IV
FEBRUARY, 1856

(FEBRUARY 38)

Feb. 1. Our kitten Min, two-thirds grown, was playing with Sophia's broom this morning, as she was sweeping the parlor, when she suddenly went into a fit, dashed round the room, and, the door being opened, rushed up two flights of stairs and leaped from the attic window to the ice and snow by the side of the doors-step,—a descent of a little more than twenty feet,—passed round the house and was lost. But she made her appearance again about noon, at the window, quite well and sound in every joint, even playful and frisky.

P. M. — Up river.

What gives to the excrements of the fox that clay-color often, even at this season? Left on an eminence.

I scented a fox's trail this afternoon (and have done so several times before), where he crossed the river, just three rods distant. Looked sharp, and discovered where it had stopped by a prominence. Yet he could not have passed since last night, or twelve hours before, it being near the village. How widely they range these nights! I hear that Daniel Foster of Princeton had eleven turkeys taken from under his barn in one night last fall, probably by a fox. Two were found a week after, buried under some brush in a neighboring wood.

The snow is somewhat banked toward the sides of the river, but shows darker-yellowish or icy in the middle. Lichens, blown from the black willows, lie here and there on the snow. Nut Meadow Brook open for some distance in the meadow. I was affected by the sight of some green polygonum leaves there. Some kind of minnow darted off. I see where a crow has walked along its side. In one place it hopped, and its feet were side by side, as in the track of yesterday, though a little more spread, the toes. I have but little doubt that yesterday's track was a crow's. The two inner toes are near together; the middle, more or less curved often.

I see a gray rabbit amid the young oaks in Hubbard's riverside grove, curled and shrunk up, squatting on the snow. I advance and begin to sketch it, when it plunges into a little hole in the snow by its side, the entrance to its burrow, three inches wide by a little more in length. The track of its foot is about one inch wide.

I see a pitch pine seed, blown thirty rods from J. Hosmer's little grove.

The Sheldon house in Deerfield, pulled down about eight years since, represented in Gleason's Pictorial for 1851 and in Barber, is in the style of the Hunt house, except that there is but one window on each side of the door. It and the meeting-house alone of those within the fort survived the assault of 1704, and the door through which a hole was cut and a woman shot is still preserved.

This has been a memorable January for snow and cold. It has been excellent sleighing ever since the
26th of December.—not less than a foot at any time since January 6th on a level in open fields, in swamps much more. Cars have been detained; the wood-lots for the most part inaccessible. The river has been closed up from end to end, with the exception of one or two insignificant openings on a few days. No bare ice. The crows have been remarkably bold, coming to eat the scraps cast out behind the houses. They alight in our yard. I think I have not noticed a tree sparrow during the month. Blue jays and chickadees also common in the village, more than usual. We have completely forgotten the summer. There has been no January thaw, though one prophesied it a fortnight ago because he saw snow-fleas. The ponds are yielding a good crop of ice. The coves have scarcely run at all. It has been what is called "an old-fashioned winter."

Feb. 2. Snowed again last night, perhaps an inch, erasing the old tracks and giving us a blank page again, restoring the purity of nature. It may be even a trifle deeper now than hitherto.

Feb. 3. Analyzed the crow blackbird's nest from which I took an egg last summer, eight or ten feet up a white maple by river, opposite Island. Large, of an irregular form, appearing as if wedged in between a twig and two large contiguous trunks. From outside to outside it measures from six to eight inches; inside, four; depth, two; height, six. The foundation is a loose mass of coarse strips of grape-vine bark chiefly, some eighteen inches long by five eightths of an inch wide; also slender grass and weed stems, mikania stems, a few cellular river weeds, as rushes, sparganium, pipe-grass, and some soft, coarse, fibrous roots. The same coarse grape-vine bark and grass and weed stems, together with some harder, wiry stems, form the sides and rim, the bark being passed around the twig. The nest is lined with the finer grass and weed stems, etc. The solid part of the nest is of half-decayed vegetable matter and mud, full of fine fibrous roots and wound internally with grass stems, etc., and some grape bark, being an inch and a half thick at bottom. Pulled apart and lying loose, it makes a great mass of material. This, like similar nests, is now a great haunt for spiders.

P. M.—Up North Branch.

A strong northwest wind (and thermometer 11°), driving the surface snow like steam. About five inches of soft snow now on ice. See many seeds of the hemlock on the snow still, and cones which have freshly rolled down the bank.

Tracked some mice to a black willow by riverside, just above spring, against the open swamp; and about three feet high, in apparently an old woodpecker's hole, was probably the mouse-nest, a double handful, consisting, four ninths, of fine shreds of inner bark, perhaps willow or maple; three ninths, the greenish moss, apparently, of button-bush; two ninths, the gray-slate fur, apparently, of rabbits or mice. Half a dozen hog's bristles might have been brought by some bird to its nest there. These made a very warm and soft nest.

Got some kind of vireo's nest from a maple far up
the stream, a dozen feet high, pensile; within, almost wholly rather coarse grape-vine shreds; without, the same and bark, covered with the delicate white spider-nests (?), birch-bark shreds, and brown cocoon silk.

Returning, saw near the Island a shrike glide by, cold and blustering as it was, with a remarkably even and steady sail or gliding motion like a hawk, eight or ten feet above the ground, and alight in a tree, from which at the same instant a small bird, perhaps a creeper or nuthatch, flitted timidly away. The shrike was apparently in pursuit.

