

Editor's Note

This letter is addressed "Mrs. Cynthia Thoreau / Concord / Mass.
/ By W. Emerson Esq."

Author's Alterations

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am] *inserted*

To Ralph Waldo Emerson

August 7, 1843

1843.

Staten-Island Aug 7th

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. James talks of going to Germany soon with his wife—to learn the language.¹ 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—² Perhaps^a 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,³ 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 W & T⁴ at their counting room—or rather intelligence Office.

I must still reckon myself with the innumerable army of invalids—indoubtedly 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— 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—⁵ 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 Dem. Rev. 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 dont think of Bradbury and Soden any more—⁶

“For good deed done through praiere

Is sold and bought too dear I wis—

To herte that of great valor is—”⁷

I see that they have given up their shop here⁸

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.—⁹ Remember me to Mrs. Brown

yr friend

Henry D. Thoreau

Correspondent: See p. 53.

¹ Henry James Sr. and his family sailed on the *Great Western* on October 19. According to Alfred Habegger, James had wanted to settle in Concord, but Emerson, perhaps fearing the New Yorker's emotional intensity, deftly deflected his overture (*The Father: A Life of Henry James, Sr.* [New York: Farrar, Straus, and Giroux, 1994], pp. 206, 532).

² Henry Wadsworth Longfellow (1807-1882) was then the Smith Professor of French and Spanish Languages and Literatures at Harvard. Longfellow, whom James later called the "dear dismal old poet," was not a likely source of help (Habegger, *The Father*, p. 453).

³ Emerson's review of *Past and Present* in the July *Dial* (pp. 96-102).

⁴ Giles Waldo and William Tappan.

⁵ For T's translations of Aeschylus and Pindar, see p. 142, note 4, and p. 209, note 7.

⁶ T refers to the publication of "A Walk to Wachusett" in the *Boston Miscellany of Literature and Fashion*; see p. 148, note 5.

⁷ Chaucer, "Romaunt of the Rose." T probably read the poem in Alexander Chalmers, ed., *The Works of the English Poets, from Chaucer to Cowper*, 1:209.

⁸ Bradbury and Soden had a branch office at 127 Nassau Street in Manhattan.

⁹ Matt. 2:9: "When they had heard the king, they departed; and, lo, the star, which they saw in the east, went before them, till it came and stood over where the young child was."

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Perhaps] perhaps