

FAMILIAR LETTERS OF
THOREAU

YEARS OF DISCIPLINE

IT was a happy thought of Thoreau's friend Ellery Channing, himself a poet, to style our Concord hermit the "poet-naturalist;" for there seemed to be no year of his life and no hour of his day when Nature did not whisper some secret in his ear,—so intimate was he with her from childhood. In another connection, speaking of natural beauty, Channing said, "There is Thoreau,—he knows about it; give him sunshine and a handful of nuts, and he has enough." He was also a naturalist in the more customary sense,—one who studied and arranged methodically in his mind the facts of outward nature; a good botanist and ornithologist, a wise student of insects and fishes; an observer of the winds, the clouds, the seasons, and all that goes to make up what we call "weather" and "climate." Yet he was in heart a poet, and held all the accumulated knowledge of more than forty years not so much for use as for delight. As Gray's poor friend West said of himself, "like a clear-flowing stream, he reflected the beauteous prospect around;" and Mother Nature had given Thoreau for his prospect the meandering Indian river of Concord, the woodland pastures and fair lakes by which he dwelt or rambled most of his life. Born in the East Quarter of Concord, July 12, 1817, he died in the village, May 6, 1862; he was there fitted for

Harvard College, which he entered in 1833, graduating in 1837; and for the rest of his life was hardly away from the town for more than a year in all. Consequently his letters to his family are few, for he was usually among them; but when separated from his elder brother John, or his sisters Helen and Sophia, he wrote to them, and these are the earliest of his letters which have been preserved. Always thoughtful for others, he has left a few facts to aid his biographer, respecting his birth and early years. In his *Journal* of December 27, 1855, he wrote:—

“Recalled this evening, with the aid of Mother, the various houses (and towns) in which I have lived, and some events of my life. Born . . . in the Minott house on the Virginia Road, where Father occupied Grandmother’s ‘thirds,’ carrying on the farm. The Catherines [had] the other half of the house, — Bob Catherine and [brother] John threw up the turkeys. Lived there about eight months; Si Merriam the next neighbor. Uncle David [Dunbar] died when I was six weeks old.¹ I was baptized in the old meeting-house, by Dr. Ripley, when I was three months, and did not cry. [In] the Red House, where Grandmother lived, we [had] the west side till October, 1818, — hiring of Josiah Davis, agent for the Woodwards; there were Cousin Charles and Uncle Charles [Dunbar], more or less. According to the day-

¹ He was named David for this uncle; Dr. Ripley was the minister of the whole town in 1817. The Red House stood near the Emerson house on the Lexington road; the Woodwards were a wealthy family, afterwards in Quincy, to which town Dr. Woodward left a large bequest.

book first used by Grandfather [Thoreau],¹ dated 1797 (his part cut out and [then] used by Father in Concord in 1808–9, and in Chelmsford in 1818–21), Father hired of Proctor [in Chelmsford], and shop of Spaulding. Chelmsford till March, 1821; last charge in Chelmsford about middle of March, 1821. Aunt Sarah taught me to walk there, when fourteen months old. Lived next the meeting-house, where they kept the powder in the garret. Father kept shop and painted signs, etc.

“Pope’s house, at South End in Boston (a ten-footer) five or six months, — moved from Chelmsford through Concord, and may have tarried in Concord a little while.

“Day-book says, ‘Moved to Pinkney Street [Boston], September 10, 1821, on Monday;’ Whitwell’s house, Pinckney Street, to March, 1823; brick house, Concord, to spring of 1826; Davis house (next to Samuel Hoar’s) to May 7, 1827; Shattuck house (now Wm. Munroe’s) to spring of 1835; Hollis Hall, Cambridge, 1833; Aunts’ house to spring of 1837. [This was what is now the inn called ‘Thoreau House.’] At Brownson’s [Canton] while teaching in winter of 1835. Went to New York with Father peddling in 1836.”

This brings the date down to the year in which Henry Thoreau left college, and when the family letters begin.

¹ John Thoreau, grandfather of Henry, born at St. Helier’s, Jersey, April, 1754, was a sailor on board the American privateer *General Lincoln*, November, 1779, and recognized *La Sensible*, French frigate, which carried John Adams from Boston to France. See *Journal*, vol. v, June 11, 1853. This John Thoreau, son of Philip, died in Concord, 1800.

The notes continue, and now begin to have a literary value.

“ Parkman house to fall of 1844; was graduated in 1837; kept town school a fortnight in 1837; began the big Red Journal, October, 1837; found my first arrowheads, fall of 1837; wrote a lecture (my first) on Society, March 14, 1838, and read it before the Lyceum, in the Masons' Hall, April 11, 1838; went to Maine for a school in May, 1838; commenced school [in the Parkman house¹] in the summer of 1838; wrote an essay on ‘Sound and Silence’ December, 1838; fall of 1839 up the Merrimack to White Mountains; ‘Aulus Persius Flaccus’ (first printed paper of consequence), February 10, 1840; the Red Journal of 546 pages ended June, 1840; Journal of 396 pages ended January 31, 1841.

“ Went to R. W. Emerson's in spring of 1841 [about April 25], and stayed there to summer of 1843; went to [William Emerson's], Staten Island, May, 1843, and returned in December, or to Thanksgiving, 1843; made pencils in 1844; Texas house to August 29, 1850; at

¹ This had been the abode of old Deacon Parkman, a granduncle of the late Francis Parkman, the historian, and son of the Westborough clergyman from whom this distinguished family descends. Deacon Parkman was a merchant in Concord, and lived in what was then a good house. It stood in the middle of the village, where the Public Library now is. The “Texas” house was built by Henry Thoreau and his father John; it was named from a section of the village then called “Texas,” because a little remote from the churches and schools; perhaps the same odd fancy that had bestowed the name of “Virginia” on the road of Thoreau's birthplace. The “Yellow House reformed” was a small cottage rebuilt and enlarged by the Thoreaus in 1850; in this, on the main street, Henry and his father and mother died.

Walden, July, 1845, to fall of 1847; then at R. W. Emerson's to fall of 1848, or while he was in Europe; Yellow House (reformed) till the present.”

As may be inferred from this simple record of the many mansions, chiefly small ones, in which he had spent his first thirty-eight years, there was nothing distinguished in the fortunes of Thoreau's family, who were small merchants, artisans, or farmers mostly. On the father's side they were from the isle of Jersey, where a French strain mingled with his English or Scandinavian blood; on the other side he was of Scotch and English descent, counting Jones, Dunbar, and Burns among his feminine ancestors. Liveliness and humor came to him from his Scotch connection; from father and grandfather he inherited a grave steadiness of mind rather at variance with his mother's vivacity. Manual dexterity was also inherited; so that he practiced the simpler mechanic arts with ease and skill; his mathematical training and his outdoor habits fitted him for a land-surveyor; and by that art, as well as by pencil-making, lecturing, and writing, he paid his way in the world, and left a small income from his writings to those who survived him. He taught pupils also, as did his brother and sisters; but it was not an occupation that he long followed after John's death in 1842. With these introductory statements we may proceed to Thoreau's first correspondence with his brother and sisters.

As an introduction to the correspondence, and a key to the young man's view of life, a passage may be taken from Thoreau's “part” at his college commencement,

August 16, 1837. He was one of two to hold what was called a "Conference" on "The Commercial Spirit,"—his alternative or opponent in the dispute being Henry Vose, also of Concord, who, in later years, was a Massachusetts judge. Henry Thoreau,¹ then just twenty, said:—

"The characteristic of our epoch is perfect freedom,—freedom of thought and action. The indignant Greek, the oppressed Pole, the jealous American assert it. The skeptic no less than the believer, the heretic no less than the faithful child of the church, have begun to enjoy it. It has generated an unusual degree of energy and activity; it has generated the *commercial spirit*. Man thinks faster and freer than ever before. He, moreover, moves faster and freer. He is more restless, because he is more independent than ever. The winds and the waves are not enough for him; he must needs ransack the bowels of the earth, that he may make for himself a highway of iron over its surface.

"Indeed, could one examine this beehive of ours from an observatory among the stars, he would perceive an unwonted degree of bustle in these later ages. There would be hammering and chipping in one quarter; baking and brewing, buying and selling, money-changing and speechmaking in another. What impression would he receive from so general and impartial a survey. Would it appear to him that mankind

¹ During the greater part of his college course he signed himself D. H. Thoreau, as he was christened (David Henry); but being constantly called "Henry," he put this name first about the time he left college, and was seldom afterwards known by the former initials.

used this world as not abusing it? Doubtless he would first be struck with the profuse beauty of our orb; he would never tire of admiring its varied zones and seasons, with their changes of living. He could not but notice that restless animal for whose sake it was contrived; but where he found one man to admire with him his fair dwelling-place, the ninety and nine would be scraping together a little of the gilded dust upon its surface. . . . We are to look chiefly for the origin of the commercial spirit, and the power that still cherishes and sustains it, in a blind and unmanly love of wealth. Wherever this exists, it is too sure to become the ruling spirit; and, as a natural consequence, it infuses into all our thoughts and affections a degree of its own selfishness; we become selfish in our patriotism, selfish in our domestic relations, selfish in our religion.

"Let men, true to their natures, cultivate the moral affections, lead manly and independent lives; let them make riches the means and not the end of existence, and we shall hear no more of the commercial spirit. The sea will not stagnate, the earth will be as green as ever, and the air as pure. This curious world which we inhabit is more wonderful than it is convenient; more beautiful than it is useful; it is more to be admired and enjoyed than used. The order of things should be somewhat reversed; the seventh should be man's day of toil, wherein to earn his living by the sweat of his brow; and the other six his Sabbath of the affections and the soul,—in which to range this widespread garden, and drink in the soft influences and sublime revelations of Nature. . . . The spirit we

are considering is not altogether and without exception bad. We rejoice in it as one more indication of the entire and universal freedom that characterizes the age in which we live, — as an indication that the human race is making one more advance in that infinite series of progressions which awaits it. We glory in those very excesses which are a source of anxiety to the wise and good; as an evidence that man will not always be the slave of matter, — but ere long, casting off those earth-born desires which identify him with the brute, shall pass the days of his sojourn in this his nether paradise, as becomes the Lord of Creation.”¹

¹ The impression made on one classmate and former room-mate (“chum”) of Thoreau, by this utterance, will be seen by this fragment of a letter from James Richardson of Dedham (afterwards Reverend J. Richardson), dated Dedham, September 7, 1837: —

“FRIEND THOREAU, — After you had finished your part in the Performances of Commencement (the tone and sentiment of which, by the way, I liked much, as being of a sound philosophy), I hardly saw you again at all. Neither at Mr. Quincy’s levee, neither at any of our classmates’ evening entertainments, did I find you; though for the purpose of taking a farewell, and leaving you some memento of an old chum, as well as on matters of business, I much wished to see your face once more. Of course you must be present at our October meeting, — notice of the time and place for which will be given in the newspapers. I hear that you are comfortably located, in your native town, as the guardian of its children, in the immediate vicinity, I suppose, of one of our most distinguished apostles of the future, R. W. Emerson, and situated under the ministry of our old friend Reverend Barzillai Frost, to whom please make my remembrances. I heard from you, also, that Concord Academy, lately under the care of Mr. Phineas Allen of Northfield, is now vacant of a preceptor; should Mr. Hoar find it difficult to get a scholar college-distinguished, perhaps he would take up with one, who, though in many respects a critical thinker, and a careful philosopher of language among other

This passage is noteworthy as showing how early the philosophic mind was developed in Thoreau, and how much his thought and expression were influenced by Emerson’s first book, — “Nature.” But the soil in which that germinating seed fell was naturally prepared to receive it; and the wide diversity between the master and the disciple soon began to appear. In 1863, reviewing Thoreau’s work, Emerson said, “That oaken strength which I noted whenever he walked or worked, or surveyed wood-lots, — the same unhesitating hand with which a field-laborer accosts a piece of work which I should shun as a waste of strength, Henry shows in his literary task. He has muscle, and ventures on and performs feats which I am forced to decline. In reading him I find the same thoughts, the same spirit that is in me; but he takes a step beyond, and illustrates by excellent images that which I should have conveyed in a sleepy generalization.” True as this is, it omits one point of difference only too well known to Emerson, — the controversial turn of Thoreau’s mind, in which he was so unlike Emerson and Alcott, and which must have given to his youthful utterances in company the air of something requiring an apology.

This, at all events, seems to have been the feeling of Helen Thoreau,¹ whose pride in her brother was such things, has never distinguished himself in his class as a regular attendant on college studies and rules. If so, could you do me the kindness to mention my name to him as of one intending to make teaching his profession, at least for a part of his life. If recommendations are necessary, President Quincy has offered me one, and I can easily get others.”

¹ This eldest of the children of John Thoreau and Cynthia Dunbar

that she did not wish to see him misunderstood. A pleasing indication of both these traits is seen in the first extant letter of Thoreau to this sister. I have this in an autograph copy made by Mr. Emerson, when he was preparing the letters for partial publication, soon after Henry's death. For some reason he did not insert it in his volume; but it quite deserves to be printed, as indicating the period when it was clear to Thoreau that he must think for himself, whatever those around him might think.

TO HELEN THOREAU (AT TAUNTON).

CONCORD, October 27, 1837.

DEAR HELEN, — Please you, let the defendant say a few words in defense of his long silence. You know we have hardly done our own deeds, thought our own thoughts, or lived our own lives hitherto. For a man to act himself, he must be perfectly free; otherwise he is in danger of losing all sense of responsibility or of self-respect. Now when such a state of things exists, that the sacred opinions one advances in argument are apologized for by his friends, before his face, lest his hearers receive a wrong impression of the man, — when such gross injustice is of frequent occurrence, where shall we look, and not look in vain, for men, deeds, thoughts? As well apologize for the grape that it is

was born October 22, 1812, and died June 14, 1849. Her grandmother, Mary Jones of Weston, Mass., belonged to a Tory family, and several of the Jones brothers served as officers in the British army against General Washington.

sour, or the thunder that it is noisy, or the lightning that it carries not.

Further, letter-writing too often degenerates into a communicating of facts, and not of truths; of other men's deeds and not our thoughts. What are the convulsions of a planet, compared with the emotions of the soul? or the rising of a thousand suns, if that is not enlightened by a ray?

Your affectionate brother,

HENRY.

It is presumed the tender sister did not need a second lesson; and equally that Henry did not see fit always to write such letters as he praised above, — for he was quite ready to give his correspondents facts, no less than thoughts, especially in his family letters.

Next to this epistle, chronologically, comes one in the conventional dialect of the American Indian, as handed down by travelers and romancers, by Jefferson, Chateaubriand, Lewis, Clarke, and Fenimore Cooper. John Thoreau, Henry's brother, was born in 1815 and died January 11, 1842. He was teaching at Taunton in 1837.

TO JOHN THOREAU (AT TAUNTON).

(Written as from one Indian to another.)

MUSKETAQUID, 202 Summers, two Moons, eleven Suns,
since the coming of the Pale Faces.

(November 11, 1837.)

TAHATAWAN, Sachimaussan, to his brother sachem,
Hopeful of Hopewell, — hoping that he is well : —

Brother: It is many suns that I have not seen the

print of thy moccasins by our council-fire; the Great Spirit has blown more leaves from the trees, and many clouds from the land of snows have visited our lodge; the earth has become hard, like a frozen buffalo-skin, so that the trampling of many herds is like the Great Spirit's thunder; the grass on the great fields is like the old man of many winters, and the small song sparrow prepares for his flight to the land whence the summer comes.

Brother: I write these things because I know that thou lovest the Great Spirit's creatures, and wast wont to sit at thy lodge-door, when the maize was green, to hear the bluebird's song. So shalt thou, in the land of spirits, not only find good hunting-grounds and sharp arrowheads, but much music of birds.

Brother: I have been thinking how the Pale-Faces have taken away our lands, — and was a woman. You are fortunate to have pitched your wigwam nearer to the great salt lake, where the Pale-Face can never plant corn.

Brother: I need not tell thee how we hunted on the lands of the Dundees, — a great war-chief never forgets the bitter taunts of his enemies. Our young men called for strong water; they painted their faces and dug up the hatchet. But their enemies, the Dundees, were women; they hastened to cover their hatchets with wampum. Our braves are not many; our enemies took a few strings from the heap their fathers left them, and our hatchets are buried. But not Tahatawan's; his heart is of rock when the Dundees sing, — his hatchet cuts deep into the Dundee braves.

Brother: There is dust on my moccasins; I have journeyed to the White Lake, in the country of the Ninares.¹ The Long-Knife has been there, — like a woman I paddled his war-canoe. But the spirits of my fathers were angered; the waters were ruffled, and the Bad Spirit troubled the air.

The hearts of the Lee-vites are gladdened; the young Peacock has returned to his lodge at Naushawtuck. He is the Medicine of his tribe, but his heart is like the dry leaves when the whirlwind breathes. He has come to help choose new chiefs for the tribe, in the great council-house, when two suns are past. — There is no seat for Tahatawan in the council-house. He lets the squaws talk, — his voice is heard above the war-whoop of his tribe, piercing the hearts of his foes; his legs are stiff, he cannot sit.

Brother: Art thou waiting for the spring, that the geese may fly low over thy wigwam? Thy arrows are sharp, thy bow is strong. Has Anawan killed all the eagles? The crows fear not the winter. Tahatawan's eyes are sharp, — he can track a snake in the grass, he

¹ White Pond, in the district called "Nine-Acre Corner," is here meant; the "Lee-vites" were a family then living on Lee's Hill. Naushawtuck is another name for this hill, where the old Tahatawan lived at times, before the English settled in Concord in September, 1635. The real date of this letter is November 11-14, 1837, and between its two dates the Massachusetts State election was held. The "great council-house" was the Boston State-House, to which the Concord people were electing deputies; the "Eagle-Beak" named on the next page was doubtless Samuel Hoar, the first citizen of the town, and for a time Member of Congress from Middlesex County. He was the father of Rockwood and Frisbie Hoar, afterwards judge and senator respectively.

knows a friend from a foe; he welcomes a friend to his lodge though the ravens croak.

Brother: Hast thou studied much in the medicine-books of the Pale-Faces? Dost thou understand the long talk of the Medicine whose words are like the music of the mockingbird? But our chiefs have not ears to hear him; they listen like squaws to the council of old men, — they understand not his words. But, Brother, he never danced the war-dance, nor heard the war-whoop of his enemies. He was a squaw; he stayed by the wigwam when the braves were out, and tended the tame buffaloes.

Fear not; the Dundees have faint hearts and much wampum. When the grass is green on the Great Fields, and the small titmouse returns again, we will hunt the buffalo together.

