

## VII

NOVEMBER, 1852

(ÆT. 35)

*Nov. 1.* A warm, mizzling kind of rain for two days past and still. *Stellaria media* in Cheney's garden, as last spring, butter-and-eggs, that small white aster (*A. dumosus* ?), the small white fleabanc, hedge-mustard.

Day before yesterday to the Cliffs in the rain, misty rain. As I approached their edge, I saw the woods beneath, Fair Haven Pond, and the hills across the river, — which, owing to the mist, was as far as I could see, and seemed much further in consequence. I saw these between the converging boughs of two white pines a rod or two from me on the edge of the rock; and I thought that there was no frame to a landscape equal to this, — to see, between two near pine boughs, whose lichens are distinct, a distant forest and lake, the one frame, the other picture. In November, a man will eat his heart, if in any month. The birches have almost all lost their leaves. On the river this afternoon, the leaves, now crisp and curled, when the wind blows them on to the water become rude boats which float and sail about awhile conspicuously before they go to the bottom, — oaks, walnuts, etc.

It is remarkable how native man proves himself to the earth, after all, and the completeness of his life in

all its appurtenances. His alliances, how wide! He has domesticated not only beasts but fowl, not only hens and geese and ducks and turkeys, but his doves, winging their way to their dovecots over street and village and field, enhance the picturesqueness of his sky, to say nothing of his trained falcons, his beautiful scouts in the upper air. He is lord of the fowl and the brute. His allies are not only on the land, but in the air and water. The dove, the martin, the bluebird, the swallow, and, in some countries, the hawk have attached themselves to his fortunes. The doves that wing their way so near the clouds, they too are man's retainers.

Nov. 2. Tall buttercups, red clover, houstonias, *Polygonum aviculare*, still.

Those handsome red buds on often red-barked twigs, with some red leaves still left, appear to be blueberry buds. The prinos berries also now attract me in the scarcity of leaves, its own all gone; its berries are apparently a brighter red for it. The month of chickadees and new-swollen buds. At long intervals I see or hear a robin still.

To Walden.

In the latter part of October the skaters and water-bugs entirely disappear from the surface of the pond, and then and in November, when the weather is perfectly calm, it is almost absolutely as smooth as glass. This afternoon a three-days' rain-storm is drawing to an end, though still overcast. The air is quite still but misty, from time to time mizzling, and the pond is very smooth, and its surface difficult to distinguish, though

it no longer reflects the *bright* tints of autumn but sombre colors only, — calm at the end of a storm, except here and there a slight glimmer or dimple, as if a few skaters which had escaped the frosts were still collected there, or a faint breeze there struck, or a few rain-drops fell there, or perchance the surface, being remarkably smooth, betrayed by circling dimples where a spring welled up from below. I paddled gently toward one of these places and was surprised to find myriads of small perch about five inches long sporting there, one after another rising to the surface and dimpling it, leaving bubbles on it. They were very handsome as they surrounded the boat, with their distinct transverse stripes, a rich brown color. There were many such schools in the pond, as it were improving the short season before the ice would close their window. When I approached them suddenly with noise, they made a sudden splash and rippling with their tails in fright, and then took refuge in the depths. Suddenly the wind rose, the mist increased, and the waves rose, and still the perch leaped, but much higher, half out of water, a hundred black points, three inches long, at once above the surface.<sup>1</sup> The pond, dark before, was now a glorious and indescribable blue, mixed with dark, perhaps the opposite side of the wave, a sort of changeable or watered-silk blue, more cerulean if possible than the sky itself, which was now seen overhead. It required a certain division of the sight, however, to discern this. Like the colors on a steel sword-blade.<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> [Walden, pp. 210, 211; Riv. 296-298.]

<sup>2</sup> [Walden, p. 196; Riv. 277.]

Slate-colored snowbirds (?) with a faint note.

The leaves which are not withered, whose tints are still fresh and bright, are now remarked in sheltered places. Plucked quite a handsome nosegay from the side of Heywood's Peak, — white and blue-stemmed goldenrods, asters (*undulatus* and ?).

I do not know whether the perch amuse themselves thus more in the fall than at any other time. In such transparent and apparently bottomless water their swimming impresses the beholder as a kind of flight or hovering, like a compact flock of birds passing below one, just beneath his level on the right or left.<sup>1</sup> What a singular experience must be theirs in their winter quarters, their long night, expecting when the sun will open their shutters!

If you look discerningly, so as to see the reflection only, you see a most glorious light blue, in comparison with which the original dark green of the opposite side of the waves is but muddy.<sup>2</sup>

*Nov. 3.* Shepherd's-purse abundant still in gardens.