We go wading through snows now up the bleak river, in the face of the cutting northwest wind and driving snow-steam, turning now this car, then that, to the wind, and our gloved hands in our bosoms or pockets. Our tracks are obliterated before we come back. How different this from sailing or paddling up the stream here in July, or poling amid the rocks! Yet still, in one square rod, where they have got out ice and a thin transparent ice has formed, I can see the pebbly bottom the same as in summer.

It is a cold and windy Sunday. The wind whistles round the northwest corner of the house and penetrates every crevice and consumes the wood in the stoves,—soon blows it all away. An armful goes but little way. Such a day makes a great hole in the wood-pile. [It] whirls round the corner of the house, in at a crevice, and flirts off with all the heat before we have begun to feed it.

Some of the low drifts but a few inches deep, made by the surface snow blowing, over the river especially, are of a fine, pure snow, so densely packed that our feet make hardly any impression on them.

River still tight at Merrick's.

There comes a deep snow in midwinter, covering up the ordinary food of many birds and quadrupeds, but anon a high wind scatters the seeds of pines and hemlocks and birch and alder, etc., far and wide over the surface of the snow for them.

You may now observe plainly the habit of the rabbits to run in paths about the swamps.

Mr. Emerson, who returned last week from lecturing on the Mississippi, having been gone but a month, tells me that he saw boys skating on the Mississippi and on Lake Erie and on the Hudson, and has no doubt they are skating on Lake Superior; and probably at Boston he saw them skating on the Atlantic.

The inside of the gray squirrel, or leaf, nest is of leaves chewed or broken up finely. I see where one, by the snow lodging on it, has helped weigh down a birch.

In Barber's "Historical Collections," page 476, there is a letter by Cotton Mather, dated "Boston, 10th Dec. 1717," describing the great snow of the previous February, from which I quote:—

"On the twentieth of the last February there came on a snow, which being added unto what had covered the ground a few days before, made a thicker mantle for our mother than was usual: And the storm with it was, for the following day, so violent as to make all communication between the neighbors everywhere to cease. People, for some hours, could not pass from
one side of a street unto another. . . . On the 24th day of the month, comes Pelion upon Ossa: Another snow came on which almost buried the memory of the former, with a storm so famous that Heaven laid an interdict on the religious assemblies throughout the country, on this Lord's day, the like whereunto had never been seen before. The Indians near an hundred years old affirm that their fathers never told them of anything that equalled it. Vast numbers of cattle were destroyed in this calamity. Whereof some there were, of the stranger [stronger? mine] sort, were found standing dead on their legs, as if they had been alive many weeks after, when the snow melted away. And others had their eyes glazed over with ice at such a rate, that being not far from the sea, their mistake of their way drowned them there. One gentleman, on whose farms were now lost above 1100 sheep, which with other cattle, were interred (shall I say) or innived, in the snow, writes me word that there were two sheep very singularly circumstanced. For no less than eight and twenty days after the storm, the people pulling out the ruins of above an hundred sheep out of a snow bank which lay sixteen foot high, drifted over them, there was two found alive, which had been there all this time, and kept themselves alive by eating the wool of their dead companions. When they were taken out they shed their own fleeces, but soon got into good case again."

"A man had a couple of young hogs, which he gave over for dead, but on the 27th day after their burial, they made their way out of a snow-bank, at the bottom of which they had found a little tansy to feed upon."

"Hens were found alive after seven days: Turkeys were found alive after five and twenty days, buried in the snow, and at a distance from the ground, and altogether destitute of anything to feed them."

"The wild creatures of the woods, the out-goings of the evening, made their descent as well as they could in this time of scarcity for them towards the sea-side. A vast multitude of deer, for the same cause, taking the same course, and the deep snow spoiling them of their only defence, which is to run, they became such a prey to these devourers that it is thought not one in twenty escaped."

"It is incredible how much damage is done to the orchards, for the snow freezing to a crust, as high as the bows of the trees, anon split them to pieces. The cattle, also, walking on the crusted snow a dozen foot from the ground, so fed upon the trees as very much to damnify them."

"Cottages were totally covered with the snow, and not the very tops of their chimneys to be seen."

These "odd accidents," he says, "would afford a story. But there not being any relation to Philosophy in them, I forbear them." He little thought that his simple testimony to such facts as the above would be worth all the philosophy he might dream of.

Feb. 4. P. M. — To Walden.
I go to walk at 3 p. m., thermometer 18°. It has been about this (and 22°) at this hour for a week or two. All the light snow, some five inches above the crust, is adrift these days and driving over the fields like steam, or like the foam-streaks on a flooded meadow, from
northwest to southeast. The surface of the fields is rough, like a lake agitated by the wind.

I see that the partridges feed quite extensively on the sumach berries, e. g. at my old house. They come to them after every snow, making fresh tracks, and have now stripped many bushes quite bare.

At Tanager Glade I see where the rabbits have gnawed the bark of the shrub oaks extensively, and the twigs, down to the size of a goose-quill, cutting them off as smoothly as a knife. They have also gnawed some young white oaks, black cherry, and apple. The shrub oaks look like hedges which have been trimmed or clipped.

I have often wondered how red cedars could have sprung up in some pastures which I knew to be miles distant from the nearest fruit-bearing cedar, but it now occurs to me that these and barberries, etc., may be planted by the crows, and probably other birds.

The oak leaves which have blown over the snow are collected in dense heaps on the still side of the bays at Walden, where I suspect they make warm beds for the rabbits to squat on.

