

V

DECEMBER, 1856

(ÆT. 39)

Dec. 1. P. M. — By path around Walden.

With this little snow of the 29th *ult.* there is yet pretty good sledding, for it lies solid.

I see the old pale-faced farmer out again on his sled now for the five-thousandth time,¹ — Cyrus Hubbard, a man of a certain New England probity and worth, immortal and natural, like a natural product, like the sweetness of a nut, like the toughness of hickory. He, too, is a redeemer for me. How superior actually to the faith he professes! He is not an office-seeker. What an institution, what a revelation is a man! We are wont foolishly to think that the creed which a man professes is more significant than the fact he is. It matters not how hard the conditions seemed, how mean the world, for a man is a prevalent force and a new law himself. He is a system whose law is to be observed. The old farmer condescends to countenance still this nature and order of things. It is a great encouragement that an honest man makes this world his abode. He rides on the sled drawn by oxen, world-wise, yet comparatively so young, as if they had seen scores of winters. The farmer spoke to me, I can swear, clean, cold, moderate as the snow.

¹ [Channing, p. 108.]

He does not melt the snow where he treads. Yet what a faint impression that encounter may make on me after all! Moderate, natural, true, as if he were made of earth, stone, wood, snow.¹ I thus meet in this universe kindred of mine, composed of these elements. I see men like frogs; their peeping I partially understand.

I go by Hayden's and take A. Wheeler's wood-path to railroad.

Slate-colored snowbirds flit before me in the path, feeding on the seeds on the snow, the countless little brown seeds that begin to be scattered over the snow, so much the more obvious to bird and beast. A hundred kinds of indigenous grain are harvested now, broadcast upon the surface of the snow. Thus at a critical season these seeds are shaken down on to a clean white napkin, unmixed with dirt and rubbish, and off this the little pensioners pick them. Their clean table is thus spread a few inches or feet above the ground. Will wonder become extinct in me? Shall I become insensible as a fungus?

A ridge of earth, with the red cockscomb lichen on it, peeps out still at the rut's edge. The dear wholesome color of shrub oak leaves, so clean and firm, not decaying, but which have put on a kind of immortality, not wrinkled and thin like the white oak leaves, but full-veined and plump, as nearer earth. Well-tanned leather on the one side, sun-tanned, color of colors, color of the cow and the deer, silver-downy beneath, turned toward the late bleached and russet fields.

¹ [Channing, pp. 68, 69.]

What are acanthus leaves and the rest to this? Emblem of my winter condition. I love and could embrace the shrub oak with its scanty garment of leaves rising above the snow, lowly whispering to me, akin to winter thoughts, and sunsets, and to all virtue. Covert which the hare and the partridge seek, and I too seek. What cousin of mine is the shrub oak? How can any man suffer long? For a sense of want is a prayer, and all prayers are answered. Rigid as iron, clean as the atmosphere, hardy as virtue, innocent and sweet as a maiden is the shrub oak. In proportion as I know and love it, I am natural and sound as a partridge. I felt a positive yearning toward one bush this afternoon. There was a match found for me at last. I fell in love with a shrub oak.¹ Tenacious of its leaves, which shrivel not but retain a certain wintry life in them, firm shields, painted in fast colors a rich brown. The deer mouse, too, knows the shrub oak and has its hole in the snow by the shrub oak's stem.

Now, too, I remark in many places ridges and fields of fine russet or straw-colored grass rising above the snow, and beds of empty straw-colored heads of everlasting and ragged-looking Roman wormwood.

The blue-curly' chalice stand empty, and waiting evidently to be filled with ice.

I see great thimble-berry bushes rising above the snow, with still a rich, rank bloom on them, as in July. Hypathral mildew, elysian fungus! To see the bloom on a thimble-berry stem lasting into midwinter! What a salve that would make, collected and boxed!²

¹ [Channing, p. 102.]

² [Channing, pp. 112, 113.]

No, I am a stranger in your towns. I am not at home at French's, or Lovejoy's, or Savery's. I can winter more to my mind amid the shrub oaks. I have made arrangements to stay with them.

The shrub oak, lowly, loving the earth and spreading over it, tough, thick-leaved; leaves firm and sound in winter and rustling like leather shields; leaves fair and wholesome to the eye, clean and smooth to the touch. Tough to support the snow, not broken down by it. Well-nigh useless to man. A sturdy phalanx, hard to break through. Product of New England's surface. Bearing many striped acorns.¹

I have seen more chestnuts in the streets of New York than anywhere else this year, large and plump ones, roasting in the street, roasting and popping on the steps of banks and exchanges. Was surprised to see that the citizens made as much of the nuts of the wild-wood as the squirrels. Not only the country boys, all New York goes a-nutting. Chestnuts for cabmen and newsboys, for not only are squirrels to be fed.

Well named *shrub oak*. Low, robust, hardy, indigenuous. Well known to the striped squirrel and the partridge and rabbit. The squirrel nibbles its nuts sitting upon an old stump of its larger cousins. What is Peruvian bark to your bark? How many rents I owe to you! how many eyes put out! how many bleeding fingers! How many shrub oak patches I have been through, stooping, winding my way, bending the twigs aside, guiding myself by the sun, over hills and valleys and plains, resting in clear grassy spaces! I love to go

¹ [Channing, p. 102.]

through a patch of shrub oak in a bee-line, where you tear your clothes and put your eyes out.¹

Dec. 2. P. M. — Got in my boat, which before I had got out and turned up on the bank. It made me sweat to wheel it home through the snow, I am so unused to the work of late.

Then walked up the railroad. The clear straw-colored grass and some weeds contrasting with the snow it rises above. Saw little in this walk. Saw Melvin's lank bluish-white black-spotted hound, and Melvin with his gun near, going home at eve. He follows hunting, praise be to him, as regularly in our tame fields as the farmers follow farming. Persistent Genius! How I respect him and thank him for him! [*sic*] I trust the Lord will provide us with another Melvin when he is gone. How good in him to follow his own bent, and not continue at the Sabbath-school all his days! What a wealth he thus becomes in the neighborhood! Few know how to take the census. I thank my stars for Melvin. I think of him with gratitude when I am going to sleep, grateful that he exists, — that Melvin who is such a trial to his mother. Yet he is agreeable to me as a tinge of russet on the hillside. I would fain give thanks morning and evening for my blessings. Awkward, gawky, loose-hung, dragging his legs after him. He is my contemporary and neighbor. He is one tribe, I am another, and we are not at war.

I saw but little in my walk. Saw no bird, only a crow's track in the snow.

¹ [Channing, pp. 102, 103.]

How quickly men come out on to the highways with their sleds and improve the first snow! The farmer has begun to play with his sled as early as any of the boys. See him already with mittens on and thick boots well greased — been soaking in grease all summer, perhaps — and fur cap and red comforter about his throat, though it is not yet cold, walking beside his team with contented thoughts. This drama every day in the streets! This is the theatre I go to. There he goes with his venture behind him, and often he gets aboard for a change.

As for the sensuality in Whitman's "Leaves of Grass," I do not so much wish that it was not written, as that men and women were so pure that they could read it without harm.

Dec. 3. About as much more snow as fell on the 29th November has fallen in the night upon that, so stilly that we were not aware of it till we looked out. It has not even lodged on the window-sashes, and I am first convinced it has fallen by seeing the old tracks in the road covered and the roofs uniformly white. It is now somewhat misty, or perhaps a fine rain beginning.

Fewer weeds now rise above the snow. Pinweed (or sarothra) is quite concealed. It is a uniform white napkin in many fields. But not yet are the Great Meadows fairly whitened. There, as I look sideways at them, I see still the stretching acres of straw-colored brown grass and weeds. The pastures are uniformly white, but the meadows are that rich, wild brown straw-

color, or only white in ridges where there is less grass, reminding of the fall, and of water beneath.

The steam of the locomotive stretches low over the earth, enveloping the cars.

The sight of the sedgy meadows that are not yet snowed up while the cultivated fields and pastures are a uniform white, — fenny places which are longer enabled to resist the aggressions of winter! It takes a deep snow to blot out the traces of summer there, for the grass did not get cut this year.

Mizzles and rains all day, making sloshy walking which sends us all to the shoemaker's. Bought me a pair of cowhide boots, to be prepared for winter walks. The shoemaker praised them because they were made a year ago. I feel like an armed man now. The man who has bought his boots feels like him who has got in his winter's wood. There they stand beside me in the chamber, expectant, dreaming of far woods and wood-paths, of frost-bound or sloshy roads, or of being bound with skate-straps and clogged with ice-dust.

For years my appetite was so strong that I fed — I browsed — on the pine forest's edge seen against the winter horizon. How cheap my diet still! Dry sand that has fallen in railroad cuts and slid on the snow beneath is a condiment to my walk. I ranged about like a gray moose, looking at the spiring tops of the trees, and fed my imagination on them, — far-away, ideal trees not disturbed by the axe of the wood-cutter, nearer and nearer fringes and eyelashes of my eye. Where was the sap, the fruit, the value of the forest for me, but in that line where it was relieved against the sky?

That was my wood-lot; that was my lot in the woods. The silvery needles of the pine straining the light.

