III

DECEMBER, 1851

(ÆT. 34)

Dec. 12. In regard to my friends, I feel that I know and have communion with a finer and subtler part of themselves which does not put me off when they put me off, which is not cold to me when they are cold, not till I am cold. I hold by a deeper and stronger tie than absence can sunder.

Ah, dear nature, the mere remembrance, after a short forgetfulness, of the pine woods! I come to it as a hungry man to a crust of bread.

I have been surveying for twenty or thirty days, living coarsely, even as respects my diet, — for I find that that will always alter to suit my employment, — indeed, leading a quite trivial life; and to-night, for the first time, had made a fire in my chamber and endeavored to return to myself. I wished to ally myself to the powers that rule the universe. I wished to dive into some deep stream of thoughtful and devoted life, which meandered through retired and fertile meadows far from towns. I wished to do again, or for once, things quite congenial to my highest inmost and most sacred nature, to lurk in crystalline thought like the trout under verdurous banks, where stray mankind should only see my bubble come to the surface. I wished to live, ah! as far away as a man can think. I wished for leisure and quiet to let my life flow in its proper channels, with its proper currents;

when I might not waste the days, might establish daily prayer and thanksgiving in my family; might do my own work and not the work of Concord and Carlisle, which would yield me better than money. (How much forbearance, aye, sacrifice and loss, goes to every accomplishment! I am thinking by what long discipline and at what cost a man learns to speak simply at last.) I bethought myself, while my fire was kindling, to open one of Emerson's books, which it happens that I rarely look at, to try what a chance sentence out of that could do for me; thinking, at the same time, of a conversation I had with him the other night, I finding fault with him for the stress he had laid on some of Margaret Fuller's whims and superstitions, but he declaring gravely that she was one of those persons whose experience warranted her attaching importance to such things, — as the *Sortes Virgilianae*, for instance, of which her numerous friends could tell remarkable instances. At any rate, I saw that he was disposed [to] regard such things more seriously than I. The first sentence which I opened upon in his book was this: "If, with a high trust, he can thus submit himself, he will find that ample returns are poured into his bosom out of what seemed hours of obstruction and loss. Let him not grieve too much on account of unfit associates. . . . In a society of perfect sympathy, no word, no act, no record, would be. He will learn that it is not much matter what he reads, what he does. Be a scholar, and he shall have the scholar's part of everything," etc., etc.[1]

[1] [*Nature, Addresses, and Lectures*, Centenary Ed., p. 184; Riv. 177, 178.]

Most of this responded well enough to my mood, and this would be as good an instance of the *Sortes Virgilianae* as most to quote. But what makes this coincidence very little if at all remarkable to me is the fact of the obviousness of the moral, so that I had, perhaps, *thought* the same thing myself twenty times during the day, and yet had not been *contented* with that account of it, leaving me thus to be amused by the coincidence, rather than impressed as by an intimation out of the deeps.

The Irishman (MacCarty) who helped me survey day before yesterday would not sit on a rock with me to eat his dinner (there being snow on the ground), from a notion that there was nothing so deadly as sitting on a rock, — sure to give you a cold in the back. He would rather stand. So the doctors said, down in the Province of New Brunswick. But I warranted him that he would not get a cold in his back, which was half as broad again as mine, and so he minded me as a new doctor. A gray-headed boy, good for nothing but to eat his dinner. These Irishmen have no heads. Let me inquire strictly into a man's descent, and if his remotest ancestors were Erse, let me not have him to help me survey. One or two I have seen, handy men, but I learned that their fathers, who came from Ireland, were of the Scotch-Irish. This fellow was sure to do the wrong thing from the best motives, and the only time he was spry was when he was running to correct his own blunders out of his own head — and make them worse than before, but I could not stop him; then I saw the broad red soles of his new cowhide boots alternately rising and falling like the buckets of a dasher or water-wheel. When he had lost his

plumb and went to get it, then he showed the red soles of his boots.

Nothing is so sure to make itself known as the truth, for what else waits to be known?

Dec. 13. *Saturday.* While surveying to-day, saw much mountain laurel for this neighborhood in Mason's pasture, just over the line in Carlisle. Its bright yellowish-green shoots are agreeable to my eye. We had one hour of almost Indian summer weather in the middle of the day. I felt the influence of the sun. It melted my stoniness a little. The pines looked like old friends again. Cutting a path through a swamp where was much brittle dogwood, etc., etc., I wanted to know the name of every shrub. This varied employment, to which my necessities compel me, serves instead of foreign travel and the lapse of time. If it makes me forget some things which I ought to remember, it no doubt enables me to forget many things which it is well to forget. By stepping aside from my chosen path so often, I see myself better and am enabled to criticise myself. Of this nature is the only true lapse of time. It seems an age since I took walks and wrote in my journal, and when shall I revisit the glimpses of the moon? To be able to see ourselves, not merely as others see us, but as we are, that service a *variety* of absorbing employments does us.

I would not be rude to the fine intimations of the gods for fear of incurring the reproach of superstition.

When I think of the Carlisle man whom I saw to-day and the filthiness of his house, I am reminded that there are all degrees of barbarism, even in this so-called civil-

ized community. Carlisle, too, belongs to the Nineteenth Century.

Saw Perez Blood in his frock, — a stuttering, sure, unpretending man, who does not speak without thinking, does not guess. When I reflected how different he was from his neighbors, Conant, Mason, Hodgman, I saw that it was not so much outwardly, but that I saw an inner form. We do, indeed, see through and through each other, through the veil of the body, and see the real form and character in spite of the garment. Any coarseness or tenderness is seen and felt under whatever garb. How nakedly men appear to us! for the spiritual assists the natural eye.

Dec. 14. The boys have been skating for a week, but I have had no time to skate for surveying. I have hardly realized that there was ice, though I have walked over it about this business. As for the weather, all seasons are pretty much alike to one who is actively at work in the woods. I should say that there were two or three remarkably warm days and as many cold ones in the course of a year, but the rest are all alike in respect to temperature. This is my answer to my acquaintances who ask me if I have not found it very cold being out all day.

