

V

APRIL, 1860

(AET. 42)

*April 1. Sunday.* Warm, with the thick haze still concealing the sun.

Worm-piles abundant this morning.

Our gooseberry begins to show a little green, but not our currant.

3 p. m. — Up Assabet in boat.

There is another fire in the woods this afternoon. It is yet more hazy than before, — about as thick as a fog, and apparently clouds behind it. Still warmer than yesterday, — 71 at 3 p. m.

The river was lowest for March yesterday, *viz.* just three feet below Hoar's wall. It is so low that the mouths of the musquash-burrows in the banks are exposed with the piles of shells before them.

Willows about the stump on S. Brown's land are very well out. Are they *discolor*? The red maple buds are considerably expanded, and no doubt make a greater impression of redness.

A kingfisher seen and heard.

As we paddle up the Assabet we hear the wood turtles — the first I have noticed — and painted turtles rustling down the bank into the water, and see where they have travelled over the sand and the mud. This and the previous two days have brought them out in numbers. Also see the sternothærus on the bottom.

The river being so low, we see lines of sawdust perfectly level and parallel to one another on the side of the steep dark bank at the Hemlocks, for thirty rods or more visible at once, reminding you of a coarse chalk-line made by snapping a string, not more than half an inch wide much of it, but more true than that would be. The sawdust adheres to the perfectly upright bank and probably marks the standstill or highest water for the time. This level line drawn by Nature is agreeable to behold.

The large *Rana fontinalis* sits enjoying the warmth on the muddy shore. I hear the first hylodes by chance, but no doubt they have been heard some time. Hear the hum of bees on the maples. Rye-fields look green. Pickerel dart, and probably have some time. The sweet-gale is almost in bloom; say next pleasant day.<sup>1</sup>

The fruit a thinker bears is *sentences*, — statements or opinions. He seeks to affirm something as true. I am surprised that my affirmations or utterances come to me ready-made, — not fore-thought, — so that I occasionally awake in the night simply to let fall ripe a statement which I had never consciously considered before, and as surprising and novel and agreeable to me as anything can be. As if we only thought by sympathy with the universal mind, which thought while we were asleep. There is such a necessity [to] make a definite statement that our minds at length do it without our consciousness, just as we carry our food to our mouths. This occurred to me last night, but I was so surprised

<sup>1</sup> It sheds its pollen the same night in my chamber, — from the old mill-site, north side.

by the fact which I have just endeavored to report that I have entirely forgotten what the particular observation was.

*April 2.* Cold and windy.

2 P. M. — Thermometer 31°, or fallen 40° since yesterday, and the ground slightly whitened by a flurry of snow. I had expected rain to succeed the thick haze. It was cloudy behind the haze and rained a little about 9 P. M., but, the wind having gone northwest (from southwest), it turned to snow.

The shrubs whose buds had begun to unfold yesterday are the spiraea, gooseberry, lilaç, and Missouri currant, — the first much the most forward and green, the rest in the order named.

Walked to the Mayflower Path and to see the great burning of the 31st.

I smelled the burnt ground a quarter of a mile off. It was a very severe burn, the ground as black as a chimney-back. The fire is said to have begun by an Irishman burning brush near Wild's house in the south part of Acton, and ran north and northeast some two miles before the southwest wind, crossing Fort Pond Brook. I walked more than a mile along it and could not see to either end, and crossed it in two places. A thousand acres must have been burned. The leaves being thus cleanly burned, you see amid their cinders countless mouse-galleries, where they have run all over the wood, especially in shrub oak land, these lines crossing each other every foot and at every angle. You are surprised to see by these traces how many of these

creatures live and run under the leaves in the woods, out of the way of cold and of hawks. The fire has burned off the top and half-way down their galleries. Every now and then we saw an oblong square mark of pale-brown or fawn-colored ashes amid the black cinders, where corded wood had been burned.

In one place, though at the north edge of a wood, I saw white birch and amelanchier buds (the base of whose stems had been burned or scorched) just bursting into leaf, — evidently the effect of the fire, for none of their kind is so forward elsewhere.

This fire ran before the wind, which was southwest, and, as nearly as I remember, the fires generally at this season begin on that side, and you need to be well protected there by a plowing or raking away the leaves. Also the men should run ahead of the fire before the wind, most of them, and stop it at some cross-road, by raking away the leaves and setting back fires.

Look out for your wood-lots between the time when the dust first begins to blow in the streets and the leaves are partly grown.

The earliest willows are apparently in prime.<sup>1</sup>

I find that the signs of the weather in Theophrastus are repeated by many more recent writers without being referred to him or through him; *e. g.*, by an authority quoted by Brand in his "Popular Antiquities," who evidently does not know that they are in Theophrastus.

Talking with a farmer who was milking sixteen cows in a row the other evening, an ox near which we stood,

<sup>1</sup> *Vide* forward.

at the end of the row, suddenly half lay, half fell, down on the hard and filthy floor, extending its legs helplessly to one side in a mechanical manner while its head was uncomfortably held between the stanchions as in a pillory. Thus man's fellow-laborer the ox, tired with his day's work, is compelled to take his rest, like the most wretched slave or culprit. It was evidently a difficult experiment each time to lie down at all without dislocating his neck, and his neighbors had not room to try the same at the same time.

