

## VI

JANUARY, 1857

(ÆT. 39)

*Jan. 1.* I observe a shelf of ice — what arctic voyagers call the ice-belt or ice-foot (which they see on a very great scale sledging upon it) — adhering to the walls and banks at various heights, the river having fallen nearly two feet since it first froze. It is often two or three feet wide and now six inches thick.

Am still surveying the W—— or Lee farm. W—— cleared out and left this faithful servant like a cat in some corner of this great house, but without enough to buy him a pair of boots, I hear. Parker was once a Shaker at Canterbury. He is now Captain E——'s right-hand man. He found him in the house. P. does the chores. Complains that, as they dine at fashionable hours, he does n't get enough to support him when he goes home at noon from helping me. When he sees how much dead wood there is on the farm, he says they ought to have a "gundalo," meaning a large, square kind of boat, to cart it off with.

E——, having lent W—— money, was obliged to take the farm to save himself, but he is nearly blind, and is anxious to get rid of it. Says that the buildings are either new or in excellent repair. He understands that in W——'s day they mixed paint by the hogshhead. Parker

has told him of logs cut two years ago which lie rotting in the swamp, and he is having them hauled out and to mill.

*Jan. 2.* To-day I see Parker is out with horse and cart, collecting dead wood at the Rock and drawing it home over the meadow. I saw the English servant-girl with one of the children flat on the ice hard at work on the river cutting a hole with a hatchet, but, as the ice was thick and the water gushed up too soon for her, I saw that she would fail and directed her to an open place. She was nearly beat out. The hole, she said, was to drown a cat in; probably one which the W——s left behind as they did Parker. E—— is resolved on a general clearing-up.

It is singular that the nuthatch and the creeper should be so rare, they are so regular.

*Jan. 3.* Snows all day, falling level, without wind, a moist and heavy snow. Snowed part of the night also. But to my surprise a high wind arose in the night and that and the cold so dried the snow that —

(*Jan. 4*) this morning it is a good deal drifted. It did not freeze together, or crust, as you might have expected. You would not suppose it had been moist when it fell. About eight inches have fallen, yet there is very little on the river. It blows off, unless where water has oozed out at the sides or elsewhere, and the rough, flowing, scaly mass is frozen into a kind of batter, like mortar, or bread that has spewed out in

the oven. Deep and drifted as the snow is, I found, when I returned from my walk, some dry burs of the burdock adhering to the lining of my coat. Even in the middle of winter, aye, in middle of the Great Snow, Nature does not forget these her vegetable economies.

It does look sometimes as if the world were on its last legs. How many there are whose principal employment it is nowadays to eat their meals and go to the post-office!

After spending four or five days surveying and drawing a plan incessantly, I especially feel the necessity of putting myself in communication with nature again, to recover my tone, to withdraw out of the wearying and unprofitable world of affairs. The things I have been doing have but a fleeting and accidental importance, however much men are immersed in them, and yield very little valuable fruit. I would fain have been wading through the woods and fields and conversing with the sane snow. Having waded in the very shallowest stream of time, I would now bathe my temples in eternity. I wish again to participate in the serenity of nature, to share the happiness of the river and the woods. I thus from time to time break off my connection with eternal truths and go with the shallow stream of human affairs, grinding at the mill of the Philistines; but when my task is done, with never-failing confidence I devote myself to the infinite again. It would be sweet to deal with men more, I can imagine, but where dwell they? Not in the fields which I traverse.

*Jan. 5.* A cold, cutting northwest wind.

*Jan. 6.* Still colder and perhaps windier. The river is now for the most part covered with snow again, which has blown from the meadows and been held by the water which has oozed out. I slump through snow into that water for twenty rods together, which is not frozen though the thermometer says  $-8^{\circ}$ . I think that the bright-yellow wood of the barberry, which I have occasion to break in my surveying, is the most interesting and remarkable for its color of any. When I get home after that slumping walk on the river, I find that the slush has balled and frozen on my boots two or three inches thick, and can only be thawed off by the fire, it is so solid.

I frequently have occasion in surveying to note the position or bearing of the edge of a wood, which I describe as edge of wood. In such a way apparently the name Edgewood originated.

Beaton, the old Scotch storekeeper, used to say of one Deacon (Joe?) Brown, a grandfather of the milkman, who used to dine at his house on Sundays and praise his wife's dinners but yet prevented her being admitted to the church, that his was like a "coo's (cow's) tongue, rough one side and smooth the other."

A man asked me the other night whether such and such persons were not as happy as anybody, being conscious, as I perceived, of much unhappiness himself and not aspiring to much more than an animal content. "Why!" said I, speaking to his condition, "the stones are happy, Concord River is happy, and I am happy too. When I took up a fragment of a walnut-shell

this morning, I saw by its very grain and composition, its form and color, etc., that it was made for happiness. The most brutish and inanimate objects that are made suggest an everlasting and thorough satisfaction; they are the homes of content. Wood, earth, mould, etc., exist for joy. Do you think that Concord River would have continued to flow these millions of years by Clamshell Hill and round Hunt's Island, if it had not been happy, — if it had been miserable in its channel, tired of existence, and cursing its maker and the hour that it sprang?"