McKean tells me of hardy horses left to multiply on the Isle of Sable. His father had one (for the shipwrecked to eat). Can they be descendants of those beasts Champlain or Lescarbot refers to?

I hear the small woodpecker whistle as he flies toward the leafless wood on Fair Haven, doomed to be cut

this winter. The chickadees remind me of Hudson's Bay for some reason. I look on them as natives of a more northern latitude.

The now dry and empty but clean-washed cups of the blue-curls spot the half snow-covered grain-fields. Where lately was a delicate blue flower, now all the winter are held up these dry chalices. What mementos to stand above the snow!

The fresh young spruces in the swamp are free from moss, but it adheres especially to the bare and dead masts of spruce trees oftentimes half destitute of bark. They look like slanting may-poles with drooping or withered garlands and festoons hanging to them. For an emblem of stillness, a spruce swamp with hanging moss now or at any season.

I notice that hornets' nests are hardly deserted by the insects than they look as if a truant boy had fired a charge of shot through them,—all ragged and full of holes. It is the work either of the insects themselves or else of other insects or birds.

It is the andromeda (panicled?) that has the fine-barked stem and the green wood, in the swamps.

Why not live out more yet, and have my friends and relations altogether in nature, only my acquaintances among the villagers? That way diverges from this I follow, not at a sharp but a very wide angle. Ah, nature is serene and immortal! Am I not one of the Zincali?

There is a beautifully pure greenish-blue sky under the clouds now in the southwest just before sunset. I hear the ice along the edge of the river cracking as the water settles. It has settled about two feet, leaving

ice for the most part without water on the meadows, all uneven and cracked over the hummocks, so that you cannot run straight for sliding. The ice takes the least hint of a core to eke out a perfect plant; the wrecks of bulrushes and meadow grass are expanded into palm leaves and other luxuriant foliage. I see delicate-looking green pads frozen into the ice, and, here and there, where some tender and still green weeds from the warm bottom of the river have lately been cast up on to the ice.

There are certain places where the river will always be open, where perchance warmer springs come in. There are such places in every character, genial and open in the coldest seasons.

I come from contact with certain acquaintances, whom even I am disposed to look toward as possible friends. It oftenest happens that I come from them wounded. Only they can wound me seriously, and that perhaps without their knowing it.

Dec. 17. The pitch pine woods on the right of the Corner road. A piercing cold afternoon, wading in the snow. R. Rice was going to Sudbury to put his bees into the cellar for fear they would freeze. He had a small hive; not enough to keep each other warm. The pitch pines hold the snow well. It lies now in balls on their plumes and in streaks on their branches, their low branches rising at a small angle and meeting each other. A certain dim religious light comes through this roof of pine leaves and snow. It is a sombre twilight, yet in some places the sun streams in, producing the strongest contrasts of light and shade.

The winter morning is the time to see the woods and shrubs in their perfection, wearing their snowy and frosty dress. Even he who visits them half an hour after sunrise will have lost some of their most delicate and fleeting beauties. The trees wear their snowy burden but coarsely after midday, and it no longer expresses the character of the tree. I observed that early in the morning every pine-needle was covered with a frosty sheath, but soon after sunrise it was all gone. You walk in the pitch pine wood as under a penthouse. The stems and branches of the trees look black by contrast. You wander zigzag through the aisles of the wood, where stillness and twilight reign.

Improve every opportunity to express yourself in writing, as if it were your last.

I do not know but a pine wood is as substantial and as memorable a fact as a friend. I am more sure to come away from it cheered, than from those who come nearest to being my friends. It is unfortunate for the chopper and the walker when the cold wind comes from the same side with the sun, for then he cannot find a warm recess in which to sit. It is pleasant to walk now through open and stately white pine woods. Their plumes do not hold so much snow commonly, unless where their limbs rest or are weighed down on to a neighboring tree. It is cold but still in their midst, where the snow is untracked by man, and ever and anon you see the snow-dust, shone on by the sun, falling from their tops and, as it strikes the lower limbs, producing innumerable new showers. For, as after a rain there is a second rain in the woods, so after a light snow there is a second snow in the woods,

when the wind rises. The branches of the white pine are more horizontal than those of the pitch, and the white streaks of snow on them look accordingly. I perceive that the young black oaks and the red oaks, too, methinks, still keep their leaves as well as the white. This piercing wind is so nearly from the west this afternoon that, to stand at once in a sheltered and a sunny place, you must seek the south-southeast side of the woods.

What slight but important distinctions between one creature and another! What little, but essential, advantages one enjoys over another! I noticed this afternoon a squirrel's nest high in the fork of a white pine. Thither he easily ascends, but many creatures strive in vain to get at him.

The lower branches of the hemlock point down, and even trail on the ground, the whole tree making a perfect canopy.

When they who have aspired to be friends cease to sympathize, it is the part of religion to keep asunder.

One of the best men I know often offends me by uttering made words — the very best words, of course, or dinner speeches, most smooth and gracious and fluent repartees, a sort of talking to Buncombe, a dash of polite conversation, a graceful bending, as if I were Master Slingsby of promising parts, from the University. O would you but be simple and downright! Would you but cease your palaver! It is the misfortune of being a gentleman and famous. The conversation of gentlemen after dinner! One of the best of men and wisest, to whom this diabolical formality will adhere. Repeating himself, shampooing himself! Passing the time of

day, as if he were just introduced! No words are so tedious. Never a natural or simple word or yawn. It produces an appearance of phlegm and stupidity in me the auditor. I am suddenly the closest and most phlegmatic of mortals, and the conversation comes to naught. Such speeches as an ex-Member of Congress might make to an ex-Member of Parliament.

To explain to a friend is to suppose that you are not intelligent of one another. If you are not, to what purpose will you explain?

My acquaintances will sometimes wonder why I will impoverish myself by living aloof from this or that company, but greater would be the impoverishment if I should associate with them.

