

and Greek as well as several modern  
 ried Rev. Samuel Ripley (1783-1847),  
 brother. Sarah and Samuel conducte  
 vard students who had been required to withdraw for a period  
 of time. In 1846 the Ripleys moved to the Old Manse in Concord;  
 Samuel died in November 1847

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Sea-side

<sup>1</sup> George Henry Lewes, "Sea-Side Studies," *Blackwood's Edinburgh Magazine*, August-October 1856, 184-197, 312-325, and 472-485, later published as part of *Sea-Side Studies at Ilfracombe, Tenby, the Scilly Isles, and Jersey* (Edinburgh: William Blackwood and Sons, 1858). Ripley probably refers to an article in the September issue in which Lewes describes "gemination," the process by which annelids (segmented worms) multiply asexually: "suppose you were to cut a caterpillar in half, fashion a head for the tail half, and then fasten the head to the cut end of the other half—this would give you an image of the Syllis budding" (p. 320).

<sup>2</sup> Seth Ames (1805-1881) married Sarah Ripley's sister, Margaret Stevenson Bradford (1805-1847), in 1830. Ames, the son of Fisher and Frances Worthington Ames, graduated from Harvard in 1825 and became a lawyer. After serving in the Massachusetts legislature he became an associate justice of the Superior Court.

*Copy-text:* ALS (NN-BGC, Henry David Thoreau Collection, 1837-1917, Series IV)

*Published:* *Cor* 1958, 434

#### *Editor's Notes*

This letter is addressed "Mr Henry Thoreau" and endorsed "Mrs Ripley".

PE supplies the date "September? 1856?" based on the contents of the letter and the reference to "Sea-side Studies," but the letter may have been written later.

### *To Thomas Cholmondeley*

*October 20, 1856*

Concord Mass. Oct 20<sup>th</sup> 1856.

Dear Cholmondeley

I wish to thank you again for those books. They are the nucleus of my library. I wrote to you on the receipt of them last winter, (directing as now) but not having heard

from you, do not know in what part of the world this may find you. Several here are enquiring if you have returned to England, as you had just started for the Crimea at the last accounts. The books have long been shelved in cases of my own construction made partly of the<sup>a</sup> driftwood of our river.<sup>1</sup> They are the admiration of all beholders. Alcott and Emerson, besides myself have been cracking some of the nuts.

Certainly I shall never pay you for them. Of those new to me the Rig Veda is the most savory that I have yet tasted. As primitive poetry, I think as any extant. Indeed all the Vedantic literature is priceless. There they stand occupying two shelves, headed by Froissart,<sup>2</sup> stretching round Egypt and India "Ultima Thule", as a fit conclusion.<sup>3</sup> What a world of variety. I shall browse there for some winters to come.<sup>a</sup>

While war has given place to peace on your side,<sup>4</sup> perhaps a more serious war still is breaking out here. I seem to hear its distant mutterings, though it may be long before the bolt will fall in our midst. There has not been anything which you could call union between the north and south in this country for many years, and there cannot be so long as slavery is in the way. I only wish that northern—that any men—were better material, or that I for one had more skill to deal with them; that the north had more spirit and would settle the question at once, and here instead of struggling feebly and protractedly away off on the plains of Kansas.<sup>5</sup> They are on the eve of a Presidential election, as perhaps you know. and all good people are praying that of the three candidates Fremont may be the man; but in my opinion the issue is quite doubtful.<sup>6</sup> As far as I have observed, the worst man stands the best chance in this country. But as for politics, what I most admire now-a-days, is not the regular governments but the irregular primitive ones, like the Vigilance committee in California<sup>7</sup> and even the free state men in Kansas. They

are the most divine.— I have just taken a run up country, as I did with you once, only a little farther this time; to the Connecticut river in New Hampshire, where I saw Alcott, King of men. He is among those who ask after you, and takes a special interest in the oriental books. He cannot say enough about them. “And then that he should send you a library! Think of it!”

