

reason'd high
 Of providence, foreknowledge, will, and fate,
 Fix'd fate, free will, foreknowledge absolute,
 And found no end, in wandering mazes lost.

² William Henry Channing had just published the first issue of the *Present*, for which he wrote a long, five-part "Confession of Faith" that discussed subjects ranging from the nature of "The Divine Being" to "The United States a Member of Christendom" (September 1843): 6-10.

³ Francis Quarles (1592-1644) is best known for *Emblemes*, a collection of poems; he also published prose religious manuals. T mentions reading Quarles's poetry in his September 14 letter to Emerson (see p. 234). George Herbert (1593-1633), a clergyman and poet, is best known for *The Temple: Sacred Poems and Private Ejaculations*, a collection of 164 poems. T quotes both Quarles and Herbert in *A Week on the Concord and Merrimack Rivers*.

⁴ Susan Haven Emerson became ill in late September, near the end of Margaret Fuller's visit to New York City.

⁵ Emerson's daughter Edith.

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Editor's Notes

This letter is addressed "Mrs. Lidian Emerson / Concord / Mass."
 PE supplies the year "1843" from the contents of the letter.
 mother] PE; possibly Mother in MS

Author's Alteration

for] *interlined above cancelled* though

To Ralph Waldo Emerson

October 17, 1843

Staten Island Oct 17th

My Dear Friend,

I went with my pupil to the Fair of the American Institute,¹ and so lost a visit from Tappan whom I met returning from the Island. I should have liked to hear more news from his lips, though he had left me a letter, and the Dial which is a sort of circular letter itself— I find Channing's

letters² full of life and enjoy their wit highly. Lane writes straight and solid like a guide-board, but I find that I put off the Social Tendencies to a future day³—which may never come— He is always Shaker fare, quite as luxurious as his principles will allow. I feel as if I were ready to be appointed a committee on poetry, I have got my eyes so whetted and proved of late, like the Knife-sharpener^e I saw at the Fair^a certified to have been in constant use in a gentleman's family for more than two years. Yes,^a I ride along the ranks of the English poets casting terrible glances, and some I blot out, and some I spare.⁴

Mackean has imported within the year several new editions and collections of old poetry, which I have the reading of but there is a good deal of chaff to a little meal, hardly worth bolting. I have just opened Bacon's Advancement of Learning⁵ for the first time, which I read with great delight. It is more like what Scott's novels were than anything^e.

I see that I was very blind to send you my manuscript in such a state,⁶ but I have a good second sight (?)^a at least. I could still shake it in the wind to some advantage, if it would hold together. There are some sad mistakes in the printing.— It is a little unfortunate that the Ethnical scripture⁷ should hold out so well, though it does really hold out. The Bible ought not to be very large. Is it not singular that while the religious world is gradually picking to pieces its old testaments, here are some coming slowly after on the sea-shore picking up the durable relics of perhaps older books and putting them together again?

Your letter to contributors is excellent and hits the nail on the head. It will taste sour to their palates at first no doubt, but it will bear a sweet fruit at last.⁸

I like the poetry, especially the Autumn verses.⁹ They ring true. Though I am quite weather beaten with poetry having weathered so many epics of late. The Sweep Ho¹⁰ sounds well this way. But I have a good deal of fault to find with your ode to Beauty. The tune is altogether

unworthy of the thoughts. You slope too quickly to the rhyme, as if that trick had better be performed as soon as possible—or as if you stood over the line with a hatchet and chopped off the verses as they came out—some short and some long. But give us a long reel and we'll cut it up to suit ourselves. It sounds like parody. "Thee knew I of old" "Remediless thirst" are some of those stereotyped lines^a.¹¹ I am frequently reminded I believe of Jane Taylors Philosopher's scales, and how the world

"Flew out with a bounce"

which—"jerked the philosopher out of his cell."¹² or else of "From^a the climes of the sun all war-worn and weary"¹³ I had rather have the thoughts come ushered with a flourish of oaths and curses. Yet I love your poetry as I do little else that is near and recent—especially when you get fairly round the end of the line, and are not thrown back upon the rocks.— To read the lecture on the Comic,¹⁴ is as good as to be in our town meeting or Lyceum once more^a.

I am glad that the concord farmers have plowed well this year, it promises that something will be done these summers. But I am suspicious of that Brittonner who advertises so many cords of *good*^b oak chestnut and maple wood for sale—¹⁵ *Good!* aye, good for what? And there shall not be left a stone upon a stone.¹⁶ But no matter let them hack away— The sturdy Irish arms that do the work are of more worth than oak or maple. Methinks I could look with equanimity upon a long street of Irish cabins and pigs and children revelling in the genial Concord dirt, and I should still find my Walden wood^a and Fair Haven in their tanned and happy faces.— I write this in the corn field—it being washing day—with the inkstand^e Elizabeth Hoar gave me—though it is not redolent of corn-stacks—I fear.

Let me not be^e forgotten by Channing & Hawthorne—nor our grey-suited neighbor¹⁷ under the hill—

Yr friend H. D. Thoreau

Correspondent: See p. 53.

¹ The annual fair of the American Institute of the City of New York opened on October 11 at Niblo's Garden and ran until October 27. Advertisements claimed that forty-five thousand people attended during three days of its last week. Patrons viewed mechanical inventions, agricultural implements, and horticultural exhibits. The American Institute had been founded in 1829 "for the purpose of encouraging and promoting Domestic Industry in this State and the United States, in Agriculture, Commerce, Manufactures, and the Arts" (*Merchants' Magazine and Commercial Review* 3 [1840]: 418).

² Ellery Channing, "The Youth of the Poet and the Painter," *Dial* 4 (October 1843): 174-186; see p. 193, note 5.