Our old men say they will send the young chief of the Karlisles, who lives in the green wigwam and is a great Medicine, that his word may be heard in the long talk which the wise men are going to hold at Shawmut, by the salt lake. He is a great talk, and will not forget the enemies of his tribe.

14th Sun. The fire has gone out in the council-house. The words of our old men have been like the vaunts of the Dundees. The Eagle-Beak was moved to talk like a silly Pale-Face, and not as becomes a great war-chief in a council of braves. The young Peacock is a woman among braves; he heard not the words of the old men, — like a squaw he looked at his medicine-paper.¹ The young chief of the green wigwam has hung

¹ A delicate sarcasm on young B., who could not finish his speech

up his moccasins; he will not leave his tribe till after the buffalo have come down on to the plains.

Brother: This is a long talk, but there is much meaning to my words; they are not like the thunder of canes when the lightning smites them. Brother, I have just heard *thy talk* and am well pleased; thou art getting to be a great Medicine. The Great Spirit confound the enemies of thy tribe.

TAHATAWAN.

His mark [a bow and arrow].

This singular letter was addressed to John Thoreau at Taunton, and was so carefully preserved in the family that it must have had value in their eyes, as recalling traits of the two Thoreau brothers, and also events in the village life of Concord, more interesting to the young people of 1837 than to the present generation. Some of its parables are easy to read, others quite obscure. The annual State election was an important event to Henry Thoreau then, — more so than it afterwards appeared; and he was certainly on the Whig side in politics, like most of the educated youths of Concord. His “young chief of the Karlisles” was Albert Nelson, son of a Carlisle physician, who began to practice law in Concord in 1836, and was afterwards in town-meeting without looking at his notes. The allusion to the “Medicine whose words are like the music of the mockingbird” is hard to explain; it may mean Edward Everett, then Governor of Massachusetts, or, possibly, Emerson, whose lectures began to attract notice in Boston and Cambridge. It can hardly mean Wendell Phillips, though his melodious eloquence had lately been heard in attacks upon slavery.

chief justice of the Superior Court of the County of Suffolk. He was defeated at the election of 1837, as a Whig candidate for the legislature, by a Democrat. Henry Vose, above named, writing from "Butternuts," in New York, three hundred miles west of Concord, October 22, 1837, said to Thoreau: "You envy my happy situation, and mourn over your fate, which condemns you to loiter about Concord and grub among clamshells [for Indian relics]. If this were your only source of enjoyment while in Concord,—but I know that it is not. I well remember that 'antique and fish-like' office of *Major* Nelson (to whom, and to Mr. Dennis, and Bemis, and John Thoreau, I wish to be remembered); and still more vividly do I remember the fairer portion of the community in C." This indicates a social habit in Henry and John Thoreau, which the Indian "talk" also implies. Tahatawan, whom Henry here impersonated, was the mythical Sachem of Musketaquid (the Algonquin name for Concord River and region), whose fishing and hunting lodge was on the hill Naushawtuck, between the two rivers so much navigated by the Thoreaus. In 1837 the two brothers were sportsmen, and went shooting over the Concord meadows and moors, but of course the "buffalo" was a figure of speech; they never shot anything larger than a raccoon. A few years later they gave up killing the game.

TO JOHN THOREAU (AT TAUNTON).

CONCORD, February 10, 1838.

DEAR JOHN, — Dost expect to elicit a spark from so dull a steel as myself, by that flinty subject of thine?

Truly, one of your copper percussion caps would have fitted this nail-head better.

Unfortunately, the "Americana"¹ has hardly two words on the subject. The process is very simple. The stone is struck with a mallet so as to produce pieces sharp at one end, and blunt at the other. These are laid upon a steel line (probably a chisel's edge), and again struck with the mallet, and flints of the required size are broken off. A skillful workman may make a thousand in a day.

So much for the "Americana." Dr. Jacob Bigelow in his "Technology," says, "Gunflints are formed by a skillful workman, who breaks them out with a hammer, a roller, and steel chisel, with small, repeated strokes."

Your ornithological commission shall be executed. When are you coming home?

Your affectionate brother,

HENRY D. THOREAU.

TO JOHN THOREAU (AT TAUNTON).

CONCORD, March 17, 1838.

DEAR JOHN, — Your box of relics came safe to hand, but was speedily deposited on the carpet, I assure you.

¹ *Americana*, in this note, is the old *Encyclopedia Americana*, which had been edited from the German *Conversations-Lexicon*, and other sources, by Dr. Francis Lieber, T. G. Bradford, and other Boston scholars, ten years earlier, and was the only convenient book of reference at Thoreau's hand. The inquiry of John Thoreau is another evidence of the interest he took, like his brother, in the Indians and their flint arrowheads. The relics mentioned in the next letter were doubtless Indian weapons and utensils, very common about Taunton in the region formerly controlled by King Philip.

What could it be? Some declared it must be Taunton herrings: "Just nose it, sir!" So down we went on to our knees, and commenced smelling in good earnest, — now horizontally from this corner to that, now perpendicularly from the carpet up, now diagonally, — and finally with a sweeping movement describing the circumference. But it availed not. Taunton herring would not be smelled. So we e'en proceeded to open it *vi et chisel*. What an array of nails! Four nails make a quarter, four quarters a yard, — i' faith, this is n't cloth measure! Blaze away, old boy! Clap in another wedge, then! There, softly! she begins to gape. Just give that old stickler, with a black hat on, another hoist. Aye, we'll pare his nails for him! Well done, old fellow, there's a breathing-hole for you. "Drive it in!" cries one; "Nip it off!" cries another. Be easy, I say. What's done may be undone. Your richest veins don't lie nearest the surface. Suppose we sit down and enjoy the prospect, for who knows but we may be disappointed? When they opened Pandora's box, all the contents escaped except Hope, but in this case hope is uppermost, and will be the first to escape when the box is opened. However, the general voice was for kicking the coverlid off.

The relics have been arranged numerically on a table. When shall we set up housekeeping? Miss Ward thanks you for her share of the spoils; also accept many thanks from your humble servant "for yourself."

I have a proposal to make. Suppose by the time you are released we should start in company for the West,

and there either establish a school jointly, or procure ourselves separate situations. Suppose, moreover, you should get ready to start previous to leaving Taunton, to save time. Go *I* must, at all events. Dr. Jarvis enumerates nearly a dozen schools which I could have, — all such as would suit you equally well.¹ I wish you would write soon about this. It is high season to start. The canals are now open, and traveling comparatively cheap. I think I can borrow the cash in this town. There's nothing like trying.

Brigham wrote you a few words on the 8th, which father took the liberty to read, with the advice and consent of the family. He wishes you to send him those [numbers] of the "Library of Health" received since 1838, if you are in Concord; otherwise, he says you need not trouble yourself about it at present. He is in C., and enjoying better health than usual. But one number, and that you have, has been received.

The bluebirds made their appearance the 14th day of March; robins and pigeons have also been seen. Mr. Emerson has put up the bluebird-box in due form. All send their love.

From your aff. br.

H. D. THOREAU.

[Postscript by Helen Thoreau.]

DEAR JOHN, — Will you have the kindness to inquire at Mr. Marston's for an old singing-book I left there, —

¹ Dr. Edward Jarvis, born in Concord (1803), had gone to Louisville, Ky., in April, 1837, and was thriving there as a physician. He knew the Thoreaus well, and gave them good hopes of success in Ohio or Kentucky as teachers. The plan was soon abandoned, and Henry

the "Handel and Haydn Collection," without a cover? Have you ever got those red handkerchiefs? Much love to the Marstons, Crockers, and Muenschers. Mr. Josiah Davis has failed. Mr. and Mrs. Howe have both written again, urging my going to Roxbury; which I suppose I shall do. What day of the month shall you return?

HELEN.

One remark in this letter calls for attention, — that concerning the "bluebird-box" for Mr. Emerson. In 1853 Emerson wrote in his journal: "Long ago I wrote of Gifts, and neglected a capital example. John Thoreau, Jr., one day put a bluebird's box on my barn, — fifteen years ago it must be, — and there it still is, with every summer a melodious family in it, adorning the place and singing his praises. There's a gift for you, — which cost the giver no money, but nothing which he bought could have been so good. I think of another, quite inestimable. John Thoreau knew how much I should value a head of little Waldo, then five years old. He came to me and offered to take him to a daguerreotypist who was then in town, and he (Thoreau) would see it well done. He did it, and brought me the daguerre, which I thankfully paid for. A few months after, my boy died; and I have since to thank John Thoreau for that wise and gentle piece of friendship."

Little Waldo Emerson died January 27, 1842, and John Thoreau the same month; so that this taking of went to Maine to find a school, but without success. See Sanborn's *Thoreau*, p. 57.

the portrait must have been but a few months before his own death, January 11. Henry Thoreau was then living in the Emerson family.

TO JOHN THOREAU (AT WEST ROXBURY).

CONCORD, July 8, 1838.

DEAR JOHN, — We heard from Helen to-day, and she informs us that you are coming home by the first of August. Now I wish you to write and let me know exactly when your vacation takes place, that I may take one at the same time. I am in school from 8 to 12 in the morning, and from 2 to 4 in the afternoon. After that I read a little Greek or English, or, for variety, take a stroll in the fields. We have not had such a year for berries this long time, — the earth is actually blue with them. High blueberries, three kinds of low, thimble- and raspberries constitute my diet at present. (Take notice, — I only diet between meals.) Among my deeds of charity, I may reckon the picking of a cherry tree for two helpless single ladies, who live under the hill; but i' faith, it was robbing Peter to pay Paul, — for while I was exalted in charity towards them, I had no mercy on my own stomach. Be advised, my love for currants continues.

The only addition that I have made to my stock of ornithological information is in the shape not of a *Fring. melod.*, — but surely a melodious Fringilla, — the *F. junco*, or rush-sparrow. I had long known him by note, but never by name.

Report says that Elijah Stearns is going to take the town school. I have four scholars, and one more en-

gaged. Mr. Fenner left town yesterday. Among occurrences of ill omen may be mentioned the falling out and cracking of the inscription stone of Concord Monument.¹ Mrs. Lowell and children are at Aunts'. Peabody [a college classmate] walked up last Wednesday, spent the night, and took a stroll in the woods.

Sophia says I must leave off and pen a few lines for her to Helen: so good-by. Love from all, and among them your aff. brother,

H. D. T.

The school above mentioned as begun by Henry Thoreau in this summer of 1838 was joined in by John, after finishing his teaching at West Roxbury, and was continued for several years. It was in this school that Louisa Alcott and her sister received some instruction, after their father removed from Boston to Concord, in the spring of 1840. It was opened in the Parkman house, where the family then lived, and soon after was transferred to the building of the Concord Academy,² not far off. John Thoreau taught the English branches and mathematics; Henry taught Latin and Greek and the higher mathematics, — and it was the custom of both brothers to go walking with their pupils one afternoon each week. It is as a professional schoolmaster that Henry thus writes to his sister Helen, then teaching at Roxbury, after a like experience in Taunton.

¹ This was the old monument of the Fight in 1775, for the dedication of which Emerson wrote his hymn, "By the rude bridge." This was sung by Thoreau, among others, to the tune of Old Hundred.

² For twenty-five years (1866-91) the house of Ellery Channing, and now of Charles Emerson, nephew of Waldo Emerson.

TO HELEN THOREAU (AT ROXBURY).

CONCORD, October 6, 1838.

DEAR HELEN, — I dropped Sophia's letter into the box immediately on taking yours out, else the tone of the former had been changed.

I have no acquaintance with "Cleaveland's First Lessons," though I have peeped into his abridged grammar, which I should think very well calculated for beginners, — at least for such as would be likely to wear out one book before they would be prepared for the abstruser parts of grammar. Ahem!

As no one can tell what was the Roman pronunciation, each nation makes the Latin conform, for the most part, to the rules of its own language; so that with us of the vowels only A has a peculiar sound. In the end of a word of more than one syllable it is sounded like "ah," as *pennah*, *Lydiah*, *Hannah*, etc., without regard to case; but "da" is never sounded "dah," because it is a monosyllable. All terminations in *es*, and plural cases in *os*, as you know, are pronounced long, — as *homines* (hominese), *dominos* (dominose), or, in English, *Johnny Vose*. For information, see Adams' "Latin Grammar," before the Rudiments.

This is all law and gospel in the eyes of the world; but remember I am speaking, as it were, in the third person, and should sing quite a different tune if it were I that had made the quire. However, one must occasionally hang his harp on the willows, and play on the Jew's harp, in such a strange country as this.

One of your young ladies wishes to study mental

philosophy, hey? Well, tell her that she has the very best text-book that I know of in her possession already. If she do not believe it, then she should have bespoken another better in another world, and not have expected to find one at "Little & Wilkins." But if she wishes to know how poor an apology for a mental philosophy men have tacked together, synthetically or analytically, in these latter days, — how they have squeezed the infinite mind into a compass that would not nonplus a surveyor of Eastern Lands — making Imagination and Memory to lie still in their respective apartments like ink-stand and wafers in a lady's escritoire, — why let her read Locke, or Stewart, or Brown. The fact is, mental philosophy is very like Poverty, which, you know, begins at home; and indeed, when it goes abroad, it is poverty itself.

Chorus. I should think an abridgment of one of the above authors, or of Amhercrombie, would answer her purpose. It may set her a-thinking. Probably there are many systems in the market of which I am ignorant.

As for themes, say first "Miscellaneous Thoughts." Set one up to a window, to note what passes in the street, and make her comments thereon; or let her gaze in the fire, or into a corner where there is a spider's web, and philosophize, moralize, theorize, or what not. What their hands find to putter about, or their minds to think about, that let them write about. To say nothing of advantage or disadvantage of this, that, or the other, let them set down their ideas at any given season, preserving the chain of thought as complete as may be.

This is the style pedagogical. I am much obliged to you for your piece of information. Knowing your dislike to a sentimental letter, I remain

Your affectionate brother,

H. D. T.

The next letter to Helen carries this pedagogical style a little farther, for it is in Latin, addressed "Ad Helenam L. Thoreâu, Roxbury, Mass.," and post-marked "Concord, Jan. 25" (1840).

TO HELEN THOREAU (AT ROXBURY).

CONCORDIAE, Dec. Kal. Feb. A. D. MDCCCXL.

CARA SOROR, — Est magnus acervus nivis ad limina, et frigus intolerabile intus. Coelum ipsum ruit, credo, et terram operit. Sero stratum linquo et mature repeto; in fenestris multa pruina prospectum absumit; et hic miser scribo, non currente calamo, nam digiti mentesque torpescunt. Canerem cum Horatio, si vox non faucibus haeserit, —

Vides ut alta stet nive candidum
Nawshawtuēt, nec jam sustineant onus
Silvae laborantes, geluque
Flumina constiterint acuto?

Dissolve frigus, ligna super foco
Large reponens, etc.

Sed olim, Musa mutata, et lactiore plectro,

Neque jam stabulis gaudet pecus, aut arator igne,

Nec prata canis albicant pruinis;

Jam Cytherea chorus ducit Venus imminente luna.

Quam turdus ferrugineus ver reduxerit, tu, spero,

linques curas scholasticas, et, negotio religato, desipere in loco audebis; aut mecum inter sylvas, aut super scopulos Pulchri-Portus, aut in cymba super lacum Waldensem, mulcens fluctus manu, aut speciem miratus sub undas.

Bulwerius est mihi nomen incognitum, — unus ex ignobile vulgo, nec refutandus nec laudandus. Certe alicui nonnullam honorem habeo qui insanabili cacoethe scribendi teneatur.

Specie flagrantis Lexingtonis non somnia deturbat? At non Vulcanum Neptunumque culpemus, cum superstitioso grege. Natura curat animalculis aequae ac hominibus; cum serena, tum procellosa, amica est.

Si amas historiam et fortia facta heroum, non deponere Rollin, precor; ne Clio offendas nunc, nec illa det veniam olim. Quos libros Latinos legis? legis, inquam, non studes. Beatus qui potest suos libellos tractare, et saepe perlegere, sine metu domini urgentis! ab otio injurioso procul est: suos amicos et vocare et dimittere quandocunque velit, potest. Bonus liber opus nobilissimum hominis. Hinc ratio non modo cur legeres, sed cur tu quoque scriberes; nec lectores carent; ego sum. Si non librum meditaris, libellum certe. Nihil posteris proderit te spirasse, et vitam nunc leniter nunc asperere egisse; sed cogitasse praecipue et scripsisse. Vereor ne tibi pertaesum hujus epistolae sit; necnon alma lux caret,

Majoresque cadunt altis de montibus umbrae.

Quamobrem vale, — imo valetis, et requiescatis placide, Sorores.

H. D. THOREAUS.

Memento scribere!

CARA SOPHIA, — Samuel Niger crebris aegrotationibus, quae agilitatem et aequum animum abstulere, obnoxius est; iis temporibus ad cellam descendit, et multas horas (ibi) manet.

Flores, ah crudelis pruina! parvo leti discrimine sunt. Cactus frigore ustus est, gerania vero adhuc videntur.

Conventus sociabiles hac hieme reconstituti fuerunt. Conveniunt (?) ad meam domum mense quarto vel quinto, ut tu hic esse possis. Matertera Sophia cum nobis remanet; quando urbem revertet non scio. Gravissime etiamnum, sed non tam aegre, laboramus.

Adolescentula E. White apud pagum paulisper moratur. Memento scribere intra duas hebdomadas.

Te valere desiderium est

Tui Matris,

C. THOREAUS.

P. S. Epistolam die solis proxima expectamus. (Amanuense, H. D. T.)

Barring a few slips, this is a good and lively piece of Latin, and noticeable for its thought as well as its learning and humor. The poets were evidently his favorites among Latin authors. Shall we attempt a free translation, such as Thoreau would give?

VERNACULAR VERSION.

CONCORD, January 23, 1840.

DEAR SISTER, — There is a huge snow-drift at the door, and the cold inside is intolerable. The very sky is coming down, I guess, and covering up the ground.

I turn out late in the morning, and go to bed early; there is thick frost on the windows, shutting out the view; and here I write in pain, for fingers and brains are numb. I would chant with Horace, if my voice did not stick in my throat, —

See how Naushawtuct, deep in snow,
Stands glittering, while the bending woods
Scarce bear their burden, and the floods
Feel arctic winter stay their flow.

Pile on the firewood, melt the cold,
Spare nothing, etc.

But soon, changing my tune, and with a cheerfuller note, I'll say, —

No longer the flock huddles up in the stall, the plowman bends over
the fire,

No longer frost whitens the meadow;

But the goddess of love, while the moon shines above,
Sets us dancing in light and in shadow.

