

XII

AUGUST, 1855

(ÆT. 38)

Aug. 1. P. M. — To Conantum by boat.

Squirrels have eaten and stripped pitch pine cones. Small rough sunflower a day or two. *Diplopappus cornifolius* (how long?) at Conant Orchard Grove. In the spring there, which has not been cleared out lately, I find a hairworm, eight or nine inches long and big as a pin-wire; is biggest in the middle and tapers thence to tail; at head is abruptly cut off; curly in your fingers like the tendril of a vine. I spent half an hour overhauling the heaps of clamshells under the rocks there. Was surprised to find the anodon and the green-rayed clams there.

Pennyroyal and alpine enchanter's-nightshade well out, how long?

Young Adams of Waltham tells me he has been moose-hunting at Chesuncook. Hunted with a guide in evening without horn, it being too early to call them out. Heard the water dropping from their muzzles when they lifted their heads from feeding on the pads, as they stood in the river.

*Aug. 2. Silas Hosmer tells me of his going a-spear-
ing in Concord River up in Southboro once with some
friends of his. It is a mere brook there, and they went*

along the bank without any boat, one carrying a large basket of pine and another the crate and a third the spear. It was hard work. He afterward showed them how they did here, by going in *midsummer* with them and catching a great many.

Aug. 4. Just after bathing at the rock near the Island this afternoon, after sunset, I saw a flock of thousands of barn swallows and some white-bellied, and perhaps others, for it was too dark to distinguish them. They came flying over the river in loose array, wheeled and flew round in a great circle over the bay there, about eighty feet high, with a loud twittering as if seeking a resting-place, then flew up the stream. I was very much surprised at their numbers. Directly after, hearing a buzzing sound, we found them all alighted on the dense golden willow hedge at Shattuck's shore, parallel with the shore, quite densely leaved and eighteen feet high. They were generally perched five or six feet from the top, amid the thick leaves, filling it for eight or ten rods. They were very restless, fluttering from one perch to another and about one another, and kept up a loud and remarkable buzzing or squeaking, breathing or hum, with only occasionally a regular twitter, now and then flitting alongside from one end of the row to the other. It was so dark we had to draw close to see them. At intervals they were perfectly still for a moment, as if at a signal. At length, after twenty or thirty minutes of bustle and hum, they all settled quietly to rest on their perches, I supposed for the night. We had rowed up within a

rod of one end of the row, looking up so as to bring the birds between us and the sky, but they paid not the slightest attention to us. What was remarkable was: first, their numbers; second, their perching on densely leaved willows; third, their buzzing or humming, like a hive of bees, even squeaking notes; and fourth, their disregarding our nearness. I supposed that they were preparing to migrate, being the early broods.

Aug. 5. 4 A. M. — On river to see swallows.

They are all gone; yet Fay saw them there last night after we passed. Probably they started very early. I asked Minott if he ever saw swallows migrating, not telling him what I had seen, and he said that [he] used to get up and go out to mow very early in the morning on his meadow, as early as he could see to strike, and once, at that hour, hearing a noise, he looked up and could just distinguish high overhead fifty thousand swallows. He thought it was in the latter part of August.

What I saw is like what White says of the swallows, in the autumn, roosting "every night in the osier beds of the aits" of the river Thames; and his editor, Jesse, says, "Swallows in countless numbers still assemble every autumn on the willows growing on the aits of the river Thames." And Jardine, in his notes to Wilson, says that a clergyman of Rotherham describes in an anonymous pamphlet their assembling (in the words of the pamphlet) "at the willow ground, on the banks of the canal, preparatory to their migration,"

early in September, 1815, daily increasing in numbers until there were tens of thousands. Divided into bands every morning and sought their food. They finally left R. the 7th October.

As I was paddling back at 6 A. M., saw, nearly half a mile off, a blue heron standing erect on the topmost twig of the great buttonwood on the street in front of Mr. Prichard's house, while perhaps all within were abed and asleep. Little did they think of it, and how they were presided over. He looked at first like a spiring twig against the sky, till you saw him flap his wings. Presently he launched off and flew away over Mrs. Brooks's house.

