Nov. 30. Dec. 1 and 2 were remarkably warm and springlike days, — a moist warmth. The crowing of cocks and other sounds remind you of spring, such is the state of the air. I wear only one coat.

Dec. 3. Suddenly quite cold, and freezes in the house.

Rode with a man this forenoon who said that if he did not clean his teeth when he got up, it made him sick all the rest of the day, but he had found by late experience that when he had not cleaned his teeth for several days they cleaned themselves. I assured him that such was the general rule, — that when from any cause we were prevented from doing what we had commonly thought indispensable for us to do, things cleaned or took care of themselves.

X ¹ was betrayed by his eyes, which had a glaring

¹ [X, whom Thoreau drove this morning to Acton, was literally an unknown quantity to him at the time. He did not learn till afterward
film over them and no serene depth into which you could look. Inquired particularly the way to Emerson's and the distance, and when I told him, said he knew it as well as if he saw it. Wished to turn and proceed to his house. Told me one or two things which he asked me not to tell S.1 Said, "I know I am insane," — and I knew it too. Also called it "nervous excitement." At length, when I made a certain remark, he said, "I don't know but you are Emerson; are you? You look somewhat like him." He said as much two or three times, and added once, "But then Emerson wouldn't lie." Finally put his questions to me, of Fate, etc., etc., as if I were Emerson. Getting to the woods, I remarked upon them, and he mentioned my name, but never to the end suspected who his companion was. 'Then proceeded to business,' — "since the time was short," — and put to me the questions he was going to put to Emerson. His insanity exhibited itself chiefly by his incessant excited talk, scarcely allowing me to interrupt him, but once or twice apologizing for his behavior. What he said was for the most part connected and sensible enough.

When I hear of John Brown and his wife weeping at length, it is as if the rocks sweated.

Dec. 4. Awake to winter, and snow two or three inches deep, the first of any consequence.

that it was Francis Jackson Merriam, one of John Brown's men, on his way to Canada. See the account in *Familiar Letters*, pp. 365–367; Riv. 428–435.

1 [Mr. F. B. Sanborn.]
streets, suggesting how withdrawn and inward the life in the former, how exposed and outward in the latter.

His late career — these six weeks, I mean — has been meteor-like, flashing through the darkness in which we live. I know of nothing more miraculous in all history. 1

Nothing could his enemies do but it redounded to his infinite advantage, the advantage of his cause. They did not hang him at once; they reserved him to preach to them. And here is another great blunder: they have not hung his four followers with him; that scene is still to come, and so his victory is prolonged.

No theatrical manager could have arranged things so wisely to give effect to his behavior and words. And who, think you, was the Manager? Who placed the slave-woman and her child between his prison and the gallows? 2

The preachers, the Bible men, they who talk about principle and doing to others as you would that they should do unto you, — how could they fail to recognize him, by far the greatest preacher of them all, with the Bible on his lips, and in his acts, the embodiment of principle, who actually carried out the golden rule? All whose moral sense is aroused, who have a calling from on high to preach, have sided with him. It may prove the occasion, if it has not proved it already, of a new sect of Brownites being formed in our midst. 3

I see now, as he saw, that he was not to be pardoned or rescued by men. That would have been to disarm him, to restore to him a material weapon, a Sharp's rifle, when he had taken up the sword of the spirit, — the sword with which he has really won his greatest and most memorable victories. Now he has not laid aside the sword of the spirit. He is pure spirit himself, and his sword is pure spirit also.

On the day of his translation, I heard, to be sure, that he was hung, but I did not know what that meant, — and I felt no sorrow on his account; but not for a day or two did I even hear that he was dead, and not after any number of days shall I believe it. Of all the men who are said to be my contemporaries, it seems to me that John Brown is the only one who has not died. I meet him at every turn. He is more alive than ever he was. He is not confined to North Elba nor to Kansas. He is no longer working in secret only. John Brown has earned immortality. 1

Men have been hung in the South before for attempting to rescue slaves, and the North was not much stirred by it. Whence, then, this wonderful difference? We were not so sure of their devotion to principle. We have made a subtle distinction, have forgotten human laws, and do homage to an idea. The North is suddenly all Transcendental. It goes behind the human law, it goes behind the apparent failure, and recognizes eternal justice and glory.

It is more generous than the spirit which actuated our forefathers, for it is a revolution in behalf of another, and an oppressed, people. 2

1 [Cape Cod, and Miscellanies, p. 441; Misc., Riv. 237.]
2 [Cape Cod, and Miscellanies, p. 443; Misc., Riv. 239.]
3 [Cape Cod, and Miscellanies, pp. 442, 443; Misc., Riv., 239.]
Dec. 6. P. M. — To Walden and Baker Bridge, in
the shallow snow and mizzling rain.

It is somewhat of a lichen day. The bright-yellow
sulphur lichens on the walls of the Walden road look
novel, as if I had not seen them for a long time. Do
they not require cold as much as moisture to enliven
them? What surprising forms and colors! Designed
on every natural surface of rock or tree. Even stones
of smaller size which make the walls are so finished,
and piled up for what use? How naturally they adorn
our works of art? See where the farmer has set up
his post-and-rail fences along the road. The sulphur
lichen has, as it were, at once leaped to occupy the
northern side of each post, as in towns handbills are
pasted on all bare surfaces, and the rails are more or
less gilded with them as if it had rained gilt. The
handbill which nature affixes to the north side of posts
and trees and other surfaces. And there are the various
shades of green and gray beside.

Though it is melting, there is more ice left on the
twigs in the woods than I had supposed.

The mist is so thick that we cannot quite see the
length of Walden as we descend to its eastern shore.
The reflections of the hillsides are so much the more
unsubstantial, for we see even the reflected mist veiling
them. You see, beneath these whitened wooded
hills and shore sloping to it, the dark, half mist-veiled
water. For two rods in width next the shore, where
the water is shallowest and the sand bare, you see a
strip of light greenish two or three rods in width, and
then dark brown (with a few green streaks only) where
the dark sediment of ages has accumulated. And, looking
down the pond, you see on each side successive
wooded promontories — with their dim reflections —
growing dimmer and dimmer till they are lost in the
mist. The more distant shores are a mere dusky line
or film, a sort of concentration of the mistiness.

In the pure greenish stripe next the shore I saw some
dark-brown objects above the sand, which looked
very much like sea turtles in various attitudes. One
appeared holding its great head up toward the surface.
They were very weird-like and of indefinite size. I
supposed that they were stumps or logs on the bot-
tom, but was surprised to find that they were a thin
and flat collection of sediment on the sandy bottom,
like that which covered the bottom generally further
out.

When the breeze rippled the surface some distance
out, it looked like a wave coming in, but it never got
in to the shore.

No sooner has the snow fallen than, in the woods,
it is seen to be dotted almost everywhere with the fine
seeds and scales of birches and alders, — no doubt an
ever-accessible food to numerous birds and perhaps
mice. Thus it is alternate snow and seeds.

Returning up the railroad, I see the great tufts
of sedge in Heywood’s
meadow curving over like
locks of the meadow’s
hair, above the snow.
These browned the meadow considerably. Then came
a black maze, of alders moistened by the rain, which
made a broad black belt between the former brown and the red-brown oaks higher up the hillside.

The white pines now, seen through the mist, the ends of their boughs drooping a little with the weight of the glaze, resemble very much hemlocks, for the extremities of their limbs always droop thus, while pines are commonly stiffly erect or ascendant.

Came upon a round bed of tansy, half a dozen feet in diameter, which was withered quite black, as seen above the snow,—blackener than any plant I remember. This reminded me that its name was by some thought to be from ἀθανασία, or immortality, from its not withering early, but in this case it suggested its funereal reputation.

What a transit that of his horizontal body alone, but just cut down from the gallows-tree! We read that at such a time it passed through Philadelphia, and by Saturday night had reached New York. Thus like a meteor it passed through the Union from the Southern region toward the North. No such freight have the cars borne since they carried him southward alive.¹

What avail all your scholarly accomplishments and learning, compared with wisdom and manhood? To omit his other behavior, see what a work this comparatively unread and unlettered man has written within six weeks! Where is our professor of belles-lettres, or of logic and rhetoric, who can write so well? He has written in prison, not a History of the World like Raleigh, for his time was short, but an American book which shall live longer than that.

¹ [Cape Cod, and Miscellanies, p. 449; Misc., Riv. 947.]

The death of Irving, which at any other time would have attracted universal attention, having occurred while these things were transpiring, goes almost unobserved. Literary gentlemen, editors, and critics think that they know how to write because they have studied grammar and rhetoric; but the art of composition is as simple as the discharge of a bullet from a rifle, and its masterpieces imply an infinitely greater force behind it. This unlettered man's speaking and writing is standard English. Some words and phrases deemed vulgarisms and Americanisms before, he has made standard American. "It will pay." It suggests that the one great rule of composition — and if I were a professor of rhetoric I should insist on this — is to speak the truth. This first, this second, this third. This demands earnestness and manhood chiefly.

