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PEOPLE AND NATURE

Nature affords for our contemplation subjects from the minutest to the most grand . . . the farther we investigate her secrets the wider appears the range she opens to us. The nearer view we take of her, the more captivating does she appear.

—“STUDIES IN NATURE,” 1839

America was . . . the Domain of Nature.

—“ROMANCE IN AMERICA,” 1844

Against absolute authority there was a counter influence, rudely and wildly antagonistic. Canada was at the very portal of the great interior wilderness. The St. Lawrence and the Lakes were the highway to that domain of savage freedom.

—THE OLD RÉGIME, 1874

Conway, Thursday Evening July 22nd
1841

Dear Father

I write, as in duty bound, to relieve your spirit of the overwhelming load of anxiety which doubtless oppresses you, seeing that your son is a wanderer in a strange land—a land of precipices and lakes, bears, wolves, and wildcats. Not only has my good genius shown me in reply through such manifold perils but he has not insinuated into my heart such a spirit of constancy with my lot that I doubt is in no less measure reconciled to any measure of change. Having a serious reading man the son you may in thirty miles walk on one of the best days that my sketchy experience can recall, I am as well in mind and body as when I last saw you. I will take care to adjust myself to no further working of events. Indeed, I have determined, in consequence of the unaccountable loss and distress of the present Autumn, neither to write to you, but to perform the whole journey by stages and, for all some sufficient reason I have judged expedient to push on for the moment as fast as possible, the prospect of a little company being added to the other attractions. Accordingly, I started this afternoon from 12:30

The eighteen-year-old explorer tells of his exploits:

“Dear Father,

I write, as in duty bound, to relieve your spirit of the overwhelming load of anxiety which doubtless oppresses you, seeing that your son is a wanderer in a strange land—a land of precipices and lakes, bears, wolves, and wildcats.” (Parkman to his father, July 22, 1841, from Conway, New Hampshire; courtesy Daniel Sargent and Massachusetts Historical Society.)