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SEPTEMBER, 1855

(ÆT. 38)

Sept. 2. Small locusts touched by frost, probably of the 31st August; nothing else in the woodland hollows.

Sept. 5. Wednesday. A stream of black ants a sixth of an inch long in the steep path beyond the Springs, some going, others returning, diagonally across the path two rods, and an inch or more wide, their further course obscured by leaves in the woods.

Sept. 10. I can find no trace of the tortoise-eggs of June 18, though there is no trace of their having been disturbed by skunks. They must have been hatched earlier. C. says he saw a painted tortoise a third grown, with a freshly killed minnow in his mouth as long as himself, eating it.

Thinking over the tortoises, I gave these names: rough tortoise, scented ditto, vermilion (rainbow, rail?), yellow box, black box, and yellow-spotted.

Sept. 11. Loudly the mole cricket creaks by mid-afternoon. Muskrat-houses begun.

Sept. 12. A few clams freshly eaten. Some grapes ripe.

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A HEN-HAWK

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Sept. 14. P. M. — To Hubbard's Close.

I scare from an oak by the side of the Close a young hen-hawk, which, launching off with a scream and a heavy flight, alights on the topmost plume of a large pitch pine in the swamp northward, bending it down, with its back toward me, where it might be mistaken for a plume against the sky, the light makes all things so black. It has a red tail; black primaries; scapulars and wing-coverts gray-brown; back showing much white and whitish head. It keeps looking round, first this side then that, warily.

I see no fringed gentian yet.

It costs so much to publish, would it not be better for the author to put his manuscripts in a safe?

Sept. 15. P. M. — Up Assabet.

See many painted tortoise scales being shed, half erect on their backs. An *Emys insculpta* which I mistook for dead, under water near shore; head and legs and tail *hanging down straight*. Turned it over, and to my surprise found it coupled with another. It was at first difficult to separate them with a paddle. I see many scales from the sternum of tortoises.

Three weeks ago saw many brown thrashers, cat-birds, robins, etc., on wild cherries. They are worth raising for the birds about you, though objectionable on account of caterpillars.

Sept. 16. As I go up the Walden road, at Breed's, Hubbard, driving his cows through the weed-field, scares a woodchuck, which comes running through

the wall and down the road, quite gray, and does not see me in the road a rod off. He stops a rod off when I move in front of him. Short legs and body flat toward the ground, *i. e.* flattened out at sides.

Sept. 19. Up Assabet.

Do I see wood tortoises on this branch only? About a week since, Mr. Thurston told me of his being carried by a brother minister to hear some music on the shore of a pond in Harvard, produced by the lapse of the waves on some stones.

Sept. 20. First decisive frost, killing melons and beans, browning button-bushes and grape leaves.

P. M. — Up main stream.

The great bittern, as it flies off from near the railroad bridge, filthily drops its dirt and utters a low hoarse *kwa kwa*; then runs and hides in the grass, and I land and search within ten feet of it before it rises. See larks in flocks on meadow. See blackbirds (grackle or red-wing or crow blackbird?).

Tried to trace by the sound a mole cricket, — thinking it a frog, — advancing from two sides and looking where our courses intersected, but in vain.

Opened a new and pretty sizable muskrat-house with no hollow yet made in it. Many tortoise-scales upon it. It is a sort of tropical vegetation at the bottom of the river. The palm-like potamogeton, — or ostrich-plumes.

Sept. 21. Stopped at the old Hunt house with Ricket-

son and C. The rafters are very slender, of oak, yet quite sound; the laths of split cedar (?), yet long and straight and as thin or thinner than our sawed ones. Between the boards and plastering, in all the lower story, at least, large-sized bricks are set on their edges in clay. Was it not partly to make it bullet-proof? They had apparently been laid from within after boarding, — from the fresh marks of the boards on the clay. An Egyptian-shaped fireplace or frame in the chamber / \ and painted or spotted panels to the door. / \ Large old-fashioned latches and bolts, blacksmith-made? The upper story projects in front and at ends seven or eight inches over the lower, and the gables above a foot over this. No weather-boards at the corners.

Sept. 22. Many tortoise-scales about the river now. Some of my driftwood — floating rails, etc. — are scented with muskrats; have been their perches; and also covered with a thick clear slime or jelly.

Sept. 23. Small sparrows, with yellow on one side above eye in front and white belly, erectile (?) crown divided by a light line. Those weeds, etc., on the bared meadow come up spontaneously.

8 P. M. — I hear from my chamber a screech owl about Monroe's house this bright moonlight night, — a loud, piercing scream, much like the whinner of a colt perchance, a rapid trill, then subdued or smothered a note or two.

A little wren-like (or female goldfinch) bird on a

willow at Hubbard's Causeway, eating a miller; with bright-yellow rump when wings open, and white on tail. Could it have been a yellow-rump warbler?

