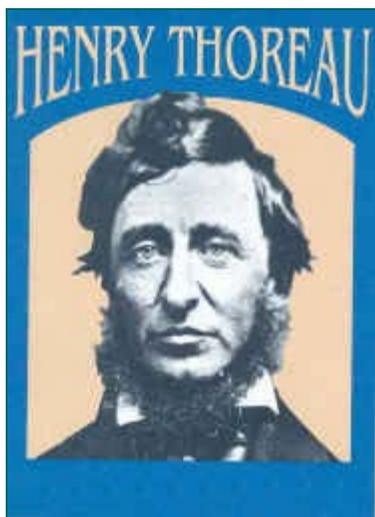


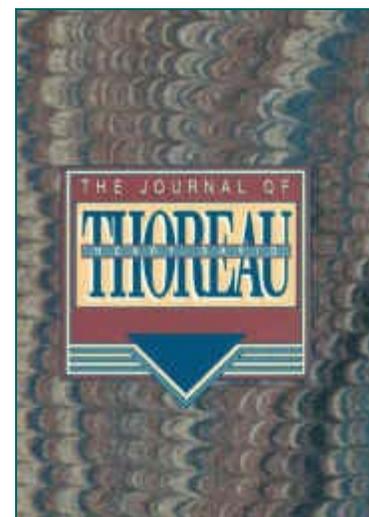
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A READER'S JOURNAL

The Journal of Henry David Thoreau, Vol. 12
by
Henry David Thoreau

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As I opened the twelfth journal of Henry David Thoreau's fourteen volume set, suddenly made aware that my journey through his journals was coming to a close. I developed a deliberate plan to read the remaining three volumes as close as possible to the

days on which he wrote them. By doing so, I would be able to compare the differences in climate between New England, where Thoreau was abroad walking through his native Concord, and my native New Orleans, where I would be, on most days, sitting comfortably on my swing as I read from his journal. As you read this review, I invite you to accompany Henry and me on an abbreviated journey through 1859, to take time to consider his thoughts, my thoughts, and to gaze upon photos of the flora and fauna he observed along his way, thanks to the wonders of the Internet today which allows one to find photos by merely typing in the Latin-name of a plant or animal.

It is early November now as I type up these notes, having sped through the already sparse journal entries of November so that I might write this review and begin reading Volume 13 on the first day of December.

[page 7] March 3. I see in that ditch (call it Grassy Ditch) near John Hosmer's second spring south of Nut Meadow Brook much grass which has lately grown an inch or more and lies flat on the water. Is it *Glyceria fluitans*? It is somewhat frost-bitten too. It fills the ditch like moss, seen at a distance. It must be a spring ditch to be thus open entirely. Also, pretty near the spring, I see a tuft of carex whose stiff glaucous points have risen several inches above the surface.

This next passage prompts me to modify my dictum [Thus a Teacher, So Also a Learner](#) to read "Thus a Reader, So Also a Hearer!" Thoreau is referring to the process of reading aloud to an audience,



and how important the job of hearing is in the transference of information and intelligence.

[page 9, 10] *March 3.* Talk about reading! — a good reader! It depends on how he is heard. There may be elocution and pronunciation (recitation, say) to satiety, but there can be no good reading unless there is good hearing also. It takes two at least for this game, as for love, and they must cooperate. The lecturer will read best those parts of his lecture which are best heard. Sometimes, it is true, the faith and spirits of the reader may run a little ahead and draw after the good hearing, and at other times the good hearing runs ahead and draws on the good reading. The reader and the hearer are a team not to be harnessed tandem [RJM: one horse in front of the other], the poor wheel horse supporting the burden of the shafts, while the leader runs pretty much at will, while the lecture lies passive in the painted curricule [RJM: two-wheeled carriage for two horses] behind.

Thoreau gives us the image of the lecture as written on the page at the podium as lying passive while the lecture reader and the hearers in the audience must share the load. Neither one should have to carry all the load of a wheel horse, the rear horse in a tandem harness, nor be allowed to run at will like the lead horse. He argues for a side-by-side harnessing of the two horses. But he has another metaphor for us involving unloading of barrels of molasses at a depot and rolling them up an incline. The lecturer has brought his sweets to the podium and deserves a helping hand to finish his delivery, i.e., a good hearing by the audience.

[page 10] *March 3.* I saw some men unloading molasses-hogsheads from a truck at a depot the other day, rolling them up an inclined plane. The truckman stood behind and shoved, after putting a couple of ropes one round each end of the hogshead, while two men standing in the depot steadily pulled at the ropes. The first man was the lecturer, the last was the audience. It is the duty of the lecturer to team his hogshead of sweets to the depot, or Lyceum, place the horse [RJM: a frame or ramp], arrange the ropes, and shove; and it is the duty of the audience to take hold of the ropes and pull with all their might. The lecturer who tries to read his essay without being abetted by a good hearing is in the predicament of a teamster who is engaged in the Sisyphean labor of rolling a molasses-hogshead up an inclined plane alone, while the freight-master and his men

stand indifferent with their hands in their pockets. I have seen many such a hogshead which had rolled off the [ramp] and gone to smash, with all its sweets wasted on the ground between the truckman and the freight-house, — and the freight-masters thought that the loss was not theirs.



