

X

MAY, 1857

(ÆT. 39)

May 1. Friday. 2 P. M. — First notice the ring of the toad, as I am crossing the Common in front of the meeting-house. There is a cool and breezy south wind, and the ring of the first toad leaks into the general stream of sound, unnoticed by most, as the mill-brook empties into the river and the voyager cannot tell if he is above or below its mouth. The bell was ringing for town meeting, and every one heard it, but none heard this older and more universal bell, rung by more native Americans all the land over. It is a sound from amid the waves of the aerial sea, that breaks on our ears with the surf of the air, a sound that is almost breathed with the wind, taken into the lungs instead of being heard by the ears. It comes from far over or through the troughs of the aerial sea, like a petrel, and who can guess by what pool the singer sits? whether behind the meeting-house horse-sheds, or from over the burying-ground hill, or from the riverside? A new reign has commenced. Bufo the First has ascended to his throne, the surface of the earth, led into office by the south wind. Bufo the Double-chinned inflates his throat. Attend to his message. Take off your greatcoats, swains! and prepare for the summer campaign. Hop a few paces further toward your goals. The measures

I shall advocate are warmth, moisture, and low-flying insects.

White-throated sparrow in shrub oaks by Walden road. Is that moss with little green pendulous fruit on reddish stems *Bryum pyriforme*? Apparently a skunk has picked up what I took to be the dead shrew in the Goose Pond Path. How they ransack the paths these nights! The ground is spotted with their probings. Plucked the *Arum triphyllum*, three inches high, with its acrid corm (solid bulb), from the edge of Saw Mill Brook.

It is foolish for a man to accumulate material wealth chiefly, houses and land. Our stock in life, our real estate, is that amount of thought which we have had, which we have thought out. The ground we have thus created is forever pasturage for our thoughts. I fall back on to visions which I have had. What else adds to my possessions and makes me rich in all lands? If you have ever done any work with these finest tools, the imagination and fancy and reason, it is a new creation, independent on the world, and a possession forever. You have laid up something against a rainy day. You have to that extent cleared the wilderness.

Is a house but a gall on the face of the earth, a nidus which some insect has provided for its young?

May 2. Saturday. Building a fence between us and Mrs. Richardson. In digging the holes I find the roots of small apple trees, seven or eight feet distant and four or more inches in diameter, two feet underground, and as big as my little finger. This is two or three feet

beyond any branches. They reach at least twice as far as the branches. The branches get trimmed, the roots do not.

May 3. Sunday. A remarkably warm and pleasant morning.

A. M. — To Battle-Ground by river.

I heard the ring of toads at 6 A. M. The flood on the meadows, still high, is quite smooth, and many are out this still and suddenly very warm morning, pushing about in boats. Now, thinks many a one, is the time to paddle or push gently far up or down the river, along the still, warm meadow's edge, and perhaps we may see some large turtles, or muskrats, or otter, or rare fish or fowl. It will be a grand forenoon for a cruise, to explore these meadow shores and inundated maple swamps which we have never explored. Now we shall be recompensed for the week's confinement to shop or garden. We will spend our Sabbath exploring these smooth warm vernal waters. Up or down shall we go? To Fair Haven Bay and the Sudbury meadows, or to Ball's Hill and Carlisle Bridge? Along the meadow's edge, lined with willow and alders and maples, under the catkins of the early willow, and brushing those of the sweet-gale with our prow, where the sloping pasture and the plowed ground, submerged, are fast drinking up the flood. What fair isles, what remote coast shall we explore? What San Salvador or Bay of All Saints arrive at? All are tempted forth, like flies, into the sun. All isles seem fortunate and blessed to-day; all capes are of Good Hope. The same sun and calm that tempts

the turtles out tempts the voyagers. It is an opportunity to explore their own natures, to float along their own shores. The woodpecker cackles and the crow black-bird utters his jarring chatter from the oaks and maples. All well men and women who are not restrained by superstitious custom come abroad this morning by land or water, and such as have boats launch them and put forth in search of adventure. Others, less free or, it may be, less fortunate, take their station on bridges, watching the rush of water through them and the motions of the departing voyagers, and listening to the notes of blackbirds from over the smooth water. They see a swimming snake, or a muskrat dive, — airing and sunning themselves there until the first bell rings.

Up and down the town, men and boys that are under subjection are polishing their shoes and brushing their go-to-meeting clothes. I, a descendant of Northmen who worshipped Thor, spend my time worshipping neither Thor nor Christ; a descendant of Northmen who sacrificed men and horses, sacrifice neither men nor horses. I care not for Thor nor for the Jews. I sympathize not to-day with those who go to church in newest clothes and sit quietly in straight-backed pews. I sympathize rather with the boy who has none to look after him, who borrows a boat and paddle and in common clothes sets out to explore these temporary vernal lakes. I meet such a boy paddling along under a sunny bank, with bare feet and his pants rolled up above his knees, ready to leap into the water at a moment's warning. Better for him to read "Robinson Crusoe" than Baxter's "Saints' Rest."

I hear the soft, purring, stertorous croak of frogs on the meadow.¹

The pine warbler is perhaps the commonest bird heard now from the wood-sides. It seems left [to] it almost alone to fill their empty aisles.

The above boy had caught a snapping turtle, the third he had got this year. The first he said he got the fore part of April. He also had caught a bullfrog sitting on the shore just now.

Thermometer from 1 to 2 P. M., at 78°. Neighbors come forth to view the expanding buds in their gardens.

I see where some fish, probably a pickerel, darted away from high on the meadows, toward the river, and swims so high that it makes a long ripple for twenty rods.

3 P. M. — To Cliffs.

In the pool which dries up in Jonathan Wheeler's orchard, I see toads, or maybe frogs, spread out on the surface, uttering a short, loud, peculiar croak, not like that of the early croaking frog, nor the smooth, purring, stertorous one of this morning, but a coarse belching croak, at a little distance like *quor* and *quar*, being on various keys, but nearer like *ow-oo-uk* though one syllable or *ar-r-r*. Thus they lie, perhaps within a foot or two and facing each other, and alternately throwing their heads back, *i. e.* upward, swelling their *white* throats and uttering this abominable noise.² Then one rushes upon the other, leaps upon him. They struggle

¹ Probably *Rana palustris*. Vide May 1st, 1858.

² [Spade-foot toads, it seems likely.]

and roll over and sink for a moment, and presently they show their heads again a foot or two apart. There are a dozen or more, with very prominent eyes, with bright golden irides.

In another pool, in Warren's meadow, I hear the ring of toads and the peep of hylodes, and, taking off my stockings and shoes, at length stand in their midst. There are a hundred toads close around me, copulating or preparing to. These look at a little distance precisely like the last, but no one utters that peculiar rough, belching croak, only their common musical ring, and occasionally a short, fainter, interrupted, quivering note, as of alarm. They are continually swimming to and leaping upon each other. I see many large reddish-brown ones, probably females, with small grayish ones lying flat on their backs, the fore feet clasped around them. These commonly lie flat on the bottom, often as if dead, but from time [to time] the under one rises with its load to the surface, puts its nose out and then sinks again. The single ones leap upon these double ones and roll them over in vain like the rest. It is the single ones that ring and are so active. They make great gray, yellowish, greenish, or whitish bubbles (different specimens being thus various), as big as their heads. One that rings within a foot of me seems to make the earth vibrate, and I feel it and am thrilled to my very spine, it is so terrene a sound. It reminds me of many a summer night on the river. A bubbling ring, which is continuous about a minute, and then its bag must be inflated again. When I move suddenly, it is the single ones chiefly that con-

ceal themselves. The others are not so easily disturbed. You would hardly believe that toads could be so excited and active. When that nearest ringer sounded, the very sod by my feet (whose spires rose above water) seemed to tremble, and the earth itself, and I was thrilled to my spine and vibrated to it. They like a rest for their toes when they ring. It is a sound as crowded with protuberant bubbles as the rind of an orange. A clear, ringing note with a bubbling trill. It takes complete possession of you, for you vibrate to it, and can hear nothing else.