I felt that he, a prisoner in the midst of his enemies and under sentence of death, if consulted as to his next step, could answer more wisely than all his countrymen beside. He best understood his position; he contemplated it most calmly. All other men, North and South, were beside themselves. Our thoughts could not revert to any greater or wiser or better men with whom to compare him, for he was above them all. The man this country was about to hang was the greatest and best in it.²

Commonly men live according to a formula, and are satisfied if the order of law is observed, but in this instance they returned to original perceptions and there was a revival of old religion; and they saw that what

² [Cape Cod, and Miscellanies, pp. 448-449; Misc., Riv. 244, 245.]
³ [Cape Cod, and Miscellanies, pp. 441, 442; Misc., Riv. 237, 238.]
was called order was confusion, what was called justice, injustice, that the best was deemed the worst.

Most Northern men, and not a few Southern ones, have been wonderfully stirred by Brown's behavior and words. They have seen or felt that they were great, heroic, noble, and that there has been nothing quite equal to them in this country, if in the recent history of the world. But the minority have been unmoved by them. They have only been surprised and provoked by the attitude of their neighbors. They have seen that Brown was brave and believed that he had done right, but they have not detected any further peculiarity in him. Not being accustomed to make fine distinctions or to appreciate noble sentiments, they have read his speeches and letters as if they read the innot,- they have not known when they burned. They have not felt that he spoke with authority, and hence they have only remembered that the law must be executed. They remember the old formula; they do not hear the new revelation. The man who does not recognize in Brown's words a wisdom and nobleness, and therefore an authority, superior to our laws, is a modern Democrat. This is the test by which to try him. He is not willfully but constitutionally blind, and he is consistent with himself. Such has been his past life. In like manner he has read history and his Bible, and he accepts, or seems to accept, the last only as an established formula, and not because he has been convicted by it. You will not find kindred sentiments in his commonplace-book.\(^1\)

\[^1\text{Cape Cod, and Miscellanies, pp. 445, 444; Misc., Riv. 240, 241.}\]

And in these six weeks what a variety of themes he has touched on! There are words in that letter to his wife, respecting the education of his daughters, which deserve to be framed and hung over every mantelpiece in the land. Compare their earnest wisdom with that of Poor Richard!\(^1\)

\[^1\text{He nothing common did or mean}\
\text{Upon that memorable scene,}\
\text{Nor called the gods with vulgar spite,}\
\text{To vindicate his helpless right;}\
\text{But bowed his comely head}\
\text{Down, as upon a bed.}\]

Years are no longer required for a revolution of public opinion; days, may hours, produce marked changes. Fifty who were ready to say, on going into some meeting in honor of him, that he ought to be hung, will not say it when they come out. They hear his words read, every one of which "conveys the perfect charm;" they see the earnest faces of the congregation; and perhaps they join in singing the hymn in his praise.

What confessions it has extorted from the cold and conservative! Witness the Newton letter.

The order of instruction has been reversed. I hear that the preacher says that his act was a failure, while to some extent he eulogizes the man. The class-teacher, after the services, tells his grown-up pupils that at first he thought as the preacher does now, but now he thinks that John Brown was right. But it is under-

\[^2\text{Cape Cod, and Miscellanies, p. 449; Misc., Riv. 247.}\]
stood that the pupils are as much ahead of the teacher as he is ahead of the priest; and the very little boys at home ask their parents why God did not save him.

They, whether in the church or out of it, who adhere to the spirit and abandon the letter, and who are accordingly called infidel, have been foremost in this movement.¹

I took out my boots, which I have not worn since last spring, with the mud and dust of spring still on them, and went forth in the snow. That is an era, when, in the beginning of the winter, you change from the shoes of summer to the boots of winter.

Dec. 8. Here is a better glaze than we have yet had, for it snowed and rained in the night.

I go to Pleasant Meadow,—or rather toward the sun, for the glaze shows best so. The wind has risen and the trees are stiffly waving with a brattling sound. The birches, seen half a mile off toward the sun, are the purest dazzling white of any tree, probably because their stems are not seen at all. It is only those seen at a particular angle between us and the sun that appear thus.

Day before yesterday the ice which had fallen from the twigs covered the snow beneath in oblong pieces one or two inches long, which C. well called lemon-drops.

When a noble deed is done, who is likely to appreciate it? They who are noble themselves. I am not surprised that certain of my neighbors speak of John Brown as an ordinary felon. Who are they? They

¹ [Cape Cod, and Miscellanies, pp. 442, 443; Misc., Riv. 241, 242.]
Two hundred years ago is about as great an antiquity as we can comprehend or often have to deal with. It is nearly as great as two thousand to our imaginations. It carries us back to the days of aborigines and the Pilgrims; beyond the limits of oral testimony, to history which begins already to be enamelled with a gloss of fable, and we do not quite believe what we read; to a strange style of writing and spelling and of expression; to those ancestors whose names we do not know, and to whom we are related only as we are to the race generally. It is the age of our very oldest houses and cultivated trees. Nor is New England very peculiar in this. In England also, a house two hundred years old, especially if it be a wooden one, is pointed out as an interesting relic of the past.

When we read the history of the world, centuries look cheap to us and we find that we had doubted if the hundred years preceding the life of Herodotus seemed as great an antiquity to him as a hundred years does to us. We are inclined to think of all Romans who lived within five hundred years B.C. as contemporaries to each other. Yet Time moved at the same deliberate pace then as now. Pliny the Elder, who died in the 79th year of the Christian era, speaking of the paper made of papyrus which was then used,—how carefully it was made,—says, just as we might say, as if it were something remarkable: "There are, thus, ancient memorials in the handwriting of Caius and Tiberius Gracchus, almost two hundred years old, which I have seen in the possession of Pomponius Secundus the poet, a very illustrious citizen. As for the handwriting of Cicero, Augustus, and Virgil, we very often meet with it still."

This too, according to Pliny, was the age of the oldest wines. "In one year the quality of all kinds of wine was peculiarly good. In the consulship of Lucius Opimius, when Caius Gracchus, disturbing the people with seditions, was killed, there was that bright and serene weather (ea caeli temperies falsit) which they call a cooking (of the grape) by the heat of the sun. This was in the year of the city 634. And some of those wines have lasted to this day, almost two hundred years, now reduced to the appearance of candied honey (in speciem redacta melis asperti)."

How is it that what is actually present and transpiring is commonly perceived by the common sense and understanding only, is bare and bald, without halo or the blue enamel of intervening air? But let it be past or to come, and it is at once idealized. As the man dead is spiritualized, so the fact remembered is idealized. It is a deed ripe and with the bloom on it. It is not simply the understanding now, but the imagination, that takes cognizance of it. The imagination requires a long range. It is the faculty of the poet to see present things as if, in this sense, also past and future, as if distant or universally significant. We do not know poets, heroes, and saints for our contemporaries, but we locate them in some far-off vale, and, the greater and better, the further off we [are] accustomed to consider them. We believe in spirits, we believe in beauty,
but not now and here. They have their abode in the remote past or in the future.

_Dec. 9._ Suddenly cold last night. The river and Fair Haven Pond froze over generally (I see no opening as I walk) last night, though they were only frozen along the edges yesterday. This is unusually sudden.

How prominent the late or fall flowers are, now withered above the snow, — the goldenrods and asters, Roman wormwood, etc., etc.! These late ones have a sort of life extended into winter, hung with icy jewelry.

I observe at mid-afternoon, the air being very quiet and serene, that peculiarly softened western sky, which perhaps is seen commonly after the first snow has covered the earth. There are many whitish filmy clouds a third of the way to the zenith, generally long and narrow, parallel with the horizon, with indistinct edges, alternating with the blue. And there is just enough invisible vapor, perhaps from the snow, to soften the blue, giving it a slight greenish tinge. Thus, methinks, it often happens that as the weather is harder the sky seems softer. It is not a cold, hard, glittering sky, but a warm, soft, filmy one.

The prosaic man sees things baldly, or with the bodily sense; but the poet sees them clad in beauty, with the spiritual sense.

Editors are still pretty generally saying that Brown's was a "crazy scheme," and their one only evidence and proof of it is that it cost him his life. I have no doubt that, if he had gone with five thousand men, liberated a thousand slaves, killed a hundred or two slaveholders, and had as many more killed on his own side, but not lost his own life, such would have been prepared to call it by another name. Yet he has been far more successful than that. They seem to know nothing about living or dying for a principle.¹

Abel Brooks told me this anecdote on the 28th ult.:

"I don't know as you remember Langley Brown. Dr. Ripley asked him to bring him a load of the best oak wood he could get. So Langley he picked out a first-rate load of white oak, and teamed it to his door. But when the doctor saw it he said at once that it would n't do, he didn't want any such stuff as that. Langley next picked out a load of yellow oak and carried that to the doctor; but the latter answered, as quickly as before, that that was not what he wanted at all. Then Langley selected a load of red oak, very straight and smooth, and carted that to the doctor's, and the moment he saw it he exclaimed, 'Ah, that's what I want, Mr. Brown!'

_Dec. 10._ Get in my boat, in the snow. The bottom is coated with a glaze.

_Dec. 11._ At 2 p.m. begins to snow, and snows till night. Still, normal storm, large flakes, warm enough, lodging.

See one sheldrake in Walden. As I stand on the railroad at Walden, at R. W. E.’s crossing, the sound of the snowflakes falling on the dry oak leaves (which

¹ [Cape Cod, and Miscellanies, pp. 445, 446; Misc., Riv. 242, 243.]
hold on) is exactly like a rustling produced by a steady but slight breeze. But there is no wind. It is a gentle and uninterrupted susurrus.

