falling with the thermometer very little below the freezing-point.

Men of science, when they pause to contemplate "the power, wisdom, and goodness" of God, or, as they sometimes call him, "the Almighty Designer," speak of him as a total stranger whom it is necessary to treat with the highest consideration. They seem suddenly to have lost their wits.

March 9. P. M. — To Lee's Cliff with C.

C. says that he heard and saw a bluebird on the 7th, and R. W. E. the same. This was the day on which they were generally observed. I am doubtful about one having been seen on the 20th of February by a boy, as stated February 23d. C. also saw a skater-insect on the 7th, and a single blackbird flying over Cassandra Ponds, which he thought a grackle.

A true spring day, not a cloud in the sky. The earth shines, its icy armor reflecting the sun, and the rills of melting snow in the ruts shine, too, and water, where exposed in the right light on the river, is a remarkably living blue, just as the osiers appear brighter. Yet it is cool and raw and very windy. The ice over the channel of the river, when not quite melted, is now generally mackerelled (the water representing the blue por-



tions) with parallel openings, riddling it or leaving a sort of network of ice over it, answering to the ridges of the waves. You can best observe them from bridges. In some cases the snow upon the ice, having lain in

successive drifts, might also assist or modify this phenomenon.

The rain of yesterday has been filling the meadows again, flowing up under the dry ice of the winter freshet, which for the most part rested on the ground, and so this rise is at first the less observed until it shows itself beyond the edge of the ice.

At Corner Spring Brook the water reaches up to the crossing and stands over the ice there, the brook being open and some space on each side of it. When I look, from forty or fifty rods off, at the yellowish water covering the ice about a foot here, it is decidedly purple (though, when close by and looking down on it, it is yellowish merely), while the water of the brook-channel and a rod on each side of it, where there is no ice beneath, is a beautiful very dark blue. These colors are very distinct, the line of separation being the edge of the ice on the bottom, and this apparent juxtaposition of different kinds of water is a very singular and pleasing sight. You see a light-purple flood, about the color of a red grape, and a broad channel of dark-purple water, as dark as a common blue-purple grape, sharply distinct across its middle.

I see at Lee's the long, narrow radical leaves of the *Turritis stricta* just beginning to push their shoots, — the most forward-looking plant there.

We cross Fair Haven Pond on the ice, though it is difficult getting on and off, it being melted about the edges, as well as overflowed there.

It is worth while to hear the wind roar in the woods to-day. It sounds further off than it is.

Came across a stout and handsome woodchopper with a full dark or black beard, but that on his upper lip was a distinct sandy color. It was a very pleasing contrast, suggesting a sympathy with the centre of light and intelligence nearer to which it grew.

March 10. 6 A. M. — To Hill.

I see at near [*sic*] the stone bridge where the strong northwest wind of last night broke the thin ice just formed, and set the irregular triangular pieces on their edges quite perpendicular and directed northwest and southeast and pretty close together, about nine inches high, for half a dozen rods, like a dense fleet of schooners with their mainsails set.

And already, when near the road, I hear the warble of my first *Concord* bluebird, borne to me from the hill through the still morning air, and, looking up, I see him plainly, though so far away, a dark speck in the top of a walnut.

When I reach the Assabet above the Hemlocks, I hear a loud crashing or brattling sound, and, looking through the trees, see that it is the thin ice of the night, half an hour after sunrise, now swiftly borne down the stream in large fleets and going to wreck against the thick old ice on each side. This evidently is a phenomenon of the morning. The river, too, has just waked up, and, no doubt, a river in midsummer as well as in winter recognizes the advent of the morning as much as a man or an animal does. They retire at night and awake in the morning.

Looking northeast over Hosmer's meadow, I see

still the rosy light reflected from the low snow-spits, alternating with green ice there. Apparently because the angles of incidence and exidence are equal, therefore we see the green in ice at sundown when we look aslant over the ice, our visual ray making such an angle with it as the yellow light from the western horizon does in coming to it.

P. M. — To Witherell Vale.

There are some who never do nor say anything, whose life merely excites expectation. Their excellence reaches no further than a gesture or mode of carrying themselves. They are a sash dangling from the waist, or a sculptured war-club over the shoulder. They are like fine-edged tools gradually becoming rusty in a shop-window. I like as well, if not better, to see a piece of iron or steel, out of which many such tools will be made, or the bush-whack in a man's hand.¹

When I meet gentlemen and ladies, I am reminded of the extent of the inhabitable and uninhabitable globe; I exclaim to myself, Surfaces! surfaces! If the outside of a man is so variegated and extensive, what must the inside be? You are high up the Platte River, traversing deserts, plains covered with soda, with no deeper hollow than a prairie-dog hole tenanted also by owls and venomous snakes.

As I look toward the woods (from Wood's Bridge), I perceive the spring in the softened air.² This is to me the most interesting and affecting phenomenon of the season as yet. Apparently in consequence of the very

¹ [Channing, p. 330.]

² *Vide* April 15.

warm sun, this still and clear day, falling on the earth four fifths covered with snow and ice, there is an almost invisible vapor held in suspension, which is like a thin coat or enamel applied to every object, and especially it gives to the woods, of pine and oak intermingled, a softened and more living appearance. They evidently stand in a more genial atmosphere than before. Looking more low, I see that shimmering in the air over the earth which betrays the evaporation going on. Looking through this transparent vapor, all surfaces, not osiers and open waters alone, look more vivid. The hardness of winter is relaxed.

There is a fine effluence surrounding the wood, as if the sap had begun to stir and you could detect it a mile off. Such is the difference between an object seen through a warm, moist, and soft air and a cold, dry, hard one. Such is the genialness of nature that the trees appear to have put out feelers by which our senses apprehend them more tenderly. I do not know that the woods are ever more beautiful, or affect me more.

I feel it to be a greater success as a lecturer to affect uncultivated natures than to affect the most refined, for all cultivation is necessarily superficial, and its roots may not even be *directed toward* the centre of the being.

Rivers, too, like the walker, unbutton their icy coats, and we see the dark bosoms of their channels in the midst of the ice. Again, in pools of melted snow, or where the river has risen, I look into clear, placid water, and see the russet grassy bottom in the sun.

Look up or down the open channel now, so smooth, like a hibernating animal that has ventured to come out to the mouth of its burrow. One way, perhaps, it is like melted silver alloyed with copper. It goes nibbling off the edge of the thick ice on each side. Here and there I see a musquash sitting in the sun on the edge of the ice, eating a clam, and the clamshells it has left are strewn along the edge. Ever and anon he drops into the liquid mirror, and soon reappears with another clam. This clear, placid, silvery water is evidently a phenomenon of spring. Winter could not show us this.

A broad channel of water separates the dry land from the ice, and the musquash-hunter finds it hard to reach the game he has shot on the ice.

Fine red-stemmed mosses have begun to push and bud on Clamshell bank, growing in the Indian ashes where surface taken off. Carpenter says, "The first green crust upon the cinders with which the surface of Ascension Island was covered, consisted of minute mosses."

We sit in the sun on the side of Money-Diggers' Hill, amid the crimson low blueberry shoots and the withered *Andropogon scoparius* and the still erect *Solidago arguta* (var. the common) and the tall stubble thickly hung with fresh gleaming cobwebs. There are some grayish moths out, etc.; some gnats.

I see the bridge far away over the ice resting on its black piers above the ice which is lifted around it. It is short-legged now. This level or horizontal line resting on perpendicular black ones is always an interesting sight to me.

As we sit in this wonderful air, many sounds — that of woodchopping, for one — come to our ears agreeably blunted or muffled, even like the drumming of a partridge, not sharp and rending as in winter and recently. If a partridge should drum in winter, probably it would not reverberate so softly through the wood and sound indefinitely far. Our voices, even, sound differently and betray the spring. We speak as in a house, in a warm apartment still, with relaxed muscles and softened voices. The voice, like a woodchuck in his burrow, is met and lapped in and encouraged by all genial and sunny influences. There may be heard now, perhaps, under south hillsides and the south sides of houses, a slight murmur of conversation, as of insects, out of doors.

These earliest spring days are peculiarly pleasant. We shall have no more of them for a year. I am apt to forget that we may have raw and blustering days a month hence. The combination of this delicious air, which you do not want to be warmer or softer, with the presence of ice and snow, you sitting on the bare russet portions, the south hillsides, of the earth, this is the charm of these days. It is the summer beginning to show itself like an old friend in the midst of winter. You ramble from one drier russet patch to another. These are your stages. You have the air and sun of summer, over snow and ice, and in some places even the rustling of dry leaves under your feet, as in Indian-summer days.

The bluebird on the apple tree, warbling so innocently to inquire if any of its mates are within call, —

the angel of the spring! Fair and innocent, yet the offspring of the earth. The color of the sky above and of the subsoil beneath. Suggesting what sweet and innocent melody (terrestrial melody) may have its birthplace between the sky and the ground.

Two frogs (may have been *Rana fontinalis*; did not see them) jumped into Hosmer's grassy ditch.

See in one place a small swarm of insects flying or gyrating, dancing like large tipulidæ. The dance within the compass of a foot always above a piece of snow of the same size in the midst of bare ground.

The most ornamental tree I have seen this spring was the willow full of catkins now showing most of their down, in front of Puffer's house.

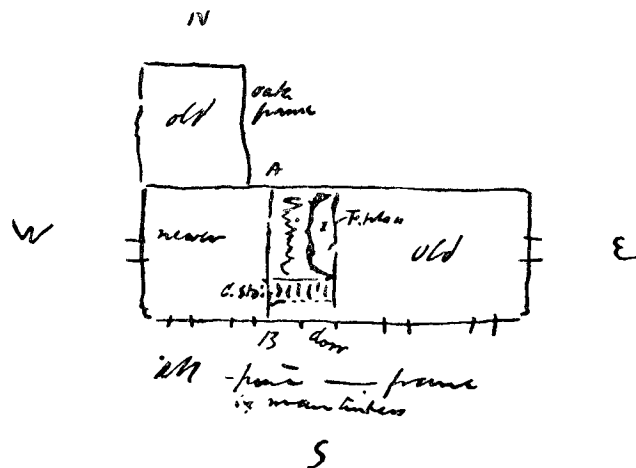
March 11. 6 A. M. — By riverside I hear the song of many song sparrows, the most of a song of any yet. And on the swamp white oak top by the stone bridge, I see and hear a red-wing. It sings almost steadily on its perch there, sitting all alone, as if to attract companions (and I see two more, also solitary, on different tree-tops within a quarter of a mile), calling the river to life and tempting ice to melt and trickle like its own sprayey notes. Another flies over on high, with a *tehuck* and at length a clear whistle. The birds anticipate the spring; they come to melt the ice with their songs.

But methinks the sound of the woodpecker tapping is as much a spring note as any these mornings; it echoes peculiarly in the air of a spring morning.

P. M. — To Hunt house.

I go to get one more sight of the old house which Hosmer is pulling down, but I am too late to see much of it. The chimney is gone and little more than the oblong square frame stands. E. Hosmer and Nathan Hosmer are employed taking it down. The latter draws all the nails, however crooked, and puts them in his pockets, for, being wrought ones, he says it is worth the while.

