

Arthur George Sedgwick to Henry James, 30 January 1870, from Cambridge

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1 Cambridge, January 30

2 1870

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6 My dear Harry

7 I received your very welcome letter written from Florence, two or three days  
8 since, and was glad to hear that you were enjoying your travels so much. When do you  
9 think of coming back? We hear rumors of an early return, but I contradict them on  
10 general principles.—Many thanks for your account of the condition of my sisters and the  
11 Nortons; it was as full and comprehensive as possible; just what I wanted to know, in  
12 fact.

13 What is there to write you about, in return for your entertaining letter? Perhaps  
14 you will be most pleased to hear of people; certainly it is easier to write about them than  
15 about anything else, scenery as a topic of correspondence being somewhat uninteresting,  
16 and everything else being furnished weekly by that admirable journal to which you so  
17 flatteringly allude—the Nation. Therefore I will endeavor to give you some account of  
18 your friends.

19 Wendell Holmes has within a week been appointed Instructor to the University—  
20 the instruction to be given to the Juniors in Constitutional Law; this appointment he

21 owes, as they say in Texas, to “his own red right arm”, and although it is very unlikely to  
22 bring him any increase of business, still extends his fame as a legal student, and must  
23 sooner or later, redound to his advantage. He is, I suppose you know, at work on the  
24 Commentaries of Kent, whom you may recollect as occupying a prominent place among  
25 the text writers of the Law School of Harvard College. He knows more law than anyone  
26 in Boston of our time, and works harder at it than anyone.

27         Gray pursues the even tenor of his way as of old, breathing in with his daily  
28 oxygen all kinds of learning; he is so precisely the same as when you were here, that  
29 there would be absolutely nothing to say about him, were it not for the important fact that  
30 he too is Lecturer on Law. The venerable Washburn having been granted leave of  
31 absence during the next Law School term, Gray lectures during his absence.

32         Howells is also connected with the University; he is what they call a “University  
33 Lecturer” on Italian Literature. By “University Lecturer” is meant a sort of unattached  
34 teacher, who gives lectures to all comers—men, women and children—who will pay the  
35 price of admission, and who therefore does not as yet obtain very large classes, but  
36 probably will in time, as the University Lecture system becomes better known. It is a  
37 system introduced by Eliot and intended probably to test the question of how far a real  
38 University is wanted here. For next year there will be some fifteen or twenty of these  
39 courses, and they will all be delivered by strong men—or noted men—as Agassiz—John  
40 Fiske, Howells, Chauncey Wright, Emerson, &c. &c.

41         Did you ever hear of, or know Lenox of New York—a Scotchman, I believe,  
42 originally, who emigrated and made himself an American, and after that made himself  
43 rich, and after that collected a very valuable library, together with a large number of

44 pictures (one of two Turners among them) and engravings? After he had done all this, he  
45 shut his possessions up, so the story goes, and refused to allow the public to see them.  
46 Agassiz once wanted to consult a valuable book in Lenox' possession, and after a great  
47 deal of trouble, was finally admitted to the house, taken down into the kitchen, and there  
48 the book was brought to him, and a servant remained in charge while he examined it.  
49 This is a calumnious world, however, and Lenox has obtained a complete triumph over  
50 all his enemies and detractors, by giving his entire collection to the public, together with  
51 a large lot on the Park for an Library building, and the sum of three hundred thousand  
52 dollars to build it! Think of this, my dear Harry, and acknowledge that the ancient  
53 Grecian lives again in the modern Naturalized American.

54 I am glad you like the Nation; I have not given up all connection with it, though I  
55 do not intend to write every week, as I have been doing during the past year. It still  
56 remains my "organ".

57 This morning I went to your house, and found Mr James and your brother at  
58 home. Willy always looks pretty well, and whenever I see him is in very fair spirits, and  
59 he certainly goes about more than he did. But I don't pretend to understand his case;  
60 perhaps your own sickness may give you the clue to his symptoms. Mr James struck me  
61 as looking better than for a long time past.

62 I do not attempt to make this letter a long one, because there is really so little to  
63 talk about that it is as well to break off early. You must let me hear from you again,  
64 when you have an opportunity of writing—why don't you carry out your original plan of  
65 writing for the Nation? I know they would be only too glad to publish. Farewell  
66 Ever faithfully yours Arthur G. Sedgwick

## Notes

4 S • embossed Sedgwick monogram, letterhead stationery

10 my sisters • Sara Sedgwick and Susan Sedgwick Norton

23-24 He is, I suppose you know, at work on the Commentaries of Kent • Oliver Wendell Holmes, Jr., edited the twelfth edition of *Commentaries on American Law* (Boston: Little Brown, 1873) by Chancellor of New York Courts James Kent (1763-1847)

27 Gray • John Chipman Gray

30 Washburn • Emory Washburn (1880-1877), Massachusetts politician (Governor of Massachusetts in 1854), law teacher and writer, and lecturer and professor of law at Harvard 1855-1876; his house at 28 Quincy Street was two doors up the street from the Jameses

32 Howells • William Dean Howells

39 Agassiz • Louis Agassiz (1807-1873), zoologist and geologist who taught at Harvard; his Cambridge home was on the same street as the Jameses'

39-40 John Fiske • positivist historian and popularizer of evolutionary science (1842-1901), lectured at Harvard in 1869-1870 on positive philosophy, served as assistant librarian at Harvard, 1872-1879, and subsequently became a successful lecturer and author

40 Chauncey Wright • philosopher and mathematician (1830-1875), resided in Cambridge; William James, Wendell Holmes, and C. S. Peirce often thought of him as their early intellectual mentor

41 Lenox of New York • New York-born James Lenox (1800-1880), son of Scotch immigrant and successful New York real estate investor, Robert Lenox (1783-1839); James Lenox collected valuable books, including the first Gutenberg Bible sent to the United States, keeping them in his residence at 53 Fifth Avenue; he left his collection to the Lenox Library, which was built, on land donated by Lenox, by Richard Morris Hunt at Fifth Avenue between Seventieth and Seventy-first streets

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