

## II

DECEMBER, 1855

(ÆT. 38)

*Dec. 3. Monday.* A pleasant day. No snow yet (since that first whitening which lasted so long), nor do I see any ice to speak of.

Hear and see, of birds, only a tree sparrow in the willows on the Turnpike. Met Goodwin going out with his gun. He shot (evidently) some crossbills once in Roxbury. He sometimes gets a skunk drowned in his muskrat or mink traps, and so can get at their secretion without being disturbed by the scent. He, too, has heard that it is a sure cure for the phthisic.

The fields and woods seem now particularly empty and bare. No cattle in pasture; only here and there a man carting or spreading manure.

Every larger tree which I knew and admired is being gradually culled out and carried to mill. I see one or two more large oaks in E. Hubbard's wood lying high on stumps, waiting for snow to be removed. I miss them as surely and with the same feeling that I do the old inhabitants out of the village street. To me they were something more than timber; to their owner not so.

*Dec. 4.* Melvin says that he shot a sheldrake once in the act of swallowing a perch seven or eight inches

long. He had got nothing to-day, for he forgot his caps.

A pleasant day and yet no snow nor ice. The younger osiers on Shattuck's row *do* shine.

*Dec. 6. 10 P. M.* — Hear geese going over.

*Dec. 8. Saturday.* Still no snow, — nor ice noticeable. I might have left my boat out till now. I have not worn gloves yet.

This afternoon I go to the woods down the railroad, seeking the society of some flock of little birds, or some squirrel, but in vain. I only hear the faint lisp of (probably) a tree sparrow. I go through empty halls, apparently unoccupied by bird or beast. Yet it is cheering to walk there while the sun is reflected from far through the aisles with a silvery light from the needles of the pine. The contrast of light or sunshine and shade, though the latter is now so thin, is food enough for me. Some scarlet oak leaves on the forest floor, when I stoop low, appear to have a little blood in them still. The shrivelled Solomon's-seal berries are conspicuously red amid the dry leaves. I visited the door of many a squirrel's burrow, and saw his nutshells and cone-scales and tracks in the sand, but a snow would reveal much more. Let a snow come and clothe the ground and trees, and I shall see the tracks of many inhabitants now unsuspected, and the very snow covering up the withered leaves will supply the place of the green ones which are gone. In a little busy flock of lispings birds, — chickadees or lesser redpolls, —

even in a nuthatch or downy woodpecker, there would have been a sweet society for me, but I did not find [it]. Yet I had the sun penetrating into the deep hollows through the aisles of the wood, and the silvery sheen of its reflection from masses of white pine needles.

Met Therien coming from Lincoln on the railroad. He says that he carried a cat from Jacob Baker's to Riordan's shanty in a bag in the night, but she ran home again. "Had they not a cat in the shanty?" I asked. "Yes," said he, "but she was run over by the cars and killed; they found her head on the track separated from her body, just below the pond." That cat of Baker's used to eat eggs and so he wished to get rid of her. He carried her in a bag to Waltham, but she came back.

Therien had several times seen where tortoises had been run over. They lie just under the rail, and put their heads out upon the rail to see what is coming, and so their heads are crushed. Also he has seen snakes cut in two. The men on the road told him that small birds were frequently run over.

Jacob Farmer brought me the head of a mink to-night and took tea here. He says that partridges sometimes fly against a house in the night, he thinks when started by a fox. His man found one in his barn this fall, which had come in in the night, and caught it before it could get out.

The mink has a delicate pard-like nose, cat-like. The long hairs are black or blackish, yet the general aspect is brown.

Farmer says he can call a male quail close to him

by imitating the note of the female, which is only a single faint whistle. He says if you take eggs out of a partridge's nest and put them back, you will find just as many cast out afterwards as you took out.

*Dec. 9.* A still, completely gray, overcast, chilly morning. At 8.30 a fine snow begins to fall, increasing very gradually, perfectly straight down, till in fifteen minutes the ground is white, the smooth places first, and thus the winter landscape is ushered in. And now it is falling thus all the land over, sifting down through the tree-tops in woods, and on the meadow and pastures, where the dry grass and weeds conceal it at first, and on the river and ponds, in which it is dissolved. But in a few minutes it turns to rain, and so the wintry landscape is postponed for the present.

*Dec. 10.* To Cambridge.

*Dec. 11.* P. M. — To Holden Swamp, Conantum.

For the first time I wear gloves, but I have not walked *early* this season.

I see no birds, but hear, methinks, one or two tree sparrows. No snow; scarcely any ice to be detected. It is only an aggravated November. I thread the tangle of the spruce swamp, admiring the leaflets of the swamp pyrus which had put forth again, now frost-bitten, the great yellow buds of the swamp-pink, the round red buds of the high blueberry, and the fine sharp red ones of the paniced andromeda. Slowly I worm my way amid the snarl, the thicket of black

alders and blueberry, etc.; see the forms, apparently, of rabbits at the foot of maples, and catbirds' nests now exposed in the leafless thicket.

Standing there, though in this *bare* November landscape, I am reminded of the incredible phenomenon of small birds in winter. That ere long, amid the cold powdery snow, as it were a fruit of the season, will come twittering a flock of delicate crimson-tinged birds, lesser redpolls, to sport and feed on the seeds and buds now just ripe for them on the sunny side of a wood, shaking down the powdery snow there in their cheerful social feeding, as if it were high midsummer to them. These crimson aerial creatures have wings which would bear them quickly to the regions of summer, but here is all the summer they want. What a rich contrast! tropical colors, crimson breasts, on cold white snow! Such etherealness, such delicacy in their forms, such ripeness in their colors, in this stern and barren season! It is as surprising as if you were to find a brilliant crimson flower which flourished amid snows. They greet the chopper and the hunter in their furs. Their Maker gave them the last touch and launched them forth the day of the Great Snow. He made this bitter imprisoning cold before which man quails, but He made at the same time these warm and glowing creatures to twitter and be at home in it. He said not only, Let there be linnets in winter, but linnets of rich plumage and pleasing twitter, bearing summer in their natures. The snow will be three feet deep, the ice will be two feet thick, and last night, perchance, the mercury sank to thirty degrees below zero. All the fountains of nature

seem to be sealed up. The traveller is frozen on his way. But under the edge of yonder birch wood will be a little flock of crimson-breasted lesser redpolls, busily feeding on the seeds of the birch and shaking down the powdery snow! As if a flower were created to be now in bloom, a peach to be now first fully ripe on its stem. I am struck by the perfect confidence and success of nature. There is no question about the existence of these delicate creatures, their adaptedness to their circumstances. There is superadded superfluous paintings and adornments, a crystalline, jewel-like health and soundness, like the colors reflected from ice-crystals.

