

1847

It was resolved to light the nation's Capitol and its grounds with gas. The use of postage stamps was inaugurated. The Massachusetts legislature resolved that "the present war with Mexico has . . . the triple object of extending slavery, of strengthening the 'slave power,' and of obtaining the control of the free states." Thoreau did not dissent. The Mexican War ended triumphantly for our country, with an almost unbroken string of victories. At the Battle of El Molino del Rey Ulysses S. Grant was made a brevet first lieutenant for gallant conduct. In the Senate John Calhoun moved that Congress had no right to prohibit slavery under the Constitution. The Mormons founded the City of the Great Salt Lake. The wheat crop was average in quantity but, at least in the eyes of some patriots, unsurpassed in quality. Black claw-hammer coats with capacious pockets in the tails were popular; the young men about town added bright plaid waistcoats.

Except for some minor revisions and additions, the *Week* was now finished; by the end of the year at least four publishers had turned it down. In September Thoreau left Walden Pond, having still several more lives to live, and was again invited to stay at Emerson's. Emerson himself started for Europe, and Henry remained behind as handyman to the household, but now on a firmer and easier basis than before. Lidian Emerson valued his presence; so did the children. He published another magazine article, but still found the progress slow in spite of Horace Greeley's help. The writing of *Walden* continued. Stimulated by his communication with the great Swiss scientist Louis Agassiz, who was teaching at Harvard, Thoreau's interest in nature study grew. The Transcendentalist was developing into the naturalist.

To EVERT A. DUYCKINCK

Concord, Jan 14, 1847.

Dear Sir—

Will you please inform Mr. [John] Wiley that I have concluded to wait a fortnight for his answer. As I should like to make some corrections in the Mss. in the meanwhile, I will thank you if you will send it to me by Harnden's express to Boston and by Adams' to Concord and I will return it in ten days.

Yrs &c.,  
Henry D. Thoreau

*This letter, written for the information of the head of Wiley & Putnam, the New York publishers and booksellers, was probably addressed to Duyckinck: Thoreau's later correspondence with the firm was through Duyckinck. Thoreau had apparently submitted an early draft of the Week and now wished it returned for revision. For further details of this correspondence see the letter to Duyckinck of May 28, 1847. Augustus Adams ran a local express from Concord to the City Tavern in Boston. Text, Adrian Joline, Rambles in Autograph Land, p. 293.*

---

From HORACE GREELEY

New York Feb. 5th, 1847.

My dear Thoreau:

Although your letter only came to hand to-day, I attended to its subject yesterday, when I was in Philadelphia on my way home from

Washington. Your article is this moment in type, and will appear about the 20th inst. as *the leading article* in Graham's Mag. for next month. Now don't object to this, nor be unreasonably sensitive at the delay. It is immensely more important to you that the article should appear thus (that is, if you have any literary aspirations,) than it is that you should make a few dollars by issuing it in some other way. As to lecturing, you have been at perfect liberty to deliver it as a lecture a hundred times if you had chosen—the more the better. It is really a good thing, and I will see that Graham pays you fairly for it. But its appearance there is worth far more to you than money.

I know there has been too much delay, and have done my best to obviate it. But I could not. A Magazine that pays, and which it is desirable to be known as a contributor to, is always crowded with articles, and has to postpone some for others of even less merit. I do this myself with good things that I am not required to pay for.

Thoreau, do not think hard of Graham. Do not try to stop the publication of your article. It is best as it is. But just set down and write a like article about Emerson, which I will give you \$25 for if you cannot do better with it; then one about Hawthorne at your leisure, &c. &c. I will pay you the money for each of these articles on delivery, publish them when and how I please, leaving to you the copyright expressly. In a year or two, if you take care not to write faster than you think, you will have the material of a volume worth publishing, and then we will see what can be done.

There is a text somewhere in St. Paul—my scriptural reading is getting rusty—which says 'Look not back to the things which are behind, but rather to these which are before,' &c. Commending this to your thoughtful appreciation, I am,

Yours, &c.  
Horace Greeley

Regards to Mr. and Mrs. Emerson.

*Thoreau's difficulties with the Carlyle article were not at an end even with the receipt of this letter. More than a year later Graham's Magazine had still not paid for it. (See Greeley's letter of April 3, 1848.) Despite Greeley's comment about lecturing, Thoreau apparently used the article for a lecture only once, on February 4, 1846, before the Concord*

*Lyceum. He never wrote about Hawthorne and Emerson for publication, as Greeley suggested, probably because he did not wish to profit by his friendship for them. This letter marks the first of several attempts by Greeley to help Thoreau get a book published. MS., Abernethy (typescript).*

---

To HORATIO R. STOREY

Concord Feb. 15th 1847

Dear Sir,

I have not forgotten your note which I received sometime since. Though I live in the woods I am not so attentive an observer of birds as I was once, but am satisfied if I get an occasional night of sound from them. My pursuits at present are such that I am not very likely to meet with any specimens which you will not have obtained. Moreover, I confess to a little squeamishness on the score of robbing their nests, though I could easily go to the length of abstracting an egg or two gently, now and then, and if the advancement of science obviously demanded it might be carried even to the extreme of deliberate murder.

I have no doubt that you will observe a greater number of species in or near the College yard than I can here. I have noticed that in an open country where there are but few trees, there are more attractions for many species of birds than in a wooded one. They not only find food there in greater abundance, but protection against birds of prey; and even if they are no more numerous than elsewhere, the few trees are necessarily more crowded with nests. Many of my classmates were quite successful in collecting birds nests and eggs and they did not have to go far from the college-yard to find them—I remember a pigeon-woodpecker's nest in the grove on the east side of the yard, which annually yielded a number of eggs to collectors, while the bird steadily supplied the loss like a hen, until my chum demolished the whole with a hatchet. I found another in the next field chipped nearly two feet into a solid stump. And in one of the fields near the yard I used to visit daily in the winter the dwelling of an ermine-weasel in a hollow apple tree. But of

course one must be a greater traveller than this if he would make anything like a complete collection.