Feb. 5. The weather is still clear, cold, and unrelenting. I have walked much on the river this winter, but, ever since it froze over, it has been on a snow-clad river, or pond. They have been river walks because the snow was shallowest there. Even the meadows, on account of the firmer crust, have been more passable than the uplands. In the afternoons I have walked off freely up or down the river, without impediment or fear.
gan to fall almost immediately), it had increased since
that time 6½ inches downward and 11½ upward. Since the 18th of January, when there was ten inches
of snow on it, it had increased about 4½ downward
and about 7½ upward. I was not prepared to find that
any ice had formed on the under side since the 18th.
The water ice was very crystalline. This ice was thicker
than the snow has been in open fields any time this
winter, yet this winter has been remarkable for the
abundance of snow. I also cut through and measured
in the Ice Heap Cove. The snow ice was 12½, and the
water ice about 6, but perhaps a little was broken off
in cutting through the last. In all about 18½ inches.
I was not prepared to find it thickest in the middle.
Earlier in the winter, or on the 18th January, it was
thickest near the shore.

Goodwin says that he has caught two crows this
winter in his traps set in water for mink, and baited
with fish. The crows, probably put to it for food and
looking along the very few open brooks, attracted by
this bait, got their feet into the traps. He thinks that
[what] I call muskrat-tracks are mink-tracks by the
Rock, and that muskrat do not come out at all this
weather. I saw a clamshell opened, and they say
minks do not open them (?).

Feb. 7. Began to snow at 8 a.m.; turned to rain at
noon, and cleared off, or rather ceased raining, at night,
with some glaze on the trees. This the first thawing,
though slight, since the 25th of December. During
the rain the air was thick, the distant woods bluish,
and the single trees, etc., on the hill, under the dull,
mist-covered sky, remarkably distinct and black.

Feb. 8. 9 a.m. — To Fair Haven Pond.

A clear and a pleasant and warmer day than we
have had for a long time. The snow begins (at noon)
to soften somewhat in the road.

For two or three weeks, successive light and dry
snows have fallen on the old crust and been drifting
about on it, leaving it at last three quarters bare and
forming drifts against the fences, etc., or here and there
low, slaty, fractured ones in mid-field, or pure white
hard-packed ones. These drifts on the crust are com-
monly quite low and flat. But yesterday's snow turning
to rain, which froze as it fell, there is now a glaze on
the trees, giving them a hoary look, icicles like rakes'
teeth on the rails, and a thin crust over all the snow.
At this hour the crust sparkles with a myriad brilliant
points or mirrors, one to every six inches, at least. This
crust is cracked like ice into irregular figures a foot or
two square. Perhaps the snow has settled considerably,
for the track in the roads is the highest part. Some
heard a loud cracking in the ground or ice last night.

I cut through, five or six rods from the east shore
of Fair Haven, and find seven inches of snow, nine
inches of snow ice and eight of water ice, — seventeen
of both. The water rises to within half an inch of the
top of the ice. Isaac Garfield has cut a dozen holes on
the west side. The ice there averages nineteen inches
in thickness. Half the holes are five or six rods from
the shore, and the rest nine or ten, the water from three
to seven feet deep. In some places more than half the whole depth is ice. The thinnest ice is 17 inches; the thickest, 29 +. The inner row invariably the thickest. The water rises above the ice in some cases.

Edward and Isaac Garfield were fishing there, and Puffer came along, and afterward Lewis Miner with his gun. He cannot get near the partridges on account of the cracklings of the crust. I saw the last two approaching with my glass.

The fishermen agree in saying that the pickerel have generally been eating, and are full, when they bite. Puffer thinks they eat a good deal, but seldom. Some think it best to cut the holes the day before, because the noise frightens them; and the crackling of the crust to-day was thought to frighten them. E. Garfield says that his Uncle Daniel was once scaling a pickerel, when he pricked his finger against the horn of a pout which the pickerel had swallowed. He himself killed a pickerel with a paddle, in the act of swallowing a large perch. Puffer had taken a striped snake out of one.

They send to Lowell for their bait, and fishermen send thither from far and wide, so that there is not a sufficient supply for them. I Garfield once caught an eel there with his pickerel bait, through the ice; also spearèd a trout that weighed three and a half pounds, he says, off Well Meadow.

E. Garfield says that he was just turning into the pond from up-stream when he heard a loud sound and

\[1\] In the middle of river, in front of our house, same day, it is 13\(^{3}/16\) inches thick, only 5 of it snow ice, it having been late to freeze there, comparatively.
south of Fair Haven, with his hands. They flew before him and dived into the snow, which was about a foot deep, going twice their length into it. He thrust his hand in and caught them. Puffer said that his companion one night speared a partridge on the alders on the south side the pond.

E. Garfield says there were many quails here last fall, but that they are suffering now. One night as he was spearing on Conant's cranberry meadow, just north the pond, his dog caught a sheldrake in the water by the shore. Some days ago he saw what he thought a hawk, as white as snow, fly over the pond, but it may have been a white owl (which last he never saw). He sometimes sees a hen-hawk in the winter, but never a partridge or other small hawk at this season. Speaks again of that large speckled hawk he killed once, which some called a "Cape eagle." Had a hummingbird's nest behind their house last summer, and was amused to see the bird drive off other birds; would pursue a robin and alight on his back; let none come near.

Puffer saw a couple of foxes cross the pond a few days ago. The wheelwright in the Corner saw four at once, about the same time.

They think that most squirrel-tracks now are of the gray ones; that they do not lay up anything. Their tracks are much larger than those of the red. Puffer says that five gray squirrels came out of one of their leafy nests in a middle-sized white pine, after it was cut down, behind the Harrington house the other day, and, a day or two after, three out of another. He says that they, too, use bark in making their nests, as well [as] leaves,—the inner bark of old chestnut rails, which looks like seaweed.

