III

JANUARY – APRIL, 1851

(ÆT. 33)

Jan. 2. Saw at Clinton last night a room at the gingham-mills which covers one and seven-eighths acres and contains 578 looms, not to speak of spindles, both throttle and mule. The rooms all together cover three acres. They were using between three and four hundred horse-power, and kept an engine of two hundred horse-power, with a wheel twenty-three feet in diameter and a band ready to supply deficiencies, which have not often occurred. Some portion of the machinery — I think it was where the cotton was broken up, lightened up, and mixed before being matted together — revolved eighteen hundred times in a minute.

I first saw the pattern room where patterns are made by a hand loom. There were two styles of warps ready for the woof or filling. The operator must count the threads of the woof, which in the mill is done by the machinery. It was the ancient art of weaving, the shuttle flying back and forth, putting in the filling. As long as the warp is the same, it is but one "style," so called.

The cotton should possess a long staple and be clean and free from seed. The Sea Island cotton has a long staple and is valuable for thread. Many bales are thoroughly mixed to make the goods of one quality. The cotton is then torn to pieces and thoroughly lightened up by cylinders armed with hooks and by fans; then spread, a certain weight on a square yard, and matted together, and torn up and matted together again two or three times over; then the matted cotton fed to a cylindrical card, a very thin web of it, which is gathered into a copper trough, making six (the six-card machines) flat, rope-like bands, which are united into one at the railway head and drawn. And this operation of uniting and drawing or stretching goes on from one machine to another until the thread is spun, which is then dyed (calico is printed after being woven), — having been wound off on to reels and so made into skeins, — dyed and dried by steam; then, by machinery, wound on to spools for the warp and the woof. From a great many spools the warp is drawn off over cylinders and different-colored threads properly mixed and arranged. Then the ends of the warp are drawn through the harness of the loom by hand. The operator knows the succession of red, blue, green, etc., threads, having the numbers given her, and draws them through the harness accordingly, keeping count. Then the woof is put in, or it is *woven!!* Then the inequalities or nubs are picked off by girls. If *they* discover any imperfection, they tag it, and if necessary the wages of the weaver are reduced. Now, I think, it is passed over a red-hot iron cylinder, and the fuzz singed off, then washed with wheels with cold water; then the water forced out by centrifugal force within horizontal wheels. Then it is starched, the ends stitched together by machinery; then stretched smooth, dried, and ironed by machinery; then measured, folded, and packed.

This the agent, Forbes, says is the best gingham-mill in this country. The goods are better than the imported. The English have even stolen their name Lancaster Mills, calling them "Lancasterian."

The machinery is some of it peculiar, part of the throttle spindles (?) for instance.

The coach-lace-mill, only place in this country where it is made by machinery; made of thread of different materials, as cotton, worsted, linen, as well as colors, the raised figure produced by needles inserted woof fashion. Well worth examining further. Also pantaloon stuffs made in same mill and dyed after being woven, the woolen not taking the same dye with the cotton; hence a slight parti-colored appearance. These goods are sheared, *i. e.* a part of the nap taken off, making them smoother. Pressed between pasteboards.

The Brussels carpets made at the carpet-factory said to be the best in the world. Made like coach lace, only wider.

Erastus (?) Bigelow inventor of what is new in the above machinery; and, with his brother and another, owner of the carpet-factory.

I am struck by the fact that no work has been shirked when a piece of cloth is produced. Every thread has been counted in the finest web; it has not been matted together. The operator has succeeded only by patience, perseverance, and fidelity.

The direction in which a railroad runs, though intersecting another at right angles, may cause that one will be blocked up with snow and the other be

comparatively open even for great distances, depending on the direction of prevailing winds and valleys. There are the Fitchburg and Nashua & Worcester.

Jan. 4. The longest silence is the most pertinent question most pertinently put. Emphatically silent. The most important question, whose answers concern us more than any, are never put in any other way.

It is difficult for two strangers, mutually well disposed, so truly to bear themselves toward each other that a feeling of falseness and hollowness shall not soon spring up between them. The least anxiety to behave truly vitiates the relation. I think of those to whom I am at the moment truly related, with a joy never expressed and never to be expressed, before I fall asleep at night, though I am hardly on speaking terms with them these years. When I think of it, I am truly related to them.

Jan. 5. The catkins of the alders are now frozen stiff!!

Almost all that my neighbors call good I believe in my soul to be bad. If I repent of anything, it is of my good behavior. What demon possessed me that I behaved so well? You may say the wisest thing you can, old man, — you who have lived seventy years, not without honor of a kind, — I hear an irresistible voice, the voice of my destiny, which invites me away from all that.[1]

Jan. 7. The snow is sixteen inches deep at least, but [it] is a mild and genial afternoon, as if it were the

[1] [*Walden*, p. 11; Riv. 19.]

beginning of a January thaw. Take away the snow and it would not be winter but like many days in the fall. The birds acknowledge the difference in the air; the jays are more noisy, and the chickadees are oftener heard.

Many herbs are not crushed by the snow.

I do not remember to have seen fleas except when the weather was mild and the snow damp.

I must live above all in the present.

Science does not embody all that men know, only what is for men of science. The woodman tells me how he caught trout in a box trap, how he made his trough for maple sap of pine logs, and the spouts of sumach or white ash, which have a large pith. He can relate his facts to human life.

The knowledge of an unlearned man is living and luxuriant like a forest, but covered with mosses and lichens and for the most part inaccessible and going to waste; the knowledge of the man of science is like timber collected in yards for public works, which still supports a green sprout here and there, but even this is liable to dry rot.

I felt my spirits rise when I had got off the road into the open fields, and the sky had a new appearance. I stepped along more buoyantly. There was a warm sunset over the wooded valleys, a yellowish tinge on the pines. Reddish dun-colored clouds like dusky flames stood over it. And then streaks of blue sky were seen here and there. The life, the joy, that is in blue sky after a storm! There is no account of the blue sky in

history. Before I walked in the ruts of travel; now I adventured. This evening a fog comes up from the south.

If I have any conversation with a scamp in my walk, my afternoon is wont to be spoiled.

The squirrels and apparently the rabbits have got all the frozen apples in the hollow behind Miles's. The rabbits appear to have devoured what the squirrels dropped and left. I see the tracks of both leading from the woods on all sides to the apple trees.

Jan. 8. The smilax (green-briar) berries still hang on like small grapes. The thorn of this vine is very perfect, like a straight dagger.

The light of the setting sun falling on the snow-banks to-day made them glow almost yellow.

The hills seen from Fair Haven Pond make a wholly new landscape; covered with snow and yellowish green or brown pines and shrub oaks, they look higher and more massive. Their white mantle relates them to the clouds in the horizon and to the sky. Perchance what is light-colored looks loftier than what is dark.

You might say of a very old and withered man or woman that they hung on like a shrub oak leaf, almost to a second spring. There was still a little life in the heel of the leaf-stalk.

Jan. 10. The snow shows how much of the mountains in the horizon are covered with forest. I can also see plainer as I stand on a hill what proportion of the township is in forest.

Got some excellent frozen-thawed apples off of Annursnack, soft and luscious as a custard and free from worms and rot. Saw a partridge budding, but they did not appear to have pecked the apples.

There was a remarkable sunset; a mother-of-pearl sky seen over the Price farm; some small clouds, as well as the edges of large ones, most brilliantly painted with mother-of-pearl tints through and through. I never saw the like before. Who can foretell the sunset,— what it will be?

The near and bare hills covered with snow look like mountains, but the mountains in the horizon do not look higher than hills.

I frequently see a hole in the snow where a partridge has squatted, the mark or form of her tail very distinct.

The chivalric and heroic spirit, which once belonged to the chevalier or rider only, seems now to reside in the walker. To represent the chivalric spirit we have no longer a knight, but a walker, errant.[1] I speak not of pedestrianism, or of walking a thousand miles in a thousand successive hours.

The Adam who daily takes a turn in his garden.

Methinks I would not accept of the gift of life, if I were required to spend as large a portion of it sitting foot up or with my legs crossed, as the shoemakers and tailors do. As well be tied neck and heels together and cast into the sea. Making acquaintance with my extremities.

