VIII

OCTOBER, 1853

(ÆT. 36)

Oct. 1. *Saturday.* Went a-barberrying by boat to Conantum, carrying Ellen, Edith, and Eddie. Grape-vines, curled, crisped, and browned by the frosts, are now more conspicuous than ever. Some grapes still hang on the vines. Got three pecks of barberries. Huckleberries begin to redden. Robins and blue-birds collect and flit about. Flowers are scarce.

Oct. 2. *Sunday.* The gentian in Hubbard's Close is frost-bitten extensively. As the [witch-] hazel is raised above frost and can afford to be later, for this reason also I think it is so. The white pines have scarcely begun at all to change here, though a week ago last Wednesday they were fully changed at Bangor. There is fully a fortnight's difference, and methinks more. The [witch-] hazel, too, was more forward there. There are but few and faint autumnal tints about Walden yet. The smooth sumach is but a dull red.

Oct. 3. *Viola lanceolata* in Moore's Swamp.

Oct. 4. The maples are reddening, and birches yellowing. The mouse-ear in the shade in the middle of the day, so hoary, looks as if the frost still lay on

it. Well it wears the frost. Bumblebees are on the *Aster undulatus*, and gnats are dancing in the air.

Oct. 5. The howling of the wind about the house just before a storm to-night sounds extremely like a loon on the pond. How fit!

Oct. 6 *and* 7. Windy. Elms bare.

Oct. 8. Found a bird's nest (?) converted into a mouse's nest in the prinos swamp, while surveying on the new Bedford road to-day, topped over with moss, and a hole on one side, like a squirrel-nest.

Oct. 9. *Sunday.* A high wind south of westerly. Set sail with W. E. C. down the river.

The red maples are now red and also yellow and reddening. The white maples are green and silvery, also yellowing and blushing. The birch is yellow; the black willow brown; the elms sere, brown, and thin; the bass bare. The button-bush, which was so late, is already mostly bare except the lower part, protected. The swamp white oak is green with a brownish tinge; the white ash turned mulberry. The white maples toward Ball's Hill have a burnt white appearance; the white oak a salmon-color and also red. Is that scarlet oak rosed? Huckleberries and blackberries are red. Leaves are falling; apples more distinctly seen on the trees; muskrat-houses not quite done.

This wind carried us along glibly, I think six miles an hour, till we stopped in Billerica, just below the

first bridge beyond the Carlisle Bridge, — at the Hibiscus Shore. I collected some hibiscus seeds and swamp white oak acorns, and we walked on thence, a mile or more further, over scrubby hills which with a rocky core border the western shore, still in Billerica, at last not far above the mills. At one place, opposite what I once called Grape Island (still unchanged), I smelled grapes, and though I saw no vines at first, they being bare of leaves, at last found the grapes quite plenty and ripe and fresh enough on the ground under my feet. Ah! their scent is very penetrating and memorable. Did we not see a fish hawk? We found ourselves in an extensive wood there, which we did not get out of. It took the rest of the day to row back against the wind.

Oct. 10. This morning it is very pleasant and warm. There are many small birds in flocks on the elms in Cheney's field, faintly warbling, — robins and purple finches and especially large flocks of small sparrows, which make a business of washing and pruning themselves in the puddles in the road, as if cleaning up after a long flight and the wind of yesterday. The faint suppressed warbling of the robins sounds like a reminiscence of the spring.

Cooler and windy at sunset, and the elm leaves come down again.

Oct. 11. Sassafras leaves are a rich yellow now and falling fast. They come down in showers on the least touching of the tree. I was obliged to cut a small

one while surveying the Bedford road to-day. What singularly and variously formed leaves! For the most part three very regular long lobes, but also some simple leaves; but here is one shaped just like a hand or a mitten with a thumb. They next turn a dark cream-color.

Father saw to-day in the end of a red oak stick in his wood-shed, three and a half inches in diameter, which was sawed yesterday, something shining. It is lead, either the side of a bullet or a large buckshot just a quarter of an inch in diameter. It came from the Ministerial Lot in the southwest part of the town, and we bought the wood of Martial Miles. It is completely and snugly buried under some twelve or fifteen layers of the wood, and it appears not to have penetrated originally more than its own thickness, for there is a very close fit all around it, and the wood has closed over it very snugly and soundly, while on every other side it is killed, though snug for an eighth of an inch around it.

Oct. 12. To-day I have had the experience of borrowing money for a poor Irishman who wishes to get his family to this country. One will never know his neighbors till he has carried a subscription paper among them. Ah! it reveals many and sad facts to stand in this relation to them. To hear the selfish and cowardly excuses some make, — that *if* they help any they must help the Irishman who lives with them, — and him they are sure never to help! Others, with whom public opinion weighs, will think of it, trusting you never will raise the sum and so they will not be called on again; who give stingily after all. What a satire in the fact that you are much more inclined to call on a certain slighted and so-called crazy woman in moderate circumstances rather than on the president of the bank! But some are generous and save the town from the distinction which threatened it, and *some* even who do not lend, plainly would if they could.

Oct. 14. *Friday.* A Mr. Farquhar of Maryland came to see me; spent the day and the night. Fine, clear Indian-summer weather.