*April 4. Wednesday morning.* Lodged at Sanborn's last night after his *rescue*, he being away.

It is warmer, an April-like morning after two colder and windy days, threatening a moist or more or less showery day, which followed.

The birds sing quite numerously at sunrise about the villages, — robins, *tree sparrows*, and methinks I heard the purple finch. The birds are eager to sing, as the flowers to bloom, after raw weather has held them in check.

*April 5. P. M.* — Row to Clamshell and walk beyond.

Fair but windy and cool.

When I stand more out of the wind, under the shelter of the hill beyond Clamshell, where there is not wind enough to make a noise on my person, I hear, or think that I hear, a very faint distant ring of toads, which, though I walk and walk all the afternoon, I never come nearer to. It is hard to tell

if it is not a ringing in my ears; yet I think it is a solitary and distant toad called to life by some warm and sheltered pool or hill, its note having, as it were, a chemical affinity with the air of the spring. It merely gives a slightly more ringing or sonorous sound to the general rustling of inanimate nature. A sound more ringing and articulate my ear detects, under and below the noise of the rippling wind. Thus gradually and moderately the year begins. It creeps into the ears so gradually that most do not observe it, and so our ears are gradually accustomed to the sound, and perchance we do not perceive it when at length it has become very much louder and more general.

It is to be observed that we heard of fires in the woods in various towns, and more or less distant, on the same days that they occurred here,—the last of March and first of April. The newspapers reported many. The same cause everywhere produced the same effect.

*April 6.* Rainy, more or less,—April weather.

I am struck by the fact that at this season all vegetable growth is confined to the warm days; during the cold ones it is stationary, or even killed. Vegetation thus comes forward rather by fits and starts than by a steady progress. Some flowers would blossom tomorrow if it were as warm as to-day, but cold weather intervening may detain them a week or more. The spring thus advances and recedes repeatedly,—its pendulum oscillates,—while it is carried steadily forward. Animal life is to its extent subject to a similar

law. It is in warm and calm days that most birds arrive and reptiles and insects and men come forth.

A toad has been seen dead on the sidewalk, flattened.

*April 7.* The purple finch,—if not before.

P. M.—To Annursnack.

This is the *Rana halecina* day,—awakening of the meadows,—though not very warm. The thermometer in Boston to-day is said to be 49. Probably, then, when it is about 50 at this season, the river being low, they are to be heard in calm places.

Fishes now lie up abundantly in shallow water in the sun,—pickerel, and I see several bream. What was lately motionless and lifeless ice is a transparent liquid in which the stately pickerel moves along. A novel sight is that of the first bream that has come forth from I know not what hibernaculum, moving gently over the still brown river-bottom, where scarcely a weed has started. Water is as yet only melted ice, or like that of November, which is ready to become ice.

As we were ascending the hill in the road beyond College Meadow, we saw the dust, etc., in the middle of the road at the top of the hill taken up by a small whirlwind. Pretty soon it began to move northeasterly through the balm-of-Gilead-grove, taking up a large body of withered leaves beneath it, which were whirled about with a great rustling and carried forward with it into the meadow, frightening some hens there. And so they went on, gradually, or rather one after another, settling to the ground, and looking at last almost exactly like a flock of small birds dashing about in sport, till

they were out of sight forty or fifty rods off. These leaves were chiefly only a rod above the ground (I noticed some taken up last spring very high into the air), and the diameter of the whirl may have been a rod, more or less.

Early potentilla out, — how long? — on side of Annursnack.

*April 8 and 9.* More or less rainy.

*April 10.* Cheney elm, many anthers shed pollen, probably 7th. Some are killed. *Salix purpurea* apparently will not open for four or five days.

2 p. m. — 44° and east wind (followed by some rain still the next day, as usual).

*April 11.* P. M. — To Cliffs.

The hills are now decidedly greened as seen a mile off, and the road or street sides pretty brightly so. I have not seen any lingering heel of a snow-bank since April came in.

*Acer rubrum* west side Deep Cut, some well out, some killed by frost; probably a day or two at least. Hazels there are all done; were in their prime, methinks, a week ago at least. The early willow still in prime. *Salix humilis* abundantly out, how long?

*Epigaea* abundantly out (probably 7th at least).

Stow's cold pool three quarters full of ice.

My early sedge, which has been out at Cliffs apparently a few days (not yet quite generally), the highest only two inches, is probably *Carex umbellata*.

*April 12.* White-bellied swallows. Elm bud-scales have begun to strew the ground, and the trees look richly in flower. 60 at 2 P. M.

Hear a pigeon woodpecker's prolonged cackle.

*April 13.* P. M. — I go up the Assabet to look at the sweet-gale, which is apparently [?] out at Merrick's shore. It is abundantly out at Pinxter Swamp, and has been some time; so I think I may say that the very first opened April 1st (*q. v.*). This may be not only because the season was early and warm, but because the water was so low, — or would that be favorable?