I have met with but one or two persons in the course of my life who understood the art of taking walks daily, — not [to] exercise the legs or body merely, nor barely to

[1] [*Excursions*, p. 206; Riv. 253.]

recruit the spirits, but positively to exercise both body and spirit, and to succeed to the highest and worthiest ends by the abandonment of all specific ends, — who had a genius, so to speak, for sauntering. And this word "saunter," by the way, is happily derived "from idle people who roved about the country [in the Middle Ages][1] and asked charity under pretence of going *à la Sainte Terre*," to the Holy Land, till, perchance, the children exclaimed, "There goes a *Sainte-Terrer*," a Holy-Lander. They who never go to the Holy Land in their walks, as they pretend, are indeed mere idlers and vagabonds.[2]

[Four pages missing.]

[Perhaps I am more] than usually jealous of my freedom. I feel that my connections with and obligations to society are at present very slight and transient. Those slight labors which afford me a livelihood, and by which I am serviceable to my contemporaries, are as yet a pleasure to me, and I am not often reminded that they are a necessity. So far I am successful, and only he is successful in his business who makes that pursuit which affords him the highest pleasure sustain him. But I foresee that if my wants should be much increased the labor required to supply them would become a drudgery. If I should sell both my forenoons and afternoons to society, neglecting my peculiar calling, there would be nothing left worth living for. I trust that I shall never thus sell my birthright for a mess of pottage.[3]

[1] [The brackets are Thoreau's.] [2] [*Excursions*, p. 205; Riv. 251.]
[3] [*Cape Cod, and Miscellanies*, pp. 460, 461; *Misc.*, Riv. 260.]

F. Andrew Michaux says that "the species of large trees are much more numerous in North America than in Europe: in the United States there are more than one hundred and forty species that exceed thirty feet in height; in France there are but thirty that attain this size, of which eighteen enter into the composition of the forests, and seven only are employed in building." [1]

The perfect resemblance of the chestnut, beech, and hornbeam in Europe and the United States rendered a separate figure unnecessary.

He says the white oak "is the only oak on which a few of the dried leaves persist till the circulation is renewed in the spring."

Had often heard his father say that "the fruit of the common European walnut, in its natural state, is harder than that of the American species just mentioned [the pacane-nut hickory] [2] and inferior to it in size and quality."

The arts teach us a thousand lessons. Not a yard of cloth can be woven without the most thorough fidelity in the weaver. The ship must be made *absolutely* tight before it is launched.

It is an important difference between two characters that the one is satisfied with a happy but level success but the other as constantly elevates his aim. Though my life is low, if my spirit looks upward habitually at an elevated angle, it is as it were redeemed. When the

[1] [*Excursions*, p. 220; Riv. 269, 270.]

[2] [The bracketed words are Thoreau's.]

desire to be better than we are is really sincere we are instantly elevated, and so far better already.

I lose my friends, of course, as much by my own ill treatment and ill valuing of them, prophaning of them, cheapening of them, as by their cheapening of themselves, till at last, when I am prepared to [do] them justice, I am permitted to deal only with the memories of themselves, their ideals still surviving in me, no longer with their actual selves. We exclude ourselves, as the child said of the stream in which he bathed head or foot. (*Vide* Confucius.)

It is something to know when you are addressed by Divinity and not by a common traveller. I went down cellar just now to get an armful of wood and, passing the brick piers with my wood and candle, I heard, methought, a commonplace suggestion, but when, as it were by accident, I reverently attended to the hint, I found that it was the voice of a god who had followed me down cellar to speak to me. How many communications may we not lose through inattention!

I would fain keep a journal which should contain those thoughts and impressions which I am most liable to forget that I have had; which would have in one sense the greatest remoteness, in another, the greatest nearness to me.

'T is healthy to be sick sometimes.

I do not know but the reason why I love some Latin verses more than whole English poems is simply in the elegant terseness and conciseness of the language,

an advantage which the individual appears to have shared with his nation.

When we can no longer ramble in the fields of nature, we ramble in the fields of thought and literature. The old become readers. Our heads retain their strength when our legs have become weak.

English literature from the days of the minstrels to the Lake Poets, Chaucer and Spenser and Shakspeare and Milton included, breathes no quite fresh and, in this sense, wild strain. It is an essentially tame and civilized literature, reflecting Greece and Rome. Her wilderness is a greenwood, her wild man a Robin Hood. There is plenty of genial love of nature in her poets, but [not so much of nature herself.] Her chronicles inform us when her wild animals, but not when the wild man in her, became extinct.[1] There was need of America. I cannot think of any poetry which adequately expresses this yearning for the Wild, the *wilde*.[2]

Ovid says: —

> Nilus in extremum fugit perterritus orbem,
> Occuluitque caput, quod adhuc latet.
> (Nilus, terrified, fled to the extremity of the globe,
> And hid his head, which is still concealed.)

And we moderns must repeat, "*Quod adhuc latet.*"

Phaëton's epitaph: —

> Hic situs est Phaëton, currûs auriga paterni;
> Quem si non tenuit, magnis tamen excidit ausis.

[1] [*Excursions*, p. 231; Riv. 283, 284.]

[2] [*Excursions*, p. 232; Riv. 284.]

His sister Lampetie *subitâ radice retenta est.* All the sisters were changed to trees while they were in vain beseeching their mother not to break their branches. *Cortex in verba novissima venit.*

His brother Cycnus, lamenting the death of Phaëton killed by Jove's lightning, and the metamorphosis of his sisters, was changed into a swan, —

> nec se coeloque, Jovique
> Credit, ut injustè missi memor ignis ab illo.
>
> (Nor trusts himself to the heavens
> Nor to Jove, as if remembering the fire unjustly sent by him),

i. e. against Phaëton. (Reason why the swan does not fly.)

> . . . precibusque minas regaliter addit.
> ([Jove] royally adds threats to prayers.)

Callisto *miles erat Phoebes, i. e.* a huntress.

> . . (neque enim coelestia tingi
> Ora decet lachrymis).

(For it is not becoming that the faces of the celestials be tinged with tears, — keep a stiff upper lip.)

How much more fertile a nature has Grecian mythology its root in than English literature! The nature which inspired mythology still flourishes. Mythology is the crop which the Old World bore before its soil was exhausted. The West is preparing to add its fables to those of the East.[1] A more fertile nature than the Mississippi Valley.

None of your four-hour nights for me. The wise man

[1] [*Excursions*, pp. 232, 233; Riv. 285.]

will take a fool's allowance. The corn would not come to much if the nights were but four hours long.

The soil in which those fables grew is deep and inexhaustible.

Lead cast by the Balearian sling: —

Volat illud, et incandescit eundo;
Et, quos non habuit, sub nubibus invenit ignes.
(That flies and grows hot with going,
And fires which it had not finds amid the clouds.)

I went some months ago to see a panorama of the Rhine. It was like a dream of the Middle Ages. I floated down its historic stream in something more than imagination, under bridges built by the Romans and repaired by later heroes, past cities and castles whose very names were music to me, — made my ears tingle, — and each of which was the subject of a legend. There seemed to come up from its waters and its vine-clad hills and valleys a hushed music as of crusaders departing for the Holy Land. There were Ehrenbreitstein and Rolandseck and Coblentz, which I knew only in history. I floated along through the moonlight of history under the spell of enchantment. It was as if I remembered a glorious dream, — as if I had been transported to a heroic age and breathed an atmosphere of chivalry. Those times appeared far more poetic and heroic than these.

Soon after I went to see the panorama of the Mississippi, and as I fitly worked my way upward in the light of to-day, and saw the steamboats wooding up, and looked up the Ohio and the Missouri, and saw its

unpeopled cliffs, and counted the rising cities,[1] and saw the Indians removing west across the stream, and heard the legends of Dubuque and of Wenona's Cliff, — still thinking more of the future than of the past or present, — I saw that this was a Rhine stream of a different kind.[2]

The Old World, with its vast deserts and its arid and elevated steppes and table-lands, contrasted with the New World with its humid and fertile valleys and savannas and prairies and its boundless primitive forests, is like the exhausted Indian corn lands contrasted with the peat meadows. America requires some of the sand of the Old World to be carted on to her rich but as yet unassimilated meadows.