Oct. 15. *Saturday.* Last night the first smart frost that I have witnessed. Ice formed under the pump, and the ground was white long after sunrise. And now, when the morning wind rises, how the leaves come down in showers after this touch of the frost! They suddenly form thick beds or carpets on the ground in this gentle air, — or without wind, — just the size and form of the tree above. Silvery cinquefoil.

Oct. 16. *Sunday.* The third pleasant day. Hunter's Moon. Walked to White Pond. The *Polygonum dumetorum* in Tarbell's Swamp lies thick and twisted, rolled together, over the loose raised twigs on the ground, as if woven over basketwork, though it is now all sere. The *Marchantia polymorpha* is still erect there. *Viola ovata* out. The *Lysimachia stricta*, with its long bulblets in the axils, how green and fresh by the shore of the pond!

Oct. 18. P. M. — With Sophia boated to Fair Haven, where she made a sketch.

The red maples have been bare a good while. In the sun and this clear air, their bare ashy branches even sparkle like silver. The woods are losing their bright colors. The muskrat-houses are more sharpened now. I find my boat all covered — the bottom and seats — with the yellow leaves of the golden willow under which it is moored, and if I empty it, it is full again to-morrow.[1] Some white oaks are salmon-red, some lighter and drier. The black oaks are a greenish yellow. Poplars (*grandidentata*) clear, rich yellow. How like some black rocks that stand in the river are these muskrat-houses! They are singularly conspicuous for the dwellings of animals.

The river is quite low now, lower than for many weeks, and accordingly the white lily pads have their stems too long, and they rise above the water four or five inches and are looped over and downward to the sunken pad with its face down. They make a singular appearance. Returning late, we see a double shadow of ourselves and boat, one, the true, quite black, the other directly above it and very faint, on the willows and high bank.

Oct. 19. *Wednesday.* Paddled E. Hoar and Mrs. King up the North Branch.

A seed of wild oat left on.

The leaves have fallen so plentifully that they quite conceal the water along the shore, and rustle pleasantly

[1] [*Excursions*, p. 266; Riv. 326, 327.]

when the wave which the boat creates strikes them. On Sunday last, I could hardly find the Corner Spring, and suspected even it had dried up, for it was completely concealed by fresh-fallen leaves, and when I swept them aside and revealed it, it was like striking the earth for a new spring. At Beck Stow's, surveying, thinking to step upon a leafy shore from a rail, I got into water more than a foot deep and had to wring my stockings out; but this is anticipating.[1]

Oct. 20. How pleasant to walk over beds of these fresh, crisp, and rustling fallen leaves, — young hyson, green tea, clean, crisp, and wholesome! How beautiful they go to their graves! how gently lay themselves down and turn to mould! — painted of a thousand hues and fit to make the beds of us living. So they troop to their graves, light and frisky. They put on no weeds. Merrily they go scampering over the earth, selecting their graves, whispering all through the woods about it. They that waved so loftily, how contentedly they return to dust again and are laid low, resigned to lie and decay at the foot of the tree and afford nourishment to new generations of their kind, as well as to flutter on high! How they are mixed up, all species, — oak and maple and chestnut and birch! They are about to add a leaf's breadth to the depth of the soil. We are all the richer for their decay. Nature is not cluttered with them. She is a perfect husbandman; she stores them all.[2]

[1] [*Excursions*, pp. 266, 267; Riv. 326, 327.]

[2] [*Excursions*, pp. 268–270; Riv. 329–331.]

While I was wringing my wet stockings (*vide* last page), sitting by the side of Beck Stow's, I heard a rush of wings, looked up, and saw three dusky ducks swiftly circling over the small water. They rounded far away, but soon returned and settled within about four rods. They first survey the spot. Wonder they did not see me. At first they are suspicious, hold up their heads and sail about. Do they not see me through the thin border of leafless bushes? At last one dips his bill, and they begin to feed amid the pads. I suddenly rise, and [they] instantly dive as at a flash, then at once rise again and all go off, with a low wiry note.

Oct. 22. A week or more of fairest Indian summer ended last night, for to-day it rains. It was so warm day before yesterday, I worked in my shirt-sleeves in the woods.

I cannot easily dismiss the subject of the fallen leaves. How densely they cover and conceal the water for several feet in width, under and amid the alders and button-bushes and maples along the shore of the river, — still light, tight, and dry boats, dense cities of boats, their fibres not relaxed by the waters, undulating and rustling with every wave, of such various pure and delicate, though fading, tints, — of hues that might make the fame of teas, — dried on great Nature's coppers. And then see this great fleet of scattered leaf boats, still tight and dry, each one curled up on every side by the sun's skill, like boats of hide, scarcely moving in the sluggish current, — like the great fleets with which you mingle on entering some great mart,

some New York which we are all approaching together. Or else they are slowly moving round in some great eddy which the river makes, where the water is deep and the current is wearing into the bank. How gently each has been deposited on the water! No violence has been used toward them yet. But next the shore, as thick as foam they float, and when you turn your prow that way, list! what a rustling of the crisped waves! Wet grounds about the edges of swamps look dry with them, and many a wet foot you get in consequence.

Consider what a vast crop is thus annually shed upon the earth. This, more than any mere grain or seed, is the great harvest of the year. This annual decay and death, this dying by inches, before the whole tree at last lies down and turns to soil. As trees shed their leaves, so deer their horns, and men their hair or nails. The year's great crop. I am more interested in it than in the English grass alone or in the corn. It prepares the virgin mould for future cornfields on which the earth fattens. They teach us how to die. How many flutterings before they rest quietly in their graves! A myriad wrappers for germinating seeds. By what subtle chemistry they will mount up again, climbing by the sap in the trees. The ground is all parti-colored with them.

