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I

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March 5. F. Brown showed me to-day some lesser redpolls which he shot yesterday. They turn out to be my falsely-called chestnut-frontleted bird of the winter. "*Linaria minor*, Ray. Lesser Redpoll Linnet. From Pennsylvania and New Jersey to Maine, in winter; inland to Kentucky. Breeds in Maine, Nova Scotia, Newfoundland, Labrador, and the Fur Countries." — Audubon's Synopsis. They have a sharp bill, black legs and claws, and a bright-crimson crown or frontlet, in the male reaching to the base of the bill, with, in his case, a delicate rose or carmine on the breast and rump. Though this is described by Nuttall as an occasional visitor in the winter, it has been the prevailing bird here this winter.

Yesterday I got my grape cuttings. The day before went to the Corner Spring to look at the tufts of green grass. Got some of the very common leptogium (??). Is it one of the *Collemaceæ*? Was pleased with the sight of the yellow osiers of the golden willow, and the red

of the cornel, now colors are so rare. Saw the green fine-threaded conferva in a ditch, commonly called frog-spittle. Brought it home in my pocket, and it expanded again in a tumbler. It appeared quite a fresh growth, with what looked like filmy air-bubbles, as big as large shot, in its midst.

The secretary of the Association for the Advancement of Science requests me, as he probably has thousands of others, by a printed circular letter from Washington the other day, to fill the blank against certain questions, among which the most important one was what branch of science I was specially interested in, using the term science in the most comprehensive sense possible. Now, though I could state to a select few that department of human inquiry which engages me, and should be rejoiced at an opportunity to do so, I felt that it would be to make myself the laughing-stock of the scientific community to describe or attempt to describe to them that branch of science which specially interests me, inasmuch as they do not believe in a science which deals with the higher law. So I was obliged to speak to their condition and describe to them that poor part of me which alone they can understand. The fact is I am a mystic, a transcendentalist, and a natural philosopher to boot. Now I think of it, I should have told them at once that I was a transcendentalist. That would have been the shortest way of telling them that they would not understand my explanations.

How absurd that, though I probably stand as near to nature as any of them, and am by constitution as

good an observer as most, yet a true account of my relation to nature should excite their ridicule only! If it had been the secretary of an association of which Plato or Aristotle was the president, I should not have hesitated to describe my studies at once and particularly.

March 6. *Sunday.* Last Sunday I plucked some alder (apparently speckled) twigs, some (apparently *tremuloides*) aspen, and some swamp (?) willow, and put them in water in a warm room. Immediately the alder catkins were relaxed and began to lengthen and open, and by the second day to drop their pollen; like handsome pendants they hung round the pitcher, and at the same time the smaller female flower expanded and brightened. In about four days the aspens began to show their red anthers and feathery scales, being an inch in length and still extending. March 2d, I added the andromeda; March 3d, the rhodora. This morning, the ground being still covered with snow, there was quite a fog over the river and meadows, which I think owing to a warm atmosphere over the cold snow.

P. M. — To Lee's Hill.

I am pleased to cut the small woods with my knife to see their color. The high blueberry, hazel, and swamp-pink are green. I love to see the dear green sprouts of the sassafras and its large and fragrant buds and bark. The twigs or extremities of the branches of young trees twenty feet high look as if scorched and

blackened. I gathered a pocketful of pignuts from a tree of Lee's Hill. Still sound, half of them. The water is pretty high on the meadows (though the ground is covered with snow), so that we get a little of the peculiar still lake view at evening when the wind goes down.

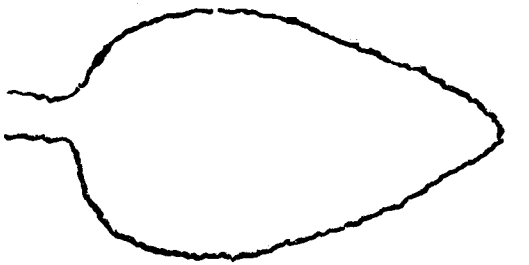
Two red squirrels made an ado about or above me near the North River, hastily running from tree to tree, leaping from the extremity of one bough to that of the nearest, or the next tree, until they gained and ascended a large white pine. I approached and stood under this, while they made a great fuss about me. One at length came part way down to reconnoitre me. It seemed that one did the barking — a faint, short, chippy bark, like that of a *toy* dog, — its tail vibrating each time, while its neck was stretched over a bough as it peered at me. The other, higher up, kept up a sort of gurgling whistle, more like a bird than a beast. When I made a noise they would stop a moment.

Scared up a partridge, which had crawled into a pile of wood. Saw a gray hare, a dirty yellowish gray, not trig and neat, but, as usual, apparently in a deshabille. As it frequently does, it ran a little way and stopped just at the entrance to its retreat; then, when I moved again, suddenly disappeared. By a slight obscure hole in the snow, it had access to a large and apparently deep woodchuck's (?) hole.

Stedman Buttrick calls the ducks which we see in the winter, widgeons and wood sheldrakes.

The hemlock cones have shed their seeds, but there

are some closed yet on the ground. Part of the pitch pine cones are yet closed. This is the form of one: —



March 7. The lichen on the earth and stones amid mosses which I have thought a collema, is, I now think, a peltigera, perhaps *P. canina* (mad-dog peltigera of Hooker?). The catkins of the sweet-gale have now, after nine days, opened, and drop their sulphury pollen more perfectly than the alders and poplars, methinks, which soon dried up and the last turned black, *i. e.* the anthers. I doubt if the willow catkins gathered at the same time (February 27) will blossom, though they have expanded.

P. M. — To Walden, Goose, and Flint's Ponds, and chestnut wood by Turnpike.

The silk of the most forward willows does not generally project the length of the scale beyond the scale yet, and I am in doubt whether they give any indication of spring; but I saw one whose catkins projected more than the length of the scale, and revealed a tinge of red through their silk, which I think have felt the influence of the new year. Also the dark chocolate-colored alder catkins — what I have called *A. incana* — are not only

relaxed, but there is an obvious looseness and space between the scales. I doubt if I have detected the speckled alder in flower. I see, however, some with short thick reddish catkins and a dull opaque bark, others with a fresh glossy and speckled bark and long, rather more forward (?), dark-chocolate catkins. These may be only a more recent and vigorous growth of the other. There is one of these a few rods east of the Peak clearing, on the shore of Walden.

On the side of the Peak, I see now small radical (?) or lower leaves of a goldenrod, as fresh as anything, the dark mulberry, claret, or lake colored radical leaves of the hawkweed,[1] and the greenish radical leaves of the bushy gerardia.

What is the earliest sign of spring? The motion of worms and insects? The flow of sap in trees and the swelling of buds? Do not the insects awake with the flow of the sap? Bluebirds, etc., probably do not come till insects come out. Or are there earlier signs in the water? — the tortoises, frogs, etc.

The little cup and cocciferæ lichens, mixed with other cladonias of the reindeer moss kind, are full of fresh fruit to-day. The scarlet apothecia of the cocciferæ on the stumps and earth partly covered with snow, with which they contrast, I never saw more fresh and brilliant, but they shrivel up and lose their brightness by the time you get them home. The only birds I *see* to-day are the lesser redpolls. I have not seen a fox-colored sparrow or a *Fringilla hyemalis*. In the Flint's Pond Mill Brook ditch, I see where the green conferva is left

[1] ?? Was it not *Aster undulatus?*

suspended vertically to the twigs, the water having gone down, and, being blanched, looks like very dense cobwebs. There are still a few pretty bright sumach berries left.

Gathered a few chestnuts. A good many, if not most, are now turned black and soured or spoiled and softened by the wet. Where they are less exposed to moisture, close to the base of the [*sic*], or on stumps where the ground is more elevated, or where they are protected under a very thick heap of light-lying leaves, they are perfectly sound and sweet and fresh yet, neither shrivelled nor soured (?). This peculiar condition is probably requisite to preserve their life for sprouting. I planted some in Sophia's pot. No doubt the mice and squirrels put many in secure, sufficiently dry and sufficiently moist places for this purpose, and so do a service. I find whitish grubs stretching themselves under the moist chestnut leaves, but they were in the same state in January.

Found the yellow bud of a *Nuphar advena* in the ditch on the Turnpike on E. Hosmer's land, bud nearly half an inch in diameter on a very thick stem, three fourths of an inch thick at base and ten inches long, four or five inches above the mud. This may have swollen somewhat during the warmest weather in the winter, after pushing up in the fall. And I see that it may, in such a case, in favorable locations, blossom at very early but irregular periods in the spring. What are the weeds in the water, — these which, together with the common cress, have been perfectly green and fresh all winter, one in regular beds of small roundish leaves

very like the cress,[1] the other with a long, narrow, coarse leaf?[2]

I read an account the other day of a snipe, I think it was, which, though neither plucked nor drawn, underwent no change but that of drying up, becoming a natural mummy for some unknown reason, as has happened to other, larger bodies. Methinks that many, if not most, men are a sort of natural mummies. The life having departed out of them, decay and putrefaction, disorganization, has not taken place, but they still keep up a dry and withered semblance of life. What the salt is that saves them and robs the worms I do not know. Some bodies there are that, being dead and buried, do not decay, but after the lapse of years are found as fresh as if they had died but yesterday. So some men, though all true life was long ago extinct in them, wear this deceitful semblance of life. They seem to *live* on, without salt or season, from mere toughness or dryness or some antiseptic quality in their fibre. They do not mellowly dissolve and fatten the earth with their decay.

March 8. 10 A. M. — Rode to Saxonville with F. Brown to look at a small place for sale, *via* Wayland. Return by Sudbury.

On wheels in snow. A spring sheen on the snow. The melting snow, running and sparkling down-hill in the ruts, was quite springlike. The snow pure white, but full of water and dissolving through the heat of the sun. Saw a mink run across the road in Sudbury, a large

[1] *Chrysosplenium?* [2] Probably forget-me-not.

black weasel, to appearance, worming its supple way over the snow. Where it ran, its tracks were thus: = = = = the intervals between the fore and hind feet sixteen or eighteen inches by two and a half.

The distant view of the open flooded Sudbury meadows, all dark blue, surrounded by a landscape of white snow, gave an impulse to the dormant sap in my veins. Dark-blue and angry waves, contrasting with the white but melting winter landscape. Ponds, of course, do not yet afford this water prospect; only the flooded meadows. There is no ice over or near the stream, and the flood has covered or broken up much of the ice on the meadows. The aspect of these waters at sunset, when the air is still, begins to be unspeakably soothing and promising. Waters are at length, and begin to reflect, and, instead of looking into the sky, I look into the placid reflecting water for the signs and promise of the morrow. These meadows are the most of ocean that I have fairly learned. Now, when the sap of the trees is probably beginning to flow, the sap of the earth, the river, overflows and bursts its icy fetters. This is the sap of which I make my sugar after the frosty nights, boiling it down and crystallizing it. I must be on the lookout now for the gulls and the ducks. That dark-blue meadowy revelation. It is as when the sap of the maple bursts forth early and runs down the trunk to the snow.

Saw two or three hawks sailing. Saw the remains of four cows and a horse that were burned in a barn a month ago. Where the paunch was, a large bag of coarse hay and stalks was seen in the midst of an indistinct circumference of ribs. Saw some very large willow

buds expanded (their silk) to thrice the length of their scales, indistinctly carved or waved with darker lines around them. They look more like, are more of, spring than anything I have seen. Heard the *phebe*, or spring note of the chickadee, now, before any spring bird has arrived.

I know of no more pleasing employment than to ride about the country with a companion very early in the spring, looking at farms with a view to purchasing if not paying for them.

Heard the first flies buzz in the sun on the south side of the house.

March 9. *Wednesday.* Rain, dissolving the snow and raising the river. I do not perceive that the early elm or the white maple buds have swollen yet. So the relaxed and loosened (?) alder catkins and the extended willow catkins and poplar catkins are the first signs of reviving vegetation which I have witnessed. Minott thinks, and quotes some old worthy as authority for saying, that the bark of the striped squirrel is the, or a, first sure sign of decided spring weather.

March 10. This is the first really spring day. The sun is brightly reflected from all surfaces, and the north side of the street begins to be a little more passable to foot-travellers. You do not think it necessary to button up your coat.