This light snow, which has been falling for an hour, resting on the horizontal spray of the hemlocks, produces the effect of so many crosses, or checker or lattice work.


Seeing a little hole in the side of a dead white birch, about six feet from the ground, I broke it off and found it to be made where a rotten limb had broken off. The hole was about an inch over and was of quite irregular and probably natural outline, and, within, the rotten wood had been removed to the depth of two or three inches, and on one side of this cavity, under the hole, was quite a pile of bird-droppings. The diameter of the birch was little more than two inches,—if at all. Probably it was the roosting-place of a chickadee. The bottom was an irregular surface of the rotten wood, and there was nothing like a nest.

There is a certain Irish woodchopper who, when I come across him at his work in the woods in the winter, never fails to ask me what time it is, as if he were in haste to take his dinner-pail and go home. This is not as it should be. Every man, and the woodchopper among the rest, should love his work as much as the poet does his. All good political arrangements proceed on this supposition. If labor mainly, or to any considerable degree, serves the purpose of a police, to keep men out of mischief, it indicates a rottenness at the foundation of our community.

The night comes on early these days, and I soon see the pine tree tops distinctly outlined against the dun (or amber) but cold western sky.

The snow having come, we see where is the path of the partridge,—his comings and goings from copse to copse,—and now first, as it were, we have the fox for our nightly neighbor, and countless tiny deer mice. So, perchance, if a still finer substance should fall from heaven (iodine?), something delicate enough to receive the trace of their footsteps, we should see where unsuspected spirits and faery visitors had hourly crossed our steps, had held conventions and transacted their affairs in our midst. No doubt such subtle spirits transact their affairs in our midst, and we may perhaps invent some sufficiently delicate surface to catch the impression of them.

If in the winter there are fewer men in the fields and woods,—as in the country generally,—you see the tracks of those who had preceded you, and so are more reminded of them than in summer.

As I talked with the woodchopper who had just cleared the top of Emerson's I got a new view of the mountains over his pile of wood in the foreground. They were very grand in their snowy mantle, which had a slight tinge of purple. But when afterward I looked at them from a higher hill, where there was no wood-pile in the foreground, they affected me less. It is now that these mountains, in color as well as form, most resemble the clouds.
I am inclined to think of late that as much depends on the state of the bowels as of the stars. As are your bowels, so are the stars.


My first true winter walk is perhaps that which I take on the river, or where I cannot go in the summer. It is the walk peculiar to winter, and now first I take it. I see that the fox too has already taken the same walk before me, just along the edge of the button-bushes, where not even he can go in the summer. We both turn our steps either at the same time.

There is now, at 2.30 p. m., the melon-rind arrangement of the clouds. Really parallel columns of fine mackerel sky, reaching quite across the heavens from west to east, with clear intervals of blue sky, and a fine-grained vapor like spun glass extending in the same direction beneath the former. In half an hour all this mackerel sky is gone.

What an ever-changing scene is the sky with its drifting cirrus and stratus! The spectators are not requested to take a recess of fifteen minutes while the scene changes, but, walking commonly with our faces to the earth, our thoughts revert to other objects, and as often as we look up the scene has changed. Now, I see, it is a column of white vapor reaching quite across the sky, from west to east, with locks of fine hair, or tow that is carded, combed out on each side, — surprising touches here and there, which show a peculiar state of the atmosphere. No doubt the best weather-signs are in these forms which the vapor takes. When
five or six feet long, very delicate but perfectly straight, their planes making a very slight angle with the surface of the ice, and yet no seam is to be detected. The black floor is by these divided into polygonal segments, for the most part geometrically straight-sided. Their position merely suggests a cleavage which has no existence. Perhaps it is the angle of excidence answering to the angle of incidence at which the sun's light and heat strikes the ice at different hours!!

I walk thus along the riverside, perhaps between the button-bushes and the meadow, where the bleached and withered grass — the Panicum virgatum and blue-joint and wool-grass — rustle amid the osiers which have saved them from the scythe.

When the snow is only thus deep, the yellowish straw-color of the sedge in the meadows rising above the snow is now first appreciated, seen between the ice and the snow-clad land.

Near the mouth of Well Meadow Brook, I see a musquash under the black ice of the pond. It is ten or twelve rods from a cabin, which must be the nearest open place, and it moves off slowly, pushing against the ice with its feet, toward the middle of the pond, and as I follow, it at length sinks to the bottom and is lost. Did it go down for concealment or for air? Here was a musquash at least a dozen rods from any hole, and it did not swim toward its cabin.

I see, in the Pleasant Meadow field near the pond, some little masses of snow, such as I noticed yesterday in the open land by the railroad causeway at the Cut. I could not account for them then, for I did not
is moist but light (it had fallen the afternoon previous) will catch and roll it up as a boy rolls up his ball. These white balls are seen far off over the fields.

When I reach the causeway at the Cut, returning, the sun has just set,—a perfect winter sunset, so fair and pure, with its golden and purple isles. I think the summer rarely equals it. There are real damask-colored isles or continents north of the sun’s place, and further off northeast they pass into bluish purple. Hayden’s house, over which I see them, seems the abode of the blessed. The east horizon also is purple. But that part of the parallel cloud-columns overhead is now invisible. At length the purple travels westward, as the sun sinks lower below the horizon, the clouds overhead are brought out, and so the purple glow glides down the western sky.

Virgil’s account of winter occupations in the First Georgic, line 291, applies well enough to New England:

"Some keep at work by the late light of the winter
Fire, and point torches with a sharp iron.
In the meanwhile the wife, relieving her long labor with her

Singing, thickens the webs with the shrill slay;
Or boils down the liquor of sweet must with fire,
And skims off the foam of the boiling kettle with leaves.

... Winter is an idle time to the husbandman.
In cold weather they commonly enjoy what they have laid up,
And jovial they give themselves up to mutual feasting:
Genial winter invites this and relaxes their cares;
As when now the laden keel has touched its port,
And the joyful sailors have placed a crown on the stern.
However, now is the time to gather acorns,
And laurel berries, and the olive, and bloody (colored) myrtle berries;
Now to set snares for cranes,1 and deer,
And chase the long-haired hares;

When the snow lies deep, and the rivers are full of drifting ice."

I saw yesterday where fox-hunters with a sleigh and hounds had improved the first shallow snow to track their game. They thread the woods by old and grown-up and forgotten paths, where no others would think to drive.

Dec. 14. At 2 p.m. begins to snow again. I walk to Walden.

Snow-storms might be classified. This is a fine, dry snow, drifting nearly horizontally from the north, so that it is quite blinding to face, almost as much so as sand. It is cold also. It is drifting but not accumulating fast. I can see the woods about a quarter of a mile distant through it. That of the 11th was a still storm, of large flakes falling gently in the quiet air, like so many white feathers descending in different directions when seen against a wood-side,—the regular snow-storm such as is painted. A myriad falling flakes weaving a coarse

1 Say partridges.
garment by which the eye is amused. The snow was a little moist and the weather rather mild. Also I remember the perfectly crystalline or star snows, when each flake is a perfect six(?)-rayed wheel. This must be the chef-d'œuvre of the Genius of the storm. Also there is the pellet or shot snow, which consists of little dry spherical pellets the size of robin-shot. This, I think, belongs to cold weather. Probably never have much of it. Also there is sleet, which is half snow, half rain.

The Juncus tenuis, with its conspicuous acheniums, is very noticeable now, rising above the snow in the wood-paths, commonly aslant.

Dec. 15. The first kind of snow-storm, or that of yesterday, which ceased in the night after some three inches had fallen, was that kind that makes handsome drifts behind the walls. There are no drifts equal to these behind loosely built stone walls, the wind passing between the stones. Slight as this snow was, these drifts now extend back four or five feet and as high as the wall, on the north side of the Corner Bridge road. The snow is scooped out in the form of easy-chairs, or of shells or plinths, if that is the name for them.

The backs of the chairs often inclining to fall off.

A man killed a wild goose a day or two since in Spencer Brook, near Legross’s.

I hear from J. [?] Moore that one man in Bedford has got eighteen minks the last fall.¹

Philosophy is a Greek word by good rights, and it stands almost for a Greek thing. Yet some rumor of it has reached the commonest mind. M. Miles, who came to collect his wood bill to-day, said, when I objected to the small size of his wood, that it was necessary to split wood fine in order to cure it well, that he had found that wood that was more than four inches in diameter would not dry, and moreover a good deal depended on the manner in which it was corded up in the woods. He piled his high and tightly. If this were not well done the stakes would spread and the wood lie loosely, and so the rain and snow find their way into it. And he added, “I have handled a good deal of wood, and I think that I understand the philosophy of it.”

Dec. 16. A. M.—To Cambridge, where I read in Gerard’s Herbal.² His admirable though quaint descriptions are, to my mind, greatly superior to the modern more scientific ones. He describes not according to rule but to his natural delight in the plants. He brings them vividly before you, as one who has seen and delighted in them. It is almost as good as to see the plants themselves. It suggests that we cannot too often get rid of the barren assumption that is

¹ Farmer says he probably bought most of them.
² Vile extracts from preface made in October, 1859.
in our science. His leaves are leaves; his flowers, flowers; his fruit, fruit. They are green and colored and fragrant. It is a man's knowledge added to a child's delight. Modern botanical descriptions approach ever nearer to the dryness of an algebraic formula, as if $x + y$ were $=$ to a love-letter. It is the keen joy and discrimination of the child who has just seen a flower for the first time and comes running in with it to its friends. How much better to describe your object in fresh English words rather than in these conventional Latinisms! He has really seen, and smelt, and tasted, and reports his sensations.