A man killed at the fatal Lincoln Bridge died in the village the other night. The only words he uttered while he lingered in his delirium were "All right," probably the last which he had uttered before he was struck, — brave, prophetic words to go out of the world with! good as "I still live," but on no razors.¹

How I love the simple, reserved countrymen, my neighbors, who mind their own business and let me alone, who never waylaid nor shot at me, to my knowledge, when I crossed their fields, though each one has a gun in his house! For nearly twoscore years I have known, at a distance, these long-suffering men, whom I never spoke to, who never spoke to me, and now feel a certain tenderness for them, as if this long probation were but the prelude to an eternal friendship. What a long trial we have withstood, and how much more admirable we are to each other, perchance, than if we had been bedfellows! I am not only grateful because Veias, and Homer, and Christ, and Shakespeare have lived, but I am grateful for Minott, and Rice, and Melvin, and Goodwin, and Puffer even. I see Melvin all alone filling his sphere, in russet suit, which no other could fill or suggest. He takes up as much room in nature as the most famous.

Six weeks ago I noticed the advent of chickadees and their winter habits. As you walk along a wood-side, a restless little flock of them, whose notes you hear at

¹ [Daniel Webster's last words were at one time etched on razors made by Wade & Butcher of Sheffield.]

a distance, will seem to say, "Oh, there he goes! Let's pay our respects to him." And they will flit after and close to you, and naïvely peck at the nearest twig to you, as if they were minding their own business all the while without any reference to you.

Dec. 4. Ceased raining and mizzling last evening, and cleared off, with a high northwest wind, which shook the house, coming in fitful gusts, but only they who slept on the west sides of houses knew of it.

7.30 A. M. — Take a run down the riverside.

Scare up a few sparrows, which take shelter in Keyes's arbor-vitæ row. The snow has now settled, owing to the rain, and presents no longer a level surface, but a succession of little hills and hollows, as if the whole earth had been a potato or corn field, and there is a slight crust to it.

Dark waves are chasing each other across the river from northwest to southeast and breaking the edge of the snow ice which has formed for half a rod in width along the edge, and the fragments of broken ice, what arctic voyagers call "brash," carry forward the undulation.

I am pleased to see from afar the highest water-mark of a spring freshet on Cheney's boat-house, a level light-colored mark about an inch wide running the whole length of the building, now several years old, where probably a thin ice chafed it.

2 P. M. — By Clamshell and back over Hubbard's Bridge.

I notice that the swallow-holes in the bank behind Dennis's, which is partly washed away, are flat-elliptical, three times or more as wide horizontally as they are deep vertically, or about three inches by one.

Saw and heard cheep faintly one little tree sparrow, the neat chestnut crowned and winged and white-barred bird, perched on a large and solitary white birch. So clean and tough, made to withstand the winter. This color reminds me of the upper side of the shrub oak leaf. I love the few homely colors of Nature at this season, — her strong wholesome browns, her sober and primeval grays, her celestial blue, her vivacious green, her pure, cold, snowy white.¹ An *F. hyemalis* also.

In the sprout-land by the road, in the woods this side of C. Miles's, much gray goldenrod is mixed with the shrub oak. It reminds me of the color of the rabbits which run there. Thus Nature feeds her children chiefly with color. I have no doubt that it is an important relief to the eyes which have long rested on snow, to rest on brown oak leaves and the bark of trees. We want the greatest variety within the smallest compass, and yet without glaring diversity, and we have it in the colors of the withered oak leaves. The white, so curled and shrivelled and *pale*; the black (?), more flat and glossy and darker brown; the red, much like the black, but *perhaps* less dark, and less deeply cut. The scarlet still occasionally retains some blood in its veins.

Smooth white reaches of ice, as long as the river,

¹ [Channing, p. 98.]

on each side are threatening to bridge over its dark-blue artery any night. They remind me of a trap that is set for it, which the frost will spring. Each day at present, the wriggling river nibbles off the edges of the trap which have advanced in the night. It is a close contest between day and night, heat and cold.

Already you see the tracks of sleds leading by unusual routes, where will be seen no trace of them in summer, into far fields and woods, crowding aside and pressing down the snow to where some heavy log or stone has thought itself secure, and the spreading tracks also of the heavy, slow-paced oxen, of the well-shod farmer, who turns out his feet. Ere long, when the cold is stronger, these tracks will lead the walker deep into remote swamps impassable in summer. All the earth is a highway then.

I see where the pretty brown bird-like birch scales and winged seeds have been blown into the numerous hollows of the thin crusted snow. So bountiful a table is spread for the birds. For how many thousand miles this grain is scattered over the earth, under the feet of all walkers, in Boxboro and Cambridge alike! and rarely an eye distinguishes it.

Sophia says that just before I came home Min caught a mouse and was playing with it in the yard. It had got away from her once or twice, and she had caught it again; and now it was stealing off again, as she lay complacently watching it with her paws tucked under her, when her friend Riordan's stout but solitary cock stepped up inquisitively, looked down at it with one eye, turning his head, then picked it up by the tail and

gave it two or three whacks on the ground, and giving it a dexterous toss into the air, caught it in its open mouth, and it went head foremost and alive down his capacious throat in the twinkling of an eye, never again to be seen in this world, Min, all the while, with paws comfortably tucked under her, looking on unconcerned. What matters it one mouse more or less to her? The cock walked off amid the currant bushes, stretched his neck up, and gulped once or twice, and the deed was accomplished, and then he crowed lustily in celebration of the exploit. It might be set down among the *gesta* (if not *digesta*) *Gallorum*. There were several human witnesses. It is a question whether Min ever understood where that mouse went to. Min sits composedly sentinel, with paws tucked under her, a good part of her days at present, by some ridiculous little hole, the possible entryway of a mouse. She has a habit of stretching or sharpening her claws on all smooth hair-bottomed chairs and sofas, greatly to my mother's vexation.

He who abstains from visiting another for magnanimous reasons enjoys better society alone.

I for one am not bound to flatter men. That is not exactly the value of me.

How many thousand acres are there now of pitched blue-curls and ragged wormwood rising above the shallow snow? The granary of the birds. They were not observed against the dark ground, but the first snow comes and reveals them. Then I come to fields in which the fragrant everlasting, straw-colored and almost odorless, and the dark taller St. John's-wort prevail.

When I bought my boots yesterday, Hastings ran over his usual rigmarole. Had he any stout old-fashioned cowhide boots? Yes, he thought he could suit me. "There 's something that 'll turn water about as well as anything. Billings had a pair just like them the other [day], and he said they kept his feet as dry as a bone. But what 's more than that, they were made above a year ago upon honor. They are just the thing, you may depend on it. I had an eye to you when I was making them." "But they are too soft and thin for me. I want them to be thick and stand out from my foot." "Well, there is another pair, maybe a little thicker. I 'll tell you what it is, these were made of dry hide."

Both were warranted single leather and not split. I took the last. But after wearing them round this cold day I found that the little snow which rested on them and melted wet the upper leather through like paper and wet my feet, and I told H. of it, that he might have an offset to Billings's experience. "Well, you can't expect a new pair of boots to turn water at first. I tell the farmers that the time to buy boots is at midsummer, or when they are hoeing their potatoes, and the pores have a chance to get filled with dirt."

It is remarkably good sleighing to-day, considering the little snow and the rain of yesterday, but it is slippery and hobbly for walkers.

My first botany, as I remember, was Bigelow's "Plants of Boston and Vicinity," which I began to use about twenty years ago, looking chiefly for the popular names and the short references to the localities of plants, even without any regard to the plant. I also learned the

names of many, but without using any system, and forgot them soon. I was not inclined to pluck flowers; preferred to leave them where they were, liked them best there. I was never in the least interested in plants in the house. But from year to year we look at Nature with new eyes. About half a dozen years ago I found myself again attending to plants with more method, looking out the name of each one and remembering it. I began to bring them home in my hat, a straw one with a scaffold lining to it, which I called my botany-box. I never used any other, and when some whom I visited were evidently surprised at its dilapidated look, as I deposited it on their front entry table, I assured them it was not so much my hat as my botany-box. I remember gazing with interest at the swamps about those days and wondering if I could ever attain to such familiarity with plants that I should know the species of every twig and leaf in them, that I should be acquainted with every plant (excepting grasses and cryptogamous ones), summer and winter, that I saw. Though I knew most of the flowers, and there were not in any particular swamp more than half a dozen shrubs that I did not know, yet these made it seem like a maze to me, of a thousand strange species, and I even thought of commencing at one end and looking it faithfully and laboriously through till I knew it all. I little thought that in a year or two I should have attained to that knowledge without all that labor. Still I never studied botany, and do not to-day systematically, the most natural system is still so artificial. I wanted to know my neighbors, if possible, — to get a little nearer to them.

I soon found myself observing when plants first blossomed and leafed, and I followed it up early and late, far and near, several years in succession, running to different sides of the town and into the neighboring towns, often between twenty and thirty miles in a day. I often visited a particular plant four or five miles distant, half a dozen times within a fortnight, that I might know exactly when it opened, beside attending to a great many others in different directions and some of them equally distant, at the same time. At the same time I had an eye for birds and whatever else might offer.

Dec. 5. Clear, cold winter weather. What a contrast between this week and last, when I talked of setting out apple trees!

P. M. — Walked over the Hill.

The Indians have at length got a regular load of wood. It is odd to see a pile of good oak wood beside their thin cotton tents in the snow, the wood-pile which is to be burnt within is so much more substantial than the house. Yet they do not appear to mind the cold, though one side the tent is partly open, and all are flapping in the wind, and there is a sick child in one. The children play in the snow in front, as before more substantial houses.

The river is well skimmed over in most places, though it will not bear, — wherever there is least current, as in broad places, or where there is least wind, as by the bridges. The ice trap was sprung last night.

