



**CANOEING**  
*in the Wilderness*

HENRY DAVID  
THOREAU

HENRY DAVID  
THOREAU



**CANOEING**

*in the Wilderness*

ISBN-13: 978-1-4236-4914-4



9 781423 649144



GIBBS  
SMITH

HENRY DAVID  
THOREAU

---

CANOEING  
*in the Wilderness*



GIBBS SMITH  
TO ENRICH AND INSPIRE HUMANKIND

Cover © 2018 Gibbs Smith

All rights reserved. No part of this book may be reproduced by any means whatsoever without written permission from the publisher, except brief portions quoted for purpose of review.

Published by  
Gibbs Smith  
P.O. Box 667  
Layton, Utah 84041

1.800.835.4993 orders  
www.gibbs-smith.com

Cover art and design by Seth Lucas, © Gibbs Smith  
Printed and bound in the United States

Gibbs Smith books are printed on either recycled, 100% post-consumer waste, FSC-certified papers or on paper produced from sustainable PEFC-certified forest/controlled wood source. Learn more at [www.pefc.org](http://www.pefc.org).

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data  
Names: Thoreau, Henry David, 1817-1862, author.  
Title: Canoeing in the wilderness / Henry David Thoreau.  
Description: First edition. | Layton, Utah : Gibbs Smith, [2018] | Originally published: 1916.  
Identifiers: LCCN 2017031770 | ISBN 9781423649144 (hardcover)  
Subjects: LCSH: Piscataquis County (Me.)—Description and travel. | Canoes and canoeing—Maine. | Thoreau, Henry David, 1817-1862—Travel. | Polis, Joseph, 1809-1884—Travel. | Maine—Description and travel.  
Classification: LCC F27.P5 T42 2018 | DDC 917.41/2504--dc23  
LC record available at <https://lccn.loc.gov/2017031770>

22 21 20 19 18 5 4 3 2 1



## CONTENTS

I. Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday, Thursday July 20–23, 1857 . . . . .	1
II. Friday, July 24. . . . .	7
III. Saturday, July 25 . . . . .	22
IV. Sunday, July 26. . . . .	32
V. Monday, July 27 . . . . .	43
VI. Tuesday, July 28 . . . . .	57
VII. Wednesday, July 29. . . . .	70
VIII. Thursday, July 30 . . . . .	85
IX. Friday, July 31 . . . . .	95
X. Saturday, Sunday, Monday August 1–3 . . .	101



## I.

MONDAY, TUESDAY, WEDNESDAY,  
THURSDAY JULY 20–23, 1857

I started on my third excursion to the Maine woods Monday, July 20, 1857, with one companion, arriving at Bangor the next day at noon. The succeeding morning, a relative of mine who is well acquainted with the Penobscot Indians took me in his wagon to Oldtown to assist me in obtaining an Indian for this expedition. We were ferried across to the Indian Island in a bateau. The ferryman's boy had the key to it, but the father, who was a blacksmith, after a little hesitation, cut the chain with a cold chisel on the rock. He told me that the Indians were nearly all gone to the seaboard and to Massachusetts, partly on account of the smallpox, of which they are very much afraid, having broken out in Oldtown. The old chief Neptune, however, was there still.

The first man we saw on the island was an Indian named Joseph Polis, whom my relative addressed familiarly as "Joe." He was dressing a deerskin in his yard. The skin was spread over a slanting log, and he was scraping it with a stick held by both hands. He was stoutly built, perhaps a little above the middle height, with a broad face, and, as others said, perfect Indian features and complexion. His house was a two-story white one with blinds, the best-looking that I

noticed there, and as good as an average one on a New England village street. It was surrounded by a garden and fruit trees, single cornstalks standing thinly amid the beans. We asked him if he knew any good Indian who would like to go into the woods with us, that is, to the Allagash Lakes by way of Moosehead, and return by the East Branch of the Penobscot.

To which he answered out of that strange remoteness in which the Indian ever dwells to the white man, “Me like to go myself; me want to get some moose”; and kept on scraping the skin.