P. M. — To Second Division Brook.

As I stand looking over the swollen river, looking from the bridge into the flowing, eddying tide, — the

almost strange chocolate-colored water, — the sound of distant crows and cocks is full of spring. As Anacreon says "the works of men shine," so the sounds of men and birds are musical. Something analogous to the thawing of the ice seems to have taken place in the air. At the end of winter there is a season in which we are daily expecting spring, and finally a day when it arrives.

I see many middling-sized black spiders on the edge of the snow, very active. By John Hosmer's ditch by the riverside I see the skunk-cabbage springing freshly, the points of the spathes just peeping out of the ground, in some other places three inches high even. The radical leaves of innumerable plants (as here a dock in and near the water) are evidently affected by the spring influences. Many plants are to some extent evergreen, like the buttercup now beginning to start. Methinks the first obvious evidence of spring is the pushing out of the swamp willow catkins, then the relaxing of the earlier alder catkins, then the pushing up of skunk-cabbage spathes (and pads at the bottom of water). This is the order I am inclined to, though perhaps any of these may take precedence of all the rest in any particular case.[1]

What is that dark pickle-green alga (?) at the bottom of this ditch, looking *somewhat* like a decaying cress, with fruit like a lichen?

At Nut Meadow Brook crossing we rest awhile on the rail, gazing into the eddying stream. The ripple-marks on the sandy bottom, where silver spangles shine in the river with black wrecks of caddis-cases lodged under each shelving sand, the shadows of the invisible dimples

[1] *Vide* next page.

reflecting prismatic colors on the bottom, the minnows already stemming the current with restless, wiggling tails, ever and anon darting aside, probably to secure some invisible mote in the water, whose shadows we do not at first detect on the sandy bottom, — when detected so much more obvious as well as larger and more interesting than the substance, — in which each fin is distinctly seen, though scarcely to be detected in the substance; these are all very beautiful and exhilarating sights, a sort of diet drink to heal our winter discontent. Have the minnows played thus all winter? The equisetum at the bottom has freshly grown several inches. Then should I not have given the precedence on the last page to this and some other water-plants? I suspect that I should, and the flags appear to be starting.

I am surprised to find on the rail a young tortoise, an inch and one sixteenth long in the shell, which has crawled out to sun, or perchance is on its way to the water, which I think must be the *Emys guttata*, for there is a large and distinct yellow spot on each dorsal and lateral plate, and the third dorsal plate is hexagonal and not quadrangular, as the *E. picta* is described to be, though in my specimen I can't make it out to be so. Yet the edges of the plates are prominent, as is described in the *E. insculpta*, which, but for the spots and two yellow spots on each side of the hind head and one fainter on the top of the head, I should take it to be. It is about seven eighths of an inch wide. Very inactive. When was it hatched and where?

What is the theory of these sudden pitches, or steep shelving places, in the sandy bottom of the brook? It is

very interesting to walk along such a brook as this in the midst of the meadow, which you can better do now before the frost is quite out of the sod, and gaze into the deep holes in its irregular bottom and the dark gulfs under the banks. Where it rushes rapidly over the edge of a steep slope  in the bottom, the shadow of the disturbed surface is like sand hurried forward in the water. The bottom, being of shifting sand, is exceedingly irregular and interesting.

What was that sound that came on the softened air? It was the warble of the first bluebird from that scraggy apple orchard yonder. When this is heard, then has spring arrived.

It must be that the willow twigs, both the yellow and green, are brighter-colored than before. I cannot be deceived. They shine as if the sap were already flowing under the bark; a certain lively and glossy hue they have. The early poplars are pushing forward their catkins, though they make not so much display as the willows.

Still in some parts of the woods it is good sledding. At Second Division Brook, the fragrance of the senecio, which is decidedly evergreen, which I have bruised, is very permanent and brings round the year again. It is a memorable sweet meadowy fragrance. I find a yellow-spotted tortoise (*Emys guttata*) in the brook. A very few leaves of cowslips, and those wholly under water, show themselves yet. The leaves of the water saxifrage, for the most part frost-bitten, are common enough. Near the caltha was also green frog-*spawn*, and Channing

says he saw pollywogs.[1] Perhaps it is a particularly warm place. The alder's catkins — the earliest of them — are very plainly expanding, or, rather, the scales are loose and separated, and the whole catkin relaxed.

Minott says that old Sam Nutting, the hunter, — Fox Nutting, Old Fox, he was called, — who died more than forty years ago (he lived in Jacob Baker's house, Lincoln; came from Weston) and was some seventy years old then, told him that he had killed not only bear about Fair Haven among the walnuts, but *moose!*

March 12. Last night it snowed, a sleety snow again, and now the ground is whitened with it, and where are gone the bluebirds whose warble was wafted to me so lately like a blue wavelet through the air?

The greater part of the alder catkins (as well as the willow) are still in their winter condition, but some have their scales conspicuously loosened and elevated, showing their lighter-colored edges and interstices. They are actually beginning to blossom, certainly in advance of the willows. The sweet-gale is the prettiest flower which I have [found] expanded yet.

It is essential that a man confine himself to pursuits — a scholar, for instance, to studies — which lie next to and conduce to his life, which do not go against the grain, either of his will or his imagination. The scholar finds in his experience some studies to be most fertile and radiant with light, others dry, barren, and dark. If he is wise, he will not persevere in the last, as a plant in a cellar will strive toward the light. He will confine

[1] Possibly lizards [*i. e.*, newts, or salamanders].

the observations of his mind as closely as possible to the experience or life of his senses. His thought must live with and be inspired with the life of the body. The death-bed scenes and observations even of the best and wisest afford but a sorry picture of our humanity. Some men endeavor to live a constrained life, to subject their whole lives to their wills, as he who said he would give a sign if he were conscious after his head was cut off, — but he gave no sign. Dwell as near as possible to the channel in which your life flows. A man may associate with such companions, he may pursue such employments, as will darken the day for him. Men choose darkness rather than light.

P. M. — To Cliffs and Fair Haven.

The sleety snow has whitened the north sides of the oaks, giving a wintry aspect as well to the wood as to the ground.

Saw the first lark rise from the railroad causeway and sail on quivering wing over the meadow to alight on a heap of dirt. Was that a mink we saw at the Boiling Spring? The senecio was very forward there in the water, and it still scents my fingers; a very lasting odor it leaves. These melting snows, so saturated with water, their white contrasting so strongly with the dark spaces, wet the feet most of any. The farmer says that no composition will keep out snow-water. The snow rests on your feet to melt. There has been no regular breaking up of the river, it has been so transiently closed the past winter. Fair Haven Pond is nearly half open. But I see no gulls nor ducks. The young oaks on the plain under the Cliffs appear still full of leaves. It is a rare lichen day.

The usnea with its large fruit is very rich on the maples in the swamp, luxuriating in this moist, overcast, melting day, but it is impossible to get it home in good condition. Looking behind the bark of a dead white pine, I find plenty of small gnats quite lively and ready to issue forth as soon as the sun comes out. The grubs there are sluggish, buried in the *chankings*. I took off some pieces of bark more than three feet long and one foot wide. Between this and the wood, in the dust left by borers, the gnats were concealed, ready to swarm. This their hibernaculum. The rich red-brown leaves of the gnaphalium, downy white beneath in circles, begin to attract me where the snow is off.

If I were to make a study of the tracks of animals and represent them by plates, I should conclude with the track of man. Everywhere I see the track of the dog and within it that of the game he is pursuing.

March 13. 6 A. M. — To Cliffs.

There begins to be a greater depth of saffron in the morning sky. The morning and evening horizon fires are warmer to the eye. I go to the Cliffs to hear if any new spring birds have arrived, for not only they are more sure to sing in the morning, but it is stiller and you can hear them better then. I hear only crows and blue jays and chickadees lisping. Excepting a few bluebirds and larks, no spring birds have come, apparently. The woods are still. But what was that familiar spring sound from the pine wood across the river, a sharp *vetter vetter vetter vetter*, like some woodpecker, or possibly nuthatch? Yet I thought it the voice of the bird and

not a tapping. It reminds me of the pine warbler (?), if that is it. I see the nuphar pushing up faintly, and I see some of my little gnats of yesterday in the morning sun, somewhat mosquito-like.

P. M. — No sap flows yet from my hole in the white maple by the bridge. Found on the Great Fields a fragment of Indian soapstone ware, which, judging from its curve and thinness, for a vestige of the rim remains, was a dish of the form and size of a saucer, only three times as thick. Listening for early birds, I hear a faint tinkling sound in the leafless woods, as if a piece of glass rattled against a stone.

All enterprises must be self-supporting, must pay for themselves. The great art of life is how to turn the surplus life of the soul into life for the body, — that so the life be not a failure. For instance, a poet must sustain his body with his poetry. As is said of the merchants, in ninety-nine cases out of a hundred the life of men is a failure, and bankruptcy may be surely prophesied. You must get your living by loving. To be supported by the charity of friends or a government pension is to go into the almshouse. To inherit property is not to be born, — is to be still-born rather. And the other, as I said, provided you continue to breathe, is to go into the almshouse. On Sundays the poor debtor goes to church to take an account of stock, and finds his outgoes greater than his income. In the Catholic Church especially they go into chancery.[1] As is the sun to the vegetable, so is virtue to the bodily health.

[1] [*Cape Cod, and Miscellanies*, p. 461; *Misc.*, Riv. 261.]

March 14. P. M. — Repairing my boat.

High winds, growing colder and colder, ground stiffening again. My ears have not been colder the past winter. Lowell Fay tells me that he overtook with a boat and killed last July a woodchuck which was crossing the river at Hollowell Place. He also says that the blacksmith of Sudbury has two otter skins taken in that town. March is rightly famous for its winds.

March 15. There were few colder nights last winter than the last. The water in the flower-stand containing my pet tortoise froze solid, — completely enveloping him, though I had a fire in my chamber all the evening, — also that in my pail pretty thick. But the tortoise, having been thawed out on the stove, leaving the impression of his back shell in the ice, was even more lively than ever. His efforts at first had been to get under his chip, as if to go into the mud. To-day the weather is severely and remarkably cold. It is not easy to keep warm in my chamber. I have not taken a more blustering walk the past winter than this afternoon.

C. says he has heard a striped squirrel and seen a water-bug (*Gyrinus*), — it must have been on Saturday (12th). Ice froze just hard enough to bear last night, — about an inch thick. In the woods beyond Peter's we heard our dog, a large Newfoundland dog, barking at something, and, going forward, were amused to see him barking while he retreated with fear at that black oak with remarkable excrescence, which had been cut off just above it, leaving it like some misshapen idol about the height of a man. Though we set him on to it, he did not

venture within three or four rods. I would not have believed that he would notice any such strange thing.

Organization, — how it prevails! After a little discipline, we study with love and reverence the forms of disease as healthy organisms. The fungi have a department in the science of botany. Who can doubt but that they too are fungi lower in the scale which he sees on the wick of his lamp!

Notwithstanding this day is so cold that I keep my ears covered, the sidewalks melt in the sun, such is its altitude. The coldness of the air blown from the icy northwest prevails over the heat of the sun.

The Bermudas are said to have been first discovered by a Spanish ship of that name, which was wrecked on them, — "which till then for six thousand years had been nameless," says John Smith. "No place known hath better walls nor a broader ditch." The English did not stumble upon them in their first voyages to Virginia, and the first Englishman who was ever in them was wrecked on them in 1593; yet at the very first planting of them in 1612 with some sixty persons, the first Governor the same year "built and laid the foundations of eight or nine forts" (!!), to be ready, one would say, to entertain the first ship company that should be next shipwrecked on to them. It would have been more sensible to have built as many charity houses. These are the vex'd Bermoothes.

March 17. Channing says he saw blackbirds yesterday; F. C. Brown, that they were getting ice out of Loring's Pond yesterday.

P. M. — Rode to Lexington with Brown.

Saw, on the corner of a wall by a house about three quarters of a mile from the monument on the Bedford road, a stone apparently worn by water into the form of a rude bird-like idol, which I thought, as I rode by, to be the work of the Indians. It was probably discovered and used by them. It was as near as nature might come by accident to an eagle, with a very regular pedestal such as busts have, on which it stood, — in all about two and a half feet high. Whitewashed as well as the wall. Found not near water. It is one of those stones which Schoolcraft describes as found among the Chippeways.