There are many whipporwills & owls about my house, and perhaps with a little pains one might find their nests. I hope you have more nimble and inquisitive eyes to serve you than mine now are— However, if I should chance to stumble on any rarer nest I will not forget your request. If you come to Concord again, as I understand you sometimes do, I shall be glad to see you at my hut—. Trusting that you will feather your own nest comfortably without stripping those of the birds quite bare—I am

Yrs  
Henry D. Thoreau

*Storer, a member of the Harvard class of 1850, studied under Agassiz and Asa Gray and was a promising naturalist. His report on the fishes of Nova Scotia and Labrador was published the year he graduated. However, in 1853 he took an M.D. at the Harvard Medical School and for the rest of his professional life was a practicing gynecologist. Thoreau, in addressing his letter, either misread or forgot Storer's correct middle initial and recorded it as B. MS., Abernethy (typescript).*

---

From HENRY WILLIAMS

Boston, March 1, 1847.

Dear Sir,

The following inquiries are made agreeably to a vote passed at the Last Annual Meeting of the Class, with a view to obtain authentic information concerning each one of its members, and to enable the Secretary to record facts now easily obtainable, but which, from year to year, it will be more and more difficult to collect.

You are respectfully requested to answer the questions proposed, as fully as may be convenient and agreeable to you, and to add such other

[1847]

facts concerning your life, before or after entering College, as you are willing to communicate. The answers are to be recorded in the Class Book for future reference.

*Please to address* Henry Williams, Jr., Boston; *post paid.*

Very Respectfully and Truly Yours,  
Henry Williams, Jr., Class Secretary.

1. When and where were you born?
2. Where were you fitted for College, and by whom?
3. If married, when, where, and to whom?
4. What is your profession? If learned, with whom studied? If mercantile, where and with whom begun?
5. What are your present employment, and residence?
6. Mention any general facts of importance before or since graduating.

*A form letter sent out by the secretary of Thoreau's Harvard Class of 1837. Thoreau did not reply until September 30, 1847. MS., Harvard.*

---

From JAMES ELLIOT CABOT

I carried them immediately to Mr. Agassiz, who was highly delighted with them [, and began immediately to spread them out and arrange them for his draughtsman. Some of the species he had seen before, but never in so fresh condition; others, as the breams and the pout, he had seen only in spirits, and the little tortoise he knew only from the books. I am sure you would have felt fully repaid for your trouble, if you could have seen the eager satisfaction with which he surveyed each fin and scale.] He said the small mud-turtle was really a very rare species, quite distinct from the snapping-turtle. The breams and pout seemed to please the Professor very much. [Of the perch Agassiz remarked that it was almost identical with that of Europe, but distinguishable, on close examination, by the tubercles on the sub-

operculum. . . . More of the painted tortoises would be acceptable. The snapping turtles are very interesting to him as forming a transition from the turtles proper to the alligator and crocodile. . . . We have received three boxes from you since the first.] He would gladly come up to Concord to make a spearing excursion, as you suggested, but is drawn off by numerous and pressing engagements.

*Few newcomers to America were able to establish themselves here more swiftly and brilliantly than Agassiz. He arrived in Boston from Europe at the beginning of October 1846. Thanks to his excellent reputation, he was engaged by the Lowell Institute of Boston to give one of its series of lectures. His first course, "Lectures on the Plan of the Creation, Especially in the Animal Kingdom," was highly successful. He was very well paid for it, and he followed it with another, by private subscription, on glaciers, which gave him more money and more renown. More important to him, America offered him a virgin field for scientific discoveries, and he was happy to stay once he realized that he could support himself. He settled in Boston and soon filled his house with scientific specimens and interested researchers. Then early in 1848 he lost his professorship in Switzerland because of a change of government and was offered the chair of Natural History at Harvard's Lawrence Scientific School.*

*Young Cabot acted as Agassiz's conscientious assistant and secretary. His "Life and Writings of Agassiz" appeared in the Massachusetts Quarterly Review for December 1847.*

*In the spring of 1847 Thoreau collected many specimens of fish and reptiles for Agassiz and shipped them to Cabot. This letter was written shortly after the receipt of the first shipment. Two different extant versions of it are here pieced together. Text, Sanborn's Henry D. Thoreau, pp. 243-44, for the unbracketed portions; Familiar Letters of Thoreau, p. 156, for the bracketed. They are dated May 3, 1847. The following note by Agassiz to Cabot is added in Familiar Letters of Thoreau.*

*"I have been highly pleased to find that the small mud turtle was really the Sternotherus odoratus, as I suspected,—a very rare species, quite distinct from the snapping turtle. The suckers were all of one and*

*the same species (Catastomus tuberculatus); the female has the tubercles. As I am very anxious to send some snapping turtles home with my first boxes, I would thank Mr. T. very much if he could have some taken for me."*

---

To JAMES ELLIOT CABOT

Concord, May 8, 1847.

Dear Sir,—

I believe that I have not yet acknowledged the receipt of your notes, and a five dollar bill. I am very glad that the fishes afforded Mr. Agassiz so much pleasure. I could easily have obtained more specimens of the *Sternotherus odoratus*; they are quite numerous here. I will send more of them ere long. Snapping turtles are perhaps as frequently met with in our muddy river as anything, but they are not always to be had when wanted. It is now rather late in the season for them. As no one makes a business of seeking them, and they are valued for soups, science may be forestalled by appetite in this market, and it will be necessary to bid pretty high to induce persons to obtain or preserve them. I think that from seventy-five cents to a dollar apiece would secure all that are in any case to be had, and will set this price upon their heads, if the treasury of science is full enough to warrant it.