But he is not done with his metaphors, finishing with a flourish of drawing water out of the well and cider through a straw. All of these metaphors I have witnessed being played out at my club during various kinds of lectures over the years, from the long push up the incline by the lecturer to an audience not interested in the topic, to spontaneous overflowing of a lecture whose subject was in a bubbling ferment.

[page 10, 11] *March 3. Read well! Did you ever know a full well that did not yield of its refreshing waters to those who put their hands to the windlass or the well-sweep? Did you ever suck cider through a straw? Did you ever know the cider to push out of the straw when you were not sucking, — unless it chanced to be in a complete ferment? An audience will draw out of a lecture, or enable a lecturer to read, only such parts of his lecture as they*

like. A lecture is like a barrel half full of some palatable liquor. You may tap it at various levels, in the sweet liquor or in the froth or in fixed air above. If it is pronounced good, it is partly to the credit of the hearers; if bad, it is partly their fault. Sometimes a lazy audience refuses to cooperate and pull on the ropes with a will, simply because the hogshead is full and therefore heavy, when if it were empty, or had only a little sugar adhering to it, they would whisk it up the slope in a jiffy. The lecturer, therefore, desires of his audience a long pull, a strong pull, and all pull together.

On March 4, 2008 my wife and I were in our mountain cabin which had been covered by several inches of snow the previous evening. The next morning I was sitting in front of a roaring fire in the hearth reading the passage below. It didn't rain that day, stayed clear, not keeping us from meeting some friends in town for lunch, who were delayed behind a snowplow. Like Thoreau's snow this spring snow of Arkansas was blindingly white and melted quite rapidly.

[page 11] *March 4. Began to snow last evening, and it is now (early in the morning) about a foot deep, and raining.*

To Thoreau the perfect New England sound is the cawing of the crow. This is typical of him, to choose the most mundane of things and raise it as an epitome.

[page 11, 12] *March 4. We heard only the jay screaming in the distance and the cawing*

of a crow.

What a perfectly New England sound is this voice of the crow! If you stand perfectly still anywhere in the outskirts of the town and listen, stilling the almost incessant hum of your own personal factory, this is perhaps the sound which you will be most sure to hear rising above all sounds of human industry and leading your thoughts to some far bay in the woods where the crow is venting his disgust. This bird sees the white man come and the Indian withdraw, but it



withdraws not. Its untamed voice is still heard above the tinkling of the forge. It sees a race pass away, but it passes away not. It remains to remind us of aboriginal nature.

Near Hosmer Spring, he finds the leaves of some *Ranunculus repens* showing, and later ponders on the mystery of life in plants. He claims that most scientists view and explain only the surface of things while the flowing out processes of the plants are ignored. Particularly bitter is his comparison of science to a grub worm who destroys what it invades.

[page 23] March 7. The mystery of the life of plants is kindred with that of our own lives, and the physiologist must not presume to explain their growth according to mechanical laws, or as he might explain some machinery of his own making. We must not expect to probe with our fingers the sanctuary of any life, whether animal or vegetable. If we do, we shall discover nothing but surface still. The ultimate expression or fruit of any created thing is a fine effluence which only the most ingenuous worshiper perceives at a reverent distance from its surface even. The cause and the effect are equally evanescent and intangible, and the former must be investigated in the same spirit and with the same reverence with which the latter is perceived. Science is often like the grub which, though it may have nestled in the germ of a fruit, has merely blighted or consumed it and never truly tasted it. Only that intellect makes any progress toward conceiving of the essence which at the same time perceives the effluence.

One might think that Thoreau only goes outside when the weather is sunny and clear, but this next passage should disabuse that notion. I am reminded of the Swedes who say, "There is no such thing as bad weather, only bad clothes."

[page 25, 26] March 8. There is a fine freezing rain with strong wind from the north; so I keep along under shelter of hills and woods, along their south sides, in my India-ruber coat and boots. Under the south edge of Woodis Park, in the low ground, I see many

radical leaves of the *Solidago altissima* and another — I am pretty sure it is the *S. stricta* — and occasionally also of the *Aster undulatus*, and all are more less lake beneath.



Thoreau likens stormy weather to a fence as it keeps the villagers away as you walk outdoors, which makes him as likely to walk abroad in stormy weather as in clement weather.

[page 26, 27] *March 8.* If the weather is thick and stormy enough, if there is a good chance to be cold and wet and uncomfortable, in other words to feel weather-beaten, you may consume the afternoon to advantage thus browsing along the edge of some near wood which would scarcely detain you at all in fair weather, and you will be as far away there as at the end of your longest fair-weather walk, and come home as if from some adventure. There is no better fence to put between you and the village than a storm into which the villagers do not venture out.

