

great satisfaction to us to bury him with those of his family who have gone before him.

Believe me, dear Sir, faithfully & gratefully

Yours,
Charles Sumner

Henry D. Thoreau^e

Correspondent: See p. 76.

¹ Horace Sumner's remains were never found.

Copy-text: ALS (VtMiM, aberms.sumernc.1850.07.31)

Published: *Cor* 1958, 264

Editor's Note

Henry D. Thoreau] *written at bottom of p. 1 of MS*

To Harrison Gray Otis Blake

August 9, 1850

Concord Aug. 9th 1850

Mr Blake,

I received your letter just as I was rushing to Fire Island Beach to recover what remained of Margaret Fuller--and read it on the way. That event and its train, as much as anything, have prevented my answering it before-- It is wisest to speak when you are spoken to.¹ I will now endeavor to reply at the risk of having nothing to say.

I find that actual events, notwithstanding the singular prominence which we all allow them, are far less real than the creations of my imagination. They are truly visionary and insignificant--all that we commonly call life & death--and affect me less than my dreams. This petty stream which from time to time swells & carries away the mills and bridges of our habitual life--and that mightier stream or ocean on which we securely float--what makes the difference between them? I have in my pocket a button which I ripped off the coat of the Marquis^a of Ossoli

on the sea-shore the other day. Held up it intercepts the light—an actual button—and yet all the life it is connected with is less substantial to me, and interests me less, than my faintest dream. Our thoughts are the epochs in our lives, all else is but as a journal of the winds that blew while we were here.

I say to myself—Do a little more of that work which you have confessed to be good. You are neither satisfied nor dissatisfied with yourself without reason. Have you not a thinking-faculty of inestimable value? If there is an experiment which you would like to try—try it. Do not entertain doubts if they are not agreeable to you. Remember that you need not eat unless you are hungry. Do not read the newspapers Improve every opportunity to be melancholy. As for health, consider yourself well. Do not engage to find things as you think they are. Do what nobody else can do for you— Omit to do anything else.

It is not easy to make our lives respectable by any course of activity— We have repeatedly to withdraw into our shells of thought, like the tortoise, somewhat helplessly; yet there is more than philosophy in that.

Do not waste any reverence on my attitude. I merely manage to sit up where I have dropped. I am sure that my acquaintances mistake me. They ask my advice on high matters, but they do not know^a, even how poorly on't I am for hats & shoes. I have hardly a shift. Just as shabby as I am in my outward apparel, aye, and more lamentably shabby—am I in my inward substance. If I should turn myself inside out, my rags and meanness would indeed appear. I am something to him that made me undoubtedly, but not much to any other that he has made.

Would it not be worth the while to discover Nature in Milton²—be native to the universe? I too love Concord best; but I am glad when I discover in oceans and wildernesses far away the materials of a million Concords; indeed I am lost unless I discover them. I see less difference

between a city and a swamp than formerly. It is a swamp however, too dismal and dreary even for me, and I should be glad if there were fewer owls & frogs & mosquitoes in it. I prefer even a more cultivated place—free from miasma and crocodile^e— I am so sophisticated—and I will take my choice.

As for missing friends—what if we do miss one another—have we not agreed on a rendezvous? While each wanders his own way through the wood, without anxiety, eye with serene joy, though it be on his hands & knees over rocks and fallen trees, he cannot but be on the right way.— There is no wrong way to him. How can he be said to miss his friends, whom the fruits still nourish and the elements sustain? A man who missed his friends at a turn, went on buoyantly, dividing the friendly air, & humming a tune to himself, ever and anon kneeling with delight to study each little lichen in his path, and scarcely made three miles a day—for friendship.

As for conforming outwardly, and living your own life inwardly,—I do not think much of that. Let not your right hand know what your left hand does in that line of business.³ It will prove a failure. Just as successfully can you walk against a sharp steel edge which divides you cleanly right and left. Do you wish to try your ability to resist distension? It is a greater strain than any soul can long endure. When you get God to pulling one way and the Devil the other, each having his feet well braced,—to say nothing of the conscience sawing transversely—almost any timber will give way.

I do not dare invite you earnestly to come to Concord, because I know too well that the berries are not thick in my field, and we should have to take it out in viewing the landscape. But come on every account, and we will see one another.

Henry D. Thoreau

Correspondent: See p. 22.

¹ The proverb dates from 1586.

² Blake taught at the Milton Academy in Milton, Massachusetts, where Christopher A. Greene (1816-1853) was headmaster from 1849 to 1851.

³ "But when thou doest alms, let not thy left hand know what thy right hand doeth" (Matt. 6:3).

Copy-text: ALS (TxAuHRH, Henry David Thoreau Collection, MS-4222, 1.3)

Published: *LVP* 1865, 63-66; *FL* 1894, 223-226; *FL* 1906, 185-188; *Cor* 1958, 264-266; *Companion* 1964, 314-317; "T to Blake" 1966, 44-46; *Spiritual Seeker* 2004, 59-62

Editor's Notes

T initially addressed the letter "H. G. O. Blake / Care of Mr. C. A. Greene / Milton / Mass."; the letter was then redirected: "Care of Mr. C. A. Greene / Milton" is cancelled and "Worcester." is written to replace "Milton". In addition, the original Concord postmark, "Concord M{*illegible*} Aug 9", is cancelled and "Milton MS / Aug 17." is written next to it.

See *Journal* 3 1990, pp. 94-99, for another version of a part of this letter.

crocodile] *PE*; crocod{*MS torn*}

Author's Alterations

Marquis] marquis

know] *preceded by cancelled even*

From George Albert Bailey

October 7, 1850

Portland, Me., Oct. 7th., 1850.

Dear Sir:

A few days since, by a lucky accident I met with a copy of a work of yours—"A week on the Concord and Merrimack Rivers."— I read it with much interest,—and if I tell you plainly that I am delighted with the book, it is because I cannot help telling you so;—therefore you should pardon whatever is amiss in the expression.— I should like to ask you many questions touching your allusions to persons; such, for instance, as "What were the names of the "agéd