When Robin Redbreast brings back the springtime, I trust that you will lay your school duties aside, cast off care, and venture to be gay now and then; roaming with me in the woods, or climbing the Fair Haven cliffs, — or else, in my boat on Walden, let the water kiss your hand, or gaze at your image in the wave.

Bulwer is to me a name unknown, — one of the unnoticed crowd, attracting neither blame nor praise. To be sure, I hold any one in some esteem who is helpless in the grasp of the writing demon.

Does not the image of the Lexington afire trouble your dreams? ¹ But we may not, like the superstitious

¹ The steamer Lexington lately burnt on Long Island Sound, with Dr. Follen on board.

mob, blame Vulcan or Neptune, — neither fire nor water was in fault. Nature takes as much care for midgets as for mankind; she is our friend in storm and in calm.

If you like history, and the exploits of the brave, don't give up Rollin, I beg; thus would you displease Clio, who might not forgive you hereafter. What Latin are you reading? I mean *reading*, not studying. Blessed is the man who can have his library at hand, and oft peruse the books, without the fear of a task-master! he is far enough from harmful idleness, who can call in and dismiss these friends when he pleases. An honest book 's the noblest work of man. There 's a reason, now, not only for your reading, but for writing something, too. You will not lack readers, — here am I, for one. If you cannot compose a volume, then try a tract. It will do the world no good, hereafter, if you merely exist, and pass life smoothly or roughly; but to have thoughts, and write them down, that helps greatly.

I fear you will tire of this epistle; the light of day is dwindling, too, —

And longer fall the shadows of the hills.

Therefore, good-by; fare ye well, and sleep in quiet, both my sisters! Don't forget to write.

H. D. THOREAU.

POSTSCRIPT. (BY MRS. THOREAU.)

DEAR SOPHIA, — Sam Black [the cat] is liable to frequent attacks that impair his agility and good-nature; at such times he goes down cellar, and stays many hours. Your flowers — O, the cruel frost! — are all but

dead; the cactus is withered by cold, but the geraniums yet flourish. The Sewing Circle has been revived this winter; they meet at our house in April or May, so that you may then be here. Your Aunt Sophia remains with us, — when she will return to the city I don't know. We still suffer from heavy colds, but not so much. Young Miss E. White is staying in the village a little while (is making a little visit in town). Don't forget to write within two weeks. We expect a letter next Sunday.

That you may enjoy good health is the prayer of
Your mother,

C. THOREAU.

(H. D. T. was the scribe.)

Cats were always an important branch of the Thoreaus' domestic economy, and Henry was more tolerant of them than men are wont to be. Flowers were the specialty of Sophia, who, when I knew her, from 1855 to 1876, usually had a small conservatory in a recess of the dining-room. At this time (1840) she seems to have been aiding Helen in her school. The next letter, to Helen, is of a graver tone: —

TO HELEN THOREAU (AT ROXBURY).

CONCORD, June 13, 1840.

DEAR HELEN, — That letter to John, for which you had an opportunity doubtless to substitute a more perfect communication, fell, as was natural, into the hands of his "transcendental brother," who is his proxy in such cases, having been commissioned to acknowledge

and receipt all bills that may be presented. But what's in a name? Perhaps it does not matter whether it be John or Henry. Nor will those same six months have to be altered, I fear, to suit his case as well. But methinks they have not passed entirely without intercourse, provided we have been sincere though humble worshipers of the same virtue in the mean time. Certainly it is better that we should make ourselves quite sure of such a communion as this by the only course which is completely free from suspicion, — the coincidence of two earnest and aspiring lives, — than run the risk of a disappointment by relying wholly or chiefly on so meagre and uncertain a means as speech, whether written or spoken, affords. How often, when we have been nearest each other bodily, have we really been farthest off! Our tongues were the witty foils with which we fenced each other off. Not that we have not met heartily and with profit as members of one family, but it was a small one surely, and not that other human family. We have met frankly and without concealment ever, as befits those who have an instinctive trust in one another, and the scenery of whose outward lives has been the same, but never as prompted by an earnest and affectionate desire to probe deeper our mutual natures. Such intercourse, at least, if it has ever been, has not condescended to the vulgarities of oral communication, for the ears are provided with no lid as the eye is, and would not have been deaf to it in sleep. And now glad am I, if I am not mistaken in imagining that some such transcendental inquisitiveness has traveled post *thither*, — for, as I observed before, where the bolt

hits, thither was it aimed, — any arbitrary direction notwithstanding.

Thus much, at least, our *kindred* temperament of mind and body — and long *family-arity* — have done for us, that we already find ourselves standing on a solid and natural footing with respect to one another, and shall not have to waste time in the so often unavailing endeavor to arrive fairly at this simple ground.

Let us leave trifles, then, to accident ; and politics, and finance, and such gossip, to the moments when diet and exercise are cared for, and speak to each other deliberately as out of one infinity into another, — you there in time and space, and I here. For beside this relation, all books and doctrines are no better than gossip or the turning of a spit.

Equally to you and Sophia, from

Your affectionate brother,

H. D. THOREAU.

We come now to the period when Thoreau entered on more intimate relations with Emerson. There was a difference of fourteen years in their ages, which had hitherto separated them intellectually ; but now the young scholar, thinker, and naturalist had so fast advanced that he could meet his senior on more equal terms, and each became essential to the other. With all his prudence and common sense, in which he surpassed most men, Emerson was yet lacking in some practical faculties ; while Thoreau was the most practical and handy person in all matters of every-day life, — a good mechanic and gardener, methodical in his habits, obser-

vant and kindly in the domestic world, and attractive to children, who now were important members of the Emerson household. He was therefore invited by Emerson to make his house a home, — looking after the garden, the business affairs, and performing the office of a younger brother or a grown-up son. The invitation was accepted in April, 1841, and Thoreau remained in the family, with frequent absences, until he went in May, 1843, to reside with Mr. William Emerson, near New York, as the tutor of his sons. During these two years much occurred of deep moment to the two friends. Young Waldo Emerson, the beautiful boy, died, and just before, John Thoreau, the sunny and hopeful brother, whom Henry seems to have loved more than any human being. These tragedies brought the bereaved nearer together, and gave to Mrs. Emerson in particular an affection for Thoreau and a trust in him which made the intimate life of the household move harmoniously, notwithstanding the independent and eccentric genius of Thoreau.

TO MRS. LUCY BROWN¹ (AT PLYMOUTH).

CONCORD, July 21, 1841.

DEAR FRIEND, — Don't think I need any prompting to write to you ; but what tough earthenware shall I put into my packet to travel over so many hills, and

¹ Mrs. Brown was the elder sister of Mrs. R. W. Emerson and of the eminent chemist and geologist, Dr. Charles T. Jackson, of Plymouth and Boston. She lived for a time in Mrs. Thoreau's family, and Thoreau's early verses, "Sic Vita," were thrown into her window there by the young poet, wrapped round a cluster of violets.

thrid so many woods, as lie between Concord and Plymouth? Thank fortune it is all the way down hill, so they will get safely carried; and yet it seems as if it were writing against time and the sun to send a letter east, for no natural force forwards it. You should go dwell in the West, and then I would deluge you with letters, as boys throw feathers into the air to see the wind take them. I should rather fancy you at evening dwelling far away behind the serene curtain of the West, — the home of fair weather, — than over by the chilly sources of the east wind.

What quiet thoughts have you nowadays which will float on that east wind to west, for so we may make our worst servants our carriers, — what progress made from *can't* to *can*, in practice and theory? Under this category, you remember, we used to place all our philosophy. Do you have any still, startling, well moments, in which you think grandly, and speak with emphasis? Don't take this for sarcasm, for not in a year of the gods, I fear, will such a golden approach to plain speaking revolve again. But away with such fears; by a few miles of travel we have not distanced each other's sincerity.

I grow savager and savager every day, as if fed on raw meat, and my tameness is only the repose of untamableness. I dream of looking abroad summer and winter, with free gaze, from some mountain-side, while my eyes revolve in an Egyptian slime of health, — I to be nature looking into nature with such easy sympathy as the blue-eyed grass in the meadow looks in the face of the sky. From some such recess I would put forth

sublime thoughts daily, as the plant puts forth leaves. Now-a-nights I go on to the hill to see the sun set, as one would go home at evening; the bustle of the village has run on all day, and left me quite in the rear; but I see the sunset, and find that it can wait for my slow virtue.

But I forget that you think more of this human nature than of this nature I praise. Why won't you believe that mine is more human than any single man or woman can be? that in it, in the sunset there, are all the qualities that can adorn a household, and that sometimes, in a fluttering leaf, one may hear all your Christianity preached.

You see how unskillful a letter-writer I am, thus to have come to the end of my sheet when hardly arrived at the beginning of my story. I was going to be soberer, I assure you, but now have only room to add, that if the fates allot you a serene hour, don't fail to communicate some of its serenity to your friend,

HENRY D. THOREAU.

No, no. Improve so rare a gift for yourself, and send me of your leisure.

TO MRS. LUCY BROWN (AT PLYMOUTH).

CONCORD, Wednesday evening,
September 8, [1841.]

DEAR FRIEND, — Your note came wafted to my hand like the first leaf of the fall on the September wind, and I put only another interpretation upon its lines than upon the veins of those which are soon to

be strewed around me. It is nothing but Indian summer here at present. I mean that any weather seems reserved expressly for our late purposes whenever we happen to be fulfilling them. I do not know what right I have to so much happiness, but rather hold it in reserve till the time of my desert.

What with the crickets and the crowing of cocks, and the lowing of kine, our Concord life is sonorous enough. Sometimes I hear the cock bestir himself on his perch under my feet, and crow shrilly before dawn; and I think I might have been born any year for all the phenomena I know. We count sixteen eggs daily now, when arithmetic will only fetch the hens up to thirteen; but the world is young, and we wait to see this eccentricity complete its period.

My verses on Friendship are already printed in the *Dial*; not expanded, but reduced to completeness by leaving out the long lines, which always have, or should have, a longer or at least another sense than short ones.

Just now I am in the mid-sea of verses, and they actually rustle around me as the leaves would round the head of Autumnus himself should he thrust it up through some vales which I know; but, alas! many of them are but crisped and yellow leaves like his, I fear, and will deserve no better fate than to make mould for new harvests. I see the stanzas rise around me, verse upon verse, far and near, like the mountains from Agiocochook, not all having a terrestrial existence as yet, even as some of them may be clouds; but I fancy I see the gleam of some Sebago Lake and Sil-

ver Cascade, at whose well I may drink one day. I am as unfit for any practical purpose — I mean for the furtherance of the world's ends — as gossamer for ship-timber; and I, who am going to be a pencil-maker to-morrow,¹ can sympathize with God Apollo, who served King Admetus for a while on earth. But I believe he found it for his advantage at last, — as I am sure I shall, though I shall hold the nobler part at least out of the service.

Don't attach any undue seriousness to this threnody, for I love my fate to the very core and rind, and could swallow it without paring it, I think. You ask if I have written any more poems? Excepting those which Vulcan is now forging, I have only discharged a few more bolts into the horizon, — in all, three hundred verses — and sent them, as I may say, over the mountains to Miss Fuller, who may have occasion to remember the old rhyme: —

“Three scipen gode
Comen mid than flode
Three hundred enhten.”

But these are far more Vandalic than they. In this narrow sheet there is not room even for one thought to root itself. But you must consider this an odd leaf of a volume, and that volume

Your friend,
HENRY D. THOREAU.

¹ This business of pencil-making had become the family bread-winner, and Henry Thoreau worked at it and kindred arts by intervals for the next twenty years.

TO MRS. LUCY BROWN (AT PLYMOUTH).

CONCORD, October 5, 1841.

DEAR FRIEND,—I send you Williams's¹ letter as the last remembrancer to one of those "whose acquaintance he had the pleasure to form while in Concord." It came quite unexpectedly to me, but I was very glad to receive it, though I hardly know whether my utmost sincerity and interest can inspire a sufficient answer to it. I should like to have you send it back by some convenient opportunity.

Pray let me know what you are thinking about any day,—what most nearly concerns you. Last winter, you know, you did more than your share of the talking, and I did not complain for want of an opportunity. Imagine your stove-door out of order, at least, and then while I am fixing it you will think of enough things to say.

What makes the value of your life at present? what dreams have you, and what realizations? You know there is a high table-land which not even the east wind reaches. Now can't we walk and chat upon its plane still, as if there were no lower latitudes? Surely our two destinies are topics interesting and grand enough for any occasion.

I hope you have many gleams of serenity and health, or, if your body will grant you no positive respite, that you may, at any rate, enjoy your sickness occasionally, as much as I used to tell of. But here is the bundle going to be done up, so accept a "good-night" from

HENRY D. THOREAU.

¹ I. T. Williams, who had lived in Concord, but now wrote from Buffalo, N. Y.

TO MRS. LUCY BROWN (AT PLYMOUTH).

CONCORD, March 2, 1842.

DEAR FRIEND,—I believe I have nothing new to tell you, for what was news you have learned from other sources. I am much the same person that I was, who should be so much better; yet when I realize what has transpired, and the greatness of the part I am unconsciously acting, I am thrilled, and it seems as if there were none in history to match it.

Soon after John's death I listened to a music-box, and if, at any time, that event had seemed inconsistent with the beauty and harmony of the universe, it was then gently constrained into the placid course of nature by those steady notes, in mild and unoffended tone echoing far and wide under the heavens. But I find these things more strange than sad to me. What right have I to grieve, who have not ceased to wonder? We feel at first as if some opportunities of kindness and sympathy were lost, but learn afterward that any *pure grief* is ample recompense for all. That is, if we are faithful; for a great grief is but sympathy with the soul that disposes events, and is as natural as the resin on Arabian trees. Only Nature has a right to grieve perpetually, for she only is innocent. Soon the ice will melt, and the blackbirds sing along the river which he frequented, as pleasantly as ever. The same everlasting serenity will appear in this face of God, and we will not be sorrowful if he is not.

We are made happy when reason can discover no occasion for it. The memory of some past moments is more persuasive than the experience of present ones.

There have been visions of such breadth and brightness that these notes were invisible in their light.

I do not wish to see John ever again, — I mean him who is dead, — but that other, whom only he would have wished to see, or to be, of whom he was the imperfect representative. For we are not what we are, nor do we treat or esteem each other for such, but for what we are capable of being.

As for Waldo, he died as the mist rises from the brook, which the sun will soon dart his rays through. Do not the flowers die every autumn? He had not even taken root here. I was not startled to hear that he was dead; it seemed the most natural event that could happen. His fine organization demanded it, and nature gently yielded its request. It would have been strange if he had lived. Neither will nature manifest any sorrow at his death, but soon the note of the lark will be heard down in the meadow, and fresh dandelions will spring from the old stocks where he plucked them last summer.

I have been living ill of late, but am now doing better. How do you live in that Plymouth world, nowadays? ¹

¹ Mrs. Brown, to whom this letter and several others of the years 1841-43 were written, lived by turns in Plymouth, her native place, and in Concord, where she often visited Mrs. Emerson at the time when Thoreau was an inmate of the Emerson household. In the early part of 1843 she was in Plymouth, and her sister was sending her newspapers and other things, from time to time. The incident of the music-box, mentioned above, occurred at the Old Manse, where Hawthorne was living from the summer of 1842 until the spring of 1845, and was often visited by Thoreau and Ellery Channing. In the letter following, this incident is recalled, and with it the agreeable

Please remember me to Mary Russell. You must not blame me if I do *talk to the clouds*, for I remain

Your friend,

HENRY D. THOREAU.

TO MRS. LUCY BROWN (AT PLYMOUTH).

CONCORD, January 24, 1843.

DEAR FRIEND, — The other day I wrote you a letter to go in Mrs. Emerson's bundle, but, as it seemed unworthy, I did not send it, and now, to atone for that, I am going to send this, whether it be worthy or not. I will not venture upon news, for, as all the household are gone to bed, I cannot learn what has been told you. Do you read any noble verses nowadays? or do not verses still seem noble? For my own part, they have been the only things I remembered, or that which occasioned them, when all things else were blurred and defaced. All things have put on mourning but they; for the elegy itself is some victorious melody or joy escaping from the wreck.

It is a relief to read some true book, wherein all are equally dead, — equally alive. I think the best parts of Shakespeare would only be enchanced by the most

gift by Richard Fuller (a younger brother of Margaret Fuller and of Ellen, the wife of Ellery Channing, who came to reside in Concord about these years, and soon became Thoreau's most intimate friend), which was a music-box for the Thoreaus. They were all fond of music, and enjoyed it even in this mechanical form, — one evidence of the simple conditions of life in Concord then. The note of thanks to young Fuller, who had been, perhaps, a pupil of Thoreau, follows this letter to Mrs. Brown, though earlier in date. Mary Russell afterwards became Mrs. Marston Watson.

thrilling and affecting events. I have found it so. And so much the more, as they are not intended for consolation.

Do you think of coming to Concord again? I shall be glad to see you. I should be glad to know that I could see you when I would.

We always seem to be living just on the brink of a pure and lofty intercourse, which would make the ills and trivialness of life ridiculous. After each little interval, though it be but for the night, we are prepared to meet each other as gods and goddesses.

I seem to have dodged all my days with one or two persons, and lived upon expectation, — as if the bud would surely blossom; and so I am content to live.

What means the fact — which is so common, so universal — that some soul that has lost all hope for itself can inspire in another listening soul an infinite confidence in it, even while it is expressing its despair?

I am very happy in my present environment, though actually mean enough myself, and so, of course, all around me; yet, I am sure, we for the most part are transfigured to one another, and are that to the other which we aspire to be ourselves. The longest course of mean and trivial intercourse may not prevent my practicing this divine courtesy to my companion. Notwithstanding all I hear about brooms, and scouring, and taxes, and housekeeping, I am constrained to live a strangely mixed life, — as if even Valhalla might have its kitchen. We are all of us Apollos serving some Admetus.

I think I must have some Muses in my pay that I

know not of, for certain musical wishes of mine are answered as soon as entertained. Last summer I went to Hawthorne's suddenly for the express purpose of borrowing his music-box, and almost immediately Mrs. Hawthorne proposed to lend it to me. The other day I said I must go to Mrs. Barrett's to hear hers, and lo! straightway Richard Fuller sent me one for a present from Cambridge. It is a very good one. I should like to have you hear it. I shall not have to employ you to borrow for me now. Good-night.

From your affectionate friend,

H. D. T.

TO RICHARD F. FULLER (AT CAMBRIDGE).

CONCORD, January 16, 1843.

DEAR RICHARD, — I need not thank you for your present, for I hear its music, which seems to be playing just for us two pilgrims marching over hill and dale of a summer afternoon, up those long Bolton hills and by those bright Harvard lakes, such as I see in the placid Lucerne on the lid; and whenever I hear it, it will recall happy hours passed with its donor.