The ferryman had told us that all the best Indians were gone except Polis, who was one of the aristocracy. He, to be sure, would be the best man we could have, but if he went at all would want a great price. Polis asked at first two dollars a day but agreed to go for a dollar and a half, and fifty cents a week for his canoe. He would come to Bangor with his canoe by the seven o’clock train that evening—we might depend on him. We thought ourselves lucky to secure the services of this man, who was known to be particularly steady and trustworthy.

I spent the afternoon with my companion, who had remained in Bangor, in preparing for our expedition, purchasing provisions, hard-bread,<sup>1</sup> pork, coffee, sugar, etc., and some india-rubber clothing.

At evening the Indian arrived in the cars, and I led the way, while he followed me, three quarters of a mile to my friend’s house, with the canoe on his head. I did not know the exact route, but steered by the lay of the land, as I do in Boston. I tried to enter into conversation with him, but as he was puffing under the weight of his canoe, not having the usual apparatus for carrying it, but, above all, as he was an Indian, I might

as well have been thumping on the bottom of his birch the while. In answer to the various observations that I made he only grunted vaguely from beneath his canoe once or twice, so that I knew he was there.

Early the next morning the stage called for us. My companion and I had each a large knapsack as full as it would hold, and we had two large rubber bags which held our provisions and utensils. As for the Indian, all the baggage he had, beside his axe and gun, was a blanket, which he brought loose in his hand. However, he had laid in a store of tobacco and a new pipe for the excursion. The canoe was securely lashed diagonally across the top of the stage, with bits of carpet tucked under the edge to prevent its chafing. The driver appeared as much accustomed to carrying canoes in this way as bandboxes.

At the Bangor House we took in four men bound on a hunting excursion, one of the men going as cook. They had a dog, a middling-sized brindled cur, which ran by the side of the stage, his master showing his head and whistling from time to time. But after we had gone about three miles the dog was suddenly missing, and two of the party went back for him, while the stage, which was full of passengers, waited. At length one man came back, while the other kept on. This whole party of hunters declared their intention to stop till the dog was found, but the very obliging driver was ready to wait a spell longer. He was evidently unwilling to lose so many passengers, who would have taken a private conveyance, or perhaps the other line of stages, the next day. Such progress did we make, with a journey of over sixty miles to be accomplished that day, and a rainstorm just setting in. We discussed the subject of dogs and their instincts

till it was threadbare, while we waited there, and the scenery of the suburbs of Bangor is still distinctly impressed on my memory.

After full half an hour the man returned, leading the dog by a rope. He had overtaken him just as he was entering the Bangor House. He was then tied on the top of the stage, but, being wet and cold, several times in the course of the journey he jumped off, and I saw him dangling by his neck. This dog was depended on to stop bears. He had already stopped one somewhere in New Hampshire, and I can testify that he stopped a stage in Maine. This party of four probably paid nothing for the dog's ride, nor for his run, while our party of three paid two dollars—and were charged four—for the light canoe which lay still on the top.

The stage was crowded all the way. If you had looked inside you would have thought that we were prepared to run the gantlet of a band of robbers, for there were four or five guns on the front seat and one or two on the back one, each man holding his darling in his arms. It appeared that this party of hunters was going our way, but much farther. Their leader was a handsome man about thirty years old, of good height, but not apparently robust, of gentlemanly address and faultless toilet. He had a fair white complexion as if he had always lived in the shade, and an intellectual face, and with his quiet manners might have passed for a divinity student who had seen something of the world. I was surprised to find that he was probably the chief white hunter of Maine and was known all along the road. I afterwards heard him spoken of as one who could endure a great deal of exposure and fatigue without showing the effect of it; and he could not only use guns, but make them, being himself a

gunsmith. In the spring he had saved a stage-driver and two passengers from drowning in the backwater of the Piscataquis on this road, having swum ashore in the freezing water and made a raft and got them off—though the horses were drowned—at great risk to himself, while the only other man who could swim withdrew to the nearest house to prevent freezing. He knew our man, and remarked that we had a good Indian there, a good hunter; adding that he was said to be worth six thousand dollars. The Indian also knew him, and said to me, “The great hunter.”

