

V

DECEMBER, 1860

(ÆT. 43)

Dec. 1. P. M. — To Fair Haven Hill.

Yesterday, rain, raising river somewhat. Examined the young hickories on Fair Haven Hill slope to see how old they are. I sawed off three at two or three inches below the surface, and also higher up. These were about three feet high. The rings are very hard to discern, but I judge the smallest of them (which is about one inch in diameter and three feet high) to be seven years old. The other two are probably older, yet not nearly so old as the pines whose beginning I remember. It therefore must be that these hickories have sprung up from nuts within seven to twenty-five years past. They are most numerous in openings four or five rods over amid the pines, and are also found many rods from the pines in the open pasture, and also especially along walls, though yet very far from other trees of any kind. I infer, therefore, that animals plant them, and perhaps their growing along walls may be accounted for in part by the fact that the squirrels with nuts oftenest take that road. What is most remarkable is that they should be planted so often in open land, on a bare hillside, where oaks rarely are. I do not know of a grove of oaks springing up in this manner, — with broad intervals of bare sward between them, and away from pines.

How is this to be accounted for? Yet I did notice oak seedlings coming up in this manner in Potter's open field beyond Bear Garden.

It is wonderful how much these hickories have endured and prevailed over. Though I searched the whole hillside, not only for the smallest, but the most perpendicular and soundest, each of the three that I sawed off had died down once at least, years ago. Though it might not betray any scar above ground, on digging I found it an inch below the surface.

Most of these small ones consist of several stems from one root, and they are often of such fantastic forms and so diseased that they seem to be wholly dead at a little distance, and yet evidently many of them make erect, smooth, and sound trees at last, all defects smoothed over or obliterated. Some which have thus died down and sprung up again are in the form of rude harps and the like. These had great tap-roots considerably larger just beneath the surface than the stock above, and they were so firmly set in the ground that, though the tree was scarcely an inch in diameter and you had dug around it to the depth of three or four inches, it was impossible to pull one up; yet I did not notice any side roots, so high. They are iron trees, so rigid and so firm set are they. It may be that they are more persistent at the root than oaks, and so at last succeed in becoming trees in these localities where oaks fail. They may be more persevering. Perhaps, also, cattle do not browse them, but do oaks. It will be very suggestive to a novice just to go and dig up a dozen seedling oaks and hickories and see what they

have had to contend with. Theirs is like the early career of genius.

Measured a great red maple near the south end of E. Hubbard's swamp, dividing in two at the ground, the largest trunk 7 feet and 10 inches at three feet and draped for three or four feet up with the pulmonaria (?) lichen. This the largest I know. Another is $5\frac{1}{2}$ feet, a third $5\frac{1}{4}$, a fourth in open land just south of turnpike $6\frac{1}{6}$.

Dec. 2. P. M. — To Smith's Hickory Hill-side.

I come *via* Britton's to see if I can find a seedling hickory under half a dozen years old. After searching long amid the very numerous young hickories at Britton's shanty and Smith's Hill I fail to find one so recently planted. I find many at the last place only one or two feet, but they invariably have great roots, and old stubs which have died down are visible at or beneath the surface of the ground. It is very common — almost the rule — to find from one to three from one root each one inch in diameter and two or three feet high, while the common stock beneath the ground is two inches in diameter. Pulling at one at Britton's, which was two feet and a quarter in height, it came up easily, to my surprise, and I found that it had broken off at just one foot below the surface, being quite decayed there. It was three quarters of an inch in diameter at the surface, and increased regularly for five or six inches downward till it was one inch in diameter. There was the stub of an old shoot, and the root was suddenly enlarged to about one and a half inches in diameter and held about

the same to where it broke off, at a foot below the surface. There was another stub about three inches above the ground, and the more recent growth above this was the work of about four years. This last had died, and this year two shoots had put out at six and eight inches above the ground and had grown two and four inches respectively. Here were evident, then, at the very least, four efforts to rise to a tree.