When did mankind make that foray into nature and bring off this booty? For certainly it is but history that some rare virtue in remote times plundered these strains from above and communicated them to men. Whatever we may think of it, it is a part of the harmony of the spheres you have sent me; which has condescended to serve us Admetuses, and I hope I may so behave that this may always be the tenor of your thought for me.

If you have any strains, the conquest of your own

spear or quill, to accompany these, let the winds waft them also to me.

I write this with one of the "primaries" of my osprey's wings, which I have preserved over my glass for some state occasion, and now it offers.

Mrs. Emerson sends her love.

TO MRS. LUCY BROWN (AT PLYMOUTH).

CONCORD, Friday evening,
January 25, 1843.

DEAR FRIEND, — Mrs. Emerson asks me to write you a letter, which she will put into her bundle tomorrow along with the "Tribunes" and "Standards," and miscellanies, and what not, to make an assortment. But what shall I write? You live a good way off, and I don't know that I have anything which will bear sending so far. But I am mistaken, or rather impatient when I say this, — for we all have a gift to send, not only when the year begins, but as long as interest and memory last. I don't know whether you have got the many I have sent you, or rather whether you were quite sure where they came from. I mean the letters I have sometimes launched off eastward in my thought; but if you have been happier at one time than another, think that then you received them. But this that I now send you is of another sort. It will go slowly, drawn by horses over muddy roads, and lose much of its little value by the way. You may have to pay for it, and it may not make you happy after all. But what shall be my new-year's gift, then? Why, I will send you my still fresh remembrance of the hours I have passed with

you here, for I find in the remembrance of them the best gift you have left to me. We are poor and sick creatures at best; but we can have well memories, and sound and healthy thoughts of one another still, and an intercourse may be remembered which was without blur, and above us both.

Perhaps you may like to know of my estate nowadays. As usual, I find it harder to account for the happiness I enjoy, than for the sadness which instructs me occasionally. If the little of this last which visits me would only be sadder, it would be happier. One while I am vexed by a sense of meanness; one while I simply wonder at the mystery of life; and at another, and at another, seem to rest on my oars, as if propelled by propitious breezes from I know not what quarter. But for the most part I am an idle, inefficient, lingering (one term will do as well as another, where all are true and none true enough) member of the great commonwealth, who have most need of my own charity, — if I could not be charitable and indulgent to myself, perhaps as good a subject for my own satire as any. You see how, when I come to talk of myself, I soon run dry, for I would fain make that a subject which can be no subject for me, at least not till I have the grace to rule myself.

I do not venture to say anything about your griefs, for it would be unnatural for me to speak as if I grieved with you, when I think I do not. If I were to see you, it might be otherwise. But I know you will pardon the trivialness of this letter; and I only hope — as I know that you have reason to be so — that you are still hap-

pier than you are sad, and that you remember that the smallest seed of faith is of more worth than the largest fruit of happiness. I have no doubt that out of S——'s death you sometimes draw sweet consolation, not only for that, but for long-standing griefs, and may find some things made smooth by it, which before were rough.

I wish you would communicate with me, and not think me unworthy to know any of your thoughts. Don't think me unkind because I have not written to you. I confess it was for so poor a reason as that you almost made a principle of not answering. I could not speak truly with this ugly fact in the way; and perhaps I wished to be assured, by such evidence as you could not voluntarily give, that it was a kindness. For every glance at the moon, does she not send me an answering ray? Noah would hardly have done himself the pleasure to release his dove, if she had not been about to come back to him with tidings of green islands amid the waste.

But these are far-fetched reasons. I am not speaking directly enough to yourself now; so let me say *directly*

From your friend,

HENRY D. THOREAU.

Exactly when correspondence began between Emerson and Thoreau is not now to be ascertained, since all the letters do not seem to have been preserved. Their acquaintance opened while Thoreau was in college, although Emerson may have seen the studious boy at the town school in Concord, or at the "Academy"

there, while fitting for college. But they only came to know each other as sharers of the same thoughts and aspirations in the autumn of 1837, when, on hearing a new lecture of Emerson's, Helen Thoreau said to Mrs. Brown, then living or visiting in the Thoreau family, "Henry has a thought very like that in his journal" (which he had newly begun to keep). Mrs. Brown desired to see the passage, and soon bore it to her sister, Mrs. Emerson, whose husband saw it, and asked Mrs. Brown to bring her young friend to see him. By 1838 their new relation of respect was established, and Emerson wrote to a correspondent, "I delight much in my young friend, who seems to have as free and erect a mind as any I have ever met." A year later (Aug. 9, 1839), he wrote to Carlyle, "I have a young poet in this village, named Thoreau, who writes the truest verses." Indeed, it was in the years 1839-40 that he seems to have written the poems by which he is best remembered. Thoreau told me in his last illness that he had written many verses and destroyed many,—this fact he then regretted, although he had done it at the instance of Emerson, who did not praise them. "But," said he, "they may have been better than we thought them, twenty years ago."

The earliest note which I find from Emerson to Thoreau bears no date, but must have been written before 1842, for at no later time could the persons named in it have visited Concord together. Most likely it was in the summer of 1840, and to the same date do I assign a note asking Henry to join the Emersons in a party to the Cliffs (*scopuli Pulchri-Portus*), and to

bring his flute,—for on that pastoral reed Thoreau played sweetly. The first series of letters from Thoreau to Emerson begins early in 1843, about the time the letters just given were written to Mrs. Brown. In the first he gives thanks to Emerson for the hospitality of his house in the two preceding years; a theme to which he returned a few months later,—for I doubt not the lovely sad poem called “The Departure” was written at Staten Island soon after his leaving the Emerson house in Concord for the more stately but less congenial residence of William Emerson at Staten Island, whither he betook himself in May, 1843. This first letter, however, was sent from the Concord home to Waldo Emerson at Staten Island, or perhaps in New York, where he was that winter giving a course of lectures.

In explanation of the passages concerning Bronson Alcott, in this letter, it should be said that he was then living at the Hosmer Cottage, in Concord, with his English friends, Charles Lane and Henry Wright, and that he had refused to pay a tax in support of what he considered an unjust government, and was arrested by the constable, Sam Staples, in consequence.

TO R. W. EMERSON (AT NEW YORK).

CONCORD, January 24, 1843.

DEAR FRIEND,—The best way to correct a mistake is to make it right. I had not spoken of writing to you, but as you say you are about to write to me when you get my letter, I make haste on my part in order to get yours the sooner. I don't well know what to say to earn

the forthcoming epistle, unless that Edith takes rapid strides in the arts and sciences—or music and natural history—as well as over the carpet; that she says “papa” less and less abstractedly every day, looking in *my* face,—which may sound like a *Ranz des Vaches* to yourself. And Ellen declares every morning that “papa *may* come home to-night;” and by and by it will have changed to such positive statement as that “papa came home *larks* night.”

Elizabeth Hoar still flits about these clearings, and I meet her here and there, and in all houses but her own, but as if I were not the less of her family for all that. I have made slight acquaintance also with one Mrs. Lidian Emerson, who almost persuades me to be a Christian, but I fear I as often lapse into heathenism. Mr. O'Sullivan¹ was here three days. I met him at the Atheneum [Concord], and went to Hawthorne's [at the Old Manse] to tea with him. He expressed a great deal of interest in your poems, and wished me to give him a list of them, which I did; he saying he did not know but he should notice them. He is a rather puny-looking man, and did not strike me. We had nothing to say to one another, and therefore we said a great deal! He, however, made a point of asking me to write for his *Review*, which I shall be glad to do. He is, at any rate, one of the not-bad, but does not by any means take you by storm,—no, nor by calm, which is the best way. He expects to see you in New York. After tea I carried him and Hawthorne to the Lyceum.

¹ Editor of the *Democratic Review*, for which Hawthorne, Emerson, Thoreau, and Whittier all wrote, more or less.

Mr. Alcott has not altered much since you left. I think you will find him much the same sort of person. With Mr. Lane I have had one regular chat *à la* George Minott, which of course was greatly to our mutual gratification and edification; and, as two or three as regular conversations have taken place since, I fear there may have been a precession of the equinoxes. Mr. Wright, according to the last accounts, is in Lynn, with uncertain aims and prospects, — maturing slowly, perhaps, as indeed are all of us. I suppose they have told you how near Mr. Alcott went to the jail, but I can add a good anecdote to the rest. When Staples came to collect Mrs. Ward's taxes, my sister Helen asked him what he thought Mr. Alcott meant, — what his idea was, — and he answered, "I vum, I believe it was nothing but principle, for I never heard a man talk honest."

There was a lecture on Peace by a Mr. Spear (ought he not to be beaten into a plowshare?), the same evening, and, as the gentlemen, Lane and Alcott, dined at our house while the matter was in suspense, — that is, while the constable was waiting for his receipt from the jailer, — we there settled it that we, that is, Lane and myself, perhaps, should agitate the State while Winkelried lay in durance. But when, over the audience, I saw our hero's head moving in the free air of the Universalist church, my fire all went out, and the State was safe as far as I was concerned. But Lane, it seems, had cogitated and even written on the matter, in the afternoon, and so, out of courtesy, taking his point of departure from the Spear-man's lecture, he drove

gracefully *in medias res*, and gave the affair a very good setting out; but, to spoil all, our martyr very characteristically, but, as artists would say, in bad taste, brought up the rear with a "My Prisons," which made us forget Silvio Pellico himself.

Mr. Lane wishes me to ask you to see if there is anything for him in the New York office, and pay the charges. Will you tell me what to do with Mr. [Theodore] Parker, who was to lecture February 15th? Mrs. Emerson says my letter is written instead of one from her.

At the end of this strange letter I will not write — what alone I had to say — to thank you and Mrs. Emerson for your long kindness to me. It would be more ungrateful than my constant thought. I have been your pensioner for nearly two years, and still left free as under the sky. It has been as free a gift as the sun or the summer, though I have sometimes molested you with my mean acceptance of it, — I who have failed to render even those slight services of the *hand* which would have been for a sign at least; and, by the fault of my nature, have failed of many better and higher services. But I will not trouble you with this, but for once thank you as well as Heaven.

Your friend,

H. D. T.

Mrs. Lidian Emerson, the wife of R. W. Emerson, and her two daughters, Ellen and Edith, are named in this first letter, and will be frequently mentioned in the correspondence. At this date, Edith, now Mrs. W. H. Forbes, was fourteen months old. Mr. Emerson's mo-

ther, Madam Ruth Emerson, was also one of the household, which had for a little more than seven years occupied the well-known house under the trees, east of the village.

TO R. W. EMERSON (AT NEW YORK).

CONCORD, February 10, 1843.

DEAR FRIEND, — I have stolen one of your own sheets to write you a letter upon, and I hope, with two layers of ink, to turn it into a comforter. If you like to receive a letter from me, too, I am glad, for it gives me pleasure to write. But don't let it come amiss; it must fall as harmlessly as leaves settle on the landscape. I will tell you what we are doing this now. Supper is done, and Edith — the dessert, perhaps more than the dessert — is brought in, or even comes in *per se*; and round she goes, now to this altar, and then to that, with her monosyllabic invocation of "oc," "oc." It makes me think of "Langue d'oc." She must belong to that province. And like the gypsies she talks a language of her own while she understands ours. While she jabbars Sanskrit, Parsee, Pehlvi, say "Edith go bah!" and "bah" it is. No intelligence passes between us. She knows. It is a capital joke, — that is the reason she smiles so. How well the secret is kept! she never descends to explanation. It is not buried liked a common secret, bolstered up on two sides, but by an eternal silence on the one side, at least. It has been long kept, and comes in from the unexplored horizon, like a blue mountain range, to end abruptly at our door one day. (Don't stumble at this steep simile.)

And now she studies the heights and depths of nature

On shoulders whirled in some eccentric orbit
Just by old Pæstum's temples and the perch
Where Time doth plume his wings.

And now she runs the race over the carpet, while all Olympia applauds, — mamma, grandma, and uncle, good Grecians all, — and that dark-hued barbarian, Partheanna Parker, whose shafts go through and through, not backward! Grandmamma smiles over all, and mamma is wondering what papa would say, should she descend on Carlton House some day. "Larks night" 's abed, dreaming of "pleased faces" far away. But now the trumpet sounds, the games are over; some Hebe comes, and Edith is translated. I don't know where; it must be to some cloud, for I never was there.

Query: what becomes of the answers Edith thinks, but cannot express? She really gives you glances which are before this world was. You can't feel any difference of age, except that you have longer legs and arms.

Mrs. Emerson said I must tell you about domestic affairs, when I mentioned that I was going to write. Perhaps it will inform you of the state of all if I only say that I am well and happy in your house here in Concord.

Your friend,

HENRY.

Don't forget to tell us what to do with Mr. Parker when you write next. I lectured this week. It was as bright a night as you could wish. I hope there were no stars thrown away on the occasion.

[A part of the same letter, though bearing a date two days later, and written in a wholly different style, as from one sage to another, is this postscript :]

February 12, 1843.

DEAR FRIEND, — As the packet still tarries, I will send you some thoughts, which I have lately relearned, as the latest public and private news.

How mean are our relations to one another! Let us pause till they are nobler. A little silence, a little rest, is good. It would be sufficient employment only to cultivate true ones.

The richest gifts we can bestow are the least marketable. We hate the kindness which we understand. A noble person confers no such gift as his whole confidence: none so exalts the giver and the receiver; it produces the truest gratitude. Perhaps it is only essential to friendship that some vital trust should have been reposed by the one in the other. I feel addressed and probed even to the remote parts of my being when one nobly shows, even in trivial things, an implicit faith in me. When such divine commodities are so near and cheap, how strange that it should have to be each day's discovery! A threat or a curse may be forgotten, but this mild trust translates me. I am no more of this earth; it acts dynamically; it changes my very substance. I cannot do what before I did. I cannot be what before I was. Other chains may be broken, but in the darkest night, in the remotest place, I trail this thread. Then things cannot *happen*. What if God were to confide in us for a moment! Should we not then be gods?

How subtle a thing is this confidence! Nothing sensible passes between; never any consequences are to be apprehended should it be misplaced. Yet something has transpired. A new behavior springs; the ship carries new ballast in her hold. A sufficiently great and generous trust could never be abused. It should be cause to lay down one's life, — which would not be to lose it. Can there be any mistake up there? Don't the gods know where to invest their wealth? Such confidence, too, would be reciprocal. When one confides greatly in you, he will feel the roots of an equal trust fastening themselves in him. When such trust has been received or reposed, we dare not speak, hardly to see each other; our voices sound harsh and untrustworthy. We are as instruments which the Powers have dealt with. Through what straits would we not carry this little burden of a magnanimous trust! Yet no harm could possibly come, but simply faithlessness. Not a feather, not a straw, is intrusted; that packet is empty. It is only *committed* to us, and, as it were, all things are committed to us.

The kindness I have longest remembered has been of this sort, — the sort unsaid; so far behind the speaker's lips that almost it already lay in my heart. It did not have far to go to be communicated. The gods cannot misunderstand, man cannot explain. We communicate like the burrows of foxes, in silence and darkness, under ground. We are undermined by faith and love. How much more full is Nature where we think the empty space is than where we place the solids! — full of fluid influences. Should we ever communicate but by these? The spirit abhors a vacuum more than Nature. There

is a tide which pierces the pores of the air. These aerial rivers, let us not pollute their currents. What meadows do they course through? How many fine mails there are which traverse their routes! He is privileged who gets his letter franked by them.

I believe these things.

HENRY D. THOREAU.

Emerson replied to these letters in two epistles of dates from February 4 to 12, 1843, — in the latter asking Thoreau to aid him in editing the April number of the *Dial* of which he had taken charge. Among other things, Emerson desired a manuscript of Charles Lane, Alcott's English friend, to be sent to him in New York, where he was detained several weeks by his lectures. He added: "Have we no news from Wheeler? Has Bartlett none?" Of these persons, the first, Charles Stearns Wheeler, a college classmate of Thoreau, and later Greek tutor in the college, had gone to Germany, — where he died the next summer, — and was contributing to the quarterly *Dial*. Robert Bartlett, of Plymouth, a townsman of Mrs. Emerson, was Wheeler's intimate friend, with whom he corresponded.¹ To this

¹ An interesting fact in connection with Thoreau and Wheeler (whose home was in Lincoln, four miles southeast of Concord) is related by Ellery Channing in a note to me. It seems that Wheeler had built for himself, or hired from a farmer, a rough woodland study near Flint's Pond, half-way from Lincoln to Concord, which he occupied for a short time in 1841-42, and where Thoreau and Channing visited him. Mr. Channing wrote me in 1883: "Stearns Wheeler built a 'shanty' on Flint's Pond for the purpose of economy, for purchasing Greek books and going abroad to study. Whether Mr. Thoreau

editorial request Thoreau, who was punctuality itself, replied at once.

TO R. W. EMERSON (AT NEW YORK).

CONCORD, February 15, 1843.

MY DEAR FRIEND, — I got your letters, one yesterday and the other to-day, and they have made me quite happy. As a packet is to go in the morning, I will give you a hasty account of the *Dial*. I called on Mr. Lane this afternoon, and brought away, together with an abundance of good-will, first, a bulky catalogue of books without commentary, — some eight hundred, I think he told me, with an introduction filling one sheet,

assisted him to build this shanty I cannot say, but I think he may have; also that he spent six weeks with him there. As Mr. Thoreau was not too original and inventive to follow the example of others, if good to him, it is very probable this undertaking of Stearns Wheeler, whom he regarded (as I think I have heard him say) a heroic character, suggested his own experiment on Walden. I believe I visited this shanty with Mr. Thoreau. It was very plain, with bunks of straw, and built in the Irish manner. I think Mr. Wheeler was as good a mechanic as Mr. Thoreau, and built this shanty for his own use. The object of these two experiments was quite unlike, except in the common purpose of economy. It seems to me highly probable that Mr. Wheeler's experiment suggested Mr. Thoreau's, as he was a man he almost worshiped. But I could not understand what relation Mr. Lowell had to this fact, if it be one. Students, in all parts of the earth, have pursued a similar course from motives of economy, and to carry out some special study. Mr. Thoreau wished to study birds, flowers, and the stone age, just as Mr. Wheeler wished to study Greek. And Mr. Hotham came next from just the same motive of economy (necessity) and to study the Bible. The prudential sides of all three were the same." Mr. Hotham was the young theological student who dwelt in a cabin by Walden in 1869-70.

