

Mary Walsh James to Henry James, 24, 25 July [1869], from Pomfret, Connecticut

ALS Houghton, bMS Am 1093.1 (34)

1 Pomfret

2 July 24th

3 My dearly beloved child

4 I have been cut off from writing for several weeks, finding that the rest had got
5 the start of me; and now although Alice wrote but two days ago I can forbear no
6 longer— Your letter last evening opens the deepest fountains in my soul, and my bosom
7 seems as if it would burst with its burden of love and tenderness— If you were only here
8 for an hour, and we could talk over this subject of expense, I could I know exorcise all
9 these demons of anxiety and conscientiousness that possess you, and leave free as air, to
10 enjoy to the full all that surrounds ^you[^] and drink in health of body & of mind in
11 following out your own safe and innocent attractions— Just here we desire dear Harry to
12 leave you, only exacting from you the promise that you will ^henceforth[^] throw away
13 prudence and think only of your own comfort and pleasure, for our sakes as well as your
14 own— I am sure you may confide in your prudent old mother to take care of that side of
15 the question.— You must have got my letter suggesting your going to Italy for the
16 winter, very soon after writing your last; so you see we are quite of one mind—
17 Italy will be just the place for you; and do not I pray you cramp yourself in any way to
18 hinder your fullest enjoyment of it— You dear reasonable over-conscientious soul!
19 Take the fullest liberty and enjoyment your tastes and inclinations crave, and we ~~are safe~~
20 ~~in promising~~ [^]will[^] promise ^heartily[^] to foot the bill—

21 Alice has doubtless told you all about ~~the~~ Pomfret— Suffice it to say, it is a great
22 success— Added to the comforts of the house, and the natural advantages of the place
23 the Bootts as father says are a “perfect fit” I do not think Willy could possibly in his
24 circumstances have found a more delightful and beneficial entourage— The life we live
25 here ^{under}[] the pines trees, Will in his hammock, Miss B. with her easel; Alice and I
26 with books and work, and Father and M^r Boott occasionally riding their favorite hobbies,
27 philosophy & music, but more frequently meeting on the common ground of literature
28 and manners has something quite Arcadian in it—
29 Our circle is often enlarged by our neighbours Miss Louisa Bangs a charming woman
30 every way, comes to join Lizzy with her easel, and the artistic atmosphere that this work
31 brings about us, suits Will exactly. Lizzy Boott’s work goes on all the while, every
32 morning, and every evening in such a simple unconscious way that one becomes quite
33 fascinated by her at her work, even when one has no right to be interested in the work
34 itself— This is as I said the very thing just now for Will— He takes great interest of
35 course in her work, and is I have no doubt helpful to her— —this common taste becomes
36 a fruitful source of much delightful intercourse between them— Lizzy is such a simple
37 unconscious creature, with such an entire absence of coquetry about her, that there is no
38 danger I think of her exerting any personal fascination over ~~it~~ him. She has so much
39 talent & so much capacity for work, and puts herself so little in it, that it seems something
40 quite celestial— Mr B. is much more of a man than I supposed Added to great personal
41 refinement, he has a great deal of general culture— He he is also a very sincere
42 independent person, capable of large and unbiassed judgments—upon men and morals.
43 He reminds of Tweedy in some things, also of Smith Van Buren, but is vastly superior to

44 either of them both by nature and by grace. Wilk by last accounts had gone off on a
45 rowing trip up the coast with Arthur S.

46 I ought perhaps to have written to Jane Norton after that letter of hers to Father and all
47 their kindness to you— But it is so hard to write such letters— It is said that Sarah
48 Sedgwick has decided to come home in Oct with the Fields— Arthur & Theodora want
49 her very much to stay— I feel very anxious to hear something about the Uncle's will, but
50 as yet no hint has been dropped upon the subject— They all seem to feel that they have
51 met with an incalculable loss— Anny Ashburner is here— She is a cheerful bright sort
52 of girl, and Alice seems to like her— Alice is busy trying to idle, and it is always very
53 hard depressing work, this to her; but I think it will tell in the end. She told you what an
54 enthusiasm there is about your last story— I have taken more pleasure in it than in any
55 thing you have ever written— The last part darling Harry was exquisite— M^r Boott is
56 one of your most ardent admirers— He predicts for you a great future! Bob writes that
57 he has been promoted to a higher place in the office, where he gets more pay, and an
58 enlarged opportunity, of becoming acquainted with Rail-road work and thus making
59 himself valuable to the company— He seems well and happy— No caterpillar yet, and
60 very fine crops—