Dec. 19. In all woods is heard now far and near the sound of the woodchopper's axe, a twilight sound, now in the night of the year, men having come out for fuel to the forests, — as if men had stolen forth in the arctic night to get fuel to keep their fires a-going. Men go to the woods now for fuel who never go there at any other time. Why should it be so pleasing to look into a thick pine wood where the sunlight streams in and gilds it? The sound of the axes far in the horizon sounds like the dropping of the caves. Now the sun gets suddenly without a cloud, and with scarcely any redness following, so pure is the atmosphere, — only a faint rosy blush along the horizon.

Dec. 20. *Saturday.* 2 P. M. — To Fair Haven Hill and plain below.

Saw a large hawk circling over a pine wood below me, and screaming, apparently that he might discover his prey by their flight. Travelling ever by wider circles. What a symbol of the thoughts, now soaring, now descending, taking larger and larger circles, or smaller and smaller. It flies not directly whither it is bound, but advances by circles, like a courtier of the skies. No such noble progress! How it comes round, as with a wider sweep of thought! But the majesty is in the imagination of the beholder, for the bird is intent on its prey. Circling and ever circling, you cannot divine which way it will incline, till perchance it dives down straight as an arrow to its mark. It rises higher above where I stand, and I see with beautiful distinctness its wings against the sky, — primaries and secondaries, and the rich tracery of the outline of the latter (?), its inner wings, or wing-linings, within the outer, — like a great moth seen against the sky. A will-o'-the-wind. Following its path, as it were through the vortices of the air. The poetry of motion. Not as preferring one place to another, but enjoying each as long as possible. Most gracefully so surveys new scenes and revisits the old. As if that hawk were made to be the symbol of my thought, how bravely he came round over those parts of the wood which he had not surveyed, taking in a new segment, annexing new territories! Without "heave-yo!" it trims its sail. It goes about without the creaking of a block. That America yacht of the air that never makes a tack, though it rounds the globe itself, takes in and shakes out its reefs without a flutter,— its sky-scrapers all under its control. Holds up one wing, as if to admire, and sweeps off this way,

then holds up the other and sweeps that. If there are two concentrically circling, it is such a regatta as Southampton waters never witnessed.

Flights of imagination, Coleridgean thoughts. So a man is said to soar in his thought, ever to fresh woods and pastures new. Rises as in thought.

Snow-squalls pass, obscuring the sun, as if blown off from a larger storm.

Since last Monday the ground has [been] covered half a foot or more with snow; and the ice also, before I have had a skate. Hitherto we had had mostly bare, frozen ground. Red, white, green, and, in the distance, dark brown are the colors of the winter landscape. I view it now from the cliffs. The red shrub oaks on the white ground of the plain beneath make a pretty scene. Most walkers are pretty effectually shut up by the snow.

I observe that they who saw down trees in the woods with a cross-cut saw carry a mat to kneel on.

It is no doubt a good lesson for the woodchopper, the long day alone in the woods, and he gets more than his half dollar a cord.

Say the thing with which you labor. It is a waste of time for the writer to use his talents merely. Be faithful to your genius. Write in the strain that interests you most. Consult not the popular taste.

The red oak leaves are even more fresh and glossy than the white.

A clump of white pines, seen far westward over the shrub oak plain, which is now lit up by the setting sun, a soft, feathery grove, with their gray stems indistinctly seen, like human beings come to their cabin door, standing expectant on the edge of the plain, impress me with a mild humanity. The trees indeed have hearts. With a certain affection the sun seems to send its farewell ray far and level over the copses to them, and they silently receive it with gratitude, like a group of settlers with their children. The pines impress me as human. A slight vaporous cloud floats high over them, while in the west the sun goes down apace behind glowing pines, and golden clouds like mountains skirt the horizon.

Nothing stands up more free from blame in this world than a pine tree.

The dull and blundering behavior of clowns will as surely polish the writer at last as the criticism of men of thought.

It is wonderful, wonderful, the unceasing demand that Christendom makes on you, that you speak *from a moral point of view*. Though you be a babe, the cry is, Repent, repent. The Christian world will not admit that a man has a just perception of any truth, unless at the same time he cries, "Lord be merciful to me a sinner."

What made the hawk mount? Did you perceive the manœuvre? Did he fill himself with air? Before you were aware of it, he had mounted by his spiral path into the heavens.

Our country is broad and rich, for here, within twenty miles of Boston, I can stand in a clearing in the woods and look a mile or more, over the shrub oaks, to the distant pine copses and horizon of uncut woods, without a house or road or cultivated field in sight.

Sunset in winter from a clearing in the woods, about Well Meadow Head.

They say that the Indians of the Great Basin live on the almonds of the pine. Have not I been fed by the pine for many a year?

Go out before sunrise or stay out till sunset.

Dec. 21. *Sunday.* My difficulties with my friends are such as no frankness will settle. There is no precept in the New Testament that will assist me. My nature, it may [be], is secret. Others can confess and explain; I cannot. It is not that I am too proud, but that is not what is wanted. Friendship is the unspeakable joy and blessing that results to two or more individuals who from constitution sympathize; and natures are liable to no mistakes, but will know each other through thick and thin. Between two by nature alike and fitted to sympathize there is no veil and there can be no obstacle. Who are the estranged? Two friends explaining.

I feel sometimes as if I could say to my friends, "My friends, I am aware how I have outraged you, how I have seemingly preferred hate to love, seemingly treated others kindly and you unkindly, sedulously concealed my love, and sooner or later expressed all and more than all my hate." I can imagine how I might utter something like this in some moment never to be realized. But let me say frankly that at the same time I feel, it may be with too little regret, that I am under an awful necessity to be what I am. If the truth were known, which I do not know, I have no concern with those friends whom I misunderstand or who misunderstand me.

The fates only are unkind that keep us asunder, but

my friend is ever kind. I am of the nature of stone. It takes the summer's sun to warm it.

