

X

FEBRUARY, 1853

(ÆT. 35)

Feb. 1. Surveying the Hunt farm.

Saw a duck in the river; different kind from the last. Dr. Bartlett tells me that it was Adam Winthrop, a *grandson* of the *Governor*, who sold this farm to Hunt in 1701. I saw the old window, some eighteen inches square, of diamond squares, four or five inches across, set in lead, on the back side [of] the house.

Feb. 2. The *Stellaria media* is full of frost-bitten blossoms, containing stamens, etc., still and half-grown buds. Apparently it never rests.

Feb. 3. Saw three ducks in the river. They resort to those parts necessarily which are open, which are near the houses. I always see them in the fall as long as the river and ponds are open, and, that being the case all this winter (almost), they have not all gone further south. The shallow and curving part of the river behind Cheney's being open all this winter, they are confined for the most part to this, in this neighborhood.

The thickest ice I have seen this winter is full nine inches.

Feb. 5. To Walden, P. M.


A thick fog. The trees and woods look well through it. You are inclined to walk in the woods for objects. They are draped with mist, and you hear the sound of it dripping from them. It is a lichen day. Not a bit of rotten wood lies on the dead leaves, but it is covered with fresh, green cup lichens, etc., etc. All the world seems a great lichen and to grow like one to-day, — a sudden humid growth. I remember now that the mist was much thicker over the pond than elsewhere. I could not distinguish a man there more than ten rods off, and the woods, seen dimly across a bay, were mistaken for the opposite side of the pond. I could almost fancy a bay of an acre in extent the whole pond. Elsewhere, methinks, I could see twice as far. I felt the greater coolness of the air over the pond, which it was, I suppose, that condensed the vapor more there.

Somebody has been fishing in a rude way and left some of their lines, apparently by mistake. They have laid branches of alders over the holes, and, after tying their lines to a stick two feet long to prevent their being pulled through, have passed the slack line over a twig of the alder a foot or more above the ice and tied a dry oak leaf to it, which, being pulled down, will show when they have a bite. These sprigs or boughs are arranged all around the pond.¹

At the eastern shore I see at last how those ridges or ramparts are formed along the edges of ponds. The sand has been recently cast up there, six or eight inches high, by a foot or two in width, just on the edge of the

¹ [Walden, p. 314; Riv. 439.]

ice, in the form of waves just breaking on the shore, as if the ice had crowded against the shore and forced it up, or it had been washed down by the rain and lodged against the edge of the ice. On a close examination, I found that apparently the ice had not moved, but rather had melted a foot or two, and left bare ground, the water having subsided since it froze, and its edge was exceedingly thin and rotten. The sand was forced or puffed up in the form of a pent roof for a long distance, and under this roof there was no frost in the ground, though all the shore above was still frozen, and even below, if the ice happened to be very thin and there was no water between it and the sand. Apparently the water of the pond, warmed by the rain which had run into it, especially next the shore, penetrating under the frozen shore, produced this expansion and puffing up of the shore there. Sometimes the ice itself, lying on the shore, was raised. The stones as big as one's fist, which for the most part compose the shore, were heaved up into a less conspicuous ridge, all loose, beneath which also there was no frost; also the dead wood, chips, twigs, and other rubbish. Within a limited space, just on the edge of the ice, was the phenomenon so common in the spring, of the frost coming out of the ground. No matter how large the rocks superimposed, or what the depth of sand that had accumulated, it was heaved up, so that the pitch pines by my shore were literally tipped or pried over by a force applied beneath, and many may now be seen slanted at an angle of forty-five degrees. Taking up some masses of this shore heaved up, which were still frozen,

I found that, as in stones a vein of a different kind often passes through and through them, so the frozen sand alternated with sparkling veins of clear ice. Where the water had stood over the sand and frozen, and then fresh sand been worked into it, these veins of ice surrounded by sand were black. The ice of Sam Barrett's pond has a greenish tinge. The bottom of the ice on the edge of the pond next the sand had a singularly reticulated appearance, like tripe or the coats of the stomach,  and I thought I detected the effects of countless air-bubbles of all sizes which had melted it there.

The frost is out of the ground in many places. A *Stellaria media* in blossom in the garden, and were of course last month.

Feb. 6. Observed some buds on a young apple tree, partially unfolded at the extremity and apparently swollen. Probably blossom-buds.

Feb. 8. The warm rains have melted off the surface snow or white ice on Walden, down to the dark ice, the color of the water, only three or four inches thick; but I observe that still, for a rod or more in width around the shores, the ice is white as snow and apparently thicker, probably owing to the reflection from the bottom from the first filling it with air-bubbles.¹

Feb. 9. At Cambridge to-day.

Dr. Harris thinks the Indians had no real hemp but

¹ [*Walden*, p. 332: Riv. 463, 464.]

their apocynum, and, he thinks, a kind of nettle, and an asclepias, etc. He doubts if the dog was indigenous among them. Finds nothing to convince him in the history of New England.¹ Thinks that the potato which is said to have been carried from Virginia by Raleigh was the ground-nut (which is described, I perceived, in Debry (Heriot?) among the fruits of Virginia), the potato not being indigenous in North America, and the ground-nut having been called wild potato in New England, the north part of Virginia, and not being found in England. Yet he allows that Raleigh cultivated the potato in Ireland.

