

IV

MARCH, 1854

(ÆT. 36)

March 1. Here is our first spring morning according to the almanac. It is remarkable that the spring of the almanac and of nature should correspond so closely. The morning of the 26th was good winter, but there came a plentiful rain in the afternoon, and yesterday and to-day are quite springlike. This morning the air is still, and, though clear enough, a yellowish light is widely diffused throughout the east, now just after sunrise. The sunlight looks and feels warm, and a *fine* vapor fills the lower atmosphere. I hear the phœbe or spring note of the chickadee, and the scream of the jay is perfectly repeated by the echo from a neighboring wood. For some days past the surface of the earth, covered with water, or with ice where the snow is washed off, has shone in the sun as it does only at the approach of spring, methinks. And are not the frosts in the morning more like the early frosts in the fall, — common white frosts?

As for the birds of the past winter: I have seen but three hawks, — one early in the winter and two lately; have heard the hooting owl pretty often late in the afternoon. Crows have not been numerous, but their cawing was heard chiefly in pleasanter mornings.

Blue jays have blown the trumpet of winter as usual, but they, as all birds, are most lively in springlike days. The chickadees have been the *prevailing* bird. The partridge common enough. One ditcher tells me that he saw two robins in Moore's Swamp a month ago. I have not seen a quail, though a few have been killed in the thaws. Four or five downy woodpeckers. The white-breasted nuthatch four or five times. Tree sparrows one or more at a time, oftener than any bird that comes to us from the north. Two pigeon woodpeckers, I think, lately. One dead shrike, and perhaps one or two live ones. Have heard of two white owls, — one about Thanksgiving time and one in midwinter. One short-eared owl in December. Several flocks of snow buntings for a week in the severest storm, and in December, last part. One grebe in Walden just before it froze completely. And two brown creepers once in middle of February. Channing says he saw a little olivaceous-green bird lately. I have not seen an *F. linaria*, nor a pine grosbeak, nor an *F. hyemalis* this winter, though the first was the prevailing bird last winter.

In correcting my manuscripts, which I do with sufficient phlegm, I find that I invariably turn out much that is good along with the bad, which it is then impossible for me to distinguish — so much for keeping bad company; but after the lapse of time, having purified the main body and thus created a distinct standard for comparison, I can review the rejected sentences and easily detect those which deserve to be readmitted.

P. M. — To Walden *via* R. W. E.'s.

I am surprised to see how bare Minott's hillside is already. It is already spring there, and Minott is puttering outside in the sun. How wise in his grandfather to select such a site for a house, the summers he has lived have been so much longer! How pleasant the calm season and the warmth — the sun is even like a burning-glass on my back — and the sight and sound of melting snow running down the hill! I look in among the withered grass blades for some starting greenness. I listen to hear the first bluebird in the soft air. I hear the dry clucking of hens which have come abroad.

The ice at Walden is softened, — the skating is gone; with a stick you can loosen it to the depth of an inch, or the first freezing, and turn it up in cakes. Yesterday you could skate here; now only close to the south shore. I notice the redness of the andromeda leaves, but not so much as once. The sand foliage is now in its prime.

March 2. A Corner man tells me that Witherell has seen a bluebird, and Martial Miles thought that he heard one. I doubt it. It may have been given to Witherell to see the first bluebird, so much has been withhelden from him.

What produces the peculiar softness of the air yesterday and to-day, as if it were the air of the south suddenly pillowed amid our wintry hills? We have suddenly a different sky, — a different atmosphere. It is as if the subtlest possible soft vapor were diffused through the atmosphere. Warm air has come to us

from the south, but charged with moisture, which will yet distill in rain or congeal into snow and hail.

The sand foliage is vital in its form, reminding me [of] what are called the vitals of the animal body. I am not sure that its arteries are ever hollow. They are rather meandering channels with remarkably distinct sharp edges, formed instantaneously as by magic. How rapidly and perfectly it organizes itself! The material must be sufficiently cohesive. I suspect that a certain portion of clay is necessary. Mixed sand and clay being saturated with melted ice and snow, the most liquid portion flows downward through the mass, forming for itself instantly a perfect canal, using the best materials the mass affords for its banks. It digs and builds it in a twinkling. The less fluid portions clog the artery, change its course, and form thick stems and leaves. The lobe principle, — lobe of the ear (*labor, lapsus?*).

On the outside all the life of the earth is expressed in the animal or vegetable, but make a deep cut in it and you find it vital; you find in the very sands an anticipation of the vegetable leaf. No wonder, then, that plants grow and spring in it. The atoms have already learned the law. Let a vegetable sap convey it upwards and you have a vegetable leaf. No wonder that the earth expresses itself outwardly in leaves, which labors with the idea thus inwardly. The overhanging leaf sees here its prototype. The earth is pregnant with law.

The various shades of this sand foliage are very agreeable to the eye, including all the different colors

which iron assumes, — brown, gray, yellowish, reddish, and clay-color. Perhaps it produces the greater effect by arranging the sands of the same color side by side, bringing them together.¹

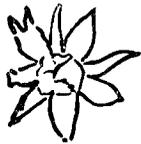
March 4. A dull, cloudy day.