At first I had felt disinclined to make this excursion up the Assabet, but it distinctly occurred to me that, perhaps, if I came against my will, as it were, to look at the sweet-gale as a matter [of] business, I might discover something else interesting, as when I discovered the sheldrake. As I was paddling past the uppermost hemlocks I saw two peculiar and plump birds near me on the bank there which reminded me of the cow blackbird and of the oriole at first. I saw at once that they were new to me, and guessed that they were crossbills, which was the case, — male and female. The former was dusky-greenish (through a glass), orange, and red, the orange, etc., on head, breast, and rump, the vent white; dark, large bill; the female more of a dusky slate-color, and yellow instead of orange and red. They were very busily eating the seeds of the hemlock, whose cones were strewn on the ground, and they were very fearless, allowing me to approach quite near.

When I returned this way I looked for them again, and at the larger hemlocks heard a peculiar note, *cheep, cheep, cheep, cheep, cheep*, in the rhythm of a fish hawk but faster and rather loud, and looking up saw them fly to the north side and alight on the top of a swamp white oak, while I sat in my boat close under the south bank. But immediately they recrossed and went to feeding on the bank within a rod of me. They were very parrot-like both in color (especially the male, greenish and orange, etc.) and in their manner of feeding, — holding the hemlock cones in one claw and rapidly extracting the seeds with their bills, thus trying one cone after another very fast. But they kept their bills a-going [so] that, near as they were, I did not distinguish the cross. I should have looked at them in profile. At last the two hopped within six feet of me, and one within four feet, and they were coming still nearer, as if partly from curiosity, though nibbling the cones all the while, when my chain fell down and rattled loudly, — for the wind shook the boat, — and they flew off a rod. In Bechstein I read that "it frequents fir and pine woods, but only when there are abundance of the cones." It may be that the abundance of white pine cones last fall had to do with their coming here. The hemlock cones were very abundant too, methinks.

*April 14.* A strong westerly wind in forenoon, shaking the house.

2 p. m. — 44°. To Easterbrooks's.

Benzoin not for two or three days at least. Gold-finches the 11th and in winter.

*April 15.* Strong northwest wind and cold. Thin ice this forenoon along meadow-side, and lasts all day.

2 p. m. — Thermometer 37. To Conantum.

At Conantum pitch pines hear the first pine warbler. Have not heard snipe yet. Is it because the meadows, having been bare, have not been thawed?

See ripples spread fan-like over Fair Haven Pond, from Lee's Cliff, as over Ripple Lake.

Crowfoot abundant; say in prime. A cedar under the Cliff abundantly out; how long? Some still not out. Say 13th. Mouse-ear. *Turritis* about out; say 16th.

Some little ferns already fairly unfolded, four or five inches long, there close under the base of the rocks, apparently *Woodsia Ilvensis*?

See and hear the seringo, — rather time [*sic*] compared with song sparrow. Probably see bay-wing (surely the 16th) about walls.

The arbor-vitæ *appears* to be much of it effete.

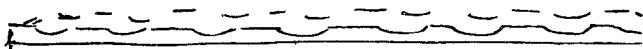
At this season of the year, we are continually expecting warmer weather than we have.

*April 16.* Rather warm.

In afternoon a true April rain, dripping and soaking into the earth and heard on the roof, which continuing, in the night it is very dark. This is owing to both the absence of the moon and the presence of the clouds.

I observed yesterday, in the cellar of the old Conantum house, a regular frame or "horse" to rest barrels (of cider, vinegar, etc.) on. It was probably made before the house was built, being exactly the length of the cellar, — two pieces of timber framed together, that

is, connected by crosspieces and lying on the cellar-bottom against one side, the whole length, with cavities cut in them to receive the barrels and prevent their rolling. There were places for eight barrels.



suggests how much more preparation was made in those days for the storing of liquors. We have at most one keg in our cellar for which such a horse would be a convenient place; yet in this now remote and uncovered cellar-hole lies a horse with places for eight barrels of liquor. It would make a toper's mouth water to behold it. You wonder how they got apples and cider-mills a-going so early, say a hundred and fifty years ago. No doubt they worked hard and sweated a good deal, and perhaps they required, or could bear, more strong drink than the present generation. This horse is a fixture, framed with the house, or rather with the cellar; a first thought it must have been, perchance made by a separate contract, since it comes below the sills. The barrels and their contents, and they who emptied them, and the house above, are all gone, and still the scalloped logs remain now in broad daylight to testify to the exact number of barrels of liquor which the former occupant expected to, and probably did, lay in. His grave-stone somewhere tells one sober story no doubt, and this his barrel-horse tells another, — and the only one that I hear. For twenty and odd years only the wood-chucks and wild mice to my knowledge have occupied this cellar. Such is the lowest stick of timber in an old New England man's house. He dug a hole

six feet into the earth and laid down a timber to hold his cider-barrel. Then he proceeded to build a house over it, with kitchen and sitting and sleeping rooms. It reminds me of travellers' stories of the London docks, of rows of hogsheads, of bonded liquors. Every New England cellar was once something like it. It is a relic of old England with her ale. The first settlers made preparations to drink a good deal, and they did not disappoint themselves.