In this next passage, Thoreau and a friend are sitting on Money-Diggers' Hill, which I imagine must refer to a prominent site where the legendary pirate, Captain Kid, was reputed to have buried a large treasure of gold. What they found was, interestingly, a common type of goldenrod.

[page 33] *March 10.* We sit in the sun on the side of Money-Diggers' Hill, amid the crimson low blueberry shoots and withered *Andropogon scoparius* and the still erect *Solidago arguta* (var. the common) and the tall stubble thickly hung with fresh gleaming cobwebs. There are some grayish moths out, etc.; some gnats.

Then he sees a bluebird in an apple tree, listens to its call, and waxes poetic about this beautiful "angel of spring".

[page 34] *March 10.* The bluebird on the apple tree, warbling so innocently to inquire if any of its mates are within call, — the angel of the spring! Fair and innocent, yet the offspring of the earth. The color of the sky above and of the subsoil beneath. Suggesting what sweet and innocent melody (terrestrial melody) may have its birthplace between the sky and the ground.

The New England accent with the hard "R" sound takes some getting used to as I



found when I moved to the area around Boston in the 1970s. One quickly becomes accustomed to the "pawk the caw in the Hawvawd yawd" routine, and can even vow never to speak that way, but what if

your friend's name is Marge, and everyone else pronounces her name as "Mawge"? If you do not adopt that pronunciation, Marge might not turn her head in a crowd when you call to her. Here's a rare occurrence of humor in his journals, based on the unusual way of saying a word with an "R" in it:

[page 38] *March 11.* My mother says that she has been to the charitable society there. One old jester of the town used to call it "the *chattable* society."

Sometimes Thoreau doesn't identify the flora or fauna by their common names. Here's an example of a bog turtle's shell he comes upon.

[page 43] *March 12.* On the northeast part of the Great Fields, I find the broken shell of a *Cistudo Blandingii* on very dry soil. The is the fifth, then, I have seen in the town. All the rest were three in the Great Meadows (one of them in a ditch) and one within a rod or two of Beck Stow's Swamp.

Muskrats, as we know them today, were called musquash in Thoreau's time. Apparently these voracious gnawers were shot for their fur coats back then and they received a shilling apiece for their skins. In 2008 in south Louisiana the muskrats have been replaced in their ecological niche by the South American nutria, and these voracious eaters are eating into levees and canal banks so much that a bounty of \$5 is paid for every nutria tail that is turned in.



[page 53] *March 17.* A great many musquash have been killed within a week. One says a cartload have been killed in Assabet. Perhaps a dozen gunners have been out in this town every day. They get a shilling apiece for their skins. One man getting musquash and one mink earned five or six dollars the other day. I hear their guns early and late long before sunrise and after sunset, for these are the best times.

Here's a bird that I had never heard of, the hyemalis, presumably the *junco hyemalis* which frequents the trees of Concord along with tree sparrows in the early spring.

[page 79, 71] *March 22.* Returning from Poplar Hill through the west end of Sleepy Hollow, it is very still, the air thick, just ready to rain, and I hear there, on the apple trees and small oaks, the tree sparrows and hyemalis singing very pleasantly. I hear the lively jingle of the hyemalis and the sweet notes of the tree sparrow, canary-like — *svar svar, svit vit vit vit*, the last part with increasing rapidity.



Thoreau muses in this next passage over his being a trapper in his mind.

[page 82, 83] *March 25.* A score of my townsmen have been shooting and trapping musquash and mink of late. . . . They are gone all day; early and late they scan the rising tide; stealthily they set their traps in remote swamps, avoiding one another. Am not I a trapper too, early and late scanning the rising flood, ranging by distant wood-sides, setting my traps in solitude, and baiting them as well as I know how, that I may catch life and light, that my intellectual part may taste some venison and be invigorated, that my nakedness may be clad in some wild, furry warmth?

What does Thoreau do for entertainment other than think and walk around looking at things in the woods? Well, he is a collector of arrowheads, which in his time could be found lying around on the top of the ground after a recent rain in many places. To him they were as pretty as butterflies and he did not need to

run after them with a net. Note his usage of the *vi*, *repair* in the sense of its *OF* root, *repatriate*, to return to some spot. Also that a collyrium is an eye salve or eyewash. Having spent several days poring into bare earth searching for quartz crystals in the Coleman mines in Arkansas, I can attest that it acts as a healing eyewash to one's eyes. The wrestler, Antæus, when thrown to the ground by Hercules, would recover his strength, and could not be beaten that way.

