

Thomas Lodge, *Glaucus and Silla, with Other Lyrical and Pastoral Poems*; and John Chalkhill, *Thealma and Clearchus: A Pastoral Romance* (Harvard's copies of the latter two works were bound in one volume). T had borrowed volume 8 of *The Works of Sir Walter Raleigh, Kt* on December 10, 1841; this was probably the volume he was asking Wheeler to return.

*Copy-text:* ALS (Children of Dr. John William Lowder)

*Published:* *ESQ* 48 (1967): 75; *CS* 6 (June 1971): 4, 5; *ARLR* 1990, 16

*Editor's Notes*

This letter is addressed "C. S. Wheeler".

The copy-text is mounted under glass. The present editor was able to inspect only page 1; the address is taken from a photocopy made before the letter was mounted.

*From Isaiah Thornton Williams*

June 23, 1842

Buffalo June. 23. 1842-

Dear Thoreau

I have not written you for a long time—but I am not going to apologize for of course you only wish to hear when & what I wish to write The poor thoughts that have occupied my busy little mind since I last wrote you have been many & often had I seen you should I have inflicted upon your ear the sad narration of them, or at least some of them—& I donot know why I should withhold any of them they were sent by a power above me, at the beck & bidding of another did they come & go— I know that men have but little to do with the affairs of this world—still I feel a responsibility to myself for all things that befall me in life—though to no other. To live this life well I feel a strong desire. I also feel a presentiment that I shall fail in part—not totally fail to do so. I donot know what it is to live well—or how to do it if I did—between idea & idea I swing<sup>a</sup> like a pendulum— I know 'tis weakness, yet such I am— But I must not disgust you by talking too much of myself—& I know it is not well to afflict myself with my own image.

Still it is pretty much all I know—the source of most I have ever learned. Perhaps this has been my fault—I have often repented & as often sinned again— What a succession of falls is life! I wonder if that is the object of it—& this that we may know how to stand when it is past— I do not suppose it is of any use to speculate about life—we know but little of it & if it were well for us to know it would be taught us—& I am coming more & more every day to the settled practicable belief that the true mode of life is to live & do from moment to moment the duty or labor before us with no questions about its fitness or end and no thought for the Morrow. I sometimes think further—that it is also best to be of men & like them while with them—to love what they love be interested in what they are interested—share their hopes & joys their dejection & sorrows—seek the ends & have the objects of pursuit that they have take their fortunes in life as I must in death & when the curtain shall have fallen—have to think my fortune & fate—is & has ever been that of my race— I fear it will be a hard one if it is, but “such is the sovereign doom & such the will of Jove”<sup>1</sup> Of one thing I am certain. My race have an indisputable claim upon my best—all the services I am able to render while I live—I will not withhold from them the pittance due from me— With this thought before me I have endeavoured to join in the reforms of the day— I make Temperance speeches, such as they are—at any rate the best I can—I go to Sabbath School & talk to & endeavour to instruct the children what I can—& where-ever I see an opportunity to do any thing for others I have a kind of general design to lend my aid—though not to interfere with my duties to myself. Whether I am taking the best course<sup>a</sup> to benefit myself & others—that is the question— Yet if I do as well I know—& know as well as I can I shall never accuse myself— After all I am not wholly satisfied with myself or with this view of things I fear there is something beyond & higher I ought to know & seek— Is it given to man in this state of existence to be satisfied? Is not this

very dissatisfaction but the breathing of an imortal nature that whispers of eternal progress? Shall not hope change this very dissatisfaction into the highest fruition? Say to me in reply what these desultory thoughts suggest to your mind-& as my sheet is nearly full I will say a few words more & fold<sup>a</sup> & forward it for your perusal.

Your letter of March 14 gave me much pleasure though I need not say that I sympathize with you most deeply in the loss you sustain by the death of your brother- I knew him but little-yet I thought I had never met with a more flowing generous spirit- It was not fitted for a cold & hard-hearted world like this-in such a nature do I see a strong assurance of a better existence when this is over. Ever will his name float down my memory untainted by those folies & crimes I am forced to associate with those of so many of my race. And Mr Emerson-how did he endure the loss of his child? It was a cruel stroke-did his philosophy come to his aid as does the Christian Faith to administer consolation to the bereaved? I wish to know what were his feelings. for the consolations that a christian faith affords<sup>e</sup> the bereaved & afflicted is one of its strongest holds upon my credulity. If there is consolation from his philosophy in trials like those-it will do much toward settling my belief- I wish to know minutely on this point- I think much on Death & sometimes doubt if my early impressions upon that subject are ever effaced- The fear of it occasions a thousand folies- I feel it is unmanly-but yet "that undiscovered country"<sup>2</sup> Who shall tell us whether to fear-or disire it? As to myself-I am less homesick than at first though I am not satisfied with the west-nor quite with my profession- Perhaps I ought to be I often think my feelings feelish. Do you think engaged in the practice of Law<sup>a</sup> the best way of spending ones life? Let me hear from you soon- I will not be so remiss in my future correspondence-

Yours &c-  
I. T. Williams

*Correspondent:* See p. 85.

<sup>1</sup> *The Iliad of Homer*, vol. 1, 1.7-8: "Since great Achilles and Atrides strove, / Such was the sovereign doom, and such the will of Jove!"

<sup>2</sup> From Shakespeare, vol. 2, *Hamlet*, 3.1.78-80: "But that the dread of something after death, - / The undiscover'd country, from whose bourn / No traveller returns".

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

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*Editor's Notes*

This letter is addressed "H. D. Thoreau / Concord / Mass- / Mr. Brown" and endorsed "I. T. Williams".

affords] *PE*; offerds *in MS*

*Author's Alterations*

swing] *preceded by cancelled* but  
course] *followed by cancelled* for  
fold] *followed by cancelled* it  
of Law] *interlined with a caret*

*To Isaiah Thornton Williams*

*October 10, 1842*

Concord Oct. 10<sup>th</sup> 1842.

Dear Williams,

That your letter seems<sup>a</sup> fresh is<sup>e,a</sup> apology enough for my not having made haste<sup>a</sup> to answer it—but as you say, I will send you a letter now, and not an apology for none. I must confess your's sounds a little sad, but that too is one strain of the harp. You say that you have a presentiment that you may fail to live this life well—but *so* perhaps even our own failure does not concern us. Something will succeed— Let us sympathise then with success—not with failure. Give me but the sight to see success, and no matter into what sloughs my feet lead. With what significance an old poet sang—

"How blind, that cannot see serenitie!"<sup>1</sup>