Guyot says, "The Baltic Sea has a depth of only 120 feet between the coasts of Germany and those of Sweden" (page 82). "The Adriatic, between Venice and Trieste, has a depth of only 130 feet." "Between France and England, the greatest depth does not exceed 300 feet." The most extensive forest, "the most gigantic wilderness," on the earth is in the basin of the Amazon, and extends almost unbroken more than fifteen hundred miles. South America the kingdom of palms; nowhere a greater number of species. "This is a sign of the preponderating development of leaves over every other part of the vegetable growth; of that expansion of foliage, of that *leafiness*, peculiar to warm and moist climates.

[1] The fresh ruins of Nauvoo, the bright brick towns. Davenport?
[2] [*Excursions*, pp. 223, 224; Riv. 274.]

America has no plants with slender, shrunken leaves, like those of Africa and New Holland. The Ericas, or heather, so common, so varied, so characteristic of the flora of the Cape of Good Hope, is a form unknown to the New World. There is nothing resembling those Metrosideri of Africa, those dry Myrtles (Eucalyptus) and willow-leaved acacias, whose flowers shine with the liveliest colors, but their narrow foliage, turned edgewise to the vertical sun, casts no shadow." [1]

The white man derives his nourishment from the earth, — from the roots and grains, the potato and wheat and corn and rice and sugar, which often grow in fertile and pestilential river bottoms fatal to the life of the cultivator. The Indian has but a slender hold on the earth. He derives his nourishment in great part but indirectly from her, through the animals he hunts.[2]

"Compared with the Old World, the New World is the humid side of our planet, the *oceanic, vegetative* world, the passive element awaiting the excitement of a livelier impulse from without." [3]

"For the American, this task is to work the virgin soil."

"Agriculture here already assumes proportions unknown everywhere else." [4]

[1] [Arnold Guyot, *The Earth and Man*. Translated by C. C. Felton.]

[2] My own.

[3] [Guyot, *op. cit.*]

[4] [Guyot, *op. cit.*]

Feb. 9. The last half of January was warm and thawy. The swift streams were open, and the muskrats were seen swimming and diving and bringing up clams, leaving their shells on the ice. We had now forgotten summer and autumn, but had already begun to anticipate spring. Fishermen improved the warmer weather to fish for pickerel through the ice. Before it was only the autumn landscape with a thin layer of snow upon it; we saw the withered flowers through it; but now we do not think of autumn when we look on this snow. That earth is effectually buried. It is midwinter. Within a few days the cold has set in stronger than ever, though the days are much longer now. Now I travel across the fields on the crust which has frozen since the January thaw, and I can cross the river in most places. It is easier to get about the country than at any other season, — easier than in summer, because the rivers and meadows are frozen and there is no high grass or other crops to be avoided; easier than in December before the crust was frozen.

Sir John Mandeville says, "In fro what partie of the earth that men dwell, outher aboven or benethen, it seemeth always to hem that dwellen there, that they gon more right than any other folk." Again, "And yee shulle undirstonde, that of all theise contrees, and of all theise yles, and of all the dyverse folk, that I have spoken of before, and of dyverse laws and of dyverse beleeves that thei have, yit is there non of hem alle, but that thei have sum resoun within hem and understondinge, but gif it be the fewere."

I have heard that there is a Society for the Diffusion of Useful Knowledge. It is said that knowledge is power and the like. Methinks there is equal need of a Society for the Diffusion of Useful Ignorance, for what is most of our boasted so-called knowledge but a conceit that we know something, which robs us of the advantages of our actual ignorance.[1]

For a man's ignorance sometimes is not only useful but beautiful, while his knowledge is oftentimes worse than useless, beside being ugly.[2] In reference to important things, whose knowledge amounts to more than a consciousness of his ignorance? Yet what more refreshing and inspiring knowledge than this?

How often are we wise as serpents without being harmless as doves!

Donne says, "Who are a little wise the best fools be." Cudworth says, "We have all of us by nature μάντευμά τε (as both Plato and Aristotle call it), a certain divination, presage and parturient vaticination in our minds, of some higher good and perfection than either power or knowledge." Aristotle himself declares, that there is λόγου τι κρεῖττον, which is λόγου ἀρχή, — (something better than reason and knowledge, which is the principle and original of all). Lavater says, "Who finds the clearest not clear, thinks the darkest not obscure."

My desire for knowledge is intermittent; but my desire to commune with the spirit of the universe, to

[1] [*Excursions*, p. 239; Riv. 293.]
[2] [*Excursions*, p. 240; Riv. 294.]

be intoxicated even with the fumes, call it, of that divine nectar, to bear my head through atmospheres and over heights unknown to my feet, is perennial and constant.[1]

It is remarkable how few events or crises there are in our minds' histories, how little *exercised* we have been in our minds, how few experiences we have had.[2]

[Four pages missing.]

The story of Romulus and Remus being suckled by a wolf is not a mere fable; the founders of every state which has risen to eminence have drawn their nourishment and vigor from a similar source. It is because the children of the empire were not suckled by wolves that they were conquered and displaced by the children of the northern forests who were.[3]

America is the she wolf to-day, and the children of exhausted Europe exposed on her uninhabited and savage shores are the Romulus and Remus who, having derived new life and vigor from her breast, have founded a new Rome in the West.

It is remarkable how few passages, comparatively speaking, there are in the best literature of the day which betray any intimacy with Nature.

It is apparent enough to me that only one or two of my townsmen or acquaintances — not more than one in many thousand men, indeed — feel or at least obey any strong attraction drawing them toward the forest or to Nature, but all, almost without exception, gravitate

[1] [*Excursions*, p. 240; Riv. 294.]
[2] [*Excursions*, p. 241; Riv. 295.]
[3] [*Excursions*, pp. 224, 225; Riv. 275.]

exclusively toward men, or society.[1] The young men of Concord and in other towns do not walk in the woods, but congregate in shops and offices. They suck one another. Their strongest attraction is toward the mill-dam. A thousand assemble about the fountain in the public square, — the town pump, — be it full or dry, clear or turbid, every morning, but not one in a thousand is in the meanwhile drinking at that fountain's head. It is hard for the young, aye, and the old, man in the outskirts to keep away from the mill-dam a whole day; but he will find some excuse, as an ounce of cloves that might be wanted, or a *New England Farmer* still in the office, to tackle up the horse, or even go afoot, but he will go at some rate. This is not bad comparatively; this is because he cannot do better. In spite of his hoeing and chopping, he is unexpressed and undeveloped.

I do not know where to find in any literature, whether ancient or modern, any adequate account of that Nature with which I am acquainted. Mythology comes nearest to it of any.[2]

The actual life of men is not without a dramatic interest at least to the thinker. It is not always and everywhere prosaic. Seventy thousand pilgrims proceed annually to Mecca from the various nations of Islam. But this is not so significant as the far simpler and more unpretending pilgrimage to the shrines of some obscure individual, which yet makes no bustle in the world.

I believe that Adam in paradise was not so favorably situated on the whole as is the backwoodsman

[1] [*Excursions*, p. 241; Riv. 296.]
[2] [*Excursions*, p. 232; Riv. 284, 285.]

in America.[1] You all know how miserably the former turned out, — or was turned out, — but there is some consolation at least in the fact that it yet remains to be seen how the western Adam in the wilderness will turn out.

In Adam's fall
We sinned all.
In the new Adam's rise
We shall all reach the skies.

An infusion of hemlock in our tea, if we must drink tea, — not the poison hemlock, but the hemlock spruce, I mean,[2] — or perchance the Arbor-Vitæ, the tree of life, — is what we want.

Feb. 12. *Wednesday.* A beautiful day, with but little snow or ice on the ground. Though the air is sharp, as the earth is half bare the hens have strayed to some distance from the barns. The hens, standing around their lord and pluming themselves and still fretting a little, strive to fetch the year about.

A thaw has nearly washed away the snow and raised the river and the brooks and flooded the meadows, covering the old ice, which is still fast to the bottom.