At length, too, a hylodes or two were heard close about me, but not one was seen. The nearest seemed to have his residence in my ear alone. It took such possession of my ear that I was unable to appreciate the source whence it came.

It is so warm, mosquitoes alight on my hands and face.

As I approach the entrance to the spring path, I hear some chickadees *phe-be*-ing. One sings *phe-e — be' be — be' be*, just as if another struck in immediately after the usual strain.

Salix tristis is out to-day at least, perhaps yesterday, by what I may call *S. tristis* Path. *Viola ovata* is pretty common there.

Above the Cliffs, scare up a pair of turtle doves from the stubble, which go off with their shrill rattling whistle. *Corydalis glauca* is five inches high. The pistillate *Equisetum arvense* shows itself.

To-day we sit without fire.

Emerson says that Brewer tells him my "night warbler" is probably the Nashville warbler.

May 4. Rain. The barber tells me that the masons of New York tell him that they would prefer human hair to that of cattle to mix with their plastering.

Balm-of-Gilead pollen in house to-day; outdoors, say to-morrow, if fair.

Minott tells me of one Matthias Bowers, a native of Chelmsford and cousin of C. Bowers, a very active fellow, who used to sleep with him and when he found the door locked would climb over the roof and come in at the dormer-window. One Sunday, when they were repairing the old Unitarian church and there was a staging just above the belfry, he climbed up the lightning-rod and put his arm round the ball at the top of the spire and swung his hat there. He then threw it down and the crown was knocked out. Minott saw him do it, and Deacon White ordered him to come down. M. also told of a crazy fellow who got into the belfry of the Lincoln church with an axe and began to cut the spire down, but was stopped after he had done considerable damage.

When M. lived at Baker's, B. had a dog Lion, famous for chasing squirrels. The gray squirrels were numerous and used to run over the house sometimes. It was an old-fashioned house, slanting to one story behind, with a ladder from the roof to the ground. One day a gray squirrel ran over the house, and Lion, dashing after him up the ladder, went completely over the house and fell off the front side before he could stop, putting out one of his toes. But the squirrel did not put out any of his toes.

Wyman told Minott that he used to see *black snakes*

crossing Walden and would wait till they came ashore and then kill them. One day he saw a bull on the northerly side swim across to get at some cows on the south.

It has rained all day, and I see in the footpath across the Common, where water flows or has flown, a great many worms, apparently drowned. Did they not come out in unusual numbers last night because it was so warm, and so get overtaken by the rain? But how account for the worms said to be found in tubs of water?

Perhaps the most generally interesting event at present is a perfectly warm and pleasant day. It affects the greatest number, the well out of doors and the sick in chambers. No wonder the weather is the universal theme of conversation.

A warm rain; and the ring of the toads is heard all through it.

May 5. Tuesday. Building fence east of house.

Hear the *tull-tull* of a myrtle-bird¹ (very commonly heard for three or four days after). Have dug up in the garden this season half a dozen of those great leather-colored pupæ (with the tongue-case bent round to breast like a long urn-handle) of the sphinx moth. First potato-worm. Staminate *Salix rostrata*, possibly yesterday.

May 6. Wednesday. A beautiful and warm day. I go to build an arbor for R. W. E. The thrasher has been heard this morning. While at work I hear the bobolink and, methinks, peewee along the brook

¹ White-throat sparrow.

(surely see it on the 9th). Sugar maple by Dr. Barrett's, possibly to-day.

May 7. A second fine day.

Small pewee and, methinks, golden robin (?).

May 8. A third fine day.

The sugar maple at Barrett's is now in full bloom.

I finish the arbor to-night. This has been the third of these remarkably warm and beautiful [days]. I have worked all the while in my shirt-sleeves. Summer has suddenly come upon us, and the birds all together. Some boys have bathed in the river.

Walk to first stone bridge at sunset. *Salix alba*, possibly the 6th. It is a glorious evening. I scent the expanding willow leaves (for there are very few blossoms yet) fifteen rods off. Already hear the cheerful, sprightly note of the yellowbird amid them. It is perfectly warm and still, and the green grass reminds me of June. The air is full of the fragrance of willow leaves. The high water stretches smooth around. I hear the sound of Barrett's sawmill with singular distinctness. The ring of toads, the note of the yellowbird, the rich warble of the red-wing, the thrasher on the hillside, the robin's evening song, the woodpecker tapping some dead tree across the water; and I see countless little fuzzy gnats in the air, and dust over the road, between me and the departed sun. Perhaps the evenings of the 6th and 7th were as pleasant. But such an evening makes a crisis in the year. I must make haste home and go out on the water.

I paddle to the Wheeler meadow east of hill after sundown. From amid the alders, etc., I hear the mew of the catbird and the *yorrick* of Wilson's thrush. One bullfrog's faint *er-er-roonk* from a distance. (Perhaps the *Amphibia*, better than any creatures, celebrate the changes of temperature.) One *dump* note. It grows dark around. The full moon rises, and I paddle by its light. It is an evening for the soft-snoring, *purring* frogs (which I suspect to be *Rana palustris*). I get within a few feet of them as they sit along the edge of the river and meadow, but cannot see them. Their croak is very fine or rapid, and has a soft, purring sound at a little distance. I see them paddling in the water like toads.

Within a week I have had made a pair of corduroy pants, which cost when done \$1.60. They are of that peculiar clay-color, reflecting the light from portions of their surface. They have this advantage, that, beside being very strong, they will look about as well three months hence as now, — or as ill, some would say. Most of my friends are disturbed by my wearing them. I can get four or five pairs for what one ordinary pair would cost in Boston, and each of the former will last two or three times as long under the same circumstances. The tailor said that the stuff was not made in this country; that it was worn by the Irish at home, and now they would not look at it, but others would not wear it, durable and cheap as it is, because it is worn by the Irish. Moreover, I like the color on other accounts. Anything but black clothes. I was pleased the other day to see a son of Concord return after an ab-

sence of eight years, not in a shining suit of black, with polished boots and a beaver or silk hat, as if on a furlough from human duties generally, — a mere clothes-horse, — but clad in an honest clay-colored suit and a snug every-day cap. It showed unusual manhood. Most returning sons come home dressed for the occasion. The birds and beasts are not afraid of me now. A mink came within twenty feet of me the other day as soon as my companion had left me, and if I had had my gray sack on as well as my corduroys, it would perhaps have come quite up to me. Even farmers' boys, returning to their native town, though not unfamiliar with homely and dirty clothes, make their appearance on this new stage in a go-to-meeting suit.

May 9. Another *fine* day.

6 A. M. — On water.

Maryland yellow-throat. Aspen leaves one inch over. Hear stake-driver. Black and white creeper's *fine* note. *Er-to-ter-twee*, or evergreen-forest note. Golden-crowned thrush note. Kingbird.

