

Charles Eliot Norton to Henry James, 11 April 1869, from Liverpool

ALS Houghton, bMS Am 1094 (369)

1 Liverpool. Sunday.

2 April 11, 1869.

3 My dear Harry

4 Your note from Malvern to me was very welcome as you have already heard. We
5 have not ceased to miss you, & whenever we have had, since you left us, any particularly
6 pleasant experience we have wished for you to share it with us. At Queen's Gate Terrace
7 affairs go on in their usual pleasant course. The days pass too swiftly, & we are already
8 looking forward with some regret to our departure from London. Not altogether with
9 regret,—for the gloom of London life becomes darker, seems more general, more
10 unbroken, the more familiar one becomes with the place & its people.

11 I left London on Thursday to go to Manchester for a day or two before coming
12 here to attend the banquet given to Dickens last night. The banquet was a great success.
13 It was held in St. George's Hall, one of the finest halls in the country,—& one which is
14 well suited to display to advantage such an ~~brilliant~~ assemblage of men & women as were
15 gathered in it last night. I have never seen a more brilliant feast,—the decorations of
16 fruits and flowers & flags all culminating in the bright dresses of the maidens & dames
17 who sat around the tables that sparkled with colored glass.

18 Most of the speeches were of a commonplace kind, but Dickens's speech was full
19 of the great qualities of his genius & his heart, and Lord Dufferin spoke like "a gentleman
20 and a scholar." Lord Houghton made two speeches, the first of them pretty good, & the

21 last a mere meandering flow of words, not ideas, inspired by too much champagne.
22 Hepworth Dixon successfully maintained his reputation. He is a man odious in look &
23 manner,—& the more odious because of a horrible resemblance to some of the worst of
24 our own countrymen.

25 It is a delightful experience to be with Dickens,—his simplicity, his sincerity, his
26 sweetness are so great, and his large sympathy & genial acceptance of the world as it
27 comes good & bad together are a capital corrective of one's own fastidiousness &
28 reserve. His perceptions are as keen as those of the merest critic, but his humour turns
29 his fault finding into pleasantness, and what offends his taste never interferes with his
30 kindness. I am constantly struck with the liberality of his judgments, & with the
31 evidence of his wide experience of men.

32 He takes a dark view of the prospects of England. In speaking of the character &
33 tone of society in London he said to me last night,—It is “^These things are[,] the portents
34 of a break up. Society is no longer a community. It has lost its cohesive forces.”

35 ———

36 We go back together to London this afternoon. I hope I shall find there later news
37 from you. Don't let a week pass without writing to some one of us.

38 I trust you are constantly gaining strength. If today is as warm & sunny on the Malvern
39 Hills as it is here you must be rejoicing in the beauty of the spring.

40 Good bye.

41 Affectionately Yours

42 C. E. Norton.

Notes

4 Your note from Malvern to me • Henry James to Charles Eliot Norton, 4 April [1869], from Malvern;
James also wrote Grace Norton on 6 April [1869], from Malvern.

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