The Indian sat on the front seat with a stolid expression of face as if barely awake to what was going on. Again I was struck by the peculiar vagueness of his replies when addressed in the stage or at the taverns. He really never said anything on such occasions. He was merely stirred up like a wild beast, and passively muttered some insignificant response. His answer, in such cases, was vague as a puff of smoke, suggesting no *responsibility*, and if you considered it you would find that you had got nothing out of him. This was instead of the conventional palaver and smartness of the white man, and equally profitable. Most get no more than this out of the Indian, and pronounce him stolid accordingly. I was surprised to see what a foolish and impertinent style a Maine man, a passenger, used in addressing him, as if he were a child, which only made his eyes glisten a little. A tipsy Canadian asked him at a tavern, in a drawling tone, if he smoked, to which he answered with an indefinite “Yes.”

“Won't you lend me your pipe a little while?” asked the other.

He replied, looking straight by the man's head, with a face singularly vacant to all neighboring

interests, "Me got no pipe"; yet I had seen him put a new one, with a supply of tobacco, into his pocket that morning.

Our little canoe, so neat and strong, drew a favorable criticism from all the wiseacres among the tavern loungers along the road. By the roadside, close to the wheels, I noticed a splendid great purple fringed orchis which I would fain have stopped the stage to pluck, but as this had never been known to stop a bear, like the cur on the stage, the driver would probably have thought it a waste of time.

When we reached the lake, about half past eight in the evening, it was still steadily raining, and in that fresh, cool atmosphere the hylas were peeping and the toads ringing about the lake. It was as if the season had revolved backward two or three months, or I had arrived at the abode of perpetual spring.

We had expected to go upon the lake at once, and, after paddling up two or three miles, to camp on one of its islands, but on account of the rain we decided to go to one of the taverns for the night.

<sup>1</sup> Hard-bread or ship-bread is a kind of hard biscuit commonly baked in large cakes and much used by sailors and soldiers.



## II. FRIDAY, JULY 24.

About four o'clock the next morning, though it was quite cloudy, accompanied by the landlord to the water's edge, in the twilight, we launched our canoe from a rock on Moosehead Lake. We had a rather small canoe for three persons, eighteen and one fourth feet long by two feet six and one half inches wide in the middle, and one foot deep within. I judged that it would weigh not far from eighty pounds. The Indian had recently made it himself, and its smallness was partly compensated for by its newness, as well as stanchness and solidity, it being made of very thick bark and ribs. Our baggage weighed about one hundred and sixty-six pounds. The principal part of the baggage was, as usual, placed in the middle of the broadest part, while we stowed ourselves in the chinks and crannies that were left before and behind it, where there was no room to extend our legs, the loose articles being tucked into the ends. The canoe was thus as closely packed as a market basket. The Indian sat on a crossbar in the stern, but we flat on the bottom with a splint or chip behind our backs to protect them from the crossbar, and one of us commonly paddled with the Indian.

Paddling along the eastern side of the lake in the still of the morning, we soon saw a few sheldrakes, which the Indian called *Shecorways*, and some

peetweets on the rocky shore. We also saw and heard loons. It was inspiring to hear the regular dip of the paddles, as if they were our fins or flippers, and to realize that we were at length fairly embarked.

Having passed the small rocky isles within two or three miles of the foot of the lake, we had a short consultation respecting our course, and inclined to the western shore for the sake of its lee; for otherwise, if the wind should rise, it would be impossible for us to reach Mount Kineo, which is about midway up the lake on the east side, but at its narrowest part, where probably we could recross if we took the western side. The wind is the chief obstacle to crossing the lakes, especially in so small a canoe. The Indian remarked several times that he did not like to cross the lakes "in littlum canoe," but nevertheless, "just as we say, it made no odds to him."

Moosehead Lake is twelve miles wide at the widest place, and thirty miles long in a direct line, but longer as it lies. Paddling near the shore, we frequently heard the *pe-pe* of the olive-sided flycatcher, also the wood pewee and the kingfisher. The Indian reminding us that he could not work without eating, we stopped to breakfast on the main shore southwest of Deer Island. We took out our bags, and the Indian made a fire under a very large bleached log, using white pine bark from a stump, though he said that hemlock was better, and kindling with canoe birch bark. Our table was a large piece of freshly peeled birch bark, laid wrong side up, and our breakfast consisted of hard-bread, fried pork, and strong coffee well sweetened, in which we did not miss the milk.