Bought a book at Little & Brown's, paying a nine-pence more on a volume than it was offered me for elsewhere. The customer thus pays for the more elegant style of the store.

Dec. 17. P. M. — To Walden.

The snow being some three or four inches deep, I see rising above it, generally, at my old bean-field, only my little white pines set last spring in the midst of an immense field of Solidago nemoralis, with a little sweet-fern (i.e. a large patch of it on the north side). What a change there will be in a few years, this little forest of goldenrod giving place to a forest of pines!

By the side of the Pout's Nest, I see on the pure white snow what looks like dust for half a dozen inches under a twig. Looking closely, I find that the twig is hardhack and the dust its slender, light-brown, chaffy-looking seed, which falls still in copious showers, dusting the snow, when I jar it; and here are the tracks of a sparrow which has jarred the twig and picked the minute seeds a long time, making quite a hole in the snow. The seeds are so fine that it must have got more snow than seed at each peck. But they probably look large to its microscopic eyes. I see, when I jar it, that a meadow-sweet close by has quite similar, but larger, seeds. This the reason, then, that these plants rise so high above the snow and retain their seed, dispersing it on the least jar over each successive layer of snow beneath them; or it is carried to a distance by the wind. What abundance and what variety in the diet of these small granivorous birds, while I find only a few nuts still! These stiff weeds which no snow can break down hold their provender. What the cereals are to men, these are to the sparrows. The only threshing they require is that the birds fly against their spikes or stalks. A little further I see the seed-box (Ludwigia) full of still smaller, yellowish seeds. And on the ridge north is the track of a partridge amid the shrubs. It has hopped up to the low clusters of smooth sumach berries, sprinkled the snow with them, and eaten all but a few. Also, here only, or where it has evidently jarred them down — whether intentionally or not, I am not sure — are the large oval seeds of the stiff-stalked lespedeza, which I suspect it ate, with the sumach berries. There is much solid food in them. When the snow is deep the birds could easily pick the latter out of the heads as they stand on the snow.
I observe, then, eaten by birds to-day, the seed of hardhack and meadow-sweet, sumach, and probably lespedeza, and even seed-box.

Under the hill, on the southeast side of R. W. E.'s lot, where the hemlock stands, I see many tracks of squirrels. The dark, thick green of the hemlock (amid the pines) seems to attract them as a covert. The snow under the hemlock is strewn with the scales of its cones, which they (and perhaps birds?) have stripped off, and some of its little winged seeds. It is pleasant to see the tracks of these squirrels (I am not sure whether they are red or gray or both, for I see none) leading straight from the base of one tree to that of another, thus leaving untrodden triangles, squares, and polygons of every form, bounded by much trodden highways. One, two, three, and the track is lost on the upright hole of a pine,—as if they had played at base-running from goal to goal, while pine cones were thrown at them on the way. The tracks of two or three suggest a multitude. You come thus on the tracks of these frisky and volatile (semivolitant) creatures in the midst of perfect stillness and solitude, as you might stand in a hall half an hour after the dancers had departed.

\[ \text{I see no nests in the trees, but numerous holes through the snow into the earth, whence they have emerged. They have loitered but little on the snow, spending their time chiefly on the trees, their castles, when abroad. The snow is strewn not only with hemlock scales, but, under other trees, with the large white pine scales for rods together where there is no track, the wind having scattered them as they fell, and also the shells of hickory-nuts. It reminds me of the platform before a grocery where nuts are sold. You see many places where they have probed the snow for these white pine cones, evidently those which they cut off green and which accordingly have not opened so as to drop the seeds. This was perhaps the design in cutting them off so early,—thus to preserve them under the snow (not dispersed). Do they find them by the scent? At any rate they will dig down through the snow and come right upon a pine cone or a hickory-nut or an acorn, which you and I cannot do.}

Two or three acres of Walden, off the bar, not yet frozen. Saw in [it] a good-sized black duck, which did not dive while I looked. I suspect it must have been a Fuligula, though I saw no white.

\[ \text{Dec. 18. Rains.}

P. M.—To Assabet opposite Tarbell’s, via Abel Hosmer’s.

It rains but little this afternoon, though there is no sign of fair weather. Only the mist appears thinner here and there from time to time. It is a lichen day. The pitch pines on the south of the road at the Colburn farm are very inspiring to behold. Their green is as much enlivened and freshened as that of the lichens. It suggests a sort of sunlight on them, though not even a patch of clear sky is seen to-day. As dry and olive or slate-colored lichens are of a fresh and living green,
so the already green pine-needles have acquired a far livelier tint, as if they enjoyed this moisture as much as the lichens do. They seem to be lit up more than when the sun falls on them. Their trunks, and those of trees generally, being wet, are very black, and the bright lichens on them are so much the more remarkable.

I see three shrikes in different places to-day,—two on the top of apple trees, sitting still in the storm, on the lookout. They fly low to another tree when disturbed, much like a bluebird, and jerk their tails once or twice when they alight.

Apples are thawed now and are very good. Their juice is the best kind of bottled cider that I know. They are all good in this state, and your jaws are the cider-press.¹

The thick, low cloud or mist makes novel prospects for us. In the southwest horizon I see a darker mass of it stretched along, seen against itself. The oak woods a quarter of a mile off appear more uniformly red than ever. They are not only redder for being wet, but, through the obscurity of the mist, one leaf runs into another and the whole mass makes one impression. The withered oak leaves, being thoroughly saturated with moisture, are of a livelier color. Also some of the most withered white oak leaves with roundish black spots like small lichens are quite interesting now.

Dec. 19. Yarrow ⁴ too is full of seed now, and the common johnswort has some seed in it still.

¹ [Excursions, pp. 319, 330; Riv. 393.]
² Tansy.

Snows very fast, large flakes, a very lodging snow, quite moist; turns to rain in afternoon. If we leave the sleigh for a moment, it whitens the seat, which must be turned over. We are soon thickly covered, and it lodges on the twigs of trees and bushes, there being but little wind, — giving them a very white and soft, spiritual look. Gives them a still, soft, and light look. When the flakes fall thus large and fast and are so moist and melting, we think it will not last long, and this turned to rain in a few hours, after three or four inches had fallen.

To omit the first mere whitening, —

There was the snow of the 4th December.
11th was a lodging snow, it being mild and still, like to-day (only it was not so moist). Was succeeded next day noon by a strong and cold northwest wind.
14th, a fine, dry, cold, driving and drifting storm.
20th (to-day’s), a very lodging, moist, and large-flaked snow, turning to rain. To be classed with the 11th in the main. This wets the woodchopper about as much as rain.

Dec. 21. A. M. — A fine winter day and rather mild.

Ride to T. Wheeler’s lot. See a red squirrel out in two places. Do they not come out chiefly in the forenoon? Also a large flock of snow buntings, fair and pleasant as it is. Their whiteness, like the snow, is their most remarkable peculiarity.

The snow of yesterday having turned to rain in the afternoon, the snow is no longer (now that it is frozen)

1859] THE SNOW WRINKLED WITH AGE 37

a uniformly level white, as when it had just fallen, but on all declivities you see it, even from a great distance, strongly marked with countless furrows or channels. These are about three inches deep, more or less parallel where the rain ran down. On hillsides these reach from top to bottom and give them a peculiar combed appearance. Hillsides around a hollow are thus very regularly marked by lines converging toward the centre at the bottom. In level fields the snow is not thus furrowed, but dimpled with a myriad little hollows where the water settled, and perhaps answering slightly to the inequalities of the ground. In level woods I do not see this regular dimpling — the rain being probably conducted down the trunks — nor the furrows on hillsides; the rain has been differently distributed by the trees.1

This makes a different impression from the fresh and uniformly level white surface of recently fallen snow. It is now, as it were, wrinkled with age. The incipient slosh of yesterday is now frozen, and makes good sleighing and a foundation for more.

Dec. 22. Another fine winter day.
P. M. — To Flint’s Pond.

C. is inclined to walk in the road, it being better walking there, and says: “You don’t wish to see anything but the sky to-day and breathe this air. You could walk in the city to-day, just as well as in the country. You only wish to be out.” This was because I inclined to walk in the woods or by the river.

1 Vide plate [sic] [three] pages forward.
As we passed under the elm beyond George Heywood's, I looked up and saw a fiery hangbird's nest dangling over the road. What a reminiscence of summer, a fiery hangbird's nest dangling from an elm over the road when perhaps the thermometer is down to -20 (?), and the traveller goes beating his arms beneath it! It is hard to recall the strain of that bird then.

We pause and gaze into the Mill Brook on the Turnpike bridge. C. says that in Persia they call the ripple-marks on sandy bottoms "chains" or "chain-work." I see a good deal of cress there, on the bottom, for a rod or two, the only green thing to be seen. No more slimy than it usually is beneath the water in summer. Is not this the plant which most, or most conspicuously, preserves its greenness in the winter? Is it not now most completely in its summer state of any plant? So far as the water and the mud and the cress go, it is a summer scene. It is green as ever, and waving in the stream as in summer.

