

## References to Sunset and the West in the Journal of Henry David Thoreau

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The idea of the west had special meaning for Americans prior to the Civil War, for it was a relatively new part of the country that just opened up for discovery and settlement. Although Thoreau could have journeyed there, he chose to remain in his beloved Concord. It seemed that he found all he could ever desire within a fairly circumscribed area. West, with its setting sun, is also symbolic of where we wish to travel in pursuit of new horizons. At the same time, Thoreau cautioned about not treading upon distant blue mountains visible from Concord; if he did, the mystery would be spoiled. Also when Thoreau set out on his many walks, he never headed out in a westward direction due to the reverence this direction held for him. As for the setting sun, Thoreau claimed that it is more mysterious to be drawn to the west by the setting sun than to have the rising sun (east) come to him. Because of this, I have assembled several pages from his Journal with references to the west.

1837

October 29, p.7: How often have they (native Indians) stood on this very spot, at this very hour, when the sun was sinking behind yonder woods and gilding with his last rays upon the waters of the Musketaquid, and pondered the day's success and the morrow's prospects, or communed with the spirit of their fathers gone before them to the land of shades!

November 9, p.9: And now that it is evening, a few clouds in the mild atmosphere rest upon the mountains, more stand still than move in the heavens, and immediately after sunset the chirping of crickets begins to increase; then feels once more at home in the world, and not as an alien, an exile.

1838

August 29, p.55: How strangely sounds of revelry strike the ear from over cultivated fields by the woodside, while the sun is declining in the west. It is a world we had not known before. We listen and are capable of no mean act of thought. We tread on Olympus and participate in the councils of the gods.

1839

August 31, p.88: In the twilight so elastic is the air that the sky seems to tinkle [sic] over farmhouse and wood. Scrambling up the bank of our terra incognita we fall on huckleberries, which have slowly ripened here, husbanding the juices which the months

have distilled, for our peculiar use this night.

1840

February 11, p.118: Falsehoods that glare and dazzle are sloped toward us, reflecting full in our faces even the light of the sun. Wait till sunset, or go round them, and the falsity will be apparent.

June 15, p.140: It would be well if we saw ourselves as in perspective always, impressed with distant outline on the sky, side by side with the shrubs on the river's brim. So let our life stand to heaven as some fair, sunlit tree against the western horizon, and by sunrise be planted on some eastern hill to glisten in the first rays of the dawn.

June 24, pp. 151-2: Though the sun set a quarter of an hour ago, his rays are still visible, darting half-way to the zenith. That glowing morrow in the west flashes on me like a faint presentiment of morning when I am falling asleep. A dull mist comes rolling from the west, as it if were the dust which day has raised...The landscape, by its patient resting there, teaches me that all good remains with him that waiteth, and that I shall sooner over take the dawn by remaining here, than by hurrying over the hills of the west.

June 24, p.152: Red, then, is Day's color; at least it is the color of his heel. He is "stepping westward." We only notice him when he comes and when he goes.

June 30, p.155: In this fresh evening each blade and leaf looks as if it had been dipped in an icy liquid greenness. Let eyes that ache come here and look, the sight will be a sovereign eyewater, or else wait and bathe them in the dark.

July 3, p.159: We will have a dawn, and noon, and serene sunset in ourselves...What we call the gross atmosphere of evening is the accumulated deed of the day, which absorbs the rays of beauty, and shows more richly than the naked promise of the dawn. By earnest toil in the heat of the noon, let us get ready a rich western blaze against the evening of our lives.

July 11, p.167: Let us not wait any longer, but step down from the mountains on to the plain of earth. Let our delay be like the sun's, when he lingers on the dividing line of day and night a brief space when the world is grateful for his light. We will make such haste as the morning and such delay as the evening.

1841

February 27, p. 225: I am attired for the future so, as the sun setting presumes all men at leisure and in contemplative mood, and am thankful that it is thus presented blank and indistinct. It still overtops my hope.