When some rare northern bird like the pine grosbeak is seen thus far south in the winter, he does not suggest poverty, but dazzles us with his beauty. There is in them a warmth akin to the warmth that melts the icicle. Think of these brilliant, warm-colored, and richly warbling birds, birds of paradise, dainty-footed, downy-clad, in the midst of a New England, a Canadian winter. The woods and fields, now somewhat solitary, being deserted by their more tender summer residents, are now frequented by these rich but delicately tinted and hardy northern immigrants of the air. Here is no imperfection to be suggested. The winter, with its snow and ice, is not an evil to be corrected. It is as if it was designed and made to be, for the artist has had leisure to add beauty to use. My acquaintances, angels from the north. I had a vision thus prospectively of these birds as I stood in the swamps. I saw this familiar — too *familiar* — fact at a different angle, and

I was charmed and haunted by it. But I could only attain to be thrilled and enchanted, as by the sound of a strain of music dying away. I had seen into paradisaic regions, with their air and sky, and I was no longer wholly or merely a denizen of this vulgar earth. Yet had I hardly a foothold there. I was only sure that I was charmed, and no mistake. It is only necessary to behold thus the least fact or phenomenon, however familiar, from a point a hair's breadth aside from our habitual path or routine, to be overcome, enchanted by its beauty and significance. Only what we have touched and worn is trivial, — our scurf, repetition, tradition, conformity. To perceive freshly, with fresh senses, is to be inspired. Great winter itself looked like a precious gem, reflecting rainbow colors from one angle.

My body is all sentient. As I go here or there, I am tickled by this or that I come in contact with, as if I touched the wires of a battery. I can generally recall — have fresh in my mind — several scratches last received. These I continually recall to mind, reimpress, and harp upon. The age of miracles is each moment thus returned. Now it is wild apples, now river reflections, now a flock of lesser redpolls. In winter, too, resides immortal youth and perennial summer. Its head is not silvered; its cheek is not blanched but has a ruby tinge to it.

If any part of nature excites our pity, it is for ourselves we grieve, for there is eternal health and beauty. We get only transient and partial glimpses of the beauty of the world. Standing at the right angle, we are dazzled by the colors of the rainbow in colorless ice. From the

right point of view, every storm and every drop in it is a rainbow. Beauty and music are not mere traits and exceptions. They are the rule and character. It is the exception that we see and hear. Then I try to discover what it was in the vision that charmed and translated me. What if we could daguerreotype our thoughts and feelings! for I am surprised and enchanted often by some quality which I cannot detect. I have seen an attribute of another world and condition of things. It is a wonderful fact that I should be affected, and thus deeply and powerfully, more than by aught else in all my experience, — that this fruit should be borne in me, sprung from a seed finer than the spores of fungi, floated from other atmospheres! finer than the dust caught in the sails of vessels a thousand miles from land! Here the invisible seeds settle, and spring, and bear flowers and fruits of immortal beauty.

*Dec. 13.* This morning it is snowing, and the ground is whitened. The countless flakes, seen against the dark evergreens like a web that is woven in the air, impart a cheerful and busy aspect to nature. It is like a grain that is sown, or like leaves that have come to clothe the bare trees. Now, by 9 o'clock, it comes down in larger flakes, and I apprehend that it will soon stop. It does.

How pleasant a sense of preparedness for the winter, — plenty of wood in the shed and potatoes and apples, etc., in the cellar, and the house banked up! Now it will be a cheerful sight to see the snows descend and hear the blast howl.

Sanborn tells me that he was waked up a few nights ago in Boston, about midnight, by the sound of a flock of geese passing over the city, probably about the same night I heard them here. They go honking over cities where the arts flourish, waking the inhabitants; over State-houses and capitols, where legislatures sit; over harbors where fleets lie at anchor; mistaking the city, perhaps, for a swamp or the edge of a lake, about settling in it, not suspecting that greater geese than they have settled there.

*Dec. 14.* It began to snow again last evening, but soon ceased, and now it has turned out a fine winter morning, with half an inch of snow on the ground, the air full of mist, through which the smokes rise up perfectly straight; and the mist is frozen in minute leafets on the fences and trees and the needles of the pines, silvering them.

I stood by Bigelow the blacksmith's forge yesterday, and saw him repair an axe. He burned the handle out, then, with a chisel, cut off the red-hot edge even, there being some great gaps in it, and by hammering drew it out and shaped it anew, — all in a few minutes. It was interesting to see performed so simply and easily, by the aid of fire and a few rude tools, a work which would have surpassed the skill of a tribe of savages.

P. M. — To Pink Azalea Woods.

The warm sun has quite melted the thin snow on the south sides of the hills, but I go to see the tracks of animals that have been out on the north sides. First, getting over the wall under the walnut trees on the south

brow of the hill, I see the broad tracks of squirrels, probably red, where they have ascended and descended the trees, and the empty shells of walnuts which they have gnawed left on the snow. The snow is so very shallow that the impression of their toes is the more distinctly seen. It imparts life to the landscape to see merely the squirrels' track in the snow at the base of the walnut tree. You almost realize a squirrel at every tree. The attractions of nature are thus condensed or multiplied. You see not merely bare trees and ground which you might suspect that a squirrel had left, but you have this unquestionable and significant evidence that a squirrel has been there since the snow fell, — as conclusive as if you had seen him.

