III

FEBRUARY, 1860

(ÆT. 42)

Feb. 1. 2 P. M. — 5°. A cold day.

Two or three inches of dry snow last night.

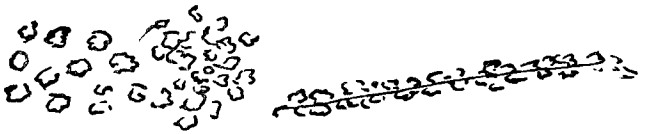
Grows colder apace toward night. Frost forms on windows.

Feb. 2. 6° below at about 8 A. M.

Clock has stopped. Teams squeak.

2 P. M. — To Fair Haven Pond.

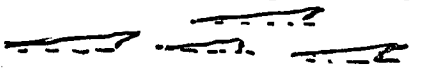
The river, which was breaking up, is frozen over again. The new ice over the channel is of a yellow tinge, and is covered with handsome rosettes two or three inches in diameter where the vapor which rose through froze and crystallized. This new ice for forty rods together is thickly covered with these rosettes, often as thick as snow, an inch deep, and sometimes in ridges like frozen froth three inches high. Sometimes they are



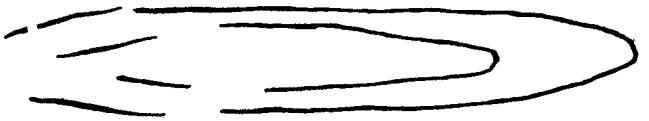
in a straight line along a crack. The frozen breath of the river at a myriad breathing-holes.

A thaw began the 7th of January, and it was mild and thawing most of the time for the rest of that month; but with February we have genuine winter again. Almost all the openings in the river are closed again, and the new ice is covered with rosettes.

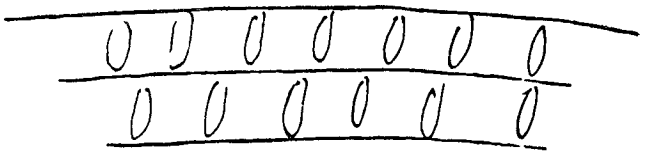
It blowed considerably yesterday, though it is very still to-day, and the light, dry snow, especially on the meadow ice and the river, was remarkably plowed and drifted by it, and now presents a very wild and arctic scene. Indeed, no part of our scenery is ever more arctic than the river and its meadows now, though the snow was only some three inches deep on a level. It is cold and perfectly still, and you walk over a level snowy tract. It is a sea of white waves of nearly uniform shape and size. Each drift is a low, sharp promontory directed toward the northwest, and showing which way the wind blowed with occasional small patches of bare ice amid them. It is exactly as if you walked over a solid sea where the waves rose about two feet high. These promontories have a general resemblance to one another. Many of them are perfect tongues of snow more or less curving and sharp.



Commonly the wind has made a little hollow in the snow directly behind this tongue, it may be to the ice, spoon-shaped or like a tray, — if small, a cradle in the snow. Again it is a complete canoe, the tongue being its bows.

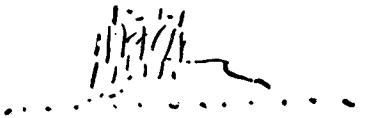


The many distinct firm ridges on a slope of the drift — as if the edges of so many distinct layers cropped out — form undulating parallel lines of great interest. Sometimes yet smaller hollows or cradles, not reaching to the ice and at right angles with the low ridges of the drift, remind you of panelling. Again these oval hollows produce a regular reticulation.



One hour you have bare ice; the next, a level counterpane of snow; and the next, the wind has tossed and sculptured it into these endless and varied forms. It is such a scene as Boothia Felix may present, — if that is any wilder than Concord. I go sliding over the few bare spots, getting a foothold for my run on the very thin sloping and ridged snow. The snow is not thus drifted in fields and meadows generally, but chiefly where there was an icy foundation on which it slid readily. The whole of the snow has evidently shifted, perhaps several times, and you cannot tell whether some slight ridges an inch high are the foundation of a drift just laid or the relics of one removed. Behind

a tuft of bushes it is collected deep, thus:



I forgot to say that all the ice between the rosettes was thinly sprinkled with very slender grain-like spiculæ, sometimes two together.

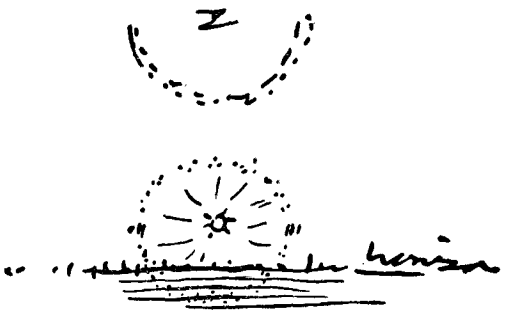
The sky was all overcast, but the sun's place quite distinct.

The cloud about the sun had a cold, dry, windy look, as if the cloud, elsewhere homogeneous cold slaty, were there electrified and arranged like iron-filings about the sun, its fibres, so to speak, more or less raying from the sun as a centre.

About 3 P. M. I noticed a distinct fragment of rainbow, about as long as wide, on each side of the sun, one north and the [other] south and at the same height above the horizon with the sun, all in a line parallel with the horizon; and, as I thought, there was a slight appearance of a bow.

The sun-dogs, if that is their name, were not so distinctly bright as an ordinary rainbow, but were plainly orange-yellow and a peculiar light violet-blue, the last color looking like a hole in the cloud, or a thinness through which you saw the sky. This lasted

perhaps half an hour, and then a bow about the sun became quite distinct, but only those parts where the sun-dogs were were distinctly rainbow-tinted, the rest being merely reddish-brown and the clouds within finely raying from the sun more or less. But higher up, so that its centre would have been in the zenith



or apparently about in the zenith, was an arc of a distinct rainbow. A rainbow right overhead. Is this what is called a parhelion?

It is remarkable that the straw-colored sedge of the meadows, which in the fall is one of the least noticeable colors, should, now that the landscape is mostly covered with snow, be perhaps the most noticeable of all objects in it for its color, and an agreeable contrast to the snow.

I frequently see where oak leaves, absorbing the heat of the sun, have sunk into the ice an inch in depth and afterward been blown out, leaving a perfect type of the leaf with its petiole and lobes sharply cut, with perfectly

upright sides, so that I can easily tell the species of oak that made it. Sometimes these moulds have been evenly filled with snow while the ice is dark, and you have the figure of the leaf in white.

I see where some meadow mouse — if not mole — just came to the surface of the snow enough to break it with his back for three or four inches, then put his head out and at once withdrew it.

We walked, as usual, on the fresh track of a fox,  peculiarly pointed, and sometimes the mark of two toe-nails in front separate from the track of the foot in very thin snow. And as we were kindling a fire on the pond by the side of the island, we saw the fox himself at the inlet of the river. He was busily examining along the sides of the pond by the button-bushes and willows, smelling in the snow. Not appearing to regard us much, he slowly explored along the shore of the pond thus, half-way round it; at Pleasant Meadow, evidently looking for mice (or moles?) in the grass of the bank, smelling in the shallow snow there amid the stubble, often retracing his steps and pausing at particular spots. He was eagerly searching for food, intent on finding some mouse to help fill his empty stomach. He had a blackish tail and blackish feet. Looked lean and stood high. The tail peculiarly large for any creature to carry round. He stepped daintily about, softly, and is more to the manor born than a dog. It was a very arctic scene this cold day, and I suppose he would hardly have ventured out in a warm one.