My acquaintances sometimes imply that I am too cold; but each thing is warm enough of its kind. Is the stone too cold which absorbs the heat of the summer sun and does not part with it during the night? Crystals, though they be of ice, are not too cold to melt, but it was in melting that they were formed. Cold! I am most sensible of warmth in winter days. It is not the warmth of fire that you would have, but everything is warm and cold according to its nature. It is not that I am too cold, but that our warmth and coldness are not of the same nature; hence when I am absolutely warmest, I may be coldest to you. Crystal does not complain of crystal any more than the dove of its mate. You who complain that I am cold find Nature cold. To me she is warm. My heat is latent to you. Fire itself is cold to whatever is not of a nature to be warmed by it. A cool wind is warmer to a feverish man than the air of a furnace. That I am cold means that I am of another nature.

The dogwood and its berries in the *swamp* by the railroad, just above the red house, pendent on long stems which hang short down as if broken, betwixt yellowish (?) and greenish (?), white, ovoid, pearly (?) or waxen (?) berries. What is the color of them? Ah, give me to walk in the dogwood swamp, with its few coarse branches! Beautiful as Satan. The prinos or black alder berries appear to have been consumed; only the skins left, for the most part, sticking to the twigs, so that I thought there were fewer than usual. Is it that our woods have

had to entertain arctic visitors in unusual numbers, who have exhausted their stores?

Sunlight on pine-needles is the phenomenon of a winter day.

Who ever saw a partridge soar over the fields? To every creature its own nature. They are very wild; but are they scarce? or can you exterminate them for that?

As I stand by the edge of the swamp (Ministerial), a heavy-winged hawk flies home to it at sundown, just over my head, in silence. I cross some mink or musk-rat's devious path in the snow, with mincing feet and trailing body.

To-night, as so many nights within the year, the clouds arrange themselves in the east at sunset in long converging bars, according to the simple tactics of the sky. It is the melon-rind jig. It would serve for a permanent description of the sunset. Such is the morning and such the evening, converging bars inclose the day at each end as within a melon rind, and the morning and evening are one day. Long after the sun has set, and downy clouds have turned dark, and the shades of night have taken possession of the east, some rosy clouds will be seen in the upper sky over the portals of the darkening west.

How swiftly the earth appears to revolve at sunset, which at midday appears to rest on its axle!

Dec. 22. If I am thus seemingly cold compared with my companion's warm, who knows but mine is a less transient glow, a steadier and more equable heat, like that of the earth in spring, in which the flowers spring and expand? It is not words that I wish to hear or

to utter, but relations that I seek to stand in; and it oftener happens, methinks, that I go away unmet, unrecognized, ungreeted in my offered relation, than that you are disappointed of words. If I can believe that we are related to one another as truly and gloriously as I have imagined, I ask nothing more, and words are not required to convince me of this. I am disappointed of relations, you of words.

I have seen, in the form, in the expression of face, of a child three years old, the tried magnanimity and grave nobility of ancient and departed worthies. Just saw a little Irish boy, come from the distant shanty in the woods over the bleak railroad to school this morning, take his last step from his last snow-drift on to the schoolhouse door-step, floundering still; saw not his face or his profile, only his mien, and imagined, saw clearly in imagination, his old-worthy face behind the sober visor of his cap. Ah! this little Irish boy, I know not why, revives to my mind the worthies of antiquity. He is not drawn, he never was drawn, in a willow wagon; he progresses by his own brave steps. Has not the world waited for such a generation? Here he condescends to his a-b-c without one smile, who has the lore of worlds uncounted in his brain. He speaks not of the adventures of the causeway. What was the bravery of Leonidas and his three hundred boys at the pass of Thermopylæ to this infant's? They but dared to die; he dares to live, — and take his "reward of merit," perchance without relaxing his face into a smile, that overlooks his unseen and unrewardable merits. Little Johnny Riordan, who faces cold and routs it like a Persian army,

who, yet innocent, carries in his knees the strength of a thousand Indras. That does not reward the thousandth part of his merit. While the charitable waddle about cased in furs, he, lively as a cricket, passes them on his way to school. I forget for the time Kossuth and his Hungarians. Here 's a Kossuth for you![1]

An innocent child is a man who has repented once for all, and is born again, — has entered into the joy of his Lord.

Almost the whole world is orthodox and looks upon you as in a state of nature. In conversation with people of more than average wit, I find that the common assumption is that they have experienced a new birth, but you are in a state of nature.

Dec. 23. It would give me such joy to know that a friend had come to see me, and yet that pleasure I seldom if ever experience.

It is a record of the mellow and ripe moments that I would keep. I would not preserve the husk of life, but the kernel.

When the cup of life is full and flowing over, preserve some drops as a specimen, sample. When the intellect enlightens the heart and the heart warms the intellect.

Thoughts will sometimes possess our heads when we are up and about our business which are the exact counterpart of the bad dreams which we sometimes have by night, and I think that the intellect is equally inert in both cases. Very frequently, no doubt, the thoughts men have are the consequence of something which they have

[1] [See pp. 241–244; also *Journal*, vol. ii, pp. 117, 118.]

eaten or done. Our waking *moods* and *humors* are our dreams, but whenever we are truly awake and serene, and healthy in all our senses, we have memorable visions. Who that takes up a book wishes for the report of the clogged bowels or the impure blood?

Yesterday afternoon I walked to the stone bridge over the Assabet, and thence down the river on the ice to the Leaning Hemlocks, and then crossed the other branch to the house. Do I not see two kinds of black alder, one blotched, the other lighter-colored, the former with many small berries crowded, the latter larger and single? Scared up partridges into the tops of the hemlocks, where they thought to conceal themselves.

Observed where a woodchopper had come to the river and cut a hole for water some days before. The river, frozen unexpectedly even, — but few open places, — had gone down since it froze, and the ice was accordingly bulged up over the rocks in its channel, with many fine cracks in all directions. It was a good opportunity to examine the fluviatile trees. I was struck by the amount of small interlaced roots — making almost a solid mass — of some red (?) oaks on the bank which the water had undermined, opposite Sam Barrett's. Observed by a wall beneath Nawshawtuct where many rabbits appeared to have played and nearly half a pint of dung was dropped in one pile on the snow.