— ten or a dozen pages, say, though I have only glanced at them; second, a review — twenty-five or thirty printed pages — of *Conversations on the Gospels, Record of a School, and Spiritual Culture*, with rather copious extracts. However, it is a good subject, and Lane says it gives him satisfaction. I will give it a faithful reading directly. [These were Alcott's publications, reviewed by Lane.] And now I come to the little end of the horn; for myself, I have brought along the *Minor Greek Poets*, and will mine there for a scrap or two, at least. As for Etzler, I don't remember any "rude and snappish speech" that you made, and if you did it must have been longer than anything I had written; however, here is the book still, and I will try. Perhaps I have some few scraps in my *Journal* which you may choose to print. The translation of the *Æschylus* I should like very well to continue anon, if it should be worth the while. As for poetry, I have not remembered to write any for some time; it has quite slipped my mind; but sometimes I think I hear the mutterings of the thunder. Don't you remember that last summer we heard a low, tremulous sound in the woods and over the hills, and thought it was partridges or rocks, and it proved to be thunder gone down the river? But sometimes it was over Wayland way, and at last burst over our heads. So we'll not despair by reason of the drought. You see it takes a good many words to supply the place of one deed; a hundred lines to a cobweb, and but one cable to a man-of-war. The *Dial* case needs to be reformed in many particulars. There is no news from Wheeler, none from Bartlett.

They all look well and happy in this house, where it gives me much pleasure to dwell.

Yours in haste,

HENRY.

P. S.

Wednesday evening, February 16.

DEAR FRIEND, — I have time to write a few words about the *Dial*. I have just received the three first signatures, which do not yet complete Lane's piece. He will place five hundred copies for sale at Munroe's bookstore. Wheeler has sent you two full sheets — more about the German universities — and proper names, which will have to be printed in alphabetical order for convenience; what this one has done, that one is doing, and the other intends to do. Hammer-Purgstall (Von Hammer) may be one, for aught I know. However, there are two or three *things* in it, as well as names. One of the books of Herodotus is discovered to be out of place. He says something about having sent Lowell, by the last steamer, a budget of literary news, which he will have communicated to you ere this. Mr. Alcott has a letter from Heraud,¹ and a book written by him, — the *Life of Savonarola*, — which he wishes to have republished here. Mr. Lane will write a notice of it. (The latter says that what is in the *New York post-office* may be directed to Mr. Alcott.) Miss [Elizabeth] Peabody has sent a "Notice to the readers of the *Dial*," which is not good.

Mr. Chapin lectured this evening, and so rhetorically that I forgot my duty and heard very little. I find my-

¹ An English critic and poetaster. See *Memoir of Bronson Alcott*, pp. 292-318.

self better than I have been, and am meditating some other method of paying debts than by lectures and writing,—which will only do to talk about. If anything of that “other” sort should come to your ears in New York, will you remember it for me?

Excuse this scrawl, which I have written over the embers in the dining-room. I hope that you live on good terms with yourself and the gods.

Yours in haste,

HENRY.

Mr. Lane and his lucubrations proved to be tough subjects, and the next letter has more to say about them and the *Dial*. Lane had undertaken to do justice to Mr. Alcott and his books, as may still be read in the pages of that April number of the *Transcendentalist* quarterly.

TO R. W. EMERSON (AT NEW YORK).

CONCORD, February 20, 1843.

MY DEAR FRIEND,—I have read Mr. Lane’s review, and *can* say, speaking for this world and for fallen man, that “it is good for us.” As they say in geology, time never fails, there is always enough of it, so I may say, criticism never fails; but if I go and read elsewhere, I say it is good,—far better than any notice Mr. Alcott has received, or is likely to receive from another quarter. It is at any rate “the other side” which Boston needs to hear. I do not send it to you, because time is precious, and because I think you would accept it, after all. After speaking briefly of the fate of Goethe and Carlyle in their own countries, he says, “To

Emerson in his own circle is but slowly accorded a worthy response; and Alcott, almost utterly neglected,” etc. I will strike out what relates to yourself, and correcting some verbal faults, send the rest to the printer with Lane’s initials.

The catalogue needs amendment, I think. It wants completeness now. It should consist of such books only as they would tell Mr. [F. H.] Hedge and [Theodore] Parker they had got; omitting the Bible, the classics, and much besides,—for there the incompleteness begins. But you will be here in season for this.

It is frequently easy to make Mr. Lane more universal and attractive; to write, for instance, “universal ends” instead of “the universal end,” just as we pull open the petals of a flower with our fingers where they are confined by its own sweets. Also he had better not say “books designed for the nucleus of a *Home* University,” until he makes that word “home” ring solid and universal too. This is that abominable dialect. He had just given me a notice of George Bradford’s Fénelon for the *Record of the Months*, and speaks of extras of the *Review and Catalogue*, if they are printed,—even a hundred, or thereabouts. How shall this be arranged? Also he wishes to use some manuscripts of his, which are in your possession, if you do not. Can I get them?

I think of no news to tell you. It is a serene summer day here, all above the snow. The hens steal their nests, and I steal their eggs still, as formerly. This is what I do with the hands. Ah, labor,—it is a divine institution, and conversation with many men and hens.

Do not think that my letters require as many special

answers. I get one as often as you write to Concord. Concord inquires for you daily, as do all the members of this house. You must make haste home before we have settled all the great questions, for they are fast being disposed of. But I must leave room for Mrs. Emerson.

Mrs. Emerson's letter, after speaking of other matters, gave a lively sketch of Thoreau at one of Alcott's Conversations in her house, which may be quoted as illustrating the young Nature-worshiper's position at the time, and the more humane and socialistic spirit of Alcott and Lane, who were soon to leave Concord for their experiment of communistic life at "Fruitlands," in the rural town of Harvard.

"Last evening we had the 'Conversation,' though, owing to the bad weather, but few attended. The subjects were: What is Prophecy? Who is a Prophet? and The Love of Nature. Mr. Lane decided, as for all time and the race, that this same love of nature — of which Henry [Thoreau] was the champion, and Elizabeth Hoar and Lidian (though L. disclaimed possessing it herself) his faithful squires — that this love was the most subtle and dangerous of sins; a refined idolatry, much more to be dreaded than gross wickednesses, because the gross sinner would be alarmed by the depth of his degradation, and come up from it in terror, but the unhappy idolaters of Nature were deceived by the refined quality of their sin, and would be the last to enter the kingdom. Henry frankly affirmed to both the wise men that they were wholly deficient in

the faculty in question, and therefore could not judge of it. And Mr. Alcott as frankly answered that it was because they went beyond the mere material objects, and were filled with spiritual love and perception (as Mr. T. was not), that they seemed to Mr. Thoreau not to appreciate outward nature. I am very heavy, and have spoiled a most excellent story. I have given you no idea of the scene, which was ineffably comic, though it made no laugh at the time; I scarcely laughed at it myself, — too deeply amused to give the usual sign. Henry was brave and noble; well as I have always liked him, he still grows upon me."

Before going to Staten Island in May, 1843, Thoreau answered a letter from the same Richard Fuller who had made him the musical gift in the previous winter. He was at Harvard College, and desired to know something of Thoreau's pursuits there, — concerning which Channing says in his *Life*,¹ "He was a respectable student, having done there a bold reading in English poetry, — even to some portions or the whole of Davenant's 'Gondibert.'" This, Thoreau does not mention in his letter, but it was one of the things that attracted Emerson's notice, since he also had the same taste for the Elizabethan and Jacobean English poets. An English youth, Henry Headley, pupil of Dr. Parr, and graduate of Oxford in 1786, had preceded Thoreau in

¹ *Thoreau, the Poet-Naturalist*. With Memorial Verses. By William Ellery Channing, New Edition, enlarged, edited by F. B. Sanborn (Boston: Charles Goodspeed, 1902). This volume, in some respects the best biography of Thoreau, is no longer rare. Among the Verses are those written by Channing for his friend's funeral; at which, also, Mr. Alcott read Thoreau's poem of Sympathy.

this study of poets that had become obsolete; and it was perhaps Headley's volume, "Select Beauties of Ancient English Poetry, with Remarks by the late Henry Headley," published long after his death,¹ that served Thoreau as a guide to Quarles and the Fletchers, Daniel, Drummond, Drayton, Habington, and Raleigh, — poets that few Americans had heard of in 1833.

TO RICHARD F. FULLER (AT CAMBRIDGE).

CONCORD, April 2, 1843.

DEAR RICHARD, — I was glad to receive a letter from you so bright and cheery. You speak of not having made any conquests with your own spear or quill as yet; but if you are tempering your spear-head during these days, and fitting a straight and tough shaft thereto, will not that suffice? We are more pleased to consider the hero in the forest cutting cornel or ash for his spear, than marching in triumph with his trophies. The present hour is always wealthiest when it is poorer than the future ones, as that is the pleasantest site which affords the pleasantest prospects.

What you say about your studies furnishing you with a "mimic idiom" only, reminds me that we shall all do well if we learn so much as to talk, — to speak truth. The only fruit which even much living yields seems to be often only some trivial success, — the ability to do some slight thing better. We make conquest only of

¹ Headley died at the age of twenty-three, in 1788. His posthumous book was edited in 1810 by Rev. Henry Kett, and published in London by John Sharp.

husks and shells for the most part, — at least apparently, — but sometimes these are cinnamon and spices, you know. Even the grown hunter you speak of slays a thousand buffaloes, and brings off only their hides and tongues. What immense sacrifices, what hecatombs and holocausts, the gods exact for very slight favors! How much sincere life before we can even utter one sincere word.

What I was learning in college was chiefly, I think, to express myself, and I see now, that as the old orator prescribed, 1st, action; 2d, action; 3d, action; my teachers should have prescribed to me, 1st, sincerity; 2d, sincerity; 3d, sincerity. The old mythology is incomplete without a god or goddess of sincerity, on whose altars we might offer up all the products of our farms, our workshops, and our studies. It should be our Lar when we sit on the hearth, and our Tutelar Genius when we walk abroad. This is the only panacea. I mean sincerity in our dealings with ourselves mainly; any other is comparatively easy. But I must stop before I get to 17thly. I believe I have but one text and one sermon.

Your rural adventures beyond the West Cambridge hills have probably lost nothing by distance of time or space. I used to hear only the sough of the wind in the woods of Concord, when I was striving to give my attention to a page of calculus. But, depend upon it, you will love your native hills the better for being separated from them.

I expect to leave Concord, which is my Rome, and its people, who are my Romans, in May, and go to

New York, to be a tutor in Mr. William Emerson's family. So I will bid you good-by till I see you or hear from you again.

Going to Staten Island, early in May, 1843, Thoreau's first care was to write to his "Romans, countrymen, and lovers by the banks of the Musketaquid,"—beginning with his mother, his sisters, and Mrs. Emerson. To Sophia and Mrs. E. he wrote May 22, —to Helen, with a few touching verses on his brother John, the next day; and then he resumed the correspondence with Emerson. It seems that one of his errands near New York was to make the acquaintance of literary men and journalists in the city, in order to find a vehicle for publication, such as his neighbor Hawthorne had finally found in the pages of the *Democratic Review*. For this purpose Thoreau made himself known to Henry James, and other friends of Emerson, and to Horace Greeley, then in the first freshness of his success with the *Tribune*,—a newspaper hardly more than two years old then, but destined to a great career, in which several of the early Transcendentalists took some part.

TO HIS FATHER AND MOTHER (AT CONCORD).

CASTLETON, STATEN ISLAND, May 11, 1843.

DEAR MOTHER AND FRIENDS AT HOME,— We arrived here safely at ten o'clock on Sunday morning, having had as good a passage as usual, though we ran aground and were detained a couple of hours in the Thames River, till the tide came to our relief. At length we curtsyed up to a wharf just the other side of their Castle Garden.

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—very incurious about them and their city. I believe my vacant looks, absolutely inaccessible to questions, did at length satisfy an army of starving cabmen that I did not want a hack, cab, or anything of that sort as yet. It was the only demand the city made on us; as if a wheeled vehicle of some sort were the sum and summit of a reasonable man's wants. "Having tried the water," they seemed to say, "will you not return to the pleasant securities of land carriage? Else why your boat's prow turned toward the shore at last?" They are a sad-looking set of fellows, not permitted to come on board, and I pitied them. They had been expecting me, it would seem, and did really wish that I should take a cab; though they did not seem rich enough to supply me with one.

It was a confused jumble of heads and soiled coats, dangling from flesh-colored faces, — all swaying to and fro, as by a sort of undertow, while each whipstick, true as the needle to the pole, still preserved that level and direction in which its proprietor had dismissed his forlorn interrogatory. They took sight from them, — the lash being wound up thereon, to prevent your attention from wandering, or to make it concentrate upon its object by the spiral line. They began at first, perhaps, with the modest, but rather confident inquiry, "Want a cab, sir?" but as their despair increased, it took the affirmative tone, as the disheartened and irresolute are apt to do: "You want a cab, sir," or even, "You want a nice cab, sir, to take you to Fourth Street." The question which one had bravely and hopefully begun to put, another had the tact to take up and conclude with

fresh emphasis, — twirling it from his particular whipstick as if it had emanated from his lips, — as the sentiment did from his heart. Each one could truly say, “Them’s my sentiments.” But it was a sad sight.

I am seven and a half miles from New York, and, as it would take half a day at least, have not been there yet. I have already run over no small part of the island, to the highest hill, and some way along the shore. From the hill directly behind the house I can see New York, Brooklyn, Long Island, the Narrows, through which vessels bound to and from all parts of the world chiefly pass, — Sandy Hook and the Highlands of Neversink (part of the coast of New Jersey), — and, by going still farther up the hill, the Kill van Kull, and Newark Bay. From the pinnacle of one Madame Grimes’s house, the other night at sunset, I could see almost round the island. Far in the horizon there was a fleet of sloops bound up the Hudson, which seemed to be going over the edge of the earth; and in view of these trading ships commerce seems quite imposing.

But it is rather derogatory that your dwelling-place should be only a neighborhood to a great city, — to live on an inclined plane. I do not like their cities and forts, with their morning and evening guns, and sails flapping in one’s eye. I want a whole continent to breathe in, and a good deal of solitude and silence, such as all Wall Street cannot buy, — nor Broadway with its wooden pavement. I must live along the beach, on the southern shore, which looks directly out to sea, — and see what that great parade of water means, that dashes and roars, and has not yet wet me, as long as I have lived.

I must not know anything about my condition and relations here till what is not permanent is worn off. I have not yet subsided. Give me time enough, and I may like it. All my inner man heretofore has been a Concord impression; and here come these Sandy Hook and Coney Island breakers to meet and modify the former; but it will be long before I can make nature look as innocently grand and inspiring as in Concord.

Your affectionate son,

HENRY D. THOREAU.

TO SOPHIA THOREAU (AT CONCORD).

CASTLETON, STATEN ISLAND, May 22, 1843.

DEAR SOPHIA, — I have had a severe cold ever since I came here, and have been confined to the house for the last week with bronchitis, though I am now getting out, so I have not seen much in the botanical way. The cedar seems to be one of the most common trees here, and the fields are very fragrant with it. There are also the gum and tulip trees. The latter is not very common, but is very large and beautiful, having flowers as large as tulips, and as handsome. It is not time for it yet.

The woods are now full of a large honeysuckle in full bloom, which differs from ours in being red instead of white, so that at first I did not know its genus. The painted-cup is very common in the meadows here. Peaches, and especially cherries, seem to grow by all the fences. Things are very forward here compared with Concord. The apricots growing out-of-doors are already as large as plums. The apple, pear, peach, cherry, and plum trees have shed their blossoms. The

whole island is like a garden, and affords very fine scenery.

In front of the house is a very extensive wood, beyond which is the sea, whose roar I can hear all night long, when there is a wind; if easterly winds have prevailed on the Atlantic. There are always some vessels in sight, — ten, twenty, or thirty miles off, — and Sunday before last there were hundreds in long procession, stretching from New York to Sandy Hook, and far beyond, for Sunday is a lucky day.

I went to New York Saturday before last. A walk of half an hour, by half a dozen houses, along the Richmond road — that is the road that leads to Richmond, on which we live — brings me to the village of Stapleton, in Southfield, where is the lower dock; but if I prefer I can walk along the shore three quarters of a mile farther toward New York to the quarantine village of Castleton, to the upper dock, which the boat leaves five or six times every day, a quarter of an hour later than the former place. Farther on is the village of New Brighton, and farther still Port Richmond, which villages another steamboat visits.

In New York I saw George Ward, and also Giles Waldo and William Tappan, whom I can describe better when I have seen them more. They are young friends of Mr. Emerson. Waldo came down to the island to see me the next day. I also saw the Great Western, the Croton water-works, and the picture-gallery of the National Academy of Design. But I have not had time to see or do much yet.

Tell Miss Ward I shall try to put my microscope to a

good use, and if I find any new and preservable flower, will throw it into my commonplace-book. Garlic, the original of the common onion, grows here all over the fields, and during its season spoils the cream and butter for the market, as the cows like it very much.

Tell Helen there are two schools of late established in the neighborhood, with large prospects, or rather designs, one for boys and another for girls. The latter by a Miss Errington, and though it is only small as yet, I will keep my ears open for her in such directions. The encouragement is very slight.

I hope you will not be washed away by the Irish sea.

Tell Mother I think my cold was not wholly owing to imprudence. Perhaps I was being acclimated.

Tell Father that Mr. Tappan, whose son I know, — and whose clerks young Tappan and Waldo are, — has invented and established a new and very important business, which Waldo thinks would allow them to burn ninety-nine out of one hundred of the stores in New York, which now only offset and cancel one another. It is a kind of intelligence office for the whole country, with branches in the principal cities, giving information with regard to the credit and affairs of every man of business of the country. Of course it is not popular at the South and West. It is an extensive business and will employ a great many clerks.

Love to all — not forgetting Aunt and Aunts — and Miss and Mrs. Ward.

On the 23d of May he wrote from Castleton to his sister Helen thus:—

DEAR HELEN, — In place of something fresher, I send you the following verses from my Journal, written some time ago: —

Brother, where dost thou dwell?
 What sun shines for thee now?
 Dost thou indeed fare well
 As we wished here below?

What season didst thou find?
 'T was winter here.
 Are not the Fates more kind
 Than they appear?

Is thy brow clear again,
 As in thy youthful years?
 And was that ugly pain
 The summit of thy fears?¹

Yet thou wast cheery still:
 They could not quench thy fire;
 Thou didst abide their will,
 And then retire.

Where chiefly shall I look
 To feel thy presence near?
 Along the neighboring brook
 May I thy voice still hear?

Dost thou still haunt the brink
 Of yonder river's tide?
 And may I ever think
 That thou art by my side?

¹ An allusion to the strange and painful death of John Thoreau, by lockjaw. He had slightly wounded himself in shaving, and the cut became inflamed and brought on that hideous and deforming malady, of which, by sympathy, Henry also partook, though he recovered.