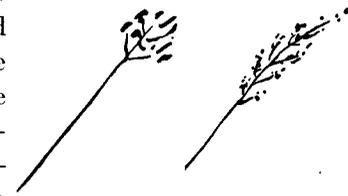
As I walk along the side of the Hill, a pair of nut-

hatches flit by toward a walnut, flying low in mid-course and then ascending to the tree. I hear one's faint *tut tut* or *gnah gnah* — no doubt heard a good way by its mate now flown into the next tree — as it is ascending the trunk or branch of a walnut in a zigzag manner, hitching along, prying into the crevices of the bark; and now it has found a savory morsel, which it pauses to devour, then flits to a new bough. It is a chubby bird, white, slate-color, and black.

It is a perfectly cloudless and simple winter sky. A white moon, half full, in the pale or dull blue heaven and a whiteness like the reflection of the snow, extending up from the horizon all around a quarter the way up to the zenith. I can imagine that I see it shooting up like an aurora. This at 4 P. M. About the sun it is only whiter than elsewhere, or there is only the faintest possible tinge of yellow there.

There are a great many walnuts on the trees, seen black against the sky, and the wind has scattered many over the snow-crust. It would be easier gathering them now than ever.

The johnswort and the larger pinweed are conspicuous above the snow. Some fine straw-colored grasses, as delicate as the down on a



young man's cheek, still rise above this crusted snow, and even a recess is melted around them, so gently has it been deposited.

The sun goes down and leaves not a blush in the sky.

This morning I saw Riordan's cock thrust out the window on to the snow to seek his sustenance, and now, as I go by at night, he is waiting on the front door-step to be let in.

My themes shall not be far-fetched. I will tell of homely every-day phenomena and adventures. Friends! Society! It seems to me that I have an abundance of it, there is so much that I rejoice and sympathize with, and men, too, that I never speak to but only know and think of. What you call bareness and poverty is to me simplicity. God could not be unkind to me if he should try. I love the winter, with its imprisonment and its cold, for it compels the prisoner to try new fields and resources. I love to have the river closed up for a season and a pause put to my boating, to be obliged to get my boat in. I shall launch it again in the spring with so much more pleasure. This is an advantage in point of abstinence and moderation compared with the seaside boating, where the boat ever lies on the shore. I love best to have each thing in its season only, and enjoy doing without it at all other times. It is the greatest of all advantages to enjoy no advantage at all. I find it invariably true, the poorer I am, the richer I am. What you consider my disadvantage, I consider my advantage. While you are pleased to get knowledge and culture in many ways, I am delighted to think that I am getting rid of them. I have never got over my surprise that I should have been born into the most estimable place in all the world, and in the very nick of time, too.¹

¹ [Channing, p. 89.]

Dec. 6. *Saturday*. 2 P. M. — To Hubbard's Bridge and Holden Swamp and up river on ice to F. Pond Crossing, just below pond; back on east side of river.

Skating is fairly begun. The river is generally frozen over, though it will bear quite across in very few places. Much of the ice in the middle is dark and thin, having been formed last night, and when you stamp you see the water trembling in spots here and there.

I can walk through the spruce swamp now dry-shod, amid the water andromeda and *Kalmia glauca*. I feel an affection for the rich brown fruit of the paniced andromeda growing about the swamp, hard, dry, inedible, suitable to the season. The dense panicles of the berries are of a handsome form, made to endure, lasting often over two seasons, only becoming darker and gray.

How handsome every one of these leaves that are blown about the snow-crust or lie neglected beneath, soon to turn to mould! Not merely a matted mass of fibres like a sheet of paper, but a perfect organism and system in itself, so that no mortal has ever yet discerned or explored its beauty.

Against this swamp I take to the riverside where the ice will bear. White snow ice it is, but pretty smooth, but it is quite glare close to the shore and wherever the water overflowed yesterday. On the meadows, where this overflow was so deep that it did not freeze solid, it cracks from time to time with a threatening squeak. I see here and there very faint tracks of muskrats or minks, made when it was soft and sloshy, lead-

ing from the springy shore to the then open middle, — the faintest possible vestiges, which are only seen in a favorable light.

Just this side of Bittern Cliff, I see a very remarkable track of an otter, made undoubtedly December 3d, when this snow ice was mere slosh. It had come up through a hole (now black ice) by the stem of a button-bush, and, apparently, pushed its way through the slosh, as through snow on land, leaving a track eight inches wide, more or less, with the now frozen snow shoved up two inches high on each side, *i. e.* two inches above the general level. Where the ice was firmer are seen only the tracks of its feet. It had crossed the open middle (now thin black ice) and continued its singular trail to the opposite shore, as if a narrow sled had been drawn bottom upward.

At Bittern Cliff I saw where they had been playing, sliding, or fishing, apparently to-day, on the snow-covered rocks, on which, for a rod upward and as much in width, the snow was trodden and worn quite smooth, as if twenty had trodden and slid there for several hours. Their droppings are a mass of fishes' scales and bones, — loose, scaly black masses. At this point the black ice approached within three or four feet of the rock, and there was an open space just there, a foot or two across, which appeared to have been kept open by them. I continued along up that side and crossed on white ice just below the pond. The river was all tracked up with otters, from Bittern Cliff upward. Sometimes one had trailed his tail, apparently edge-wise, making a mark like the tail of a deer mouse;

sometimes they were moving fast, and there was an interval of five feet between the tracks. I saw one place where there was a zigzag piece of black ice two rods long and one foot wide in the midst of the white, which I was surprised to find had been made by an otter pushing his way through the slosh. He had left fishes' scales, etc., at the end. These very conspicuous tracks generally commenced and terminated at some button-bush or willow, where a black ice now masked the hole of that date. It is surprising that our hunters know no more about them.

I see also what I take to be rabbit's tracks made in that slosh, shaped like a horse's track, only rather longer and larger. They had set out to  cross the river, but, coming to open water, turned back.

Each pinweed, etc., has melted a little hollow or rough cave in the snow, in which the lower part at least snugly hides. They are never more interesting than now on Lechea Plain, since they are perfectly relieved, brown on white.

Far the greater part of the shrub oak leaves are fallen.

When I speak of the otter to our oldest village doctor, who should be *ex officio* our naturalist, he is greatly surprised, not knowing that such an animal is found in these parts, and I have to remind him that the Pilgrims sent home many otter skins in the first vessels that returned, together with beaver, mink, and black fox skins, and 1156 pounds of otter skins in the years 1631-36, which brought fourteen or fifteen shillings

a pound, also 12,530 pounds of beaver skin. *Vide* Bradford's History.

Though so many oak leaves hang on all winter, you will be surprised on going into the woods at any time, only a short time after a fall of snow, to see how many have lately fallen on it and are driven about over it, so that you would think there could be none left till spring.

Where I crossed the river on the roughish white ice, there were coarse ripple-marks two or three feet apart and convex to the south or up-stream, extending quite



across, and many spots of black ice a foot wide, more or less in the midst of the white, where

probably was water yesterday. The water, apparently, had been blown southerly on to the ice already formed, and hence the ripple-marks.

In many places the otters appeared to have gone floundering along in the sloshy ice and water.

On all sides, in swamps and about their edges and in the woods, the bare shrubs are sprinkled with buds, more or less noticeable and pretty, their little gemmæ or gems, their most vital and attractive parts now, almost all the greenness and color left, greens and salads for the birds and rabbits. Our eyes go searching along the stems for what is most vivacious and characteristic, the concentrated summer gone into winter quarters. For we are hunters pursuing the summer on snow-shoes and skates, all winter long. There is really but one season in our hearts.

What variety the pinweeds, clear brown seedy plants, give to the fields, which are yet but shallowly covered with snow! You were not aware before how extensive these grain-fields. Not till the snow comes are the beauty and variety and richness of vegetation ever fully revealed. Some plants are now seen more simply and distinctly and to advantage. The pinweeds, etc., have been for the most part confounded with the russet or brown earth beneath them, being seen against a background of the same color, but now, being seen against a pure white background, they are as distinct as if held up to the sky.

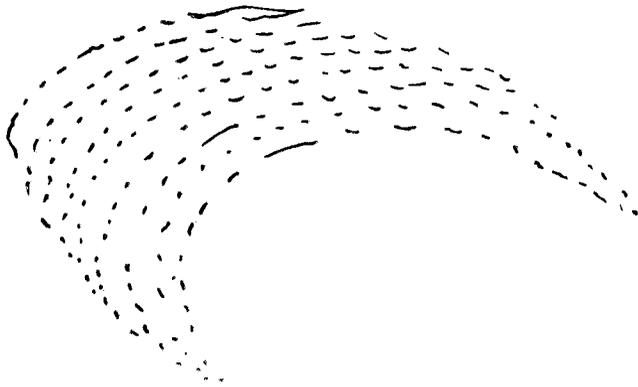
Some plants seen, then, in their prime or perfection, when supporting an icy burden in their empty chalice.

Dec. 7. Sunday. P. M. — Take my first skate to Fair Haven Pond.