It appears plainly, now that the frame is laid bare,




that the eastern two-thirds of the main house is older than the western third, for you can see where the west part has been added on, at the line A B. All the joists in the old part are hewn; in the newer, sawn. But very extensive repairs had been made in the old part, probably at the same time with the addition. Also the back part had been added on to the new part, merely

butted on at one side without tenant or mortise. The peculiar cedar laths were confined to the old part. The whole has oak sills and pine timbers. The two Hosmers were confident that the chimney was built at the same time with the new part, because, though there were flues in it from the new part, there was no break in the courses of brick about them. On the chimney was the date 1703 (?), — I think that was it, — and if this was the date of the chimney, it would appear that the old part belonged to the Winthrops, and it may go back to near the settlement of the town. The laths long and slender of white cedar split. In the old part the ends of the timbers were not merely mortised into the posts, but rested on a shoulder thus:

twelve
by four
mantel-
long and
inches



The fireplace measures twelve feet wide by three deep and a half high. The tree is log, fourteen feet some fifteen to sixteen square at the ends, but

one half cut away diagonally between the ends, and now charred. It would take three men to handle it easily. The timbers of the old part had been cased and the joists plastered over at some time, and, now that they were uncovered, you saw many old memorandums and scores in chalk on them, as "May ye 4th," "Ephraim Brown," "0—3s—4d," "oxen  — so they kept their score or tally, — such as the butcher and baker sometimes make. Perhaps the occupant had let his neighbor have the use of his oxen so many days. I asked if they had

found any old coins. N. Hosmer answered, Yes, he had, and showed it me, — took it out of his pocket. It was about as big as a quarter of a dollar, with "Britain," etc., legible, "Geo II," and date "1742," but it was of lead. But there was no manuscript, — not a copy of verses, only these chalk records of butter and cheese, oxen and bacon, and a counterfeit coin, out of the smoky recesses. Very much such relics as you find in the old rats' nests in which these houses abound.¹

My mother says that she has been to the charitable society there. One old jester of the town used to call it "the *chattable* society."

Mrs. A. takes on dolefully on account of the solitude in which she lives, but she gets little consolation. Mrs. B. says she envies her that retirement. Mrs. A. is aware that she does, and says it is as if a thirsty man should envy another the river in which he is drowning. So goes the world. It is either this extreme or that. Of solitude one gets too much and another not enough.

E. Hosmer says that a man told him that he had seen my uncle Charles take a twelve-foot ladder, set it up straight, and then run up and down the other side, kicking it from behind him as he went down. E. H. told of seeing him often at the tavern toss his hat to the ceiling, twirling it over, and catch it on his head every time.

Large flocks of blackbirds to-day in the elm-tops and other trees. These are the first conspicuous large

¹ *Vide* [pp. 46-48]. [See *Excursions*, p. 201; Riv. 247.]

flocks of birds. J. Farmer says he saw ducks this morning and has seen larks some days. Channing saw geese to-day.

Find out as soon as possible what are the best things in your composition, and then shape the rest to fit them. The former will be the midrib and veins of the leaf.

There is always some accident in the best things, whether thoughts or expressions or deeds. The memorable thought, the happy expression, the admirable deed are only partly ours. The thought came to us because we were in a fit mood; also we were unconscious and did not know that we had said or done a good thing. We must walk consciously only part way toward our goal, and then leap in the dark to our success. What we do best or most perfectly is what we have most thoroughly learned by the longest practice, and at length it falls from us without our notice, as a leaf from a tree. It is the *last* time we shall do it, — our unconscious leavings.

March 12. Saturday. P. M. — Walk in rain to Ministerial Swamp.

Going up the railroad in this rain, with a south wind, I see a pretty thick low fog extending across the railroad only against Dennis's Swamp. There being much more ice and snow within the swamp, the vapor is condensed and is blown northward over the railroad. I see these local fogs with always the same origin, *i. e.*, large masses of snow or ice, in swamps or woods, perhaps the north sides of hills, in several places after-

ward. The air is warm. As often as we came to a particularly icy or snowy place, as Harrington's road in woods, we found ourselves in a fog.

It is a regular spring rain, such as I remember walking in, — windy but warm. It alternately rains hard and then holds up a little. A similar alternation we see in the waves of water and all undulating surfaces, — in snow and sand and the clouds (the mackerel sky). Now you walk in a comparative lull, anticipating fair weather, with but a slight drizzling, and anon the wind blows and the rain drives down harder than ever. In one of these lulls, as I passed the Joe Hosmer (rough-cast) house, I thought I never saw any bank so handsome as the russet hillside behind it. It is a very barren, exhausted soil, where the cladonia lichens abound, and the lower side is a flowing sand, but this russet grass with its weeds, being saturated with moisture, was in this light the richest brown, methought, that I ever saw. There was the pale brown of the grass, red browns of some weeds (*sarothra* and pinweed probably), dark browns of huckleberry and sweet-fern stems, and the very visible green of the cladonias thirty rods off, and the rich brown fringes where the broken sod hung over the edge of the sand-bank. I did not see the browns of withered vegetation so rich last fall, and methinks these terrestrial lichens were never more fair and prominent. On some knolls these vivid and rampant lichens as it were dwarf the oaks. A peculiar and unaccountable light seemed to fall on that bank or hillside, though it was thick storm all around. A sort of Newfoundland sun seemed to be shining on

it. It was such a light that you looked around for the sun that might be shining on it. Both the common largest and the very smallest hypericums (*Sarothra*) and the pinweeds were very rich browns at a little distance, coloring whole fields, and also withered and fallen ferns, reeking wet. It was a prospect to excite a reindeer. These tints of brown were as softly and richly fair and sufficing as the most brilliant autumnal tints.¹ In fair and dry weather these spots may be commonplace, but now they are worthy to tempt the painter's brush. The picture should be the side of a barren lichen-clad hill with a flowing sand-bank beneath, a few blackish huckleberry bushes here and there, and bright white patches of snow here and there in the ravines, the hill running east and west and seen through the storm from a point twenty or thirty rods south. This kind of light, the air being full of rain and all vegetation dripping with it, brings out the browns wonderfully.²

I notice now particularly the tallows by the railroad, full of dark cones, as a fruit. The broad radical leaves of (apparently) water dock are very fresh and conspicuous.

See two ducks flying over Ministerial Swamp.

In one place in the meadow southeast of Tarbell's, I find on the ice, about a couple of holes an inch across where a little stubble shows itself, a great many small ants dead, — say a thousand. They are strewn about the holes for six or eight inches, and are collected in a dense heap about the base of the stubble. I take up

¹ [Channing, p. 294.]

² *Vide* [p. 45].

a mass of them on my knife, each one entire, but now, of course, all wet and adhering together. It looks as if they had been tempted out by the warmth of the sun and had been frozen or drowned; or is it possible that they were killed by the frost last fall and now washed up through the ice? I think, from their position around the base of the stubble in that little hole in the ice, that they came out of the earth and clustered there since the ice melted to that extent. There are many other insects and worms and caterpillars (and especially spiders, dead) on the ice, there as well as elsewhere.

I perceive that a freshet which washes the earth bare in the winter and causes a great flow of water over it in that state — when it is not soaked up — must destroy a great many insects and worms. I find a great many that appear to have been drowned rather than frozen. May not this have tempted the bluebirds on early this year?

March 13. 7 A. M. — *F. hyemalis* in yard.

Going down railroad, listening *intentionally*, I hear, far through the notes of song sparrows (which are very numerous), the song of one or two larks. Also hearing a coarse *chuck*, I look up and see four blackbirds, whose size and long tails betray them crow blackbirds.¹ Also I hear, I am pretty sure, the cackle of a pigeon woodpecker.

The bright catkins of the willow are the springing most generally observed.

¹ [Two interrogation-points in pencil here.]

P. M. — To Great Fields.

Water rising still. Winter-freshet ice on meadows still more lifted up and partly broken in some places. The broad light artery of the river (and some meadows, too) very fair in the distance from Peter's.

Talking with Garfield to-day about his trapping, he said that mink brought three dollars and a quarter, a remarkably high price, and asked if I had seen any. I said that I commonly saw two or three in a year. He said that he had not seen one alive for eight or ten years. "But you trap them?" "O yes," he said. "I catch thirty or forty dollars' worth every winter." This suggests how little a trapper may see of his game. Garfield caught a skunk lately.

In some meadows I see a great many dead spiders on the ice, where apparently it has been overflowed — or rather it was the heavy rain, methinks — when they had no retreat.

Hear a ground squirrel's sharp chirrup, which makes you start, it is so sudden; but he is probably earthed again, for I do not see him.

On the northeast part of the Great Fields, I find the broken shell of a *Cistudo Blandingii*, on very dry soil. This is the fifth, then, I have seen in the town. All the rest were three in the Great Meadows (one of them in a ditch) and one within a rod or two of Beck Stow's Swamp.

It is remarkable that the spots where I find most arrowheads, etc., being light, dry soil, — as the Great Fields, Clamshell Hill, etc., — are among the first to be bare of snow, and the frost gets out there first. It

is very curiously and particularly true, for the only parts of the northeast section of the Great Fields which are so dry that I do not slump there are those small in area, where perfectly bare patches of sand occur, and there, singularly enough, the arrowheads are particularly common. Indeed, in some cases I find them only on such bare spots a rod or two in extent where a single wigwam might have stood, and not half a dozen rods off in any direction. Yet the difference of level may not be more than a foot, — if there is any. It is as if the Indians had selected precisely the driest spots on the whole plain, with a view to their advantage at this season. If you were going to pitch a tent to-night on the Great Fields, you would inevitably pitch on one of these spots, or else lie down in water or mud or on ice. It is as if they had chosen the site of their wigwams at this very season of the year.

I see a small flock of blackbirds flying over, some rising, others falling, yet all advancing together, one flock but many birds, some silent, others chucking, — incessant alternation. This harmonious movement as in a dance, this agreeing to differ, makes the charm of the spectacle to me. One bird looks fractional, naked, like a single thread or ravelling from the web to which it belongs. Alternation! Alternation! Heaven and hell! Here again in the flight of a bird, its ricochet motion, is that undulation observed in so many materials, as in the mackerel sky.

If men were to be destroyed and the books they have written [were to] be transmitted to a new race of creatures, in a new world, what kind of record would be

found in them of so remarkable a phenomenon as the rainbow?

I cannot easily forget the beauty of those terrestrial browns in the rain yesterday. The withered grass was not of that very pale hoary brown that it is to-day, now that it is dry and lifeless, but, being perfectly saturated and dripping with the rain, the whole hillside seemed to reflect a certain yellowish light, so that you looked around for the sun in the midst of the storm. All the yellow and red and leather-color in the fawn-colored weeds was more intense than at any other season. The withered ferns which fell last fall — pinweeds, sarrathea, etc. — were actually a *glowing* brown for the same reason, being all dripping wet. The cladonias crowning the knolls had visibly expanded and erected themselves, though seen twenty rods off, and the knolls appeared swelling and bursting as with yeast. All these hues of brown were most beautifully blended, so that the earth appeared covered with the softest and most harmoniously spotted and tinted tawny fur coat of any animal. The very bare sand slopes, with only here and there a thin crusting of mosses, was [*sic*] a richer color than ever it is.

In short, in these early spring rains, the withered herbage, thus saturated, and reflecting its brightest withered tint, seems in a certain degree to have revived, and sympathizes with the fresh greenish or yellowish or brownish lichens in its midst, which also seem to have withered. It seemed to me — and I think it may be the truth — that the abundant moisture, bringing out the highest color in the brown surface of the earth,

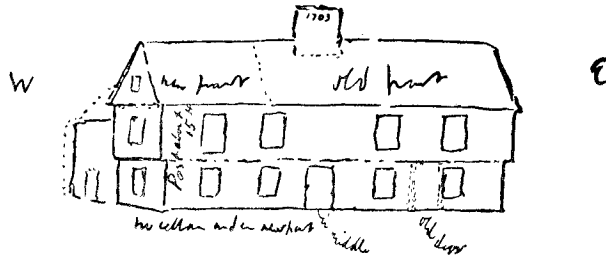
generated a certain degree of light, which, when the rain held up a little, reminded you of the sun shining through a thick mist.

Oak leaves which have sunk deep into the ice now are seen to be handsomely spotted with black (of fungi or lichens?), which spots are rarely perceived in dry weather.