A little further I heard the sound [of] a downy woodpecker tapping a pitch pine in a little grove, and saw him inclining to dodge behind the stem. He flitted from pine to pine before me. Frequently, when I pause to listen, I hear this sound in the orchards or streets. This was in one of these dense groves of young pitch pines.

Suddenly I heard the screwing mew and then the whir of a partridge on or beneath an old decaying apple tree which the pines had surrounded. There were several such, and another partridge burst away from one. They shoot off swift and steady, showing their dark-edged tails, almost like a cannon-ball. I saw one's track under an apple tree and where it had pecked a frozen-thawed apple.

Then I came upon a fox-track made last night, leading toward a farmhouse, — Wheeler's, where there

are many hens, — running over the side of the hill parallel with Wheeler's new wall. He was dainty in the choice of his ground, for I observed that for a mile he had adhered to a narrow cow-path, in which the snow lay level, for smoothness. Sometimes he had cantered, and struck the snow with his foot between his tracks. Little does the farmer think of the danger which threatens his hens.

In a little hollow I see the sere gray pennyroyal rising above the snow, which, snuffed, reminds me of garrets full of herbs.

Now I hear, half a mile off, the hollow sound of woodchopping, the work of short winter days begun, which is gradually laying bare and impoverishing our landscape. In two or three thicker woods which I have visited this season, I was driven away by this ominous sound.

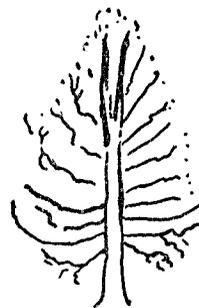
Further over toward the river, I see the tracks of a deer mouse on a rock, which suddenly come to an end where apparently it had ascended a small pine by a twig which hung over it. Sometimes the mark of its tail was very distinct. Afterwards I saw in the pasture westward where many had run about in the night. In one place many had crossed the cow-path in which I was walking, in one trail, or the same one had come and gone many times. In the large hollows where rocks have been blasted, and on the sides of the river, I see irregular spaces of dark ice bare of snow, which was frozen after the snow ceased to fall. But this ice is rotten and mixed with snow. I am surprised to see the river frozen over for the most part with this thin and

rotten snow ice, and the drooping or bent alders are already frozen into this slush, giving to the stream a very wintry aspect. I see some squirrel-tracks about a hole in a stump.

At the azalea meadow or swamp, the red tops of the osiers, which are very dense and of a uniform height, are quite attractive, in the absence of color at this season. Any brighter and warmer color catches our eye at this season. I see an elm there whose bark is worn quite smooth and white and bare of lichens, showing exactly the height at which the ice stood last winter.

Looking more closely at the light snow there near the swamp, I found that it was sprinkled all over (as with pellets of cotton) with regular star-shaped cottony flakes with six points, about an eighth of an inch in diameter and on an average a half an inch apart. It snowed geometry.

How snug and warm a hemlock looks in the winter! That by the azalea looks thus: There is a tendency in the limbs to arrange themselves ray-wise about a point one third from the base to the top. What singular regularity in the outline of a tree!



I noticed this morning successive banks of frost on the windows, marked by their irregular waving edges, like the successive five, ten, and fifteen fathom lines which mark the depth of the shores on charts.

Thus by the snow I was made aware in this short

walk of the recent presence there of squirrels, a fox, and countless mice, whose trail I had crossed, but none of which I saw, or probably should have seen before the snow fell. Also I saw this afternoon the track of one sparrow, probably a tree sparrow, which had run among the weeds in the road.

*Dec. 15.* This morning it has begun to snow apparently in earnest. The air is quite thick and the view confined. It is quite still, yet some flakes come down from one side and some from another, crossing each other like wool and warp apparently, as they are falling in different eddies and currents of air. In the midst of it, I hear and see a few little chickadees prying about the twigs of the locusts in the graveyard. They have come into town with the snow. They now and then break forth into a short sweet strain, and then seem suddenly to check themselves, as if they had done it before they thought.

The boys have skated a little within two or three days, but it has not been thick enough to bear a man yet.

How like a bird of ill omen the crow behaves! Still holding its ground in our midst like a powwow that is not to be exterminated! Sometimes when I am going through the Deep Cut, I look up and see half a dozen black crows flitting silently across in front and ominously eyeing down; passing from one wood to another, yet as if their passage had reference to me.

The snow turned to rain, and this afternoon I walk

in it down the railroad and through the woods. The low grass and weeds, bent down with a myriad little crystalline drops, ready to be frozen perhaps, are very interesting, but wet my feet through very soon. A steady but gentle, warm rain.

*Dec. 16.* Steady, gentle, warm rain all the forenoon, and mist and mizzling in the afternoon, when I go round by Abel Hosmer's and back by the railroad.

The mist makes the near trees dark and noticeable, like pictures, and makes the houses more interesting, revealing but one at a time. The old apple trees are very important to this landscape, they have so much body and are so dark. It is very pleasing to distinguish the dim outline of the woods, more or less distant, through the mist, sometimes the merest film and suspicion of a wood. On one side it is the plump and rounded but soft masses of pitch pines, on another the brushy tops of maples, birches, etc. Going by Hosmer's, the very heaps of stones in the pasture are obvious as cairns in one of Ossian's landscapes.

Saw two red squirrels on the fence, one on each side of his house, particularly red along their backs and top of head and tail. They are remarkably tame. One sits twirling apparently a dried apple in his paws, with his tail curled close over his back as if to keep it warm, fitting its curve. How much smothered sunlight in their wholesome brown red this misty day! It is clear New England, *Nov-anglia*, like the red subsoil. It is springlike.

As we go over the bridge, admire the reflection of

the trees and houses from the smooth open water over the channel, where the ice has been dissolved by the rain.