I find that it is an excellent walk for variety and novelty and wildness, to keep round the edge of the meadow, — the ice not being strong enough to bear and transparent as water, — on the bare ground or snow, just between the highest water mark and the present water line, — a narrow, meandering walk, rich in unex-

[1] [*Excursions*, p. 223; Riv. 273.]
[2] [*Excursions*, p. 225; Riv. 275.]

pected views and objects. The line of rubbish which marks the higher tides — withered flags and reeds and twigs and cranberries — is to my eyes a very agreeable and significant line, which Nature traces along the edge of the meadows. It is a strongly marked, enduring natural line, which in summer reminds me that the water has once stood over where I walk. Sometimes the grooved trees tell the same tale. The wrecks of the meadow, which fill a thousand coves, and tell a thousand tales to those who can read them. Our prairial, mediterranean shore. The gentle rise of water around the trees in the meadow, where oaks and maples stand far out in the sea, and young elms sometimes are seen standing close around some rock which lifts its head above the water, as if protecting it, preventing it from being washed away, though in truth they owe their origin and preservation to it. It first invited and detained their seed, and now preserves the soil in which they grow. A pleasant reminiscence of the rise of waters, to go up one side of the river and down the other, following this way, which meanders so much more than the river itself. If you cannot go on the ice, you are then gently compelled to take this course, which is on the whole more beautiful, — to follow the sinuosities of the meadow. Between the highest water mark and the present water line is a space generally from a few feet to a few rods in width. When the water comes over the road, then my spirits rise, — when the fences are carried away. A prairial walk. Saw a caterpillar crawling about on the snow.

The earth is so bare that it makes an impression on me as if it were catching cold.

I saw to-day something new to me as I walked along the edge of the meadow. Every half-mile or so along the channel of the river I saw at a distance where apparently the ice had been broken up while freezing by the pressure of other ice, — thin cakes of ice forced up on their edges and reflecting the sun like so many mirrors, whole fleets of shining sails, giving a very lively appearance to the river, — where for a dozen rods the flakes of ice stood on their edges, like a fleet beating up-stream against the sun, a fleet of ice-boats.

It is remarkable that the cracks in the ice on the meadows sometimes may be traced a dozen rods from the water through the snow in the neighboring fields.

It is only necessary that man should start a fence that Nature should carry it on and complete it. The farmer cannot plow quite up to the rails or wall which he himself has placed, and hence it often becomes a hedgerow and sometimes a coppice.

I found to-day apples still green under the snow, and others frozen and thawed, sweeter far than when sound, — a sugary sweetness.[1]

There is something more than association at the bottom of the excitement which the roar of a cataract produces. It is allied to the circulation in our veins. We have a waterfall which corresponds even to Niagara somewhere within us.[2] It is astonishing what a rush and tumult a slight inclination will produce in a swollen brook. How it proclaims its glee, its boisterousness, rushing headlong in its prodigal course as if it would exhaust itself in half an hour! How it spends itself! I

[1] [See *Excursions*, p. 319; Riv. 392.] [2] [See p. 300.]

would say to the orator and poet, Flow freely and *lavishly* as a brook that is full, — without stint. Perchance I have stumbled upon the origin of the word "lavish." It does not hesitate to tumble down the steepest precipice and roar or tinkle as it goes, for fear it will exhaust its fountain. The impetuosity of descending water even by the slightest inclination! It seems to flow with ever increasing rapidity.

It is difficult to believe what philosophers assert, that it is merely a difference in the form of the elementary particles — as whether they are square or globular — which makes the difference between the steadfast, everlasting, and reposing hillside and the impetuous torrent which tumbles down it.

It is refreshing to walk over sprout-lands, where oak and chestnut sprouts are mounting swiftly up again into the sky, and already perchance their sere leaves begin to rustle in the breeze and reflect the light on the hillsides.

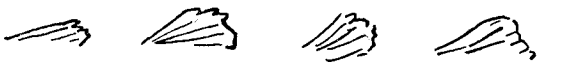
> "Heroic underwoods that take the air
> With freedom, nor respect their parents' death." [1]

I trust that the walkers of the present day are conscious of the blessings which they enjoy in the comparative freedom with which they can ramble over the country and enjoy the landscape, anticipating with compassion that future day when possibly it will be partitioned off into so-called pleasure-grounds, where only a few may enjoy the narrow and exclusive pleasure which is compatible with ownership, — when walking over the surface of God's earth shall be construed to

[1] [W. E. Channing, "Walden Spring."]

mean trespassing on some gentleman's grounds, when fences shall be multiplied and man traps and other engines invented to confine men to the public road. I am thankful that we have yet so much room in America.[1]

Feb. 13. Skated to Sudbury. A beautiful, summer-like day. The meadows were frozen just enough to bear. Examined now the fleets of ice-flakes close at hand. They are a very singular and interesting phenomenon, which I do not remember to have seen. I should say that when the water was frozen about as thick as pasteboard, a violent gust had here and there broken it up, and while the wind and waves held it up on its edge, the increasing cold froze it in firmly. So it seemed, for the flakes were for the most part turned one way; *i. e.* standing on one side, you saw only their edges, on another — the northeast or southwest — their sides. They were for the most part of a triangular form, like a shoulder[*sic*]-of-mutton sail, slightly scalloped, like



shells. They looked like a fleet of a thousand mackerel-fishers under a press of sail careering before a smacking breeze. Sometimes the sun and wind had reduced them to the thinness of writing-paper, and they fluttered and rustled and tinkled merrily. I skated through them and strewed their wrecks around. They appear to have been elevated expressly to reflect the sun like mirrors, to adorn the river and attract the eye of the skater. Who will say

[1] [*Excursions*, p. 216; Riv. 264, 265.]

that their principal end is not answered when they excite the admiration of the skater? Every half-mile or mile, as you skate up the river, you see these crystal fleets. Nature is a great imitator and loves to repeat herself. She wastes her wonders on the town. It impresses me as one superiority in her art, if art it may be called, that she does not require that man appreciate her, takes no steps to attract his attention.

The trouble is in getting on and off the ice; when you are once on you can go well enough. It melts round the edges.

Again I saw to-day, half a mile off in Sudbury, a sandy spot on the top of a hill, where I prophesied that I should find traces of the Indians. When within a dozen rods, I distinguished the foundation of a lodge, and merely passing over it, I saw many fragments of the arrowhead stone. I have frequently distinguished these localities half a mile [off], gone forward, and picked up arrowheads.

Saw in a warm, muddy brook in Sudbury, quite open and exposed, the skunk-cabbage spathes above water. The tops of the spathes were frost-bitten, but the fruit [*sic*] sound. There was one partly expanded. The first flower of the season; for it is a flower. I doubt if there is [a] month without its flower. Examined by the botany all its parts, — the first flower I have seen. The *Ictodes fœtidus.*

Also mosses, mingled red and green. The red will pass for the blossom.

As for antiquities, one of our old deserted country roads, marked only by the parallel fences and cellar-hole

with its bricks where the last inhabitant died, the victim of intemperance, fifty years ago, with its bare and exhausted fields stretching around, suggests to me an antiquity greater and more remote from the America of the newspapers than the tombs of Etruria. I insert the rise and fall of Rome in the interval. This is the decline and fall of the Roman Empire.

It is important to observe not only the subject of our pure and unalloyed joys, but also the secret of any dissatisfaction one may feel.

In society, in the best institutions of men, I remark a certain precocity. When we should be growing children, we are already little men. Infants as we are, we make haste to be weaned from our great mother's breast, and cultivate our parts by intercourse with one another.

I have not much faith in the method of restoring impoverished soils which relies on manuring mainly and does not add some virgin soil or muck.

Many a poor, sore-eyed student that I have heard of would grow faster, both intellectually and physically, if, instead of sitting up so very late to study, he honestly slumbered a fool's allowance.[1]

I would not have every man cultivated, any more than I would have every acre of earth cultivated. Some must be preparing a mould by the annual decay of the forests which they sustain.[2]

Saw half a dozen cows let out and standing about in a retired meadow as in a cow-yard.