All that vegetable life which loves a superfluity of moisture is now rampant, cold though it is, compared with summer. Radical leaves are as bright as ever they are.

The barrenest surfaces, perhaps, are the most interesting in such weather as yesterday, when the most terrene colors are seen. The wet earth and sand, and especially subsoil, are very invigorating sights.

The Hunt house, to draw from memory, — though I have given its measures within two years in my Journal, — looked like this: —



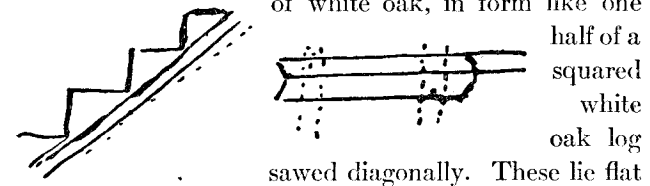
This is only generally correct, without a scale.

Probably grackles have been seen some days. I think I saw them on the 11th? Garfield says he saw black ducks yesterday.

March 14. P. M. — To Hunt house.


I thought from the above drawing that the original door must have been in the middle of the old part and not at one end, and that I should detect it in the manner in which the studs were set in. I really did so and found some other traces of the old door (where I have dotted it) when I got there. Some of the chalk-marks which have been preserved under the casing of the timbers so long have been completely washed off in yesterday's rain, as the frame stood bare. Also read in chalk on a chamber floor joist (which had been plastered over beneath) "enfine Brown," so many s. and d., and what most read for "Feb 1666," but, being written over a rough knot, it is doubtful. "Hides 3."

Saw E. Hosmer take up the cellar stairs. They are




sawed diagonally. These lie flat on their broadest sides on the slanting earth, resting near each end on a horse, which is a white oak stick with the bark on, hewed on the upper side and sunk in the earth, and they are fastened to this by two pins of wood placed as I have indicated.

I judge by my eye that the house is fifteen feet high to the eaves. The posts are remarkably sawn and hewn away on account of the projection of the upper story, so that they are more than twice as large above

as below, thus:  the corner posts being cut on two sides or more than half away (six inches off them) below the second story. The chimney was laid in clay. "T. B." were perhaps the initials of Thomas Brown; also "I. [?] H. D."

The cowslip in pitcher has fairly blossomed to-day.

I see a large flock of grackles searching for food along the water's edge, just below Dr. Bartlett's. Some wade in the water. They are within a dozen rods of me and the road. It must be something just washed up that they are searching for, for the water has just risen and is still rising fast. Is it not insects and worms washed out of the grass? and perhaps the snails? When a grackle sings, it is as if his mouth were  full of cotton, which he was trying to spit out.

The river is still rising. It is open [?] and generally over the meadows. The meadow ice is rapidly breaking up. Great cakes half a dozen rods long are drifted down against the bridges. There is a strong current on the meadow, not only north along the causeway, but south along the north end of the causeway, the water thus rushing both ways toward the only outlet at the bridge. This is proved by great cakes of ice floating swiftly along parallel with the causeway, but in opposite directions, to meet at the bridge. They are there soon broken up by the current after they strike the abutments. I see a large cake eight feet wide and ten inches thick, just broken off, carried under the bridge in a vertical position and wholly under water, such is the pressure there. This shows to what an extent the causeways and bridges act as dams to the flood.

March 15. Rainy day and southerly wind.

I come home in the evening through a very heavy rain after two brilliant rainbows at sunset, the first of the year.

March 16. 6 A. M. — The water is just over the slanting iron truss, four feet from its east end, and still rising.

P. M. — Launch my boat and sail to Ball's Hill.

It is fine clear weather and a strong northwest wind. What a change since yesterday! Last night I came home through as incessant heavy rain as I have been out in for many years, through the muddiest and wettest of streets, still partly covered with ice, and the rain-water stood over shoes in many places on the sidewalks. I heard of several who went astray in this water and had adventures in the dark. You require india-rubber boots then. But to-day I see the children playing at hop-scotch on those very sidewalks, with a bed marked in the dry sand. So rapid are the changes of weather with us, and so porous our soil.

With a strong wind we sail over the Red Bridge road. The water is falling over the lower side of the road as over a dam. For the road really operates as a dam, the water being much lower on the east side.

A new phase of the spring is presented; a new season has come. By the soaking rain and the wind of yesterday especially, the remaining snow and ice has been almost entirely swept away, and the ice has been broken, floated off, and melted, and much frost taken out of the ground: and now, as we glide over the Great

Meadows before this strong wind, we no longer see dripping, saturated russet and brown banks through rain, hearing at intervals the alarm notes of the early robins, — banks which reflect a yellowish light, — but we see the bare and now pale-brown and dry russet hills. The earth has cast off her white coat and come forth in her clean-washed sober russet early spring dress. As we look over the lively, tossing blue waves for a mile or more eastward and northward, our eyes fall on these shining russet hills, and Ball's Hill appears in this strong light at the verge of this undulating blue plain, like some glorious newly created island of the spring, just sprung up from the bottom in the midst of the blue waters. The fawn-colored oak leaves, with a few pines intermixed, thickly covering the hill, look not like a withered vegetation, but an ethereal kind, just expanded and peculiarly adapted to the season and the sky.

Look toward the sun, the water is yellow, as water in which the earth has just washed itself clean of its winter impurities; look from the sun and it is a beautiful dark blue; but in each direction the crests of the waves are white, and you cannot sail or row over this watery wilderness without sharing the excitement of this element. Our sail draws so strongly that we cut through the great waves without feeling them. And all around, half a mile or a mile distant, looking over this blue foreground, I see the bare and peculiarly neat, clean-washed, and bright russet hills reflecting the bright light (after the storm of yesterday) from an infinite number of dry blades of withered grass. The russet

surfaces have now, as it were, a combed look, — combed by the rain. And the leather-color of withered oak leaves covering Ball's Hill, seen a mile or two off in the strong light, with a few pines intermixed, as if it were an island rising out of this blue sea in the horizon. This sight affects me as if it were visible at this season only. What with the clear air and the blue water and the sight of the pure dry withered leaves, that distant hill affects me as something altogether ethereal.

After a day of soaking rain, concluded with a double rainbow the evening before, — not to mention the rain of the evening, — go out into the sparkling spring air, embark on the flood of melted snow and of rain gathered from all hillsides, with a northwest wind in which you often find it hard to stand up straight, and toss upon a sea of which one half is liquid clay, the other liquid indigo, and look round on an earth dressed in a homespun of pale sheeny brown and leather-color. Such are the blessed and fairy isles we sail to!

We meet one great gull beating up the course of the river against the wind, at Flint's Bridge. (One says they were seen about a week ago, but there was very little water then.) Its is a very leisurely sort of limping flight, tacking its way along like a sailing vessel, yet the slow security with which it advances suggests a leisurely contemplativeness in the bird, as if it were working out some problem quite at its leisure. As often as its very narrow, long, and curved wings are lifted up against the light, I see a very narrow distinct light edging to the wing where it is thin. Its black-tipped wings. Afterwards, from Ball's Hill, looking

north, I see two more circling about looking for food over the ice and water.

There is an unexpected quantity of ice in that direction, not on the channel, but the meadows east of it, all the way from Ball's Hill to Carlisle Bridge, — large masses, which have drifted from the channel and from above, for there the wind has blown more directly across the river. These great masses have been driven and wedged one against another, and ground up on the edges. This first sight of the bare tawny and russet earth, seen afar, perhaps, over the meadow flood in the spring, affects me as the first glimpse of land, his native land, does the voyager who has not seen it a long time. But in a week or two we get used to it.

I look down over Tarbell's Bay, just north of Ball's Hill. Not only meadows but potato and rye fields are buried deep, and you see there, sheltered by the hills on the northwest, a placid blue bay having the russet hills for shores. This kind of bay, or lake, made by the freshet — these deep and narrow "fiords" — can only be seen along such a stream as this, liable to an annual freshet. The water rests as gently as a dewdrop on a leaf, leaving its tender temporary shores. It has no strand, leaves no permanent water-mark, but though you look at it a quarter of a mile off, you know that the rising flood is gently overflowing a myriad withered green blades there in succession. There is the magic of lakes that come and go. The lake or bay is not an institution, but a phenomenon. You plainly see that it is so much water poured into the hollows of the earth

March 17. 6.30 A. M. — River risen still higher. It is seven and a half inches below the highest part of the truss and about fifteen and a half inches below the middle of the lower stone step of the railroad. It is not quite over Wood's road.

I hear a robin fairly singing.

A great many musquash have been killed within a week. One says a cartload have been killed in Assabet. Perhaps a dozen gunners have been out in this town every day. They get a shilling apiece for their skins. One man getting musquash and one mink earned five or six dollars the other day. I hear their guns early and late long before sunrise and after sunset, for those are the best times.

P. M. — To Flint's Bridge by water.

The water is very high, and smooth as ever it is. It is very warm. I wear but one coat on the water. The town and the land it is built on seem to rise but little above the flood. This bright smooth and level surface seems here the prevailing element, as if the distant town were an island. I realize how water predominates on the surface of the globe. I am surprised to see new and unexpected water-lines, drawn by the level edge of the flood about knolls in the meadows and in the woods, — waving lines, rarely if ever recognized or thought of by the walker or any, which mark the boundary of a possible or probable freshet any spring.¹ Even if the highest water-mark were indicated at one point, the surveyor could not, with any labor short of infinite, draw these lines for us which

¹ [Channing, pp. 294, 295.]

wind about every elevation of earth or rock. Yet, though this slight difference of level which the water so simply and effectually points out, is so unobservable by us ordinarily, no doubt Nature never forgets it for a moment, but plants grow and insects, etc., breed in conformity to it. Many a kingdom of nature has its boundaries parallel with this waving line. By these freshets, the relation of some field, usually far from the stream, to future or past deluge is suggested. I am surprised and amused, at least, to walk in such a field and observe the nice distinctions which the great water-level makes there. So plants and animals and thoughts have their commonly unseen shores, and many portions of the earth are, with reference to them, islands or peninsulas or capes, shores or mountains.

We are stiff and set in our geography because the level of water is comparatively, or within short periods, unchangeable. We look only in the sea for islands and continents and their varieties. But there are more subtle and invisible and fluctuating floods which island this or that part of the earth whose geography has never been mapped. For instance, here is Mantaketuket Rock, commonly a rocky peninsula with a low or swampy neck and all covered with wood. It is now a small rocky island, and not only the swampy neck but a considerable portion of the upland is blotted out by the flood, covered and concealed under water; and what surprises me is that the water should so instantly know and select its own shore on the upland, though I could not have told with my eye whether it

would be thirty feet this way or as many that. A distinction is made for me by the water in this case which I had never thought of, revealing the relation of this surface to the flood ordinarily far from it, and which I now begin to perceive that every tree and shrub and herbaceous plant growing there knew, if I did not.

How different to-day from yesterday! Yesterday was a cool, bright day, the earth just washed bare by the rain, and a strong northwest wind raised respectable billows on our vernal seas and imparted remarkable life and spirit to the scene. To-day it is perfectly still and warm. Not a ripple disturbs the surface of these lakes, but every insect, every small black beetle struggling on it, is betrayed; but, seen through this air, though many might not notice the difference, the russet surface of the earth does not shine, is not bright. I see no *shining* russet islands with dry but flushing oak leaves. The air is comparatively dead when I attend to it, and it is as if there were the veil of a fine mist over all objects, dulling their edges. Yet this would be called a clear day. These aerial differences in the days are not commonly appreciated, though they affect our spirits.