3 P. M. — To Cliffs and Andromeda Ponds.

In the Heywood Brooks, many young pollywogs two inches long and more; also snails on the bottom. I find these water-bugs, large and small, not on the surface, but apparently sheltered amid the weeds, going into winter quarters. While collecting caddis-worms, of which there are many, whose cases are made of little pieces of weeds piled about them like well-stones, I disturbed

<sup>1</sup> [*Walden*, pp. 210, 211; Riv. 297.]

<sup>2</sup> [*Walden*, p. 196; Riv. 277.]

a good-sized fish, either a pout or a sucker, near the path. It swam rapidly down this shallow stream, creating a wave which reached from side to side and betrayed it. I followed it down till it concealed itself under some frog-spittle, and when I had dislodged it thence, it went down further, till, coming to where the stream was dammed, it buried itself in the mud above the dam in an instant, and I could not dig it out.

The landscape from Fair Haven Hill looks November, bare gray limbs and twigs in the swamps; and where many young (or shrub) oaks have lost their leaves, you hear the rustling of oak and walnut leaves in the air. There is a ripple on the river from the cool northerly wind. The plants are sere. It is the month of withered oak leaves. The shrub oak plain is all withered. Only one or two butter-and-eggs left. At Andromeda Pond, started nine black (?) ducks just at sunset, as usual they circling far round to look at me. The andromeda is a dull brown like the shrub oak leaves now.

Or I was startled by the cracking of the ground in the coldest nights, which sounded as if it were my house that cracked, and in the morning I would find a crack in the earth a quarter of an inch wide and a quarter of a mile long.<sup>1</sup>

The sunsets begin to be interestingly warm.

*Nov. 4.* Autumnal dandelion and yarrow.

Must be out-of-doors enough to get experience of wholesome reality, as a ballast to thought and senti-

<sup>1</sup> [*Walden*, p. 301; Riv. 422.]

ment. Health requires this relaxation, this aimless life. This life in the present. Let a man have thought what he will of Nature in the house, she will still be novel outdoors. I keep out of doors for the sake of the mineral, vegetable, and animal in me.

How precious a fine day early in the spring!—less so in the fall; less still in the summer and winter. *Chimaphila*<sup>1</sup> sheds its pollen now. Saw witch-hazels out of bloom, some still fresh.

The winds of autumn draw a few strains from the telegraph, after all. At this post it is only a musical hum, but at the next it attains to clearness and reminds me of the isles of Greece. I put my ear to the post. Every fibre resounded with the increasing inflatus, but when it rose into a more melodious and tenser tone it seemed to retire and concentrate itself in the pith of the wood.

There was also Thorer of Steige, in Magnus Bare-foot's reign, who was "old and heavy." He gained some victories, but when it went against him could not run. He told his foe, "I am well in hands, but ill on my feet." He "was a man exceedingly stout, both high of stature and thick." So that, when he was hung, his neck gave way and his body fell to the ground. The poet sings:—

"How the king's thralls hung on the gallows  
Old Thorer and his traitor-fellows."

My thought is a part of the meaning of the world, and hence I use a part of the world as a symbol to express my thought.

<sup>1</sup> [*Lycopodium dendroideum*] substituted for this in pencil.]

Nov. 9. Tuesday. *Ranunculus repens*, *Bidens con-nata* (flat in a brook), yarrow, dandelion, autumnal dandelion, tansy, *Aster undulatus*, etc. A late three-ribbed goldenrod, with large serratures in middle of the narrow leaves, ten or twelve rays. *Potentilla argentea*. Fore part of November time for walnutting.

All around Walden, both in the thickest wood and where the wood has been cut off, there can be traced a meandering narrow shelf on the steep hillside, the footpath worn by the feet of Indian hunters, and still occasionally trodden by the white man, probably as old as the race of man here. And the same trail may be found encircling all our ponds. Near the sandy eastern shore, where the water is eight or ten feet deep, I have seen from a boat, in calm weather, broad circular heaps of small stones on the bottom, half a dozen feet in diameter by a foot or more in height, where all around was bare sand, — probably the work of some kind of fish.<sup>1</sup>

The French call dragon-flies "demoiselles."

Nov. 11. Did Harris call the water-bug *Gyrinus* to-day?

Nov. 12. 4 P. M. — To Cliffs.