Though there is an extremely cold, cutting northwest wind, against which I see many travellers turning their backs, and so advancing, I hear and see an unusual number of merry little tree sparrows about the few weeds that are to be seen. They look very chipper, flitting restlessly about and jerking their long tails.

*Jan. 7.* P. M. — To Walden down railroad and return over Cliffs.

I should not be ashamed to have a shrub oak for my coat-of-arms.

It is bitter cold, with a cutting northwest wind. The pond is now a plain snow-field, but there are no tracks of fishers on it. It is too cold for them. The surface of the snow there is finely waved and grained, giving it a sort of slaty fracture, the appearance which hard, dry *blown* snow assumes. All animate things are reduced to their lowest terms. This is the fifth day of cold, blowing weather. All tracks are concealed in an hour or two. Some have to make their paths two or three times

over in a day. The fisherman is not here, for his lines would freeze in.

I go through the woods toward the Cliffs along the side of the Well Meadow Field.

There is nothing so sanative, so poetic, as a walk in the woods and fields even now, when I meet none abroad for pleasure. Nothing so inspires me and excites such serene and profitable thought. The objects are elevating. In the street and in society I am almost invariably cheap and dissipated, my life is unspeakably mean. No amount of gold or respectability would in the least redeem it, — dining with the Governor or a member of Congress!! But alone in distant woods or fields, in unpretending sprout-lands or pastures tracked by rabbits, even in a bleak and, to most, cheerless day, like this, when a villager would be thinking of his inn, I come to myself, I once more feel myself grandly related, and that cold and solitude are friends of mine. I suppose that this value, in my case, is equivalent to what others get by churchgoing and prayer. I come to my solitary woodland walk as the homesick go home. I thus dispose of the superfluous and see things as they are, grand and beautiful. I have told many that I walk every day about half the daylight, but I think they do not believe it. I wish to get the Concord, the Massachusetts, the America, out of my head and be sane a part of every day. If there are missionaries for the heathen, why not send them to me? I wish to know something; I wish to be made better. I wish to forget, a considerable part of every day, all mean, narrow, trivial men (and this requires usually to forego and forget

all personal relations so long), and therefore I come out to these solitudes, where the problem of existence is simplified. I get away a mile or two from the town into the stillness and solitude of nature, with rocks, trees, weeds, snow about me. I enter some glade in the woods, perchance, where a few weeds and dry leaves alone lift themselves above the surface of the snow, and it is as if I had come to an open window. I see out and around myself. Our *skylights* are thus far away from the ordinary resorts of men. I am not satisfied with ordinary windows. I must have a true *skylight*. My true skylight is on the outside of the village. I am not thus expanded, recreated, enlightened, when I meet a company of men. It chances that the sociable, the town and county, or the farmers' club does not prove a skylight to me. I do not invariably find myself translated under those circumstances. They bore me. The man I meet with is not often so instructive as the silence he breaks. This stillness, solitude, wildness of nature is a kind of thoroughwort, or boneset, to my intellect. This is what I go out to seek. It is as if I always met in those places some grand, serene, immortal, infinitely encouraging, though invisible, companion, and walked with him. There at last my nerves are steadied, my senses and my mind do their office. I am aware that most of my neighbors would think it a hardship to be compelled to linger here one hour, especially this bleak day, and yet I receive this sweet and ineffable compensation for it. It is the most agreeable thing I do. Truly, my coins are uncurrent with them.

I love and celebrate nature, even in detail, merely

because I love the scenery of these interviews and translations. I love to remember every creature that was at this *club*. I thus get off a certain social scurf and scalliness. I do not consider the other animals brutes in the common sense. I am attracted toward them undoubtedly because I never heard any nonsense from them. I have not convicted them of folly, or vanity, or pomposity, or stupidity, in dealing with me. Their vices, at any rate, do not interfere with me. My fairies invariably take to flight when a man appears upon the scene. In a caucus, a meeting-house, a lyceum, a club-room, there is nothing like it in my experience. But away out of the town, on Brown's scrub oak lot, which was sold the other day for six dollars an acre, I have company such as England cannot buy, nor afford. This society is what I live, what I survey, for. I subscribe generously to *this* — all that I have and am.

*There*, in that Well Meadow Field, perhaps, I feel in my element again, as when a fish is put back into the water. I wash off all my chagrins. All things go smoothly as the axle of the universe. I can remember that when I was very young I used to have a dream night after night, over and over again, which might have been named Rough and Smooth. All existence, all satisfaction and dissatisfaction, all event was symbolized in this way. Now I seemed to be lying and tossing, perchance, on a horrible, a fatal rough surface, which must soon, indeed, put an end to my existence, though even in the dream I knew it to be the symbol merely of my misery; and then again, suddenly, I was lying on a delicious smooth surface, as of a summer sea,

as of gossamer or down or softest plush, and life was such a luxury to live. My waking experience *always* has been and is such an alternate Rough and Smooth. In other words it is Insanity and Sanity.