[1] [*Excursions*, p. 238; Riv. 291.]
[2] [*Excursions*, p. 238; Riv. 292.]

Feb. 14. Consider the farmer, who is commonly regarded as the healthiest man. He may be the toughest, but he is not the healthiest. He has lost his elasticity; he can neither run nor jump. Health is the free use and command of all our faculties, and equal development. His is the health of the ox, an overworked buffalo. His joints are stiff. The resemblance is true even in particulars. He is cast away in a pair of cowhide boots, and travels at an ox's pace. Indeed, in some places he puts his foot into the skin of an ox's shin. It would do him good to be thoroughly shampooed to make him supple. His health is an insensibility to all influence. But only the healthiest man in the world is sensible to the finest influence; he who is affected by more or less of electricity in the air.

We shall see but little way if we require to understand what we see. How few things can a man measure with the tape of his understanding! How many greater things might he be seeing in the meanwhile!

One afternoon in the fall, November 21st, I saw Fair Haven Pond with its island and meadow; between the island and the shore, a strip of perfectly smooth water in the lee of the island; and two hawks sailing over it; and something more I saw which cannot easily be described, which made me say to myself that the landscape could not be improved. I did not see how it could be improved. Yet I do not know what these things can be; I begin to see such objects only when I leave off understanding them, and afterwards remember that I did not appreciate them before. But I get no further than this. How adapted these forms and colors to our

eyes, a meadow and its islands! What are these things? Yet the hawks and the ducks keep so aloof, and nature is so reserved! We are made to love the river and the meadow, as the wind to ripple the water.[1]

There is a difference between eating for strength and from mere gluttony. The Hottentots eagerly devour the marrow of the koodoo and other antelopes raw, as a matter of course, and herein perchance have stolen a march on the cooks of Paris. The eater of meat must come to this. This is better than stall-fed cattle and slaughter-house pork. Possibly they derive a certain wild-animal vigor therefrom which the most artfully cooked meats do not furnish.[2]

We learn by the January thaw that the winter is intermittent and are reminded of other seasons. The back of the winter is broken.

Feb. 15. Fatal is the discovery that our friend is fallible, that he has prejudices. He is, then, only prejudiced in our favor. What is the value of his esteem who does not justly esteem another?

Alas! Alas! when my friend begins to deal in confessions, breaks silence, makes a theme of friendship (which then is always something past), and descends to merely human relations! As long as there is a spark of love remaining, cherish that alone. Only *that* can be kindled into a flame. I thought that friendship, that love was still possible between [us]. I thought that we had not withdrawn very far asunder. But now that my friend rashly, thoughtlessly, profanely speaks, *recogniz-*

[1] [See p. 107.] [2] [*Excursions*, p. 225; Riv. 275, 276.]

ing the distance between us, that distance seems infinitely increased.

Of our friends we do not incline to speak, to complain, to others; we would not disturb the foundations of confidence that may still be.

Why should we not still continue to live with the intensity and rapidity of infants? Is not the world, are not the heavens, as unfathomed as ever? Have we exhausted any joy, any sentiment?

The author of Festus well exclaims: —

> "Could we but think with the intensity
> We love with, we might do great things, I think."

Feb. 16. Do we call this the land of the free? What is it to be free from King George the Fourth and continue the slaves of prejudice? What is it [to] be born free and equal, and not to live? What is the value of any political freedom, but as a means to moral freedom? Is it a freedom to be slaves or a freedom to be free, of which we boast? We are a nation of politicians, concerned about the outsides of freedom, the means and outmost defenses of freedom. It is our children's children who may perchance be essentially free. We tax ourselves unjustly. There is a part of us which is not represented. It is taxation without representation. We quarter troops upon ourselves. In respect to virtue or true manhood, we are essentially provincial, not metropolitan, — mere Jonathans. We are provincial, because we do not find at home our standards; because

we do not worship truth but the reflection of truth; because we are absorbed in and narrowed by trade and commerce and agriculture, which are but means and not the end. We are essentially provincial, I say, and so is the English Parliament. Mere country bumpkins they betray themselves, when any more important question arises for them to settle. Their natures are subdued to what they work in!

The finest manners in the world are awkwardness and fatuity when contrasted with a finer intelligence. They appear but as the fashions of past days, — mere courtliness, small-clothes, and knee-buckles, — have the vice of getting out of date; an attitude merely. The vice of manners is that they are continually deserted by the character; they are cast-off clothes or shells, claiming the respect of the living creature. You are presented with the shells instead of the meat, and it is no excuse generally that, in the case of some fish, the shells are of more worth than the meat. The man who thrusts his manners upon me does as if he were to insist on introducing me to his cabinet of curiosities, when I wish to see himself. Manners are conscious; character is unconscious.[1]

My neighbor does not recover from his formal bow so soon as I do from the pleasure of meeting him.

Feb. 18. *Tuesday.* Ground nearly bare of snow. Pleasant day with a strong south wind. Skated, though the ice was soft in spots. Saw the skunk-cabbage in flower. Gathered nuts and apples on the bare ground,

[1] [*Cape Cod, and Miscellanies*, pp. 476–478; *Misc.*, Riv. 280–282.]

still sound and preserving their colors, red and green, many of them.

Yesterday the river was over the road by Hubbard's Bridge.

Surveyed White Pond yesterday, February 17th.

There is little or nothing to be remembered written on the subject of getting an honest living. Neither the New Testament nor Poor Richard speaks to our condition. I cannot think of a single page which entertains, much less answers, the questions which I put to myself on this subject. How to make the getting our living poetic! for if it is not poetic, it is not life but death that we get. Is it that men are too disgusted with their experience to speak of it? or that commonly they do not question the common modes? The most practically important of all questions, it seems to me, is how shall I get my living, and yet I find little or nothing said to the purpose in any book. Those who are living on the interest of money inherited, or dishonestly, *i. e.* by false methods, acquired, are of course incompetent to answer it. I consider that society with all its arts, has done nothing for us in this respect. One would think, from looking at literature, that this question had never disturbed a solitary individual's musings. Cold and hunger seem more friendly to my nature than those methods which men have adopted and advise to ward them off.[1] If it were not that I desire to do something here, — accomplish some work, — I should certainly prefer to suffer and die rather than be at the pains to get a living by the modes men propose.

[1] [*Cape Cod and Miscellanies*, p. 462; *Misc.*, Riv. 262.]

There may be an excess even of informing light.

Niepce, a Frenchman, announced that "no substance can be exposed to the sun's rays without undergoing a chemical change." Granite rocks and stone structures and statues of metal, etc., "are," says Robert Hunt, "all alike destructively acted upon during the hours of sunshine, and, but for provisions of nature no less wonderful, would soon perish under the delicate touch of the most subtile of the agencies of the universe." But Niepce showed, says Hunt, "that those bodies which underwent this change during daylight possessed the power of restoring themselves to their original conditions during the hours of night, when this excitement was no longer influencing them." So, in the case of the daguerreotype, "the picture which we receive to-night, unless we adopt some method of securing its permanency, fades away before the morning, and we try to restore it in vain." (Infers) "the hours of darkness are as necessary to the inorganic creation as we know night and sleep are to the organic kingdom." Such is the influence of "actinism," that power in the sun's rays which produces a chemical effect.[1]

Feb. 25. A very windy day. A slight snow which fell last night was melted at noon. A strong, gusty wind; the waves on the meadows make a fine show. I saw at Hubbard's Bridge that all the ice had been blown up-stream from the meadows, and was collected over the channel against the bridge in large

[1] [*Excursions*, p. 238; Riv. 292.]

cakes. These were covered and intermingled with a remarkable quantity of the meadow's crust. There was no ice to be seen up-stream and no more down-stream.