*April 17.* I hear this forenoon the soothing and simple, though monotonous, notes of the chip-bird, telling us better than our thermometers what degree of summer warmth is reached; adds its humble but very pleasant contribution to the steadily increasing quire of the spring. It perches on a cherry tree, perchance, near the house, and unseen, by its steady *che-che-che-che-che-che*, affecting us often without our distinctly hearing it, it blends all the other and previous sounds of the season together. It invites us to walk in the yard and inspect the springing plants.

The evenings are very considerably shortened. We begin to be more out of doors, the less housed, think less, stir about more, are fuller of affairs and chores, come in chiefly to eat and to sleep. The amelanchier flower-buds are conspicuously swollen. Willows (*Salix alba*) probably (*did not* four or five days ago).

P. M. — Sail to Ball's Hill.

It is quite warm — 67 at 2 p. m. — and hazy, though rather strong and gusty northwest wind.

We land at the Holt and walk a little inland. It is

unexpectedly very warm on lee side of hilltop just laid bare and covered with dry leaves and twigs. See my first *Vanessa Antiopa*.

Looking off on to the river meadow, I noticed, as I thought, a stout stake aslant in the meadow, three or more rods off, sharp at the top and rather light-colored on one side, as is often the case; yet, at the same time, it occurred to me that a stake-driver often resembled a stake very much, but I thought, nevertheless, that there was no doubt about this being a stake. I took out my glass to look for ducks, and my companion, seeing what I had, and asking if it was not a stake-driver, I suffered my glass at last to rest on it, and I was much surprised to find that it was a stake-driver after all. The bird stood in shallow water near a tussock, perfectly still, with its long bill pointed upwards in the same direction with its body and neck, so as perfectly to resemble a stake aslant. If the bill had made an angle with the neck it would have been betrayed at once. Its resource evidently was to rely on its form and color and immobility solely for its concealment. This was its instinct, whether it implies any conscious artifice or not. I watched it for fifteen minutes, and at length it relaxed its muscles and changed its attitude, and I observed a slight motion; and soon after, when I moved toward it, it flew. It resembled more a piece of a rail than anything else, — more than anything that would have been seen here before the white man came. It is a question whether the bird consciously coöperates in each instance with its Maker, who contrived this concealment. I can never believe that this resemblance

is a mere coincidence, not designed to answer this very end — which it does answer so perfectly and usefully.

The meadows are alive with purring frogs.

J. Brown says that he saw martins on his box on the 13th and 14th, and that his son saw one the 8th (?).

I notice now and of late holes recently dug, — wood-chuck? or fox?

Lake grass was very long — a foot or two — and handsome, the 15th.

Heard a pigeon woodpecker on the 16th.

*April 18.* Cold, and still a strong wind. 46 at 2 p. m.

The *Salix discolor* peels well; also the aspen (early) has begun to peel.

Melvin says he has heard snipe some days, but thinks them scarce.

As I go by the site of Staples's new barn on the Kettle place, I see that they have just dug a well on the hillside and are bricking it up. They have dug twenty-four feet through sand (no stones of any size or consequence in it; I see none at all in what was thrown out; should say it was pure sand), and have some four feet of water in the well. This is probably as low as water in the meadow in front. It is just as far to water as in Messer's well east of it, and about as high up the hill. The whole range appears to be strictly a sand-hill. Humphrey Buttrick, the sportsman, was at the bottom, bricking up the well; a Clark who had been mining lately in California, and who had dug the well, was passing down brick and mortar to him; and Melvin, with a bundle of apple scions in his hand, was sitting

close by and looking over into the well from time to time.

Melvin said he feared that, the water being so low, the snipes would be overtaken by it and their nests broken up when it rose; that Josh Haynes told him that he found a woodcock's nest, and afterward he sailed over the nest in a boat, and yet, when the water went down, the bird went on and hatched the eggs.

Melvin has seen a dandelion in bloom.

Clark has heard a partridge drum.

I find that the side-hill just below the Dutch house is more loose and sandy than half a dozen years ago, and I attribute it to the hens wallowing in the earth and dusting themselves, and also pecking the grass and preventing its growing.

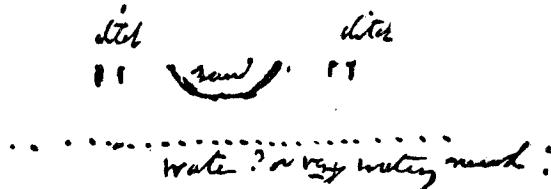
*April 19.* Surveying J. B. Moore's farm.

Hear the field sparrow sing on his dry upland, it being a warm day, and see the small blue butterfly hovering over the dry leaves.

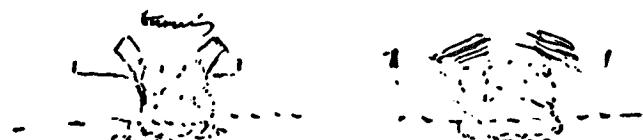
Toward night, hear a partridge drum. You will hear at first a single beat or two far apart and have time to say, "There is a partridge," so distinct and deliberate is it often, before it becomes a rapid roll.