[page 88, 89] *March 28*. It is now high time to look for arrowheads, etc. I spend many hours every spring gathering the crop which the melting snow and rain have washed bare. When, at length, some island in the meadow or some sandy, field elsewhere has been plowed, perhaps for rye, in the fall, I take note of it, and do not fail to repair thither as soon as the earth begins to be dry in the spring. If the spot chances never to have been cultivated before, I am the first to gather a crop from it. The farmer little thinks that another reaps a harvest which is the fruit of his toil. As much ground is turned up in a day by the plow as Indian implements could not have turned over in a month, and my eyes rest on the evidences of an aboriginal life which passed here a thousand years ago perchance. Especially if the knolls in the meadows are washed by a freshet where they have been plowed the previous fall, the soil will be taken away lower down and the stones left, — the arrowheads, etc., and soapstone pottery amid them, — somewhat as gold is washed in a dish or tom. I landed on two spots this afternoon and picked up a dozen arrowheads. It is one of the regular pursuits of the spring. As much as sportsmen go in pursuit of ducks, and gunners of musquash, and scholars of rare books, and travelers of adventures, and poets of ideas, and all men of money, I go in search of arrowheads when the proper season comes round again. So I help myself to live worthily, and loving my life as I should. It is a good collyrium to look on the bare earth, — to pore over it so much, getting strength to all your senses, like Antæus. If I did not find arrowheads, I might, perchance, begin to pick up crockery and fragments of pipes, — the relics of a more recent man. Indeed, you can hardly name a more innocent or wholesome entertainment.

He saw arrowheads as the thoughts of ancient inhabitants of the American continent, and immune to the rages of time. Like all our earthly possessions collected arrowheads pass through us temporarily on their way back to the earth from which we extracted momentarily. His thoughts on arrowheads suggests to me a poem:

**There's a poem
In an arrowhead
As sure as there's
An arrowhead in the earth.**

**There's a worm
In the earth
Which passes earth
Through itself.**

**There's an arrowhead
In the earth
Which the earth
Passes through itself.**

Here, in condensed form, is Thoreau's paean to the arrowhead passing through the earth on its flight to eternity. It might be titled, "The Arrowhead Talks Back."

**[page 91-93] *March*
28. Time will soon**



destroy the works of famous painters and sculptors, but the Indian arrowhead will balk his efforts and Eternity will have to come to his aid. They are not fossil bones, but, as it were, fossil thoughts, forever reminding me of the mind that shaped them. I would fain know that I am treading in the tracks of human game, — that I am on the trail of mind, — and these little reminders never fail to set me right. When I see these signs I know that the subtle spirits

that made them are not far of, into whatever form transmuted. . . . This arrow-headed character promises to outlast all others. The larger pestles and axes may, perchance, grow scarce and be broken, but the arrowhead shall, perhaps, never cease to wing its way through the ages to eternity. It was originally winged for but a short flight, but it still, to my mind's eye, wings its way through the ages, bearing a message from the hand that shot it. . . . They cannot be said to be lost or found. Surely their use was not so much to bear its fate to some bird or quadruped, or man, as it was to lie here near the surface of the earth for a perpetual reminder to the generations that come after. . . . When you pick up an arrowhead and put it in your pocket, it may say: "Eh, you think you have got me, do you? But I shall wear a hole in your pocket at last, or if you put me in your cabinet, you heir or great-grandson will forget me or throw me out the window directly, or when the house falls I shall drop into the cellar and there I shall be quite at home again. Ready to be *found* again, eh? Perhaps some new red man that is to come will fit me to a shaft and make me do his bidding for a bow-shot. What reck I?"

Later, on May Day, he muses about those who go to Colorado or California, yearning for the riches to be found by panning in gold-laden rivers and streams. Instead he dreams of Concord and its arrowhead-laden fields.

[page 175] *May 1.* I feel no desire to go to California or Pike's Peak, but I often think at night with inexpressible satisfaction and yearning of the *arrowheadiferous* sands of Concord. I have often spent whole afternoons, especially in the spring, pacing back forth over a sandy field, looking for these relics of a race. This is the gold which our sands yield.

There are no plastic flowers in vases or wax fruit in fruit bowls in my home. There is "a wearisome monotony", as Thoreau would say, about such frozen artifacts which merely sit there and would not

change at all but for the dust they gather upon their surface. But dare to fill vases with fresh flowers and bowls with fresh fruit and every visitor knows immediately that there is life about the house. Behind the effort of preparing the fresh flowers and fruit, "the motive is not economy but satisfaction."

[page 96] March 28. When we look at our masterpieces we see only dead paint and its vehicle, which suggests no liquid life rapidly flowing off from beneath. In the former case — in Nature — it is constant surprise and novelty. In many arrangements there is a wearisome monotony. We know too well what we shall have for our Saturday's dinner, but each day's feast in Nature's year is a surprise to us and adapted to our appetite and spirits. She has arranged such an order of feasts as never tires. Her motive is not economy but satisfaction.

One of the bane of modern life has been the increasing prevalence of white bread, made from wheat by milling away all of the nutrients in the outer shell of the wheat kernel, cut by machines into nice uniform slices with no holes through which jelly or jam can drip in children's sandwiches, and produced cheap enough for everyone to afford it. This so-called boon was decades in the future during Thoreau's time, when only rich people could afford white bread and the poor had to make do with their brown bread made from whole grain wheat. We see today a surge of consumer interest again in the brown breads, and now, these are slightly more expensive than the white bread. The folly of the poor wanting something just because the rich can have it, irrespective of whether it is good for them, is ever with us.