Saw the grizzly bear near the Haymarket to-day, said (?) to weigh nineteen hundred, — apparently too much. He looked four feet and a few inches in height, by as much in length, not including his great head, and his tail, which was invisible. He looked gentle, and continually sucked his claws and cleaned between them with his tongue. Small eyes and funny little ears; perfectly bearish, with a strong wild-beast scent; fed on Indian meal and water. Hind paws a foot long. Lying down, with his feet up against the bars; often sitting up in the corner on his hind quarters.

Two sables also, that would not be waked up by day, with their faces in each other's fur. An American chinchilla, and a silver lioness said to be from California.

Feb. 11. Friday. While surveying for J. Moore to-day, saw a large wood tortoise stirring in the Mill

¹ Agassiz asked him what authority there was for it.

Brook, and several bodies of frogs¹ without their hind legs. But Sunday it snowed about a foot deep, — our second, only, important snow this winter, — and now the brook is not only frozen over, but almost completely concealed under drifts, and that reminiscence or prophecy of spring is also buried up.

While surveying on the Hunt farm the other day, behind Simon Brown's house I heard a remarkable echo. In the course of surveying, being obliged to call aloud to my assistant from every side and almost every part of a farm in succession, and at various hours of a day, I am pretty sure to discover an echo if any exists, and the other day it was encouraging and soothing to hear it. After so many days of comparatively insignificant drudgery with stupid companions, this leisure, this sportiveness, this generosity in nature, sympathizing with the better part of me; somebody I could talk with, — one degree, at least, better than talking with one's self. Ah! Simon Brown's premises harbor a hired man and a hired maid he wots not of. Some voice of somebody I pined to hear, with whom I could form a community. I did wish, rather, to linger there and call all day to the air and hear my words repeated, but a vulgar necessity dragged me along round the bounds of the farm, to hear only the stale answers of my chain-man shouted back to me.

I am surprised that we make no more ado about echoes. They are almost the only kindred voices that I hear. I wonder that the traveller does not oftener remark upon a remarkable echo, — he who observes

¹ *Rana palustris*. Channing saw some entire.

so many things. There needs some actual doubleness like this in nature, for if the voices which we commonly hear were all that we ever heard, what then? Has it to do with the season of the year? I have since heard an echo on Moore's farm.

It was the memorable event of the day, that echo I heard, not anything my companions said, or the travellers whom I met, or my thoughts, for they were all mere repetitions or echoes in the worst sense of what I had heard and thought before many times; but this echo was accompanied with novelty, and by its repetition of my voice it did more than double that. It was a profounder Socratic method of suggesting thoughts unutterable to me the speaker. There was one I heartily loved to talk with. Under such favorable auspices I could converse with myself, could reflect; the hour, the atmosphere, and the conformation of the ground permitted it.

Feb. 13. In the midst of the snow-storm on Sunday (to-day), I was called to window to see a dense flock of snowbirds on and under the pigweed in the garden.¹ It was so in the other storm. It is to be remarked that I have not observed them in the garden at any other time this winter. They come with the storm, the falling and driving snow. I *suspect* they were my chestnut-fronted ones.²

Feb. 23. Wednesday. Melvin tells me that he saw shiners while fishing in Walden yesterday. The ice-

¹ Probably tree sparrows.

² Not linarias.

men worked till midnight night before last at Loring's Pond, to improve the short cold.

I think myself in a wilder country, and a little nearer to primitive times, when I read in old books which spell the word savages with an *l* (salvages), like John Smith's "General Historie of Virginia, etc.," reminding me of the derivation of the word from *sylva*. There is some of the wild wood and its bristling branches still left in their language. The savages they described are really *salvages*, men of the *woods*.

Feb. 27. Frank Brown has killed, within a day or two, a tree sparrow (*Emberiza Canadensis*, Canada bunting, or tree sparrow, of Audubon's Synopsis). I think this must be my bright-chestnut-fronted bird of the winter,¹ though Peabody says it is distinguished by the spot on the breast, which reminds me of the larger, finch-like bird.

A week or two ago I brought home a handsome pitch pine cone which had freshly fallen and was closed perfectly tight. It was put into a table drawer. To-day I am agreeably surprised to find that it has there dried and opened with perfect regularity, filling the drawer, and from a solid, narrow, and sharp cone, has become a broad, rounded, open one, — has, in fact, expanded with the regularity of a flower's petals into a conical flower of rigid scales, and has shed a remarkable quantity of delicate-winged seeds. Each scale, which is very elaborately and perfectly constructed, is armed with a short spine, pointing downward, as if to protect

¹ A mistake. *Vide* [Journal, vol. v, p. 3].

its seed from squirrels and birds. That hard closed cone, which defied all violent attempts to open it, and could only be cut open with [*sic*], has thus yielded to the gentle persuasion of warmth and dryness. The expanding [of] the pine cones, that, too, is a season.

Mr. Herbert is strenuous that I say "ruffed grouse" for "partridge" and "hare" for "rabbit." He says of the snipe, "I am myself satisfied that the sound is produced by the fact that the bird, by some muscular action or other, turns the quill-feathers edgewise, as he drops plumb through the air; and that while in this position, during his accelerated descent, the vibration of the feathers and the passage of the air between them gives utterance to this wild humming sound."

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