The first stub was about the diameter of the whole tree at present (above ground). Call it, then,	4 years
The second was probably two years old when it died (at least)	2
The third (forming the present tree)	4
The fourth (growth of this year)	1
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	11

This little hickory, two feet and a quarter high and three quarters of an inch in diameter, standing in open land, was then at least eleven years old. What more the root would have revealed if I had dug deeper, I do not know. The fact that the lowest observed stub was nearly six inches below the surface, showing plainly to the eye that the earth had been heaped up about, was significant and suggested that this root might have survived in the ground through clearing and burning and subsequent cultivation. I remember well when the field was cultivated, I should think within ten or twelve years. It must be seventeen or eighteen years since the woods were cut here; since which time a peach orchard (which I selected) has been

raised, a premium obtained for it, and the trees died and gone some years ago, also an apple orchard. The hickories are on the site and in the midst of these; and what makes it the more likely that these hickories may be from roots of young seedlings left in the ground is the fact that there are sprouts from several large chestnut stumps in the midst of the orchard, which, by their size, have probably been cut down once or twice since the tree was cut, and yet survived. What is true of these chestnut sprouts may be true of the hickories.

On Smith's Hill I selected a large and healthy-looking one (hickory), sawed it off, and found it nearly dead. It was four years old. It had been cut down before to a stub, which showed five years more. I did not look beneath the surface. The leading shoot was perfectly withered and dead. The same was very commonly the case, except when the tree had got above a certain height. I do not think that a single hickory has been planted in either of these places for some years at least. Indeed, why should squirrels bring the nuts to these particular localities where other hickories already stood? which they must do, supposing them to be planted still, and not to be all of one age.

They seem to be able to resist fire, cultivation, and frost. The last is apparently their great enemy at present. It is astonishing how many efforts they make, how persistent they are. Thus much is certain, at least.

In surrounding young wood they are common, and have got up three or four times as high. It may be that when pine and oaks and hickories, young and old, are cut off and the land cleared, the two former are ex-

terminated but the hickories are tough and stubborn and do not give up the ground. I cannot as yet account for their existence in these two localities otherwise. Yet I still think that some must have been planted on Fair Haven Hill *without the pines* in a manner in which oaks are not, within a dozen years. Or perchance, if the oaks are *so* planted, they fail to come up?

In Stow's wood at Saw Mill Brook an old chestnut stump. Two sprouts from this were cut three years ago and have forty-two rings. From the stumps of the sprouts, other sprouts three years old have grown. The old stump was cut there forty-five years ago. The centre of the stumps of each of these sprouts is hollow for one and a half inches in diameter. See a chestnut stump, a seedling sawed off, with seventy-five rings and no sprout from it. Commonly the sprouts stand in a circle around the stump, — often a dozen or more of them.

Dec. 3.¹ P. M. — To Hill.

The hickory which was blown down by the wall has been cut up into lengths. The end of one some twelve feet from ground *apparently* is sixteen inches in diameter and has 112 rings distinct, the first 50 within five and three quarters inches. The bark is one inch thick.

Measured the three white oaks on the southeast side of hill.

¹ [Under date of March 22, 1861. Thoreau wrote to Daniel Ricketson: "I took a severe cold about the 3d of December, which at length resulted in a kind of bronchitis, so that I have been confined to the house ever since." — *Familiar Letters*, p. 376; Riv. 435.]

The northernmost	at three feet is	10 feet in	circumference.
" southeasternmost	" " "	10 $\frac{1}{2}$ "	" "
" southwesternmost	" " "	11 $\frac{1}{2}$ "	" "

I find no young hickories springing up on the *open* hillside. Yet, if they do so elsewhere, why should they not here, where nuts are abundant? But, under and about the hickory which stands near the white oak (under the north side of the hill), there are many small hickories two to four feet high amid the birches and pines, — the largest of which birches and pines have been lately cut off.

I am inclined to think now that both oaks and hickories are occasionally planted in open land a rod or two or more beyond the edge of a pine or other wood, but that the hickory roots are more persistent under these circumstances and hence oftener succeed there.

As for the planting of acorns, it is to be observed that they do not require to be buried but merely transported and dropped on the surface in a suitable place. All the sound white oak acorns that I can find have now sent down their radicle under these circumstances, though, no doubt, far the greatest part of them will be killed this winter.

Talking with Walcott and Staples to-day, they declared that John Brown did wrong. When I said that I thought he was right, they agreed in asserting that he did wrong because he threw his life away, and that no man had a right to undertake anything which he knew would cost him his life. I inquired if Christ did not foresee that he would be crucified if he preached such doctrines as he did, but they both, though as if

it was their only escape, asserted that they did not believe that he did. Upon which a third party threw in, "You do not think that he had so much foresight as Brown." Of course, they as good as said that, if Christ *had* foreseen that he would be crucified, he would have "backed out." Such are the principles and the logic of the mass of men.

