

IV

NOVEMBER, 1856

(ÆT. 39)

Nov. 2. Sunday. Took a walk two miles west of Eagleswood. The *Quercus palustris*, or pin oak, very common there, much like the scarlet oak. Name said to be derived from the dead stub ends of branches on the trunk beneath, like pins or treenails. Its acorns subglobose, and marked with meridional lines. A mile and a half west of Spring's, a new oak, with narrow and entire willow-like leaves, apparently *Q. imbricaria*, laurel or shingle oak, or perhaps Michaux's *Q. cinerea*, which may be a variety of it. According to Michaux's plates, I see that the leaves of the *Q. Phellos*, or willow oak, are about two and three quarters by one third plus inches, of the laurel oak three and a half by seven eighths. *His* upland willow oak (*Q. cinerea*) leaf is about three by three quarters and less tapering at base.

The *Cornus florida* was exceedingly common and large there. Conspicuous with its scarlet berries, fed on by robins. The leaves were turned a brown scarlet or orange red.

About the 10th of November, I first noticed long bunches of very small dark-purple or black grapes fallen on the dry leaves in the ravine east of Spring's

house. Quite a large mass of clusters remained hanging on the leafless vine, thirty feet overhead there, till I left, on the 24th November. These grapes were much shrivelled, but they had a very agreeably spicy acid taste, evidently not acquired till after the frosts. I thought them quite a discovery and ate many from day to day, swallowing the skins and stones, and recommended them to Spring. He said that they were very much like a certain French grape, which he had eaten in France. It is a true frost grape, but apparently answers to *Vitis astivalis* (?). *Vide* fruit and leaves. One I opened has only two seeds, while *one* of the early ones at Brattleboro has four, but one of the late ones of Brattleboro has only two, which also I have called *V. astivalis*.

Was interested by Pierce's Perpetual Calendar on a round stick (sometimes on a pencil-case), by which you tell the day of the week, etc., for any date.

Visited the principal antique bookstore, in Fulton Street, upstairs, west of Broadway; also Tunison's antique bookstore, 138 Fulton Street.

May be worth while to get Oswald's Etymological Dictionary and, if possible, Smith's (smaller) (abridged) Dictionary of Antiquities. He is the author of the Latin Dictionary.

I suspect it is the *Quercus montana*, var. *monticola* of *Prinus*, so common at Eagleswood, with its large acorns now sprouted. Indeed, almost every acorn of white and chestnut oaks was sprouted.

Noticed plenty of *Chimaphila maculata* in the great ravine.

Saw more rabbits and wild mice there than here.

Game is protected. The boys said the wild rabbits played with the tame ones in the yard.

The prevailing trees there are red cedar, tulip, white oak, pin oak, chestnut oak, etc., gum-tree, pitch pine, and, of smaller trees, the *Cornus florida*. There was no white pine and but two or three small white birches.

The wire fence was something new, and the tongue used by an Irishwoman to wipe a cinder out of her son's eye. The four feet of flame issuing from one chimney of the State of Maine steamer after we passed her (the sun just set), not yellow and fiery but white like a lit cloud, or her smoke reflecting the departing day.

A clayey soil at Eagleswood, making very bad walking even after a frosty night only. Clay mixed with the red sandstone sand. When I washed my hands, though but little soiled, the water was colored red.

Am glad to get back to New England, the dry, sandy, wholesome land, land of scrub oaks and birches and white pines, now in her russet dress, reminding me of her flaxen-headed children.

Saw some very large true hornbeams.

The pastures, etc., at Eagleswood were densely overrun with wild carrots, the commonest weed and a great pest.

When I got back to New England the grass seemed bleached a shade or two more flaxen, more completely withered.

Nov. 25. Tuesday. Get home again this morning.

Nov. 27. P. M. — Take a turn down the river. A painted tortoise sinking to the bottom, and apparently tree sparrows along the shore.

Nov. 28. P. M. — To chestnut wood by Turnpike, to see if I could find my comb, probably lost out of my pocket when I climbed and shook a chestnut tree more than a month ago.

