

Elizabeth (Lizzie) Boott to Henry James, 13 June 1874, from Cambridge

ALS Houghton, bMS Am 1094 (32)

1 Cambridge June 13th 74

2

3 Dear Harry—I was very glad to get your letter from Leghorn, tho' sorry at the same time
4 that you did not appreciate that lovely spot as it deserves. I always had a great fancy for
5 it, for tho' it is base & crude enough on the shore, there are beautiful walks & drives
6 among the hills which you probably did not discover. We always fancied too that the
7 light there was quite Eastern, but then we have never been to the East. I sympathize
8 strongly in your feeling for Pisa which is an enchanting place for not more than two or
9 three days. After that I find it oppressive as I do Siena in a less degree & all other dying
10 cities, pleasant enough to think of when one lives in Cambridge, but not the place for
11 New England Heathens to live in long. If you go into the side streets "non ci si vede
12 neppure un cane" as said the waiter of the Armi d'Inghilterra. He is an original of the first
13 water is he not? I am glad you made his acquaintance and were inspired by him as well as
14 by the Cathedral & the beautiful Palazzo Pubblico to write so vivid a description of the
15 place. This, and your article on a return to Italy after Switzerland & Germany, made me
16 desperately homesick, & I made a vow never to read anything more of the kind. This is
17 strictly private—I never confess to any Italian homesickness here, nor do I generally feel
18 any, so will you please for the future, caro Enrico, be kind enough not to write any more
19 such descriptions as they disturb my equanimity badly. I advised Mrs. Wister to read
20 them, & she promised to do so with tears in her eyes! She also talked a great deal about
21 you and described your moon-light rambles in the villa Medici as you never deigned to

22 describe them to your friends last winter! All this before little Porter who was vainly
23 trying to depict the tragic beauty before him, and as vainly seeking to put himself in
24 harmony with her mood. This was none of the pleasantest for the day was raw & snowy
25 and she was evidently pining for brighter climes. He will never succeed in painting her,
26 for he is sadly wanting in imagination in spite of his eye for color & his grace in painting
27 children.— Miss Bartlett is here, but I have not seen her yet. She returns to Europe in the
28 Autumn with Mrs. Mason probably, who sails in September. She is still trying to get a
29 divorce from the Dead I believe, for as things stand now, she is Sumner's widow &
30 obliged to sign legal papers with his name.—I am glad you have seen the Halls & liked
31 them so well. I think my friend Constance the handsomest as well as the most charming
32 of the daughters, but tastes differ. With Mrs. Huntington you will have a deep sympathy
33 about the great Titian "Incognito" whom she stands before by the hour gazing into his
34 deep blue eyes, & insisting that he was virtue personified, while her son Henry declares
35 the reverse.—Of course I remember the Bancrofts—Miss B. is charming I think, tho'—I
36 cannot reach Dr. G—ski pitch of enthusiasm about her, & Bancroftino is, as you say,
37 most excellent in every respect, & I am glad you appreciate him. It would not have been
38 necessary for cavalier No. 1 to tell him that he was No. 2, for I think he was aware of the
39 fact & bore it philosophically. He thought it perfectly right & natural that it should be so,
40 for I am told that both he & his sister entertained certain suspicions à la Pulleine, which
41 were probably long since happily dispelled by your continued delight in Europe & mine
42 in America!—

43 Thank you for your sympathy in my artistic successes, which by the way have not
44 been such as to throw a glamor over anything, & America still pleases me on the strength
45 of her own merits only. Pictures or I should say my pictures do not sell fast, & an auction

46 to which several members of the Class looked forward to as a possible source of wealth
47 only brought in a few dollars, so that just now we are all on the verge of bankruptcy. A
48 pen & ink drawing of mine (cupids & flower) has been photographed by request by one
49 of the picture dealers here who gives me 20 cents for every copy sold, & charges 4
50 dollars for the photo! It has been christened by him much to my disgust “Incense of
51 flowers”, & the other day Papa saw a copy of it in a shop window at Rutland & beneath
52 “from a drawing by Miss Boott”—So much for fame!

53 I have just returned from the usual sketching expedition which the Hunt class
54 makes yearly. This time a little village called Annisquam beyond Gloucester was chosen
55 and we spent ten days there delightfully, sketching morning & afternoon, and the interval
56 filled by many talks about this world & the next after the fashion of Boston women. We
57 all think each other charming, & being thus encouraged by the good opinion of the
58 others, each shows her best side, & all are sorry when the time comes to leave. This is
59 one of the attractions of Boston for me. The place is intensified New England, but there is
60 something in the scenery which always pleases me. Green fields studded with gray rocks,
61 or rather rocks with a little grass growing between, wide spreading apple trees covered
62 with a profusion of pink & white blossoms & the sun playing through the branches on the
63 grass, gray houses & an occasional red chimney & beyond a long stretch of level beach,
64 all this touches a certain Puritan sentiment which lives hidden in some out of the way
65 corner of my heart & has not been killed by a lifetime in Italy. We went every afternoon
66 to Coffin’s beach & were rowed across the creek by an ancient Mariner called Uncle
67 George who charged us a dollar & gave back 25 cents the next day as he said he had
68 asked too much! Vedder made his studies for the sea serpent & the Abel here, & it is
69 certainly the most weird place I ever saw. In the twilight the mounds of white sand

70 covered with gray grass have a most ghostly appearance & are unlike anything I ever
71 saw, & well suited to please the imagination of a Vedder.—