*Dec. 17. 9.30 A. M. — To Hill.*

A remarkably fine, springlike morning. The earth all bare; the sun so bright and warm; the steam curling up from every fence and roof, and carried off at [an] angle by the slight northwesterly air. After those rainy days the air is apparently uncommonly clear, and hence (?) the sound of cock-crowing is so sweet, and I hear the sound of the sawmill even at the door, also the cawing of crows. There is a little ice, which makes it as yet good walking, in the roads. The peculiar brightness and sunniness may be partly owing to the sun being reflected through the cleansed air from the more than russet, the bleached, surface of the earth. Methinks every squirrel will be out now. This is the morning. Ere long the wind will rise and this season will be over. There will probably be some wrack in the afternoon sky.

Columella says you must be careful not to carry out seeds in your manure and so have *segetes herbidas* (weedy crops).

*Dec. 18.* Saw to-day a dark-colored spider of the *very largest* kind on ice, — the mill-pond at E. Wood's in Acton.

J. Farmer says that he once tried to kill a cat by taking her by the legs and striking her head against a stone, but she made off, and in a week was about again,

apparently as well as ever, and he did not meddle with her again.

*Dec. 20.* Still no snow, and, as usual, I wear no gloves.

P. M. — To Hubbard's skating meadow.

A few chickadees busily inspecting the buds at the willow-row ivy tree, for insects, with a short, clear *chink* from time to time, as if to warn me of their neighborhood.

Boys are now devoted to skating after school at night, far into evening, going without their suppers. It is pretty good on the meadows, which are somewhat overflowed, and the sides of the river, but the greater part of it is open. I walk along the side of the river, on the ice beyond the Bath Place. Already there is dust on this smooth ice, on its countless facets, revealed by the sun. How warm the dull-red cranberry vine rises above the ice here and there! I stamped and shook the ice to detect the holes and weak places where that little brook comes in there. They were plainly revealed, for the water beneath, being agitated, proclaimed itself at every hole far and wide or for three or four rods. The edge of the ice toward the channel is either rubbed up or edged with a ridge of frozen foam.

I see *some* gossamer on the weeds above the ice. Also, in now hard, dark ice, the tracks apparently of a fox, made when it was saturated snow. So long his trail is revealed, but over the pastures no hound can now trace him. There has been much overflow about

every tussock in the meadow, making that rough, opaque ice, like yeast. I mark the many preparations for another year which the farmer has made, — his late plowings, his muck-heaps in fields, perhaps of grass, which he intends to plow and cultivate, his ditches to carry off the winter's floods, etc. How placid, like silver or like steel in different lights, the surface of the still, living water between these borders of ice, reflecting the weeds and trees, and now the warm colors of the sunset sky! The ice is that portion of the flood which is congealed and laid up in our fields for a season.

Dec. 21. Going to the post-office at 9 A. M. this very pleasant morning, I hear and see tree sparrows on Wheildon's pines, and just beyond scarce a downy woodpecker and a brown creeper in company, from near the base of a small elm within three feet of me. The former dashes off with a loud rippling of the wing, and the creeper flits across the street to the base of another small elm, whither I follow. At first he hides behind the base, but ere long works his way upward and comes in sight. He is a gray-brown, a low curve from point of beak to end of tail, resting flat against the tree.

P. M. — *Via* Hubbard's Grove and river to Fair Haven Pond. Return by Andromeda Ponds.

See only a jay (?) flying high over the fields, and chickadees. The last rarely seem to mind you, keeping busy at work, yet hop nearer and nearer. Hubbard's barren pasture under Fair Haven Hill, whose surface

is much broken, alternate sod and bare sand, is now tinged with the pale leather or cinnamon color of the second-sized pinweed, which thickly covers it.

I here take to the riverside. The broader places are frozen over, but I do not trust them yet. Fair Haven is entirely frozen over, probably some days. Already some eager fisherman has been here, this morning or yesterday, and I hear that a great pickerel was carried through the street. I see, close under the high bank on the east side, a distinct tinge of that red in the ice for a rod.

I remark the different pale colors to which the grasses have faded and bleached. Those coarse sedges amid the button-bushes are bleached particularly light. Some, more slender, in the Pleasant Meadow, is quite light with singular reddish or pinkish radical blades making a mat at the base. Some dense sedge or rushes in tufts in the Andromeda Ponds have a decided greenish tinge, *somewhat* like  well-cured hay.

A few simple colors now prevail. Even the apples on the trees have assumed the brown color of the leaves.

I do not remember to have seen the Andromeda Ponds so low. The weedy and slimy bottom is for the most part exposed. The slime, somewhat clay-colored, is collected here and there into almost organic forms, — manna[?]-like, with a skin to it. I make a nosegay of the sphagnum, which must suffer from this unusual exposure. It is frozen stiff at the base. What rugged castellated forms it takes at the base of the

andromeda which springs from it! Some is green or yellowish-green, some bright-crimson, some brown, some quite white, with different shades of all these colors. Such are the temples and cheeks of these soft crags. What a primitive and swampy wilderness for the wild mice to run amidst! — the andromeda woods!

Walden is skimmed over, all but an acre, in my cove. It will probably be finished to-night.<sup>1</sup>

No doubt the healthiest man in the world is prevented from doing what he would like by sickness.

*Dec. 22.* Dull overcast morning, so warm that it has actually thawed in the night, and there is a wet space larger than the ice on the sidewalk. It draws forth crowing from cockerels, as spring does rills from glaciers.

P. M. — Warm rain and frost coming out and muddy walking.

In reading Columella I am frequently reminded, not only by the general tone, but even by the particular warnings and directions, of our agricultural journals and reports of farmers' clubs. Often what is last and most insisted on among us, was most insisted on by the Romans. As when he says it is better to cultivate a little land well than a great deal ill, and quotes the poet: —

“ . . . Laudato ingentia rura,  
Exiguum colito.”