February 28, p. 226: I hear a man blowing a horn this still evening, and it sounds like the plaint of nature in these times. In this, which I refer to some man, there is something greater than any man. It is as if the earth spoke. It adds a great remoteness to the horizon, and its very distance is grand, as when one draws back the head to speak. That which I now hear in the west seems like an invitation to the east. It runs round the earth as a whisper gallery. It is the spirit of the West calling to then spirit of the East, or else it is the rattling of some team lagging in Day's train. Coming to me through the darkness and silence, all things great seem transpiring there. It is friendly as a distant hermit's taper. When it is trilled or undulates, the heavens are crumpled into time, and successive waves flow across them.

April 15, p. 252: When I hear a robin sing at sunset, I cannot help contrasting the equanimity of Nature with the bustle and impatience of man.

July 10 to 11, p. 265: A slight sound at evening lifts me up by the ears, and makes life seem inexpressibly serene and grand. It may be in Uranus, or it may be in the shutter. It is the original sound of which all literature is but the echo. It makes all fear superfluous. Bravery comes from further than the sources of fear.

August 18, p. 273: If I were awakened from a deep sleep, I should know which side the meridian the sun might be by the chirping of the crickets. Night has already insidiously set her foot in the valley in many places, where the shadows of the shrubs and fences begin to darken the landscape. There is a deeper shading in the colors of the afternoon landscape. Perhaps the forenoon is brighter than the afternoon, not only because of the greater transparency of the atmosphere then, but because we naturally look most into the west, as we look forward into the day, and so in the forenoon see the sunny side of things, but in the afternoon the shadow of every tree.

December 29, p. 301: ...or when the setting sun slants across the pastures, and the cows low to my inward ear and only enhance the stillness, and the eve is as the dawn, a beginning hour and not a final one, as if it would never have done, with its clear western amber inciting men to lives of as limpid purity. Then do other parts of may day's work shine than I had thought at noon, for I discover the real purport of my toil, as, when the husbandman has reached the end of the furrow and looks back, he can best tell where the pressed earth shines most.

1845-1846

August 23, p. 385: Toward evening, as the world waxes darker, I am permitted to see the woodchuck stealing across my path, and tempted to seize and devour it. The wildest, most desolate scenes are strangely familiar to me.

March 26 (1846), p.400: A serene summer evening sky seemed darkly reflected in the pond, though the clear sky was nowhere visible overhead. It was no longer the end of a season, but the beginning.

Also: Trees seemed all at once to be fitly grouped, to sustain new relations to men and to one another. There was somewhat cosmical in the arrangement of nature. O the evening robin, at the close of a New England day! If I could ever find the twig he sits upon! Where does the minstrel really roost?

February 22 (no year), p.435: Many a day spent on the hilltops waiting for the sky to fall, that I might catch something, though I never caught much, only a little, manna-wise, that would dissolve again in the sun.

1837-1847

Undated, p. 443: Consider the phenomena of morn, or eve, and you will say that Nature has perfected herself by an eternity of practice, evening stealing over the fields, the stars coming to bathe in retired waters, the shadows of the trees creeping farther and farther into the meadows, and a myriad of phenomena beside.

Undated, p. 446: In whatever moment we awake to life, as now I this evening, after walking along the bank and hearing the same evening sounds that were heard of yore, it seems to have slumbered just below the surface, as in the spring the new verdure which covers the fields has never retreated far from the winter.

Undated, p. 447: All actions and objects and events lose their distinct importance in this hour, in the brightness of the vision, as, when sometimes the pure light that attends the setting sun falls on the trees and houses, the light itself is the phenomenon, and no single object is so distinct to our admiration as the light itself.

Undated, p. 449: It [purple finch] has the crimson hues of the October evenings, and its plumage still shines as it had caught and preserved some of their tints (beams?). We know it chiefly as a traveler. It reminds me of many things I had forgotten. Many a serene evening lies snugly packed under its wing.

1850

May 12, p. 12: I have heard my brother playing on his flute at evening half a mile off through the houses of the village, every note with perfect distinctness. It seemed a more beautiful communication with me than the sending up of a rocket would have been.

No date, p. 26: The horizon is very extensive as it is, and if the top were cleared so that you could get the western view, it would be one of the most extensive seen from any hill

in the county. The most imposing horizons are those which are seen from tops of hills rising out of a river valley.