Part of the Bedford road in Moore's Swamp had settled a few days ago so much more that the water was six inches deep over it, when they proceeded to cart on more sand; and about the 17th, when they had carted on considerable, half a dozen rods in length suddenly sank before their eyes, and only water and sand was seen where the road had been. One said that the water

was six feet deep over the road. It certainly was four or five. The road was laid out fifty feet wide, and without this, one each side, a broad ditch had been dug, thus:—



As I calculate, at least ten feet in thickness of sand have been placed on this swamp, and the firm mud could not have been less than a dozen more. The weight of the sand has now at last pressed down the mud and broken through it, causing the sides to turn up suddenly, *i.e.*, a thickness of six feet or more to turn, indeed, completely over and bottom side up on to the middle of the road a part of the way. The weight of sand suddenly jerked this tremendous weight of mud right back on to the road, bottom up.



The evening of the 21st a few rods more, with the culvert, went down, so that it was full four feet under water, making some seven or eight rods in all.

Up to about the 17th it had settled gradually, but then it sank *instantly* some five feet. This shows that the

weight of sand had burst through the mud, and that therefore it must have been comparatively liquid beneath. Perhaps it was water. In the deepest part of many a seemingly firm swamp which is cultivated, there is an exceedingly thin and liquid mud, or perhaps water. Here was probably once a pond, which has filled up and grown over, but still a relic of it survives deep under the mud in the deepest part.

There are thus the relics of ponds concealed deep under the surface, where they are little suspected, perchance, as under cleared and cultivated swamps or under roads and culverts. The two walls of the culvert must have been ten or twelve feet high, of heavy rocks, and yet they had not broken through in all this time till now!

*April 20.* The *Salix purpurea* in prime; began, say, 18th.

A warm day. Now begin to sit without fires more commonly, and to wear but one coat commonly.

Moore tells me that last fall his men, digging sand in that hollow just up the hill, dug up a parcel of snakes half torpid. They were both striped and black together, in a place somewhat porous, he thought where a horse had been buried once. The men killed them, and laid them all in a line on the ground, and they measured several hundred feet. This seems to be the common practice when such collections are found; they are at once killed and stretched out in a line, and the sum of their lengths measured and related.

It is a warm evening, and I hear toads ring distinctly for the first time.

C. sees bluets and some kind of thrush to-day, size of wood thrush, — *he* thought probably hermit thrush.

*April 22.* Row to Fair Haven.

Thermometer 56° or 54°.

See shad-flies. Scare up woodcock on the shore by my boat's place, — the first I had seen. It was feeding within a couple of rods, but I had not seen or thought of it. When I made a loud and sharp sound driving in my rowlocks, it suddenly flew up. It is evident that we very often come quite near woodcocks and snipe thus concealed on the ground, without starting them and so without suspecting that they are near. These marsh-birds, like the bittern, have this habit of keeping still and trusting to their resemblance to the ground.

See now hen-hawks, a pair, soaring high as for pleasure, circling ever further and further away, as if it were midsummer. The peculiar flight of a hawk thus fetches the year about. I do not see it soar in this serene and leisurely manner very early in the season, methinks.

The early *luzula* is almost in bloom; makes a show, with its budded head and its purplish and downy, silky leaves, on the warm margin of Clamshell Bank. Two or three dandelions in bloom spot the ground there.

Land at Lee's Cliff. The *cassandra* (water-brush) is well out, — how long? <sup>1</sup> — and in one place we dis-

<sup>1</sup> One found it the 20th.

turb great clouds of the little fuzzy gnats that were resting on the bushes, as we push up the shallow ditch there. The *Ranunculus fascicularis* is now in prime, rather than before. The columbine is hardly yet out.

I hear that the *Viola ovata* was found the 17th and the 20th, and the bloodroot in E. Emerson's garden the 20th.

J. B. Moore gave me some mineral which he found being thrown out of [a] drain that was dug between Knight's factory and his house. It appears to me to be red lead and quartz, and the lead is quite pure and marks very well, or freely, but is pretty dark.

*April 24.* The river is only half an inch above summer level. The meadow-sweet and hardhack have begun to leaf.

*April 25.* A cold day, so that the people you meet remark upon it, yet the thermometer is 47 at 2 p. m. We should not have remarked upon it in March. It is cold for April, being windy withal.

I fix a stake on the west side the willows at my boat's place, the top of which is at summer level and is about ten and a half inches below the stone wharf there. The river is one and one fourth inches above summer level to-day. That rock northwest of the boat's place is about fifteen inches (the top of it) below summer level. Heron Rock top (just above the junction of the rivers) is thirteen inches above summer level. I judge by my eye that the rock on the north side,

where the first bridge crossed the river, is about four inches lower than the last.