What bird wilt thou employ
 To bring me word of thee?
 For it would give them joy, —
 'T would give them liberty,
 To serve their former lord
 With wing and minstrelsy.

A sadder strain mixed with their song,
 They've slower built their nests;
 Since thou art gone
 Their lively labor rests.

Where is the finch, the thrush
 I used to hear?
 Ah, they could well abide
 The dying year.

Now they no more return,
 I hear them not;
 They have remained to mourn,
 Or else forgot.

As the first letter of Thoreau to Emerson was to thank him for his lofty friendship, so now the first letter to Mrs. Emerson, after leaving her house, was to say similar things, with a passing allusion to her love of flowers and of gardening, in which she surpassed all his acquaintance in Concord, then and afterward. A letter to Emerson followed, touching on the *Dial* and on several of his new and old acquaintance. "Rockwood Hoar" is the person since known as judge and cabinet officer, — the brother of Senator Hoar, and of Thoreau's special friends Elizabeth and Edward Hoar. Channing is the poet, who had lately printed his first volume, without finding many readers.

TO MRS. EMERSON (AT CONCORD).

CASTLETON, STATEN ISLAND, May 22, 1843.

MY DEAR FRIEND,—I believe a good many conversations with you were left in an unfinished state, and now indeed I don't know where to take them up. But I will resume some of the unfinished silence. I shall not hesitate to know you. I think of you as some elder sister of mine, whom I could not have avoided, — a sort of lunar influence, — only of such age as the moon, whose time is measured by her light. You must know that you represent to me woman, for I have not traveled very far or wide, — and what if I had? I like to deal with you, for I believe you do not lie or steal, and these are very rare virtues. I thank you for your influence for two years. I was fortunate to be subjected to it, and am now to remember it. It is the noblest gift we can make; what signify all others that can be bestowed? You have helped to keep my life "on loft," as Chaucer says of Griselda, and in a better sense. You always seemed to look down at me as from some elevation, — some of your high humilities, — and I was the better for having to look up. I felt taxed not to disappoint your expectation; for could there be any accident so sad as to be respected for something better than we are? It was a pleasure even to go away from you, as it is not to meet some, as it apprised me of my high relations; and such a departure is a sort of further introduction and meeting. Nothing makes the earth seem so spacious as to have friends at a distance; they make the latitudes and longitudes.

You must not think that fate is so dark there, for even here I can see a faint reflected light over Concord, and I think that at this distance I can better weigh the value of a doubt there. Your moonlight, as I have told you, though it is a reflection of the sun, allows of bats and owls and other twilight birds to flit therein. But I am very glad that you can elevate your life with a doubt, for I am sure that it is nothing but an insatiable faith after all that deepens and darkens its current. And your doubt and my confidence are only a difference of expression.

I have hardly begun to live on Staten Island yet; but, like the man who, when forbidden to tread on English ground, carried Scottish ground in his boots, I carry Concord ground in my boots and in my hat, — and am I not made of Concord dust? I cannot realize that it is the roar of the sea I hear now, and not the wind in Walden woods. I find more of Concord, after all, in the prospect of the sea, beyond Sandy Hook, than in the fields and woods.

If you were to have this Hugh the gardener for your man, you would think a new dispensation had commenced. He might put a fairer aspect on the natural world for you, or at any rate a screen between you and the almshouse. There is a beautiful red honeysuckle now in blossom in the woods here, which should be transplanted to Concord; and if what they tell me about the tulip tree be true, you should have that also. I have not seen Mrs. Black yet, but I intend to call on her soon. Have you established those simpler modes of living yet? — "In the full tide of successful operation?"

Tell Mrs. Brown that I hope she is anchored in a secure haven and derives much pleasure still from reading the poets, and that her constellation is not quite set from my sight, though it is sunk so low in that northern horizon. Tell Elizabeth Hoar that her bright present did "carry ink safely to Staten Island," and was a conspicuous object in Master Haven's inventory of my effects. Give my respects to Madam Emerson, whose Concord face I should be glad to see here this summer; and remember me to the rest of the household who have had vision of me. Shake a day-day to Edith, and say good-night to Ellen for me. Farewell.

TO R. W. EMERSON (AT CONCORD).

CASTLETON, STATEN ISLAND, May 23.

MY DEAR FRIEND, — I was just going to write to you when I received your letter. I was waiting till I had got away from Concord. I should have sent you something for the *Dial* before, but I have been sick ever since I came here, rather unaccountably, — what with a cold, bronchitis, acclimation, etc., still unaccountably. I send you some verses from my Journal which will help make a packet. I have not time to correct them, if this goes by Rockwood Hoar. If I can finish an account of a winter's walk in Concord, in the midst of a Staten Island summer, — not so wise as true, I trust. — I will send it to you soon.

I have had no later experiences yet. You must not count much upon what I can do or learn in New York. I feel a good way off here; and it is not to be visited, but seen and dwelt in. I have been there but once, and

have been confined to the house since. Everything there disappoints me but the crowd; rather, I was disappointed with the rest before I came. I have no eyes for their churches, and what else they find to brag of. Though I know but little about Boston, yet what attracts me, in a quiet way, seems much meaner and more pretending than there, — libraries, pictures, and faces in the street. You don't know where any respectability inhabits. It is in the crowd in Chatham Street. The crowd is something new, and to be attended to. It is worth a thousand Trinity Churches and Exchanges while it is looking at them, and will run over them and trample them under foot one day. There are two things I hear and am aware I live in the neighborhood of, — the roar of the sea and the hum of the city. I have just come from the beach (to find your letter), and I like it much. Everything there is on a grand and generous scale, — seaweed, water, and sand; and even the dead fishes, horses, and hogs have a rank, luxuriant odor; great shad-nets spread to dry; crabs and horseshoes crawling over the sand; clumsy boats, only for service, dancing like sea-fowl over the surf, and ships afar off going about their business.

Waldo and Tappan carried me to their English ale-house the first Saturday, and Waldo spent two hours here the next day. But Tappan I have only seen. I like his looks and the sound of his silence. They are confined every day but Sunday, and then Tappan is obliged to observe the demeanor of a church-goer to prevent open war with his father.

I am glad that Channing has got settled, and that.

too, before the inroad of the Irish. I have read his poems two or three times over, and partially through and under, with new and increased interest and appreciation. Tell him I saw a man buy a copy at Little & Brown's. He may have been a virtuoso, but we will give him the credit. What with Alcott and Lane and Hawthorne, too, you look strong enough to take New York by storm. Will you tell L., if he asks, that I have been able to do nothing about the books yet?

Believe that I have something better to write you than this. It would be unkind to thank you for particular deeds.

TO R. W. EMERSON (AT CONCORD).

STATEN ISLAND, June 8, 1843.

DEAR FRIEND, — I have been to see Henry James, and like him very much. It was a great pleasure to meet him. It makes humanity seem more erect and respectable. I never was more kindly and faithfully catechised. It made me respect myself more to be thought worthy of such wise questions. He is a man, and takes his own way, or stands still in his own place. I know of no one so patient and determined to have the good of you. It is almost friendship, such plain and human dealing. I think that he will not write or speak inspiringly; but he is a refreshing, forward-looking and forward-moving man, and he has naturalized and humanized New York for me. He actually reproaches you by his respect for your poor words. I had three hours' solid talk with him, and he asks me to make free use of his house. He wants an expression

of your faith, or to be sure that it is faith, and confesses that his own treads fast upon the neck of his understanding. He exclaimed, at some careless answer of mine: "Well, you Transcendentalists are wonderfully consistent. I must get hold of this somehow!" He likes Carlyle's book,¹ but says that it leaves him in an excited and unprofitable state, and that Carlyle is so ready to obey his humor that he makes the least vestige of truth the foundation of any superstructure, not keeping faith with his better genius nor truest readers.

I met Wright on the stairs of the Society Library, and W. H. Channing and Brisbane on the steps. The former (Channing) is a concave man, and you see by his attitude and the lines of his face that he is retreating from himself and from yourself, with sad doubts. It is like a fair mask swaying from the drooping boughs of some tree whose stem is not seen. He would break with a conchoidal fracture. You feel as if you would like to see him when he has made up his mind to run all the risks. To be sure, he doubts because he has a great hope to be disappointed, but he makes the possible disappointment of too much consequence. Brisbane, with whom I did not converse, did not impress me favorably. He looks like a man who has lived in a cellar, far gone in consumption. I barely saw him, but he did not look as if he could let Fourier go, in any case, and throw up his hat. But I need not have come to New York to write this.

I have seen Tappan for two or three hours, and

¹ *Past and Present.*

like both him and Waldo; but I always see those of whom I have heard well with a slight disappointment. They are so much better than the great herd, and yet the heavens are not shivered into diamonds over their heads. Persons and things flit so rapidly through my brain nowadays that I can hardly remember them. They seem to be lying in the stream, stemming the tide, ready to go to sea, as steamboats when they leave the dock go off in the opposite direction first, until they are headed right, and then begins the steady revolution of the paddle-wheels; and *they* are not quite cheerily headed anywhither yet, nor singing amid the shrouds as they bound over the billows. There is a certain youthfulness and generosity about them, very attractive; and Tappan's more reserved and solitary thought commands respect.

After some ado, I discovered the residence of Mrs. Black, but there was palmed off on me, in her stead, a Mrs. Grey (quite an inferior color), who told me at last that she was not Mrs. Black, but her mother, and was just as glad to see me as Mrs. Black would have been, and so, forsooth, would answer just as well. Mrs. Black had gone with Edward Palmer to New Jersey, and would return on the morrow.

I don't like the city better, the more I see it, but worse. I am ashamed of my eyes that behold it. It is a thousand times meaner than I could have imagined. It will be something to hate, — that's the advantage it will be to me; and even the best people in it are a part of it, and talk coolly about it. The pigs in the street are the most respectable part of the population. When will

the world learn that a million men are of no importance compared with *one* man? But I must wait for a shower of shillings, or at least a slight dew or mizzling of sixpences, before I explore New York very far.

The sea-beach is the best thing I have seen. It is very solitary and remote, and you only remember New York occasionally. The distances, too, along the shore, and inland in sight of it, are unaccountably great and startling. The sea seems very near from the hills, but it proves a long way over the plain, and yet you may be wet with the spray before you can believe that you are there. The far seems near, and the near far. Many rods from the beach, I step aside for the Atlantic, and I see men drag up their boats on to the sand, with oxen, stepping about amid the surf, as if it were possible they might draw up Sandy Hook.

I do not feel myself especially serviceable to the good people with whom I live, except as inflections are sanctified to the righteous. And so, too, must I serve the boy. I can look to the Latin and mathematics sharply, and for the rest behave myself. But I cannot be in his neighborhood hereafter as his Educator, of course, but as the hawks fly over my own head. I am not attracted toward him but as to youth generally. He shall frequent me, however, as much as he can, and I'll be I.

Bradbury¹ told me, when I passed through Boston,

¹ Of the publishing house of Bradbury & Soden, in Boston, which had taken Nathan Hale's *Boston Miscellany* off his hands, and had published in it, with promise of payment, Thoreau's "Walk to Wachusett." But much time had passed, and the debt was not paid; hence the lack of a "shower of shillings" which the letter laments. Emerson's reply gives the first news of the actual beginning of Alcott's short-

that he was coming to New York the following Saturday, and would then settle with me, but he has not made his appearance yet. Will you, the next time you go to Boston, present that order for me which I left with you?

If I say less about Waldo and Tappan now, it is, perhaps, because I may have more to say by and by. Remember me to your mother and Mrs. Emerson, who, I hope, is quite well. I shall be very glad to hear from her, as well as from you. I have very hastily written out something for the *Dial*, and send it only because you are expecting something, — though something better. It seems idle and Howittish, but it may be of more worth in Concord, where it belongs. In great haste. Farewell.

TO HIS FATHER AND MOTHER (AT CONCORD).

CASTLETON, June 8, 1843.

DEAR PARENTS, — I have got quite well now, and like the lay of the land and the look of the sea very much, — only the country is so fair that it seems rather too much as if it were made to be looked at. I have been to New York four or five times, and have run about the island a good deal.

George Ward, when I last saw him, which was at his house in Brooklyn, was studying the daguerreotype process, preparing to set up in that line. The boats run now almost every hour from 8 A. M. to 7 P. M., back and forth, so that I can get to the city much more easily lived paradise at Fruitlands, and dwells with interest on the affairs of the rural and lettered circle at Concord.

than before. I have seen there one Henry James, a lame man, of whom I had heard before, whom I like very much; and he asks me to make free use of his house, which is situated in a pleasant part of the city, adjoining the University. I have met several people whom I knew before, and among the rest Mr. Wright, who was on his way to Niagara.

I feel already about as well acquainted with New York as with Boston, — that is, about as little, perhaps. It is large enough now, and they intend it shall be larger still. Fifteenth Street, where some of my new acquaintance live, is two or three miles from the Battery, where the boat touches, — clear brick and stone, and no “give” to the foot; and they have laid out, though not built, up to the 149th street above. I had rather see a brick for a specimen, for my part, such as they exhibited in old times. You see it is “quite a day’s training” to make a few calls in different parts of the city (to say nothing of twelve miles by water and land, — *i. e.*, not brick and stone), especially if it does not rain shillings, which might interest omnibuses in your behalf. Some omnibuses are marked “Broadway — Fourth Street,” and they go no farther; others “Eighth Street,” and so on, — and so of the other principal streets. (This letter will be circumstantial enough for Helen.)

This is in all respects a very pleasant residence, — much more rural than you would expect of the vicinity of New York. There are woods all around. We breakfast at half past six, lunch, if we will, at twelve, and dine or sup at five; thus is the day partitioned off.

From nine to two, or thereabouts, I am the schoolmaster, and at other times as much the pupil as I can be. Mr. and Mrs. Emerson are not indeed of my kith or kin in any sense; but they are irreproachable and kind. I have met no one yet *on the island* whose acquaintance I shall cultivate, — or hoe round, — unless it be our neighbor Captain Smith, an old fisherman, who catches the fish called “moss-bonkers” — so it sounds — and invites me to come to the beach, where he spends the week, and see him and his fish.

Farms are for sale all around here, and so, I suppose men are for purchase. North of us live Peter Wandell, Mr. Mell, and Mr. Disosway (don't mind the spelling), as far as the Clove road; and south, John Britton, Van Pelt, and Captain Smith, as far as the Fingerboard road. Behind is the hill, some 250 feet high, on the side of which we live; and in front the forest and the sea, — the latter at the distance of a mile and a half.

Tell Helen that Miss Errington is provided with assistance. This were a good place as any to establish a school, if one could wait a little. Families come down here to board in the summer, and three or four have been already established this season.

As for money matters, I have not set my traps yet, but I am getting my bait ready. Pray, how does the garden thrive, and what improvements in the pencil line? I miss you all very much. Write soon, and send a Concord paper to

Your affectionate son,

HENRY D. THOREAU.

The traps of this sportsman were magazine articles, — but the magazines that would pay much for papers were very few in 1843. One such had existed in Boston for a short time, — the *Miscellany*, — and it printed a good paper of Thoreau's, but the pay was not forthcoming. His efforts to find publishers more liberal in New York were not successful. But he continued to write for fame in the *Dial*, and helped to edit that.

TO MRS. EMERSON.

STATEN ISLAND, June 20, 1843.

MY VERY DEAR FRIEND, — I have only read a page of your letter, and have come out to the top of the hill at sunset, where I can see the ocean, to prepare to read the rest. It is fitter that it should hear it than the walls of my chamber. The very crickets here seem to chirp around me as they did not before. I feel as if it were a great daring to go on and read the rest, and then to live accordingly. There are more than thirty vessels in sight going to sea. I am almost afraid to look at your letter. I see that it will make my life very steep, but it may lead to fairer prospects than this.

You seem to me to speak out of a very clear and high heaven, where any one may be who stands so high. Your voice seems not a voice, but comes as much from the blue heavens as from the paper.

My dear friend, it was very noble in you to write me so trustful an answer. It will do as well for another world as for this; such a voice is for no particular time nor person, but it makes him who may hear it stand for all that is lofty and true in humanity. The thought

of you will constantly elevate my life; it will be something always above the horizon to behold, as when I look up at the evening star. I think I know your thoughts without seeing you, and as well here as in Concord. You are not at all strange to me.

I could hardly believe, after the lapse of one night, that I had such a noble letter still at hand to read, — that it was not some fine dream. I looked at midnight to be sure that it was real. I feel that I am unworthy to know you, and yet they will not permit it wrongfully.

I, perhaps, am more willing to deceive by appearances than you say you are; it would not be worth the while to tell how willing; but I have the power perhaps too much to forget my meanness as soon as seen, and not be incited by permanent sorrow. My actual life is unspeakably mean compared with what I know and see that it might be. Yet the ground from which I see and say this is some part of it. It ranges from heaven to earth, and is all things in an hour. The experience of every past moment but belies the faith of each present. We never conceive the greatness of our fates. Are not these faint flashes of light which sometimes obscure the sun their certain dawn?

My friend, I have read your letter as if I was not reading it. After each pause I could defer the rest forever. The thought of you will be a new motive for every right action. You are another human being whom I know, and might not our topic be as broad as the universe? What have we to do with petty rumbling news? We have our own great affairs. Sometimes in Concord I found my actions dictated, as it were, by your

influence, and though it led almost to trivial Hindoo observances, yet it was good and elevating. To hear that you have sad hours is not sad to me. I rather rejoice at the richness of your experience. Only think of some sadness away in Peking, — unseen and unknown there. What a mine it is! Would it not weigh down the Celestial Empire, with all its gay Chinese? Our sadness is not sad, but our cheap joys. Let us be sad about all we see and are, for so we demand and pray for better. It is the constant prayer and whole Christian religion. I could hope that you would get well soon, and have a healthy body for this world, but I know this cannot be; and the Fates, after all, are the accomplisners of our hopes. Yet I do hope that you may find it a worthy struggle, and life seem grand still through the clouds.

What wealth is it to have such friends that we cannot think of them without elevation! And we can think of them any time and anywhere, and it costs nothing but the lofty disposition. I cannot tell you the joy your letter gives me, which will not quite cease till the latest time. Let me accompany your finest thought.

I send my love to my other friend and brother, whose nobleness I slowly recognize.

HENRY.

TO MRS. THOREAU (AT CONCORD).

STATEN ISLAND, July 7, 1843.

DEAR MOTHER, — I was very glad to get your letter and papers. Tell Father that circumstantial letters make very substantial reading, at any rate. I like to

know even how the sun shines and garden grows with you. I did not get my money in Boston, and probably shall not at all. Tell Sophia that I have pressed some blossoms of the tulip tree for her. They look somewhat like white lilies. The magnolia, too, is in blossom here.