For beautiful variety can any crop be compared with them? The dogwood (poison sumach) blazing its sins as scarlet, the early-blushing maple, the rich chrome (?) yellow of the poplar, the mulberry ash, the brilliant red huckleberry with which the hills'

backs are painted like sheep's, — not merely the plain flavidness of corn, but all the colors of the rainbow. The salmon-colored oaks, etc., etc. The frost touches them, and, with the slightest breath of day or jarring of earth's axle, see in what showers they come floating down, at the first earnest touch of autumn's wand. They stoop to rise, to mount higher in coming years by subtiler chemistry, and the sapling's first fruits, thus shed, transmuted at last, may adorn its crown, when, in after years, it has become the monarch of the forest.[1]

Yesterday, toward night, gave Sophia and mother a sail as far as the Battle-Ground. One-eyed John Goodwin, the fisherman, was loading into a hand-cart and conveying home the piles of driftwood which of late he had collected with his boat. It was a beautiful evening, and a clear amber sunset lit up all the eastern shores; and that man's employment, so simple and direct, — though he is regarded by most as a vicious character, — whose whole motive was so easy to fathom, — thus to obtain his winter's wood, — charmed me unspeakably. So much do we love actions that are simple. They are all poetic. We, too, would fain be so employed. So unlike the pursuits of most men, so artificial or complicated. Consider how the broker collects his winter's wood, what sport he makes of it, what is his boat and hand-cart! Postponing instant life, he makes haste to Boston in the cars, and there deals in stocks, not quite relishing his employment, — and so earns the money with which he buys his fuel. And when, by chance, I meet him about this indirect

[1] [*Excursions*, pp. 265–270; Riv. 324–331.]

and complicated business, I am not struck with the beauty of his employment. It does not harmonize with the sunset. How much more the former consults his genius, some genius at any rate! Now I should love to get my fuel so, — I have got some so, — but though I may be glad to have it, I do not love to get it in any other way less simple and direct. For if I buy one necessary of life, I cheat myself to some extent, I deprive myself of the pleasure, the inexpressible joy, which is the unfailing reward of satisfying any want of our nature simply and truly.

No *trade* is simple, but artificial and complex. It postpones life and substitutes death. It goes against the grain. If the first generation does not die of it, the third or fourth does. In face of all statistics, I will never believe that it is the descendants of tradesmen who keep the state alive, but of simple yeomen or laborers. This, indeed, statistics say of the city reinforced by the country. The oldest, wisest politician grows not more human so, but is merely a gray wharf rat at last. He makes a habit of disregarding the moral right and wrong for the legal or political, commits a slow suicide, and thinks to recover by retiring on to a farm at last. This simplicity it is, and the vigor it imparts, that enables the simple vagabond, though he does get drunk and is sent to the house of correction so often, to hold up his head among men.

"If I go to Boston every day and sell tape from morning till night," says the merchant (which we will admit is not a beautiful action), "some time or other I shall be able to buy the best of fuel without stint."

Yes, but not the pleasure of picking it up by the river-side, which, I may say, is of more value than the warmth it yields, for it but keeps the vital heat in us that we may repeat such pleasing exercises. It warms us twice, and the first warmth is the most wholesome and memorable, compared with which the other is mere coke. It is to give no account of my employment to say that I cut wood to keep me from freezing, or cultivate beans to keep me from starving. Oh, no, the greatest value of these labors is received before the wood is teamed home, or the beans are harvested (or winnowed from it). Goodwin stands on the solid earth. The earth looks solider under him, and for such as he no *political* economies, with *their* profit and loss, supply and demand, need ever be written, for they will need to use no policy. As for the complex ways of living, I love them not, however much I practice them. In as many places as possible, I will get my feet down to the earth. There is no secret in his trade, more than in the sun's. It is no mystery how he gets his living; no, not even when he steals it. But there is less double-dealing in his living than in your trade.

Goodwin is a most constant fisherman. He must well know the taste of pickerel by this time. He will fish, I would not venture to say how many days in succession. When I can remember to have seen him fishing almost daily for some time, if it rains, I am surprised on looking out to see him slowly wending his way to the river in his oilcloth coat, with his basket and pole. I saw him the other day fishing in the middle of the stream, the day after I had seen him fishing on

the shore, while by a kind of magic I sailed by him; and he said he was catching minnow for bait in the winter. When I was twenty rods off, he held up a pickerel that weighed two and a half pounds, which he had forgot to show me before, and the next morning, as he afterward told me, he caught one that weighed three pounds. If it is ever necessary to appoint a committee on fish-ponds and pickerel, let him be one of them. Surely he is tenacious of life, hard to scale.

Oct. 23. *Sunday.* P. M. — Down railroad to chestnut wood on Pine Hill.

