“OUR PROFESSORS DO NOT OFTEN COMMIT MURDER”

1. Comment by Harvard President Jared Sparks.

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Doctor John White Webster, a fat and sassy man. According to Horace Mann, Sr., taking full privilege of hindsight, and relying upon the science of phrenology, it had always seemed that there was something wrong with him:

I think his head was terribly wide at the base.

This was not only a physician but also a Harvard professor. And, as President Jared Sparks took care to point out,

Harvard professors do not often commit murder.

The current explanation for this hanging of a Harvard professor is that the authorities in Boston had mousetrapped themselves—they had on entirely circumstantial evidence hanged a friendless negro seaman, Washington Goode who had gone to his grave protesting his entire innocence, and therefore they could not in all conscience refrain from hanging this high-status white man merely because the evidence had again been circumstantial. That current explanation has a flaw in that they had a way out of their predicament which they neglected to utilize. They could simply have gone "Ooooh, my consciousness has suddenly been raised and now I see that it is irremediably perverse to kill people to teach them a lesson they won’t forget." They could have done away with the death penalty as Michigan had in 1846, as Rhode Island would in 1852, and as Wisconsin would in 1853. Why did they not opt for this "easy out"?

“NARRATIVE HISTORY” AMOUNTS TO FABULATION, THE REAL STUFF BEING MERE CHRONOLOGY
May 20, Monday: John White Webster was born in Anne Street (this was before it became one of Boston’s red-light districts). His father had an apothecary shop across the street from their home. This baby was destined to take the Hippocratic Oath and then betray it.

**NOBODY COULD GUESS WHAT WOULD HAPPEN NEXT**
March 12, Thursday: Harriet Frederica Hickling was born on the island of Sao Miguel in the Azores, daughter of Thomas Hickling and Sarah Falder Hickling.
The USS Constitution went on a two-year cruise to Europe and would then go into the Washington Navy Yard for repairs. Aboard it, Doctor George Parkman was headed for France (while on the continent he would meet the Marquis de Lafayette, Count von Rumford, and the Baron Georges Cuvier). Meanwhile, John White Webster would be studying medicine at Guy's Hospital in London, where John Keats was a fellow student.²

LIFE IS LIVED FORWARD BUT UNDERSTOOD BACKWARD?
— NO, THAT’S GIVING TOO MUCH TO THE HISTORIAN’S STORIES.
LIFE ISN’T TO BE UNDERSTOOD EITHER FORWARD OR BACKWARD.

2. Keats would graduate as a certified apothecary. Frequent sore throats would lead his physician to prescribe mercury, which at the time had a very general use. The restaurant in Guy’s Hospital—until recently named in Keats’s honor—has been transformed into a McDonalds.
In roughly this timeframe John White Webster and George Parkman studied under Professor John Collins Warren at the old Harvard Medical College on Mason Street in Boston (Dr. Webster would murder Dr. Parkman, and be hanged).

Because he was a Quaker pacifist who had tried to remain positively oriented during the Revolution, and because he practiced smallpox vaccination, Dr. Benjamin Waterhouse was dismissed from this medical faculty.

THE FUTURE IS MOST READILY PREDICTED IN RETROSPECT
Doctor John White Webster became a physician in the Azores Islands, where he would marry a daughter of the US consul. (At the end of her life, as a widow, sadder and wiser, she would return there.)
May 16, Saturday: Doctor John White Webster got married with Harriet Fredrica Hickling, daughter of US Vice-Consul Thomas Hickling and Sarah Falder Hickling on the island of São Miguel in the Azores.

DO I HAVE YOUR ATTENTION? GOOD.
Doctor Walter Channing was made the Dean of Medical Faculty at Harvard College.

Doctor John White Webster went into medical practice in Boston with a Doctor Gorham.

CHANGE IS ETERNITY, STASIS A FIGMENT
Doctor John White Webster put out *A Description of the Island of St. Michael*, a definitive mineralogical and geological survey of this island in the Azores. Upon the recommendation of Doctor George Parkman among others, he was chosen as a Harvard Medical School lecturer at a salary of $800 per year.3

3. After the murder of Doctor Parkman, Doctor Oliver Wendell Holmes would visit Professor Webster’s prison cell as he awaited execution. The fact that Harvard was a bastion of white righteousness has it goes without saying nothing whatever to do with these sad events.
Dr. John White Webster became an associate editor of the *Boston Journal of Philosophy and the Arts* (until 1826).
Pietro Bachi found work in the United States as a teacher of Italian and Spanish at Harvard College, at a salary of $500 per year.

Benjamin Peirce, Senior became Harvard’s librarian.

Doctor John White Webster compiled A MANUAL OF CHEMISTRY.

Richard Hildreth graduated from Harvard and would teach school for one year, at the Concord Academy in Concord, Massachusetts, before deciding to follow the example of Sir Walter Scott and pursue a career in law and literature.

In about this year Nathaniel Baker arrived at the age of 80 and sold his portion of the Baker farm to Amos Baker’s son James Baker.

Elizur Wright, Junior graduated at Yale College and went to teach in a school at Groton.
Doctor John White Webster brought out an edition of Andrew Fyfe’s ELEMENTS OF CHEMISTRY. He was promoted from being a Harvard Medical School lecturer in chemistry, mineralogy, and geology at a salary of $800 per year to be Harvard’s Erving Professor of Chemistry at a salary of $1,200.
Doctor John White Webster, who started as a lecturer at Harvard College for only $800 per year (merely twice as much as a skilled laborer could make) and had an earning potential of only $1,200 as a full professor of chemistry in the Medical College (merely three times as much as a skilled laborer could make), was forced to sell the grand home he had acquired on Concord Avenue in Cambridge, and relocate his wife and beauteous daughters to less expensive digs at 22 Garden Street, near the Washington Elm where founding father of our nation General George Washington had mustered his troops on Cambridge Common.

During Henry Thoreau’s early college years a well-to-do free black family in Boston purchased the pew deed to a pew in the Park Street Church. To make sure these black parishioners understood how white Christians felt about them, the white Christians nailed shut the door to their pew, and then, capitulating to popular sentiment, the trustees of this house of worship revoked this deed. Hearing of these events, another Boston Protestant church inserted a clause on their pew deed documentary form — that pews were transferable only to “respectable white persons.”

WHAT I’M WRITING IS TRUE BUT NEVER MIND
YOU CAN ALWAYS LIE TO YOURSELF
Professor John White Webster brought out a translation of Justus von Liebig’s *Animal Chemistry or Organic Chemistry*.

Disputes between volunteer icecutters and landowners around Fresh Pond caused a Harvard College commission chaired by Law Professor Greenleaf to establish the concept of “ice rights” or “surface rights,” which in the great American tradition of commodification could be used, leased, or sold (they were, like, derivatives).
Visiting Harvard College and Boston town, Charles Dickens discovered this place to be chock full of sweetness and light:

There is no doubt that much of the intellectual refinement and superiority of Boston, is referable to the quiet influence of the University of Cambridge, which is within three or four miles of the city. The resident professors at that university are gentlemen of learning and varied attainments; and are, without one exception that I can call to mind, men who would shed a grace upon, and do honour to, any society in the civilised world. Many of the resident gentry in Boston and its neighbourhood, and I think I am not mistaken in adding, a large majority of those who are attached to the liberal professions there, have been educated at this same school. Whatever the defects of American universities may be, they disseminate no prejudices; rear no bigots; dig up the buried ashes of no old superstitions; never interpose between the people and their improvement; exclude no man because of his religious opinions; above all, in their whole course of study and instruction, recognise a world, and a broad one too, lying beyond the college walls.

It was a source of inexpressible pleasure to me to observe the almost imperceptible, but not less certain effect, wrought by this institution among the small community of Boston; and to note at every turn the humanising tastes and desires it has engendered; the affectionate friendships to which it has given rise; the amount of vanity and prejudice it has dispelled. The golden calf they worship at Boston is a pigmy compared with the giant effigies set up in other parts of that vast counting-house which lies beyond the Atlantic; and the almighty dollar sinks into something comparatively insignificant, amidst a whole Pantheon of better gods. Above all, I sincerely believe that the public institutions and charities of this capital of Massachusetts are as nearly perfect, as the most considerate wisdom benevolence, and humanity, can make them. I never in my life was more affected by the contemplation of happiness, under circumstances of privation and bereavement, than in my visits to these establishments.

At Harvard, Doctor John White Webster was able to borrow $400 from his wealthy Boston friend Doctor George Parkman.  

WALDEN: [T]hat economy of living which is synonymous with philosophy is not even sincerely professed in our colleges.

4. Today’s equivalent would be the price of, say, a new Toyota Avalon.
William Thaddeus Harris graduated from Harvard College. He would study for the law, but would never practice.

The rules of “rugby” football, which dated to William Webb Ellis’s famous act of 1823, were formalized.

Professor John White Webster had gotten enthused about a mastodon skeleton Mammut americanum that had been found in a New Jersey bog in 1844 and was available on the market for only $3,000, and jumped at the chance to acquire it for the Harvard Museum supposing that the officials of the college would be as enthusiastic as he was about these magnificently preserved bones and supposing that he could easily raise the funds to reimburse him for his grand procurement (but in this year he discovered that he had been quite mistaken, because some of the local folks whose names had been inscribed on the presentation plaques had failed to make good on their promises and had left him holding the bag for the balance of the debt).
Professor Webster would be undaunted by this residual obligation. He knew he would be able to turn to his richie-rich Boston acquaintance Doctor George Parkman, who although he was personally rather unpleasant was the sole owner of a whole potfull of downtown real estate, for a personal loan to cover the balance.

A new building for the Harvard Medical College was erected upon land belonging to Doctor Parkman down on the flats of the Charles River at the foot of North Grove Street near the Massachusetts Hospital on Allen Street (now Massachusetts General) and near the New Gaol at Foundry Wharf, all of this in the neighborhood of the tollhouse at the Boston approaches to the Cambridge Bridge:

(Don’t go looking for this two-story brick building set on piers at the waterfront near Massachusetts General Hospital. It was long ago torn down.)
A pamphlet appeared in Boston summarizing the munificence and beneficence of the 1,496 men in the commonwealth who were worth at least $50,000, each.

Strict rules were utilized for the determination of benevolence. Since Queen Victoria had given $900,000 for relief in the Irish Potato Famine out of her vast fortune, the size of which was approximately known — by computation a Boston laborer receiving an average wage would have needed to donate $0.80 in order “to be precisely as benevolent as Her Majesty.” Similarly, the editors knew of a Boston man with an annual income of $20.00 who annually gave $0.50 to charity. It was on the basis of this sort of “widow’s mite” high standard that only 375 of the 1,496 were being declared to be “more or less Benevolent”:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Amount of property owned</th>
<th>$244,780,000</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Number worth over one million dollars</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Number worth just one million dollars</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Number worth three fourths of a million dollars</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Number worth half a million dollars</td>
<td>45</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Number worth quarter of a million dollars</td>
<td>147</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Number who began poor, or nearly so</td>
<td>705</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Number who rec’d all, or the greater part, by inheritance or marriage</td>
<td>282</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Number of rich Farmers</td>
<td>90</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Number of rich Manufacturers (Cotton, Woolen, &amp;c.)</td>
<td>53</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Number of rich Merchants (and Various Traders)</td>
<td>463</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Number of rich Lawyers (including Judges)</td>
<td>75</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Number of rich Physicians</td>
<td>31</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Number of rich Clergymen</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Number of rich Brokers (including some speculators)</td>
<td>46</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Number of rich Publishers</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Number of rich Editors</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Number of rich Shoe makers (and Dealers)</td>
<td>50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Number of rich Tailors (and Clothes-Dealers)</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Number of rich Carpenters (and Ship-Builders)</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Number of rich Masons</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Number of rich Butchers (and Provision-Dealers)</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Number of rich Distillers</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Number ascertained to be more or less Benevolent</td>
<td>375</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Number of rich Old Bachelors</td>
<td>68</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
While this benevolence was going on in Boston in the New World, in Ireland the apparently sound and meaty white tubers of the new potato crop, upon which so very much depended, suddenly again disintegrated into stinking black slime — just as they had in the previous harvest season. This episode of the “late blight” of Phytophthora infestans was merely as bad as before but the population was already in an emaciated condition.