When I am opposite the end of the willow-row, seeing the osiers of perhaps two years old all in a mass, they are seen to be very distinctly yellowish beneath and scarlet above. They are fifty rods off. Here is the same chemistry that colors the leaf or fruit, coloring the bark. It is generally, probably always, the upper part of the twig, the more recent growth, that is the

higher-colored and more flower or fruit like. So leaves are more ethereal the higher up and further from the root. In the bark of the twigs, indeed, is the more permanent flower or fruit. The flower falls in spring or summer, the fruit and leaves fall or wither in autumn, but the blushing twigs retain their color throughout the winter and appear more brilliant than ever the succeeding spring. They are winter fruit. It adds greatly to the pleasure of late November, of winter, or of early spring walks to look into these mazes of twigs of different colors.

As I float by the Rock, I hear rustling amid the oak leaves above that new water-line, and, there being no wind, I know it to be a striped squirrel, and soon see its long-unseen striped sides flirting about the instep of an oak. Its lateral stripes, alternate black and yellowish, are a type which I have not seen for a long time, or rather a punctuation-mark, the character to indicate where a new paragraph commences in the revolution of the seasons. Double lines.

I find by measurement that there is from two to three inches fall in the middle between the piers of Flint's Bridge, on the two sides of the bridge, supposing the planking to be level; but there is much more close to the abutments, for the water is very conspicuously heaped up in the middle in each case, or between each two piers, thus:—



If you look from above, it is somewhat thus:—

If I land now on any knoll which is left dry above the flood, an island in the meadow, and its surface is broken, I am pretty sure to find Indian relics. They pitched their wigwams on these highest places, near water.

I was speaking yesterday of the peculiarity of our meadow-bays in time of flood, — a shore where there are no shore-marks; for in time trees, rocks, etc., arrange themselves parallel with the water's edge, and the water by its washing makes for itself a strand, washing out the soil from the bank and leaving the sand and stones, and paths of animals and men conform to the permanent shore, but in this case all is abrupt and surprising. Rocky islands covered with green lichens and with polypody half submerged rise directly from the water, and trees stand up to their middles in it. Any eye would perceive that a rock covered with green lichens quite down to the water's edge was something unusual.

March 18. 8 A. M. — To stone bridge.

The water has fallen three or four inches. It was at its height last night, and was then about five inches below the highest part of the truss. This is quite high water. But it has now begun to rain, and the river will probably rise again.

Along the shores you see now much coarse wrack



of green and black pontederia stems which have been torn up by the ice. The ice and the wrack are also dotted with cranberries here and there.

What a variety of weather! What a difference in the days! Three days ago, the 15th, we had steady rain with a southerly wind, with a clear interval and a brilliant double rainbow at sunset, — a day when all the russet banks were dripping, saturated with wet, and the peep of the robin was heard through the drizzle and the rain. In the evening it rained again much harder than before. The next day it was clear and cool, with a strong northwest wind, and the flood still higher on the meadows; the dry russet earth and leather-colored oak reflected a flashing light from far; the tossing blue waves with white crests excited the beholder and the sailer. In short, the tables were completely turned; snow and ice were for the most part washed and blown away from both land and water. Yesterday it was very warm, without perceptible wind, with a comparatively lifeless [air], yet such as invalids like, with no flashing surfaces, but, as it were, an invisible mist sobering down every surface; and the water, still higher than before, was perfectly smooth all day. This was a weather-breeder. To-day comes a still, steady rain again, with warm weather and a southerly wind, which threatens to raise the river still higher, though it had begun to fall.¹

One would say that frost in the ground, though it may be melted for several inches (as now), bred rain, if, indeed, its evaporations do not create it. Expect

¹ *Vide* [p. 65].

rain after rain till the frost is completely out. The melted frost, rising in the form of vapor, returns, perhaps, in rain to liberate its kind still imprisoned in the earth.

Consider how I discovered where the Winthrop family in this town placed their front door some two hundred years ago, without any verbal or written or ocular evidence. I first suspected [?] and then verified it. I, with others, saw by the frame of the old Hunt house that an addition had been made to its west end in 1703. This brought the front door, which was in the middle of the present, near one end of the original or Winthrop house. I, sitting at home, said to myself, having an occult sympathy with the Winthrops of that date, "The front door must originally have been in the middle of the old house, for symmetry and convenience required it, and if it was, I shall find traces of it; I shall find there where studs have been set into the frame in a different manner from the rest." I went to the house and looked where the door should have been, and I found precisely the evidence I sought, and, beside, where the timber above had been cut out just the width of the door. Indeed, if I had found no traces of the old door, I should have known that the present door was placed where it is after the house was built, for at this corner of the house the end of the sill chanced to be nearly round, the stick tapering, and the post was fitted upon [it] in a remarkable manner, thus:



Oak wood had been thus laboriously fitted to it, but within three feet of the corner this sill had been wholly cut away under the

door to make room for it, for they certainly had not put in a piece of sill only three feet long and *of that form* there originally.

Flood, who is saving rails, etc., at the stone bridge, remarks that old settlers say this stream is highest the third day after a rain. But of course this depends on the amount of the rain, the direction and force of the wind, etc., etc. A southwest wind will take the water out sooner, and any strong wind will evaporate it fast.

Rice thinks that he has seen two gulls on the Sudbury meadows, — the white and the gray gulls. He has often seen a man shoot the large gull from Cambridge bridge by heading him off, for the gull flies slowly. He would first run this way, and when the gull turned aside, run that, till the gull passed right over his head, when he shot him. Rice saw Fair Haven Pond still covered with ice, though open along the shore, yesterday. I frequently see the gulls flying up the course of the stream, or of the river valley, at least. R. thinks that the ducks will be seen more numerous, gathering on our waters, just before a storm, like yesterday's.

March 19. 7 A. M. — Fair weather and a very strong southwest wind, the water not quite so high as day before yesterday, — just about as high as yesterday morning, — notwithstanding yesterday's rain, which was pretty copious.

P. M. — To Tarbell's *via* J. P. Brown's.

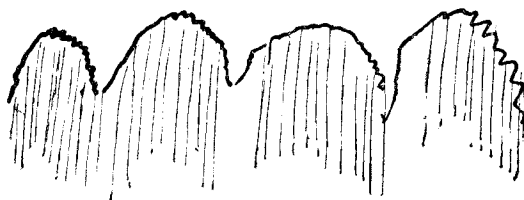
The wind blows very strongly from the southwest, and, the course of the river being northeast, it must help the water to run off very much. If it blew with

equal violence from the north, the river would probably have risen on account of yesterday's rain. On the northeast sides of the broadest expanses the waves run very high, quite sea-like, and their tumult is exciting both [to] see and [to] hear. All sorts of lumber is afloat. Rails, planks, and timber, etc., which the unthrifty neglected to secure now change hands. Much railroad lumber is floated off. While one end rests on the land, it is the railroad's, but as soon as it is afloat it is made the property of him who saves it. I see some poor neighbors as earnest as the railroad employees are negligent, to secure it. It blows so hard that you walk aslant against the wind. Your very beard, if you wear a full one, is a serious cause of detention. Or if you are fortunate enough to go before the wind, your carriage can hardly be said to be natural to you.

A new ravine has begun at Clamshell this spring. That other, which began with a crack in the frozen ground, I stood at the head of and looked down and out through the other day. It not only was itself a new feature in the landscape, but it gave to the landscape seen through [it] a new and remarkable character, as does the Deep Cut on the railroad. It faces the water, and you look down on the shore and the flooded meadows between its two sloping sides as between the frame of a picture. It affected me like the descriptions or representations of much more stupendous scenery, and to my eyes the dimensions of this ravine were quite indefinite, and in that mood I could not have guessed if it were twenty or fifty feet wide. The landscape has a strange and picturesque appearance seen through

it, and it is itself no mean feature in it. But a short time ago I detected here a crack in the frozen ground. Now I look with delight as it were at a new landscape through a broad gap in the hill.

Walking afterward on the side of the hill behind Abel Hosmer's, overlooking the russet interval, the ground being bare where corn was cultivated last year, I see that the sandy soil has been washed far down the hill for its whole length by the recent rains combined with the melting snow, and it forms on the nearly level ground at the base very distinct flat yellow sands, with a convex edge, contrasting with the darker soil there.



Such slopes must lose a great deal of this soil in a single spring, and I should think that was a sound reason in many cases for leaving them woodland and never exposing and breaking the surface. This, plainly, is one reason why the brows of such hills are commonly so barren. They lose much more than they gain annually. It is a question whether the farmer will not lose more by the wash in such cases than he will gain by manuring.

The meadows are all in commotion. The ducks are now concealed by the waves, if there are any floating there. While the sun is behind a cloud, the surface of

the flood is almost uniformly yellowish or blue, but when the sun comes out from behind the cloud, a myriad dazzling white crests to the waves are seen. The wind makes such a din about your ears that conversation is difficult; your words are blown away and do not strike the ear they were aimed at. If you walk by the water, the tumult of the waves confuses you. If you go by a tree or enter the woods, the din is yet greater. Nevertheless this universal commotion is very interesting and exciting. The white pines in the horizon, either single trees or whole woods, a mile off in the southwest or west, are particularly interesting. You not only see the regular bilateral form of the tree, all the branches distinct like the frond of a fern or a feather (for the pine, even at this distance, has not merely beauty of outline and color, — it is not merely an amorphous and homogeneous or continuous mass of green, — but shows a regular succession of flattish leafy boughs or stages, in flakes one above another, like the veins of a leaf or the leaflets of a frond; it is this richness and symmetry of detail which, more than its outline, charms us), but that fine silvery light reflected from its needles (perhaps their under sides) incessantly in motion. As a tree bends and waves like a feather in the gale, I see it alternately dark and light, as the sides of the needles, which reflect the cool sheen, are alternately withdrawn from and restored to the proper angle,¹ and the light appears to flash upward from the base of the tree incessantly. In the intervals of the flash it is often as if the tree were withdrawn

¹ [Channing, p. 296.]

altogether from sight. I see one large pine wood over whose whole top these cold electric flashes are incessantly passing off harmlessly into the air above. I thought at first of some fine spray dashed upward, but it is rather like broad flashes of pale, cold light. Surely you can never see a pine wood so expressive, so speaking. This reflection of light from the waving crests of the earth is like the play and flashing of electricity. No deciduous tree exhibits these fine effects of light. Literally incessant sheets, not of heat- but cold-lightning, you would say were flashing there. Seeing some just over the roof of a house which was far on this side, I thought at first that it was something like smoke even — though a rare kind of smoke — that went up from the house. In short, you see a play of light over the whole pine, similar in its cause, but far grander in its effects, than that seen in a waving field of grain. Is not this wind an awaking to life and light [of] the pines after their winter slumber? The wind is making passes over them, magnetizing and electrifying them. Seen at midday, even, it is still the light of dewy morning alone that is reflected from the needles of the pine. This is the brightening and awakening of the pines, a phenomenon perchance connected with the flow of sap in them. I feel somewhat like the young Astyanax at sight of his father's flashing crest.¹ As if in this wind-storm of March a certain electricity was passing from heaven to earth through the pines and calling them to life.

That first general exposure of the russet earth, March

¹ [Channing, p. 296.]

16th, after the soaking rain of the day before, which washed off most of the snow and ice, is a remarkable era in an ordinary spring. The earth casting off her white mantle and appearing in her homely russet garb. This russet — including the leather-color of oak leaves — is peculiar and not like the russet of the fall and winter, for it reflects the spring light or sun, as if there were a sort of sap in it. When the strong northwest winds first blow, drying up the superabundant moisture, the withered grass and leaves do not present a merely weather-beaten appearance, but a washed and combed springlike face. The knolls forming islands in our meadowy flood are never more interesting than then. This is when the earth is, as it were, re-created, raised up to the sun, which was buried under snow and ice.