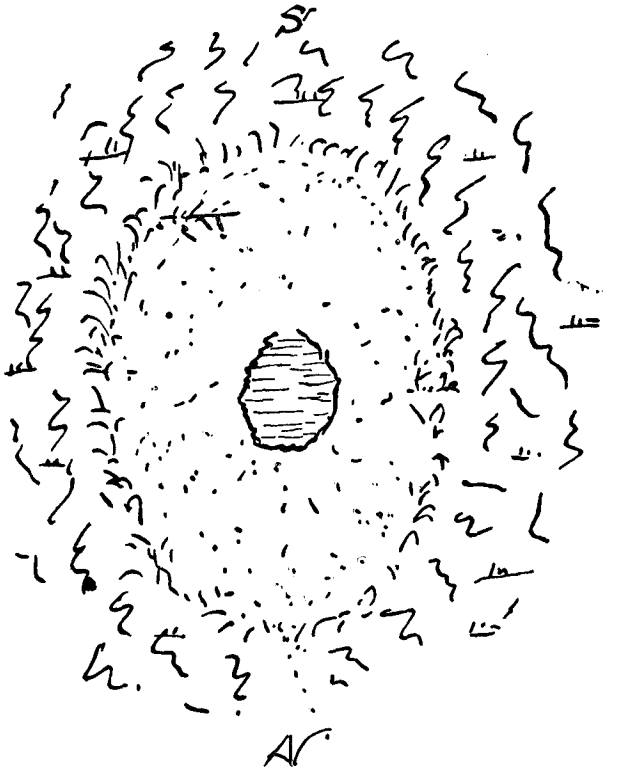
The fox seems to get his living by industry and perseverance. He runs smelling for miles along the most favorable routes, especially the edge of rivers and ponds, until he smells the track of a mouse beneath the snow or the fresh track of a partridge, and then follows it till he comes upon his game. After exploring thus a great many quarters, after hours of fruitless search, he succeeds. There may be a dozen partridges resting in the snow within a square mile, and his work is simply to find them with the aid of his nose. Compared with the dog, he affects me as high-bred, unmixed. There is nothing of the mongrel in him. He belongs to a noble family which has seen its best days, — a younger son. Now and then he starts, and turns and doubles on his track, as if he heard or scented danger. (I watch him through my glass.) He does not mind us at the distance of only sixty rods. I have myself seen one place where a mouse came to the surface to-day in the snow. Probably he has smelt out many such galleries. Perhaps he seizes them *through* the snow.

I had a transient vision of one mouse this winter, and that the first for a number of years.

I have seen a good many of those snails left on the ice during the late thaw, as the caterpillars, etc., were.

Feb. 3. 3 P. M. — To Gowing's Swamp.

I accurately pace the swamp in two directions and find it to be shaped thus: —



Gowing's Swamp. (Scale of forty paces to an inch)

When I read some of the rules for speaking and writing the English language correctly, — as that a sentence must never end with a particle, — and perceive how implicitly even the learned obey it, I think —

Any fool can make a rule
And every fool will mind it.

Feb. 5. P. M. — Up Assabet.

2 P. M., 40°.

I see where crows have pecked the tufts of cladonia lichens which peep out of the snow, pulling them to pieces, no doubt looking for worms. Also have eaten the frozen-thawed apples under the trees, tracking all the ground over there.

February 1st, though so cold and the snow so dry, as it blowed pretty hard, was a day of drift behind northerly walls, and when those shell-like drifts were formed, as well as the wild drifts of Hubbard's meadow described on the 3d.

I see at the Assabet stone bridge where, apparently, one or two otters travelled about on the ice last night in the thin snow. The river is open eight or ten rods there, and I noticed their tracks all about the river and close to the edge of the ice, thin as it was, for a dozen rods above and below the bridge. At first, being at a distance, I thought them dog-tracks, but I might have known that no dogs would ever have run about so there, on that thin ice and so near the edge of it. They were generally like this, each four being from fifteen to twenty-four inches apart. Occasionally the track was somewhat like a rabbit's. I saw where one had apparently dragged himself along the ice. They had entered the water in many places, also travelled along under the slanting ice next the bank long distances. They were evidently attracted by that open water. There was no distinct sliding place.

Coming home last night in the twilight, I recognized a neighbor a dozen rods off by his walk or carriage, though it was so dark that I could not see a single feature of his person. Indeed, his person was all covered up excepting his face and hands, and I could not possibly have distinguished these at this distance from another man's. Nor was it owing to any peculiarity in his dress, for I should have known him though he had had on a perfectly new suit. It was because the man within the clothes moved them in a peculiar manner that I knew him thus at once at a distance and in the twilight. He made a certain figure in any clothes he might wear, and moved in it in a peculiar manner. Indeed, we have a very intimate knowledge of one another; we see through thick and thin; spirit meets spirit. A man hangs out innumerable signs by which we may know him. So, last summer, I knew another neighbor half a mile off up the river, though I did not see him, by the manner in which the breath from his lungs and mouth, *i. e.* his voice, made the air strike my ear. In that manner he communicated himself to all his acquaintance within a diameter of one mile (if it were all up and down the river). So I remember to have been sure once in a very dark night who was preceding me on the sidewalk, — though I could not see him, — by the sound of his tread. I was surprised to find that I knew it.

And to-day, seeing a peculiar very long track of a man in the snow, who has been along up the river this morning, I guessed that it was George Melvin, because it was accompanied by a hound's track. There was a

thin snow on the ice, and I observed that he not only furrowed the snow for a foot before he completed his step, but that the (toe) of his track was always indefinite, as if his boot had been worn out and prolonged at the toe. I noticed that I and my companion made a clear and distinct track at the toe, but when I experimented, and tried to make a track like this by not lifting my feet but gliding and partly scuffing along, I found myself walking just like Melvin, and that perfectly convinced me that it was he.[1]

We have no occasion to wonder at the instinct of a dog. In these last two instances I surpassed the instinct of the dog.

It may always be a question how much or how little of a man goes to any particular act. It is not merely by taking time and by a conscious effort that he betrays himself. A man is revealed, and a man is concealed, in a myriad unexpected ways; *e. g.*, I can hardly think of a more effectual way of disguising neighbors to one another than by stripping them naked.

Feb. 6. To Cambridge.

A rainy day.

Feb. 7. 2 P. M. — To Walden and Flint's.

Thermometer 43°. Fair, with many clouds, mostly obscuring the sun. Wind northwest, growing cooler.

The sand has begun to flow on the west side of the cut, the east being bare. Nature has some bowels at last.

[1] I told him of it afterward, and he gave a corresponding account of himself.

I notice over the ditch near the Turnpike bridge, where water stands an inch or two deep over the ice, that the dust which had blown on to the ice from the road is now very regularly and handsomely distributed over the ice by the water, *i. e.*, is broken into prettily shaped small black figures equally distant from one another, — so that what was a deformity is now a beauty. Some kinds of worms or caterpillars have apparently crawled over it and left their trails on it, white or clear trails.

Feb. 8. 2 P. M. — Up river to Fair Haven Hill.

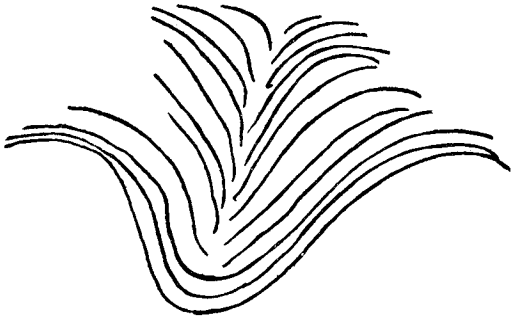
Thermometer 43. 40° and upward may be called a *warm* day in the winter.

We have had much of this weather for a month past, reminding us of spring. February may be called *earine* (springlike). There is a peculiarity in the air when the temperature is thus high and the weather fair, at this season, which makes sounds more clear and pervading, as if they trusted themselves abroad further in this genial state of the air. A different sound comes to my ear now from iron rails which are struck, as from the cawing crows, etc. Sound is not abrupt, piercing, or rending, but softly sweet and musical. It will take a yet more genial and milder air before the bluebird's warble can be heard.

