

Mary Walsh James to Henry James, 21 January [1873], from Cambridge

ALS Houghton, bMS Am 1093.1 (42)

1 Cambridge

2 Jan 21st

3 My darling Harry

4 We were delighted to get your second letter from Rome as it relieved all the
5 anxieties of about M^r Tweedy, which your account of his illness, had given rise to. He is I
6 should judge a bad subject for fevers, and the fact of his being ill in Rome where they so
7 often prove fatal, especially to foreigners must have been to Aunt Mary very alarming. I
8 trust his restoration is being fast accomplished by a change of air, which I should think all
9 important for him— I shall try to write to Aunt Mary by this mail—

10 You I rejoice to hear are basking in the sunshine, both within doors, and without. I
11 sincerely rejoice to hear of your little sunny room high up, and hope you will not think of
12 changing it unless for one equally sunny— I mean I hope you will not exchange an inch of
13 sunshine for ever so many francs. You seemed by your letter to be steeped for the time in a
14 Cambridge ^social[^] atmosphere— You will have to be civil at first, but by degrees you
15 may be able to evade their civilities— M^{rs} Wister is too conscious of her own charms to be
16 very dangerous I am told, but beware.

17 Perhaps at M^{rs} Von Hoffman's house you may meet with some Italians society— I should
18 think they would try and bring in that element a little—

19 I am sitting writing in Alice's room— Will comes in from his lesson, and throws himself
20 in the big green chair in the warm broad sunshine— I say, what shall I say to Harry?— He

21 says, say I hoped to have written him long ago; but now I cannot say when I will be able to.
22 I think he finds his lessons all that he can do. The intellectual part is easy enough, but the
23 whole thing taxes his weak nerves considerably— With habit & experience this I hope will
24 abate— He complains of the louthish character of the young men generally, so few show
25 intelligence or interest, still there are a few— This is the usual experience of college
26 professors— I remember M^r Gurnee once saying, tell William he must be sure to expect
27 nothing from the young men—

28 Alice goes this evening to dine with Ida Higginson, to meet Nina Lowell—and Fanny
29 Morse! She of course deplores afresh the stupidity and want of imagination of the
30 Bostonians, whose highest idea of doing a pleasant thing for you is to ask you to meet some
31 one you see every day— I spoke of Alice's head in my last letter— This is why she does
32 not write to you just now. She is perfectly well in all other respects, enjoys seeing people,
33 and avails herself of every opportunity for going about— The Sedgwicks are a great God
34 send to her, and Sara her chosen companion— She is certainly very lovely— She is not at
35 all strong, Susan's loss weighs even more heavily upon her; I think when they all come
36 home, and she sees the children, and it is all over, she will feel better.

37 Father went in town yesterday to see John Gray and consult him about some ~~law~~ little law
38 point— He said he looked more sombre than ever since his engagement, but remarked “I
39 think it was John Ropes who took the life out of him, he was pirouetting &c”— I trust John
40 G. indulges in some internal pirouettes, known only to Miss M. Our sympathies are deeply
41 enlisted for poor dear Wilk just now. I told you of the depressed & hopeless state he was in
42 about his work when he was here— This is a crisis in Wilky's life when he is brought face
43 to face for the first time ~~not~~ only with the fact that he has got to stand on his feet, and

44 provide for himself, and that too under the deepest sense of his own infirmities and
45 temptations— But he will come out all right— He writes to Bob “I am ready for the issue,
46 come what may, and shall draw all I can of will and strength from your example which has
47 always been before me. I know the critical moment has come to me, when my action and
48 will alone—guided by what is true and just are to be the only sources of my advancement.
49 Every thing may go from me, influence, friends, advancement, my engagement even may
50 perish, before I shall surrender the hold I have upon my manhood” “I shall not complain if
51 I am obliged to stick here the whole year”— Since then Bob writes Atkins has two places
52 in view for Wilky. One at Watertown a small country town, on the line where he would
53 have hard work, no society, same salary, but responsibility, independence, and a great
54 opportunity to make himself valuable; and a clerkship in Atkins office in Milwaukee, same
55 salary, comparative independence and a better chance to learn R. R work than where he
56 now is— I urged him to take the Watertown place, and I think he would have done so, if it
57 had not been for Carrie; M^r Carye would be very loth to have her go, and it is very natural it
58 should be so. Seeing how very hard it would be for Wilkie to exile himself, doubly hard
59 without the countenance and encouragement of Carrie, I advised him to remain in
60 Milwaukee and abide patiently and industriously what time may bring forth. I feel for the
61 dear fellow in every pore of my skin. No doubt he will pull through all right, I only pray
62 that Carrie will be strong and faithful to the great responsibility that rests upon her” These
63 extracts will give you a better idea of the situation than any thing I can say, and need no
64 comment. I am sure you will rejoice with us, in seeing ~~these dear boys~~ [^]dear Wilky[^]
65 rising so manfully above this trying circumstances, and rather bent on doing so, and seeing
66 Bob strengthened as he has been by suffering and supported by Divine Love, thus lovingly

Notes

- 4 your second letter from Rome • Henry James to Mary Walsh James, 29 December [1872]
- 7 Aunt Mary • Mary Temple Tweedy
- 15 M^{ES} Wister • Sarah Butler Wister (1835-1908), daughter of actress Fanny Kemble and mother of novelist Owen Wister; she and Henry James became lifelong friends
- 17 M^{ES} Von Hoffman's house • Lydia (Lily) Gray Ward von Hoffmann, daughter of Henry James, Sr.'s, friends, Anna Hazard Barker Ward and Samuel Gray Ward (1817-1907); she and her husband, Richard von Hoffmann, were residing at Villa Mattei, on Rome's Caelian hill
- 26 M^E Gurnee • Ephraim Whitman Gurney (1829-1886), professor of history at Harvard and from 1870 to 1875 dean of faculty
- 28 Ida Higginson • Ida Agassiz Higginson (1837-1935), daughter of Harvard zoology and geology professor Louis Agassiz and wife of Henry Lee Higginson
- 28 Nina Lowell • A friend of Alice James
- 34 Sara • Sara Sedgwick
- 35 Susan • Susan Sedgwick Norton
- 39 John Ropes • John Codman Ropes (1836-1899), law partner of John Chipman Gray
- 40 Miss M. • Nina Mason, John Chipman Gray's fiancée

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