The ways are mostly settled, frozen dry.

March 18. The season is so far advanced that the sun, every now and then promising to shine out through this rather warm rain, lighting up transiently with a whiter light the dark day and my dark chamber, affects me as I have not been affected for a long time. I must go forth.

P. M. — To Conantum.

I find it unexpectedly mild. It appears to be clearing up but will be wet underfoot.

Now, then, spring is beginning again in earnest after this short check. Is it not always thus? Is there not always an early promise of spring, something answering to the Indian summer, which succeeds the summer, so an Indian or false spring preceding the true spring, — first false promise which merely excites our expectations to disappoint them, followed by a short return of

winter? Yet all things appear to have made progress, even during these wintry days, for I cannot believe that they have thus instantaneously taken a start. I no sooner step out of the house than I hear the bluebirds in the air, and far and near, everywhere except in the woods, throughout the town you may hear them, — the blue curls of their warblings, — harbingers of serene and warm weather, little azure rills of melody trickling here and there from out the air, their short warble trilled in the air reminding of so many corkscrews assaulting and thawing the torpid mass of winter, assisting the ice and snow to melt and the streams to flow. Everywhere also, all over the town, within an hour or two have come out little black two-winged gnats with plumed or fuzzy shoulders. When I catch one in my hands, it looks like [a] bit of black silk ravelling. They have suddenly come forth everywhere.

How eagerly the birds of passage penetrate the northern ice, watching for a crack by which to enter! Forthwith the swift ducks will be seen winging their way along the rivers and up the coast. They watch the weather more sedulously than the teamster. All nature is thus forward to move with the revolution of the seasons. Now for some days the birds have been ready by myriads, a flight or two south, to invade our latitudes and, with this mild and serener weather, resume their flight.

Bells and the lowing of cows have acquired I know not what new melody in this air, for a change has come over all things, as well as our spirits. They sound more limpid, as, in this sun just bursting forth, the drops of

water on the sprays are prismatic. The geiropodium has bleached all white.

I stand still now to listen if I may hear the note of any new bird, for the sound of my steps hinders, and there are so few sounds at this season in a still afternoon like this that you are pretty sure to detect one within a considerable distance. Hark! Did I not hear the note of some bird then? Methinks it could not have been my own breathing through my nose. No, there it is again, — a robin; and we have put the winter so much further behind us. What mate does he call to in these deserted fields? It is, as it were, a scared note as he whisks by, followed by the familiar but still anxious *toot, toot, toot.* He does not sing as yet. There were one or two more fine bird-like tinkling sounds I could not trace home, not to be referred to my breathing.

It is decidedly clearing up. At Conantum Cliff the columbines have started and the saxifrage even, the former as conspicuously as any plant, particularly any on dry ground. Both these grow there in high and dry chinks in the face of the cliff, where no soil appears, and the sunnier the exposure the more advanced. Even if a fallen fragment of the rock is so placed as to reflect the heat upon it, it has the start of its neighbors. These plants waste not a day, not a moment, suitable to their development. I pluck dry sprigs of pennyroyal, which I love to put in my pocket, for it scents me thoroughly and reminds me of garrets full of herbs.

With regard to my seringo-bird (and others), I think that my good genius withheld his name that I might learn his character.

I came forth expecting to hear new birds, and I am not disappointed. We know well what to count upon. Their coming is more sure than the arrival of the sailing and steaming packets. Almost while I listen for this purpose, I hear the *chuck, chuck* of a blackbird in the sky, whom I cannot detect. So small an object is lost in the wide expanse of the heavens, though no obstacle intervenes. When your eye has detected it, you can follow it well enough, but it is difficult to bring your sight to bear on it, as to direct a telescope to a particular star. How many hawks may fly undetected, yet within sight, above our heads! And there 's the great gull I came to see, already fishing in front of Bittern Cliff. Now he stoops to the water for his prey, but sluggishly, methinks. He requires a high and perhaps a head wind to make his motions graceful. I see no mate. He must have come up, methinks, before the storm was over, unless he started when I did. I believe it is only an easterly wind or storm brings him up.

The ice in Fair Haven is more than half melted, and now the woods beyond the pond, reflected in its serene water where there has been opaque ice so long, affect me as they perhaps will not again this year.[1] The oaks have not yet lost their leaves. The thistles, which keep their heads so low they do not feel the wind, show their green faces everywhere. It grows more and more fair. Yesterday at this hour it was more raw and blustering than the past winter; to-day it seems more mild and balmy than summer. I have rarely known a greater contrast. There is a little cap of dark and angry cloud

[1] The tapping of the woodpecker about this time

on Wachusett, not so wide as the mountain's base, while all the rest of the horizon there is clear.

Several times I hear and see blackbirds flying north singly, high overhead, chucking as if to find their mates, migrating; or are they even now getting near their own breeding-place? Perchance these are blackbirds that were hatched here, — that know me! I saw a silent sparrow lurking amid the hazels and other shrubs by a wall and picking worms or what-not, — brownish gray with a forked tail, two triangular black spots on the breast, and black stripes lengthwise there, altogether a gray, much striped bird, two brownish stripes with a lighter-colored one on the centre of the head. Soon after, I heard a song sparrow distinctly. Could it have been this?[1] I think not.

The bluebird and song sparrow sing immediately on their arrival, and hence deserve to enjoy some pre-eminence. They give expression to the joy which the season inspires. But the robin and blackbird only peep and chuck at first, commonly, and the lark is silent and flitting. The bluebird at once fills the air with his sweet warbling, and the song sparrow from the top of a rail pours forth his most joyous strain. Both express their delight at the weather which permits them to return to their favorite haunts. They are the more welcome to man for it.

Hearing a faint quack, I looked up and saw two apparently dusky ducks winging their swift way northward over the course of the river. Channing says he saw some large white-breasted ducks to-day, and also a frog. I have seen dead frogs, as if killed while dormant.

[1] Think now (March 24) it must have been the song sparrow. *Vide* Apr. 1st.

The sun is now declining, with a warm and bright light on all things, a light which answers to the late afterglow of the year, when, in the fall, wrapping his cloak closer about him, the traveller goes home at night to prepare for winter. This the foreglow of the year, when the walker goes home at eve to dream of summer.

To-day first I smelled the earth.

March 19. This morning I hear the blackbird's fine clear whistle and also his spraycy note, as he is swayed back and forth on the twigs of the elm or of the black willow over the [river]. His first note may be a chuck, but his second is a rich gurgle or warble.

"Coelum non animum mutant, qui trans mare currunt."
(Marginal index in Benzo's "History of the West Indies.")

Observed the leaves of a dock in the water, more forward than any vegetation I have noticed.

March 20. *Sunday.* 8 A. M. — *Via* Walden, Goose, Flint's, and Beaver Ponds and the valley of Stony Brook to the south end of Lincoln.

A rather cool and breezy morning, which was followed by milder day. We go listening for early birds, with bread and cheese for our dinners.

(Yesterday I forgot to say I painted my boat. Spanish brown and raw oil were the ingredients. I found the painter had sold me the brown in hard lumps as big as peas, which I could not reduce with a stick; so I passed the whole when mixed through an old coffee-mill, which

made a very good paint-mill, catching it in an old coffee-pot, whose holes I puttied up, there being a lack of vessels; and then I broke up the coffee-mill and nailed a part over the bows to protect them, the boat is made so flat. I had first filled the seams with some grafting-wax I had, melted.)

It was a question whether we should not go to Fair Haven to see the gulls, etc. I notice the downy, swaddled plants now and in the fall, the fragrant life-everlasting and the ribwort, innocents born in a cloud. Those algæ I saw the other day in John Hosmer's ditch were the most like seaweed of anything I have seen in the county. They made me look at the whole earth as a seashore; reminded me of Nereids, sea nymphs, Triton, Proteus, etc., etc.; made the ditches fabulate in an older than the arrow-headed character. Better learn this strange character which nature speaks to-day than the Sanscrit. Books in the brooks. Saw a large dead water-bug on Walden. I suspect he came out alive.

Walden is melting apace. It has a canal two rods wide along the northerly side and the west end, wider at the east end, yet, after running round from west to east, it does not keep the south shore, but crosses in front of the deep cove in a broad crack to where it started, by the ice ground. It is glorious to behold the life and joy of this ribbon of water sparkling in the sun. The wind blows eastward over the opaque ice, unusually hard, owing to the recent severe though transient cold, all watered or waved like a tessellated floor, a figured carpet; yet dead, yet in vain, till it slides on to the living water surface, where it raises a myriad brilliant sparkles

on the bare face of the pond, an expression of glee, of youth, of spring, as if it spoke the joy of the fishes within it and of the sands on its shore, a silvery sheen like the scales of a leuciscus, as if it were all one active fish in the spring. It is the contrast between life and death. There is the difference between winter and spring. The bared face of the pond sparkles with joy. How handsome the curves which the edge of the ice makes, answering somewhat to those of the shore, but more regular, sweeping entirely round the pond, as if defined by a vast, bold sweep![1]

It is evident that the English do not enjoy that contrast between winter and summer that we do, — that there is too much greenness and spring in the winter. There is no such wonderful resurrection of the year. Birds kindred with our first spring ones remain with them all winter, and flowers answering to our earliest spring ones put forth there in January. In one sense they have no winter but such as our spring. Our April is their March; our March, their February; our February, January, and December are not theirs at all under any name or sign.

Those alder catkins on the west side of Walden tremble and undulate in the wind, they are so relaxed and ready to bloom, — the most forward blossom-buds. Here and there, around the pond, within a rod of the water, is the fisherman's stone fireplace, with its charred brands, where he cheered and warmed himself and ate his lunch.

The peculiarity of to-day is that now first you perceive that dry, warm, summer-presaging scent from dry

[1] [*Walden*, pp. 343, 344; Riv. 480.]

oak and other leaves, on the sides of hills and ledges. You smell the summer from afar. The warm [*sic*] makes a man young again. There is also some dryness, almost dustiness, in the roads. The mountains are white with snow, and sure as the wind is northwest it is wintry; but now it is more westerly. The edges of the mountains now melt into the sky. It is affecting to be put into communication with such distant objects by the power of vision, — actually to look into rich lands of promise. In this spring breeze, how full of life the silvery pines, probably the under sides of their leaves. Goose Pond is wholly open. Unexpectedly dry and crispy the grass is getting in warm places.

At Flint's Pond, gathered a handful or two of chestnuts on a sloping bank under the leaves, *every one* sound and sweet, but mostly sprouting. There were none black as at C. Smith's, proving that in such places as this, somewhat warm and dry, they are all preserved the winter through. Now, then, new groves of chestnuts (and of oaks?) are being born. Under these wet leaves I find myriads of the snow-fleas, like powder. Some brooks are full of little wiggling creatures *somewhat* like caddis-worms, stemming the stream, — food for the early fishes. The canoe birch sprouts are red or salmon-colored like those of the common, but soon they cast off their salmon-colored jackets and come forth with a white but naked look, all dangling with ragged reddish curls. What is that little bird that makes so much use of these curls in its nest, lined with coarse grass? The snow still covers the ground on the north side of hills, which are hard and slippery with frost.

I am surprised to find Flint's Pond not more than half broken up. Probably it was detained by the late short but severe cold, while Walden, being deeper, was not. Standing on the icy side, the pond appears nearly all frozen; the breadth of open water is far removed and diminished to a streak; I say it is beginning to break up. Standing on the water side (which in Flint's is the middle portion), it appears to be but bordered with ice, and I say there is ice still left in the pond.

Saw a bluish-winged beetle or two.[1] In a stubble-field east of Mt. Tabor, started up a pack (though for numbers, about twenty, it may have been a bevy) of quail, which went off to some young pitch pines, with a whir like a shot, the plump, round birds. The redpolls are still numerous.[2] On the warm, dry cliff, looking south over Beaver Pond, I was surprised to see a large butterfly, black with buff-edged wings, so tender a creature to be out so early, and, when alighted, opening and shutting its wings. What does it do these frosty nights? Its chrysalis must have hung in some sunny nook of the rocks. Born to be food for some early bird.[3]

Cutting a maple for a bridge over Lily Brook, I was rejoiced to see the sap falling in large, clear drops from the wound.

