

Editor's Notes

This letter is addressed "Mrs. L. C. Brown / Plymouth / Mass." and postmarked "CONCORD MAS. SEP 9".

PE supplies the year "1841" on the basis that it is the only year during the publication of the *Dial* in which September 8 fell on a Wednesday.

reserve] PE; resere in MS

least] PE; lea{text obscured by sealing wax}t

those] PE; possibly these in MS

Author's Alterations

eccentricity] excentricity

a longer] *interlined with a caret*

would] *followed by cancelled do*

more] *followed by cancelled thunder*

From Isaiah Thornton Williams

September 24, 1841

Buffalo N.Y. Sept. 24, 1841-

Mr. D. H. Thoreau

My dear Sir,

Your kind offer to receive and answer any communication from me, is not forgotten- I owe myself an apology for so long neglecting to avail myself of so generous an offer. Since I left Concord I have hardly found rest for the sole of my foot.¹ I have followed the star of my destiny till it has, at length, come and stood over this place.² Here I remain engaged in the study of Law- Part of the time I have spent in New-Hampshire part in Ohio & part in New-York-and so precarious was^a my residence in either place that I have scarcely known whither you might direct a letter with any certainty of its reaching me.

When I left Concord I felt a strong desire to continue the conversation I had so fortunately commenced with some of those whom the Public call Trancendentalists. Their sentiments seemed to me to possess a peculiar fitness. Though full of doubt I felt I was fed & refreshed by those interviews. The doctrines I there heard have^a ever

since, been uppermost in my mind—and like balmy sleep over the weary limbs, have they stolen over me quite un-awares. I have not embraced them—but they have embraced me— I am led, their willing captive. Yet I feel I have but yet taken the first step. I would know more of this matter. I would be taken by the hand and led up from this darkness and torpidity where I have so long groveled like an earth-worm^e. I know what it is to be a slave to what I thought a Christian faith—and with what rapture do greet the hand that breaks my chains—& the voice that bids me—live—

Most of the books you recommended to me I was not able to obtain—“Nature”³ I found—and language can^a not express my admiration of it. When gloom like a thick cloud comes over me in that I find an Amulet that dissipates the darkness and kindles anew my highest hopes. Few copies of Mr Emerson’s Essays⁴ have found their way to this place— I have read part of them and am very much delighted with them. Mr Parker’s Sermon⁵ I have also found—and as much as I should have^a shrunk from such sentiments a year ago—half, do I already receive them. I have also obtained “Hero^a Worship^a”⁶—which of course I read with great interest—and as I read I blush for my former bigotry and wonder that I had^a not known it all before wonder what there is in chains that I should have loved them so much— Mr. E’s oration⁷ before the Theological class at Cambridge I very much want. If—you have it in your possession, allow me to beg you to forward it to me & I will return it by mail after perusing it. Also Mr. Alcott’s “Human Culture”^{—8} I will offer no apology for asking this favor—for I know you will not require it.

I find I am not alone here, your principals are working their^a way even in Buffalo—this emporium of wickedness and sensuality. We look to the east for our guiding star for there our sun did rise. Our motto is^a that of the Grecian Hero—“Give but to see—and Ajax asks no more”^{—9}

For myself my attention is much engrossed in my studies— Entering upon them as I do without a Public Education—I feel that nothing but the most undivided attention^a and entire devotion to them will ensure me even an ordinary standing in the profession. There is something false— in such devotion— I already feel its chilling effects I fear I shall fall into the wake of the profession which is in this section proverbially bestial— Law is a noble profession it calls loudly for men of genius and integrity to fill its ranks. I do not aspire to be a great Lawyer—I know I cannot be, but it is the sincere desire of my heart that I may be a true one

You are ready to ask—how I like the West— I must answer—not very well— I love New England so much that the West is comparatively^a odious to me— The part of Ohio that I visited was on dead Level—often did I—strain my eyes to catch a glimpse^a of some distant mountain—that should transport me in imagination to the wild country of my birth, but the eternal level spread itself on & on & I almost felt myself launched forever. Aloud did I exclaim—“My own blue hills—¹⁰ O, Where are they!”— I did not know how much I was indebted to them for the happy hours I’d passed at^a home— I knew I loved them—and my noble river too—along whose banks—I’d roamed half uncertain if in earth or Heaven— I never shall—I never can forget them all—though I drive away the remembrance of them which ever in the unguarded moment^a throngs me laden with ten thousands incidents before forgotten & so talismanic its power—that I wake from the enchantment as from a dream. If I were in New-England again I would never leave her. but—now I am away—I fear forever—I must eat of the Lotus—and forget her.^a Tis true we have a noble Lake—whose pure waters kiss the foot of our city—and whose^a bosom bears the burdens of our commerce—her^a beacon light now looks in upon me through my window as if to watch, lest I should say untruth of that which is^a her nightly charge But hills or mountains we have none.