It takes my feet a few moments to get used to the skates. I see the track of one skater who has preceded me this morning. This is the first skating. I keep mostly to the smooth ice about a rod wide next the shore commonly, where there was an overflow a day or two ago. There is not the slightest overflow to-day, and yet it is warm (thermometer at 25 at 4.30 p. m.). It must be that the river is falling. Now I go shaking over hobbly places, now shoot over a bridge of ice only a foot wide between the water and the shore at a bend. — Hubbard Bath, — always so at first there. Now I suddenly see the trembling surface of water where I thought were black spots of ice only around me. The river is rather low, so that I cannot keep the river above

the Clamshell Bend. I am confined to a very narrow edging of ice in the meadow, gliding with unexpected ease through withered sedge, but slipping sometimes on a twig; again taking to the snow to reach the next ice, but this rests my feet; straddling the bare black willows, winding between the button-bushes, and following narrow threadings of ice amid the sedge, which bring me out to clear fields unexpectedly. Occasionally I am obliged to take a few strokes over black and thin-looking ice, where the neighboring bank is springy, and am slow to acquire confidence in it, but, returning, how bold I am! Where the meadow seemed only sedge and snow, I find a complete ice connection.

At Cardinal Shore, as usual, there is a great crescent of hobbly ice, where, two or three days ago, the north-



west wind drove the waves back up-stream and broke up the edge of the ice. This crescent is eight or ten rods wide and twice as many long, and consists of cakes of ice from a few inches to half a dozen feet in

diameter, with each a raised edge all around, where apparently the floating sludge has been caught and accumulated. (Occasionally the raised edge is six inches high!) This is mottled black and white, and is not yet safe. It is like skating over so many rails, or the edges of saws. Now I glide over a field of white air-cells close to the surface, with coverings no thicker than egg-shells, cutting through with a sharp crackling sound. There are many of those singular spider-shaped dark places amid the white ice, where the surface water has run through some days ago.

As I enter on Fair Haven Pond, I see already three pickerel-fishers retreating from it, drawing a sled through the Baker Farm, and see where they have been fishing, by the shining chips of ice about the holes. Others were here even yesterday, as it appears. The pond must have been frozen by the 4th at least. Some fisherman or other is ready with his reels and bait as soon as the ice will bear, whether it be Saturday or Sunday. Theirs, too, is a sort of devotion, though it be called hard names by the preacher, who perhaps could not endure the cold and wet any day. Perhaps he dines off their pickerel on Monday at the hotel. The ice appears to be but three or four inches thick.

That grand old poem called Winter is round again without any connivance of mine. As I sit under Lee's Cliff, where the snow is melted, amid sere pennyroyal and frost-bitten catnep, I look over my shoulder upon an arctic scene. I see with surprise the pond a dumb white surface of ice speckled with snow, just as so many winters before, where so lately were lapsing waves or

smooth reflecting water. I see the holes which the pickerel-fisher has made, and I see him, too, retreating over the hills, drawing his sled behind him. The water is already skimmed over again there. I hear, too, the familiar becheing voice of the pond. It seemed as if winter had come without any interval since midsummer, and I was prepared to see it flit away by the time I again looked over my shoulder. It was as if I had dreamed it. But I see that the farmers have had time to gather their harvests as usual, and the seasons have revolved as slowly as in the first autumn of my life. The winters come now as fast as snowflakes. It is wonderful that old men do not lose their reckoning. It was summer, and now again it is winter. Nature loves this rhyme so well that she never tires of repeating it. So sweet and wholesome is the winter, so simple and moderate, so satisfactory and perfect, that her children will never weary of it. What a poem! an epic in blank verse, enriched with a million tinkling rhymes. It is solid beauty. It has been subjected to the vicissitudes of millions of years of the gods, and not a single superfluous ornament remains. The severest and coldest of the immortal critics have shot their arrows at and pruned it till it cannot be amended.¹

The swamp white oak leaves are like the shrub oak in having two colors above and beneath. They are considerably curled, so as to show their silvery lining, though firm. Hardy and handsome, with a fair silver winter lining.

Am pleased to see the holes where men have dug for

¹ [Channing, p. 111.]

money, since they remind me that some are dreaming still like children, though of impracticable things, — dreaming of finding money, and trying to put their dream in practice. It proves that men live Arabian nights and days still. I would [rather] they should have even that kind of faith than none at all. If any silly or abominable or superstitious practice ever prevailed among any savage race, just that may be repeated in the most civilized society to-day.

You will see full-grown woods where the oaks and pines or birches are separated by right lines, growing in squares or other rectilinear figures, because different lots were cut at different times.

Dec. 8. Thermometer at 8 A. M. 8° above zero. Probably the coldest day yet.

Bradford, in his "History of the Plymouth Plantation," remembering the condition of the Pilgrims on their arrival in Cape Cod Bay the 11th of November, 1620, O. S. (page 79): "Which way soever they turned their eyes (save upward to the heavens) they could have little solace or content in respect of any outward objects. For summer being done, all things stand upon them with a weather-beaten face; and the whole country, full of woods and thickets, represented a wild and savage hue." Such was a New England November in 1620 to Bradford's eyes, and such, no doubt, it would be to his eyes in the country still. However, it required no little courage to found a colony here at that season of the year.

The earliest mention of anything like a glaze in New

England that I remember is in Bradford's "History of the Plymouth Plantation," page 83, where he describes the second expedition with the shallop from Cape Cod Harbor in search of a settlement, the 6th of December, O. S. "The weather was very cold, and it froze so hard as the spray of the sea lighting on their coats, they were as if they had been glazed." Bradford was one of the ten principal ones. That same night they reached the bottom of the Bay and saw the Indians cutting up a blackfish. Nature has not changed one iota.

Dec. 9. P. M. — Railroad to Lincoln Bridge and back by road.

There is scarcely a particle of ice in Walden yet, and that close to the edge, apparently, on the west and northwest sides. Yet Fair Haven was so solidly frozen on the 6th that there was fishing on it, and yesterday I met Goodwin bringing a fine lot of pickerel from Flint's, which was frozen at least four inches thick. This is, no doubt, owing solely to the greater depth of Walden.

As I stand on the railroad against Heywood's meadow, the sun now getting low in the west, the leaves of the young oaks in Emerson's sprout-land on the side of the hill make a very agreeable thick, rug-like stuff for the eye to rest on. The white oak leaves are a very pale brown, but the scarlet oaks are quite red now in the sun. Near at hand they are conspicuously ruddy in any light, the scarlet oaks. (Those black oaks which I examine near at hand afterward are a pure, somewhat yellowish brown.) This slight difference of shading makes a very pleasing variety on this densely covered

hillside, like a rich embroidered stuff. One species does not stand by itself, but they are dispersed and intimately mingled. These oak leaves have more distinct characters now at this distance than in summer. It is as if a rich rug, with stuff six or eight feet deep, had been dropped over this hill, opening the stuff on the brow, dyed of various shades of enduring brown, the wholesome and strong color which Nature loves; and here and there the now dark green of a pine is seen. When the wind rises, the leaves rustle their content.

The sunlight reveals no redness in the white oak leaves. The bright colors of autumn are transient; these browns are permanent. These are not so much withered leaves, for they have a wintry life in them still, and the tanned or bronzed color of assured health. They are a sort of epidermis or bark, not at once thrown off, serving, perhaps, to protect the trees as well as the quadrupeds and birds.

Coming through the Walden woods, I see already great heaps of oak leaves collected in certain places on the snow-crust by the roadside, where an eddy deposited them. It suggests that a certain law has attended their movements, which appeared so lawless, even as with the iron filings under the influence of music. The greater part that have fallen are deposited in clear and crispy heaps in particular places. They are beds which invite the traveller to repose on them, even in this wintry weather.

From a little east of Wyman's I look over the pond westward. The sun is near setting, away beyond Fair Haven. A bewitching stillness reigns through all the

woodland and over the snow-clad landscape. Indeed, the winter day in the woods or fields has commonly the stillness of twilight. The pond is perfectly smooth and full of light. I hear only the strokes of a lingering woodchopper at a distance, and the melodious hooting of an owl, which is as common and marked a sound as the axe or the locomotive whistle. Yet where does the ubiquitous hooter sit, and who sees him? In whose wood-lot is he to be found? Few eyes have rested on him hooting. Few on him silent on his perch even. Yet cut away the woods never so much year after year, though the chopper has not seen him and only a grove or two is left, still his aboriginal voice is heard indefinitely far and sweet, mingled oft, in strange harmony, with the newly invented din of trade, like a sentence of Allegri sounded in our streets, — hooting from invisible perch at his foes the woodchoppers, who are invading his domains. As the earth only a few inches beneath the surface is undisturbed and what it was anciently, so are heard still some primeval sounds in the air. Some of my townsmen I never see, and of a great proportion I do not hear the voices in a year, though they live within my horizon; but every week almost I hear the loud voice of the hooting owl, though I do not see the bird more than once in ten years.

I perceive that more or other things are seen in the reflection than in the substance. As I look now over the pond westward, I see in substance the now bare outline of Fair Haven Hill a mile beyond, but in the reflection I see not this, only the tops of some pines, which stand close to the shore but are invisible against

the dark hill beyond, and these are indefinitely prolonged into points of shadow.

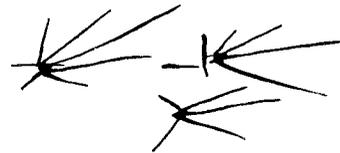
The sun is set, and over the valley, which looks like an outlet of Walden toward Fair Haven, I see a burnished bar of cloud stretched low and level, as if it were the bar over that passageway to Elysium, the last column in the train of the sun.

When I get as far as my bean-field, the reflected white in the winter horizon of this perfectly cloudless sky is being condensed at the horizon's edge, and its hue deepening into a dun golden, against which the tops of the trees — pines and elms — are seen with beautiful distinctness, and a slight blush begins to suffuse the eastern horizon, and so the picture of the day is done and set in a gilded frame.