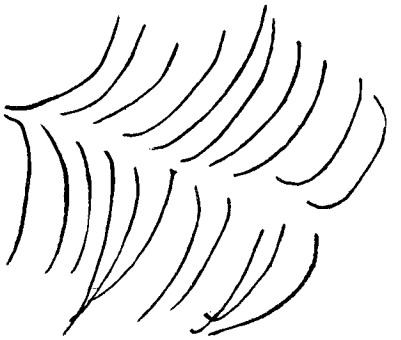
Walking over Hubbard's broad meadow on the softened ice, I admire the markings in it. The more interesting and prevailing ones now appearing ingrained and giving it a more or less marbled look, — one, what you may call *checkered* marbling (?),

consisting of small polygonal figures three quarters

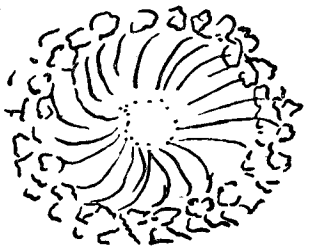
[of an inch in] diameter, bounded by whitish lines more or less curved within the ice, and apparently covered with an entire thin surface ice, and so on for rods (these when five or six inches wide make a mackerel-sky ice); the other apparently passing from this into a sort of fibrous structure of waving lines, hair-like or rather flame-like, — call it *phlogistic:* — only



far more regular and beautiful than I can draw. Sometimes like perhaps a cassowary's feathers, the branches being very long and fine. This fibrous or phlogistic structure is evidently connected with the flow of the surface water, for I see some old holes, now smoothly frozen over, where these rays have flowed from all sides into the hole in the midst of the checked ice,



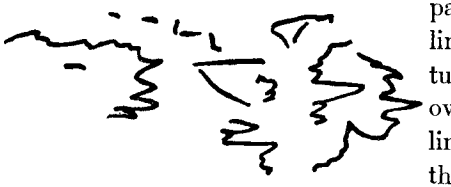
making a circular figure which reminded me of a jellyfish: only far more beautiful than this. The whitish lines which bound these figures and form the parallel fibres are apparently lines of fine bubbles more dense than elsewhere.



I am not sure that these markings always imply a double or triple ice, *i. e.* a thinner surface ice, which contains them.

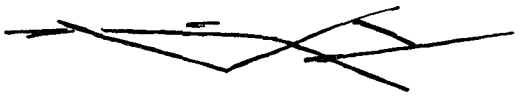
The ice is thus marked under my feet somewhat as the heavens overhead; there is both the mackerel sky and the fibrous flame or asbestos-like form in both. The mackerel spotted or marked ice is very common, and also reminds me of the reticulations of the pickerel.

I see some quite thin ice which had formed on puddles on the ice, now soaked through, and in these are very interesting figures bounded by straight and crinkled particularly white lines. I find, on turning the ice over, that these lines correspond to the raised edges of and between bubbles which have occupied a place in the ice, *i. e.* upward [?] in it.



Then there is occasionally, where puddles on the ice have frozen, that triangular rib-work of crystals, — a beautiful casting in alto[*sic*]-relievo of low crystal prisms with one edge up, — so meeting and cross-

ing as to form triangular and other figures. Shining splinters in the sun. Giving a rough hold to the feet.



One would think that the forms of ice-crystals must include all others.

I see hundreds of oak leaves which have sunk deep into the ice. Here is a scarlet oak leaf which has sunk one inch into the ice, and the leaf still rests at the bottom of this mould. Its stem and lobes and all their bristly points are just as sharply cut there as is the leaf itself, fitting the mould closely and tightly, and, there being a small hole or two in the leaf, the ice stands up through them half an inch high, like so many sharp tacks. Indeed, the leaf is sculptured thus in bas-relief [*sic*], as it were, as sharply and exactly as it could be done by the most perfect tools in any material. But as time has elapsed since it first began to sink into the ice, the upper part of this mould is enlarged by melting more or less, and often shows the outline of the leaf exaggerated and less sharp and perfect. You see these leaves at various depths in the ice, — many quite concealed by new ice formed over them, for water flows into the mould and thus a cast of it is made in ice. So fragments of rushes and sedge and cranberry leaves have on all sides sunk into the ice in like manner. The smallest and lightest-colored object that falls on the ice begins thus at once to sink through it, the sun as it were driving it; and a great many, no doubt, go quite through.

This is especially common after a long warm spell like this. I see, even, that those colored ridges of froth which have bounded the water that overflowed the ice, since they contain most of the impurities or coloring matter, sink into the ice accordingly, making rough furrows an inch or more deep often.

The proper color of water is perhaps best seen when it overflows white ice.

Pliny could express a natural wonder.

About an old boat frozen in, I see a great many little gyrinus-shaped bugs  swimming about in the water above the ice.

Feb. 9. A hoar frost on the ground this morning — for the open fields are mostly bare — was quite a novel sight. I had noticed some vapor in the air late last evening.

Feb. 10. A very strong and a cold northwest wind to-day, shaking the house, — thermometer at 11 A. M., 14°, — consumes wood and yet we are cold, and drives the smoke down the chimney.

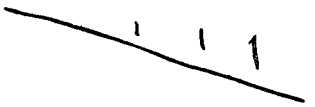
I see that Wheildon's pines are rocking and showing their silvery under sides as last spring, — their first awakening, as it were.

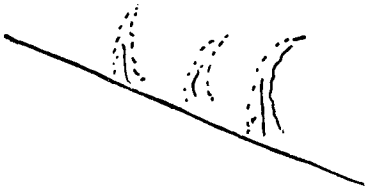
P. M. — The river, where open, is very black, as usual when the waves run high, for each wave casts a shadow.[1] Theophrastus notices that the roughened water is black, and says that it is because fewer rays fall on it and the light is dissipated.

It is a day for those rake and horn icicles; the water,

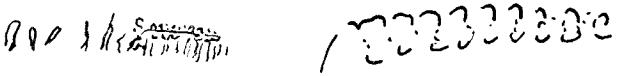
[1] Call it Black Water.

dashing against the southeast shores where they chance to be open, *i. e.* free of ice, and blown a rod inland, freezes to the bushes, forming rakes and oftener horns. If twigs project above the ice-belt thus: the water freezes over them thus: —





The very grass stubble is completely encased for a rod in width along the shore, and the trunks of trees for two or three feet up. Any sprig lying on the edge of the ice is completely crusted. Sometimes the low button-bush twigs with their few remaining small dark balls, and also the drooping corymbs of the late rose hips, are completely encased in an icicle, and you see their bright scarlet reflected through the ice in an exaggerated manner. If a hair is held up above the ice where this spray is blowing, it is sufficient to start a thick icicle rake or horn, for the ice forming around it becomes at once its own support, and gets to be two or three inches thick. Where the open water comes within half a dozen feet of the shore, the spray has blown over the intervening ice and covered the grass and stubble, looking like a glaze, — countless loby fingers and horns over some fine stubble core, — and when the grass or stem is horizontal you



have a rake. Just as those great organ-pipe icicles

that drip from rocks have an annular structure growing

downward, so these on the horizontal stubble and weeds, when directed to the point toward which the wind was blowing; *i. e.*, they grow thus southeast.

Then there is the thickened edge of the ice, like a cliff, on the southeast sides of openings against which the wind has dashed the waves, especially on the southeast side of broad meadows.

No finer walking in any respect than on our broad meadow highway in the winter, when covered with bare ice. If the ice is wet, you slip in rubbers; but when it is dry and cold, rubbers give you a firm hold, and you walk with a firm and elastic step. I do not know of any more exhilarating walking than up or down a broad field of smooth ice like this in a cold, glittering winter day when your rubbers give you a firm hold on the ice.

I see that the open places froze last night only on the windward side, where they were less agitated, the waves not yet running so high there.

A little snow, however, even the mere shavings or dust of ice made by skaters, hinders walking in rubbers very much, for though the rubber may give a good hold on clear ice, when you step on a little of the ice dust or snow you slide on that.

Those little gyrinus-shaped bugs of the 8th, that had come out through a crevice in the ice about a boat frozen in, and were swimming about in the shallow

water above the ice, I see are all gone now that that water is frozen, — have not been frozen in; so they must have returned back under the ice when it became cold, and this shows that they were not forced up accidentally in the first place, but attracted by the light and warmth, probably as those minnows were some time ago. That is, in a thaw in the winter some water-insects — beetles, etc. — will come up through holes in the ice and swim about in the sun.

Feb. 11. *Saturday.* 2 P. M., 20°.

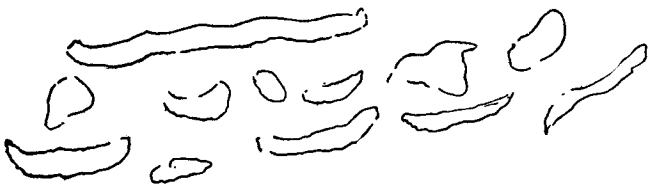
Feb. 12. *Sunday.* 2 P. M., 22°.

