

*To Helen Louisa Thoreau**October 6, 1838*Concord Oct. 6th -38.

Dear Helen,

I dropped Sophia's letter into the box immediately on taking yours out, else the tone of the former had been changed.

I have no acquaintance with "Cleavelands First Lessons," though I have peeped into his abridged Grammar,¹ which I should think very well calculated for beginners, at least, for such as would be likely to wear out one book, before they would be prepared for the abstruser parts of Grammar. Ahem! As no one can tell what was the Roman pronunciation, each nation makes the Latin conform, for the most part, to the rules of its own language; so that with us, of the vowels, only *â* has a peculiar sound.

In the end of a word of more than one syllable, it is sounded like *ah*-as *pennah*, *Lydiah Hannah*, &c. without regard to case.-but *da* is never sounded *dah* because it is a monosyllable.

All terminations in *es* and plural cases in *os*, as you know, are pronounced^e long-as *homines* (*hominēse*) *dominos* (*dominōse*) or in English *Johnny Voss*. For information see *Adam's Latin Grammar*-before the *Rudiments*² This is all law and gospel in the eyes of the world-but remember I am speaking as it were, in the third person, and should sing quite a different tune, if it were I that made the quire. However one must occasionally hang his harp on the willows, and play on the Jew's harp, in such a strange country as this.³

One of your young ladies wishes to study *Mental Philosophy*-hey? well tell her that she has the very best text book that I know of already in her possession. If she do not believe it, then she should have bespoken a better in another world, and not have expected to find one at "*Little and Wilkins*."⁴ But if she wishes to know how poor

an apology for a Mental Philosophy men have tacked together, synthetically or analytically, in these latter days—how they have squeezed the infinite mind into a compass that would not nonpluss a surveyor of Eastern Lands—making Imagination and Memory to lie still in their respective apartments, like ink-stand and wafers in a lady's^e escritoire—why let her read Locke—or Stewart, or Brown.⁵ The fact is, Mental Philosophy is very like poverty—which, you know, begins at home;⁶ and, indeed, when it goes abroad, it is poverty itself.

Chorus. I should think an abridgment of one of the above authors, or of Abercrombie,⁷ would answer her purpose. It may set her a-thinking.

Probably there are many systems in the market of which I am ignorant. AS for themes—say first “Miscellaneous Thoughts”—set one up to a window to note^a what passes in the street, and make her comments thereon; or let her gaze in the fire, or into a corner where there is a spider's web, and philosophize^a—moralize—theorize, or what not.

What their hands find to putter about, or^a their Minds to think about,—that let them write about.— To say nothing of Advantages or disadvantages—of this, that, or the other. Let them set down their ideas at any given Season—preserving the chain of thought^e as complete as may be^e.

This is the style pedagogical. I am much obliged to you for your peice of^a information. Knowing your dislike to a sentimental letter I remain

Yr affectionate brother.

HDT

Correspondent: See p. 26.

¹ Charles Dexter Cleveland, *First Lessons in Latin*. By “his abridged Grammar” T probably means *Adam's Latin Grammar: With Numerous Additions and Improvements*, an expanded edition of Alexander Adam's grammar book that Cleveland edited.

² At Harvard T used *Adam's Latin Grammar, with Some Improvements*. In this volume, “The Pronunciation of Latin” (pp. 9-10),

which gives rules for the placement of accents and the pronunciation of vowels, immediately precedes "The Rudiments of Latin Grammar." T draws his discussion of the "Roman pronunciation" from these two pages, particularly from the section called "Rules for the Sound of the Vowel," where two of T's examples, "penna" and "homines," appear.

³ See Ps. 137:2-4: "We hanged our harps upon the willows in the midst thereof. For there they that carried us away captive required of us a song; and they that wasted us *required of us mirth, saying, Sing us one of the songs of Zion. How shall we sing the Lord's song in a strange land?*"

⁴ Charles Coffin Little (1799-1869) and John Hubbard Wilkins (1794-1861) joined the Boston bookstore of Carter, Hilliard and Company in 1821 and 1822, respectively. In 1827 the company became Hilliard, Gray and Company. Wilkins left to form his own paper-selling business in 1833; Little remained and became senior partner. He renamed the firm Charles C. Little and Company (later Little and Brown) and made it the country's leading publisher of legal works. Little was the son of David and Sarah Chase Little of Kennebunk, Maine, and in 1829 he married Sarah Ann Hilliard (1808-1848), daughter of William (Little's partner) and Sarah Lovering Hilliard. In 1854 Little married Abby Wheaton (1820-1875), daughter of Henry and Catharine Wheaton of Providence, Rhode Island. Wilkins, son of Samuel and Dorcas Towne Wilkins of Amherst, New Hampshire, graduated from Harvard in 1818. In 1826 he married Thomasine Bond Minot (1778?-1864), daughter of William and Hannah Cranch Bond. Wilkins studied for a time at the Harvard Divinity School, became a Swedenborgian, and wrote a well-regarded textbook on astronomy.

⁵ T owned a copy of John Locke's *Essay concerning Human Understanding*, which he had read at Harvard. Dugald Stewart (1753-1828) and Thomas Brown (1778-1820) were prominent Scottish Realists. T owned copies of Stewart's *Elements of the Philosophy of the Human Mind* and Brown's *Lectures on the Philosophy of the Human Mind*.

⁶ T plays on the proverb "Charity begins at home," which was current by the fourteenth century.

⁷ John Abercrombie (1780-1844) was another of the Scottish Realists. T owned a copy of his *Inquiries concerning the Intellectual Powers, and the Investigation of Truth*.

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Editor's Notes

This letter is addressed "Miss. Helen L. Thoreau, / Roxbury. / Mass." and postmarked "CONCORD MAS. OCT 6".

pronounced] PE; pronoun{MS blotted}

lady's] PE; lady{MS torn}

thought] PE; tho{text obscured by sealing wax}ht

may be] PE; ma{text obscured by sealing wax}e

Author's Alterations

to note] win

philosophize] philosophise

or] preceded by erased that

peice of] interlined with a caret

To Charles Stearns Wheeler

November 28, 1838

Concord Nov. 28th 1838.

Friend Wheeler,

Does it jump with your inclinations and arrangements to read a lecture before our Lyceum on the second or third week of December?¹ Mr. Frost informs me that to such date we are supplied, and no further— So, concluding that you are^a not lacking in bowels of compassion² I have ventured to indite this epistle. We must trouble you to say definitely on which, of in either of the above evenings or on any other, you will do us this favor.

If^e you chance meet any one in the course of the winter, who is desirous to express his thoughts publicly, will you please suggest our town?

From yr. Classmate
Henry D. Thoreau
(one of the Curators)

Correspondent: Charles Stearns Wheeler (1816-1843), son of Charles and Julia Stearns Wheeler of Lincoln, Massachusetts, was a member of the Harvard class of 1837. He became a tutor in Greek at Harvard, published a two-volume edition of *Herodotus, from the*