

**A MOOSEHEAD
JOURNAL: MY GARDEN
ACQUAINTANCE. A
GOOD WORD FOR WINTER**

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A Moosehead Journal: My Garden Acquaintance. A Good Word for Winter by James Russell Lowell

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JAMES RUSSELL LOWELL

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JUL 27 1943

From Philip Barbour

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A MOOSEHEAD JOURNAL

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1853

ADDRESSED TO THE EDELMANN STORG AT THE BAGNI DI
LUCCA.

THURSDAY, 11th August. — I knew as little yesterday of the interior of Maine as the least penetrating person knows of the inside of that great social millstone which, driven by the river Time, sets imperatively agoing the several wheels of our individual activities. Born while Maine was still a province of native Massachusetts, I was as much a foreigner to it as yourself, my dear Storg. I had seen many lakes, ranging from that of Virgil's Cumæan to that of Scott's Caledonian Lady; but Moosehead, within two days of me, had never enjoyed the profit of being mirrored in my retina. At the sound of the name, no reminiscential atoms (according to Kenelm Digby's Theory of Association, — as good as any) stirred and marshalled themselves in my brain. The truth is, we think lightly of Nature's penny shows, and estimate what we see by the cost of the ticket. Empedocles gave

his life for a pit-entrance to *Ætna*, and no doubt found his account in it. Accordingly, the clean face of Cousin Bull is imaged patronizingly in Lake George, and Loch Lomond glasses the hurried countenance of Jonathan, diving deeper in the streams of European association (and coming up drier) than any other man. Or is the cause of our not caring to see what is equally within the reach of all our neighbors to be sought in that aristocratic principle so deeply implanted in human nature? I knew a pauper graduate who always borrowed a black coat, and came to eat the Commencement dinner, — not that it was better than the one which daily graced the board of the public institution in which he hibernated (so to speak) during the other three hundred and sixty-four days of the year, save in this one particular, that none of his eleemosynary fellow-commoners could eat it. If there are unhappy men who wish that they were as the Babe Unborn, there are more who would aspire to the lonely distinction of being that other figurative personage, the Oldest Inhabitant. You remember the charming irresolution of our dear Esthwaite, (like Macheath between his two doxies,) divided between his theory that he is under thirty, and his pride at being the only one of us who witnessed the September gale and the rejoicings at the Peace? Nineteen years ago I was walking through the Franconia Notch, and stopped to chat with a hermit, who fed with gradual logs the unwearied teeth of a saw-mill. As the strident steel slit off the *slabs* of the log, so did the less willing

machine of talk, acquiring a steadier up-and-down motion, pare away that outward bark of conversation which protects the core, and which, like other bark, has naturally most to do with the weather, the season, and the heat of the day. At length I asked him the best point of view for the Old Man of the Mountain.

"Dunno, — never see it."

Too young and too happy either to feel or affect the Horatian indifference, I was sincerely astonished, and I expressed it.

The log-compelling man attempted no justification, but after a little asked, "Come from Baws'n?"

"Yes" (with peninsular pride).

"Goodle to see in the vycinity o' Baws'n."

"Oh, yes!" I said; and I thought, — see Boston and die! see the State-Houses, old and new, the caterpillar wooden bridges crawling with innumerable legs across the flats of Charles; see the Common, — largest park, doubtless, in the world, — with its files of trees planted as if by a drill-sergeant, and then for your *nunc dimittis!*

"I should like, 'awl, I *should* like to stan' on Bunker Hill. You 've ben there offen, likely?"

"N-o-o," unwillingly, seeing the little end of the horn in clear vision at the terminus of this Socratic perspective.

"'Awl, my young frien', you've larned neow that wut a man *kin* see any day for nawthin', children half price, he never *doos* see. Nawthin' pay, nawthin' vally."