

Mary Walsh James to Henry James, 8 December 1873, from Cambridge

ALS Houghton, bMS Am 1093.1 (52)

1 Cambridge

2 Dec 8th 1873

3

4 My darling Harry

5 Yesterday your letter of the 16th Nov came in, and right glad were to get news of
6 you both, after so long an interval—Will's letter of the 9th being the last. Our hearts are
7 made glad and thankful by the good accounts you give of him. I wish you would report
8 better things of yourself— That liver trouble is just what I have feared, and makes me
9 feel more strongly than ever that you ought to seek a less relaxing climate than that of
10 Rome. You say you shrink from the cold in Florence, and are longing to be away to a
11 milder climate—but Florence cold is proverbially disagreeable and a drier more genial
12 cold might act much more favorable upon you in your present condition. I got a letter
13 from Aunt Mary also yesterday, of the same date with yours, saying that M^r Tweedy
14 finds himself so much better in Dresden, is enjoying so much the ~~more~~ tonic cold
15 weather, that she fears he will insist on staying there all winter— Aunt Mary is evidently
16 not enjoying it herself, and will I fear keep up a constant worry until she gets him away—
17 Alice wrote you a week ago, and is very much afraid that a previous letter, which you
18 have not acknowledged has gone astray— Our last letters have all been full of our
19 strange experience of Wilky's visit with Carrie, and our disappointment— There is one
20 great consolation in it, that he seems to have no shadow of a misgiving himself, about his

21 having drawn a prize—and let us hope that it may turn out that we have made the mistake
22 not he—

23 Our news from Bob's little household, and the pictures he draws of Mary & the boy have
24 something more of heaven than earth in them. I wish you could read some of the daily
25 bulletins he has sent us, you would feel that he is the most enviable of men— The boy's
26 name is not yet announced— Mary has the naming, and her conjugal sentiment it would
27 seem is not strong enough to make her understand Bob's strong desire in the matter [^](for
28 I presume he leaves her perfectly free)[_^] or she would decide at once— The little fellow
29 from all accounts gives promise in strength & beauty of doing credit to his name
30 whatever it may be. I have just been interrupted by being called to receive M^{rs} D^r & M^{rs}
31 Wendell Holmes!. The latter I have never seen ~~before~~ since her marriage— She looks
32 well in health & says Wendell is remarkably well, quite made over by his recreation at
33 Milton last summer. M^{rs} D^r spoke with the greatest interest and affection of you both,
34 and made me promise to give her love and say how much she misses you. Frank
35 Washburn is lying very low with typhoid fever— Yesterday he was pronounced rather
36 better, but not out of danger—his wife is on the eve of her confinement. Did I tell you
37 that William has been speculating [_^]with[_^], and mismanaging the family [^]property[_^] in
38 such a way that they are reduced almost to a pittance—all but the Grinnell portion which
39 Charles seeing how things were going withdrew a year ago— William has sunk all his
40 wife's property and they are all living together in a little house in West Cedar Street, and
41 it is doubtful if they will be able to live there— I this moment remember Will's request
42 about D^r Froeund's address; it has entirely escaped me until this moment. I will send it
43 by the next letter. M^r Boott came in yesterday just after your letter, and was thrown into

44 one of his uncomfortable moods, by hearing that nothing had been received relative to
45 Will's impressions of D^r Grynsyn[Λ]nowski[Λ]— It is evidently a thing he has deeply at
46 heart So Will must be sure to lay himself out upon it.

47 The late fearful tragedy of the Ville-du-Havre, has shrouded us all in gloom— The only
48 sufferers we personally knew were the Hunter family— Kate the oldest girl had recently
49 married a son of D^r Dunn, who it is said is a very strong good man, and will be a great
50 help and comfort to the surviving sisters, who were the youngest. A sea voyage seems
51 every year to become more perilous— If vessels are to run each other down of a bright
52 star light night, the ocean will certainly have new terrors for us—

53 Father received from Perry your notice of Howell's Poems, saying that he had already
54 another in the press— At Howells suggestion (who happened to come in the same day)
55 Father sent it to the Independent. He said he thought they would be glad to have it with
56 your name, that they paid well, and that it would be a good vehicle for some of your
57 things. Father is waiting their answer, and will send the notes of travel, returned by
58 Scribner to Lippincott he thinks— The N. A. sends \$25 for Meta Holderness— The
59 Albano paper will be paid for in a few days— We have nothing of late from the Nation,
60 but some of your returns will soon be flowing in—meanwhile give yourself no concern,
61 your credit ~~is~~ still is good, and so is ours.

62 Father forwarded you a letter today from Howells, and M^r Norton met me yesterday and
63 said he was writing to you—

64 Shady-Hill has been renewed & embellished by the treasures of Art & antiquity that
65 Charles has brought home—

66 The are chiefly disposed [^]of[^] in the Library, which is open to the public every
67 Saturday from 12 to 2 A. M! Charles also receives a select circle of artistic friends every
68 Wed. Eveng who enjoy the additional pleasure of hearing him talk about them— So you
69 see he understands and plays his role very well— The family seem very happy now that
70 they are settled down— The old lady looks as well and seems are bright as before she
71 went away—