[page 97] March 28. Brown is the color for me, the color of our coats and our daily lives, the color of the poor man's loaf.

Thoreau loves sailing his small boat, a bark, he calls it, over shallow lakes which he knows will become fields of flowers when the water has drained to the seas and August comes. What a sea adventure he has, comparable to Magellan at the Antipodes, only inches above the field of grass to come.

[page 98] March 28. Here, where in August the bittern booms in the grass, and mowers march *en echelon* and whet their scythes and crunch the ripe wool-grass, raised now a few feet, you scud before the wind in your tight bark and listen to the sough of the great waves sporting around you, while you hold the steering-oar and your mast bends to the gale and you stow all your ballast to windward. The crisped sound of surging waves that rock you, that ceaseless roll and gambol, and ever and anon break into your boat.



What will grow when the water has gone and the bottom of Thoreau's sea is exposed to the air and sunlight of summer?

[page 98, 99] March 28. Deep lie the seeds of the rhexia now, absorbing wet from the flood, but in a few months this mile-wide lake will have gone to the other side of the globe; and the tender rhexia will lift its head on the drifted hummocks

in dense patches, bright and scarlet as a flame, — such succession have we here, — where the wild goose and countless wild ducks have floated and dived above them. So Nature condenses her matter. She is a thousand thick. So many crops the same surface bears.

Ducks and geese, Thoreau has sympathy for because they are ever the target of guns lobbing shot towards them. This next passage gives us an idea of what hunting duck and geese was like before hunting seasons, duck stamps, and daily limits were imposed on hunters.

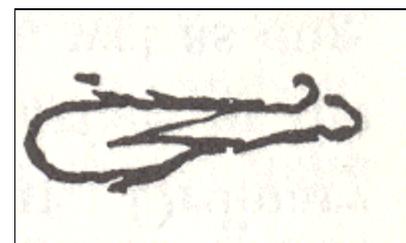
[page 99] *March 28.* Undoubtedly the geese fly more numerously over rivers which, like ours, flow northeasterly, — are more at home with the water under them. Each flock runs the gauntlet of a thousand gunners, and when you see them steer off from you and your boat you may remember how great their experience in such matters may be, how many such boats and gunners they have seen and avoided between here and Mexico, and even now, perchance (though you, low plodding, little dream it), they see one or two more lying in wait ahead. They have an experienced ranger of the air for their guide. The echo of one gun hardly dies away before they see another pointed at them. How many bullets or smaller shot have sped in vain toward their ranks! Ducks fly more irregularly and shorter distances at a time. The geese rest in fair weather by day only in the midst of our broadest meadow or pond. So they go, anxious and earnest to hide their nests under the pole.

Often, after I tell someone that I am a writer, their first question is along the lines of, "How much do you get paid for that?" The singular idea that one might write because one likes to write never crosses their mind — only money seems to be a proper motivation for writing. Few people who hold that belief will ever become a writer. Thoreau encountered such thoughts from his fellows as he wandered through the woods and fields taking the notes which ended up in his journals.

[page 111] *April 3.* Men's minds run so much on work and money that the mass instantly associate all literary labor with a pecuniary reward. They are mainly curious to know how much money the lecturer or author gets for his work. They think that the naturalist takes so much pains to collect plants or animals because he is paid for it. An Irishman who saw me in the fields making a minute in my note-book took it for granted that I was casting up my wages and actually inquired what they came to, as if he had never dreamed of any other use for writing.

Here's another uncommon flower which he describes in detail, even drawing its flower bud for us to see in his journal.

[page 114] *April 4.* The epigæa looks as if it would open in two or three days at least, — showing much color and this form: [See drawing.] The flower-bulbs are protected by the withered leaves, oak leaves, which partly cover them, so that you must look pretty sharp to detect the first flower. These plants



blossom by main strength, as it were, or the virtue that is in them, — not growing by water, as most early flowers, — in dry copses.

In another fine example of



his use of irony, Thoreau asks if we might investigate the contents of a Celine Dion's stomach to determine if she were worthwhile keeping around because of the injurious bugs she ate from a garden. Silly as that sounds, this kind of thinking pervaded the nineteenth century legislatures and continues in many yet today. The

Great Egrets were slaughtered by the thousands in the early twentieth century, their numbers decimated simply to add colorful plumes to the hats of society ladies. Gaining legal protection from such folly, only a century later these majestic birds have rebounded so well, that they can be found strutting around my garden, eating anoles and insects from the grass.

[page 124] April 8. When the question of the protection of birds comes up, the legislatures regard only a low use and never a high use; the best-disposed legislators employ one, perchance, only to examine their crops and see how many grubs or cherries they contain, and never to study their dispositions, or the beauty of their plumage, or listen and report on the sweetness of their song. The legislature will preserve a bird professedly not because it is a beautiful creature, but because it is a good scavenger or the like. This, at least, is the defense set up. It is as if the question were whether some celebrated singer of the human race — some Jenny Lind or another — did more harm or good, should be destroyed, or not, and therefore a committee should be appointed, not to listen to her singing at all, but to examine the contents of her stomach and see if she devoured anything which was injurious to the farmers and gardeners, or which they cannot spare.