It clears up. A very bright rainbow. Three reds and greens. I see its foot within half a mile in the southeast, heightening the green of the pines. From Fair Haven Hill, I see a very distant, long, low dark-blue cloud, still left, in the northwest horizon beyond

<sup>1</sup> [Walden, pp. 199, 200, 205; Riv. 282, 290.]

the mountains, and against this I see, apparently, a narrow white cloud resting on every mountain and conforming exactly to its outline, — *as if* the white *frilled* edge of the main cloud were turned up over them. In fact, the massive dark-blue cloud beyond revealed these distinct white caps resting on the mountains this side, for twenty miles along the horizon.

The sun having set, my long dark cloud has assumed the form of an alligator, and where the sun has just disappeared it is split into two tremendous jaws, between which glows the eternal city, its crenate lips all coppery golden, its serrate fiery teeth. Its body lies a slumbering mass along the horizon.

Nov. 13. *Saturday*. To Andromeda Ponds. Andromeda is a dull reddish brown, like oak leaves. Saw a flock of little passenger birds<sup>1</sup> by Walden, busily pecking at the white birch catkins; about the size of a chickadee; *distinct* white bar on wings; most with dark pencilled breast, some with whitish; forked tail; bright chestnut or crimson (?) frontlet; yellowish shoulders or sack. When startled, they went off with a jingling sound somewhat like emptying a bag of coin. Is it the yellow redpoll?

Nov. 14. Still yarrow, tall buttercup, and tansy.

Nov. 16. 9 A. M. — Sail up river to Lee's Bridge.

Colder weather and very windy, but still no snow. A very little ice along the edges of the river, which

<sup>1</sup> *Fringilla linaria* [now called *Acanthis linaria*, the redpoll].

does not all melt before night. Muskrat-houses completed. Interesting objects looking down a river-reach at this season, and our river should not be represented without one or two of these cones. They are quite conspicuous half a mile distant, and are of too much importance to be omitted in the river landscape. I still see the drowned white lily pads showing their red sides. On the meadow side the water is very much soiled by the dashing of the waves. I see one duck. The pines on shore look very cold, reflecting a silvery light. The waves run high, with white caps, and communicate a pleasant motion to the boat. At Lee's Cliff the *Cerastium viscosum*. We sailed up Well Meadow Brook. The water is singularly grayey, clear and cold. The bottom of the brook showing great nuphar roots, like its ribs, with some budding leaves. Returning, landed at Holden's Spruce Swamp. The water is frozen in the pitcher-plant leaf. The swamp-pink and blueberry buds attract.

Nov. 18. Measured a stick of round timber, probably white pine, on the cars this afternoon, — ninety-five feet long, nine and ten twelfths in circumference at butt, and six and two twelfths in circumference at small end, quite straight. From Vermont. Yarrow and tansy still. These are cold, gray days.

Nov. 21. I was surprised this afternoon to find the river skimmed over in some places, and Fair Haven Pond one-third frozen or skimmed over, though commonly there is scarcely any ice to be observed along

the shores. The commonest bird I see and hear nowadays is that little red crowned or fronted bird I described the 13th. I hear now more music from them. They have a mewling note which reminds me of a canary-bird. They make very good forerunners of winter. Is it not the ruby-crowned wren?<sup>1</sup>

Nov. 23. This morning the ground is white with snow, and it still snows. This is the first time it has been fairly white this season, though once before, many weeks ago, it was slightly whitened for ten or fifteen minutes. It was so warm and still last night at sundown that I remarked to a neighbor that it was moderating to snow. It is, in some degree, also, warmer after the first snow has come and banked up the houses and filled the crevices in the roof. Already the landscape impresses me with a greater sense of fertility. I have not worn gloves yet, though it has been finger-cold. There is something genial even in the first snow, and Nature seems to relent a little of her November harshness. Men, too, are disposed to give thanks for the bounties of the year all over the land, and the sound of the mortar is heard in all houses, and the odor of summer savory reaches even to poets' garrets.

This, then, may be considered the end of the flower season for this year, though this snow will probably soon melt again.

Among the flowers which may be put down as lasting thus far, as I remember, in the order of their hardiness: yarrow, tansy (these very fresh and common),

<sup>1</sup> Lesser redpoll.

cerastium, autumnal dandelion, dandelion, and perhaps tall buttercup, etc., the last four scarce. The following seen within a fortnight: a late three-ribbed goldenrod of some kind, blue-stemmed goldenrod (these two perhaps within a week), *Potentilla argentea*, *Aster undulatus*, *Ranunculus repens*, *Bidens connata*, shepherd's-purse, etc., etc. N. B.: I have not looked for witch-hazel nor *Stellaria media* lately.

I had a thought in a dream last night which surprised me by its strangeness, as if it were based on an experience in a previous state of existence, and could not be entertained by my waking self. Both the thought and the language were equally novel to me, but I at once perceived it to be true and to coincide with my experience in this state.