“Modus ergo, qui in omnibus rebus, etiam parandis agris adhibebitur: tantum enim obtinendum est, quanto est opus, ut emisse videamur quo potiremur,

<sup>1</sup> No, it proved too warm.

non quo oneremur ipsi, atque aliis fruendum eriperemus, more praeopotentium, qui possident fines gentium, quos ne circumire equis quidem valent, sed proculcandos pecudibus, et vastandos ac populandos feris derelinquunt, aut occupatos nexu civium, et ergastulis tenent.” (Therefore, as in all things, so in buying land moderation will be used; for only so much is to be obtained as is necessary, to make it appear that we have bought what we can use, not what we may be burdened with, and hinder others from enjoying, like those overpowerful ones who possess the territory of nations, which they cannot go round even with horses, but leave to be trampled by herds, and to be laid waste and depopulated by wild beasts, or keep occupied by *nexu civium*<sup>1</sup> and prisons.)

This reminds me of those extensive tracts said to belong to the Peter Piper estate, running back a mile or more and absorbing several old farms, but almost wholly neglected and run out, which I often traverse and am better acquainted with than their so-called owners. Several times I have had to show such the nearest way out of their wood-lots.<sup>2</sup> Extensive wood-lots and cranberry meadows, perhaps, and a rambling old country house on one side, but you can't buy an acre of land for a house-lot. “Where wealth accumulates and men decay.”

*Dec. 23.* P. M. — To Conantum-End.

<sup>1</sup> Confinement and compulsory labor on farms of fellow-citizens for debt.

<sup>2</sup> [*Excursions*, p. 185; Riv. 226.]

A very bright and pleasant day with remarkably soft wind from a little north of west. The frost has come out so in the rain of yesterday that I avoid the muddy plowed fields and keep on the grass ground, which shines with moisture. I think I do not remember such and so much pleasant, springlike weather as this and some other days of this month.

I admire those old root fences which have almost entirely disappeared from tidy fields, — white pine roots got out when the neighboring meadow was a swamp, — the monuments of many a revolution. These roots have not penetrated into the ground, but spread over the surface, and, having been cut off four or five feet from the stump, were hauled off and set up on their edges for a fence. The roots are not merely interwoven, but grown together into solid frames, full of loopholes like Gothic windows of various sizes and all shapes, triangular and oval and harp-like, and the slenderer parts are dry and resonant like harp-strings. They are rough and unapproachable, with a hundred snags and horns which bewilder and balk the calculation of the walker who would surmount them. The part of the trees above ground presents no such fantastic forms. Here is one seven paces, or more than a rod, long, six feet high in the middle, and yet only one foot thick, and two men could turn it up, and in this case the roots were six or nine inches thick at the extremities. The roots of pines growing in swamps grow thus in the form of solid frames or rackets, and those of different trees are interwoven with all so that they stand on a very broad foot and stand or fall together to some

extent before the blasts, as herds meet the assault of beasts of prey with serried front. You have thus only to dig into the swamp a little way to find your fence, — post, rails, and slats already solidly grown together and of material more durable than any timber. How pleasing a thought that a field should be fenced with the roots of the trees got out in clearing the land a century before! I regret them as mementoes of the primitive forest. The tops of the same trees made into fencing-stuff would have decayed generations ago. These roots are singularly unobnoxious to the effects of moisture.

The swamp is thus covered with a complete web of roots. Wild trees, such as are fitted to grow in the uncultivated swamps.

I detect the Irishman where the elms and maples on the causeway are cut off at the same height with the willows *to make pollards* of!

I sit on the hillside near the wall corner, in the further Conantum field, as I might in an Indian-summer day in November or October. These are the colors of the earth now: all land that has been some time cleared, except it is subject to the plow, is russet, the color of withered herbage and the ground finely commixed, a lighter straw-color where are rank grasses next water; sprout-lands, the pale leather-color of dry oak leaves; pine woods, green; deciduous woods (bare twigs and stems and withered leaves commingled), a brownish or reddish gray; maple swamps, smoke-color; land just cleared, dark brown and earthy; plowed land, dark brown or blackish; ice and water, slate-color or

blue; andromeda swamps, dull red and dark gray; rocks, gray.

At Lee's Cliff I notice these radical (?) leaves quite fresh: saxifrage, sorrel, polypody, mullein, columbine, veronica, thyme-leaved sandwort, spleenwort, strawberry, buttercup, radical johnswort, mouse-ear, radical pinweeds, cinquefoils, checkerberry, wintergreen, thistles, catnip, *Turritis stricta* especially fresh and bright. What is that fine very minute plant thickly covering the ground, like a young arenaria?

Think of the life of a kitten, ours for instance: last night her eyes set in a fit, doubtful if she will ever come out of it, and she is set away in a basket and submitted to the recuperative powers of nature; this morning running up the clothes-pole and erecting her back in frisky sport to every passer.

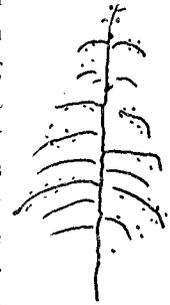
Dec. 25. 9 A. M. — Snow driving almost horizontally from the northeast and fast whitening the ground, and with it the first tree sparrows I have noticed in the yard. It turns partly to rain and hail at midday.

Dec. 26. After snow, rain, and hail yesterday and last night, we have this morning quite a glaze, there being at last an inch or two of crusted snow on the ground, the most we have had. The sun comes out at 9 A. M. and lights up the ice-incrusted trees, but it is pretty warm and the ice rapidly melts.

I go to Walden *via* the almshouse and up the railroad. Trees seen in the west against the dark cloud, the sun shining on them, are perfectly white as frostwork, and their outlines very perfectly and distinctly revealed,

great wisps that they are an all ghosts of trees, with recurved twigs. The walls and fences are encased, and the fields bristle with a myriad of crystal spears. Already the wind is rising and a brattling is heard overhead in the street. The sun, shining down a gorge over the woods at Brister's Hall, reveals a wonderfully brilliant as well as seemingly solid and diversified region in the air. The ice is from an eighth to a quarter of an inch thick about the twigs and pine-needles, only half as thick commonly on one side. Their heads are bowed; their plumes and needles are stiff, as if preserved under glass for the inspection of posterity.