Therefore a visit which had been planned for Queen Victoria would obviously need to be postponed. Of over 100,000 malnourished, cholera-ridden Irish, off-loaded from the converted cargo holds of sailing ships into Canadian quarantine stations, one-third died within this year. Next to a wharf at Montréal, in a pit, 6,000 bodies were dumped and the cause of death was set down simply as “ship fever.” Spectators on the banks of the St. Lawrence noticed that, as survivors of the trans-Atlantic voyage were being barged upriver toward the Canadian interior, they appeared too weak to return the waves of children on shore.

We don’t know precisely how many people have starved to death or, weakened by starvation, succumbed to diarrhea and fever or to cholera in Ireland during the ensuing period, but we do know that the first great die-off would occur during the winter of 1846-1847. A table prepared after the fact by Census Commissioners, presented here, in all probability under-estimates the mortality because of the manner in which they collected data: for a family all of whose members succumbed zero deaths would be tabulated. Of the total number of deaths, which would be between 500,000 and 1,500,000, the percentage of that total which would occur in each
year probably worked out to something like this:

**Mortality, expressed as %ages of the 1841 Population**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1842</td>
<td>5.1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1843</td>
<td>5.2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1844</td>
<td>5.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1845</td>
<td>6.4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1846</td>
<td>9.1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1847</td>
<td>18.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1848</td>
<td>15.4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1849</td>
<td>17.9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1850</td>
<td>12.2%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Prior to 1845 the average intake of an [Irish](#) adult during a winter had consisted of ten to twelve pounds of potatoes, with buttermilk, daily. In the oncoming winter it would consist of one pound of Indian meal or one bowl of soup with one slice of bread — and to prove oneself worthy to receive such sustenance one would need to be doing daily hard labor.

In this year a painting was made of [Albert Edward, Prince of Wales](#). The 5-year-old appears well enough nourished.

A Mrs. Thynne brought some of the corals of Torquay to London “for the purpose of study and the entertainment of friends.” Each day, this lady’s housemaid[^5] would need to spend thirty to forty-five minutes

[^5]: Possibly, but of course not necessarily, an [Irish](#) woman.
pouring the six gallons of salt water of the aquarium backward and forward before an open window, in order to keep it fresh. The “aquarium craze,” something that Brits would be referring to as “sea-gardening,” had fairly begun.

On a related note (?), the “Boston Museum” was constructed on Tremont Street in Boston. Many edifices of this type were in this period becoming economically possible, due in part to the wealth being generated by the sea trade and in part to of the eagerness of these Irish unfortunates to part with their labor for ridiculously low wages. —Hey, it’s an ill wind that blows nobody any good!

At this point John Mitchel and other Young Irelanders who had come to disdain the doctrine of “moral force” broke with Daniel O’Connell and founded the Irish Confederation, devoted to an agenda of the doing of harm so that good might result. —Hey, let’s give terrorism a chance!

Thomas Carlyle would be doing his part, from this year into 1851, by making a study of the situation in Ireland in order to inform curious Englishmen what they ought to make of it.

April 30, Thursday: The diary of William Cranch Bond of Harvard Observatory reports

a happy day for Cambridge ... a day of as pure and unallowed enjoyment as perhaps the world ever gave its votaries.

The occasion was the inauguration dinner and fireworks in honor of a new president for Harvard College, Edward Everett. It had been the chemistry professor of Harvard Medical College, the convivial Doctor John White Webster, who had insisted that they must have fireworks.

6. This structure is not to be confused with the “Boston Museum of Natural History” which was constructed in 1863 in the newly filled Back Bay and which eventually became the Museum of Science. This structure wasn’t a museum at all, it was a 1,200-seat auditorium at which plays were regularly performed. It was termed a “museum” in order to reassure blue-blooded Boston clients who might have been reluctant to visit anything so vulgar as a “theater.”

7. President-elect Everett might have felt like Nanky-Poo in the opera “Madame Butterfly.” His three years in this office would later be characterized as the “most wretched” of his life.
Dr. Samuel Kneeland, Jr. received Harvard Medical College’s Boylston Prize, of either $50 or a gold medal of that value at the recipient’s option, for an essay “Hydrotherapy” in the American Journal of the Medical Sciences (Philadelphia, XIV, 75-108). He would spend two years in professional studies in Paris before beginning the practice of medicine in Boston. He published a translation of ANDRY’S DISEASES OF THE HEART. He would pass some time in Brazil, and also visit the Lake Superior copper region.

Doctor Oliver Wendell Holmes became Parkman Professor of Anatomy and Physiology at Harvard Medical College. 8

Professor John White Webster succeeded in getting the $400 he had borrowed from Doctor George Parkman in 1842 brought forward into a loan of $2,432 funded by a syndicate of his Harvard College colleagues including Parkman. As security for this note he offered his collection of gemstones and geological specimens.

8. Dr. Holmes would hold this post for the next 40 years. He would become dean of the Harvard Medical School, a post he would hold until 1882.
George Heywood, son of Concord’s Dr. Abiel Heywood, graduated from Harvard.

The eminently successful debtor, Professor John White Webster, hit the Boston richie Robert Gould Shaw up for “a loan,” but Shaw evidently knew his man for his response was to offer to make this man a gift — of course an outright gift is something which a professional debtor is ever required to reject for it blows the essential cover story, that the professional debtor is actually a full-fledged participating member of society but needs a tiny temporary boost by his friends in order to get past some unexpected and unanticipatable difficulties. So Doctor Webster kept petitioning for a loan, and as part of this con job he made the mistake of mentioning that he could offer collateral — that as collateral for this new “loan” he could offer his wonderful collection of gemstones and geological specimens. Now, he actually couldn’t, for this collection had already been designated as the collateral for the “loan” this Harvard professor had obtained in 1847 from a syndicate of his colleagues, a loan which he had of course not paid back. When Doctor George Parkman, one of the people from whom Professor Webster had already “borrowed” money, would find out about this new piece of double-dealing, it would be the straw that broke the camel’s back. He affected outright rage and began to harass and attempt to humiliate Professor Webster not only in front of his colleagues but also in front of his students, his wife and his daughters. There is much contemporary testimony to the very repetitive but very inventive, and very demeaning and very insulting remarks, which Dr. Parkman made about Professor Webster both to his face and behind his back. Clearly, Doctor Parkman, one of Boston’s delightful eccentrics with manifold personality problems, was playing the psychological game which as a slumlord he well knew how to play, the game which has aptly been titled “Now I’ve Got You, You Son Of A Bitch.”

9. For elaboration of this, there’s only one place to start, and it is part two, titled “Death of a Harvard Man,” in:

November 19, Monday: Doctor George Parkman, whose personal fortune amounted to some half a million dollars (that’d be some fifty million, in today’s currency) went to Professor John White Webster’s office to see if he couldn’t humiliate him some more.

November 23, Friday morning: On this day of public lectures, Professor John White Webster went to Doctor George Parkman’s mansion at 8 Walnut Street, to request a meeting for that afternoon at his office.
November 23, Friday afternoon: Doctor George Parkman had called at the clock shop of William Bond and Son to pay part of a bill, and had promised to return in the afternoon but did not do so.

This was the shop which was producing the cash flow which was enabling the Bonds to run the Harvard Observatory without any salaries. When it later turned out to be his friend and colleague Professor John White Webster the chemistry professor of the medical college who was arrested for the murder of Doctor Parkman, however, William Cranch Bond was defensive and incredulous:

We who are intimately acquainted with Doctor Webster cannot harbor a suspicion of the kind for an instant.

Doctor Parkman was then seen at the Massachusetts Hospital on Allen Street (now Massachusetts General), and that was the last recorded sighting. From the later bill of indictment, we learn that one account of what happened that Friday afternoon at the Harvard Medical College was that “John White Webster with a certain knife which he then and there in his right hand had held, the said George Parkman then and there feloniously willfully and of his malice aforethought did strike, beat and kick upon the head, breast, back and belly, sides and other parts of him, the said George Parkman and then and there feloniously willfully and with malice aforethought did cast and throw the said George Parkman down unto and upon the floor with great force and violence there giving unto the said George Parkman then and there as well as by the beating, stabbing, striking and kicking of him several mortal wounds and bruises in and upon the head, breast, belly and other sides of
the body … of which said mortal strokes, wounds and bruises he the said George Parkman then and there instantly died.” From the “confession” which the Unitarian minister, the Reverend George Putnam said that Professor John White Webster had made to him in his jail cell after being condemned to death by hanging, we learn that another account of what happened that Friday afternoon at the Harvard Medical College was that Doctor Parkman was waving a copy of the letter of recommendation which he had originally prepared to help Doctor Webster obtain an appointment on the Harvard faculty many years before, and had said to Doctor Webster “I got you into your position and now I will get you out of it.” Whereupon Doctor Webster became enraged and fearful and, grabbing up a stump of grapevine from the stovewood, whacked Doctor George Parkman once solidly along the side of the head, killing him instantly.
TRIAL
OF
PROFESSOR JOHN W. WEBSTER,
FOR THE
MURDER
OF
DOCTOR GEORGE PARKMAN.
REPORTED EXCLUSIVELY FOR THE N. Y. DAILY GLOBE.

NEW YORK:
STRINGER & TOWNSEND, 222 BROADWAY.
PRINTED AT THE GLOBE OFFICE.
1850.
November 23, Friday evening: Professor John White Webster informed his wife that he had settled all the family’s debts with Doctor George Parkman for $483 and change, so, now they would be able to make a new start of things. Meanwhile he was dismembering the body of Doctor Parkman with the 6-inch Bowie knife he kept on the desk in his office, beginning by burning up the incriminating head with the accusing expression on its face, in the assay oven of the Harvard Medical College.
November 25, Sunday morning: Handbills were out, asking for information on the whereabouts of the missing Doctor George Parkman.

Professor John White Webster was burning more and more body parts in the assay oven, but burning something as wet as a human body sure takes a heck of a lot of firewood, doesn’t it? At the trial, there would be expert testimony from another Boston medico, who had had problems when he attempted to burn the body of “a pirate” after dissecting it — for one thing, his neighbors had been complaining about the smell of burning flesh that was permeating the neighborhood.

According to BIRTHS, MARRIAGES AND DEATHS OF THE TOWN OF CONCORD, MASSACHUSETTS (Groton, 1894), Charles Bartlett of Concord & Nancy Fuller of Groton filed an intention to marry.
November 28, Wednesday: The handbills posted all over the place were causing the nickname for the slumlord Doctor George Parkman, “The Pedestrian” (because he had never seen the need to indulge himself with the ownership of a horse and buggy), to become a cant term for “cheapskate” or “tinhorn” in Boston. A revised flyer was therefore put out, by fellow rich Bostonian Robert Gould Shaw, speculating that the Doctor had been done in and asking for any events which had attracted suspicion. Of course, it was going to be hard to figure out, which of all the very many people who had had reason to detest the deceased had been the one actually to have volunteered to have done this dirty deed.

Professor John White Webster still had a long way to go, in burning up the pieces of Doctor Parkman’s corpse. Human bodies are alarmingly difficult to dispose of.
November 29, Thursday: The struggling family of Professor John White Webster spent their Thanksgiving holiday in the relief of knowing that their financial troubles were for the time being behind them, the immensely wealthy family of Doctor George Parkman spent their Thanksgiving holiday in fretting about what might have become of their husband and father –the slumlord whom so many people hated– and the swamp-yankee family of Ephraim Littlefield, the janitor of the Harvard Medical College, spent their Thanksgiving holiday feasting upon the big bird that had been so unexpectedly (and so unprecedentedly) presented to them by the suddenly-overly-generous Professor Webster.