72 Charles expresses the opinion that “America has no great men and ^therefore[^] has never
73 justified her existence”— Europe & England especially to the depreciation of America,
74 are his frequent theme, I understand, for we see nothing of him— Father called on him
75 of course when he first arrived, and also after they were settled in their house—but he did
76 not see him excusing himself because he was arranging his books— Father had taken a
77 carriage to go up there, and it did not seem very friendly, not even civil— We had
78 previously asked him to dinner, which he declined— I fancy he feels a very strong
79 antagonism to Father’s views. Tell Will that old M^{rs} Norton said to Alice, the other
80 day—with quite a sympathetic but serious look, “I hope your brother’s are getting on
81 harmoniously ² in Italy?” Alice of course quite astonished replied, “what do you mean
82 M^{rs} Norton?; oh! you know your brother William does not like Europe, and especially
83 Italy, and Harry is so captivated with every thing abroad”— You may imagine Alice’s
84 consternation and the warmth of her assurances that her brothers never quarrelled and
85 that no mere differences of taste ^even if they had any, which she disdained[^], could
86 possibly produce a want of harmony between them Will will remember his discussion
87 with Grace at the Ashburners as the foundation of the old lady’s very settled opinion on
88 this subject—how literal and unimaginative they all are— A letter came to Wilky from

89 D^f Wilkinson one of his most charming and characteristic effusions, in acknowledgement
90 of M^f Carry's card of invitation to the marriage reception— It seems it arrived at the
91 house, on the very day and hour for which they were invited— The D^f makes much of
92 this— But there also came a letter from M^{ts} W. the flattest and also[and] most
93 characteristic thing you ever read— After going over as usual the old story of how and
94 where all her children are settled, she closes with sending to Carrie “for her photographic
95 Album” her own photograph! Can you imagine egotism to go farther. I think the D^f
96 could not have been cognizant of the performance, at least I trust not—
97 Prof. Agassiz is seriously ill. He was attacked a day or two ago with a paralysis of the
98 larynx— D^f Sicard arrived this morn^g from New York, and it is said will remain with
99 him. His condition is thought very critical— He has been overworking very much of
100 late. Sara Sedgwick said last Even^g that Fanny Holmes had told her yesterday that
101 Wendell's Book would be out to-day—and that she talked with great interest about it, and
102 of all the labor it cost them, and what a relief it was to them to have it off their hands, as
103 if it were a common work. This sounds delightful.
104 Carrie wrote a proper and graceful letter to us, when she got home, which was quite
105 soothing—
106 I am very glad Will wrote Wilky, and you must do so too—he never seemed to me to
107 value so much his family ties, as he has of late—
108 We shall now look daily for a letter from Will for it is time—

109 Blessings upon you both my darling boys

110 Your loving Mother

111 Aunt Kate went back to N. Y. last week— Cousin Helen has been laid up for more than
112 a month with a badly sprained ankle

Notes

- 5 your letter of the 16th Nov • Henry James to his parents, 16, [17] November [1873]
- 6 Will's letter of the 9th • William James to the James family, 9 November 1873 (see *The Correspondence of William James* 4: 453-54)
- 13 Aunt Mary • Mary Temple Tweedy
- 23 the boy • Edward (Ned) Holton James (1873-1954)
- 30-31 M^{rs} D^r & M^{rs} Wendell Holmes • Amelia Lee Jackson (Mrs. Oliver Wendell) Holmes (1818-1888) and Fanny Bowditch Dixwell (Mrs. Oliver Wendell, Jr.) Holmes
- 37 William • William T. Washburn
- 42 D^r Froeund • Dr. Maximilian Bernhard Freund
- 45 D^r Grynsyn[_^]nowski[_^] • Ernst Georg Friedrich Gryzanovski (1824-1888), Polish-born writer and diplomat who resided at the time in Florence, where the Bootts knew him and where Henry James had met him in the spring of 1873

47 The late fearful tragedy of the Ville-du-Havre • The *Ville-du-Havre* collided with another ship and sank on 22 November 1873; May Hunter and a sister were among the survivors, according to Alice James's 25 April 1874 letter to Annie Ashburner ("The Letters of Alice James to Anne Ashburner" 45-47)

53 your notice of Howell's Poems • "Howells' Poems," a review of William Dean Howells's *Poems* (Boston: Osgood, 1873), appeared in the 8 January 1874 issue of the *Independent* (9)

58 Meta Holderness • Henry James's review of Victor Cherbuliez's *Meta Holdenis*, *North American Review* October 1873: 461-68

58-59 The Albano paper • "Roman Neighborhoods," *Atlantic Monthly* December 1873: 671-80

62 Father forwarded you a letter today from Howells • William Dean Howells to Henry James, 5 December 1873 (see *Letters, Fictions, Lives* 89-92)

63 he was writing to you • Charles Eliot Norton to Henry James, 5, [8] December 1873

79 old M^{rs} Norton • Catharine Eliot Norton, mother of Charles, Jane, and Grace Norton

101 Wendell's Book • Oliver Wendell Holmes, Jr.'s, edition of *Commentaries on American Law*

106 Will wrote Wilky • William James to Garth Wilkinson (Wilky) James, 16 November 1873 (see *The Correspondence of William James* 4: 454-55)

111 Cousin Helen • Helen Rodgers Wyckoff Perkins

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To cite this letter, according to MLA style guidelines:

James, Mary Walsh. Letter to Henry James. 8 December 1873. James Family Papers. Houghton Library. Harvard University. Cambridge, Mass. [Dear Henry James.org](http://www.dearhenryjames.org) Ed. Pierre A. Walker et al. 2005. Salem State College. [insert your date of access here] <http://www.dearhenryjames.org>.