How nicely is Nature adjusted! The least disturbance of her equilibrium is betrayed and corrects itself. As I looked down on the surface of the brook, I was surprised to see a leaf floating, as I thought, up the stream, but I was mistaken. The motion of a particle of dust on the surface of any brook far inland shows which way the earth declines toward the sea, which way lies the constantly descending route, and the only one.

I see in the chestnut woods near Flint's Pond where squirrels have collected the small chestnut burs left on the trees and opened them, generally at the base of the trunks on the snow. These are, I think, all small and imperfect burs, which do not so much as open in the fall and are rejected then, but, hanging on the tree, they have this use at least, as the squirrels' winter food.

Three men are fishing on Flint's Pond, where the ice is seven or eight inches thick. I look back to the wharf rock shore and see that rush (cladium I have called it), the warmest object in the landscape,—a narrow line of warm yellow rushes,—for they reflect the western light,—along the edge of the somewhat snowy pond and next the snow-clad and wooded shore. This rush, which is comparatively inconspicuous in the summer, becomes thus in the winter afternoons a conspicuous and interesting object, lit up by the westering sun.

The fisherman stands erect and still on the ice, awaiting our approach, as usual forward to say that he has had no luck. He has been here since early morning, and for some reason or other the fishes won't bite. You won't catch him here again in a hurry. They all tell the same story. The amount of it is he has had "fisherman's luck," and if you walk that way you may find him at his old post to-morrow. It is hard, to be sure,—four little fishes to be divided between three men, and two and a half miles to walk; and you have only got a more ravenous appetite for the supper which you have not earned. However, the pond floor is not a bad place to spend a winter day.

On what I will call Sassafras Island, in this pond, I notice the largest and handsomest high blueberry bush that I ever saw, about ten feet high. It divides
at the ground into four stems, all very large and the largest three inches in diameter (one way) at three feet high, and at the ground, where they seem to form one trunk (at least grown together), nine inches in diameter. These stems rise upward, spreading a little in their usual somewhat zigzag manner, and are very handsomely clothed with large gray and yellow lichens with intervals of the (smoothish? and) finely divided bark. The bark is quite reddish near the ground. The top, which is spreading and somewhat flattish or cor-ymbose, consists of a great many fine twigs, which give it a thick and dark appearance against the sky compared with the more open portion beneath. It was perfectly sound and vigorous.

In a (apparently kingbird’s?) nest on this island I saw three cherry-stones, as if it had carried home this fruit to its young. It was, outside, of gnaphalium and saddled on a low limb. Could it have been a cherry-bird?

The cladium (?) retains its seeds over the ice, little conical, sharp-pointed, flat-based, dark-brown, shining seeds. I notice some seeds left on a large dock, but none of pars-nips or other um-belliferous plants.

The furrows in the snow on the hillsides look somewhat like this:

\[ Dec. 23. \] The third fine, clear, bright, and rather mild winter day.

1859] FISHES IN A NEWLY DUG POND 41

P. M. — To Ball’s Hill across meadow.

The gardener at Sleepy Hollow says that they caught many small pouts and some pickerel that weighed half a pound (!) in the little pond lately dug there.¹ I think this pond, say a third of an acre, was commenced about three years ago and completed last summer. It has no inlet and a very slight outlet, a shallow ditch that previously existed in the meadow, but in digging they have laid open two or three very deep spring-holes, and the pickerel were found in them. These fishes, no doubt, came up the shallow ditch. This proves that if you dig a pond in a meadow and connect it by the smallest rill or ditch with other water in which fishes live, however far off, the pond will be at once stocked with fishes. They are always ready to extend their territory.

The Great Meadows are more than half covered with ice, and now I see that there was a very slight fall of snow last night. It is only betrayed here, having covered the ice about an eighth of an inch thick, except where there are cracks running quite across the meadow, where the water has oozed a foot or two each way and dissolved the snow, making conspicuous dark lines.

In this slight snow I am surprised to see countless tracks of small birds, which have run over it in every direction from one end to the other of this great meadow since morning. By the length of the hind toe I know them to be snow buntings. Indeed, soon after I see them running still on one side of the meadow.

¹ Vide Oct. 10, 1860.
I was puzzled to tell what they got by running there. Yet I [saw them] stopping repeatedly and picking up something. Of course I thought of those caterpillars which are washed out by a rain and freshet at this season, but I could not find one of them. It rained on the 18th and again the 20th, and over a good part of the meadow the top of the stubble left by the scythe rises a little above the ice, i.e. an inch or two, not enough to disturb a skater. The birds have run here chiefly, visiting each little collection or tuft of stubble, and found their food chiefly in and about this thin stubble. I examined such places a long time and very carefully, but I could not find there the seed of any plant whatever. It was merely the stubble of sedge, with never any head left, and a few cranberry leaves projecting. All that I could find was pretty often (in some places very often) a little black, or else a brown, spider (sometimes quite a large one) motionless on the snow or ice; and therefore I am constrained to think that they eat them, for I saw them running and picking in exactly such places a little way from me, and here were their tracks all around. Yet they are called graminivorous [sic]. Wilson says that he has seen them feeding on the seeds of aquatic plants on the Seneca River, clinging to their heads. I think he means wool-grass. Yet its seeds are too minute and involved in the wool. Though there was wool-grass hereabouts, the birds did not go near it. To be sure, it has but little seed now. If they are so common at the extreme north, where there is so little vegetation but perhaps a great many spiders, is it not likely that they feed on these insects?

It is interesting to see how busy this flock is, exploring this great meadow to-day. If it were not for this slight snow, revealing their tracks but hardly at all concealing the stubble, I should not suspect it, though I might see them at their work. Now I see them running briskly over the ice, most commonly near the shore, where there is most stubble (though very little); and they explore the ground so fast that they are continually changing their ground, and if I do not keep my eye on them I lose the direction. Then here they come, with a stiff *rip* of their wings as they suddenly wheel, and those peculiar rippling notes, flying low quite across the meadow, half a mile even, to explore the other side, though that too is already tracked by them. Not the fisher nor skater range the meadow a thousandth part so much in a week as these birds in a day. They hardly notice me as they come on. Indeed, the flock, flying about as high as my head, divides, and half passes on each side of me. Thus they sport over these broad meadows of ice this pleasant winter day. The spiders lie torpid and plain to see on the snow, and if it is they that they are after they never know what kills them.

I have loitered so long on the meadow that before I get to Ball's Hill those patches of bare ice (where water has oozed out and frozen) already reflect a green light which advertises me of the lateness of the hour. You may walk eastward in the winter afternoon till the ice begins to look green, half to three quarters of an hour before sunset, the sun having sunk behind you to the proper angle. Then it is time to turn your steps home-
ward. Soon after, too, the ice began to boom, or fire its evening gun, another warning that the end of the day was at hand, and a little after the snow reflected a distinct rosy light, the sun having reached the grosser atmosphere of the earth. These signs successively prompt us once more to retrace our steps. Even the fisherman, who perhaps has not observed any sign but that the sun is ready to sink beneath the horizon, is winding up his lines and starting for home; or perhaps he leaves them to freeze in.

In a clear but pleasant winter day, I walk away till the ice begins to look green and I hear it boom, or perhaps till the snow reflects a rosy light.

I ascended Ball's Hill to see the sun set. How red its light at this hour! I covered its orb with my hand, and let its rays light up the fine woollen fibres of my glove. They were a dazzling rose-color. It takes the gross atmosphere of earth to make this redness.

You notice the long and slender light-brown or grayish downy racemes of the clethra seeds about the edges of ponds and pond-holes. The pods contain many very minute chaffy-looking seeds.

You find in the cluster of the one or two rather large flattish seed with a small meat.

The pinweed — the larger (say thymifolia) — pods open, showing their three pretty leather-brown inner divisions open like a little calyx, a third or half containing still the little hemispherical or else triangular reddish-brown seeds. They are hard and abundant. That

1 About same time, as noticed two or three days.

1839] LIATRIS IN WINTER

large juncus (paradoxus-like?) of the river meadows — long white-tailed seed — just rising above the ice is full of seed now, glossy, pale-brown, white-tailed, chaffy to look at. The wool-grass wool is at least half gone, and its minute almost white (?) seed or achenium in it; but a little is left, not more than the thirtieth of an inch long. It looks too minute and involved in the wool for a snow bunting to eat. The above plants are all now more or less recurved, bent by the cold and the blasts of autumn.

The now bare or empty heads of the liatris look somewhat like dusky daisies surmounted by a little button instead of a disk. The last, a stiff, round, parchment-like skin, the base on which its flowerets stood, is pierced by many little round holes just like the end of a thimble, where the cavities are worn through, and it is convex like that. It readily scales off and you can look through it.

I noticed on the 18th that the plumes of the pine which had been covered with snow and glaze and were then thawed and wet with the mist and rain were very much contracted or narrowed, —

not — and this gave a peculiar and more open character to the tree.

Dec. 24. P. M. — To Flint's Pond.
A strong and very cold northwest wind. I think that
the cold winds are oftenest not northwest, but northwest by west. There is, in all, an acre or two in Walden not yet frozen, though half of it has been frozen more than a week.