Here Professor Webster presents the suspicious turkey to the Littlefields (a reenactment).
The Littlefield family, as portrayed on an “The American Experience” television program.
November 30, Friday: After Boston police detective Derastus Clapp had inspected Professor John White Webster’s laboratory at the Harvard Medical College without discovering anything, the building’s janitor Ephraim Littlefield had taken matters into his own hands and chiseled his way through five courses of bricks to the point at which he was able to stick his head and arm, and a light, into the cavity under the building and sight a human pelvis and other body parts on the mud flats of the Charles River beneath Professor Webster’s privy hole.¹⁰

I took the crowbar and knocked the bigness of the hole right through. There are five courses of brick in the wall. I managed to get in ... and to get the light and my head into the hole, and then ... I held my light forward, and the first thing I saw was the pelvis of a man and two parts of a leg.

¹⁰ Littlefield would eventually be able to collect the $3,000 reward offered by the Parkman family, and retire.
Suspecting these body parts to be those of Doctor George Parkman, Detective Clapp took a coach, with two other officers for backup, to the Webster home in Cambridge. Stopping the coach away from the residence, Clapp proceeded alone to encounter the professor on his porch as he was saying farewell to a visitor. The detective requested that the professor accompany him to his laboratory to perform a second search. Webster went back inside for his hat and coat but then, as he approached the coach and sighted the other officers, claimed to have forgotten his keys. The officers deterred his effort to return to the house by telling him that “it was of no consequence” since they would be able to get in. The coach proceeded over Craigie’s Bridge where the police had been searching the waters earlier, and the conversation turned to the search efforts for the missing doctor. Professor Webster commented that he had last seen Dr. Parkman the week prior at the college, and that the doctor had departed alive. Noticing when the coach turned onto Brighton Street, he became agitated and said “The driver is going the wrong way.” Detective Clapp said that the driver was “probably green” and would get back on course. As they stopped in front of the jail, Professor Webster asked “What does this all mean?” The police escorted him inside the building before informing him that he was being confined on a charge of murder.
December 1, Saturday: A less-than-lifesize statue of Aristides the Sophist, author of SACRED TALES (HIEROI LOGOI), was unveiled in Louisburg Square on top of Boston’s Beacon Hill. (What was this, some parlor ornament that some Boston richie was trying to find a decent way to dispose of?)

In front of Harvard Medical College, the medical school of Harvard College, a surly mob of people had assembled who well knew that the students therein had been paying graverobbers (termed humorously “resurrectionists” at the time) to keep them supplied them with the fresh corpses of their relatives, for use in dissection.

Inside, the scorched torso and one of the thighs of Doctor George Parkman were being discovered at the bottom of an old tea chest packed full of chemical equipment. None of these downtown denizens gave a damn for Doctor Parkman the slumlord — but what an excellent opportunity this was to agitate to prevent the medical students and faculty from stealing and defiling any more bodies of poor people!

Since his obtaining enough money to retire from business in 1841, Ebenezer Elliott had been living quietly at Great Houghton, near Barnsley. On this day after long illness and depression, he died at the age of 68. The body would be placed in Darfield churchyard.

John Greenleaf Whittier would write a poem about him:

**Elliott**

Hands off! thou tithe-fat plunderer! play
No trick of priestcraft here!
Back, puny lordling! darest thou lay
A hand on Elliott’s bier?
Alive, your rank and pomp, as dust,
Beneath his feet he trod:
He knew the locust swarm that cursed
The harvest-fields of God.

On these pale lips, the smothered thought
Which England’s millions feel,
A fierce and fearful splendour caught,
As from his forge the steel.
Strong-armed as Thor, — and a shower of fire
His smitten anvil flung;
God’s curse, Earth’s wrong, dumb Hunger’s ire,
He gave them all a tongue!

Then let the poor man’s horny hands
Bear up the mighty dead,
And labour’s swart and stalwart bands,
Behind as mourners tread.
Leave cant and craft their baptized bounds,
Leave rank its minister floor;
Give England’s green and daisied grounds
The poet of the poor!

Lay down upon his Sheaf’s green verge
That brave old heart of oak,
With fitting dirge from sounding forge,
And pall of furnace smoke!
Where whirls the stone its dizzy rounds,
And axe and sledge are swung,
And, timing to their stormy sounds,
His stormy lays are sung.

There let the peasant’s step be heard,
The grinder chant his rhyme;
Nor patron’s praise nor dainty word
Befits the man or time.
No soft lament nor dreamer’s sigh
For him whose words were bread,—
The Runic rhyme and spell whereby
The foodless poor were fed!

Pile up thy tombs of rank and pride,
O England, as thou wilt!
With pomp to nameless worth denied,
Emblazon titled guilt!
No part or lot in these we claim;
But, o’er the sounding wave,
A common right to Elliott’s name,
A freehold in his grave!

**Thomas Carlyle**’s *Occasional Discourse on the Negro Question* (the essay which would in 1853 be reissued under the title initially planned, *Occasional Discourse on the Nigger Question*) appeared in *Fraser’s Magazine*. The author would be outraged at the outrage expressed by his readers.

Even more of a “Teutomaniac” than the history professor Thomas Arnold, *Carlyle* asserted that “if the Black gentleman is born to be a servant, and, in fact, is useful in God’s creation only as a servant, then let him hire not by the month, but by a very much longer term.”

11. You know, actually, what this sort of “humor” reminds me of? I once sighted a photograph of a Southern lynching, in which the dead man’s black feet are protruding into the frame of the photograph from above, while all the white guys and their wives and children are clustering around to have their group portrait made. And from the big toe of the hanged man is hanging a piece of this Thomas Carlylish humor in the form of one of those funny little hotel room signs that you put on your outside doorknob, proclaiming something on the order of “Please do not disturb my slumbers.”
According to Simon Heffer’s MORAL DESPERADO: A LIFE OF THOMAS CARLYLE (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1995), pages 276-7:

It is the form and tone, rather than the actual message, that did most of the damage. Carlyle constructs a brilliant parody of an Exeter Hall meeting, with an unnamed speaker spelling out unpalatable truths to an audience driven deeper and deeper into shock. Philanthropy in general he parodies as "the Universal Abolition of Pain Association," which is at risk of turning into a "Sluggard and Scoundrel Protection Society." Carlyle did not feel he was attacking the blacks; his targets were the liberals who were destroying them. This was not, though, how his audience saw it.

He was so open to interpretation because of the callous, heartless and brutally sarcastic language he used. He talks of the emancipated blacks being like the Irish, with a land of plenty they are refusing to exploit, because no one is there to guide them to the greater happiness that exists beyond eating pumpkins. The essay is also an attack on the "dismal science" of economics; the blacks were not more constructively employed because it was in no one's economic interest to do so, just as it was not in Ireland.... He cannot envision the black man being born for any other purpose than to serve; and while he may abhor slavery, he wonders whether being bound for life to a master in other circumstances is not the most humane and appropriate way to deal with the "emancipated," and ease them into civilization. To apply the principles of *laissez-faire* to them was, he argued, cruel, as they had no means to survive on their own. Again (and the allegorical is never far away), all this was true of Ireland, as he saw it.

His strictures about what actually constitutes slavery cannot be easily dismissed, and reflect directly his Irish experiences. "You cannot abolish slavery by act of parliament," he claims, "but can only abolish the name of it, which is very little!"

I encounter these materials myself with mixed feelings, since it is my suspicion that Carlyle may well have been correct in his assertion that a society cannot eliminate a scourge such as human chattel bondage that has grown from the bottom up, by any techniques which proceed merely from the top down. In fact here in the USA, when we would enact the XIIIth Amendment to our federal Constitution in 1865 in the indicated top-down manner, we would not abolish slavery so much as abolish the name of it, exactly as specified here by Carlyle.

For in fact the amendment initially ratified by $\frac{2}{3}$ds of our state legislatures, including by now ratification even
by the sovereign state of Mississippi, does not define precisely what might constitute a “slave,” or “slavery,” or “enslavement,” nor does it proscribe whatever these entities might in some manner eventually be decided to be, but instead it merely extends to the federal congress the authority to enact legislation defining and proscribing these undefined entities, and criminalizing and punishing a certain range of abusive conduct, thus effectively forbidding the other two arms of our federal government, the executive arm and the judicial arm, forever from proscribing or punishing these undefined entities — and indeed, subsequent to this amendment, much as we hate to contemplate this, our federal government has never ever enacted any such proscription, and there has never been any such punishment. In fact in our nation slavery is as unassailable during this Year of Our Lord 2010 as it had been, say, in the year 1810. What a field day of sarcasm a 20th-Century Carlyle would have with us!

December 14, Friday: Boston Coroner Jabez Pratt declared that the remains found in the tea chest at Harvard Medical College, and in the assay oven, and in the basement, were indeed those of the megamillionaire Doctor George Parkman rather than the remains of one or another of the poor stiffs who were being stolen from their graves and cut up in the course of the continuing educational work going on at the college (one way to tell was the absence of any of the preserving chemicals normally used on dissection cadavers).

Professor Jeffries Wyman, an anatomist of Harvard Medical College, testified that he had found no duplicates among the bones in the furnace, indicating that these bones had come from a single human corpse.
Waldo Emerson to his JOURNAL:

Every day shows a new thing to veteran walkers. Yesterday reflections of trees in the ice; snowflakes, perfect rowels, on the ice; beautiful groups of icicles all along the eastern shore of Flint’s Pond, in which, especially where encrusting the bough of a tree, you have the union of the most flowing with the most solidly fixed. Ellery all the way squandering his jewels as if they were icicles, sometimes not comprehended by me, sometimes not heard. How many days can Methusalem go abroad & see somewhat new? When will he have counted the changes of the kaleidoscope?
March 19, Tuesday: In Boston, the trial *in re* the Commonwealth of Massachusetts *v.* John White Webster began:

Massachusetts Attorney General John H. Clifford would be assisted in this prosecution by the Boston attorney George Bemis, hired by the Parkman family for $1,500. This case would be one of the first to use forensic and circumstantial evidence to prove a defendant’s guilt. It would be argued that the accused couldn’t fairly be convicted on circumstantial evidence alone, since circumstantial evidence could not possibly remove every reasonable doubt. Up to that point the standard in murder cases had been proof “to an absolute certainty,” rather than proof “beyond a reasonable doubt,” that the dead body was indeed that of the victim. It would also be pointed out that others besides Professor Webster, such as the janitor, had had access to that laboratory. Judge Lemuel Shaw would issue a legal opinion that would become a basis for a subsequent appeal of the guilty verdict, that “It would be injurious to the best interests of society to have it so ordered that circumstantial proof cannot avail. If it were necessary always to have positive evidence, how many of the acts committed in the community ... would go entirely unpunished?” The attorney George Bemis would act not only as second chair for the prosecution but also as court reporter, eventually offering his notes as the official transcript of the case. He would heavily edit and “slant” this record to demonstrate the correctness of the prosecution case. At the time Boston was a city of 120,000 souls, and there would be all of 60,000 spectators at this trial, many from out of town. How were all these tourists to be accommodated in an era before television cameras and microphones could be set up in a popular courtroom? Tickets were issued, and those waiting in line were divided into groups which would exactly fill the public gallery of the building. Then every ten minutes the constables would clear the public galleries and allow the next group of spectators to file in and take their seats, for their ten minutes of someone else’s fame. The lawyers and judges quickly got used to the noise of this every-ten-minute shuffle.

March 20, Wednesday: *In re* the Commonwealth of Massachusetts *v.* John White Webster.
March 21, Thursday: From the Salem Register: “Hawthorne seeks to vent his spite ... by small sneers at Salem, and by vilifying some of his former associates, to a degree of which we should have supposed any gentleman ... incapable.... The most venomous, malignant, and unaccountable assault is made upon a venerable gentleman, whose chief crime seems to be that he loves a good dinner.”

The chemist Charles T. Jackson, Mrs. Lidian Emerson’s brother the ether controversialist, testified for the prosecution in re the Commonwealth of Massachusetts v. John White Webster that no traces of the normal embalming preservatives had been found in the remains of Doctor George Parkman. He also commented that he noticed that the 6-inch Bowie knife which the professor had habitually kept on his desk had seemed to have been recently cleaned.

In the middle of the testimony there was a ruckus, for a portion of the Tremont House had gone up in flames and fire brigades were rushing to the rescue.
March 22, Friday: In re the Commonwealth of Massachusetts v. John White Webster.