61 Sunday—July 25th Father has just got back from Cambridge whither he went to pay his
62 rent. He says Wilk got back from his rowing trip. Arthur's wherry was upset, and he
63 recovered his seat in it with some difficulty. They were out in a fog, and their compass
64 being out of order they found themselves among the breakers— After these hair breadth
65 escapes having made land, they wisely resolved to stay there;—they transferred their

66 wherries to the rail road, and came home themselves by the same more reliable
67 conveyance—

68 This is a delicious warm day, (the weather has been rather cool for our out of door life)
69 Lizzie Boott & Will have been all the morn^g under the pines— She as usual with her
70 pencil, and Will in the hammock, with a volume of Browning in his hand— They have
71 been discussing as I hear ~~them~~ their ^voices[_] a wide range of subjects— Art, languages
72 and literature— What an striking instance she is of what a careful and thorough
73 education can accomplish, perhaps I should add under the most favorable
74 circumstances— Of course she never could [_]never[_] have been formed as she is in
75 America— Look at Minny Temple in contrast with her— Minny has all her tastes and
76 capabilities naturally in a higher degree; and look at the difference— Minny writes that
77 she gets up at 6 o'clk every morn^g and takes a lesson in drawing Perhaps she is
78 beginning to work out her own salvation— I hardly dare to say or predict any thing
79 about Will's improvement— There ~~was~~ certainly had been no improvement in him up to
80 our coming here: and for some days after— But he appears to have taken a great start
81 the last two weeks— He is in the hammock or sitting about pretty much all day— He
82 says he gets tired, but he gets rested— He looks fifty per cent better in the face, indeed I
83 never saw him brighter; he is the life of the party You know Father used to say to you,
84 that if you would only fall in love it would be the making of you— Possibly Will's
85 susceptible heart may be coming to the rescue of ~~your~~ his back—

86 Bob has set out on a new road to distinction— He has abandoned the pen and taken up
87 the oar. He has been enrolled as a member of the "Western Boating Club", and is going
88 into training at once, to enable him to take part in the great match next year— He is to

89 give up every leisure moment; all society; all the luxuries of the table for the coming
90 year to this end—so great is his enthusiasm that there is no telling but that we may have
91 the honor of numbering among us the Champion oarsman of the West!

92 I got a letter from Aunt Kate from Edingburgh— It is delightful to see her enjoying
93 herself so much— I hope for her sake and yours too you may meet— You will no doubt
94 next winter—

95 Now about yourself darling Harry— How is your sleep? how is your appetite? how is
96 your digestion? Your legs are all right, blessings upon them! They will be your salvation
97 I have not a doubt. This entire rest of your brain and nervous system, must after a time
98 inevitably work its effect, and the time spent in the study of art in Italy next winter will
99 happily and profitably bridge over the interval. Give my kindest remembrances to each
100 of the Norton household, and say just the proper thing for me— You had better not
101 mention Arthurs faux pas, perhaps; for Wilky says they were the result of great want of
102 judgment and inexperienced ~~and~~ [^]with too much[^] self reliance—

103 Father has told you all about his book and the reason why its publication is delayed—
104 Father got the start of me again in writing—so I have delayed this until the next
105 steamer—

106 Adieu my precious one a thousand blessings on your head—

107 Your loving Mother

Notes

- 6 your letter last evening • Henry James to Mary Walsh James, from Glion, [27], 28, 30 June [1869]
- 43 Tweedy • Edmund Tweedy (c. 1812-1901), husband of Mary Temple Tweedy
- 43 Smith Van Buren • Son of former U. S. president Martin Van Buren and husband of Henry James, Sr.'s, sister, Ellen King James Van Buren (1823-1849)
- 45 Arthur • Arthur George Sedgwick (1844-1915), brother of Susan Sedgwick Norton, Sara Sedgwick, and Theodora Sedgwick, nephew of Grace and Anne Ashburner, and first cousin of Annie Ashburner
- 54 your last story • Probably “A Light Man,” *Galaxy* July 1869: 49-68, although the first of three installments of “Gabrielle de Bergerac” appeared in the July 1869 *Atlantic Monthly* (55-71; the remainder in the August and September 1869 issues: 231-41, 352-61)
- 103 his book • *The Secret of Swedenborg: being an Elucidation of His Doctrine of the Divine National Humanity* (Boston: Ticknor and Fields, 1869)

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