E. Garfield says the chip squirrels come out this month.

Puffer saw a star-nosed mole yesterday in the road. Its track was dog-like.

Coming home at twelve, the ice is fast melting on the trees, and I see in the drops the colors of all the gems. The snow is soft, and the coves begin to run as not for many weeks.

Thermometer at 3.30 P. M., 31°.

Puffer once found the nest of what he calls the deer mouse (probably jumping) in pile of wood at what is now R. Rice's place in Sudbury, and the old one carried off nine young clinging to her teats. These men do not chop now; they saw, because the snow is so deep and the crust cuts their legs.

Mr. Prichard tells me that he remembers a six weeks of more uninterrupted severe cold than we have just [had], and that was in '31, ending the middle of January. The caves on the south side of his house did not once run during that period, but they have run or dripped a trifle on several days during the past six weeks.
once when there was good skating in all the bays,
from the long causeway in Sudbury down to the rail-
road bridge, but caught only two or three perch.

Feb. 9. How much the northwest wind prevails in the
winter! Almost all our storms come from that quarter,
and the ridges of snow-drifts run that way. If the In-
dians placed their heaven in the southwest on account
of the warmth of the southwest wind, they might have
made a stern winter god of the northwest wind.

P. M. — Up Assabet.

3.30 p. m., thermometer 30°. This and yesterday
comparatively warm weather. Half an inch of snow
fell this forenoon, but now it has cleared up. I see a few
squirrel-tracks, but no mice-tracks, for no night has
intervened since the snow. It is only where the river
washes a wooded bank that I see mice or even squirrel
tracks; elsewhere only where dogs and foxes have trav-
ered it. For example, there are no tracks on the side
of the river against Hosmer’s and Emerson’s land,
though many alders, etc., there, but many tracks com-
monly on the opposite wooded side. In the swamp
west of Pigeon Rock, I see where the rabbits have bitten
off the swamp white oak sprouts, where they have sprung
up tender, looking like poplar, from stocks broken by
the ice last winter.

I hear a phœbe note from a chickadee.

Saw a penile nest eighteen feet high, within a lichen-
clad red maple on the edge of the Assabet Spring or
Pink Azalea Swamp. It looked very much like a bunch
of the lichens dangling, and I was not sure it was not
till I climbed up to it. Without, it was chiefly the coarse
greenish lichens of the maple, bound with coarse bits of
bark and perhaps bleached milkweed bark (??) and
brown cocoon silk, and within, a thin lining of pine-
needles, hemlock twigs, and the like. Was it a yellow-
throat virco’s? It was not shaped like the
red-eye’s, but, sidewise, thus: [diagram]
looking down upon it, thus: [diagram]
to one of the limbs and about a foot from
the end of the twig.

Feb. 10. Speaking about the weather and the fishing
with E. and I. Garfield on the 8th, I was amused
to hear these two young farmers suddenly disputing
as to whether the moon (??), if that be it, was in the
Feet or the Head or elsewhere. Though I know far
more of astronomy than they, I should not know how
at once to find out this nonsense in an almanac. Yet
they talk very glibly about it, and go a-fishing accord-
ingly. Again, in the evening of the same day, I over-
took Mr. Prichard and observed that it was time for
a thaw, but said he, “That does not look like it,” point-
ing to the moon in the west. “You could hang a powder-
horn upon that pretty well.”

P. M. — To Walden.

Returning, I saw a fox on the railroad, at the crossing
below the shanty site, eight or nine rods from me.
He looked of a dirty yellow and lean. I did not notice
the white tip to his tail. Seeing me, he pricked up his
ears and at first ran up and along the east bank on the
crust, then changed his mind and came down the steep
keep up for a long time, pretty direct after his first turning.

Feb. 11. P. M. — To Fair Haven Pond by river.

Israel Rice says that he does not know that he can remember a winter when we had as much snow as we have had this winter. Eb. Conant says as much, excepting the year when he was twenty-five, about 1803. It is now fairly thawing, the eaves running; and puddles stand in some places. The boys can make snowballs, and the horses begin to slump occasionally.

Saw a partridge by the riverside, opposite Fair Haven Hill, which at first I mistook for the top of a fence-post above the snow, amid some alders. I shouted and waved my hand four rods off, to see if it was one, but there was no motion, and I thought surely it must be a post. Nevertheless I resolved to investigate. Within three rods, I saw it to be indeed a partridge, to my surprise, standing perfectly still, with its head erect and neck stretched upward. It was as complete a deception as if it had designedly placed itself on the line of the fence and in the proper place for a post. It finally stepped off daintily with a teetering gait and head up, and took to wing.

I thought it would be a thawing day by the sound, the peculiar sound, of cock crowing in the morning.

It will indicate what steady cold weather we have had to say that the lodging snow of January 13th, though it did not lodge remarkably, has not yet completely melted off the sturdy trunks of large trees.
Feb. 12. Thawed all day yesterday and rained somewhat last night; clearing off this morning. Heard the caves drop all night. The thermometer at 8.30 A.M., 42°. The snow or crust and cold weather began December 26th, and not till February 7th was there any considerable relenting, when it rained a little; i.e. forty-three days of uninterrupted cold weather, and no serious thaw till the 11th, or yesterday. How different the sunlight over thawing snow from the same over dry, frozen snow! The former excites me strangely, and I experience a springlike melting in my thoughts. Water now stands above the ice and snow on the river.

