

Charles Eliot Norton to Henry James, 19 January 1873, from London

ALS Houghton, bMS Am 1094 (376)

1 33 Cleveland Square. W.

2 January 19, 1873.

3 My dear Harry

4 Your letter brought Italy to London for an hour two or three weeks
5 ago, and I was grateful to you for such a boon. I cannot give you an equal pleasure. You
6 would hardly thank me could I transfer the spirit of London, even for an hour, to Rome. I
7 do not like London better the longer I stay in it; it is the gloomiest & least social of
8 cities; but it impressed me more & more, and I adapt myself to it without reluctance. It is
9 the centre of more real activities than any other place; more is transacted here; the play
10 of life is fuller, passion & character have freer scope. The single city includes many
11 provinces; & one may run through the gamut of existence in a day from the narrowest
12 provincialism to the most perfect cosmopolitanism. Here Naples walks side by side with
13 Dresden; & Bombay & Chicago pass on the sidewalk. Everything is here that the world
14 affords. I doubt not that one could find a Pyramid or a Pompeii.

15 But if I tell you of myself I have nothing new to say. My days pass with as quiet a
16 succession as if we were still at St. Germain. The few varieties that interrupt them are of
17 a tranquil sort. Yet perhaps I do them [^]days[^] wrong, for they contain some great
18 pleasures; chief among which I must set my not infrequent walks & talks with Carlyle.
19 Each time I see him he seems better than before, more full of all sweet tenderness & all
20 manly strength. I continually get a stronger impression of the depth of his heart. With his

21 mere intellect, his imagination, his humour, his originality of expression, his fervid
22 exaggerations, we are familiar enough; but they all take on new aspects & proportions in
23 the light of the less known tenderness of his sensibility, the quickness of his personal
24 sympathies, and the sweet modesty of his inner nature. I shall carry home few better
25 possessions for myself than my affectionate memories of him.

26 I wish you were here to see with me the Exhibition of pictures by the Old
27 Masters at the Royal Academy. It is better than Bethnal Green, for it contains some
28 supremely fine pictures. The Venetians as usual leave all the rest behind;—Titian &
29 Tintoret are here in great force; then comes Velasquez in two vigorous portraits painted
30 as if the very genius of Spain were mixed in his colours, so that history & character are as
31 much illustrated in his work as art; Rembrandt follows him in the best portrait of his I
32 have ever seen; Holbein comes next, not at his best, but incomparably good in his way;
33 and Vandyk, Sir Joshua & Gainsborough cover only too much space on the walls; one
34 could spare half their work, & lose nothing. Going back to Italy there is a most precious,
35 & most interesting picture by Sandro Botticelli, one of his very greatest though not one of
36 his most characteristically charming pictures; there is a striking piece of Signorelli's,—
37 and many more beside that are worthy of the time & the place from which they come.—
38 My heart turns Italy ward, but our eyes look homeward, & soon we shall begin to count
39 by weeks the rest of our stay abroad. I shall be very glad when we have been a month at
40 home. The winter here is surprisingly mild & healthy; and, in spite of ^their[^] shortness
41 & darkness & dampness we succeed in keeping the days cheerful. Mackay is now staying
42 with us; as aimiable, animated & socially active as ever. He wants to see you in Holland,
43 & were he not dining out this eveg. he would send a message to you of kind
44 remembrance & regard.

45 We were all sorry to hear from your letter to Grace that came last night, that you
46 were suffering from a cold. I hope you are well again. Pray give kindest regards from us
47 all to the Tweedys. We are very glad to hear of his well-doing, and I trust your next letter
48 may bring word of his complete recovery.

49 Good night, my dear Harry. Write soon again.

50 Ever affectionately Yours

51 C. E. Norton.

Notes

41 Mackay • Baron Donald Mackay

45 your letter to Grace that came last night • Henry James to Grace Norton, 15 January 1873

© This is copyrighted material; reproduction for commercial purposes is not permitted by law except with permission of the copyright owners

To cite this letter, according to MLA style guidelines:

Norton, Charles Eliot. Letter to Henry James. 19 January 1873. James Family Papers. Houghton Library.

Harvard University. Cambridge, Mass. Dear Henry James.org Ed. Pierre A. Walker et al. 2005.

Salem State College. *[insert your date of access here]* <http://www.dearhenryjames.org>.