Sept. 24. P. M. — Up river to Conantum with C.

A very bright and pleasant fall day. The button-bushes pretty well browned with frost (though the maples are but just beginning to blush), their pale-yellowish season past. Nowadays remark the more the upright and fresh green phalanxes of bulrushes when the pontederias are mostly prostrate. The river is perhaps as low as it has been this year. Hardly can I say a bird sings, except a slight warble, perhaps, from some kind of migrating sparrow. Was it a tree sparrow, not seen?¹ The slender white spikes of the *Polygonum hydropiperoides* and the rose-colored ones of the front-rank kind, and rarely of the *P. amphibium*, look late and cool over the water. See some kalmiana lilies still freshly bloomed.

Above the Hubbard Bridge we see coming from the south in loose array some twenty apparently black ducks, with a silveriness to the under sides of their wings in the light. At first they were in form like a flock of blackbirds, then for a moment assumed the outline of a fluctuating harrow.

Some still raking, others picking, cranberries.

I suppose it was the solitary sandpiper (*Totanus solitarius*) which I saw feeding at the water's edge on Cardinal Shore, like a snipe. It was very tame; we did not scare it even by shouting. I walked along

¹ Probably a song sparrow.

the shore to within twenty-five feet of it, and it still ran toward me in feeding, and when I flushed it, it flew round and alighted between me and C., who was only three or four rods off. It was about as large as a snipe; had a bluish dusky bill about an inch and a quarter long, apparently straight, which it kept thrusting into the shallow water with a nibbling motion, a perfectly white belly, dusky-green legs; bright brown and black above, with duskier wings. When it flew, its wings, which were uniformly dark, hung down much, and I noticed no white above, and heard no note.

Brought home quite a boat-load of fuel, — one oak rail, on which fishers had stood in wet ground at Bittern Cliff, a white pine rider (?) with a square hole in [it] made by a woodpecker anciently, so wasted the sap as to leave the knots projecting, several chestnut rails; and I obtained behind Cardinal Shore a large oak stump which I know to have been bleaching there for more than thirty years, with three great gray prongs sprinkled with lichens. It bore above the marks of the original burning. There was a handful of hazelnuts under it emptied by the ground (?) squirrel, a pretty large hole in the rough and thin stem end of each, where the bur was attached. Also, at Clamshell Hill Shore, a chestnut boat-post with a staple in it, which the ice took up last winter, though it had an arm put through it two feet underground. Some much decayed perhaps old red maple stumps at Hubbard's Bath Place. It would be a triumph to get all my winter's wood thus. How much better than to buy a

cord coarsely from a farmer, seeing that I get my money's worth! Then it only affords me a momentary satisfaction to see the pile tipped up in the yard. Now I derive a separate and peculiar pleasure from every stick that I find. Each has its history, of which I am reminded when I come to burn it, and under what circumstances I found it. Got home late. C. and I supped together after our work at wooding, and talked it over with great appetites.

Dr. Aikin, in his "Arts of Life," says that "the acorns of warm climates are fit for human food."

Sept. 25. A very fine and warm afternoon after a cloudy morning. Carry Aunt and Sophia a-barberrying to Conantum. Scare up the usual great bittern above the railroad bridge, whose hoarse *qua qua*, as it flies heavily off, a pickerel-fisher on the bank imitates. Saw two marsh hawks skimming low over the meadows and another, or a hen-hawk, sailing on high.

Saw where the moles had been working in Conant's meadow, — heaps of fresh meadow mould some eight inches in diameter on the green surface, and now a little hoary.

We got about three pecks of barberries from four or five bushes, but I filled my fingers with prickles to pay for them. With the hands well defended, it would be pleasant picking, they are so handsome, and beside are so abundant and fill up so fast. I take hold the end of the drooping twigs with my left hand, raise them, and then strip downward at once as many clusters as my hand will embrace, commonly bring-

ing away with the raceme two small green leaves or bracts, which I do not stop to pick out. When I come to a particularly thick and handsome wreath of fruit, I pluck the twig entire and bend it around the inside of the basket. Some bushes bear much larger and plumper berries than others. Some also are comparatively green yet. Meanwhile the catbird mews in the alders by my side, and the scream of the jay is heard from the wood-side.

When returning, about 4.30 P. M., we observed a slight mistiness, a sea-turn advancing from the east, and soon after felt the raw east wind, — quite a contrast to the air we had before, — and presently all the western woods were partially veiled with the mist. Aunt thought she could smell the salt marsh in it. At home, after sundown, I observed a long, low, and uniformly level slate-colored cloud reaching from north to south throughout the western horizon, which I supposed to be the sea-turn further inland, for we no longer felt the east wind here.

