

Francis Boott to Henry James, 14 June [1874], from Cambridge

ALS Houghton, bMS Am 1094 (33)

1 Cambridge June 14

2 Dear Harry,

3 Your long letter of March 10th (!) stares me in the face reproachfully—&
4 well it may. In it you, with excess of moderation, ask for a note only—& that combined
5 with L's offer of a vehicle confirms my flagging purpose. Just half of your letter is
6 devoted to your reasons why you should not follow my suggestion of a notice of Miss
7 Blagden's poems. I had not the faintest idea that the rose (so to speak) which I
8 thoughtlessly asked for wd. be so hard of attainment—~~no~~ impossible indeed—nor that
9 [^]it[^] wd. cost you so much time & space to explain conscientiously the reasons why it
10 was impossible. How cd. you think I ever supposed you cd. go into the details of private
11 life, or emulate in any degree Mr. Austin's biog^l notice? I supposed a critique of the
12 poems, if they pleased you, wd. be a good subject for your pen, & that a wholly
13 impersonal sketch of Bellosguardo might be a fitting frame for your sketch—You hint
14 that her biographer's has gone to the dogs—But a sketch of her character wd. be wanting
15 in a leading trait if her bold assertion of the rights of dumb canines were left out. I think
16 A's a model of biography, if the object of such a work is to give a complete idea of the
17 subject. Is not Boswell's Johnson always cited as a model? & who wd. wish any of the
18 details omitted? It certainly reflects no credit on the writer, & I can't conceive of your
19 degrading yourself to such work—but for all that, scavengers are useful & necessary
20 members of society.—Not that I mean at all to imply that Mr. A. has placed himself at all

21 in the Boswell category. You speak of ~~intrusive~~ “invasive & indelicate gossip”, & there
22 are many to whom such a publication wd. be highly distasteful—to none, I can easily
23 believe, more ~~se~~ than to yourself—But I have a conviction that it wd. not be so to Miss
24 B.; & if she is where she can read it, I know she wd. enjoy it—or rather I ought to say, if
25 she were still alive & only supposed dead, (as I have just heard a man is whose memorial
26 in stone is let into the walls of our neighboring Hall). My theory is that A. wrote the
27 notice as a debt of gratitude. You say I cannot have the heart to accuse you of slighting
28 my friend. My friend indeed! I have known her more years than you have hours, but no
29 such poem was ever addressed to me as to you.—

30 I saw your notice of the Bernese anatomy, & was sorry that the printer made you say they
31 are wanting in hips, which they are not, but in glutaei muscles. Curiously enough, my
32 nephew Dr. Loring in N. Y. based a theory on your letter that the bears play the part they
33 do in Berne on acc’t. of the resemblance [^]of the citizens[_^] to bears having been observed
34 in older times! But [_^]it[_^] is one thing for a bear to remind one in one peculiarity of a
35 Bernese, & quite another for the latter to suggest a bear—I have been most pleased in
36 reading your enthusiastic letters of the descent in to Italy (see next sheet) also your acc’ts.
37 of various Italian cities, especially Pisa & Sienna. Leghorn you do scant justice to. All
38 do, except those who make a certain stay there. We have wintered it & summered it for
39 20 years, always living close to the Meditⁿ, a mile beyond the gate, & having as a
40 background the beautiful landscape bounded by Monte Nero & the Carrara Apennines.—

41 I wish you had seen & known the old landlord at Sienna—L. took his portrait, & he used
42 to talk over the history of his life. I think I must have re-told it to you. It was he who
43 saved the younger Hallam’s estate from going wholly to his courier & giving it minus

44 £4000 to his sisters—For this service the family sent him the portraits of father & son
45 which he has hung up in our (then) sitting-room with himself between them—Yet, (such
46 is human justice!) Tennyson cd. find no place for him in the In Memoriam. The waiter
47 you have hit off well. He was a character—One of his sayings I remember was that
48 marriage “è l’avanguardia dell’ultima corbelleria—” This was explained by his own ill
49 luck, his wife having played him false & run away not long after the ceremony—We are
50 very glad to hear you are coming back—You’ll find us corner of Quincy & Cambridge
51 streets—Till then farewell—Yours very truly F B

Notes

- 5 L's offer of a vehicle • Presumably Francis Boott was going to mail his letter in the same envelope that Lizzie Boott was using for her 13 June 1874 letter to Henry James
- 6-7 Miss Blagden's poems • *Poems by the late Isa Blagden with a Memoir* appeared in 1873 (Edinburgh: Blackwood)
- 11 Mr. Austin's biog¹ notice • The *Memoir* to Isabella Blagden's *Poems* was by future poet laureate Alfred Austin (1835-1913)
- 13 Bellosguardo • Both the Bootts and Isabella Blagden (1816-1873) had long resided in this picturesque suburb of Florence
- 26 our neighboring Hall • Harvard's Memorial Hall
- 30 your notice of the Bernese anatomy • "An Autumn Journey," *Galaxy* April 1873: 536-44 (although the article is reprinted as "The St. Gothard" in *Transatlantic Sketches*, the passage in question is cut in "The Old Saint-Gothard" in *Italian Hours*)
- 36 your enthusiastic letters of the descent into Italy • "An Autumn Journey"
- 36-37 your acc'ts. of various Italian cities, especially Pisa & Sienna. Leghorn • "Tuscan Cities," which appeared in the *Nation* 21 May 1874: 329-30, discusses Leghorn, Pisa, Lucca, and Pistoia; "Siena" appeared in *Atlantic Monthly* June 1874: 664-69
- 43 the younger Hallam • Arthur Henry Hallam (1811-33), Tennyson's university friend who became the subject of "In Memoriam"
- 44 father • Henry Hallam (1777-1859), English historian and father of Arthur Henry Hallam
- 48 è l'avanguardia dell'ultima corbelleria • is the vanguard of the final foolishness
- 50-51 corner of Quincy & Cambridge streets • See Mary Walsh James to Henry James, 12 September [1873]

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