July 16, p. 51: There was a glorious lurid sunset to-night, accompanied with many sombre clouds, and when I looked into the west with my head turned, the grass had the same fresh green, and the distant herbage and foliage in the horizon the same dark blue, and the clouds and sky the same bright colors beautifully mingled and dissolving into one another, that I have seen in pictures of tropical landscapes and skies. Pale saffron skies with faint fishes of rosy clouds dissolving in them. A blood-stained sky. I regretted that I had an impatient companion. What shall we make of the fact that you have only to stand on your head a moment to be enchanted with the beauty of the landscape?

September 19, p. 74: The setting sun is reflected from the windows of the almshouse as brightly as from the rich man's house.

September 19, p. 76: Looking through a stately pine grove, I saw the western sun falling in golden streams through its aisles. Its west side, opposite to me, was all lit up with golden light; but what was I to it? Such sights reminded me of houses which we never inhabit, that commonly I am not at home in the world. I see somewhat fairer than I enjoy or possess.

November 11, p. 94: We had a remarkable sunset to-night. I was walking in the meadow, the source of Nut Meadow Brook. We walked in so pure and bright a light, so softly and serenely bright, I thought I had never bathed in such a golden flood, without a ripple or a murmur to it. The west side of every wood and rising ground gleamed like the boundary of Elysium.

November 21, p. 106-7: Some distant angle in the sun where a lofty and dense white pine wood, with mingled gray and green, meets a hill covered with shrub oaks, affects me singularly, re-inspiring me with all the dreams of my youth. It is a place far away, yet actual and where we have been. I saw the sun falling on a distant white pine wood whose gray and moss-covered stems were visible amid the green, in an angle where this forest abutted on a hill covered with shrub oaks. It was like looking into dreamland. It is one of the avenues to my future. Certain coincidences like this are accompanied by a certain flash as of hazy lightning, flooding all the world suddenly with a tremulous serene light which is difficult to see long at a time.

November 21, p. 108: Every sunset inspires me with the desire to go to a West as distant and as fair as that into which the sun goes down.

November 25, p. 112: When I got up so high on the side of the Cliff the sun was setting like an Indian-summer sun. There was a purple tint in the horizon. It was warm on the

face of the rocks, and I could have sat till the sun disappeared, to dream there. It was a mild sunset such as is to be attended to. Just as the sun shines into us warmly and serenely, our Creator breathes on us and re-creates us.

November 29, p. 119: The pines standing in the ocean of mist, seen from the Cliffs, are trees in every stage of transition from the actual to the imaginary...You are reminded of your dreams. Life looks like a dream. You are prepared to see visions. And now, just before sundown, the night wind blows up more mist through the valley, thickening the veil which already hung over the trees, and the gloom of night gathers early and rapidly around. Birds lose their way.

December 17, p. 126: I noticed when the snow first came that the days were very sensibly lengthened by the light being reflected from the snow. Any work which required light could be pursued about half an hour longer. So that we may well pray that the ground may not be laid bare by a thaw in these short winter days.

December 24, p. 129: In walking across the Great Meadows to-day on the snow-crust, I noticed that the fine, dry snow which was blown over the surface of the frozen field, when I [looked] westward over it or toward the sun, looked precisely like steam curling up from its surface, as sometimes from a wet roof when the sun comes out after a rain.

1851

January 5, p. 138: I felt my spirits rise when I had got off the road into the open fields, and the sky had a new appearance. I stepped along more buoyantly. There was a warm sunset over the wooded valleys, a yellowish tinge on the pines. Reddish dun-colored clouds like dusky flames stood over it. And then streaks of blue sky were seen here and there. The life, the joy, that is in blue sky after a storm! There is no account of the blue sky in history.

January 10, p. 140: There was a remarkable sunset; a mother-of-pearl sky seen over the Price farm; some small clouds, as well as the edges of large ones, most brilliantly painted with mother-of-pearl tints through and through. I never saw the like before. Who can foretell the sunset, what it will be?

February 27, p. 170: Westward is heaven, or rather heavenward is the west. The way to heaven is from east to west round the earth. The sun leads and shows it. The stars, too, light it.

June 14, p. 254: A serene evening, the sun going down behind clouds, a few white or slightly shaded piles of clouds floating in the eastern sky, but a broad, clear, mellow cope left for the moon to rise into. An evening for poets to describe...All nature is in an expectant attitude.