I am sorry that I can give but a poor account of myself. I got “run down” they say, more than a year ago, and have not yet got fairly up again. It has not touched my spirits however, for they are as indifferently tough, as sluggishly resilient, as a dried fungus. I would it were the kind called punk;<sup>8</sup> that they might catch and retain some heavenly spark. I dwell as much aloof from society as ever; find it just as impossible to agree in opinion with the most intelligent of my neighbors; they not having improved one jot, nor I either. I am still immersed in nature, have much of the time a living sense of the breadth of the field on whose verge I dwell. The *great west* and *north west* stretching on infinitely far and grand and wild, qualifying all our thoughts. That is the only America I know. I prize this western reserve chiefly for its intellectual value. That is the road to new life and freedom,—if ever we are dissatisfied with this and not to exile as in Siberia and knowing this, one need not travel it. That great north-west where several of our shrubs, fruitless here, retain and mature their fruits properly.

I am pleased to think of you in that England, where we all seem to have<sup>a</sup> originated, or at least sojourned which Emerson values so much, but which I know so little about. That island seems as full of good things as a nut is of meat: and I trust that it still is a sound nut without mould or worm. I hope that by this time you are settled in your mind and satisfactorily employed there.

My father mother and sister send their best wishes, and would be glad to see you in this country again. We are all

quite anxious to hear that you are safe and sound: I in particular hope that you are<sup>a</sup> in all respects unscathed by the battle of life, ready for still worthier encounters.

Yours.  
H. D. T.

*Correspondent:* See p. 307.

<sup>1</sup> Cholmondeley had arranged for John Chapman to send T a list of the books in October 1855 (see pp. 355-356 and 371-372); they arrived November 30 (see p. 389). T collected driftwood primarily for fuel, but in a November 9, 1855, description of a collecting trip on the Assabet River, he anticipates needing material for bookcases: "As I shall want some shelves to put my Oriental books on, I shall begin to save some boards now" (*Journal* 1906, 8:18).

<sup>2</sup> Probably Jean Froissart, *Chronicles of England, France, Spain, and the Adjoining Countries*.

<sup>3</sup> *Ultima Thule* is the title of Cholmondeley's book about New Zealand; the phrase means "at the extreme limit of travel and discovery" (*OED*). T's system for arranging the books is geo-cultural, beginning with Froissart's chronicles of England and several European countries and moving east to New Zealand.

<sup>4</sup> After hostilities in the Crimean War ceased with an armistice in February, a peace treaty was signed at the Congress of Paris, held from February 28 to March 30, 1856.

<sup>5</sup> As T notes, the division in the United States over the issues that ultimately resulted in the Civil War was growing increasingly hostile, and armed conflict had already broken out in Kansas. The passage of the Kansas-Nebraska Act in 1854 set up a system of "popular sovereignty," whereby those who settled the two territories were to decide whether the states would, upon admission to the Union, permit or prohibit slavery. Tension between the opposing forces grew throughout 1855 and early 1856. In May 1856, violence broke out, with deaths on both sides, including the killing of five pro-slavery settlers at Pottawatomie Creek by men affiliated with John Brown. In Washington, Preston Brooks, a Democratic representative from South Carolina, assaulted Senator Charles Sumner of Massachusetts on the floor of the Senate, and the fall election campaign centered on "Bleeding Kansas," as the Republicans called it. In their campaign rhetoric, Democrats labeled their opponents "Black Republicans" for their opposition to slavery.

<sup>6</sup> The 1856 presidential election was contested by James Buchanan of the Democratic Party, John C. Frémont of the Republi-

can Party, and Millard Fillmore, a Know-Nothing who represented the American Party. Both the Republican Party and the American Party drew support from former members of the Whig Party. In November, Buchanan beat Frémont by almost a half million in the popular vote and by sixty votes in the electoral college.