P. M. To Gilson's Mill, Littleton.

George Brooks points to an old house of which one half the roof only has been shingled, etc., etc., and says he guessed it to be a widow's dower from this, and on inquiry found it so.

Went to Gilson's tumble-down mill and house. He appeared, licking his chaps after dinner, in a mealy coat, and suddenly asked in the midst of a sentence, with a shrug of his shoulders, "Is n't there something painted

on my back?" There were some marks in red chalk they used to chalk the bags with, and he said he thought he had felt his son at the mill chalking his back. He feared he was making an exhibition before strangers.

The boy speared fishes, chiefly suckers, pouts, etc. A fire in a hand-crate carried along the bank of the brook (Stony Brook). He had lately speared a sucker weighing five and a quarter pounds, which he sold; went back and forth some twenty-five rods and found the suckers less shy at last than at first. Saw otter there. I saw many perch at the foot of the falls. He said that they and trout could get up five or six feet over the rocks there into the pond, it being a much broken fall.

May 10. Cultivated cherry out.

P. M. — Up river.

Salix Babylonica behind Dodd's, how long? Say with *S. alba*. I observe that the fertile flowers of many plants are more late than the barren ones, as the sweet-gale (whose fertile are now in prime), the sweet-fern, etc.

See twenty or thirty tortoises on one stump by stone bridge and more still within a rod along the bank of E. Wood's ditch. Now the *Emys picta* lie out in great numbers, this suddenly warm weather, and when you go along the road within a few rods they tumble in. The banks of some ditches look almost as if paved with them.

I went looking for snapping turtles over the meadow south of railroad. Now I see one large head like a brown stake projecting three or four inches above the water four rods off, but it is slowly withdrawn, and I

paddle up and catch the fellow lying still in the dead grass there. Soon after I paddle within ten feet of one whose eyes like knobs appear on the side of the stake, and touch him with my paddle.

This side Clamshell, strawberries and cinquefoil are abundant. *Equisetum sylvaticum*.

There is a strong wind, against which I push and paddle. But now at last I do not go seeking the warm, sunny, and sheltered coves; the strong wind is enlivening and agreeable. It is a *washing* day. I love the wind at last.

Before night a sudden shower with some thunder and lightning; the first.

May 11. Warbling vireo and chewink. A very cold northwest wind. I hear they had a snow-storm yesterday in Vermont.

May 12. How rarely I meet with a man who can be free, even in thought! We live according to rule. Some men are bedridden; all, world-ridden. I take my neighbor, an intellectual man, out into the woods and invite him to take a new and absolute view of things, to empty clean out of his thoughts all institutions of men and start again; but he can't do it, he sticks to his traditions and his crotchets. He thinks that governments, colleges, newspapers, etc., are from everlasting to everlasting.

The *Salix cordata* var. *Torreyana* is distinguished by its naked ovaries more or less red-brown, with flesh-colored stigmas, with a distinct slender woolly rachis

and conspicuous stalks, giving the ament a loose and open appearance.

When I consider how many species of willow have been planted along the railroad causeway within ten years, of which no one knows the history, and not one in Concord beside myself can tell the name of one, so that it is quite a discovery to identify a single one in a year, and yet within this period the seeds of all these kinds have been conveyed from some other locality to this, I am reminded how much is going on that man wots not of.

While dropping beans in the garden at Texas just after sundown (May 13th), I hear from across the fields the note of the bay-wing, *Come here here there there quick quick quick or I'm gone* (which I have no doubt sits on some fence-post or rail there), and it instantly translates me from the sphere of my work and repairs all the world that we jointly inhabit. It reminds me of so many country afternoons and evenings when this bird's strain was heard far over the fields, as I pursued it from field to field. The spirit of its earth-song, of its serene and true philosophy, was breathed into me, and I saw the world as through a glass, as it lies eternally. Some of its aboriginal contentment, even of its domestic felicity, possessed me. What he suggests is permanently true. As the bay-wing sang many a thousand years ago, so sang he to-night. In the beginning God heard his song and pronounced it good, and hence it has endured. It reminded me of many a summer sunset, of many miles of gray rails, of many a rambling pasture, of the farmhouse far in the fields,

its milk-pans and well-sweep, and the cows coming home from pasture.

I would thus from time to time take advice of the birds, correct my human views by listening to their volucral (?). He is a brother poet, this small gray bird (or bard), whose muse inspires mine. His lay is an idyl or pastoral, older and sweeter than any that is classic. He sits on some gray perch like himself, on a stake, perchance, in the midst of the field, and you can hardly see him against the plowed ground. You advance step by step as the twilight deepens, and lo! he is gone, and in vain you strain your eyes to see whither, but anon his tinkling strain is heard from some other quarter. One with the rocks and with us.

Methinks I hear these sounds, have these reminiscences, only when well employed, at any rate only when I have no reason to be ashamed of my employment. I am often aware of a certain compensation of this kind for doing something from a sense of duty, even unconsciously. Our past experience is a never-failing capital which can never be alienated, of which each kindred future event reminds us. If you would have the song of the sparrow inspire you a thousand years hence, let your life be in harmony with its strain to-day.

I ordinarily plod along a sort of whitewashed prison entry, subject to some indifferent or even grovelling mood. I do not distinctly realize my destiny. I have turned down my light to the merest glimmer and am doing some task which I have set myself. I take incredibly narrow views, live on the limits, and have no

recollection of absolute truth. Mushroom institutions hedge me in. But suddenly, in some fortunate moment, the voice of eternal wisdom reaches me even, in the strain of the sparrow, and liberates me, whets and clarifies my senses, makes me a competent witness.¹

The second amelanchier out, in garden. Some fir balsams, as Cheney's. Is not ours in the grove, with the chip-bird's nest in it, the *Abies Fraseri*? Its cones are short. I hear of, and also find, a ground-bird's (song sparrow's) nest with five eggs.

P. M. — To Miles Swamp, Conantum.

I hear a yorrick, apparently anxious, near me, utter from time to time a sharp grating *char-r-r*, like a fine watchman's rattle. As usual, I have not heard them sing yet. A night-warbler, plainly light beneath. It always flies to a new perch immediately after its song. Hear the *screep* of the parti-colored warbler.

Veronica serpyllifolia is abundantly out at Corner Spring. As I go along the hillside toward Miles Swamp, I mistake the very light gray cliff-sides east of the river at Bittern Cliff for amelanchier in bloom.

The brother of Edward Garfield (after dandelions!) tells me that two years ago, when he was cutting wood at Bittern Cliff in the winter, he saw something dark squatting on the ice, which he took to be a mink, and taking a stake he went to inspect it. It turned out to be a bird, a new kind of duck, with a long, slender, pointed bill (he thought red). It moved off backwards, hissing at him, and he threw his stake about a rod and partly

¹ [Channing, p. 93.]

broke its neck, then killed it. It was very lean and the river was nowhere open. He sent it to Waltham and sold it for twenty-five cents.

Black ash, maybe a day.

Vaccinium Pennsylvanicum. I see a whitish cocoon on a small carpinus. It is artfully made where there is a short crook in the main stem, so as to just fill the hollow and make an even surface, the stick forming one side.



May 13. Work in garden. I see a toad only an inch and a quarter long; so they must be several years growing.

P. M. — To Leaning Hemlocks.

A large bunch of oat spawn in meadow water. Scare up a black duck and apparently two summer ducks. Canoe birch, how long? *Sternotherus*.

May 14. P. M. — To Assabet Bath and stone bridge.