June 14, p. 257: How moderate, deliberate, is Nature! How gradually the shades of night gather and deepen, giving man ample leisure to bid farewell today, conclude his day's affairs, and prepare for slumber! The twilight seems out of proportion to the length of the day. Perchance it saves our eyes.

June 14, p. 258: The moon is accumulating yellow light and triumphing over the clouds, but still the west is suffused here and there with a slight red tinge, marking the path of the day. Though inexperienced ones might call it night, it is not yet. Dark, heavy clouds lie along the western horizon, exhibiting the forms of animals and men, while the moon is behind a cloud.

July 5, p. 283: As we come over Hubbard's Bridge between 5 and 6 P.M., the sun getting low, a cool wind blowing up the valley, we sit awhile on the rails which are destined for the new railing. The light on the Indian hill is very soft and glorious, giving the idea of the most wonderful fertility. The most barren hills are gilded like waving grain-fields. What a paradise to sail by! The cliffs and woods up the stream are nearer and have more shadow and actuality about them. This retired bridge is a favorite spot with me. I have witnessed many a fair sunset from it.

July 6, p. 284: Ah! But that first faint tinge of moonlight on the gap! (Seen some time ago) a silvery light from the east before day had departed in the west. What an immeasurable interval there is between the first tinge of moonlight which we detect, lighting with mysterious, silvery, poetic light the western slopes, like a paler grass, and the last wave of daylight on the eastern slopes! It is wonderful how our senses ever span so vast an interval, how from being aware of the one we become aware of the other. And now the night wind blows, from where? What gave it birth? It suggests an interval equal to that between the most distant periods recorded in history. The silver age is not more distant from the golden than moonlight is from sunlight. I am looking into the west, where the red clouds still indicate the course of departing day. I turn and see the silent, spiritual, contemplative moonlight shedding the softest imaginable light on the western slopes of the hills, as if, after a thousand years of polishing, their surfaces were just beginning to be bright, Ba pale whitish lustre.

July 9, p. 295: Coming out of town, willingly as usual, when I saw that reach of Charles River just above the depot, the fair, still water this cloudy evening suggesting the way to eternal peace and beauty, whence it flows, the placid, lake-like fresh water, so unlike the salt brine, affected me not a little...What can be more impressive than to look up a noble river just at evening, one, perchance, which you have never explored, and behold its placid waters, reflecting the woods and sky, lapsing inaudibly toward the ocean; to behold as a lake, but know it as a river, tempting the beholder to explore it and his own destiny at once?

July 21, p. 322: The undersides of the leaves, exposed by the breeze, give a light bluish tinge to the woods as I look down on them. Looking at the woods west of this hill, there is a grateful dark shade under their eastern sides, where they meet the meadows, their cool night side, a triangular segment of night, to which the sun has set. The mountains look like waves on a blue ocean tossed up by a stiff gale.

August 5, pp. 370-1: Moon half full. I sit beside Hubbard's Grove. A few level red bars above the horizon; a dark, irregular bank beneath them, with a streak of red sky below, on the horizon's edge. This will describe many a sunset...The air is still. I hear the voices of loud-talking boys in the early twilight, it must be a mile off. The swallows go over with a watery twittering.

August 31, pp. 435-6: There was a quiet beauty in the landscape at that hour (half an hour before sunset, Tupelo Cliff) which my senses were prepared to appreciate. The sun going down on the west side, that hand being already in shadow for the most part, but his rays lighting up the water and the willows and pads even more than before...The trivialness of the day is past. The greater stillness, the serenity of the air, its coolness and transparency, the mistiness being condensed, are favorable to thought. (The pensive eve.). The coolness of evening comes to condense the haze of noon and make the air transparent and the outline of objects firm and distinct, and chaste (chaste eve); even as I am made more vigorous by my bath, am more continent of thought. After bathing, even at noonday, a man realizes a morning or evening life. The evening is such a bath for both mind and body. When I have walked all day in vain under the torrid sun, and the world has been all trivial, as well field and wood as highway, then at eve the sun goes down westward, and the wind goes down with it, and the dews begin to purify the air and make it transparent, and the lakes and rivers acquire a glassy stillness, reflecting the skies, the reflex of the day. I too am at the top of my condition for perceiving beauty.