Walk up river to Fair Haven Pond. Clear and windy, — northwest.

About a quarter of an inch of snow fell last evening. This scarcely colors that part of the ground that was bare, and on all icy surfaces which are exposed to the sweep of the wind it is already distributed very regularly in thin drifts. It lies on the ice in waving lines or in lunar or semicircular, often spread-eagle, patches with very regular intervals, quite like the openings lately seen in the river when breaking up. The whole surface of the icy field is thus watered. That is, it is not collected in one place more than another, but very evenly distributed in these patches over the whole surface. I speak of what lies on the open ice. It comes flowing like a vapor from the northwest, low over the ice and much faster than a man walks, and a part is ever catching and lodging here and there and building a low drift, the northwest side of which will be abrupt

with a sharp, beetling edge an inch or a half-inch high. No doubt these drifts are constantly changing their ground or rolling over. I see now that this vapor-like snow-dust is really sometimes blown up six or eight feet into the air, though for the most part it merely slides low over the ice.

The greater part of this snow is lodged a foot deep amid the button-bushes, and there it continues to accumulate as long as the wind blows strong.



In this cold, clear, rough air from the northwest we walk amid what simple surroundings! Surrounded by our thoughts or imaginary objects, living in our *ideas*, not one in a million ever sees the objects which are actually around him.

Above me is a cloudless blue sky; beneath, the sky-blue, *i. e.* sky-reflecting, ice with patches of snow scattered over it like mackerel clouds. At a distance in several directions I see the tawny earth streaked or spotted with white where the bank or hills and fields appear, or else the green-black evergreen forests, or the brown, or russet, or tawny deciduous woods, and here and there, where the agitated surface of the river is exposed, the blue-black water. That dark-eyed water, especially when I see it at right angles with the direction

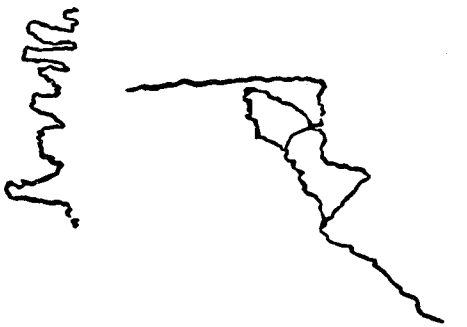
of the sun, is it not the first sign of spring? How its darkness contrasts with the general lightness of the winter! It has more life in it than any part of the earth's surface. It is where one of the arteries of the earth is palpable, visible.

Those are peculiar portions of the river which have thus always opened first, — been open latest and longest. In winter not only some creatures, but the very earth is partially dormant; vegetation ceases, and rivers, to some extent, cease to flow. Therefore, when I see the water exposed in midwinter, it is as if I saw a skunk or even a striped squirrel out. It is as if the woodchuck unrolled himself and snuffed the air to see if it were warm enough to be trusted.

It excites me to see early in the spring that black artery leaping once more through the snow-clad town. All is tumult and life there, not to mention the rails and cranberries that are drifting in it. Where this artery is shallowest, *i. e.*, comes nearest to the surface and runs swiftest, there it shows itself soonest and you may see its pulse beat. These are the wrists, temples, of the earth, where I feel its pulse with my eye. The living waters, not the dead earth. It is as if the dormant earth opened its dark and liquid eye upon us.

But to return to my walk. I proceed over the sky-blue ice, winding amid the flat drifts as if amid the clouds, now and then treading on that thin white ice (much marked) of absorbed puddles (of the surface), which crackles somewhat like dry hard biscuit. Call it biscuit ice. Some of it is full of internal eyes like bird's-eye maple, little bubbles that *were* open above, and

elsewhere I tread on ice in which are traced all kinds of characters, Coptic and Syriac, etc. How curious those crinkled lines in ice that has been partly rotted, reaching down half an inch perpendicularly, or else at an angle with the surface, and with a channel that may be felt above!



There are places (a few), like that at Hubbard's Grove, commonly thin or open, leading to the shore, with the ice puffed up, *as if* kept open by a musquash, where apparently a spring comes in. Only betrayed by its being slow to freeze, or by the rottenness of the ice there. This is the least observed of all tributaries, the first evidence of a tributary.

On the east side of the pond, under the steep bank, I see a single lesser redpoll picking the seeds out of the alder catkins, and uttering a faint mewing note from time to time on account of me, only ten feet off. It has a crimson or purple front and breast.

How unexpected is one season by another! Off Pleasant Meadow I walk amid the tops of bayonet rushes frozen in, as if the summer had been overtaken by the winter.

Returning just before sunset, I see the ice beginning to be green, and a rose-color to be reflected from the

low snow-patches. I see the color from the snow first where there is some shade, as where the shadow of a maple falls afar over the ice and snow. From this is reflected a purple tinge when I see none elsewhere. Some shadow or twilight, then, is necessary, umbra mixed with the reflected sun. Off Holden Wood, where the low rays fall on the river from between the fringe of the wood, the snow-patches are not rose-color, but a very dark purple like a grape, and thus there are all degrees from pure white to black. When crossing Hubbard's broad meadow, the snow-patches are a most beautiful crystalline purple, like the petals of some flowers, or as if tinged with cranberry juice. It is quite a faery scene, surprising and wonderful, as if you walked amid those rosy and purple clouds that you see float in the evening sky. What need to visit the crimson cliffs of Beverly?

I thus find myself returning over a green sea, winding amid purple islets, and the low sedge of the meadow on one side is really a burning yellow.

The hunter may be said to invent his game, as Neptune did the horse, and Ceres corn.

It is twenty above at 5.30, when I get home.

I walk over a smooth green sea, or *aequor*, the sun just disappearing in the cloudless horizon, amid thousands of these flat isles as purple as the petals of a flower. It would not be more enchanting to walk amid the purple clouds of the sunset sky. And, by the way, this is but a sunset sky under our feet, produced by the same law, the same slanting rays and twilight. Here the clouds are these patches of snow or frozen

vapor, and the ice is the greenish sky between them. Thus all of heaven is realized on earth. You have seen those purple fortunate isles in the sunset heavens, and that green and amber sky between them. Would you believe that you could ever walk amid those isles? You can on many a winter evening. I have done so a hundred times. The ice is a solid crystalline sky under our feet.

Whatever aid is to be derived from the use of a scientific term, we can never begin to see anything as it is so long as we remember the scientific term which always our ignorance has imposed on it. Natural objects and phenomena are in this sense forever wild and unnamed by us.

Thus the sky and the earth sympathize, and are subject to the same laws, and in the horizon they, as it were, meet and are seen to be one.

I have walked in such a place and found it hard as marble.

Not only the earth but the heavens are made our footstool. That is what the phenomenon of ice means. The earth is annually inverted and we walk upon the sky. The ice reflects the blue of the sky. The waters become solid and make a sky below. The clouds grow heavy and fall to earth, and we walk on them. We live and walk on solidified fluids.

We have such a habit of looking away that we see not what is around us. How few are aware that in winter, when the earth is covered with snow and ice, the phenomenon of the sunset sky is double! The one is on the earth around us, the other in the horizon. These

snow-clad hills answer to the rosy isles in the west. The winter is coming when I shall walk the sky. The ice is a solid sky on which we walk. It is the inverted year. There is an annual light in the darkness of the winter night. The shadows are blue, as the sky is forever blue. In winter we are purified and translated. The earth does not absorb our thoughts. It becomes a Valhalla.

Next above Good Fishing Bay and where the man was drowned, I pass Black Rock Shore, and over the Deep Causeway I come to Drifted Meadow.

North of the Warm Woodside (returning) is Bulrush Lagoon, — off Grindstone Meadow, — a good place for lilies; then Nut Meadow Mouth; Clamshell Bend, or Indian Bend; Sunset Reach, where the river flows nearly from west to east and is a fine sparkling scene from the hills eastward at sunset; then Hubbard's Bathing-Place, and the swift place, and Lily Bay, or Willow Bay.

Feb. 13. 2 P. M. — Down river.

Thermometer 38°. Warm; a cloud just appearing in the west.

That hard meadow just below the boys' bathing-place below the North Bridge is another elfin burial-ground. It would be a bad place to walk in a dark night. The mounds are often in ridges, even as if turned up by the plow.