It is to be remembered that by good deeds or words you encourage yourself, who always have need to witness or hear them.

Dec. 4. The first snow, four or five inches, this evening.

Talk about slavery! It is not the peculiar institution of the South. It exists wherever men are bought and sold, wherever a man allows himself to be made a mere thing or a tool, and surrenders his inalienable rights of reason and conscience. Indeed, this slavery is more complete than that which enslaves the body alone. It exists in the Northern States, and I am reminded by what I find in the newspapers that it exists in Canada. I never yet met with, or heard of, a judge who was not a slave of this kind, and so the finest and most unflinching weapon of injustice. He fetches a slightly higher price than the black man only because he is a more valuable slave.

It appears that a colored man killed his would-be kidnapper in Missouri and fled to Canada. The bloodhounds have tracked him to Toronto and now demand him of her judges. From all that I can learn, they are playing their parts like judges. They are servile,

while the poor fugitive in their jail is free in spirit at least.

This is what a Canadian writes to the *New York Tribune*: "Our judges may be compelled to render a judgment adverse to the prisoner. Depend upon it, they will not do it unless *compelled* [his italics].¹ And then the poor fellow will be taken back, and probably burned to death by the brutes of the South." Compelled! By whom? Does God compel them? or is it some other master whom they serve? Can't they hold out a little longer against the *tremendous pressure*? If they are fairly represented, I would n't trust their courage to defend a setting hen of mine against a weasel. Will this excuse avail them when the real day of judgment comes? They have not to fear the slightest bodily harm: no one stands over them with a stick or a knife even [?]. They have at the worst only to resign their places and not a mouse will squeak about it. And yet they are likely to assist in tying this victim to the stake! Would that his example might teach them to break their own fetters! They appear not to know what kind of justice that is which is to be done though the heavens fall. Better that the British Empire be destroyed than that it should help to reënslave this man!

This correspondent suggests that the "good people" of New York may rescue him as he is being carried back. There, then, is the only resort of justice, — not where the judges are, but where the mob is, where human hearts are beating, and hands move in obedience to their impulses. Perhaps his fellow-fugitives in Toronto

¹ [The brackets are Thoreau's.]

may not feel compelled to surrender him. Justice, departing from the Canadian soil, leaves her last traces among these.

What is called the religious world very generally deny virtue to all who have not received the Gospel. They accept no god as genuine but the one that bears a Hebrew name. The Greenlander's *Pirksomá* [?] (he that is above), or any the like, is always the name of a false god to them.

C. says that Walden was first frozen over on the 16th December.

Dec. 22. This evening and night, the second important snow, there having been sleighing since the 4th, and now, —

Dec. 23. — there is seven or eight inches of snow at least. Larks were about our house the middle of this month.

Dec. 26. Melvin sent to me yesterday a perfect *Strix asio*, or red owl of Wilson, — not at all gray. This is now generally made the same with the *nævia*, but, while some consider the red the old, others consider the red the young. This is, as Wilson says, a bright "nut brown" like a hazelnut or dried hazel bur (not *hazel*). It is twenty-three inches [in]alar extent by about eleven long. Feet extend one inch beyond tail. Cabot makes the old bird red; Audubon, the young. How well fitted these and other owls to withstand the winter! a mere core in the midst of such a muff of feathers! Then

the feet of this are feathered finely to the claws, looking like the feet of a furry quadruped. Accordingly owls are common here in winter; hawks, scarce.

It is no worse, I allow, than almost every other practice which custom has sanctioned, but that is the worst of it, for it shows how bad the rest are. To such a pass our civilization and division of labor has come that A, a professional huckleberry-picker, has hired B's field and, we will suppose, is now gathering the crop, perhaps with the aid of a patented machine; C, a professed cook, is superintending the cooking of a pudding made of some of the berries; while Professor D, for whom the pudding is intended, sits in his library writing a book, — a work on the *Vacciniæ*, of course. And now the result of this downward course will be seen in that book, which should be the ultimate fruit of the huckleberry-field and account for the existence of the two professors who come between D and A. It will be worthless. There will be none of the spirit of the huckleberry in it. The reading of it will be a weariness to the flesh. To use a homely illustration, this is to save at the spile but waste at the bung. I believe in a different kind of division of labor, and that Professor D should divide himself between the library and the huckleberry-field.