In this next passage, Thoreau comes upon a "forest violin" or the origins of violins and violas in antiquity, likely suggested to an early Orpheus by the sound of two limbs rubbing together in the forest such as Thoreau found.



[page 127, 128] *April 9.* The wind is as strong, and yet colder, being more from the north, than before. Through, I think, all this windy weather, or at least for about three weeks, the wind has regularly gone down with the sun, strong as it has been each day.

As we go up the hill in the woods east of Hubbard's Close, I hear a singular sound through the roaring of the wind amid the trees, which I think at first some creature forty rods off, but it proves to be the creaking of one bough on another. When I knew what it was I was surprised to find it so near, even within a rod. It was occasioned by two little dead limbs, an inch or less in diameter, on two different white pines which stood four or five feet apart, — such limbs as are seen on every white pine below the living ones, some twelve feet from the ground. These with every motion of the trees in the wind were grating back and forth on each other, and had worn into one another, and this produced, not a mere coarse, grating sound, but a perfect viol sound, such as I never heard from trees before, — a jarring or vibratory creak, as if the bow leaped on the strings, for one limb was bow and the other string. It was on one key or note when the trees approached, and quite another and very fine and sharp when they receded. I raised one limb with a pole, and the music ceased. This was as musical as a viol, a forest-viol, which might have suggested that instrument to some Orpheus wandering in the wood. He would only have to place a box of resonant wood beneath to complete a simple viol. We heard several others afterward which made a coarse, squeaking noise like a bird, but this would have suggested music to anyone. It was mythologic, and an Indian might have referred it to a departed spirit. The fiddles made by the trees whose limbs cross one another, — played on by the wind! When we listened, in the wood, we heard all kinds of creaking and groaning sounds from the laboring trees.



If one were to generalize from the zany proposition that "enough monkeys typing keys at random on typewriter keys will eventually write Hamlet" to its musical equivalent, if you get enough of these tree-violos together, you'll get a Mozart Violin Concerto.

Carpe Diem! cries Robin Williams in a classroom as the English professor in "The Dead Poets' Society" and soon we can hear that cry reflected off the walls of all other kinds of less literature rooms. Thoreau has his own style for telling us to Seize the Day!

[page 159] *April 24.*
**Nothing must be postponed.
Take time by the forelock.
Now or never! You must
live in the present, launch
yourself on every wave,**

find your eternity in each moment. Fools stand on their island opportunities and look toward another land. There is no other land; there is not other life but this, or the like of this. Where the good husbandman is, there is the good soil. Take any other course, and life will be a succession of regrets. Let us see vessels sailing prosperously before the wind, and not simply stranded barks. There is no world for the penitent and regretful.

In another bit of synchronicity, I observed a marsh hawk in flight over my area on the same day I read in Thoreau's journal about a man shooting a pair of marsh hawks, a hundred and forty-nine years earlier, in a time when there were no laws against shooting such birds which prey in your chickens. The marsh hawk I saw was slate gray with fine white markings, a truly elegant bird. I have yet to photograph one as they rarely seem to land or perch in accessible places near me.

[page 197] June 2. I hear that Farmer shot on the 28th ult. two marsh hawks, male and female, and got their four eggs, in which the young were moving.

Another bird which I have never seen, to my knowledge, is the cuckoo. Thoreau apparently saw many of these around Concord and knew of people who collected their eggs.

[page 201] June 13. My rail's egg of June 1st looks like that of the Virginia rail in the Boston collection. A boy brought me a remarkably large cuckoo's egg on the 11th. Was it not that of the yellow-billed? The one in the collection looks like it. This one at B. is not only larger but lighter-colored.

Old Man River he just keeps rolling along, but dammed up rivers and streams around Concord get Sunday off, a day when the water lies at rest and the level of the river below the dams falls enough to allow small islands of gravel to rise out from the river beds.

[page 247] July 20. So completely emasculated and demoralized is our river that it is even made to observe the Christian Sabbath, and Hosmer tells me that at this season on a Sunday morning (for then the river runs lowest, owing to the factory and mill gates being shut above) little gravelly islands begin to peep out in the channel below. Not only the operatives make the Sunday a day of rest, but the river too, to some extent, so that the very fishes feel the influence (or want of *influence*) of man's religion. The very rivers run with fuller streams on Monday morning. All nature begins to work with new impetuosity on Monday.



Amazing to think that the river gets up on Monday morning as so many job-holders do, and prepares itself for a busy week's run till it next rests on Sunday. Thoreau later tells us that he could use the level of the river as a clock, with a little bit of calibration and testing he would be able to tell each day of the week, and the approximate hour of the day.

[page 287] August 14. By a gauge in the river I can tell about what time the millers on the stream and its tributaries go to work in the morning and leave off at night, and also can distinguish the Sundays, since it is the day on which the river does not rise, but falls. If I had lost the day of the week, I could recover it by a careful examination of the river. It lies by in the various mill-ponds on Sunday and keeps the Sabbath. What its *persuasion* is, is another question.