P. M. — To Walden *via* Hubbard's Wood and foot of Cliff Hill.

The snow has melted very rapidly the past week. There is much bare ground. The checkerberries are revealed, — *somewhat* shrivelled many of them. I look along the ditches and brooks for tortoises and frogs, but the ditches are still full of dirty ice, and they are not yet seen in the brooks. In Hubbard's maple swamp I see the evergreen leaves of the gold-thread as well as the mitchella and large pyrola. I begin to sniff the air and smell the ground. In the meadow beyond I see some still fresh and perfect pitcher-plant leaves, and everywhere the green and reddish radical leaves of the golden senecio, whose fragrance when bruised carries me back or forward to an incredible season. Who would believe that under the snow and ice lie still — or in midwinter — some green leaves which, bruised, yield the same odor that they do when their yellow blossoms spot the meadows in June? Nothing so realizes the summer to me now. This past winter the sphagnum (?) in swamps and meadows has been frost-bitten and blackened, but last winter it was fresh and handsome. I see nowadays, the ground being laid bare, great cracks in the earth revealed, a third of an

¹ [*Walden*, pp. 337-339; Riv. 471, 472, 474.]

inch wide, running with a crinkling line for twenty rods or more through the pastures and under the walls, — frost-cracks of the past winter. Sometimes they are revealed through ice four or five inches thick over them. I observed to-day where a crack had divided a piece of bark lying over it with the same irregular and finely meandering line, *sometimes* forking. Yesterday I saw a wasp slowly stretching himself and, I think, a fly, outside of Minott's house in the sun, by his wood-shed. In the dry pasture under the Cliff Hill, the radical leaves of the johnswort are now revealed everywhere in pretty radiating wreaths flat on the ground, with leaves recurved, reddish above, green beneath, and covered with dewy drops. I can no longer get on to the river ice. I do not find any willow catkins started. A red maple which I cut bleeds somewhat, — only the upper side the cut however. Is not this the earliest distinct motion of the spring? This stood in water. Other trees were dry. Found a geiropodium (?), its globe now transparent, with the vermilion-colored remnants of others (?) lying in jelly about. In dry pastures I see that fungus — is it? — split into ten or twelve rays like a star and curved backward around a white bag or inner membrane. Were they not the seeds of rose-hips which I saw abundantly in some creature's dung? The various cladonias are now very plump and erect, not only exposed to view, the ground being bare, but flourishing on account of the abundant moisture, — some light, some dark green, and various more dusky shades.



In one or two places on the snow under the Cliffs I noticed more than a half-pint of partridge-droppings within a diameter of six inches. Were these all dropped in one night by one bird, or in the course of several nights, or by many birds? I saw that they had eaten the buds of the small blueberry *vacillans*. In their manure was what looked like woody fibres; may have been fibres of leaves. I am surprised to see how fresh and tender is the wintergreen bud, almost pure white. Was it so two months ago? It looks as if it had started under the snow. What is that gray beetle of which I found many under the bark of a large dead white pine, five eighths of an inch long, within an elliptical sort of log fort seven eighths of an inch or more in diameter piled around, of fibres of the sap-wood, perhaps one eighth or one tenth of an inch high, with some red bark chankings? Sometimes a curious chrysalis instead, like a very narrow and long bandbox with flat and parallel top and bottom, but highest at one end like a coffin. Also some white grubs stretch themselves, and some earwig-shaped creatures under the bark. I find that the ice of Walden has melted or softened so much that I sink an inch or more at every step, and hardly anywhere can I cut out a small cake, the water collects so fast in [the] hole. But at last, in a harder and drier place, I succeeded. It was now fifteen and a half inches thick, having lost about an inch and a half. Though the upper side was white and rotten and saturated with water for four or five inches, the under surface was still perfectly smooth and so far unchanged, yet ready to flake off, and did so readily in my hand, in

flakes a half-inch to an inch thick, leaving the irregular, undulating surface with which I am familiar. But this side was comparatively unchanged and hard, though for two and three quarters inches, measuring upwards, it was whitish, then for two and a half inches remarkably clear (free from air-bubbles) and hard. Then by successive layers it grew more white and soft till you reached the upper surface. I think that that slight white ice beneath the clear and dark may have been produced by the recent warmth of the water, though this is doubtful. At any rate this year the ice has melted *much* more above than beneath. Least of all between two and three quarters and five inches from the under side.

March 5. Sunday. Channing, talking with Minott the other day about his health, said, "I suppose you'd like to die now." "No," said Minott, "I've toughed it through the winter, and I want to stay and hear the bluebirds once more."

The patches of bare ground grow larger and larger, of snow less and less; even after a night you see a difference. It is a clear morning with some wind beginning to rise, and for the first time I see the water looking blue on the meadows.

Has not the johnswort two lives, in winter sending out radical shoots which creep flat on the ground under the snow, in the summer shooting upward and blossoming?

P. M. To Upper Nut Meadow.

The river is breaking up. The meadows are already

partly bare, for it has only been cold enough to form a thin ice on them since this last freshet, and the old ice still lies concealed on the bottom. Great fields of thick ice from the channel, or between the channel and meadows, are driven by the wind against the thick ice on the channel. Hence the meadow ice *appears* to break up first. The waves dash against the edge of the ice and eat into it fast.