<sup>7</sup> Vigilance committees were groups of private citizens dedicated to the maintenance of order and justice; they formed at times when government institutions had broken down or proved inadequate. A prominent vigilance committee formed in San Francisco in 1851, and a second was created in May 1856 after James King, a newspaper editor, was shot on the street. The 1856 Vigilance Committee disbanded in August 1856, but its influence continued through the immediate establishment by its leaders of the "People's party," which carried out the "far-reaching republicanist ideology of the Vigilante movement" (Philip J. Ethington, *The Public City: The Political Construction of Urban Life in San Francisco, 1850-1900* [Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994], p. 161). The *New-York Daily Tribune* of October 13 printed a dispatch from San Francisco that read, "The approaching election promises to be a spirited one in this city, in consequence of the feeling that has been engendered by the necessity for the organization of the Vigilance Committee." The report goes on to say that the Vigilance Committee, that is, the People's party, was having trouble agreeing on candidates, but that both the Republican and the American parties were expected to nominate only "Vigilance men."

<sup>8</sup> The term "punk" can refer to "several kinds of bracket fungus which when dry may be used as tinder" (*OED*). T may have in mind the tinder fungus (*Fomes fomentarius*), which has been used to start fires dating back to prehistoric times.

*Copy-text:* MSC by Sophia Elizabeth Thoreau (NN-BGC, Henry David Thoreau Collection, 1837-1917, Series III)

*Published:* Cor 1958, 435-437

#### *Editor's Note*

This is one of two letters from T to Cholmondeley that Sophia copied; the other is on pp. 377-380. At the top of p. 1 of this letter, Sophia wrote, "Letter from Thoreau to Cholmondeley."

#### *Alterations*

Changes appearing in the manuscript copy are reported below; they could be either faithful representations of the original manuscript or errors made and corrected by the copyist.

the] *interlined with a caret*

come.] P *interlined in pencil with a pencilled caret*  
 have] *followed by cancelled to have*  
 are ] *followed by cancelled safe and sound*

*To Marcus Spring*

*October 23, 1856*

Concord Oct 23<sup>d</sup> '56

Dear Sir

After considerable<sup>a</sup> hesitation on account<sup>a</sup> of my prior<sup>a</sup>  
 health<sup>1,a</sup>—I decided to<sup>e,a</sup> start for Eagleswood this after-  
 noon—bringing compass & lectures as you request—<sup>2</sup>

Yrs truly

Marcus Spring Esq—  
 Eagleswood  
 Perth Amboy  
 NJ

*Correspondent:* Marcus Spring (1810-1874), son of Adolphus and Lydia Taft Spring, was a dry goods merchant who became a prominent reformer. In 1836, Spring married Rebecca Buffum (1811-1911), daughter of Arnold and Rebecca Gould Buffum. The Springs established the Raritan Bay Union, a reform community near Perth Amboy, New Jersey, on an estate named Eagleswood, and had recently opened a school on the grounds. Marcus Spring had formerly been a member of the Fourierist North American Phalanx.

<sup>1</sup> In the spring and summer of 1855, T had been acutely ill; see p. 334, notes 1 and 3. His recovery was slow: in a letter to Daniel Ricketson of April 1, 1857, he wrote of his “two-year old invalidity,” describing himself as “decent for a steady pace but not yet for a race” (MaLiTIW, Thoreau Society Archives, Parmenter Collection).

<sup>2</sup> T had been engaged to survey the property and to lecture to the community at Eagleswood. In Journal entries for October 24 and 25, he records leaving Concord on October 24, stopping at Worcester and New York City on the way, and arriving at Eagleswood on October 25 (*Journal* 1906, 9:133, 134).

*Copy-text:* AL draft (MCo-SC, Thoreau Survey Papers, Series II, Box 1, Folder 9, no. 165)

*Editor's Notes*

The copy-text is in faint pencil. The document also contains