³ T apparently had read Charles Lane's essay "A Day with the Shakers" (*Dial* 4 [October 1843]: 165-173) but had not yet read the second part of "Social Tendencies" (pp. 188-204); the first part of the essay was published in the July number (pp. 65-86).

⁴ In the fall of 1841 T began, with Emerson's encouragement and financial aid, to work on a literary project probably intended to be an anthology of English poetry with historical and critical commentary. He copied twenty pages of poetry from Emerson's commonplace book into one of his own and spent two weeks in November and December of that year at Harvard reading, copying, and annotating old English poets. T resumed the work in August 1843, when he gained access to libraries in New York City, among them the Mercantile Library, where McKean was the librarian. As Robert Sattelmeyer notes, T's Journal for the Staten Island period includes quotations from or estimations of Marlowe, Spenser, Francis Quarles, William Drummond of Hawthornden, Thomas Carew, George Peele, Samuel Daniel, Lovelace, and Donne ("Thoreau's Projected Work on the English Poets," *SAR* 1980, p. 248). It is not known which specific volumes T read at the Mercantile and New York Society libraries, and, whatever his original conception, T stopped working on the project when he returned to Concord in December 1843.

⁵ The Mercantile Library owned an 1825 edition of Francis Bacon's *Of the Proficiency and Advancement of Learning*, which was first published in 1605.

⁶ T refers to "A Winter Walk," which Emerson revised and published in the October *Dial* (pp. 211-226; see *Excursions* 2007, pp. 55-77). See also p. 229.

⁷ In the *Dial*, under "Ethnical Scriptures," Emerson had regularly

included excerpts from the scriptures and sacred books of several religions. For the October number, T apparently helped Emerson make the selections from David Collie's translation of *The Chinese Classical Work Commonly Called the Four Books*, which includes excerpts from Mencius, Confucius, and others ("Chinese Four Books," *Dial* 4 [October 1843]: 205-210; see *Early Essays* 1975, pp. 147-153).

⁸ Emerson's letter, a response to several letters to the editor of the *Dial*, covers such topics as railroads, communities, the discontent of the young, and educated men; it also includes an account, translated from the *Deutsche Schnellpost* (see p. 254, note 7), of Bettina von Arnim's latest work. T may refer to Emerson's expression of impatience with bored young men: "Apathies and total want of work and reflection on the imaginative character of American life, &c &c., are like seasickness, which never will obtain any sympathy, if there is a woodpile in the yard, or an unweeded patch in the garden" (*Dial* 4 [October 1843]: 267).

⁹ Ellery Channing, "Autumn," *Dial* 4 (October 1843): 186-187.

¹⁰ Ellen Sturgis Hooper, "Sweep Ho!", *Dial* 4 (October 1843): 245.

¹¹ T refers to Emerson, "Ode to Beauty," *Dial* 4 (October 1843): 257-259. The lines to which T objects are the following: "Say when in lapsed ages / Thee knew I of old" and "Love drinks at thy banquet / Remediless thirst; / Thou intimate stranger! / Thou latest and first!" (p. 257).

¹² Jane Taylor (1783-1824), a writer of children's verse, is best known for "Twinkle, Twinkle, Little Star." Her poem "The Philosopher's Scales" was published in a number of editions of two collections of her work, *The Contributions of Q. Q. to a Periodical Work* and *The Writings of Jane Taylor*. In an 1832 Boston edition of the latter work, the last two lines of the poem read: "While the scale with the soul in, so mightily fell, / That it jerked the philosopher out of his cell." The opening stanza of the poem contains the line "The flow of murmuring waters, day by day," and the sixth stanza contains the line "And down, down, the farthing's worth came with a bounce" (3:117-120).

¹³ T quotes the opening line in William Gillespie's poem "The Highlander," which appears in an 1836 Boston edition of a textbook that he owned (*The American First Class Book; or, Exercises in Reading and Recitation*, ed. John Pierpont, p. 230). The poem is also included in a number of other nineteenth-century textbooks. For example, an 1838 textbook published in London, *Selections from Modern Authors: For the Use of the Higher Classes in Schools, and for Young Persons Generally*, contains both "The Philosopher's

Scales" and "The Highlander," but it is not known whether T had read that book.

¹⁴ Emerson's lecture "Comedy" was part of his "Human Life" series. He first read it in Boston on January 30, 1839, and then repeated it in Concord on May 1, when T most likely heard it. The October *Dial* essay "The Comic" (pp. 247-256) is a version of this lecture.

¹⁵ In the *Concord Freeman* of October 13, Joel Britton had advertised "from 700 to 1000 cords of Oak, Chesnut, Pine and Maple Wood, separated and corded" to be sold from a lot in Lincoln ("Wood for Sale," October 13, 1843).

¹⁶ T alludes to Jesus's prophecy of the future destruction of the Temple in Jerusalem, recorded in all three synoptic Gospels: "See ye not all these things? verily I say unto you, There shall not be left here one stone upon another, that shall not be thrown down" (Matt. 24:2; cf. Mark 13:2 and Luke 19:44).

¹⁷ Edmund Hosmer.

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Editor's Notes

This letter is addressed "R. Waldo Emerson / Concord / Mass." and endorsed "H. D Thoreau. / Oct. 1843". PE supplies the year "1843" following the endorsement.

Knife-sharpener] *PE*; Knife- / sharpener *in MS*
 anything] *PE*; anything *in MS*
 inkstand] *PE*; ink- / stand *in MS*
 be] *PE*; {text obscured by sealing wax}e

Author's Alterations

Fair] fair
 Yes,] ~-
 (?)] *inserted*
 lines] *interlined above cancelled* verses
 "From] *preceded by cancelled* the
 more] most
 good] *interlined with a caret*
 wood] *interlined with a caret*