

'Take long walks ... if you would keep your spirits up'

Rich Heffern | Dec. 24, 2010 Eco Catholic

Henry David Thoreau was America's foremost nature writer and philosopher. Below is the entry in his journal for Dec. 25, in 1857. He kept careful record of his forays and expeditions outdoors on the outskirts of Concord, Mass. He was a careful observer of the natural world. Here he writes of his discoveries on a Christmas Day walk and makes an observation that is also good advice for all of us.

"Dec. 25, 1857: A strong wind from the northwest is gathering the snow into picturesque drifts behind the walls. As usual they resemble shells more than anything, sometimes prows of vessels, also the folds of a white napkin or counterpane dropped over a bonneted head. There are no such picturesque snow drifts as are formed behind loose or open stone walls. Already yesterday it had drifted so much, i.e. so much ground was bare, that there were as many carts as sleights in the streets.

Just beyond Hubbard's Bridge, on Conant's Brook Meadow, I am surprised to find a tract of ice, some thirty by seven or eight rods, blown quite bare. It shows how unstable the snow is.

Sanborn got some white spruce and usnea for Christmas in the swamp. I thought the last would be the most interesting and weird.

On the north sides of the walls we go over boots and get them full, then let ourselves down into the shell-work on the south side; so beyond the brows of hills. At Lee's Cliff, I pushed aside the snow with my foot and got some fresh green catnip for Min. I see the numerous tracks there, too, of foxes, or else hares, that have been running about in the light snow.

Met William Wheeler's shaggy gray terrier, or Indian dog, going home. He got out of the road and into the field to avoid us.

Take long walks in stormy weather or through deep snow in the fields and woods, if you would keep your spirits up. ... We must go out and re-ally ourselves to Nature every day. We must make root, send out some little fiber at least, even every winter day. I am sensible that I am imbibing health when I open my mouth to the wind. Staying in the house breeds a kind of insanity always. Every house is in this way a hospital. A night and a forenoon is as much confinement to those wards as I can stand. I am aware that I recover some sanity which I had lost almost the instant that I go abroad outdoors."

Have a Merry and Blessed Christmas