August 31, p. 438: What unanimity between the water and the sky! One only a little denser element than the other. The grossest part of heaven. Think of a mirror on so large a scale! Standing on distant hills, you see the heavens reflected, the evening sky, in some low lake or river in the valley, as perfectly as in any mirror they could be. Does it not prove how intimate heaven is with earth?

1. (Continued, new paragraph) We commonly sacrifice to supper this serene and sacred hour. Our customs turn the hour of sunset to a trivial time, as at the meeting of two roads, one coming from the noon, the other heading to the night. It might be [well] if our repasts were taken out-of-doors, in view of the sunset and the rising stars.

(Continued, new paragraph) The air of the valleys at this hour is the distilled essence of all those fragrances which during the day have been filling and have been dispersed in



the atmosphere. The fine fragrances, perchance, which have floated in the upper atmospheres have settled to these low vales!

September 7, p. 473-4: I hear no larks sing as in the spring, nor robins; only a few distressed notes from the robin. In Hubbard's grain-field beyond the brook, now the sun is down. The air is very still. There is a fine sound of crickets, not loud. The woods and single trees are heavier masses in the landscape than in the spring. Night as more allies. The heavy shadows of woods and trees are remarkable now...The sky is singularly marked this evening. There are bars or rays of nebulous light springing from the western horizon where the sun has disappeared, and alternating with beautiful blue rays, more blue by far than any other portion of the sky. These continue to diverge till they have reached the middle, and then converge to the eastern horizon, making a symmetrical figure like the divisions of a muskmelon, not very bright, yet distinct, though growing less and less bright toward the east. It was a quite remarkable phenomenon encompassing the heavens, as if you were to behold the divisions of a muskmelon thus alternately colored from within it. A proper vision, a colored mist. The most beautiful thing in nature is the sun reflected from a tearful cloud. These white and blue ribs embraced the earth. The two outer blues much the brightest and matching one another.

September 8, p. 484: The eastern horizon is now grown dun-colored, showing where the advanced guard of the night are already skirmishing with the vanguard of the sun, a lurid light tinging the atmosphere there, while a dark-columned cloud hangs immanent over the broad portal, untouched by the glare. Some bird flies over, making a noise like the barking of a puppy. It is yet so dark that I have dropped my pencil and cannot find it.

September 24, p. 14: Returning over the causeway from Flint's Pond the over evening (22d), just at sunset, I observed that while the west was of a bright golden color under a bank of clouds, the sun just setting, and not a tinge of red was yet visible there, there was a distinct purple tinge in the nearer atmosphere, that Annursnack Hill, seen through it, had an exceedingly rich empurpled look. It is rare that we perceive this purple tint in the air, telling of the juice of the wild grape and poke-berries. The empurpled hills! Methinks I have only noticed this in cooler weather.

September 27, p. 28: The shadow deepens down the woody hills and is most distinctly dark where they meet the meadow line. Now the sun in the west is coming out and lights up the river a mile off, so that it shines with a white light like a burnished silver mirror. The poplar tree seems quite important to the scene. The pastures are so dry that the cows have been turned on to the meadow, but they gradually desert it, all feeding one way. The patches of sunlight on the meadow look luridly yellow, as if flames were traversing it.

September 30, p. 37: The sun has been obscured much of the day by passing clouds, but now, at 5 P.M., the sun comes out and by the very clear and brilliant light, through the shadows begin to fall long from the trees, it is proved how remarkably clear or pure the atmosphere is. According to all accounts, an hour of such a light would be something quite memorable in England.

October 1, pp. 38-9: The twilight is much shorter now than a month ago, probably as the atmosphere is clearer and there is less to reflect the light. The air is cool, and the ground also feels cold under my feet, as if the grass were wet with dew, which is not yet the case. I go through Wheeler's corn-field in the twilight, where the stalks are bleached almost white, and his tops are still stacked along the edge of the field. The moon is not far up above the southwestern horizon. Looking west at this hour, the earth is an unvaried, undistinguishable black in contrast with the twilight sky. It is as if you were walking in night up to your chin.

October 15, p. 78: The sun sets when we are off Israel Rice's. A few golden coppery clouds, intensely glowing, like fishes in some molten metal of the sky, and then the small scattered clouds grow blue-black above, or one half, and reddish or pink the other half, and after a short twilight the night sets in. We think it is pleasantest to be on the water this hour.