March 21. Morning along the river.

The air full of song sparrows, — *swedit swedit swedit* and then a rapid jingle or trill, holding up its head with-

[1] *Vide* forward [p. 33].

[2] Have not seen them again, March 28.

[3] [This butterfly, the mourning-cloak (Antiopa), hibernates in the perfect state.]

out fear of me, the innocent, humble bird, or one pursuing another through the alders by the waterside. Why are the early birds found most along the water? These song sparrows are now first heard *commonly*. The blackbirds, too, create some melody. And the bluebirds, how sweet their warble in the soft air, heard over the water! The robin is heard further off, and seen flying rapidly, hurriedly through the orchard. And now the elms suddenly ring with the *chill-lill-lill* and canary-like notes of the *Fringilla hyemalis*, which fill the air more than those of any bird yet, — a little strange they sound because they do not tarry to breed with us, — a ringing sound. The Cheney elm buds appear to be beginning to open, and a few green blades of grass are shooting up on our bank.

I think that with my knife I can cut a pole that will bridge almost anything that can be called a *brook* even in New England.

Observed yesterday where a mass of ice in Walden of about an acre had cracked off from the main body and blown thirty or forty rods, crumbling up its edge against the eastern shore.[1]

Might not my Journal be called "Field Notes?"

I see a honey-bee about my boat, apparently attracted by the beeswax (if there is any) in the grafting-wax with which I have luted it. There are many; one is caught and killed in it.

P. M. — To Kibbe Place.

The *Stellaria media* is fairly in bloom in Mr. Cheney's

[1] [*Walden*, p. 343; Riv. 480.]

garden. This, then, is our earliest flower; though it is said to have been introduced. It may blossom under favorable circumstances in warmer weather any time in the winter. It has been so much opened that you could easily count its petals any month the past winter, and plainly blossoms with the first pleasant weather that brings the robins, etc., in numbers. I heard undoubtedly a frog jump into the river, though I did not see him. Conspicuous, now that the snow is almost entirely gone, are the fresh-looking evergreen leaves of the pyrola. What shall I name those run-out pastures, those arid downs, where the reindeer lichen fairly covers the whole surface, and your feet crunch it at every step? I see the *Fringilla hyemalis* on the old Carlisle road. How suddenly the newly arrived birds are dispersed over the whole town! How numerous they must be! Robins are now quite abundant, flying in flocks. One after another flits away before you from the trees, somewhat like grasshoppers in the grass, uttering their notes faintly, — ventriloquizing, in fact. I hear [one] meditating a bar to be sung anon, which sounds a quarter of a mile off, though he is within two rods. However, they do not yet get to melody. I thank the red-wing for a little bustle and commotion which he makes, trying to people the fields again. To-day, as well as yesterday, there is a slight warm haze before the day is over. A hawk looking about. Are they not more active now? Do they not, in fact, migrate? What is that lustrous green pestle-shaped beetle (common enough) with a waved buff spot on each wing-case? When he flew, I thought he showed blue beneath and was the same I saw yesterday in Lincoln, — the first beetle-

insect I have seen. Insects and flies, both in air and water, come out in the spring sun. Just as flies buzz on the dry and sunny side of a bank or rock, those little wiggling insects come forth in the open and sunny water, and are no less active, though they do not hum. Saw two more of those large black and buff butterflies. The same degree of heat brings them out everywhere.

The bees this morning had access to no flower; so they came to my grafting-wax, notwithstanding it was mixed with tallow and covered with fresh paint. Often they essayed to light on it and retreated with disgust; yet one got caught. As they detected the beeswax concealed and disguised in this composition, so they will receive the earliest intelligence of the blossoming of the first flower which contains any sweet for them.

It is a genial and reassuring day; the mere warmth of the west wind amounts almost to balminess. The softness of the air mollifies our own dry and congealed substance. I sit down by a wall to see if I can muse again. We become, as it were, pliant and ductile again to strange but memorable influences; we are led a little way by our genius. We are affected like the earth, and yield to the elemental tenderness; winter breaks up within us; the frost is coming out of me, and I am heaved like the road; accumulated masses of ice and snow dissolve, and thoughts like a freshet pour down unwonted channels. A strain of music comes to solace the traveller over earth's downs and dignify his chagrins, the petty men whom he meets are the shadows of grander to come. Roads lead elsewhither than to Carlisle and Sudbury. The earth is uninhabited but fair to inhabit, like

the old Carlisle road. Is then the road so rough that it should be neglected? Not only narrow but rough is the way that leadeth to life everlasting. Our experience does not wear upon us. It is seen to be fabulous or symbolical, and the future is worth expecting. Encouraged, I set out once more to climb the mountain of the earth, for my steps are symbolical steps, and in all my walking I have not reached the top of the earth yet.

In two or three places I hear the ground squirrel's pert chirrup or *qui vive* in the wall, like a bird or a cricket. Though I do not see him, the sun has reached him too.

Ah! then, as I was rising this crowning road, just beyond the old lime-kiln, there leaked into my open ear the faint peep of a hyla from some far pool. One little hyla somewhere in the fens, aroused by the genial season, crawls up the bank or a bush, squats on a dry leaf, and essays a note or two, which scarcely rends the air, does no violence to the zephyr, but yet breaks through all obstacles, thick-planted maples, and far over the downs to the ear of the listening naturalist, who will never see that piper in this world, — nor even the next, it may be, — as it were the first faint cry of the new-born year, notwithstanding the notes of birds. Where so long I have heard only the brattling and moaning of the wind, what means this tenser, far-piercing sound? All nature rejoices with one joy. If the hyla has revived again, may not I? He is heard the first warm, hazy evening.

Came home through the Hunt pasture. A warmer sunset marks the season. Some oaks have lost their leaves.

Whatever your sex or position, life is a battle in which you are to show your pluck, and woe be to the coward. Whether passed on a bed of sickness or a tented field, it is ever the same fair play and admits no foolish distinction. Despair and postponement are cowardice and defeat. Men were born to succeed, not to fail.

J. Farmer saw a phœbe to-day. They build in his cellar. I hear a few peepers from over the meadows at my door in the evening.

March 22. As soon as the damp gardens are bared of snow and a really warm spring day arrives, the chickweed blossoms fairly.

As soon as those spring mornings arrive in which the birds sing, I am sure to be an early riser. I am waked by my genius. I wake to inaudible melodies and am surprised to find myself expecting the dawn in so serene and joyful and expectant a mood. I have an appointment with spring. She comes to the window to wake me, and I go forth an hour or two earlier than usual. It is by especial favor that I am waked, — not rudely but gently, as infants should be waked. Though as yet the trill of the chip-bird is not heard, — added, — like the sparkling bead which bursts on bottled cider or ale. When we wake indeed, with a double awakening, — not only from our ordinary nocturnal slumbers, but from our diurnal, — we burst through the thallus of our ordinary life with a proper exciple, we awake with emphasis.

6 A. M. — To Cliffs.

There is a white frost on the ground.

One robin really sings on the elms. Even the cockerel

crows with new lustiness. Already I hear from the railroad the plaintive strain of a lark or two. They sit now conspicuous on the bare russet ground. The tinkling bubbles of the song sparrow are wafted from distant fence-posts, — little rills of song that begin to flow and tinkle as soon as the frost is out of the ground. The blackbird tries to sing, as it were with a bone in his throat, or to whistle and sing at once. Whither so fast, the restless creature, — *chuck, chuck*, at every rod, and now and then *whistle-ter-ee?* The *chill-lill* of the blue snowbirds is heard again. A partridge goes off on Fair Haven Hill-side with a sudden whir like the wad of a six-pounder, keeping just level with the tops of the sprouts. These birds and quails go off like a report.

It affects one's philosophy, after so long living in winter quarters, to see the day dawn from some hill. Our effete lowland town is fresh as New Hampshire. It is as if we had migrated and were ready to begin life again in a new country, with new hopes and resolutions. See your town with the dew on it, in as wild a morning mist (though thin) as ever draped it. To stay in the house all day, such reviving spring days as the past have been, bending over a stove and gnawing one's heart, seems to me as absurd as for a woodchuck to linger in his burrow. We have not heard the news then! Sucking the claws of our philosophy when there is game to be had!

The tapping of the woodpecker, *rat-tat-tat*, knocking at the door of some sluggish grub to tell him that the spring has arrived, and his fate, this is one of the season sounds, calling the roll of birds and insects, the reveille.

The Cliff woods are comparatively silent. Not yet the woodland birds, except, perhaps, the woodpecker, so far as it migrates; only the orchard and river birds have arrived. Probably the improvements of men thus advance the season. This is the Bahamas and the tropics or turning-point to the redpoll. Is not the woodpecker (downy?) our first woodland bird? Come to see what effects the frost and snow and rain have produced on decaying trees, — what trunks will drum.

Fair Haven Pond will be open entirely in the course of the day. The oak plain is still red. There are no expanding leaves to greet and reflect the sun as it first falls over the hills. To see the first rays of the sun falling over an eastern wooded ridge on to a western wood and stream and lake! I go along the riverside to see the now novel reflections. The subsiding waters have left a thousand little isles, where willows and sweet-gale and the meadow itself appears. I hear the phœbe note of the chickadee, one taking it up behind another as in a catch, *phe-bee phe-bee*. The very earliest alder is in bloom and sheds its pollen. I detect a few catkins at a distance by their distinct yellowish color. This the first native flower. One of my willow catkins in the pitcher has opened at length.

That is an interesting morning when one first uses the warmth of the sun instead of fire; bathes in the sun, as anon in the river; eschewing fire, draws up to a garret window and warms his thoughts at nature's great central fire, as does the buzzing fly by his side. Like it, too, our muse, wiping the dust off her long-unused wings, goes blundering through the cobweb of criticism, more dusty

still, — what venerable cobweb is that, which has hitherto escaped the broom, whose spider is invisible, but the *North American Review?* — and carries away the half of it.

No sap flows from the maples I cut into, except that one in Lincoln. What means it? *Hylodes Pickeringii*, a name that is longer than the frog itself! A description of animals, too, from a dead specimen only, as if, in a work on man, you were to describe a dead man only, omitting his manners and customs, his institutions and divine faculties, from want of opportunity to observe them, suggesting, perchance, that the colors of the eye are said to be much more brilliant in the living specimen, and that some cannibal, your neighbor, who has tried him on his table, has found him to be sweet and nutritious, good on the gridiron. Having had no opportunity to observe his habits, because you do not live in the country. Only dindons and dandies. Nothing is known of his habits. Food: seeds of wheat, beef, pork, and potatoes.

P. M. — To Martial Miles Meadow, by boat to Nut Meadow Brook.

Launched my new boat. It is very steady, too steady for me; does not toss enough and communicate the motion of the waves. Beside, the seats are not well arranged; when there are two in it, it requires a heavy stone in the stern to trim. But it holds its course very well with a side wind from being so flat from stem to stern.

The cranberries now make a show under water, and I

always make it a point to taste a few. Fresh clamshells have been left by the muskrats at various heights. C. says he saw a painted tortoise yesterday. Very likely. We started two ducks feeding behind a low spit of meadow. From Brooks's plates I should think them widgeons.[1] They had the grayish-white breasts of the wood duck. They look as if they had dropped from heaven, motionless. Saw a green grasshopper and a common caterpillar, also another beetle similar to that of yesterday, except that this was a sort of slate-color with two or three fawn-colored marks on each wing-case.[2] The spear-heads of the skunk-cabbage are now quite conspicuous. I see that many flowers have been destroyed by the cold. In no case is the spathe unrolled, and I think it is not yet in blossom.

At Nut Meadow Brook, water-bugs and skaters are now plenty. I see the *Emys guttata* with red spots. Some which I think to be the same sex have striated scales, while others are smooth above. What I take to be the female has a flat-edged shell as well as depressed sternum. The yellow spots appear like some yellow wood let in. The spots are brightest when they are in the water. They are in couples. C. saw a frog. Some willows will be out in a day or two. Silvery catkins of all sizes shine afar. The two white feathers of the blue snowbird contrast prettily with the slate.