In the evening went to Welch's (?) circus with C. Approaching, I perceived the peculiar scent which belongs to such places, a certain sourness in the air, suggesting trodden grass and cigar smoke. The curves of the great tent, at least eight or ten rods in diameter, — the main central curve and wherever it rested on a post, — suggested that the tent was the origin of much of the Oriental architecture, the Arabic perhaps. There was the pagoda in perfection. It is remarkable what graceful attitudes feats of strength and agility seem to require.

Sept. 26. Went up Assabet for fuel. One old piece of oak timber looks as if it had been a brace in a bridge. I get up oak rails here and there, almost as heavy as lead, and leave them to dry somewhat on the bank. Stumps, partially burned, which were brought by the feshet from some newly cleared field last spring; bleached oak trees which were once lopped for a fence; alders and birches which the river ice bent and broke by its weight last spring. It is pretty hard and dirty work. It grieves me to see how rapidly some great trees which have fallen or been felled waste away when left on the ground. There was the large oak by the Assabet, which I remember to have been struck by lightning, and afterward blown over, being dead. It used to lie with its top down-hill and partly in the water and its butt far up. Now there is no trace of its limbs, and the very core of its trunk is the only solid part, concealed within a spongy covering. Soon only a richer mould will mark the spot.

Sept. 27. Collecting fuel again this afternoon, up the Assabet.

Yesterday I traced the note of what I have falsely thought the *Rana palustris*, or cricket frog, to its true source. As usual it sounded loud and incessant above all ordinary crickets and led me at once to a bare and soft sandy shore. After long looking and listening, with my head directly over the spot from which the sound still came at intervals (as I had often done before), I concluded, as no creature was visible, that it must issue from the mud, or rather slimy sand. I noticed that the

shore near the water was upheaved and cracked as by a small mole-track and, laying it open with my hand, I found a *mole cricket* (*Gryllotalpa brevipennis*). Harris says that their burrows "usually terminate beneath a stone or clod of turf." They live on the roots of grass and other vegetables, and in Europe the corresponding species does a great deal of harm. They "avoid the light of day, and are active chiefly during the night." Have their burrows "in moist and soft ground, particularly about ponds." "There are no house crickets in America."

Among crickets "the males only are musical." The "shrilling" is produced by shuffling their wing-covers together lengthwise. French call crickets *cri-cri*. Most crickets die on approach of winter, but a few survive under stones.

See furrows made by many clams now moving into deep water.

Some single red maples now fairly make a show along the meadow. I see a blaze of red reflected from the troubled water.

Sept. 29. Go to Daniel Ricketson's, New Bedford.

At Natural History Library saw Dr. Cabot, who says that he has heard either the hermit, or else the olivaceous, thrush sing, — very like a wood thrush, but softer. Is sure that the hermit thrush sometimes breeds hereabouts.

De Kay, in the New York Reports, thus describes the blackfish:¹ —

¹ [The quotation is somewhat abridged.]

"FAMILY DELPHINIDÆ.

Genus *Globicephalus*. Lesson.

The Social Whale.

Globicephalus melas.*Delphinus melas*. Trail, Nicholson's Journal.*D. globiceps*. Cuvier, Mem. Mus. Vol. 19.*D. deductor*. Scoresby, Arct. Regions.*D. intermedius*. Harlan.*Phocena globiceps*. Sampson, Am. Journal."

"Length 15 to 20 feet;" "shining, bluish black above;" a narrow light-gray stripe beneath; "remarkable for its loud cries when excited."

"Black Whale-fish," "Howling Whale," "Social Whale," and "Bottle-head."¹ Often confounded with the grampus. Not known why they are stranded. In 1822 one hundred stranded in one herd at Wellfleet. First described in a History of Greenland. In the Naturalists' Library, Jardine, I find *Globicephalus deductor* or *melas*, "The Deductor or Ca'ing Whale." First accurately described by Trail in 1809. Sixteen to twenty-four feet long. In 1799 two hundred ran ashore on one of the Shetland Isles. In the winter of 1809-10, one thousand one hundred and ten "approached the shore of Hvalfiord, Iceland, and were captured."² In 1812 were used as food by the poor of Bretagne.³ They visit the neighborhood of Nice in May and June.

Get out at Tarkiln Hill, or Head of the River Station, three miles this side of New Bedford. Recognized an old Dutch barn. R.'s sons Arthur and Walter were

¹ [Cape Cod, p. 142; Riv. 170.] ² [Cape Cod, p. 146; Riv. 174.]