The meadows have been flooded for a fortnight, and this water has been frozen barely thick enough to bear once only. The old ice on the meadows was covered several feet deep. I observed from the bridge, a few rods off northward, what looked like an island directly over the channel. It was the crust of the meadow afloat. I reached [it] with a little risk and found it to be four rods long by one broad, — the surface of the meadow with cranberry vines, etc., all connected and in their natural position, and no ice visible but around its edges. It appeared to be the frozen crust (which was separated from the unfrozen soil as ice is from the water beneath), buoyed up (?), perchance, by the ice around its edges frozen to the stubble. Was there any pure ice under it? Had there been any above it? Will frozen meadow float? Had ice which originally supported it from above melted except about the edges? When the ice melts or the soil thaws, of course it falls to the bottom, wherever it may be. Here is another agent employed in the distribution of plants. I have seen where a smooth shore which I frequented for bathing was in one season strewn with these hummocks, bearing the button-bush with them, which have now changed the character of the shore. There were many rushes and lily-pad stems on the ice. Had the ice formed about them as they grew, broken them off when it floated away, and so they were strewn about on it?

Feb. 26. *Wednesday.* Examined the floating meadow again to-day. It is more than a foot thick, the under part much mixed with ice, — ice and muck. It appeared to me that the meadow surface had been heaved by the frost, and then the water had run down and under it, and finally, when the ice rose, lifted it up, wherever there was ice enough mixed with it to float it. I saw large cakes of ice with other large cakes, the latter as big as a table, on top of them. Probably the former rose while the latter were already floating about. The plants scattered about were bulrushes and lily-pad stems.

Saw five red-wings and a song sparrow(?) this afternoon.

Feb. 27. Saw to-day on Pine Hill behind Mr. Joseph Merriam's house a Norway pine, the first I have seen in Concord. Mr. Gleason pointed it out to me as a singular pine which he did not know the name of. It was a very handsome tree, about twenty-five feet high. E. Wood thinks that he has lost the surface of two acres of his meadow by the ice. Got fifteen cartloads out of a hummock left on another meadow. Blue-joint was introduced into the first meadow where it did not grow before.

Of two men, one of whom knows nothing about a subject, and, what is extremely rare, knows that he knows nothing, and the other really knows something about it, but thinks that he knows all, — what great advantage has the latter over the former? which is the

best to deal with? I do not know that knowledge amounts to anything more definite than a novel and grand surprise, or a sudden revelation of the insufficiency of all that we had called knowledge before; an indefinite sense of the grandeur and glory of the universe. It is the lighting up of the mist by the sun. But man cannot be said to know in any higher sense, [any more] than he can look serenely and with impunity in the face of the sun.[1]

A culture which imports much muck from the meadows and deepens the soil, not that which trusts to heating manures and improved agricultural implements only.

How, when a man purchases a thing, he is determined to get and get hold of it, using how many expletives and how long a string of synonymous or similar terms signifying possession, in the legal process! What's mine 's my own. An old deed of a small piece of swamp land, which I have lately surveyed at the risk of being mired past recovery, says that "the said Spaulding his Heirs and Assigns, shall and may from this (?) time, and at all times forever hereafter, by force and virtue of these presents, lawfully, peaceably and quietly have, hold, use, occupy, possess and enjoy the said swamp," etc.

Magnetic iron, being anciently found in *Magnesia*, — hence *magnes*, or magnet, — employed by Pliny and others. Chinese appear to have discovered the magnet very early, A. D. 121 and before (?); used by them to

[1] [*Excursions*, p. 240; Riv. 294.]

steer ships in 419; mentioned by an Icelander, 1068; in a French poem, 1181; in Torfæus' History of Norway, 1266. Used by De Gama in 1427. Leading stone, hence loadstone.

The peroxide of hydrogen, or ozone, at first thought to be a chemical curiosity merely, is found to be very generally diffused through nature.

The following bears on the floating ice which has risen from the bottom of the meadows. Robert Hunt says: "Water conducts heat downward but very slowly; a mass of ice will remain undissolved but a few inches under water on the surface of which ether or any other inflammable body is burning. If ice swam beneath the surface, the summer sun would scarcely have power to thaw it; and thus our lakes and seas would be gradually converted into solid masses."

The figures of serpents, of griffins, flying dragons, and other embellishments of heraldry, the eastern idea of the world on an elephant, that on a tortoise, and that on a serpent again, etc., usually regarded as mythological in the common sense of that word, are thought by some to "indicate a faint and shadowy knowledge of a previous state of organic existence," such as geology partly reveals.

The fossil tortoise has been found in Asia large enough to support an elephant.

Ammonites, snake-stones, or petrified snakes have been found from of old, often decapitated.

In the northern part of Great Britain the fossil remains of encrinites are called "St. Cuthbert's beads."

"Fiction dependent on truth."

Westward is heaven, or rather heavenward is the west. The way to heaven is from east to west round the earth. The sun leads and shows it. The stars, too, light it.

Nature and man; some prefer the one, others the other; but that is all *de gustibus*. It makes no odds at what well you drink, provided it be a well-head.

Walking in the woods, it may be, some afternoon, the shadow of the wings of a thought flits across the landscape of my mind, and I am reminded how little eventful are our lives. What have been all these wars and rumors of wars, and modern discoveries and improvements so-called? A mere irritation in the skin. But this shadow which is so soon past, and whose substance is not detected, suggests that there are events of importance whose interval is to us a true historic period.[1]

The lecturer is wont to describe the Nineteenth Century, the American [of] the last generation, in an off-hand and triumphant strain, wafting him to paradise, spreading his fame by steam and telegraph, recounting the number of wooden stopples he has whittled. But who does not perceive that this is not a sincere or pertinent account of any man's or nation's life? It is the hip-hip-hurrah and mutual-admiration-society style. Cars go by, and we know their substance as well as their shadow. They stop and we get into them. But those sublime thoughts passing on high do not stop, and we never get into them. Their conductor is not like one of us.

I feel that the man who, in his conversation with me

[1] [*Excursions*, p. 244; Riv. 299.]

about the life of man in New England, lays much stress on railroads, telegraphs, and such enterprises does not go below the surface of things. He treats the shallow and transitory as if it were profound and enduring. In one of the mind's avatars, in the interval between sleeping and waking, aye, even in one of the interstices of a Hindoo dynasty, perchance, such things as the Nineteenth Century, with all its improvements, may come and go again. Nothing makes a deep and lasting impression but what is weighty.

Obey the law which reveals, and not the law revealed.

I wish my neighbors were wilder.

A wildness whose glance no civilization could endure.[1]

He who lives according to the highest law is in one sense lawless. That is an unfortunate discovery, certainly, that of a law which binds us where we did not know that we were bound. Live free, child of the mist! He for whom the law is made, who does not obey the law but whom the law obeys, reclines on pillows of down and is wafted at will whither he pleases, for man is superior to all laws, both of heaven and earth, when he takes his liberty.[2]

Wild as if we lived on the marrow of antelopes devoured raw.[3]

There would seem to be men in whose lives there have been no events of importance, more than in the beetle's which crawls in our path.

[1] [*Excursions*, p. 225; Riv. 276.]
[2] [*Excursions*, p. 240; Riv. 295.]
[3] [*Excursions*, p. 225; Riv. 276.]

March 19. The ice in the pond is now soft and will not bear a heavy stone thrown from the bank. It is melted for a rod from the shore. The ground has been bare of snow for some weeks, but yesterday we had a violent northeast snow-storm, which has drifted worse than any the past winter. The spring birds — ducks and geese, etc. — had come, but now the spring seems far off.

No good ever came of obeying a law which you had discovered.

March 23. For a week past the elm buds have been swollen. The willow catkins have put out. The ice still remains in Walden, though it will not bear. Mather Howard saw a large meadow near his house which had risen up but was prevented from floating away by the bushes.

March 27. Walden is two-thirds broken up. It will probably be quite open by to-morrow night.

March 30. Spring is already upon us. I see the tortoises, or rather I hear them drop from the bank into the brooks at my approach. The catkins of the alders have blossomed. The pads are springing at the bottom of the water. The pewee is heard, and the lark.

"It is only the squalid savages and degraded boschmen of creation that have their feeble teeth and tiny stings steeped in venom, and so made formidable," — ants, centipedes, and mosquitoes, spiders, wasps, and scorpions. — HUGH MILLER.

To attain to a true relation to one human creature is enough to make a year memorable.

The man for whom law exists — the man of forms, the conservative — is a tame man.

