Leonard Mann  July 24, 1890

My dear Sir Dance —

I send you copies of some articles on Thoreau, that may be of use to you. If not, after reading them, consign them to the waste basket.

The new edition mentions me in Danton L. Sabin of St. Louis, and the conversation was held at the School of Philosophy.

The author of the other two, Horace H. Brown, was well acquainted with Thoreau, being the younger brother of a family of boys that were playmates of Thoreau as a boy, and the article you write to me about some time ago was by an older brother, Joseph Brown. I find some unable to buy a copy, but I may borrow one and copy the article for you — as well as for myself.

I have just received a copy of "Selections from Thoreau," edited with an introduction by Mr. Dale, sent me by the publishers.

W. W. H. 4th

The edibles for March have a short article on Thoreau by F. B. Sampson.

Sincerely,

Alfred W. Thorne
Mr. Alcott on Thoreau.

In one of his lectures, Mr. Thoreau alluded to Thoreau as a
divine genius who broke away from the contradictions of life and fled to the woods
to reconcile them, bought Mr. Alcott to his feet with fresh facts about
his friend Thoreau that are too good to be lost. "Thoreau," said Mr. Alcott,
"was an extreme individualist. He was named after sl Thor, the
Walden who originated the saying, I will find a way or cut one and
never lose the spirit of his great ancestor. He said to himself, I will
be independent of the human race as possible. He had a prodigious
common sense, no one more. He also had a high ideal and rare poetic
common sense. He was more in sympathy with nature than with any human
being. The animals knew him and selected him as their representative.
He was a simple, natural man. In my family when we had a visit
from him, the word passed, "Mr. Thoreau has come; we will all listen! Then
he went to the Walden cabin he came to me and said, "Mr. Alcott, lend
me an axe," and with this he built the temple of the grand primeval man.
Here, with Homer and the Bible, he lived a practical and ideal life. He
announced the universe to Concord." Then, turning to the custodians of Thoreau's
journals, Mr. H. D. Blake, who was in the room, Mr. Alcott said that Mr. Blake
had reported to him in this wise: "Well, really, the Bible is a good book,
but Henry's ideas came as near I sometimes take a text from his
writings and think of it all day." Then Mr. Alcott added: "Henry Thoreau
was one grand man." All this was said with a glow and flash
that thrilled the audience.
More than forty years ago, half a dozen boys were on the east bank of the Acacutte river taking a bannock after their devine in the stream. They were talking about the concial heaps of stones in the river, and wishing that they knew what built them. There were about as many stones as they were boys, and no conclusion had been arrived at, when one of the boys said, "Here comes Henry Thorow, let me ask him." So when he came near, one of the boys asked him, "What made these heaps of stones in the river?" I asked a Protetst Indian that question, and he said, "the neeusewax did," but I told him, I was a better Indian than he, for I knew and he did not, and with that reply, he walked off. John — said, "that in just like this, he never will tell a fellow anything unless it is in his lectures, show him that he is a great lecturer, about chipmunks and skunks, I won't get near him," and the unanimous opinion of the boys was, that when they got left again, another man would do it. The boys could not understand Thorow, and he did not understand boys, and both were losers by it.

While looking over Thorow's "Autumn" lately, the writer was reminded of the time when Thorow and the writer's father spent some two or three weeks running across the boundary lines in the woods. I think it was in 1858, and there were some disputes, and laws were needed, and perhaps it was probable, and after a while these men were selected to fix the boundary. The real trouble was owing to the variation of the compass, the old lines having been run some two hundred years after; but Thorow understood his business thoroughly and settled the boundary question so that peace was declared. Thorow's companion was an old lumberman and woodchopper, and a close observer of natural objects, but he said that Thorow was the best man he had ever known in the woods. He would climb a tree like a squirrel, knew every plant and animal...
and seemed to have been born to the task. Thoreau asked many
questions; one of them was, "Do you know where there is a white grape,
which grows on high land which has many years and is of superior quality?"
"Yes," was the reply. "It is a little north of Beacon Street up past and when the
grapes are ripe, if you are not on the embankment side you never will tell you
where they are." Thoreau laughed and appeared satisfied.