Might I aspire to praise the moderate nymph Nature! I must be like her, moderate.<sup>1</sup>

This snow which fell last Saturday so moist and heavy is now surprisingly dry and light and powdery. In the wood-path between the Well Meadow Field and the Cliff, it is all scored with the tracks of leaves that have scurried over it. Some might not suspect the cause of these fine and delicate traces, for the cause is no longer obvious. Here and there is but a leaf or two to be seen in the snow-covered path. The myriads which scampered here are now at rest perhaps far on one side. I have listened to the whispering of the dry leaves so long that whatever meaning it has for my ears, I think that I must have heard it.

On the top of the Cliff I am again exposed to the cutting wind. It has blown the hilltops almost bare, and the snow is packed in hard drifts, in long ridges or coarse folds, behind the walls there. Fine, dry snow, thus blown, will become hard enough to bear. Especially the flat rocks are bared, the snow having nothing to hold by.

Going down path to the spring, I see where some fox (apparently) has passed down it, and though the rest of the broad path is else perfectly unspotted white, each track of the fox has proved a trap which has caught from three or four to eight or ten leaves each, snugly packed; and thus it is reprinted.

<sup>1</sup> [Channing, p. 113.]

*Jan. 8.* I find by hanging Smith's thermometer on the same nail with ours that it stands  $5^{\circ}$  below ours.

It was  $18^{\circ}$  at 3 p. m. by ours when I went out to walk. I picked up on the bare ice of the river, opposite the oak in Shattuck's land, on a small space blown bare of snow, a fuzzy caterpillar, black at the two ends and red-brown in the middle, rolled into a ball or close ring, like a woodchuck. I pressed it hard between my fingers and found it frozen. I put it into my hat, and when I took it out in the evening, it soon began to stir and at length crawled about, but a portion of it was not quite flexible. It took some time for it to thaw. This is the fifth cold day, and it must have been frozen so long. It was more than an inch long.

Miss Minott tells me that she does not think her brother George has ever been to Boston more than once (though she tells me he says he has been twice),<sup>1</sup> and certainly not since 1812. He was born in the Casey house, *i. e.* the same in which C. lived, the second of three that stood beyond the old black house beyond Moore's. Casey was a Guinea negro. Casey used to weep in his latter days when he thought of his wife and two children in Africa from whom he was kidnapped. Minott went only to the East Quarter schools. The house he now lives in is about sixty years old, was moved from beside Casey's to where it now stands before it was roofed. Minott says he has lived where he now does as much as sixty years. He has not been up in town for three years, on account of his rheumatism. Does nothing whatever in the house but read the news-

<sup>1</sup> *He since tells me once.*

papers and few old books they have, the Almanac especially, and hold the cats, and very little indeed out of the house. Is just able to saw and split the wood.

*Jan. 11.* Began snowing yesterday afternoon, and it is still snowing this forenoon.

Mother remembers the Cold Friday very well. She lived in the house where I was born. The people in the kitchen — Jack Garrison, Esther, and a Hardy girl — drew up close to the fire, but the dishes which the Hardy girl was washing froze as fast as she washed them, close to the fire. They managed to keep warm in the parlor by their great fires.

The other day a man came "just to get me to run a line in the woods." This is the usual request. "Do you know where one end of it is?" I asked. (It was the Stratton lot.) "No," said he, "I don't know either end; that is what I want to find." "Do you know either of the next sides of the lot?" Thinking a moment, he answered, "No." "Well, do you know any one side of the whole lot, or any corner?" After a little hesitation he said that he did not. Here, then, was a wood-lot of half a dozen acres, well enough described in a deed dated 1777, courses and distances given, but he could not tell exactly in what part of the universe any particular part of it was, but he expected me to find out. This was what he understood by "running." On the strength of this deed he had forbidden a man to chop wood somewhere.

Frequently, when my employer does not know where his land lies, and has put into my hands an ancient and

tattered piece of paper called his deed, which throws no light at all on the question, he turns away, saying, "I want you to make it all right. Give me all that belongs to me."

In the deed of the Stratton wood-lot, dated 1777, there is no mention [of] any building on [it] to be conveyed, so that probably there was only a cellar-hole there then, eighty years ago, as now. For so long, at least, it has been a mere dent in the earth there, to which, from time to time, dead horses or hogs were drawn from the village and cast in. These are our Ninevehs and Babylons. I approach such a cellar-hole as Layard the scene of his labors, and I do not fail to find there relics as interesting to me as his winged bulls.

For some years past I have partially offered myself as a lecturer; have been advertised as such several years. Yet I have had but two or three invitations to lecture in a year, and some years none at all. I congratulate myself on having been permitted to stay at home thus, I am so much richer for it. I do not see what I should have got of much value, but money, by going about, but I do see what I should have lost. It seems to me that I have a longer and more liberal lease of life thus. I cannot afford to be telling my experience, especially to those who perhaps will take no interest in it. I wish to be getting experience. You might as well recommend to a bear to leave his hollow tree and run about all winter scratching at all the hollow trees in the woods. He would be leaner in the spring than if he had stayed at home and sucked his claws. As for the lecture-goers, it is none

of their business what I think. I perceive that most make a great account of their relations, more or less personal and direct, to many men, coming before them as lecturers, writers, or public men. But all this is impertinent and unprofitable to me. I never yet recognized, nor was recognized by, a crowd of men. I was never assured of their existence, nor they of mine.

