

**WILLIAM  
JAMES**

THE LETTERS  
OF WILLIAM  
JAMES, VOL. 1

William James

**The Letters of William James, Vol. 1**

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**James W.**

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**William James**  
**The Letters of William James, Vol. 1**

**To my Mother,**

**gallant and devoted ally**

**of my Father's most arduous**

**and happy years,**

**this collection of his letters**

**is dedicated**

## PREFACE

WHETHER William James was compressing his correspondence into brief messages, or allowing it to expand into copious letters, he could not write a page that was not free, animated, and characteristic. Many of his correspondents preserved his letters, and examination of them soon showed that it would be possible to make a selection which should not only contain certain letters that clearly deserved to be published because of their readable quality alone, but should also include letters that were biographical in the best sense. For in the case of a man like James the biographical question to be answered is not, as with a man of affairs: How can his actions be explained? but rather: What manner of being was he? What were his background and education? and, above all, What were his temperament and the bias of his mind? What native instincts, preferences, and limitations of view did he bring with him to his business of reading the riddle of the Universe? His own informal utterances throw the strongest light on such questions.

In these volumes I have attempted to make such a selection. The task has been simplified by the nature of the material, in which the most interesting letters were often found, naturally enough, to include the most vivid elements of which a picture could be composed. I have added such notes as seemed necessary in the interest of clearness; but I have tried to leave the reader to his own conclusions. The work was begun in 1913, but had to be laid aside; and I should regret the delay in completing it even more than I do if it were not that very interesting letters have come to light during the last three years.

James was a great reader of biographies himself, and pointed again and again to the folly of judging a man's ideas by minute logical and textual examinations, without apprehending his mental attitude sympathetically. He was well aware that every man's philosophy is biased by his feelings, and is not due to purely rational processes. He was quite incapable himself of the cool kind of abstraction that comes from indifference about the issue. Life spoke to him in even more ways than to most men, and he responded to its superabundant confusion with passion and insatiable curiosity. His spiritual development was a matter of intense personal experience.

So students of his books may even find that this collection of informal and intimate utterances helps them to understand James as a philosopher and psychologist.

I have not included letters that are wholly technical or polemic. Such documents belong in a study of James's philosophy, or in a history of its origin and influence. However interesting they might be to certain readers, their appropriate place is not here.

A good deal of biographical information about William James, his brother Henry, and their father has already been given to the public; but unfortunately it is scattered, and much of it is cast in a form which calls for interpretation or amendment. The elder Henry James left an autobiographical fragment which was published in a volume of his "Literary Remains," but it was composed purely as a religious record. He wrote it in the third person, as if it were the life of one "Stephen Dewhurst," and did not try to give a circumstantial report of his youth or ancestry. Later, his son Henry wrote two volumes of early reminiscences in his turn. In "A Small Boy and Others" and "Notes of a Son and Brother" he reproduced the atmosphere of a household of which he was the last survivor, and adumbrated the figures of Henry James, Senior, and of certain other members of his family with infinite subtlety at every turn of the page. But he too wrote without much attention to particular facts or the sequence of events, and his two volumes were incomplete and occasionally inaccurate with respect to such details.

Accordingly I have thought it advisable to restate parts of the family record, even though the restatement involves some repetition.

Finally, I should explain that the letters have been reproduced *verbatim*, though not *literatim*, except for superscriptions, which have often been simplified. As respects spelling and punctuation, the

manuscripts are not consistent. James wrote rapidly, used abbreviations, occasionally "simplified" his spelling, and was inclined to use capital letters only for emphasis. Thus he often followed the French custom of writing adjectives derived from proper names with small letters—*e.g.* french literature, european affairs. But when he wrote for publication he was too considerate of his reader's attention to distract it with such petty irregularities; therefore unimportant peculiarities of orthography have generally not been reproduced in this book. On the other hand, the phraseology of the manuscripts, even where grammatically incomplete, has been kept. Verbal changes have not been made except where it was clear that there had been a slip of the pen, and clear what had been intended. It is obvious that rhetorical laxities are to be expected in letters written as these were. No editor who has attempted to "improve away" such defects has ever deserved to be thanked.

Acknowledgments are due, first of all, to the correspondents who have generously supplied letters. Several who were most generous and to whom I am most indebted have, alas! passed beyond the reach of thanks. I wish particularly to record my gratitude here to correspondents too numerous to be named who have furnished letters that are not included. Such material, though omitted from the book, has been informing and helpful to the Editor. One example may be cited—the copious correspondence with Mrs. James which covers the period of every briefest separation; but extracts from this have been used only when other letters failed. From Dr. Dickinson S. Miller, from Professor R. B. Perry, from my mother, from my brother William, and from my wife, all of whom have seen the material at different stages of its preparation, I have received many helpful suggestions, and I gratefully acknowledge my special debt to them. President Eliot, Dr. Miller, and Professor G. H. Palmer were, each, so kind as to send me memoranda of their impressions and recollections. I have embodied parts of the memoranda of the first two in my notes; and have quoted from Professor Palmer's minute—about to appear in the "Harvard Graduates' Magazine." For all information about William James's Barber ancestry I am indebted to the genealogical investigations of Mrs. Russell Hastings. Special acknowledgments are due to Mr. George B. Ives, who has prepared the topical index.

Finally, I shall be grateful to anyone who will, at any time, advise me of the whereabouts of any letters which I have not already had an opportunity to examine.

*H. J.*

*August, 1920.*

## DATES AND FAMILY NAMES

1842. January 11. Born in New York.  
1857-58. At School in Boulogne.  
1859-60. In Geneva.  
1860-61. Studied painting under William M. Hunt in Newport.  
1861. Entered the Lawrence Scientific School.  
1863. Entered the Harvard Medical School.  
1865-66. Assistant under Louis Agassiz on the Amazon.  
1867-68. Studied medicine in Germany.  
1869. M.D. Harvard.  
1873-76. Instructor in Anatomy and Physiology in Harvard College.  
1875. Began to give instruction in Psychology.  
1876. Assistant Professor of Physiology.  
1878. Married. Undertook to write a treatise on Psychology.  
1880. Assistant Professor of Philosophy.  
1882-83. Spent several months visiting European universities and colleagues.  
1885. Professor of Philosophy. (Between 1889 and 1897 his title was Professor of Psychology.)  
1890. "Principles of Psychology" appeared.  
1892-93. European travel.  
1897. Published "The Will to Believe and other Essays on Popular Philosophy."  
1899. Published "Talks to Teachers," etc.  
1899-1902. Broke down in health. Two years in Europe.  
1901-1902. Gifford Lectures. "The Varieties of Religious Experience."  
1906. Acting Professor for half-term at Stanford University. (Interrupted by San Francisco earthquake.)  
1906. Lowell Institute lectures, subsequently published as "Pragmatism."  
1907. Resigned all active duties at Harvard.  
1908. Hibbert lectures at Manchester College, Oxford; subsequently published as "A Pluralistic Universe."  
1910. August 26. Died at Chocorua, N.H.  
(See Appendix in volume II for a full list of books by William James, with their dates.)  
William James was the eldest of five children. His brothers and sister, with their dates, were: Henry (referred to as "Harry"), 1843-1916; Garth Wilkinson (referred to as "Wilky"), 1845-1883; Robertson (referred to as "Bob" and "Bobby"), 1846-1910; Alice, 1848-1892.  
He had five children. Their dates and the names by which they are referred to in the letters are: Henry ("Harry"), 1879; William ("Billy"), 1882; Hermann, 1884-1885; Margaret Mary ("Peggy," "Peg"), 1887; Alexander Robertson ("Tweedie," "François"), 1890.

# I

## INTRODUCTION

### **Ancestry—Henry James, Senior—Youth—Education—Certain Personal Traits**

THE ancestors of William James, with the possible exception of one pair of great-great-grandparents, all came to America from Scotland or Ireland during the eighteenth century, and settled in the eastern part of New York State or in New Jersey. One Irish forefather is known to have been descended from Englishmen who had crossed the Irish Channel in the time of William of Orange, or thereabouts; but whether the others who came from Ireland were more English or Celtic is not clear. In America all his ancestors were Protestant, and they appear, without exception, to have been people of education and character. In the several communities in which they settled they prospered above the average. They became farmers, traders, and merchants, and, so far as has yet been discovered, there were only two lawyers, and no doctors or ministers, among them. They seem to have been reckoned as pious people, and several of their number are known to have been generous supporters of the churches in which they worshiped; but, if one may judge by the scanty records which remain, there is no one among them to whom one can point as foreshadowing the inclination to letters and religious speculation that manifested itself strongly in William James and his father. They were mainly concerned to establish themselves in a new country. Inasmuch as they succeeded, lived well, and were respected, it is likely that they possessed a fair endowment of both the imagination and the solid qualities that one thinks of as appropriately combined in the colonists who crossed the ocean in the eighteenth century and did well in the new country. But, as to many of them, it is impossible to do more than presume this, and impossible to carry presumption any farther.

The last ancestor to arrive in America was William James's paternal grandfather. This grandfather, whose name was also William James, came from Bally-James-Duff, County Cavan, in the year 1789. He was then eighteen years old. He may have left home because his family tried to force him into the ministry,—for there is a story to that effect,—or he may have had more adventurous reasons. But in any case he arrived in a manner which tradition has cherished as wholly becoming to a first American ancestor—with a very small sum of money, a Latin grammar in which he had already made some progress at home, and a desire to visit the field of one of the revolutionary battles. He promptly disposed of his money in making this visit. Then, finding himself penniless in Albany, he took employment as clerk in a store. He worked his way up rapidly; traded on his own account, kept a store, traveled and bought land to the westward, engaged as time went on in many enterprises, among them being the salt industry of Syracuse (where the principal residential street bears his name), prospered exceedingly, and amassed a fortune so large, that after his death it provided a liberal independence for his widow and each of his eleven children. The imagination and sagacity which enabled him to do this inevitably involved him in the public affairs of the community in which he lived, although he seems never to have held political office. Thus his name appears early in the history of the Erie Canal project; and, when that great undertaking was completed and the opening of the waterway was celebrated in 1823, he delivered the "oration" of the day at Albany. It may be found in Munsell's Albany Collections, and considering what were the fashions of the time in such matters, ought to be esteemed by a modern reader for containing more sense and information than "oratory." He was one of the organizers and the first Vice-President of the Albany Savings Bank, founded in 1820, and of the Albany Chamber of Commerce,—the President, in both instances, being Stephen Van Rensselaer. When he died, in 1832, the New York "Evening Post" said of him: "He has done more to build up the city [of Albany] than any other individual."

Two portraits of the first William James have survived, and present him as a man of medium height, rather portly, clean-shaven, hearty, friendly, confident, and distinctly Irish.

Unrecorded anecdotes about him are not to be taken literally, but may be presumed to be indicative. It is told of him, for instance, that one afternoon shortly after he had married for the third time, he saw a lady coming up the steps of his house, rose from the table at which he was absorbed in work, went to the door and said "he was sorry Mrs. James was not in." But the poor lady was herself his newly married wife, and cried out to him not to be "so absent-minded." He discovered one day that a man with whom he had gone into partnership was cheating, and immediately seized him by the collar and marched him through the streets to a justice. "When old Billy James came to Syracuse," said a citizen who could remember his visits, "things went as *he* wished."

In his comfortable brick residence on North Pearl Street he kept open house and gave a special welcome to members of the Presbyterian ministry. One of his sons said of him: "He was certainly a very easy parent—weakly, nay painfully sensitive to his children's claims upon his sympathy." "The law of the house, within the limits of religious decency, was freedom itself."<sup>1</sup> Indeed, there appears to have been only one matter in which he was rigorous with his family: his Presbyterianism was of the stiffest kind, and in his old age he sacrificed even his affections for what he considered the true faith. Theological differences estranged him from two of his sons,—William and Henry,—and though the old man became reconciled to one of them a few days before his death, he left a will which would have cut them both off with small annuities if its elaborate provisions had been sustained by the Court.

In 1803 William James married (his third wife) Catherine Barber,[2] a daughter of John Barber, of Montgomery, Orange County, New York. The Barbbers had been active people in the affairs of their day. Catherine's grandfather had been a judge of the Court of Common Pleas, and her father and her two uncles were all officers in the Revolutionary Army. One of the uncles, Francis Barber, had previously graduated from Princeton and had conducted a boarding-school for boys at "Elizabethtown," New Jersey, at which Alexander Hamilton prepared for college. During the war he rose to the rank of Lieutenant-Colonel, was detailed by Washington to be one of Steuben's four aides, and performed other staff-duties. John, Catherine's father, returned to Montgomery after the Revolution, was one of the founders of Montgomery Academy, an associate judge of the County Court, a member of the state legislature, and a church elder for fifty years. In Henry James, Senior's, reminiscences there is a passage which describes him as an old man, much addicted to the reading of military history, and which contrasts his stoicism with his wife's warm and spontaneous temperament and her exceptional gift of interesting her grandchildren in conversation.<sup>2</sup>

In the same reminiscences Catherine Barber herself is described as having been "a good wife and mother, nothing else—save, to be sure, a kindly friend and neighbor" and "the most democratic person by temperament I ever knew."<sup>3</sup> She adopted the three children of her husband's prior marriages and, by their own account, treated them no differently from the five sons and three daughters whom she herself bore and brought up. She managed her husband's large house during his lifetime, and for twenty-seven years after his death kept it open as a home for children, and grandchildren, and cousins as well. This "dear gentle lady of many cares" must have been a woman of sound judgment

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<sup>1</sup> *Literary Remains of Henry James*, p. 151.

<sup>2</sup> See *Literary Remains*, p. 149.

<sup>3</sup> If the reader were familiar, as he cannot be presumed to have been, with the elder Henry James or his writings, he would be in no danger of finding anything cold or qualifying in these words, but would discern a true adoration expressing itself in a way that was peculiarly characteristic of their writer. For Henry James, Senior, a spiritual democracy deeper than that of our political jargon was not a mere conception: it was an unquestioned reality. The outer wrappings in which people swathed their souls excited him to anger and ridicule more often than praise; but when men or women seemed to him beautiful or adorable he thought it was because they betrayed more naturally than others the inward possession of that humble "social" spirit which he wanted to think of as truly a common possession—God's equal gift to each and all. To say of his mother that *that* could be felt in her, that she was *merely* that, was his purest praise. The reader may find this habit of his thought expressing itself anew in William James by turning to a letter on page 210 below. That letter might have been written by Henry James, Senior.

in addition to being an embodiment of kindness and generosity in all things; for admiration as well as affection and gratitude still attend her memory after the lapse of sixty years.

