

⁶ William Allen (1815-1895), son of Barzillai and Lucy Baldwin Allen of East Bridgewater, Massachusetts, graduated from Harvard and taught school, first in Concord, then in Maine, and finally for fourteen years in East Bridgewater. Allen was elected to the Massachusetts legislature and served first as inspector, then as clerk, of the Boston Custom House. In 1845 he married Amanda Cole (1823-1904), daughter of David and Pamela McArthur Cole of Maine.

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Editor's Note

This letter is addressed "Mr. D. H. Thoreau. / Concord. / Mass. tts.," postmarked "Butternuts Ny Oct 23", and endorsed "H. Vose".

Author's Alterations

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To Helen Louisa Thoreau

October 27, 1837

Concord Oct 27 1837

Dear H.

Please you, let the defendant say a few words in defence of his long silence.¹ 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 apologised 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, & not look in vain, for men, deeds, thoughts? As well apologize for the grape that it is

sour,—or the thunder that it is noisy, or the lightning that it tarries not. Farther, letterwriting too often degenerates into a communing of facts, & not of truths; of other men's deeds, & 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^a affectionate brother,
Henry

Correspondent: Helen Louisa Thoreau (1812-1849), the oldest of the Thoreau children, was a schoolteacher. Her poor health limited her opportunities to teach, but she was an active abolitionist and a member of the Concord Women's Anti-Slavery Society.

¹ As was her brother John, Helen was teaching in Taunton, Massachusetts, where her maternal relatives lived.

Copy-text: MSC by Ralph Waldo Emerson (NN-BGC, Henry David Thoreau Collection, 1837-1917, Series III)

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Editor's Note

Sanborn was responsible for all of the nineteenth- and early-twentieth-century publications of this letter, and in every instance he refers to his source as a copy in Emerson's hand.

Alteration

A change appearing in the manuscript copy is reported below; it could be either a faithful representation of the original manuscript or an error made and corrected by the copyist.

Your] Yours