There was wit and even poetry in the negro's answer to the man who tried to persuade him that the slaves would not be obliged to work in heaven. "Oh, you g' way, Massa. I know better. If dere 's no work for cullud folks up dar, dey 'll *make* some fur 'em, and if dere 's nuffin better to do, dey 'll make 'em *shub de clouds along*. You can't fool this chile, Massa."

I was describing the other day my success in solitary and distant woodland walking outside the town. I do not go there to get my dinner, but to get that sustenance which dinners only preserve me to enjoy, without which dinners are a vain repetition. But how little men can help me in this! only by having a kindred experience. Of what use to tell them of my happiness? Thus, if ever we have anything important to say, it might be introduced with the remark: "It is nothing to you, in particular. It is none of your business, I know." *That* is what might be called going into *good society*. I never chanced to meet with any man so cheering and elevating and encouraging, so infinitely suggestive, as the stillness and solitude of the Well Meadow Field.

Men even think me odd and perverse because I do not prefer their society to this nymph or wood-god

rather. But I have tried them. I have sat down with a dozen of them together in a club, and instantly — they did not inspire me. One or another abused our ears with many words and a few thoughts which were not theirs. There was very little genuine goodness apparent. We are such hollow pretenders. I lost my time.

But out there! Who shall criticise that companion? It is like the hone to the knife. I bathe in that climate and am cleansed of all social impurities. I become a witness with unprejudiced senses to the order of the universe. *There* is nothing petty or impertinent, none to say, "See what a great man I am!" *There* chiefly, and not in the society of the wits, am I cognizant of wit. Shall I prefer a part, an infinitely small fraction, to the whole? *There* I get my underpinnings laid and repaired, cemented, levelled. *There* is my country club. We dine at the sign of the Shrub Oak, the New Albion House.<sup>1</sup>

I demand of my companion some evidence that he has travelled further than the sources of the Nile, that he has seen something, that he has been *out of town, out of the house*. Not that he can tell a good story, but that he can keep a good silence. Has he attended to a silence more significant than any story? Did he ever get out of the road which all men and fools travel? You call yourself a great traveller, perhaps, but can you get beyond the influence of a certain class of ideas?

I expect the time when there will be founded hospitals for the founders of hospitals.

<sup>1</sup> [Channing, p. 113.]

*Jan. 13.* I hear one thrumming a guitar below stairs. It reminds me of moments that I have lived. What a comment on our life is the least strain of music! It lifts me up above all the dust and mire of the universe. I soar or hover with clean skirts over the field of my life. It is ever life within life, in concentric spheres. The field wherein I toil or rust at any time is at the same time the field for such different kinds of life! The farmer's boy or hired man has an instinct which tells him as much indistinctly, and hence his dreams and his restlessness; hence, even, it is that he wants money to realize his dreams with. The identical field where I am leading my humdrum life, let but a strain of music be heard there, is seen to be the field of some unrecorded crusade or tournament the thought of which excites in us an ecstasy of joy. The way in which I am affected by this faint thrumming advertises me that there is still some health and immortality in the springs of me. What an elixir is this sound! I, who but lately came and went and lived under a *dish cover*, live now under the heavens. It releases me; it bursts my bonds. Almost all, perhaps all, our life is, speaking comparatively, a stereotyped despair; *i. e.*, we never at any time realize the full grandeur of our destiny. We forever and ever and habitually underrate our fate. Talk of infidels! Why, all of the race of man, except in the rarest moments when they are lifted above themselves by an ecstasy, are infidels. With the very best disposition, what does my belief amount to? This poor, timid, unenlightened, thick-skinned creature, what *can* it believe? I am, of course, hopelessly ignorant and unbelieving until some

divinity stirs within me. Ninety-nine one-hundredths of our lives we are mere hedgers and ditchers, but from time to time we meet with reminders of our destiny.

We hear the kindred vibrations, music! and we put out our dormant feelers unto the limits of the universe. We attain to a wisdom that passeth understanding. The stable continents undulate. The hard and fixed becomes fluid.

"Unless above himself he can  
Erect himself, how poor a thing is man!"

When I *hear* music I fear no danger, I am invulnerable, I see no foe. I am related to the earliest times and to the latest.<sup>1</sup>

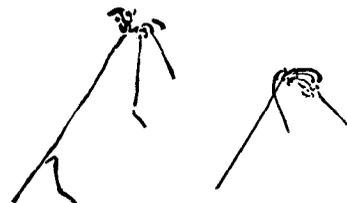
There are infinite degrees of life, from that which is next to sleep and death, to that which is forever awake and immortal. We must not confound man with man. We cannot conceive of a greater difference than between the life of one man and that of another. I am constrained to believe that the mass of men are never so lifted above themselves that their destiny is seen to be transcendently beautiful and grand.