I find, on shovelling away the snow, that there is about two inches of solid ice at the bottom,—that thin crusted snow of December 26th. These two inches must be added, then, to my measures of January 12th, 16th, 23d, 29th, and 30th. To-day I find it has settled since the 29th,—owing, of course, mainly to the rain of the 7th and especially of last night—about two inches in open land and an inch and a half in Trillium Woods. Thus, west of railroad, $11\frac{1}{2} + 2 = 12\frac{1}{2}$ [sic]; east of railroad, $13\frac{1}{2} + 2 = 15\frac{1}{2}$; Trillium Woods, $13 + 2 = 15$; average, $12 + 2 = 14$. There has been scarcely any loss on the west side of the railroad, but $3\frac{1}{2}$ on the east side. It may be owing to the drifting since the 29th.

From January 6th to January 13th, not less than a foot of snow on a level in open land, and from January 13th to February 7th, not less than sixteen inches on a level at any one time in open land, and still there is fourteen on a level. That is, for twenty-five days the snow was sixteen inches deep in open land!!

Feb. 13. Grew cold again last night, with high wind. The wind began about midday. I think a high wind commonly follows rain or a thaw in winter. The thermometer at 8.30 A.M. is at zero. (At 1 P.M., 8°+.) This fall of 42° from 8.30 A.M. yesterday to the same time to-day has produced not a thin and smooth, but a very firm and thick, uneven crust, on which I go in any direction across the fields, stepping over the fences; yet there is some slosh at the bottom of the snow, above the icy foundation.

Now, no doubt, many sportsmen are out with their dogs, who have been imprisoned by the depth of the snow. In the woods where there are bushes beneath, you still slump more or less.

The crust is quite green with the needles of pitch pines, sometimes whole plumes which have recently fallen. Are these chiefly last year's needles brought down by the glaze, or those of the previous year which had not fallen before? I suspect they are chiefly the former, but _maybe_ some of the latter.

Feb. 14. Still colder this morning, — 7° at 8.30 A.M. P. M. — To Walden.

I find that a great many pine-needles, both white and pitch, of '54 still hold on, bristling around the twigs, especially if the tree has not grown much the last

1 Vide forward, Mar. 19th.
2 Vide Feb. 14th.
year. So those that strew the snow now are of both kinds.

I can now walk on the crust in every direction at the Andromeda Swamp; can run and stamp without danger of breaking through, raised quite above the andromeda (which is entirely concealed), more than two feet above the ground. But in the woods, and even in wood-paths, I slump at every other step.

In all the little valleys in the woods and sprout-lands, and on the southeast sides of hills, the oak leaves which have blown over the crust are gathered in dry and warm-looking beds, often five or six feet in diameter, about the base of the shrub oaks. So clean and crisply dry and warm above the cold, white crust, they are singularly inviting to my eye. No doubt they are of service to colic and warm the rabbit and partridge and other beasts and birds. They fill every little hollow, and betray thus at a distance a man’s tracks made a week ago, or a dog’s many rods off on a hillside. If the snow were not crusted, they would not be gathered thus in troops.

I walk in the bare maple swamps and detect the minute nests of some vireo high over my head, in the fork of some unattainable twig, where I never suspected them in summer,—a little basket cradle that rocked so high in the wind. And where is that young family now, while their cradle is filled with ice?

I was struck to-day by the size and continuousness of the natural willow hedge on the east side of the railroad causeway, at the foot of the embankment, next to the fence. Some twelve years ago, when that cause-

way was built through the meadows, there were no willows there or near there, but now, just at the foot of the sand-bank, where it meets the meadow, and on the line of the fence, quite a dense willow hedge has planted itself. I used to think that the seeds were brought with the sand from the Deep Cut in the woods, but there is no golden willow there; but now I think that the seeds have been blown hither from a distance, and lodged against the foot of the bank, just as the snow-drift accumulates there, for I see several ash trees among them, which have come from an ash ten rods east in the meadow, though none has sprung up elsewhere. There are also a few alders, elms, birch, poplars, and some elder. For years a willow might not have been persuaded to take root in that meadow; but run a barrier like this through it, and in a few years it is lined with them. They plant themselves here solely, and not in the open meadow, as exclusively as along the shores of a river. The sand-bank is a shore to them, and the meadow a lake. How impatient, how rampant, how precocious these osiers! They have hardly made two shoots from the sand in as many springs, when silvery catkins burst out along them, and anon golden blossoms and downy seeds, spreading their race with incredible rapidity. Thus they multiply and clamber together. Thus they take advantage even of the railroad, which elsewhere disturbs and invades their domains. May I ever be in as good spirits as a willow! How tenacious of life! How withy! How soon it gets over its hurts! They never despair. Is there no moisture longer in nature which they can transmute into sap?
They are emblems of youth, joy, and everlasting life. Scurcly is their growth restrained by winter, but their silvery down peeps forth in the warmest days in January (?). The very trees and shrubs and weeds, if we consider their origin, have drifted thus like snow against the fences and hillsides. Their growth is protected and favored there. Soon the alders will take their places with them. This hedge is, of course, as straight as the railroad or its bounding fence.

Over this crust, alder and birch and pine seeds, etc., which in summer would have soon found a resting-place, are blown far and wide.

Feb. 16. P. M. — To Walden.

It has been trying to snow for two days. About one inch fell last night, but it clears up at noon, and sun comes out very warm and bright. Wild says it is the warmest day at 12 m. since the 23d of December, when the thermometer stood at 50°. To-day it is at 44. I hear the eaves running before I come out, and our thermometer at 2 p. m. is 38°. The sun is most pleasantly warm on my check; the melting snow shines in the ruts; the cocks crow more than usual in barns; my greatcoat is an incumbrance.