Dec. 30. Sunday. I saw the crows a week ago perched on the swamp white oaks over the road just beyond Wood's Bridge, and many acorns and bits of bark and moss, evidently dropped or knocked off by them, lay on the snow beneath. One sat within twenty feet over my head with what looked like a piece of acorn in his bill.

To-day I see that they have carried these same white oak acorns, cups and all, to the ash tree by the river-side, some thirty rods southeast, and dropped them there. Perhaps they find some grubs in the acorns, when they do not find meat. The crows now and of late frequent thus the large trees by the river, especially swamp white oak, and the snow beneath is strewn with bits of bark and moss and with acorns (commonly worthless). They are foraging. Under the first swamp white oak in Hubbard's great meadow (Cyanean) I see a little snap-turtle (shell some one and a quarter inches in diameter — on his second year, then) on its back on the ice — shell, legs, and tail perfect, but head pulled off, and most of the inwards with it by the same hole (where the neck was). What is left smells quite fresh, and this head must have been torn off to-day — or within a day or two. I see two crows on the next swamp white oak westward, and I can scarcely doubt that they did it. Probably one found the young turtle at an open and springy place in the meadow, or by the river, where they are constantly preying, and flew with it to this tree. Yet it is possible (?) that it was frozen to death when they found it.

I also saw under the oak where the crows were one of those large brown cocoons of the *Attacus Cecropia*, which no doubt they had torn off.

Eben Conant's sons tell me that there has been a turtle dove associating with their tame doves and feeding in the yard from time to time for a fortnight past. They saw it to-day.

The traveller Burton says that the word *Doab*, "which

means the land embraced by the bifurcation of two streams, has no English equivalent." ("Lake Regions of Central Africa," page 72.)

It is remarkable how universally, as it respects soil and exposure, the whortleberry family is distributed with us, one kind or another (of those of which I am speaking) flourishing in every soil and locality, — the Pennsylvania and Canada blueberries especially in elevated cool and airy places — on hills and mountains, and in openings in the woods and in sprout-lands; the high blueberry in swamps, and the second low blueberry in intermediate places, or almost anywhere but in swamps hereabouts; while we have two kinds confined to the Alpine tops of our highest mountains. The family thus ranges from the highest mountain-tops to the lowest swamps and forms the prevailing small shrubs of a great part of New England. Not only is this true of the family, but *hereabouts* of the genus *Gaylussacia*, or the huckleberries proper, alone. I do not know of a spot where any shrub grows in this neighborhood but one or another species or variety of the *Gaylussacia* may also grow there. It is stated in Loudon (page 1076) that all the plants of this order "require a peat soil, or a soil of a close cohesive nature," but this is not the case with the huckleberry. The huckleberry grows on the tops of our highest hills; no pasture is too rocky or barren for it; it grows in such deserts as we have, standing in pure sand; and, at the same time, it flourishes in the strongest and most fertile soil. One variety is peculiar to quaking bogs where there can hardly be said to be any soil beneath, not to mention another but

unpalatable species, the hairy huckleberry, which is found in bogs. It extends through all our woods more or less thinly, and a distinct species, the dangle-berry, belongs especially to moist woods and the edges of swamps.

Such care has nature taken to furnish to birds and quadrupeds, and to men, a palatable berry of this kind, slightly modified by soil and climate, wherever the consumer may chance to be. Corn and potatoes, apples and pears, have comparatively a narrow range, but we can fill our basket with whortleberries on the summit of Mt. Washington, above almost all the shrubs with which we are familiar, — the same kind which they have in Greenland, — and again, when we get home, with another species in Beck Stow's Swamp.

I find that in Bomare's "Dictionnaire Raisonné" the *Vitis Idæa* (of many kinds) is called "raisin des bois." Our word "berry," according to lexicographers, is from the Saxon *beria*, a grape or cluster of grapes; but it must acquire a new significance here, if a new word is not substituted for it.