As I go along on the snow under Clamshell Hill I hear it sing around me, being melted next the ground. This is a spring sound. I cannot yet see the mar-chantia (?) in the ditches, for they are yet filled with ice or flooded. I see no horse-tail (unless one) nor flags, etc., yet started in Nut Meadow, nor any minnows out. This brook has run clear of ice a long time. Near Jenny's its sides are strewn with the wreck of angelica stems and asters. I go along looking at its deep, sometimes yellow, shelving bottom, sprinkled with red pebbles. In the upper meadow the sweet-gale grows rankly along its edges, slanted over the water almost horizontally, so as frequently to meet and conceal it altogether. It is here a dark and sluggish water, comparatively shallow, with a muddy bottom. This sweet-gale is now full of fruit. This and the water andromeda are wild plants, as it were driven to the water's edge by the white man. Saw a wood tortoise at the bottom. A reptile out of the mud before any bird, and probably quadruped. Not yet a frog, I think. The down of some willow catkins by this brook *may have* started forward this spring, though it is doubtful. Those which look most forward now will not be

so a fortnight hence. It grew colder before I left. I saw some crystals beginning to shoot on the pools between the tussocks, shaped like feathers or fan-coral, — the most delicate I ever saw. Thus even ice begins with crystal leaves, and birds' feathers and wings are leaves, and trees and rivers with intervening earth are vast leaves.

Saw a small blackish caterpillar on the snow. Where do they come from? And crows, as I think, migrating northeasterly. They came in loose, straggling flocks, about twenty to each, commonly silent, a quarter to a half a mile apart, till four flocks had passed, and perhaps there were more. Methinks I see them going southwest in the fall.

March 6. A cool morning. The bare water here and there on the meadow begins to look smooth, and I look to see it rippled by a muskrat. The earth has to some extent frozen dry, for the drying of the earth goes on in the cold night as well as the warm day. The alders and hedgerows are still silent, emit no notes.

P. M. — To Goose Pond.

According to G. Emerson, maple sap sometimes begins to flow in the middle of February, but usually in the second week of March, especially in a clear, bright day with a westerly wind, after a frosty night. The brooks — the swift ones and those in swamps — open before the river; indeed some of the first have been open the better part of the winter. I saw trout glance in the Mill Brook this afternoon, though near its sources, in Hubbard's Close, it is still covered with

dark, icy snow, and the river into which it empties has not broken up. Can they have come up from the sea? Like a film or shadow they glance before the eye, and you see where the mud is roiled by them. Saw children checkerberrying in a meadow. I see the skunk-cabbage started about the spring at head of Hubbard's Close, amid the green grass, and what looks like the first probing of the skunk. The snow is now all off on meadow ground, in thick evergreen woods, and on the south sides of hills, but it is still deep in sprout-lands, on the north sides of hills, and generally in deciduous woods. In sprout-lands it is melted beneath, but upheld by the bushes. What bare ground we have now is due then not so much to the increased heat of the sun and warmth of the air as to the little frost there was in the ground in so many localities. This remark applies with less force, however, to the south sides of hills. The ponds are hard enough for skating again. Heard and saw the first blackbird, flying east over the Deep Cut, with a *tchuck, tchuck*, and finally a split whistle.

March 7. P. M. — To Annursnack.

I did not mention the drifts yesterday. Most of the snow left on bare, dry level ground consists of the remains of drifts, particularly along fences, — most on the south side. Also much that looks like snow is softened ice in the lower parts of fields. Looking from Annursnack, there is no perceptible difference as to snow between the north and south prospects, though the north one is not extensive; but the snowiest view is westward. Has this anything to do with there being

most snow inland? All the sides of steep hills are likely to be bare, washed bare by rain (?). I do not know why there should be so much snow in sprout-lands and deciduous woods, unless it is because the sun has had less chance to thaw the frosts which yet have been thick there.

It is remarkable how true each plant is to its season. Why should not the fringed gentian put forth early in the spring, instead of holding in till the latter part of September? I do not perceive enough difference in the temperature. How short a time it is with us! I see many little white or dirty white puff-balls, yellowish inside, commonly less than an inch in diameter, on bare cultivated fields, and, in pastures, some great chocolate-colored ones (within). Both yield their dust. Heard the first bluebird, — something like *pe-a-wor*, — and then other slight warblings, as if farther off. Was surprised to see the bird within seven or eight rods on the top of an oak on the orchard's edge under the hill. But he appeared silent, while I heard others faintly warbling and twittering far in the orchard. When he flew I heard no more, and then I suspected that he had been ventriloquizing; as if he hardly dared open his mouth yet, while there was so much winter left. It is an overcast and moist but rather warm afternoon. He revisits the apple trees, and appears to find some worms. Probably not till now was his food to be found abundantly. Saw some fuzzy gnats in the air. Saw where a partridge had been eating many prinos berries, now black and shrivelled. I suspect that they devour a great bulk, which has but

little nutriment. The radical leaves of the pinweeds are like the johnswort with leaves reflexed, — most of them closer and finer. They appear unaffected by frost. The radical leaves of the crowfoot everywhere are the commonest green, as soon as the snow goes off. You can hardly tell when it begins to spring. Saw mountain cranberry near Brooks's pigeon-place, very flat on the pasture, raying out from a centre six feet each way, more than three quarters of an inch thick in the middle. Did not know it was so woody. This one of the *winter-reds*, perfectly fresh and glossy. The river *channel* is nearly open everywhere. Saw, on the alders by the riverside front of Hildreth's, a song sparrow, quirking its tail. It flew across the river to the willows, and soon I heard its well-known dry *tehip*, *tehip*. Saw, methinks, what I called ephemerae last spring, — one on the water, three quarters of an inch long, narrow, gray-winged, several segments [?] curved on the back.

On winter-rye field, top of Annursnack, what looked like a *very large* hard core of a buttonwood ball — same color. Broke it with a stone and found it full of dark earth. Was it not my pigeon's-egg fungus turned dark and hardened?