Returning to river, the water is blue as blue ink from this side. Hubbard's field a smooth russet bank lit by the setting sun and the pale skim-milk sky above.

[1] Brown thinks them sheldrakes. [See p. 65].

[2] *Vide* March 18, 1860.

I told Stacy the other day that there was another volume of De Quincey's Essays (wanting to see it in his library). "I know it," says he, "but I shan't buy any more of them, for nobody reads them." I asked what book in his library was most read. He said, "The Wide, Wide World."

In a little dried and bleached tortoise-shell about an inch and three quarters long, I can easily study his anatomy and the house he lives in. His ribs are now distinctly revealed under his lateral scales, slanted like rafters to the ridge of his roof, for his sternum is so large that his ribs are driven round upon his back. It is wonderful to see what a perfect piece of dovetailing his house is, the different plates of his shell fitting into each other by a thousand sharp teeth or serrations, and the scales always breaking joints over them so as to bind the whole firmly together, all parts of his abode variously interspliced and dovetailed. An architect might learn much from a faithful study of it. There are three large diamond-shaped openings down the middle of the sternum, covered only by the scales, through [which], perhaps, he feels, he breasts the earth. His roof rests on four stout posts. This young one is very deep in proportion to its breadth. The *Emys guttata* is first found in warm, muddy ditches.

The bæomyces is not yet dried up.

March 23. 5 A. M. — I hear the robin sing before I rise.

6 A. M. — Up the North River.

A fresh, cool spring morning. The white maple may

perhaps be said to begin to blossom to-day, — the male, — for the stamens, both anthers and filament, are conspicuous on some buds. It has opened unexpectedly, and a rich sight it is, looking up through the expanded buds to the sky. This and the aspen are the first trees that *ever grow large*, I believe, which show the influence of the season thus conspicuously. From Nawshawtuct I see the snow is off the mountains. A large aspen by the Island is unexpectedly forward. I already see the red anthers appearing. It will bloom in a day or two.

My boat is very good to float and go before the wind, but it has not *run* enough to it, — if that is the phrase, — but lugs too much dead water astern. However, it is all the steadier for it. Methinks it will not be a bad sailer.

I have seen for a week past fresh holes in the sand made by some early burrowing animal, probably the skunk.

One studies books of science merely to learn the language of naturalists, — to be able to communicate with them.

The frost in swamps and meadows makes it good walking there still. Away, away to the swamps, where the silver catkins of the swamp willow shine a quarter of a mile off, — those southward-penetrating vales of Rupert's Land.

The birds which are merely migrating or tarrying here for a season are especially gregarious now, — the redpoll, *Fringilla hyemalis*, fox-colored sparrow, etc. The white maples appear to be confined to the bank of the river.

I judge by the dead bodies of frogs, partially devoured, in brooks and ditches that many are killed in their hibernacula.

Evelyn and others wrote when the language was in a tender, nascent state and could be moulded to express the shades of meaning; when sesquipedalian words, long since cut and apparently dried and drawn to mill, — not yet to the dictionary lumber-yard, — put forth a fringe of green sprouts here and there along in the angles of their rugged bark, their very bulk insuring some sap remaining; some florid suckers they sustain at least. Which words, split into shingles and laths, will supply poets for ages to come.

A man can't ask properly for a piece of bread and butter without some animal spirits. A child can't cry without them.

P. M. — To Howard's meadow.

The telegraph harp sounds more commonly, now that westerly winds prevail. The winds of winter are too boisterous, too violent or rude, and do not strike it at the right angle when I walk, so that it becomes one of the spring sounds.

The ice went out of Walden this forenoon; of Flint's Pond day before yesterday, I have no doubt. Methinks I see a more reddish chestnut sparrow, with distinct whiter lines and two white feathers in tail, or is this the song sparrow? With a faint, tinkling *cheep*. Grass or bay-winged finch? or could it have been field sparrow? but not my seringo. The pads at Howard's meadow are very forward, more than a foot high, their tips above the water.

The cat-tail down puffs and swells in your hand like a mist, or the conjurer's trick of filling a hat with feathers.

for when you have rubbed off but a thimbleful, and can close and conceal the wound completely, the expanded down fills your hand to overflowing. Apparently there is a spring to the fine elastic threads which compose the down, which, after having been so long closely packed, on being the least relieved at the base, spring open apace into the form of parachutes to convey the seed afar. Where birds or the winds or ice have assaulted them, this has spread like an eruption.[1] Again, when I rub off the down of its spike with my thumb, I am surprised at the sensation of warmth it imparts to my hand, as it flushes over it magically, at the same time revealing a faint purplish-crimson tinge at the base of the down, as it rolls off and expands. It is a very pleasing experiment to try.

The buds of the shad-blossom look green. The crimson-starred flowers of the hazel begin to peep out, though the catkins have not opened. The alders are almost generally in full bloom, and a very handsome and interesting show they make with their graceful tawny pendants, inclining to yellow. They shake like ear-drops in the wind, perhaps the first completed ornaments with which the new year decks herself. Their yellow pollen is shaken down and colors my coat like sulphur as I go through them.

I go to look for mud turtles in Heywood's meadow. The alder catkins, just burst open, are prettily marked spirally by streaks of yellow, contrasting with alternate rows of rich reddish-brown scales, which make one revolution in the length of the catkin. I see trout glance

[1] *Vide* amount of seed in *Tribune*, Mar. 16, 1860.

along the brook, as indeed a month ago. I hear in Heywood's north meadow the most unmusical low croak from one or two frogs, though it is half ice there yet, — a remarkable note with which to greet the new year, as if one's teeth slid off with a grating sound in cracking a nut, — but not a frog nor a dimple is to be seen.

Man cannot afford to be a naturalist, to look at Nature directly, but only with the side of his eye. He must look through and beyond her. To look at her is fatal as to look at the head of Medusa. It turns the man of science to stone. I feel that I am dissipated by so many observations. I should be the magnet in the midst of all this dust and filings. I knock the back of my hand against a rock, and as I smooth back the skin, I find myself prepared to study lichens there. I look upon man but as a fungus. I have almost a slight, dry headache as the result of all this observing. How to observe is how to behave. O for a little Lethe! To crown all, lichens, which are so thin, are described in the *dry* state, as they are most commonly, not most truly, seen. Truly, they are *dryly* described.

Without being the owner of any land, I find that I have a civil right in the river, — that, if I am not a landowner I am a water-owner. It is fitting, therefore, that I should have a boat, a cart, for this my farm. Since it is almost wholly given up to a few of us, while the other highways are much travelled, no wonder that I improve it. Such a one as I will choose to dwell in a township where there are most ponds and rivers and our range is widest. In relation to the river, I find my natural

rights least infringed on. It is an extensive "common" still left. Certain savage liberties still prevail in the oldest and most civilized countries. I am pleased to find that, in Gilbert White's day, at least, the laborers in that part of England enjoyed certain rights of common in the royal forests, — so called, though no large wood, — where they cut their turf and other fuel, etc., etc., and obtained materials for broom-making, etc., when other labor failed. It is no longer so, according to his editor. Nobody legislates for me, for the way would be not to legislate at all.

I am surprised as well as delighted when any one wishes to know what I think. It is such a rare use they would make of me, as if they were acquainted with the tool. Commonly, if men want anything of me, it is only to know how many acres I make of their land, or, at most, what trivial news I have burdened myself with. They never will go to law for my meat. They prefer the shell.[1]

I saw probably a milkweed down in the air, the 20th.

March 24. 6 A. M. — By river to Hemlocks.

I see where the muskrats opened clams, probably last evening, close to the water's edge, or in the fork of a willow, or on a tussock just covered with water, the shells remaining, for they bring the clam to the air to eat it. The downy (?) woodpeckers are quite numerous this morning, the skirts of their coats barred with white and a large, long white spot on their backs. They have a smart, shrill peep or whistle, somewhat like

[1] [*Cape Cod, and Miscellanies*, p. 455; *Misc.*, Riv. 253.]

a robin, but more metallic. Saw two gray squirrels coursing over the trees on the Rock Island. The forest is to them a vast web over which they run with as little hesitation as a spider across his net. They appear to have planned or to be familiar with their course before they start. The Island has several bunches of leaves in its trees, probably their nests. For several mornings the water has been perfectly smooth at six o'clock, but by seven the wind has risen with the ascending sun and the waves with the wind, and the day assumed a new and less promising aspect.

I think I may consider the shepherd's-purse in bloom to-day, for its flowers are nearly as conspicuous as those of the stellaria, which had its spring opening some days since, both being the worse for the frost this morning. Since the cold snap of the 14th, 15th, etc., have walked for the most part with unbuttoned coat, and for the most part without mittens.

I find the arrow-headed character on our plains, older than the written character in Persia.

Now are the windy days of March drying up the superabundant moisture. The river does not yet preserve a smooth reflecting surface far into the day. The meadows are mostly bare, the water going down, but perchance the April rains will fill them again.

Last afternoon was moist and cloudy and still, and the robin sang faintly, as if to usher in a warm rainstorm, but it cleared off at evening.

There are very slight but white mists on the river these mornings.

It spits a little snow this afternoon.

P. M. — To Second Division Brook.

The white pine wood, freshly cut, piled by the side of the Charles Miles road, is agreeable to walk beside. I like the smell of it, all ready for the borers, and the rich light-yellow color of the freshly split wood and the purple color of the sap at the ends of the quarters, from which distill perfectly clear and crystalline tears, colorless and brilliant as diamonds, tears shed for the loss of a forest in which is a world of light and purity, its life oozing out. These beautiful accidents that attend on man's works! Fit pendants to the ears of the Queen of Heaven! How full of interest is one of these wrecks of a wood! C. declares that Miss Ripley spent one whole season studying the lichens on a stick of wood they were about to put on the fire. I am surprised to find that these terebinthine (?) tears have a hard (seemingly soft as water) not film but transparent skin over them. How many curiosities are brought to us with our wood! The trees and the lichens that clothe them, the forest warrior and his shield adhering to him.

I have heard of two skeletons dug up in Concord within twenty years, one, at least, undoubtedly an Indian. This was as they were digging away the bank directly behind I. Moore's house. Dr. Jarvis pronounced it an Indian. The other near the jail.

I tied a string round what I take to be the *Alnus incana*, two or three rods this side Jenny's Road, on T. Wheeler's ditch. The bark is of a more opaque and lighter color, the fruit more orbicular, but the most sure difference was that a part of the pistillate catkins were upright. It was not quite in bloom, but neither

were some of those whose fertile catkins drooped, nor could I yet see a difference in the color of the opened catkins.

At Second Division, saw pollywogs again, full grown with long tails. The cowslip leaves are in many places above water, and I see what I suppose is that slender rush two inches high at the bottom of the water like a fine grass. What is that foliaceous plant amid the mosses in the wet which resembles the algæ? I find nothing like it in Hooker under head of Algæ. In many cases I find that the willow cones are a mere dense cluster of loose leaves, suggesting that the scales of cones of all kinds are only modified leaves, a crowding and stinting of the leaves, as the stem becomes a thorn; and in this view those conical bunches of leaves of so many of the pine family have relation to the cones of the tree as well in origin as in form. The leaf, perchance, becomes calyx, cone, husk, and nutshell.

The past has been a remarkable winter; such a one as I do not remember. The ground has been bare almost all the time, and the river has been open about as much. I got but one chance to take a turn on skates over half an acre. The first snow more than an inch deep fell January 13th, but probably was not a foot deep and was soon gone. There was about as much more fell February 13th, and no more to be remembered, *i. e.* only two or three inches since. I doubt if there has been one day when it was decidedly better sleighing than wheeling. I have hardly heard the sound of sleigh-bells. A yellow lily bud already yellow at the Tortoise Ditch, Nut Meadow.

Those little holes in sandy fields and on the sides of hills, which I see so numerously as soon as the snow is off and the frost out of the ground, are probably made by the skunk in search of bugs and worms, as Rice says. His tracks in the winter are very numerous, considering how rarely he is seen at that season. Probably the tortoises do not lay their eggs so early as I thought. The skunk gets them too.