Thus is our now especially slow-footed river laid up not merely on the meadows, but on the twigs and leaves of the trees, on the needles of the pines. The pines thus weighed down are sharp-pointed at top and remind me of firs and even hemlocks, their drooping boughs being wrapped about them like the folds of a cloak or a shawl. The crust is already strewn with bits of the green needles which have been broken off. Frequently the whole top stands up bare, while the middle and lower branches are drooping and massed together, resting on one another.



But the low and spreading weeds in the fields and the wood-paths are the most interesting. Here are asters, savory-leaved, whose flat imbricated calyxes, three quarters of an inch over, are surmounted and inclosed in a perfectly transparent ice

button, like a glass knob, through which you see the reflections of the brown calyx. These are very common. Each little blue-curls calyx has a spherical button like those brass ones on little boys' jackets, — little sprigs on them, — and the pennyroyal has still smaller spheres, more regularly arranged about its stem, chandelier-wise, and still smells through the ice. The finest grasses support the most wonderful burdens of ice and most branched on their minute threads. These weeds are spread and arched over into the snow again, — countless little arches a few inches high, each cased in ice, which you break with a tinkling crash at each step.



The scarlet fruit of the cockspur lichen, seen glowing through the more opaque whitish or snowy crust of a stump, is, on close inspection, the richest sight of all, for the scarlet is increased and multiplied by reflection through the bubbles and hemispherical surfaces of the crust, as if it covered some vermilion grain thickly strewn. And the brown cup lichens stand in their midst. The whole rough bark, too, is encased.

Already a squirrel has perforated the crust above the mouth of his burrow, here and there by the side of the path, and left some empty acorn shells on the snow. He has shovelled out this morning before the snow was frozen on his door-step.

Now, at 10 A. M., there blows a very strong wind from the northwest, and it grows cold apace.

Particularly are we attracted in the winter by greenness and signs of growth, as the green and white shoots of grass and weeds, pulled or floating on the water, and also by color, as cockspur lichens and crimson birds, etc.

Thorny bushes look more thorny than ever; each thorn is prolonged and exaggerated.

Some boys have come out to a wood-side hill to coast. It must be sport to them, lying on their stomachs, to hear their sled cronching the crystallized weeds when they have reached the more weedy pasture below.

4 P. M. — Up railroad.

Since the sun has risen higher and fairly triumphed over the clouds, the ice has glistened with all the prismatic hues. On the trees it is now considerably dissipated, but rather owing to the wind than the sun. The ice is chiefly on the upper and on the storm side of twigs, etc. The whole top of the pine forest, as seen miles off in the horizon, is of sharp points, the leading shoots with a few plumes, even more so than I have drawn on the last page but one.

It has grown cold, and the crust bears. The weeds and grasses, being so thickened by this coat of ice, appear much more numerous in the fields. It is surprising what a bristling crop they are. The sun is gone before five. Just before I looked for rainbow flocks in the west, but saw none, — only some small *pink-dun* (?) clouds. In the east still larger ones, which after sunset turned to pale slate.

In a true history or biography, of how little consequence those events of which so much is commonly made! For example, how difficult for a man to remember in what towns or houses he has lived, or when! Yet one of the first steps of his biographer will be to establish these facts, and he will thus give an undue importance to many of them. I find in my Journal that the most important events in my life, if recorded at all, are not dated.

*Dec. 27.* Recalled this evening, with the aid of Mother, the various houses (and towns) in which I have lived and some events of my life.

Born, July 12, 1817, in the *Minott House*, on the Virginia Road, where Father occupied Grandmother's thirds, carrying on the farm. The Catherines the other half of the house. Bob Catherines and John threw up the turkeys. Lived there about eight months. Si Merriam next neighbor. Uncle David died when I was six weeks old. I was baptized in old M. H. by Dr. Ripley, when I was three months, and did not cry.

The *Red House*, where Grandmother lived, we the west side till October, 1818, hiring of Josiah Davis, agent for Woodwards. (There were Cousin Charles and Uncle C. more or less.) Accord-

ing to day-book, Father hired of Proctor, October 16, 1818, and shop of *Spaulding*, November 10, 1818. Day-book first used by Grandfather, dated 1797. His part cut out and used by Father in Concord in 1808-9, and in Chelmsford, 1818-19-20-21. till March, 1821. (Last charge in Chelmsford about middle of March, 1821.) Aunt Sarah taught me to walk there when fourteen months old. Lived next the meeting-house, where they kept the powder in the garret. Father kept shop and painted signs, etc.

*Chelmsford,*

*Pope's House,*

at South End in Boston, five or six (?) months, a ten-footer. Moved from Chelmsford through Concord, and may have tarried in Concord a little while. Day-book says, "Moved to Pinkney Street Sep 10th 1821 on Monday."

*Whitwell's House,* Pinckney Street, Boston, to March, 1823 (?).

*Brick House,*

Concord, to spring of 1826.

*Davis's House*

(next to S. Hoar's) to May 7th, 1827.

*Shattuck House*  
(Hollis Hall,

(now William Monroe's) to spring of 1835. (Hollis, Cambridge, 1833.)

Cambridge)

*Aunt's House,*

to spring of 1837. At Brownson's

(Hollis Hall and  
Canton) while teaching in winter of 1835.  
Went to New York with Father,  
peddling, in 1836.

*Parkman House*, to fall of 1844. Was graduated in  
(Hollis, 1837. Kept town school a fortnight  
Cambridge) in 1837 (?). Began the big Red  
Journal, October, 1837. Found first  
arrowheads, fall of 1837. Wrote a  
lecture (my first) on Society, March  
14th, 1838, and read it before the  
Lyceum in the Masons' Hall,  
April 11th, 1838. Went to Maine  
for a school in May, 1838. Com-  
menced school in the house in  
summer of 1838. Wrote an essay  
on Sound and Silence, December,  
1838. Fall of 1839 up Merrimack  
to White Mountains. "Aulus Per-  
sius Flaccus," first printed paper of  
consequence, February 10th, 1840.  
The Red Journal of 546 pages ended,  
June, 1840. Journal of 396 pages  
ended January 31st, 1841. Went to  
(R. W. E.'s) R. W. E.'s in spring of 1841 and  
stayed there to summer of 1843.