March 8. Steady rain on the roof in the night, suggesting April-like warmth. This will help melt the snow and ice and take the frost out of the ground.

What pretty wreaths the mountain cranberry makes, curving upward at the extremity! The leaves are now a dark, glossy red, and wreath and all are of such a

shape as might fitly be copied in wood or stone or architectural foliages.

I wrote a letter for an Irishman night before last, sending for his wife in Ireland to come to this country. One sentence which he dictated was, "Don't mind the rocking of the vessel, but take care of the children that they be not lost overboard."

Lightning this evening, after a day of successive rains.

March 9. A. M. — Clearing up.

Water is fast taking place of ice on the river and meadows, and morning and evening we begin to have some smooth water prospects. Saw this morning a muskrat sitting "in a round form on the ice," or, rather, motionless like the top of a stake or a mass of muck on the edge of the ice. He then dove for a clam, whose shells he left on the ice beside him.

Boiled a handful of rock-tripe (*Umbilicaria Muhlenbergii*) — which Tuckerman says "was the favorite Rock-Tripe in Franklin's Journey" — for more than an hour. It produced a *black* pulp, looking *somewhat* like boiled tea leaves, and was insipid like rice or starch. The dark water in which it was boiled had a bitter taste and was slightly gelatinous. The pulp was not positively disagreeable to the palate. The account in "The Young Voyageurs"¹ is correct.

P. M. — To Great Meadows.

Peter H. says that he saw gulls (?) and sheldrakes

¹ [By Captain Mayne Reid.]

about a month ago, when the meadow was flooded. I detect the trout minnows not an inch long by their quick motions or quirks, soon concealing themselves. The river channel is open, but there is a very *thin* ice of recent formation over the greater part of the meadows. It is a still, moist, luring day, and the water is smooth. Saw several flocks of large grayish and whitish or speckled ducks, — I suppose the same that P. calls sheldrakes. They, like ducks commonly, incline to fly in a line about an equal distance apart. I hear the common sort of quacking from them. It is pleasant to see them at a distance alight on the water with a slanting flight, launch themselves, and sail along so stately. The pieces of ice, large and small, drifting along, help to conceal them, supply so many objects on the water. There is this last night's ice on the surface, but the old ice still at the bottom of the meadows. In the spaces of still open water I see the reflection of the hills and woods, which for so long I have not seen, and it gives expression to the face of nature. The face of nature is lit up by these reflections in still water in the spring. Sometimes you see only the top of a distant hill reflected far within the meadow, where a dull-gray field of ice intervenes between the water and the shore.

March 10. Misty rain, rain, — the third day of more or less rain.

P. M. — C. Miles road *via* Clamshell Hill.

Misty and mizzling. The radical leaves of the shepherd's-purse are common and fresh, also that early

thistle by Nut Meadow Brook, with much down webbed, holding the mist in drops. Each alder catkin has a clear drop at the end, though the air is filled with mist merely, which from time to time is blown in my face and I put up my umbrella. The hæomyces is very perfect and handsome to-day. It occurs to me that heavy rains and sudden meltings of the snow, such as we had a fortnight ago (February 26th), before the ground is thawed, so that all the water, instead of being soaked up by the ground, flows rapidly into the streams and ponds, is necessary to swell and break them up. If we waited for the direct influence of the sun on the ice and the influence of such water as would reach the river under other circumstances, the spring would be very much delayed. In the violent freshet there is a mechanic force added to the chemic. The willow catkins on the Miles [road] I should say had decidedly started since I was here last, and are all peeping from under their scales conspicuously. At present I should say that the vegetable kingdom showed the influence of the spring as much in the air as in the water, — that is, in the flowing of the sap, the skunk-cabbage buds, and the swelling of the willow catkins. I have detected very little, if anything, starting in brooks or ditches, for the first have far overflowed their banks and [are] full of rapid and sandy water, and the latter are still frequently full of ice. But probably that depends on the year, whether open or not. Saw a skunk in the Corner road, which I followed sixty rods or more. Out now about 4 P. M. — partly because it is a dark, foul day. It is a slender black (and white) animal, with its back re-

markably arched, standing high behind and carrying its head low; runs, even when undisturbed, with a



singular teeter or undulation, like the walking of a Chinese lady. Very slow; I hardly have to run to keep up with it. It has a long tail, which it regularly erects when I come too near and prepares to discharge its liquid. It is white at the end of the tail, and the hind head and a line on the front of the face, — the rest black, except the flesh-colored nose (and I think feet). The back is more arched and the fore and hind feet nearer together than in my sketch. It tried repeatedly to get into the wall, and did not show much cunning. Finally it steered, apparently, for an old skunk or woodchuck hole under a wall four rods off, and got into it, — or under the wall, at least, — for it was stopped up, — and there I view at leisure close to. It has a remarkably long, narrow, pointed head and snout, which enable it to make those deep narrow holes in the earth by which it probes for insects. Its eyes have an innocent, childlike, bluish-black expression. It made a singular loud patting sound repeatedly, on the frozen ground under the wall, undoubtedly with its fore feet (I saw only the upper part of the animal), which reminded me of what I have heard about your stopping and stamping in order to stop the skunk. Probably it has to do with its getting its food, — patting the earth

to get the insects or worms. Though why it did so then I know not.

Its track was small, round, showing the nails, a little less than an inch in diameter, alternate five or six inches by two or two and a half, sometimes two feet together. There is something pathetic in such a sight, — next to seeing one of the human aborigines of the country. I respect the skunk as a human being in a very humble sphere. I have no doubt they have begun to probe already where the ground permits, — or as far as it does. But what have they eat all winter?