To continue the account of the weather [seven] pages back: To-day it has cleared off to a very strong southwest wind, which began last evening, after the rain, — strong as ever blows all day, stronger than the northwest wind of the 16th and hardly so warm, with flitting wind-clouds only. It differs from the 16th in being yet drier and barer, — the earth, — scarcely any snow or ice to be found, and, such being the direction of the wind, you can hardly find a place in the afternoon which is both sunny and sheltered from the wind, and there is a yet greater commotion in the water.

We are interested in the phenomena of Nature mainly as children are, or as we are in games of chance. They are more or less exciting. Our appetite for novelty is insatiable. We do not attend to ordinary things, though they are most important, but to extraordinary ones.

While it is only moderately hot or cold, or wet or dry, nobody attends to it, but when Nature goes to an extreme in any of these directions we are all on the alert with excitement. Not that we care about the philosophy or the effects of this phenomenon. *E. g.*, when I went to Boston in the early train the coldest morning of last winter, two topics mainly occupied the attention of the passengers, Morphy's chess victories and Nature's victorious cold that morning. The inhabitants of various towns were comparing notes, and that one whose door opened upon a greater degree of cold than any of his neighbors' doors chuckled not a little. Almost every one I met asked me almost before our salutations were over "how the glass stood" at my house or in my town, — the librarian of the college, the registrar of deeds at Cambridgeport, — a total stranger to me, whose form of inquiry made me think of another sort of glass, — and each rubbed his hands with pretended horror but real delight if I named a higher figure than he had yet heard. It was plain that one object which the cold was given us for was our amusement, a passing excitement. It would be perfectly consistent and American to bet on the coldness of our respective towns, of [*sic*] the morning that is to come. Thus a greater degree of cold may be said to warm us more than a less one. We hear with ill-concealed disgust the figures reported from some localities, where they never enjoy the luxury of severe cold. This is a perfectly legitimate amusement, only we should know that each day is peculiar and has its kindred excitements.

In those wet days like the 12th and the 15th when the browns culminated, the sun being concealed, I was drawn toward and worshipped the brownish light in the sod, — the withered grass, etc., on barren hills. I felt as if I could eat the very crust of the earth; I never felt so terrene, never sympathized so with the surface of the earth. From whatever source the light and heat come, thither we look with love.

The newspapers state that a man in Connecticut lately shot ninety-three musquash in one day.

Melvin says that in skinning a mink you must cut round the parts containing the musk, else the operation will be an offensive one; that Wetherbee has already baited some pigeons (he hears); that he last year found a hen-hawk's egg in March and thinks that woodcocks are now laying.

March 20. 7 A. M. — River no higher than three days ago, notwithstanding the rain of two days ago, the wind being southwest and very strong.

P. M. — I see under the east side of the house amid the evergreens, where they were sheltered from the cold northwest wind, quite a parcel of sparrows, chiefly *F. hyemalis*, two or three tree sparrows, and one song sparrow, quietly feeding together. I watch them through a window within six or eight feet. They evidently love to be sheltered from the wind, and at least are not averse to each other's society. The tree sparrows *sing* a little. One perches on a bush to sing, while others are feeding on the ground, but he is very restless on his perch, hopping about and stooping as if dodging

those that fly over. He must perch on some bit of stubble or twig to sing. They are evidently picking up the seeds of weeds which lie on the surface of the ground invisible to our eyes. They suffer their wings to hang rather loose. The *F. hyemalis* is the largest of the three. They have remarkably distinct light-colored bills, and when they stretch, show very distinct clear-white lateral tail-feathers. This stretching seems to be contagious among them, like yawning with us. They have considerable brown on the quill-feathers. The tree sparrows are much brighter brown and white than the song sparrow. The latter alone scratches once or twice, and is more inclined to hop or creep close to the ground, under the fallen weeds. Perhaps it deserves most to be called the *ground-bird*.

P. M. — Up Assabet. Very strong northwest wind.

When I get opposite the end of the willow-row, the sun comes out and they are very handsome, like a rosette, pale-tawny or fawn-colored at base and a rich yellow or orange yellow in the upper three or four feet.



This is, methinks, the brightest object in the landscape these days. Nothing so betrays the spring sun.

I am aware that the sun has come out of a cloud first by seeing it lighting up the osiers. Such a willow-row, cut off within a year or two, might be called a heliometer, or measure of the sun's brightness.

The last year's shoots of many trees—as maples, both white and red—retain a permanent bright color, red or scarlet, all winter and spring, till new ones

grow. The top of the forest is thus very agreeably tinged.

The river is so high that I leave it at Pinxter Swamp, and come into it again only at the swift narrow place above, near the road.

March 21. 6 A. M. — The water has fairly begun to fall. It was at its height the 17th; fell a little — two or three inches — the morning of the 18th. On the 18th it rained very considerably all day, which would ordinarily have raised the river a foot, or perhaps two, but, the wind being very strong from the southwest, it only prevented its falling any more until this morning. It did not probably raise it more than two inches. Of course, there could not have been much melted snow and ice to be added to the last rain about the sources of the river, since they are considerably further south, where the ground must have been much more bare than here.

A crow blackbird.

P. M. — Sail to Fair Haven Pond.

A strong northwest wind. Draw my boat over the road on a roller. Raising a stone for ballast from the south side of the railroad causeway, where it is quite sunny and warm, I find the under sides very densely covered with little ants, all stirring and evidently ready to come out, if some have not already. They feel the heat through the stone on the ground. It blowed very smartly in gusts, and my boat scud along this way and that, not minding its helm much, as if it were lifted partly out of water. I went from point to point as quickly as you could say “here” and “there.”

I see a female marsh hawk sailing and hunting over Potter's Swamp. I not only see the white rump but the very peculiar crescent-shaped curve of its wings.



Fair Haven Pond is only two thirds open. The east end is frozen still, and the body of the ice has drifted in to shore a rod or two, before the northwest wind, and its edge crumbled against the trees.

I see, on a yellow lily root washed up, leaf-buds grown five or six inches, or even seven or eight, with the stems.

Everywhere for several days the alder catkins have dangled long and loose, the most alive apparently of any tree. They seem to welcome the water which half covers them. The willow catkins are also very conspicuous, in silvery masses rising above the flood.

I see several white pine cones in the path by Wheel-don's which appear to have fallen in the late strong winds, but perhaps the ice in the winter took them off. Others still hold on.

From the evening of March 18th to this, the evening of the 21st, we have had uninterrupted strong wind,—till the evening of the 19th very strong southwest wind, then and since northwest,—three days of strong wind.

March 22. P. M. — The wind changes to easterly and is more raw, *i. e.* cool and moist, and the air thickens as if it would rain.

Returning from Poplar Hill through the west end of Sleepy Hollow, it is very still, the air thick, just ready

to rain, and I hear there, on the apple trees and small oaks, the tree sparrows and hyemalis singing very pleasantly. I hear the lively jingle of the hyemalis and the sweet notes of the tree sparrow, canary-like, — *svar svar, svit vit vit vit vit*, the last part with increasing rapidity. Both species in considerable numbers, singing together as they flit along, make a very lively concert. They sing as loud and full as ever now. There has been no sweeter warble than this of the tree sparrow as yet.

It is a peculiarly still hour now, when the first drops of rain begin to be heard on the dry leaves around me, and, looking up, I see very high in the air two large birds, which, at that height, with their narrow wings, flying southeast, looked, *i. e.* were shaped, like night-hawks. I think they were gulls.

The great scarlet oak has now lost almost every leaf, while the white oak near it still retains them.

C. says he saw fox-colored sparrows this afternoon.

March 23. P. M. — Walk to Cardinal Shore and sail to Well Meadow and Lee's Cliff.

It clears up at 2 P. M.

The *Lycoperdon stellatum* are numerous and blossomed out widely in Potter's Path by Bare Hill, after the rain of the night.

As we sail upward toward the pond, we scare up two or three golden-eyes, or whistlers, showing their large black heads and black backs, and afterward I watch one swimming not far before us and see the white spot, amid the black, on the side of his head. I have

now no doubt that I saw some on the 21st flying here, and it is very likely that Rice saw them here on the 17th, as he says.

The pond may be said to be open to-day. There is, however, quite a large mass of ice, which has drifted, since the east wind arose yesterday noon, from the east side over to the north of the Island. This ice, of which there may be eight or ten acres, is so very dark, almost black, that it is hard to discern till you are just upon it, though some little pieces which we broke off and left on its edge were very visible for half a mile. When at the edge of this field of ice, it was a very dark gray in color, had none of the usual whiteness of ice. It was about six inches thick, but was most completely honeycombed. The upper surface was not only thus dark, dusky, or blackish, but full of little hollows three to six inches across, and the whole mass undulated with the waves very much, irregular cracks alternately opening and closing in it, yet it was well knitted together. With my paddle I could depress it six inches on the edge, and cause it to undulate like a blanket for a rod or more, and yet it bore us securely when we stepped out upon it, and it was by no means easy to break off or detach a piece a foot wide. In short, it was thoroughly honeycombed and, as it were, saturated with water. The masses broken off reminded me of some very decayed and worm-eaten interiors of trees. Yet the small cakes into which it visibly cracked when you bent it and made it undulate were knitted together or dovetailed somewhat like the plates of a tortoise-shell, and immediately returned to their places.

Though it would bear you, the creaking of one such part on another was a quite general and considerable noise, and one detached mass, rubbed in your hand upon the edge of the field, yielded a singular metallic or ringing sound, evidently owing to its hollowness or innumerable perforations. It had a metallic ring. The moment you raised a mass from the water, it was very distinctly white and brilliant, the water running out from it. This was the relic of that great mass which I saw on the 21st on the east side.

There was a great quantity of bayonet rush, also, drifted over here and strewn along the shore. This and the pontederia are the coarsest of the wrack. Now is the time, then, that it is added to the wrack, probably being ripped up by the ice. It reminds you of the collections of seaweed after a storm, — this river-weed after the spring freshets have melted and dispersed the ice. The ice thus helps essentially to clear the shore.

I am surprised to see one of those sluggish ghost-horses alive on the ice. It was probably drifted from the shore by the flood and here lodged.

That dark, uneven ice has a peculiarly coarse-grained appearance, it is so much decomposed. The pieces are interlocked by the irregularities of the perpendicular combing. The under side presents the most continuous surface, and it is held together chiefly on that side. One piece rings when struck on another, like a trowel on a brick, and as we rested against the edge of this ice, we heard a singular wheezing and grating sound, which was the creaking of the ice, which was undulating under the waves and wind.

As we entered Well Meadow, we saw a hen-hawk perch on the topmost plume of one of the tall pines at the head of the meadow. Soon another appeared, probably its mate, but we looked in vain for a nest there. It was a fine sight, their soaring above our heads, pre-



sented a perfect outline and, as they came round, showing their rust-colored tails with a whitish rump, or, as they sailed away from us, that slight teeter-

ing or quivering motion of their dark-tipped wings seen edgewise, now on this side, now that, by which they balanced and directed themselves. These are the most eagle-like of our common hawks. They very commonly perch upon the very topmost plume of a pine, and, if motionless, are rather hard to distinguish there.

The cowslip and most of the skunk-cabbage there have been and are still drowned by flood; else we should find more in bloom. As it is, I see the skunk-cabbage in bloom, but generally the growth of both has been completely checked by the water.

While reconnoitring there, we hear the peep of one hylodes somewhere in this sheltered recess in the woods. And afterward, on the Lee side, I hear a single croak from a wood frog.