March 23, Saturday: In re the Commonwealth of Massachusetts v. John White Webster.

An issue of Chambers’ Edinburgh Journal:

March 24, Sunday: In re the Commonwealth of Massachusetts v. John White Webster.

Jonathan Hildreth of Concord, a soldier of the Revolution, died at the age of 90 years 1 month and 24 days.

March 25, Monday: In re the Commonwealth of Massachusetts v. John White Webster.

March 26, Tuesday: The prosecution completed the presentation of evidence in re the Commonwealth of Massachusetts v. John White Webster.

12. The Redding & Company that is mentioned in the above snippet from WALDEN; OR, LIFE IN THE WOODS was a periodical depot at 8 State Street in downtown Boston. They served the “easy reading” end of the market. The company had begun as a newspaper depot in the 1830s, became a periodical depot in the 1840s, and by the 1850s was a book publisher and seller as well as a tea merchant. George W. Redding (1824-1892) had started as a newsboy, then became a New-York newspaper distributor, then the proprietor of a periodical depot and a publisher of pamphlets such as “Easy Nat; or, Boston Bars and Boston Boys” (1844). Here is the sort of advice it offered to aspiring authors: “You see, our readers want everything condensed, rapid, dramatic. Take any ordinary novel, and cut it down one-half, and it’ll be twice as good as it was before.” Thoreau mentions that they didn’t merely sell magazines and dime novels and tea, but also, sold a few snack items such as nuts and raisins and a few bulk items such as salt and meal. They were really going after the extreme low end of the readership market, “the end with the munchies.” They were certainly never going to offer to sell anyone a book such as WALDEN, although they might well offer the “Readers’ Digest” version (yes, there is such), or one or another of those many-Thoreau-snippets-out-of-context market opportunities that one or another clown seems to be forever generating!
JOHN WHITE WEBSTER

A soldier of the Revolution, died March 24, 1850, aged 90 years, 1 month, & 24 days.

There is a token for those who know best, for weary miles we lay softly by and swell low in the ground.
March 27, Wednesday: The defense began to present its case in re the Commonwealth of Massachusetts v. John White Webster. Perhaps it is not entirely surprising that, since the chemist Charles T. Jackson had testified for the prosecution, the anesthesia dentist William Thomas Green Morton would testify for the defense. The two men were professional enemies locked in combat for the great prestige of having been the first to recognize the value of anesthesia during protracted surgery. Doctor Morton suggested that the dental remains which had been
discovered in the assay oven could have come from just about any poor stiff who had been cut up in the medical school as a dissection cadaver. Many men’s mouths, in his observation, had exactly Doctor George Parkman’s condition of teeth and dental appliances. The panel of judges found this testimony to be not entirely convincing and would say so, as the dentist who had prepared Parkman’s partial plate had already testified in great detail as to all the various characteristics by which he was quite certain that this was the scorched remains of the plate which he had only recently taken the greatest of pains to create and fit for this specific deceased.

March 28, Thursday: The defense continued its case in re the Commonwealth of Massachusetts v. John White Webster.

March 29, Friday: The defense spent only part of the day completing its case in re the Commonwealth of Massachusetts v. John White Webster.
March 30, Saturday: An issue of Chambers’ Edinburgh Journal:

Nathaniel Hawthorne prepared a brief new preface for the 2nd edition of his THE SCARLET LETTER:

Much to the author’s surprise, and (if he may say so without additional offense) considerably to his amusement, he finds that his sketch of official life, introductory to THE SCARLET LETTER, has created an unprecedented excitement in the respectable community immediately around him. It could hardly have been more violent, indeed, had he burned down the Custom-House, and quenched its last smoking ember in the blood of a certain venerable personage, against whom he is supposed to cherish a peculiar malevolence [the Reverend Charles W. Upham of Salem, characterized by Senator Charles Sumner as “that smooth, smiling, oily man of God”]. As the public disapprobation would weigh very heavily on him, were he conscious of deserving it, the author begs leave to say, that he has carefully read over the introductory pages, with a purpose to alter or expunge whatever might be found amiss, and to make the best reparation in his power for the atrocities of which he has been adjudged guilty. But it appears to him, that the only remarkable features of the sketch are its frank and genuine good-humor, and the general accuracy with which he has conveyed his sincere impressions of the characters therein described. As to enmity, or ill-feeling of any kind, personal or political, he utterly disclaims such motives. The sketch might, perhaps, have been wholly omitted, without loss to the public, or detriment to the book; but, having undertaken to write it, he conceives that it could not have been done in a better or a kindlier spirit, nor, so far as his abilities availed, with a livelier effect of truth. The author is constrained, therefore, to republish his introductory sketch without the change of a word.

Concluding arguments of counsel in the case of the Commonwealth of Massachusetts v. John White Webster. The defense was still insisting that it hadn’t been the Professor but somebody else who had murdered the Doctor, that it might for instance have been the janitor who had keys to the rooms of the building and being a mere cleanup man was obviously a person of low character, but that if the Professor had been the one to do the deed, the deed would have had to have been manslaughter committed in a fit of passion rather than cold-
blooded murder for profit, and anyway, this defendant was such a jolly family man and of such exemplary character. At 5PM the defendant asked leave to address the courtroom, and made the complaint that his attorneys in their superior wisdom had neglected to present to the court the hundreds of pages of evidence and argument which he had prepared while waiting in his jail cell. He pointed out, utterly irrelevantly, that shortly after the time at which he was alleged to have committed the murder, he had purchased a copy of Alexander von Humboldt’s COSMOS and was studying this new volume over a mutton-chop supper in a restaurant in Cambridge, and he could prove this. For in fact when he paid his bill and departed from the restaurant, he forgot and left his new copy of COSMOS behind, and the keeper of the public house could so testify, and this was not the conduct of a man who had just committed a murder. The jury was charged and retired before 8PM. Boston went to its supper, and boys hired at $0.50 per hour stood in the street outside, ready to run bearing the news of the verdict, and to shout it in the various districts and hotels and taverns of the city. In the jury’s chambers, a verdict was reached in 40 minutes but the jury then spent two hours in silent prayer. At 10:30PM the jury returned to the courtroom with their verdict, “Guilty.” The accused was then heard to exclaim:

Take me away from this place so that I may not be looked on any longer.

The Illustrated London News published a new, and inaccurate, depiction of the Great Lisbon Earthquake of November 1, 1755:

April 1, Monday: In the case in re the Commonwealth of Massachusetts v. John White Webster, a jury of his peers having found him guilty of the crime of murder in the first degree, the convicted man was sentenced to be hanged by the neck at a time and a place to be approved by the authorities, until he be dead.

President Jared Sparks of Harvard College, and Professor Henry Wadsworth Longfellow, would visit the prisoner in his cell in the Leverett Street lockup (since demolished).
May 4, Saturday: Professor John White Webster’s lawyers submitted a petition for a writ of error against Massachusetts Supreme Judicial Court Chief Justice Lemuel Shaw, because of his allegedly faulty instructions to the jury:

Nathaniel Hawthorne paid his first visit to the Boston Athenæum, as the guest of a paying member. He might not be willing himself to become a paying member rather than a moocher, but he certainly recognized quality when he saw it:

The library is in a noble hall, and looks splendidly with its vista of alcoves.

An issue of Chambers’ Edinburgh Journal:
June 12, Wednesday: Professor John White Webster’s lawyers had submitted a petition for a writ of error against Judge Lemuel Shaw because of his faulty instructions to the jury. On this day the hearing was held before a panel of five judges one of whom was Shaw, and the writ denied. Webster would appeal to Governor George N. Briggs for a pardon, asserting his entire innocence. He had been convicted on evidence which was wholly circumstantial. Unfortunately for him, the black man Washington Goode had just been hanged in Boston for murder entirely on the basis of such circumstantial evidence. Thus, the Governor could not pardon Webster without seeming to allow different standards of evidence to accused white men. The Fall River Weekly News would express this matter most succinctly: “If any delays, misgivings or symptoms of mercy are manifested, the gibbeted body of Washington Goode will be paraded before the mind’s eye of his Excellency. If he relents in this case, though the entire population of the State petition for a remission of sentence, Governor Briggs will forfeit all claim to public respect as a high minded, honorable and impartial chief magistrate. He can do one of two things and retain his character as a man and a public servant: resign his office, or let the law take its course.” The governor signed the death warrant. Webster, therefore, in a last-ditch effort to avoid the gallows, would make a retreating confession. He had indeed struck the victim. However, he had only struck him once. Also, he was only defending himself as he had been provoked into doing this! His act had not been premeditated or malicious. He had been pushed into this by Doctor Parkman, who had become so inordinately aggressive to collect the money he was owed. The creditor had been “gesticulating in the most violent and menacing manner.” He had even been threatening to seize the professor’s mineral cabinet, despite the fact that the professor had put this asset up as security to cover not only this loan, but another separate loan to another man. What could Professor Webster do under such extenuating circumstances but seize “whatever thing was handiest –it was a stick of wood– and [deal] him an instantaneous blow with all the force that passion could give it. It was on the side of his head, and there was nothing to break the force of the blow. He fell instantly upon the pavement. There was no second blow. He did not move.” (Of course, such an exculpatory confession would get the man exactly nowhere, for it did nothing to restore the torn social fabric. For a suitable restoration of the torn social fabric, we will need to wait until after this hanging, when the victim’s widow would be listed as the 1st contributor to a fund created for the murderer’s impoverished widow and daughters.)

July 2, Tuesday: The minister of the Unitarian church in Roxbury, Massachusetts, the Reverend George Putnam, D.D. brought appeal before the Governor’s Council on Pardons, saying that Professor John White Webster had confessed his remorse to him in his jail cell for the unprededated act of passion which he had committed on the afternoon of November 23, 1849. He said that Doctor Webster had informed him that what had actually happened was that he had invited Doctor George Parkman there not to kill him but to arrange to pay off the debt, but that Parkman had been entirely unreasonable about this and he had been waving a copy of the letter of recommendation which he had originally prepared to help Doctor Webster obtain his appointment on the Harvard College faculty many years before, and had said to the Professor “I got you into your position and now I will get you out of it.” And that with this Professor Webster had become enraged and fearful and, grabbing up a stump of grapevine from the stovewood, had whacked Parkman once solidly along the side of the head, killing him instantly. For the good of Professor Webster’s soul, therefore, he ought not to be hanged by the neck in Boston until he be dead.
July 19, Thursday: At 3:30AM, holding course with close-reefed sails, the *Elizabeth* struck a Fire Island sandbar. The ship’s lifeboats were soon smashed. As it grew lighter figures could be made out on the beach but these humans didn’t seem to be doing anything by way of a rescue, only waiting and watching. In fact these were not rescuers but resident scavengers waiting for their storm booty. At noon the first mate, in command of the *Elizabeth* since its skipper had died of the small pox, picked himself out a likely plank and jumped overboard. His instructions to those he left behind: “Save yourselves!” There was only one life preserver, which would by tradition have gone to Margaret Fuller, but as they all waited aboard the vessel and saw that it was breaking up in the surge, she offered that life preserver to a crewman who was volunteering to take his chances going overboard to summon aid (wreck #18 below):

The toddler had been slung into a canvas bag around the neck of a sailor. A Tribune reporter reached the beach at about 11AM. At about noon the Fire Island Lighthouse lifeboat and rescue howitzer arrived but, despite the fact that the ship was only a few hundred yards out into the breakers, rescue attempts were made difficult by wind and waves that were building into a hurricane. The lifeboat would never be launched. At about 3PM, with perhaps a thousand people on the beach at that point watching (half of whom were looting as cases of goods washed ashore), the ship began to come apart as pieces of its marble cargo broke through the hull. Some of the people aboard made it ashore by clinging to pieces of wreckage. When a sailor attempted to get the toddler ashore, the attempt failed and the tiny body would be submerged for about twenty minutes before being located and carried still warm out of the waves (the body would be placed in a chest donated by one of the sailors). Just before leaping overboard the cook heard Fuller, in her white nightgown, say “I see nothing but death before me.” When the ship broke up all who had not made it to shore were drowned (of the total of 22 aboard, a total of 10 including the baby could not be gotten across the surf to shore). Ossoli was seen to reach up from
the water and attempt to grab a piece of rigging before disappearing beneath the waves.