About this time Thoreau went to a party in Concord, and he says in his
journal or diary, that he would rather eat oysters and cheese with his
old companion in the woods.

It is a great mistake to suppose that Thoreau was a solitary student in
Concord and vicinity at that time. He was better equipped for his work, and could
record his observations and discoveries better than his fellow students and this was
enough to make him famous in later years.

There was a young man who worked on a farm one year, and saved his
money like a miser. He spent it the next year in travel and the study of
natural history. This was done for several years, and so long as the writer knew
him. Another deliberately chose a hunter's and trapper's life in the wild
northwestern section of our great country, and he had the nerve and
determination to stick to his wild dangerous profession. There was
a man in Burlington, Mass., 70 years old, who would be in the woods and
fields as early as 3 o'clock during the summer months, and as soon
as he could see in the winter, returning in time to do a full day's work
at the shoe bench.

He was a most enthusiastic student, but he was a good business
man as well. He supplied the city table with shelled oysters and
lobsters, cold woodcock and partridge in season, and by the skilful
administration of strychnine cleared the country of foxes and other pests and
put many dollars in his pocket. On Sundays he would let his birds
and squirrels out of their cages, call in the dog and cat, and a pet
duck, and then as the boy said, "father was in heaven." This man's son
solved the problem which had never been solved before, namely, "Where is
the other end of a squirrel's hole?" and the name of Shelton is forever
more associated with their problem which had vexed the poetic mind for centuries. Even more pleasant was the reply which a man asked me when I asked him if he read Thoreau books. He replied that he only read them during the winter months, when he could not go out and look for himself, and that they were a good substitute for his wanderings.

These unknown men are, and have been the touch lines, the fester of the Grand Trunk naturalists, and they have not lived in vain.

There was a great intermediate class between Emerson and the Canadian woodsman who would have gladly aided Thoreau if he had been a little more human in his dealings with them. The model, representing Concord farmers who cultivate their fields, educate their children, pay their taxes for the support of schools, churches, and their chosen form of government, whose time gave them lives for this country in its years of peril, are not to be denied at and despised by men whose occupations and opinions differed from theirs. In the language of Ruskin "let us think less of peculiarity of employment and more of excellence of achievement."

Crayon

(Horace R. Flannan)

Atlantic
Reminiscences of Thoreau II

I met Thoreau the next part of Concord, passing along the east bank of the Assabet river from Derby's bridge up the stream, along the high banks which over look the river, & the land formerly owned by Timothy Sheehan, and past there to the Minuteman Swamy and vicinity. Where he first found the climbing fern. The winter saw him the day he found the same plant, while returning home with his prize. I never saw such a pleased, happy look on his face as he had that day. He took off his hat, in the presence of which the porch was crowded up, and showed me the dainty graceful glory of the southeast. He said it had never been seen before in the New England states outside the Botanical Gardens in Cambridge, and he volunteered the information that it grew in a curve, among the grass we saw on the meadow.

I went other perhaps two weeks, two men who said they came from Cambridge came to me and asked where the climbing fern grew. I did not tell them for many reasons, perhaps the best one was which Thoreau gave while speaking of the pink lilac which grew on the Cape. He replied to my question if he had seen the pink lilac which grew in Hayward's pond in Mass. He said he had never seen them there or on the Concord river, but there was a place on the Cape, a pool of creek where they had grown unnoticed by the inhabitants until Theodore Parker saw them and was amused and gratified them, and "after that," said Thoreau, "the baymeadow grabbed itself root and branch and almost exterminated them.

While passing over the route mentioned at the beginning of this article, Thoreau was only a gleaner, after his father and mother, who together had been seen the more than once by the writer, years before Henry D. Thoreau followed in their footsteps.

Let the young men and women of Concord who have a love for the study of botany and natural history not be afraid to glean after Thoreau for he said "not to have much to report on this subject."