We cross to Lee's shore and sit upon the bare rocky ridge overlooking the flood southwest and northeast. It is quite sunny and sufficiently warm. I see one or two of the small fuzzy gnats in the air. The prospect thence is a fine one, especially at this season, when the water

is high. The landscape is very agreeably diversified with hill and vale and meadow and cliff. As we look southwest, how attractive the shores of russet capes and peninsulas laved by the flood! Indeed, that large tract east of the bridge is now an island. How fair that low, undulating russet land! At this season and under these circumstances, the sun just come out and the flood high around it, russet, so reflecting the light of the sun, appears to me the most agreeable of colors, and I begin to dream of a russet fairyland and elysium. How dark and terrene must be green! but this smooth russet surface reflects almost all the light. That broad and low but firm island, with but few trees to conceal the contour of the ground and its outline, with its fine russet sward, firm and soft as velvet, reflecting so much light,—all the undulations of the earth, its nerves and muscles, revealed by the light and shade, and even the sharper ridgy edge of steep banks where the plow has heaped up the earth from year to year,—this is a sort of fairyland and elysium to my eye. The tawny couchant island! Dry land for the Indian's wigwam in the spring, and still strewn with his arrow-points. The sight of such land reminds me of the pleasant spring days in which I have walked over such tracts, looking for these relics. How well, too, this smooth, firm, light-reflecting, tawny earth contrasts with the darker water which surrounds it,—or perchance lighter sometimes! At this season, when the russet colors prevail, the contrast of water and land is more agreeable to behold. What an inexpressibly soft curving line is the shore! Or if the water is perfectly smooth and

yet rising, you seem to see it raised an eighth of an inch with swelling lip above the immediate shore its kisses, as in a cup or the of [*sic*] a saucer. Indian isles and promontories. Thus we sit on that rock, hear the first wood frog's croak, and dream of a russet elysium. Enough for the season is the beauty thereof. Spring has a beauty of its own which we would not exchange for that of summer, and at this moment, if I imagine the fairest earth I can, it is still russet, such is the color of its blessed isles, and they are surrounded with the phenomena of spring.

The qualities of the land that are most attractive to our eyes now are dryness and firmness. It is not the rich black soil, but warm and sandy hills and plains which tempt our steps. We love to sit on and walk over sandy tracts in the spring like cicindelas. These tongues of russet land tapering and sloping into the flood do almost speak to one. They are alternately in sun and shade. When the cloud is passed, and they reflect their pale-brown light to me, I am tempted to go to them.

I think I have already noticed within a week how very agreeably and strongly the green of small pines contrasts with the russet of a hillside pasture now. Perhaps there is no color with which green contrasts more strongly.

I see the shadow of a cloud — and it chances to be a hollow ring with sunlight in its midst — passing over the hilly sprout-land toward the Baker house, a sprout-land of oaks and birches; and, owing to the color of the birch twigs, perhaps, this shadow turns all from

russet to a decided dark-purplish color as it moves along. And then, as I look further along eastward in the horizon, I am surprised to see strong purple and violet tinges in the sun, from a hillside a mile off densely covered with full-grown birches. It is the steep old corn-field hillside of Jacob Baker's. I would not have believed that under the spring sun so many colors were brought out. It is not the willows only that shine, but, under favorable circumstances, many other twigs, even a mile or two off. The dense birches, so far that their white stems are not distinct, reflect deep, strong purple and violet colors from the distant hillsides opposite to the sun. Can this have to do with the sap flowing in them?

As we sit there, we see coming, swift and straight, northeast along the river valley, not seeing us and therefore not changing his course, a male goosander, so near that the green reflections of his head and neck are plainly visible. He looks like a paddle-wheel steamer, so oddly painted up, black and white and green, and moves along swift and straight like one. Ere long the same returns with his mate, the red-throated, the male taking the lead.

The loud *peop* (?) of a pigeon woodpecker is heard in our sea [?], and anon the prolonged loud and shrill *cackle*, calling the thin-wooded hillsides and pastures to life. It is like the note of an alarm-clock set last fall so as to wake Nature up at exactly this date. *Up up up up up up up up up!* What a rustling it seems to make among the dry leaves!

You can now sit on sunny sheltered sprout-land

hillsides and enjoy the sight and sound of rustling dry leaves.

Then I see come slowly flying from the southwest a great gull, of voracious form, which at length by a sudden and steep descent



alights in Fair Haven Pond, searing up a crow which was seeking its food on the edge of the ice. This shows that the crows get along the meadow's edge also what has washed up.

It is suggested that the blue is darkest when reflected from the most agitated water, because of the shadow (occasioned by the inequalities) mingled with it.

Some Indians of the north have but one word for blue and black, and blue is with us considered the darkest color, though it is the color of the sky or air. Light, I should say, was white; the absence of it, black. Hold up to the light a perfectly opaque body and you get black, but hold up to it the least opaque body, such as air, and you get blue. Hence you may say that blue is light seen through a veil.

March 24. P. M. — Down railroad.

Southeast wind. Begins to sprinkle while I am sitting in Laurel Glen, listening to hear the earliest wood frogs croaking. I think they get under weigh a little earlier, *i. e.*, you will hear many of them sooner than you will hear many hylodes. Now, when the leaves get to be dry and rustle under your feet, dried by the March winds, the peculiar dry note, *wurk wurk wur-r-r-k wurk* of the wood frog is heard faintly by ears on the

alert, borne up from some unseen pool in a woodland hollow which is open to the influences of the sun. It is a singular sound for awakening Nature to make, associated with the first warmer days, when you sit in some sheltered place in the woods amid the dried leaves. How moderate on her first awakening, how little demonstrative! You may sit half an hour before you will hear another. You doubt if the season will be long enough for such Oriental and luxurious slowness. But they get on, nevertheless, and by to-morrow, or in a day or two, they croak louder and more frequently. Can you ever be sure that you have heard the very first wood frog in the township croak? Ah! how weather-wise must he be! There is no guessing at the weather with him. He makes the weather in his degree; he encourages it to be mild. The weather, what is it but the temperament of the earth? and he is wholly of the earth, sensitive as its skin in which he lives and of which he is a part. His life relaxes with the thawing ground. He pitches and tunes his voice to chord with the rustling leaves which the March wind has dried. Long before the frost is quite out, he feels the influence of the spring rains and the warmer days. His is the very voice of the weather. He rises and falls like quicksilver in the thermometer. You do not perceive the spring so surely in the actions of men, their lives are so artificial. They may make more fire or less in their parlors, and their feelings accordingly are not good thermometers. The frog far away in the wood, that burns no coal nor wood, perceives more surely the general and universal changes.

In the ditch under the west edge of Trillium Wood I see six yellow-spot turtles. They surely have not crawled from far. Do they go into the mud in this ditch? A part of the otherwise perfectly sound and fresh-looking scales of one has been apparently eaten away, as if by a worm.

There sits also on the bank of the ditch a *Rana fontinalis*, and it is altogether likely they were this species that leaped into a ditch on the 10th. This one is mainly a bronze brown, with a very dark greenish snout, etc., with the raised line down the side of the back. This, methinks, is about the only frog which the marsh hawk could have found hitherto.


Returning, above the railroad causeway, I see a flock of goldfinches, first of *spring*, flitting along the causeway-bank. They have not yet the bright plumage they will have, but in some lights might be mistaken for sparrows. There is considerable difference in color between one and another, but the flaps of their coats are black, and their heads and shoulders more or less yellow. They are eating the seeds of the mullein and the large primrose, clinging to the plants sidewise in various positions and pecking at the seed-vessels. Wilson says, "In the month of April they begin to change their winter dress, and, before the middle of May, appear in brilliant yellow."

C. sees geese go over again this afternoon. How commonly they are seen in still rainy weather like this! He says that when they had got far off they looked like a black ribbon almost perpendicular waving in the air.

March 25. A rainy day.

P. M. — To Clamshell.

I heard the *what what what what* of the nuthatch this forenoon. Do I ever hear it in the afternoon? It is much like the cackle of the pigeon woodpecker and suggests a relation to that bird.

Again I walk in the rain and see the rich yellowish browns of the moist banks. These Clamshell hills and neighboring promontories, though it is a dark and rainy day, reflect a certain yellowish light from the wet withered grass which is very grateful to my eyes, as also the darker more reddish browns, as the radical leaves of the *Andropogon scoparius* in low tufts here and there. (Its culms, where they stand, are quite light yellow.) Surely russet is not the name which describes the fields and hillsides now, whether wet or dry. There is not red enough in it. I do not know a better name for this (when wet) yellowish brown than "tawny." On the south side of these warm hills, it may perhaps be called one of the fawn-colors, *i. e.* brown inclining to green. Much of this peculiar yellowish color on the surface of the Clamshell plain is due to a little curled sedge or grass growing at short intervals, loosely covering the ground (with green mosses intermixed) in little tufts  like curled hair.

I saw yesterday, in Laurel Glen, where the early sedge had been grazed very close to the ground, and the same, perhaps digested, fine as green-paint dust, lay around. Was it the work of a mouse?

Day before yesterday, in clear, dry weather, we had

pale-brown or fawn-colored earth, *i. e.*, a dry, withered grass blade [color]; to-day, a more yellow brown or tawny, the same being wet. The wet brings out an agreeable yellow light, as if the sun were shining through a mist on it. The earth is more truly russet in November, when there is more redness left in the withered and withering vegetation. Such is the change in the color of the bare portions of the earth (*i. e.* bare of trees and bushes) produced by rain. Also the oak leaves are much redder. In fair weather the light color of these objects was simply a light reflected from them, originating in the sun and sky; now it is a more proper and inward light, which attracts and confines our attention to moist sward itself.

A snipe flies away from the moist Clamshell shore, uttering its *cr-a-ack c-r-r-rack*.

I thought the other day, How we enjoy a warm and pleasant day at this season! We dance like gnats in the sun.

A score of my townsmen have been shooting and trapping musquash and mink of late. Some have got nothing else to do. If they should strike for higher wages now, instead of going to the clam-banks, as the Lynn shoemakers propose, they would go to shooting musquash. They are gone all day; early and late they scan the rising tide; stealthily they set their traps in remote swamps, avoiding one another. Am not I a trapper too, early and late scanning the rising flood, ranging by distant wood-sides, setting my traps in solitude, and baiting them as well as I know how, that I may catch life and light, that my intellectual part

may taste some venison and be invigorated, that my nakedness may be clad in some wild, furry warmth?

The color of spring hitherto, — I should say that in dry weather it was fawn-colored, in wet more yellowish or tawny. When wet, the green of the fawn is supplied by the lichens and the mosses.

March 26. P. M. — To Conantum via Cardinal Shore and boat.

The river has gone down considerably, but the rain of yesterday and to-day has checked its fall somewhat.

Much earth has been washed away from the roots of grasses and weeds along the banks of the river, and many of those pretty little bodkin bulbs are exposed and so transported to new localities. This seems to be the way in which they are spread.

I see many smallish ants on the red carcass of a musquash just skinned and lying on the bank, cold and wet as the weather is. They love this animal food. On the top of the hill at Lee's Cliff much wintergreen has been eaten; at least a great many leaves are lying loose, strewn about.

I find washed up on the (Cardinal) shore a little bream about an inch and an eighth long, very much like those found at Walden last fall. It has about seven transverse bars, a similar dorsal fin, a reddish-copper iris, with the black vertical dash through the eye. I think it must be one of the common breams of the river, — though I see only the black spot on the operculum and not any red one, — and apparently all the young are thus striped (?).

What was that large rather grayish duck on Fair Haven Pond this afternoon? It was far off. Was it a last year's male sheldrake, or a female, or another?

March 27. 7 A. M. — Was that the *Alauda*, shore lark (?), which flew up from the corn-field beyond Texas house, and dashed off so swiftly with a peculiar note, — a small flock of them?

P. M. — Sail from Cardinal Shore up Otter Bay, close to Deacon Farrar's.

I see a gull flying over Fair Haven Pond which appears to have a much duskier body beneath than the common near by, though about the same size. Can it be another species?

The wind is so nearly west to-day that we sail up from Cardinal Shore to the pond, and from the road up what I will call Otter Bay, behind Farrar's, and, returning, sail from the road at Creel (or Pole) Brook to Pond Island and from Hallowell willows to railroad. The water is quite high still, and we sail up Otter Bay, I think, more than half a mile, to within a very short distance of Farrar's. This is an interesting and wild place.