There is no down visible on the sallows when I descend the east side of the railroad, unless a scale has come off.

Where I measured the ice in the middle of Walden on the 6th I now measure again, or close by it, though without cutting out the cake. I find about 11½ (probably about same as the 6th, when called 11½ — ) of snow ice and 21½ in all, leaving 10½ clear ice, which would make the ice to have increased beneath through all this thickness and in spite of the thaws 2½ — inches. Near the shore in one place it was twenty-two inches.

Feb. 17. Some three or four inches of snow fallen in the night and now blowing. At noon begins to snow again, as well as blow. Several more inches fall.

Feb. 18. Yesterday's snow drifting. No cars from above or below till 1 p. m.

Feb. 19. Measure snow again, on account of what fell on 17th. West of railroad, 15½ + 2; east of railroad, 12½ + 2; average of both, 14 + 2 = 16; Trillium Wood, 18½ + 2 = 20½. The great body of the last snow appears to have settled under the east side of the railroad. There are five and one half inches more in the wood than on the 12th, and I think this is about the average of what fell on the 17th (night and day). Accordingly, the snow has been deeper since the 17th than before this winter. I think if the drifts could be fairly measured it might be found to be seventeen or eighteen inches deep on a level. This snow, you may say, is all drifted, for in the fields east of the railroad there is not so much as there was a week ago, while west there is about four inches more.

Feb. 20. P. M. — Up Assabet.

See a broad and distinct otter-trail, made last night or yesterday. It came out to the river through the low
woods north of Pinxter Swamp, making a very conspicuous trail, from seven to nine or ten inches wide and three or four deep, with sometimes singularly upright sides, as if a square timber had been drawn along, but commonly rounded. It made some short turns and zigzags: passed under limbs which were only five inches above the snow, not over them; had apparently slid down all banks and declivities, making a uniform broad hollow trail there without any mark of its feet. On reaching the river, it had come along under the bank, from time to time looking into the crevices where it might get under the ice there, sometimes ascending the bank and sliding back. On level ground its trail had this appearance:

Commonly seven to nine or ten inches wide, and tracks of feet twenty to twenty-four apart; but sometimes there was no track of the feet for twenty-five feet, frequently for six; in the last case swelled in the outline, as above. Having come down as far as opposite the great white [sic] on the hill, it returned on its track and entered a hole under the ice at Assabet Spring, from which it has not issued.

Feb. 22. P. M. — To Assabet stone bridge and home on river.

It is a pleasant and warm afternoon, and the snow is melting. Yet the river is still perfectly closed (as it has been for many weeks), both against Merrick's and in the Assabet, excepting directly under this upper stone bridge and probably at mouth of Loring's Brook. I am surprised that the warm weather within ten days has not caused the river to open at Merrick's, but it was too thick to be melted.

Now first, the snow melting and the ice beginning to soften, I see those slender grayish-winged insects creeping with closed wings over the snow-clad ice, — Perla (?). On all parts of the river. Have seen none before, this winter.¹

Just below this bridge begins an otter-track, several days old yet very distinct, which I trace half a mile down the river. In the snow less than an inch deep, on the ice, each foot makes a track three inches wide, apparently enlarged in melting, and the whole four appear thus: The clear interval, sixteen inches; the length occupied by the four feet, fourteen inches. It looks as if someone had dragged a round timber down the middle of the river a day or two since, which bounced as it went. There is now a crack running down the middle of the river, and it is slightly elevated there, owing, probably, to the increasing temperature.

Feb. 23. 9 A. M. — To Fair Haven Pond, up river.

A still warmer day. The snow is so solid that it still bears me, though we have had several warm suns on

¹ From a third of an inch to an inch long; of various sizes, etc. And every warm day afterward. Have in fact four wings. Vide Mar. 22.
it. It is melting gradually under the sun. In the morning I make but little impression in it. As it melts, it acquires a rough but regularly waved surface. It is inspiring to feel the increased heat of the sun reflected from the snow. There is a slight mist above the fields, through which the crowing of cocks sounds springlike.

I sit by a maple on a maple [sic]. It wears the same shaggy coat of lichens summer and winter.

At 2 p. m. the thermometer is 47°. Whenever it is near 40 there is a speedy softening of the snow.

I read in the papers that the ocean is frozen,—not to bear or walk on safely,—or has been lately, on the back side of Cape Cod; at the Highland Light, one mile out from the shore. A phenomenon which, it is said, the oldest have not witnessed before.

Feb. 24. Dr. Jarvis tells me that he thinks there was as much snow as this in '35, when he lived in the Parkman house and drove in his sleigh from November 23d to March 30th excepting one day.

Feb. 25. P. M. — To Walden and Fair Haven.

The only bare ground is the railroad track, where the snow was thin. The crust still bears, and left by the railroad at Andromeda Ponds and went through on crust to Fair Haven. Was surprised to see some little minnows only an inch long in an open place in Well Meadow Brook. As I stood there, saw that they had just felled my bee tree, the hemlock. The chopper even then stood at its foot. I went over and saw him cut into the cavity by my direction. He broke a piece out of his axe as big as my nail against a hemlock knot in the meanwhile. There was no comb within. They have just been cutting wood at Bittern Cliff. The sweet syrup is out on the ends of the hickory logs there.

Gathered some facts from Henry Bond’s “Genealogies of the Families of Watertown, etc.”