P. M. — On the river to Bittern Rock.

The river is now completely concealed by snow. I come this way partly because it is the best walking here, the snow not so deep. The only wild life I notice is a crow on a distant oak. The snow is drifted and much deeper about the button-bushes, etc. It is surprising

<sup>1</sup> [Channing, p. 332.]

what an effect a thin barrier of bushes has on it, causing it to lodge there until often a very large drift is formed more or less abrupt on the south. Wool-grass still rises above the snow along the sides.



In a very few places, for half a dozen feet the snow is blown off, revealing the dark transparent ice, in which I see numerous great white cleavages, which show its generous thickness, a foot at least. They cross each other at various angles and are frequently curved vertically, reflecting rainbow tints from within. Small triangles only a foot or two over are seen to be completely cracked around at the point of convulsion, yet it is as firm there as anywhere. I am proud of the strength of my floor, and love to jump and stamp there and bear my whole weight on it. As transparent as glass, yet you might found a house on it. Then there are little feathery flake-like twisted cleavages, which extend not more than an inch into it.

I see no tracks but of mice, and apparently of foxes, which have visited every muskrat-house and then turned short away.

Am surprised to see, returning, how much it has drifted in the Corner road. It has overflowed from the northern fields and lodged behind the north wall, forming drifts as high as the wall, which extend from one third to two thirds across the road for two long reaches, driving the traveller into the neighboring field, having

taken down the fence. It must be pleasant to ride along in the narrow path against the untouched and spotless edge of the drift, which curves over sharp like the visor of a cap. Sometimes this edge is bent down till it is almost vertical, yet a foot or two wide and only a few inches thick.

*Jan. 14. P. M. — Up Assabet on ice.*

I go slumping four or five inches in the snow on the river, and often into water above the ice, breaking through a slight crust under the snow, which has formed in the night. Each cold day this concealed overflow, mixing with the snow beneath, is converted into ice, and so raises it, makes the surface snow shallower, and improves the walking; but unless it is quite cold, this snow and water is apt to get a slight crust only, through which you sink.

I notice, on the black willows and also on the alders and white maples overhanging the stream, numerous dirty-white cocoons, about an inch long, attached by their sides to the base of the recent twigs and disguised by dry leaves curled about them, — a sort of fruit which these trees bear now. The leaves are not attached to the twigs, but artfully arranged about and fastened to the cocoons. Almost every little cluster of leaves contains a cocoon, apparently of one species. So that often when you would think that the trees were retaining their leaves, it is not the trees but the caterpillars that have retained them. I do not see a cluster of leaves on a maple, unless on a dead twig, but it conceals a cocoon. Yet I cannot find one alive; they are all crumbled

within. The black willows retain very few of their narrow curled leaves here and there, like the terminal leaflet of a fern (the alders and maples scarcely any ever), yet these few are just enough to withdraw attention from those which surround the cocoons. What kind of understanding was there between the mind that determined that these leaves should hang on during the winter, and that of the worm that fastened a few of these leaves to its cocoon in order to disguise it? <sup>1</sup> I thus walk along the edge of the trees and bushes which overhang the stream, gathering the cocoons, which probably were thought to be doubly secure here. These cocoons, of course, were attached before the leaves had fallen. Almost every one is already empty, or contains only the relics of a nymph. It has been attacked and devoured by some foe. These numerous cocoons attached to the twigs overhanging the stream in the still and biting winter day suggest a certain fertility in the river borders, — impart a kind of life to them, — and so are company to me. There is so much more life than is suspected in the most solitary and dreariest scene. They are as much as the lisping of a chickadee.

Hemlock seeds are scattered over the snow. The birch (white) catkins appear to lose their seeds first at the base, though that may be the uppermost. They are blown or shaken off, leaving a bare threadlike core.



Mr. Wild tells me that while he lived on Nantucket he never observed the thermometer lower than 2° above zero.

<sup>1</sup> [Channing, p. 122.]

*Jan. 15. P. M.* — To Fair Haven Pond and across to railroad.

As I passed the south shed at the depot, observed what I thought a tree sparrow on the wood in the shed, a mere roof open at the side, under which several men were at that time employed sawing wood with a horse-power. Looking closer, I saw, to my surprise, that it must be a song sparrow, it having the usual marks on its breast and no bright-chestnut crown. The snow is nine or ten inches deep, and it appeared to have taken refuge in this shed, where was much bare ground exposed by removing the wood. When I advanced, instead of flying away, it concealed itself in the wood, just as it often dodges behind a wall.<sup>1</sup>

What is there in music that it should so stir our deeps? We are all ordinarily in a state of desperation; such is our life; oftentimes it drives us to suicide. To how many, perhaps to most, life is barely tolerable, and if it were not for the fear of death or of dying, what a multitude would immediately commit suicide! But let us hear a strain of music, we are at once advertised of a life which no man had told us of, which no preacher preaches. Suppose I try to describe faithfully the prospect which a strain of music exhibits to me. The field of my life becomes a boundless plain, glorious to tread, with no death nor disappointment at the end of it. All meanness and trivialness disappear. I become adequate to any deed. No particulars survive this expansion; persons do not survive it. In the light of this strain there is no thou nor I. We are actually lifted above ourselves.