You will excuse me for taking toll in the shape of some, it may be, impertinent and unscientific inquiries. There are found in the waters of the Concord, so far as I know, the following kinds of fishes:—

*Pickereel.* Besides the common, fishermen distinguish the Brook, or Grass Pickereel, which bites differently, and has a shorter snout. Those caught in Walden, hard by my house, are easily distinguished from those caught in the river, being much heavier in proportion to their size, stouter, firmer fleshed, and lighter colored. The little pickereel which I sent last, jumped into the boat in its fright.

*Pouts.* Those in the pond are of different appearance from those that I have sent.

*Breams.* Some more green, others more brown.

*Suckers.* The horned, which I sent first, and the black. I am not sure whether the *Common* or *Boston sucker* is found here. Are the three which I sent last, which were speared in the river, identical with the three *black suckers*, taken by hand in the brook, which I sent before? I have never examined them minutely.

*Perch.* The river perch, of which I sent five specimens in the box, are darker colored than those found in the pond. There are myriads of small ones in the latter place, and but few large ones. I have counted ten transverse bands on some of the smaller.

*Lampreys.* Very scarce since the dams at Lowell and Billerica were built.

*Shiners.* *Leuciscus chrysoleucas*, silver and golden.

What is the difference?

*Roach* or *Chiverin*, *Leuciscus pulchellus*, *argenteus*, or what not. The *white* and the *red*. The former described by Storer, but the latter, which deserves distinct notice, not described, to my knowledge. Are the minnows (called here *dace*), of which I sent three live specimens, I believe, one larger and two smaller, the young of this species?

*Trout.* Of different appearance in different brooks in this neighborhood.

*Eels.*

*Red-finned Minnows*, of which I sent you a dozen alive. I have never recognized them in any books. Have they any scientific name?

If convenient, will you let Dr. Storer see these brook minnows? There is also a kind of dace or fresh-water smelt in the pond, which is, perhaps, distinct from any of the above. What of the above does M. Agassiz particularly wish to see? Does he want more specimens of kinds which I have already sent? There are also minks, muskrats, frogs, lizards, tortoise, snakes, caddice-worms, leeches, muscles, etc., or rather, *here they are*. The funds which you sent me are nearly exhausted. Most fishes can now be taken with the hook, and it will cost but little trouble or money to obtain them. The snapping turtles will be the main expense. I should think that five dollars more, at least, might be profitably expended.

*The authority Thoreau cites is David H. Storer, A Synopsis of the Fishes of North America (1846). Text, Familiar Letters of Thoreau, pp. 150-53.*

[1847]

From JAMES ELLIOT CABOT

[Mr.] Agassiz was [very] much surprised and pleased at the extent of the collections you sent during his absence in New York; [the little fox he has established in comfortable quarters in his backyard where he is doing well.] Among the fishes there is one, and probably two, new species. The fresh-water smelt he does not know. He is very anxious to see the pickerel with the long snout, which he suspects may be the *Esox estor*, or Maskalongé; he has seen this at Albany. . . . As to the minks, etc., I know they would all be very acceptable to him. When I asked him about these, and more specimens of what you have sent, he said, "I dare not make any request, for I do not know how much trouble I may be giving to Mr. Thoreau; but my method of examination requires many more specimens than most naturalists would care for."

*The letter is dated May 27, 1847 by Sanborn. Text, Familiar Letters of Thoreau, pp. 156-57; bracketed portions are from another version of the letter given in Sanborn's Henry D. Thoreau, p. 244.*

To EVERT A. DUYCKINCK

Concord May 28 -47

Dear Sir,

I should not have delayed sending you my manuscript so long, if I had not known that delay would be no inconvenience to you, and advantage to the sender. I will remind you, to save time, that I wish to be informed for what term the book is to be the property of the publishers, and on what terms I can have 30 copies cheaply bound in boards without immediate expense.—If you take it—It will be a great convenience to me to get through with the printing as soon as possible, as I wish to take a journey of considerable length and should not be willing that any other than myself should correct the proofs.

If you will inform me as soon as may be, whether you want the manuscript, and what are the most favorable terms on which you will print & publish it, you will greatly oblige

Yrs &c  
Henry D. Thoreau.

*Thoreau, having completed his first book, the Week, while at Walden Pond, had now started it on an unsuccessful round of the publishers. (Duyckinck was with Wiley & Putnam, 161 Broadway.) After continued rejection Thoreau thoroughly revised the book. He did not get it published until 1849. The "journey of considerable length" was apparently never taken, for Thoreau left Walden in early September and settled down to live with the Emersons again. MS., New York; previously unpublished.*

---

To JAMES ELLIOT CABOT

Concord, June 1, 1847.

Dear Sir,—

I send you 15 pouts, 17 perch, 13 shiners, 1 larger land tortoise, and 5 muddy tortoises, all from the pond by my house. Also 7 perch, 5 shiners, 8 breams, 4 dace? 2 muddy tortoises, 5 painted do., and 3 land do., all from the river. One black snake, alive, and one dormouse? caught last night in my cellar. The tortoises were all put in alive; the fishes were alive yesterday, *i. e.*, Monday, and some this morning. Observe the difference between those from the pond, which is pure water, and those from the river.

I will send the light-colored trout and the pickerel with the longer snout, which is our large one, when I meet with them. I have set a price upon the heads of snapping turtles, though it is late in the season to get them.

If I wrote red-finned eel, it was a slip of the pen; I meant red-finned

minnow. This is their name here; though smaller specimens have but a slight reddish tinge at the base of the pectorals.

Will you, at your leisure, answer these queries?

Do you mean to say that the twelve banded minnows which I sent are undescribed, or only one? What are the scientific names of those minnows which have any? Are the four dace I send to-day identical with one of the former, and what are they called? Is there such a fish as the black sucker described,—distinct from the common?

Text, Familiar Letters of Thoreau, pp. 153–54.

---

From JAMES ELLIOT CABOT

(June 1.)