Water overflowing the ice at an opening in the river, and mixing with thin snow, saturating it, seen now on one side at right angles with the sun's direction, is as

black as black cloth. It is surprising what a variety of distinct colors the winter can show us, using but few pigments, so to call them. The principal charm of a winter walk over ice is perhaps the peculiar and pure colors exhibited.

There is the *red* of the sunset sky, and of the snow at evening, and in rainbow flocks during the day, and in sun-dogs.

The *blue* of the sky, and of the ice and water reflected, and of shadows on snow.

The *yellow* of the sun and the morning and evening sky, and of the sedge (or straw-color, bright when lit on edge of ice at evening), and *all three* in hoar frost crystals.

Then, for the secondary, there is the *purple* of the snow in drifts or on hills, of the mountains, and clouds at evening.

The *green* of evergreen woods, of the sky, and of the ice and water toward evening.

The *orange* of the sky at evening.

The *white* of snow and clouds, and the *black* of clouds, of water agitated, and water saturating thin snow on ice.

The *russet* and *brown* and *gray*, etc., of deciduous woods.

The *tawny* of the bare earth.

I suspect that the green and rose (or purple) are not noticed on ice and snow unless it is pretty cold, and perhaps there is less greenness of the ice now than in December, when the days were shorter. The ice may now be too old and white.

Those horn, knob, and rake icicles on the southeast

sides of all open places — or that were open on the 10th near enough to the bushes — are suddenly softening and turning white on one side to-day, so that they remind me of the alabaster (?) or plaster images on an Italian's board. All along the ice belt or shelf — for the river has fallen more than a foot — countless white figures stand crowded, their minute cores of sedge or twigs being concealed. Some are like beaks of birds, — cranes or herons. Having seen this phenomenon in one place, I know with certainty in just how many places and where, throughout the town, — four or five, — I shall find these icicles, on the southeast sides of the larger open places which approached near enough to a bushy or reedy shore.

The grass comes very nearly being completely encrusted in some places, but commonly rounded knobs stand up.

The ground being bare, I pick up two or three arrowheads in Tarbell's field near Ball's Hill.

There is nothing more affecting and beautiful to man, a child of the earth, than the sight of the naked soil in the spring. I feel a kindredship with it.

The sun being in a cloud, partly obscured, I see a very dark purple tinge on the flat drifts on the ice earlier than usual, and when afterward the sun comes out below the cloud, I see no purple nor rose. Hence it seems that the twilight has as much or more to do with this phenomenon, supposing the sun to be low, than the slight angle of its rays with the horizon.

Always you have to contend with the stupidity of men. It is like a stiff soil, a hard-pan. If you go deeper than usual, you are sure to meet with a pan made harder even by the superficial cultivation. The stupid you have always with you. Men are more obedient at first to words than ideas. They mind names more than things. Read to them a lecture on "Education," naming that subject, and they will think that they have heard something important, but call it "Transcendentalism," and they will think it moonshine. Or halve your lecture, and put a psalm at the beginning and a prayer at the end of it and read it from a pulpit, and they will pronounce it good without thinking.

The Scripture rule, "Unto him that hath shall be given," is true of composition. The more you have thought and written on a given theme, the more you can still write. Thought breeds thought. It grows under your hands.

Feb. 15.[1] As in the expression of moral truths we admire any closeness to the physical fact which in all language is the symbol of the spiritual, so, finally, when natural objects are described, it is an advantage if words derived originally from nature, it is true, but which have been turned (*tropes*) from their primary signification to a moral sense, are used, *i. e.*, if the object is personified. The one who loves and understands a thing the best will incline to use the personal pronouns in speaking of it. To him there is no *neuter*

[1] [The manuscript journal volume that begins with this date bears the legend "The early spring" at the beginning.]

gender. Many of the words of the old naturalists were in this sense doubly tropes.

P. M. — About 30° at 2 P. M. Skated to Bound Rock.

Frequently, the same night that it first freezes, or perhaps in the morning, the ice over the thread of the river will be puffed up for many rods a foot or more, evidently by expanding vapors beneath, and also over the channel of some warm spring emptying in. Also at Walden where it is very shallow or the ice rests on a bar between the pond and a bay.

When lately the open parts of the river froze more or less in the night after that windy day, they froze by stages, as it were, many feet wide, and the water dashed and froze against the edge of each successive strip of ice, leaving so many parallel ridges.

The river is rapidly falling, is more than a foot lower than it was a few days ago, so that there is an ice-belt left where the bank is steep, and on this I skate in many places; in others the ice slants from the shore for a rod or two to the water; and on the meadows for the most part there is no water under the ice, and it accordingly rumbles loudly as I go over it, and I rise and fall as I pass over hillocks or hollows.

From the pond to Lee's Bridge I skated so swiftly before the wind, that I thought it was calm, for I kept pace with it, but when I turned about I found that quite a gale was blowing.

Occasionally one of those puffs (making a pent-roof

of ice) runs at right angles across the river where there is no spring or stream emptying in. A crack may have started it.

Feb. 16. 2 P. M. — To Walden.

A snow-storm, which began in the night, — and is now three or four inches deep. The ground, which was more than half bare before, is thus suddenly concealed, and the snow lodges on the trees and fences and sides of houses, and we have a perfect wintry scene again. We hear that it stormed at Philadelphia yesterday morning.

As I [look] toward the woods beyond the poorhouse, I see how the trees, especially apple trees, are suddenly brought out relieved against the snow, black on white, every twig as distinct as if it were a pen-and-ink drawing the size of nature. The snow being spread for a background, while the storm still raging confines your view to near objects, each apple tree is distinctly outlined against it.

Suddenly, too, where of late all was tawny-brown in pastures I see a soft snowy field with the pale-brown lecheas just peeping out of it.

It is a moist and starry snow, lodging on trees, — leaf, bough, and trunk. The pines are well laden with it. How handsome, though wintry, the side of a high pine wood, well grayed with the snow that has lodged on it, and the smaller pitch pines converted into marble or alabaster with their lowered plumes liké rams' heads!

The character of the wood-paths is wholly changed

by the new-fallen snow. Not only all tracks are concealed, but, the pines drooping over it and half concealing or filling it, it is merely a long chink or winding open space between the trees.

This snow, as I have often noticed before, is composed of stars and other crystals with a very fine cotton intermixed. It lodges and rests softly on the horizontal limbs of oaks and pines. On the fruit and dry leafets (?) of the alders that slant over the pond it is in the form of little cones two inches high, making them snowball plants. So many little crystalline wheels packed in cotton.

When we descend on to Goose Pond we find that the snow rests more thickly on the numerous zigzag and horizontal branches of the high blueberries that bend over it than on any deciduous shrub or tree, producing a very handsome snowy maze, and can thus distinguish this shrub, by the manner in which the snow lies on it, quite across the pond. It is remarkable also how very distinct and *white* every plane surface, as the rocks which lie here and there amid the blueberries or higher on the bank, — a place where no twig or weed rises to interrupt the pure white impression. In fact, this crystalline snow lies up so light and downy that it evidently admits more light than usual, and the surface is more white and glowing for it. It is semitransparent. This is especially the case with the snow lying upon rocks or musquash-houses, which is elevated and brought between you and the light. It is partially transparent, like alabaster. Also all the birds' nests in the blueberry bushes are revealed, by the great snow-balls they hold.

Feb. 17. P. M. — Cold and northwest wind, drifting the snow. 3 P. M., thermometer 14°.

A perfectly clear sky except one or two little cloud-flecks in the southwest, which, when I look again after walking forty rods, have entirely dissolved. When the sun is setting the light reflected from the snow-covered roofs is quite a clear pink, and even from white board fences.

Grows colder yet at evening, and frost forms on the windows.

I hear that some say they saw a bluebird and heard it sing last week!! It was probably a shrike.

Minott says that he hears that Heard's testimony in regard to Concord River in the meadow case was that "it is dammed at both ends and cursed in the middle," *i. e.* on account of the damage to the grass there.