The next generation, eleven in number as has already been said,<sup>4</sup> may well have given their widowed mother "many cares." It had been the purpose of the first William James to provide that his children (several of whom were under age when he died) should qualify themselves by industry and experience to enjoy the large patrimony which he expected to bequeath to them, and with that in view he left a will which was a voluminous compound of restraints and instructions. He showed thereby how great were both his confidence in his own judgment and his solicitude for the moral welfare of his descendants. But he accomplished nothing more, for the courts declared the will to be invalid; and his children became financially independent as fast as they came of age. Most of them were blessed with a liberal allowance of that combination of gayety, volubility, and waywardness which is popularly conceded to the Irish; but these qualities, which made them "charming" and "interesting" to their contemporaries, did not keep them from dissipating both respectable talents and unusual opportunities. Two of the men—William, namely, who became an eccentric but highly respected figure in the Presbyterian ministry, and Henry of whom more will be said shortly—possessed an ardor of intellect that neither disaster nor good fortune could corrupt. But on the whole the personalities and histories of that generation were such as to have impressed the boyish mind of the writer of the following letters and of his younger brother like a richly colored social kaleidoscope, dashed, as the patterns changed and disintegrated, with amusing flashes of light and occasional dark moments of tragedy. After they were all dead and gone, the memory of them certainly prompted the author of "The Wings of a Dove" when he described Minny Theale's New York forebears as "an extravagant, unregulated cluster, with free-living ancestors, handsome dead cousins, lurid uncles, beautiful vanished aunts, persons all busts and curls," to have known whom and to have belonged to whom "was to have had one's small world-space both crowded and enlarged."

It is unnecessary, however, to pause over any but one member of that generation.

Henry James, the second son of William and Catherine, was born in 1811. He was apparently a boy of unusual activity and animal spirits, but at the age of thirteen he met with an accident which maimed him for life. He was, at the time, a schoolboy at the Albany Academy, and one of his fellow students, Mr. Woolsey Rogers Hopkins, wrote the following account of what happened. (The Professor Henry referred to was Joseph Henry, later the head of the Smithsonian Institute.)

"On a summer afternoon, the older students would meet Professor Henry in the Park, in front of the Academy, where amusements and instruction would be given in balloon-flying, the motive power being heated air supplied from a tow ball saturated with spirits of turpentine. When one of these air-ships took fire, the ball would be dropt for the boys, when it was kicked here and there, a roll of fire. [One day when] young James had a sprinkling of this [turpentine] on his pantaloons, one of these balls was sent into the open window of Mrs. Gilchrist's stable. [James], thinking only of conflagration, rushed to the hayloft and stamped out the flame, but burned his leg."

The boy was confined to his bed for the next two years, and one leg was twice amputated above the knee. He was robust enough to survive this long and dire experience of the surgery of the eighteenth-twenties, and to establish right relations with the world again; but thereafter he could live conveniently only in towns where smooth footways and ample facilities for transportation were to be had.

In 1830 he graduated from Union College, Schenectady, and in 1835 entered the Princeton Theological Seminary with the class of '39. By the time he had completed two years of his Seminary course, his discontent with the orthodox dispensation was no longer to be doubted. He left Princeton, and the truth seems to be that he had already conceived some measure of the antipathy to all ecclesiasticisms which he expressed with abounding scorn and irony throughout all his later years.

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<sup>4</sup> The places of two of the eleven who died early were taken by their orphaned children.

In 1840 he married Mary Walsh, the sister of a fellow student at Princeton, who had shared his religious doubts and had, with him, turned his back on the ministry and left the Seminary. She was the daughter of James and Mary (Robertson) Walsh of New York City, and was thus descended from Hugh Walsh, an Irishman of English extraction who came from Killingsley,<sup>5</sup> County Down, in 1764, and settled himself finally near Newburgh, and from Alexander Robertson, a Scotchman who came to America not long before the Revolution and whose name is borne by the school of the Scotch Presbyterian Church in New York City. Mary Walsh was a gentle lady, who accommodated her life to all her husband's vagaries and presided with cheerful indulgence over the development of her five children's divergent and uncompromising personalities. She lived entirely for her husband and children, and they, joking her and teasing her and adoring her, were devoted to her in return. Several contemporaries left accounts of their impressions of her husband without saying much about her; and this was natural, for she was not self-assertive and was inevitably eclipsed by his richly interesting presence. But it is all the more unfortunate that her son Henry, who might have done justice, as no one else could, to her good sense and to the grace of her mind and character, could not bring himself to include an adequate account of her in the "Small Boy and Others." To a reader who ventured to regret the omission, he replied sadly, "Oh! my dear Boy—that memory is too sacred!" William James spoke of her very seldom after her death, but then always with a sort of tender reverence that he vouchsafed to no one else. She supplied an element of serenity and discretion to the councils of the family of which they were often in need; and it would not be a mistake to look to her in trying to account for the unusual receptivity of mind and æsthetic sensibility that marked her two elder sons.

During the three or four years that followed his marriage Henry James, Senior, appears to have spent his time in Albany and New York. In the latter city, in the old, or then new, Astor House, his eldest son was born on the eleventh of January, 1842. He named the boy William, and a few days later brought his friend R. W. Emerson to admire and give his blessing to the little philosopher-to-be.<sup>6</sup> Shortly afterwards the family moved into a house at No. 2 Washington Place, and there, on April 15, 1843, the second son, Henry, came into the world. There was thus a difference of fifteen months in the ages of William and the younger brother, who was also to become famous and who figures largely in the correspondence that follows.

William James derived so much from his father and resembled him so strikingly in many ways that it is worth while to dwell a little longer on the character, manners, and beliefs of the elder Henry James. He was not only an impressive and all-pervading presence in the early lives of his children, but always continued to be for them the most vivid and interesting personality who had crossed the horizon of their experience. He was their constant companion, and entered into their interests and poured out his own ideas and emotions before them in a way that would not have been possible to a nature less spontaneous and affectionate.

His books, written in a style which "to its great dignity of cadence and full and homely vocabulary, united a sort of inward palpitating human quality, gracious and tender, precise, fierce, scornful, humorous by turns, recalling the rich vascular temperament of the old English masters rather than that of an American of today,"<sup>7</sup> reveal him richly to anyone who has a taste for theological reading. His philosophy is summarized in the introduction to "The Literary Remains," and his own personality and the very atmosphere of his household are reproduced in "A Small Boy and Others," and "Notes of a Son and Brother." Thus what it is appropriate to say about him in this place can be given largely in either his own words or those of one or the other of his two elder sons.

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<sup>5</sup> According to the Rev. Hugh Walsh of Newburgh, who has worked out the Walsh genealogy. *A Small Boy and Others* (page 6) says "Killyleagh."

<sup>6</sup> *A Small Boy and Others*, p. 8.

<sup>7</sup> *Literary Remains of Henry James*, Introduction, p. 9.

The intellectual quandary in which Henry James, Senior, found himself in early manhood was well described in letters to Emerson in 1842 and 1843. "Here I am," he wrote, "these thirty-two years in life, ignorant in all outward science, but having patient habits of meditation, which never know disgust or weariness, and feeling a force of impulsive love toward all humanity which will not let me rest wholly mute, a force which grows against all resistance that I can muster against it. What shall I do? Shall I get me a little nook in the country and communicate with my *living* kind—not my talking kind—by life only; a word perhaps of that communication, a fit word once a year? Or shall I follow some commoner method—learn science and bring myself first into man's respect, that I may thus the better speak to him? I confess this last theory seems rank with earthliness—to belong to days forever past.... I am led, quite without any conscious wilfulness either, to seek the *laws* of these appearances that swim round us in God's great museum—to get hold of some central *facts* which may make all other facts properly circumferential, and *orderly* so—and you continually dishearten me by your apparent indifference to such law and central facts, by the dishonor you seem to cast on our intelligence, as if it stood much in our way. Now my conviction is that my intelligence is the necessary digestive apparatus for my life; that there is *nihil in vita*—worth anything, that is—*quod non prius in intellectu*.... Oh, you man without a handle! Shall one never be able to help himself out of you, according to his needs, and be dependent only upon your fitful tippings-up?"<sup>8</sup>

To a modern ear these words confess not only the mental isolation and bewilderment of their author, but also the rarity of the atmosphere in which his philosophic impulse was struggling to draw breath. Like many other struggling spirits of his time, he fell into a void between two epochs. He was a theologian too late to repose on the dogmas and beliefs that were accepted by the preceding generation and by the less critical multitude of his own contemporaries. He was, in youth, a skeptic—too early to avail himself of the methods, discoveries, and perspectives which a generation of scientific inquiry conferred upon his children. The situation was one which usually resolved itself either into permanent skepticism or a more or less unreasoning conformity. In the case of Henry James there happened ere long one of those typical spiritual crises in which "man's original optimism and self-satisfaction get leveled with the dust."<sup>9</sup>

While he was still struggling out of his melancholy state a friend introduced him to the works of Swedenborg. By their help he found the relief he needed, and a faith that possessed him ever after with the intensity of revelation.

"The world of his thought had a few elements and no others ever troubled him. Those elements were very deep ones and had theological names." So wrote his son after he had died.<sup>10</sup> He never achieved a truly philosophic formulation of his religious position, and Mr. Howells once complained that he had written a book about the "Secret of Swedenborg" and had *kept it*. He concerned himself with but one question, conveyed but one message; and the only business of his later life was the formulation and serene reutterance, in books, occasional lectures, and personal correspondence, of his own conception of God and of man's proper relation to him. "The usual problem is—given the creation to find the Creator. To Mr. James it [was]—given the Creator to find the creation. God is; of His being there is no doubt; but who and what are we?" So said a critic quoted in the Introduction to the "Literary Remains," and William James's own estimate may be quoted from the same place (page 12). "I have often," he wrote "tried to imagine what sort of a figure my father might have made, had he been born in a genuinely theological age, with the best minds about him fermenting with the mystery of the Divinity, and the air full of definitions and theories and counter-theories, and strenuous reasoning and contentions, about God's relation to mankind. Floated on such a congenial tide, furthered by sympathetic comrades, and opposed no longer by blank silence but by passionate

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<sup>8</sup> See, further, *Notes of a Son and Brother*, pp. 181 *et seq.*

<sup>9</sup> *Society of the Redeemed Form of Man*, quoted in the Introduction to *Literary Remains*, p. 57, *et seq.*

<sup>10</sup> Letter to Shadworth H. Hodgson, p. 241 *infra*.

and definite resistance, he would infallibly have developed his resources in many ways which, as it was, he never tried; and he would have played a prominent, perhaps a momentous and critical, part in the struggles of his time, for he was a religious prophet and genius, if ever prophet and genius there were. He published an intensely positive, radical, and fresh conception of God, and an intensely vital view of our connection with him. And nothing shows better the altogether lifeless and unintellectual character of the professional theism of our time, than the fact that this view, this conception, so vigorously thrown down, should not have stirred the faintest tremulation on its stagnant pool."

The reader will readily infer that there was nothing conventional, prim, or parson-like about this man. The fact is that the devoutly religious mind is often quite anarchic in its disregard of all those worldly institutions and conventions which do not express human dependence on the Creator. Henry James, Senior, dealt with such things in the most allusive and paradoxical terms. "I would rather," he once ejaculated, "have a son of mine corroded with all the sins of the Decalogue than have him perfect!" His prime horror, writes Henry James, was of prigs; "he only cared for virtue that was more or less ashamed of itself; and nothing could have been of a happier whimsicality than the mixture in him, and in all his walk and conversation, of the strongest instinct for the human and the liveliest reaction from the literal. The literal played in our education as small a part as it perhaps ever played in any, and we wholesomely breathed inconsistency and ate and drank contradictions.... The moral of all was that we need never fear not to be good enough if we were only social enough; a splendid meaning indeed being attached to the latter term. Thus we had ever the amusement, since I can really call it nothing less, of hearing morality, or moralism, as it was more invidiously worded, made hay of in the very interest of character and conduct; these things suffering much, it seemed, by their association with conscience—the very home of the literal, the haunt of so many pedantries."<sup>11</sup>

The erroneous statement that has become current, and that describes Henry James, Senior, as a Swedenborgian minister, is a rich absurdity to anyone who knew him or his writings. Not only had the churches in general sold themselves to the devil, in his view, but the arch-sinners in this respect were the Swedenborgian congregations, for they, if any, might be expected to know better. A letter which he wrote to the editor of the "New Jerusalem Messenger," in 1863, illustrates this and tells more about him than could ten pages of description:

DEAR SIR,—You were good enough, when I called on you at Mr. Appleton's request in New York, to say among other friendly things that you would send me your paper; and I have regularly received it ever since. I thank you for your kindness, but my conscience refuses any longer to sanction its taxation in this way, as I have never been able to read the paper with any pleasure, nor therefore of course with any profit. I presume its editorials are by you, and while I willingly seized upon every evidence they display of an enlarged spirit, I yet find the general drift of the paper so very poverty-stricken in a spiritual regard, as to make it absolutely the least nutritive reading I know. The old sects are notoriously bad enough, but your sect compares with these very much as a heap of dried cod on Long Wharf in Boston compares with the same fish while still enjoying the freedom of the Atlantic Ocean. I remember well the manly strain of your conversation with me in New York, and I know therefore how you must suffer from the control of persons so unworthy as those who have the property of your paper. Why don't you cut the whole concern at once, as a rank offence to every human hope and aspiration? The intercourse I had some years since with the leaders of the sect, on a visit to Boston, made me fully aware of their deplorable want of manhood; but judging from your paper, the whole sect seems spiritually benumbed. Your mature men have an air of childishness and your young men have the aspect of old women. I find it hard above all to imagine

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<sup>11</sup> *A Small Boy and Others*, p. 216.

the existence of a living woman in the bounds of your sect, whose breasts flow with milk instead of hardening with pedantry. I know such things are of course, but I tell you frankly that these are the sort of questions your paper forces on the unsophisticated mind. I really know nothing so sad and spectral in the shape of literature. It seems composed by skeletons and intended for readers who are content to disown their good flesh and blood, and be moved by some ghastly mechanism. It cannot but prove very unwholesome to you spiritually, to be so nearly connected with all that sadness and silence, where nothing more musical is heard than the occasional jostling of bone by bone. Do come out of it before you wither as an autumn leaf, which no longer rustles in full-veined life on the pliant bough, but rattles instead with emptiness upon the frozen melancholy earth.

Pardon my freedom; I was impressed by your friendliness towards me, and speak to you therefore in return with all the frankness of friendship.

Consider me as having any manner and measure of disrespect for your ecclesiastical pretensions, but as being personally, yours cordially,

*H. James.*<sup>12</sup>

A diary entry made by his daughter Alice has fortunately been preserved. "A week before Father died," says this entry, "I asked him one day whether he had thought what he should like to have done about his funeral. He was immediately very much interested, not having apparently thought of it before; he reflected for some time, and then said with the greatest solemnity and looking so majestic: 'Tell him to say only this: "Here lies a man, who has thought all his life that the ceremonies attending birth, marriage and death were all damned non-sense." Don't let him say a word more!'"

Henry James, Senior, lived entirely with his books, his pen, his family, and his friends. The first three he could carry about with him, and did carry along on numerous restless and extended journeys. From friends, even when he left them on the opposite side of the ocean, he was never quite separated, for he always maintained a wide correspondence, partly theological, partly playful and friendly. He was so sociable and so independent and lively a talker, that he entered into hearty relations with interesting people wherever he went. Thackeray was a familiar visitor at his apartment in Paris when his older children were just old enough to remember, and his recollections of Carlyle and Emerson will reward any reader whose appetite does not carry him as far as the theological disquisitions. "I suppose there was not in his day," said E. L. Godkin, "a more formidable master of English style."<sup>13</sup> In his conversation the winning impulsiveness of both his humor and his indignation appeared more clearly even than in his writing. He loved to talk, not for the sake of oppressing his hearer by an exposition of his own views, but in order to stir him up and rouse him to discussion and rejoinder. At home he was not above espousing the queerest of opinions, if by so doing he could excite his children to gallop after him and ride him down. "Meal-times in that pleasant home were exciting. 'The adipose and affectionate Wilky,' as his father called him, would say something and be instantly corrected or disputed by the little cock-sparrow Bob, the youngest, but good-naturedly defend his statement, and then Henry (Junior) would emerge from his silence in defence of Wilky. Then Bob would be more impertinently insistent, and Mr. James would advance as Moderator, and William, the eldest, join in. The voice of the Moderator presently would be drowned by the combatants and he soon came down vigorously into the arena, and when, in the excited argument, the dinner-knives might not be absent from eagerly gesticulating hands, dear Mrs. James, more conventional, but bright as well as motherly, would look at me, laughingly reassuring, saying, 'Don't be disturbed; they won't stab each other. This is usual when the boys come home.' And the quiet little sister ate her dinner, smiling, close to the combatants. Mr. James considered this debate, within bounds, excellent for the boys. In

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<sup>12</sup> *Vide* also a passage in the *Literary Remains*, at p. 104.