November 18, p. 122: Now at sundown I hear the hooting of an owl, "hoo hoo hoo, hooer hoo." It sounds like the hooting of an idiot or a maniac broke loose. This is faintly answered in a different strain, apparently from a greater distance, almost as if it were the echo, i.e., so far as the succession is concerned.

November 22, pp. 128-9: As I returned through Hosmer's field, the sun was setting just beneath a black cloud by which it had been obscured, and as it had been a cold and windy afternoon, its light, which fell suddenly on some white pines between me and it, lighting them up like a shimmering fire, and also on the oak leaves and chestnut stems, was quite a circumstance. It was from the contrast between the dark and comfortless afternoon and this bright and cheerful light, almost fire. The eastern hills and woods, too, were clothed in a still golden light. The light of the setting sun, just emerged from a cloud and suddenly falling on and lighting up the needles of the white pine between you and it, after a raw and louring afternoon near the beginning of winter, is a memorable phenomenon.

November 25, p. 130: When returning between Bear Hill and the railroad, the sun had set and there was a very clear amber light in the west, and turning about, we were surprised at the darkness in the east, the crescent of night, almost as if the air were thick, a thick snow-storm were gathering...That kind of sunset which I witnessed on Saturday and

Sunday is perhaps peculiar to the late autumn. The sun is unseen behind a hill. Only this bright white light like a fire falls on the trembling needles of the pine.

December 14, p. 138: There is a beautifully pure greenish-blue sky under the clouds now in the southwest just before sunset.

December 19, p. 142: IN all woods is hard now far and near the sound of the woodchopper's axe, a twilight sound, now in the night of the year, men having come out for fuel to the forests...Why should it be so pleasing to look into a thick pine wood where the sunlight streams in and gilds it? The sound of the axes far in the horizon sounds like the dropping of the eaves. Now the sun gets suddenly without a cloud, and with scarcely any redness following, so pure is the atmosphere, only a faint rosy blush along the horizon.

December 20, pp. 144-5: A clump of white pines, seen far westward over the shrub oak plain, which is now lit up by the setting sun, a soft, feathery grove, with their gray stems indistinctly seen, like human beings come to their cabin door, standing expectant on the edge of the plain, impress me with a mild humanity. The trees have hearts...A slight vaporous cloud floats high over them, while in the west the sun goes down apace behind glowing pines, and golden clouds like mountains skirt the horizon.

December 21, p. 148: Tonight, as so many nights within the year, the clouds arrange themselves in the east at sunset in long converging bars, according to the simple tactics of the sky. It is the melon-rind jig. It would serve for a permanent description of the sunset. Such is the morning and such the evening, converging bars inclose the day at each end as within a melon rind, and the morning and evening are one day. Long after the sun has set, and downy clouds have turned dark, and the shades of night have taken possession of the east, some rosy clouds will be seen in the upper sky over the portals of the darkening west.

December 23, pp. 152-3: By half past three the sun is fairly out. I go to the Cliffs. There is a narrow ridge of snow, a white line, on the storm side of the stem of every exposed tree. I see that there is to be a fine, clear sunset, and make myself a seat in the snow of the Cliff to witness it. Already a few clouds are glowing like a golden sierra just above the horizon. From a low arch the clear sky has rapidly spread eastward over the whole heavens, and the sun shines serenely, and the air is still, and the spotless snow covers the fields. The snow-storm is over, the clouds have departed, the sun shines serenely, the air is still, a pure and trackless white napkin covers the ground, and a fair evening is coming to conclude all. Gradually the sun sinks, the air grows more dusky, and I perceive that if it were not for the light reflected from the snow it would be quite dark...Now the sun has quite disappeared, but the afterglow, as I may call it, apparently the reflection from the

cloud beyond which the sun went down on the thick atmosphere of the horizon, is unusually bright and lasting. Long, broken clouds in the horizon, in the dun atmosphere, as if the fires of day were still smoking there, hand with red and golden edging like the saddle-cloths of the steeds of the sun. Now all the clouds grow black, and I give up tonight; but unexpectedly, half an hour later when I look out, having got home, I find that the evening star is shining brightly, and, beneath all, the west horizon is glowing red, that dun atmosphere instead of clouds reflecting the sun, and I detect, just above the horizon, the narrowest imaginable white sickle of the new moon.