This morning, when I woke, I found it snowing, the snow fine and driving almost horizontally, as if it had set in for a long storm, but a little after noon it ceased snowing and began to clear up, and I set forth for a walk. The snow which we have had for the last week or ten

days has been remarkably light and dry. It is pleasant walking in the woods now, when the sun is just coming out and shining on the woods freshly covered with snow. At a distance the oak woods look very venerable. A fine, hale, wintry aspect things wear, and the pines, all snowed up, even suggest comfort. Where boughs cross each other much snow is caught, which now in all woods is gradually tumbling down.

By half past three the sun is fairly out. I go to the Cliffs. There is a narrow ridge of snow, a white line, on the storm side of the stem of every exposed tree. I see that there is to be a fine, clear sunset, and make myself a seat in the snow on the Cliff to witness it. Already a few clouds are glowing like a golden sierra just above the horizon. From a low arch the clear sky has rapidly spread eastward over the whole heavens, and the sun shines serenely, and the air is still, and the spotless snow covers the fields. The snow-storm is over, the clouds have departed, the sun shines serenely, the air is still, a pure and trackless white napkin covers the ground, and a fair evening is coming to conclude all. Gradually the sun sinks, the air grows more dusky, and I perceive that if it were not for the light reflected from the snow it would be quite dark. The woodchopper has started for home. I can no longer distinguish the color of the red oak leaves against the snow, but they appear black. The partridges have come forth to bud on the apple trees. Now the sun has quite disappeared, but the afterglow, as I may call it, apparently the reflection from the cloud beyond which the sun went down on the thick atmosphere of the horizon, is unusually bright and lasting.

Long, broken clouds in the horizon, in the dun atmosphere, — as if the fires of day were still smoking there, — hang with red and golden edging like the saddle-cloths of the steeds of the sun. Now all the clouds grow black, and I give up to-night; but unexpectedly, half an hour later when I look out, having got home, I find that the evening star is shining brightly, and, beneath all, the west horizon is glowing red, — that dun atmosphere instead of clouds reflecting the sun, — and I detect, just above the horizon, the narrowest imaginable white sickle of the new moon.

Dec. 24. It spits snow this afternoon. Saw a flock of snowbirds on the Walden road. I see them so commonly when it is beginning to snow that I am inclined to regard them as a sign of a snow-storm. The snow bunting (*Emberiza nivalis*) methinks it is, so white and arctic, not the slate-colored. Saw also some pine grosbeaks, magnificent winter birds, among the weeds and on the apple trees; like large catbirds[1] at a distance, but, nearer at hand, some of them, when they flit by, are seen to have gorgeous heads, breasts, and rumps (?), with red or crimson reflections, more beautiful than a steady bright red would be. The note I heard, a rather faint and innocent whistle of two bars.

Now and long since the birds' nests have been full of snow.

I had looked in vain into the west for nearly half an hour to see a red cloud blushing in the sky. The few clouds were dark, and I had given up all to night, but

[1] Rice calls them winter larks. Perhaps he means another.

when I had got home and chanced to look out the window from the supper [table], I perceived that all the west horizon was glowing with a rosy border, and that dun atmosphere had been the cloud this time which made the day's adieus. But half an hour before, that dun atmosphere hung over all the western woods and hills, precisely as if the fires of the day had just been put out in the west, and the burnt territory was sending out volumes of dun and lurid smoke to heaven, as if Phaëton had again driven the chariot of the sun so near as to set fire to earth.

Dec. 25. *Thursday. Via* spruce swamp on Conantum to hilltop, returning across river over shrub oak plain to Cliffs.

A wind is now blowing the light snow which fell a day or two ago into drifts, especially on the lee, now the south, side of the walls, the outlines of the drifts corresponding to the chinks in the walls and the eddies of the wind. The snow glides, unperceived for the most part, over the open fields without rising into the air (unless the ground is elevated), until it reaches an opposite wall, which it sifts through and is blown over, blowing off from it like steam when seen in the sun. As it passes through the chinks, it does not drive straight onward, but curves gracefully upwards into fantastic shapes, somewhat like the waves which curve as they break upon the shore; that is, as if the snow that passes through a chink were one connected body, detained by the friction of its lower side. It takes the form of saddles and shells and porringers. It builds up a fantastic alabaster wall

behind the first, — a snowy sierra. It is wonderful what sharp turrets it builds up, — builds up, *i. e.* by accumulation though seemingly by attrition, though the curves upward to a point like the prows of ancient vessels look like sharp carving, or as if the material had been held before the blowpipe. So what was blown up into the air gradually sifts down into the road or field, and forms the slope of the sierra. Astonishingly sharp and thin overhanging eaves it builds, even this dry snow, where it has the least suggestion from a wall or bank, — less than a mason ever springs his brick from. This is the architecture of the snow. On high hills exposed to wind and sun, it curls off like the steam from a damp roof in the morning. Such sharply defined forms it takes as if the core had been the flames of gaslights.

I go forth to see the sun set. Who knows how it will set, even half an hour beforehand? whether it will go down in clouds or a clear sky? I feel that it is late when the mountains in the north and northwest have ceased to reflect the sun. The shadow is not partial but universal.

In a winter day the sun is almost all in all.

I witness a beauty in the form or coloring of the clouds which addresses itself to my imagination, for which you account scientifically to my understanding, but do not so account to my imagination. It is what it suggests and is the symbol of that I care for, and if, by any trick of science, you rob it of its symbolicalness, you do me no service and explain nothing. I, standing twenty miles off, see a crimson cloud in the horizon. You tell me it is a mass of vapor which absorbs all other rays and reflects the red, but that is nothing to the purpose, for

this red vision excites me, stirs my blood, makes my thoughts flow, and I have new and indescribable fancies, and you have not touched the secret of that influence. If there is not something mystical in your explanation, something unexplainable to the understanding, some elements of mystery, it is quite insufficient. If there is nothing in it which speaks to my imagination, what boots it? What sort of science is that which enriches the understanding, but robs the imagination? not merely robs Peter to pay Paul, but takes from Peter more than it ever gives to Paul? That is simply the way in which it speaks to the understanding, and that is the account which the understanding gives of it; but that is not the way it speaks to the imagination, and that is not the account which the imagination gives of it. Just as inadequate to a pure mechanic would be a poet's account of a steam-engine.