A pleasant day, but breezy. I see a downy woodpecker tapping an apple tree, and hear, when I have passed, his sharp, metallic note. I notice these flowers still along the railroad causeway: fresh sprouts from the root of the *Solidago nemoralis* in bloom, one or two fall dandelions, red clover and white, yarrow, *Trifolium arvense* (perhaps not fresh), one small blue snapdragon, fresh tansy in bloom on the sunny sand-bank. There are green leaves on the ends of elder twigs; blackberry vines still red; apple trees yellow and brown and partly bare; white ash bare (nearly); golden willows yellow and brown; white birches, exposed, are nearly bare; some pines still parti-colored. White, black, and red oaks still hold most of their leaves. What a peculiar red has the white! And some black have now a rich brown. The *Populus grandidentata* near railroad, bare; the *P. tremuloides*, half bare. The hickories are finely crisped, yellow, more or less browned. Several yellow butterflies in the meadow.

And many birds flit before me along the railroad, with faint notes, too large for linarias. Can they be tree sparrows? Some weeks.[1] Many phenomena remind me that now is to some extent a second spring, — not only the new-springing and blossoming of flowers, but the peeping of the hylodes for some time, and the faint warbling of their spring notes by many birds. Everywhere in the fields I see the white, hoary (ashy-colored) sceptres of the gray goldenrod. Others are slightly yellowish still. The yellow is gone out of them, as the last flake of sunshine disappears from a field when the clouds are gathering. But though their golden hue is gone, their reign is not over. Compact puffed masses of seeds ready to take wing. They will send out their ventures from hour to hour the winter through. The *Viola pedata* looking up from so low in the wood-path makes a singular impression.

I go through Brooks's Hollow. The hazels bare, only here and there a few sere, curled leaves on them. The red cherry is bare. The blue flag seed-vessels at Walden are bursting, — six closely packed brown rows.

I find my clothes all bristling as with a *chevaux-de-frise* of beggar-ticks, which hold on for many days. A storm of arrows these weeds have showered on me, as I went through their moats. How irksome the task to rid one's self of them! We are fain to let some adhere. Through thick and thin I wear some; hold on many days. In an instant a thousand seeds of the bidens fastened themselves firmly to my clothes, and

[1] Probably the white-in-tail [*i. e.* vesper sparrow, or grass finch].

I carried them for miles, planting one here and another there. They are as thick on my clothes as the teeth of a comb.

The prinos is bare, leaving red berries. The pond has gone down suddenly and surprisingly since I was here last, and this pool is left, cut off at a higher level, stagnant and drying up. This is its first decided going down since its going up a year or two ago. The red-looking water purslane is left bare, and the water-target leaves are turned brown and drying up on the bare mud. The clethra partly bare, crisped, yellowish and brown, with its fruit with persistent styles (?) in long racemes. Here are dense fields of light-colored rattlesnake grass drooping with the weight of their seeds.

The high blueberries about the pond have still a few leaves left on, turned bright scarlet red. These it is adorn the shore so, seen at a distance, small but very bright. The panicled andromeda is thinly clad with yellow and brown leaves, not sere. Alders are green. Smooth sumach bare. Chestnuts commonly bare. I now notice the round red buds of the high blueberry. The blue-stemmed, and also the white, solidago on Walden bank. Small sassafras trees bare. The *Aster undulatus* is still quite abundant and fresh on this high, sunny bank, — far more so than the *Solidago cæsia*, — and methinks it is the latest of our asters and is besides the most common or conspicuous flower now. It is in large, dense masses, two or three feet high, pale purple or whitish, and covered with humble-bees. The radical leaves, now hearted and crenatish,

are lake beneath. Also a hieracium quite freshly bloomed, but with white, bristly leaves and smooth stem, about twenty-flowered; peduncles and involucres glandular-hairy. Is it *Gronovii* or veiny-leaved? Almost as slender as the paniculed. (In press.) No gerardias. Strawberries are red and green. It is the season of fuzzy seeds, — goldenrods, everlasting, senecio, asters, epilobium, etc., etc. *Viburnum Lentago*, with ripe berries and dull-glossy red leaves; young black cherry, fresh green or yellow; mayweed. The chestnuts have mostly fallen. One *Diplopappus linariifolius* in bloom, its leaves all yellow or red. This and *A. undulatus* the asters seen to-day.

The red oak now red, perhaps inclining to scarlet; the white, with that peculiar ingrained redness; the shrub oak, a clear thick leather-color; some dry black oak, darker brown; chestnut, light brown; hickory, yellow, turning brown. These the colors of some leaves I brought home.

Oct. 24. Early on Nawshawtuct.

Black willows bare. Golden willow with yellow leaves. Larch yellow. Most alders by river bare except at top. Waxwork shows red. Celtis almost bare, with greenish-yellow leaves at top. Some hickories bare, some with rich golden-brown leaves. Locusts half bare, with greenish-yellow leaves. Catnip fresh and green and in bloom. Barberries green, reddish, or scarlet. Cranberry beds at distance in meadows (from hill) are red, for a week or more. Lombardy poplar yellow. Red maples and elms alone very conspicuously bare in our landscape. White thorns bare, and berries mostly fallen, reddening the ground. Hedge-mustard still fresh and in bloom. Buttonwoods half bare. The rock maple leaves a clear yellow; now and then [one] shows some blood in its veins, and blushes. People are busy raking the leaves before their houses; some put them over their strawberries.