I hear two thrashers plainly singing in emulation of each other.

At the temporary brush fence pond, now going down, amid the sprout-land and birches, I see, within a dozen rods along its shore, one to three rods from edge, thirteen wood tortoises on the grass, at 4 P. M. this cloudy afternoon. This is apparently a favorite resort for them, — a shallow open pool of half an acre, which dries up entirely a few weeks later, in dryish, mossy ground in an open birch wood, etc., etc. They take refuge in the water and crawl out over the mossy ground. They lie

about in various positions, very conspicuous there, at every rod or two. They are of various forms and colors: some almost regularly oval or elliptical, even pointed behind, others very broad behind, more or less flaring and turned up on the edge; some a dull lead-color and almost smooth, others brown with dull-yellowish marks. I see one with a large dent three eighths of an inch deep and nearly two inches long in the middle of its back, where it was once partially crushed. Hardly one has a perfect shell. The males (?), with concave sternums; the females, even or convex. They have their reddish-orange legs stretched out often, listlessly, when you approach, draw in their heads with a hiss when you take them up, commonly taking a bit of stubble with them.

See a pair of marsh hawks, the smaller and lighter-colored male, with black tips to wings, and the large brown female, sailing low over J. Hosmer's sprout-land and screaming, apparently looking for frogs or the like. Or have they not a nest near? They hover very near me. The female, now so near, sails very grandly, with the outer wing turned or tilted up when it circles, and the bars on its tail when it turns, etc., reminding me of a great brown moth. Sometimes alone; and when it approaches its mate it utters a low, grating note like *cur-r-r*. Suddenly the female holds straight toward me, descending gradually. Steadily she comes on, without swerving, until only two rods off, then wheels.

I find an old bog-hoe left amid the birches in the low ground, the handle nearly rotted off. In the low birch

land north of the pear tree the old corn-hills are very plain still, and now each hill is a dry moss-bed, of various species of *cladonia*. What a complete change from a dusty corn-hill!

Abel Hosmer tells me that he has collected and sown white pine seed, and that he has found them in the crop of pigeons. (?)

Salix lucida at bridge; maybe staminate earlier. Herb-of-St.-Barbara, how long?

May 15. Black currant at R. W. E.'s.

Abel Hosmer thought that the *Salix alba* roots might reach half a dozen rods into his field as big as your finger. Thought that they made the grass grow as much as the locust; only they made it rough plowing by throwing the plow out.

May 16. P. M. — To Hill for pines.

The meadows are now mostly bare, the grass showing itself above the water that is left, and an unusual number of swallows are flying low over it. A yellow lily out, and, on the hill, a red cedar, maybe a day.

May 17. P. M. — Round Walden.

Gold-thread is abundantly out at Trillium Woods. The yellow birch catkins, now fully out or a little past prime, are very handsome now, numerous clusters of rich golden catkins hanging straight down at a height from the ground on the end of the pendulous branches, amid the *just* expanding leaf-buds. It is like some great chandelier hung high over the underwood. So,

too, with the canoe birch. Such black as I see is not quite so forward yet. The canoe, yellow, and black birches are among the handsomest trees when in bloom. The bunches of numerous rich golden catkins, hanging straight down on all sides and trembling in the breeze, contrast agreeably with the graceful attitude of the tree, commonly more or less inclined, the leaves not being enough expanded to conceal them in the least. They should be seen against evergreens on a hillside, — something so light and airy, so graceful. What nymphs are they?

What was that peculiar spawn on a submerged alder stem seen the 13th? It looked like a fresh light-colored fungus, flattish and circular, a third of an inch over, and waving in the water, but, taken out, hung down longer. In the midst of this jelly were minute eggs.

I just notice the fertile sweet-fern bloom on *tall* plants,¹ where the sterile catkins are falling off above it. Most plants have none.

Two cocoons of apparently the *Attacus Promethea* on a small black birch, the silk wound round the leaf-stalk.

May 18. P. M. — To Bateman's Pond *via* Yellow Birch Swamp with Pratt.

Pratt says he saw the first rhodora and cultivated pear out yesterday. Many are now setting out pines and other evergreens, transplanting some wildness into the neighborhood of their houses. I do not know of

¹ And others.

a white pine that has been set out twenty-five years in the town. It is a new fashion. Judging from the flowering of such of the plants as I notice, this is a backward season. There is a very grand and picturesque old yellow birch in the old cellar northwest the yellow birch swamp. Though this stands out in open land, it does not shed its pollen yet, and its catkins are not much more than half elongated, but it is very beautiful as it is, with its dark-yellowish tassels variegated with brown. Yet in the swamp westerly the yellow birches are in full bloom, and many catkins strew the ground. They are four or five inches long when in bloom. They begin to shed their pollen at the base of the catkin, as, I think, other birches do.

In the yellow birch and ash swamp west of big yellow birch, I hear the fine note of cherry-birds, much like that of young partridges, and see them on the ash trees. *Viola Muhlenbergii* abundantly out, how long? The fever-bush in this swamp is very generally killed, at least the upper part, so that it has not blossomed. This is especially the case in the swamp; on higher ground, though exposed, it is in better condition. It appears to have been killed in the spring, for you see the unexpanded flower-buds quite conspicuous. Pratt shows me the fringed gentian stems by a swamp northeast of Bateman's Pond, but we find no traces of a new plant, and I think it must be annual there. The violet wood-sorrel is apparently later than the *Oxalis stricta*, not now so forward, lower, and darker green, only a few of the leaves showing that purplish mark. Hear the peep, how long? In woods close behind Easterbrook's

place, whence it probably strayed, several Canada plums now in bloom, showing the pink. Interesting to see a wild apple tree in the old cellar there, though with a forward caterpillar's nest on it. Call it *Malus celtaris*, that grows in an old cellar-hole.¹ Pedicularis, some time. The blossom-buds of the *Cornus florida* have been killed when an eighth of an inch in diameter, and are black within and fall on the least touch or jar; all over the town. There is a large tree on the further side the ravine near Bateman's Pond and another by some beeches on the rocky hillside a quarter of a mile northeast. In the swampy meadow north of this Pratt says he finds the calla. The *Rubus triflorus* is well out there on the hummocks. The white ash is not yet out in most favorable places. The red huckleberry looks more forward—blossom-buds more swollen—than those of common there. Some high blueberry. Pratt has found perfectly white *Viola pedata* behind Easterbrook place, and cultivated them, but now lost them. Says he saw two "black" snakes intertwined (copulating?) yesterday.

May 19. A. M. — Surveying D. Shattuck's woodlot beyond Peter's.

See myriads of minute pollywogs, recently hatched, in the water of Moore's Swamp on Bedford road. Digging again to find a stake in woods, came across a nest or colony of wood ants, yellowish or sand-color, a third of an inch long, with their white grubs, now squirming, still larger, and emitting that same pungent

¹ [Excursions, p. 316; Riv. 388.]

spicy odor, perhaps too pungent to be compared with lemon-peel. This is the second time I have found them in this way this spring (*vide* April 28th). Is not the pungent scent emitted by wasps quite similar?

I see the ferns all blackened on the hillside next the meadow, by the frost within a night or two.

That ant scent is not at all sickening, but tonic, and reminds me of a bitter flavor like that of peach-meats.

May 20. Began to rain the latter part of yesterday, and rains all day against all desire and expectation, raising the river and, in low land, rotting the seed. Gardeners wish that their land had not been planted nor plowed. Postpone your journey till the May storm is over.