The weather is almost April-like. We always have much of this rainy, drizzling, misty weather in early spring, after which we expect to hear geese.

March 11. Fair weather after three rainy days. Air full of birds, — bluebirds, song sparrows, chickadee (phæbe notes), and blackbirds. Song sparrows toward the water, with at least two kinds or variations of their strain hard to imitate. *Ozit, ozit, ozit, psat* ^{quick} *te te te te te ter twe ter* is one; the other began *chip chip che we*, etc., etc. Bluebirds' warbling curls in elms.

Shall the earth be regarded as a graveyard, a necropolis, merely, and not also as a granary filled with the seeds of life? Is not its fertility increased by this decay? A fertile compost, not exhausted sand.

On Tuesday, the 7th, I heard the first song sparrow chirp, and saw it flit silently from alder to alder. This pleasant morning after three days' rain and mist, they

generally forthburst into sprayey song from the low trees along the river. The developing of their song is gradual but sure, like the expanding of a flower. This is the first *song* I have heard.

P. M. — To Cliffs.

River higher than any time in the winter, I think, yet, there being some ice on the meadows and the tops of reflected trees being seen along its edges, Aunt thought the river had gone down and that this was the ground. Muskrats are driven out of their holes. Heard one's loud splash behind Hubbard's. It comes up, brown striped with wet. I could detect its progress beneath in shallow water by the bubbles which came up. I believe I saw to-day, and have for some time seen, lizards in water, wiggling away more swiftly than tadpoles or frogs. From the hill the river and meadow is about equally water and ice, — rich blue water and islands or continents of white ice — no longer ice in place — blown from this side or that. The distant mountains are all white with snow while our landscape is nearly bare. Another year I must observe the alder and willow sap as early as the middle of February at least. Fair Haven covered with ice. Saw a hawk. Goodwin saw a ground squirrel a fortnight ago and heard robin this morning. He has caught skunks in traps set for minks with a piece of muskrat. Says the fox and skunk eat huckleberries, etc. Nowadays, where snow-banks have partly melted against the banks by the roadside in low ground, I see in the grass numerous galleries where the mice or moles have worked in the winter.

March 12. A. M. — Up railroad to woods.

We have white frosts these mornings. This is the blackbird morning. Their sprayey notes and *conquerer* ring with the song sparrows' jingle all along the river. Thus gradually they acquire confidence to sing. It is a beautiful spring morning. I hear *my* first robin peep distinctly at a distance on some higher trees, — oaks or ? [*sic*], — on a high key. No singing yet. I hear from an apple tree a faint cricket-like chirp, and a sparrow darts away, flying far, *dashing from side to side*. I think it must be the white-in-tail, or grass finch. Saw either a large mouse or a ground squirrel on the snow near the edge of the wood, — probably the former. I hear a jay loudly screaming *phe-phay phe-phay*, — a loud, shrill chickadee's *phebe*. Now I see and hear the lark sitting with head erect, neck outstretched, in the middle of a pasture, and I hear another far off singing. Sing when they first come. All these birds do their warbling especially in the still, sunny hour after sunrise, as rivers twinkle at their sources. Now is the time to be abroad and hear them, as you detect the slightest ripple in smooth water. As with tinkling sounds the sources of streams burst their icy fetters, so the rills of music begin to flow and swell the general quire of spring. Memorable is the warm light of the spring sun on russet fields in the morning.

A new feature is being added to the landscape, and that is expanses and reaches of blue water.

C. says he saw a gull to-day.

P. M. — To Ball's Hill along river.

My companion tempts me to certain licenses of speech, *i. e.* to reckless and sweeping expressions which I am wont to regret that I have used. That is, I find that I have used more harsh, extravagant, and cynical expressions concerning mankind and individuals than I intended. I find it difficult to make to him a sufficiently moderate statement. I think it is because I have not his sympathy in my sober and constant view. He asks for a paradox, an eccentric statement, and too often I give it to him.

Saw some small ducks, black and white, — perhaps teal or widgeons. This great expanse of deep-blue water, deeper than the sky, why does it not blue my soul as of yore? It is hard to soften me now. I see no gulls myself. The time was when this great blue scene would have tinged my spirit more. Now is the season to look for Indian relics, the sandy fields being just bared. I stand on the high lichen covered and colored (greenish) hill beyond Abner Buttrick's; I go further east and look across the meadows to Bedford, and see that peculiar scenery of March, in which I have taken so many rambles, the earth just bare and beginning to be dry, the snow lying on the north sides of hills, the gray deciduous trees and the green pines soughing in the March wind — they look now as if deserted by a companion, the snow. When you walk over bare lichen-clad hills, just beginning to be dry, and look afar over the blue water on the meadows, you are beginning to break up your winter quarters and plan adventures for the new year. The scenery

is like, yet unlike, November; you have the same barren russet, but now, instead of a dry, hard, cold wind, a peculiarly soft, moist air, or else a raw wind. Now is the reign of water. I see many crows on the meadow by the water's edge these days. It is astonishing how soon the ice has gone out of the river, but it still lies on the bottom of the meadow. Is it peculiar to the song sparrow to dodge behind and hide in walls and the like? Toward night the water becomes smooth and beautiful. Men are eager to launch their boats and paddle over the meadows.

The spring birds have come a little earlier this year than last, methinks, and I suspect the spring may be earlier in the air, yet there is more ice and snow and frozen ground still, because the winter has been so much more severe.