(William Emer-  
son's, Staten Is-  
land) Went to Staten Island, June, 1843,<sup>1</sup>  
and returned in December, 1843, or  
to Thanksgiving. Made pencils in  
1844.

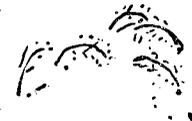
<sup>1</sup> [It was really in May of that year that he went to Staten Island.  
See *Familiar Letters*, p. 68; Riv. 79, 80.]

*Texas House*, to August 29th, 1850. At Walden,  
(Walden) July, 1845, to fall of 1847, then at  
(R. W. E.'s) R. W. E.'s to fall of 1848, or while  
he was in Europe.

*Yellow House*, reformed, till present.

Dec. 28. P. M. — Hollowell place and back near  
Hubbard's Bridge.

To-day and yesterday the boys have been skating on  
the crust in the streets, — it is so hard, the snow being  
very shallow. Considerable ice still clings to the rails  
and trees and especially weeds, though much attenu-  
ated. The birches were most bent —  
and are still — in hollows on the north  
sides of hills. Saw some rabbit's fur  
on the crust and some (apparently  
bird?) droppings, since the sleet fell, — a few pinches  
of fur the only trace of the murder. Was it a hawk's  
work? Crossed the river on the ice in front of Puffer's.  
What do the birds do when the seeds and bark are thus  
encased in ice?



Dec. 29. Down railroad to Andromeda Ponds.

I occasionally see a small snowflake in the air against  
the woods. It is quite cold, and a serious storm seems  
to be beginning. Just before reaching the Cut I see  
a shrike flying low beneath the level of the railroad,  
which rises and alights on the topmost twig of an elm  
within four or five rods. All ash or bluish-slate above  
down to middle of wings; dirty-white breast, and a  
broad black mark through eyes on side of head; pri-

marics (?) black, and some white appears when it flies. Most distinctive its small hooked bill (upper mandible). It makes no sound, but flits to the *top* of an oak further off. Probably a male.

Am surprised to find eight or ten acres of Walden still open, notwithstanding the cold of the 26th, 27th, and 28th and of to-day. It must be owing to the wind partly. If quite cold, it will probably freeze to-night.<sup>1</sup>

I find in the andromeda bushes in the Andromeda Ponds a great many nests apparently of the red-wing (?)<sup>2</sup> suspended after their fashion amid the twigs of the andromeda, each now filled with ice. I count twenty-one within fifteen rods of a centre, and have no doubt there are a hundred in that large swamp, for I only looked about the edge part way. It is remarkable that I do not remember to have seen flocks of these birds there. It is an admirable place for them, these swamps are so impassable and the andromeda so dense. It would seem that they steal away to breed here, are not noisy here as along the river.<sup>3</sup>

I never knew, or rather do not remember, the crust so strong [and] hard as it is now and has been for three days. You can skate over it as on ice in any direction. I see the tracks of skaters on all the roads, and they seem hardly to prefer the ice. Above Abiel Wheeler's, on the back road, the crust is not broken yet, though many sleds and sleighs have passed. The tracks of the skaters are as conspicuous [as] any there. But the snow is but two or three inches deep. Jonas Potter

<sup>1</sup> Not quite. Say the night of the 30th.

<sup>2</sup> Yes.

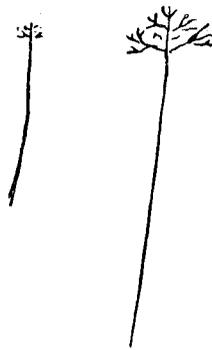
<sup>3</sup> *Vide* next page.

tells me that [he] has known the crust on snow two feet deep to be as strong as this, so that he could drive his sled anywhere over the walls; so that he cut off the trees in Jenny's lot three feet from the ground, and cut again after the snow was melted.

When two men, Billings and Prichard, were dividing the stock of my father and Hurd, the former acting for Father, P. was rather tight for Hurd. They came to a cracked bowl, at which P. hesitated and asked, "Well, what shall we do with this?" B. took it in haste and broke it, and, presenting him one piece, said, "There, that is your half and this is ours."

A good time to walk in swamps, there being ice but no snow to speak of,—all crust. It is a good walk along the edge of the river, the wild side, amid the button-bushes and willows. The eupatorium stalks still stand there, with their brown hemispheres of little twigs, orreries.

The nests of last page are suspended very securely between eight or ten andromeda stems, about half-way up them; made of more or less coarse grass or sedge without, then about half an inch of *dense and fine, now frozen sphagnum*, then fine wild grass or sedge very regularly, and sometimes another layer of sphagnum and of fine grass above these, the whole an inch thick, the bottom commonly rounded. The outside grasses are well twisted about whatever andromeda stems stand at or near the river. I saw the traces of mice in some of them.



Dec. 30. The snow which began last night has continued to fall very silently but steadily, and now it is not far from a foot deep, much the most we have had yet: a dry, light, powdery snow. When I come down I see it in miniature drifts against the panes, alternately streaked dark and light as it is more or less dense. A remarkable, perfectly regular conical peak, a foot high, with concave sides, stands in the fireplace under the sink-room chimney. The pump has a regular conical Persian (?) cap, and every post about the house a similar one. It is quite light, but has not drifted. About 9 A. M. it ceases, and the sun comes out, and shines dazzlingly over the white surface. Every neighbor is shovelling out, and hear the sound of shovels scraping on door-steps. Winter now first fairly commenced, I feel.

The places which are slowest to freeze in our river are, first, *on account of warmth as well as motion*, where a brook comes in, and also probably where are springs in banks and under bridges: then, on account of shallowness and rapidity, at bends. I perceive that the cold respects the same places every winter. In the dark, or after a heavy snow, I know well where to cross the river most safely. Where the river is most like a lake, broad with a deep and muddy bottom, there it freezes first and thickest. The open water at a bend seems to be owing to the swiftness of the current, and this to the shallowness, and this to the sands taken out of the opposing bank and deposited there.