<sup>13</sup> *Life of E. L. Godkin*, vol. II, p. 218. New York, 1907.

their speech singularly mature and picturesque, as well as vehement, the Gaelic (Irish) element in their descent always showed. Even if they blundered, they saved themselves by wit."<sup>14</sup> It was certainly to their father's talk, to the influence of his "full and homely" idiom, and to the attention-arresting whimsicality and humor with which he perverted the whole vocabulary of theology and philosophy, that both William and Henry owed much of their own wealth of resource in ordinary speech. They used often to exaggerate their father's tricks of utterance, for he would have been the last man to refuse himself as a whetstone for his children's wit, and the business of outdoing the head of the family in the matter of language was an exercise familiar to all his sons.<sup>15</sup> Whoever knew them will remember that their everyday diction displayed a natural command of such words and figures as most men cannot use gracefully except when composing with pen in hand.

Finally, with respect to the constancy of Henry James, Senior's, presence in the lives of his children, it should be made clear that he never had any "business" or profession to interfere with "his almost eccentrically home-loving habit." During the years of moving about Europe, during the quiet years in Newport, the family was thrown upon its inner social resources. The children were constantly with their parents and with each other, and they continued all their lives to be united by much stronger attachments than usually exist between members of one family.

William James never acknowledged himself as feeling particularly indebted to any of the numerous schools and tutors to whom his father's oscillations between New York, Europe, and Newport confided him. He was sent first to private schools in New York City; but they seem to have been considered inadequate to his needs, for he was not allowed to remain long in any one. Nor were the changes any less frequent after the family moved to Europe (for the second time since his birth) in 1855. He was then thirteen years old. The exact sequence of events during the next five years of restless movement cannot be determined now, but the important points are clear. The family, including by this time three younger brothers and a younger sister as well as a devoted maternal aunt, remained abroad from 1855 to 1858. London, Paris, Boulogne-sur-Mer, and Geneva harbored them for differing periods. In London and Paris governesses, tutors, and a private school of the sort that admits the irregularly educated children of strangers visiting the Continent, administered what must have been a completely discontinuous instruction. In Boulogne, William and his younger brother Henry attended the *Collège* through the winter of 1857-58. This term at the *Collège de Boulogne*, during which he passed his sixteenth birthday, was his earliest experience of thorough teaching, and he once said that it gave him his first conception of earnest work. Then, after a year at Newport, there was another European migration—this time to Geneva for the winter of 1859-60. There William was entered at the "Academy," as the present University was still called. He subsequently described himself as having reached Geneva "a miserable, home-bred, obscure little ignoramus." During the following summer he was sent for a while to Bonn-am-Rhein, to learn German. Some Latin, mathematics to the extent of the usual school algebra and trigonometry, a smattering of German and an excellent familiarity with French—such, in conventional terms, was the net result of his education in 1859. He tried to make up for the deficiencies in his schooling, and as occasion offered he picked up a few words of Greek, attained to a moderate reading knowledge of Italian, and a quite complete command of German. But these came later.

He seldom referred to his schooling with anything but contempt, and usually dismissed all reference to it by saying that he "never had any." But, as is often the case with even those boys who

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<sup>14</sup> *Early Years of the Saturday Club*; E. W. Emerson's chapter on Henry James, Senior, p. 328. There follows a delightful account of a "Conversation" at R. W. Emerson's house in Concord, at which Henry James, Senior, upset a prepared discourse of Alcott's and launched himself into an attack on "Morality." Whereupon Miss Mary Moody Emerson, "eighty-four years old and dressed underneath without doubt, in her shroud," seized him by the shoulders and shook him and rebuked him. "Mr. James beamed with delight and spoke with most chivalrous courtesy to this Deborah bending over him."

<sup>15</sup> Some passages in William James's early letters to his family might seem labored. They should be read with this in mind. An especially high-sounding phrase or a flight into a grand style was understood as a signal meaning "fun," and such passages are never to be taken as serious.

follow a regular curriculum, his amusements and excursions beyond the bounds of his prescribed studies did more to develop him appropriately than did any of his schoolmasters. An interest in exact knowledge showed itself early. He once recalled a trivial incident which illustrates this, though he apparently remembered it because he realized, young as he was when it occurred, that it grew out of a real difference between the cast of his mind and the cast of Henry's. As readers of the "Small Boy" will remember, Henry, at the ordinarily "tough" age of ten, was already animated by a secret passion for authorship, and used to confide his literary efforts to folio sheets, which he stored in a copy-book and which he tried to conceal from his tormenting brother. But William came upon them, and discovered that on one page Henry had made a drawing to represent a mother and child clinging to a rock in the midst of a stormy ocean and that he had inscribed under it: "The thunder roared and the lightning followed!" William saw the meteorological blunder immediately; he fairly pounced upon it, and he tormented the sensitive romancer about it so unmercifully that the occasion had to be marked by punishments and the inauguration of a maternal protectorate over the copy-book. About four years later, when he was fifteen years old, his father bought a microscope to give him at Christmas. William happened upon the bill for it in advance, and was hardly able to contain his excitement until Christmas day, so portentous seemed the impending event. Apparently no similar experience ever equalled the intensity of this one. He doubtless made as good use of the instrument as an unguided boy could. But though his proclivities were generously indulged, they were never trained. At Geneva he began to study anatomy, but there was no regular instruction in osteology; so he borrowed a copy of Sappey's "Anatomie" and got permission to visit the Museum and there examine the human skeleton by himself.

Clearly, there was profit for him also in the restlessness which governed his father's movements and which threw the boy into quickening collision with places, people, and ideas at a rate at which such contacts are not vouchsafed to many schoolboys. From so far back as his nineteenth year (there is no evidence to go by before that) William was blessed with an effortless and confirmed cosmopolitanism of consciousness; and he had attained to an acquaintance with English and French reviews, books, paintings, and public affairs which was remarkable not only for its happy ease, but, in one so young, for its wide range. The letters which follow show clearly with what expert observation he responded, all his life, to changes of scene and to the differences between peoples and environments. The fascination of these differences never failed for him when he traveled, and his letters from abroad give such voluminous proof of his own addiction to what he somewhat harshly called "the most barren of exercises, the making of international comparisons," that the problem of the editor is to control rather than to emphasize the evidence. He began young to be a wide reader; soon he became a wide reader in three languages. Above all, he was encouraged early to trust his own impulse and pursue his own bent. Probably his active and inquiring intelligence could not have been permanently cribbed and confined by any schooling, no matter how narrow and rigorous. But, as nothing was to be more remarkable about him in his maturity than the easy assurance with which he passed from one field of inquiry to another, ignoring conventional bounds and precincts, never losing his freshness of tone, shedding new light and encouragement everywhere, so it is impossible not to believe that the influences and circumstances which combined in his youth fostered and corroborated his native mobility and detachment of mind.

Meanwhile he had one occupation to which no reference has yet been made, but to which he thought, for a while, of devoting himself wholly, namely, painting. He began to draw before he had reached his 'teens. Henry James said: "As I catch W. J.'s image, from far back, at its most characteristic, he sits drawing and drawing, always drawing, especially under the lamp-light of the Fourteenth Street back parlor; and not as with a plodding patience, which I think would less have affected me, but easily, freely, and, as who should say, infallibly: always at the stage of finishing off, his head dropped from side to side and his tongue rubbing his lower lip. I recover a period during which to see him at all was so to see him—the other flights and faculties removed him from my

view."<sup>16</sup> What was an idle amusement in New York became, when the boy was transferred to foreign places and cut off from other amusements, a sharpener of observation and a resource for otherwise vacant hours. For when the family of young Americans reached St. John's Wood, London, and then moved to the Continent, the two elder boys found little to do at first except to wander about "in a state of the direst propriety," staring at street scenes, shop-windows, and such "sights" as they were old enough to enjoy, and then to buy "water-colors and brushes with which to bedaub eternal drawing blocks." In Paris William had better lessons in drawing than he had ever had elsewhere, and it seems fair to say that he made good use of his opportunity to educate his eye; saw good pictures; sketched and copied with zest; and began to show great aptitude in his own "daubings." From Bonn, later still, he wrote to his Genevese fellow student Charles Ritter: "Je me suis pleinement décidé à essayer le métier de peintre. En un an ou deux je saurais si j'y suis propre ou non. Si c'est non, il sera facile de reculer. Il n'y a pas sur la terre un objet plus déplorable qu'un méchant artiste." [18]

He applied himself with energy to art for the following year at Newport, working daily in the studio of William Hunt, along with his stimulating young friend, John La Farge. To what good purpose he had drawn and painted from boyhood, and to what point he trained his gift that winter, cannot now be measured and defined in words. Paper and canvas are the proof of such things, which must be seen rather than described; and unfortunately only one canvas and very few drawings have been preserved. In the "Notes of a Son and Brother," several random sketches are reproduced which will say much to the discerning critic. The one canvas that at all indicates the climax of his artistic effort, the beautiful and simple portrait of his cousin Katharine Temple, is also reproduced in the "Notes"; but a small half-tone gives, alas! only an inadequate impression of the quality of the painting. The sketches which are included in the following pages will give an idea of the felicity of his hand, and of his talent for seeing the living line whenever he made sketches or notes from life. He threw these scraps off so easily, valuing them not at all, that few were kept. Then, before a year had passed (that is to say, in 1861), he had decided not to be a painter after all. Thereafter what was remarkable was just that he let so genuine a talent remain completely neglected. Except to record an observation in the laboratory, to explain the object under discussion to a student, or to amuse his children, he soon left pencil and brush quite untouched.

The photographs of James reproduced in this book are all excellent "likenesses," and one, with his colleague, Royce, caught an attitude which suggests the alertness that marked his bearing. He was of medium height (about five feet eight and one-half inches), and though he was muscular and compact, his frame was slight and he appeared to be slender in youth, spare in his last years. His carriage was erect and his tread was firm to the end. Until he was over fifty he used to take the stairs of his own house two, or even three, steps at a bound. He moved rapidly, not to say impatiently, but with an assurance that invested his figure with an informal sort of dignity. After he strained his heart in the Adirondacks in 1899 he had to habituate himself to a moderate pace in walking, but he never learned to make short movements and movements of unpremeditated response in a deliberate way. When he drove about the hilly roads of the Adirondacks or New Hampshire, he was forever springing in and out of the carriage to ease the horses where the way was steep. (Indeed it was so intolerable to him to sit in a carriage while straining beasts pulled it up grade, that he lost much of his enjoyment of driving when he could no longer walk up the hills.) Great was his brother Henry's astonishment at Chocorua, in 1904, to see that he still got out of a "democrat wagon" by springing lightly from the top of the wheel. His doctors had cautioned him against such sudden exertions; but he usually jumped without thinking.

In talking he gesticulated very little, but his face and voice were unusually expressive. His eyes were of that not very dark shade whose depth and color changes with alterations of mood. Mrs. Henry Whitman, who knew him well and painted his portrait, called them "irascible blue eyes." He

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<sup>16</sup> *A Small Boy and Others*, p. 207.

talked in a voice that was low-pitched rather than deep—an unforgettably agreeable voice, that was admirable for conversation or a small lecture-room, although in a very large hall it vibrated and lacked resonance. His speech was full of earnest, humorous and tender cadences.

James was always as informal in his dress as the occasion permitted. The Norfolk jacket in which he used to lecture to his classes invariably figured in college caricatures—as did also his festive neckties. But there was nothing that disgusted him more than a "loutish" carelessness about appearances. A friend of old days, describing a first meeting with him in the late sixties ejaculated, "He was the *cleanest*-looking chap!" There seemed to be no flabby or unvitalized fibre in him.

People and conversation excited him—if too many, or too long-continued, to the point of irritation and exhaustion. If, as was sometimes the case, he was moody and silent in a small company, it was a sign that he was overworked and tired out. But when he was roused to vivacity and floated on the current of congenial discussion, his enunciation was rapid, with occasional pauses while he searched for the right word or figure and pursed his lips as though helping the word to come. Then he talked spontaneously, humorously, and often extravagantly, just as he will appear to have written to his correspondents. Sometimes he was vehement, but never ponderous; and he never made anyone, no matter how humble, feel that he was trying to "impress." Men and women of all sorts felt at ease with him, and anybody who, in Touchstone's phrase,<sup>17</sup> had any philosophy in him, was soon expounding his private hopes, faiths, and skepticisms to James with gusto. He was, distinctly, not a man who required a submissive audience to put him in the vein. A kind of admiring attention that made him self-conscious was as certain to reduce him to silence as a manly give and take was sure to bring him out. It never seemed to occur to him to debate or talk for victory. In Faculty meetings he spoke seldom, and he spent very little time on his feet—except as called upon—when professional congresses or conferences were thrown open to discussion. Similarly, he was seldom at his best at large dinners or formal occasions. His best talk might have been described by a phrase which he used about his father. It was pat and intuitive and had a "smiting" quality. He was never guilty of abusing anecdote,—that frequent instrument of social oppression,—but he loved and told a good story when it would help the discussion along, and showed a fair gift of mimicry in relating one.<sup>18</sup>

Once, in the early days of their acquaintance, François Pillon, who knew how affectionately James was attached to Harvard University and Cambridge and who assumed that he was a New Englander, asked him about the Puritans. James launched upon a vivacious sketch of their sombre community, and when he had finished Pillon ejaculated with mingled solicitude and astonishment: "Alors! pas un seul bon-vivant parmi vos ancêtres!" The story of the solemn-minded student who stemmed the full tide of a lecture one day by exclaiming, "But, Doctor, Doctor!—to be serious for a moment—," is already well known.

But what counted for the charm and effect of James's conversation more than all else was his lively interest in his interlocutor and in every fresh idea that developed in talk with him. He made the other man feel that he had no desire to pigeon-hole him and dismiss him from further consideration, but that he rejoiced in him as a fellow creature, unique like himself and forever fascinating. "How delicious," he cried, "is the fact that you can't cram individuals under cut-and-dried heads of classification!" He fell instinctively into the other man's mental stride while he drew him out about his age, occupation, history, family circumstances, theories, prejudices, and peculiarities. He abounded in sympathy and even enthusiasm for the other's personal aims and peculiar ideals.

His first reaction to a new scene or to fresh contact with a foreign people was apt to be one of admiration. "How jolly it looks!" he would exclaim, "and how superior in such and such ways to that last!" "How *good* they seem!" "How sound and worthy to be given its chance to develop is

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<sup>17</sup> For James's use of Touchstone's question, see p. 190 *infra*.

