

The more distress, the more intelligence.
 Quhay sailis lang in hie prosperitie,
 Ar sone owreset be stormis without defence."⁴

From your friend
 Henry D. Thoreau

Correspondent: See p. 53.

¹ T quotes John Bellenden, "Allegorie of Vertue and Delyte," in *Chronicle of Scottish Poetry*, 2:56. T borrowed volume 2 from the Harvard College Library in 1837, and he borrowed all four volumes of the collection in 1841. By using Bellenden's ship and El Dorado images, T implies that many letters sail from New England to New York City, Emerson's El Dorado, the place where he made money as a lecturer.

² Emerson arrived in New York City on February 25, delivered his six-lecture series "The Times" between March 3 and March 14, and returned to Concord on March 18.

³ See p. 103, note 4.

⁴ John Bellenden, "Allegorie of Vertue and Delyte," 2:55.

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

Published: *Scribner's Magazine* 17 (1895): 352-353; *Cor* 1958, 63-65

Editor's Note

This letter is addressed "R. W. Emerson / New York." and endorsed "H. D. Thoreau / March 1842".

Author's Alterations

homely] *followed by cancelled* but
 blue-birds,] *followed by cancelled* and

To Isaiah Thornton Williams

March 14, 1842

Concord March 14th 1842

Dear Williams,

I meant to write to you before but John's death, and my own sickness, with other circumstances, prevented. John died of the lock-jaw, as you know, Jan. 11th I have been

confined to my chamber for a month with a prolonged shock of the same disorder—from close attention to, and sympathy with him, which I learn is not without precedent. Mr. Emerson too has lost his oldest child, Waldo, by scarlet fever, a boy of rare promise, who in the expectation of many was to be one of the lights of his generation.

John was sick but three days from the slightest apparent cause—an insignificant cut on his finger, which gave him no pain, and was more than a week old—but nature does not ask for such causes as man expects—when she is ready there will be cause enough. I mean simply that perhaps we never assign the sufficient cause for anything—though it undoubtedly exists. He was perfectly calm, ever pleasant while reason lasted, and gleams of the same serenity and playfulness shone through his delirium to the last. But I will not disturb his memory. If you knew him, I could not add to your knowledge, and if you did not know him, as I think you could not, it is now too late, and no eulogy of mine would suffice— For my own part I feel that I could not have done without this experience.

What you express with regard to the effect of time on our youthful feelings—which indeed is the theme of universal elegy—reminds me of some verses of Byron—quite rare to find in him, and of his best I think. Probably you remember them.

“No more, no more,! Oh never more on me
 The freshness of the heart can fall like dew
 Which out of all the lovely things we see,
 Extracts emotions beautiful and new,
 Hived in our bosoms like the bag o’ the bee,
 Think’st thou the honey with these objects grew
 Alas! ’Twas not in them, but in thy power,
 To double even the sweetness of a flower.

No more, no more! Oh, never more, my heart!
 Canst thou be my sole world, my universe

Once all in all, but now a thing apart,
 Thou canst not be my blessing, or my curse;
 The illusion's gone forever—"i,e

It would be well if we could add new years to our lives as innocently as the fish adds new layers to its shell—no less beautiful than the old. And I believe we may if we will replace the vigor and elasticity of youth with faithfulness in later years.

When I consider the universe I am still the youngest born. We do not *grow* old we *rust* old. Let us not consent to be old, but to die (live?) rather. Is Truth old? or Virtue—or Faith? If we possess them they will be our *elixir vitæ* and fount of youth. It is at least good to remember our innocence; what we regret is not quite lost— Earth sends no sweeter strain to Heaven than this plaint. Could we not grieve perpetually, and by our grief discourage time's encroachments? All our sin too shall be welcome for such is the material of Wisdom, and through her is our redemption to come.

'Tis true, as you say, "Man's ends are shaped for him,"² but who ever dared confess the extent of his free agency? Though I am weak, I am strong too. If God shapes my ends—he shapes me also—and his means are always equal to his ends. His work does not lack this completeness, that the creature consents. *I am my destiny.* Was I ever in that straight that it was not sweet to do right? And then for this free agency I would not be free of God certainly— I would only have freedom to defer to him He has not made us solitary agents. He has not made us to do without him Though we must "abide our destiny", will not he abide it with us? So do the stars and the flowers. My destiny is now arrived—is now arriving. I believe that what I call my circumstances will be a very true history of myself—for God's works are complete both within and without—and shall I not be content with his success? I welcome my fate for it is not trivial nor whimsical^e. Is there not a

soul in circumstances?—and the disposition of the soul to circumstances—is not that the crowning circumstance of all? But after all it is *intra*-stances, or how it stands within me that I am concerned about. Moreover circumstances are past, but I am to come, that is to say, they are results of me—but I have not yet arrived at my result.

All impulse, too, is primarily from within. The soul which does shape the world is within and central.

I must confess I am apt to consider the trades and professions so many traps which the Devil sets to catch men in—and good luck he has too, if one may judge. But did it ever occur that a man came to want, or the almshouse from consulting his higher instincts? All great good is very present and urgent, and need not be postponed. What did Homer—and Socrates—and Christ and Shakspeare & Fox?³ Did they have to compound for their leisure, or steal their hours? What a curse would civilization be if it thus ate into the substance of the soul— Who would choose rather the simple grandeur of savage life for the solid leisure it affords? But need we sell our birthright for a mess of pottage?⁴ Let us trust that we shall be fed as the sparrows are.⁵

“Grass and Earth to sit on, water to wash the feet, and fourthly, affectionate speech are at no time deficient in the mansions of the good”⁶

You may be interested to learn that Mr. Alcott is going to England in April.⁷

That you may find in Law the profession you love, and the means of spiritual culture, is the wish of your friend
Isaiah T. Williams
Buffalo, N.Y.

Henry D. Thoreau.

Correspondent: See p. 85.

¹ Byron, *Don Juan*, 1.214.1-8; 1.215.1-5.

² See p. 100, note 3.

³ George Fox (1624-1691) founded the Society of Friends.

⁴ An allusion to Gen. 25:29-34.

⁵ Matt. 6:26: "Behold the fowls of the air: for they sow not, neither do they reap, nor gather into barns; yet your heavenly Father feedeth them. Are ye not much better than they?" See also Luke 12:24.

⁶ Manu, *Institutes of Hindu Law; or, The Ordinances of Menu*. T had copied this passage into a commonplace book and included it in a selection of sayings he published in the January 1843 issue of the *Dial* (pp. 331-340; see *Early Essays* 1975, p. 133). See also p. 90, note 1.

⁷ Alcott left Concord on May 6, sailed from Boston on the *Rosalind* on May 8, and arrived in England on May 31. He stayed until September 28 and returned to Concord on October 21.

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

Published: *Cor* 1958, 66-68

Editor's Notes

"No more . . . gone forever-"] *Hoar placed open double quotation marks in the left margin of each line of the poetry. This use of marginal quotation marks is seen in many handwritten documents of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries.*

whimsical] *PE*; whim / sical in *MS*

To Charles Stearns Wheeler

June 15, 1842

Concord June 15th 1842

Dear Sir,

Shall I trouble you to return *these* books to the Library viz. The Bruce-Lodge & Chalkhill-and Raleigh-five vols.¹ They are all I have.

Yrs. &c

Henry D. Thoreau

I hope you will smuggle some poetical treasures into the country on your return.

Correspondent: See pp. 51-52.

¹ Wheeler, a tutor at Harvard, sometimes checked out books for T at his request. On January 10, 1842, Wheeler checked out John Barbour, *The Bruce; or, The History of Robert I. King of Scotland*;