Agassiz is delighted to find one, and he thinks two, more new species; one is a Pomotis,—the bream without the red spot in the operculum, and with a red belly and fins. The other is the shallower and lighter colored shiner. The four dace you sent last are *Leuciscus argenteus*. They are different from that you sent before under this name, but which was a new species. Of the four kinds of minnow, two are new. There is a black sucker (*Catostomus nigricans*), but there has been no specimen among those you have sent, and A. has never seen a specimen. He seemed to know your mouse, and called it the white-bellied mouse. It was the first specimen he had seen. I am in hopes to bring or send him to Concord, to look after new *Leucisci*, etc.

Text, Familiar Letters of Thoreau, p. 157; Sanborn prints only this fragment.

To EVERT A. DUYCKINCK

Concord July 3d 1847.

Dear Sir,

I sent you my Mss. this (Saturday) morning by Augustus Adams' and Harnden's expresses, and now write this for greater security, that you may inform me if it does not arrive duly. If Mr. [George P.] Putnam is not likely to return for a considerable time yet, will you please inform

Yrs &c  
Henry D. Thoreau.

MS. New York; *previously unpublished.*

---

To EVERT A. DUYCKINCK

Concord, July 27th, 1847.

Dear Sir

It is a little more than three weeks since I returned my mss. sending a letter by mail at the same time for security, so I suppose that you have received it. If Messrs Wiley & Putnam are not prepared to give their answer now, will you please inform me what further delay if any, is unavoidable, that I may determine whether I had not better carry it elsewhere—for time is of great consequence to me.

Yours respectfully  
Henry D. Thoreau

MS., Fruitlands Museum, Harvard, Massachusetts; *previously unpublished.*

To JAMES MUNROE &amp; CO.

Concord Aug 28th 1847

Dear Sir,

Mr Emerson has showed me your note to him and says that he thinks you must have misunderstood him. If you will inform me how large an edition you contemplated, and what will be the whole or outside of the expense—(The book is about the size of one vol of Emerson's essays)—I will consider whether I will pay one half the same (or whatever of my part one half the profits has failed to pay)—*at the end of six months after the day of publication*, if that is agreeable to you. This arrangement to affect only one edition. The MSS is quite ready and is now in New York.

Please answer this as soon as convenient.

Yours &c.  
Henry D. Thoreau

P S. I should have said above that I decline your proposition as it now stands.

MS., Historical Society of Pennsylvania.

---

To HENRY WILLIAMS, JR.

Concord Sept 30th 1847

Dear Sir,

I confess that I have very little class spirit, and have almost forgotten that I ever spent four years at Cambridge. That must have been in a former state of existence. It is difficult to realize that the old routine is still kept up. However, I will undertake at last to answer your questions as well as I can in spite of a poor memory and a defect of information.

1st then, I was born, they say, on the 12th of July 1817, on what is called the Virginia Road, in the east part of Concord.

2nd I was fitted, or rather made unfit, for College, at Concord Academy & elsewhere, mainly by myself, with the countenance of Phineas Allen, Preceptor.

3d I am not married.

4th I dont know whether mine is a profession, or a trade, or what not. It is not yet learned, and in every instance has been practised before being studied. The mercantile part of it was begun *here* by myself alone.

—It is not one but legion. I will give you some of the monster's heads. I am a Schoolmaster—a Private Tutor, a Surveyor—a Gardener, a Farmer—a Painter, I mean a House Painter, a Carpenter, a Mason, a Day-Laborer, a Pencil-Maker, a Glass-paper Maker, a Writer, and sometimes a Poetaster. If you will act the part of Iolas, and apply a hot iron to any of these heads, I shall be greatly obliged to you.

5th My present employment is to answer such orders as may be expected from so general an advertisement as the above—that is, if I see fit, which is not always the case, for I have found out a way to live without what is commonly called employment or industry attractive or otherwise. Indeed my steadiest employment, if such it can be called, is to keep myself at the top of my condition, and ready for whatever may turn up in heaven or on earth. For the last two or three years I have lived in Concord woods alone, something more than a mile from any neighbor, in a house built entirely by myself.

6th I cannot think of a single general fact of any importance before or since graduating

Yrs &c  
Henry D Thoreau

P S. I beg that the Class will not consider me an object of charity, and if any of them are in want of pecuniary assistance, and will make known their case to me, I will engage to give them some advice of more worth than money.

MS., Harvard.

To SOPHIA THOREAU

Concord, October 24, 1847.

Dear Sophia,—

I thank you for those letters about Ktaadn, and hope you will save and send me the rest, and anything else you may meet with relating to the Maine woods. That Dr. Young is both young and green too at traveling in the woods. However, I hope he got "yarbs" enough to satisfy him. I went to Boston the 5th of this month to see Mr. Emerson off to Europe. He sailed in the Washington Irving packet ship; the same in which Mr. [F. H.] Hedge went before him. Up to this trip the first mate aboard this ship was, as I hear, one Stephens, a Concord boy, son of Stephens the carpenter, who used to live above Mr. Dennis's. Mr. Emerson's stateroom was like a carpeted dark closet, about six feet square, with a large keyhole for a window. The window was about as big as a saucer, and the glass two inches thick, not to mention another skylight overhead in the deck, the size of an oblong doughnut, and about as opaque. Of course it would be in vain to look up, if any contemplative promenader put his foot upon it. Such will be his lodgings for two or three weeks; and instead of a walk in Walden woods he will take a promenade on deck, where the few trees, you know, are stripped of their bark. The steam-tug carried the ship to sea against a head wind without a rag of sail being raised.

I don't remember whether you have heard of the new telescope at Cambridge or not. They think it is the best one in the world, and have already seen more than Lord Rosse or Herschel. I went to see Perez Blood's, some time ago, with Mr. Emerson. He had not gone to bed, but was sitting in the woodshed, in the dark, alone, in his astronomical chair, which is all legs and rounds, with a seat which can be inserted at any height. We saw Saturn's rings, and the mountains in the moon, and the shadows in their craters, and the sunlight on the spurs of the mountains in the dark portion, etc., etc. When I asked him the power of his glass, he said it was 85. But what is the power of the Cambridge glass? 2000!!! The last is about twenty-three feet long.

I think you may have a grand time this winter pursuing some study,—keeping a journal, or the like,—while the snow lies deep without. Winter is the time for study, you know, and the colder it is the more studious

we are. Give my respects to the whole Penobscot tribe, and tell them that I trust we are good brothers still, and endeavor to keep the chain of friendship bright, though I do dig up a hatchet now and then. I trust you will not stir from your comfortable winter quarters, Miss Brain, or even put your head out of your hollow tree, till the sun has melted the snow in the spring, and "the green buds, they are a-swellin'."

From your  
Brother Henry.

*Thoreau's sister was visiting her Bangor cousins again. Perez Blood was an amateur Concord astronomer, according to Sanborn. Thoreau had befriended the Penobscot Indians when he made his first journey to the Maine woods in the summer of 1846. Text, Familiar Letters of Thoreau, pp. 158-60.*

---

To EMERSON

Concord, November 14, 1847.

Dear Friend,—

I am but a poor neighbor to you here,—a very poor companion am I. I understand that very well, but that need not prevent my *writing* to you now. I have almost never written letters in my life, yet I think I can write as good ones as I frequently see, so I shall not hesitate to write this, such as it may be, knowing that you will welcome anything that reminds you of Concord.

I have banked up the young trees against the winter and the mice, and I will look out, in my careless way, to see when a pale is loose or a nail drops out of its place. The broad gaps, at least, I will occupy. I heartily wish I could be of good service to this household. But I, who have only used these ten digits so long to solve the problem of a living, how can I? The world is a cow that is hard to milk,—life does not come so easy,—and oh, how thinly it is watered ere we get it! But the young

bunting calf, he will get at it. There is no way so direct. This is to earn one's living by the sweat of his brow. It is a little like joining a community, this life, to such a hermit as I am; and as I don't keep the accounts, I don't know whether the experiment will succeed or fail finally. At any rate, it is good for society, so I do not regret my transient nor my permanent share in it.

Lidian and I make very good housekeepers. She is a very dear sister to me. Ellen and Edith and Eddy and Aunty Brown keep up the tragedy and comedy and tragic-comedy of life as usual. The two former have not forgotten their old acquaintance; even Edith carries a young memory in her head, I find. Eddy can teach us all how to pronounce. If you should discover any rare hoard of wooden or pewter horses, I have no doubt he will know how to appreciate it. He occasionally surveys mankind from my shoulders as wisely as ever Johnson did. I respect him not a little, though it is I that lift him up so unceremoniously. And sometimes I have to set him down again in a hurry, according to his "mere will and good pleasure." He very seriously asked me, the other day, "Mr. Thoreau, will you be my father?" I am occasionally Mr. Rough-and-tumble with him that I may not miss *him*, and lest he should miss *you* too much. So you must come back soon, or you will be superseded.

Alcott has heard that I laughed, and so set the people laughing, at his arbor, though I never laughed louder than when I was on the ridgepole. But now I have not laughed for a long time, it is so serious. He is very grave to look at. But, not knowing all this, I strove innocently enough, the other day, to engage his attention to my mathematics. "Did you ever study geometry, the relation of straight lines to curves, the transition from the finite to the infinite? Fine things about it in Newton and Leibnitz." But he would hear none of it,—men of taste preferred the natural curve. Ah, he is a crooked stick himself. He is getting on now so many *knots* an hour. There is one knot at present occupying the point of highest elevation,—the present highest point; and as many knots as are not handsome, I presume, are thrown down and cast into the pines. Pray show him this if you meet him anywhere in London, for I cannot make him hear much plainer words here. He forgets that I am neither old nor young, nor anything in particular, and behaves as if I had still some of the animal heat in me. As for the building, I feel a little oppressed when I come near it. It has no great disposition to be beautiful; it is certainly a wonderful structure, on the whole, and the fame of the

architect will endure as long as it shall stand. I should not show you this side alone, if I did not suspect that Lidian had done complete justice to the other.

Mr. Hosmer has been working at a tannery in Stow for a fortnight, though he has just now come home sick. It seems that he was a tanner in his youth, and so he has made up his mind a little at last. This comes of reading the New Testament. Was n't one of the Apostles a tanner? Mrs. Hosmer remains here, and John looks stout enough to fill his own shoes and his father's too.

Mr. Blood and his company have at length seen the stars through the great telescope, and he told me that he thought it was worth the while. Mr. [Benjamin] Peirce made him wait till the crowd had dispersed (it was a Saturday evening), and then was quite polite,—conversed with him, and showed him the micrometer, etc.; and he said Mr. Blood's glass was large enough for all ordinary astronomical work. [Rev.] Mr. [Barzillai] Frost and Dr. [Josiah] Bartlett seemed disappointed that there was no greater difference between the Cambridge glass and the Concord one. They used only a power of 400. Mr. Blood tells me that he is too old to study the calculus or higher mathematics. At Cambridge they think that they have discovered traces of another satellite to Neptune. They have been obliged to exclude the public altogether, at last. The very dust which they raised, "which is filled with minute crystals," etc., as professors declare, having to be wiped off the glasses, would ere long wear them away. It is true enough, Cambridge college is really beginning to wake up and redeem its character and overtake the age. I see by the catalogue that they are about establishing a scientific school in connection with the university, at which any one above eighteen, on paying one hundred dollars annually (Mr. [Abbott] Lawrence's fifty thousand dollars will probably diminish this sum), may be instructed in the highest branches of science,—in astronomy, "theoretical and practical, with the use of the instruments" (so the great Yankee astronomer may be born without delay), in mechanics and engineering to the last degree. Agassiz will ere long commence his lectures in the zoölogical department. A chemistry class has already been formed under the direction of Professor [Eben N.] Horsford. A new and adequate building for the purpose is already being erected. They have been foolish enough to put at the end of all this earnest the old joke of a diploma. Let every sheep keep but his own skin, I say.

I have had a tragic correspondence, for the most part all on one side,

with Miss [Ford]. She did really wish to—I hesitate to write—marry me. That is the way they spell it. Of course I did not write a deliberate answer. How could I deliberate upon it? I sent back as distinct a *no* as I have learned to pronounce after considerable practice, and I trust that this *no* has succeeded. Indeed, I wished that it might burst, like hollow shot, after it had struck and buried itself and made itself felt there. *There was no other way.* I really had anticipated no such foe as this in my career.

I suppose you will like to hear of my book, though I have nothing worth writing about it. Indeed, for the last month or two I have forgotten it, but shall certainly remember it again. Wiley & Putnam, Munroe, the Harpers, and Crosby & Nichols have all declined printing it with the least risk to themselves; but Wiley & Putnam will print it in their series, and any of them, anywhere, at *my* risk. If I liked the book well enough, I should not delay; but for the present I am indifferent. I believe this is, after all, the course you advised,—to let it lie.

I do not know what to say of myself. I sit before my green desk, in the chamber at the head of the stairs, and attend to my thinking, sometimes more, sometimes less distinctly. I am not unwilling to think great thoughts if there are any in the wind, but what they are I am not sure. They suffice to keep me awake while the day lasts, at any rate. Perhaps they will redeem some portion of the night ere long.

I can imagine you astonishing, bewildering, confounding, and sometimes delighting John Bull with your Yankee notions, and that he begins to take a pride in the relationship at last; introduced to all the stars of England in succession, after the lecture, until you pine to thrust your head once more into a genuine and unquestionable nebula, if there be any left. I trust a common man will be the most uncommon to you before you return to these parts. I have thought there was some advantage even in death, by which we "mingle with the herd of common men."

Hugh [the gardener] still has his eye on the Walden *agellum*, and orchards are waving there in the windy future for him. That's the where-I'll-go-next, thinks he; but no important steps are yet taken. He reminds me occasionally of this open secret of his, with which the very season seems to labor, and affirms seriously that as to his wants—wood, stone, or timber—I know better than he. That is a clincher which I shall have to avoid to some extent; but I fear that it is a wrought nail and will not break. Unfortunately, the day after cattle show—the day after small beer—he was among the missing, but not long this time. The

Ethiopian cannot change his skin nor the leopard his spots, nor indeed Hugh—his Hugh.

As I walked over Conantum, the other afternoon, I saw a fair column of smoke rising from the woods directly over my house that was (as I judged), and already began to conjecture if my deed of sale would not be made invalid by this. But it turned out to be John Richardson's young wood, on the southeast of your field. It was burnt nearly all over, and up to the rails and the road. It was set on fire, no doubt, by the same Lucifer that lighted Brooks's lot before. So you see that your small lot is comparatively safe for this season, the back fire having been already set for you.

They have been choosing between John Keyes and Sam Staples, if the world wants to know it, as representative of this town, and Staples is chosen. The candidates for governor—think of my writing this to you!—were Governor [George N.] Briggs and General [Caleb] Cushing, and Briggs is elected, though the Democrats have gained. Ain't I a brave boy to know so much of politics for the nonce? But I should n't have known it if Coombs had n't told me. They have had a peace meeting here,—I should n't think of telling you if I did n't know anything would do for the English market,—and some men, Deacon [Reuben] Brown at the head, have signed a long pledge, swearing that they will "treat all mankind as brothers henceforth." I think I shall wait and see how they treat me first. I think that nature meant kindly when she made our brothers few. However, my voice is still for peace. So good-by, and a truce to all joking, my dear friend, from

H. D. T.

*When Sanborn printed this letter he left blank the name of the woman who proposed to Thoreau. But the catalogue of the William Harris Arnold sale of 1924, in an excerpt, includes the name "Miss Ford." This was unquestionably Sophia Foord (she frequently spelled her name "Ford"), who was about forty-five when Thoreau wrote his deliberate no. She had tutored the Alcott children in Concord, as well as the young Emersons, during parts of 1845 and 1846. In late 1846 and early 1847 she lived under the Emersons' roof. She left it for good April 1. Further details of this abortive romance are given in Walter Harding, "Thoreau's Feminine Foe," PMLA, LXIX (March 1954), 110-16.*

*As Raymond Adams has pointed out in "Emerson's House at Walden" (The Thoreau Society Bulletin, § 24 [July, 1948]), Bronson Alcott devoted the summer of 1847 to building a rustic summerhouse for Emerson; Thoreau was his assistant. The house, built of gnarled and knotted wood, was too fantastic ever to prove useful.*

*Thoreau sold his Walden cabin to Hugh Whelan, Emerson's gardener, soon after he left the pond. On Hugh's misadventures with the hut see Thoreau's sprightly account in the letter to Emerson of January 12, 1848. Some years later the hut was purchased by a Concord farmer and moved to the opposite end of the town, where it was used as a granary. Its timbers ultimately helped to make a barn.*

*The Lucifer was the railroad train that was constantly setting fire to Concord woods. Sam Staples was the village jailer who, in the summer of 1846, had arrested Thoreau for nonpayment of taxes. Text, Emerson-Thoreau, pp. 737-40.*

---

TO ABEL ADAMS

Concord Nov 15th-47

Dear Sir,

Mrs Emerson requests me to forward this circular to you. Mr E. had anticipated it, and, as she thinks, said that you would take care of it. She is sure that he will take new shares.

She desires to be kindly remembered to your family, and would have written herself, if not prevented by a slight indisposition.

We have not yet heard from Mr. E.

Yrs respectfully  
H. D. Thoreau

To Mr. Abel Adams Boston,

*The letter is written on the back of a notice from the Fitchburg Railroad Company, dated November 10, 1847, offering present owners of*

*stock in the company the opportunity to buy new shares.* MS., Massachusetts Historical Society; *previously unpublished.*

---

From EMERSON

Manchester, 2 Dec. 1847.

Dear Henry,

Very welcome in the parcel was your letter, very precious your thoughts & tidings. It is one of the best things connected with my coming hither that you could & would keep the homestead, that fire-place shines all the brighter,—and has a certain permanent glimmer therefor. Thanks, evermore thanks for the kindness which I well discern to the *youths* of the house, to my darling little horseman of pewter, leather wooden, rocking & what other breeds, destined, I hope, to ride Pegasus yet, and I hope not destined to be thrown, to Edith who long ago drew from you verses which I carefully preserve, & to Ellen who by speech & now by letter I find old enough to be companionable, & to choose & reward her own friends in her own fashions. She sends me a poem today, which I have read three times!—I believe, I must keep back all my communication on English topics until I get to London, which is England. Everything centralizes, in this magnificent machine which England is. Manufacturer for the world she is become or becoming one complete tool or engine in herself.—Yesterday the *time* all over the kingdom was reduced to Greenwich time. At Liverpool, where I was, the clocks were put forward 12 minutes. This had become quite necessary on account of the railroads which bind the whole country into swiftest connexion, and require so much accurate interlocking, intersection, & simultaneous arrival, that the difference of time produced confusion. Every man in England carries a little book in his pocket called “Bradshaws Guide,” which contains time tables of arrival & departure at every station on all railroads of the kingdom. It is published anew on the first day of every month & costs sixpence. The proceeding effects of Electric telegraph will give a new importance to such arrangements.

[1847]

—But lest I should not say what is needful, I will postpone England once for all,—and say that I am not of opinion that your book should be delayed a month. I should print it at once, nor do I think that you would incur any risk in doing so that you cannot well afford. It is very certain to have readers & debtors here as well as there. The Dial is absurdly well known here. We at home, I think, are always a little ashamed of it,—I am,—and yet here it is spoken of with the utmost gravity, & I do not laugh. Carlyle writes me that he is reading Doomsday Book.—You tell me in your letter one odious circumstance, which we will dismiss from remembrance henceforward. Charles Lane entreated me, in London, to ask you to forward his Dials to him, which must be done, if you can find them. Three bound vols are among his books in my library. The 4th Vol is in unbound numbers at J Munroe & Co.’s Shop, received there in a parcel to my address a day or two before I sailed & which I forgot to carry to Concord It must be claimed without delay It is certainly there—was opened by me, & left. And they can enclose all 4 vols to Chapman for me.— Well, I am glad the Pleasaunce at Walden suffered no more but it is a great loss as it is which years will not repair.— I see that I have baulked you by the promise of a letter which ends in as good as none But I write with counted minutes & a miscellany of things before me.

Yours affectionately,  
R. W. E.

MS., Berg.

---

From EMERSON

Will Mr Thoreau please to bear in mind that when there is good mortar in readiness, Mr. Dean must be summoned to fit the airtight stove to the chimney in the Schoolroom; unless Mr. T. can do it with convenience himself

MS., Berg; printed in Emerson-Thoreau, p. 742. Sanborn thinks that this letter accompanied the longer one of December 2. Rusk (Emerson Letters, III, 445) suggests that a much earlier date would seem more likely. Since there is no specific evidence for it, we tentatively accept Sanborn's date.

To EMERSON

Concord Dec 15 1847

Dear Friend,

You are not so far off but the affairs of *this* world still attach to you. Perhaps it will be so when we are dead. Then look out.— Joshua R. Holman of Harvard, who says he lived a month with Lane at Fruitlands wishes to *hire* said Lane's farm for one or more years, and will pay \$125 rent, taking out of the same what is necessary for repairs—as, for a new bank-wall to the barn cellar, which he says is indispensable. Palmer is gone, Mrs Palmer is going. This is all that is known, or that is worth knowing.

Yes or no—  
What to do?

Hugh's plot begins to thicken. He starts thus. 80 dollars on one side—Walden field & house on the other. How to bring these together so as to make a garden & a palace.

\$80 .....  field  house

1st let  $\frac{10}{70}$  go over to unite the two last



$\frac{6}{64}$  for Wetherbee's rocks to found your palace on.

64 So far indeed we have already got.

$\frac{4}{60}$  to bring the rocks to the field.

save  $\frac{20}{40}$  by all means to manure the field, and you have left 40 to complete the palace—build cellar— & dig well. Build the cellar yourself— & let well alone— & now how does it stand?

\$40 to complete the palace somewhat like this



—for when one asks— [“]What do you want? Twice as much room more,” the reply— Parlor kitchen & bedroom—these make the palace.— Well, Hugh, what will you do? Here are forty dollars to buy a new house 12 feet by 25 and add it to the old. — Well, Mr Thoreau, as I tell you, I know no more than a child about it. It shall be just as you say. — Then build it yourself—get it roofed & get in. Commence at one end & leave it half done, and let time finish what money's begun.

So you see we have forty dollars for a nest egg—sitting on which, Hugh & I, alternately & simultaneously, there may in course of time be hatched a house, that will long stand, and perchance even lay fresh eggs one day for its owner, that is, if when he returns he gives the young chick 20 dollars or more in addition by way of “swichin”—to give it a start in the world.

Observe this—I got your check changed into thirty dollars the other day, & immediately paid away sixteen for Hugh. To-day Mr Cheney says that they in Boston refuse to answer it—not having funds enough to warrant it. There must be some mistake &c — We shall pay back the thirty dollars & await your orders.

The Mass. Quart. Review came out on the 1st of Dec., but it does not seem to be making a sensation—at least not hereabouts. I know of none in Concord who takes, or has seen, it yet.

We wish to get by all possible means some notion of your success or failure in England—more than your two letters have furnished— Can't you send a fair sample both of Young & of Old England's criticism, if there is any printed? Alcott & Channing are equally greedy with myself.

Henry Thoreau

C T [Jackson] takes the Quarterly (new one) and will lend it to us. Are you not going to send your wife some news of your good or ill success by the newspapers?

*The tribulations of Hugh Whelan over the remodeling of Thoreau's Walden cabin continue in this letter. The Massachusetts Quarterly Review was founded late in 1847 by Theodore Parker and James Elliot Cabot as a successor to the Dial. C. T. Jackson was Emerson's brother-in-law. MS., C. Waller Barrett; the postscript is in a different handwriting, probably Mrs. Emerson's.*

---

To JAMES MUNROE & CO.

Concord Dec. 27th 1847

Gentlemen,

In a letter from R. W. Emerson, which I received this morning, he requests me to send him Charles Lane's Dials. Three bound vols accompany this letter to you—"The fourth," to quote his own words, "is in unbound numbers at J Munroe & Co's shop, received there in a parcel to my address a day or two before I sailed, and which I forgot to carry to Concord—It is certainly there, was opened by me, & left."

—And he wishes me to ask you to "enclose all four vols. to Chapman" for him (Emerson).

If all is right, will you please say so to the express-man—or at any rate give me an opportunity to look for the fourth vol, if it is missing.

I may as well inform you that I do not intend to print *my book* anywhere immediately.

Yrs Respectfully  
Henry Thoreau

*Thoreau had decided on further revision of A Week on the Concord and Merrimack Rivers after its unsuccessful round of the publishers. MS., Boston Public Library; previously unpublished.*

[1847]

To EMERSON

Concord Dec 29th 1847.

My Dear Friend,

I thank you for your letter. I was very glad to get it—And I am glad again to write to you. However slow the steamer, no time intervenes between the writing and the reading of thoughts, but they come freshly to the most distant port.

I am here still, & very glad to be here—and shall not trouble you with my complaints because I do not fill my place better. I have had many good hours in the chamber at the head of the stairs—a solid time, it seems to me. Next week I am going to give an account to the Lyceum of my expedition to Maine. Theodore Parker lectures tonight—We have had Whipple on Genius—too weighty a subject for him—with his \_\_\_\_\_ antithetical definitions,—new-vamped—What it *is*, & what it is *not*—but altogether what it is *not*. Cuffing it this way, & cuffing it that, as if it were an India rubber ball. Really, it is a subject which should—expand & accumulate itself before the speaker's eyes, as he goes on,—like the snow balls which boys roll in the street—& when he stops, it should be so large that he cannot start it—but must leave it there—\_\_\_\_\_. [H. N.] Hudson too has been here with a dark shadow in the core of him, and his desperate wit so much indebted to the surface of him—wringing out his words and snapping them off like a dish-cloth—very remarkable but not memorable. Singular that these two best lecturers should have so much "wave" in their timber—Their solid parts too be made and kept solid by shrinkage and contraction of the whole—with consequent checks & fissures—Ellen and I have a good understanding—I appreciate her genuineness—Edith tells me after her fashion—"By & by, I shall grow up to be a woman, and then I shall remember how you exercised me."—Eddie has been to Boston to Christmas—but can remember nothing but the coaches—all Kendall's coaches. There is no variety of that vehicle that he is not familiar with.—He *did* try once to tell us something else, but, after thinking and stuttering a long time—said—"I dont know what the word is,"— the *one* word, forsooth that would have disposed of all that Boston phenomenon. If you did not know him better than I—I could tell you more. He is a good companion for me—& I am glad that we are

all natives of Concord—It is *Young Concord*—Look out—World.—Mr Alcott seems to have sat down for the winter. He has got Plato and other books to read. He is as large featured—and hospitable to traveling thoughts & thinkers as ever—but with the same creaking & sneaking Connecticut philosophy as ever, mingled with what is better. If he would only stand straight and toe the line!—though he were to put off several degrees of largeness—and put on a considerable degree of littleness.—After all, I think we must call him particularly *your* man.—I have pleasant walks and talks with Channing.—James Clark—the Swedenborgian that was—is at the Poor House—insane with too large views, so that he cannot support himself—I see him working with Fred and the rest. Better than be there not insane. It is strange that they will make an ado when a man's body is buried—and not when he thus really & tragically dies—or seems to die. Away with your funeral processions,—into the ballroom with them. I hear the bell toll hourly over there.

Lidian & I have a standing quarrel as to what is a suitable state of preparedness for a traveling Professor's visits—or for whomsoever else—but further than this we are not at war. We have made up a dinner—we have made up a bed—we have made up a party—& our own minds & mouths three several times for your Professor, and he came not—Three several turkeys have died the death—which I myself carved, just as if he had been there, and the company too, convened and demeaned themselves accordingly— Everything was done up in good style, I assure you with only the part of the Professor omitted. To have seen the preparation though Lidian says it was nothing extraordinary—I should certainly have said he was a coming—but he did not. He must have found out some shorter way to Turkey—some overland rout[e]—I think. By the way, he was complimented at the conclusion of his course in Boston by the Mayor moving the appointment of a committee to draw up resolutions expressive of &c &c which was done.

I have made a few verses lately—Here are some—though perhaps not the best—at any rate they are the shortest on that universal theme—yours as well as mine, & several other people's

The good how can we trust?  
Only the wise are just.  
The good we use,  
The wise we cannot choose.  
These there are none above;

The good they know & love,  
But are not known again  
By those of lesser ken.  
They do not charm us with their eyes,  
But they transfix with their advice,  
No partial sympathy they feel,  
With private woe or private weal,  
But with the Universe joy & sigh,  
Whose knowledge is their sympathy.

Good night

Henry Thoreau

I am sorry to send such a medley as this to you. I have forwarded Lane's Dial to Munroe with the proper instructions and he tells the express man that all is right.

*Thoreau delivered his lecture on the Maine Woods before the Concord Lyceum early in January. E. P. Whipple was a popular lecturer and essayist of the day. Sanborn identifies the traveling professor as Agassiz. The "few verses" were later incorporated by Thoreau in the essay on friendship in the Wednesday chapter of the Week. MS., Berg. The blanks indicate words crossed out by Thoreau and now undecipherable.*