I am surprised to find that water froze pretty thick in my chamber the night of the 14th of March, '53, after a fire in the evening, and that they were at work on the ice at Loring's on the 16th. This is very different weather. The ice is all out of the river proper, and all spoiled even on Walden.

March 13. To Boston.

C. says he saw skater insects to-day. Harris tells me that those gray insects within the little log forts under the bark of the dead white pine, which I found about a week ago, are *Rhagium lineatum*. Bought a telescope to-day for eight dollars. Best military spy-glass with six slides, which shuts up to about same size, fifteen dollars, and very powerful. Saw the squares

of achromatic glass from Paris which Clark(c?)¹ uses; fifty-odd dollars apiece, the larger. It takes two together, one called the flint. These French glasses all one quality of glass. My glass tried by Clark and approved. Only a part of the object (?) glass available. Bring the edge of the diaphragm against middle of the light, and your nail on object glass in line with these shows what is cut off. Sometimes may enlarge the hole in diaphragm. But, if you do so, you may have to enlarge the hole in diaphragm near small end, which must be exactly as large as the pencil of light there. As the diameter of the pencil is to the diameter of the available portion of the object glass, so is the power, — so many times it magnifies. A good glass because the form of the blurred object is the same on each side of the focus, — *i. e.*, shoved in or drawn out. C. was making a glass for Amherst College.

March 14. A. M. — Threatening rain after clear morning.

Great concert of song sparrows in willows and alders along Swamp Bridge Brook by river. Hardly hear a *distinct* strain. Couples chasing each other, and some tree sparrows with them.

R. W. E. saw a small bird in the woods yesterday which reminded him of the parti-colored warbler.

P. M. — To Great Meadows.

Raw thickening mists, as if preceding rain.

Counted over forty robins with my glass in the meadow

[Alvan Clark's name lacks the final "e."]

north of Sleepy Hollow, in the grass and on the snow. A large company of fox-colored sparrows in Heywood's maple swamp close by. I heard their loud, sweet, canary-like whistle thirty or forty rods off, sounding richer than anything yet; some on the bushes singing, *twee twee twa twa ter tweer tweer twa*,—this is the scheme of it only, there being no dental grit to it. They were shy, flitting before me, and I heard a slight susurrus where many were busily scratching amid the leaves of the swamp, without seeing them, and also saw many indistinctly. Wilson never heard but one sing, their common note there being a *cheep*. Saw fresh tracks in what looked like a woodchuck's hole. No ice visible as I look over the meadows from Peter's, though it lies at the bottom.¹ Scared up four black ducks from the flooded meadow on the right of the roadway as you go to Peter's. The water being rough on the meadows, they had apparently sought this smooth and shallow place shut in by the woods.

Alder scales are visibly loosened, their lower edges (*i. e.* as they hang) showing a line of yellowish or greenish. The pads in open warm ditches are now decidedly the greatest growth of this season, though I am not sure how much is due to last fall.

From within the house at 5.30 P. M. I hear the loud honking of geese, throw up the window, and see a large flock in disordered harrow flying more directly north or even northwest than usual. Raw, thick, misty weather.

¹ [Queried in pencil.]

March 15. Pleasant morning, unexpectedly. Hear on the alders by the river the *lill lill lill lill* of the first *F. hyemalis*, mingled with song sparrows and tree sparrows. The sound of Barrett's sawmill in the still morning comes over the water very loud. I hear that peculiar, interesting loud hollow tapping of a woodpecker from over the water.

I am sorry to think that you do not get a man's most effective criticism until you provoke him. Severe truth is expressed with some bitterness.

J. Farmer tells me his dog started up a lark last winter completely buried in the snow.

Painted my boat.

March 16. A. M. — Another fine morning.

Willows and alders along watercourses all alive these mornings and ringing with the trills and jingles and warbles of birds, even as the waters have lately broken loose and tinkle below, — song sparrows, blackbirds, not to mention robins, etc., etc. The song sparrows are very abundant, peopling each bush, willow, or alder for a quarter of a mile, and pursuing each other as if now selecting their mates. It is their song which especially fills the air, made an incessant and undistinguishable trill and jingle by their numbers. I see ducks afar, sailing on the meadow, leaving a long furrow in the water behind them. Watch them at leisure without scaring them, with my glass; observe their free and undisturbed motions. Some dark-brown partly on water, alternately dipping with their tails up, partly on land. These I think may be sum-

mer ducks.¹ Others with bright white breasts, etc., and black heads about same size or larger, which may be golden-eyes. *i. e.* brass-eyed whistlers.² They dive and are gone some time, and come up a rod off. At first I saw but one, then, a minute after, three. The first phoebe near the water is heard.

Saw and heard honey-bees about my boat in the yard, attracted probably by the beeswax in the grafting-wax which was put on it a year ago. It is warm weather. A thunder-storm in the evening.

March 17. Friday. A remarkably warm day for the season; too warm while surveying without my great-coat; almost like May heats.

4 P. M. — To Cliffs.

The grass is *slightly* greened on south bank-sides, — on the south side of the house. It begins to be windy. Saw a small gyrenus at the brook bridge behind Hubbard's Grove. The first tinge of green appears to be due to moisture more than to direct heat. It is not on bare dry banks, but in hollows where the snow melts last that it is most conspicuous. Fair Haven is open for half a dozen rods about the shores. If this weather holds, it will be entirely open in a day or two.