If we knew all things thus mechanically merely, should we know anything really?

It would be a truer discipline for the writer to take the least film of thought that floats in the twilight sky of his mind for his theme, about which he has scarcely one idea (that would be teaching his ideas how to shoot), faintest intimations, shadowiest subjects, make a lecture on this, by assiduity and attention get perchance two views of the same, increase a little the stock of knowledge, clear a new field instead of manuring the old; instead of making a lecture out of such obvious truths, hackneyed to the minds of all thinkers. We seek too soon to ally the perceptions of the mind to the

experience of the hand, to prove our gossamer truths practical, to show their connection with our every-day life (better show their distance from our every-day life), to relate them to the cider-mill and the banking institution. Ah, give me pure mind, pure thought! Let me not be in haste to detect the *universal law;* let me see more clearly a particular instance of it! Much finer themes I aspire to, which will yield no satisfaction to the vulgar mind, not one sentence for them. Perchance it may convince such that there are more things in heaven and earth than are dreamed of in their philosophy. Dissolve one nebula, and so destroy the nebular system and hypothesis. Do not seek expressions, seek thoughts to be expressed. By perseverance you get two views of the same rare truth.

That way of viewing things you know of, least insisted on by you, however, least remembered, — take that view, adhere to that, insist on that, see all things from that point of view. Will you let these intimations go unattended to and watch the door-bell or knocker? That is your text. Do not speak for other men; speak for yourself. They show you as in a vision the kingdoms of the world, and of all the worlds, but you prefer to look in upon a puppet-show. Though you should only speak to one kindred mind in all time, though you should not speak to one, but only utter aloud, that you may the more completely realize and live in the idea which contains the reason of your life, that you may build yourself up to the height of your conceptions, that you may remember your Creator in the days of your youth and justify His ways to man, that the end of life may not be its

amusement, speak — though your thought presupposes the non-existence of your hearers — thoughts that transcend life and death. What though mortal ears are not fitted to hear absolute truth! Thoughts that blot out the earth are best conceived in the night, when darkness has already blotted it out from sight.

We look upward for inspiration.

Dec. 26. I observed this afternoon that when Edmund Hosmer came home from sledding wood and unyoked his oxen, they made a business of stretching and scratching themselves with their horns and rubbing against the posts, and licking themselves in those parts which the yoke had prevented their reaching all day. The human way in which they behaved affected me even pathetically. They were too serious to be glad that their day's work was done; they had not spirits enough left for that. They behaved as a tired woodchopper might. This was to me a new phase in the life of the laboring ox. It is painful to think how they may sometimes be overworked. I saw that even the ox could be weary with toil.

Dec. 27. *Saturday.* Sunset from Fair Haven Hill. This evening there are many clouds in the west into which the sun goes down so that we have our visible or apparent sunset and red evening sky as much as fifteen minutes before the real sunset. You must be early on the hills to witness such a sunset, — by half past four at least. Then all the vales, even to the horizon, are full of a purple vapor, which half veils the distant mountains, and the windows of undiscoverable farmhouses shine like an early candle or a fire. After the sun has gone behind a cloud, there appears to be a gathering of clouds around his setting, and for a few moments his light in the amber sky seems more intense, brighter, and purer than at noonday.

I think you never see such a brightness in the noonday heavens as in the western sky sometimes, just before the sun goes down in clouds, like the ecstasy which we [are] told sometimes lights up the face of a dying man. That is a *serene* or evening death, like the end of the day. Then, at last, through all the grossness which has accumulated in the atmosphere of day, is seen a patch of serene sky fairer by contrast with the surrounding dark than midday, and even the gross atmosphere of the day is gilded and made pure as amber by the setting sun, as if the day's sins were forgiven it. The man is blessed who every day is permitted to behold anything so pure and serene as the western sky at sunset, while revolutions vex the world.

There is no winter necessarily in the sky, though the snow covers the earth. The sky is always ready to answer to our moods; we can see summer there or winter. Snow and drifts on the earth; it swiftly descends from the heavens and leaves them pure. The heavens present, perhaps, pretty much the same aspect summer and winter.

It is remarkable that the sun rarely goes down without a cloud.

Venus — I suppose it is — is now the evening star, and very bright she is immediately after sunset in the early twilight.

Dec. 28. All day a drizzling rain, ever and anon holding up with driving mists. A January thaw. The snow rapidly dissolving; in all hollows a pond forming; unfathomable water beneath the snow. Went into Tommy Wheeler's house, where still stands the spinning-wheel, and even the loom, home-made. Great pitch pine timbers overhead, fifteen or sixteen inches in diameter, telling of the primitive forest here. The white pines look greener than usual in this gentle rain, and every needle has a drop at the end of it. There is a mist in the air which partially conceals them, and they seem of a piece with it. Some one has cut a hole in the ice at Jenny's Brook, and set a steel trap under water, and suspended a large piece of meat over it, for a bait for a mink, apparently.

Dec. 29. The sun just risen. The ground is almost entirely bare. The puddles are not skimmed over. It is warm as an April morning. There is a sound as of bluebirds in the air, and the cocks crow as in the spring. The steam curls up from the roofs and the ground. You walk with open cloak. It is exciting [to] behold the smooth, glassy surface of water where the melted snow has formed large puddles and ponds, and to see it running in the sluices. In the clear atmosphere I saw, far in the eastern horizon, the steam from the steam-engine, like downy clouds above the woods, I think even beyond Weston. By school-time you see the boys in the streets playing with the sluices, and the whole population is inspired with new life.

In the afternoon to Saw Mill Brook with W. E. C.