Mr. Stewart tells me that he has found a gray squirrel's nest up the Assabet, in a maple tree. I resolve that I too will find it. I do not know within less than a quarter of a mile where to look, nor whether it is in a hollow tree, or in a nest of leaves. I examine the shore first and find where he landed. I then examine the maples in that neighborhood to see what one has been climbed. I soon find one the bark of which has been lately rubbed by the boots of a climber, and, looking up, see a nest. It was a large nest made of maple twigs, with a centre of leaves, lined with finer, about twenty feet from the ground, against the leading stem of a large red maple. I noticed no particular entrance. When I put in my hand from above and felt the young, they uttered a dull croak-like squeak, and one clung fast to my hand when I took it out through the leaves and twigs with which it was covered. It was yet blind, and could not have been many days old, yet it instinctively clung to my hand with its little claws, as if it knew that there was danger of its falling from a height to the ground which it never saw. The idea of clinging was strongly planted in it. There was quite a depth of loose sticks, maple twigs, piled on the top of the nest. No wonder that they become skillful climbers who are born high above the ground and begin their lives in a tree, having first of all to descend to reach the earth. They are cradled in a tree-top, in but a loose basket, in helpless infancy, and there slumber when their mother is away. No wonder that they are never made

dizzy by high climbing, that were born in the top of a tree, and learn to cling fast to the tree before their eyes are open.

On my way to the Great Meadows I see boys a-fishing, with perch and bream on their string, apparently having good luck, the river is so low.

The river appears the lower, because now, before the weeds and grass have grown, we can see by the bare shore of mud or sand and the rocks how low it is. At midsummer we might imagine water at the base of the grass where there was none.

I hear the greatest concerts of blackbirds, — red-wings and crow blackbirds nowadays, especially of the former (also the 22d and 29th). The maples and willows along the river, and the button-bushes, are all alive with them. They look like a black fruit on the trees, distributed over the top at pretty equal distances. It is worth while to see how slyly they hide at the base of the thick and shaggy button-bushes at this stage of the water. They will suddenly cease their strains and flit away and secrete themselves low amid these bushes till you are past; or you scare up an unexpectedly large flock from such a place, where you had seen none.

I pass a large quire in full blast on the oaks, etc., on the island in the meadow northwest of Peter's. Suddenly they are hushed, and I hear the loud rippling rush made by their wings as they dash away, and, looking up, I see what I take to be a sharp-shinned hawk just alighting on the trees where they were, having failed to catch one. They retreat some forty rods off, to another tree, and renew their concert there. The hawk plumes him-

self, and then flies off, rising gradually and beginning to circle, and soon it joins its mate, and soars with it high in the sky and out of sight, as if the thought of so terrestrial a thing as a blackbird had never entered its head. It appeared to have a plain reddish-fawn breast. The size more than anything made me think it a sharp-shin.

When looking into holes in trees to find the squirrel's nest, I found a pout partly dried, with its tail gone, in one maple, about a foot above the ground. This was probably left there by a mink. Minott says that, being at work in his garden once, he saw a mink coming up from the brook with a pout in her mouth, half-way across his land. The mink, observing him, dropped her pout and stretched up her head, looking warily around, then, taking up the pout again, went onward and went under a rock in the wall by the roadside. He looked there and found the young in their nest, — so young that they were all "red" yet.

*April 26.* Hear the ruby-crowned wren in the morning, near George Heywood's.

We have had no snow for a long long while, and have about forgotten it. Dr. Bartlett, therefore, surprises us by telling us that a man came from Lincoln after him last night on the wheels of whose carriage was an inch of snow, for it snowed there a little, but not here. This is connected with the cold weather of yesterday; the chilling wind came from a snow-clad country. As the saying is, the cold was in the air and had got to come down.

To-day it is 53° at 2 p. m., yet cold, such a difference is there in our feelings. What we should have called a

warm day in March is a cold one at this date in April. It is the northwest wind makes it cold.

Out of the wind it is warm. It is not, methinks, the same air at rest in one place and in motion in another, but the cold that is brought by the wind seems not to affect sheltered and sunny nooks.

P. M. — To Cliffs and Well Meadow.

Comptonia. There are now very few leaves indeed left on the young oaks below the Cliffs. Sweet-briar, thimble-berry, and blackberry on warm rocks leaf early.

Red maples are past prime. I have noticed their handsome crescents over distant swamps commonly for some ten days. At height, then, say the 21st. They are especially handsome when seen between you and the sunlit trees.

The *Amelanchier Botryapium* is leafing; will apparently bloom to-morrow or next day. Sweet-fern (that does not flower) leafing.

The forward-rank sedge of Well Meadow which is so generally eaten (by rabbits, or possibly woodchucks), cropped close, is allied to that at Lee's Cliff, which is also extensively browsed now. I have found it difficult to get whole specimens. Certain tender early greens are thus extensively browsed now, in warm swamp-edges and under cliffs, — the bitter cress, the *Carex varia* (?) at Lee's, even skunk-cabbage.

The hellebore now makes a great garden of green under the alders and maples there, five or six rods long and a foot or more high. It grows thus before these trees have begun to leaf, while their numerous stems serve only to break the wind but not to keep out the sun. It is the

greatest growth, the most massive, of any plant's; now ahead of the cabbage. Before the earliest tree has begun to leaf it makes conspicuous green patches a foot high.

The river is exactly at summer level.

*April 27.* River five eightths of an inch below summer level.

P. M. — Row to Conantum.

At the stone bridge the lower side outer end of the stone is about a quarter of an inch above summer level.

I saw yesterday, and see to-day, a small hawk which I take to be a pigeon hawk. This one skims low along over Grindstone Meadow, close to the edge of the water, and I see the blackbirds rise hurriedly from the button-bushes and willows before him. I am decided by his size (as well as color) and his low, level skimming.<sup>1</sup>

The river meadows are now so dry that E. Wood is burning the Mantatuket one. Fishes are rising to the shad-flies, probably because the river is so low.