The bodies of Giovanni and Margaret were not immediately recovered. When Ellery Channing reached that beach, some people who were still standing around informed him that they would have made a rescue attempt had they known someone “important” was on board. The reporter took some letters found on the beach in a box back to New-York and dried them and turned them over to Horace Greeley. Nathaniel Hawthorne had not met Giovanni Angelo but commented, according to his son’s Nathaniel Hawthorne and His Wife, a

13. Four editions of the Encyclopædia Britannica held that their drownings occurred on July 16th and this error would not get corrected until 1974 — which would be hardly worth mentioning were it not such a graphic illustration of the general lack of value we place on a pushy woman’s contribution to our clownish society.
Yeah, and a kind Providence put those clownish variola scarifications on the fated child’s face!

Behind this term “Providence” mobilized by Hawthorne we can see lurking the notion that this was an unquestionably murderous, yet unquestionably kind, act of God. His deity was merely disposing of a female who had gotten out of her place, sort of like crushing an ant that had wandered onto the author’s dinnerplate. God as the sanitary police for the Old Boys Network. The schadenfreudian remarks Nathaniel made from time to time about the Ossolis may have had less to do with his generally livid gender chauvinism, and less to do with the two of them as a couple, or with the two of them as particular individuals, than with Hawthorne’s special ambivalence toward the twisted sister with whom he had had those starry-night walks while his wife was inconvenienced, or his general misanthropy toward any woman who would do such an unwomanly thing
Dear reader, do you agree with Nathaniel that fortune was kind to Margaret and her family? Do you, perhaps, harbor a hope that fortune will smile on you and on your family as it did not smile on her and her family? Do you suspect, as so many scholars studying this period have suspected, that Margaret perhaps harbored some sort of a death wish, and that it was this death wish which prevented her from leaping overboard into the breakers and attempting to make it to the shore that was only a few yards away? Remember, if you will, that Margaret had a spinal deformity, which very likely was some part of the cause of part of pretty boy Nathaniel’s hostility toward her and which very likely was the entire cause of his hostility toward her husband—what kind of clown could it be, who could marry a deformed woman, and have sex with her and produce a child?—and remember, also, if you will, that Margaret herself had long before been forced to abandon any suspicion she might have had in her earlier years, of the basic fairness of life. We were born to be mutilated, she commented, and, she might have added, we were born also, to be mocked:

I have no belief in beautiful lives; we were born to be mutilated: Life is basically unjust.

Several days after the USS Elizabeth had disintegrated, when all that lay in the breakers were some rough blocks of Italian marble and some hull timbers half buried in the sand, a sea captain named James Wick would show up at the offices of the New-York Herald Tribune on Manhattan Island with a packing crate containing the corpses of a man and a woman. Greeley was informed that these were the bodies of the “Italian count” Ossoli and Greeley’s war correspondent Margaret Fuller. He “refused to have anything to do with them,”
according to Tribune reporter Felix Dominy.

The horses rattled the empty chariots,
longing for their noble drivers.
But they on the ground lay,
dearer to the vultures than to their wives.

So Captain Wick and his mate, to get rid of the bodies of Greeley’s war correspondent and her clownish husband without getting themselves into trouble, would bury this packing crate at night on Coney Island without marking the spot.14 We are reminded of something Henry Thoreau would jot down in his journal some nine months subsequent to this event, between April 19 and April 22, 1851, and something he would write into Cape Cod, and we are led to wonder whether Thoreau had in some manner come to suspect that his “friend” Greeley had something to do with the fact that it was these bodies in particular that had not been recovered from the wreck of the USS Elizabeth. For Thoreau did make an uncharacteristically bitter remark during this period, a remark about the moral character of editors in this country, a group of whom Greeley was arguably the single one who was the best known personally by Thoreau:

… probably no country was ever ruled by so mean a class of tyrants as are the editors of the periodical press in this country.

Later in this day, in Boston, an appeal brought on behalf of Professor John White Webster by the minister of the Unitarian church in Roxbury, Massachusetts, the Reverend George Putnam, D.D., failed to move the Governor’s Council on Pardons. Murder being contrary to the law of God, with one dissenting vote they recommended to the Governor of the commonwealth that he murder this murderer.

August 29, Friday: The wife and children of Professor John White Webster visited him for the last time in his cell. The professor knew, but his family was prevented from knowing, that the ceremony had been set for the next morning.

The “Yellow House, reformed”. Having completed the extensive renovations to the property they had purchased at 73 Main Street in Concord, the Thoreau family moved into its Yellow House. The family would live in this residence, now the “Thoreau/Alcott” house, for the remainder of Henry Thoreau’s life, with him occupying the finished attic room.

August 30, Saturday morning: In the morning John White Webster was hanged in public at #5 Leverett Street on Leverett Square in Boston for the murder of George Parkman. It took about four minutes. In deference to the social standing of the culprit, there had not been a prior public announcement of the date or the place of the execution. The Reverend George Putnam, D.D. immediately departed for Cambridge to inform the family. That evening a lady and her two children visiting from New-York would come to the family home in Cambridge in the hope that she would be able to see the corpse of the murderer, but fortunately these ghoulish tourists would be intercepted by the maid and the widow and the daughters did not come to know of it. To fool the crowds which were assembling, and in addition to prevent the body from being exhumed, it would be interred in secret that night at the lowbrow cemetery on Copp’s Hill — rather than in the expected venue at toney Mount Auburn Cemetery.

On this day Henry Thoreau was also concerned with cemeteries, for at the request of John Shepard Keyes, he was surveying two sides of the Concord West Burying Ground by running the lines of the old Hurd place, the so-called Block House now on Lowell Road, and the line of the river bank further east on Main Street. The

15. “Reformed” here means that the ceilings had been raised and extensive modifications had been made.
16. Did this Thoreau home have a lawn? America’s obsession with outdoor living spaces in the vicinity of their homes would not begin until after the US Civil War, with sports such as lawn croquet catching on in the leisured middle class. In all likelihood, the lot on which the Thoreau boardinghouse stood inside this pretty fence in the 1850s consisted of swept dirt and sand kept bare — except of course for the family’s large garden.
17. Due to this unpleasantness, Harvard College has created a special endowment for the relief of desperate professors. The widow Harriet Frederica Hickling Webster, who would only live for a few additional years, would take the four daughters back to the Azores. There, one of the four, Sarah Hickling Webster, would marry Samuel Wyllys Dabney (1826-1893), who would from 1872 to 1892 be the US consul to the Azores.
purpose of this activity, probably, was to determine where to position the iron fence from the old courthouse around the burial ground. According to the Town Report, Thoreau received $1.00 for this on March 1, 1851.

View Thoreau’s personal working drafts of his surveys courtesy of AT&T and the Concord Free Public Library:
http://www.concordlibrary.org/scollect/Thoreau_surveys/Thoreau_surveys.htm

(The official copy of this survey of course had become the property of the person or persons who had hired this Concord town surveyor to do their surveying work during the 19th Century. Such materials have yet to be recovered.)

Aug 31st Tall Ambrosia
Among the signs of Autumn I perceive
The Roman Wormwood (called by learned men
Ambrosia elatior, food for gods,–)
For to impartial science the humblest weed
Is as immortal as the proudest flower–)
Sprinkles its yellow dust over my shoes
As I cross the now neglected garden
We trample under foot the food of Gods
& spill their nectar in each drop of dew–
My honest shoes thus powdered country-fide
Fast friends that never stray far from my coach
Bearing many a mile the marks of their adventure
At the post-house disgrace the Gallic gloss
Of those well dressed ones who no morning dew
Nor Roman wormwood ever have been through
Who never walk but are transported rather
For what old crime of theirs I do not gather

The grey blueberry bushes venerable as oaks why is not their fruit poisonous? Bilberry called Vaccinium corymbosum some say amoenum & or Blue Bilberry & Vaccinium disomorphum MX–Black Bilberry. Its fruit hangs on into September but loses its wild & sprightly taste.

'Tis very fit the ambrosia of the gods
Should be a weed on earth. their nectar
The morning dew with which we wet our shoes
For the gods are simple folks and we should
pine upon their humble fare

The purple flowers of the humble Trichostema mingled with the worm wood. smelling like it
And the spring-scented–dandelion scented primrose Yellow primrose
The swamp pink. Azalea viscosa–its now withered pistils standing out.

We are most apt to remember & cherish the flowers which appear earliest in the spring– I look with equal affection on those which are the latest to bloom in the fall
The choke Berry Pyrus arbutifolia
The beautiful white waxen berries of the cornel–either cornus alba or Paniculata white berried or Panicled–beautiful both when full of fruit & when its cymes are naked delicate red cymes or stems of berries. spreading its little fairy fingers to the skies its little palms. Fairy palms they might be called.
One of the Viburnums Lentago–or pyrifolium or–Nudum–with its poisonous looking fruit in cymes first–greenish white then red then purple or all at once.
The imp eyed red velvety looking berry of the swamps
The spotted Polygonum Polygonum Persicaria seen in low lands amid the potatoes now wild Princes feather?

18. We can gather that it was sometime prior to this date, that this former Concord Academy classmate had become an selectman of Concord.
It seems to be during this timeframe that the Reverend Adin Ballou authored the following material in opposition to capital punishment, referring regretfully to the recent hangings of Washington Goode, Daniel H. Pierson, and John White Webster:

**Capital Punishment: Reasons For Immediate Abolition**

**What is Capital Punishment?**
It is the infliction of death on a human being who has been convicted of murder or some other crime, and who is a helpless prisoner in the hands of the public authorities. It is commonly executed by hanging, beheading, shooting, &c.; in our country almost always by hanging.

**Who Inflict the Death Penalty?**
All the people in the state or nation who do not unequivocally protest against it. This is emphatically true in our Commonwealth of Massachusetts. Reader, whether voter or non-voter, male or female, adult or youth, thou art either for Capital Punishment or against it. Thou art not a neutral in the case. When one of thy fellow creatures is put to death on the gallows by public authority, with thy approbation or with thy consent, consider the deed as thine own. Nay, if thou lettest it be done without thy solemn protest against it, the deed is virtually thine own. Wince not at this. Know thy responsibility before God in this matter. Unless thou hast cleared the skirts of thy garments by some public, unequivocal and uncompromising testimony against Capital Punishment, thou art the man or the woman who inflicts it. Thou and thy fellows took the life of Washington Goode, Daniel H. Pierson, and John W. Webster. Say not "the Sheriff did it - the Governor ordered it - the Court decreed it - the law requires it." All true: but in whose name and by whose authority does the Sheriff, the Governor, the Court, the law hang a man? Who made the law, the Court, the Governor and the Sheriff? Answer: the people - the sovereign people. They do all these things. Who are the people? Answer: the voters, together with all who help to form that public

19. In 1848 they had hanged Pierson, a white imbecile of Boston, after he killed his wife and children.
opinion which governs voters, legislators and rulers. Whatever public opinion unequivocally demands should be done, is done. Voters, legislators and rulers see that it is done. They see that hanging is done. Why? Because public opinion demands it. And who form public opinion? All men, women and children who think and speak. Public opinion is nothing but the confluence of private opinions; like a mighty river made up of many small streams, rivulets or springs. Reader, remember that thou art one of these streams, rivulets or springs. Thy opinion is for or against Capital Punishment. So if not against it, thou art for it. If for it, thy private opinion is a part of that great river of public opinion which says to voters, legislators and rulers, “Keep on hanging murderers.” Therefore thou art one of the executioners of Capital Punishment, acting through thy agents. The deed is really thine. If it be glorious, then glory on. But if it be abhorrent and abominable, hold back thy hand from thy guilty brother’s life. Protest against the custom, the law, the public opinion. Let thy testimony be unequivocal, uncompromising and incessant against it, till the death penalty be utterly abolished.