My sheet is nearly full & I must draw to a close— I fear I have already wearied your patience. Please remember me to those of your friends whose acquaintance I had pleasure to form while in Concord— I engaged to write your brother— Mr Alcott also gave me the the same privilege—which I hope soon to avail myself of. I hope sometime to visit your town again which I remember with so much satisfaction—yet with so much regret—regret that I did not earlier avail myself of the acquaintances, it was my high privilege to make while there^a and that the lucubrations of earlier years did not better fit me to appreciate & enjoy— I cheer myself with fanning the fading embers of a hope that I shall yet retrieve my fault. that such an opportunity will again be extended to me—and that I may once more look upon that man whose name I never speak without reverence—whom of all—I most admire—almost adore—Mr Emerson— I shall wait with impatience to hear from you— Believe me

ever yours—
Isaiah T. Williams.

Correspondent: Isaiah Thornton Williams (1819-1886), son of Isaiah and Martha Tenney Williams, was educated at the Exeter Academy in New Hampshire and studied law in Buffalo in the office of Millard Fillmore. In 1849 he married Ellen E. White (1826-1877), daughter of Ferdinand and Dorothy Gardner White of Boston. After practicing law in Buffalo, Williams moved to New York City in 1854, where he often defended Horace Greeley in libel suits brought against the aggressive editor. He left his law practice in 1867 to become registrar of bankruptcy for New York County.

¹ Gen. 8:9: “But the dove found no rest for the sole of her foot”

² Matt. 2:9: “and, lo, the star, which they saw in the east, went before them, till it came and stood over where the young child was.”

³ Emerson’s first book was published in September 1836. T probably read it the following April.

⁴ Emerson’s first volume of *Essays* was published on March 19, 1841, by James Munroe and Company.

⁵ Theodore Parker, *A Discourse on the Transient and Permanent in Christianity*.

⁶ Thomas Carlyle, *On Heroes, Hero-Worship, and the Heroic in History*. Carlyle sent Lidian Emerson proof sheets for the book in February 1841, and T lists the sheets with other titles in an April 15 entry in a reading list he kept from December 5, 1840, through June 3, 1841.

⁷ Emerson gave his Divinity School Address on July 15, 1838. Munroe published a thousand copies, which were all sold by July 1, 1839.

⁸ Bronson Alcott's *The Doctrine and Discipline of Human Culture* was published in 1836 both as a pamphlet and as an introduction to his *Conversations with Children on the Gospels*; see also p. 142, note 2.

⁹ *The Iliad of Homer*, vol. 1, 17.730: "Give me to see and Ajax asks no more".

¹⁰ Williams may have in mind Felicia Hemans's poem "The Cambrian in America," in which the speaker yearns for the landscape of home. The poem, included in *The Poetical Works of Mrs. Felicia Hemans*, contains the lines "But happier, could the weary-hearted / Look on his own blue hills, and die!" (p. 477).

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Editor's Notes

This letter is addressed "Mr. D. H. Thoreau, / Concord / Mass-", postmarked "BUFFALO N.Y. SEP 25", and endorsed "I. T. Williams". earth-worm] *PE*; earth- / worm *in MS*

Author's Alterations

was] *interlined above cancelled* has been
 have] *interlined with a caret*
 can] *interlined above cancelled* will
 have] *interlined with a caret*
 Hero] hero
 Worship] worship
 had] *interlined above cancelled* did
 their] they
 is] *interlined with a caret*
 attention] *followed by cancelled* will
 comparatively] *interlined with a caret*
 a glimpse] *interlined with a caret*
 at] in
 moment] moments
 her.] *followed by cancelled* forever-

whose] *interlined above cancelled* its
 her] *interlined above cancelled* its
 is] *interlined above cancelled* was
 while there] *interlined with a caret*

To Lucy Jackson Brown

October 5, 1841

Concord, October 5, 1841.

Dear Friend:-

I send you Williams's letter as the last remembrancer to one of those "whose acquaintance he had the pleasure to form while in Concord." It came quite unexpectedly to me, but I was very glad to receive it, though I hardly know whether my utmost sincerity and interest can inspire a sufficient answer to it. I should like to have you send it back by some convenient opportunity.

Pray let me know what you are thinking about any day,- what most nearly concerns you. Last winter, you know, you did more than your share of the talking, and I did not complain for want of an opportunity. Imagine your stove-door out of order, at least, and then while I am fixing it, you will think of enough things to say.

What makes the value of your life at present? what dreams have you? and what realizations? You know there is a high table-land¹ which not even the east wind reaches. Now can't we walk and chat upon its plane still, as if there were no lower latitudes? Surely our two destinies are topics interesting and grand enough for any occasion.

I hope you have many gleams of serenity and health, or, if your body will grant you no positive respite,-that you may, at any rate, enjoy your sickness occasionally, as much as I used to tell of. But here is the bundle going to be done up, so accept a "good-night" from

Henry D. Thoreau.

Correspondent: See p. 77.