My mother’s mother was Mary Jones, only daughter of “Col. Elisha Jones, Esq., of Weston. A Boston newspaper, of Feb. 15, 1775, says ‘On Monday last, died, in this town, in the sixty-sixth year of his age, Elisha Jones Esq., late of Weston, for many years a magistrate, Col. of a Regiment of Militia, and member of the General Assembly. In the many departments in which he acted, he eminently showed the man of principle, virtue,’ &c. He married, Jan. 24, 1733–4, Mary Allen, and occupied his father’s homestead.”

(Mary Allen was the daughter of Abel Allen, who was the son of Lewis Allen of Watertown Farms, who died 1707–8.)


Colonel Elisha Jones was born 1710, the son of Captain Josiah Jones (born, 1670, in Weston) and Abigail Banne. Captain Josiah Jones was the son of Josiah Jones of Watertown Farms (born 1643) and Lydia Treadway (daughter of Nathaniel Treadway, who died in Watertown, 1689). Josiah Jones was son of Lewis Jones
(who appears to have moved from Roxbury to Watertown about 1650, and died 1684) and Anna (perhaps Stone? born in England). This Josiah Jones in 1666 bought "of John Stone and wife Sarah, of Watertown, a farm of 124 acres on the N. side of Sudbury highway, about two miles from Sudbury."


I see at bottom of the mill brook, below Emerson's, two dead frogs. The brook has part way yet a snowy bridge over it. Were they left by a mink, or killed by cold and ice? In Hubbard's maple swamp beyond, I see the snow under a dead maple, where a woodpecker has drilled a handsome round hole. Excepting the carrying it downward within, it is ready for a nest. May they not have a view to this use even now?

Feb. 27. Wednesday.  P. M. — Up Assabet.

Am surprised to see how the ice lasts on the river. It but just begins to be open for a foot or two at Merrick's, and you see the motion of the stream. It has overflowed the ice for many rods a few feet in width. It has been tight even there (and of course everywhere else on the main stream, and on North Branch except at Loring's Brook and under stone bridge) since January 25th, and elsewhere on the main stream since January 7th, as it still is. That is, we may say that the river has been frozen solidly for seven weeks. On the 25th I saw a load of wood drawn by four horses up the middle of the river above Fair Haven Pond. On that day, the 25th, they were cutting the last of Baker's wood-lot on the south side of Fair Haven. They cut the greater part of it last winter, and this was the wood they were hauling off.

I see many birch scales, freshly blown over the snow. They are falling all winter. What is that narrow, twisted, yellowish-brown scale which is seen on the snow all winter near woods?

Shaped like this: 1 —

Found, in the snow in E. Hosmer's meadow, a gray rabbit's hind leg, freshly left there, perhaps by a fox.

The papers are talking about the prospect of a war between England and America. Neither side sees how its country can avoid a long and fratricidal war without sacrificing its honor. Both nations are ready to take a desperate step, to forget the interests of civilization and Christianity and their commercial prosperity and fly at each other's throats. When I see an individual thus beside himself, thus desperate, ready to shoot or be shot, like a blackleg who has little to lose, no serene aims to accomplish, I think he is a candidate for bedlam. What asylum is there for nations to go to? Nations are thus ready to talk of wars and challenge one another, 2 because they are made up to such an extent of poor, low-spirited, despairing men, in whose eyes the chance of shooting somebody else without being shot themselves exceeds their actual good fortune. Who, in fact, will be the first to enlist but

1 Probably pine stipule.

2 Will it not be thought disreputable at length, as duelling between individuals now is?
the most desperate class, they who have lost all hope?  
And they may at last infect the rest.

Minott says that partridges will bud on black birches  
as on apple trees.

Feb. 28.  P. M. — To Nut Meadow.

Mother says that the cat lay on her bread one night  
and caused it to rise finely all around her.

I go on the crust which we have had since the 13th,  
* i. e.* on the solid frozen snow, which settles very gradually  
in the sun, across the fields and brooks.

The very beginning of the river's breaking up appears  
to be the oozing of water through cracks in the thinnest  
places, and standing in shallow puddles there on the  
ice, which freeze solid at night. The river and brooks  
are quite shrunken. The brooks flow far under the  
hollow ice and snow-crust a foot thick, which here and there has fallen in, showing the shrunken stream far below. The surface of the snow melts into a regular waved form, like raised scales.

Miles is repairing the damage done at his new mill by  
the dam giving way. He is shovelling out the flume,  
which was half filled with sand, standing in the water.  
His sawmill, built of slabs, reminds me of a new country.  
He has lost a head of water equal to two feet by this accident. Yet he sets his mill going to show me how it works. What a smell as of gun-wash when he raised the gate! He calls it the sulphur from the pond. It must be the carburetted hydrogen gas from the bottom of the pond under the ice. It powerfully scents the whole mill. A powerful smelling-bottle. How pleasant are  

the surroundings of a mill! Here are the logs (pail-  
stuff), already drawn to the door from a neighboring hill before the mill is in operation. The dammed-up  
meadow, the meadow [sic], the melted snow, and welling springs are the serf he compels to do his work. He is unruly as yet, has lately broken loose, filled up the flume, and flooded the fields below. He uses the dam of an  
old mill which stood here a hundred years ago, which  
now nobody knows anything about. The mill is built of slabs, of the worm-eaten sap-wood. The old dam  
had probably been undermined by muskrats. It would  
have been most prudent to have built a new one. Rude forces, rude men, and rude appliances.