I measure the blueberry bush on Flint's Pond Island. The five stems are united at the ground, so as to make one round and solid trunk thirty-one inches in circumference, but probably they have grown together there, for they become separate at about six inches above. They may have sprung from different seeds of one two. At three feet from the ground they measure eleven inches, eleven, eleven and a half, eight, and six and a half, or, on an average, nine and a half. I climbed up and found a comfortable seat with my feet four feet above the ground, and there was room for three or four more there, but unfortunately this was not the season for berries.

There were several other clumps of large ones there. One clump close by the former contained twenty-three stems within a diameter of three feet, and their average diameter at three feet from the ground was about two inches. These had not been cut, because they stood on this small island which has little wood beside, and therefore had grown the larger. The two prevailing lichens on them were Parmelia caperata and saxatilis, extending quite around their trunks; also a little of a parmelia more glaucous than the last one, and a little green usnea and a little ramalina.¹

This island appears to be a mere stony ridge three or four feet high, with a very low wet shore on each side.

¹ Vide specimens in drawer.

even as if the water and ice had shoved it up, as at the other end of the pond.

I saw the tracks of a partridge more than half an inch deep in the ice, extending from this island to the shore, she having walked there in the slosh. They were quite perfect and reminded me of bird-tracks in stone. She may have gone there to bud on these blueberry trees. I saw where she spent the night at the bottom of that largest clump, in the snow.

This blueberry grove must be well known to the partridges; no doubt they distinguish their tops from afar.

Perhaps yet larger ones were seen here before we came to cut off the trees. Judging from those whose rings I have counted, the largest of those stems must be about sixty years old. The stems rise up in a winding and zigzag manner, one sometimes resting in the forks of its neighbor. There were many more clumps of large ones there.

Dec. 25. The last our coldest night, as yet. No doubt Walden froze over last night entirely.

P. M. — To Carlisle Bridge on river and meadow.

I now notice a great many flat, annular, glow-worm-like worms frozen in the ice of the Great Meadow, which were evidently washed out of the meadow-grass lately; but they are almost all within the ice, inaccessible to birds; are only in certain parts of the meadow, especially about that island in it, where it is shallow. It is as if they were created only to be frozen, for this must be their annual fate. I see one which seems to
be a true glow-worm. The transparent ice is specked black with them, as if they were cranberry leaves in it. You can hardly get one out now without breaking it, they are so brittle. The snow buntings are about, as usual, but I do not think that they were after these insects the other day.

Standing by the side of the river at Eleazer Davis's Hill,— prepared to pace across it,— I hear a sharp fine *screep* from some bird, which at length I detect amid the button-bushes and willows. The *screep* was a note of recognition meant for me. I saw that it was a novel bird to me. Watching it a long time, with my glass and without it, I at length made out these marks: It was slate-colored above and dirty-white beneath, with a broad and very conspicuous bright-orange crown, which in some lights was red-orange, along the middle of the head; this was bounded on each side by a black segment, beneath which was a yellow or whitish line. There was also some yellow and a black spot on the middle of the closed wings, and yellow within the tail-feathers. The ends of the wings and the tail above were dusky, and the tail forked.

It was so very active that I could not get a steady view of it. It kept drifting about behind the stems of the button-bushes, etc., half the time on the ice, and again on the lower twigs, busily looking for its prey, turning its body this way and that with great restlessness, appearing to hide from me behind the stems of the button-bush and the withered coarse grass. When I

1 No. I compare it with description Sept. 16, 1857, and find it is not the glow-worm, though somewhat like it.

1859] A GOLDEN-CRESTED WREN

came nearest it would utter its peculiar *screep*, or *screep* *screep*, or even *screep* *screep* *screep*. Yet it was unwilling to leave the spot, and when I cornered it, it hopped back within ten feet of me. However, I could see its brilliant crown, even between the twigs of the button-bush and through the withered grass, when I could detect no other part.

It was evidently the golden-crested wren, which I have not made out before. This little creature was contentedly seeking its food here alone this cold winter day on the shore of our frozen river. If it does not visit us often it is strange that it should choose such a season.

I see that the strong wind of yesterday has blown off quite a number of white pine cones, which lie on the ice opposite E. Davis's Hill.

As I crossed Flint's about 4 p. m. yesterday on my way home, when it was bitter cold, the ice cracked with an exceedingly brittle shiver, as if all the pond's crockery had gone to smash, suggesting a high degree of tension, even of dryness,— such as you hear only in very cold weather,— right under my feet, as if I had helped to crack it. It is the report of the artillery which the frost foe has discharged at me. As you are swiftly pacing homeward, taking your way across the pond, with your mittened hands in your pocket and your cap drawn down over your ears, the pond loves to give a rousing crack right under your feet, and you hear the whole pond titter at your surprise. It is bracing its nerves against the unheard-of cold that is at hand, and it snaps some of them. You hear this best where there is considerable depth and breadth of
water,—on ponds rather than on the river and meadow. The cold strains it up so tight that some of the strings snap. On hearing that sound you redouble your haste toward home, where vestal virgins keep alive a little fire still. In the same manner the very surface of the earth cracks in frosty weather.

To-night, when I get just below Davis's Hill the ice displays its green flag and fires its evening gun as a warning to all walkers to return home.

Consider how the pickerel-fisher lives. G., whom I saw at Flint's Pond on the 22d, had been there all day, eaten all the dinner he had brought, and caught only four little fish, hardly enough for his supper, if he should cook them. His companion swore that he would not go a-fishing again for ten years. But G. said nothing of that sort. The next day I found him five miles from here on the other side of the town, with his lines set in the bay of the river off Ball's Hill. There, too, he had been trampling about from hole to hole,—this time alone,—and he had done a trifle better than the day before, for he had caught three little fish and one great one. But instead of giving up here, he concluded to leave his lines in overnight,—since his bait would die if he took them off,—and return the next morning. The next was a bitter cold day, but I hear that Goodwin had some fish to dispose of. Probably not more than a dollar's worth, however.

You may think that you need take no care to preserve your woodland, but every tree comes either from the stump of another tree or from a seed. With the present management, will there always be a fresh stump, or a nut in the soil, think you? Will not the nobler kinds of trees, which bear comparatively few seeds, grow more and more scarce? What is become of our chestnut wood? There are but few stumps for sprouts to spring from, and, as for the chestnuts, there are not enough for the squirrels, and nobody is planting them.

The sweet-gale rises above the ice of the meadow on each side of the river, with its brown clusters of little aments (some of its seeds begun to fall) amid its very dark colored twigs. There is an abundance of bright-yellow resin between its seeds, and the aments, being crushed between the fingers, yield an odoriferous, perhaps terebinthine (piney) fragrance and stain the fingers yellow. It is worth the while, at this season especially, when most plants are inexpressive, to meet with one so pronounced.

I see the now withered spikes of the chelone here and there, in which (when diseased?) a few of its flat winged seeds are still found.

How different are men and women, e.g. in respect to the adornment of their heads! Do you ever see an old or jammed bonnet on the head of a woman at a public meeting? But look at any assembly of men with their hats on; how large a proportion of the hats will be old, weather-beaten, and indented, but I think so much the more picturesque and interesting! One farmer rides by my door in a hat which it does me good to see, there is so much character in it,—so much independence to begin with, and then affection for his old friends, etc., etc. I should not wonder if there were lichens on it. Think of painting a hero in a bran-new
The chief recommendation of the Kossuth hat is that it looks old to start with, and almost as good as new to end with. Indeed, it is generally conceded that a man does not look the worse for a somewhat dilapidated hat. But go to a lyceum and look at the bonnets and various other headgear of the women and girls,—who, by the way, keep their hats on, it being too dangerous and expensive to take them off!! Why, every one looks as fragile as a butterfly’s wings, having just come out of a bandbox,—as it will go into a bandbox again when the lyceum is over. Men wear their hats for use; women theirs for ornament. I have seen the greatest philosopher in the town with what the traders would call “a shocking bad hat” on, but the woman whose bonnet does not come up to the mark is at best a “bluestocking.”

Ladies are in haste to dress as if it were cold or as if it were warm,—though it may not yet be so,—merely to display a new dress.

Again, what an ado women make about trifles! Here is one tells me that she cannot possibly wear india-rubber boots in sloshy weather, because they have heels. Men have been wearing boots with heels from time immemorial; little boys soon learn the art, and are eager to try the experiment. The woodchoppers and teamsters, and the merchants and lawyers, go and come quietly the livelong day, and though they may meet with many accidents, I do not remember any that originated in the heels of their boots. But not so with women; they bolt at once, recklessly as runaway horses, the moment they get the boots on, before they have learned the wonderful art of wearing them. My informant tells me of a friend who has got a white swelling from coming down-stairs imprudently in boots, and of another seriously injured on the meeting-house steps,—for when you deal with steps, then comes the rub,—and of a third who involuntarily dashed down the front stairs, knocked a hat-tree through the side-lights, and broke I do not know how many ribs. Indeed, that quarter-inch obstruction about the heels seems to be an insuperable one to the women.

Dec. 26. P. M.—Skate to Lee’s Bridge and there measure back, by pacing, the breadth of the river. After being uniformly overcast all the forenoon, still and moderate weather, it begins to snow very gradually, at first imperceptibly, this afternoon,—at first I thought I imagined it,—and at length begins to snow in earnest about 6 p. m., but lasts only a few minutes.