March 18. Saturday. Very high wind this forenoon; began by filling the air with a cloud of dust. Never felt it shake the house so much; filled the house with dust through the cracks; books, stove, papers covered

¹ Were they not females of the others?

² Probably both sheldrakes. *Vide* April 6 and 7, 1855.

with it. Blew down Mr. Frost's chimney again. Took up my boat, a very heavy one, which was lying on its bottom in the yard, and carried it two rods. The white caps of the waves on the flooded meadow, seen from the window, are a rare and exciting spectacle, — such an angry face as our Concord meadows rarely exhibit. Walked down the street to post-office. Few inhabitants out more than in a rain. Elms bending and twisting and thrashing the air as if they would come down every moment. I was cautious about passing under them. Yet scarcely a rotten limb in the street. The highest winds occur neither in summer, when the trees are covered with leaves, nor in winter, when they may be covered with ice. Saw a flattened toad on the sidewalk. Could it have been last year's? ¹

P. M. — Walked round by the west side of the river to Conantum.

Wind less violent. C. has already seen a yellow-spotted tortoise in a ditch. (Two sizable elms by river in Merriek's pasture blown down, roots being rotted off on water side.) The willow catkins this side M. Miles's five eighths of an inch long and show some red. Poplar catkins nearly as large, color somewhat like a gray rabbit. Old barn blown down on Conantum. It fell regularly, like a weak box pushed over, without moving its bottom,   the roof falling upon it a little to leeward. The hay is left exposed, but does not blow away. The river was at its height last night. Before this we saw many robins and sparrows under Clamshell

¹ Guess not.

Hill for shelter. Birds seek warm and sheltered places in such weather. It is very cold and freezing, this wind. The water has been blown quite across the Hubbard's Bridge causeway in some places and incrusted the road with ice. Before looking this way we had seen the whitened shore from Lupine Hill. It is blown and



dashes against the willows and incrusts them with ice, sometimes to the height of three feet, with icicles shaped like bulls' horns,

especially observable where many osiers stand together, and from the more horizontal osiers, etc., depend icicles, five or six inches long, very regularly, looking exactly like coarse rakes, apparently not the result of melting but of the spray and water blown or dashed upon them:

more regular. A  very wintry sight.

The water is in many places blown a rod on to the shore and frozen. Saw where a woodchuck (probably) had dug out quite a pile of gravel in the side of a hill.

March 19. Sunday. Cold and windy. The meadow ice bears where shallow. William Rice 2d (?) saw a woodchuck last Sunday. Met his father in Walden Woods, who described a flock of crows he had just seen which followed him "eying down, eying down."

Saw in Mill Brook behind Shannon's three or four shiners¹ (the first), poised over the sand with a distinct longitudinal light-colored line midway along their

¹ Mimnows?

sides and a darker line below it. This is a noteworthy and characteristic lineament, or cipher, or hieroglyphic, or type, of spring. You look into some clear, sandy-bottomed brook, where it spreads into a deeper bay, yet flowing cold from ice and snow not far off, and see, indistinctly poised over the sand on invisible fins, the outlines of a shiner, scarcely to be distinguished from the sands behind it, as if it were transparent, or as [if] the material of which it was builded had all been picked up from them. Chiefly distinguished by the lines I have mentioned.

Goodwin killed a pigeon yesterday.

Flint's Pond almost entirely open, — much more than Fair Haven.

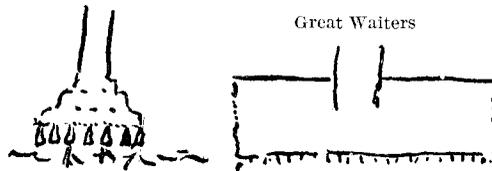
March 21. Tuesday. At sunrise to Clamshell Hill.

River skimmed over at Willow Bay last night. Thought I should find ducks cornered up by the ice; they get behind this hill for shelter. Saw what looked like clods of plowed meadow rising above the ice. Looked with glass and found it to be more than thirty black ducks asleep with their heads in [*sic*] their backs, motionless, and thin ice formed about them. Soon one or two were moving about slowly. There was an open space, eight or ten rods by one or two. At first all within a space of apparently less than a rod [in] diameter. It was 6.30 A. M., and the sun shining on them, but bitter cold. How tough they are! I crawled far on my stomach and got a near view of them, thirty rods off. At length they detected me and quacked. Some got out upon the ice, and when I rose up all took to

flight in a great straggling flock which at a distance looked like crows, in no order. Yet, when you see two or three, the parallelism produced by their necks and bodies steering the same way gives the idea of order.

March 22. Wednesday. P. M. — Launch boat and paddle to Fair Haven.

Still very cold. The most splendid show of ice chandeliers, casters, hour-glasses ($\frac{1}{2}$) that I ever saw or imagined about the piers of the bridges, surpassing any crystal, so large. Rather like the bases of columns,



—terraced pedestals, that is it, — the prototypes of the ornaments of the copings and capitals. Perfect and regular, sharp, cone-shaped drops hang from the first figure a few inches above the water. I should have described it then. It would have filled many pages. Scared up my flock of black ducks and counted forty together. See crows along the water's edge. What do they eat? Saw a small black duck with glass, — a dipper (?). Fair Haven still covered and frozen anew in part. Shores of meadow strewn with cranberries. The now silvery willow catkins (notwithstanding the severe cold) shine along the shore, over the cold water, and C. thinks some willow osiers decidedly more yellow.

