

The November 29 events marked in the Journal, and one piece of information about November 26 recorded on the 29th, all of which were transferred to the list, appear in this chart. The events are “Get in Boat” (first image, line 4 of the events; marked through with a wavy line), “F. H. Pond skimmed over” (second image, line 10 of the events), “River skimmed over” (second image, line 11 of the events), and “Skating” (second image, line 18 of the events; marked through with a wavy line).

I’ve counted seventeen such charts: there are fewer charts than lists, either because the process of making them helped Thoreau winnow the events he wanted to focus on, or because he didn’t live long enough to finish. I suspect it was some of both.

Now you see how extensively and thoroughly Thoreau prepared himself to really see nature. Even with this small sample of the work that was involved—and there are about 1800 pages of notes, lists, and charts—you can also see what a discipline of the mind would be required to move continually from the parts to the whole, from the view of the scientist to that of the poet.

Thoreau didn’t live long enough to make full use of what he was still learning about nature from the charts he created—he died on May 6, 1862. But the combination of precise, deep knowledge and poetic insight informs such late essays as “Autumnal Tints” and “Wild Apples,” as well as “Huckleberries” and “The Dispersion of Seeds.”

In closing, I want to return to the object of Thoreau’s intensive preparation: he was to be the hunter “that shoots at beauty.” In July 1857, he got a letter from Charles C. Morse, who asked him if he could be engaged to “deliver two or more lectures upon scientific subjects” to members of the Rochester Atheneum and Mechanics Association, just up the road from here (the document is at the Huntington Library in San Marino,

CA, accessioned as HM 20592). Thoreau drafted his response in pencil on a blank page of the bifolio containing Morse's letter:

Academy of Mechanics
Association Rochester N.Y.
Henry D. Thoreau

Dear Sir, I have
been unable to obtain from
our bookseller your "Talk on
the Concord & Merrimack Rivers"
and therefore enclose you the
supposed price. You will please
send it to my address by
mail.

I would also inquire if you
are in the lecture field and
whether you could be obtained
to deliver two or more lectures
upon some scientific subjects
before our Association this coming
winter?