There was yesterday eight or ten acres of open water at the west end of Walden, where is depth and breadth combined.

What a *horrid* shaggy and stiff low wilderness were the Andromeda Ponds yesterday! What then must they have been on the 21st! As it was, it was as if I walked through a forest of glass (with a tough woody core) up to my middle. That dense tufted grass with a greenish tinge was still stiffly coated with ice, as well

as everything else, and my shoes were filled with the fragments, but here and there the crimson sphagnum blushed through the crust beneath. Think of that dense grass, a *horrid* stiff crop,

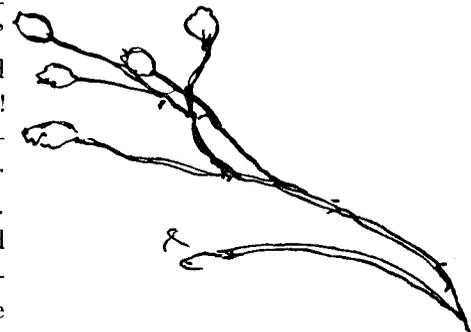


[Water Milkweed Pods. See page 72]

each stem as big as your finger, firm but brittle and about two feet high, and the countless birds' nests filled even with ice!

P. M. — Across river and over Hill.

The wind has been blowing and the snow drifting.



[Rose Hips. See page 72]

The paths are filled up again. The surface of the snow is coarsely waved and rough now, as if it caught at every straw and faced its windy foe again. It appears a coarser grain now. By the river are conspicuous the now empty and spread pods of the water milkweed, gray-brown without, silky-white within, — in some a seed or two left still; also the late rose corymbs of red hips; also the cupatorium drawn at venture four pages back, or more erect, thus, —

some with brown fuzz and seeds still; the sium sometimes, with its very flat cymes; and that light-brown sedge or rush. Some black ash keys still hang on amid the black abortions (?).



For a few days I have noticed the snow sprinkled with alder and birch scales. I go now through the birch meadow southwest of the Rock. The high wind is scattering them over the snow there. See one downy (?) woodpecker and one or two chickadees. The track of a squirrel on the Island Neck. Tracks are altered by the depth of the snow. Looking up over the top of the hill now, southwest, at 3.30 P. M., I see a few mother-o'-pearl tints, and methinks the same or rainbow tints in the drifting snow there, against the bright light of the unseen sun. Only in such clear cold air as this have the small clouds in the west that fine evanishing edge. It requires a state of the air that quickly dissipates all

The Meadow-Sweet

moisture. It must be rare in summer. In this rare atmosphere all cloud is quickly dissipated and mother-o'-pearl tinted as it passes away. The snow is too deep and soft yet for many tracks. No doubt the mice have been out beneath it.

Recrossing the river behind Dodd's, now at 4 P. M., the sun quite low, the open reach just below is quite green, a vitreous green, as if seen through a junk-bottle. Perhaps I never observed this phenomenon but when the sun was low.

He who would study birds' nests must look for them in November and in winter as well as in midsummer, for then the trees are bare and he can see them, and the swamps and streams are frozen and he can approach new kinds. He will often be surprised to find how many have haunted where he little suspected, and will receive many hints accordingly, which he can act upon in the summer. I am surprised to find many new ones (*i. e.* not new species) in groves which I had examined several times with particular care in the summer.

This was not a lodging snow, and the wind has already blown most of it off the trees, yet the long-limbed oak on the north of the hill still supports a ridge of its pure white as thick as its limbs. They lie parallel like the ulna and radius, and one is a bare white bone.

Beside the other weeds on the last page, I might have shown the tall rough golden-rod, still conspicuous: —

Found, in the Wheeler west of the Island, a nest alder about eight feet from



meadow, south-in the fork of an ground, partly

saddled on, made apparently chiefly of fine grass and bark fibres, quite firm and very thick bottomed, and well bound without with various kind of lint. This is a little oval, three by three and a half inches within and seven eighths deep, with a very firm, smooth rim of fine grass and dark shreds, lined with the same and some lint. A few alder leaves dangle from the edge, and, what is remarkable, the outer edge *all around* is defiled, quite covered, with black and white caterpillar-like droppings of the young birds. It is broader and shallower than a yellowbird's and larger than a wood pewee's. Can it be a redstart's? I should think it too large.

*Dec. 31.* It is one of the mornings of *creation*, and the trees, shrubs, etc., etc., are covered with a fine leaf frost, as if they had their morning robes on, seen against the sun. There has been a mist in the night. Now, at 8.30 A. M., I see, collected over the low grounds behind Mr. Cheney's, a dense fog (over a foot of snow), which looks dusty like smoke by contrast with the snow. Though limited to perhaps twenty or thirty acres, it [is] as dense as any in August. This accounts for the frost on the twigs. It consists of minute leaves, the longest an eighth of an inch, all around the twigs, but longest commonly on one side, in one instance the southwest side.

Clearing out the paths, which the drifting snow had filled, I find already quite [a] crust, from the sun and the blowing making it compact; but it is soft in the woods.

9 A. M. -- To Partridge Glade.

I see many partridge-tracks in the light snow, where they have sunk deep amid the shrub oaks; also gray rabbit and deer mice tracks, for the last ran over this soft surface last night. In a hollow in the glade, a gray rabbit's track, apparently, leading to and from a hole in the snow, which, following, and laying open, I found to extend curving about this pit, four feet through and under the snow, to a small hole in the earth, which apparently led down deep.

At ten the frost leaves are nearly all melted.

It is invariably the east track on the railroad causeway which has the least snow on it. Though it is nearly all blown off elsewhere on the causeway, Trillium Woods have prevented its being blown off opposite to them. The snow-plow yesterday cast the snow six feet one side the edge of the cars, and it fell thick and rich, evenly broken like well-plowed land. It lies like a rich tilth in the sun, with its glowing cottony-white ridges and its shadowy hollows.