<sup>1</sup> *Vide Jan. 22d.*

The tracks of the mice near the head of Well Meadow were particularly interesting. There was a level surface of pure snow there, unbroken by bushes or grass, about four rods across, and here were nine tracks of mice running across it from the bushes on this side to those on the other, the tracks quite near together but repeatedly crossing each other at very acute angles, but each particular course was generally quite direct. The snow was so light that only one distinct track was made by all four of the feet, five or six inches apart, but the tail left a very distinct mark. A single track, thus stretching away almost straight, sometimes half a dozen rods, over unspotted snow, is very handsome, like a chain of a new pattern; and then they suggest an airy lightness in the body that impressed them. Though there may have been but one or two here, the tracks suggesting quite a little company that had gone gadding over to their neighbors under the opposite bush. Such is the delicacy of the impression on the surface of the lightest snow, where other creatures sink, and night, too, being the season when these tracks are made, they remind me of a fairy revel. It is almost as good as if the actors were here. I can easily imagine all the rest. Hopping is expressed by the tracks themselves. Yet I should like much to see by broad daylight a company of these revellers hopping over the snow. There is a still life in America that is little observed or dreamed of. Here were possible auditors and critics which the lecturer at the Lyceum last night did not think of. How snug they are somewhere under the snow now, not to be thought of, if it were not for these pretty tracks! And for a week, or

fortnight even, of pretty still weather the tracks will remain, to tell of the nocturnal adventures of a tiny mouse who was not beneath the notice of the Lord. So it was so many thousands of years before Gutenberg invented printing with *his* types, and so it will be so many thousands of years after his types are forgotten, perchance. The deer mouse will be printing on the snow of Well Meadow to be read by a new race of men.

Cold as the weather is and has been, almost all the brook is open in the meadow there, an artery of black water in the midst of the snow, and there are many sink-holes, where the water is exposed at the bottom of a dimple in the snow. Indeed, in some places these little black spots are distributed very thickly, the snow in swells covering the intervening tussocks.

*Jan. 16. P. M. — Up Assabet.*

This morning was one of the coldest. It improves the walking on the river, freezing the overflow beneath the snow. As I pass the Island (Egg Rock), I notice the ice-foot adhering to the rock about two feet above the surface of the ice generally. The ice there for a few feet in width slants up to it, and, owing to this, the snow is blown off it. This edging of ice revealed is peculiarly green by contrast with the snow, methinks. So, too, where the ice, settling, has rested on a rock which has burst it and now holds it high above the surrounding level. The same phenomena, no doubt, on a much larger scale occur at the north.

I observe that the holes which I bored in the white maples last spring were nearly grown over last summer,

commonly to within a quarter or an eighth of an inch, but in one or two instances, in very thriftily growing trees, they were entirely closed.

When I was surveying Shattuck's [and] Merrick's pasture fields the other day, McManus, who was helping me, said that they would be worth a hundred or two hundred dollars more if it were not for the willow-rows which bound and separate them, for you could not plow parallel with them within five rods on account of the roots, you must plow at right angles with them. Yet it is not many years since they were set out, as I remember. However, there should be a great amount of root to account for their wonderful vivaciousness, making seven or eight feet in a year when trimmed.

*Jan. 18. A very cold day. Thermometer at 7.30 A. M., -14° (Smith's hanging on same nail -20°); at 1.15 P. M., -3°; 2.15 P. M., -4°; 3.45 P. M., 0°. It is cloudy and no sun all day, and considerable wind also. There was no Sabbath-school on account of the cold; could not warm the room.*

We sometimes think that the inferior animals act foolishly, but are there any greater fools than mankind? Consider how so many, perhaps most, races — Chinese, Japanese, Arabs, Mussulmans generally, Russians — treat the traveller; what fears and prejudices he has to contend with. So many millions believing that he has come [to] do them some harm. Let a traveller set out to go round the world, visiting every race, and he shall meet with such treatment at their hands that he will be obliged to pronounce them incorrigible fools. Even in

Virginia a naturalist who was seen crawling through a meadow catching frogs, etc., was seized and carried before the authorities.

Three little pigs were frozen to death in an Irishman's pen last night at the Green Store.

Began to snow in the evening, the thermometer at zero.

*Jan. 19.* A snow-storm with very high wind all last night and to-day. Though not much snow falls (perhaps seven or eight inches), it is exceedingly drifted, so that the first train gets down about noon and none gets up till about 6 p. m.! There is no vehicle passing the house before 2 p. m.! A fine dry snow, intolerable to face.

*Jan. 20.* There probably is not more than twelve to fifteen inches of snow on a level, yet the drifts are very large. Neither milkman nor butcher got here yesterday, and to-day the milkman came with oxen, partly through the fields. Though the snow is nowhere deep in the middle of the main street, the drifts are very large, especially on the north side, so that, as you look down the street, it appears as uneven as a rolling prairie.

Heard, in the Dennis swamp by the railroad this afternoon, the peculiar goldfinch-like mew — also like some canaries — of, I think, the lesser redpoll (?). Saw several. Heard the same a week or more ago.