It has been confidently asserted and believed that if the cold in the winter exceeded a certain degree it surely killed the peach blossoms. Last winter we had greater cold than has ever been generally observed here, and yet it is a remarkable spring for peach blossoms; thus once for all disproving that assertion. Everything in the shape of a peach tree blossoms this season, even a mutilated shrub on the railroad causeway, sprung from a stone which some passenger cast out. Nevertheless the lowest limbs, which were covered by the drifts, have blossomed much the earliest and fullest, as usual, and this *after-blow* is quite unexpected. Peach trees are revealed along fences where they were quite unobserved before.

The expression in Sophocles' *Oedipus at Colonus*,

"White Colonos," said to refer to the silvery soil, reminded me at first of the tracts now whitened by the pyrus blossoms, which may be mistaken for hoary rocks. *Vide* this description of Colonos. Have all the Canada plums that striking pink color at the base of the blossoms at last?

I find that the corydalis sprig which I brought home five days ago keeps fresh and blossoms remarkably well in water, — its delicate bright flesh-colored or pink flowers and glaucous leaves!

How suddenly, after all, pines seem to shoot up and fill the pastures! I wonder that the farmers do not earlier encourage their growth. To-day, perchance, as I go through some run-out pasture, I observe many young white pines dotting the field, where last year I had noticed only blackberry vines; but I see that many are already destroyed or injured by the cows which have dived into them to scratch their heads or for sport (such is their habit; they break off the leading shoot and bend down the others of different evergreens), or perchance where the farmer has been mowing them down, and I think the owner would rather have a pasture here than a wood-lot. A year or two later, as I pass through the same field, I am surprised to find myself in a flourishing young wood-lot, from which the cows are now carefully fenced out, though there are many open spaces, and I perceive how much further advanced it would have been if the farmer had been more provident and had begun to abet nature a few years earlier. It is surprising by what leaps — two or three feet in a season — the pines stretch toward the

sky, affording shelter also to various hardwoods which plant themselves in their midst.

I do not know a white pine in the town which has been set out twenty-five years.

May 21. Rains still, more or less, all day. But it is an ill wind that blows nobody any good; this weather is good for cuttings and transplanted trees.

P. M. — To Hill.

Sassafras (fertile) will apparently bloom to-morrow. These, too, — the young trees, — have been killed the past winter, like the fever-bush.

There is, leaning over the Assabet at the Grape Bower, an amelanchier variety *Botryapium* about five inches in diameter and some twenty-eight feet long, a light and graceful tree. The leaves of this are, as usual, nearly smooth and quite brown, of a delicate tint (purplish?). At the spring just beyond, is another amelanchier, and other small ones are not uncommon, differing from the last, not in the form of its petals and leaves, but the latter are green, or very slightly streaked with purplish. It seems to be a common variety of the variety *Botryapium* and quite downy, though not so downy as those of the *oblongifolia*. The bark of these trees is much like that of a maple.

I find checkerberries still fresh and abundant. Last year was a remarkable one for them. They lurk under the low leaves, scarcely to be detected, often, as you are standing up, almost below the level of the ground, dark-scarlet berries, some of them half an inch in diameter, broad pear-shaped, of a pale or hoary pink color be-

neath. The peduncle curves downward between two leaves. There they lurk under the glossy, dark-green, brown-spotted leaves, close to the ground. They make a very handsome nosegay.

I saw yesterday a parrot exceedingly frightened in its cage at a window. It rushed to the bars and struggled to get out. A piece of board had been thrown from the window above to the ground, which probably the parrot's instinct had mistaken for a hawk. Their eyes are very open to danger from above.

The staminate buds of the black spruce are quite a bright red.

May 22. After two or three days more of rainy weather, it is fair and warm at last. Thermometer seventy-odd degrees above zero. When the May storm is over, then the summer is fairly begun.

9 A. M. — I go up the Assabet in boat to stone bridge.

Is it not summer when we do not go seeking sunny and sheltered places, but also love the wind and shade?

As I stand on the sand-bank below the Assabet stone bridge and look up through the arch, the river makes a pretty picture. It is perfectly smooth above the bridge and appears two or three feet higher (it is probably half as much) than below and rushes to its fall very regularly thus, the bridge partially damming the stream: the smoothness extends part way under the bridge in the middle, the turbulent water rushing down each side.



May 23. P. M. — To Holden Swamp by boat.

River still high *generally* over the meadows. Can sail across the Hubbard meadow. Off Staples wood-lot, hear the *ah tche tche chit-i-vet* of the redstart.

Tortoises out again abundantly. Each particularly warm and sunny day brings them out on to every floating rail and stump. I count a dozen within three or four feet on a rail. It is a tortoise day. I hear one regular bullfrog trump, and as I approach the edge of the Holden Swamp, the tree-toads. Hear the peep there, and the redstarts, and the chestnut-sided warbler. It appears striped slate and black above, white beneath, yellow-crowned with black side-head, two yellow bars on wing, white side-head below the black, black bill, and long chestnut streak on side. Its song lively and rather long, about as the summer yellowbird, but not in two bars; *tse tse tse | te tsah tsah tsah | te sah yer se* is the rhythm. *Kalmia glauca* yesterday. *Rhodora*, on shore there, a little before it. *Nemophanes*, a day or two.

This is the time and place to hear the new-arriving warblers, the first fine days after the May storm. When the leaves generally are just fairly expanding, and the deciduous trees are hoary with them, — a silvery hoariness, — then, about the edges of the swamps in the woods, these birds are flitting about in the tree-tops like gnats, catching the insects about the expanding leaf-buds.

I wade in the swamp for the *kalmia*, amid the water andromeda and the sphagnum, scratching my legs with the first and sinking deep in the last. The water is now gratefully cool to my legs, so far from being poisoned

in the strong water of the swamp. It is a sort of baptism for which I had waited.

At Miles Swamp, the *carpinus* sterile catkins, apparently a day or two, but I see no fertile ones, unless that is one (pressed) at the southeast edge of swamp near grafted apple, and its catkins are effete! Hear the first veery strain. The small twigs of the *carpinus* are singularly tough, as I find when I try to break off the flowers. They bend without breaking. Sand cherry at Lupine Bank, possibly a day. *Sassafras*, a day or two. Fringed polygala, I hear of.

The first goldfinch twitters over, and at evening I hear the *spark* of a nighthawk.

May 24. A. M. — To Hill.

White ash, apparently yesterday, at Grape Shore but not at Conantum. What a singular appearance for some weeks its great masses of dark-purple anthers have made, fruit-like on the trees!

A very warm morning. Now the birds sing more than ever, methinks, now, when the leaves are fairly expanding, the first really warm summer days. The water on the meadows is perfectly smooth nearly all the day. At 3 P. M. the thermometer is at 88°. It soon gets to be quite hazy. Apple out. Heard one speak to-day of his sense of awe at the thought of God, and suggested to him that awe was the cause of the potato-rot.¹ The same speaker dwelt on the sufferings of life, but my advice was to go about one's business, suggesting that no ecstasy was ever interrupted, nor its

¹ [Channing, p. 89.]

fruit blasted. As for completeness and roundness, to be sure, we are each like one of the laciniae of a lichen, a torn fragment, but not the less cheerfully we expand in a moist day and assume unexpected colors. We want no completeness but intensity of life. Hear the first cricket as I go through a warm hollow, bringing round the summer with his everlasting strain.¹

May 25. P. M. — With Ricketson to my boat under Fair Haven Hill.