Martial Miles, who is there, says that there are many  
trout in this brook. He sees them running down just  
before winter, and at that time Charles Snow once  
spear ed a great many, one weighing four pounds. He  
once came within four feet of an otter at 10 P. M., in  
the middle of the road, by the guide-board just north  
of this brook. Spoke of the one shot in a ditch at Donge  
Hole, as I had heard before; also of the three killed  
(shot) at Farrar's Swamp. The one who shot them  
told him that he attempted to kill them with a shovel,  
but that they would take it out of his hands as often  
as he attempted it.

Coombs came along with his dog and gun, on his  
way to shoot partridges, which will come out to bud  
this evening on certain young apple trees. He has  
got four or five for several nights in succession, and  
sees foxes there, running about on the crust. Francis  
Wheeler says he sold two young fox-skins to a tin ped-
dler to-day for a dollar. Coombs says they got a silver-gray fox in Lincoln this winter, and sold its skin for sixteen dollars! He says that he killed a sheldrake a month or six weeks ago in a small open place beneath the falls at the factory. This shows what hardy birds they are. Last summer he found a black duck’s nest on one of the islands in Loring’s Pond. He saw the duck hide in the grass, came up, and put his hand on a parcel of feathers and, raising a handful, was surprised to find the eggs under them.

How various are the talents of men! From the brook in which one lover of nature has never during all his lifetime detected anything larger than a minnow, another extracts a trout that weighs three pounds, or an otter four feet long. How much more game he will see who carries a gun, i.e. who goes to see it! Though you roam the woods all your days, you never will see by chance what he sees who goes on purpose to see it. One gets his living by shooting woodcocks; most never see one in their lives.

Coombs goes to shoot partridges this evening by a far-off wood-side, and M. Miles goes home to load up, for he is going to Boston with a load of wood to-night.

Our young maltese cat Min, which has been absent five cold nights, the ground covered deep with crusted snow,—her first absence,—and given up for dead, has at length returned at daylight, awakening the whole house with her mewing and afraid of the strange girl we have got in the meanwhile. She is a mere wreck of skin and bones, with a sharp nose and wiry tail. She is as one returned from the dead. There is as much rejoicing as at the return of the prodigal son, and if we had a fatted calf we should kill it. Various are the conjectures as to her adventures,—whether she has had a fit, been shut up somewhere, or lost, torn in pieces by a certain terrier or frozen to death. In the meanwhile she is fed with the best that the house affords, minced meats and sauces of warmed milk, and, with the aid of unstinted sleep in all laps in succession, is fast picking up her crumbs. She has already found her old place under the stove, and is preparing to make a stew of her brains there.

That strong gun-wash-she scent from the mill-pond water was very encouraging. I who never partake of the sacrament make the more of it.

How simple the machinery of the mill! Miles has dammed a stream, raised a pond or head of water, and placed an old horizontal mill-wheel in position to receive a jet of water on its buckets, transferred the motion to a horizontal shaft and saw by a few cog-wheels and simple gearing, and, throwing a roof of slabs over all, at the outlet of the pond, you have a mill.

Returning on the crust, over Puffer’s place, I saw a fine, plump hen hanging from an apple tree and a crow from another, probably poisoned to kill foxes with,—a hen which probably a fox had killed.

Stopped at Martial Miles’s to taste his cider. Marvelously sweet and spirited without being bottled; alum and mustard put into the barrels.

A weight of water stored up in a meadow, applied to move a saw, which scratches its way through the trees placed before it. So simple is a sawmill.
A millwright comes and builds a dam across the foot of the meadow, and a mill-pond is created, in which, at length, fishes of various kinds are found; and muskrats and minks and otter frequent it. The pond is like a weight wound up.

Feb. 29. Minott told me this afternoon of his catching a pickerel in the Mill Brook once,—before the pond was drawn off, when the brook had four or five times as much water as now,—which weighed four pounds. Says they stayed in it all winter in those days. This was near his land up the brook. He once also caught there, when fishing for pickerel, a trout which weighed three and a half pounds. He fell within two feet of the water, but [he] succeeded in tossing him higher up. When cutting peat thereabouts, he saw a stinkpot turtle in the water eating a frog which it had just caught. Speaks of seeing a mink swimming along a little [sic] in his beech wood-lot, and from time to time running along the shore; part way up an alder and down again.

He loves to recall his hunting days and adventures, and I willingly listen to the stories he has told me half a dozen times already. One day he saw about twenty black ducks on Goose Pond, and stole down on them, thinking to get a shot, but it chanced that a stray dog scared them up before he was ready. He stood on the point of the neck of land between the ponds, and watched them as they flew high toward Flint's Pond. As he looked, he saw one separate from the flock when they had got half-way to Flint's Pond, or half a mile, and return straight toward Goose Pond again. He thought he would await him, and give him a shot if he came near enough. As he flew pretty near and rather low, he fired, whereupon the duck rose right up high into the air, and he saw by his motions that he was wounded. Suddenly he dropped, by a slanting fall, into the point of a thick pine wood, and he heard him plainly strike the ground like a stone. He went there and searched for a long time, and was about giving it up, when at length he saw the duck standing, still alive and bleeding, by the side of a stump, and made out to kill him with a stick before he could reach the water.

He said he saw Emerson come home from lecturing the other day with his knitting-bag (lecture-bag) in his hand. He asked him if the lecturing business was as good as it used to be. Emerson said he did n't see but it was as good as ever; guessed the people would want lectures "as long as he or I lived."

Told again of the partridge hawk striking down a partridge which rose before him and flew across the run in the beech woods,—how suddenly he did it,—and he, hearing the fluttering of the partridge, came up and secured it, while the hawk kept out of gunshot.