There is an abundance of low willows whose catkins are now conspicuous, rising four to six or seven feet above the water, thickly placed on long wand-like osiers. They look, when you look from the sun, like dead gray twigs or branches (whose wood is exposed) of bushes in the light, but, nearer, are recognized for the pretty bright buttons of the willow. We sail by masses of these silvery buttons two or three rods long,

rising above the water. By their color they have relation to the white clouds and the sky and to the snow and ice still lingering in a few localities. In order to see these silvery buttons in the greatest profusion, you must sail amid them on some flooded meadow or swamp like this. Our whole course, as we wind about in this bay, is lined also with the alder, whose pretty tassels, now many of them in full bloom, are hanging straight down, suggesting in a peculiar manner the influence of gravity, or are regularly blown one side.

It is remarkable how modest and unobtrusive these early flowers are.

The musquash and duck hunter or the farmer might and do commonly pass by them with[out] perceiving them. They steal into the air and light of spring without being noticed for the most part. The sportsman seems to see a mass of weather-stained dead twigs showing their wood and partly covered with gray lichens and moss, and the flowers of the alder, now partly in bloom, maybe half, make the impression at a little distance of a collection of the brown twigs of winter — also are of the same color with many withered leaves.

Twenty rods off, masses of alder in bloom look like masses of bare brown twigs, last year's twigs, and would be taken for such.

Of our seven indigenous flowers which begin to bloom in March, four, *i. e.* the two alders, the aspen, and the hazel, are not generally noticed so early, if at all, and most do not observe the flower of a fifth, the



white maple. The first four are yellowish or reddish brown at a little distance, like the banks and sward moistened by the spring rain. The browns are the prevailing shades as yet, as in the withered grass and sedge and the surface of the earth, the withered leaves, and these brown flowers.

I see from a hilltop a few very bright green spots a rod in diameter in the upper part of Farrar's meadow, which the water has left within a day or two. Going there, I find that a very powerful spring is welling up there, which, with water warm from the bowels of the earth, has caused the grass and several weeds, as *Cardamine rhomboidea*, etc., to grow thus early and luxuriantly, and perhaps it has been helped by the flood standing over it for some days. These are bright liquid green in the midst of brown and withered grass and leaves. Such are the spots where the grass is greenest now.

C. says that he saw a turtle dove on the 25th.

It is remarkable how long many things may be preserved by excluding the air and light and dust, moisture, etc. Those chalk-marks on the chamber-floor joists and timbers of the Hunt house, one of which was read by many "Feb. 1666," and all of which were in an ancient style of writing and expression,—“ye” for “the,” etc., “enfine Brown,”—were as fresh when exposed (having been plastered and cased over) as if made the day before. Yet a single day's rain completely obliterated some of them. Cousin Charles says that, on the timbers of a very old house recently taken down in Haverhill, the chalk-marks made by

the framers, numbering the sticks, [were] as fresh as if just made.

I saw a large timber over the middle of the best room of the Hunt house which had been cased, according to all accounts, at least a hundred years ago, the casing having just been taken off. I saw that the timber appeared to have been freshly hewn on the under side, and I asked the carpenter who was taking down the house what he had been hewing that timber for,—for it had evidently been done since it was put up and in a very inconvenient position, and I had no doubt that he had just done it, for the surface was as fresh and distinct from the other parts as a fresh whittling,—but he answered to my surprise that he had not touched it, it was so when he took the casing off. When the casing was put on, it had been roughly hewn by one standing beneath it, in order to reduce its thickness or perhaps to make it more level than it was. So distinct and peculiar is the weather-stain, and so indefinitely it may be kept off if you do not allow this painter to come [?] to your wood.

Cousin Charles says that he took out of the old Haverhill house a very broad panel from over the fireplace, which had a picture of Haverhill at some old period on it. The panel had been there perfectly sheltered in an inhabited house for more than a hundred years. It was placed in his shop and no moisture allowed to come near it, and yet it shrunk a quarter of an inch in width when the air came to both sides of it.

He says that his men, who were digging a cellar last week on a southwest slope, found fifty-one snakes

of various kinds and sizes — green, black, brown, etc. — about a foot underground, within two feet square (or cube?). The frost was out just there, but not in many parts of the cellar. They could not run, they were so stiff, but they ran their tongues out. They did [not] take notice of any hole or cavity.

March 28. P. M. — Paddle to the Bedford line.

It is now high time to look for arrowheads, etc. I spend many hours every spring gathering the crop which the melting snow and rain have washed bare. When, at length, some island in the meadow or some sandy field elsewhere has been plowed, perhaps for rye, in the fall, I take note of it, and do not fail to repair thither as soon as the earth begins to be dry in the spring. If the spot chances never to have been cultivated before, I am the first to gather a crop from it. The farmer little thinks that another reaps a harvest which is the fruit of his toil. As much ground is turned up in a day by the plow as Indian implements could not have turned over in a month, and my eyes rest on the evidences of an aboriginal life which passed here a thousand years ago perchance. Especially if the knolls in the meadows are washed by a freshet where they have been plowed the previous fall, the soil will be taken away lower down and the stones left, — the arrowheads, etc., and soapstone pottery amid them, — somewhat as gold is washed in a dish or tom. I landed on two spots this afternoon and picked up a dozen arrowheads. It is one of the regular pursuits of the spring. As much as sportsmen go in pursuit of ducks, and

gunners of musquash, and scholars of rare books, and travellers of adventures, and poets of ideas, and all men of money, I go in search of arrowheads when the proper season comes round again. So I help myself to live worthily, and loving my life as I should. It is a good collyrium to look on the bare earth, — to pore over it so much, getting strength to all your senses, like Antæus. If I did not find arrowheads, I might, perchance, begin to pick up crockery and fragments of pipes, — the relics of a more recent man. Indeed, you can hardly name a more innocent or wholesome entertainment. As I am thus engaged, I hear the rumble of the bowling-alley's thunder, which has begun again in the village. It comes before the earliest natural thunder. But what its lightning is, and what atmospheres it purifies, I do not know. Or I might collect the various bones which I come across. They would make a museum that would delight some Owen at last, and what a text they might furnish me for a course of lectures on human life or the like! I might spend my days collecting the fragments of pipes until I found enough, after all my search, to compose one perfect pipe when laid together.

I have not decided whether I had better publish my experience in searching for arrowheads in three volumes, with plates and an index, or try to compress it into one. These durable implements seem to have been suggested to the Indian mechanic with a view to my entertainment in a succeeding period. After all the labor expended on it, the bolt may have been shot but once perchance, and the shaft which was devoted to

it decayed, and there lay the arrowhead, sinking into the ground, awaiting me. They lie all over the hills with like expectation, and in due time the husbandman is sent, and, tempted by the promise of corn or rye, he plows the land and turns them up to my view. Many as I have found, methinks the last one gives me about the same delight that the first did. Some time or other, you would say, it had rained arrowheads, for they lie all over the surface of America. You may have your peculiar tastes. Certain localities in your town may seem from association unattractive and uninhabitable to you. You may wonder that the land bears any money value there, and pity some poor fellow who is said to survive in that neighborhood. But plow up a new field there, and you will find the omnipresent arrow-points strewn over it, and it will appear that the red man, with other tastes and associations, lived there too. No matter how far from the modern road or meeting-house, no matter how near. They lie in the meeting-house cellar, and they lie in the distant cow-pasture. And some collections which were made a century ago by the curious like myself have been dispersed again, and they are still as good as new. You cannot tell the third-hand ones (for they are all second-hand) from the others, such is their persistent out-of-door durability; for they were chiefly made to be lost. They are sown, like a grain that is slow to germinate, broadcast over the earth. Like the dragon's teeth which bore a crop of soldiers, these bear crops of philosophers and poets, and the same seed is just as good to plant again. It is a stone fruit. Each one yields me a thought. I come nearer to the maker

of it than if I found his bones. His bones would not prove any wit that wielded them, such as this work of his bones does. It is humanity inscribed on the face of the earth, patent to my eyes as soon as the snow goes off, not hidden away in some crypt or grave or under a pyramid. No disgusting mummy, but a clean stone, the best symbol or letter that could have been transmitted to me.

The Red Man, his mark



At every step I see it, and I can easily supply the "Tahatawan" or "Mantatuket" that might have been written if he had had a clerk. It is no single inscription on a particular rock, but a footprint — rather a mind-print — left everywhere, and altogether illegible. No vandals, however vandalic in their disposition, can be so industrious as to destroy them.

Time will soon destroy the works of famous painters and sculptors, but the Indian arrowhead will balk his efforts and Eternity will have to come to his aid. They are not fossil bones, but, as it were, fossil thoughts, forever reminding me of the mind that shaped them. I would fain know that I am treading in the tracks of human game, — that I am on the trail of mind, — and these little reminders never fail to set me right. When I see these signs I know that the subtle spirits that made them are not far off, into whatever form transmuted. What if you do plow and hoe amid them, and swear that not one stone shall be left upon another? They are only the less like to break in that case. When

you turn up one layer you bury another so much the more securely. They are at peace with rust. This arrow-headed character promises to outlast all others. The larger pestles and axes may, perchance, grow scarce and be broken, but the arrowhead shall, perhaps, never cease to wing its way through the ages to eternity. It was originally winged for but a short flight, but it still, to my mind's eye, wings its way through the ages, bearing a message from the hand that shot it. Myriads of arrow-points lie sleeping in the skin of the revolving earth, while meteors revolve in space. The footprint, the mind-print of the oldest men. When some Vandal chieftain has razed to the earth the British Museum, and, perchance, the winged bulls from Nineveh shall have lost most if not all of their features, the arrowheads which the museum contains will, perhaps, find themselves at home again in familiar dust, and resume their shining in new springs upon the bared surface of the earth then, to be picked up for the thousandth time by the shepherd or savage that may be wandering there, and once more suggest their story to him. Indifferent they to British Museums, and, no doubt, Nineveh bulls are old acquaintances of theirs, for they have camped on the plains of Mesopotamia, too,¹ and were buried *with* the winged bulls.

They cannot be said to be lost nor found. Surely their use was not so much to bear its fate to some bird or quadruped, or man, as it was to lie here near the surface of the earth for a perpetual reminder to the generations that come after. As for museums, I think

¹ [Channing, p. 295.]

it is better to let Nature take care of our antiquities. These are our antiquities, and they are cleaner to think of than the rubbish of the Tower of London, and they are a more ancient armor than is there. It is a recommendation that they are so inobvious, — that they occur only to the eye and thought that chances to be directed toward them. When you pick up an arrowhead and put it in your pocket, it may say: "Eh, you think you have got me, do you? But I shall wear a hole in your pocket at last, or if you put me in your cabinet, your heir or great-grandson will forget me or throw me out the window directly, or when the house falls I shall drop into the cellar, and there I shall lie quite at home again. Ready to be *found* again, eh? Perhaps some new red man that is to come will fit me to a shaft and make me do his bidding for a bow-shot. What reck I?"

As we were paddling over the Great Meadows, I saw at a distance, high in the air above the middle of the meadow, a very compact flock of blackbirds advancing against the sun. Though there were more than a hundred, they did not appear to occupy more than six feet in breadth, but the whole flock was dashing first to the right and then to the left. When advancing straight toward me and the sun, they made but little impression on the eye, — so many fine dark points merely, seen against the sky, — but as often as they wheeled to the right or left, displaying their wings flatwise and the whole length of their bodies, they were a very conspicuous black mass. This fluctuation in the amount of dark surface was a very pleasing phenomenon. It reminded me [of] those blinds whose sashes [*sic*]

are made to move all together by a stick, now admitting nearly all the light and now entirely excluding it; so the flock of blackbirds opened and shut. But at length they suddenly spread out and dispersed, some flying off this way, and others that, as, when a wave strikes against a cliff, it is dashed upward and lost in fine spray. So they lost their compactness and impetus and broke up suddenly in mid-air.