In Hubbard's Grove, hear the shrill chattering of downy woodpeckers, very like the red squirrel's *tche tche*. Thermometer at 87° at 2.30 P. M. It is interesting to hear the bobolinks from the meadow sprinkle their lively strain along amid the tree-tops as they fly over the wood above our heads. It resounds in a novel manner through the aisles of the wood, and at the end that fine buzzing, wiry note. The black spruce of Holden's, apparently yesterday, but not the 23d. What a glorious crimson fire as you look up to the sunlight through the thin edges of the scales of its cones! So intensely glowing in their cool green beds! while their purplish sterile blossoms shed pollen on you. Took up four young spruce and brought them home in the boat.

After all, I seem to have distinguished only one spruce, and that the black, judging by the cones, — perhaps the dark and light varieties of it, for the last is said to be very like the white spruce. The white spruce cones are cylindrical and have an entire firm edge to the scales, and the needles are longer.

¹ [Daniel Ricketson and his Friends, pp. 355, 356.]

Though the river is thus high, we bathe at Cardinal Shore and find the water unexpectedly warm and the air also delicious. Thus we are baptized into nature.

May 26. Pink azalea in garden. Mountain-ash a day; also horse-chestnut the same. Beach plum well out, several days at least. Wood pewee, and Minott heard a loon go laughing over this morning.

The vireo days have fairly begun. They are now heard amid the elm-tops. Thin coats and straw hats are worn.

I have noticed that notional nervous invalids, who report to the community the exact condition of their heads and stomachs every morning, as if they alone were blessed or cursed with these parts; who are old betties and quiddles, if men; who can't eat their breakfasts when they are ready, but play with their spoons, and hanker after an ice-cream at irregular hours; who go more than half-way to meet any invalidity, and go to bed to be sick on the slightest occasion, in the middle of the brightest forenoon, — improve the least opportunity to be sick; — I observe that such are self-indulgent persons, without any regular and absorbing employment. They are nice, discriminating, experienced in all that relates to bodily sensations. They come to you stroking their wens, manipulating their ulcers, and expect you to do the same for them. Their religion and humanity stick. They spend the day manipulating their bodies and doing no work; can never get their nails clean.

Some of the earliest willows about warm edges of woods are gone to seed and downy.

P. M. — To Saw Mill Brook.

It is very hazy after a sultry morning, but the wind is getting east and cool. The oaks are in the gray, or a little more, and the silvery leaflets of the deciduous trees invest the woods like a permanent mist. At the same season with this haze of buds comes also the kindred haziness of the air.

I see the common small reddish butterflies.

Very interesting now are the red tents of expanding oak leaves, as you go through sprout-lands, — the crimson velvet of the black oak and the more pinkish white oak. The salmon and pinkish-red canopies or umbrellas of the white oak are particularly interesting. The very sudden expansion of the great hickory buds, umbrella-wise. Now, at last, all leaves dare unfold, and twigs begin to *shoot*.

As I am going down the footpath from Britton's camp to the spring, I start a pair of nighthawks (they had the white on the wing) from amid the dry leaves at the base of a bush, a bunch of sprouts, and away they flitted in zigzag noiseless flight a few rods through the sprout-land, dexterously avoiding the twigs, uttering a faint hollow *what*, as if made by merely closing the bill, and one alighted flat on a stump.

On those carpinus trees which have fertile flowers, the sterile are effete and drop off.

The red choke-berry not in bloom, while the black is, for a day or more at least.

Roadside near Britton's camp, see a grosbeak, ap-

parently female of the rose-breasted, quite tame, as usual, brown above, with black head and a white streak over the eye, a less distinct one beneath it, two faint bars on wings, dirty-white bill, white breast, dark spotted or streaked, and from time [to time] utters a very sharp *chirp* of alarm or interrogation as it peers through the twigs at me.

A lady's-slipper. At Cliffs, no doubt, before. At Abel Brooks's (or Black Snake, or Red Cherry, or Rye) Hollow, hear the wood thrush.

In Thrush Alley, see one of those large ant-hills, recently begun, the grass and moss partly covered with sand over a circle two feet in diameter, with holes two to five inches apart, and the dry sand is dark-spotted with the fresh damp sand about each hole.

My mother was telling to-night of the sounds which she used to hear summer nights when she was young and lived on the Virginia Road, — the lowing of cows, or cackling of geese, or the beating of a drum as far off as Hildreth's, but above all Joe Merriam whistling to his team, for he was an admirable whistler. Says she used to get up at midnight and go and sit on the door-step when all in the house were asleep, and she could hear nothing in the world but the ticking of the clock in the house behind her.

May 27. P. M. — To Hill.

I hear the sound of fife and drum the other side of the village, and am reminded that it is May Training. Some thirty young men are marching in the streets in two straight sections, with each a very heavy and warm

cap for the season on his head and a bright red stripe down the legs of his pantaloons, and at their head march two with white stripes down their pants, one beating a drum, the other blowing a fife. I see them all standing in a row by the side of the street in front of their captain's residence, with a dozen or more ragged boys looking on, but presently they all remove to the opposite side, as it were with one consent, not being satisfied with their former position, which probably had its disadvantages. Thus they march and strut the better part of the day, going into the tavern two or three times, to abandon themselves to unconstrained positions out of sight, and at night they may be seen going home singly with swelling breasts.

When I first saw them as I was ascending the Hill, they were going along the road to the Battle-Ground far away under the hill, a fifer and a drummer to keep each other company and spell one another. Ever and anon the drum sounded more hollowly loud and distinct, as if they had just emerged from a subterranean passage, though it was only from behind some barn, and following close behind I could see two platoons of awful black beavers, rising just above the wall, where the warriors were stirring up the dust of Winter Street, passing Ex-Captain Abel Heywood's house, probably with trailed arms. There might have been some jockey in their way, spending his elegant leisure teaching his horse to stand fire, or trying to run down an orphan boy. I also hear, borne down the river from time to time, regular reports of small arms from Sudbury or Wayland, where they are probably firing by platoons.

Celtis occidentalis, perhaps yesterday. How the staminate flowers drop off, even before opening! I perceived that rare meadow fragrance on the 25th. Is it not the sweet-scented vernal grass? ¹ I see what I have called such, now very common. The earliest thorn on hill, a day or more. Hemlock, apparently a day or two. Some butternut catkins; the leaves have been touched by frost. This is blossom week, beginning last Sunday (the 24th). At evening, the first bat.

May 28. Rain again in the night, and this forenoon, more or less. In some places the ground is strewn with apple blossoms, quite concealing it, as white and thick as if a snow-storm had occurred.

May 29. P. M. — To Lee's Cliff.

A fine-grained air, June-like, after a cloudy, rain-threatening or rainy morning. Sufficient [*sic*] with a still, clear air in which the hum of insects is heard, and the sunniness contrasts with the shadows of the freshly expanded foliage, like the glances of an eye from under the dark eyelashes of June. The grass is not yet dry. The birds sing more lively than ever now after the rain, though it is only 2 P. M.

On the Corner road I overtake a short, thick-set young man dressed in thick blue clothes, with a large basket of scions, etc., on his arm, who has just come from Newton in the cars and is going to graft for Lafayette Garfield, thus late. He does not think much of the Baldwin, and still less of the Porter. The last is too

¹ Think not, but perceive that in any case.

sour! and, above all, does not bear well!! Has set more scions of Williams' Favorite than of any other, and thinks much of Seaver's apple, a sweeting, etc. Verily, it is all *de gustibus*. Having occasion to speak of his father, who had been unfortunate, he said, "We boys (his sons) clubbed together and bought the old fellow a farm" just before he died. He had a very broad, round face, and short front teeth half buried in the gums, for he exposed the whole of his gums when he opened his mouth.