March 23. Thursday. Snows and rains a little. The birds in yard active now, — hyemalis, tree sparrow, and song sparrow. The hyemalis jingle easily distinguished. Hear all together on apple trees these days. Minott confesses to me to-day that he has not been to Boston since the last war, or 1815. Aunt said that he had not been ten miles from home since; that he has not been to Acton since Miss Powers [?] lived there; but he declared that he had been there to cornwallis and musters. When I asked if he would like to go to Boston, he answered he was going to another Boston.

March 24. Fair again, the snow melting. Great flocks of hyemalis drifting about with their jingling note. The same ducks under Clamshell Hill. The elm buds were apparently expanded before this cold, which began on the 18th. Goose Pond half open. Flint's has perhaps fifteen or twenty acres of ice yet about shores. Can hardly tell when it is open this year. The black ducks — the most common that I see — are the only ones whose note I know or hear, — a hoarse, croaking quack. How shy they are!

March 25. Saturday. Cold and windy.

Down river in boat to Great Meadows.

Freezes on oars. Too cold and windy almost for ducks. They are in the smoother open water (free from ice) under the lee of hills. Got a boat-load of driftwood, — rails, bridge timber, planks, etc. White maple buds bursting, making trees look like some fruit trees with blossom-buds.

Is not the small duck or two I see one at a time and flying pretty high a teal? Willow osiers near Mill Brook mouth I am almost certain have acquired a fresher color; at least they surprise me at a distance by their green passing through yellowish to red at top.

March 26. River froze over at Lily Bay.¹

March 27. Saw a hawk — probably marsh hawk — by meadow.

March 28. P. M. — To White Pond.

Coldest day for a month or more, — severe as almost any in the winter. Saw this afternoon either a snipe or a woodcock; it appeared rather small for the last.² Pond opening on the northeast. A flock of hyemalis drifting from a wood over a field incessantly for four or five minutes, — thousands of them, notwithstanding the cold. The fox-colored sparrow sings sweetly also. Saw a small slate-colored hawk, with wings transversely mottled beneath, — probably the sharp-shinned hawk.

Got first proof of "Walden."

March 29. Wednesday. P. M. — To Fair Haven.

Coldest night. Pump froze so as to require thawing. Saw two marsh hawks (?), white on rump. A gull of

¹ ["Lily" is crossed out in pencil and "Willow?" substituted (the interrogation-point being Thoreau's).]

² Probably a snipe.

pure white, — a wave of foam in the air. How simple and wave-like its outline, the outline of the wings presenting two curves, between which the tail is merely the point of junction, — all wing  like a birch scale; tail remarkably absorbed.

Saw two white-throated, black-beaked divers fly off swiftly low over the water, with black tips of wings curved short downward.  Afterward saw one scoot along out from the shore upon the water and dive; and that was the last I could see of him, though I watched four or five minutes. Fair Haven half open; channel wholly open. See thin cakes of ice at a distance now and then blown up on their edges and glistening in the sun. Had the experience of arctic voyagers amid the floe ice on a small scale. Think I saw a hen-hawk, — two circling over Cliffs.

March 30. 6 A. M. — To Island.

First still hour since the afternoon of the 17th. March truly came in like a lamb and went out like a lion this year. Remarkably and continuously pleasant weather from the very first day till the 18th. Apparently an early spring, — buds and birds well advanced. — then suddenly very severe cold and high winds cold enough to skim the river over in broad places at night, and commencing with the greatest and most destructive gale for many a year, felt far and wide; and it has never ceased to blow since till this morning. Vegetation is accordingly put back. The ground these last cold (thirteen) days has been about bare of snow, but frozen. Some had peas and potatoes in before it.

First half of month very pleasant and mild spring weather, last half severe winter cold and high winds. The water at its highest, — not very high, — this month on the 17th. Ducks have been lurking in sheltered places not frozen. Robins feed along the edge of the river. At the Island I see and hear this morning the cackle of a pigeon woodpecker at the hollow poplar; had heard him tapping distinctly from my boat's place, $\frac{1}{4}$ + of a mile. Great flocks of tree sparrows and some *F. hyemalis* on the ground and trees on the Island Neck, making the air and bushes ring with their jingling. The former — some of them — say somewhat like this: *a che che, ter twee twee, tweer tweer twa*. It sounded like a new bird. The black ducks seem always to rise with that loud, hoarse croaking — quacking. The river early is partly filled with thin, floating, hardly cemented ice, occasionally turned on its edge by the wind and sparkling in the sun. If the sun had kept out of the way one day in the past fortnight, I think the river would have frozen to bear.

Read an interesting article on Étienne Geoffroy Saint-Hilaire, the friend and contemporary of Cuvier, though opposed to him in his philosophy. He believed species to be variable. In looking for anatomical resemblances he found that he could not safely be guided by function, form, structure, size, color, etc., but only by the relative position and mutual dependence of organs. Hence his *Le Principe des Connexions* and his maxim, "An organ is sooner destroyed than transposed," — "Un organ est plutôt altéré, atrophié, anéanti, que transposé." A principal formula

of his was, "Unity of Plan, Unity of Composition." (In the *Westminster Review*, January, 1854.)

March 31. Weather changes at last to drizzling.

In criticising your writing, trust your fine instinct. There are many things which we come very near questioning, but do not question. When I have sent off my manuscripts to the printer, certain objectionable sentences or expressions are sure to obtrude themselves on my attention with force, though I had not consciously suspected them before. My critical instinct then at once breaks the ice and comes to the surface.