Capital Punishment is Anti-Christian

Noah, Moses, and the ancients generally sanctioned it; but Christ prohibits it. The Old Testament, he knew, contained many sayings which authorized the taking of blood for blood, “life for life, eye for eye,” &c. But he took care that the New Testament should record all imperative testimony against thus resisting evil with evil. Referring directly to that whole class of Old Testament sayings which sanction the taking of “life for life,” our Lord says: “But I say unto you that ye resist not evil” - that is, by inflicting evil on the evil-doer, as you have heretofore done under the authority of these Noachic and Mosaic sayings. Away with all hatred and vindictiveness. Oppose evil only with good - only by doing what is best both for the injurious and the injured parties. “Love your enemies, bless them that curse you, do good to them that hate you,” &c. that ye may be the children of your father in heaven, who always acts on this divine principle toward the unthankful and evil. On the same ground he enjoined the duty of always cherishing the spirit of forgiveness. “When ye pray, say ... Forgive us our debts as we forgive our debtors.” “For if ye forgive not men their trespasses, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses.” Is it forgiving an offender to take blood for blood, life for life, eye for eye? Is this forgiving as we would have God forgive us? Wilt thou hang thy son’s murderer by the neck till he be “dead, dead, dead,” and then pray God to forgive thine offences as thou hast his! And after this wilt thou still presume to call Jesus Christ thy Lord, and thyself a Christian! Of all such Christ demandeth, “Why call ye me Lord, Lord, and do not the things which I say?” As Jesus taught, so taught his apostles. Hear Paul: “Recompense to no man evil for evil”; “avenge not yourselves”; “be not overcome of evil, but overcome evil with good.” “See that none render evil for evil unto any man.” So Peter, John and all the apostles. Hanging the evil doer is recompensing “evil for evil.” It is man avenging himself by
“rendering evil for evil.” It is a vain attempt to overcome evil with evil. Therefore it is utterly anti-Christian. Christ never gave countenance to Capital Punishment, or to the taking of human life for any cause. He exemplified what he taught. He was once called on to adjudge a woman to death for adultery, according to the law of Moses. Did he sanction Capital Punishment? No; but he required those who would have stoned the criminal to death, to be sure first that they themselves were without sin. They felt the rebuke and fled. The woman still remained to receive death, if at all, from his sinless hands. But forbearing to harm her, guilty though she was, he said, “Go and sin no more.” Jesus was no patron either of crime or of Capital Punishment. When James and John would have called fire down from heaven upon the unaccommodating Samaritans, “even as Elias did,” he turned and rebuked them, saying, “Ye know not what manner of spirit ye are of. For the Son of Man is not come to destroy men’s lives, but to save them.” So then Christians, following out their Lord’s mission in his divine spirit, are not to destroy men’s lives, but to save them - even though Noah, Moses and Elias be officiously quoted to the contrary. When will this genuine Christianity come to be understood and exemplified throughout nominal Christendom? In that day will Capital Punishment, as well as War, be denounced and renounced as utterly anti-Christian. Reader, do not attempt to parry the force of the foregoing demonstration by any special pleading. Do not say, as some have, “Christ had no reference to public judicial proceedings; capital punishment, &c., when he gave forth those strong prohibitory precepts against resisting evil with evil; he only referred to petty revenge between individuals in common life,” &c. This is groundless assumption, and contrary to the obvious meaning of Christ’s language. “Ye have heard that it hath been said, an eye for an eye,” &c. Where? By whom? See Gen. 9:6, Ex. 21:22-25, Lev. 24:17-20, Deut. 19:16-21. Examine those passages, and thou wilt see that “life for life, eye for eye,” &c. were to be taken by public judicial authority. Can we, then, suppose Christ did not forbid legal and judicial resistance of evil with evil, but merely ordinary individual retaliations? No; he forbade all those sayings had authorized; that is, both individual and governmental takings of “life for life, eye for eye,” &c. This is too plain to be caviled upon. Neither let the reader say, as some have, Christ did not refer to those sayings of Noah, Moses, &c. but only to certain glosses on them made by some of the Jewish Rabbis. Show us any rabbinical glosses stronger than the original Scripture sayings in the Pentateuch. There are none. It is sheer assumption to plead all such abatement of Christ’s obvious meaning. Nor let anyone rise up and say, as some have said, “You make Christ to contemn Moses, and the New Testament to destroy the Old. Thus you pervert the Word of God.” Strange notion! Is not Christ superior to Moses, and the New Testament to the Old? Who doubts this? The Jew may, but not the Christian. He who places Jesus Christ below Moses, or no higher than Moses, or the New Testament below the Old, or no higher than the Old, is anti-Christian, whatever else he may be. This is a settled point. But it does not follow that Christ contemns Moses, or that the New Testament destroys the Old. The
less and the greater may mutually corroborate each other. Moses wrote of the Christ, and commanded that when he came, the people should hear him "in all things." Therefore said Jesus to the Jews, "Had ye believed Moses, ye would have believed me; for he wrote of me." Moses was a faithful servant, but Christ is the Son of God. He who respects Moses as a servant, will surely respect Christ as the Son of God. And he who, under pretence of reverencing Moses, takes "life for life," regardless of Christ’s solemn injunction to "resist not evil with evil," insults both of them. He tramples under foot his acknowledged Lord, and impudently says to Moses, "I will not obey thy command, to hear Christ in all things. I will hear him in nothing that differs from thy old law of "life for life, eye for eye, tooth for tooth." That law suits my own instincts exactly, and I will not allow it to be superseded, even by Jesus Christ!" Would Moses feel honored by such an adherent? No; he would rebuke the self-willed zealot, and say, "No man honors me who does not honor the Son of God more." If the patriarchs and prophets of the Old Testament, who all predicted a more glorious dispensation of divine truth and righteousness to come, could be summoned to give judgment, they would unanimously concur with Paul in his testimony: "If that which was done away was glorious, much more that which remaineth is glorious." Instead of subordinating the New Testament to the Old, or lowering down its sublime law, of resisting evil only with good, to the ancient maxims, they would exalt Jesus Christ and his precepts above all, as the true light and life of men. Alas! that anyone should so poorly appreciate either the Old or the New Testament, as to imagine that he can truly honor the former without implicitly obeying the latter as God’s revised statutes. The former had a glory which was designed to be superseded by the superior glory of the latter, even as the moon and the stars of night fade away in the radiance of the sun. Does the sun destroy the moon and stars, because he outshines them? No more does the New Testament destroy the Old by superseding its imperfect institutions with diviner ones. The position is impregnable. Capital Punishment, however sanctioned by Noah, Moses and the ancients, is anti-Christian. It ought therefore to be immediately abolished in all professedly Christian States. He who upholds it fights against Jesus Christ.

**Capital Punishment is Unnecessary**

There is no excuse for hanging a murderer, on the ground that he is outraging the public peace, and endangering the lives of his fellow-creatures. He is a helpless prisoner; completely in the power of the government, and there he can be kept in safe custody - in a custody which will prevent his injuring others, or being injured by others. What more does the public good require? What more does his own good require? What more does any reasonable, humane, upright man desire? Who is it that clamors for his life - that cries out to have this powerless, pinioned man thrust into eternity from a gallows? O spirit of vindictive cruelty, we know thee all through the dark ages! Thou art thyself a murderer from the beginning. Be thou exorcised from all well-meaning souls. Thou hast often transformed thyself into an angel of light, and seated thyself in the high places of Christianity; but thou shalt be cast down into the pit, whence thou camest.
Thou deprecatest and revengest murder, but art forever predisposing mankind to commit it. We know thee; "Get thee behind us, Satan." Capital Punishment is not necessary in order to prevent the criminal’s escaping his due recompense. God has not left rewards and punishments to the uncertainty and imperfection of human government. He himself will render to every man according to his deeds. No sinner can escape the divine judgment. No murderer can by any possibility evade a just retribution. He may all mere human punishments, but none of the divine. Who but an atheist doubts this great truth? Then let no man say, "The murderer must be hung, or he will go unpunished." Not so. His going unpunished is an impossibility. Keep him, then, unharmed, where he can harm no one, and let him be made better if possible. Leave him to be punished by the only authority that is competent to do it without error. Why not? Avenger of blood, thou art dismissed. Thy mission is fulfilled. To whom will the putting to death of the criminal do any good? It will preserve no one’s life, that could not just as surely be preserved by the judicious confinement of the convict. It will not help God’s administration of justice. It will not restore the murdered person to life. It will give no comfort to the murdered one’s surviving friends, unless they are depraved enough to find comfort in retaliation. It will do the murderer himself no good. If he be unprepared to die, it will precipitate him into the spirit world against all the dictates of religion; and if he have become a penitent - a regenerate man, forgiven of God - man ought to be both ashamed and afraid to be less merciful. It will do the righteous, the well-disposed and tender-hearted, no good. They are grieved and disgusted by such State tragedies. It will do the wicked, the depraved, the hard-hearted, no good. They love such spectacles, crowd eagerly around them, display all the hateful traits of devils incarnate, and go away ripe for violence and bloodshed. Hence our State authorities will not allow them free access to the place of execution, giving tickets of admission only to a few select witnesses, or respectable amateurs of this kind of tragedy. This is proof positive, if proof were wanting, that the hanging of murderers works no good to the wicked. If it did, the more they should see of it the better. Away with a punishment which is as unnecessary as it is anti-Christian.

This Punishment is Irreparable
Man can take away life; but he cannot restore it. Many have been put to death for crimes which seemed to have been conclusively proved against them, who were afterwards ascertained beyond doubt, to be innocent. Then their judges and executioners would have given worlds for the power to reverse the fatal sentence - to repair the dreadful error. But there was no remedy - no reparation. What presumption is it in ignorant, fallible mortals, themselves daily beggars for Divine mercy, to crush the life out of their guilty fellows; to thrust them from the land of the living into the unknown world of spirits! It is the prerogative of the Most High to kill; for He knoweth when and how to take life, and is able, moreover, to restore it at pleasure. Not so man. In his pride and rashness he kills, and
there his power ends. He may stare at the ruin he has wrought; he may deplore it; but he cannot repair it. Alas! for the accusers, the jurors, the judges, the executioners, and their abettors, who presume to quench the flame of human life. The guilt of their victims is no justification of their presumption. Vengeance belongeth unto God alone, who ever judgeth righteously, and can do no wrong. Let man content himself with imposing uninjurious restraint on the outrageous and dangerous. Then if he err in judgment, or in methods of treatment, he can correct his errors, repair his incidental wrongs, and prove himself to be, what he ever ought to be the overcomer of evil with good. Read the following extracts, and see how liable human tribunals are to put to death the innocent.

A few years ago, a poor German came to New York and took lodgings, where he was allowed to do his cooking in the same room with the family. The husband and wife lived in a perpetual quarrel. One day, the German came into the kitchen, with a clasp-knife and a pan of potatoes, and began to pare them for his dinner. The quarrelsome couple were in a more violent altercation than usual, but he sat with his back towards them, and, being ignorant of their language, felt in no danger of being involved in their disputes. But the woman, with a sudden and unexpected movement, snatched the knife from his hand, and plunged it into her husband’s heart. She had sufficient presence of mind to rush into the street, and scream murder. The poor foreigner, in the meanwhile, seeing the wounded man reel, sprang forward to catch him in his arms, and drew out the knife. People from the street crowded in, and found him with the dying man in his arms, the knife in his hand, and blood upon his clothes. The wicked woman swore, in the most positive terms, that he had been fighting with her husband, and had stabbed him with a knife he always carried. The unfortunate German knew too little English to understand her accusation, or to tell his own story. He was dragged off to prison, and the true state of the case was made known through an interpreter; but it was not believed. Circumstantial evidence was exceedingly strong against the accused, and the real criminal swore that she saw him commit the murder. He was executed, notwithstanding the most persevering efforts of his lawyer, John Anthon, Esq., whose convictions of the man’s innocence were so painfully strong, that, from that day to this, he has refused to have, any connection with a capital case. Some years after this tragic event, the woman died, and on her deathbed confessed her agency in the diabolical transaction; but her poor victim could receive no benefit from this tardy repentance. Society had wantonly thrown away its power to atone for the grievous wrong.

