

Henry James, Sr., to Henry James, 21 December [1869], from Cambridge

ALS Houghton, bMS Am 1092.9 (4203)

1 Cambridge Dec 21

2 My darling Harry:

3 You could not have received my letter, I suppose, written at the
4 same time with those of mother & Willy, whose receipt you acknowledge. I wrote you a
5 long letter then, containing nothing of much worth but the expression of my quickened
6 and indeed agonized affection; but I could wish of course that even that had not been
7 written in vain. I should write to you oftener than I do, except that I know you are sure to
8 get more readable letters from the rest of the family, and that I am generally so tired of
9 pen and ink when I sit down to write a letter that it costs me a considerable effort to take
10 them up again. But there is no day passes that I don't think much to your address, and
11 that I don't felicitate myself upon having such a boy. My paternal feeling grows so much
12 in fact, as I grow older, becomes so much more intense and absorbing that I am
13 compelled in self-defense to keep it under, lest its pains (so inevitable in the present
14 disjointed social state) should come to exceed its pleasures. There is [^]almost[_^] no
15 enjoyment, in the present condition of society, which will bear cultivating, it is so apt to
16 run over into pain; and this because our enjoyments are so prevalently subjective rather
17 than objective, moral rather than aesthetic. Your long sickness and Alice's, and now
18 Willy's, have been an immense discipline for me, in gradually teaching me to
19 universalize my sympathies. It was dreadful to see those you love so tenderly exposed to
20 so much wearing suffering, and I fought against the conviction that it was inevitable. But

21 when I gained a truer perception of the case, and saw that it was a zeal chiefly on behalf
22 of my own children that animated my rebellion, and that I should perhaps scarcely suffer
23 at all, if other people's children alone were in question, and mine were left to enjoy their
24 wonted health & peace, I grew ashamed of myself, and consented to ask for the
25 amelioration of ~~your~~ [^]their[^] lot only as a part of the common lot. This is what we
26 want, and this alone, for God's eternal sabbath in our nature, the reconciliation of the
27 individual and the universal interest in humanity. In a word what we need is the
28 socialization of the race, whereby God's justice shall be established between man and
29 man, giving all alike the sure satisfaction of their material necessities, and so ~~ever~~
30 exempting every man from the degrading bondage of his animal nature, in giving him a
31 sense of spiritual in living unity with his kind.

32 But I am writing a sermon as usual. You see from this what you are spared
33 ordinarily in not hearing from me oftener.

34 What an immense comfort it is to us to think of your being so near aunt
35 Kate as you have of late—Aunt Kate to whom all the angels lend their softest down,
36 wherever there is a ^danger to be averted,[^] a woe to be shared, or a pain to be assuaged.
37 I envy you both the delight you must have in each other when you meet. Give my love
38 and all our loves to her & her party. How curious the concatenation of Cousin Helen &
39 Rome! especially of Henry W. & Rome. What a fatherly contempt and disdain Henry
40 must entertain for antiquity. If any thing can attest to the spiritual sense more vividly than
41 another our existing social chaos, it is the kind of American life you see floated over the
42 ocean to that hoary Roman world.

43 We are all very much as usual, save that Alice is suffering from the effect this
44 morning of a very bad headache yesterday, but will be better I hope in a little while. (You

45 needn't allude to this news in answering). She has been gaining much strength of late.
46 She goes to Dr Butler or rather Lorenzo, 3 times a week, & comes home always
47 strengthened. She attends all the "bees", and does so much more than she used to do in
48 the line of visiting, that a stranger
49 But is time to shut my ports. I have a letter to write to Bob for this mail. I have a good
50 mind to write to Jane Norton very often, but I never know if it will be acceptable, because
51 she will feel herself bound to answer it; but I believe I will try, this or next week.
52 Ever my darling boy. Your loving daddy,

Notes

38-39 Cousin Helen ... Henry W. • Helen Rodgers Wyckoff Perkins (1807-1887) and her brother, Henry
Wyckoff (1815-1890), first cousins of Mary Walsh James

46 Dr Butler ... Lorenzo • David P. Butler was a Boston physician and physical therapist (his practice at
53 Temple Place included a gymnasium) who treated William, Henry, and Alice James. Presumably Dr.
Lorenzo was an associate or competitor.

48 that a stranger • one or more pages of manuscript that would have followed this phrase are missing

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