While we were getting breakfast a brood of twelve black dippers,<sup>2</sup> half grown, came paddling by within

three or four rods, not at all alarmed; and they loitered about as long as we stayed, now huddled close together, now moving off in a long line, very cunningly.

Looking northward from this place it appeared as if we were entering a large bay, and we did not know whether we should be obliged to diverge from our course and keep outside a point which we saw, or should find a passage between this and the mainland. It was misty dog-day weather, and we had already penetrated a smaller bay of the same kind, and knocked the bottom out of it, though we had been obliged to pass over a bar between an island and the shore, where there was but just breadth and depth enough to float the canoe, and the Indian had observed, "Very easy makum bridge here," but now it seemed that if we held on we should be fairly embayed. Presently, however, the mist lifted somewhat and revealed a break in the shore northward. The Indian immediately remarked, "I guess you and I go there."

This was his common expression instead of saying "we." He never addressed us by our names, though curious to know how they were spelled and what they meant. We called him Polis. He had already guessed very accurately at our ages, and said that he was forty-eight.

After breakfast I emptied the melted pork that was left into the lake, making what the sailors call a "slick," and watching to see how much it spread over and smoothed the agitated surface. The Indian looked at it a moment and said, "That make hard paddlum through; hold 'em canoe. So say old times."

We hastily reloaded, putting the dishes loose in the bows, that they might be at hand when wanted, and set out again. The western shore, near which we

paddled along, rose gently to a considerable height and was everywhere densely covered with the forest, in which was a large proportion of hard wood to enliven and relieve the fir and spruce.

The Indian said that the lichen which we saw hanging from the trees was called *chorchorque*. We asked him the names of several birds which we heard this morning. The thrush, which was quite common, and whose note he imitated, he said was called *Adelungquamooktum*; but sometimes he could not tell the name of some small bird which I heard and knew, but he said, "I tell all the birds about here; can't tell littlum noise, but I see 'em, then I can tell." I observed that I should like to go to school to him to learn his language, living on the Indian island the while; could not that be done?

"Oh, yer," he replied, "good many do so."

I asked how long he thought it would take. He said one week. I told him that in this voyage I would tell him all I knew, and he should tell me all he knew, to which he readily agreed.

Mount Kineo, which was generally visible, though occasionally concealed by islands or the mainland in front, had a level bar of cloud concealing its summit, and all the mountain-tops about the lake were cut off at the same height. Ducks of various kinds were quite common, and ran over the water before us as fast as a horse trots.

The Indian asked the meaning of *reality*, as near as I could make out the word, which he said one of us had used; also of *interrent*, that is, intelligent. I observed that he could rarely sound the letter r, but used l, as also r for l sometimes; as *load* for road, *pickelel* for pickerel, *Soogle* Island for Sugar Island. He generally

added the syllable *um* to his words, as *paddlum*, etc.

On a point on the mainland where we landed to stretch our legs and look at the vegetation, going inland a few steps, I discovered a fire still glowing beneath its ashes, where somebody had breakfasted, and a bed of twigs prepared for the following night. So I knew not only that they had just left, but that they designed to return, and by the breadth of the bed that there was more than one in the party. You might have gone within six feet of these signs without seeing them. There grew the beaked hazel, rue seven feet high, and red osier, whose bark the Indian said was good to smoke, "tobacco before white people came to this country, Indian tobacco."

The Indian was always very careful in approaching the shore, lest he should injure his canoe on the rocks, letting it swing round slowly sidewise, and was still more particular that we should not step into it on shore, nor till it floated free, and then should step gently lest we should open its seams, or make a hole in the bottom.

After passing Deer Island we saw the little steamer from Greenville, far east in the middle of the lake. Sometimes we could hardly tell her from an island which had a few trees on it. Here we were exposed to the wind from over the whole breadth of the lake, and ran a little risk of being swamped. While I had my eye fixed on the spot where a large fish had leaped, we took in a gallon or two of water; but we soon reached the shore and took the canoe over the bar at Sand-bar Island, a few feet wide only, and so saved a considerable distance.