Pray, have you the seventeen-year locust in Concord? The air here is filled with their din. They come out of the ground at first in an imperfect state, and, crawling up the shrubs and plants, the perfect insect bursts out through the back. They are doing great damage to the fruit and forest trees. The latter are covered with dead twigs, which in the distance look like the blossoms of the chestnut. They bore every twig of last year's growth in order to deposit their eggs in it. In a few weeks the eggs will be hatched, and the worms fall to the ground and enter it, and in 1860 make their appearance again. I conversed about their coming this season before they arrived. They do no injury to the leaves, but, beside boring the twigs, suck their sap for sustenance. Their din is heard by those who sail along the shore from the distant woods, — Phar-r-r-aoh. Phar-r-r-aoh. They are departing now. Dogs, cats, and chickens subsist mainly upon them in some places.

I have not been to New York for more than three weeks. I have had an interesting letter from Mr. Lane,¹ describing their new prospects. My pupil and I are getting on apace. He is remarkably well advanced in Latin, and is well advancing.

¹ At Fruitlands with the Alcotts. See Sanborn's *Thoreau*, p. 137, for this letter.

Your letter has just arrived. I was not aware that it was so long since I wrote home; I only knew that I had sent five or six letters to the town. It is very refreshing to hear from you, though it is not all good news. But I trust that Stearns Wheeler is not dead. I should be slow to believe it. He was made to work very well in this world. There need be no tragedy in his death.

The demon which is said to haunt the Jones family, hovering over their eyelids with wings steeped in juice of poppies, has commenced another campaign against me. I am "clear Jones" in this respect at least. But he finds little encouragement in my atmosphere, I assure you, for I do not once fairly lose myself, except in those hours of truce allotted to rest by immemorial custom. However, this skirmishing interferes sadly with my literary projects, and I am apt to think it a good day's work if I maintain a soldier's eye till nightfall. Very well, it does not matter much in what wars we serve, whether in the Highlands or the Lowlands. Everywhere we get soldiers' pay still.

Give my love to Aunt Louisa, whose benignant face I sometimes see right in the wall, as naturally and necessarily shining on my path as some star of unaccountably greater age and higher orbit than myself. Let it be inquired by her of George Minott, as from me, — for she sees him, — if he has seen any pigeons yet, and tell him there are plenty of jack snipes here. As for William P., the "worthy young man," — as I live, my eyes have not fallen on him yet.

I have not had the influenza, though here are its head-

quarters, — unless my first week's cold was it. Tell Helen I shall write to her soon. I have heard Lucretia Mott. This is badly written; but the worse the writing the sooner you get it this time from

Your affectionate son,

H. D. T.

TO R. W. EMERSON (AT CONCORD).

STATEN ISLAND, July 8, 1843.

DEAR FRIENDS, — I was very glad to hear your voices from so far. I do not believe there are eight hundred human beings on the globe. It is all a fable, and I cannot but think that you speak with a slight outrage and disrespect of Concord when you talk of fifty of them. There are not so many. Yet think not that I have left all behind, for already I begin to track my way over the earth, and find the cope of heaven extending beyond its horizon, — forsooth, like the roofs of these Dutch houses. My thoughts revert to those dear hills and that *river* which so fills up the world to its brim, — worthy to be named with Mincius and Alpheus, — still drinking its meadows while I am far away. How can it run heedless to the sea, as if I were there to countenance it? George Minott, too, looms up considerably, — and many another old familiar face. These things all look sober and respectable. They are better than the environs of New York, I assure you.

I am pleased to think of Channing as an inhabitant of the gray town. Seven cities contended for Homer dead. Tell him to remain at least long enough to establish Concord's right and interest in him. I was begin-

ning to know the man. In imagination I see you pilgrims taking your way by the red lodge and the cabin of the brave farmer man, so youthful and hale, to the still cheerful woods. And Hawthorne, too, I remember as one with whom I sauntered, in old heroic times, along the banks of the Scamander, amid the ruins of chariots and heroes. Tell him not to desert, even after the tenth year. Others may say, "Are there not the cities of Asia?" But what are they? Staying at home is the heavenly way.

And Elizabeth Hoar, my brave townswoman, to be sung of poets, — if I may speak of her whom I do not know. Tell Mrs. Brown that I do not forget her, going her way under the stars through this chilly world, — I did *not* think of the wind, — and that I went a little way with her. Tell her not to despair. Concord's little arch does not span all our fate, nor is what transpires under it law for the universe.

And least of all are forgotten those walks in the woods in ancient days, — too sacred to be idly remembered, — when their aisles were pervaded as by a fragrant atmosphere. They still seem youthful and cheery to my imagination as Sherwood and Barnsdale, — and of far purer fame. Those afternoons when we wandered o'er Olympus, — and those hills, from which the sun was seen to set, while still our day held on its way.

"At last he rose and twitched his mantle blue;

To-morrow to fresh woods, and pastures new."

I remember these things at midnight, at rare intervals. But know, my friends, that I a good deal hate you all in my most private thoughts, as the substratum of the

little love I bear you. Though you are a rare band, and do not make half use enough of one another.

I think this is a noble number of the *Dial*.¹ It perspires thought and feeling. I can speak of it now a little like a foreigner. Be assured that it is not written in vain, — it is not for me. I hear its prose and its verse. They provoke and inspire me, and they have my sympathy. I hear the sober and the earnest, the sad and the cheery voices of my friends, and to me it is a long letter of encouragement and reproof; and no doubt so it is to many another in the land. So don't give up the ship. Methinks the verse is hardly enough better than the prose. I give my vote for the "Notes from the Journal of a Scholar," and wonder you don't print them faster. I want, too, to read the rest of the "Poet and the Painter." Miss Fuller's is a noble piece, — rich, extempore writing, talking with pen in hand. It is too good not to be better, even. In writing, conversation should be folded many times thick. It is the height of art that, on the first perusal, plain common sense should appear; on the second, severe truth; and on a third, beauty; and, having these warrants for its depth and reality, we may then enjoy the beauty for evermore. The sea-piece is of the best that is going, if not of the best that is staying. You have spoken a good word for Carlyle. As for the "Winter's Walk," I should be glad to have it printed in the *Dial* if you think it good

¹ Emerson also was satisfied with it for once, and wrote to Thoreau: "Our *Dial* thrives well enough in these weeks. I print W. E. Channing's 'Letters,' or the first ones, but he does not care to have them named as his for a while. They are very agreeable reading."

enough, and will criticise it; otherwise send it to me, and I will dispose of it.

I have not been to New York for a month, and so have not seen Waldo and Tappan. James has been at Albany meanwhile. You will know that I only describe my personal adventures with people; but I hope to see more of them, and *judge* them too. I am sorry to learn that Mrs. Emerson is no better. But let her know that the Fates pay a compliment to those whom they make sick, and they have not to ask, "What have I done?"

Remember me to your mother, and remember me yourself as you are remembered by

H. D. T.

I had a friendly and cheery letter from Lane a month ago.

TO HELEN THOREAU (AT ROXBURY).

STATEN ISLAND, July 21, 1843.

DEAR HELEN, — I am not in such haste to write home when I remember that I make my readers pay the postage. But I believe I have not taxed you before.

I have pretty much explored this island, inland and along the shore, finding my health inclined me to the peripatetic philosophy. I have visited telegraph stations, Sailors' Snug Harbors, Seaman's Retreats, Old Elm Trees, where the Huguenots landed, Britton's Mills, and all the villages on the island. Last Sunday I walked over to Lake Island Farm, eight or nine miles from here, where Moses Prichard lived, and found the present occupant, one Mr. Davenport, formerly from

Massachusetts, with three or four men to help him, raising sweet potatoes and tomatoes by the acre. It seemed a cool and pleasant retreat, but a hungry soil. As I was coming away, I took my toll out of the soil in the shape of arrowheads, which may after all be the surest crop, certainly not affected by drought.

I am well enough situated here to observe one aspect of the modern world at least. I mean the migratory, — the western movement. Sixteen hundred immigrants arrived at quarantine ground on the 4th of July, and more or less every day since I have been here. I see them occasionally washing their persons and clothes: or men, women, and children gathered on an isolated quay near the shore, stretching their limbs and taking the air; the children running races and swinging on this artificial piece of the land of liberty, while their vessels are undergoing purification. They are detained but a day or two, and then go up to the city, for the most part without having *landed* here.

In the city, I have seen, since I wrote last, W. H. Channing, at whose home, in Fifteenth Street, I spent a few pleasant hours, discussing the all-absorbing question "what to do for the race." (He is sadly in earnest about going up the river to rusticate for six weeks, and issues a new periodical called *The Present* in September.) Also Horace Greeley, editor of the *Tribune*, who is cheerfully in earnest, at his office of all work, a hearty New Hampshire boy as one would wish to meet, and says, "Now be neighborly," and believes only, or mainly, first, in the Sylvania Association, somewhere in Pennsylvania: and, secondly, and most of all, in a new

association to go into operation soon in New Jersey, with which he is connected. Edward Palmer came down to see me Sunday before last. As for Waldo and Tappan, we have strangely dodged one another, and have not met for some weeks.

I believe I have not told you anything about Lucretia Mott. It was a good while ago that I heard her at the Quaker Church in Hester Street. She is a preacher, and it was advertised that she would be present on that day. I liked all the proceedings very well, their plainly greater harmony and sincerity than elsewhere. They do nothing in a hurry. Every one that walks up the aisle in his square coat and expansive hat has a history, and comes from a house to a house. The women come in one after another in their Quaker bonnets and handkerchiefs, looking all like sisters or so many chickadees. At length, after a long silence, — waiting for the Spirit, — Mrs. Mott rose, took off her bonnet, and began to utter very deliberately what the Spirit suggested. Her self-possession was something to see, if all else failed; but it did not. Her subject was, "The Abuse of the Bible," and thence she straightway digressed to slavery and the degradation of woman. It was a good speech, — Transcendentalism in its mildest form. She sat down at length, and, after a long and decorous silence, in which some seemed to be really digesting her words, the elders shook hands, and the meeting dispersed. On the whole, I liked their ways and the plainness of their meeting-house. It looked as if it was indeed made for service.

I think that Stearns Wheeler has left a gap in the

community not easy to be filled. Though he did not exhibit the highest qualities of the scholar, he promised, in a remarkable degree, many of the essential and rarer ones; and his patient industry and energy, his reverent love of letters, and his proverbial accuracy, will cause him to be associated in my memory even with many venerable names of former days. It was not wholly unfit that so pure a lover of books should have ended his pilgrimage at the great book-mart of the world. I think of him as healthy and brave, and am confident that if he had lived he would have proved useful in more ways than I can describe. He would have been authority on all matters of fact, and a sort of connecting link between men and scholars of different walks and tastes. The literary enterprises he was planning for himself and friends remind me of an older and more studious time. So much, then, remains for us to do who survive. Love to all. Tell all my friends in Concord that I do not send my love, but retain it still.

Your affectionate brother.

TO MRS. THOREAU (AT CONCORD).

STATEN ISLAND, August 6, 1843.

DEAR MOTHER, — AS MR. William Emerson is going to Concord on Tuesday, I must not omit sending a line by him, — though I wish I had something more weighty for so direct a post. I believe I directed my last letter to you by mistake; but it must have appeared that it was addressed to Helen. At any rate, this is to you without mistake.

I am chiefly indebted to your letters for what I have

learned of Concord and family news, and am very glad when I get one. I should have liked to be in Walden woods with you, but not with the railroad. I think of you all very often, and wonder if you are still separated from me only by so many miles of earth, or so many miles of memory. This life we live is a strange dream, and I don't believe at all any account men give of it. Methinks I should be content to sit at the back door in Concord, under the poplar tree, henceforth forever. Not that I am homesick at all, — for places are strangely indifferent to me, — but Concord is still a cynosure to my eyes, and I find it hard to attach it, even in imagination, to the rest of the globe, and tell where the seam is.

I fancy that this Sunday evening you are pouring over some select book, almost transcendental perchance, or else "Burgh's Dignity," or Massillon, or the *Christian Examiner*. Father has just taken one more look at the garden, and is now absorbed in Chappelle, or reading the newspaper quite abstractedly, only looking up occasionally over his spectacles to see how the rest are engaged, and not to miss any newer news that may not be in the paper. Helen has slipped in for the fourth time to learn the very latest item. Sophia, I suppose, is at Bangor; but Aunt Louisa, without doubt, is just flitting away to some good meeting, to save the credit of you all.

It is still a cardinal virtue with me to keep awake. I find it impossible to write or read except at rare intervals, but am, generally speaking, tougher than formerly. I could make a pedestrian tour round the

world, and sometimes think it would perhaps be better to do at once the things I *can*, rather than be trying to do what at present I cannot do well. However, I shall awake sooner or later.

I have been translating some Greek, and reading English poetry, and a month ago sent a paper to the *Democratic Review*, which, at length, they were sorry they could not accept; but they could not adopt the sentiments. However, they were very polite, and earnest that I should send them something else, or reform that.

I go moping about the fields and woods here as I did in Concord, and, it seems, am thought to be a surveyor, — an Eastern man inquiring narrowly into the condition and value of land, etc., here, preparatory to an extensive speculation. One neighbor observed to me, in a mysterious and half-inquisitive way, that he supposed I must be pretty well acquainted with the state of things; that I kept pretty close; he did n't see any surveying instruments, but perhaps I had them in my pocket.

I have received Helen's note, but have not heard of Frisbie Hoar yet.¹ She is a faint-hearted writer, who could not take the responsibility of blotting one sheet alone. However, I like very well the blottings I get. Tell her I have not seen Mrs. Child nor Mrs. Sedgwick.

Love to all from your affectionate son.

¹ Afterwards Senator Hoar of Massachusetts, but then in Harvard College.

TO R. W. EMERSON (AT CONCORD).

STATEN ISLAND, August 7, 1843.

MY DEAR FRIEND, — I fear I have nothing to send you worthy of so good an opportunity. Of New York I still know but little, though out of so many thousands there are no doubt many units whom it would be worth my while to know. Mr. James¹ talks of going to Germany soon with his wife to learn the language. He says he must know it; can never learn it here; there he may absorb it; and is very anxious to learn beforehand where he had best locate himself to enjoy the advantage of the highest culture, learn the language in its purity, and not exceed his limited means. I referred him to Longfellow. Perhaps you can help him.

I have had a pleasant talk with Channing; and Greeley, too, it was refreshing to meet. They were both much pleased with your criticism on Carlyle, but thought that you had overlooked what chiefly concerned them in the book, — its practical aim and merits.

I have also spent some pleasant hours with Waldo and Tappan at their counting-room, or rather intelligence office.

I must still reckon myself with the innumerable army of invalids, — undoubtedly in a fair field they would rout the well, — though I am tougher than formerly. Methinks I could paint the sleepy god more truly than the poets have done, from more intimate experience.

¹ Henry James, Senior.

Indeed, I have not kept my eyes very steadily open to the things of this world of late, and hence have little to report concerning them. However, I trust the awakening will come before the last trump, — and then perhaps I may remember some of my dreams.

I study the aspects of commerce at its Narrows here, where it passes in review before me, and this seems to be beginning at the right end to understand this Babylon. I have made a very rude translation of the Seven against Thebes, and Pindar too I have looked at, and wish he was better worth translating. I believe even the best things are not equal to their fame. Perhaps it would be better to translate fame itself, — or is not that what the poets themselves do? However, I have not done with Pindar yet. I sent a long article on Etzler's book to the *Democratic Review* six weeks ago, which at length they have determined not to accept, as they could not subscribe to all the opinions, but asked for other matter, — purely literary, I suppose. O'Sullivan wrote me that articles of this kind have to be referred to the circle who, it seems, are represented by this journal, and said something about "collective we" and "homogeneity."

Pray don't think of Bradbury & Soden¹ any more, —

¹ Emerson had written, July 20: "I am sorry to say that when I called on Bradbury & Soden, nearly a month ago, their partner, in their absence, informed me that they should not pay you, at present, any part of their debt on account of the *Boston Miscellany*. After much talking, all the promise he could offer was 'that within a year it would probably be paid,' — a probability which certainly looks very slender. The very worst thing he said was the proposition that you

"For good deed done through praiere
Is sold and bought too dear, I wis,
To herte that of great valor is."

I see that they have given up their shop here.

Say to Mrs. Emerson that I am glad to remember how she too dwells there in Concord, and shall send her anon some of the thoughts that belong to her. As for Edith, I seem to see a star in the east over where the young child is. Remember me to Mrs. Brown.

These letters for the most part explain themselves, with the aid of several to Thoreau's family, which the purpose of Emerson, in 1865, to present his friend in a stoical character, had excluded from the collection then printed. Mention of C. S. Wheeler and his sad death in Germany had come to him from Emerson, as well as from his own family at Concord, — of whose occupations Thoreau gives so genial a picture in the letter of August 6 to his mother. Emerson wrote: "You will have read and heard the sad news to the little village of Lincoln, of Stearns Wheeler's death. Such an overthrow to the hopes of his parents made me think more of them than of the loss the community will suffer in his kindness, diligence, and ingenuous mind." He died at Leipsic, in the midst of Greek studies which have since been taken up and carried farther by a child of Concord, Professor Goodwin of the same university. Henry James, several times mentioned in the correspondence, was the moral and theological essayist should take your payment in the form of *Boston Miscellanies*! I shall not fail to refresh their memory at intervals."

(father of the novelist Henry James, and the distinguished Professor James of Harvard), who was so striking a personality in Concord and Cambridge circles for many years. W. H. Channing was a Christian Socialist fifty years ago, — cousin of Ellery Channing, and nephew and biographer of Dr. Channing. Both he and Horace Greeley were then deeply interested in the Fourierist scheme of association, one development of which was going on at Brook Farm, under direction of George Ripley, and another, differing in design, at Fruitlands, under Bronson Alcott and Charles Lane. The jocose allusions of Thoreau to his Jones ancestors (the descendants of the Tory Colonel Jones of Weston) had this foundation in fact, — that his uncle, Charles Dunbar, soon to be named in connection with Daniel Webster, suffered from a sort of lethargy, which would put him to sleep in the midst of conversation. Webster had been retained in the once famous “Wyman case,” of a bank officer charged with fraud, and had exerted his great forensic talent for a few days in the Concord court-house. Emerson wrote Thoreau: “You will have heard of the Wyman trial, and the stir it made in the village. But the Cliff and Walden knew nothing of that.”

TO MRS. THOREAU (AT CONCORD).

CASTLETON, Tuesday, August 29, 1843.