CARRYING OFF SIMS

A recent English writer (De Quincey),[1] endeavoring to account for the atrocities of Caligula and Nero, their monstrous and anomalous cruelties, and the general servility and corruption which they imply, observes that it is difficult to believe that "the descendants of a people so severe in their habits" as the Romans had been "could thus rapidly" have degenerated and that, "in reality, the citizens of Rome were at this time a new race, brought together from every quarter of the world, but especially from Asia." A vast "proportion of the ancient citizens had been cut off by the sword," and such multitudes of emancipated slaves from Asia had been invested with the rights of citizens "that, in a single generation, Rome became almost transmuted into a baser metal." As Juvenal complained, "the Orontes . . . had mingled its impure waters with those of the Tiber." And "probably, in the time of Nero, not one man in six was of pure Roman descent." Instead of such, says another, "came Syrians, Cappadocians, Phrygians, and other enfranchised slaves." "These in half a century had sunk so low, that Tiberius pronounced her [Rome's][2] very senators to be *homines ad servitutem natos*, men born to be slaves." [3]

[1] [In *The Cæsars.*] [2] [Supplied by Thoreau.]
[3] [Blackwell, *Court of Augustus;* quoted by De Quincey in a note.]

So one would say, in the absence of particular genealogical evidence, that the vast majority of the inhabitants of the city of Boston, even those of senatorial dignity, — the Curtises, Lunts, Woodburys, and others, — were not descendants of the men of the Revolution, — the Hancocks, Adamses, Otises, — but some "Syrians, Cappadocians, and Phrygians," merely, *homines ad servitutem natos*, men born to be slaves. But I would have done with comparing ourselves with our ancestors, for on the whole I believe that even they, if somewhat braver and less corrupt than we, were not men of so much principle and generosity as to go to war in behalf of another race in their midst. I do not believe that the North will soon come to blows with the South on this question. It would be too bright a page to be written in the history of the race at present.

There is such an officer, if not such a man, as the Governor of Massachusetts. What has he been about the last fortnight? He has probably had as much as he could do to keep on the fence during this moral earthquake. It seems to me that no such keen satire, no such cutting insult, could be offered to that man, as the absence of all inquiry after him in this crisis. It appears to [have] been forgotten that there was such a man or such an office. Yet no doubt he has been filling the gubernatorial chair all the while. One Mr. Boutwell, — so named, perchance, because he goes about well to suit the prevailing wind.[1]

In '75 two or three hundred of the inhabitants of

[1] [*Cape Cod, and Miscellanies*, p. 390; *Misc.*, Riv. 174.]

Concord assembled at one of the bridges with arms in their hands to assert the right of three millions to tax themselves, to have a voice in governing themselves. About a week ago the authorities of Boston, having the sympathy of many of the inhabitants of Concord, assembled in the gray of the dawn, assisted by a still larger armed force, to send back a perfectly innocent man, and one whom they knew to be innocent, into a slavery as complete as the world ever knew. Of course it makes not the least difference — I wish you to consider this — who the man was, — whether he was Jesus Christ or another, — for inasmuch as ye did it unto the least of these his brethren ye did it unto him. Do you think *he* would have stayed here in liberty and let the black man go into slavery in his stead? They sent him back, I say, to live in slavery with other three millions — mark that — whom the same slave power, or slavish power, North and South, holds in that condition, — three millions who do not, like the first mentioned, assert the right to govern themselves but simply to run away and stay away from their prison.

Just a week afterward, those inhabitants of this town who especially sympathize with the authorities of Boston in this their deed caused the bells to be rung and the cannon to be fired to celebrate the courage and the love of liberty of those men who assembled at the bridge. As if *those* three millions had fought for the right to be free themselves, but to hold in slavery three million others. Why, gentlemen, even consistency, though it is much abused, is sometimes a virtue. Every humane and intelligent inhabitant of Concord, when he

or she heard those bells and those cannon, thought not so much of the events of the 19th of April, 1775, as of the event of the 12th of April, 1851.

I wish my townsmen to consider that, whatever the human law may be, neither an individual nor a nation can ever deliberately commit the least act of injustice without having to pay the penalty for it. A government which deliberately enacts injustice, and persists in it! — it will become the laughing-stock of the world.

Much as has been said about American slavery, I think that commonly we do not yet realize what slavery is. If I were seriously to propose to Congress to make mankind into sausages, I have no doubt that most would smile at my proposition and, if any believed me to be in earnest, they would think that I proposed something much worse than Congress had ever done. But, gentlemen, if any of you will tell me that to make a man into a sausage would be much worse — would be any worse — than to make him into a slave, — than it was then to enact the fugitive slave law, — I shall here accuse him of foolishness, of intellectual incapacity, of making a distinction without a difference. The one is just as sensible a proposition as the other.[1]

When I read the account of the carrying back of the fugitive into slavery, which was read last Sunday evening, and read also what was not read here, that the man who made the prayer on the wharf was Daniel Foster of *Concord*, I could not help feeling a slight degree of pride because, of all the towns in the Commonwealth,

[1] [*Cape Cod, and Miscellanies*, pp. 392–394; *Misc.*, Riv. 177–179.]

Concord was the only one distinctly named as being represented in that new tea-party, and, as she had a place in the first, so would have a place in this, the last and perhaps next most important chapter of the History of Massachusetts. But my second feeling, when I reflected how short a time that gentleman has resided in this town, was one of doubt and shame, because the *men* of Concord in recent times have done nothing to entitle them to the honor of having their town named in such a connection.

I hear a good deal said about trampling this law under foot. Why, one need not go out of his way to do that. This law lies not at the level of the head or the reason. Its natural habitat is in the dirt. It was bred and has its life only in the dust and mire, on a level with the feet; and he who walks with freedom, unless, with a sort of quibbling and Hindoo mercy, he avoids treading on every venomous reptile, will inevitably tread on it, and so trample it under foot.

It has come to this, that the friends of liberty, the friends of the slave, have shuddered when they have understood that his fate has been left to the legal tribunals, so-called, of the country to be decided. The people have no faith that justice will be awarded in such a case. The judge may decide this way or that; it is a kind of accident at best. It is evident that he is not a competent authority in so important a case. I would not trust the life of my friend to the judges of all the Supreme Courts in the world put together, to be sacrificed or saved by precedent. I would much rather trust to the sentiment of the people, which would itself be a

precedent to posterity. In their vote you would get something worth having at any rate, but in the other case only the trammelled judgment of an individual, of no significance, be it which way it will.

I think that recent events will be valuable as a criticism on the administration of justice in our midst, or rather as revealing what are the true sources of justice in any community. It is to some extent fatal to the courts when the people are compelled to go behind the courts. They learn that the courts are made for fair weather and for very civil cases.[1]

[Two pages missing.]

let us entertain opinions of our own; [2] let us be a town and not a suburb, as far from Boston in this sense as we were by the old road which led through Lexington; a place where tyranny may ever be met with firmness and driven back with defeat to its ships.

Concord has several more bridges left of the same sort, which she is taxed to maintain. Can she not raise men to defend them?

As for measures to be adopted, among others I would advise abolitionists to make as earnest and vigorous and persevering an assault on the press, as they have already made, and with effect too, on the church. The church has decidedly improved within a year or two, aye, even within a fortnight; but the press is, almost without exception, corrupt. I believe that in this country the press exerts a greater and a more pernicious

[1] [*Cape Cod, and Miscellanies*, pp. 394, 395; *Misc.*, Riv. 179, 180.]