Such is a winter eve. Now for a merry fire, some old poet's pages, or else serene philosophy, or even a healthy book of travels, to last far into the night, eked out perhaps with the walnuts which we gathered in November.

The worker who would accomplish much these short days must shear a dusky slice off both ends of the night. The chopper must work as long as he can see, often returning home by moonlight, and set out for the woods again by candle-light.

In many parts of the river the ice has been formed with remarkably coarse crystallization, the surface being starred with great raised rays as thick as your thumb and several feet long, as it were the beginning of a bony



system, as if under the action of a strong wind which rippled the water while it was freezing. All covered with these rounded plaits. Soon, where there is much current, even in pretty cold weather, the ice is worn thin during the day, and when you are following the tracks of one who has preceded you by half a dozen hours over the black ice, you are surprised by seeing the trembling water reveal itself at numerous holes otherwise not noticeable close about you.

The northwest wind, meeting the current in an exposed place, produces that hobble ice which I described at Cardinal Shore day before yesterday. This is the case in this place every year, and no doubt this same phenomenon occurred annually at this point on this river a thousand years before America was discovered. This regularity and permanence make these phenomena more interesting to me.

Dec. 10. A fine, clear, cold winter morning, with a small leaf frost on trees, etc. The thermometer at 7.15 and at 7.30 3°. Going to the post-office at the former hour, I notice those level bars, as it were, of frozen mist against the Walden wood. When I return, the sun is rising and the smokes from the chimneys, which slant from northwest to southeast, though it seems quite still, blush like sunset clouds.

It is remarkable how suggestive the slightest drawing as a memento of things seen. For a few years past I have been accustomed to make a rude sketch in my journal of plants, ice, and various natural phenomena, and though the fullest accompanying description may

fail to recall my experience, these rude outline drawings do not fail to carry me back to that time and scene. It is as if I saw the same thing again, and I may again attempt to describe it in words if I choose.

Yesterday I walked under the murderous Lincoln Bridge, where at least ten men have been swept dead from the cars within as many years. I looked to see if their heads had indented the bridge, if there were sturdy blows given as well as received, and if their brains lay about. But I could see neither the one nor the other. The bridge is quite uninjured, even, and straight, not even the paint worn off or discolored. The ground is clean, the snow spotless, and the place looks as innocent as a bank whereon the wild thyme grows. It does its work in an artistic manner. We have another bridge of exactly the same character on the other side of the town, which has killed one, at least, to my knowledge. Surely the approaches to our town are well guarded. These are our modern Dragons of Wantley. Boucaniers of the Fitchburg Railroad, they lie in wait at the narrow passes and decimate the employees. The Company has signed a bond to give up one employee at this pass annually. The Vermont mother commits her son to their charge, and when she asks for him, again the Directors say: "I am not your son's keeper. Go look beneath the ribs of the Lincoln Bridge." It is a monster which would not have minded Perseus with his Medusa's head. If he could be held back only four feet from where he now crouches, all travellers might pass in safety and laugh him to scorn. This would require but a little resolution in our legis-

lature, but it is preferred to pay tribute still. I felt a curiosity to see this famous bridge, naturally far greater than my curiosity to see the gallows on which Smith was hung, which was burned in the old courthouse, for the exploits of this bridge are ten times as memorable. Here they are killed without priest, and the bridge, unlike the gallows, is a fixture. Besides, the gallows bears an ill name, and I think deservedly. No doubt it has hung many an innocent man, but this Lincoln Bridge, long as it has been in our midst and busy as it has been, no legislature, nobody, indeed, has ever seriously complained of, unless it was some bereaved mother, who was naturally prejudiced against it. To my surprise, I found no difficulty in getting a sight of it. It stands right out in broad daylight in the midst of the fields. No sentinels, no spiked fence, no crowd about it, and you have to pay no fee for looking at it. It is perfectly simple and easy to construct, and does its work silently. The days of the gallows are numbered. The next time this county has a Smith to dispose of, they have only to hire him out to the Fitchburg Railroad Company. Let the priest accompany him to the freight-train, pray with him, and take leave of him there. Another advantage I have hinted at, an advantage to the morals of the community, that, strange as it may seem, no crowd ever assembles at this spot; there are no morbidly curious persons, no hardened reprobates, no masculine women, no anatomists there.

Does it not make life more serious? I feel as if these were stirring times, as good as the days of the Crusaders, the Northmen, or the Boucaniers.

Gathered this afternoon quite a parcel of walnuts on the hill. It has not been better picking this season there. They lie on the snow, or rather sunk an inch or two into it. And some trees hang quite full.¹ See the squirrel-tracks leading straight from tree to tree.

It has been a warm, clear, glorious winter day, the air full of that peculiar vapor. How short the afternoons! I hardly get out a couple of miles before the sun is setting. The nights are light on account of the snow, and, there being a moon, there is no distinct interval between the day and night. I see the sun set from the side of Nawshawtuct, and make haste to the post-office with the red sky over my shoulder. When the mail is distributed and I come forth into the street on my return, the apparently full moon has fairly commenced her reign, and I go home by her light.

Bradford, in his "History of the Plymouth Plantation," written between 1630 and 1650, uses, on page 235, the word "kilter," speaking of guns being out of kilter, proving that this is an old word; yet it is not in my dictionaries.

Dec. 11. Minott tells me that his and his sister's wood-lot together contains about ten acres and has, with a very slight exception at one time, supplied all their fuel for thirty years, and he thinks would constantly continue to do so. They keep one fire all the time, and two some of the time, and burn about eight cords in a year. He knows his wood-lot and what grows

¹ So, too, the shagbarks hang on the trees on the Souhegan, where they have not been gathered.

in it as well as an ordinary farmer does his corn-field, for he has cut his own wood till within two or three years; knows the history of every stump on it and the age of every sapling; knows how many beech trees and black birches there are there, as another knows his pear or cherry trees. He complains that the choppers make a very long carf nowadays, doing most of the cutting on one side, to avoid changing hands so much. It is more economical, as well as more poetical, to have a wood-lot and cut and get out your own wood from year to year than to buy it at your door. Minott may say to his trees: "Submit to my axe. I cut your father on this very spot." How many sweet passages there must have been in his life there, chopping all alone in the short winter days! How many rabbits, partridges, foxes he saw! A rill runs through the lot, where he quenched his thirst, and several times he has laid it bare. At last rheumatism has made him a prisoner, and he is compelled to let a stranger, a vandal, it may be, go into his lot with an axe. It is fit that he should be buried there.

Dec. 12. Wonderful, wonderful is our life and that of our companions! That there should be such a thing as a brute animal, not human! and that it should attain to a sort of society with our race! Think of cats, for instance. They are neither Chinese nor Tartars. They do not go to school, nor read the Testament; yet how near they come to doing so! how much they are like us who do so! What sort of philosophers are we, who know absolutely nothing of the origin and des-

tiny of cats? At length, without having solved any of these problems, we fatten and kill and eat some of our cousins!

As soon as the snow came, I naturally began to observe that portion of the plants that was left above the snow, not only the weeds but the withered leaves, which before had been confounded with the russet earth. Yesterday afternoon, after a misty forenoon, it began to rain by degrees, and in the course of the night more than half the snow has disappeared, revealing the ground here and there; and already the brown weeds and leaves attract me less.

This morning it is fair again.

P. M. — To Saw Mill Brook and back by Red Choke-berry Path and Walden.

Large oaks in thick woods have not so many leaves on them as in pastures, methinks (?). At the wall between Saw Mill Brook Falls and Red Choke-berry Path, I see where a great many chestnut burs have been recently chewed up fine by the squirrels, to come at the nuts. The wall for half a dozen rods and the snow are covered with them. You can see where they have dug the burs out of the snow, and then sat on a rock or the wall and gnawed them in pieces. I, too, dig many burs out of the snow with my foot, and though many of *these* nuts are softened and discolored they have a peculiarly sweet and agreeable taste.

Yesterday morning I noticed that several people were having their pigs killed, not foreseeing the thaw. Such warm weather as this the animal heat will hardly get out before night. I saw Peter, the dexterous pig-butcher,

busy in two or three places, and in the afternoon I saw him with washed hands and knives in sheath and his leather overalls drawn off, going to his solitary house on the edge of the Great Fields, carrying in the rain a piece of the pork he had slaughtered, with a string put through it. Often he carries home the head, which is less prized, taking his pay thus in kind, and these supplies do not come amiss to his outcast family.

I saw Lynch's dog stealthily feeding at a half of his master's pig, which lay dressed on a wheelbarrow at the door. A little yellow-brown dog, with fore feet braced on the ice and outstretched neck, he eagerly browsed along the edge of the meat, half a foot to right and left, with incessant short and rapid snatches, which brought it away as readily as if it had been pudding. He evidently knew very well that he was stealing, but made the most of his time. The little brown dog weighed a pound or two more afterward than before.

Where is the great natural-historian? Is he a butcher, or the patron of butchers? As well look for a great anthropologist among cannibals, New-Zealanders.

Dec. 13. P. M. — To Hill and round by J. Hosmer woodland and Lee house.

I see some of those great andromeda puffs still hanging on the twigs behind Assabet Spring, black and shrivelled bags. The river is generally open again. The snow is mostly gone. In many places it is washed away down to the channels made by the mice, branching galleries. I go through the lot where Wheeler's Irishmen cut last winter. Though they changed hands, they did not

cut twice in a place, and the stump, instead of having a smooth surface, is roughly hacked.