DEAR MOTHER, — Mr. Emerson has just given me warning that he is about to send to Concord, which I will endeavor to improve. I am a great deal more wakeful than I was, and growing stout in other respects,

— so that I may yet accomplish something in the literary way; indeed, I should have done so before now but for the slowness and poverty of the “Reviews” themselves. I have tried sundry methods of earning money in the city, of late, but without success: have rambled into every bookseller’s or publisher’s house, and discussed their affairs with them. Some propose to me to do what an honest man cannot. Among others, I conversed with the Harpers — to see if they might not find me useful to them; but they say that they are making \$50,000 annually, and their motto is to let well alone. I find that I talk with these poor men as if I were over head and ears in business, and a few thousands were no consideration with me. I almost reproach myself for bothering them so to no purpose; but it is a very valuable experience, and the best introduction I could have.

We have had a tremendous rain here last Monday night and Tuesday morning. I was in the city at Giles Waldo’s, and the streets at daybreak were absolutely impassable for the water. Yet the accounts of the storm that you may have seen are exaggerated, as indeed are all such things, to my imagination. On Sunday I heard Mr. Bellows preach here on the island; but the fine prospect over the Bay and Narrows, from where I sat, preached louder than he, — though he did far better than the average, if I remember aright. I should have liked to see Daniel Webster walking about Concord; I suppose the town shook, every step he took. But I trust there were some sturdy Concordians who were not tumbled down by the jar, but repre-

sented still the upright town. Where was George Minott? he would not have gone far to see him. Uncle Charles should have been there, — he might as well have been catching cat naps in Concord as anywhere.

And then, what a whetter-up of his memory this event would have been! You 'd have had all the classmates again in alphabetical order reversed, — “and Seth Hunt and Bob Smith — and he was a student of my father's, — and where 's Put now? and I wonder — you — if Henry 's been to see George Jones yet! A little account with Stow, — Balcom, — Bigelow, poor miserable t-o-a-d, — (sound asleep.) I vow, you, — what noise was that? — saving grace — and few there be — That 's clear as preaching, — Easter Brooks, — morally deprived, — How charming is divine philosophy, — some wise and some otherwise, — Heighho! (sound asleep again) Webster 's a smart fellow — bears his age well, — how old should you think he was? you — does he look as if he were ten years younger than I?”

I met, or rather, was overtaken by Fuller, who tended for Mr. How, the other day, in Broadway. He dislikes New York very much. The Mercantile Library, — that is, its Librarian, presented me with a stranger's ticket, for a month, and I was glad to read the Reviews there, and Carlyle's last article. I have bought some pantaloons; stockings show no holes yet. These pantaloons cost \$2.25 ready made.

In haste.

TO R. W. EMERSON (AT CONCORD).

STATEN ISLAND, September 14, 1843.

DEAR FRIEND, — Miss Fuller will tell you the news from these parts, so I will only devote these few moments to what she does n't know as well. I was absent only one day and night from the island, the family expecting me back immediately. I was to earn a certain sum before winter, and thought it worth the while to try various experiments. I carried *The Agriculturist* about the city, and up as far as Manhattanville, and called at the Croton Reservoir, where, indeed, they did not want any Agriculturists, but paid well enough in their way.

Literature comes to a poor market here; and even the little that I write is more than will sell. I have tried *The Dem. Review*, *The New Mirror*, and *Brother Jonathan*.¹ The last two, as well as the *New World*, are overwhelmed with contributions which cost nothing, and are worth no more. *The Knickerbocker* is too poor, and only *The Ladies' Companion* pays. O'Sullivan is printing the manuscript I sent him some time ago, having objected only to my want of sympathy with the Committee.

I doubt if you have made more corrections in my manuscript than I should have done ere this, though

¹ It may need to be said that these were New York weeklies — the *Mirror*, edited in part by N. P. Willis, and the *New World* by Park Benjamin, formerly of Boston, whose distinction it is to have first named Hawthorne as a writer of genius. “Miss Fuller” was Margaret, — not yet resident in New York, whither she went to live in 1844.

they may be better; but I am glad you have taken any pains with it. I have not prepared any translations for the *Dial*, supposing there would be no room, though it is the only place for them.

I have been seeing men during these days, and trying experiments upon trees; have inserted three or four hundred buds (quite a Buddhist, one might say). Books I have access to through your brother and Mr. McKean, and have read a good deal. Quarles's "Divine Poems" as well as "Emblems" are quite a discovery.

I am very sorry Mrs. Emerson is so sick. Remember me to her and to your mother. I like to think of your living on the banks of the Mill Brook, in the midst of the garden with all its weeds; for what are botanical distinctions at this distance?

TO HIS MOTHER (AT CONCORD).

STATEN ISLAND, October 1, 1843.

DEAR MOTHER, — I hold together remarkably well as yet, — speaking of my outward linen and woolen man; no holes more than I brought away, and no stitches needed yet. It is marvelous. I think the Fates must be on my side, for there is less than a plank between me and — Time, to say the least. As for Eldorado, that is far off yet. My bait will not tempt the rats, — they are too well fed. The *Democratic Review* is poor, and can only afford half or quarter pay, which it *will* do; and they say there is a *Ladies' Companion* that pays, — but I could not write anything companionable. However, speculate as we will, it is quite

gratuitous; for life, nevertheless and never the more, goes steadily on, well or ill-fed, and clothed somehow, and "honor bright" withal. It is very gratifying to live in the prospect of great successes always; and for that purpose we must leave a sufficient foreground to see them through. All the painters prefer distant prospects for the greater breadth of view and delicacy of tint. But this is no news, and describes no new conditions.

Meanwhile I am somnambulic at least, — stirring in my sleep; indeed, quite awake. I read a good deal, and am pretty well known in the libraries of New York. Am in with the librarian (one Dr. Forbes) of the Society Library, who has lately been to Cambridge to learn liberality, and has come back to let me take out some un-take-out-able books, which I was threatening to read on the spot. And Mr. McKean, of the Mercantile Library, is a true gentleman (a former tutor of mine), and offers me every privilege there. I have from him a perpetual stranger's ticket, and a citizen's rights besides, — all which privileges I pay handsomely for by improving.

A canoe race "came off" on the Hudson the other day, between Chippeways and New Yorkers, which must have been as moving a sight as the buffalo hunt which I witnessed. But canoes and buffaloes are all lost, as is everything here, in the mob. It is only the people have come to see one another. Let them advertise that there will be a gathering at Hoboken, — having bargained with the ferryboats, — and there will be, and they need not throw in the buffaloes.

I have crossed the bay twenty or thirty times, and

have seen a great many immigrants going up to the city for the first time: Norwegians, who carry their old-fashioned farming-tools to the West with them, and will buy nothing here for fear of being cheated; English operatives, known by their pale faces and stained hands, who will recover their birthright in a little cheap sun and wind; English travelers on their way to the Astor House, to whom I have done the honors of the city; whole families of emigrants cooking their dinner upon the pavement, — all sunburnt, so that you are in doubt where the foreigner's face of flesh begins; their tidy clothes laid on, and then tied to their swathed bodies, which move about like a bandaged finger, — caps set on the head as if woven of the hair, which is still growing at the roots, — each and all busily cooking, stooping from time to time over the pot, and having something to drop in it, that so they may be entitled to take something out, forsooth. They look like respectable but straitened people, who may turn out to be Counts when they get to Wisconsin, and will have this experience to relate to their children.

Seeing so many people from day to day, one comes to have less respect for flesh and bones, and thinks they must be more loosely joined, of less firm fibre, than the few he had known. It must have a very bad influence on children to see so many human beings at once, — mere herds of men.

I came across Henry Bigelow a week ago, sitting in front of a hotel in Broadway, very much as if he were under his father's stoop. He is seeking to be admitted into the bar in New York, but as yet had not succeeded.

I directed him to Fuller's store, which he had not found, and invited him to come and see me if he came to the island. Tell Mrs. and Miss Ward that I have not forgotten them, and was glad to hear from George — with whom I spent last night — that they had returned to C. Tell Mrs. Brown that it gives me as much pleasure to know that she thinks of me and my writing as if I had been the author of the piece in question, — but I did not even read over the papers I sent. The *Mirror* is really the most readable journal here. I see that they have printed a short piece that I wrote to sell, in the *Dem. Review*, and still keep the review of "Paradise," that I may include in it a notice of another book by the same author, which they have found, and are going to send me.

I don't know when I shall come home; I like to keep that feast in store. Tell Helen that I do not see any advertisement for her, and I am looking for myself. If I could find a rare opening, I might be tempted to try with her for a year, till I had paid my debts, but for such I am sure it is not well to go out of New England. Teachers are but poorly recompensed, even here. Tell her and Sophia (if she is not gone) to write to me. Father will know that this letter is to him as well as to you. I send him a paper which usually contains the news, — if not all that is stirring, all that has stirred, — and even draws a little on the future. I wish he would send me, by and by, the paper which contains the results of the Cattle-Show. You must get Helen's eyes to read this, though she is a scoffer at honest penmanship.

TO MRS. EMERSON (AT CONCORD).

STATEN ISLAND, October 16, 1843.

MY DEAR FRIEND, — I promised you some thoughts long ago, but it would be hard to tell whether these are the ones. I suppose that the great questions of "Fate, Freewill, Foreknowledge absolute," which used to be discussed at Concord, are still unsettled. And here comes [W. H.] Channing, with his *Present* to vex the world again, — a rather galvanic movement, I think. However, I like the man all the better, though his schemes the less. I am sorry for his confessions. Faith never makes a confession.

Have you had the annual berrying party, or sat on the Cliffs a whole day this summer? I suppose the flowers have fared quite as well since I was not there to scoff at them; and the hens, without doubt, keep up their reputation.

I have been reading lately what of Quarles's poetry I could get. He was a contemporary of Herbert, and a kindred spirit. I think you would like him. It is rare to find one who was so much of a poet and so little of an artist. He wrote long poems, almost epics for length, about Jonah, Esther, Job, Samson, and Solomon, interspersed with meditations after a quite original plan, — Shepherd's Oracles, Comedies, Romances, Fancies, and Meditations, — the quintessence of meditation, — and Euchiridions of Meditation all divine, — and what he calls his Morning Muse; besides prose works as curious as the rest. He was an unwearied Christian, and a reformer of some old school withal. Hopelessly

quaint, as if he lived all alone and knew nobody but his wife, who appears to have revered him. He never doubts his genius; it is only he and his God in all the world. He uses language sometimes as greatly as Shakespeare; and though there is not much straight grain in him, there is plenty of tough, crooked timber. In an age when Herbert is revived, Quarles surely ought not to be forgotten.

I will copy a few such sentences as I should read to you if there. Mrs. Brown, too, may find some nutriment in them.

How does the Saxon Edith do? Can you tell yet to which school of philosophy she belongs, — whether she will be a fair saint of some Christian order, or a follower of Plato and the heathen? Bid Ellen a good-night or good-morning from me, and see if she will remember where it comes from; and remember me to Mrs. Brown, and your mother, and Elizabeth Hoar.

TO R. W. EMERSON (AT CONCORD).

STATEN ISLAND, October 17, 1843.

MY DEAR FRIEND, — I went with my pupil to the Fair of the American Institute, and so lost a visit from Tappan, whom I met returning from the Island. I should have liked to hear more news from his lips, though he had left me a letter and the *Dial*, which is a sort of circular letter itself. I find Channing's¹

¹ The allusion here is to Ellery Channing's "Youth of the Poet and Painter," in the *Dial*, — an unfinished autobiography. The *Present* of W. H. Channing, his cousin, named above, was a short-lived periodical, begun September 15, 1843, and ended in April, 1844. "McKean"

letters full of life, and I enjoy their wit highly. Lane writes straight and solid, like a guide-board, but I find that I put off the "social tendencies" to a future day, which may never come. He is always Shaker fare, quite as luxurious as his principles will allow. I feel as if I were ready to be appointed a committee on poetry, I have got my eyes so whetted and proved of late, like the knife-sharpener I saw at the Fair, certified to have been "in constant use in a gentleman's family for more than two years." Yes, I ride along the ranks of the English poets, casting terrible glances, and some I blot out, and some I spare. McKean has imported, within the year, several new editions and collections of old poetry, of which I have the reading, but there is a good deal of chaff to a little meal, — hardly worth bolting. I have just opened Bacon's "Advancement of Learning" for the first time, which I read with great delight. It is more like what Scott's novels *were* than anything.

I see that I was very blind to send you my manuscript in such a state; but I have a good *second* sight, at least. I could still shake it in the wind to some advantage, if it would hold together. There are some sad mistakes in the printing. It is a little unfortunate that the "Ethnical Scriptures" should hold out so well, though it does really hold out. The Bible ought not to be very large. Is it not singular that, while the religious world is gradually picking to pieces its old testaments,

was Henry Swasey McKean, who was a classmate of Charles Emerson at Harvard in 1828, a tutor there in 1830-35, and who died in 1857.

here are some coming slowly after, on the scashore, picking up the durable relics of perhaps older books, and putting them together again?

Your Letter to Contributors is excellent, and hits the nail on the head. It will taste sour to their palates at first, no doubt, but it will bear a sweet fruit at last. I like the poetry, especially the Autumn verses. They ring true. Though I am quite weather-beaten with poetry, having weathered so many epics of late. The "Sweep Ho!" sounds well this way. But I have a good deal of fault to find with your "Ode to Beauty." The tune is altogether unworthy of the thoughts. You slope too quickly to the rhyme, as if that trick had better be performed as soon as possible, or as if you stood over the line with a hatchet, and chopped off the verses as they came out, some short and some long. But give us a long reel, and we'll cut it up to suit ourselves. It sounds like parody. "Thee knew I of old," "Remediless thirst," are some of those stereotyped lines. I am frequently reminded, I believe, of Jane Taylor's "Philosopher's Scales," and how the world

"Flew out with a bounce,"

which

"Yerked the philosopher out of his cell;"

or else of

"From the climes of the sun all war-worn and weary."

I had rather have the thought come ushered with a flourish of oaths and curses. Yet I love your poetry as I do little else that is near and recent, especially when you get fairly round the end of the line, and are not thrown back upon the rocks. To read the lecture on

"The Comic" is as good as to be in our town meeting or Lyceum once more.

I am glad that the Concord farmers plowed well this year; it promises that something will be done these summers. But I am suspicious of that *Brittonner*, who advertises so many cords of *good* oak, chestnut, and maple wood for sale. *Good!* ay, good for what? And there shall not be left a stone upon a stone. But no matter, — let them hack away. The sturdy Irish arms that do the work are of more worth than oak or maple. Methinks I could look with equanimity upon a long street of Irish cabins, and pigs and children reveling in the genial Concord dirt; and I should still find my Walden Wood and Fair Haven in their tanned and happy faces.

I write this in the corn-field — it being washing-day — with the inkstand Elizabeth Hoar gave me;¹ though it is not redolent of corn-stalks, I fear. Let me not be

¹ This inkstand was presented by Miss Hoar, with a note dated "Boston, May 2, 1843," which deserves to be copied: —

DEAR HENRY, — The rain prevented me from seeing you the night before I came away, to leave with you a parting assurance of good will and good hope. We have become better acquainted within the two past years than in our whole life as schoolmates and neighbors before; and I am unwilling to let you go away without telling you that I, among your other friends, shall miss you much, and follow you with remembrance and all best wishes and confidence. Will you take this little inkstand and try if it will carry ink safely from Concord to Staten Island? and the pen, which, if you can write with steel, may be made sometimes the interpreter of friendly thoughts to those whom you leave beyond the reach of your voice, — or record the inspirations of Nature, who, I doubt not, will be as faithful to you who trust her in the sea-girt Staten Island as in Concord woods and meadows. Good-by, and εὖ παράγειν, which, a wise man says, is the only salutation fit for the wise.

Truly your friend,

E. HOAR.

forgotten by Channing and Hawthorne, nor our gray-suited neighbor under the hill [Edmund Hosmer].

This letter will be best explained by a reference to the *Dial* for October, 1843. The "Ethnical Scriptures" were selections from the Brahminical books, from Confucius, etc., such as we have since seen in great abundance. The Autumn verses are by Channing; "Sweep Ho!" by Ellen Sturgis, afterwards Mrs. Hooper; the "Youth of the Poet and Painter" also by Channing. The Letter to Contributors, which is headed simply "A Letter," is by Emerson, and has been much overlooked by his later readers; his "Ode to Beauty" is very well known, and does not deserve the slashing censure of Thoreau, though, as it now stands, it is better than first printed. Instead of

"Love drinks at thy banquet
Remediless thirst,"

we now have the perfect phrase,

"Love drinks at thy fountain
False waters of thirst."

"The Comic" is also Emerson's. There is a poem, "The Sail," by William Tappan, so often named in these letters, and a sonnet by Charles A. Dana, afterwards of the *New York Sun*.

TO HELEN THOREAU (AT CONCORD).

STATEN ISLAND, October 18, 1843.

DEAR HELEN, — What do you mean by saying that "we have written eight times by private opportunity"? Is n't it the more the better? And am I not glad of it?

But people have a habit of not letting me know it when they go to Concord from New York. I endeavored to get you *The Present* when I was last in the city, but they were all sold; and now another is out, which I will send, if I get it. I did not send the *Democratic Review*, because I had no copy, and my piece was not worth fifty cents. You think that Channing's words would apply to me too, as living more in the natural than the moral world; but I think that you mean the world of men and women rather, and reformers generally. My objection to Channing and all that fraternity is that they need and deserve sympathy themselves rather than are able to render it to others. They want faith, and mistake their private ail for an infected atmosphere; but let any one of them recover hope for a moment, and right his *particular* grievance, and he will no longer train in that company. To speak or do anything that shall concern mankind, one must speak and act as if well, or from that grain of health which he has left. This *Present* book indeed is blue, but the hue of its thoughts is yellow. I say these things with the less hesitation, because I have the jaundice myself; but I also know what it is to be well. But do not think that one can escape from mankind who is one of them, and is so constantly dealing with them.

I could not undertake to form a nucleus of an institution for the development of infant minds, where none already existed. It would be too cruel. And then, as if looking all this while one way with benevolence, to walk off another about one's own affairs suddenly! Something of this kind is an unavoidable objection to that.

I am very sorry to hear such bad news about Aunt Maria; but I think that the worst is always the least to be apprehended, for nature is averse to it as well as we. I trust to hear that she is quite well soon. I send love to her and Aunt Jane. For three months I have not known whether to think of Sophia as in Bangor or Concord, and now you say that she is going directly. Tell her to write to me, and establish her whereabouts, and also to get well directly. And see that she has something worthy to do when she gets down there, for that 's the best remedy for disease.

Your affectionate brother,

H. D. THOREAU.