- Mrs. Child

A young lady, belonging to a genteel and very proud family in Missouri, was beloved by a young man named Burton; but, unfortunately, her affections were fixed on another, less worthy. He left her with a tarnished
reputation. She was by nature energetic and high-spirited; her family were proud, and she lived in the midst of a society which considered revenge a virtue, and named it honor. Misled by this false popular sentiment, and her own excited feelings, she resolved to repay her lover’s treachery with death. But she kept her secret so well that no one suspected her purpose, though she purchased pistols, and practiced with them daily. Mr. Burton gave evidence of his strong attachment by renewing his attentions when the world looked most coldly on her. His generous kindness won her bleeding heart, but the softening influence of love did not lead her to forego the dreadful purpose she had formed. She watched for a favorable opportunity, and shot her betrayer when no one was near to witness the horrible deed. Some little incident excited the suspicion of Burton, and he induced her to confess to him the whole transaction. It was obvious enough that suspicion would naturally fasten upon him, the well-known lover of her who had been so deeply injured. He was arrested; but succeeded in persuading her that he was in no danger. Circumstantial evidence was fearfully against him, and he soon saw that his chance was doubtful; but with affectionate magnanimity he concealed this from her. He was convicted and condemned. A short time before the execution, he endeavored to cut his throat; but his life was saved for the cruel purpose of taking it away according to the cold-blooded barbarism of the law. Pale and wounded, he was hoisted to the gallows, before the gaze of a Christian community. The guilty cause of all this was almost frantic when she found that he had thus sacrificed himself to save her. She immediately published the whole history of her wrongs and her revenge. Her keen sense of wounded honor was in accordance with public sentiment; her wrongs excited indignation and compassion, and the knowledge that an innocent and magnanimous man had been so brutally treated, excited a general revulsion of popular feeling. No one wished for another victim, and she was left unpunished, save by the dreadful records of her memory.

- Mrs. Child

Hold! all ye vindictives that would take “life for life.” It is impious, cold-hearted presumption in man to do this awful deed! It is anti-Christian, unnecessary, irreparable, abhorrent! We challenge a refutation of these reasons for abolishing the death penalty. They are unanswerable. Let the abomination cease.

July 7, Monday: Henry Thoreau went with Sexton Anthony Wright to view the universe through Perez Blood’s telescope. Just for the fun of it, I will illustrate this with a depiction, prepared in this very year by H. Dassel, which is not of Thoreau peering through Blood’s telescope but of the astronomer Maria Mitchell, peering presumably through her father’s telescope on the roof of his bank at the comet she had discovered (see following screen).
July 7, Monday: The intimations of the night are divine methinks. Men might meet in the morning & report the news of the night.– What divine suggestions have been made to them? I find that I carry with me into the day often some such hint derived from the gods. Such impulses to purity—to heroism—to literary effort even as are never day-born.

One of those morning's which usher in no day—but rather an endless morning—for clouds prolong the twilight the livelong day—

And now that there is an interregnum in the blossoming of the flowers so is there in the singing of the birds–The golden robin is rarely heard—and the bobolink &c.

I rejoice when in a dream I have loved virtue & nobleness.

Where is Grecian History? It is when in the morning I recall the intimations of the night.

The moon is now more than half full.20 When I come through the village at 10 o'clock this cold night—cold as in May—the heavy shadows of the elms covering the ground with their rich tracery impress me as if men had got so much more than they had bargained for—not only trees to stand in the air, but to chequer the ground with their shadows. At night they lie along the earth. They tower—they arch—they droop over the streets like chandeliers of darkness. In my walk the other afternoon I saw the sun shining into the depths of a thick pine wood, checkering the ground like moonlight—and illuminating the lichen-covered bark of a large white-pine, from which it was reflected Through the surrounding thicket as from another sun—;

This was so deep in the woods that you would have said no sun could penetrate thither.

I have been tonight with Anthony Wright to look through Perez Bloods Telescope a 2nd time.21 A dozen of his Bloods neighbors were swept along in the stream of our curiosity. One who lived half a mile this side said that Blood had been down that way within a day or two with his terrestrial or day glass looking into the eastern horizon the hills of Billerica Burlington—and Woburn—. I was amused to see what sort of respect this man with a telescope had obtained from his neighbors—something akin to that which savages award to civilized men—though in this case the interval between the parties was very slight. Mr Blood with his scull cap on his short figure—his north European figure made me think of Tycho Brahe—. He did not invite us into his house this cool evening—men nor women—. Nor did he ever before to my knowledge

I am still contented to see the stars with my naked eye Mr Wright asked him what his instrument cost. He answered—"Well, that is something I don't like to tell. (stuttering or hesitating in his speech a little, as usual) It is a very proper question however" —"Yes," said I, "and you think that you have given a very proper answer."

Returning my companion Wright the sexton told me how dusty he found it digging a grave that afternoon for one who had been a pupil of mine—for two feet he said, notwithstanding the rain, he found the soil as dry as ashes.

With a certain wariness, but not without a slight shudder at the danger oftentimes, I perceive how near I have come to admitting into my mind the details of some trivial affair, as a case at court—. And I am astonished to observe how willing men are to lumber their minds with such rubbish—to permit idle rumors tales incidents even of an insignificant kind—to intrude upon what should be the sacred ground of the thoughts. Shall the temple of our thought be a public arena where the most trivial affair of the market & the gossip of the teatable is discussed—a dusty noisy trivial place—or shall it be a quarter of heaven itself—a place consecrated to the service of the gods—a hypaethral temple. I find it so difficult to dispose of the few facts which to me are significant that I hesitate to burden my mind with the most insignificant which only a divine mind could illustrate. Such is for the most part the news—in newspapers & conversation. It is important to preserve the mind's chastity in this respect. Think of admitting the details of a single case at the criminal court into the mind—to probe profanely through its very sanctum sanctorum for an hour—aye for many hours—to make a very bar-room of your mind's inmost apartment—as if for a moment the dust of the street had occupied you—aye the very street itself with all its travel passed through your very mind of minds—your thoughts shrive—with all its filth & bustle [possibly “hustle”]? Would it not be an intellectual suicide? By all manner of boards & traps threatening the extreme penalty of the divine law excluding trespassers from these grounds it behoves us to preserve the purity & sanctity of the mind. It is so hard to forget what it is worse than useless to remember. If I am to be a channel or thorough [thoroughfare] —I prefer that it be of the mountain springs —& not the town sewers—. The Parnassian streams There is inspiration—the divine gossip which comes to the ear of the attentive mind—from the Courts of Heaven—there is the profane & stale revelation of the barroom & the police Court. The same ear is fitted to receive both communications—only the character of the individual determines to which source chiefly it shall be open & to which closed. I believe that the mind can be profaned by the habit of attending to trivial things so that all our thoughts shall be tinged with triviality. They shall be dusty as stones in the street—. Our very minds shall be paved and macadamized as was—it's foundation broken into fragments for the wheels of travel to roll over. If we have thus desecrated ourselves the remedy will be by circumspection —& wariness by our aspiration & devotion to consecrate ourselves—to make a fane of the mind. I think that we should treat ourselves as innocent & ingenuous [ingenious] children whose guardians we are—be careful what

20. The moon would have been half full on the 4th.
21. I don't know when the first time was.
objects & what subjects we thrust on its attention.22 Even the facts of science may dust the mind by their dryness –unless they are in a sense effaced each morning or rather rendered fertile by the dews of fresh & living truth. Every thought that passes through the mind helps to wear & tear it & to deepen the ruts which as in the streets of Pompeii evince how much it has been used. How many things there are concerning which we might well deliberate whether we had better know them. Routine – conventionality manners & &c – how insensibly and undue attention to these dissipates & impoverishes the mind – robs it of its simplicity & strength emasculates it. Knowledge doe[s] not come [come] to us by details but by lieferungs from the gods. What else is it to wash & purify ourselves? Conventionalities are as bad as impurities. Only thought which is expressed by the mind in repose as it wer[e] lying on its back & contemplating the heaven’s –is adequately & fully expressed– What are side long – transient passing half views? The writer expressing his thought – must be as well seated as the astronomer contemplating the heavens – he must not occupy a constrained position. The facts the experience we are well poised upon –! Which secures our whole attention!23

The senses of children are unprofaned their whole body is one sense – they take a physical pleasure in riding on a rail – they love to teter – so does the unviolated – the unsophisticated mind derive an inexpressable pleasure from the simplest exercise of thoughts.

I can express adequately only the thought which I love to express.– All the faculties in repose but the one you are using – the whole energy concentrated in that.

Be ever so little distracted – your thoughts so little confused – Your engagements so few – your attention so free your existence so mundane – that in all places & in all hours you can hear the sound of crickets in those seasons when they are to be heard. It is a mark of serenity & health of mind when a person hears this sound much – in streets of cities as well as in fields. Some ears never hear this sound – are called deaf. Is it not because they have so long attended to other sounds?

The poet W.H. Auden has in 1962 brought forward a snippet from this day’s entry as:

[Paragraph 81] If we have thus desecrated ourselves,—as who has not?—the remedy will be by wariness and circumspection, by devotion and aspiration to reconsecrate ourselves—and make once more a fane of the mind. We should treat our minds—that is, ourselves—as innocent and ingenious children, whose guardians we are, and be careful what objects and what subjects we thrust on their attention. Read not the Times.1 Read the Eternities.2 Even the facts of science may dust the mind by their dryness, unless they are in a sense effaced each morning, or rather rendered fertile by the dews of fresh and living truth. Knowledge does not come to us by details, but in flashes of light from heaven. Yes, every thought that passes through the mind helps to wear and tear it, and to deepen the ruts, which, as in the streets of Pompeii, evince how much it has been used. How many things there are concerning which we might well deliberate whether we had better know them—had better let their peddling carts be driven even at the slowest trot or walk—over that bridge of glorious span by which we trust to pass at last from the furthest brink of time to the nearest shore of eternity. Conventionalities are as bad as impurities. By an undue attention to routine, manners, and so forth,3 the mind is insensibly dissipated and impoverished— robbed of its simplicity and strength and, in short, emasculated.

1. [“The Times” was presumably the London Times.]
2. [Bradley P. Dean] emend the essay copy-text by omitting ‘Conventionalities are at length as bad as impurities.’, which appears after this sentence in the essay but which appears without the words ‘at length’ as the penultimate sentence of this paragraph in the extant reading-draft manuscript.
3. [Bradley P. Dean] emend the manuscript copy-text by expanding ‘&c’ to ‘and so forth’.

The poet W.H. Auden has in 1962 brought forward a snippet from this day’s entry as:

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<tr>
<th>Pg</th>
<th>Topic</th>
<th>Aphorism Selected by Auden out of Thoreau</th>
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<td>353</td>
<td>Reason and Thought</td>
<td>We should treat our minds as innocent and ingenious children whose guardians we are — be careful what objects and what subjects we thrust on their attention.</td>
</tr>
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</table>
23. Thoreau would later use this comment pertaining to his “different drummer” theme, in his early lecture “WHAT SHALL IT PROFIT”:

[Paragraph 79] Not without a slight shudder at the danger, I often perceive how near I had come to admitting into my mind the details of some trivial affair,—the news of the street; and I am astonished to observe how willing men are to lumber their minds with such rubbish,—to permit idle rumors and incidents of the most insignificant kind to intrude on ground which should be sacred to thought. Shall the mind be a public arena, where the affairs of the street and the gossip of the tea-table chiefly are discussed? Or shall it be a quarter of heaven itself,—an hypæthral temple, consecrated to the service of the gods? I find it so difficult to dispose of the few facts which to me are significant, that I hesitate to burden my attention with those which are insignificant, which only a divine mind could illustrate. Such is, for the most part, the news in newspapers and conversations. It is important to preserve the mind’s chastity in this respect. Think of admitting the details of a single case of the criminal court into our thoughts, to stalk profanely through their very sanctum sanctorum for an hour, ay, for many hours! to make a very bar-room of the mind’s inmost apartment, as if for so long the dust of the street had occupied us,—the very street itself, with all its travel, its bustle, and filth had passed through our thoughts’ shrine! Would it not be an intellectual and moral suicide?