Snow all gone from Minott's hillside. The willow at the red house shines in the sun. The boys have come out under the hill to pitch coppers. Watts sits on his door-step. It is like the first of April. The wind is west. At the turnpike bridge, water stands a foot or two deep over the ice. Water spiders have come out and are skating against the stream. How much they depend on January thaws! Now for the frozen-thawed apples! This is the first chance they have had to thaw this winter. It feels as warm as in summer; you sit on any fence-rail and vegetate in the sun, and realize that the earth may produce peas again. Yet they say that this open and mild weather is unhealthy; that is always the way with them. How admirable it is that we can never foresee the weather, — that that is always novel! Yesterday nobody dreamed of to-day; nobody dreams of to-morrow. Hence the weather is ever the news. What a fine and measureless joy the gods grant us thus, letting us know nothing about the day that is to dawn! This day, yesterday, was as incredible as any other miracle. Now all creatures feel it, even the cattle chewing stalks in the barn-yards; and perchance it has penetrated even to the lurking-places of the crickets under the rocks.

The artist is at work in the Deep Cut. The telegraph harp sounds.

Dec. 30. *Tuesday. Mem.:* Go to the Deep Cut.[1]

The flies now crawl forth from the crevices all covered with dust, dreaming of summer, without life or energy enough to clean their wings.

[1] [See next date.]

This afternoon, being on Fair Haven Hill, I heard the sound of a saw, and soon after from the Cliff saw two men sawing down a noble pine beneath, about forty rods off. I resolved to watch it till it fell, the last of a dozen or more which were left when the forest was cut and for fifteen years have waved in solitary majesty over the sprout-land. I saw them like beavers or insects gnawing at the trunk of this noble tree, the diminutive manikins with their cross-cut saw which could scarcely span it. It towered up a hundred feet as I afterward found by measurement, one of the tallest probably in the township and straight as an arrow, but slanting a little toward the hillside, its top seen against the frozen river and the hills of Conantum. I watch closely to see when it begins to move. Now the sawers stop, and with an axe open it a little on the side toward which it leans, that it may break the faster. And now their saw goes again. Now surely it is going; it is inclined one quarter of the quadrant, and, breathless, I expect its crashing fall. But no, I was mistaken; it has not moved an inch; it stands at the same angle as at first. It is fifteen minutes yet to its fall. Still its branches wave in the wind, as if it were destined to stand for a century, and the wind soughs through its needles as of yore; it is still a forest tree, the most majestic tree that waves over Musketaquid. The silvery sheen of the sunlight is reflected from its needles; it still affords an inaccessible crotch for the squirrel's nest; not a lichen has forsaken its mast-like stem, its raking mast, — the hill is the hulk. Now, now 's the moment! The manikins at its base are fleeing from their crime. They have

dropped the guilty saw and axe. How slowly and majestically it starts! as if it were only swayed by a summer breeze, and would return without a sigh to its location in the air. And now it fans the hillside with its fall, and it lies down to its bed in the valley, from which it is never to rise, as softly as a feather, folding its green mantle about it like a warrior, as if, tired of standing, it embraced the earth with silent joy, returning its elements to the dust again. But hark! there you only saw, but did not hear. There now comes up a deafening crash to these rocks, advertising you that even trees do not die without a groan. It rushes to embrace the earth, and mingle its elements with the dust. And now all is still once more and forever, both to eye and ear.

I went down and measured it. It was about four feet in diameter where it was sawed, about one hundred feet long. Before I had reached it the axemen had already half divested it of its branches. Its gracefully spreading top was a perfect wreck on the hillside as if it had been made of glass, and the tender cones of one year's growth upon its summit appealed in vain and too late to the mercy of the chopper. Already he has measured it with his axe, and marked off the mill-logs it will make. And the space it occupied in upper air is vacant for the next two centuries. It is lumber. He has laid waste the air. When the fish hawk in the spring revisits the banks of the Musketaquid, he will circle in vain to find his accustomed perch, and the hen-hawk will mourn for the pines lofty enough to protect her brood. A plant which it has taken two centuries to

perfect, rising by slow stages into the heavens, has this afternoon ceased to exist. Its sapling top had expanded to this January thaw as the forerunner of summers to come. Why does not the village bell sound a knell? I hear no knell tolled. I see no procession of mourners in the streets, or the woodland aisles. The squirrel has leaped to another tree; the hawk has circled further off, and has now settled upon a new eyrie, but the woodman is preparing [to] lay his axe at the root of that also.

Dec. 31. The third warm day; now overcast and beginning to drizzle. Still it is inspiriting as the brightest weather. Though the sun surely is not a-going to shine, there is a latent light in the mist, as if there were more electricity than usual in the air. There are warm, foggy days in winter which excite us.

It reminds me, this thick, spring-like weather, that I have not enough valued and attended to the pure clarity and brilliancy of the winter skies. Consider in what respects the winter sunsets differ from the summer ones. Shall I ever in summer evenings see so celestial a reach of blue sky contrasting with amber as I have seen a few days since. The day sky in winter corresponds for clarity to the night sky, in which the stars shine and twinkle so brightly in this latitude.

I am too late, perhaps, to see the sand foliage in the Deep Cut; should have been there day before yesterday; it is now too wet and soft. Yet in some places it is perfect. I see some perfect leopards' paws.[1] These

[1] [*Walden*, pp. 336, 337; Riv. 470.]

things suggest that there is motion in the earth as well as on the surface; it lives and grows. It is warmed and influenced by the sun, just as my blood by my thoughts. I seem to see some of the life that is in the spring bud and blossom more intimately, nearer its fountainhead, the fancy sketches and designs of the artist. It is more simple and primitive growth; as if for ages sand and clay might have thus flowed into the forms of foliage, before plants were produced to clothe the earth. The earth I tread on is not a dead, inert mass. It is a body, has a spirit, is organic, and fluid to the influence of its spirit, and to whatever particle of that spirit is in me. She is not dead, but sleepeth. It is more cheering than the fertility and luxuriance of vineyards, this fundamental fertility near to the principle of growth. To be sure it is somewhat fœcal and stercoral.[1] So the poet's creative moment is when the frost is coming out in the spring, but, as in the case of some too easy poets, if the weather is too warm and rainy or long continued it becomes mere diarrhœa, mud and clay relaxed. The poet must not have something pass his bowels merely; that is women's poetry. He must have something pass his brain and heart and bowels, too, it may be, all together. So he gets delivered. There is no end to the fine bowels here exhibited, — heaps of liver, lights, and bowels. Have you no bowels? Nature has some bowels. And there again she is mother of humanity.[2] Concord is a worthier place to live in, the globe is a worthier place, for these creations, this slumbering life that may wake. Even the solid globe is permeated by the living

[1] [*Walden*, p. 340; Riv. 475.] [2] [*Ibid.*]

law. It is the most living of creatures. No doubt all creatures that live on its surface are but parasites.