³ [Cape Cod, p. 144; Riv. 171.]

just returning from tautog-fishing in Buzzard's Bay, and I tasted one at supper. Singularly curved from snout to tail.¹

Sept. 30. Sunday. Rode with R. to Sassacowens Pond, in the north part of New Bedford on the Taunton road, called also Toby's Pond, from Jonathan Toby, who lives close by, who has a famous lawsuit about a road he built to Taunton years ago, which he has not got paid for; in which suit, he told us, he had spent thirty thousand dollars; employed Webster. Toby said the pond was called from the last of the Indians who lived there one hundred or one hundred and fifty years ago, and that you can still see his cellar-hole, etc., on the west side of the pond. We saw floating in the pond the bottom of an old log canoe — the sides rotted off — and some great bleached trunks of trees washed up. Found two quartz arrowheads on the neighboring fields. Noticed the ailanthus, or trees of heaven, about Toby's house, giving it a tropical look.

Thence we proceeded to Long Pond, stopping at the south end, which is in Freetown, about eight miles from R.'s. The main part is in Middleborough. It is about four (a man near by said five) miles long by seven eighths wide, measuring on the map of Middleborough and of the State, and fifteen feet deep, or twenty [in] some places, with at least three islands in it. This and the neighboring ponds were remarkably low. We first came out on to a fine, soft, white sandy beach,

¹ [Daniel Ricketson and his Friends, p. 337.]

two rods wide, near the southeast end, and walked westerly. It was very wild, and not a boat to be seen. The sandy bottom in the shallow water from the shore to three or four rods out, or as far as we could see, was thickly furrowed by clams, chiefly the common unio, and a great many were left dead or dying, high and dry, within a few feet of the water. These furrows, with each its clam at the end, though headed different ways, — all ways, — described various figures on the bottom; some pretty perfect circles, figure 6's and 3's, whip-lashes curling to snap, bow-knots, serpentine lines, and often crossing each other's tracks like the paths of rockets or bombshells. I never saw these furrows so numerous. Soon we came to a stony and rocky shore abutting on a meadow fringed with wood, with quite a primitive aspect. With the stones the clams ceased. Saw two places where invisible inhabitants make fires and do their washing on the shore, — some barrels or firkins, etc., still left. Some of the rocks at high-water mark were very large and wild, which the water had undermined on the edge of the woods. Here, too, were some great bleached trunks of trees, high and dry. Saw a box tortoise which had been recently killed on the rocky shore.

After walking in all about a third or half a mile, came again to a sandy shore, where the sand-bars lately cast up and saturated with water sank under us. There we saw, washed up dead, a great pickerel twenty-three inches long (we marked it on a cane), and there was projecting from its mouth the tail of another pickerel. As I wished to ascertain the size of the last, but could

not pull it out, — for I found it would part first at the tail, it was so firmly fixed, — I cut into the large one, though it was very offensive, and found that the head and much more was digested and that the smaller fish had been at least fifteen inches long. The big one had evidently been choked by trying to swallow too large a mouthful. Such was the penalty it had paid for its voracity. There were several suckers and some minnows also washed up near by.

They get no iron from these ponds now.

Went to a place easterly from the south end of this pond, called Joe's Rock, just over the Rochester line, where a cousin of Marcus Morton told us that one Joe Ashly secreted himself in the Revolution amid the fissures of the rocks, and, being supplied with food by his friends, could not be found, though he had enlisted in the army.

Returning, we crossed the Acushnet River where it took its rise, coming out of a swamp. Looked for arrowheads in a field where were many quahog, oyster, scallop, clam, and winkle (*Pyruca*) shells, probably brought by the whites, four or five miles, from the salt water. Also saw these in places which Indians had frequented.

Went into an old deserted house, the Brady house, where two girls who had lived in the family of R. and his mother had been born and bred, their father Irish, their mother Yankee. R. said that they were particularly bright girls and lovers of nature; had read my "Walden." Now keep school. Have still an affection for their old house. We visited the spring they had

used. Saw the great willow tree at the corner of the house, in which one of the girls, an infant in the cradle, thought that the wind began as she looked out the window, and heard the wind sough through it. Saw how the chimney in the garret was eked out with flat stones, bricks being dear.

Arthur Ricketson showed me in his collection what was apparently (?) an Indian mortar, which had come from Sampson's in Middleborough. It was a dark granite-like stone, some ten inches long by eight wide and four thick, with a regular round cavity worn in it four inches in diameter and one and one half deep, also a smaller one opposite on the other side.

He also showed me the perfect shell of an *Emys guttata*, with some of the internal bones, which had been found between the plastering and boarding of a meeting-house at the Head of the River (in New Bedford), which was seventy-five or eighty years old and was torn down fifteen or twenty years ago. Supposed to have crawled in when the meeting-house was built, though it was not very near water. It had lost no scales, but was bleached to a dirty white, sprinkled with spots still yellow.¹

¹ [Daniel Ricketson and his Friends, pp. 337-340.]