<sup>18</sup> Cf. Henry James's *Life of W. W. Story*, vol. II, p. 204, where there is a passage which sounds reminiscent of the author's father and brother.

such a civilization!" Restlessness, discriminating moods, and a longing for the "simplifications" of home soon followed; but even when restlessness and homesickness became acute, their effect was not permanent. He was no sooner back in his own home than the peculiar virtues of the place and people from whom he had fled shone again as unique and precious to the universe. It was good that there should be one Oxford, and that it should cling to every ancient peculiarity without surrendering to the spirit of the age—and good too that there should be one Chautauqua!

For James was perennially "keen" about new things and future things, about beginnings and promises. His mind looked forward eagerly. Youth never bored him. Anything spontaneous, young, or original was likely to excite him. And then he would pour out expressions of approval and acclaim. Brilliant students and young authors were often "little geniuses"; he guessed that they would "produce something very big before long"; they had already arrived at "an important vision," or had "driven their spear into the Universe where its ribs are short"; they were going to make "perhaps the most original contribution to philosophy that anyone had made for a generation."

It must be admitted that his recognition would occasionally have had a happier effect had it been less encouraging. But he enjoyed being generous and hated to spoil a gift of praise by "stingy" qualifications. He might have said that the great point was not to let any unique virtue in a man evaporate or be wasted. At any rate, he said, that should be seen to in a university. He was quite unconventional in recognizing originality, and preferred all the risks involved in hailing potentialities that might never come to fruition, to a policy of playing safe in his estimates. Yet on the whole he very seldom "fooled himself." Few men who have possessed a comparable gift of discovering special virtues in different individuals have combined with it so just a sense of what could not be expected of those same individuals in the way of other virtues.

But there would be danger of misunderstanding if this trait were mentioned without an important qualification. The reader will do well, in interpreting any judgment of James's to consider whether the book, or theory, or man under consideration was new and unrecognized, or was already established and secure of a place in men's esteem. In the former case, especially if there was anything in the situation to appeal to James's natural "inclination to succor the under-dog," his praise was likely to be extravagantly expressed and his reservations were apt to be withheld. In the latter case he was no less certain to give free rein to his critical discernment. Men who knew him as a teacher are likely to remember how he encouraged them in their efforts on the one hand, and on the other how stimulating to them and enlarging to their mental horizons were his free and often destructive comments upon famous books and illustrious men.

As a teacher at Harvard for thirty-five years, he influenced the lives and thoughts of more than a generation of students who sat in his classes. To many of them he was an adviser as well as a teacher, and to some he was a lifelong friend. Such was the character of his books and public discourses that people of all sorts and conditions from outside the University came to him or wrote to him for encouragement and counsel. The burden of his message to all was the bracing text which he himself loved and lived by—"Son of man, stand upon thy feet and I will speak unto thee." He never tried to win disciples, to compel allegiance to his own doctrines, or to found a school. But he taught countless young men to love philosophy, and helped many a troubled soul besides to face the problems of the universe in an independent and gallant spirit. He helped them by example as well as by precept, for it was plain to everyone who knew him or read him that his genius was ardently adventurous and humane.

## II 1861-1864

### Chemistry and Comparative Anatomy in the Lawrence Scientific School

IN the autumn of 1861 James turned to scientific work, and began what was to become a lifelong connection with Cambridge and Harvard University by registering for the study of chemistry in the Lawrence Scientific School. Among the students who were in the School in his time were several who were to be his friends and colleagues in later years—Nathaniel S. Shaler, later Professor of Geology and Dean of the Scientific School, Alexander Agassiz, engineer, captain of industry, eminent biologist, and organizer of the museum that his father had founded, the entomologist Samuel H. Scudder, F. W. Putnam, who afterwards became Curator of the Peabody Museum of Ethnology and Anthropology, and Alpheus Hyatt, the palæontologist, who was Curator of the Museum of Comparative Zoölogy at Harvard for many years before his death in 1902. The chemical laboratory of the school had just been placed under the charge of Charles W. Eliot,—in 1869 to become President Eliot,—who writes: "I first came in contact with William James in the academic year 1861-62. As I was young and inexperienced, it was fortunate for me that there were but fifteen students of chemistry in the Scientific School that year, and that I was therefore able to devote a good deal of attention to the laboratory work of each student. The instruction was given chiefly in the laboratory and was therefore individual. James was a very interesting and agreeable pupil, but was not wholly devoted to the study of Chemistry. During the two years in which he was registered as a student in Chemistry, his work was much interfered with by ill-health, or rather by something which I imagined to be a delicacy of nervous constitution. His excursions into other sciences and realms of thought were not infrequent; his mind was excursive, and he liked experimenting, particularly novel experimenting.... I received a distinct impression that he possessed unusual mental powers, remarkable spirituality, and great personal charm.<sup>19</sup> This impression became later useful to Harvard University."

Henry James published many of the few still existing letters which William wrote during this time in his "Notes of a Son and Brother." Three of them are among the first six selected for inclusion here. The fun and extravagance of these early letters is so full of an intimate raillery that they should be read in their context in that book, where the whole family has been made to live again. The first of the letters that follow was written a few weeks after the opening of the autumn term in which James began his course in chemistry. The son of Professor Benjamin Peirce (the mathematician) of whom it makes mention was the brilliant but erratic Charles S. Peirce, to whom other references appear in later letters, and whose name James subsequently associated with his pragmatism. "Harry," "Wilky" and "Bobby" will be recognized as William's younger brothers. Wilky was at the Sanborn School in Concord, thirteen miles away. Bobby was in Newport, under the parental roof at 13 Kay Street. The Emerson referred to was R. W. Emerson's son, Edward W. Emerson, and "Tom" Ward, the Thomas W. Ward of a lifelong friendship and of several later letters and allusions.

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<sup>19</sup> The following entries occur among some "notes on his students" which President Eliot made at the time—

## To his Family

CAMBRIDGE, Sunday Afternoon, Sept. 16, 1861.

DEAREST FAMILY,—This morning, as I was busy over the tenth page of a letter to Wilky, in he popped and made my labor of no account. I had intended to go and see him yesterday, but concluded to delay as I had plenty of work to do and did not wish to take the relish off the visits by making them frequent when I was not home-sick. Moreover, Emerson and Tom Ward were going on, and I thought he would have too much of a good thing. But he walked over this morning with, or rather without them, for he went astray and arrived very hot and dusty. I gave him a bath and took him to dinner and he is now gone to see [Andrew?] Robeson and Emerson. His plump corpusculus looks as always. He says it is pretty lonely at Concord and he misses Bob's lively and sportive wiles very much in the long and lone and dreary evenings, tho' he consoles himself by thinking he will have a great time at study. I have at last got to feel quite settled and homelike. I write in my new parlor whither I moved yesterday. You have no idea what an improvement it is on the old affair, worth double the price, and the little bedroom under the roof is perfectly delicious, with a charming outlook upon little backyards with trees and pretty old brick walls. The sun is upon *this* room from earliest dawn till late in the afternoon—a capital thing in winter.

I like Mrs. Upham's very much. Dark, aristocratic dining-room, with royal cheer—"fish, roast-beef, veal-cutlets or pigeons?" says the splendid, tall, noble-looking, white-armed, black-eyed Juno of a handmaid as you sit down. And for dessert, a choice of three, *three* of the most succulent, unctuous (no, not unctuous, unless you imagine a celestial unction without the oil) pie-ey confections, always two plates full—my eye! She has an admirable chemical, not mechanical, combination of jam and cake and cream, which I recommend to mother if she is ever at a loss; though she has no well-stored pantry like that of good old 13 Kay Street; or if she has, it exists not for miserable me. I get up at six, breakfast and study till nine, when I go to school till one, when dinner, a short loaf and work again till five, then gymnasium or walk till tea, and after that, visit, work, literature, correspondence, etc., etc., till ten, when I "divest myself of my wardrobe" and lay my weary head upon my downy pillow and dreamily think of dear old home and Father and Mother and brothers and sister and aunt and cousins and all that the good old Newport sun shines upon, until consciousness is lost. My time last week was fully occupied, and I suspect will be so all winter—I hope so.

This chemical analysis is so bewildering at first that I am entirely "muddled and beat"<sup>20</sup> and have to employ most all my time reading up. Agassiz gives now a course of lectures in Boston, to which I have been. He is evidently a great favorite with his audience and feels so himself. But he is an admirable, earnest lecturer, clear as day, and his accent is most fascinating. I should like to study under him. Prof. Wyman's lectures on [the] Comp[arative] anatomy of vert[ebrates] promise to be very good; prosy perhaps a little and monotonous, but plain and packed full and well arranged (*nourris*). Eliot I have not seen much of; I don't believe he is a *very* accomplished chemist, but can't tell yet. Young [Charles] Atkinson, nephew of Miss Staigg's friend, is a very nice boy. I walked over to Brookline yesterday afternoon with him to see his aunt, who received me very cordially. There is something extremely good about her. The rest of this year's class is nothing wonderful. In last year's there is a son of Prof. Peirce, whom I suspect to be a very "smart" fellow with a great deal of character, pretty independent and violent though. [Storrow] Higginson I like very well. [John] Ropes is always out, so I have not seen him again.

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<sup>20</sup> The expression was undoubtedly recognized in Kay Street as borrowed from the Lincolnshire boor, in Fitzjames Stephen's Essay on Spirit-Rapping, who ended his life with the words, "What with faith, and what with the earth a-turning round the sun, and what with the railroads a-fuzzing and a-whizzing, I'm clean stoned, muddled and beat."

We are only about twelve in the laboratory, so that we have a very cosy time. I expect to have a winter of "crowded" life. I can be as independent as I please, and want to live regardless of the good or bad opinion of everyone. I shall have a splendid chance to try, I know, and I know too that the "native hue of resolution" has never been of very great shade in me hitherto. But I am sure that that feeling is a right one, and I mean to live according to it if I can. If I do, I think I shall turn out all right.

I stopped this letter before tea, when Wilk the rosy-gilled and Higginson came in. I now resume it after tea by the light of a taper and that of the moon. This room is without gas and I must get some of the jovial Harry's abhorred kerosene tomorrow. Wilk read Harry's letter and amused me "metch" by his naïve interpretation of mother's most rational request "that I should keep a memorandum of all monies I receive from Father." He thought it was that she might know exactly what sums the prodigal philosopher really gave out, and that mistrust of his generosity caused it. The phrase has a little sound that way, as Harry framed it, I confess....

"Kitty" Temple, next addressed, was the eldest of four Temple cousins, who were daughters of Henry James, Senior's, favorite sister. Having lost both their parents the Temple children had come to live in Newport under the care of their paternal aunt, Mrs. Edmund Tweedie. The fast friendship between the elder Jameses and the Tweedies, the relationship between the two groups of children and the parity of their ages resulted in the Jameses, Temples and Tweedies all living almost as one family. "Minnie," Kitty's younger sister, was about seventeen years old and was the enchanting and most adored of all the charming and freely circulating young relatives with whom William had more or less grown up. Henry James drew two of his most appealing heroines from her image,—Minnie Theale in the "Wings of the Dove" and Isabel Archer in "The Portrait of a Lady,"—and she is still more authentically revealed by references that recur in "Notes of a Son and Brother" and in the bundle of her own letters with which that volume beautifully closes. In a long-after year William, who was fondly devoted to her, received an early letter of hers containing an affectionate reference to himself and wrote to the friend who had sent it: "I am deeply thankful to you for sending me this letter, which revives all sorts of poignant memories and makes her live again in all her lightness and freedom. Few spirits have been more free than hers. I find myself wishing so that she could know me as I am now. As for knowing her as *she* is now??!! I find that she means as much in the way of human character for me now as she ever did, being unique and with no analogue in all my subsequent experience of people. Thank you once more for what you have done." At the time of the next letter, "Minnie" had just cut her hair short, and a photograph of her new aspect was the occasion of the badinage about her madness. "Dr. Prince" was an alienist to whom another James cousin had lately been married.

## To Miss Katharine Temple (Mrs. Richard Emmet)

CAMBRIDGE, [Sept. 1861].

My dear Kitty,—Imagine if you can with what palpitations I tore open the rude outer envelope of your precious, long-looked-for missive. I read it by the glimmer of the solitary lamp which at eventide lights up the gloom of the dark and humid den called Post Office. And as I read on unconscious of the emotion I was betraying, a vast crowd collected. Profs. Agassiz and Wyman ran with their note-books and proceeded to take observations of the greatest scientific import. I with difficulty reached my lodgings. When thereout fell the Photograph. Wheeeew! oohoo! aha! la-la! [*Marks representing musical flourish*] boisteroso triumphissimmo, chassez to the right, cross over, forward two, hornpipe and turn summerset! Up came the fire engines; but I proudly waved them aside and plunged bareheaded into the chill and gloomy bowels of the night, to recover by violent exercise the use of my reasoning faculties, which had almost been annihilated by the shock of happiness. As I stalked along, an understanding of the words in your letter grew upon me, and then I felt, my sober senses returning, that I ought not to be so elate. For you certainly bring me bad news enough. Elly's arm broken and Minny gone mad should make me rather drop a tear than laugh.

But leaving poor Elly's case for the present, let's speak of Minny and her fearful catastrophe. Do you know, Kitty,—now that it 's all over, I don't see why I should not tell you,—I have often had flashes of horrid doubts about that girl. Occasionally I have caught a glance from her furtive eye, a glance so wild, so weird, so strange, that it has frozen the innermost marrow in my bones; and again the most sickening feeling has come over me as I have noticed fleeting shades of expression on her face, so short, but ah! so piercingly pregnant of the mysteries of mania—*unhuman*, ghoulish, fiendish-cunning! Ah me! ah me! Now that my worst suspicions have proved true, I feel sad indeed. The well-known, how-often fondly-contemplated features tell the whole story in the photograph taken, as you say, a few days before the crisis. Madness is plainly lurking in that lurid eye, stamps indelibly the arch of the nostril and the curve of the lip, and in ambush along the soft curve of the cheek it lies ready to burst forth in consuming fire. But oh! still is it not pity to think that that fair frame, whilom the chosen fane of intellect and heart, clear and white as noonday's beams, should now be a vast desert through whose lurid and murky glooms glare but the fitful forked lightnings of fuliginous insanity!—Well, Kitty, after all, it is but an organic lesion of the gray cortical substance which forms the *pia mater* of the brain, which is very consoling to us all. Was she all alone when she did it? Could no one wrest the shears from her vandal hand? I declare I fear to return home,—but of course Dr. Prince has her by this time. I shall weep as soon as I have finished this letter.

But now, to speak seriously, I am really shocked and grieved at hearing of poor little Elly's accident and of her suffering. I suppose she bears it though like one of the Amazons of old. I suppose the proper thing for me to do would be to tell her how naughty and careless she was to go and risk her bones in that unprincipled way, and how it will be a good lesson to her for the future about climbing into swings, etc., etc., *ad libitum*; but I will leave that to you, as her elder sister (I have no doubt you've dosed her already), and convey to her only the expression of my warmest condolence and sympathy. I hope to see her getting on finely when I come home, which will be shortly. After all it will soon be over, and then her arm will be better than ever, twice as strong, and who of us are exempt from pain? Take me, for example: you might weep tears of blood to see me day after day forced to hold ignited crucibles in my naked hands till the eyes of my neighbors water and their throats choke with the dense fumes of the burning leather. Yet I ask for no commiseration. Nevertheless I bestow it upon poor Elly, to whom give my best love and say I look forward to seeing her soon.