We cannot spare the very lively and lifelike descriptions of some of the old naturalists. They sympathize with the creatures which they describe. Edward Topsell in his translation of Conrad Gesner, in 1607, called "The History of Four-footed Beasts," says of the antelopes that "they are bred in India and Syria, near the river Euphrates," and then — which enables you to realize the living creature and its habitat — he adds, "and delight much to drink of the cold water thereof." The beasts which most modern naturalists describe do not *delight* in anything, and their water is neither hot nor cold. Reading the above makes you want to go and drink of the Euphrates yourself, if it is warm weather. I do not know how much of his spirit he owes to Gesner, but he proceeds in his translation to say

that "they have horns growing forth of the crown of their head, which are very long and sharp; so that Alexander affirmed they pierced through the shields of his soldiers, and fought with them very irefully: at which time his company slew as he travelled to India, eight thousand five hundred and fifty, which great slaughter may be the occasion why they are so rare and seldom seen to this day."

Now here *something* is described at any rate; it is a real account, whether of a real animal or not. You can plainly see the horns which "grew forth" from their crowns, and how well that word "irefully" describes a beast's fighting! And then for the number which Alexander's men slew "as he travelled to India," — and what a travelling was that, my hearers! — eight thousand five hundred and fifty, just the number you would have guessed after the thousands were given, and [an] easy one to remember too. He goes on to say that "their horns are great and made like a saw, and they with them can cut asunder the branches of osier or small trees, whereby it cometh to pass that many times their necks are taken in the twists of the falling boughs, whereat the beast with repining cry, bewrayeth himself to the hunters, and so is taken." The artist too has done his part equally well, for you are presented with a drawing of the beast with serrated horns, the tail of a lion, a cheek tooth (canine?) as big as a boar's, a stout front, and an exceedingly "ireful" look, as if he were facing all Alexander's army.

Though some beasts are described in this book which have no existence as I can learn but in the imagination

of the writers, they really have an existence there, which is saying not a little, for most of our modern authors have not imagined the actual beasts which they presume to describe. The very frontispiece is a figure of "the gorgon," which looks sufficiently like a hungry beast covered with scales, which you may have dreamed of, apparently just fallen on the track of you, the reader, and snuffing the odor with greediness.

These men had an adequate idea of a beast, or what a beast should be, a very *bellua* (the translator makes the word *bestia* to be "*a vastando*"); and they will describe and will draw you a cat with four strokes, more beastly or beast-like to look at than Mr. Ruskin's favorite artist draws a tiger. They had an adequate idea of the wildness of beasts and of men, and in their descriptions and drawings they did not always fail when they *surpassed* nature.

Gesner says of apes that "they are held for a subtil, ironical, ridiculous and unprofitable beast, whose flesh is not good for meat as a sheep, neither his back for burthen as an asses, nor yet commodious to keep a house like a dog, but of the Grecians termed gelotopoios, made for laughter." As an evidence of an ape's want of "discretion," he says: "A certain ape after a shipwreck, swimming to land, was seen by a countryman, who thinking him to be a man in the water gave him his hand to save him, yet in the mean time asked him what countryman he was, to which he answered that he was an Athenian: Well, said the man, dost thou know Piræus (a port in Athens)? Very well, said the ape, and his wife, friends and children. Whereat the

man being moved, did what he could to drown him." "They are best contented to sit aloft although tied with chains. . . . They bring forth young ones for the most part by twins, whereof they love the one and hate the other; that which they love they bear on their arms, the other hangeth at the dam's back, and for the most part she killeth that which she loveth, by pressing it too hard: afterward, she setteth her whole delight upon the other."

Feb. 18. A snow-storm, falling all day; wind north-east.

The snow is fine and drives low; is composed of granulated masses one sixteenth to one twentieth of an inch in diameter. Not in flakes at all. I think it is not those large-flaked snow-storms that are the worst for the traveller, or the deepest.

It would seem as if the more odd and whimsical the conceit, the more credible to the mass. They require a surprising truth, though they may well be surprised at any truth. For example, Gesner says of the beaver: "The biting of this beast is very deep, being able to crash asunder the hardest bones, and commonly he never loseth his hold until he feeleth his teeth gnash one against another. Pliny and Solinus affirm, that the person so bitten cannot be cured, except he hear the crashing of the teeth, which I take to be an opinion without truth."

Gesner (unless we owe it to the translator) has a livelier conception of an animal which has no existence, or of an action which was never performed, than most naturalists have of what passes before their eyes. The

ability to report a thing *as if* [*it*] *had occurred*, whether it did or not, is surely important to a describer. They do not half tell a thing because you might expect them to but half believe it. I feel, of course, very ignorant in a museum. I know nothing about the things which they have there, — no more than I should know my friends in the tomb. I walk amid those jars of bloated creatures which they label frogs, a total stranger, without the least froggy thought being suggested. Not one of them can croak. They leave behind all life they that enter there, both frogs and men. For example, Gesner says again, "The tree being down and prepared, they take one of the oldest of their company, whose teeth could not be used for the cutting, (or, as others say, they constrain some strange beaver whom they meet withal, to fall flat on his back), . . . and upon his belly lade they all their timber, which they so ingeniously work and fasten into the compass of his legs that it may not fall, and so the residue by the tail draw him to the water side, where those buildings are to be framed, and this the rather seemeth to be true, because there have been some such taken that had no hair on their backs, but were pilled, which being espied by the hunters, in pity of their slavery or bondage, they have let them go away free." Gives Albertus and Olaus Magnus as authorities for this.

Melvin tells me that he went a day or two ago to where G. M. Barrett had placed a dead cow of his, and that he found the snow thickly tracked by foxes to within five feet around the carcass, and they appeared

to have sat down there, but so suspicious of some trick were they that they had not touched it.

Sometimes, when I go forth at 2 P. M., there is scarcely a cloud in the sky, but soon one will appear in the west and steadily advance and expand itself, and so change the whole character of the afternoon and of my thoughts. The history of the sky for that afternoon will be but the development of that cloud.

I think that the most important requisite in describing an animal, is to be sure and give its character and spirit, for in that you have, without error, the sum and effect of all its parts, known and unknown. You must tell what it is to man. Surely the most important part of an animal is its *anima*, its vital spirit, on which is based its character and all the peculiarities by which it most concerns us. Yet most scientific books which treat of animals leave this out altogether, and what they describe are as it were phenomena of dead matter. What is most interesting in a dog, for example, is his attachment to his master, his intelligence, courage, and the like, and not his anatomical structure or even many habits which affect us less.

If you have undertaken to write the biography of an animal, you will have to present to us the living creature, *i. e.*, a result which no man can understand, but only in his degree report the impression made on him.

Science in many departments of natural history does not pretend to go beyond the shell; *i. e.*, it does not get to animated nature at all. A history of animated nature must itself be animated.

The ancients, one would say, with their gorgons,

sphinxes, satyrs, mantichora, etc., could imagine more than existed, while the moderns cannot imagine so much as exists.

In describing brutes, as in describing men, we shall naturally dwell most on those particulars in which they are most like ourselves, — in which we have most sympathy with them.

We are as often injured as benefited by our systems, for, to speak the truth, no human system is a true one, and a name is at most a mere convenience and carries no information with it. As soon as I begin to be aware of the life of any creature, I at once forget its name. To know the names of creatures is only a convenience to us at first, but so soon as we have learned to distinguish them, the sooner we forget their names the better, so far as any true appreciation of them is concerned. I think, therefore, that the best and most harmless names are those which are an imitation of the voice or note of an animal, or the most poetic ones. But the name adheres only to the accepted and conventional bird or quadruped, never an instant to the real one. There is always something ridiculous in the name of a great man, — as if he were named John Smith. The name is convenient in communicating with others, but it is not to be remembered when I communicate with myself.

If you look over a list of medicinal recipes in vogue in the last century, how foolish and useless they are seen to be! And yet we use equally absurd ones with faith to-day.

When the ancients had not found an animal wild and

strange enough to suit them, they created one by the mingled [traits] of the most savage already known, — as hyenas, lionesses, pards, panthers, etc., etc., — one with another. Their beasts were thus of wildness and savageness all compact, and more *ferine* and *terrible* than any of an unmixed breed could be. They allowed nature great license in these directions. The most strange and fearful beasts were by them supposed to be the offspring of two different savage kinds. So fertile were their imaginations, and such fertility did they assign to nature. In the modern account the fabulous part will be omitted, it is true, but the portrait of the real and living creature also.