I observed this afternoon the old Irishwoman at the shanty in the woods, sitting out on the hillside, bareheaded, in the rain and on the icy though thawing ground, knitting. She comes out, like the ground squirrel, at the least intimation of warmer weather. She will not have to go far to be buried, so close she lives to the earth, while I walk still in a greatcoat and under an umbrella. Such Irish as these are naturalizing themselves at a rapid rate, and threaten at last to displace the Yankees, as the latter have the Indians. The process of acclimation is rapid with them; they draw long breaths in the American sick-room. What must be the philosophy of life to that woman, ready to flow down the slope with the running sand! Ah, what would I not give for her point of view! She does not use any *th*'s in her style. Yet I fear that even she may have learned to lie.

There is a low mist in the woods. It is a good day to study lichens. The view so confined it compels your attention to near objects, and the white background reveals the disks of the lichens distinctly. They appear more loose, flowing, expanded, flattened out, the colors brighter for the damp. The round greenish-yellow lichens on the white pines loom through the mist (or are seen dimly) like shields whose devices you would fain read. The trees appear all at once covered with their crop of lichens and mosses of all kinds, — flat and tearful are some, distended by moisture. This is their solstice, and your eyes run swiftly through the mist to these things only. On every fallen twig, even,

that has lain under the snows, as well as on the trees, they appear erect and now first to have attained their full expansion. Nature has a day for each of her creatures, her creations. To-day it is an exhibition of lichens at Forest Hall, the livid green of some, the fruit of others. They eclipse the trees they cover. And the red, club-pointed (baobab-tree-like) on the stumps, the *erythrean* stumps! Ah, beautiful is decay! True, as Thales said, the world was made out of water. That is the principle of all things.

I do not lay myself open to my friends!? The owner of the casket locks it, and unlocks it. Treat your friends for what you know them to be. Regard no surfaces. Consider not what they did, but what they intended. Be sure, as you know them you are known of them again. Last night I treated my dearest friend ill. Though I could find some excuse for myself, it is not such excuse as under the circumstances could be pleaded in so many words. Instantly I blamed myself, and sought an opportunity to make atonement, but the friend avoided me, and, with kinder feelings even than before, I was obliged to depart. And now this morning I feel that it is too late to speak of the trifle, and, besides, I doubt now in the cool morning, if I have a right to suppose such intimate and serious relations as afford a basis for the apology I had conceived, for even magnanimity must ask this poor earth for a field. The virtues even wait for invitation. Yet I am resolved to know that one centrally, through thick and thin, and though we should be cold to one another, though we should never speak to one another, I will know that inward

and essential love may exist even under a superficial cold, and that the law of attraction speaks louder than words. My true relation this instant shall be my apology for my false relation the last instant. I made haste to cast off my injustice as scurf. I own it least of anybody, for I have absolutely done with it. Let the idle and wavering and apologizing friend appropriate it. Methinks our estrangement is only like the divergence of the branches which unite in the stem.

This night I heard Mrs. S—— lecture on womanhood. The most important fact about the lecture was that a woman said it, and in that respect it was suggestive. Went to see her afterward, but the interview added nothing to the previous impression, rather subtracted. She was a woman in the too common sense after all. You had to fire small charges: I did not have a finger in once, for fear of blowing away all her works and so ending the game. You had to substitute courtesy for sense and argument. It requires nothing less than a chivalric feeling to sustain a conversation with a lady. I carried her lecture for her in my pocket wrapped in her handkerchief; my pocket exhales cologne to this moment. The championess of woman's rights still asks you to be a ladies' man. I can't fire a salute, even, for fear some of the guns may be shotted. I had to unshot all the guns in truth's battery and fire powder and wadding only. Certainly the heart is only for rare occasions; the intellect affords the most unfailing entertainment. It would only do to let her feel the wind of the ball. I fear that to the last woman's lectures will demand mainly courtesy from man.

(To go on with walk, this written next morning.) How deceptive the size of a large pine! still, as you approach it, even within a rod or two, it looks only like a reasonable stick, fit for a string-piece, perchance, the average size of trees one foot in diameter, — big as a keg or a half-barrel, it may be, — fit for the sill or the beams of an old-fashioned house. This you think is a generous appreciation and allowance. Not till you stand close to its foot, upon one of its swelling insteps, and compare its diameter with the diameter of your own eyeballs, do you begin to discover its width. Stand by its side, and see how it shuts out a hemisphere from you. Why, it is as wide as a front door. What a slender arrow, a light shaft, now that you stand a rod or two off! What a ballista, a battering ram, a mighty vegetable monster, a cannon, near at hand! Now set a barrel, aye, a hogshead beside it. You apply your measures. The foot rule seems suddenly shrunk. Your umbrella is but half as long as it was.

The pine I saw fall yesterday measured to-day one hundred and five feet, and was about ninety-four years old. There was one still larger lying beside it, one hundred and fifteen feet long, ninety-six years old, four feet diameter the longest way. The tears were streaming from the sap-wood — about twenty circles — of each, pure amber or pearly tears.

Through the drizzling fog, now just before nightfall, I see from the Cliffs the dark cones of pine trees that rise above the level of the tree-tops, and can trace a few elm tree tops where a farmhouse hides beneath.

Denuded pines stand in the clearings with no old

cloak to wrap about them, only the apexes of their cones entire, telling a pathetic story of the companions that clothed them. So stands a man. It is clearing around him. He has no companions on the hills. The lonely traveller, looking up, wonders why he was left when his companions were taken.