According to Father Rasles' Dictionary, the Abenaki word for bluets ¹ was, fresh, *satar* (in another place *saté, tar*); dry, *sakisatar*.

First there is the early dwarf blueberry, the smallest of the whortleberry shrubs with us, and the first to ripen its fruit, not commonly an erect shrub, but more or less reclined and drooping, often covering the earth with a sort of dense matting. The twigs are green, the flowers commonly white. Both the shrub and its

¹ [See p. 300.]

fruit are the most tender and delicate of any that we have.

The *Vaccinium Canadense* may be considered a more northern form of the same.

Some ten days later comes the high blueberry, or swamp blueberry, the commonest stout shrub of our swamps, of which I have been obliged to cut down not a few when running lines as a surveyor through the low woods. They are a pretty sure indication of water, and, when I see their dense curving tops ahead, I prepare to wade, or for a wet foot. The flowers have an agreeable sweet and berry-promising fragrance, and a handful of them plucked and eaten have a subacid taste agreeable to some palates.

At the same time with the last the common low blueberry is ripe. This is an upright slender shrub with a few long wand-like branches, with green bark and pink-colored recent shoots and glaucous-green leaves. The flowers have a considerable rosy tinge, of a delicate tint.

The last two more densely flowered than the others.

The huckleberry, as you know, is an upright shrub, more or less stout depending on the exposure to the sun and air, with a spreading, bushy top, a dark-brown bark, and red recent shoots, with thick leaves. The flowers are much more red than those of the others.

As in old times they who dwelt on the heath remote from towns were backward to adopt the doctrines which prevailed there, and were therefore called heathen in a bad sense, so we dwellers in the huckleberry pastures, which are our heath lands, are slow to adopt the notions

of large towns and cities and may perchance be nick-named huckleberry people. But the worst of it is that the emissaries of the towns care more for our berries than for our salvation.

In those days the very race had got a bad name, and *ethnicus* was only another name for heathen.

All our hills are or have been huckleberry hills, the three hills of Boston and, no doubt, Bunker Hill among the rest.

In May and June all our hills and fields are adorned with a profusion of the pretty little more or less bell-shaped flowers of this family, commonly turned toward the earth and more or less tinged with red or pink and resounding with the hum of insects, each one the forerunner of a berry the most natural, wholesome, palatable that the soil can produce.

The early low blueberry, which I will call "bluet," adopting the name from the Canadians, is probably the prevailing kind of whortleberry in New England, for the high blueberry and huckleberry are unknown in many sections. In many New Hampshire towns a neighboring mountain-top is the common berry-field of many villages, and in the berry season such a summit will be swarming with pickers. A hundred at once will rush thither from all the surrounding villages, with pails and buckets of all descriptions, especially on a Sunday, which is their leisure day. When camping on such ground, thinking myself quite out of the world, I have had my solitude very unexpectedly interrupted by such an advent, and found that the week-days were the only Sabbath-days there.

For a mile or more on such a rocky mountain-top this will be the prevailing shrub, occupying every little shelf from several rods down to a few inches only in width, and then the berries droop in short wreaths over the rocks, sometimes the thickest and largest along a seam in a shelving rock, — either that light mealy-blue, or a shining black, or an intermediate blue, without bloom. When, at that season, I look from Concord toward the blue mountain-tops in the horizon, I am reminded that near at hand they are equally blue with berries.

The mountain-tops of New England, often lifted above the clouds, are thus covered with this beautiful blue fruit, in greater profusion than in any garden.

What though the woods be cut down, this emergency was long ago foreseen and provided for by Nature, and the interregnum is not allowed to be a barren one. She is full of resources: she not only begins instantly to heal that scar, but she consoles (compensates?) and refreshes us with fruits such as the forest did not produce. To console us she heaps our baskets with berries.

The timid or ill-shod confine themselves to the land side, where they get comparatively few berries and many scratches, but the more adventurous, making their way through the open swamp, which the bushes overhang, wading amid the water andromeda and sphagnum, where the surface quakes for a rod around, obtain access to those great drooping clusters of berries which no hand has disturbed. There is no wilder and richer sight than is afforded from such a point of view,

of the edge of a blueberry swamp where various wild berries are intermixed.

As the sandalwood is said to diffuse its perfume around the woodman who cuts it, so in this case Nature rewards with unexpected fruits the hand that lays her waste.