We crossed a broad bay and found the water quite rough. A very little wind on these broad lakes raises

a sea which will swamp a canoe. Looking off from the shore, the surface may appear to be almost smooth a mile distant, or if you see a few white crests they appear nearly level with the rest of the lake, but when you get out so far, you may find quite a sea running, and ere long, before you think of it, a wave will gently creep up the side of the canoe and fill your lap, like a monster deliberately covering you with its slime before it swallows you, or it will strike the canoe violently and break into it. The same thing may happen when the wind rises suddenly, though it were perfectly calm and smooth there a few minutes before; so that nothing can save you, unless you can swim ashore, for it is impossible to get into a canoe when it is upset. Since you sit flat on the bottom, though the danger should not be imminent, a little water is a great inconvenience, not to mention the wetting of your provisions. We rarely crossed even a bay directly, from point to point, when there was wind, but made a slight curve corresponding somewhat to the shore, that we might the sooner reach it if the wind increased.

When the wind is aft, and not too strong, the Indian makes a spritsail of his blanket. He thus easily skims over the whole length of this lake in a day.

The Indian paddled on one side, and one of us on the other, to keep the canoe steady, and when he wanted to change hands he would say, "T" other side." He asserted, in answer to our questions, that he had never upset a canoe himself, though he may have been upset by others.

Think of our little eggshell of a canoe tossing across that great lake, a mere black speck to the eagle soaring above it!

My companion trailed for trout as we paddled

along, but, the Indian warning him that a big fish might upset us, for there are some very large ones there, he agreed to pass the line quickly to the stern if he had a bite.

While we were crossing this bay, where Mount Kineo rose dark before us within two or three miles, the Indian repeated the tradition respecting this mountain's having anciently been a cow moose—how a mighty Indian hunter succeeded in killing this queen of the moose tribe with great difficulty, while her calf was killed somewhere among the islands in Penobscot Bay, and, to his eyes, this mountain had still the form of the moose in a reclining posture. He told this at some length and with apparent good faith, and asked us how we supposed the hunter could have killed such a mighty moose as that. An Indian tells such a story as if he thought it deserved to have a good deal said about it, only he has not got it to say, and so he makes up for the deficiency by a drawling tone, long-windedness, and a dumb wonder which he hopes will be contagious.

We approached the land again through pretty rough water, and then steered directly across the lake at its narrowest part to the eastern side, and were soon partly under the lee of the mountain, having paddled about twenty miles. It was now about noon.

We designed to stop there that afternoon and night, and spent half an hour looking along the shore northward for a suitable place to camp. At length, by going half a dozen rods into the dense spruce and fir wood on the side of the mountain almost as dark as a cellar, we found a place sufficiently clear and level to lie down on, after cutting away a few bushes. The Indian cleared a path to it from the shore with his

axe, and we then carried up all our baggage, pitched our tent, and made our bed, in order to be ready for foul weather, which then threatened us, and for the night. He gathered a large armful of fir twigs, breaking them off, which he said were the best for our bed, partly, I thought, because they were the largest and could be most rapidly collected. It had been raining more or less for four or five days, and the wood was even damper than usual, but he got dry bark from the under side of a dead leaning hemlock, which he said he could always do.

This noon his mind was occupied with a law question, and I referred him to my companion, who was a lawyer. It appeared that he had been buying land lately—I think it was a hundred acres—but there was probably an incumbrance to it, somebody else claiming to have bought some grass on it for this year. He wished to know to whom the grass belonged, and was told that if the other man could prove that he bought the grass before he, Polis, bought the land, the former could take it whether the latter knew it or not. To which he only answered, “Strange!” He went over this several times, fairly sat down to it, with his back to a tree, as if he meant to confine us to this topic henceforth; but as he made no headway, only reached the jumping-off place of his wonder at white men’s institutions after each explanation, we let the subject die.

He said that he had fifty acres of grass, potatoes, etc., somewhere above Oldtown, besides some about his house; that he hired a good deal of his work, hoeing, etc., and preferred white men to Indians because “they keep steady and know how.”