[2] [*Cape Cod, and Miscellanies*, p. 397; *Misc.*, Riv. 183.]

influence than the church. We are not a religious people, but we are a nation of politicians. We do not much care for, we do not read, the Bible, but we do care for and we do read the newspaper. It is a bible which we read every morning and every afternoon, standing and sitting, riding and walking. It is a bible which every man carries in his pocket, which lies on every table and counter, which the mail and thousands of missionaries are continually dispersing. It is the only book which America has printed, and is capable of exerting an almost inconceivable influence for good or for bad. The editor is [a] preacher whom you voluntarily support. Your tax is commonly one cent, and it costs nothing for pew hire. But how many of these preachers preach the truth? I repeat the testimony of many an intelligent traveller, as well as my own convictions, when I say that probably no country was ever ruled by so mean a class of tyrants as are the editors of the periodical press in *this* country. Almost without exception the tone of the press is mercenary and servile. The *Commonwealth*, and the *Liberator*, are the only papers, as far as I know, which make themselves heard in condemnation of the cowardice and meanness of the authorities of Boston as lately exhibited. The other journals, almost without exception, — as the *Advertiser*, the *Transcript*, the *Journal*, the *Times*, *Bee*, *Herald*, etc., — by their manner of referring to and speaking of the Fugitive Slave Law or the carrying back of the slave, insult the common sense of the country. And they do this for the most part, because they think so to secure the approbation of their patrons, and also, one would

think, because they are not aware that a sounder sentiment prevails to any extent.

But, thank fortune, this preacher can be more easily reached by the weapons of the reformer than could the recreant priest. The *free* men of New England have only to refrain from purchasing and reading these sheets, have only to withhold their cents, to kill a score of them at once.[1]

Mahomet made his celestial journey in so short a time that "on his return he was able to prevent the complete overturn of a vase of water, which the angel Gabriel had struck with his wing on his departure."

When he took refuge in a cave near Mecca, being on his flight (Hegira) to Medina, "by the time that the Koreishites [who were close behind] [2] reached the mouth of the cavern, an acacia tree had sprung up before it, in the spreading branches of which a pigeon had made its nest, and laid its eggs, and over the whole a spider had woven its web."

He said of himself, "I am no king, but the son of a Koreishite woman, who ate flesh dried in the sun."

He exacted "a tithe of the productions of the earth, where it was fertilized by brooks and rain; and a twentieth part where its fertility was the result of irrigation."

April 22. Had mouse-ear in blossom for a week. Observed the crowfoot on the Cliffs in abundance, and

[1] [*Cape Cod, and Miscellanies*, pp. 397–399; *Misc.*, Riv. 183–185.]

[2] [The brackets are Thoreau's.]

the saxifrage. The wind last Wednesday, April 16th, blew down a hundred pines on Fair Haven Hill.

Having treated my friend ill, I wished to apologize; but, not meeting him, I made an apology to myself.

It is not the invitation which I hear, but which I feel, that I obey.

April 26. The judge whose words seal the fate of a man for the longest time and furthest into eternity is not he who merely pronounces the verdict of the law, but he, whoever he may be, who, from a love of truth and unprejudiced by any custom or enactment of men, utters a true opinion or *sentence* concerning him. He it is that *sentences* him.[1] More fatal, as affecting his good or ill fame, is the utterance of the least inexpugnable truth concerning him, by the humblest individual, than the sentence of the supremest court in the land.

Gathered the mayflower and cowslips yesterday, and saw the houstonia, violets, etc. Saw a dandelion in blossom.

Are they Americans, are they New-Englanders, are they inhabitants of Concord, — Buttricks and Davises and Hosmers by name, — who read and support the Boston *Herald*, *Advertiser*, *Traveller*, *Journal*, *Transcript*, etc., etc., *Times*? Is that the *Flag of our Union*?

Could slavery suggest a more complete servility? Is there any dust which such conduct does not lick and make fouler still with its slime? Has not the Boston

[1] [*Cape Cod, and Miscellanies*, p. 396; *Misc.*, Riv. 181.]

Herald acted its part well, served its master faithfully? How could it have gone lower on its belly? How can a man stoop lower than he is low? do more than put his extremities in the place of that head he has? than make his head his *lower* extremity? And when I say the Boston *Herald* I mean the Boston press, with such few and slight exceptions as need not be made. When I have taken up this paper or the Boston *Times*, with my cuffs turned up, I have heard the gurgling of the sewer through every column; I have felt that I was handling a paper picked out of the public sewers, a leaf from the gospel of the gambling-house, the groggery, and the brothel, harmonizing with the gospel of the Merchants' Exchange.[1]

I do not know but there are some who, if they were tied to the whipping-post and could but get one hand free, would use it to ring the bells and fire the cannon to celebrate their liberty. It reminded me of the Roman Saturnalia, on which even the slaves were allowed to take some liberty. So some of you took the liberty to ring and fire. That was the extent of your freedom; and when the sound of the bells died away, your liberty died away also, and when the powder was all expended, your liberty went off with the smoke. Nowadays men wear a fool's-cap and call it a liberty-cap. The joke could be no broader if the inmates of the prisons were to subscribe for all the powder to be used in such salutes, and hire their jailors to do the firing and ringing for them.[2]

[1] [*Cape Cod, and Miscellanies*, pp. 399, 400; *Misc.*, Riv. 185, 186.]

[2] [*Cape Cod, and Miscellanies*, p. 393; *Misc.*, Riv. 177, 178.]

April 29. Every man, perhaps, is inclined to think his own situation singular in relation to friendship. Our thoughts would imply that other men *have* friends, though we have not. But I do not know of two whom I can speak of as standing in this relation to one another. Each one makes a standing offer to mankind, "On such and such terms I will give myself to you;" but it is only by a miracle that his terms are ever accepted.

We have to defend ourselves even against those who are nearest to friendship with us.

What a difference it is! — to perform the pilgrimage of life in the society of a mate, and not to have an acquaintance among all the tribes of men!

What signifies the census — this periodical numbering of men — to one who has no friend?

I distinguish between my *actual* and my *real* communication with individuals. I *really* communicate with my friends and congratulate myself and them on our relation and rejoice in their presence and society oftenest when they are personally absent. I remember that not long ago, as I laid my head on my pillow for the night, I was visited by an inexpressible joy that I was permitted to know and be related to such mortals as I was then actually related to; and yet no special event that I could think of had occurred to remind me of any with whom I was connected, and by the next noon, perchance, those essences that had caused me joy would have receded somewhat. I experienced a remarkable gladness in the thought that they existed. Their existence was then blessed to me. Yet such has never been my actual waking relation to any.

Every one experiences that, while his relation to another actually may be one of distrust and disappointment, he may still have relations to him ideally and so really, in spite of both. He is faintly conscious of a confidence and satisfaction somewhere, and all further intercourse is based on this experience of success.

The very dogs and cats incline to affection in their relation to man. It often happens that a man is more humanely related to a cat or dog than to any human being. What bond is it relates us to any animal we keep in the house but the bond of affection? In a degree we grow to love one another.

April 30. What is a chamber to which the sun does not rise in the morning? What is a chamber to which the sun does not set at evening? Such are often the chambers of the mind, for the most part.

Even the cat which lies on a rug all day commences to prowl about the fields at night, resumes her ancient forest habits. The most tenderly bred grimalkin steals forth at night, — watches some bird on its perch for an hour in the furrow, like a gun at rest. She catches no cold; it is her nature. Caressed by children and cherished with a saucer of milk. Even she can erect her back and expand her tail and spit at her enemies like the wild cat of the woods. Sweet Sylvia!

What is the singing of birds, or any natural sound, compared with the voice of one we love?

To one we love we are related as to nature in the spring. Our dreams are mutually intelligible. We take the census, and find that there is one.

Love is a mutual confidence whose foundations no one knows. The one I love surpasses all the laws of nature in sureness. Love is capable of any wisdom.

> "He that hath love and judgment too
> Sees more than any other doe."

By our very mutual attraction, and our attraction to all other spheres, kept properly asunder. Two planets which are mutually attracted, being at the same time attracted by the sun, preserve equipoise and harmony.

Does not the history of chivalry and knight-errantry suggest or point to another relation to woman than leads to marriage, yet an elevating and all-absorbing one, perchance transcending marriage? As yet men know not one another, nor does man know woman.

I am sure that the design of my maker when he has brought me nearest to woman was not the propagation, but rather the maturation, of the species. Man is capable of a love of woman quite transcending marriage.

I observe that the *New York Herald* advertises situations wanted by "respectable young women" by the column, but never by respectable young men, rather "intelligent" and "smart" ones; from which I infer that the public opinion of New York does not require young men to be respectable in the same sense in which it requires young women to be so.

May it consist with the health of some bodies to be impure?