March 25. I forgot to say yesterday that several little groves of alders on which I had set my eye had been cut down the past winter. One in Trillium Woods was a favorite because it was so dense and regular, its outline rounded as if it were a moss bed; and another more than two miles from this, at Dugan's, which I went to see yesterday, was then being cut, like the former, to supply charcoal for powder. Dugan does most of this work about the town. The willow hedges by causeways are regularly trimmed and peeled. The small wood brings eight dollars a cord. Alders, also, and poplars are extensively used.

6 A. M. — To Brister's Hill.

The *Fringilla hyemalis* sing *most* in concert of any bird nowadays that I hear. Sitting near together on an oak or pine in the woods or an elm in the village, they keep up a very pleasant, enlivening, and incessant jingling and twittering *chill-lill-lill*, so that it is difficult to distinguish a single bird's note, — parts of it much like a canary. This sound advances me furthest toward summer, unless it be the note of the lark, who, by the way, is the most steady singer at present. Notwithstanding the raw and windy mornings, it will sit on a low twig or tussock or pile of manure in the meadow and sing for hours, as sweetly and plaintively as in summer. I see the white-breasted nuthatch, head downward, on the oaks. First heard his rapid and, as it were, angry *gnah gnah gna*, and a *faint*, wiry creaking note about grubs as he moved round the tree. I thought I heard the note of a robin and of a bluebird from an oak. It proceeded from a small bird about as big as a blue-[bird], which did not perch like a woodpecker, uttering first some notes robin-like or like the golden robin, then perfect bluebird warbles,[1] and then it flew off with a flight like neither. From what I saw and heard afterward I suspected it *might* be a downy woodpecker. I see fine little green beds of moss peeping up at Brister's Spring above the water.

When I saw the fungi in my lamp, I was startled and awed, as if I were stooping too low, and should next be found classifying carbuncles and ulcers. Is there not sense in the mass of men who ignore and confound these things, and never see the cryptogamia on the one side any more than the stars on the other? Underfoot they catch a transient glimpse of what they call toadstools, mosses, and frog-spittle, and overhead of the heavens, but they can all read the pillars on a Mexican quarter. They ignore the worlds above and below, keep straight along, and do not run their boots down at the heel as I do. How to keep the heels up I have been obliged to study carefully, turning the nigh foot painfully on side-hills. I find that the shoemakers, to save

[1] Was it not the fox-colored sparrow?

a few iron heel-pegs, do not complete the rows on the inside by three or four, — the very place in the whole boot where they are most needed, — which has fatal consequences to the buyer. I often see the tracks of them in the paths. It is as if you were to put no underpinning under one corner of your house. I have managed to cross very wet and miry places dry-shod by moving rapidly on my heels. I always use leather strings tied in a hard knot; they untie but too easily even then.

The various lights in which you may regard the earth, *e. g.* the dry land as sea bottom, or the sea bottom as a dry down.

Those willow cones appear to be galls, for, cutting open one of the leafy ones, I found a hard core such as are often seen bare, the nucleus of the cone, and in it a grub. This gall had completely checked the extension of the twig, and the leaves had collected and overflowed it as the water at a dam. Perchance when the twig is vigorous and full of sap the cone is leafy; otherwise a hard cone.

11 A. M. — To Framingham.

A Lincoln man heard a flock of geese, he thinks it was day before yesterday.

Measured a white oak in front of Mr. Billings's new house, about one mile beyond Saxonville, — twelve and one twelfth feet in circumference at four feet from the ground (the smallest place within ten feet from the ground), fourteen feet circumference at ground, and a great spread.

Frank's place is on the Concord River within less than ten miles of Whitehall Pond in Hopkinton, one of [the sources], perhaps the principal source, of the river. I thought that a month hence the stream would not be twenty feet wide there. Mr. Wheeler, auctioneer, of Framingham, told me that the timber of the factory at Saxonville was brought by water to within about one mile of where the mill stands. There is a slight rapid.

Brown says that he saw the north end of Long Pond covered with ice the 22d, and that R. W. E. saw the south end entirely open. The red maple buds already redden the swamps and riverside. The winter rye greens the ground.

March 26. There is a large specimen of what I take to be the common alder by the poplar at Egg Rock, five inches in diameter. It may be considered as beginning to bloom to-day. Some white maples appear still as backward as the red.

Saw about 10 A. M. a gaggle of geese, forty-three in number, in a very perfect harrow flying northeasterly. One side [of] the harrow was a little longer than the other. They appeared to be four or five feet apart. At first I heard faintly, as I stood by Minott's gate, borne to me from the southwest through the confused sounds of the village, the indistinct honking of geese. I was somewhat surprised to find that Mr. Loring at his house should have heard and seen the same flock. I should think that the same flock was commonly seen and heard from the distance of a mile east and west. It is remarkable that we commonly see geese go over in the spring

about 10 o'clock in the morning, as if they were accustomed to stop for the night at some place southward whence they reached us at that time. Goodwin saw six geese in Walden about the same time.

The scales of the alder run to leaves sometimes.

P. M. — Up Assabet to stone-heaps, in boat.

A warm, moist, April-like afternoon, with wet-looking sky, and misty. For the first time I take off my coat. Everywhere are hovering over the river and floating, wrecked and struggling, on its surface, a miller-like insect, without mealy wings, very long and narrow, six-legged with two long feelers and, I believe, two long slender grayish wings, from my harbor to the heaps, or a couple of miles at least, food for fishes. This was the degree and kind of warmth to bring them forth. The tortoises, undoubtedly painted, drop now in several instances from the limbs and floating rails on which they had come out to sun. I notice by the Island a yellow scum on the water close to the shore, which must be the pollen of the alders just above. This, too, is perhaps food for fishes.

Up the Assabet, scared from his perch a stout hawk, — the red-tailed undoubtedly, for I saw very plainly the cow-red when he spread his wings from off his tail (and rump?). I rowed the boat three times within gunshot before he flew, twice within four rods, while he sat on an oak over the water, — I think because I had two ladies with me, which was as good as bushing the boat. Each time, or twice at least, he made a motion to fly before he started. The ends of his primaries looked

very ragged against the sky. This is the hen-hawk of the farmer, the same, probably, which I have scared off from the Cliff so often. It was an interesting eagle-like object, as he sat upright on his perch with his back to us, now and then looking over his shoulder, the broad-backed, flat-headed, curve-beaked bird.

Heard a pewee. This, it seems to me, is the first true pewee day, though they have been here some time. What is that cress-like weed in and on the edge of the river opposite Prescott Barrett's? A fresher and more luxuriant growth of green leaf than I have seen yet; as if it had grown in winter.

I do not perceive any fresh additions to the stone-heaps, though perhaps I did not examine carefully enough.

Went forth just after sunset. A storm gathering, an April-like storm. I hear now in the dusk only the song sparrow along the fences and a few hylas at a distance. And now the rattling drops compel me to return.

March 27. Sunday. After a long spell of fair weather, the first April-like rain fell last night. But it is fair again this morning with a cool breeze, which will hardly permit the catkins to open. I miss very much the early willows along the railroad, which have been cut down the past winter to prevent catching fire from the engines and spreading to the woods. And hence my neighbor the switch-man has bean-poles to sell.

P. M. — To Martial Miles's.

The skunk-cabbage in full bloom under the Clamshell

Hill; undoubtedly was open yesterday afternoon. Perhaps I might have found one a day earlier still, had I looked here carefully. Call it the 26th. The spathes of those in bloom are open *at least* half an inch wide. Many are decaying, having been killed by that severe cold a fortnight ago, probably; else it would have blossomed earlier. Nevertheless, the spathes appear to furnish a remarkable protection to the spadix, they are so curved over it as well as involved about it, and so roomy. What meant those little pellets of the pollen in one of these vegetable shells? Had some bee left them yesterday? The inside of the shell-like vessel which the spathe makes contains considerable of the yellow pollen of the flower. I fear I may not have got so early a specimen of this as of the other plants thus far, after all. Clusters of stout, curved spear-heads about three inches high; in some the mahogany-color, in some the yellowish green prevails. Some are a very dark mahogany, others almost a clear light yellow. Also the thistles, johnswort (radical leaves), buttercups, clover, mullein, have grown very decidedly. I see but one tortoise (*Emys guttata*) in Nut Meadow Brook now; the weather is too raw and gusty.

The hazel is fully out. The 23d was perhaps full early to date them. It is in some respects the most interesting flower yet, though so minute that only an observer of nature, or one who looked for them, would notice it. It is the highest and richest colored yet, — ten or a dozen little rays at the end of the buds which are [at] the ends and along the sides of the bare stems. Some of the flowers are a light, some a dark crimson. The high

color of this minute, unobserved flower, at this cold, leafless, and almost flowerless season! It is a beautiful greeting of the spring, when the catkins are scarcely relaxed and there are no signs of life in the bush. Moreover, they are so tender that I never get one home in good condition. They wilt and turn black.

Tried to see the faint-croaking frogs at J. P. Brown's Pond in the woods. They are remarkably timid and shy; had their noses and eyes out, croaking, but all ceased, dove, and concealed themselves, before I got within a rod of the shore. Stood perfectly still amid the bushes on the shore, before one showed himself; finally five or six, and all eyed me, gradually approached me within three feet to reconnoitre, and, though I waited about half an hour, would not utter a sound nor take their eyes off me, — were plainly affected by curiosity. Dark brown and some, perhaps, dark green, about two inches long; had their noses and eyes out when they croaked. If described at all, must be either young of *Rana pipiens* or the *R. palustris*.

That earliest willow I can find, behind Miles's, sheltered by a wood on the north but on high and dry land (!!), will bloom to-morrow if it is pleasant.[1] I see the yellow now. I see the earth freshly stirred and tracks about the woodchuck-holes. So they have been out. You hear that faint croak of frogs and, toward night, a few hylas regularly now. Did not see frog spawn in the pool by Hubbard's Wood. Still the hardhack and meadow-sweet tops are perfect.

The base of the pitch pine cone which, closed, was

[1] *Vide* [p. 80].

semicircular, after it has opened becomes more or less flat and horizontal by the crowding of the scales backward upon the smaller and imperfect ones next the stem, and, viewed on this flat end, they are handsomely arranged in curving rays.

March 28. My Aunt Maria asked me to read the life of Dr. Chalmers, which however I did not promise to do. Yesterday, Sunday, she was heard through the partition shouting to my Aunt Jane, who is deaf, "Think of it! He stood half an hour to-day to hear the frogs croak, and he would n't read the life of Chalmers."

6 A. M. — To Cliffs.

Too cold for the birds to sing much. There appears to be more snow on the mountains. Many of our spring rains are snow-storms there. The woods ring with the cheerful jingle of the *F. hyemalis*. This is a very trig and compact little bird, and appears to be in good condition. The straight edge of slate on their breasts contrasts remarkably with the white from beneath; the short, light-colored bill is also very conspicuous amid the dark slate; and when they fly from you, the two white feathers in their tails are very distinct at a good distance. They are very lively, pursuing each other from bush to bush. Could that be the fox-colored sparrow I saw this morning, — that reddish-brown sparrow? [1]

I do not now think of a bird that *hops* so distinctly, rapidly, and commonly as the robin, with its head up.

Why is the pollen of flowers commonly yellow?

[1] Probably.

I saw yesterday, on the warm pool by Hubbard's Wood, long, narrow blades of reddish grass, bent nearly at right angles and floating on the water, lighter-colored beneath (lake-colored?). The floating part was from six inches to ten or twelve in length. This is much the greatest growth of grass that I have seen, for it is scarcely anywhere yet visibly green. It is an agreeable surprise, flushing the cheek, this warm color on the surface of some warm pool.

P. M. — To Assabet.

Saw eleven black ducks near the bathing-place on the Assabet, flying up the stream. Came within three or four rods of me, then wheeled and went down. Their faint quack sounded much [like] the croak of the frogs occasionally heard now in the pools. As they wheeled and went off, made a very fine whistling sound, which yet I think was not made by their wings.

Opened an ant-hill about two and a half feet wide and eight inches high, in open land. It was light and dry, and apparently made by the ants; free from stones or sticks for about a foot in depth. The ants, which were red with black abdomens and were about a third of an inch long, crawled about sluggishly on being exposed. Their galleries, a quarter of an inch and more in diameter, with ants in them, extended to the depth of two feet in the yellow sand, and how much further I don't know. Opened another in the woods with black ants of the same size in the same condition.