There is a fine healthy and handsome scarlet oak between Muhlenbergii Brook and the Assabet River watering-place, in the open land. It is about thirty-five feet high and spreads twenty-five, perfectly regular. It is very full of leaves, excepting a crescent of bare twigs at the summit about three feet wide in the middle. The leaves have a little redness in them.

There is a dense growth of young birches from the seed in the sprout-land lot just beyond on the riverside, now apparently two or three years old, and they have a peculiar pink tint seen in the mass.

Dec. 14. This morning it begins to snow, and the ground is whitened again, but in an hour or two it turns to rain, and rains all the rest of the day. At night clears up, and in the night a strong and gusty northwest wind blows, which, by morning, —

Dec. 15, has dried up almost all the water in the road. It still blows hard at 2 p. m., but it is not cold.

3 p. m. — To Walden.

The high northwest wind of this morning, with what of cold we have, has made *some* of those peculiar rake-toothed icicles on the dead twigs, etc., about the edge of the pond at the east end. To produce this phenomenon is required only open water, a high wind, and sufficiently cold weather to freeze the spray. I observe B——'s boat left out at the pond, as last winter. When I see that a man neglects his boat thus, I do not wonder

that he fails in his business. It is not only shiftlessness or unthrift, but a sort of filthiness to let things go to wrack and ruin thus.

I still recall to mind that characteristic winter eve of December 9th; the cold, dry, and wholesome diet my mind and senses necessarily fed on,—oak leaves, bleached and withered weeds that rose above the snow, the now dark green of the pines, and perchance the faint metallic chip of a single tree sparrow; the hushed stillness of the wood at sundown, aye, all the winter day; the short boreal twilight; the smooth serenity and the reflections of the pond, still alone free from ice; the melodious hooting of the owl, heard at the same time with the yet more distant whistle of a locomotive, more aboriginal, and perchance more enduring here than that, heard above the voices of all the wise men of Concord, as if they were not (how little he is Anglicized!); the last strokes of the woodchopper, who presently bends his steps homeward; the gilded bar of cloud across the apparent outlet of the pond, conducting my thoughts into the eternal west; the deepening horizon glow; and the hasty walk homeward to enjoy the long winter evening. The hooting of the owl! That is a sound which my red predecessors heard here more than a thousand years ago. It rings far and wide, occupying the spaces rightfully,—grand, primeval, aboriginal sound. There is no whisper in it of the Buckleyes, the Flintes, the Hosmers who recently squatted here, nor of the first parish, nor of Concord Fight, nor of the last town meeting.

Mrs. Moody very properly calls eating nuts “a mouse-

like employment.” It is quite too absorbing; you can't read at the same time, as when you are eating an apple.

Dec. 17. P. M. — Cold, with a piercing northwest wind and bare ground still. The river, which was raised by the rain of the 14th and ran partly over the meadows, is frozen over again, and I go along the edge of the meadow under Clamshell and back by Hubbard's Bridge.

At Clamshell, to my surprise, scare up either a woodcock or a snipe. I think the former, for I plainly saw considerable red on the breast, also a light stripe along the neck. It was feeding alone, close to the edge of the hill, where it is springy and still soft, almost the only place of this character in the neighborhood, and though I started it three times, it each time flew but little way, round to the hillside again, perhaps the same spot it had left a moment before, as if unwilling to leave this unfrozen and comparatively warm locality. It was a great surprise this bitter cold day, when so many springs were frozen up, to see this hardy bird loitering still. Once alighted, you could not see it till it arose again.

In Saw Mill Brook, as I crossed it, I saw the tail disappearing of some muskrat or other animal, flapping in the cold water, where all was ice around. A flock of a dozen or more tree sparrows fitting through the edge of the birches, etc., by the meadow front of Puffer's. They make excursions into the open meadow and, as I approach, take refuge in the brush. I hear their faint *cheep*, a very feeble evidence of their existence, and also a pretty little suppressed warbling from them.

To-day, though so cold, there is much of the frozen overflow, a broad border of it, along the meadow, a discolored yellowish and soft ice (it probably ran out yesterday or last night), the river still rising a little.

The wind is so cold and strong that the Indians that are encamped in three wigwams of cloth in the railroad wood-yard have all moved into two and closed them up tight.

That feeble *cheep* of the tree sparrow, like the tinkling of an icicle, or the chafing of two hard shrub oak twigs, is probably a call to their mates, by which they keep together. These birds, when perched, look larger than usual this cold and windy day; they are puffed up for warmth, have added a porch to their doors.

It is pretty poor picking out of doors to-day. There 's but little comfort to be found. You go stumping over bare frozen ground, sometimes clothed with curly yellowish withered grass like the back of half-starved cattle late in the fall, now beating this ear, now that, to keep them warm. It is comparatively summer-like under the south side of woods and hills.

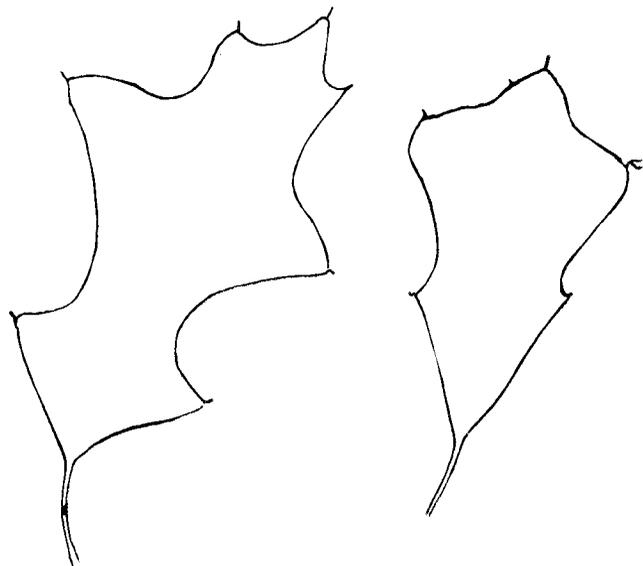
When I returned from the South the other day, I was greeted by withered shrub oak leaves which I had not seen there. It was the most homely and agreeable object that met me. I found that I had no such friend as the shrub oak hereabouts. A farmer once asked me what shrub oaks were made for, not knowing any use they served. But I can tell him that they do me good. They are my parish ministers, regularly settled. They never did any man harm that I know.

Yesterday afternoon I was running a line through the

woods. How many days have I spent thus, sighting my way in direct lines through dense woods, through cat-briar and viburnum in New Jersey, through shrub oak in New England, requiring my axeman to shear off twigs and bushes and dead limbs and masses of withered leaves that obstruct the view, and then set up a freshly barked stake exactly on the line; looking at these barked stakes from far and near as if I loved them; not knowing where I shall come out; my duty then and there perhaps merely to locate a straight line between two points.

Now you have the foliage of summer painted in brown. Go through the shrub oaks. All growth has ceased; no greenness meets the eye, except what there may be in the bark of this shrub. The green leaves are all turned to brown, quite dry and sapless. The little buds are sleeping at the base of the slender shrunken petioles. Who observed when they passed from green to brown? I do not remember the transition; it was very gradual. But these leaves still have a kind of life in them. They are exceedingly beautiful in their withered state. If they hang on, it is like the perseverance of the saints. Their colors are as wholesome, their forms as perfect, as ever. Now that the crowd and bustle of summer is passed, I have leisure to admire them. Their figures never weary my eye. Look at the few broad scallops in their sides. When was that pattern first cut? With what a free stroke the curve was struck! With how little, yet just enough, variety in their forms! Look at the fine bristles which arm each pointed lobe, as perfect now as when the wild bee hummed about them, or the chewink

scratched beneath them. What pleasing and harmonious colors within and without, above and below! The smooth, delicately brown-tanned upper surface, acorn-color, the very pale (some silvery or ashy) ribbed under side. How poetically, how like saints or innocent and beneficent beings, they give up the ghost! How spiritual! Though they have lost their sap, they have not given up the ghost. Rarely touched by worm or insect, they are as fair as ever. These are the forms of some:—



When was it ordained that this leaf should turn brown in the fall?

Dec. 18. 12 M. Start for Amherst, N. H.

A very cold day. Thermometer at 8 A. M. -8° (and

I hear of others very much lower at an earlier hour), -2° at 11.45.

I find the first snow enough to whiten the ground beyond Littleton, and it deepens all the way to Amherst. The steam of the engine hugs the earth very close. Is it because it [is] a very clear, cold day?

The last half the route from Groton Junction to Nashua is along the Nashua River mostly. This river looks less interesting than the Concord. It appears even more open, *i. e.* less wooded (?). At any rate the banks are more uniform, and I notice none of our meadows on it. At Nashua, hire a horse and sleigh, and ride to Amherst, eleven miles, against a strong northwest wind, this bitter cold afternoon. When I get to South Merrimack, about 3.15 P. M., they tell me the thermometer is -3° . While the driving hand is getting benumbed, I am trying to warm the other against my body under the buffalo. Warm myself there in the shop of a tub and pail maker, who does his work by hand, splitting out the staves with a curved knife and smoothing them with curved shaves. His hoops are white ash, shaved thin. After entering Amherst territory, near the Souhegan, notice many shagbark trees, which they tell me the owners value as they do a good apple tree, getting a dozen bushels of shelled nuts sometimes from a tree. I see the nuts on some still.