We see eight geese floating afar in the middle of the meadow, at least half a mile off, plainly (with glass) much larger than the ducks in their neighborhood and the white on their heads very distinct. When at length they arise and fly off northward, their peculiar *heavy* undulating wings, blue-heron-like and unlike any duck, are very noticeable. The black, sheldrake, etc., move their wings rapidly, and remind you of paddle-wheel steamers. Methinks the wings of the black duck appear to be set very far back when it is flying. The meadows, which are still covered far and wide, are quite alive with black ducks.

When walking about on the low east shore at the Bedford bound, I heard a faint honk, and looked around over the water with my glass, thinking it came from that side or perhaps from a farmyard in that direction. I soon heard it again, and at last we detected a great flock passing over, quite on the other side of us and pretty high up. From time to time one of the company uttered a short note, that peculiarly metallic, clangorous sound. These were in a single undulating line, and, as usual, one or two were from time to time crowded out of the line, apparently by the

crowding of those in the rear, and were flying on one side and trying to recover their places, but at last a second short line was formed, meeting the long one at the usual angle and making a figure somewhat like a hay-hook. I suspect it will be found that there is really some advantage in large birds of passage flying in the wedge form and cleaving their way through the air, — that they really do overcome its resistance best in this way, — and perchance the direction and strength of the wind determine the comparative length of the two sides.

The great gulls fly generally up or down the river valley, cutting off the bends of the river, and so do these geese. These fly sympathizing with the river, — a stream in the air, soon lost in the distant sky.

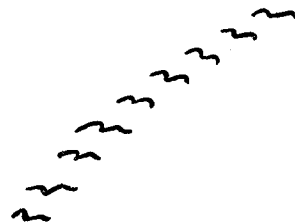
We see these geese swimming and flying at midday and when it is perfectly fair.

If you scan the horizon at this season of the year you are very likely to detect a small flock of dark ducks moving with rapid wing athwart the sky, or see the undulating line of migrating geese against the sky.

Perhaps it is this easterly wind which brings geese, as it did on the 24th.

Ball's Hill, with its withered oak leaves and its pines, looks very fair to-day, a mile and a half off across the water, through a very thin varnish or haze. It reminds me of the isle which was called up from the bottom of the sea, which was given to Apollo.

How charming the contrast of land and water, espe-



cially a temporary island in the flood, with its new and tender shores of waving outline, so withdrawn yet habitable, above all if it rises into a hill high above the water and contrasting with it the more, and if that hill is wooded, suggesting wildness! Our vernal lakes have a beauty to my mind which they would not possess if they were more permanent. Everything is in rapid flux here, suggesting that Nature is alive to her extremities and superficialities. To-day we sail swiftly on dark rolling waves or paddle over a sea as smooth as a mirror, unable to touch the bottom, where mowers work and hide their jugs in August; coasting the edge of maple swamps, where alder tassels and white maple flowers are kissing the tide that has risen to meet them. But this particular phase of beauty is fleeting. Nature has so many shows for us she cannot afford to give much time to this. In a few days, perchance, these lakes will have all run away to the sea. Such are the pictures which she paints. When we look at our masterpieces we see only dead paint and its vehicle, which suggests no liquid life rapidly flowing off from beneath. In the former case — in Nature — it is constant surprise and novelty. In many arrangements there is a wearisome monotony. We know too well what [we] shall have for our Saturday's dinner, but each day's feast in Nature's year is a surprise to us and adapted to our appetite and spirits. She has arranged such an order of feasts as never tires. Her motive is not economy but satisfaction.

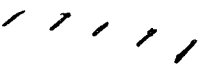
As we sweep past the north end of Poplar Hill, with a sand-hole in it, its now dryish, pale-brown mottled

sward clothing its rounded slope, which was lately saturated with moisture, presents very agreeable hues. In this light, in fair weather, the patches of now dull-greenish mosses contrast just regularly enough with the pale-brown grass. It is like some rich but modest-colored Kidderminster carpet, or rather the skin of a monster python tacked to the hillside and stuffed with earth. These earth colors, methinks, are never so fair as in the spring. Now the green mosses and lichens contrast with the brown grass, but ere long the surface will be uniformly green. I suspect that we are more amused by the effects of color in the skin of the earth now than in summer. Like the skin of a python, greenish and brown, a fit coat for it to creep over the earth and be concealed in. Or like the skin of a pard, the great leopard mother that Nature is, where she lies at length, exposing her flanks to the sun. I feel as if I could land to stroke and kiss the very sward, it is so fair. It is homely and domestic to my eyes like the rug that lies before my hearth-side.¹ Such ottomans and divans are spread for us to recline on. Nor are these colors mere thin superficial figures, vehicles for paint, but wonderful living growths, — these lichens, to the study of which learned men have devoted their lives, — and libraries have been written about them. The earth lies out now like a leopard, drying her lichen and moss spotted skin in the sun, her sleek and variegated hide. I know that the few raw spots will heal over. Brown is the color for me, the color of our coats and our daily lives, the color of the poor man's loaf.

¹ [Channing, p. 95.]

The bright tints are pies and cakes, good only for October feasts, which would make us sick if eaten every day.

One side of each wave and ripple is dark and the other light blue, reflecting the sky, — as I look down on them from my boat, — and these colors (?) combined produce a *dark* blue at a distance. These blue spaces ever remind me of the blue in the iridescence produced by oily matter on the surface, for you are slow to regard it as a reflection of the sky. The rippling undulating surface over which you glide is like a changeable blue silk garment.

Here, where in August the bittern booms in the grass, and mowers march *en échelon* and whet their scythes and crunch  the ripe wool-grass, raised now a few feet, you scud before the wind in your tight bark and listen to the surge (or sough?) of the great waves sporting around you, while you hold the steering-oar and your mast bends to the gale and you stow all your ballast to windward. The crisped sound of surging waves that rock you, that ceaseless roll and gambol, and ever and anon break into your boat.

Deep lie the seeds of the rhexia now, absorbing wet from the flood, but in a few months this mile-wide lake will have gone to the other side of the globe; and the tender rhexia will lift its head on the drifted hummocks in dense patches, bright and scarlet as a flame, — such succession have we here, — where the wild goose and countless wild ducks have floated and dived above them. So Nature condenses her matter. She

is a thousand thick. So many crops the same surface bears.

Undoubtedly the geese fly more numerously over rivers which, like ours, flow northeasterly, — are more at home with the water under them. Each flock runs the gantlet of a thousand gunners, and when you see them steer off from you and your boat you may remember how great their experience in such matters may be, how many such boats and gunners they have seen and avoided between here and Mexico, and even now, perchance (though you, low plodding, little dream it), they see one or two more lying in wait ahead. They have an experienced ranger of the air for their guide. The echo of one gun hardly dies away before they see another pointed at them. How many bullets or smaller shot have sped in vain toward their ranks! Ducks fly more irregularly and shorter distances at a time. The geese rest in fair weather by day only in the midst of our broadest meadow or pond. So they go, anxious and earnest to hide their nests under the pole.

The gulls seem used to boats and sails and will often fly quite near without manifesting alarm.

March 29. Driving rain and southeast wind, etc.

Walden is first clear after to-day.

Garfield says he saw a woodcock about a fortnight ago. Minott thinks the middle of March is as early as they come and that they do not then begin to lay.

March 30. 6 A. M. — To Hill (across water).

Hear a red squirrel chirrup at me by the hemlocks

(running up a hemlock), all for my benefit; not that he is excited by fear, I think, but so full is he of animal spirits that he makes a great ado about the least event. At first he scratches on the bark very rapidly with his hind feet without moving the fore feet. He makes so many queer sounds, and so different from one another, that you would think they came from half a dozen creatures. I hear now two sounds from him of a very distinct character, — a low or base inward, worming, screwing, or brewing, kind of sound (very like that, by the way, which an anxious partridge mother makes) and at the same time a very sharp and shrill bark, and clear, on a very high key, totally distinct from the last, — while his tail is flashing incessantly. You might say that he successfully accomplished the difficult feat of singing and whistling at the same time.

P. M. — To Walden *via* Hubbard's Close.

The green-bodied flies out on sheds, and probably nearly as long as the other; the same size as the house-fly.

I see numerous large skaters on a ditch. This may be the *Gerris lacustris*, but its belly is not white, only whitish in certain lights. It has six legs, two feelers (the two foremost legs being directed forward), a stoutish body, and brown above. The belly looks whitish when you look at it edgewise, but turned quite over (on its back), it is brown.

A very small brown grasshopper hops into the water.

I notice again (in the spring-holes in Hubbard's Close) that water purslane, being covered with water, is an evergreen, — though it is reddish.

Little pollywogs two inches long are lively there.

See on Walden two sheldrakes, male and female, as is common. So they have for some time paired. They are a hundred rods off. The male the larger, with his black head and white breast, the female with a red head. With my glass I see the long red bills of both. They swim at first one way near together, then tack and swim the other, looking around incessantly, never quite at their ease, wary and watchful for foes. A man cannot walk down to the shore or stand out on a hill overlooking the pond without disturbing them. They will have an eye upon him. The locomotive-whistle makes every wild duck start that is floating within the limits of the town. I see that these ducks are not here for protection alone, for at last they both dive, and remain beneath about forty pulse-beats, — and again, and again. I think they are looking for fishes. Perhaps, therefore, these divers are more likely to alight in Walden than the black ducks are.

Hear the hovering note of a snipe.

March 31. The frost is out of our garden, and I see one or two plowing early land. You walk dry now over this sandy land where the frost is melted, even after heavy rain, and there is no slumping in it, for there is no hard-pan and ice to hold the water and make a batter of the surface soil. This is a new condition of things when the surface of the earth generally begins to be dry. But there is still much frost in cold ground, and I often feel the crust which was heaved by it sink under me, and for some time have noticed the chinks

where the frozen ground has gaped and erected itself from and over stones and sleepers.

P. M. — To Holbrook's improvements.

Many painted turtles out along a ditch in Moore's Swamp. These the first I have seen, the water is so high in the meadows. One drops into the water from some dead brush which lies in it, and leaves on the brush two of its scales. Perhaps the sun causes the loosened scales to curl up, and so helps the turtle to get rid of them.

Humphrey Buttrick says that he has shot two kinds of little dippers, — the one black, the other with some white.

I see, on a large ant-hill, largish ants at work, front half reddish, back half black, but on another, very large ant-hill near by (a rod to left of Holbrook's road, perhaps fifty rods this side of his clearing on the north side), five feet through, there [are] none out.

It will show how our prejudices interfere with our perception of color, to state that yesterday morning, after making a fire in the kitchen cooking-stove, as I sat over it I thought I saw a little bit of red or scarlet flannel on a chink near a bolt-head on the stove, and I tried to pick it out, — while I was a little surprised that I did not smell it burning. It was merely the reflection of the flame of the fire through a chink, on the dark stove. This showed me what the true color of the flame was, but when I knew what this was, it was not very easy to perceive it again. It appeared now more yellowish. I think that my senses made the truest report the first time.

The wood frogs lie spread out on the surface of the sheltered pools in the woods, cool and windy as it is, dimpling the water by their motions, and as you approach you hear their lively *wurk wurrk wur-r-k*, but, seeing you, they suddenly hist and perhaps dive to the bottom.

It is a very windy afternoon, wind northwest, and at length a dark cloud rises on that side, evidently of a windy structure, a dusky mass with lighter intervals, like a parcel of brushes lying side by side, — a parcel of "mare's-tails" perhaps. It winds up with a flurry of rain.