And Henrietta the ablebodied and strongminded—your report of her constancy touched me more than anything has for a long while. Tell her to stick it out for a few days longer and she will

be richly rewarded by an apple and a chestnut *from Massachusetts*. As for yourself and sister in the affair of the wings, 'tis but what I expected,—I am too old now to expect much from human nature,—yet after such length of striving to please, so many months of incessant devotion, one *must* feel a slight twinge. If your sister can still understand, let her know that I thank her for her photograph. Too bad, too bad! With her long locks she would still be winning, outwardly, spite of the howling fiends within; but they gone, like Samson, she has nothing left.—But now, my dear Kitty, I must put an end to my scribbling. This writing in the middle of the week is an unheard-of license, for I must work, work, work. Relentless Chemistry claims its hapless victim. Excuse all faults of grammar, punctuation, spelling and sense on the score of telegraphic haste. Love to all and to yourself. Please "remember me" to your aunt Charlotte, and believe [me] yours affectionately,

W. J.

## To his Family

CAMBRIDGE,  
Sunday afternoon [Early Nov., 1861].

Dearly beloved Family,—Wilky and I have just returned from dinner, and having completed a concert for the benefit of the inmates of Pasco Hall and the Hall next door, turn ourselves, I to writing a word home, he to digesting in a "lobbing" position on the sofa. Wilky wrote you a complete account of our transactions in Boston yesterday much better than I could have done. I suppose you will ratify our action as it seemed the only one possible to us. The radiance of Harry's visit<sup>21</sup> has not faded yet, and I come upon gleams of it three or four times a day in my farings to and fro; but it has never a bit diminished the lustre of far-off shining Newport all silver and blue and this heavenly group below<sup>22</sup> (all being more or less failures, especially the two outside ones),—the more so as the above-mentioned Harry could in no wise satisfy my cravings to know of the family and friends, as he did not seem to have been on speaking terms with any of them for some time past and could tell me nothing of what they did, said, or thought about any given subject. Never did I see a so much uninterested creature in the affairs of those about him. He is a good soul though in his way, too—much more so than the light fantastic Wilky, who has been doing nothing but disaster since he has been here, breaking down my good resolutions about eating, keeping me from any intellectual exercise, ruining my best hat wearing it while dressing, while in his night-gown, wishing to wash his face with it on, insisting on sleeping in my bed, inflicting on me thereby the pains of crucifixion, and hardly to be prevented from taking the said hat to bed with him. The odious creature occupied my comfortable armchair all the morning in the position represented in the fine plate which accompanies this letter. But one more night though and he shall be gone and no thorn shall be in the side of the serene and hallowed felicity of expectation in which I shall revel until the time comes for going home, home, home to the hearts of my infancy and budding youth.

It is not homesickness I have, if by that term be meant a sickness of heart and loathing of my present surroundings, but a sentiment far transcending this, that makes my hair curl for joy whenever I think of home, by which home comes to me as hope, not as regret, and which puts roses long faded thence in my old mother's cheeks, mildness in my father's voice, flowing graces into my Aunt Kate's movements, babbling confidingness into Harry's talk, a straight parting into Robby's hair and a heavenly tone into the lovely babe's temper, the elastic graces of a kitten into Moses's<sup>23</sup> rusty and rheumatic joints. Aha! Aha! The time will come—Thanksgiving in less than two weeks and then, oh, then!—probably a cold reception, half repellent, no fatted calf, no fresh-baked loaf of spicy bread,—but I dare not think of that side of the picture. I will ever hope and trust and my faith shall be justified.

As Wilky has submitted to you a résumé of his future history for the next few years, so will I, hoping it will meet your approval. Thus: one year study chemistry, then spend one term at home, then one year with Wyman, then a medical education, then five or six years with Agassiz, then probably death, death, death with inflation and plethora of knowledge. This you had better seriously consider. This is a glorious day and I think I must close and take a walk. So farewell, farewell until a quarter to nine Sunday evening soon! Your bold, your beautiful,

*Your Blossom!!*

*Dedicated to Miss Kitty, oh! I beg pardon, to Miss Temple.*

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<sup>21</sup> A diary of Mr. T. S. Perry's has fixed the date of this visit as Oct. 31-Nov. 4.

<sup>22</sup> W. J. could make much better drawings than the ones which he enclosed in this letter.

<sup>23</sup> A horse.

The following curious facts were discovered by the Chemist James in some of his recent investigations:

At Pensacola, Fla., there is a navy yard, and consequently many officers of the U.S.A.

In Pensacola there is a larger proportional number of old maids than in any city of the Union.

The ladies of Pensacola, instead of seeking an eligible partner in the middle ranks of society, spend their lives in a vain attempt to entrap the officers who flirt with them and then leave Pensacola. The moral lesson is evident.

The "Kitty" to whom James addressed the next letter was another cousin, the daughter of one of his father's elder brothers. Her husband was the alienist to whom the reader will remember that the mad Minny was consigned in a previous letter. It should also be explained that James's two youngest brothers had now entered the Union army, and that one of them, Wilky, adjutant of the first colored regiment, had been wounded in the charge on Fort Wagner in which Colonel Robert Gould Shaw was killed.

## To Mrs. Katharine James (Mrs. William H.) Prince

CAMBRIDGE, Sept. 12, 1863.

My dear Cousin Kitty,—I was very agreeably surprised at getting your letter a few days after arriving here, and am heartily glad to find that you still remember me and think sometimes of the visit you paid us that happy summer. I often think of you, and at such times feel very much like renewing our delightful converse. Several times I have been on the uttermost *brink* of writing to you, but somehow or other I have always quailed at plunging over. Nature makes us so awkward. I again felt several times like going to pay you a short visit,—last winter and this spring, I remember,—but hesitated, never having been invited, and being entirely ignorant how you would receive me, whether you would chain me up in your asylum and scourge me, or what—tho' I believe those good old days are over.

When you were at our house, I recollect I was in the first flush of my chemical enthusiasm. A year and a half of hard work at it here has somewhat dulled my ardor; and after half a year's vegetation at home, I am back here again, studying this time Comparative Anatomy. I am obliged before the 15th of January to make finally and irrevocably "the choice of a profession." I suppose your sex, which has, or should have, its bread brought to it, instead of having to go in search of it, has no idea of the awful responsibility of such a choice. I have four alternatives: Natural History, Medicine, Printing, Beggary. Much may be said in favor of each. I have named them in the ascending order of their pecuniary invitingness. After all, the great problem of life seems to be how to keep body and soul together, and I *have* to consider lucre. To study natural science, I know I should like, but the prospect of supporting a family on \$600 a year is not one of those rosy dreams of the future with which the young are said to be haunted. Medicine would pay, and I should still be dealing with subjects which interest me—but how much drudgery and of what an unpleasant kind is there! Of all departments of Medicine, that to which Dr. Prince devotes himself is, I should think, the most interesting. And I should like to see him and his patients at Northampton very much before coming to a decision.

The worst of this matter is that everyone must more or less act with insufficient knowledge—"go it blind," as they say. Few can afford the time to try what suits them. However, a few months will show. I shall be most happy some day to avail myself of your very cordial invitation. I have heard so much of the beauty of Northampton that I want very much to see the place too.

I heard from home day before yesterday that "Wilky was improving daily." I hope he is, poor fellow. His wound is a very large and bad one and he will be confined to his bed a long while. He bears it like a man. He is the best abolitionist you ever saw, and makes a common one, as we are, feel very small and shabby. Poor little Bob is before Charleston, too. We have not heard from him in a very long while. He made an excellent officer in camp here, every one said, and was promoted.

But I must stop. I hope, now that the ice is broken, you will soon feel like writing again. And, if you please, eschew all formality in addressing me by dropping the title of our relationship before my name. As for you, the case is different. My senior, a grave matron, quasi-mother of I know not how many scores, not of children, but of live lunatics, which is far more exceptional and awe-inspiring, I tremble to think I have shown too much levity and familiarity already. Are you very different from what you were two years ago? As no word has passed between us since then, I suppose I should have begun by congratulating you first on your engagement, which is I believe the fashionable thing, then on your marriage, tho' I don't rightly know whether that is fashionable or not. At any rate I now end. Yours most sincerely,

WM. JAMES.

## To his Mother

CAMBRIDGE, [circa Sept., 1863].

My dearest Mother,—...To answer the weighty questions which you propound: I am glad to leave Newport because I am tired of the place itself, and because of the reason which you have very well expressed in your letter, the necessity of the whole family being near the arena of the future activity of us young men. I recommend Cambridge on account of its own pleasantness (though I don't wish to be invidious towards Brookline, Longwood, and other places) and because of its economy if I or Harry continue to study here much longer....

I feel very much the importance of making soon a final choice of my business in life. I stand now at the place where the road forks. One branch leads to material comfort, the flesh-pots; but it seems a kind of selling of one's soul. The other to mental dignity and independence; combined, however, with physical penury. If I myself were the only one concerned I should not hesitate an instant in my choice. But it seems hard on Mrs. W. J., "that not impossible she," to ask her to share an empty purse and a cold hearth. On one side is *science*, upon the other *business* (the honorable, honored and productive business of printing seems most attractive), with *medicine*, which partakes of [the] advantages of both, between them, but which has drawbacks of its own. I confess I hesitate. I fancy there is a fond maternal cowardice which would make you and every other mother contemplate with complacency the worldly fatness of a son, even if obtained by some sacrifice of his "higher nature." But I fear there might be some anguish in looking back from the pinnacle of prosperity (*necessarily* reached, if not by eating dirt, at least by renouncing some divine ambrosia) over the life you might have led in the pure pursuit of truth. It seems as if one *could* not afford to give that up for any bribe, however great. Still, I am undecided. The medical term opens tomorrow and between this and the end of the term here, I shall have an opportunity of seeing a little into medical business. I shall confer with Wyman about the prospects of a naturalist and finally decide. I want you to become familiar with the notion that I *may* stick to science, however, and drain away at your property for a few years more. If I can get into Agassiz's museum I think it not improbable I may receive a salary of \$400 to \$500 in a couple of years. I know some stupider than I who have done so. You see in that case how desirable it would be to have a home in Cambridge. Anyhow, I am convinced that somewhere in this neighborhood is the place for us to rest. These matters have been a good deal on my mind lately, and I am very glad to get this chance of pouring them into yours. As for the other boys, I don't know. And that idle and useless young female, Alice, too, whom we shall have to feed and clothe! ... Cambridge is all right for business in Boston. Living in Boston or Brookline, etc., would be as expensive as Newport if Harry or I stayed here, for we could not easily go home every day.

Give my warmest love to Aunt Kate, Father, who I hope will not tumble again, and all of them over the way. Recess in three weeks; till then, my dearest and best of old mothers, good-bye! Your loving son,

W. J.

[P.S.] Give my best love to Kitty and give *cette petite* humbug of a Minny a hint about writing to me. I hope you liked your shawl.

The physical and nervous frailty, which President Eliot had noticed in James during the first winter at the Scientific School, and which later manifested itself so seriously as to interfere with his studies, kept him from enlisting in the Federal armies during the Civil War. The case was too clear to occasion discussion in his letters. He continued as a student at the School and, at about the time the foregoing letter was written, transferred himself from the Chemical Department to the Department of Comparative Anatomy and Physiology, in which Professor Jeffries Wyman was teaching. It was

in these two subjects that he himself was to begin teaching ten years later. The next year (1864-65), when he entered the Medical School, Professor Wyman was again his instructor.

Jeffries Wyman (1814-1874) was a less widely effective man than Agassiz, but his influence counted more in James's student years than did that of any other teacher. "All the young men who worked under him," says President Eliot, "took him as the type of scientific zeal, disinterestedness and candor." N. S. Shaler, an admirable judge of men, has recorded his opinion of Wyman in his autobiography, saying: "In some ways he was the most perfect naturalist I have ever known ... within the limits of his powers he had the best-balanced mind it has been my good fortune to come into contact with.... Though he published but little, his store of knowledge of the whole field of natural history was surprisingly great, and, as I came to find, it greatly exceeded that of my master Agassiz in its range and accuracy."<sup>24</sup>

James, who was Wyman's pupil during two critical years, held him in particular reverence and affection, and said of him: "Those who year by year received part or all of their first year's course of medical instruction from him always speak with a sort of worship of their preceptor. His extraordinary effect on all who knew him is to be accounted for by the one word, character. Never was a man so absolutely without detractors. The quality which every one first thinks of in him is his extraordinary modesty, of which his unflinching geniality and serviceableness, his readiness to confer with and listen to younger men—how often did his unmagisterial manner lead them unawares into taking dogmatic liberties, which soon resulted in ignominious collapse before his quiet wisdom!—were kindred manifestations. Next were his integrity, and his complete and simple devotion to objective truth. These qualities were what gave him such incomparable fairness of judgment in both scientific and worldly matters, and made his opinions so weighty even when they were unaccompanied by reasons.... An accomplished draughtsman, his love and understanding of art were great.... He had if anything too little of the *ego* in his composition, and all his faults were excesses of virtue. A little more restlessness of ambition, and a little more willingness to use other people for his purposes, would easily have made him more abundantly productive, and would have greatly increased the sphere of his effectiveness and fame. But his example on us younger men, who had the never-to-be-forgotten advantage of working by his side, would then have been, if not less potent, at least different from what we now remember it; and we prefer to think of him forever as the paragon that he was of goodness, disinterestedness, and single-minded love of the truth."<sup>25</sup>

The stream of James's correspondence still flowed entirely for his family at this time, and his letters were often facetious accounts of his way of life and occupations.

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<sup>24</sup> N. S. Shaler, *Autobiography*, pp. 105 ff.

<sup>25</sup> *Harvard Advocate*, Oct. 1, 1874.

## *To his Sister (age 15)*

CAMBRIDGE, Sept. 13, 1863.

Chérie charmante de Bal,—Notwithstanding the abuse we poured on each other before parting and the (on *my* part) feigned expressions of joy at not meeting you again for so many months, it was with the liveliest regret that I left Newport before your return. But I was obliged in order to get a room here—drove, literally drove to it. That you should not have written to me for so long grieves me more than words can tell—you who have nothing to do besides. It shows you to have little affection and *that* of a poor quality. I have, however, heard from *others* who tell me that Wilky is doing well, "improving daily," which I am very glad indeed to hear. I am glad you had such a pleasant summer. I am nicely established in a cosy little room, with a large recess with a window in it, containing bed and washstand, separated from the main apartment by a rich green silken curtain and a large gilt cornice. This gives the whole establishment a splendid look.

I found when I got here that Miss Upham had changed her price to \$5.00. Great efforts were made by two of us to raise a club, but little enthusiasm was shown by anyone else and it fell through. I then, with that fine economical instinct which distinguishes me, resolved to take a tea and breakfast of bread and milk in my room and only pay Miss Upham for dinners. Miss U. is at Swampscott. So I asked to see [her sister] Mrs. Wood, to learn the cost of seven dinners. She, with true motherly instinct, said that I should only make a slop in my room, and that she would rather let me keep on for \$4.50, seeing it was me. I said she must first consult Miss Upham. She returned from Swampscott saying that Miss U. had sworn *she* would rather pay *me* a dollar a week than have me go away. Ablaze with economic passion, I cried "Done!" trying to make it appear as if she had made a formal offer to that effect. But she would not admit it, and after much recrimination we were separated, it being agreed that I should come for \$4.50, *but tell no-one*. (Mind *you* don't either.) I now lay my hand on my heart, and confidently look towards my mother for that glance of approbation which she *must* bestow. Have I not redeemed any weaknesses of the past? Though part of my conception failed, yet it was boldly planned and would have been a noble stroke.