It has rained all day, filling the streams. Just after dark, high southerly winds arise, but very warm, blowing the rain against the windows and roof and shaking the house. It is very dark withal, so that I can hardly find my way to a neighbor's. We think of vessels on the coast, and shipwrecks, and how this will bring down the remaining leaves and to-morrow morning the street will be strewn with rotten limbs of the elms amid the leaves and puddles, and some loose chimney or crazy building will have fallen. Some fear to go to bed, lest the roof be blown off.

Oct. 25. 7 A. M. — To Hubbard's Grove.

The rain is over, the ground swept and washed. There is a high and cold west wind. Birds fly with difficulty against it (are they tree sparrows?). The brooks and the river are unexpectedly swelled with yesterday's rain. The river is a very dark blue. The wind roars in the wood. A maple is blown down. *Aster longifolius* in low ground (a *few*). This and the *Diplopappus linariifolius*, and, above all, *A. undulatus*, the only flowers of the kind seen this week.[1]

[1] Afterwards *A. puniceus*, *Tradescanti*, and one *lævis*! *Vide* bottom of next page.

P. M. — Sailed down river to the pitch pine hill behind Abner Buttrick's, with a strong northwest wind, and cold.

Saw a telltale on Cheney's shore, close to the water's edge. I am not quite sure whether it is the greater or lesser, but am inclined to think that all I have seen are the lesser. It was all white below and dark above, with a pure white tail prettily displayed in flying. It kept raising its head with a jerk as if it had the St. Vitus's dance. It would alight in the water and swim like a little duck. Once, when I went ashore and started it, it flew so as to bring a willow between it and me, and alighted quite near, much nearer than before, to spy me. When it went off, it uttered a sharp *te-te-te-te-te*, flying with quivering wings, dashing about. I think that the storm of yesterday and last night brought it up.

The white maples are completely bare. The tall dry grass along the shore rustles in the cold wind. The shores are very naked now. I am surprised to see how much the river has risen. The swamp white oaks in front of N. Barrett's — their leafy tops — look quite silvery at a distance in the sun, very different from near to. In *some* places along the water's edge the *Aster Tradescanti* lingers still, some flowers purple, others white. The ground is strewn with pine-needles as sunlight. The iron-wood is nearly bare (on the Flint Bridge Rock). I see one or two specimens of the *Polygonum hydropiperoides* and the smaller, nameless one in flower still. They last thus till the severe frosts. There are masses of the yellow water ranunculus

washed up by the shore after this high wind. This is one of our *river* weeds. The shepherd's-purse in bloom.

Oct. 26. I well remember the time this year when I first heard the dream of the toads. I was laying out house-lots on Little River in Haverhill. We had had some raw, cold and wet weather. But this day was remarkably warm and pleasant, and I had thrown off my outside coat. I was going home to dinner, past a shallow pool, which was green with springing grass, and where a new house was about being erected, when it occurred to me that I heard the dream of the toad. It rang through and filled all the air, though I had not heard it once. And I turned my companion's attention to it, but he did not appear to perceive it as a new sound in the air. Loud and prevailing as it is, most men do not notice it at all. It is to them, perchance, a sort of simmering or seething of all nature. That afternoon the dream of the toads rang through the elms by Little River and affected the thoughts of men, though they were not conscious that they heard it.

How watchful we must be to keep the crystal well that we were made, clear! — that it be not made turbid by our contact with the world, so that it will not reflect objects.[1] What other liberty is there worth having, if we have not freedom and peace in our minds, — if our inmost and most private man is but a sour and turbid pool? Often we are so jarred by chagrins in dealing with the world, that we cannot reflect. Everything beautiful impresses us as sufficient to itself. Many

[1] [Channing, p. 87.]

men who have had much intercourse with the world and not borne the trial well affect me as all resistance, all bur and rind, without any gentleman, or tender and innocent core left. They have become hedgehogs.

Ah! the world is too much with us, and our whole soul is stained by what it works in, like the dyer's hand. A man had better starve at once than lose his innocence in the process of getting his bread. This is the pool of Bethsaida [*sic*] which must be stilled and become smooth before we can enter to be healed. If within the old man there is not a young man, — within the sophisticated, one unsophisticated, — then he is but one of the devil's angels.

It is surprising how any reminiscence of a different season of the year affects us. When I meet with any such in my Journal, it affects me as poetry, and I appreciate that other season and that particular phenomenon more than at the time. The world so seen is all one spring, and full of beauty. You only need to make a faithful record of an average summer day's experience and summer mood, and read it in the winter, and it will carry you back to more than that summer day alone could show. Only the rarest flower, the purest melody, of the season thus comes down to us.

P. M. — To Cliffs.

As I go up the back road, some fresh sprouts in bloom on a tall rough goldenrod. I hear a faint twittering of the sparrows in the grass, like crickets. Those flitting sparrows which we have had for some weeks, are they not the sober snowbirds (tree sparrows?)? They fly in a great drifting flock, wheeling and dashing about, as if preluding or acting a snow-storm, with rapid *te te te*. They are as dry and rustling as the grass. The *Aster puniceus*, with the *longifolius*, — a few, — on the sheltered sides of ditches. Checkerberries have now a fine, clear, fresh tint, a peculiar pink (?). Now leaves are off, or chiefly off, I begin to notice the buds of various form and color and more or less conspicuous, prepared for another season, — partly, too, perhaps, for food for birds. The tupelo is bare. The smooth speedwell in bloom, the meek-eyed flower, low or flat in the sod.