This is a raw, cloudy, and disagreeable day. Yet I think you are most likely to see wild fowl this weather.

I saw in Dodd's yard and flying thence to the alders by the river what I think must be the tree sparrow,[1] — a ferruginous crowned, or headed, and partly winged bird, light beneath, with a few of the *F. hyemalis* in company. It sang sweetly, much like some notes of a canary. One pursued another. It was not large enough for the fox-colored sparrow. Perhaps I have seen it before within the month.

As near as I can make out, the hawks or falcons I am likely to see here are the American sparrow hawk, the fish hawk, the goshawk, the short-winged buzzard (if this is the same with Brown's stuffed sharp-shinned or slate-colored hawk, — not slate in his specimen; is not this the common small hawk that soars?), the red-tailed hawk (have we the red-shouldered hawk, about the same size and aspect with the last?), the hen-harrier. (I suppose it is the adult of this with the slate-color over meadows.)

March 29. 6 A. M. — To Leaning Hemlocks, by boat.

The sun has just risen, but there is only a now clear saffron belt next the east horizon; all the rest of the sky is covered with clouds, broken into lighter and darker shades. An agreeable yellow sunlight falls on the western fields and the banks of the river. Whence this yellow tinge? Probably a different light would be reflected if there were no dark clouds above. A somewhat milder morning than yesterday, and the river as usual quite smooth. From Cheney's boat-house I hear very distinctly the tapping of a woodpecker at the Island about

[1] No doubt of it.

a quarter of a mile. Undoubtedly could hear it twice as far at least, if still, over the water. At every stroke of my paddle, small silvery bubbles about the size of a pin-head, dashed from the surface, slide or roll over the smooth surface a foot or two. On approaching the Island, I am surprised to hear the scolding, cackle-like note of the pigeon woodpecker, a prolonged loud sound somewhat like one note of the robin. This was the tapper, on the old hollow aspen which the small woodpeckers so much frequent. Unless the latter make *exactly* the same sound with the former, then the pigeon woodpecker has come!! But I could not get near enough to distinguish his size and colors. He went up the Assabet, and I heard him cackling and tapping far ahead.

The catkins of the *Populus tremuloides* are just beginning to open, — to curl over and downward like caterpillars. Yesterday proved too cold, undoubtedly, for the willow to open, and unless I learn better, I shall give the poplar the precedence, dating both, however, from to-day.[1]

It would be worth the while to attend more to the different notes of the blackbirds. Methinks I may have seen the female red-wing within a day or two; or what are these purely black ones without the red shoulder? It is pleasant to see them scattered about on the drying meadow. The red-wings will stand close to the water's edge, looking larger than usual, with their red shoulders very distinct and handsome in that position, and sing *okolee*, or *bob-y-lee*, or what-not. Others, on the tops of trees over your head, out of a fuzzy beginning spit forth a clear, shrill whistle incessantly, for what purpose I

[1] *Vide* [p. 70].

don't know. Others, on the elms over the water, utter still another note, each time lifting their wings slightly. Others are flying across the stream with a loud *char-r, char-r*.

Looking at the mouth of a woodchuck-hole and at low places, as on the moss, in the meadows, [I see] that those places are sprinkled with little pellets or sometimes salt-shaped masses of frost some inches apart, apparently like snow. This is one kind of frost.

There is snow and ice still along the edge of the meadows on the north side of woods; the latter even five or six inches thick in some places.

The female flowers of the white maple, crimson stigmas from the same rounded masses of buds with the male, are now quite abundant. I think they have not come out more than a day or two. I did not notice them the 26th, though I did not look carefully for them. The two sorts of flowers are not only on the same tree and the same twig and sometimes in the same bud, but also sometimes in the same little cup. The recent shoot of the white maple is now a yellowish brown, sprinkled with ashy dots.

I am in some uncertainty about whether I do not confound several kinds under the name of the downy woodpecker. It not only flies *volatu undoso*, but you hear, as it passes over you, the strong ripple of its wings.

Two or three times, when a visitor stayed into evening, and it proved a dark night, I was obliged to conduct him to the cart-path in the rear of my house and then point out to him the direction he was to pursue, and in keeping which he was to be guided rather by his feet

than his eyes. One very dark night I directed thus on their way two young men who had been fishing in the pond, who would otherwise have been at a loss what course to take. They lived about a mile off, and were quite used to the woods. A day or two after, one of them told me that they wandered about the greater part of the night, close by their own premises, and did not get home till toward morning, by which time, as there were several heavy showers in the course of the night, and the leaves were very wet, they were drenched to their skins. I have heard of many going astray, even in the village streets, when the darkness was so thick that you could cut it with a knife, as the phrase is. Some who lived in the outskirts, having come to town shopping with their wagons, have been obliged to put up for the night, and gentlemen and ladies making a call have gone half a mile out of their way, feeling the sidewalk only and not knowing when they turned, and were obliged to inquire the way at the first house they discovered. Even one of the village doctors was thus lost in the heart of the village on a nocturnal mission, and spent nearly the whole night feeling the fences and the houses, being, as he said, ashamed to inquire. If one with the vision of an owl, or as in broad daylight, could have watched his motions, they would have been ludicrous indeed. It is a novel and memorable acquaintance one may make thus with the most familiar objects. It is a surprising and memorable and, I may add, valuable experience to be lost in the woods, especially at night. Sometimes in a snow-storm, even by day, one will come out upon a well-known road and yet find it impossible

to tell which way leads to the village. Though your reason tells you that you have travelled it one hundred times, yet no object looks familiar, but it is as strange to you as if it were in Tartary. By night, of course, the perplexity is infinitely greater. We are constantly steering like pilots by certain well-known beacons and headlands, though we are not conscious of it, and if we go beyond our usual course we still preserve the bearing of some neighboring cape, and not till we are completely lost or turned round, — for a man needs only to be turned round once with his eyes shut in this world to be lost, — do we appreciate the vastness and strangeness of nature. Every man has once more to learn the points of compass as often as he awakes, whether from sleep or from any abstraction. In fact, not till we are lost do we begin to realize where we are, and the infinite extent of our relations.[1]

A pleasant short voyage is that to the Leaning Hemlocks on the Assabet, just round the Island under Nawshawtuct Hill. The river here has in the course of ages gullied into the hill, at a curve, making a high and steep bank, on which a few hemlocks grow and overhang the deep, eddying basin. For as long as I can remember, one or more of these has always been slanting over the stream at various angles, being undermined by it, until one after another, from year to year, they fall in and are swept away. This is a favorite voyage for ladies to make, down one stream and up the other, plucking the lilies by the way and landing on the Island, and concluding with a walk on Nawshawtuct Hill.

[1] [*Walden*, pp. 188–190; Riv. 266–268.]

This which Gilbert White says of the raven is applicable to our crow: "There is a peculiarity belonging to ravens that must draw the attention even of the most incurious — they spend all their leisure time in striking and cuffing each other on the wing in a kind of playful skirmish."

P. M. — To early willow behind Martial Miles's.

A bright, sunny, but yet rather breezy and cool afternoon. On the railroad I hear the telegraph. This is the lyre that is as old as the world. I put my ear to the post, and the sound seems to be in the core of the post, directly against my ear. This is all of music. The utmost refinements of art, methinks, can go no further. This is one of those days divided against itself, when there is a cool wind but a warm sun, when there is little or no coolness proper to this locality, but it is wafted to us probably from the snow-clad northwest, and hence in sheltered places it is very warm. However, the sun is rapidly prevailing over the wind, and it is already warmer than when I came out.

Four ducks, two by two, are sailing conspicuously on the river. There appear to be two pairs. In each case one two-thirds white and another grayish-brown and, I think, smaller. They are very shy and fly at fifty rods' distance. Are they whistlers? The white are much more white than those I saw the other day and at first thought summer ducks.[1] Would it not be well to carry a

[1] [See p. 40.] These were either mergansers or the golden-eye; I think the former, *i. e. Mergus serrator*, or red-breasted merganser (?), or sheldrake.

spy-glass in order to watch these shy birds such as ducks and hawks? In some respects, methinks, it would be better than a gun. The latter brings them nearer dead, but the former alive. You can identify the species better by killing the bird, because it was a dead specimen that was so minutely described, but you can study the habits and appearance best in the living specimen. These ducks first flew north, or somewhat against the wind (was it to get under weigh?), then wheeled, flew nearer me, and went south up-stream, where I saw them afterward.

In one of those little holes which I refer to the skunk, I found part of the shell of a *reddish* beetle or dor-bug. Both hole and beetle looked quite fresh. Saw small ants there active.

Under the south side of Clamshell Hill, in the sun, the air is filled with those black fuzzy gnats, and I hear a fine hum from them. The first humming of insects — unless of those honey-bees the other day — of the season. I can find no honey-bees in the skunk-cabbage this pleasant afternoon. I find that many of the oak-balls are pierced, and their inhabitants have left them; they have a small round hole in them. The rest have still thirty or forty small white maggots about one twelfth of an inch long. Thus far I have not seen these balls but on the black oak, and some are still full of them, like apples.

Walking along near the edge of the meadow under Lupine Hill, I slumped through the sod into a muskrat's nest, for the sod was only two inches thick over it, which was enough when it was frozen. I laid it open with my hands. There were three or four channels or hollowed

paths, a rod or more in length, not merely worn but made in the meadow, and centring at the mouth of this burrow. They were three or four inches deep, and finally became indistinct and were lost amid the cranberry vines and grass toward the river. The entrance to the burrow was just at the edge of the upland, here a gently sloping bank, and was probably just beneath the surface of the water six weeks ago. It was about twenty-five rods distant from the true bank of the river. From this a straight gallery, about six inches in diameter every way, sloped upward about eight feet into the bank just beneath the turf, so that the end was about a foot higher than the entrance. There was a somewhat circular enlargement about one foot in horizontal diameter and the same depth with the gallery; and [in] it was nearly a peck of coarse meadow stubble, showing the marks of the scythe, with which was mixed accidentally a very little of the moss which grew with it. Three short galleries, only two feet long, were continued from this centre somewhat like rays toward the high land, as if they had been prepared in order to be ready for a sudden rise of the water, or had been actually made so far under such an emergency. The nest was of course thoroughly wet and, humanly speaking, uncomfortable, though the creature could breathe in it. But it is plain that the muskrat cannot be subject to the toothache. I have no doubt this was made and used last winter, for the grass was as fresh as that in the meadow (except that it was pulled up), and the sand which had been taken out lay partly in a flattened heap in the meadow, and no grass had sprung up through it.

In the course of the above examination I made a very interesting discovery. When I turned up the thin sod from over the damp cavity of the nest, I was surprised to see at this hour of a pleasant day what I took to be beautiful frost crystals of a rare form, — frost bodkins I was in haste to name them, for around the fine white roots of the grass, apparently the herd's-grass, which were from one to two or more inches long, reaching downward into the dark, damp cavern (though the green blades had scarcely made so much growth above; indeed, the growth was scarcely visible there), appeared to be lingering still into the middle of this warm afternoon rare and beautiful frost crystals exactly in the form of a bodkin, about one sixth of an inch wide at base and tapering evenly to the lower end, sometimes the upper part of the core being naked for half an inch, which last gave them a slight resemblance to feathers, though they were not flat but round, and at the abrupt end of the rootlet (as if cut off) a larger, clear drop. On examining them more closely, feeling and tasting them, I found that it was not frost but a clear, crystalline dew in almost invisible drops, concentrated from the dampness of the cavern, and perhaps melted frost still reserving by its fineness its original color, thus regularly arranged around the delicate white fibre; and, looking again, incredulous, I discerned extremely minute white threads or gossamer standing out on all sides from the main rootlet in this form and affording the core for these drops. Yet on those fibres which had lost their dew, none of these minute threads appeared. There they pointed downward somewhat

like stalactites, or very narrow caterpillar brushes. It impressed me as a wonderful piece of chemistry, that the very grass we trample on and esteem so cheap should be thus wonderfully nourished, that this spring greenness was not produced by coarse and cheap means, but in sod, out of sight, the most delicate and magical processes are going on. The half is not shown. The very sod is replete with mechanism far finer than that of a watch, and yet it is cast under our feet to be trampled on. The process that goes on in the sod and the dark, about the minute fibres of the grass, — the chemistry and the mechanics, — before a single green blade can appear above the withered herbage, if it could [be] adequately described, would supplant all other revelations. We are acquainted with but one side of the sod. I brought home some tufts of the grass in my pocket, but when I took it out I could not at first find those pearly white fibres and thought that they were lost, for they were shrunk to dry brown threads; and, as for the still finer gossamer which supported the roscid droplets, with few exceptions they were absolutely undiscoverable, — they no longer stood out around the core, — so fine and delicate was their organization. It made me doubt almost if there were not actual, substantial, though invisible cores to the leaflets and veins of the hoar frost. And can these almost invisible and tender fibres penetrate the earth where there is no cavern? Or is what we call the solid earth porous and cavernous enough for them?