I have been pretty busy this week. I have a filial feeling towards Wyman already. I work in a vast museum, at a table all alone, surrounded by skeletons of mastodons, crocodiles, and the like, with the walls hung about with monsters and horrors enough to freeze the blood. But I have no fear, as most of them are tightly bottled up. Occasionally solemn men and women come in to see the museum, and sometimes timid little girls (reminding me of thee, beloved, only they are less fashionably dressed) who whisper: "Is folks allowed here?" It pains me to remark, however, that not all the little girls are of this pleasing type, *most* being boldfaced jigs. How does Wilky get on? Is Mayberry gone? How is he nursed? Who holds his foot for the doctor? Tell me all about him. Everyone here asks about him, and all without exception seem enthusiastic about the darkeys. How has Aunt Kate's knee been since her return? Sorry indeed was I to leave without seeing her. Give her my best love. Is Kitty Temple as angelic as ever? Give my best love to her and Minny and the little ones. (My little friend Elly, how often I think of her!) Have your lessons with Bradford (the brandy-witness) begun? You may well blush. Tell Harry Mr. [Francis J.] Child is here, just as usual; Mrs. C. at Swampscott. [C. C.] Salter back, but morose. One or two new students, and Prof. [W. W.] Goodwin, who is a very agreeable man. Among other students, a son of Ed. Everett [William Everett], very intelligent and a capital scholar, studying law. He took honors at Cambridge, England. Tucks, *mère & fille* away, *fil*s here....

I send a photograph of Gen. Sickles for yours and Wilky's amusement. It is a part of a great anthropomorphological collection<sup>26</sup> which I am going to make. So take care of it, as well as of all

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<sup>26</sup> The "great anthropomorphological collection" consisted of photographs of authors, scientists, public characters, and also people

the photographs you will find in the table drawer in my room. But isn't he a bully boy? Harry's handwriting much better. Desecrate my room as little as possible. Good-bye, much love to Wilky and all. If he wants nursing send for me without hesitation. Love to the Tweedies. Haven't you heard yet from Bobby?

*Your aff. bro.,*  
*WM.*

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whose only claim upon his attention was that their physiognomies were in some way typical or striking. James never arranged the collection or preserved it carefully, but he filled at least one album in early days, and he almost always kept some drawer or box at hand and dropped into it portraits cut from magazines or obtained in other ways. He seemed to crave a visual image of everybody who interested him at all.

### III

## 1864-1866

#### The Harvard Medical School—With Louis Agassiz to the Amazon

IN 1864 the family moved from Newport to Boston, where Henry James, Senior, took a house on Ashburton Place (No. 13) for two years, and there was no more occasion for family letters. Although James began the regular course at the Medical School, he had arrived at no clear professional purpose and no selection of any particular field of study. The School afforded him some measure of preparation for natural science as well as for practice.

Philosophy had undoubtedly begun to beckon him, although its appealing gesture lacked authority and did not enlist him in any regular course of philosophic studies. In sixty-five he wrote to his brother Henry from Brazil saying, "When I get home, I'm going to study philosophy all my days." But in many respects his character and tastes matured slowly. The instruction offered by Professor Francis Bowen in Harvard College does not appear to have excited his interest at all. It cannot have failed to excite the irony of his father,—as did everything of the sort that was academic and orthodox,—and James would have been aware of this and might have been influenced. On the other hand, it was obvious that, in the case of his father, who had no connection with church, college or school, the consideration and expression of theories and beliefs had always been a totally unremunerative occupation; and James had to consider how to earn a living. His prospective share of the property that had sufficed for his parents was clearly not going to be enough to support him in independent leisure. In the way of bread and butter, biology and medicine offered more than metaphysical speculation. Last and most important, the tide of contemporary inquiry, driven forward by the storm of the Darwinian controversy, was setting strongly toward a fresh examination of nature. Philosophy must embrace the new reality. Everything that was stimulating in contemporary thought urged men to the scrutiny of the phenomenal world. "Natural History," which has since diversified and amplified itself beyond the use of that appellation, was almost romantically "having its day."

Grau, teurer Freund, ist alle Theorie,  
Und grün des Lebens goldener Baum.<sup>27</sup>

Thus Goethe, and Louis Agassiz, whose lectures James had already followed, and with the abundance of whose inspiring activity no other scientific energizing could then compare, was fond of quoting the lines.

Under such circumstances it was not strange that James should interrupt his medical studies in order to join the expedition which Agassiz was preparing to lead to the Amazon.

No richer or more instructive experience could well have offered itself to him at twenty-three than this journey to Brazil seemed to promise. He was no sooner on the Amazon, however, than it became clear to him that he was not intended to be a field-naturalist; and he pictured the stages of this self-discovery in long, diary-like letters which he sent home to his family. On arriving at Rio he was forced to consider the question of his going on or coming home, by an illness that kept him quarantined for several uncomfortable weeks, and left him depressed and unable to use his eyes during several weeks more. Although he decided in favor of continuing with Agassiz, he revealed more and more clearly in his letters that he was seeing Brazil with the eye of an adventurer and lover

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<sup>27</sup> All theory is gray, dear friend, But the golden tree of life is green.

of landscape rather than of a geologist or collector, and that the months spent in fishing and pickling specimens were to count most for him by teaching him what his vocation was *not*. He found that he was essentially indifferent to the classification of birds, beasts, and fishes, and that he was not made to deal with the riddle of the universe from the only angle of approach that was possible in Agassiz's company.

It would be a mistake, however, to let it appear that nine months of collecting with Louis Agassiz were nine months wasted. There are some men whom it is an education to work under, even though the affair in hand be foreign to one's ultimate concern. Agassiz was such an one, "recognized by all as one of those naturalists in the unlimited sense, one of those folio-copies of mankind, like Linnæus and Cuvier." Thirty years after, James could still say of him: "Since Benjamin Franklin we had never had among us a person of more popularly impressive type.... He was so commanding a presence, so curious and enquiring, so responsive and expansive, and so generous and reckless of himself and his own, that everyone said immediately, Here is no musty *savant*, but a man, a great man, a man on the heroic scale, not to serve whom is avarice and sin."<sup>28</sup>—"To see facts and not to argue or *raisonniren* was what life meant for Agassiz," and James, who was already incorrigibly interested in the causes, values and purposes of things, and whose education had been most unsystematic, profited by his corrective influence. "James," said Agassiz at this time, "some people perhaps consider you a bright young man; but when you are fifty years old, if they ever speak of you then, what they will say will be this: That James—oh, yes, I know him; he used to be a very bright young man!" Such "cold-water therapeutics" were gratefully accepted from one who was not only a teacher but a kind friend; and James remembered them, and recorded later that "the hours he spent with Agassiz so taught him the difference between all possible abstractionists and all livers in the light of the world's concrete fullness, that he was never able to forget it." Considering with what passionate fidelity his own abstractions always face the concrete, this is perhaps more of an acknowledgment than at first sight appears.

The Thayer Expedition set sail from New York April 1, 1865. The next letter was written from ship-board, still in New York Harbor. The "Professor" will be recognized as Louis Agassiz.

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<sup>28</sup> See *Memories and Studies*, pp. 6, 8, and 9; and the address on Agassiz, *passim*.

## To his Mother

[Mar. 30?], 1865.

We have been detained 48 hours on this steamer in port on account of different accidents.... A dense fog is raging which will prevent our going outside as long as it lasts. Sapristi! c'est embêtant....

The Professor has just been expatiating over the map of South America and making projects as if he had Sherman's army at his disposal instead of the ten novices he really has. He may get some students at Rio to accompany the different parties, which will let them be more numerous. I'm sure I hope he will, on account of the language. If each of us has a Portuguese companion, he can do things twice as easily. The Prof. now sits opposite me with his face all aglow, holding forth to the Captain's wife about the imperfect education of the American people. He has talked uninterruptedly for a quarter of an hour at least. I know not how she reacts; I presume she feels somewhat flattered by the attention, however. This morning he made a characteristic speech to Mr. Billings, Mr. Watson's friend. Mr. B. had offered to lend him some books. Agassiz: "May I enter your state-room and take them when I shall want them, sir?" Billings, extending his arm said genially, "Sir, all that I have is yours!" To which, Agassiz, far from being overcome, replied, shaking a monitory finger at the foolishly generous wight, "Look out, sir, dat I take not your skin!" That expresses very well the man. Offering your services to Agassiz is as absurd as it would be for a South Carolinian to invite General Sherman's soldiers to partake of some refreshment when they called at his house....

At this moment Prof. passes behind me and says, "Now today I am going to show you a little what I will have *you* do." Hurray! I have not been able to get a word out of the old animal yet about my fate. I'm only sorry I can't tell *you*....

## To his Parents

*Rio, Brazil, Apr. 21, 1865.*

My dearest Parents,—Every one is writing home to catch the steamer which leaves Rio on Monday. I do likewise, although, so far, I have very little to say to you. You cannot conceive how pleasant it is to feel that tomorrow we shall lie in smooth water at Rio and the horrors of this voyage will be over. O the vile Sea! the damned Deep! No one has a right to write about the "nature of Evil," or to have any opinion about evil, who has not been at sea. The awful slough of despond into which you are there plunged furnishes too profound an experience not to be a fruitful one. I cannot yet say what the fruit is in my case, but I am sure some day of an accession of wisdom from it. My sickness did not take an actively nauseous form after the first night and second morning; but for twelve mortal days I was, body and soul, in a more indescribably hopeless, homeless and friendless state than I ever want to be in again. We had a head wind and tolerably rough sea all that time. The trade winds, which I thought were gentle zephyrs, are hideous moist gales that whiten all the waves with foam....

*Sunday Evening.* Yesterday morning at ten o'clock we came to anchor in this harbor, sailing right up without a pilot. No words of mine, or of any man short of William the divine, can give any idea of the magnificence of this harbor and its approaches. The boldest, grandest mountains, far and near. The palms and other trees of such vivid green as I never saw anywhere else. The town "realizes" my idea of an African town in its architecture and effect. Almost everyone is a negro or a negress, which words I perceive we don't know the meaning of with us; a great many of them are native Africans and tattooed. The men have white linen drawers and short shirts of the same kind over them; the women wear huge turbans, and have a peculiar rolling gait that I have never seen any approach to elsewhere. Their attitudes as they sleep and lie about the streets are picturesque to the last degree.

Yesterday was, I think, the day of my life on which I had the most outward enjoyment. Nine of us took a boat at about noon and went on shore. The strange sights, the pleasure of walking on terra firma, the delicious smell of land, compared with the hell of the last three weeks, were perfectly intoxicating. Our Portuguese went beautifully,—every visage relaxed at the sight of us and grinned from ear to ear. The amount of fraternal love that was expressed by bowing and gesture was tremendous. We had the best dinner I ever eat. Guess how much it cost. 140,000 reis—literal fact. Paid for by the rich man of the party. The Brazilians are of a pale Indian color, without a particle of red and with a very aged expression. They are very polite and obliging. *All* wear black beaver hats and glossy black frock coats, which makes them look like *des épiciers endimanchés*. We all returned in good order to the ship at 11 P.M., and I lay awake most of the night on deck listening to the soft notes of the vampire outside of the awning. (Not knowing what it was, we'll call it the vampire.) This morning Tom Ward and I took another cruise on shore, which was equally new and strange. The weather is like Newport. I have not seen the thermometer....

Agassiz just in, delighted with the Emperor's simplicity and the precision of his information; but apparently they did not touch upon our material prospects. He goes to see the Emperor again tomorrow. Agassiz is one of the most fascinating men personally that I ever saw. I could listen to him talk by the hour. He is so childlike. Bishop Potter, who is sitting opposite me writing, asks me to give his best regards to father. I am in such a state of abdominal tumefaction from having eaten bananas all day that I can hardly sit down to write. The bananas here are no whit better than at home, but *so* cheap and *so* filling at the price. My fellow "savans" are a very uninteresting crew. Except Tom Ward I don't care if I never see one of 'em again. I like Dr. Cotting very much and Mrs. Agassiz too. I could babble on all night, but must stop somewhere.

Dear old Father, Mother, Aunt Kate, Harry and Alice! You little know what thoughts I have had of you since I have been gone. And I have felt more sympathy with Bob and Wilk than ever,

from the fact of my isolated circumstances being more like theirs than the life I have led hitherto. Please send them this letter. It is written as much for them as for anyone. I hope Harry is rising like a phoenix from his ashes, under the new régime. Bless him. I wish he or some person I could talk to were along. Thank Aunt Kate once more. Kiss Alice to death. I think Father is the *wisest* of all men whom I know. Give my love to the girls, especially the Hoopers. Tell Harry to remember me to T. S. P[erry] and to Holmes. Adieu.

*Your loving*

*W. J.*

Give my love to Washburn.

## To his Father

*RIO, June 3, 1865.*

My dearest old Father and my dearest old everybody at home,—I've got so much to say that I don't well know where to begin.—I sent a letter home, I think about a fortnight ago, telling you about my small-pox, etc., but as it went by a sailing vessel it is quite likely that this may reach you first. That was written from the *maison de santé* where I was lying in the embrace of the loathsome goddess, and from whose hard straw bed, eternal chicken and rice, and extortionate prices I was released yesterday. The disease is over, and granting the necessity of having it, I have reason to think myself most lucky. My face will not be marked at all, although at present it presents the appearance of an immense ripe raspberry.... My sickness began four weeks ago today. You have no idea of the state of bliss into which I have been plunged in the last twenty-four hours by the first draughts of my newly gained freedom. To be dressed, to walk about, to see my friends and the public, to go into the dining-room and order my own dinner, to feel myself growing strong and smooth-skinned again, make a very considerable reaction. Now that I know I am no longer an object of infection, I am perfectly cynical as to my appearance and go into the dining-room here when it is at its fullest, having been invited and authorized thereto by the good people of the hotel. I shall stay here for a week before returning to my quarters, although it is very expensive. But I need a soft bed instead of a hammock, and an arm-chair instead of a trunk to sit upon for some days yet....

In my last letter, I said something about coming home sooner than I expected. Since then, I have thought the matter over seriously and conscientiously every day, and it has resulted in my determining so to do. My coming was a mistake, a mistake as regards what I anticipated, and a pretty expensive one both for you, dear old Father, and for the dear generous old Aunt Kate. I find that by staying I shall learn next to nothing of natural history as I care about learning it. My whole work will be mechanical, finding objects and packing them, and working so hard at that and in traveling that no time at all will be found for studying their structure. The affair reduces itself thus to so many months spent in physical exercise. Can I afford this? *First*, pecuniarily? No! Instead of costing the \$600 or \$700 Agassiz told me twelve months of it would cost, the expense will be nearer to triple that amount....