Finally with Thoreau's "door-grass", I look up a Latin name for an unknown plant and find one that we have in bare spots in our lawn, a weed, if you will. Of course, a weed is best defined as a plant where you don't want it, and I want it where it resides



already.

[page 293] August 26. How singular that the *Polygonum aviculare* should grow so commonly and densely about back doors where the earth is trodden, bordering on paths! Hence properly called door-grass. I am not aware that it prevails in any other places.

Frost is most noticeable when it first appears in the Fall because its effects are so dramatic. Thoreau reckons frost to be a formidable foe, one sneaks over the fields during the dead of night, leaving behind browned and deadened bodies lying under its evanescent, hoary shroud by dawn.

[page 295, 296] August 26. That first frost on the 17th was the first stroke of winter aiming at the scalp of summer. Like a stealthy and insidious aboriginal enemy, it made its assault just before daylight in some deep and far-away hollow and then silently withdrew. Few have seen the drooping plants, but the news of this stroke circulates rapidly through the village. Men communicate it with a tone of warning. The foe is gone by sunrise, but some fearful neighbors who have visited their potato and cranberry patches report this stroke. The implacable and irresistible foe to all this tender greenness is not far off, nor can we be sure, any month in the year, that some scout from his low camp may not strike down the tenderest of the children of summer. The earliest and latest frosts are not distinguishable. This foe will go on steadily increasing in strength and boldness, till his white camps will be pitched over all the fields, and we shall be compelled to take refuge in our strongholds, with some of summer's withered spoils stored up in barns, maintaining ourselves and our herds on the seeds and roots and withered grass which we have *embarned*. Men in anticipation of this. time have been busily collecting and curing the green blades all the country over, while they have still some nutriment in them. Cattle and horses have been dragging homeward their winter's food.

"Row, row, row your boat/Gently down the stream/ Merrily, merrily, merrily/Life is but a dream" goes the childhood ditty. Going down the stream a bit or camping down aways on a neighbors lawn adds spice to the adventure because we are far from the familiar sights and sounds of our own stream or backyard. It is

a dreaming we do when we are awake as well as asleep, as Thoreau points out to us.

[page 296] August 26. All our life, *i. e.* the living part of it, is a persistent dreaming awake. The boy does not camp in his father's yard. That would not be adventurous enough, there are too many sights and sounds to disturb the illusion; so he marches off twenty or thirty miles and there pitches his tent, where stranger inhabitants are tamely sleeping in their beds just like his father at home, and camps in *their* yard, perchance. But then he dreams uninterruptedly that he is anywhere but where he is.

What is a person like who has a strong "I"? Well, a little bit like Henry David Thoreau in this next anecdote when he went to buy a pair of shoes. Back then one usually bought their shoes from a shoemaker, that is, a person who actually makes the shoes on the premises, not just someone who earns a living by repairing shoes as we know them today, the real shoemaker relegated as it were to the halls of history. I did know a real shoemaker as a young boy in the 1940s and 1950s. His name was Musso, my Aunt Zelda's father-in-law, and, in his shop set up at that time in a corner of a shoe store that sold mostly factory-made shoes, he was happily at work designing and assembling custom shoes for people with odd-shaped feet, usually on just one foot, for whom no factory shoes would suffice. Thoreau bought his shoes from such a craftsman and could therefore demand that the tips of his shoes be properly attached, not with wooden pegs nor even zinc pegs, but with iron pegs which could stand up to the walking and trudging with which he filled his days, over dry ground and marshy lowlands, at any time of the year. A person with a strong "I" will not let a so-called expert talk him out of what he has already deemed to be necessary. A customer is often more knowledgeable about how a product is actually used than the designer and manufacturer, who clothe themselves in omniscience by virtue of their occupation.

[page 311] Sept. 1. Bought a pair of shoes the other day, and, observing that as usual they were only wooden-pegged at the toes, I required the seller to put in an extra row of iron pegs there while I waited for them. So he called to his boy to bring those zinc pegs, but I insisted on iron pegs and no zinc ones. He gave me considerable advice on the subject of shoes, but I suggested that even the wearer of shoes, of whom I was one, had an opportunity to learn some of their qualities. I have learned to respect my own opinion in this matter. As I do not use blacking and the seller often throws in a box of blacking when I buy a pair of shoes, they accumulate on my hands.

On September 3, 2008 I was reading the next passage as Hurricane Gustav roared over our home, knocking down fruit, limbs, and entire trees along its path. Meanwhile, exactly 149 years earlier, Ralph Waldo Emerson had a large windfall of choice pears on his property.

[page 313] Sept. 3. A strong wind, which blows down much fruit. R. W. E. sits surrounded by choice windfall pears.

Will Rogers, great American humorist and political commentator said that he never felt safe while Congress was in session. Thoreau seldom talks politics, but he was unable to restrain himself when the clerk at the hardware store threw him a straight line.