I hear that Boston Harbor froze over on the 18th, down to Fort Independence. The river has been frozen everywhere except at the very few swiftest places since

about December 18th, and *everywhere* since about January 1st.

At R. W. E.'s this evening, at about 6 p. m., I was called out to see Eddy's cave in the snow. It was a hole about two and a half feet wide and six feet long, into a drift, a little winding, and he had got a lamp at the inner extremity. I observed, as I approached in a course at right angles with the length of the cave, that the mouth of the cave was lit as if the light were close to it, so that I did not suspect its depth. Indeed, the light of this lamp was remarkably reflected and distributed. The snowy walls were one universal reflector with countless facets. I think that one lamp would light sufficiently a hall built of this material. The snow about the mouth of the cave within had the yellow color of the flame to one approaching, as if the lamp were close to it. We afterward buried the lamp in a little crypt in this snow-drift and walled it in, and found that its light was visible, even in this *twilight*, through fifteen inches' thickness of snow. The snow was all aglow with it. If it had been darker, probably it would have been visible through a much greater thickness. But, what was most surprising to me, when Eddy crawled into the extremity of his cave and shouted at the top of his voice, it sounded ridiculously faint, as if he were a quarter of a mile off, and at first I could not believe that he spoke loud, but we all of us crawled in by turns, and though our heads were only six feet from those outside, our loudest shouting only amused and surprised them. Apparently the porous snow drank up all the sound. The voice was, in fact, muffled by the surrounding snow walls, and

I saw that we might lie in that hole screaming for assistance in vain, while travellers were passing along twenty feet distant. It had the effect of ventriloquism. So you only need make a snow house in your yard and pass an hour in it, to realize a good deal of Esquimau life.

*Jan. 21. P. M.* — Up river to W. Wheeler's Bridge and back by road.

The roads are perhaps more blocked up than last winter, yet with hardly more than half as much snow. The river is now so concealed that a common eye would not suspect its existence. It is drifted on it exactly as on the meadow, *i. e.* successive low drifts with a bluff head toward the wind.

It is remarkable how many tracks of foxes you will see quite near the village, where they have been in the night, and yet a regular walker will not glimpse one oftener than once in eight or ten years.

The overflow, under the snow, is generally at the bends, where the river is narrower and swifter.

I noticed that several species of birds lingered late this year. The *F. hyemalis*, and then there was that woodcock, and song sparrow! What does it mean?

As I flounder along the Corner road against the root fence, a very large flock of snow buntings alight with a wheeling flight amid the weeds rising above the snow in Potter's heater piece, — a hundred or two of them. They run restlessly amid the weeds, so that I can hardly get sight of them through my glass; then suddenly all arise and fly only two or three rods, alighting within

three rods of me. (They keep up a constant twittering.) It was as if they were any instant ready for a longer flight, but their leader had not so ordered it. Suddenly away they sweep again, and I see them alight in a distant field where the weeds rise above the snow, but in a few minutes they have left that also and gone further north. Beside their *rippling* note, they have a vibratory twitter, and from the loiterers you hear quite a tender peep, as they fly after the vanishing flock.

What independent creatures! They go seeking their food from north to south. If New Hampshire and Maine are covered deeply with snow, they scale down to Massachusetts for their breakfasts. Not liking the grain in this field, away they dash to another distant one, attracted by the weeds rising above the snow. Who can guess in what field, by what river or mountain they breakfasted this morning. They did not seem to regard me so near, but as they went off, their wave actually broke over me as a rock. They have the pleasure of society at their feasts, a hundred dining at once, busily talking while eating, remembering what occurred at Grinnell Land. As they flew past me they presented a pretty appearance, somewhat like broad bars of white alternating with bars of black.

*Jan. 22.* Snows all day, clearing up at night, — a remarkably fine and dry snow, which, looking out, you might suspect to be blowing snow merely. Yet thus it snows all day, driving almost horizontally, but it does not amount to much.

P. M. — To Walden.

I never knew it to make such a business of snowing and bring so little to pass. The air is filled, so that you cannot see far against it, *i. e.* looking north-north-west, yet but an inch or two falls all day. There is some drifting, however.

You wonder how the tree sparrows can seek their food on the railroad causeway, flying in the face of such a fine, cold, driving snow-storm. Within the woods it is comparatively still. In the woods by Abel Brooks's rye hollow I hear a faint note, and see undoubtedly a brown creeper inspecting the branches of the oaks. It has white and black bars on the head, uttering from time to time a fine, wiry, *screeching tse, tse, or tse, tse, tse.*

Minott tells me that Sam Barrett told him once when he went to mill that a song sparrow took up its quarters in his grist-mill and stayed there all winter. When it did not help itself he used to feed it with meal, for he was glad of its company; so, what with the dashing water and the crumbs of meal, it must have fared well.

I asked M. about the Cold Friday. He said, "It was plaguy cold; it stung like a wasp." He remembers seeing them toss up water in a shoemaker's shop, usually a very warm place, and when it struck the floor it was frozen and rattled like so many shot. Old John Nutting used to say, "When it is cold it is a sign it's going to be warm," and "When it's warm it's a sign it's going to be cold."