*Secondly*, I can't afford the excursion mentally (though that is not exactly the adjective to use). I said to myself before I came away: "W. J., in this excursion you will learn to know yourself and your resources somewhat more intimately than you do now, and will come back with your character considerably evolved and established." This has come true sooner, and in a somewhat different way, than I expected. I am now certain that my forte is not to go on exploring expeditions. I have no inward spur goading me forwards on that line, as I have on several speculative lines. I am convinced now, for good, that I am cut out for a speculative rather than an active life,—I speak now only of my *quality*; as for my *quantity*, I became convinced some time ago and reconciled to the notion, that I was one of the very lightest of featherweights. Now why not be reconciled with my deficiencies? By accepting them your actions cease to be at cross-purposes with your faculties, and you are so much nearer to peace of mind. On the steamer I began to read Humboldt's Travels. Hardly had I opened the book when I seemed to become illuminated. "Good Heavens, when such men are provided to do the work of traveling, exploring, and observing for humanity, men who gravitate into their work as the air does into our lungs, what need, what *business* have we outsiders to pant after them and toilsomely try to serve as their substitutes? There are men to do all the work which the world requires without the talent of any one being strained." Men's activities are occupied in two ways: in grappling with external circumstances, and in striving to set things at one in their own topsy-turvy mind.

You must know, dear Father, what I mean, tho' I can't must[er] strength of brain enough now to express myself with precision. The grit and energy of some men are called forth by the resistance

of the world. But as for myself, I seem to have no spirit whatever of that kind, no pride which makes me ashamed to say, "I can't do that." But I have a mental pride and shame which, although they seem more egotistical than the other kind, are still the only things that can stir my blood. These lines seem to satisfy me, although to many they would appear the height of indolence and contemptibleness: "Ne forçons point notre talent,—Nous ne ferions rien avec grâce,—Jamais un lourdaud, quoi-qu'il fasse,—Ne deviendra un galant." Now all the time I should be gone on this expedition I should have a pining after books and study as I have had hitherto, and a feeling that this work was not in my path and was so much waste of life. I had misgivings to this effect before starting; but I was so filled with enthusiasm, and the romance of the thing seemed so great, that I stifled them. Here on the ground the romance vanishes and the misgivings float up. I have determined to listen to them this time. I said that my act was an expensive mistake as regards what I anticipated, but I have got this other *edification* from it. It has to be got some time, and perhaps only through some great mistake; for there are some familiar axioms which the individual only seems able to learn the meaning of through his individual experience. I don't know whether I have expressed myself so as to let you understand exactly how I feel. O my dear, affectionate, wise old Father, how I longed to see you while I lay there with the small-pox,<sup>29</sup> first revolving these things over! and how I longed to confer with you in a more confiding way than I often do at home! When I get there I can explain the gaps. As this letter does not sail till next Saturday (this is Sunday), I will stop for the present, as I feel quite tired out....

It was not feasible for James to leave the expedition and return home immediately, and soon after the last letter was written, his returning health and eyesight brought with them a more cheerful mood. He determined to stay in Brazil for a few months longer.

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<sup>29</sup> The case of small-pox left no scar whatever. Indeed James afterward regarded it as having been perhaps no small-pox at all, but only varioloid, and by October he described himself as being in better health than ever before. During several weeks of convalescence that followed his distressing experience in quarantine he was, however, quite naturally, "blue and despondent."

## To his Father

*River Solimoes (Amazon),  
Sept. 12-15, 1865.*

My dearest Daddy,—Great was my joy the other evening, on arriving at Manaos, to get a batch of letters from you.... I could do no more than merely "accuse" the reception. Now I can manage to sweat out a few lines of reply. It is noon and the heat is frightful. We have all come to the conclusion that, for *us* at least, there will be no hell hereafter. We have all become regular alembics, and the heat grows upon you, I find. Nevertheless it is not the dead, sickening heat of home. It is more like a lively baking, and the nights remain cool. We are just entering on the mosquito country, and I suspect our suffering will be great from them and the flies. While the steamboat is in motion we don't have them, but when she stops you can hardly open your mouth without getting it full of them. Poor Mr. Bourkhardt is awfully poisoned and swollen up by bites he got ten days ago on a bayou. At the same time with the mosquitoes, the other living things seem to increase; so it has its good side. The river is much narrower—about two miles wide perhaps or three (I'm no judge)—very darkly muddy and swirling rapidly down past the beautiful woods and islands. We are all going up as far as Tabatinga, when the Professor and Madam, with some others, go into Peru to the Mountains, while Bourget and I will get a canoe and some men and spend a month on the river between Tabatinga and Ega. Bourget is a very dog, yapping and yelping at every one, but a very hard-working collector, and I can get along very well with him. We shall have a very gypsy-like, if a very uncomfortable time. The best of this river is that you can't bathe in it on account of the numerous anthropophagous fishes who bite mouthfuls out of you. Tom Ward *may* possibly be out and at Manaos by the time we get back there at the end of October. Heaven grant he may, poor fellow! I'd rather see him than any one on this continent. Agassiz is perfectly delighted with him, his intelligence and his energy, thinks him in fact much the best man of the expedition.

I see no reason to regret my determination to stay. "On contrary," as Agassiz says, as I begin to use my eyes a little every day, I feel like an entirely new being. Everything revives within and without, and I now feel sure that I shall learn. I have profited a great deal by hearing Agassiz talk, not so much by what he says, for never did a man utter a greater amount of humbug, but by learning the way of feeling of such a vast practical engine as he is. No one sees farther into a generalization than his own knowledge of details extends, and you have a greater feeling of weight and solidity about the movement of Agassiz's mind, owing to the continual presence of this great background of special facts, than about the mind of any other man I know. He has a great personal tact too, and I see that in all his talks with me he is pitching into my loose and superficial way of thinking.... Now that I am become more intimate with him, and can talk more freely to him, I delight to be with him. I only saw his defects at first, but now his wonderful qualities throw them quite in the background. I am convinced that he is the man to do me good. He will certainly have earned a holiday when he gets home. I never saw a man work so hard. Physically, intellectually and socially he has done the work of ten different men since he has been in Brazil; the only danger is of his overdoing it....

I am beginning to get impatient with the Brazilian sleepiness and ignorance. These Indians are particularly exasperating by their laziness and stolidity. It would be amusing if it were not so infuriating to see how impossible it is to make one hurry, no matter how imminent the emergency. How queer and how exhilarating all those home letters were, with their accounts of what every one was doing, doing, doing. To me, just awakening from my life of forced idleness and from an atmosphere of Brazilian inanity, it seemed as if a little window had been opened and a life-giving blast of one of our October nor'westers had blown into my lungs for half an hour. I had no idea before of the real greatness of American energy. They wood up the steamer here for instance at the rate (accurately

counted) of eight to twelve logs a minute. It takes them two and one-half hours to put in as much wood as would go in at home in less than fifteen minutes.

Every note from home makes me proud of our country.... I have not been able to look at the papers, but I have heard a good deal. I do hope our people will not be such fools as to hang Jeff. Davis for treason. Can any one believe in revenge now? And if not for that, for what else should we hang the poor wretch? Lincoln's violent death did more to endear him to those indifferent and unfriendly to him than the whole prosperous remainder of his life could have done; and so will Jeff's if he is hung. Poor old Abe! What is it that moves you so about his simple, unprejudiced, unpretending, honest career? I can't tell why, but albeit unused to the melting mood, I can hardly ever think of Abraham Lincoln without feeling on the point of blubbing. Is it that he seems the representative of pure simple human nature against all conventional additions?...

## To his Parents

*Teffé (Amazon), Oct. 21, 1865.*

I left the party up at Saõ Paulo the 20th of last month and got here the 16th of this, having gone up two rivers, the Içá and Jutay, and made collections of fishes which were very satisfactory to the Prof. as they contained almost one hundred new species. On the whole it was a most original month, and one which from its strangeness I shall remember to my dying day; much discomfort from insects and rain, much ecstasy from the lovely landscape, much hard work and heat, a very disagreeable companion, J— [added to the party in Brazil], the very best of fare, turtle and fresh fish every day, and running through all a delightful savor of freedom and gypsy-hood which sweetened all that might have been unpleasant. We slept on the beaches every night and fraternized with the Indians, who are socially very agreeable, but mentally a most barren people. I suppose they are the most exclusively practical race in the world. When I get home I shall bore you with all kinds of stories about them. I found the rest of the party at this most beautiful little place in a wonderful picturesque house. It was right pleasant to meet them again. The Prof. has been working himself out and is thin and nervous. That good woman, Mrs. Agassiz, is perfectly well. The boys, poor fellows, have all their legs in an awful condition from a kind of mite called "muguim" which gets under the skin and makes dreadful sores. You can't walk in the woods without getting them on you, and poor Hunney [Hunnewell] is ulcerated very badly. They have no mosquitoes though here.

Since last night we have had everything packed—our packing-work, its volume, its dirtyness, and its misery is wonderful. Twenty-nine full barrels of specimens from here, and hardly one tight barrel among them. The burly execrations of the burly Dexter when at the cooper's work would make your hair shiver. But when a good barrel presents itself, then the calm joy almost makes amends for the past. Dexter says he has the same feeling for a decent barrel that he has for a beautiful woman. When the steamer comes we are going down to Manaos, where we expect the gunboat which the government has promised the Prof. Dexter and Tal go up the Rio Negro for a month. The rest of us are going to the Madeira River in the steamer. I don't know what I shall do exactly, but there will probably be some canoeing to be done, in which case I'm ready; tho' the rainy season is beginning, which makes canoe traveling very uncomfortable. We shall be at Parâ by the middle of December certainly. I am very anxious to learn whether the New York and Brazilian steamers are to run. We may learn at Manaos, where there is also a chance for letters for us, and American papers. Why can't you send the "North American," with Father's and Harry's articles? It would be worth any price to me.

*22nd Oct.*

On board the old homestead, viz., Steamer Icamiba. The only haven of rest we have in this country, and then only when she is in motion; for when we stop at a place, the Prof. is sure to come around and say how very desirable it would be to get a large number of fishes from this place, and willy-nilly you must trudge. I wrote in my last letter something about the possibility of my wishing to go down South again with the Professor. I don't think there is any more probability of it than of my wishing to explore Central Africa. If there is anything I hate, it is collecting. I don't think it is suited to my genius at all; but for that very reason this little exercise in it I am having here is the better for me. I am getting to be very practical, orderly, and businesslike. That fine disorder which used to prevail in my precincts, and which used to make Mother heave a beautiful sigh when she entered my room, is treated by the people with whom I am here as a heinous crime, and I feel very sensitive and ashamed about it. The 22nd of October!—what glorious weather you are having at home now, and how we should all like to be wound up by one day of it! I have often longed for a good, black, sour, sleety, sloshy winter's day in Washington Street. Oh, the bliss of standing on such a day half

way between Roxbury and Boston and having all the horse-cars pass you full! It will be splendid to get home in mid-winter and revel in the cold.

I am delighted to hear how well Wilky is, and to hear from him. I wish Bob would write me a line—and only one letter from Alice in all this time—shame! Oh, the lovely white child! How the red man of the forest would like to hug her to his bosom once more! I proposed, beloved Alice, to write thee a long letter by this steamer describing my wonderful adventures with the wild Indians, and the tiger [jaguar?], and various details which interest thy lovely female mind; but I feel so darned heavy and seedy this morning that I cannot pump up the flow of words, and the letter goes on with the steamer from Manaos this evening. This expedition has been far less adventurous and far more picturesque than I expected. I have not yet seen a single snake wild here. The adventure with the tiger consisted in his approaching to within 30 paces of our mosquito net, and roaring so as to wake us, and then keeping us awake most of the rest of the night by roaring far and near. I confess I felt some skeert, on being suddenly awoke by him, tho' when I had laid me down I had mocked the apprehensions of Tal about tigers. The adventure with the wild Indians consisted in our seeing two of them naked at a distance on the edge of the forest. On shouting to them in Lingoa Geral they ran away. It gave me a very peculiar and unexpected thrilling sensation to come thus suddenly upon these children of Nature. But I now tell you in confidence, my beloved white child, what you must not tell any of the rest of the family (for it would spoil the adventure), that we discovered a few hours later that these wild Indians were a couple of mulattoes belonging to another canoe, who had been in bathing.

I shall have to stop now. Do you still go to school at Miss Clapp's? For Heaven's sake write to me, Bal! Tell Harry if he sees [John] Bancroft to tell him Bourkhardt is much better, having found an Indian remedy of great efficacy. Please give my best love to the Tweedies, Temples, Washburns, La Farges, Paine, Childs, Elly Van Buren and in fact everybody who is in any way connected with me. Best of love to Aunt Kate, Wilk and Bob, Harry and all the family. I pine for Harry's literary *efforts* and to see a number or so of the "Nation." You can't send too many magazines or papers—  
Care of James B. Bond, Pará.

W. J.

## IV 1866-1867

### Medical Studies at Harvard

JAMES returned from Brazil in March, 1866, and immediately entered the Massachusetts General Hospital for a summer's service as undergraduate interne. In the autumn he left the Hospital and resumed his studies in the Harvard Medical School.

The Faculty of the School then included Dr. O. W. Holmes and Professor Jeffries Wyman. Charles Ed. Brown-Séquard was lecturing on the pathology of the nervous system. During the years of James's interrupted course a number of men attended the school who were to be his friends and colleagues for many years thereafter—among them William G. Farlow, subsequently Professor of Cryptogamic Botany and a Cambridge neighbor for forty years, and Charles P. Putnam and James J. Putnam—two brothers in whose company he was later to spend many Adirondack vacations and to whom he became warmly attached. Henry P. Bowditch, whose instinct for physiological inquiry was already vigorous, and who was destined to become a leader of research in America, and the teacher and inspirer of a generation of younger investigators, was another Medical School contemporary with whom he formed an enduring friendship.

The instruction given in the Harvard Medical School in the sixties was as good as any obtainable in America, but it fell short of what is nowadays reckoned as essential for a medical education to an extent that none but a modern student of medicine can understand. The emphasis was still on lectures, demonstrations and reading, and the pupil's rôle was an almost completely passive one. James, according to the testimony of one of his classmates, made a solitary exception to the practice of the class by attempting to keep a graphic record of his microscopic studies in histology and pathology. When questioned about this long after, he admitted that he believed himself to have been the only student of his time in the Medical School who took the trouble to make drawings from the microscopic field with regularity.

The teaching of Pasteur and Lister had not then revolutionized medicine. Modern bacteriology and the possibilities of aseptic surgery were yet to be understood. Surgeons who operated in the amphitheatre of the Massachusetts General Hospital could still take pride in appearing in blood-soiled gowns, much as a fisherman scorns a brand-new outfit and sports his weather-rusted old clothes. The demonstrations of even Dr. Henry J. Bigelow, a skillful operator who was then a leader in his profession, filled James with a horror which he never forgot.

On the other hand, the discovery of anesthesia, which made possible an enlarged and humane use of animals for experimental inquiry, and such illuminating reports and investigations as those of Claude Bernard, Helmholtz, Virchow and Ludwig were giving a great impetus to the investigation of bodily processes and functions, and a study of these was a possible next step in James's evolution. He had already been unusually well grounded in comparative anatomy by Agassiz and Jeffries Wyman. He was gravitating surely, even if he did not yet realize it clearly, toward philosophy. Whenever he more or less consciously projected himself forward, it must have seemed to him that the examination of processes in the living body, for which he was already prepared, might be related, in an enlightening way, to the philosophic pursuits that were beginning to invite him. Physiology therefore commanded both his respect and his curiosity, and he turned in that direction rather than toward what he then saw surgery and the practice of internal medicine to be.