I see a brute with a gun in his hand, standing motionless over a musquash-house which he has destroyed. I find that he has visited everyone in the neighborhood of Fair Haven Pond, above and below, and broken them all down, laying open the interior to the water, and then stood watchful, close by, for the poor creature to show its head there for a breath of air. There lies the red carcass of one whose pelt he has taken on the spot, flat on the bloody ice. And for his afternoon’s cruelty that fellow will be rewarded with a ninepence, perchance. When I consider what
are the opportunities of the civilized man for getting
ninepences and getting light, this seems to me more
savage than savages are. Depend on it that whoever
does the musquash's house, his refuge when the
water is frozen thick, he and his family will not come
to a good end. So many of these houses being broken
open, — twenty or thirty I see, — I look into the open
hole, and find in it, in almost every instance, many
pieces of the white root with the little leaf-bud curled
up which I take to be the yellow lily root, — the leaf-
bud unrolled has the same scent with the yellow lily.
There will be half a dozen of these pointed buds, more
or less green, coming to a point at the end of the root:  
Also I see a little coarser, what I take to be a green
leaf-stalk of the pontederia, for I see a little
of the stipules sheathing the stalk from within it? The
first unrolls to something like: 

In one hole there was a large quantity of this root,
and these buds attached or bitten off, the root generally
five or six eighths inch in diameter and one to four
inches long. I think, therefore, that this root must be
their principal food at this time. If you open twenty
cabins you will find it in at least three quarters of
them, and nothing else, unless a very little pontederia
leaf-stem. I see no fresh clamshells in them, and
scarcely any on the ice anywhere on the edge of open

Of course it is yellow lily.

places, nor are they probably deposited in a heap under
the ice. It may be, however, that the shells are opened
in this hole and then dropped in the water near by!!
By eating or killing at least so many lily buds they
must thin out that plant considerably.

Twice this winter I have noticed a musquash floating
in a placid open place in the river when it was frozen
for a mile each side, looking at first like a bit of stump
or frozen meadow, but showing its whole upper outline
from nose to end of tail; perfectly still till he observed
me, then suddenly diving and steering under the ice
toward some cabin’s entrance or other retreat half a
dozen or more rods off.

As some of the tales of our childhood, the invention of
some Mother Goose, will haunt us when we are grown up,
so the race itself still believes in some of the fables with
which its infancy was amused and imposed on, e. g. the
fable of the cranes and pygmies, which learned men en-
deavored to believe or explain in the last century.

Aristotle, being almost if not quite the first to write
systematically on animals, gives them, of course, only
popular names, such as the hunters, fowlers, fishers,
and farmers of his day used. He used no scientific
terms. But he, having the priority and having, as it
were, created science and given it its laws, those popu-
lar Greek names, even when the animal to which they
were applied cannot be identified, have been in great
part preserved and make those learned far-fetched and
commonly unintelligible names of genera to-day, e. g.
’Oλυθωόρον, etc., etc. His History of Animals has thus
become a very storehouse of scientific nomenclature.
Dec. 27. Grows cold in the evening, so that our breaths condense and freeze on the windows and in the morning,—

Dec. 28.—they are like ground glass (covered with frost), and we cannot see out. Sleds creak or squeak along the dry and hard snow-path. Crows come near the houses. These are among the signs of cold weather.

The open places in the river yesterday between Lee’s Bridge and Carlisle Bridge were: 1st, below Nut Meadow Brook, a rather shoal place; 2d, at Clamshell Bend, longer; 3d, at Hubbard’s Bath Bend; (3½, was there not a little open at ash tree? 1); 4th, I think there was a short opening at Lee’s Bend; 5th, from Monroe’s to Merrick’s pasture; 6th, below junction to bridge; 7th, below French’s Rock; 8th, Barrett’s Bar. N. B.—Did not observe or examine between this and the shoal below the Holt. 3 It was no doubt open at the last place and perhaps more. There was no opening between the Holt shoal and Carlisle Bridge, for there was none on the 25th.

The most solidly frozen portions are the broad and straight reaches. All broad bays are frozen hard. When you come to where the river is winding, there is shallower and swifter water—and open places as yet.

1 Yes.
2 Or, rather, I think it was thinly frozen?
3 Perhaps ice between 8th and ash opening; 9th, west side Holt Bend; 10th, north side ditto; 11th, east side ditto; 12th, Holt Ford was open almost round the Holt. N. B.—But slight intervals between the last four.

Dec. 29. A very cold morning,—about —15° at 8 A. M. at our door.

I went to the river immediately after sunrise. I could [see] a little greenness in the ice, and also a little rose-color from the snow, but far less than before the sun set. Do both these phenomena require a gross atmosphere? Apparently the ice is greenest when the sun is twenty or thirty minutes above the horizon.

From the smooth open place behind Cheney’s a great deal of vapor was rising to the height of a dozen feet or more, as from a boiling kettle. This, then, is a phenomenon of quite cold weather. I did not notice it yesterday afternoon. These open places are a sort of
breathing-holes of the river. When I look toward the sun, now that they are smooth, they are hardly to be distinguished from the ice. Just as cold weather reveals the breath of a man, still greater cold reveals the breath of, i.e., warm, moist air over, the river.

I collect this morning the little shining black seeds of the amaranth, raised above the snow in its solid or dense spike.

P. M. — To Ball's Hill, skating.

Walked back, measuring the river and ice by pacing.¹

The first open place in the main stream in Concord, or no doubt this side Carlisle Bridge, coming upstream, were [sic]: —

1st, Holt Ford, 10 rods by 1 (extreme width).
2d, east side Holt Bend, near last, 8 by 1½.
3d, west side Holt Bend (midway), 3 by ½.
(On the 28th it must have been open nearly all round to Holt Bend.)
4th, Barrett's Bar, 42 rods by 6 at west end, where it reaches 12 rods above ford: extends down the north side very narrow to the rock and only little way down the south side; can walk in middle half-way.
5th, a bar above Monument, 10 by 3.
6th, from Hunt's Bridge to Island, or say 54 rods by 4.
7th, from 8 below willow-row to 5 below boat's place, or 80+ rods by 3.
This as far as I looked to-day, but no doubt the next was: —
8th, just above ash tree, probably three or four rods long.

¹ Feb. 15, 1860, when the river was much more open than Dec. 29, 1859, it was scarcely open at the narrowest place above Bound Rock, only puffed up in the channel, and the first decided opening was at Rice's Bend; all below Bound Rock to Fair Haven Pond, etc., was quite solid. Hence the statements below are true.

² Proved by looking the 30th.

This is the last in Concord. (I do not include the small openings which are to be found now at bridges.) The longest opening is that below my boat's place; next, at junction next Barrett's Bar; next, either Clamshell or Hubbard's Bath. But for area of water that below the junction is considerably the largest of all.¹

When I went to walk it was about 10° above zero, and when I returned, 1°. I did not notice any vapor rising from the open places, as I did in the morning, when it was -16° and also -6°. Therefore the cold must be between +1° and -6° in order that vapor may rise from these places. It takes a greater degree of cold to show the breath of the river than that of man. Apparently, the river is not enough warmer than the air to permit of its rising into it, i.e., evaporating, unless the air is of a very low temperature. When the air is say four or five degrees below, the water being +32°, then there is a visible evaporation. Is there the same difference, or some 40°, between the heat of the human breath and that air in which the moisture in the breath becomes visible in vapor? This has to do with the dew-point. Next, what makes the water of those open places thus warm? and is it any warmer than elsewhere? There is considerable heat reflected from a sandy bottom where the water is shallow, and at these places it is always sandy and shallow, but I doubt if this actually makes the water warmer, though it may
melt the more opaque ice which absorbs it. The fact that Holt Bend, which is deep, is late to freeze, being narrow, seems to prove it to be the swiftness of the water and not reflected heat that prevents freezing. The water is apparently kept warm under the ice and down next to the unfrozen earth, and by a myriad springs from within the bowels of the earth.

I notice that, on the thin black ice lately formed on these open places, the breath of the water has made its way up through and is frozen into a myriad of little rosettes, which nearly cover its surface and make it white as with snow. You see the same on pretty thick ice. This occurs whenever the weather is coldest in the night or very early in the morning. Also, where these open places have lately closed, the ice for long distances over the thread of the river will often be heaved up roofwise a foot or more high and a rod wide, apparently pushed up by the heat of this breath beneath.

As I come home, I observe much thin ice, just formed as it grows colder, drifting in gauze-like masses down these open places, just as I used to see it coming down the open river when it began to freeze. In this case it is not ice which formed last night, but which is even now forming.

The musquash make a good deal of use of these open spaces. I have seen one four times in three several places this winter, or within three weeks. They improve all the open water they can get. They occasionally leave their clamshells upon the edges of them now. This is all the water to reflect the sky now, whether amber or purple. I sometimes see the musquash dive in the midst of such a placid purple lake.

Where the channel is broad the water is more sluggish and the ice accordingly thick, or it will answer just as well if the channel is deep, i.e., if its capacity is the same, though it be very narrow. The ice will be firm there too, e.g., at Ash Tree Rock (though it was lately open off the willows eight or ten rods above, being less deep and narrower); and even at the deeper hole next below the opening is not where it is deep, though very narrow, but half a dozen rods below, where it is much wider.