[page 317] Sept. 8. I went to the store the other day to buy a bolt for our front door, for, as I told the storekeeper, the Governor was coming here. "Aye," said he, "and the Legislature too." Then I will take two bolts," said I.

Wit and Thoreau were mostly strangers, if we mean by that *only* making funny sayings, which he seldom did, to my knowledge. Yet, here is another example about a woman who swears upon her very life in which Thoreau strikes a witty Wildean note.

[page 329] Sept. 15. When an Irishwoman tells me that she wouldn't tell a lie for her life (because I appear to doubt her), it seems to me that she has already told a lie. She holds herself and the truth very cheap to say that so easily.

Ah, Thoreau, there are times he reminds me a bit of Will Rogers, as in this anecdote when he was asked to help pay for a statue to Horace Mann.

[page 335] Sept. 18. Dr. Bartlett handed me a paper today, desiring me to subscribe for a statue to Horace Mann. I declined, and said that I thought a man ought not any more to take up room in the world after he was dead. We shall lose one advantage of a man's dying if we are to have a statue of him forthwith. This is probably meant to be an opposition statue to that of Webster. At this rate they will crowd the streets with them. A man will have to add a clause to his will, "No statue to be made of me." It is very offensive to my imagination to see the dying stiffen into statues at this rate.

Often I have encountered the aster, but only in crossword puzzles as the fall bloomer or some such hint. In the next passage we can read that the aster is in fact the latest blooming of all flowers in New England, where I suspect most crossword puzzles are creating during those long, drear winter months, spent indoors in front of warm fires.

[page 363] Oct. 2. The *Aster undulatus* and *Solidago caesia* and often *puberula* are particularly prominent now, looking late and bright, attracting bees, etc. I see the *S. caesia* so covered with the little fuzzy gnats as to be whitened by them. How bright the *S. puberula* in sprout-lands, — its yellow wand, — perhaps in the midst of a clump of little scarlet or dark-purple black oaks! The *A. undulatus* looks fairer than ever, now that flowers are more scarce.

We near the end of our passage with Henry through another year's journal. The only items of note remaining are a day of gossamer and the chip-monk. Here's his encounter with gossamer, one of many that he reports in his journal. Its origin seems to have remained a mystery to this day.

[page 444] Nov. 15. A fine gossamer is streaming from every fence and tree and stubble, though a careless observer would not notice it. As I look along over the grass toward the sun at Hosmer's field, beyond Lupine Hill, I notice the shimmering effect of the gossamer — which seems to cover it almost like a web, — occasioned by its motion, though the air is so still. This is noticed at least forty rods off.



The *Chip Monk* is my name for Abel Brooks, known to Thoreau, who lives alone and smiles while he collects wood chips. Thoreau makes a point at several places in earlier journals about how he himself collects most of his firewood as he floats along the river in his boat, tossing pieces of floating wood into his boat along the way. Naturally he would appreciate a man who lives alone and gleans his firewood from chips of wood and enjoys the trails he takes along the way. His chips warm him during the collection of them and later during the burning of them.

[page 455, 456] Nov. 28. Goodwin is cutting out a few cords of dead wood in the midst of

E. Hubbard's old lot. This has been Hubbard's practice for thirty years or more, and so, it would seem, they are all dead before he gets to them. Saw Abel Brooks there with a half-bushel basket on his arm. He was picking up chips on his and neighboring lots; had got about two quarts of old and blackened pine chips, and with these was returning home at dusk more than a mile. Such a petty quantity as you would hardly have gone to the end of your yard for, and yet he said that he had got more than two cords of them at home, which he had collected thus and sometimes with a wheelbarrow. He had thus spent an hour or two and walked two or three miles in a cool November evening to pick up two quarts of pine chips scattered through the woods. He evidently takes real satisfaction in collecting his fuel, perhaps gets more heat of all kinds out of it than any man in town. He is not reduced to taking a walk for exercise as some are. It is one thing to *own* a wood-lot as he does who perambulates its bounds almost daily, so as to have worn a path about it, and another to own one as many another does who hardly knows where it is. Evidently the quantity of chips in his basket is not essential; it is the chippy idea which he pursues. It is to him an unaccountably pleasing occupation. And no doubt he loves to see his pile grow at home.

We, you and I, dear Reader, have finished a dozen volumes of Thoreau's Journals spanning the years, 1837 through 1859, the first Journal covering the ten years from 1837 to 1847 and the second picking up again in 1850. Along the way we walked to the woods and back out again many times together. Often we were accompanied by Ellery Channing, the ubiquitous C., and other times it was only I or you, the solitary Reader, to whom Henry confided his discoveries in nature or his innermost thoughts. Henry, we must call him because by now we have known him longer than most of our long-time friends. Never once has he alienated himself from us because of some imagined slight, or some favor he asked, but we were unable to oblige, rather, he has remained a true and steadfast friend, and we dread already the goodbye-saying which faces us a mere two years hence. Yes, thereafter we may read his words again, but never with the same freshness and surprise of first discovery, a first discovery I have delighted in sharing with you these many years. Stay tuned.