*Jan. 23.* The coldest day that I remember recording, clear and bright, but very high wind, blowing the snow. Ink froze. Had to break the ice in my pail with a ham-

mer. Thermometer at 6.45 A. M.,  $-18^{\circ}$ ; at 10.30,  $-14^{\circ}$  (Smith's,  $-20^{\circ}$ ; Wilds',  $-7^{\circ}$ , the last being in a more sheltered place); at 12.45,  $-9^{\circ}$ ; at 4 P. M.,  $-5\frac{1}{2}^{\circ}$ ; at 7.30 P. M.,  $-8^{\circ}$ . I may safely say that  $-5^{\circ}$  has been the highest temperature to-day by our thermometer.

Walking this afternoon, I notice that the face inclines to stiffen, and the hands and feet get cold soon. On first coming out in very cold weather, I find that I breathe fast, though without walking faster or exerting myself any more than usual.

*Jan. 24.* Thermometer about 6.30 A. M. in the bulb !! but Smith's on the same nail,  $-30^{\circ}$ ; Wilds', early,  $-16^{\circ}$ ; Emerson's, the same; at 9.15 A. M., ours,  $-18^{\circ}$ ; Smith's,  $-22^{\circ}$ ; which would indicate that ours would have stood at  $-26^{\circ}$  at 6.30, if the thermometer had been long enough. At 11.30 A. M. ours was  $-1^{\circ}$ , at 4 P. M.,  $+12^{\circ}$ . So the cold spell that began the evening of the 22d ended to-day noon.<sup>1</sup>

*Jan. 25.* Still another very cold morning. Smith's thermometer over ours at  $-29^{\circ}$ , ours in bulb; but about seven, ours was at  $-18^{\circ}$  and Smith's at  $-24$ ; ours therefore at first about  $-23^{\circ}$ .

P. M. — To Bittern Rock on river.

The road beyond Hubbard's Bridge has been closed by snow for two or three weeks; only the walls show that there has been a road there. Travellers take to the fields.

I see the track of a fox or dog across the meadow,

<sup>1</sup> No. *Vide* below.

made some time ago. Each track is now a pure white snowball rising three inches above the surrounding surface, and this has formed a lee behind which a narrow drift has formed, extending a foot or two south-easterly.

*Jan. 26.* Another cold morning. None looked early, but about eight it was  $-14^{\circ}$ .

A. M. — At Cambridge and Boston.

Saw Boston Harbor frozen over (for some time). Reminded me of, I think, Parry's Winter Harbor, with vessels frozen in. Saw thousands on the ice, a stream of men reaching down to Fort Independence, where they were cutting a channel toward the city. Ice said to reach fourteen miles. Snow untracked on many decks.<sup>1</sup>

At 10 P. M.,  $+14^{\circ}$ .

*Jan. 27.* Thawing a little at last. Thermometer  $35^{\circ}$ .

The most poetic and truest account of objects is generally by those who first observe them, or the discoverers of them, whether a sharper perception and curiosity in them led to the discovery or the greater novelty more inspired their report. Accordingly I love most to read the accounts of a country, its natural productions and curiosities, by those who first settled it, and also the earliest, though often unscientific, writers on natural science.

Hear the unusual sound of pattering rain this afternoon, though it is not yet in earnest. Thermometer

<sup>1</sup> Ice did not finally go out till about Feb. 15th.

to-day commonly at  $38^{\circ}$ . Wood in the stove is slow to burn; often goes out with this dull atmosphere. But it is less needed.

10 P. M. — Hear music below. It washes the dust off my life and everything I look at.

Was struck to-day with the admirable simplicity of Pratt. He told me not only of the discovery of the tower of Babel, which, from the measures given, he had calculated could not stand between the roads at the Mill Pond, but of the skeleton of a man twenty feet long. Also of an eyestone which he has, bought of Betty Nutting, about as big as half a pea. Just lay it in your eye, bind up your eye with a handkerchief, and go to bed. It will not pain you, but you will feel it moving about, and when it has gathered all the dirt in the eye to itself, it will always come out, and you will probably find it in the handkerchief. It is a little thing and you must look sharp for it. He often lends his.

*Jan. 28.* Am again surprised to see a song sparrow sitting for hours on our wood-pile in the yard, in the midst of snow in the yard. It is unwilling to move. People go to the pump, and the cat and dog walk round the wood-pile without starting it. I examine it at my leisure through a glass. Remarkable that the coldest of all winters these summer birds should remain. Perhaps it is no more comfortable this season further south, where they are accustomed to abide. In the afternoon this sparrow joined a flock of tree sparrows on the bare ground west of the house. It was amusing to see the tree sparrows wash themselves, standing in the

puddles and tossing the water over themselves. Minott says they waded in to where it is an inch deep and then "splutter splutter," throwing the water over them. They have had no opportunity to wash for a month, perhaps, there having been no thaw. The song sparrow did not go off with them.

P. M. — To Walden.

Notice many heaps of leaves on snow on the hillside southwest of the pond, *as usual*. Probably the rain and thaw have brought down some of them.

*Jan.* 31. Snows fast, turning to rain at last.