Went through the dense maple swamp against Potter's pasture. It is completely bare, and the ground is very thickly strewn with leaves, which conceal the wet places. But still the high blueberry bushes in the midst and on the edge retain a few bright-red or scarlet-red leaves. Red circles of the pitcher-plant, in the meadow beyond, are full of water to where cut evenly off by the scythe. Lambkill, being an evergreen, is now more conspicuous.

The river has risen still higher than yesterday, and flooded the meadows yet more. How long it continues to rise, before we feel the full influence of the rain that fell on the Worcester hills! The green-briar is bare except a few yellow leaves. Butter-and-eggs just ending in a sheltered place. Some *Solidago nemoralis* show still bright-yellow masses of flowers on bare, dead-looking stalks, the leaves having fallen or being dried up, — a constant lover of the sun. A storm appears to be thickening. The sun has been shorn of his beams all the afternoon. The clouds are not

distinct and handsome. It is cool, gray weather. But yet there is a little more adventure in a walk, and it better suits a pensive mood. I see the hole of the great black spider already walled about. Slate-colored snowbirds. This has been the month for acorns, — and the last half of September, — though it is now too late.

When, after feeling dissatisfied with my life, I aspire to something better, am more scrupulous, more reserved and continent, as if expecting somewhat, suddenly I find myself full of life as a nut of meat, — am overflowing with a quiet, genial mirthfulness. I think to myself, I must attend to my diet; I must get up earlier and take a morning walk; I must have done with luxuries and devote myself to my muse. So I dam up my stream, and my waters gather to a head. I am freighted with thought.

[At this point and scattered through the pages immediately succeeding, the Journal contains further matter relating to the Maine excursion of the previous month. Only the parts not included in "The Maine Woods" are here printed.]

Very small and narrow intervals on the Penobscot. Every lake and stream in the wilderness is soon made to feel the influence of the white man's dam.

At Oldtown I went on board the small river steamers which run to the Five Islands, built propeller-fashion. They lay just opposite Orono Island; had been laid up during the low stage of water, and were to start the next day on their first trip. One was properly named

the Governor Neptune. A hand told me that they drew only fourteen inches of water and could run easily in two feet of water, though they did not like to.

Why is [it] that we look upon the Indian as the man of the woods? There are races half civilized, and barbarous even, that dwell in towns, but the Indians we associate in our minds with the wilderness.

Oct. 27. 6.30 A. M. — To Island by boat.

The river still rises, — more than ever last night, owing to the rain of the 24th (which ceased in the night of the 24th). It is two feet higher than then. I hear a blackbird in the air; and these, methinks, are song sparrows flitting about, with the three spots on breast. Now it is time to look out for walnuts, last and hardest crop of the year?

I love to be reminded of that universal and eternal spring when the minute crimson-starred female flowers of the hazel are peeping forth on the hillsides, — when Nature revives in all her pores.

Some less obvious and commonly unobserved signs of the progress of the seasons interest me most, like the loose, dangling catkins of the hop-hornbeam or of the black or yellow birch. I can recall distinctly to my mind the image of these things, and that time in which they flourished is glorious as if it were before the fall of man. I see all nature for the time under this aspect. These features are particularly prominent; as if the first object I saw on approaching this planet in the spring was the catkins of the hop-hornbeam on

the hillsides. As I sailed by, I saw the yellowish waving sprays.

See nowadays concave chocolate-colored fungi passing into dust on the edges, close on the ground in pastures.

Oct. 28. Rain in the night and this morning, preparing for winter.

We noticed in a great many places the narrow paths by which the moose came down to the river, and sometimes, where the bank was steep and somewhat clayey, they had slid down it. The holes made by their feet in the soft bottom in shallow water are visible for a long time. Joe told me that, though they shed their horns annually, each new pair has an additional prong. They are sometimes used as an ornament in front entries, for a hat-tree (to hang hats on).

Cedar bark appeared to be their commonest string.

. . . . . .

These first beginnings of commerce on a lake in the wilderness are very interesting, — these larger white birds that come to keep company with the gulls, — if they only carry a few cords of wood across the lake.

. . . . . .

Just saw in the garden, in the drizzling rain, little sparrow-sized birds flitting about amid the dry cornstalks and the weeds, — one, quite slaty with black streaks and a bright-yellow crown and rump, which I think is the yellow-crowned warbler, but most of the others much more brown, with yellowish breasts

and no yellow on crown to be observed, which I think the young of the same. One flew up fifteen feet and caught an insect. They uttered a faint *chip*. Some of the rest were sparrows. I did not get good sight of the last. I suspect the former may be my *tull-lulls* of the Moosehead Carry.[1]

For a year or two past, my *publisher*, falsely so called, has been writing from time to time to ask what disposition should be made of the copies of "A Week on the Concord and Merrimack Rivers" still on hand, and at last suggesting that he had use for the room they occupied in his cellar. So I had them all sent to me here, and they have arrived to-day by express, filling the man's wagon, — 706 copies out of an edition of 1000 which I bought of Munroe four years ago and have been ever since paying for, and have not quite paid for yet. The wares are sent to me at last, and I have an opportunity to examine my purchase. They are something more substantial than fame, as my back knows, which has borne them up two flights of stairs to a place similar to that to which they trace their origin. Of the remaining two hundred and ninety and odd, seventy-five were given away, the rest sold. I have now a library of nearly nine hundred volumes, over seven hundred of which I wrote myself. Is it not well that the author should behold the fruits of his labor? My works are piled up on one side of my chamber half as high as my head, my *opera omnia*. This is authorship; these are the work of my brain. There was just one piece of good luck in the venture. The

[1] No, they were [*sic*].

unbound were tied up by the printer four years ago in stout paper wrappers, and inscribed, —

H. D. Thoreau's
Concord River
50 cops.

So Munroe had only to cross out "River" and write "Mass." and deliver them to the expressman at once. I can see now what I write for, the result of my labors.