December 24, pp. 153-4: I had looked in vain into the west for nearly half an hour to see a red cloud blushing in the sky. The few clouds were dark, and I had given up all to night, but when I had got home and chanced to look out the window from the supper [table], I perceived that all the west horizon was glowing with a rosy border, and that dun atmosphere had been the cloud this time which made the days adieus. But half an hour before, that dun atmosphere hung over all the western woods and hills, precisely as if the fires of the day had just been put in the west, and the burnt territory was sending out volumes of dun and lurid smoke to heaven, as if Phaeton had again driven the chariot of the sun so near as to set fire to earth.

December 25, pp. 155-6: I go forth to see the sun set. Who knows how it will set, even half an hour beforehand? Whether it will go down in clouds or a clear sky? I feel that it is late when the mountains in the north and northwest have ceased to reflect the sun. The shadow is not partial but universal.

In a winter day the sun is almost all in all.

I witness a beauty in the form or coloring of the clouds which addresses itself to my imagination, for which you account scientifically to my understanding, but do not so account to my imagination. It is what it suggests and is the symbol of that I care for, and if, by any trick of science, you rob it of its symbolicalness, you do me no service and explain nothing. I, standing, twenty miles off, see a crimson cloud in the horizon. You tell me it is a mass of vapor which absorbs all other rays and reflects the red, but that is nothing to the purpose, for this red vision excites me, stirs my blood, makes my thoughts flow, and I have new and indescribable fancies, and you have not touched the secret of that influence.

December 27, pp. 158-9: Sunset from fair Haven Hill. This evening there are many clouds in the west into which the sun goes down so that we have our visible or apparent sunset and red evening sky as much as fifteen minutes before the real sunset. You must be early on the hills to witness such a sunset, by half past four at least. Then all the vales, even to the horizon, are full of a purple vapor, which half veils the distant mountains, and the

windows of undiscoverable farmhouses shine like an early candle or a fire. After the sun had gone behind a cloud, there appears to be a gathering of clouds around his setting, and for a few moments his light in the amber sky seems more intense, brighter, and purer than at noonday.

I think you never see such a brightness in the noonday heavens as in the western sky sometimes, just before the sun goes down in clouds, like the ecstasy which we [are] told sometimes lights up the face of a dying man. That is a serene or evening death, like the end of the day. Then, at last, through all the grossness which has accumulated in the atmosphere of day, is seen a patch of serene sky fairer by contrast with the surrounding dark than midday, and even the gross atmosphere of the day is gilded and made pure as amber by the setting sun, as if the day's sins were forgiven it. The man is blessed who every day is permitted to behold anything so pure and serene as the western sky at sunset, while revolutions vex the world.

December 30, p. 164: Consider in what respects the winter sunsets differ from the summer ones. Shall I ever in summer evenings see so celestial a reach of blue sky contrasting with amber as I have seen a few days since. The day sky in winter corresponds for clarity to the night sky, in which the stars shine and twinkle so brightly in this latitude.

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January 17, pp. 200-01: In proportion as I have celestial thoughts, is the necessity for me to be out and behold the western sky before sunset these winter days. That is the symbol of the unclouded mind that knows neither winter nor summer. What is your thought like? That is the hue, that the purity, and transparency, and distance from earthly taint of my inmost mind, for whatever we see without is a symbol of what is deepest within. The lover of contemplation, accordingly, will gaze much into the sky.

January 17, pp. 201-02: Those western vistas through clouds to the sky show the clearest heavens, clearer and more elysian than if the whole sky is comparatively free from clouds, for then there is wont to be a vapor more generally diffused, especially near the horizon, which, in cloudy days, is absorbed, as it were, and collected into masses; and the vistas are clearer than the unobstructed cope of heaven.

January 19, p. 206: From Bare Hill I looked into the west, the sun still fifteen minutes high. The snow blowing far off in the sun, high as a house, looked like the mist that rises from rivers in the morning...The low western sky an Indian red, after the sun was gone.

January 12, p. 208: To see the sun rise or go down every day would preserve us sane forever, so to relate ourselves, for our mind's and body's health, to a universal fact.