The old writers have left a more lively and lifelike account of the gorgon than modern writers give us of real animals.

Feb. 19. Snow maybe near a foot deep, and now drifting.

Feb. 20. P. M. — I see directly in front [of] the Depot Lee [?] house, on the only piece of bare ground I see hereabouts, a large flock of lesser redpolls feeding. They must be picking up earth, sand, or the withered grass. They are so intent on it that they allow me to come quite near. This, then, is one use for the drifting of snow which lays bare some spots, however deep it may be elsewhere, — so that the birds, etc., can come at the earth. I never thought of this use before. First the snow fell deep and level on the 18th, then, the 19th, came high wind and plowed it out here and there to

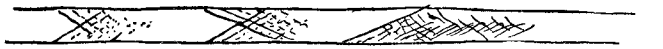
the ground; and so it will always be in some places, however deep it may have been.

J. Farmer tells me that his grandfather once, when moving some rocks in the winter, found a striped squirrel frozen stiff. He put him in his pocket, and when he got home laid him on the hearth, and after a while he was surprised to see him running about the room as lively as ever he was.

I notice a very pale pink reflection from snowy roofs and sides of white houses at sunrise. So both the pink and the green are phenomena of the morning, but in a much less degree, which shows that they depend more on the twilight and the grossness of the atmosphere than on the angle at which the sunlight falls.

Feb. 21. 2 P. M. — Thermometer forty-six and snow rapidly melting. It melts first and fastest where the snow is so thin that it feels the heat reflected from the ground beneath.

I see now, in the ruts in sand on hills in the road, those interesting ripples which I only notice to advantage in very shallow running water, a phenomenon almost, as it were, confined to melted snow running in ruts in the road in a thaw, especially in the spring. It is a spring phenomenon. The water, meeting with some slight obstacle, ever and anon appears to shoot across diagonally to the opposite side, while ripples from



the opposite side intersect the former, producing countless regular and sparkling diamond-shaped ripples.

If you hold your head low and look along up such a stream in a right light, it is seen to have a regularly braided surface, tress-like, preserving its figures as if it were solid, though the stream is seen pulsing high through the middle ripples in the thread of the stream. The ripples are as rectilinear as ice-crystals. When you see the sparkling stream from melting snow in the ruts, know that then is to be seen this braid of the spring.

It was their very admiration of nature that made the ancients attribute those magnanimous qualities which are rarely to be found in man to the lion as her masterpiece, and it is only by a readiness, or rather preparedness, to see more than appears in a creature that one can appreciate what is manifest.

It is remarkable how many berries are the food of birds, mice, etc. Perhaps I may say that all are, however hard or bitter. This I am inclined to say, judging of what I do not know from what I do. For example, mountain-ash, prinos, skunk-cabbage, sumach, choke-cherry, cornels probably, elder-berry, viburnums, rose hips, arum, poke, thorn, barberry, grapes, tupelo, amphicarpæa, thistle-down, bayberry (?), *Cornus florida*, checkerberry, hemlock, larch, pines, etc., birch, alder, juniper. The berries and seeds of wild plants generally, however little it is suspected by us, are the food of birds, squirrels, or mice.

Feb. 23. 2 P. M. — Thermometer 56°. Wind south. 3 P. M. — Thermometer 58° and snow almost gone. River rising. We have not had such a warm day since the beginning of December (which was remarkably warm).

I walk over the moist Nawshawtuct hillside and see the green radical leaves of the buttercup, shepherd's-purse (circular), sorrel, chickweed, cerastium, etc., revealed.

About 4 P. M. a smart shower, ushered in by thunder and succeeded by a brilliant rainbow and yellow light from under the dark cloud in the west. Thus the first remarkable heat brings a thunder-shower.

The words "pardall" and "libbard," applied by Gesner to the same animal, express as much of the wild beast as any.

I read in Brand's "Popular Antiquities" that "Bishop Stillingfleet observes, that among the Saxons of the northern nations, the Feast of the New Year was observed with more than ordinary jollity: thence, as Olaus Wormius and Scheffer observe, they reckoned their age by so many Iolas." (*Iola*, to make merry. — Gothic.) So may we measure our lives by our joys. We have lived, not in proportion to the number of years that we have spent on the earth, but in proportion as we have enjoyed.

February is pronounced the coldest month in the year. In B.'s "Popular Antiquities" is quoted this from the Harleian Manuscripts: —

> "Février de tous les mois,
> Le plus court et moins courtois."

In the same work it is said that this saying is still current in the north of England: —

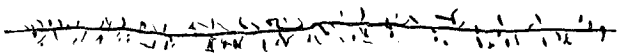
> "On the first of March,
> The crows begin to search."

Would it not apply to the crows searching for their food in our meadows, along the water's edge, a little later?

A fact stated barely is dry. It must be the vehicle of some humanity in order to interest us. It is like giving a man a stone when he asks you for bread. Ultimately the moral is all in all, and we do not mind it if inferior truth is sacrificed to superior, as when the moralist fables and makes animals speak and act like men. It must be warm, moist, incarnated, — have been breathed on at least. A man has not seen a thing who has not felt it.

Feb. 24. 2 P. M. — Thermometer 42. A very spring-like day, so much sparkling light in the air.

The clouds reflecting a dazzling brightness from their edges, and though it is rather warm (the wind raw) there are many, finely divided, in a stream southwest to northeast all the afternoon, and some most brilliant mother-o'-pearl. I never saw the green in it more distinct. This on the thin white edges of clouds as if it were a small piece of a rainbow. Some of the finest imaginable rippling, and some fine strings of clouds, narrow ant-eater skeletons, stretching from southwest to northeast, with the wind, looking like a little cotton



caught on a crooked telegraph-wire, the spine is so distinct.

A great part of the very finely divided cloud, one stratum above another, had the appearance of a woven

web, the fibres crossing each other in a remarkable manner right overhead.

The river risen and quite over the meadows yesterday and to-day, and musquash begun to be killed.

Feb. 25. P. M. — Round *via* Clamshell to Hubbard's Bridge.

Colder, and frozen ground; strong wind, northwest.

I noticed yesterday in the street some dryness of stones at crossings and in the road and sidewalk here and there, and even two or three boys beginning to play at marbles, so ready are they to get at the earth.

The fields of open water amid the thin ice of the meadows are the spectacle to-day. They are especially dark blue when I look southwest. Has it anything to do with the direction of the wind? It is pleasant to see high dark-blue waves half a mile off running incessantly along the edge of white ice. There the motion of the blue liquid is the most distinct. As the waves

rise and fall they seem to run swiftly along the edge of the ice.

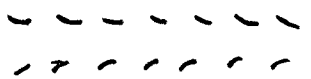
The white pine cones have been blowing off more

or less in every high wind ever since the winter began, and yet perhaps they have not more than half fallen yet.

For a day or two past I have seen in various places the small tracks apparently of skunks. They appear to come out commonly in the warmer weather in the latter part of February.

I noticed yesterday the first conspicuous silvery sheen from the needles of the white pine waving in the wind. A small one was conspicuous by the side of the road more than a quarter of a mile ahead. I suspect that those plumes which have been appressed or contracted by snow and ice are not only dried but opened and spread by the wind.

Those peculiar tracks which I saw some time ago, and still see, made in slosh and since frozen at the Andromeda Ponds, I think must be mole-tracks, and



those "nicks" on the sides are where they shoved back the snow with their vertical flippers. This is a very peculiar track, a broad channel in slosh, and at length in ice.

Feb. 26. *Sunday.* 2 P. M. — Thermometer 30; cold northwest wind.

The water is about six inches above Hoar's steps. That well covers the meadows generally. Cold and strong northwest wind this and yesterday.

Feb. 27. 2 P. M. — Thermometer 50.

To Abner Buttrick's Hill.

The river has been breaking up for several days,

and I now see great cakes lodged against each of the bridges, especially at Hunt's and the North Bridge, where the river flows with the wind. For a week or more you could not go to Ball's Hill by the south side of the river. The channel is now open, at least from our neighborhood all the way to Ball's Hill,[1] except the masses of ice moving in it; but the ice generally rests on the bottom of the meadows, — such as was there before the water rose, — and the freshet is for the most part covered with a thin ice except where the wind has broke[n] it up. The high wind for several days has prevented this water from freezing hard.