After dinner we returned southward along the shore, in the canoe, on account of the difficulty of

climbing over the rocks and fallen trees, and began to ascend the mountain along the edge of the precipice. But, a smart shower coming up just then, the Indian crept under his canoe, while we, protected by our rubber coats, proceeded to botanize. So we sent him back to the camp for shelter, agreeing that he should come for us with his canoe toward night. It had rained a little in the forenoon, and we trusted that this would be the clearing-up shower, which it proved; but our feet and legs were thoroughly wet by the bushes. The clouds breaking away a little, we had a glorious wild view, as we ascended, of the broad lake with its numerous forest-clad islands extending beyond our sight both north and south, and the boundless forest undulating away from its shores on every side, as densely packed as a rye-field and enveloping nameless mountains in succession. It was a perfect lake of the woods.

Looking southward, the heavens were completely overcast, the mountains capped with clouds, and the lake generally wore a dark and stormy appearance, but from its surface six or eight miles distant there was reflected upward through the misty air a bright blue tinge from the unseen sky of another latitude beyond. They probably had a clear sky then at the south end of the lake.

Again we mistook a little rocky islet seen through the “drisk,” with some taller bare trunks or stumps on it, for the steamer with its smoke-pipes, but as it had not changed its position after half an hour we were undeceived. So much do the works of man resemble the works of nature. A moose might mistake a steamer for a floating isle, and not be scared till he heard its puffing or its whistle.

If I wished to see a mountain or other scenery under the most favorable auspices, I would go to it in foul weather so as to be there when it cleared up. We are then in the most suitable mood, and nature is most fresh and inspiring. There is no serenity so fair as that which is just established in a tearful eye.

Jackson, in his "Report on the Geology of Maine," says: "Hornstone, which will answer for flints, occurs in various parts of the State. The largest mass of this stone known in the world is Mount Kineo, upon Moosehead Lake, which appears to be entirely composed of it, and rises seven hundred feet above the lake level. This variety of hornstone I have seen in every part of New England in the form of Indian arrow-heads, hatchets, chisels, etc., which were probably obtained from this mountain by the aboriginal inhabitants of the country." I have myself found hundreds of arrow-heads made of the same material. It is generally slate-colored, with white specks, becoming a uniform white where exposed to the light and air. I picked up a small thin piece which had so sharp an edge that I used it as a knife, and, to see what I could do, fairly cut off an aspen one inch thick with it, by bending it and making many cuts; though I cut my fingers badly with the back of it in the meanwhile.

From the summit of the precipice which forms the southern and eastern sides of this mountain peninsula, five or six hundred feet high, we probably might have jumped down to the water, or to the seemingly dwarfish trees on the narrow neck of land which connects it with the main. It is a dangerous place to try the steadiness of your nerves.

The plants which attracted our attention on this mountain were the mountain cinquefoil, abundant

and in bloom still at the very base by the waterside, very beautiful harebells overhanging the precipice, bearberry, the Canada blueberry, wild holly, the great round-leaved orchis, bunchberry, reddening as we ascended, green at the base of the mountain, red at the top, and the small fern *Woodsia ilvensis*, growing in tufts, now in fruit. Having explored the wonders of the mountain, and the weather being now cleared up, we commenced the descent. We met the Indian, puffing and panting, about one third of the way up, but thinking that he must be near the top. On reaching the canoe we found that he had caught a lake trout weighing about three pounds, while we were on the mountain.

When we got to the camp, the canoe was taken out and turned over, and a log laid across it to prevent its being blown away. The Indian cut some large logs of damp and rotten wood to smoulder and keep fire through the night. The trout was fried for supper. Our tent was of thin cotton cloth and quite small, forming with the ground a triangular prism closed at the rear end, six feet long, seven wide, and four high, so that we could barely sit up in the middle. It required two forked stakes, a smooth ridgepole, and a dozen or more pins to pitch it. It kept off dew and wind and an ordinary rain, and answered our purpose well enough. We reclined within it till bedtime, each with his baggage at his head, or else sat about the fire, having hung our wet clothes on a pole before the fire for the night.

As we sat there, just before night, looking out through the dusky wood, the Indian heard a noise which he said was made by a snake. He imitated it at my request, making a low whistling note—*pheet*—*pheet*—two or three times repeated, somewhat like

the peep of the hyla, but not so loud. He said that he had never seen them while making it, but going to the spot he finds the snake. This, he said, was a sign of rain. When I had selected this place for our camp he had remarked that there were snakes there. "But they won't do any hurt," I said.

"Oh, no," he answered, "just as you say; it makes no difference to me."