Nevertheless, in spite of this result, sitting beside the inert mass of my works, I take up my pen to-night to record what thought or experience I may have had, with as much satisfaction as ever. Indeed, I believe that this result is more inspiring and better for me than if a thousand had bought my wares. It affects my privacy less and leaves me freer.[1]

Oct. 30. *Sunday.* A white frost this morning, lasting late into the day. This has settled the accounts of many plants which lingered still.

P. M. — To Hubbard's Meadow Wood.

I see tree sparrows in loose flocks, chasing one another, on the alders and willows by the brook-side. They keep up a general low and incessant twittering warble, as if suppressed, very sweet at this season, but not heard far. It is, as Wilson says, *like* a chip-bird, but this has a spot commonly on breast and a bright-chestnut crown. It is quite striped (bay and brown with dark) above and has a forked tail. I am not quite *sure* that I have seen them before. They are a chubby little bird, and have not the stripes on the

[1] [Channing, p. 84.]

breasts which the song sparrow has. The last, moreover, has not that striped bay and blackish and ash above. By the bathing-place, I see a song sparrow with his full striped breast. He drops stealthily behind the wall and skulks amid the bushes; now sits behind a post, and peeps round at me, ever restless and quirking his tail, and now and then uttering a faint *chip*. It is not so light beneath as the last.

The muskrat-houses are mostly covered with water now.

Saw a *Solidago nemoralis* in full flower yesterday. Here is the autumnal dandelion and fragrant everlasting[1] to-day.

What with the rains and frosts and winds, the leaves have fairly fallen now. You may say the fall has ended. Those which still hang on the trees are withered and dry. I am surprised at the change since last Sunday. Looking at the distant woods, I perceive that there is no yellow nor scarlet there now. They are (except the evergreens) a mere dull, dry red. The autumnal tints are gone. What life remains is merely at the foot of the leaf-stalk. The woods have for the most part acquired their winter aspect, and coarse, rustling, light-colored withered grasses skirt the river and the wood-side. This is November. The landscape prepared for winter, without snow. When the forest and fields put on their sober winter hue, we begin to look more to the sunset for color and variety.

Now, now is the time to look at the buds [of] the swamp-pink, — some yellowish, some, mixed with their

[1] [Two interrogation-points in pencil here.]

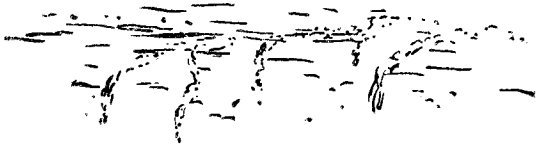
oblong seed-vessels, red, etc. The larger red maple buds have now two sets of scales, three in each. The water andromeda is still green. Along the Depot Brook, the great heads of *Aster puniceus* stand dry and fuzzy and singularly white, — like the goldenrods and other asters, — but some quite low are still green and in flower.

The prevalence of this light, dry color perhaps characterizes November, — that of bleaching withered grass, of the fuzzy gray goldenrods, harmonizing with the cold sunlight, and that of the leaves which still hang on deciduous trees.

The dead-looking fruit of the alders is now conspicuous.

Oct. 31. 7 A. M. — By river to Nawshawtuct.

Owing to the rain of the 28th, added to that of the 23d, the river has risen now probably more than three feet above where it was a week ago, yet wider over the meadows. Just at the edge, where it is mixed with grass and leaves, it is stiffened slightly this morning. On the hill, I see flocks of robins, flitting from tree to tree and peeping. It is a clear, cool, November-ish morning, reminding me of those peculiarly pleasant mornings in winter when there is a slight vapor in the atmosphere. The same without snow or ice. There is a fine vapor, twice as high as a house, over the flooded meadows, through which I see the whiter dense smoke



columns or streaks from the chimneys of the village, a cheerful scene. Methinks I see, far away toward the woods, a frozen mist (?) suspended against their sides.

What was that very heavy or thick, though not *very* large, hawk that sailed away from a hickory? The hemlock seeds are apparently ready to drop from their cones. The cones are mostly open. Now appears to be the very time for walnuts. I knock down showers with a stick, but all do not come out of the shells.

I believe I have not bathed since Cattle-Show. It has been rather too cold, and I have had a cold withal.