[Paragraph 80] By all kinds of traps and sign-boards, threatening the extreme penalty of the divine law, exclude such trespassers from the only ground which can be sacred to you. It is so hard to forget what it is worse than useless to remember! If I am to be a thoroughfare, I prefer that it be of the mountain-brooks, the Parnassian streams, and not the town-sewers. There is inspiration, that gossip which comes to the ear of the attentive mind from the courts of heaven. There is the profane and stale revelation of the bar-room and the police court. The same ear is fitted to receive both communications. Only the character of the hearer determines to which it shall be open, and to which closed. I believe that the mind can be permanently profaned by the habit of attending to trivial things, so that all our thoughts shall be tinged with triviality. Our very intellect shall be macadamized, as it were,—its foundation broken into fragments for the wheels of travel to roll over; and if you would know what will make the most durable pavement, surpassing rolled stones—spruce blocks—and asphaltum—you have only to look into some of our minds which have been subjected to this treatment so long.

October 10, Monday: Harriet Fredrica Hickling Webster, widow of Professor John White Webster, died.
The mastodon skeleton *Mammut americanum* that had been purchased by Professor John White Webster was taken from the Medical College Museum to the new Harvard Anatomical Museum, and was found to have been another skeleton in Harvard College’s closet — if only in that it had been assembled incorrectly.
June 25, Friday: James McGee was hanged on the same gallows on which Washington Goode and John White Webster had been hung, for having stabbed to death Deputy Warden Galen C. Walker in the Massachusetts State Prison on December 15, 1856.

For what would be known as the four Treaties of Tientsin, the Chinese negotiators were not allowed to dispute a single word of the prepared English text, involving 56 articles. Privileges for the Russians and for the Americans were included along with the privileges for the British and the French. From this point Westerners would import and sell their opium at will.
August 8, Thursday: At Weymouth on May 3, 1860 the pregnant Betsy Frances Tirrell had ingested ten grains of strychnine in preserved fruit, supplied to her by her fiancé George Canning Hersey under the pretense that this deadly poison would merely produce miscarriage. Tirrell had been convicted of murder.

The accused was hanged in the rotunda of Dedham jail at about the center of the north side, between the wings, on this morning, on the same gallows on which Washington Goode, James McGee, and John White Webster had been hung. The rope used was a small cord of Italian flax that had been tested with a weight of 3,400 pounds. Hersey declined to make a statement prior to execution but left a written confession protesting only that he had not also, as suspected, poisoned his wife Emeline Hersey, or poisoned Mary Tirrell. Hersey was 29 years of age at the point of his death.
Boston’s City Hall was built facing the School Street entrance to the Parker House.

Chief of Police Edward H. Savage’s *A Chronological History of the Boston Watch and Police, from 1631 to 1865; together with the Recollections of a Boston Police Officer, or Boston by Daylight and Gaslight, from the Diary of an Officer Fifteen Years in the Service*. (Boston: Published and sold by the author. 1865).
During this year and the following one, Charles Dickens would be on a 2d reading tour of the United States. In his later years his personality seemed to have changed remarkably, perhaps due to his being sadly disappointed in the conduct of his children. Coming through Boston, the wife of his American publisher, James Thomas Fields, commented that for a sad man he seemed remarkably happy. He somewhat distressed his local tour guides when there was only one thing that interested him this 2nd time, about the Boston area:

I want to see where Dr. Parkman was killed.

Cleveland Amory would explain the incident in this way in 1957 in his The Proper Bostonians (NY: E.P. Dutton & Co., Inc., page 226):

Tremors of the Parkman earthquake continued to be felt by Boston Society often at times when they were least desired. Twenty years later, when Boston was privileged to play proud host to Charles Dickens, there was a particularly intense tremor. Dickens was asked which one of the city’s historic landmarks he would like to visit first. “The room where Dr. Parkman was murdered,” he replied, and there being no doubt he meant what he said, nothing remained for a wry-faced group of Boston’s best but to shepherd the distinguished novelist out to the chemistry laboratory of the Harvard Medical School.

(Don’t go looking for this two-story brick building set on piers at the waterfront near Massachusetts General Hospital associated with the Professor John White Webster/Doctor George Parkman case, Harvard Medical College there was long ago relocated, and the old edifice demolished.)
The brick multistory structures of The Riverside Press on Blackstone Street in Cambridge, Massachusetts had become inadequate for the volume of production. The Press increasingly had to find storage facilities off premises. The firm merged with Rand McNally and moved its operation to Taunton, Massachusetts. The 500 employees (80% were unionized) were offered new jobs in that non-union shop. With the closing of this, and other local manufacturing plants (Lever Brothers, Boston Woven Hose, Blake and Knowles Steam Pump, Simplex Wire and J.W. Squire, etc.) the dominate proportion of the workforce in Cambridge and in the Riverside community changed from blue-collar to white-collar.

When Robert Sullivan’s THE DISAPPEARANCE OF DR. PARKMAN about the Professor John White Webster/Doctor George Parkman case was published in Boston in this year, it was published by Little, Brown & Company.

When Helen Thomson’s MURDER AT HARVARD about that famous case was published in Boston in this year, it was published by Houghton Mifflin.
Louis Farrakhan declared that the Gulf War was going to turn out to be the “War of Armageddon which is the final war” (Abanes, Richard. END-TIME VISIONS. NY: Four Walls Eight Windows, 1998, page 307). Just prior to Operation Desert Storm, a United States Marine attorney provided the following description of the law of war: “All the laws of war boil down to these three fundamentals. One. If it needs to be killed, kill it. Two. If it doesn’t need to be killed, don’t kill it. Three. If you see somebody killing something that doesn’t need to be killed, try to stop them. Any questions?”

Exemplifying a more “Rashomon-like” what-is-truth frame of mind, Alfred A. Knopf of New York, a subsidiary of Random House, published Simon Schama’s DEAD CERTAINTIES (UNWARRANTED SPECULATIONS) in regard to the famous Professor John White Webster/Doctor George Parkman case. There are no facts, only interpretations — so maybe the butler did it.

The bulk of the reviews of this book characterize Simon Schama’s speculations as unwarranted.

By the time of the Gulf War cease-fire, Iraq had weaponized anthrax (using strains of the microorganism that Armageddon = the place (possibly to be identified with Har Megiddo, the Mount of Megiddo, near Tel Aviv, near which many were fought) designated in REVELATION 16:16 as the scene of the final battle between the kings of the earth at the end of the world. Here is the layout of the Battle of Megiddo as won by the pharaoh Thutmose III over the Canaanites in 1482 BCE:
had been collected in Texas and supplied to Saddam Hossein by the United States federal government), botulinum toxin, and aflatoxin and had several other lethal agents in development. Inspectors from the UN Special Commission (UNSCOM) would spend frustrating years chasing down evidence of the scope of this program, the very existence of which Iraq would indignantly deny. The UNSCOM team would find that Iraq's stockpile included Scud missiles that had been pre-loaded with disease organisms.

On January 18th, President Herbert Walker Bush reported that he had directed US armed forces to commence combat operations on January 16th against Iraqi forces and military targets in Iraq and Kuwait, in conjunction with a coalition of allies and UN Security Council resolutions. On January 12th Congress had passed the Authorization for Use of Military Force against Iraq Resolution (P.L. 102-1). Combat operations would be suspended on February 28th.

On May 17th, President Bush stated in a status report to Congress that the Iraqi repression of the Kurdish people had necessitated a limited introduction of US forces into northern Iraq for emergency relief purposes.

On September 25-27th, after widespread looting and rioting broke out in Kinshasa, US Air Force C-141s transported 100 Belgian troops and equipment into Mnshasa. US planes also carried 300 French troops into the Central African Republic and hauled back American citizens and third country nationals from locations outside Zaire.
July 14, Monday: Robert Novak’s column “Mission to Niger” in the Washington Post and elsewhere disparaged former Ambassador Joseph Wilson and destroyed the CIA career of his wife, Valerie Plame. What had happened was that the CIA had delegated this former ambassador, as well as the deputy commander of the United States European Command, General Carlton Fulford, Jr., to figure out whether Iraq had actually been seeking supplies of uranium “yellowcake” there, and they had returned to described this report as a fabrication. Nevertheless, the report fitted the convenience of President George W. Bush and so he relied on it in his State of the Union Address of January 28, 2003, in making a case for attacking Iraq. Former ambassador Wilson had then gone public in the New York Times, pointing out that the report so touted by the President was considered by the intelligence community to have been a fabrication. Vice-President Dick Cheney was using his chief of staff, I. Lewis “Scooter” Libby, to sic the journalistic hounds, such as Novak, on Joseph Wilson and his wife Valerie Plame. Truth-tellers, whistle-blowers, beware, the Bush Administration has no principles, the Bush Administration has no restraint, the Bush Administration has no regard for the truth, the Bush Administration will destroy its enemies (such as you!)

(In a related piece of news, on this day the US federal government acknowledged the existence of Area 51.)
Season 15, Episode 13 of “The American Experience” was on TV, entitled “Murder at Harvard,” written by Melissa Banta and Simon Schama and directed by Eric Stange.

Doctor Parkman was played by the actor Sean McGuirk and Professor Webster by Timothy Sawyer. The TV dramatization emphasized a “Plan B” scenario according to which the swamp-yankee janitor Ephraim Littlefield—who had originally alerted investigators into Dr. Parkman’s disappearance on the basis of his and his wife’s suspicions about Professor Webster’s conduct, and for this had received a $3,000 reward that allowed him to retire—had for some unknown motive himself perpetrated the murder — and had then succeeded in foisting his own guilt onto the high-status Harvard prof.25

Failing to stick to the facts of the Commonwealth of Massachusetts v. John White Webster case, in addition the acting has been reviewed as “unsufferable.”

25. While such a “Plan B” defense of “somebody else did the deed” might have been appropriate during the trial, the possibility of an injustice would subsequently be problematized by a “retreating confession” made to the Unitarian minister, the Reverend George Putnam, a confession recorded in the jail cell after Professor Webster had been condemned to death by hanging, we learn that another account of what happened that Friday afternoon at the Harvard Medical College was that Doctor Parkman had been waving a copy of the letter of recommendation which he had originally prepared to help Doctor Webster obtain an appointment on the Harvard faculty many years before, and had been taunting Professor Webster with such remarks as “I got you into your position and now I will get you out of it.”—Whereupon Doctor Webster became enraged and fearful and, grabbing up a stump of grapevine from the stovewood, had whacked Doctor Parkman once solidly along the side of the head, which blow had killed him instantly.
“MAGISTERIAL HISTORY” IS FANTASIZING: HISTORY IS CHRONOLOGY

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“It’s all now you see. Yesterday won’t be over until tomorrow and tomorrow began ten thousand years ago.”

- Remark by character “Garin Stevens” in William Faulkner’s INTRUDER IN THE DUST

Prepared: December 4, 2014

“Stack of the Artist of Kouroo” Project John White Webster and Prof. John White Webster
This stuff presumably looks to you as if it were generated by a human. Such is not the case. Instead, someone has requested that we pull it out of the hat of a pirate who has grown out of the shoulder of our pet parrot “Laura” (as above). What these chronological lists are: they are research reports compiled by ARRGH algorithms out of a database of modules which we term the Kouroo Contexture (this is data mining). To respond to such a request for information we merely push a button.
Commonly, the first output of the algorithm has obvious deficiencies and we need to go back into the modules stored in the contexture and do a minor amount of tweaking, and then we need to punch that button again and recompile the chronology — but there is nothing here that remotely resembles the ordinary "writerly" process you know and love. As the contents of this originating contexture improve, and as the programming improves, and as funding becomes available (to date no funding whatever has been needed in the creation of this facility, the entire operation being run out of pocket change) we expect a diminished need to do such tweaking and recompiling, and we fully expect to achieve a simulation of a generous and untiring robotic research librarian. Onward and upward in this brave new world.

First come first serve. There is no charge.
Place requests with <Kouroo@kouroo.info>. Arrgh