It seems that I used to tie a regular granny's knot in my shoe-strings, and I learned of myself — rediscovered — to tie a true square knot, or what sailors sometimes call a reef-knot. It needed to be as secure as a reef-knot in any gale, to withstand the wringing and twisting I gave it in my walks.

The common small violet lespedeza out, elliptic-leaved, one inch long. The small white spreading polygala, twenty rods behind Wyman site, some time. Very common this year.

It is the wet season, and there is a luxuriant dark foliage. Hear a yellow-legs flying over, — *phe' phe phe, phe' phe phe.*

8 P. M. — On river to see swallows.

At this hour the robins fly to high, thick oaks (as this swamp white oak) to roost for the night. The wings of the chimney swallows flying near me make a whis-

ting sound like a duck's. Is not this peculiar among the swallows? They flutter much for want of tail. I see martins about. Now many swallows in the twilight, after circling eight feet high, come back two or three hundred feet high and then go down the river.

Aug. 6. P. M. — Down river to Tarbell Hill with C.

Saw a *Sternotherus odoratus*, caught by the neck and hung in the fork between a twig and main trunk of a black willow, about two feet above water, — apparently a month or two, being nearly dry. Probably in its haste to get down had fallen and was caught. I have noticed the same thing once or twice before. Hear the autumnal crickets.

At Ball's Hill see five summer ducks, a brood now grown, feeding amid the pads on the opposite side of the river, with a whitish ring, perhaps nearly around neck. A rather shrill squeaking quack when they go off. It is remarkable how much more game you will see if you are in the habit of *sitting* in the fields and woods. As you pass along with a noise it hides itself, but presently comes forth again.

The *Ludwigia sphaerocarpa* out maybe a week. I was obliged to wade to it all the way from the shore, the meadow-grass cutting my feet above and making them smart. You must wear boots here. The lespedeza with short heads, how long? These great meadows through which I wade have a great abundance of hedge-hyssop now in bloom in the water. Small St. John's-worts and elodeas, lanceolate loosestrife, arrow-

heads, small climbing bellflower, also horse-mint on the drier clods. These all over the meadow.

I see seven or eight nighthawks together; dull-buff breasts, with tails short and black beneath. The mole cricket creaks along the shore.

Meadow-haying on all hands.

Aug. 7. To Tarbell Hill again with the Emersons, a-berrying.

Very few berries this year.

Aug. 8. Blue-curls, how long? Not long.

Aug. 9. Elecampane, apparently several days. River is risen and fuller, and the weeds at bathing-place washed away somewhat. Fall to them.

Dana says a sprit is the diagonal boom or gaff, and hence a spritsail. Most fore-and-aft sails have a gaff and boom.

Aug. 10. P. M. — To Nagog.
Middle of huckleberrying.

Aug. 19. See painted tortoise shedding scales, — half off and loose.¹

Aug. 22. I hear of some young barn swallows in the nest still in R. Rice's barn, Sudbury.

Aug. 24. Scare up a pack of grouse.

¹ Again Sept. 10 and 15.

Aug. 25. In Dennis's field this side the river, I count about one hundred and fifty cowbirds about eight cows, running before their noses and in odd positions, awkwardly walking with a straddle, often their heads down and tails up a long time at once, occasionally flying to keep up with a cow, over the heads of the others, and following off after a single cow. They keep close to the cow's head and feet, and she does not mind them; but when all went off in a whirring (rippling?) flock at my approach, the cow (about whom they were all gathered) *looked off after them* for some time, as if she felt deserted.

Aug. 29. Saw two green-winged teal, somewhat pigeon-like, on a flat low rock in the Assabet.

Aug. 31. First frost in our garden. Passed in boat within fifteen feet of a great bittern, standing perfectly still in the water by the riverside, with the point of its bill directly up, as if it knew that from the color of its throat, etc., it was much less likely to be detected in that position, near weeds.