Unexpectedly find many chestnuts in the burs which have fallen some time ago. Many are spoiled, but the rest, being thus moistened, are softer and sweeter than a month ago, very agreeable to my palate. The burs from some cause having fallen without dropping their nuts.

As I stood looking down the hill over Emerson's young wood-lot there, perhaps at 3.30 p. m., the sunlight reflected from the many ascending twigs of bare young chestnuts and birches, very dense and ascendant with a marked parallelism, they reminded me of the lines of gossamer at this season, being almost exactly similar to the eye. It is a true November phenomenon.

Nov. 29. Begins to snow this morning and snows slowly and interruptedly with a little fine hail all day till it is several inches deep. This the first snow I have seen, but they say the ground was whitened for a short time some weeks ago.

It has been a remarkably pleasant November, warmer and pleasanter than last year.

Nov. 30. Sunday. P. M. — To Cliffs *via* Hubbard's Grove.

Several inches of snow, but a rather soft and mild air still. Now see the empty chalices of the blue-curls and the rich brown-fruited pinweed above the crust. (The very cat was full of spirits this morning, rushing about and frisking on the snow-crust, which bore her alone. When I came home from New Jersey the other day, was struck with the sudden growth and stateliness of our cat Min, — his cheeks puffed out like a regular grimalkin. I suspect it is a new coat of fur against the winter chiefly. The cat is a third bigger than a month ago, like a patriarch wrapped in furs; and a mouse a day, I hear, is nothing to him now.) This as I go through the Depot Field, where the stub ends of corn-stalks rise above the snow. I find half a dozen russets, touched and discolored within by frost, still hanging on Wheeler's tree by the wall.

I see the fine, thin, yellowish stipule of the pine leaves now, on the snow by Hubbard's Grove and where some creature has eaten the resinous terminal pitch pine buds.¹ In Hubbard's bank wall field, beyond the brook, see the tracks of many sparrows that have run from weed to weed, as if a chain had dropped there. Not an apple is left in the orchard on Fair Haven Hill; not a track there of walker. Now all plants are withered and blanched, except perhaps some *Vaccinium vacillans* red leaves which sprang up in the burning last spring. Here and there a squirrel or a rabbit has hastily crossed the path.

Minott told me on Friday of an oldish man and woman who had brought to a muster here once a great

¹ *Vide* spring of '59.

leg of bacon boiled, to turn a penny with. The skin, as thick as sole-leather, was flayed and turned back, displaying the tempting flesh. A tall, raw-boned, omnivorous heron of a Yankee came along and bargained with the woman, who was awaiting a customer, for as much of that as he could eat. He ate and ate and ate, making a surprising hole, greatly to the amusement of the lookers-on, till the woman in her despair, unfaithful to her engagement, appealed to the police to drive him off.

Sophia, describing the first slight whitening of snow a few weeks ago, said that when she awoke she noticed a certain bluish-white reflection on the wall and, looking out, saw the ground whitened with snow.

My first sight of snow this year I got as I was surveying about the 5th of November in a great wooded gully making up from the Raritan River, in Perth Amboy, N. J. It was a few fine flakes in the chilly air, which very few who were out noticed at all.

That country was remarkable for its gullies, commonly well wooded, with a stream at the bottom. One was called Souman's [?] Gully, the only good name for any feature of the landscape thereabouts, yet the inhabitants objected especially to this word "gully."

That is a great place for oysters, and the inhabitants of Amboy are said to be very generally well off in consequence. All are allowed to gather oysters on the flats at low tide, and at such times I saw thirty or forty wading about with baskets and picking them up, the indigenous ones. Off the mouth of the Raritan, I saw about seventy-five boats one morning busily taking up

the oysters which they had laid down, — their usual morning's work.

I used to get my clothes covered with beggar-ticks in the fields there, and burs, small and large.

Minot Pratt tells me that he watched the fringed gentian this year, and it lasted till the first week in November.