At my lecture, the audience attended to me closely, and I was satisfied; that is all I ask or expect generally. Not one spoke to me afterward, nor needed they. I have no doubt that they liked it, in the main, though few of them would have dared say so, provided they were

conscious of it. Generally, if I can only get the ears of an audience, I do not care whether they say they like my lecture or not. I think I know as well as they can tell. At any rate, it is none of my business, and it would be impertinent for me to inquire. The stupidity of most of these country towns, not to include the cities, is in its innocence infantile. Lectured in basement (vestry) of the orthodox church, and I trust helped to undermine it.

I was told to stop at the U. S. Hotel, but an old inhabitant had never heard of it and could not tell me where to find it, but I found the letters on a sign without help. It was the ordinary unpretending (?) desolate-looking country tavern. The landlord apologized to me because there was to be a ball there that night which would keep me awake, and it did. He and others there, horrible to relate, were in the habit of blowing their noses with their fingers and wiping them on their boots! Champney's U. S. Hotel was an ordinary team tavern, and the letters U. S., properly enough, not very conspicuous on the sign.

A paper called the *Farmer's Cabinet* is published there. It has reached its fifty-fifth volume. I rode back to Nashua in the morning of —

Dec. 19. Knew the road by some yellow birch trees in a swamp and some rails set on end around a white oak in a pasture. These it seems were the objects I had noticed. In Nashua observed, as I thought, some elms in the distance which had been whitewashed. It turned out that they were covered from top to bottom, on one

side, with the frozen vapor from a fall on the canal. Walked a little way along the bank of the Merrimack, which was frozen over, and was agreeably reminded of my voyage up it. The night previous, in Amherst, I had been awaked by the loud cracking of the ground, which shook the house like the explosion of a powder-mill. In the morning there was to be seen a long crack across the road in front. I saw several of these here in Nashua, and ran a bit of stubble into them but in no place more than five inches. This is a sound peculiar to the coldest nights. Observed that the Nashua in Pepperell was frozen to the very edge of the fall, and even further in some places.

Got home at 1.30 P. M.

P. M. — To Walden.

Walden froze completely over last night. This is very sudden, for on the evening of the 15th there was not a particle of ice in it. In just three days, then, it has been completely frozen over, and the ice is now from two and a half to three inches thick, a transparent green ice, through which I see the bottom where it is seven or eight feet deep. I detect its thickness by looking at the cracks, which are already very numerous, but, having been made at different stages of the ice, they indicate very various thicknesses. Often one only an inch deep crosses at right angles another two and a half inches deep, the last having been recently made and indicating the real thickness of the ice. I advance confidently toward the middle, keeping within a few feet of some distinct crack two inches or more deep,

but when that fails me and I see only cracks an inch or an inch and a half deep, or none at all, I walk with great caution and timidity, though the ice may be as thick as ever, but I have no longer the means of determining its thickness. The ice is so transparent that it is too much like walking on water by faith.

The portion of the pond which was last frozen is a thinner and darker ice stretching about across the middle from southeast to northwest, *i. e.* from the shoulder of the Deep Cove to nearly midway between the bar and Ice-Fort Cove Cape. Close to the northwest end of this, there is a small and narrow place twenty feet long east and west, which is still so thin that a small stone makes a hole. The water, judging from my map, may[be] seventy or seventy-five feet deep there. It looks as if that had been the warmest place in the surface of the pond and therefore the last to yield to the frost king. Into this, or into the thinner ice at this point, there empties, as it were, a narrow meandering creek from near the western shore, which was nearly as late to freeze as any part. All this, I think, I have noticed in previous years. About the edge of all this more recent and darker ice, the thicker ice is white with a feathery frost, which seems to have been produced by the very fine spray, or rather the vapor, blown from the yet unfrozen surface on to the ice by the strong and cold wind. Here is where, so to speak, its last *animal heat* escaped, the dying breath of the pond frozen on its lips. It had the same origin with the frost about the mouth of a hole in the ground whence warm vapors had escaped. The fluid, timid pond was

encircled within an ever-narrowing circle by the icy grasp of winter, and this is a trace of the last vaporous breath that curled along its trembling surface. Here the chilled pond gave up the ghost.

As I stand here, I hear the hooting of my old acquaintance the owl in Wheeler's Wood. Do I not oftenest hear it just before sundown? This sound, heard near at hand, is more simply animal and guttural, without resonance or reverberation, but, heard here from out the depths of the wood, it sounds peculiarly hollow and drum-like, as if it struck on a tense skin drawn around, the tympanum of the wood, through which all we denizens of nature hear. Thus it comes to us an accredited and universal or melodious sound; is more than the voice of the owl, the voice of the wood as well. The owl only touches the stops, or rather wakes the reverberations. For all Nature is a musical instrument on which her creatures play, celebrating their joy or grief unconsciously often. It sounds now, *hoo | hoo hoo* (very fast) | *hoo-rer | hoo*.

Withered leaves! this is our frugal winter diet, instead of the juicy salads of spring and summer. I think I could write a lecture on "Dry Leaves," carrying a specimen of each kind that hangs on in the winter into the lecture-room as the heads of my discourse. They have long hung to some extent in vain, and have not found their poet yet. The pine has been sung, but not, to my knowledge, the shrub oak. Most think it is useless. How glad I am that it serves no vulgar use! It is never seen on the woodman's cart. The citizen who has just bought a sprout-land on which shrub oaks alone come

up only curses it. But it serves a higher use than they know. Shrub oak! how true its name! Think first what a family it belongs to. The oak, the king of trees, is its own brother, only of ampler dimensions. The oaks, so famous for grandeur and picturesqueness, so prized for strength by the builder, for knees or for beams; and this is the oak of smaller size, the Esquimau of oaks, the shrub oak! The oaken shrub! I value it first for the noble family it belongs to. It is not like brittle sumach or venomous dogwood, which you must beware how you touch, but wholesome to the touch, though rough; not producing any festering sores, only honest scratches and rents.

Dr. Kane says in his "Arctic Explorations," page 21, that at Fiskernaes in Greenland "the springs, which well through the mosses, frequently remain unfrozen throughout the year."

Dec. 20. Rain more or less all day.

Dec. 21. *Sunday*. Think what a pitiful kind of life ours is, eating our kindred animals! and in some places one another! Some of us (the Esquimaux), half whose life is spent in the dark, wholly dependent on one or two animals not many degrees removed from themselves for food, clothing, and fuel, and partly for shelter; making their sledges "of small fragments of porous bones [of whale],¹ admirably knit together by thongs of hide" (Kane's last book, vol. i, page 205), thus getting about, sliding about, on the bones of our cousins.

¹ [Supplied by Thoreau.]

Where Kane wintered in the *Advance* in 1853-54, on the coast of Greenland, about $78\frac{1}{2}^{\circ}$ north latitude, or further north than any navigator had been excepting Parry at Spitzbergen, he meets with Esquimaux, and "the fleam-shaped tips of their lances were of unmistakable steel." "The metal was obtained in traffic from the more southern tribes." Such is trade.

P. M. — To Walden.

The pond is open again *in the middle*, owing to the rain of yesterday. I go across to the cliffs by way of the Andromeda Ponds.

How interesting and wholesome their color now! A broad level thick stuff, without a crevice in it, composed of the dull brown-red andromeda. Is it not the most uniform and deepest red that covers a large surface now? No withered oak leaves are nearly as red at present. In a broad hollow amid the hills, you have this perfectly level red stuff, marked here and there only with gray streaks or patches of bare high blueberry bushes, etc., and all surrounded by a light border of straw-colored sedge, etc.

Even the little red buds of the *Vaccinium Pennsylvanicum* and *vacillans* on the now bare and dry-looking stems attract me as I go through the open glades between the first Andromeda Pond and the Well Meadow Field. Many twigs of the *Vaccinium vacillans* appear to have been nibbled off, and some of its buds have *unfolded*, apparently in the fall. I observe sage willows with many leaves on them still.

Apparently the red oak retains much fewer leaves than the white, scarlet, and black. I notice the petioles of

both the black and red twisted in that peculiar way. The red oak leaves look thinner and flatter, and therefore perhaps show the lobes more, than those of the black. The white oak leaves are the palest and most shrivelled, the lightest, perhaps a shade of buff, but they are of various shades, some pretty dark with a salmon tinge. The swamp white oak leaves (which I am surprised to find Gray makes a variety (*discolor*) of the *Quercus Prinus*) are very much like the shrub oak, but more curled. These two are the best preserved, though they do not hang on so well as the white and scarlet. Both remarkable for their thick, leathery, sound leaves, uninjured by insects, and their very light downy under sides. The black oak leaves are the darkest brown, with clear or deep yellowish-brown under sides, obovate in outline. The scarlet oak leaves, which are very numerous still, are of a ruddy color, having much blood in their cheeks. They are all winter the reddest on the hillsides. They still spread their ruddy fingers to the breeze. After the shrub and swamp white, they are perhaps the best preserved of any I describe. The red oak leaves are a little lighter brown than the black oak, less yellowish beneath. Their lobes, methinks, are narrower and straighter-sided. They are the color of their own acorns.

Dec. 22. To Boston and Cambridge.

Dec. 23. Some savage tribes must share the experience of the lower animals in their relation to man. With what thoughts must the Esquimau manufacture

his knife from the rusty hoop of a cask drifted to his shores, not a natural but an artificial product, the work of man's hands, the waste of the commerce of a superior race, whom perchance he never saw!

