

Henry James, Sr., to Henry James, 14 January [1873], from Cambridge

ALS Houghton, bMS Am 1092.9 (4197)

1 Cambridge Jany 14

2 My darling Harry:

3 We had a sitting last evening, and the evening before in the Library, at which
4 were present Mother Alice & Willy to whom I read the proof of your Madonna of the
5 Future which I had from Howells: and which is to appear in the March Atlantic. We were
6 all charmed with the story. A great many eulogiums were passed upon it as I proceeded
7 and when I finished both evenings, (for its length was 25 pages) Willy pronounced it very
8 distingué, Mother charming, Alice exquisite. I was very much struck with it as a whole,
9 and admired it greatly also in parts. But I have a story to tell. Mr Howells couldn't agree
10 to give 25 pages of one number of the magazine to it; that was positive. And then besides
11 he had [[^]]a[[^]] decided shrinking from one episode—that in which Theobald tells of his
12 love for, and his visit from the Titian-ic beauty, and his subsequent disgust of her
13 worthlessness—as being risky for the magazine; and then moreover he objected to the
14 interview at the end between the writer and the old English neighbor, as rubbing into the
15 reader what was sufficiently evident with out it. On [^]both[[^]] the first and second points,
16 we all thought that while Howells in general is too timid, there was good ground for his
17 timidity in the present case. Both Mother & Alice shrank from both the episodes as not
18 helping the understanding of the story along, and as being scary rather in themselves.
19 Willy thought the second quite unnecessary & superfluous, and thought the first if it had
20 not been so much detailed but had been condensed into half a column, would perhaps do.

21 But I thought they were both utterly uncalled for by the actual necessities of the tale,
22 while they would both alike confer upon a disagreeable musky odour strikingly at war
23 with its unworldly beauty. I went to Howells accordingly this morning & told him that if
24 he would consent to publish the whole tale in one piece, I would take upon me the
25 responsibility of striking out the two episodes. He agreed, and he has made the
26 connection of the parts perfect, so that no one would ever dream of anything stricken out.
27 He promises me also to save the excluded pieces and I will send them to you or keep
28 them for you so that you may publish them if you like, in your volume—which Howells
29 says ought to be published forthwith. I ought to say also that Howells admires the story
30 very much, thinks it very beautiful, and only objects to these episodes as being too much
31 fashioned upon French literature. He thought also that the first one was very well done
32 except for the details.

33 We were talking about your pecuniary desires. He bid me say to you that he
34 would be glad to publish either a serial from you, or an article every month, either a story
35 or on any literary or asthetic topic, such as you get occasionally into the Nation: (I send
36 you by the way last week's nation containing your letter about the ^French[^] theatres)
37 and he thinks the Atlantic would be a better place for you than the Nation, as your name
38 would be published ^along with the articles,[^] you would have four times the number of
39 readers, and readers moreover whose natures are not belittled by the proverbial
40 niggardliness of the Nation itself. He said he would like nothing better than an article of 6
41 or seven pages from you every month, of whatever sort; and he was clear that you ought
42 to publish a volume under the title of Romances forthwith. He was very friendly, and I
43 told him I would communicate with you at once. He thought—in answer to a question of
44 mine, that the Galaxy would pay well for literary matter for you. I can help you if you are

45 disposed to publish a selection of your tales. I think it would be a good thing for you to
46 do, and Willy also is clear about it. You have a large number of admirers, that is evident;
47 and I suspect the volume might be remunerative.

48 We are all as usual. Alice's head continues to bother her. She is obliged to give up
49 reading & all sorts of occupation of a sedentary character as completely exhaustive. But
50 her general health does not go back at all: She eats well, sleeps well, and behaves with
51 the greatest patience. (It just occurs to me that you may not have heard of this feebleness
52 of her nervous system before. If so deal tenderly with the information in reply). But I cant
53 but hope that, as her general condition is so very good and this disqualification is so
54 exceptional, that something will be found to remedy it ere long.

55 Willy is going on with his teaching. The 11 O clock bell has just tolled and he is
56 on his platform expounding the mysteries of Physiology. He uses himself up now & then
57 visiting & all the rest of, such as debating about Middlemarch & other transient topics,
58 but on the whole he gets on very well. He often talks of you. We all do that of course, but
59 he very often initiates the talk. I need n't say that he always talks of you in the most
60 tenderly affectionate & appreciative way. Yes we are all your tender lovers darling Harry,
61 & none more so than your devoted daddy. H. J.

62

63 John Gray is engaged to Nina Mason—an engagement that excites much wonder,
64 as she is very worldly, it is supposed, and John unworldly.

65 I clip an interesting item from last nights Transcript.

Envelope: Mr. Henry James, j[r] | Spada, Flamini & Co. | Bankers. | Rome | Italy.

Postmarks: *NEW YORK* | JAN 15 | PAID ALL; ROMA | 31 | GEN | 73 | 9M

Notes

4-5 your Madonna of the Future • “The Madonna of the Future,” *Atlantic Monthly* March 1873: 276-97

36 your letter about the French theatres • “The Parisian Stage,” *Nation* 9 January 1873: 23-24.

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