A wood tortoise in Nut Meadow Brook.

I see a little three-spotted sparrow, — apparently

the same seen March 18th, — with its mate, not so spotted. The first apparently the female, quite tame. The male sings a regular song sparrow strain, and they must be that, I think. Keep up a faint chip. Apparently thinking of a nest.

The trout glances like a film from side to side and under the bank.

Saw a solid mass of green conferva at the bottom of the brook, waved with the sand which had washed into it, which made it look exactly like a rock partly covered with green lichens. I was surprised when I thrust a stick into it and was undeceived. Observe the shadow of water flowing rapidly over a shelving bottom in this brook, producing the appearance of sand washing along.

Tried several times to catch a skater. Got my hand close to him; grasped at him as quick as possible; was sure I had got him this time; let the water run out between my fingers; hoped I had not crushed him; opened my hand; and lo! he was not there. I never succeeded in catching one. What are those common snails in the mud in ditches, with their feet out, for some time past?

The early willow will bloom to-morrow. Its catkins have lost many of their scales. The crowded yellow anthers are already bursting out through the silvery down, like the sun of spring through the clouds of winter. How measuredly this plant has advanced, sensitive to the least change of temperature, its expanding not to be foretold, unless you can foretell the weather. This is the earliest willow that I know.

Yet it is on a dry upland. There is a great difference in localities in respect to warmth, and a corresponding difference in the blossoming of plants of the same species. But can this be the same species with that early one in Miles's Swamp? Its catkins have been picked off, by what?

Dugan tells me that three otter were dug out the past winter in Deacon Farrar's wood-lot, side of the swamp, by Powers and Willis of Sudbury. He has himself seen one in the Second Division woods. He saw two pigeons to-day. *Prated* [*sic*] for them; they came near and then flew away. He saw a woodchuck yesterday. I believe I saw the slate-colored marsh hawk to-day. I saw water-worn stones by the gates of three separate houses in Framingham the other day. The grass now looks quite green in those places where the water recently stood, in grassy hollows where the melted snow collects. Dugan wished to get some guinea-hens to keep off the hawks.

Those fine webs of the grass fibres stood out as if drawn out and held up by electricity.

March 30. April weather, alternate rain and brightening up. I am not sure my willow will bloom fairly to-day. How warily the flowers open! not to be caught out too early, not bursting into bloom with the first genial heat, but holding back as if foreseeing the transient checks, and yielding only to the absolute progress of the season. However, probably some hardy flowers which are quite ready will open just before a cold snap, while others, which were almost

equally advanced, may be retarded a week. Is it not the pollen which the bees seek in the earliest flowers, as the skunk-cabbage (?) and the willow, having occasion for bee-bread first? As usual, the robin sings more this cloudy and showery morning than I have heard it yet.

P. M. — To Cliffs.

The gooseberry leaves in the garden are just *beginning* to show a little green. Is this the same with the wild? Lilacs have buds equally advanced.

Seeing one of those little holes (which I have thought were made by beetles or dor-bugs) in Wheeler's upland rye-field near the Burying-Ground, the mouth walled about like a well with a raised curb with fragments of dried grass and little bits of wood, I resolved to explore it, but after the first shovelful I lost the trace of it, for I had filled it with sand. Finding another, I stuck a mullein stalk into it to a surprising depth, and then could dig with confidence. At fifteen or sixteen inches from the surface, I found a black spider, nearly three quarters of an inch long in the body, clasping the mullein, but very sluggish, only moving its legs, but not crawling away. In another hole I found another similar spider in exactly the same condition and at the same depth, but in this case my stick went down only one foot and was there stopped by ice, which filled the hole, but after digging through an inch of frozen ground, I found the spider in the dry cavity, three or four inches deeper. How the water stood so as to freeze above him I don't know. I could see nothing like a nest at the bottom, nor any

enlargement of the hole. The soil is very sandy and light. In the sand beneath the frost was a moving common red earthworm. I did not expect to find frost in such a place now.

Now commences the season for fires in the woods. The winter, and now the sun and winds, have dried the old leaves more thoroughly than ever, and there are no green leaves to shade the ground or to check the flames, and these high March winds are the very ones to spread them. It is a dry, windy, and withal hazy day, — that blue smoky haze that reminds of fires, which some have thought the effect of distant fires in the woods, which perhaps is only a finer mist, produced by the increased heat of the sun on an earth abounding in moisture. Is not this White's London smoke (*vide* Commonplace-Book), and followed by rain? The woods look peculiarly dry and russet. There is as yet no new greenness in the landscape. With these thoughts and impressions I had not gone far before I saw the smoke of a fire on Fair Haven Hill. Some boys were going *sassafrasing*, for boys will have some pursuit peculiar to every season. A match came in contact with a marble, nobody knew how, and suddenly the fire flashed up the broad open hillside, consuming the low grass and sweet-fern and leaving a smoking, blackened waste. A few glowing stumps, with spadefuls of fresh earth thrown on them, the white ashes here and there on the black ground, and the not disagreeable scent of smoke and cinders was all that was left when I arrived.

I see from the Cliffs that the young oaks look thin,

are losing their leaves. A warm, breezy wind roves in the woods. Dry leaves, which I at first mistake for birds, go sailing through the air in front of the Cliff. The distant highways, I perceive, begin to be dusty; sandy fields to be dry. There is an inspiriting strong ripple on the river, which seems to flow up-stream.

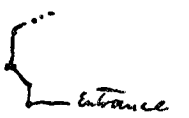
I see again that same kind of clouds that I saw the 10th of last April, low in the sky; higher and overhead those great downy clouds, equal to the intervals of celestial blue, with glowing edges and with wet bases. The sky is mapped with them as with New Hollands and Borneos. There are mares'-tails and rosettes in the west.

The motions of a hawk correcting the flaws in the wind by raising his shoulder from time to time, are much like those of a leaf yielding to them. For the little hawks are hunting now. You have not to sit long on the Cliffs before you see one. I still see fresh earth where the skunk, if it is he, has been probing last night for insects about the pines in pastures and any dead twigs that afford lurking-places. Saw a dead cricket in one. They make a hole sometimes so deep and pointed that only two fingers will fathom it. If dor-bugs make such holes as the spiders, they can easily find them.

I am surprised to find many of the early sedge already out. It may have been out a day or two. I should put it between the skunk-cabbage and the aspen, — at any rate, before the last. Little black ants in the pitchy-looking earth about the base of white pines in woods are still dormant.

Ah, those youthful days! are they never to return? when the walker does not too curiously observe particulars, but sees, hears, scents, tastes, and feels only himself, — the phenomena that show themselves in him, — his expanding body, his intellect and heart. No worm or insect, quadruped or bird, confined his view, but the unbounded universe was his. A bird is now become a mote in his eye.

Dug into what I take to be a woodchuck's burrow in the low knoll below the Cliffs. It was in the side of the hill and sloped gently downward at first, diagonally, into the hill about five feet, perhaps westerly, then turned and ran north into the hill about three feet, then northwest further into the hill four feet, then north again five feet, then northeast I know not how far, the last five feet perhaps ascending. It was the full length of the shovel from the surface of the ground to the bottom of the hole when I left off, owing, perhaps, to the rise of the hill. The hole was arched above and flat on the bottom like an oven, about five inches [in] diameter at base, and it seemed to have a pretty hard crust as I broke into it. There was a little enlargement, perhaps ten inches in diameter, in the angle at the end of twelve feet. It was thus. It was a wonder where the sand was conveyed to, for there was not a wheelbarrow-load at the entrance.



March 31. The robins sing at the very earliest dawn. I wake with their note ringing in my ear.

6 A. M. — To Island by boat.

The pickerels dart away from the shallows, where they have spent the night. It is spearing-time, then. The chickadee sings, not merely *phebe* but *phe-be-be*. Heard a note like that of the warbling vireo from a bird in Cheney's elm which I think must be a fox-colored sparrow. Should think it a vireo if it could be here now.

9 A. M. — To Lincoln, surveying for Mr. Austin.

The catkins of the hazel are now trembling in the wind and much lengthened, showing yellowish and beginning to shed pollen.

Saw and heard sing in a peach orchard my *warbling vireo* of the morning. It must be the fox-colored sparrow. It is plumper than a bluebird, tail fox-colored, a distinct spot on the breast, no bars visible on wings. Beginning with a clear, rich, deliberate note, jingling more rapidly at the end; much like the warbling vireo at the end.

I afterward heard a fine concert of little songsters along the edge of the meadow. Approached and watched and listened for more than half an hour. There were many little sparrows, difficult to detect, flitting and hopping along and scratching the ground like hens, under the alders, willows, and cornels in a wet leafy place, occasionally alighting on a low twig and preening themselves. They had bright-bay crowns, two rather indistinct white bars on wings, an ashy breast and dark tail. These twittered sweetly, some parts very much like a canary and many together, making it the fullest and sweetest I have heard yet, — like a

shopful of canaries. The blackbirds may make more noise. About the size of a song sparrow. I think these are the tree sparrow. Also, mixed with them, and puzzling me to distinguish for a long time, were many of the fox-colored (?) sparrows mentioned above, with a creamy cinnamon-tinged ashy breast, cinnamon shoulderlet, ashy about side head and throat, a fox-colored tail; a size larger than the others; the spot on breast very marked. Were evidently two birds intimately mixed. Did not Peabody confound them when he mentioned the mark on the breast of the tree sparrow? The rich strain of the fox-colored sparrow, as I think it is, added much to the quire. The latter solos, the former in concert. I kept off a hawk by my presence. These were for a long time invisible to me, except when they flitted past.

Heard the jingle of the rush sparrow.

A range-pole on the side of Mt. Tabor, twenty-odd feet long and ten or twelve from the ground, slanted upward on three forked posts like a rafter, a bower being opposite the lower end two rods off, and this end of the pole full of shot.

Mt. Tabor. — When the air is a little hazy, the mountains are particularly dark blue. It is affecting to see a distant mountain-top, like the summits of Uncannunuc, well seen from this hill, whereon you camped for a night in your youth, which you have never revisited, still as blue and ethereal to your eyes as is your memory of it. It lies like an isle in the far heavens, a part of earth unprophaned, which does not bear a price in the market, is not advertised by the real estate broker.

There is another fire in the horizon, and there was one also yesterday on the side of this hill. What is that forward weed, its narrow green leaves floating at end of a long stem, in springs for cattle south side this hill, somewhat potamogeton-like? [1]

Brown has these birds set up which I may wish to examine: —

Turtle-dove, green heron, *Ardea Herodias*, pileated woodpecker, fox-colored sparrow, young of purple finch, white-eyed vireo, goldfinch, brown creeper, scarlet tanager (male and female), white-breasted nuthatch, solitary vireo, red-eyed vireo, yellow redpoll warbler, hermit thrush (killed here), cardinal grosbeak, pine grosbeak, black-billed cuckoo, mocking-bird, woodcock, *Totanus flavipes* (or small yellow-leg), (great ditto?), Bartram's tatler (or upland plover), golden ditto, *Falco sparverius*, sharp-shinned or slate-colored hawk, or *F. Pennsylvanicus* of Wilson, green-winged teal, blue-winged teal, wood duck (young drakes).

[1] *Callitriche verna. Vide* May 2d.