January 22, p. 217: One mother-o-pearl tint is common to the winter sky half an hour before sundown.

January 23, pp. 220-1: Just before sunset there were few clouds or specks to be seen in the western sky, but the sun gets down lower, and many dark clouds are made visible, their sides toward us being darkened. In the bright light they were but floating feathers of vapor; now they swell into dark evening clouds.

It is a fair sunset, with many purplish fishes in the horizon, pinkish and golden with bright edges; like a school of purplish whales, they sail or float down from the north; or like leopards' skins they hang in the west. If the sun goes behind a cloud, it is still reflected from the least haziness or vapor in that part of the sky, the air is so clear; and the afterglow is remarkably long. And now the blaze is put out, and only a few glowing clouds, like the flickering light of the fire, skirt the west. And now only the brands and embers, mixed with smoke, make an Indian red along the horizon. And the new moon and the evening star, close together, preside over the twilight scene.

January 24, pp. 222-3: When the mountains in the horizon are well wooded and the snow does not lodge, they still look blue. All but a narrow segment of the sky in the northwest and southeast being suddenly overcast by a passing kind of snow-squall, though no snow falls, I look into the clear sky with its floating clouds in the northwest as from night into day, now at 4 P.M. The sun sets about five.

Walden and White Ponds are a vitreous greenish blue, like patches of the winter sky seen in the west before sundown.

January 24, p. 223: When the cars passed, I being on the pond (Walden), the sun was setting and suffusing the clouds far and near with rosy light. Even the steam from the engine, as it flocks or wreaths rose above the shadow of the woods, became a rosy cloud even fairer than the rest, but it was soon dissipated.

January 24, pp. 224-5: When I come out on to the causeway, I behold a splendid picture in the west. The damask-lined clouds, like rifts from a coal mine, which sparkle beneath, seen diving into the west. When clouds rise in mid-afternoon, you cannot foresee what sunset picture they are preparing for us. A single elm by Hayden's is relieved against the amber and golden border, deepening into dusky but soon to be red, in the horizon.

January 26, p. 235: From these cliffs at this moment, the clouds in the west have a singular brassy color, and they are arranged in an unusual manner. A new disposition of the clouds will make the most familiar country appear foreign, like Tartary or Arabia Felix.

About 2 o'clock P.M. these days, after a fair forenoon, there is wont to blow up from the northwest a squally cloud, spanning the heavens, but before it reaches the southeast horizon it has lifted above the northwest, and so it leaves the sky clear there for sunset, while it has sunk low and dark in the southeast.

January 29, p. 247: That point where the sun goes down is the cynosure which attracts all eyes at sundown and half an hour before. What do all other parts of the horizon concern us? Our eyes follow the path of that great luminary. We watch for his rising, and we observe his setting. He is a companion and fellow-traveler we all have. We pity him who has his cheerless dwelling elsewhere, even in the northwest or southwest, off the high road of nature.

February 3, p. 272: The sun had set without a cloud in the sky,--a rare occurrence, but I missed the clouds, which make the glory of evening. The sky must have a few clouds, as the mind a few moods; nor is the evening the less serene for them. There is only a tinge of red along the horizon. The moon is nearly full tonight, and the moment is passed when the light in the east (i.e., of the moon) balances the light in the west.

February 14, p. 302: I think it was before the first thaw, which this winter came before the end of December, that the main attraction in my afternoon walks (at any rate when the days were shortest and the cold most intense) was the western sky at and before sunset, when, though the vistas there between the clouds, you saw a singularly crystalline, vitreous sky, which perhaps is not seen at any other season of the year, at least not in such perfection.

February 17, pp. 307-8: Perhaps the peculiarity of those western vistas was partly owing to the shortness of the days when we naturally look to the heavens and make the most of the little light, when we live an arctic life, when the woodchopper's axe reminds us of twilight at 3 o'clock P.M., when the morning and the evening literally make the whole day, when I traveled, as it were, between the portals of the night, and the path was narrow as well as blocked with snow. Then, too, the sun has the last opportunity to fill the air with vapor.

February 24, p. 320: As we grow older, is it not ominous that we have more to write about evening, less about morning? We must associate more with the early hours.

The following is a photograph not far from Concord of sunset, December 21, 2003, the shortest day of the year:

