

1852

Massachusetts enacted a prohibition law. Isaac Singer patented a new and improved sewing machine. Daniel Webster died at Marshfield; Henry Clay died in Washington. Commodore Matthew C. Perry sailed for Japan to negotiate a treaty with the Japanese. In a four-hour speech in the Senate Charles Sumner bitterly attacked the Fugitive Slave Law. Total tonnage of the American merchant marine, including canal boats and barges, was 4,138,440. The Post Office, after a decade of either profits or else relatively small losses, went spectacularly into the red. The year before, it had shown a surplus of \$131,000; now it showed a deficit of almost \$2,000,000, and this trend was to continue for a good many years.

This was a year when Horace Greeley bulked large. He was a vigorous and helpful literary agent for Thoreau. Greeley advised him about the proper length for his manuscripts, negotiated with magazine editors to place Thoreau's work, offered him good terms for a long review article on Emerson, which Thoreau rejected, and lent him money. (Probably the best tribute to Greeley is that Thoreau was able to make himself ask Greeley for a loan.) Most of the time Thoreau spent in following the pleasant routine he had set up for himself in Concord: writing, and some surveying, in the morning as a rule, walking in the country in the afternoon, and more writing at night, or a midnight walk if the moon were up. By now he could drive his pen ahead with the efficiency of a well-trained professional author. There is little waste motion to be noted in the manuscripts that survive; there are few corrections; and the handwriting has all the oversimplification of speed and fluency. The *Journal* for the year is copious. The writing in it is most frequently sensitive and accurate description of the Concord woods.

To MARSTON WATSON

I have not yet seen Mr. [Ellery] Channing, though I believe he is in town,—having decided to come to Plymouth myself,—but I will let him know that he is expected. Mr. [Daniel] Foster wishes me to say that he accepts your invitation, and that he would like to come Sunday after next; also that he would like to know before next Sunday whether you will expect him. I will take the Saturday afternoon train. I shall be glad to get a winter view of Plymouth Harbor, and to see where your garden lies under snow.

*After leaving Harvard Marston Watson took up the kind of pastoral life that probably met with Thoreau's approval. He bought a pretty farm near Plymouth and devoted himself to raising ornamental trees and flowering plants. In Plymouth he organized a number of series of what were conveniently called "Marston's meetings" in Leyden Hall. They were held on Sundays; some of the speakers were clerical and some not. Thoreau delivered a lecture to Watson's group on February 22; the probable date of this letter is February 17. Text, Sanborn's memoir of Alcott in A. Bronson Alcott: His Life and Philosophy, I, 483 n.*

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From HORACE GREELEY

New York, February 24, 1852.

My Friend Thoreau,—

Thank you for your remembrance, though the motto you suggest is impracticable. The People's Course is full for the season; and even

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if it were not, your name would probably not pass; because it is not merely necessary that each lecturer should continue *well* the course, but that he shall be *known* as the very man beforehand. Whatever draws less than fifteen hundred hearers damages the finances of the movement, so low is the admission, and so large the expense. But, Thoreau, you are a better speaker than many, but a far better writer still. Do you wish to swap any of your "wood-notes wild" for dollars? If yea, and you will sell me some articles, shorter, if you please, than the former, I will try to coin them for you. Is it a bargain? Yours,

Horace Greeley.

Text, *Sanborn's* Henry D. Thoreau, p. 231.

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From HORACE GREELEY

New York, Mar. 18, 1852.

My Dear Sir:

I ought to have responded before this to yours of the 5th inst. but have been absent—hurried, &c &c. I have had no time to bestow upon it till to-day.

I shall get you some money for the articles you send me, though not immediately.

As to your longer account of a Canadian tour, I don't know. It looks unmanageable. Can't you cut it into three or four, and omit all that relates to time? The cities are described to death; but I know you are at home with Nature, and that she rarely and slowly changes. Break this up if you can, and I will try to have it swallowed and digested.

Yours,

Horace Greeley.

Henry D. Thoreau, Esq. Concord, Mass.

Thoreau apparently took Greeley's advice, for when the account of the Canadian tour was printed in Putnam's it appeared in three separate parts. MS., Morgan.

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From HORACE GREELEY

Sanborn, in his *Henry D. Thoreau* (pp. 232-33), states that Greeley, a week after his letter of March 18, wrote Thoreau that the publisher Sartain had accepted his articles "for a low price," and adds: "If you break up your 'Excursion to Canada' into three or four articles, I have no doubt I could get it published on similar terms." He also enclosed the following letter from Sartain:

Philadelphia, March 24, 1852.

Dear Sir,—

I have read the articles of Mr. Thoreau forwarded by you, and will be glad to publish them if our terms are satisfactory. We generally pay for prose composition per printed page, and would allow him three dollars per page. We do not pay more than four dollars for any that we now engage. I did not suppose our maximum rate would have paid you (Mr. Greeley) for your lecture, and therefore requested to know your own terms. Of course, when an article is unusually desirable, we may deviate from rule; I now only mention ordinary arrangement. I was very sorry not to have your article, but shall enjoy the reading of it in Graham. Mr. T. might send us some further contributions, and shall at least receive prompt and courteous decision respecting them.

Yours truly,  
John Sartain.

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To T. W. HIGGINSON

Concord April 2nd 52

Dear Sir,

I do not see that I can refuse to read another lecture, but what makes me hesitate is the fear that I have not another available which

will entertain a large audience, though I have thoughts to offer which I think will be quite as worthy of their attention. However I will try, for the prospect of earning a few dollars is alluring. As far as I can foresee, my subject would be Reality rather transcendently treated. It lies still in "Walden or Life in the Woods." Since you are kind enough to undertake the arrangements, I will leave it to you to name an evening of next week—decide on the most suitable room—and advertise (?)—if this is not taking you too literally at your word

If you still think it worth the while to attend to this, will you let me know as soon as may be what evening will be most convenient

Yrs with thanks  
Henry D. Thoreau

MS. (facsimile), *T. W. Higginson's Part of a Man's life*, opp. p. 16.

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From HORACE GREELEY

Friend Thoreau,—

I wish you to write me an article on Ralph Waldo Emerson, his Works and Ways, extending to one hundred pages, or so, of letter sheet like this, to take the form of a review of his writings, but to give some idea of the Poet, the Genius, the Man,—with some idea of the New England scenery and home influence, which have combined to make him what he is. Let it be calm, searching, and impartial; nothing like adulation, but a just summing up of what he is and what he has done. I mean to get this into the "Westminster Review," but if not acceptable there, I will publish it elsewhere. I will pay you fifty dollars for the article when delivered; in advance, if you desire it. Say the word, and I will send the money at once. It is perfectly convenient to do so. Your "Carlyle" article is my model, but you can give us Emerson better than you did Carlyle. I presume he would allow you to write extracts for this purpose from his lectures not yet published. I would delay the

publication of the article to suit his publishing arrangements, should that be requested.

Yours,  
Horace Greeley.

Text, *Sanborn's Henry D. Thoreau*, pp. 233-34. *Sanborn dates the letter April 3, 1852.*

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To T. W. HIGGINSON

Concord, 2 pm Ap. 3d./52

I certainly do not feel prepared to offer myself as a lecturer to the Boston public, and hardly know whether more to dread a small audience or a large one. Nevertheless I will repress this squeamishness, and propose no alterations in your arrangements. I shall be glad to accept of your invitation to tea.

Henry D. Thoreau.

*Thoreau delivered the lecture at the Mechanics Apprentices Library in Boston. The audience was small. Bronson Alcott, there with him, urged the clerks and apprentices reading their newspapers at the other end of the lecture room to listen to Thoreau; but they would not. MS. (facsimile), T. W. Higginson & H. W. Boynton, A Reader's History of American Literature, p. 196.*

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From HORACE GREELEY

New York, April 20, 1852.

Dear Sir:

I have yours of the 17th. I am rather sorry you will not do the Works and Ways; but glad that you are able to employ your time to better purpose.

But your Quebeck notes don't reach me yet, and I fear the 'good time' is passing. They ought to have appeared in the June Nos. of the Monthlies, but now cannot before July. If you choose to send them to me all in a bunch, I will try to get them printed in that way. I don't care about them if you choose to reserve or to print them elsewhere; but I can better make a use for them at this season than at any other.

Yours,  
Horace Greeley.

H. D. Thoreau, Concord, Mass.

*In a letter we have been unable to find, Thoreau declined to exploit his friendship with Emerson by writing the article that Greeley had suggested. When the "Quebeck notes" did arrive Greeley offered them to the American Whig Review and other magazines, but they were not then accepted. MS., Lawrence A. Averill, Wiscasset, Maine.*

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From HORACE GREELEY

New York, May 26, 1852

Friend Thoreau:

I duly received your package and letter, and immediately handed over the former to C. Bissell Editor of the Whig Review, asking him to examine it fully and tell me what he could give for it, which he promised to do. Two or three days afterward, I left for the West

without having heard from him. This morning, without having seen your letter, having reached home at 1 o'clock, I went to Bissell at 9, and asked him about the matter. He said he had not read all the MSS. but had part of it, and inquired if I would be willing to have him print part and pay for it. I told him I could not consent without consulting you, but would thank him to make me a proposition in writing, which I would send you. He said he would do so very soon, whereupon I left him.

I hope you will acquit me of negligence in the matter, though I ought to have acknowledged the receipt of your package. I did not, simply because I was greatly hurried, trying to get away, and because I momentarily expected some word from Bissell.

Yours,  
Horace Greeley.

H. D. Thoreau, Esq.

*The package presumably contained the "Quebeck notes" (Greeley's letter of April 20). Thoreau apparently sent a covering letter. MS., Berg; previously unpublished.*

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From HORACE GREELEY

New York June 25, 1852

Dear Thoreau:

I have had only bad luck with your manuscript. Two magazines have refused it on the ground of its length, saying that articles 'To be continued' are always unpopular, however good. I will try again.

Yours,  
Horace Greeley

H. D. Thoreau, Esq.

MS., Hosmer collection.

From HORACE GREELEY

New York, July 8, 1852.

Dear Thoreau,—

Yours received. I was absent yesterday. I *can* lend you the seventy-five dollars, and am very glad to do it. Don't talk about security. I am sorry about your MSS., which I do not quite despair of using to your advantage.

Yours,  
Horace Greeley.

Text, *Sanborn's Henry D. Thoreau*, p. 235.

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To SOPHIA THOREAU

Concord July 13th '52

Dear Sophia,

I am a miserable letter writer, but perchance if I should say this at length and with sufficient emphasis & regret, it could make a letter. I am sorry that nothing transpires here of much moment; or, I should rather say that I am so slackened and rusty, like the telegraph wire this season, that no wind that blows can extract music from me. I am not on the trail of any elephants or mastodons, but have succeeded in trapping only a few ridiculous mice, which can not feed my imagination. I have become sadly scientific. I would rather come upon the vast valley-like "spore" only of some celestial beast which this world's woods can no longer sustain, than spring my net over a bushel of moles. You must do better in those woods where you are. You must have some adventures to relate and repeat for years to come—which will eclipse even Mother's voyage to Goldsborough & Sissiboo. They say that Mr Pierce the presidential candidate was in town last 5th of July visiting Hawthorne whose college chum he was, and that Hawthorne is writing a life of him for electioneering purposes. Concord is just as idiotic as

ever in relation to the spirits and their knockings. Most people here believe in a spiritual world which no respectable junk bottle which had not met with a slip—would condescend to contain even a portion of for a moment—whose atmosphere would extinguish a candle let down into it, like a well that wants airing—in spirits which the very bull frogs in our meadows would blackball. Their evil genius is seeing how low it can degrade them. The hooting of owls—the croaking of frogs—is celestial wisdom in comparison. If I could be brought to believe in the things which they believe—I should make haste to get rid of my certificate of stock in this & the next world's enterprises, and buy a share in the first Immediate Annihilation Company that offered—I would exchange my immortality for a glass of small beer this hot weather. Where *are* the heathen? Was there ever any superstition before? And yet I suppose there may be a vessel this very moment setting sail from the coast of North America to that of Africa with a missionary on board! Consider the dawn & the sun rise—the rain bow & the evening,—the words of Christ & the aspirations of all the saints! Hear music? See—smell—taste—feel—hear—anything—& then hear these idiots inspired by the cracking of a restless board—humbly asking “Please spirit, if you cannot answer by knocks, answer by tips of the table.”!!!!!!

Yrs  
H. D. Thoreau

MS., Huntington.

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TO H. G. O. BLAKE

Concord July 21st '52.

Mr Blake,

I am too stupidly well these days to write to you. My life is almost altogether outward, all shell and no tender kernel; so that I fear the report of it would be only a nut for you to crack, with no meat in it for you to eat. Moreover, you have not cornered me up, and I enjoy

such large liberty in writing to you that I feel as vague as the air. However, I rejoice to hear that you have attended so patiently to anything which I have said heretofore, and have detected any truths in it. It encourages me to say more—not in this letter I fear—but in some book which I may write one day. I am glad to know that I am as much to any mortal as a persistent and *consistent* scarecrow is to a farmer—such a bundle of straw in a man's clothing as I am—with a few bits of tin to sparkle in the sun dangling about me. As if I were hard at work there in the field. However, if this kind of life saves any man's corn,— why he is the gainer. I am not afraid that you will flatter me as long as you know what I am, as well as what I think, or aim to be, & distinguish between these two, for then it will commonly happen that if you praise the last, you will condemn the first.

I remember that walk to Asnebumskit very well;—a fit place to go on a Sunday, one of the true temples of the earth. A temple you know was anciently “an open place without a roof,” whose walls served merely to shut out the world, and direct the mind toward heaven; but a modern *meeting house* shuts out the heavens, while it crowds the world into still closer quarters. Best of all is it when as on a *Mt.* top you have for all walls your own elevations and deeps of surrounding ether. The partridge berries watered with *Mt* dews, which are gathered there, are more memorable to me than the words which I last heard from the pulpit at least, and for my part I would rather walk toward Rutland than Jerusalem. Rutland—modern town—land of ruts—trivial and worn—not too sacred—with no holy sepulchre, but prophane green fields and dusty roads,—and opportunity to live as holy a life as you can;—where the sacredness if there is any is all in yourself and not in the place.

I fear that your Worcester people do not often enough go to the hill-tops, though, as I am told, the springs lie nearer to the surface on your hills than in your valleys. They have the reputation of being Free Soilers—Do they insist on a free atmosphere too, that is, on freedom for the head or brain as well as the feet? If I were consciously to join any party it would be that which is the most free to entertain thought.

All the world complain now a days of a press of trivial duties & engagements which prevents their employing themselves on some higher ground they know of,—but undoubtedly if they were made of the right stuff to work on that higher ground, provided they were released from all those engagements—they would now at once fulfill the superior engagement, and neglect all the rest, as naturally as they breathe. They

would never be caught saying that they had no time for this when the dullest man knows that this is all that he has time for. No man who acts from a sense of duty ever puts the lesser duty above the greater. No man has the desire and the ability to work on high things but he has also the ability to build himself a high staging.

As for passing *through* any great and glorious experience, and rising *above* it,—as an eagle might fly athwart the evening sky to rise into still brighter & fairer regions of the heavens, I cannot say that I ever sailed so creditably, but my bark ever seemed thwarted by some side wind and went off over the edge and now only occasionally tacks back toward the center of that sea again. I have outgrown nothing good, but, I do not fear to say, fallen behind by whole continents of virtue which should have been passed as islands in my course; but I trust—what else can I trust?—that with a stiff wind some Friday, when I have thrown some of my cargo over board, I may make up for all that distance lost.

Perchance the time will come when we shall not be content to go back & forth upon a raft to some huge Homeric or Shakspearean Indian that lies upon the reef, but build a bark out of that wreck, and others that are buried in the sands of this desolate island, and such new timber as may be required, in which to sail away to whole new worlds of light & life where our friends are.

Write again. There is one respect in which you did not finish your letter, you did not write it with ink, and it is not so good therefore against or for you in the eye of the law, nor in the eye of

H. D. T.

*Rutland, Massachusetts is near the base of Mount Wachusett, the destination of many of Thoreau's walks with Blake.* MS., C. Waller Barrett.

[1852]

*From* WILLIAM H. SWEETSER

Charlestown, Mass. July 21 1852.

Sir,

I am a boy 15 years of age collecting autographs and should be very much obliged if you would send me yours.

Yours respectfully,  
Wm. H. Sweetser.

To Henry Thoreau Esq.

MS., Berg: *previously unpublished.*

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*To* WILLIAM H. SWEETSER

Concord July 26 '52

Wm H. Sweetser

This is the way I write when I have a poor pen and still poorer ink.

Yrs,  
Henry D. Thoreau

MS., New York.

To H. G. O. BLAKE

Mr. Blake,

Here come the sentences which I promised you. You may keep them if you will regard & use them as the disconnected fragments of what I may find to be a completer essay, on looking over my journal at last, and may claim again.

I send you the thoughts on chastity & sensuality with diffidence and shame, not knowing how far I speak to the condition of men generally, or how far I betray my peculiar defects. Pray enlighten me on this point if you can.

Henry D. Thoreau

*Sanborn prints the brief essays headed "Love" and "Chastity and Sensuality" as part of this letter, but Thoreau's signature preceding them seems to make them an enclosure. For the essays, see Familiar Letters of Thoreau, pp. 238-51. MS., Iowa State Department of History and Archives. Except for "1852" penciled at a later date in the margin, the manuscript is undated; but Emerson and Sanborn, both of whom consulted directly with Blake, ascribe the letter to September 1852.*

To GEORGE WILLIAM CURTIS

Concord Nov 16th 1852

Dear Sir,

I send you herewith 100 pages of "Cape Cod." It is not yet half the whole. The remainder of the narrative is more personal, as I reach the scene of my adventures. I am a little in doubt about the extracts from the old ministers. If you prefer to, you may omit from the middle of the 86th page to the end of this parcel: (the rest being respected); or perhaps a smaller type will use it up fast enough.

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As for the conditions of sale; if you accept the paper, it is to be mine to reprint, if I think it worth the while, after it has appeared in your journal.

I shall expect to be paid *as fast as* the paper is printed, and if it is likely to be on hand long, to receive reasonable warning of it.

I have collected this under several heads for your convenience. The next subject is "The Beach," which I will copy out & forward as soon as you desire it.

Yrs

Henry D. Thoreau.

*If we judge by this letter, Thoreau's account of his experiences on Cape Cod was now well on its way to publication. But the unhappy circumstances that attended so many of his contacts with magazines recur; the Cape Cod articles did not actually appear until 1855—and then Thoreau stopped them because of a controversy with Curtis. Why they took so long to reach print we do not know. MS., Harvard; previously unpublished.*

From HORACE GREELEY

New York, Nov. 23, 1852.

My Dear Thoreau,

I have made no bargain—none whatever—with [George Palmer] Putnam, concerning your MS. I have indicated no price to him. I handed over the MS. because I wish it published, and presumed that was in accordance both with your interest and your wishes.

And I now say to you that if he will pay you \$3 per printed page, I think that will be very well. I have promised to write something for him myself, and shall be well satisfied with that price. Your 'Canada' is not so fresh and acceptable as if it had just been written on the strength of a last summer's trip, and I hope you will have it printed in Putnam's

Monthly. But I have said nothing to his folks as to price, and will not till I hear from you again.

Very probably, there was some misapprehension on the part of Geo. Curtis. I presume the price now offered you is that paid to writers generally for the Monthly.

As to Sartain, I know his magazine has broken down, but I guess he will pay you. I have not seen but one of your articles printed by him, and I think the other may be reclaimed. Please address him at once. I have been very busy the past season, and had to let every thing wait that could till after Nov. 2d.

Yours,  
Horace Greeley.

H. D. Thoreau Esq

*Greeley erred in thinking that only one of Thoreau's articles had been printed in Sartain's Union Magazine. "The Iron Horse" appeared in XI (July 1852), 66-68, and "A Poet Buying a Farm" in XI (August 1852), 127. Both have been overlooked by the bibliographers of Thoreau. They are excerpts from Walden. MS., Huntington.*

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TO MARSTON WATSON

Concord, December 31, 1852.

Mr. Watson,—

I would be glad to visit Plymouth again, but at present I have nothing to read which is not severely heathenish, or at least secular,—which the dictionary defines as “relating to affairs of the present world, not holy,”—though not necessarily unholy; nor have I any leisure to prepare it. My writing at present is profane, yet in a good sense, and, as it were, sacredly, I may say; for, finding the air of the temple too close, I sat outside. Don't think I say this to get off; no, no! It will not do to read such things to hungry ears. “If they ask for bread, will you give

them a stone?” When I have something of the right kind, depend upon it I will let you know.

*After having lectured for Watson once before, Thoreau—in spite of Watson's invitation—did not lecture in Plymouth again until October 8, 1854. Text, Familiar Letters of Thoreau, p. 230.*