To-night I notice the rose-color in the snow and the green in the ice at the same time, having been looking out for them.

The clouds were very remarkable this cold afternoon, about twenty minutes before sunset, consisting of very long and narrow white clouds converging in the horizon (melon-rind-wise) both in the west and east. They looked like the skeletons and backbones of celestial sloths, being pointed at each end, or even like porcupine quills or ivory darts sharp at each end. So long and slender, but pronounced, with a manifest backbone and marrow. It looked as if invisible giants were darting them from all parts of the sky at the setting sun. These were long darts indeed. Well underneath was an almost invisible rippled vapor whose grain was exactly at right angles with the former, all over the sky, yet it was so delicate that it did not prevent your seeing the former at all. Its filmy arrows all pointed athwart
the others. I know that in fact those slender white cloud sloths were nearly parallel across the sky, but how much handsomer are the clouds because the sky is made to appear concave to us! How much more beautiful an arrangement of the clouds than parallel lines! At length those white arrows and bows, slender and sharp as they were, gathering toward a point in the west horizon, looked like flames even, forked and darting flames of ivory-white, and low in the west there was a piece of rainbow but little longer than it was broad.

Taking the river in Concord in its present condition, it is, with one exception, only the shallowest places that are open. Suppose there were a dozen places open a few days ago, if it has grown much colder since, the deepest of them will be frozen over; and the shallowest place in all in Concord is the latest of all to freeze, e.g., at the junction. So, if you get into the river at this season, it is most likely to be at the shallowest places, they being either open or most thinly frozen over. That is one consolation for you.

The exception is on the west side of the Holt (and the depth is one side from the opening), but that is on account of the narrowness of the river there. Indeed, the whole of Holt Bend is slow to freeze over, on account of the great narrowness and consequent swiftness of the stream there; but the two narrowest points of it are among the first to freeze over, because they are much the deepest, the rush of waters being either below or above them, where it is much shallower, though broader.

Dec. 30. I awake to find it snowing fast, but it slackens in a few hours. Perhaps seven or eight inches have fallen,—the deepest snow yet, and almost quite level. At first the flakes (this forenoon) were of middling size. At noon, when it was leaving off, they were of a different character. I observed them on my sleeve,—little slender spicules about one tenth of an inch long, little dry splinters, sometimes two forking, united at one end, or two or three lying across one another, quite dry and fine; and so it concluded.

P. M.—Going by Dodd’s, I see a shrike perched on the tip-top of the topmost upright twig of an English cherry tree before his house, standing square on the topmost bud, balancing himself by a slight motion of his tail from time to time. I have noticed this habit of the bird before. You would suppose it inconvenient for so large a bird to maintain its footing there. Scared by my passing [?] in the road, it flew off, and I thought I would see if it alighted on a similar place. It flew toward a young elm, whose higher twigs were much more slender, though not quite so upright as
those of the cherry, and I thought he might be excused if he alighted on the side of one; but no, to my surprise, he alighted without any trouble upon the very top of one of the highest of all, and looked around as before.

I spoke to the barber to-day about that whirl of hair on the occiput of most (if not all) men's heads. He said it was called the crown, and was of a spiral form, a beginning spiral, when cut short; that some had two, one on the right, the other on the left, close together. I said that they were in a sense double-headed. He said that it was an old saying that such were bred under two crowns.

I noticed the other day that even the golden-crested wren was one of the winter birds which have a black head,—in this case divided by yellow.

Those who depend on skylights found theirs but a dim, religious light this forenoon and hitherto, owing to the thickness of snow resting on them. Also cellar windows are covered, and cellars are accordingly darkened.

What a different phenomenon a musquash now from what it is in summer! Now if one floats, or swims, its whole back out, or crawls out upon the ice at one of those narrow oval water spaces in the river, some twenty rods long (in calm weather, smooth mirrors), in a broad frame of white ice or yet whiter snow, it is seen at once, as conspicuous (or more so) as a fly on a window-pane or a mirror. But in summer, how many hundreds crawl along the weedy shore or plunge in the long river unsuspected by the boatman! Even if the musquash is not there I often see the open clam-

shell on the edge of the ice, perfectly distinct a long way off, and he is betrayed. However, the edges of these silver lakes,—winter lakes, late freezers, swift-waters, musquash mirrors, breathing-holes,—to-day, after the morning's snow, are, by the water flowing back over the thin edges and staining the snow, a distinct yellow (brown-yellow) tinge for a rod or two on every side. This shows what and how much coloring matter there is in the river water. I doubt if it would be so at Walden. No doubt, however, we here get the impurer parts of the river, the scum as it were, repeatedly washed over at these places.

Dec. 31. Thermometer at 7.45 a.m., -1°, yet even more vapor is rising from the open water below my boat's place than on the 29th, when it was -15°. The wind is southwesterly, i.e. considerably south of west. This shows that fog over the water is a phenomenon of the morning chiefly, as well in winter as in summer. You will see a fog over the water in a winter morning, though the temperature may be considerably higher than at midday when no fog is seen.

There has evidently been a slight fog generally in the night, and the trees are white with it. The crystals are directed southwesterly, or toward the wind. I think that these crystals are particularly large and numerous, and the trees (willows) particularly white, next to the open water spaces, where the vapor even now is abundantly rising. Is this fog in the night occasioned by the cold earth condensing the moisture which a warmer wind has brought to us?
At 10 a.m., thermometer 18°. I see no vapor from the water.

Crows yesterday flitted silently, if not ominously, over the street, just after the snow had fallen, as if men, being further within, were just as far off as usual. This is a phenomenon of both cold weather and snowy. You hear nothing; you merely see these black apparitions, though they come near enough to look down your chimney and scent the boiling pot, and pass between the house and barn.

Just saw moved a white oak, Leighton’s, some five inches in diameter, with a frozen mass of earth some five or five and a half feet in diameter and two plus thick. It was dug round before the frost, — a trench about a foot wide and filled with stalks, etc., — and now pried up with levers till on a level with the ground, then dragged off. It would not have cost half so much if a sloping path had been dug to it on one side so that the drag could have been placed under it in the hole and another dug at the hole it was removed to, — unless the last were planked over and it was dragged on to it.

They were teaming ice before sunrise (from Sam Barrett’s Pond) on the morning of the 29th, when the thermometer was 16 or 20 degrees below. Cold work, you would say. Yet some say it is colder in thawing weather, if you have to touch the ice.

P. M. — To the sweet-gale meadow or swamp up Assabet.

I notice that one or more of the terminal leaflets remain on the branches of the flowering fern commonly.

See where probably a shrike (do I ever see a small hawk in winter?) has torn a small bird in pieces and its slate-colored down and its feathers have been blown far and wide over the snow.

There is a great deal of hemlock scales scattered over the recent snow (at the Hemlocks), evidently by birds on the trees, and the wind has blown them southeast, — scales, seeds, and cones, — and I see the tracks of small birds that have apparently picked the seeds from the snow also. It may have been done by gold-finches. I see a tree sparrow hopping close by, and perhaps they eat them on the snow. Some of the seeds have blown at least fifteen rods southeast. So the hemlock seed is important to some birds in the winter.

All the sound witch-hazel nuts that I examine are empty.

How vain to try to teach youth, or anybody, truths! They can only learn them after their own fashion, and when they get ready. I do not mean by this to condemn our system of education, but to show what it amounts to. A hundred boys at college are drilled in physics and metaphysics, languages, etc. There may be one or two in each hundred, prematurely old perchance, who approaches the subject from a similar point of view to his teachers, but as for the rest, and the most promising, it is like agricultural chemistry to so many Indians. They get a valuable drilling, it may be, but they do not learn what you profess to teach. They at most only learn where the arsenal is, in case they should ever want to use any of its weapons. The young men, being young, necessarily listen to the lecturer in history, just as they do to the singing of a bird.
They expect to be affected by something he may say. It is a kind of poetic pabulum and imagery that they get. Nothing comes quite amiss to their mill.

I think it will be found that he who speaks with most authority on a given subject is not ignorant of what has been said by his predecessors. He will take his place in a regular order, and substantially add his own knowledge to the knowledge of previous generations.

The oblong-conical sterile flower-buds or catkins of the sweet-gale, half a dozen at the end of each black twig, dark-red, oblong-conical, spotted with black, and about half an inch long, are among the most interesting buds of the winter. The leaf-buds are comparatively minute. The white edges of their scales and their regular red and black colors make the imbrication of the bud very distinct. The sterile and fertile flowers are not only on distinct plants, but they commonly grow in distinct patches. Sometimes I detect the one only for a quarter of a mile, and then the other begins to prevail, or both may be found together. It grows along the wet edge of banks and the river and in open swamps.

The mullein seeds are full of minute brown seeds, which a jar sprinkles over the snow, and [they] look black there; also the primrose, of larger brown seeds, which rattle out in the same manner.

One of the two large docks, perhaps *obtusifolius*, commonly holds its seeds now, but they are very ready to fall. (Mainly one-seeded; *vide* three-ribbed goldenrod meadow.)
clusiveness of the headquarters. Do you suppose they were a race of consumptives and dyspeptics who invented Grecian mythology and poetry? The poet's words are, "You would almost say the body thought!"
I quite say it. I trust we have a good body then.