I think I have noticed that coarse-natured farmers' boys, etc., have not a sufficiently fine and delicate taste to appreciate a high-flavored apple. It is commonly too acid for them, and they prefer some tame, sweet thing, fit only for baking, as a pumpkin sweeting.

Men derive very various nutriment from the same nature, their common habitat, like plants. Some derive, as it were directly from the soil, a brawny body, and their cheeks bulge out like pumpkin sweetings. They seem more thoroughly naturalized here, and the elements are kinder to them. They have more of the wind and rain and meadow muck in their composition. They flourish in the swampy soil like vegetables and do not fear toothache or neuralgia. Some grow like a pumpkin pine, at least. They fish and hunt and get the meadow-hay. Compared with ordinary men, they grow like a Rohan potato beside a Lady's-Finger. Their system has great power of assimilation. The soil is native to them. As different elements go to the composition of two human bodies as the thoughts that occupy their brains are different. How much more readily one na-

ture assimilates to beef and potatoes and makes itself a brawny body of them, than another!

We sat and talked a spell at the Corner Spring. What is the new warbler I see and hear frequently now, with apparently a black head, white side-head, brown back, forked tail, and light legs?

The sun came out an hour or more ago, rapidly drying the foliage, and for the first time this year I noticed the little shades produced by the foliage which had expanded in the rain, and long narrow dark lines of shade along the hedges or willow-rows. It was like the first bright flashings of an eye from under dark eyelashes after shedding warm tears.

Now I see a great dark low-arching cloud in the northwest already dropping rain there and steadily sweeping southeast, as I go over the first Conantum Hill from the spring. But I trust that its southwest end will drift too far north to strike me. The rest of the sky is quite serene, sprinkled here and there with bright downy, glowing summer clouds. The grass was not yet dried before this angry summer-shower cloud appeared. I go on, uncertain whether it is broad or thin and whether its heel will strike me or not.

How universal that strawberry-like fragrance of the fir-balsam cone and wilted twig! My meadow fragrance (also perceived on hillsides) reminds me of it. Methinks that the fragrance of the strawberry may stand for a large class of odors, as the terebinthine odors of firs and arbor-vitæ and cedar (as the harp stands for music). There is a certain sting to it, as to them.

Black shrub oaks well out. *Oxalis stricta*.

The *Veronica serpyllifolia*, now erect, is commonly found in moist depressions or hollows in the pastures, where perchance a rock has formerly been taken out and the grass is somewhat thicker and deeper green; also in the grassy ruts of old, rarely used cart-paths.

Red and black oaks are out at Lee's Cliff, well out, and already there are crimson spots on the red oak leaves. Also the fine red *mammilla* galls stud the black cherry leaves. Galls begin with the very unfolding of the leaves. The *Polygonatum pubescens* out there. Some, nay most, *Turritis stricta* quite out of bloom.

Fair Haven Lake now, at 4.30 p. m., is perfectly smooth, reflecting the darker and glowing June clouds as it has not before. Fishes incessantly dimple it here and there, and I see afar, approaching steadily but diagonally toward the shore of the island, some creature on its surface, maybe a snake, — but my glass shows it to be a muskrat, leaving two long harrow-like ripples behind. Soon after, I see another, quite across the pond on the Baker Farm side, and even distinguish that to be a muskrat. The fishes, methinks, are busily breeding now. These things I see as I sit on the top of Lee's Cliff, looking into the light and dark eye of the lake. The heel of that summer-shower cloud, seen through the trees in the west, has extended further south and looks more threatening than ever. As I stand on the rocks, examining the blossoms of some forward black oaks which close overhang it, I think I hear the sound of flies against my hat. No, it is scattered raindrops, though the sky is perfectly clear above me, and the cloud from which they come is yet far on

one side. I see through the tree-tops the thin vanguard of the storm scaling the celestial ramparts, like eager light infantry, or cavalry with spears advanced. But from the west a great, still, ash-colored cloud comes on. The drops fall thicker, and I seek a shelter under the Cliffs. I stand under a large projecting portion of the Cliff, where there is ample space above and around, and I can move about as perfectly protected as under a shed. To be sure, fragments of rock look as if they would fall, but I see no marks of recent ruin about me.

Soon I hear the low all-pervading hum of an approaching hummingbird circling above the rock, which afterward I mistake several times for the gruff voices of men approaching, unlike as these sounds are in some respects, and I perceive the resemblance even when I know better. Now I am sure it is a hummingbird, and now that it is two farmers approaching. But presently the hum becomes more sharp and thrilling, and the little fellow suddenly perches on an ash twig within a rod of me, and plumes himself while the rain is fairly beginning. He is quite out of proportion to the size of his perch. It does not acknowledge his weight.

I sit at my ease and look out from under my lichen-clad rocky roof, half-way up the Cliff, under freshly leafing ash and hickory trees on to the pond, while the rain is falling faster and faster, and I am rather glad of the rain, which affords me this experience. The rain has compelled me to find the cosiest and most homelike part of all the Cliff. The surface of the pond, though the rain dimples it all alike and I perceive no

wind, is still divided into irregular darker and lighter spaces, with distinct boundaries, as it were *watered* all over. Even now that it rains very hard and the surface is all darkened, the boundaries of those spaces are not quite obliterated. The countless drops seem to spring again from its surface like stalagmites.

A mosquito, sole living inhabitant of this antrum, settles on my hand. I find here sheltered with me a sweet-briar growing in a cleft of the rock above my head, where perhaps some bird or squirrel planted it. Mulleins beneath. *Galium Aparine*, just begun to bloom, growing next the rock; and, in the earth-filled clefts, columbines, some of whose cornucopias strew the ground. *Ranunculus bulbosus* in bloom; saxifrage; and various ferns, as spleenwort, etc. Some of these plants are never rained on. I perceive the buttery-like scent of barberry bloom from over the rock, and now and for some days the bunches of effete white ash anthers strew the ground.

It lights up a little, and the drops fall thinly again, and the birds begin to sing, but now I see a new shower coming up from the southwest, and the wind seems to have changed somewhat. Already I had heard the low mutterings of its thunder — for this is a thunder-shower — in the midst of the last. It seems to have shifted its quarters merely to attack me on a more exposed side of my castle. Two foes appear where I had expected none. But who can calculate the tactics of the storm? It is a first regular summer thunder-shower, preceded by a rush of wind, and I begin to doubt if my quarters will prove a sufficient shelter. I am fairly

besieged and know not when I shall escape. I hear the still roar of the rushing storm at a distance, though no trees are seen to wave. And now the forked flashes descending to the earth succeed rapidly to the hollow roars above, and down comes the deluging rain. I hear the alarmed notes of birds flying to a shelter. The air at length is cool and chilly, the atmosphere is darkened, and I have forgotten the smooth pond and its reflections. The rock feels cold to my body, as if it were a different season of the year. I almost repent of having lingered here; think how far I should have got if I had started homeward. But then what a condition I should have been in! Who knows but the lightning will strike this cliff and topple the rocks down on me? The crashing thunder sounds like the overhauling of lumber on heaven's loft. And now, at last, after an hour of steady confinement, the clouds grow thin again, and the birds begin to sing. They make haste to conclude the day with their regular evening songs (before the rain is fairly over) according to the program. The peep on some pine tree top was heard almost in the midst of the storm. One or two bullfrogs trump. They care not how wet it is. Again I hear the still rushing, all-pervading roar of the withdrawing storm, when it is at least half a mile off, wholly beyond the pond, though no trees are seen to wave. It is simply the sound of the countless drops falling on the leaves and the ground. You were not aware what a sound the rain made. Several times I attempt to leave my shelter, but return to it. My first stepping abroad seems but a signal for the rain to commence again. Not till after an hour and a half do I

escape. After all, my feet and legs are drenched by the wet grass.¹

Those great hickory buds, how much they contained! You see now the large reddish scales turned back at the base of the new twigs. Suddenly the buds burst, and those large pinnate leaves stretched forth in various directions.