72 I am reading Merimée's letters according to your advice & am much interested &
73 entertained by them. They are certainly most graceful & charming, but one cannot help a
74 certain feeling of dissatisfaction with the man for being with all his talent so frivolous. I
75 dare say the defiant, chilling attitude which the lady maintained towards him may be in
76 parts the cause of it, but one would think that a correspondence of thirty years about
77 one's black eyes & blue cashmere might be unsatisfactory to say the least. One cannot
78 help feeling too that his constancy was owing to her power of piquing while she repelled
79 him, & tho' one may admire the power, one wonders that she should care to take so much
80 trouble to rare it. I am going to read your review of the book. I liked the Turgenieff very
81 much. Don't you think the Eaux Printanières one of the best if not the best of his works?
82 Cambridge is well & putting on its best dress for Class day. I have never seen the foliage
83 richer or fuller than it is this year. The Memorial Hall will be opened on Commencement,
84 and the great hall used as a dining room for the Alumni. The tower of the building is
85 unpardonably bad, but the interior, if not looked at with too critical eyes is very fine.

86 Mrs. Walsh has arrived and is as full of life as ever. Alice I have not seen since my
87 return. She has been to Beverly on a visit to the Morses, which proves that her nervous
88 system is in a good condition, for Mamma Morse provokes her more than any other
89 living creature. William seems remarkably well, and able to work like other people. His
90 friend Henry Bowditch thinks his condition much improved by his European tour. It is
91 delightful to see him so active, but I can never fully believe it, as I have never known him
92 when he was well. The Nortons I often see, & freely confess that I have changed my
93 mind about the ladies, tho' I still very much prefer Miss Jane to her sister. It is certainly a

94 delightful house to go to, & one where one is always sure of a hearty welcome. My
95 feelings about Charles are still unchanged.—We are going to Rye Beach for July, and
96 perhaps to Beverly for August. We return to Cam. on Sept 1st to move into our new
97 quarters. I rejoice that you still hold to your plan of coming home. It will be pleasant to
98 see you again and provided you do not still hate me too much for my patriotism, let me
99 see you at the corner of Quincy & Cambridge Sts. as soon as you can after your return.
100 Till then dear Harry farewell & believe me yrs ever
101 E. Boott—

Notes

3 your letter from Leghorn • Henry James to Elizabeth (Lizzie) Boott, 7, 8 April [1874]

11-12 non ci si vede neppure un cane • one cannot even see a dog there

12 the Armi d’Inghilterra • (i.e. the “England Arms”) hotel in Siena; in the section of “Siena Early and Late” written for *Italian Hours* (1909), James mentioned its disappearance

14-15 so vivid a description of the place • James described Siena, including its Cathedral and Palazzo Pubblico, in “Siena,” *Atlantic Monthly* June 1873: 664-69 (reprinted in *Transatlantic Sketches* and *Italian Hours*).

15 your article on a return to Italy after Switzerland & Germany • “An Autumn Journey,” *Galaxy* April 1873: 536-44 (reprinted as “The St. Gothard” in *Transatlantic Sketches* and as “The Old Saint-Gothard” in *Italian Hours*)

18 caro Enrico • dear Henry

21 Porter • Benjamin Curtis Porter (1845-1908)

27, 28 Miss Bartlett [...] Mrs. Mason • Henry James had often seen Alice Mason, divorced wife of Senator Charles Sumner, and her companion, Alice Bartlett (later Warren), while in Rome during the winter of 1873

30 the Halls ... my friend Constance • James met in Rome and mentioned in his 1873 letters home an English friend of the Bootts and a “beautiful musician” (see Henry James to Henry James, Sr., 19 January 1873); in his 7, 8 April [1874] letter to Lizzie Boott, James described visiting Mrs. Hall and Constance Hall at their villa near Florence

32 Mrs. Huntington • James knew Ellen Greenough Huntington, Francis Boott’s sister-in-law, and in his 7, 8 April [1874] letter to Lizzie Boott he described seeing Mrs. Huntington, Laura Huntington, and Henry Huntington in Florence

33 the great Titian “Incognito” • Titian’s “Portrait of a Gentleman, known as ‘The Young Englishman,’” at the Palazzo Pitti, so called because of the subject’s intensely blue eyes

35 the Bancrofts • John Chandler Bancroft and his sister

36 Dr. G—ski • Ernst Georg Friedrich Gryzanovski

36 Bancroftino • little Bancroft

53 Hunt • Painter William Morris Hunt (1824-1879); William and Henry James had also studied with him

66 Coffin’s beach • beach in west Gloucester, Mass., located between Essex Bay and Wingersheek Beach

68 Vedder ... the sea serpent & the Abel • Painter Elihu Vedder (1836-1923); his “Lair of the Sea Serpent” (1864) is at the Boston Museum of Fine Arts and his “Death of Abel” (1869) is at the Fine Arts Museum of San Francisco

72 Mérimée's letters • *Lettres à une inconnue* by Prosper Mérimée (Paris: Lévy, 1873); the "inconnue" is Jenny Dacquin (1811-1895) with whom Mérimée corresponded from 1831 until his death in 1870 although they rarely met

80 your review of the book • "The Letters of Prosper Mérimée," *Independent* 9 April 1874: 9-10

80-81 the Turgenieff • James's long review-essay on Turgenev, "Frühlingsfluthen. Ein König Lear des Dorges. Zwei Novellen. Von Iwan Turgéniew," *North American Review* April 1874: 326-56

81 the Eaux Printanières • Turgenev's 1870 story, "Spring Torrents" or "The Torrents of Spring" in English translations and "Frühlingsfluthen" in German

87 the Morses • Samuel T. Morse, Harriet Jackson Lee Morse, and their daughters, Fanny and Mary

93 her sister • Grace Norton

99 Quincy & Cambridge Sts. • See Mary Walsh James to Henry James, 12 September [1873]

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