The cracking of the ground is a phenomenon of the coldest nights. After being awaked by the loud cracks the night of the 18th at Amherst (a man told me in the morning that he had seen a crack running across the plain (I saw it), almost broad enough to put his hand into; this was an exaggeration; it was not a quarter of an inch wide), I saw a great many the same forenoon running across the road in Nashua, every few rods, and also by our house in Concord the same day when I got home. So it seems the ground was cracking all the country over, partly, no doubt, because there was so little snow, or none (none at Concord).

If the writer would interest readers, he must report so much life, using a certain satisfaction always as a *point d'appui*. However mean and limited, it must be a genuine and contented life that he speaks out of. They must have the essence or oil of himself, tried out of the fat of his experience and joy.¹

P. M. — Surveying for Cyrus Jarvis.

Snows more or less all day, making an inch or two.

Dec. 24. More snow in the night and to-day, making nine or ten inches.

P. M. — To Walden and Baker Farm with Ricketson, it still snowing a little.

Turned off from railroad and went through Wheeler,

¹ [Channing, p. 97.]

or Owl, Wood. The snow is very light, so that sleighs cut through it, and there is but little sleighing. It is very handsome now on the trees by the main path in Wheeler Wood; also on the weeds and twigs that rise



above the snow, resting on them just like down, light towers of down with the bare extremity of the twig peeping out above. We push through the light dust, throwing it before our legs as a husbandman grain which he is sowing. It is only in still paths in the woods that it rests on the trees much. Am surprised to find Walden still open in the middle. When I push aside the snow with my feet, the ice appears quite black by contrast. There is considerable snow on the edge of the pine woods where I used to live. It rests on the successive tiers of boughs, perhaps weighing them down, so that the trees are opened into great flakes from top to bottom. The snow collects and is piled up in little columns like down about every twig and stem, and this is only seen in perfection, complete to the last flake, while it is snowing, as now.

Returned across the pond and went across to Baker Farm.

Noticed, at east end of westernmost Andromeda Pond, the slender spikes of lycopus with half a dozen



distant little spherical dark-brown whorls of pungently fragrant or spicy seeds, somewhat nutmeg-like, or even

like flagroot (?), when bruised. I am not sure that the seeds of any other mint are thus fragrant now. It scents your handkerchief or pocketbook finely when the crumbled whorls are sprinkled over them.

It was very pleasant walking thus before the storm was over, in the soft, subdued light. We are also more domesticated in nature when our vision is confined to near and familiar objects. Did not see a track of any animal till returning near the Well Meadow Field, where many foxes (?), one of whom I had a glimpse of, had been coursing back and forth in the path and near it for three quarters of a mile. They had made quite a path.

I do not take snuff. In my winter walks, I stoop and bruise between my thumb and finger the dry whorls of the lycopus, or water horehound, just rising above the snow, stripping them off, and smell that. That is as near as I come to the Spice Islands. That is my smelling-bottle, my ointment.¹

Dec. 25. P. M. — To Lee's Cliff.

A strong wind from the northwest is gathering the snow into picturesque drifts behind the walls. As usual they resemble shells more than anything, sometimes prows of vessels, also the folds of a white napkin or counterpane dropped over a bonneted head. There are no such picturesque snow-drifts as are formed behind loose and open stone walls. Already yesterday it had drifted so much, *i. e.* so much ground was bare, that there were as many carts as sleighs in the streets.

¹ [Daniel Ricketson and his Friends, pp. 348-350.]

Just beyond Hubbard's Bridge, on Conant's Brook Meadow, I am surprised to find a tract of ice, some thirty by seven or eight rods, blown quite bare. It shows how unstable the snow is.

Sanborn got some white spruce and some usnea for Christmas in the swamp. I thought the last would be the most interesting and *weird*.

On the north sides of the walls we go over boots and get them full, then let ourselves down into the shell-work on the south side; so beyond the brows of hills.

At Lee's Cliff I pushed aside the snow with my foot and got some fresh green catnip for Min.

I see the numerous tracks there, too, of foxes, or else hares, that have been running about in the light snow.

Called at the Conantum House. It grieves me to see these interesting relics, this and the house at the Baker Farm, going to complete ruin.

Met William Wheeler's shaggy gray terrier, or Indian dog, going home. He got out of the road into the field and went round to avoid us.

Take long walks in stormy weather or through deep snows in the fields and woods, if you would keep your spirits up. Deal with brute nature. Be cold and hungry and weary.

Dec. 27. Saturday. Walden is still open in one place of considerable extent, just off the east cape of long southern bay.

Dec. 28. Sunday. Am surprised to see the *F. hyemalis* here.

Walden completely frozen over again last night. Goodwin & Co. are fishing there to-day. Ice about four inches thick, occasionally sunk by the snow beneath the water. They have had but poor luck. One middling-sized pickerel and one large yellow perch only, since 9 or 10 A. M. It is now nearly sundown. The perch is very full of spawn. How handsome, with its broad dark transverse bars, sharp narrow triangles, broadest on the back!

The men are standing or sitting about a smoky fire of damp dead wood, near by the spot where many a fisherman has sat before, and I draw near, hoping to hear a fish story. One says that Louis Menan, the French Canadian who lives in Lincoln, fed his ducks on the fresh-water clams which he got at Fair Haven Pond. He saw him open the shells, and the ducks snapped them up out of the shells very fast.

I observe that some shrub oak leaves have but little silveriness beneath, as if they were a variety, the color of the under approaching that of the upper surface somewhat.

Since the snow of the 23d, the days seem considerably lengthened, owing to the increased light after sundown.

The fishermen sit by their damp fire of rotten pine wood, so wet and chilly that even smoke in their eyes is a kind of comfort. There they sit, ever and anon scanning their reels to see if any have fallen, and, if not catching many fish, still getting what they went for, though they may not be aware of it, *i. e.* a wilder experience than the town affords.

There lies a pickerel or perch on the ice, waving a fin

or lifting its gills from time to time, gasping its life away.

I thrive best on solitude. If I have had a companion only one day in a week, unless it were one or two I could name, I find that the value of the week to me has been seriously affected. It dissipates my days, and often it takes me another week to get over it. As the Esquimaux of Smith's Strait in North Greenland laughed when Kane warned them of their utter extermination, cut off as they were by ice on all sides from their race, unless they attempted in season to cross the glacier southward, so do I laugh when you tell me of the danger of impoverishing myself by isolation. It is here that the walrus and the seal, and the white bear, and the eider ducks and auks on which I batten, most abound.

Dec. 29. The snow is softened yet more, and it thaws somewhat. The cockerels crow, and we are reminded of spring.

P. M. — To Warren Miles's mill.

We must go out and re-ally ourselves to Nature every day. We must make root, send out some little fibre at least, even every winter day. I am sensible that I am imbibing health when I open my mouth to the wind. Staying in the house breeds a sort of insanity always. Every house is in this sense a hospital. A night and a forenoon is as much confinement to those wards as I can stand. I am aware that I recover some sanity which I had lost almost the instant that I come abroad.

Do not the *F. hyemalis*, lingering yet, and the *numerous* tree sparrows foretell an open winter?

The fields behind Dennis's have but little snow on them; the weeds rising above it imbrown them. It is collected in deep banks on the southeast slopes of the hills, — the wind having been northwest, — and there no weeds rise above it.

By Nut Meadow Brook, just beyond Brown's fence crossing, I see a hornets' nest about seven inches in diameter on a thorn bush, only eighteen inches from the ground. Do they ever return to the same nests?

White oaks standing in open ground will commonly have more leaves now than black or red oaks of the same size, also standing exposed.

Miles is sawing pail-stuff. Thus the full streams and ponds supply the farmer with winter work. I see two trout four or five inches long in his brook a few rods below the mill. The water is quite low, he having shut it off. Rich copper-brown fish darting up and down the fast-shoaling stream.

When I return by Clamshell Hill, the sun has set, and the cloudy sky is reflected in a short and narrow open reach at the bend there. The water and reflected sky are a dull, dark green, but not the real sky.

Dec. 30. Surveying the W—— farm.

Parker, the Shaker that was, my assistant, says that the first year he came to live with W——, he worked on the farm, and that when he was digging potatoes on that jog (of about an acre) next to the site of the old Lee house, he found snakes' eggs in many hills, perhaps half a dozen together, he thinks as many as seventy in all. He did not perceive that they were united as he

hoed them out, but may have separated them. When he broke the eggs, the young snakes, two or three inches long, wriggled out and about.

Had the experience of losing a pin and then hunting for it a long time in vain.

What an evidence it is, after all, of civilization, or of a capacity for improvement, that savages like our Indians, who in their protracted wars stealthily slay men, women, and children without mercy, with delight, who delight to burn, torture, and devour one another, proving themselves more inhuman in these respects even than beasts, — what a wonderful evidence it is, I say, of their capacity for improvement that even they can enter into the most formal compact or treaty of peace, burying the hatchet, etc., etc., and treating with each other with as much consideration as the most enlightened states. You would say that they had a genius for diplomacy as well as for war. Consider that Iroquois, torturing his captive, roasting him before a slow fire, biting off the fingers of him alive, and finally eating the heart of him dead, betraying not the slightest evidence of humanity; and now behold him in the council-chamber, where he meets the representatives of the hostile nation to treat of peace, conducting with such perfect dignity and decorum, betraying such a sense of justness. These savages are equal to us civilized men in their treaties, and, I fear, not essentially worse in their wars.