Luzula a day or two at Clamshell. Strawberry well out; how long? *Viola ovata* common. One dandelion white, as if going to seed! *Thalictrum anemonoides* are abundant, maybe two or three days, at Blackberry Steep.

I see where a robin has been destroyed, probably by a hawk. I think that I see these traces chiefly in the spring and fall. Why so? Columbine, but perhaps earlier, for I hear that it has been plucked here.

<sup>1</sup> Methinks I saw a yet smaller hawk, perhaps sparrow hawk, fly or skim over the village about the 12th.

I see, close under the rocks at Lee's, some new polypody flattened out.

I stand under Lee's Cliff. There is a certain summeriness in the air now, especially under a warm cliff like this, where you smell the very dry leaves, and hear the pine warbler and the hum of a few insects, — small gnats, etc., — and see considerable growth and greenness. Though it is still windy, there is, nevertheless, a certain serenity and long-lineness in the air, as if it were a habitable place and not merely to be hurried through. The noon of the year is approaching. Nature seems meditating a siesta. The hurry of the duck migration is, methinks, over. But the woods generally, and at a distance, show no growth yet.

There is a large fire in the woods northwest of Concord, just before night. A column of smoke is blown away from it far southeast, and as the twilight approaches, it becomes more and more dun. At first some doubted if it was this side the North River or not, but I saw that Annursnack was this side of it, but I expected our bells would ring presently. One who had just come down in the cars thought it must be in Groton, for he had left a fire there. And the passengers in the evening train from Boston said that they began to see the smoke of it as soon as they left the city! So hard is it to tell how far off a great fire is.<sup>1</sup>

April 28. P. M. — To Ed. Hoar's, Lincoln. Warm. 65°.

<sup>1</sup> I learn afterward that it was just this side of Groton Junction in Groton. Some seven hundred acres burned. *Vide* Apr. 30th.

The common *Salix rostrata* on east side railroad, yesterday at least. *S. Torreyana* a day or two longer. These willows are full of bees and resound with their hum. I see honey-bees laden with large pellets of the peculiar yellow pollen of the *S. rostrata*. Methinks I could tell when that was in bloom by catching the bees on their return to the hive. Here are also much smaller bees and flies, etc., etc., all attracted by these flowers. As you stand by such a willow in bloom and resounding with the hum of bees in a warm afternoon like this, you seem nearer to summer than elsewhere.

Again I am advertised of the approach of a new season, as yesterday. The air is not only warmer and stiller, but has more of meaning or smothered voice to it, now that the hum of insects begins to be heard. You seem to have a great companion with you, are reassured by the scarcely audible hum, as if it were the noise of your own thinking. It is a voiceful and significant stillness, such as precedes a thunder-storm or a hurricane. The boisterous spring winds cease to blow, the waves to dash, the migrating ducks to vex the air so much. You are sensible of a certain repose in nature.

Sitting on Mt. Misery, I see a very large bird of the hawk family, blackish with a partly white head but no white tail, — probably a fish hawk; sailed quite near, looking very large.

Large ants at work; how long?

April 29. River two and seven eighths inches below summer level at 6 A. M. Three plus inches below at night.

Peetweet. I see this above Dodd's, and in the afternoon another up Assabet. As if they had come together from the south, — those bound to this river valley, — for they are not a numerous bird. I have in other instances noticed that birds which are not seen flying in flocks will yet arrive in a town generally, in all parts of it, the same day.

We have had but little fire for two or three weeks past. A few bits of old board, which make a quick blaze, suffice to take off the chill of your chamber in the morning. You now look on heaps of fuel with indifference. One old plank, well husbanded, is sufficient shield against all the cold that is to come.

The frost melting at 6 a. m. wets my feet. It is almost a dew then.

The only change in the distant forest is the red crescents to the red maples of late.

I see the downy tall anemone heads yet, and, in some cases, the cotton which remains is entirely free of seed, and is very prettily recurved, in the form of a fool's-cap or short cone. You could not do it with your fingers.

P. M. — Up Assabet.

The earliest aspen is just bursting into bloom, but none is quite flattened out.

I listen to a concert of red-wings, — their rich sprayey notes, amid which a few more liquid and deep in a lower tone or undertone, as if it bubbled up from the very water beneath the button-bushes; as if those singers sat lower. Some old and skillful performer

touches these deep and liquid notes, and the rest seem to get up a concert just to encourage him. Yet it is ever a prelude or essay with him, as are all good things, and the melody he is capable of and which we did not hear this time is what we remember. The future will draw him out. The different individuals sit singing and pluming themselves and not appearing to have any conversation with one another. They are only tuning all at once; they never seriously perform; the hour has not arrived. Then all go off with a hurried and perhaps alarmed *tchuck tchuck*.

A clam lies up.