P. M. — By boat with Sophia to my grapes laid down in front of Fair Haven.

It is a beautiful, warm and calm Indian-summer afternoon. The river is so high over the meadows, and the pads and other low weeds so deeply buried, and the water is so smooth and glassy withal, that I am reminded of a calm April day during the freshets. The coarse withered grass, and the willows, and button-bushes with their myriad balls, and whatever else stands on the brink, are reflected with wonderful distinctness. This shore, thus seen from the boat, is like the ornamented frame of a mirror. The button-balls, etc., are more distinct in the reflection, if I remember, because they have there for background the reflected sky, but the actual ones are seen against the russet meadow. I even see houses a mile off, distinctly reflected in the meadow flood. The cocks crow in barn-yards as if with new lustiness. They seem to appreciate the day. The river is three feet and more

above the summer level. I see many pickerel dart away, as I push my boat over the meadows. They lie up there now, and fishing is over, except spearing. You can no longer stand on the true banks to fish, and the fish are too widely dispersed over the grassy-bottomed and shallow meadow. The flood and wind have washed up great quantities of cranberries loosened by the rake, which now line the shore, mixed with the wrecked grass and weeds. We gathered five quarts, partly frost-bitten. There are already myriads of snow-fleas on the water next the shore, and on the cranberries we pick in the wreck, as if they were peppered. When we ripple the surface, the undulating light is reflected from the waves upon the bank and bushes and withered grass. Is not this already November, when the yellow and scarlet tints are gone from the forest?

It is very pleasant to float along over the smooth meadow, where every weed and each stem of coarse grass that rises above the surface has another, answering to it and even more distinct, in the water beneath, making a rhyme to it, so that the most irregular form appears regular. A few scattered dry and clean (very light straw-colored) grasses are so cheap and simple a beauty thus reflected. I see this especially on Potter's meadow. The bright hips of the meadow rose, which we brush against with our boat, — for with sallows and button-bushes it forms islands, — are handsomer thus seen than a closer inspection proves.

Tansy lingers still by Hubbard's Bridge. But methinks the flowers are disappearing earlier this season than last.

I slowly discover that this is a gossamer day. I first see the fine lines stretching from one weed or grass stem or rush to another, sometimes seven or eight feet distant, horizontally and only four or five inches above the water. When I look further, I find that they are everywhere and on everything, sometimes forming conspicuous fine white gossamer webs on the heads of grasses, or suggesting an Indian bat. They are so abundant that they seem to have been suddenly produced in the atmosphere by some chemistry, — spun out of air, — I know not for what purpose. I remember that in Kirby and Spence it is not allowed that the spider can walk on the water to carry his web across from rush to rush, but here I see myriads of spiders on the water, making some kind of progress, and one at least with a line attached to him. True they do not appear to walk well, but they stand up high and dry on the tips of their toes, and are blown along quite fast. They are of various sizes and colors, though mostly a greenish-brown or else black; some very small. These gossamer lines are not visible unless between you and the sun. We pass some black willows, now of course quite leafless, and when they are between us and the sun they are so completely covered with these fine cobwebs or lines, mainly parallel to one another, that they make one solid woof, a misty woof, against the sun. They are not drawn taut, but curved downward in the middle, like the rigging of vessels, — the ropes which stretch from mast to mast, — as if the fleets of a thousand Lilliputian nations were collected one behind another under

bare poles. But when we have floated a few feet further, and thrown the willow out of the sun's range, not a thread can be seen on it.

I landed and walked up and down the causeway and found it the same there, the gossamer reaching across the causeway, though not necessarily supported on the other side. They streamed southward with the slight zephyr. As if the year were weaving her shroud out of light. It seemed only necessary that the insect have a *point d'appui;* and then, wherever you stood and brought the leeward side of its resting-place between you and the sun, this magic appeared. They were streaming in like manner southward from the railing of the bridge, parallel waving threads of light, producing a sort of flashing in the air. You saw five or six feet in length from one position, but when I moved one side I saw as much more, and found that a great many, at least, reached quite across the bridge from side to side, though it was mere accident whether they caught there, — though they were continually broken by unconscious travellers. Most, indeed, were slanted slightly upward, rising about one foot in going four, and, in like manner, they were streaming from the south rail over the water, I know not how far. And there were the spiders on the rail that produced them, similar to those on the water. Fifteen rods off, up the road, beyond the bridge, they looked like a shimmering in the air in the bare tree-tops, the finest, thinnest gossamer veil to the sun, a dim wall.

I am at a loss to say what purpose they serve, and am inclined to think that they are to some extent

attached to objects as they float through the atmosphere; for I noticed, before I had gone far, that my grape-vines in a basket in the boat had got similar lines stretching from one twig to another, a foot or two, having undoubtedly caught them as we paddled along. It might well be an electric phenomenon. The air appeared crowded with them. It was a wonder they did not get into the mouth and nostrils, or that we did not feel them on our faces, or continually going and coming amid them did not whiten our clothes more. And yet one with his back to the sun, walking the other way, would observe nothing of all this. Only stand so as to bring the south side of any tree, bush, fence, or other object between you and the sun. Methinks it is only on these very finest days late in autumn that this phenomenon is seen, as if that fine vapor of the morning were spun into these webs.

According to Kirby and Spence, "in Germany these flights of gossamer appear so constantly in autumn that they are there metaphorically called 'Der fliegender Sommer' (the flying or departing summer)." What can possess these spiders thus to run all at once to every the least elevation, and let off this wonderful stream? Harris tells me he does not know what it means. Sophia thought that thus at last they emptied themselves and wound up, or, I suggested, unwound, themselves, — cast off their mortal coil. It looks like a mere frolic spending and wasting of themselves, of their vigor, now that there is no further use for it, their prey, perchance, being killed or banished by the frost.