3 P. M. — To Cliffs and Walden.

You must go forth early to see the snow on the twigs. The twigs and leaves are all bare now, and the snow half melted on the ground; where the trees are thick it has not reached the ground at all, except in the shape of water in the course of the day. But early this morning the woods presented a very different scene. The beauty and purity of new-fallen snow, lying just as it fell, on the twigs and leaves all the country over, afforded endless delight to the walker. It was a delicate and fairylike scene. But a few hours later the woods were comparatively lumpish and dirty. So, too, you must go forth very early to see a hoar frost, which is rare here; these crisped curls adorn only the forehead of the day. The air is full of low, heavy mist, almost rain. The pines, in this atmosphere and contrasted with the

snow, are suddenly many degrees darker, and the oaks redder. But still the tops of the dead grass rise above the snow in the fields, and give the country a yellow or russet look. The wetter meadows are quite russet. I am surprised to see Fair Haven entirely skimmed over.

Having descended the Cliff, I go along to the Andromeda Ponds. Sportsmen have already been out with their dogs, improving this first snow to track their game. The andromeda looks somewhat redder than before, a warm reddish brown, with an edging of yellowish sedge or coarse grass about the swamp, and red rustling shrub oak hills with a white ground rising around. These swamps, resorted to by the muskrat and ducks, most remind me of the Indian.

The mist so low is clouds close to the ground, and the steam of the engine also hugs the earth in the Cut, concealing all objects for a great distance.

Though the parents cannot determine whether the child shall be male or female, yet, methinks, it depends on them whether he shall be a worthy addition to the human family.

*Nov. 24.* At this time last year the andromeda in the Ministerial Swamp was red. Now it has not turned from brown.

*Nov. 25.* At Walden. — I hear at sundown what I mistake for the squawking of a hen, — for they are firing at chickens hereabouts, — but it proved to be a flock of wild geese going south. This proves how much the voices of all fowls are alike.

*Nov. 27.* Almost an Indian-summer day. The shrub oaks and the sprouts make woods you can look down on. They are now our rustling gardens. The leaves of the former are now a very handsome leather-color, whiter on the under side, clear and firm; smooth, and not shrivelled nor dimmed. It is a new color for a garden; something foreign and Oriental, even, it suggests. I find acorns which have sent a shoot down into the earth this fall.

Like many of my contemporaries I had rarely for many years used animal food, or tea or coffee, etc., etc., not so much because of any ill effects which I had traced to them in my own case, though I could theorize extensively in that direction, as because it was not agreeable to my imagination. It appeared more beautiful to live low and fare hard in many respects; and though I never did so, I went just far enough to please my imagination. But now I find myself somewhat less particular in these respects. I carry less religion to the table, ask no blessing, not because I am wiser than I was, but, I am obliged to confess, because, however much it is to be regretted, with years I have grown more coarse and indifferent. The repugnance to animal food and the rest is not the result of experience, but is an instinct.<sup>1</sup>

*Nov. 29, 30, and Dec. 1.* The snow which fell the 23d whitened the ground but a day or two. These have been the mildest and pleasantest days since November came in.

November 29th, walked in P. M. to old stone bridge and down bank of river by Sam Barrett's house.

<sup>1</sup> [*Walden*, pp. 237, 240; Riv. 334, 338.]

When I stood on the caving swallow banks by the bridge about 4 o'clock, the sun sank below some clouds, or they rose above it, and it shone out with that bright, calm, memorable light which I have elsewhere described, lighting up the pitch pines and everything. The patches of winter rye, at this season so green by contrast, are an interesting feature in the landscape. When I got out of the wood, going toward Barrett's, the softness of the sunlight on the russet landscape, the smooth russet grassy fields and meadows, was very soothing, the sun now getting low in a November day. The stems and twigs of the maples, etc., looking down the river, were beautifully distinct. You see distinctly the form of the various clumps of maples and birches. Geese in river swam as fast as I walked. Many broken but apparently rather recent turtles' eggs on the bank.

*Nov. 30. To Pine Hill.*

The buds of the *Populus tremuloides* show their down as in early spring, and the early willows. Wood-choppers have commenced some time since. This is another pleasant day. From Pine Hill, Wachusett is seen over Walden. The country seems to slope up from the west end of Walden to the mountain. Already, a little after 4 o'clock, the sparkling windows and vanes of the village, seen under and against the faintly purple-tinged, slate-colored mountains, remind me of a village in a mountainous country at twilight, where early lights appear. I think that this peculiar sparkle without redness, a cold glitter, is peculiar to this season.