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From Isaiah Thornton Williams

November 27, 1841

Buffalo N.Y. Nov 27 1841-

My dear Friend

I feel rebuked as I draw your most interesting letter from my file and sit down to answer it—that I have so long delayed so grateful a task— For—though I rarely get away from the world & Law long enough to retire within myself and inquire how I am—how I feel and what sentiments and what responses^a my heart gives out in answer to your voice whose notes of sweetest music comes from that “Land—of every land the pride Beloved of Heaven o’er all the World beside” “That spot of earth divinely blest—That dearer sweeter spot than all the rest”¹ Yet—when weary and heart sick—when disgusted with the present—and memory, as if to give relief, retires to wander in the ‘Graveyard of the past’—she passes not unmindful nor lingers briefly around that spot where more than in any other I feel I first tasted of that bread I hope will yet nourish my youth strengthen my manhood—cheer and solace “when the daughters of music are brought low”²

Time’s devastating hand is beginning already to obliterate the traces of my youthful feelings—and I am becoming more & more contented with my present situation and feel less and less a desire inexorable to return and be a child once more—

This I suppose to be the natural^a tendency of the circumstances in which I am placed. Man’s ends are shaped for him³ and he must abide his destiny. This seems a little like fatality—yet, how can we avoid the conclusion that the Soul is shaped by circumstances and many of those circumstances beyond man’s control^a? I think that could I

always be "true to the dream of Childhood" I should be always be happy- I can imagine circumstances in which I think I might be so-but they are not my present circumstances-these are my fate- I would not complain of them did they not war against what I feel to be my highest interest and indeed I will not as it is-for I know not what is my highest good- I know not the good whither I am bound, and as I donot know but all is well as far as the external is concerned I will trust to the author of my being-the author and creator of those beautiful fields and woods I so much enjoy in my morning and evening walks-the author of the glorious Lake sunsets-that all is well. I have already half answered your interrogatory in relation to my hopes and feelings as I enter upon the study of Law- With so little knowledge-so a-stranger in its walks-with my face only set toward the temple just spying its tapering finger pointing to the heaven^a as the throne of its justice-its golden dome glittering as though it were the light of that city which "has no need of a candle neither the light of the Sun"⁴-not yet passed under its gateway-or wandered among the trees and flowers of its paradisaean garden-viewed the stones of its foundation or laid hold of its mossy pillars-I barely know what to hope or how to feel at all- I must say, if I would speak truly,^a that I donot "burn with high hopes"⁵ Tis not that "the way seems steep and difficult"⁶ but that "the event is feared";⁷ tis the prospect of a life^a in^a "daily contact with the things I loath"⁸ I love the profession It^a presents a boundless field-a shoreless ocean where my bark may drift-and bound & leap from wave to wave in wild but splendid rage-without the fear of rock or strand. Yet^a I chose it not so much for the love I bore it-for I knew that in it my intercourse must be with the worst specimens of humanity-as knowing that by it I might get more knowledge, dicipline and intellectual culture than in any other which I could choose simply as a means of livelihood-have more time to devote to

literature and philosophy—and, as I have said, be better prepared intellectually for progress in these pursuits than in any other branch of business followed simply to provide for the bodily wants— So—you see—this profession I chose simply as a means to enable me to pursue what I most delight in—and for that end I think it the wisest selection I could make I know this motive will not lead me to any eminence in the profession—yet I donot know as I wish to be great in that respect even if I could— My books tell me that on entering the profession I must bid adieu to literature—every-thing^a and^a give up myself wholly to Law— I thought I would do so for a time^a—and I sat down to Blackstone⁹ with a heavy heart— Adieu ye Classic halls—My Muse adieu! I wept—as I took perhaps^a my last look of her—her form lessening in the distance—she cast her eye over her shoulder to to rest once more on me— O, it was all pity, love and tenderness— I called aloud for her—but She hastened on—grieved, She heeded not my call— It was too much— What ever might by standing as a Lawyer—I would not turn my back to literature—philosophy theology or poetry— Would give them their place & Law its place— A thousand thanks for the pamphlets you forwarded me. I have read them with great pleasure—and shall read them many times more— The Oration at Watterville I very much admire—it is circulating among Mr. E.s admirers in this place who all express great admiration of it— Human Culture I admire more and more as I read it over.¹⁰ I loaned it to a young man who told me on returning it that he had almost committed it to memory—and wished the loan of it again as soon as the other friends had read it I have read some of your poetry in the Dial— I want to see more of it—it transports me to my Childhood and makes and makes every thing look as playful as when first I looked upon them in my earliest morning— I only wish it were more liquid—smooth I should admire Pope’s Homer if it were for nothing but that it flows so smoothly.¹¹

Remember me affectionately to the friends in Concord
and believe me

ever yours
I. T. Williams

Correspondent: See p. 85.

¹ See James Montgomery, "The West Indies," 3.1-2, 3.65-66, 3.15-16, and 3.67-68, in *The West Indies, and Other Poems*.

² See Eccl. 12:4: "And the doors shall be shut in the streets, when the sound of the grinding is low, and he shall rise up at the voice of the bird, and all the daughters of musick shall be brought low".

³ Probably a reference to Hamlet's well-known assertion: "There's a divinity that shapes our ends, / Rough-hew them how we will" (Shakespeare, vol. 2, *Hamlet*, 5.2.10-11).

⁴ Rev. 22:5: "And there shall be no night there; and they need no candle, neither light of the sun; for the Lord God giveth them light: and they shall reign for ever and ever."

⁵ See Byron's description of the soldiers soon to die in Belgium (*Childe Harold's Pilgrimage*, 3.27.5-9):

Ere evening to be trodden like the grass
Which now beneath them, but above shall grow
In its next verdure, when this fiery mass
Of living valour, rolling on the foe

And burning with high hope, shall moulder cold and low

⁶ See Milton, vol. 2, *Paradise Lost*, 2.70-72: "But perhaps / The way seems difficult and steep to scale / With upright wing against a higher foe."

⁷ See Milton, vol. 2, *Paradise Lost*, 2.81-82: "The ascent is easy then; / The event is fear'd".

⁸ See George Croly, *Catiline: A Dramatic Poem*, 3.2.83-85: "Banish'd from Rome! What's banish'd, but set free / From daily contact of the things I loathe? / 'Tried and convicted traitor!' Who says this?" (*The Poetical Works of the Rev. George Croly*, 2:103).

⁹ Probably William Blackstone's *Commentaries on the Laws of England*.

¹⁰ Emerson's *The Method of Nature: An Oration* and Alcott's *The Doctrine and Discipline of Human Culture* are two of three pamphlets T sent Williams on October 2 at Emerson's behest. See pp. 90-91, note 3.

¹¹ Alexander Pope translated *The Iliad* into heroic couplets in a six-volume edition published 1715-1720. He also translated *The Od-*

yssey in five volumes, published 1725-1726. T owned a nineteenth-century edition of each translation.

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Author's Alterations

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To Lucy Jackson Brown

March 2, 1842

Concord March 2nd 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 death¹ 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