He lay on the right side of the tent, because, as he said, he was partly deaf in one ear, and he wanted to lie with his good ear up. As we lay there he inquired if I ever heard "Indian sing." I replied that I had not often, and asked him if he would not favor us with a song. He readily assented, and, lying on his back, with his blanket wrapped around him, he commenced a slow, somewhat nasal, yet musical chant, in his own language, which probably was taught his tribe long ago by the Catholic missionaries. He translated it to us, sentence by sentence, afterward. It proved to be a very simple religious exercise or hymn, the burden of which was that there was only one God who ruled all the world. His singing carried me back to the period of the discovery of America, when Europeans first encountered the simple faith of the Indian. There was, indeed, a beautiful simplicity about it; nothing of the dark and savage, only the mild and infantile. The sentiments of humility and reverence chiefly were expressed.

It was a dense and damp spruce and fir wood in which we lay, and, except for our fire, perfectly dark; and when I awoke in the night, I either heard an owl from deeper in the forest behind us, or a loon from a distance over the lake. Getting up some time after midnight to collect the scattered brands together, while my companions were sound asleep, I observed, partly in

the fire, which had ceased to blaze, a perfectly regular elliptical ring of light, about five inches in its shortest diameter, six or seven in its longer, and from one eighth to one quarter of an inch wide. It was fully as bright as the fire, but not reddish or scarlet like a coal, but a white and slumbering light, like the glowworm's. I saw at once that it must be phosphorescent wood, which I had often heard of, but never chanced to see. Putting my finger on it, with a little hesitation, I found that it was a piece of dead moosewood which the Indian had cut off in a slanting direction the evening before.

Using my knife, I discovered that the light proceeded from that portion of the sapwood immediately under the bark, and thus presented a regular ring at the end, and when I pared off the bark and cut into the sap, it was all aglow along the log. I was surprised to find the wood quite hard and apparently sound, though probably decay had commenced in the sap, and I cut out some little triangular chips, and, placing them in the hollow of my hand, carried them into the camp, waked my companion, and showed them to him. They lit up the inside of my hand, revealing the lines and wrinkles, and appearing exactly like coals of fire raised to a white heat. I noticed that part of a decayed stump within four or five feet of the fire, an inch wide and six inches long, soft and shaking wood, shone with equal brightness.

I neglected to ascertain whether our fire had anything to do with this, but the previous day's rain and long-continued wet weather undoubtedly had.

I was exceedingly interested by this phenomenon. It could hardly have thrilled me more if it had taken the form of letters, or of the human face. I little thought that there was such a light shining in the darkness of

the wilderness for me.

The next day the Indian told me their name for the light—*artosoqu*'—and on my inquiring concerning the will-o'-the-wisp he said that his "folks" sometimes saw fires passing along at various heights, even as high as the trees, and making a noise. I was prepared after this to hear of the most startling and unimagined phenomena witnessed by "his folks," they are abroad at all hours and seasons in scenes so unfrequented by white men. Nature must have made a thousand revelations to them which are still secrets to us.

I did not regret my not having seen this before, since I now saw it under circumstances so favorable. I was in just the frame of mind to see something wonderful, and this was a phenomenon adequate to my circumstances and expectation, and it put me on the alert to see more like it. I let science slide, and rejoiced in that light as if it had been a fellow creature. A scientific *explanation*, as it is called, would have been altogether out of place there. That is for pale daylight. Science with its retorts would have put me to sleep; it was the opportunity to be ignorant that I improved. It made a believer of me more than before. I believed that the woods were not tenantless, but choke-full of honest spirits as good as myself any day—not an empty chamber in which chemistry was left to work alone, but an inhabited house. It suggested, too, that the same experience always gives birth to the same sort of belief or religion. One revelation has been made to the Indian, another to the white man. I have much to learn of the Indian, nothing of the missionary. I am not sure but all that would tempt me to teach the Indian my religion would be his promise to teach me *his*. Long enough I had heard of irrelevant things; now

at length I was glad to make acquaintance with the light that dwells in rotten wood.

I kept those little chips and wet them again the next night, but they emitted no light.

<sup>2</sup> The name dipper is applied to several species of water-birds that are notable for their skill in diving.