There are many cranberries washed far on to a large cake of ice which stretches across the river at Hunt's Bridge. The wind subsiding leaves them conspicuous on the middle of the cake.

I noticed yesterday that the skunk-cabbage had not started yet at Well Meadow, and had been considerably frost-bitten.

Heywood says that when the ground is regularly descending from the north to the railroad, a low fence a quarter of a mile off has been found to answer perfectly; if it slopes upward, it must be very near the road.

I walk down the river below Flint's on the north side. The sudden apparition of this dark-blue water on the surface of the earth is exciting. I must now walk where I can see the most water, as to the most living part of nature. This is the blood of the earth, and we see its blue arteries pulsing with new life now. I see, from

[1] Yes, and upward as far as Cardinal Shore, the reach above Hubbard's Bridge being open; thence it is mackerelled up to the pond.

far over the meadows, white cakes of ice gliding swiftly down the stream, — a novel sight. They are whiter than ever in this spring sun.

The abundance of light, as reflected from clouds and the snow, etc., etc., is more springlike than anything of late.

For several days the earth generally has been bare. I see the tawny and brown earth, the fescue- and lichen-clad hills behind Dakin's and A. Buttrick's.

Among the radical leaves most common, and therefore early-noticed, are the veronica and the thistle, — green in the midst of brown and decayed; and at the bottom of little hollows in pastures, now perhaps nearly covered with ice and water, you see some greener leafets of clover.

I find myself cut off by that arm of our meadow sea which makes up toward A. Buttrick's. The walker now by the river valley is often compelled to go far round by the water, driven far toward the farmers' door-yards.

I had noticed for some time, far in the middle of the Great Meadows, something dazzlingly white, which I took, of course, to be a small cake of ice on its end, but now that I have climbed the pitch pine hill and can overlook the whole meadow, I see it to be the white breast of a male sheldrake accompanied perhaps by his mate (a darker one). They have settled warily in the very midst of the meadow, where the wind has blown a space of clear water for an acre or two. The aspect of the meadow is sky-blue and dark-blue, the former a thin ice, the latter the spaces of open water which the

wind has made, but it is chiefly ice still. Thus, as soon as the river breaks up or begins to break up fairly, and the strong wind widening the cracks makes at length open spaces in the ice of the meadow, this hardy bird appears, and is seen sailing in the first widened crack in the ice, where it can come at the water. Instead of a piece of ice I find it to be the breast of the sheldrake, which so reflects the light as to look larger than it is, steadily sailing this way and that with its companion, who is diving from time to time. They have chosen the opening farthest removed from all shores. As I look I see the ice drifting in upon them and contracting their water, till finally they have but a few square rods left, while there are forty or fifty acres near by. This is the first bird of the spring that I have seen or heard of.

C. saw a skater-insect on E. Hubbard's Close brook in woods to-day.

Feb. 28. 2 P. M. — Thermometer 52; wind easterly. To Conantum.

I am surprised to see how my English brook cress has expanded or extended since I saw it last fall to a bed four feet in diameter, as if it had grown in the water, though it is quite dirty or muddied with sediment. Many of the sprigs turn upwards and just rest on the water at their ends, as if they might be growing. It has also been eaten considerably by some inhabitant of the water. I am inclined to think it must grow in the winter.

What is that bluish bulb now apparently beginning to shoot in the water there, floating loose (not the water-purslane)?

I suppose they are linarias which I still see flying about.

Passed a very little boy in the street to-day, who had on a home-made cap of a woodchuck-skin, which his father or elder brother had killed and cured, and his mother or elder sister had fashioned into a nice warm cap. I was interested by the sight of it, it suggested so much of family history, adventure with the chuck, story told about [it], not without exaggeration, the human parents' care of their young these hard times. Johnny was promised many times, and now the work has been completed, — a perfect little idyl, as they say. The cap was large and round, big enough, you would say, for the boy's father, and had some kind of cloth visor stitched to it. The top of the cap was evidently the back of the woodchuck, as it were expanded in breadth, contracted in length, and it was as fresh and handsome as if the woodchuck wore it himself. The great gray-tipped wind hairs were all preserved, and stood out above the brown only a little more loosely than in life. As if he put his head into the belly of a woodchuck, having cut off his tail and legs and substituted a visor for the head. The little fellow wore it innocently enough, not knowing what he had on, forsooth, going about his small business pit-a-pat; and his black eyes sparkled beneath it when I remarked on its warmth, even as the woodchuck's might have done. Such should be the history of every piece of clothing that we wear.

As I stood by Eagle Field wall, I heard a fine rattling sound, produced by the wind on some dry weeds at my

elbow. It was occasioned by the wind rattling the fine seeds in those pods of the indigo-weed which were still closed, — a distinct rattling din which drew my attention to it, — like a small Indian's calabash. Not a mere rustling of dry weeds, but the shaking of a rattle, or a hundred rattles, beside.

Looking from Hubbard's Bridge, I see a great water-bug even on the river, so forward is the season.

I take up a handsomely spread (or blossomed) pitch pine cone, but I find that a squirrel has begun to strip it first, having gnawed off a few of the scales at the base. The squirrel always begins to gnaw a cone thus at the base, as if it were a stringent law among the squirrel people, — as if the old squirrels taught the young ones a few simple rules like this.

C. saw a dozen robins to-day on the ground on Ebby Hubbard's hill by the Yellow Birch Swamp.

One tells me that George Hubbard told him he saw blackbirds go over this forenoon.

One of the Corner Wheelers feels sure that he saw a bluebird on the 24th, and says he saw a sheldrake in the river at the factory "a month ago." I should say that the sheldrake was our hardiest duck.

It suggests from what point of view Gesner (or his translator) describes an animal, — how far he takes into account man's relation to it, — that he commonly gives the "epithets" which have been applied to it. He deals in description, and epithets are a short description. And the translator says to the reader, "All these rows and ranks of living four-footed beasts are as letters and midwives to save the reverence which is

due to the Highest (that made them) from perishing within you."

I hear this account of Austin: —

An acquaintance who had bought him a place in Lincoln took him out one day to see it, and Austin was so smitten with the quiet and retirement and other rural charms that he at once sold his house in Concord, bought a small piece of rocky pasture in an out-of-the-way part of this out-of-the-way town, and with the funds raised by the sale of his old house built him a costly stone house upon it. Now he finds that this retirement (or country life) is the very thing which he does not want, but, his property being chiefly invested in the house, he is caught in a trap, as it were, for he cannot sell it, though he advertises it every year. As for society, he has none; his neighbors are few and far between, and he never visits them nor they him. They can do without him, being old settlers, *adscripti glebae*. He found one man in the next town who got his living by sporting and fishing, and he has built him a little hut and got him to live on his place for society and helpfulness. He cannot get help either for the outdoor or indoor work. There are none thereabouts who work by the day or job, and servant-girls decline to come so far into the country. Surrounded by grain-fields, he sends to Cambridge for his oats, and, as for milk, he can scarcely get any at all, for the farmers all send it to Boston, but he has persuaded one to leave some for him at the depot half a mile off.

As it is important to consider Nature from the point of view of science, remembering the nomenclature and

system of men, and so, if possible, go a step further in that direction, so it is equally important often to ignore or forget all that men presume that they know, and take an original and unprejudiced view of Nature, letting her make what impression she will on you, as the first men, and all children and natural men still do. For our science, so called, is always more barren and mixed up with error than our sympathies are.

As I go down the Boston road, I see an Irishman wheeling home from far a large damp and rotten pine log for fuel. He evidently sweats at it, and pauses to rest many times. He found, perhaps, that his wood-pile was gone before the winter was, and he trusts thus to contend with the remaining cold. I see him unload it in his yard before me and then rest himself. The piles of solid oak wood which I see in other yards do not interest me at all, but this looked like *fuel*. It warmed me to think of it. He will now proceed to split it finely, and then I fear it [will] require almost as much heat to dry it, as it will give out at last. How rarely we are encouraged by the sight of simple actions in the street! We deal with banks and other institutions, where the life and humanity are concealed, — what there is. I like at least to see the great beams half exposed in the ceiling or the corner.