Yours Respectfully
Chas. C. Morse

To
C. W. Morse

Concord July 12 1860

Mr Charles C Morse

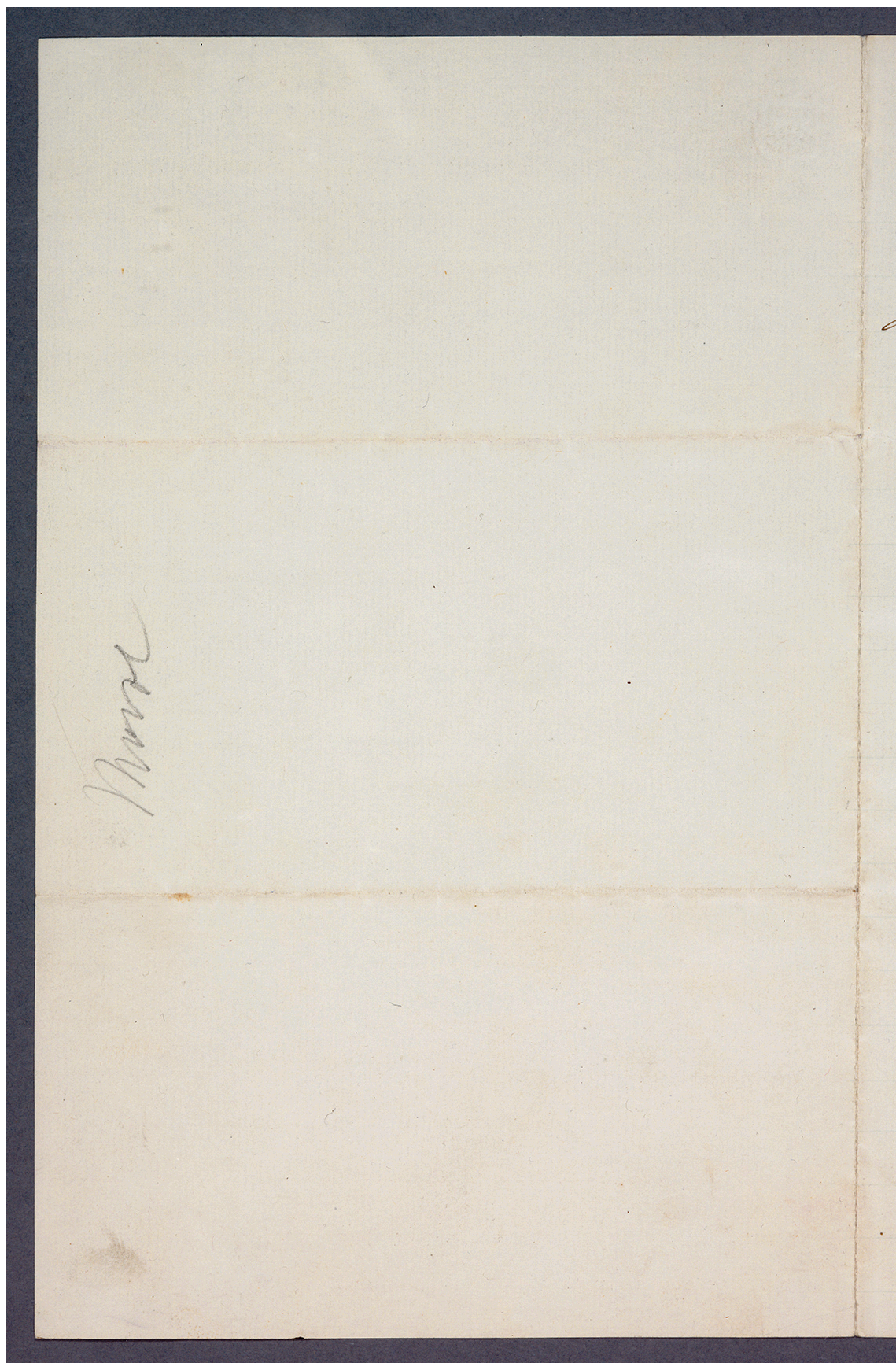
Dear Sir -

I mail you a few ~~80~~
a copy of my "work" as you
request -

I am in the lecture field -
but my subject are all scientific -
- with transcendental &
aesthetic - ~~Eden~~ ~~the~~ ~~atmosphere~~
~~atmosphere~~ of nature generally

Such as "Walking in the Wild"
"Winter and Spring" ~~and~~ ~~the~~ ~~even~~
~~the~~ ~~atmosphere~~ ~~of~~ ~~the~~ ~~forest~~ -
and ~~spring~~ ~~landscape~~ ~~landscape~~ ~~landscape~~
landscape & ~~spring~~ ~~landscape~~ ~~landscape~~
the ~~spring~~ ~~landscape~~ ~~landscape~~ will include
a great many ~~land~~ ~~scapes~~ ~~land~~ ~~scapes~~
of them - I shall be happy to send
of them. Yrs respectfully

Benjamin D. Brown



Here's a line-by-line transcript of the second and third paragraphs of that draft:

I am in the lecture field—
—but my subjects are not scientific
—rather transcendental &
aesthetic— ~~I devote myself to the~~
~~observation of nature generally—~~
Such as "Walking or the Wild"
"Autumnal Tints" {illegible} &c &c Even
if the title were scientific—the treat-
It is nature as She is beautiful
ment would hardly be so—in a
& affecting—rather than useful
popular sense— If you think
merely—
that your audience will incline
or erect their ears to such themes
as these—I shall be happy to read
to them.

In revising his draft, Thoreau removed two sentences that he may have thought were too idiosyncratic. One is easy to read because he simply lined it out: "I devote myself to the observation of nature generally—"

The other, hidden more effectively because he wrote right over it (it's transcribed above in smaller gray type), speaks directly to Thoreau's self-identification as a hunter of beauty: "It [the subject of his lectures and his investigations] is nature as She is beautiful & affecting—rather than useful merely—"

At the last, this is the Thoreau I have been pursuing for over forty years, and the Thoreau who captured Walt from his first reading of *Walden*. How lucky for both of us!

I want to thank you again for inviting me to speak—and for giving me your attention on this night in particular.

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