I see and hear the cuckoo. The *Salix nigra*, apparently several days, at Corner Bridge.

Many of the black spruce have the terminal twigs dead. They are a slow-growing tree. It is encouraging to see thrifty-growing white pines by their side, which have added three feet to their height the last year.

With all this opportunity, this comedy and tragedy, how near all men come to doing nothing! It is strange that they did not make us more intense and emphatic, that they do not goad us into some action. Generally, with all our desires and restlessness, we are no more likely to embark in any enterprise than a tree is to walk to a more favorable locality. The seaboard swarms with adventurous and rowdy fellows, but how unaccountably they train and are held in check! They are as likely to be policemen as anything. It exhausts their wits and energy merely to get their living, and they can do no more. The Americans are very busy and adventurous sailors, but all in somebody's employ, — as hired men. I have not heard of one setting out in his own bark, if only to run down our own coast on a voyage of adventure or observation, on his own account.

¹ *Vide* forward [next date].

May 30. P. M. — To chestnut oaks.

I think that there are many chestnut-sided warblers this season. They are pretty tame. One sits within six feet of me, though not still. He is much painted up.

Blue-stemmed goldenrod is already a foot high. I see the geranium and two-leaved Solomon's-seal out, the last abundant. The red pyrus by the path, not yet, but probably the same elsewhere.

The young black oak leaflets are dark red or reddish, thick and downy; the scarlet oak also are somewhat reddish, thick and downy, or thin and green and little downy, like red oak, but rather more deeply cut; the red oak broad, thin, green and not downy; the white pink-red. Was it not a whip-poor-will I scared up at the base of a bush in the woods to-day, that went off with a clumsy flight?

By the path near the northeast shore of Flint's Pond, just before reaching the wall by the brook, I see what I take to be an uncommonly large *Uvularia sessilifolia* flower, but, looking again, am surprised to find it the *Uvularia perfoliata*, which I have not found hereabouts before. It is a taller and much more erect plant than the other, with a larger flower, methinks. It is considerably past its prime and probably began with the other.

Chestnut oak not yet in bloom, though the black and scarlet are well out in ordinary places. Its young leaves have a reddish-brown tinge. All the large trees are cut down. The white oak is not out.

It is remarkable that many beach and chestnut oak leaves, which so recently expanded, have already attained their full size! How they launch themselves forth

to the light! How suddenly Nature spreads her umbrellas! How little delay in expanding leaves! They seem to expand before our eyes, like the wings of moths just fallen from the cocoon.

Buttercups thickly spot the churchyard.

Perhaps I could write meditations under a rock in a shower.

When first I had sheltered myself under the rock, I began at once to look out on the pond with new eyes, as from my house. I was at Lee's Cliff as I had never been there before, had taken up my residence there, as it were. Ordinarily we make haste away from all opportunities to be where we have instinctively endeavored to get. When the storm was over where I was, and only a few thin drops were falling around me, I plainly saw the rear of the rain withdrawing over the Lincoln woods south of the pond, and, above all, heard the grand rushing sound made by the rain falling on the freshly green forest, a very different sound when thus heard at a distance from what it is when we are in the midst of it. In the latter case we are soothed by a gentle pattering and do not suspect the noise which a rain-storm makes. This Cliff thus became my house. I inhabited it. When, at length, it cleared up, it was unexpectedly early and light, and even the sun came out and shone warm on my back as I went home. Large puddles occupied the cart-paths and rose above the grass in the fields.

In the midst of the shower, though it was not raining very hard, a black and white creeper came and inspected the limbs of a tree before my rock, in his usual

zigzag, prying way, head downward often, and when it thundered loudest, heeded it not. Birds appear to be but little incommoded by the rain. Yet they do not often sing in it.

The blue sky is never more celestial to our eyes than when it is first seen here and there between the clouds at the end of a storm, — a sign of speedy fair weather. I saw clear blue patches for twenty minutes or more in the southwest before I could leave my covert, for still I saw successive fine showers falling between me and the thick glaucous white pine beneath.

I think that such a projection as this, or a cave, is the only effectual protection that nature affords us against the storm.

I sang "Tom Bowling" there in the midst of the rain, and the dampness seemed to be favorable to my voice.¹ There was a slight rainbow on my way home. Met Conant riding home, who had been caught in town and detained, though he had an umbrella. Already a spider or other insect had drawn together the just expanded leaves of a hickory before my door with its web within them, making a close tent. This twig extended under my rocky roof and was quite dry. Probably a portion of the Cliff, being undermined by rain, had anciently fallen out and left this rocky roof above.

May 31. P. M. — To Gowing's Swamp and to *Pinus resinosa*.

In the ditches in Moore's Swamp on the new Bedford

¹ [This was Thoreau's favorite song. See Sanborn, pp. 268, 269, 272, especially the quotation from Mr. Ricketson.]

road, the myriads of pollywogs, now three quarters of an inch long, crowding close to the edge, make a continuous black edging to the pool a foot wide. I see where thousands have been left high and dry and are now trodden into the sand, yet preserving their forms, spotting it with black. The water looks too full of yellowish sediment to support them. That central meadow and pool in Gowing's Swamp is its very navel, *omphalos*, where the umbilical cord was cut that bound it to creation's womb. Methinks every swamp tends to have or suggests such an interior tender spot. The sphagnous crust that surrounds the pool is pliant and quaking, like the skin or muscles of the abdomen; you seem to be slumping into the very bowels of the swamp. Some seem to have been here to collect sphagnum, either for wells, or to wrap plants in. There grow the white spruce and the larch. The spruce cones, though now erect, at length turn down. The sterile flowers on lower twigs around stand up now three quarters of an inch long, open and reddish-brown. *Andromeda Polifolia*, much past its prime. I detect no hairy huckleberry. The *Vaccinium Oxyccocus* is almost in bloom! and has grown three inches; is much in advance of the common.

The *Pinus resinosa* not yet out; will be apparently with the *rigida*. It has no fertile flowers or cones. The sterile flower-buds are dark-purple, while those of the *rigida* there are light-green. The largest tree is about ten inches in diameter. It is distinguished, at a distance even, by its lighter-colored and smoother or flatter bark. It is also very straight and perpendicular, with its

branches in regular whorls, and its needles are very long.

Rhodora now in its prime.

I see in open land a hollow circle of *Lycopodium dendroideum*, ten feet in diameter; some of the inner portion is dead. This too, then, like the flowering fern, grows or spreads in circles. Also the cinnamon fern grows in circles.

See an ants' nest, just begun, which covers the grass with sand for more than ten feet in one direction and seven in the other and is thickly pierced with holes.