I stepped ashore behind Prichard's to examine a dead mud turtle, and when I had done, and turned round toward my boat again, behold, it was half-way across the river, blown by the southwest wind! The wind had risen after I landed, and perhaps I had given it a slight impulse with my foot when I landed. It lodged against a clump of willows on the other side, and I was compelled to return up-stream to borrow another boat to get it with. When I had borrowed a boat, I came near making the mistake of simply crossing the stream at once and running down the opposite shore; as if I could release my own boat and return on the same side to the borrowed one, return that, and so have got over my difficulties. I had to pause a moment and cipher it out in my mind.

It was remarkable how rapidly this large snapping turtle, which was killed last fall, had decayed. There [was] very little indeed of offensive odor about it. The shell contained only skin and bones now, and the pre-

vailing odor was a peculiarly salt one, like strong dry salt fish. But a small dead dog of apparently the same age near by was much more offensive.

I have noticed before that turtles and snakes are decomposed rapidly. Perhaps it is so with all reptiles.

It was remarkable what a bar the river had become to me, being between me and my boat,— how comparatively helpless I was. I have rarely looked at it in that light. There was no way but to row quite down to my boat, bring it over to this side, row back with the borrowed boat, and return on the bank to my own. It reminded me of the man crossing the bridge with a fox, a goose, and a peck of corn. By the time I got under weigh again the afternoon was too far spent for a long excursion.

The turtle's scales were more than half of them off, and its long framework loosened, and the very bones of its head seemed somewhat decayed.

The river being very low, I notice, up the Assabet, where the muddy shore has been probed either by a peetweet (do they feed thus?) or a woodcock or snipe,— I am inclined to think the peetweet, for I see them along the river just arrived. According to this, this bird is so confined in its range that perhaps I could tell if it had come by finding its track on the mud or sand.

When I examine a flat sandy shore on which the ripples now break, I find the tracks of many little animals that have lately passed along it close to the water's edge. Some, indeed, have come out of the water and gone into it again. Minks, squirrels, and birds; they it is that walk these inland strands. The moist sand and mud which

the water has but just ceased to dash over retains the most delicate impressions. It is the same with all our rivers. I have noticed it on the sandy shore of the broad Merrimack. Many little inhabitants of the wood and of the water have walked there, though probably you will not see one. They make tracks for the geologists. I now actually see one small-looking rusty or brown black mink scramble along the muddy shore and enter a hole in the bank.

I see swarms of water-bugs at rest in still bays under the willows and button-bushes, but when I approach near they begin to gyrate rapidly, and this evidently is their resource to avoid capture.

On the west side, just at the bend of the river by Dove Rock, where the ripples have caused the sandy strand to cave and made a perpendicular cliff an inch high, I notice, rising above the sand and waving in the water, what look at first like stubble of rye or pipes. With my finger I dig some up, two or three inches long and half in the sand. They look even like earthworms coated with sand, are hollow cylinders of sand, and have a certain toughness, breaking when drawn apart just as if there was a skin to them. They are both simple, more or less upright, flexible and waving, and also are branched sometimes.

I bring some home, which, dried and half flattened, look just like dead fishworms that have fallen in the sand. When I place a piece in the palm of my hand and rub it with my finger, it is reduced at once to pure sand and there is no vestige of a skin. The man of the Aquarium tells me, after this, that he finds



exactly similar things by the salt water, with worms in them.

I detect a new water-plant which I must have often seen before and confounded with the ranunculus, utricularias, and potomogetons. It *appears* to be the *Naias flexilis*, said to bloom in July and August. Much of it is covered with a whitish mealy-looking substance. It forms dense beds on the bottom in muddy places, *e. g.* west side just above sawed maple. I see its buds plainly now.

*April 30.* Cattle begin to go up-country, and every week day, especially Mondays, to this time [*sic*] May 7th,<sup>1</sup> at least, the greatest droves to-day. Methinks they will find slender picking up there for a while. Now many a farmer's boy makes his first journey, and sees something to tell of, — makes acquaintance with those hills which are mere blue warts in his horizon, finds them solid and *terra firma*, after all, and inhabited by herdsmen, partially befenced and measurable by the acre, with cool springs where you may quench your thirst after a dusty day's walk.

Surveying Emerson's wood-lot to see how much was burned near the end of March, I find that what I anticipated is exactly true, — that the fire did not burn hard on the northern slopes, there being then frost in the ground, and where the bank was very steep, say at angle of forty-five degrees, which was the case with more than a quarter of an acre, it did not run down at all, though no man hindered it.

<sup>1</sup> And 14th; thereafter few.

That fire in the woods in Groton on the 27th, which was seen so far, so very dun and extensive the smoke, so that you looked to see the flames too, proves what slight burnings it is, comparatively, that we commonly see making these cloud-like or bluish smokes in the horizon, and also how very far off they may often be. Those whitish columns of smoke which we see from the hills, and count so many of at once, are probably often fifty or sixty miles off or more. I can now believe what I have read of a traveller making such a signal on the slope of the Rocky Mountains a hundred miles off, to save coming back to his party. Yet, strange to say, I did not see the smoke of the still larger fire between Concord and Acton in March at all, I being in Lincoln and outdoors all the time. This Groton fire did not seem much further off than a fire in Walden Woods, and, as I believe and hear, in each town the inhabitants supposed it to be in the outskirts of their own township.