During the winter of 1866-67 he lived with his parents in the house<sup>30</sup> in Quincy Street, Cambridge, in which they had settled themselves, and worked regularly at the Medical School. He had come back from the year of mere animal existence on the Amazon in excellent physical condition.

Of the four letters which follow, two were written to Thomas W. Ward, who, it will be remembered, had been a member of the Amazon Expedition, and who, after getting back to New York, had entered the great Baring banking house of which his father, Samuel Ward, was the American partner. O. W. Holmes, Jr., will be recognized as the present Associate Justice of the United States Supreme Court. In no one did James find more sympathetic philosophic companionship at this period.

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<sup>30</sup> This house has since been enlarged and converted into the Colonial Club.

## To Thomas W. Ward

BOSTON, Mar. 27, 1866.

Meo caro Compadre,—I have been intending to write you every night for the last month, but the strange epistolary inertia which always weighs down upon me has kept me from it until now. I have had news of you two or three times from my father having met yours, and from Dexter, who said he had met you in New York. I am very curious to know how you find your occupation to suit you, and if you find the dust of daily drudgery to obscure at all the visions of your far-off-future power. From what Dexter said I am afraid they do a little. We had given up Allen<sup>31</sup> as gone to the fishes; but the poor Devil arrived last week after a 98-days' passage!!! I never felt gladder for anything in my life. He had a horrible time at sea, being within 160 miles of New York and then blown back as far as St. Thomas. He says most of his collections arrived at Bahia spoiled by the sun. He was sixteen days crossing a limestone desert on which nothing grew but cacti; so there was no shade at noon, and the thermometer at 98°. His health has been improved by the voyage, however, and he thinks it is better now than when he left for Brazil. Nevertheless he is going to give up natural history for the present and adopt some out-of-door life till he gets decidedly better, which he says he has been slowly but steadily doing for some years past. Poor Allen! None of us have been sold as badly as he. If I had not been to Brazil, I would go again to do what I have done, knowing beforehand what it would be. Allen says *he* would not, on any account.

I have been studying now for about two weeks, and think I shall be much more interested in it than before. It was some time before I could get settled down to reading. But now I do it quite naturally, and even *thinking* is beginning not to feel like a wholly abnormal process; all which, as you may imagine, is very agreeable—altho' I confess that as yet the philosophical *rouages* of my mind have not attained even to the degree of lubrication they had before I left. I shan't apologize for the egotistical pronoun, for I suppose, my dear old Thomas, that you will be interested to compare my experience since my return with yours, and learn something from it if possible—even as I would with yours. I spent the first month of my return in nothing but "social intercourse," having the two Temple girls and Elly Van Buren in the house for a fortnight, and being obliged to escort them about to parties, etc., nearly every night. The consequences were a falling in love with every girl I met—succeeded now by a reaction which makes me, and will make me for a long time, decline every invitation. I feel now somehow as if I had settled down upon a steady track that I shall not have much temptation to slip off of, for a good many months at any rate. I am conscious of a desire I never had before so strongly or so permanently, of narrowing and deepening the channel of my intellectual activity, of economizing my feeble energies and consequently treating with more *respect* the few things I shall devote them to. This temper may be a transient one; mais pour peu qu'il dure un an ou deux, to fix the shorter term! I'm sure it will give a tone to my mind it lacked before. As for the disrespect with which you treat the worthy problems that you turn your back upon, I don't see now exactly how you get over that; but something tells me that, practically, my salvation depends for the present on following some such plan. And, I am sure that, in the majority of men at any rate, the process of growing into a calm mental state is not one of leveling, but of going around, difficulties. The problem they solve is not one of being, but of method. They reach a point from which the view within certain limits is harmonious, and they keep within those limits; they find as it were a centre of oscillation in which they may be at rest. Now whether any other kind of solution is possible, I don't know. Many men will say not; but I feel somehow, now, as if I had no right to an opinion on any subject, no right to open my mouth before others until I know some *one* thing as thoroughly as it can be known, no matter how insignificant it

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<sup>31</sup> John A. Allen, another of the Brazilian party.

may be. After that I shall perhaps be able to think on general subjects.—The only fellow here I care anything about is Holmes, who is on the whole a first-rate article, and one which improves by wear. He is perhaps too exclusively intellectual, but sees things so easily and clearly and talks so admirably that it's a treat to be with him. T. S. Perry is also flourishing in health and spirits. Ed[ward] Emerson I have not yet seen. I made the acquaintance the other day of Miss Fanny Dixwell of Cambridge (the eldest), do you know her? She is decidedly AI, and (so far) the best girl I have known. I should like if possible to confine my whole life to her, Ellen Hooper, Sara Sedgwick,<sup>32</sup> Holmes, Harry, and the Medical School, for an indefinite period, letting no breath of extraneous air enter.

There, I hope that's a confession of faith. I wish you would write me a similar or even more "developed" one, for I really want to know how the building up into flesh and blood of the wide-sweeping plans that the solitudes of Brazil gave birth to seems to alter them. Write soon, and I'll answer soon; for I think, Chéri de Thomas, que ce doux commerce que nous avons mené tant d'années ought not all of a sudden to die out. I'd give a great deal to see you, but see no prospect of getting to New York for a long time. Our family spends six months at Swampscott from the first of May. I shall have a room in town. What chance is there of your being able to pay us a visit at Swampscott in my vacation (from July 15 to Sept. 15)? Ever your friend

*WM. JAMES.*

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<sup>32</sup> Miss Dixwell became Mrs. O. W. Holmes; the other two, Mrs. E. W. Gurney and Mrs. William E. Darwin respectively.

## To Thomas W. Ward

BOSTON, June 8, 1866.

Chéri de Thomas,—I cannot exactly say I *hasten* to reply to your letter. I have thought of you about every day since I received it, and given you a Brazilian hug therewith, and wanted to write to you; but having been in a pretty unsettled theoretical condition myself, from which I hoped some positive conclusions might emerge worthy to be presented to you as the last word on the Kosmos and the human soul, I deferred writing from day to day, thinking that better than to offer you the crude and premature spawning of my intelligence. In vain! the conclusions never have emerged, and I see that, if I am *ever* to write you, I must do it on the spur of the moment, with all my dullness thick upon me.

I have just read your letter over again, and am grieved afresh at your melancholy tone about yourself. You ask why I am quiet, while you are so restless. Partly from the original constitution of things, I suppose; partly because I am less quiet than you suppose; only I once heard a proverb about a man consuming his own smoke, and I do so particularly in your presence because you, being so much more turbid, produce a reaction in me; partly because I am a few years older than you, and have not solved, but grown callous (I hear your sneer) to, many of the problems that now torture you. The *chief* reason is the original constitution of things, which generated me with fewer sympathies and wants than you, and also perhaps with a certain tranquil confidence in the right ordering of the Whole, which makes me indifferent in some circumstances where you would fret. Yours the nobler, mine the happier part! I *think*, too, that much of your uneasiness comes from that to which you allude in your letter—your oscillatoriness, and your regarding each oscillation as something final as long as it lasts. There is nothing more certain than that every man's life (except perhaps Harry Quincy's) is a line that continuously oscillates on every side of its direction; and if you would be more confident that any state of tension you may at any time find yourself in will inevitably relieve *itself*, sooner or later, you would spare yourself much anxiety. I myself have felt in the last six months more and more certain that each man's constitution limits him to a certain amount of emotion and action, and that, if he insists on going under a higher pressure than normal for three months, for instance, he will pay for it by passing the next three months below par. So the best way is to keep moving steadily and regularly, as your mind becomes thus deliciously appeased (as you imagine mine to be; ah! Tom, what damned fools we are!). If you feel below par now, don't think your life is deserting you forever. You are just as sure to be up again as you are, when elated, sure to be down again. Six months, or any given cycle of time, is sure to see you produce a certain amount, and your fretful anxiety when in a stagnant mood is frivolous. The good time will come again, as it has come; and go too. I think we ought to be independent of our moods, look on them as external, for they come to us unbidden, and feel if possible neither elated nor depressed, but keep our eyes upon our work and, if we have done the best we could *in that given condition*, be satisfied.

I don't know whether all this solemn wisdom of mine seems to you anything better than conceited irrelevance. I began the other day to read the thoughts of Marcus Aurelius, translated by Long, published by Ticknor, which, if you have not read, I advise you to read, slowly. I only read two or three pages a day, and am only half through the book. He certainly had an invincible soul; and it seems to me that any man who can, like him, grasp the love of a "life according to nature," *i.e.*, a life in which your individual will becomes so harmonized to nature's will as cheerfully to acquiesce in whatever she assigns to you, knowing that you serve *some* purpose in her vast machinery which will never be revealed to you—any man who can do this will, I say, be a pleasing spectacle, no matter what his lot in life. I think old Mark's perpetual yearnings for patience and equanimity and kindness would do your heart good.—I have come to feel lately, more and more (I can't tell though whether it will be permanent) like paying my footing in the world in a very humble way, (driving my physicking

trade like any other tenth-rate man), and then living my free life in my leisure hours entirely within my own breast as a thing the world has nothing to do with; and living it easily and patiently, without feeling responsible for its future.

I will now, my dear old Tom, stop my crudities. Although these notions and others have of late led me to a pretty practical contentment, I cannot help feeling as if I were insulting Heaven by offering them about as if they had an absolute worth. Still, as I am willing to take them all back whenever it seems right, you will excuse my apparent conceit. Besides, they may suggest some practical point of view to you.

The family is at Swampscott. I have a room in Bowdoin Street for the secular part of the week. We have a very nice house in Swampscott.... I am anxiously waiting your arrival on Class Day. I expect you to spend all your time with me either here or in Swampscott, when we shall, I trust, patch up the Kosmos satisfactorily and rescue it from its present fragmentary condition....

## To his Sister

CAMBRIDGE, Nov. 14, 1866.

Chérie de Jeune Balle,—I am just in from town in the keen, cold and eke beauteous moonlight, which by the above qualities makes me think of thee, to whom, nor to whose aunt, have I (not) yet written. (I don't understand the grammar of the not.)

Your first question is, "where have I been?" "To C. S. Peirce's lecture, which I could not understand a word of, but rather enjoyed the sensation of listening to for an hour." I then turned to O. W. Holmes's and wrangled with him for another hour.

You may thank your stars that you are not in a place where you have to ride in such full horse-cars as these. I rode half way out with my "form" entirely out of the car overhanging the road, my feet alone being on the same vertical line as any part of the car, there being just room for them on the step. Aunt Kate may, and probably *will*, have shoot through her prolific mind the supposish: "How wrong in him to do sich! for if, while in that posish, he should have a sudden stroke of paralysis, or faint, his nerveless fingers relaxing their grasp of the rail, he would fall prostrate to the ground and bust." To which I reply that, when I go so far as to have a stroke of paralysis, I shall not mind going a step farther and getting bruised.

Your next question probably is "*how* are and *where* are father and mother?"... I think father seems more lively for a few days past and cracks jokes with Harry, etc. Mother is recovering from one of her indispositions, which she bears like an angel, doing any amount of work at the same time, putting up cornices and raking out the garret-room like a little buffalo.

Your next question is "wherever is Harry?" I answer: "He is to Ashburner's, to a tea-squall in favor of Miss Haggerty." I declined. He is well. We have had nothing but invitations (6) in 3 or 4 days. One, a painted one, from "Mrs. L—," whoever she may be. I replied that domestic affliction prevented me from going, but I would take a pecuniary equivalent instead, viz: To 1 oyster stew 30 cts., 1 chicken salad 0.50, 1 roll 0.02, 3 ice creams at 20 cts. 0.60, 6 small cakes at 0.05, 0.30, 1 pear \$1.50, 1 lb. confectionery 0.50.

I expect momentarily her reply with a check, and when it comes will take you and Aunt Kate on a tour in Europe and have you examined by the leading physicians and surgeons of that country. M—L— came out here and dined with us yesterday of her own accord. I no longer doubt what I always suspected, her *penchant* for me, and I don't blame her for it. Elly Temple staid here two days, too. She scratched, smote, beat, and kicked me so that I shall dread to meet her again. What an awful time Bob & Co. must have had at sea! and how anxious you must have been about them.

With best love to Aunt Kate and yourself believe me your af. bro.

WM. JAMES.

## To O. W. Holmes, Jr

[A pencil memorandum, Winter of 1866-67?]

Why I'm blest if I'm a Materialist:

The materialist posits an X for his ultimate principle.

Were he satisfied to inhabit this vacuous X, I should not at present try to disturb him.

But that atmosphere is too rare; so he spends all his time on the road between it and sensible realities, engaged in the laudable pursuit of degrading every (sensibly) higher thing into a (sensibly) lower. He thus accomplishes an immensely great positively conceived and felt result, and it availeth little to naturalize the sensible impression of this that he should at the end put in his little caveat that, after all, the low denomination is as unreal as the unreduced higher ones were. In the confession of ignorance is nothing which the mind can close upon and clutch—it's a vanishing negation; while the pretension of knowledge is full of positive, massively-felt contents. The former kicks the beam. What balm is it, when instead of my High you have given me a Low, to tell me that the Low is good for nothing?

If you take my \$1000 gold and give me greenbacks, I feel unreconciled still, even when you have assured me that the greenbacks are counterfeit. Or what comfort is it to me now to be told that a billion years hence greenbacks and gold will have the same value? especially when that is explained to be zero? How anyone can say that this pennyworth of negation can so balance these tons of affirmation as to make the naturalist *feel* like anyone else—I confess it's a mystery to me.

But as a man's happiness depends on his feeling, I think materialism inconsistent with a high degree thereof, and in this sense maintained that a materialist should not be an optimist, using the latter word to signify one whose philosophy authenticates, by guaranteeing the objective significance of, his most pleasurable feelings.

You have transferred the question of optimism to a wider field, where I can't well follow it now. The term would have to be defined first, and then I think it would take me ten or twelve years of hard study to form any opinion as to the truth of your second premise.—I send the above remarks on "materialism," because they were what I was groping for the other evening, but could not say till you were gone and I in bed. To conclude:

**Corruptio optimistorum pessima!**

## V 1867-1868

### **Eighteen Months in Germany**

IN the spring of 1867 James interrupted his course at the Medical School again. He was impelled to do this, partly by the pressure of a conviction that his health required him to stop work or continue elsewhere under different conditions, and partly by a desire to learn German and study physiology in the German laboratories. He knew a little German already, and it seemed reasonable to suppose that if he went abroad immediately he would have time to familiarize himself with the language during a pleasant and restful summer and would be ready to enter one of the universities in the autumn. He sailed in April and spent the summer in Dresden and Bohemia. But his health became worse instead of better.

It is unnecessary to detail the record of a long illness by selecting for this book the passages of his correspondence in which James sooner or later revealed what his condition was. It would also be idle to inquire closely about the causes of his illness, considering that, for one reason, James was completely puzzled and baffled himself. Insomnia, digestive disorders, eye-troubles, weakness of the back, and sometimes deep depression of spirits followed each other or afflicted him simultaneously. If his trouble was in part nervous, it was a reality none the less. A photograph that was taken of him at about this period recorded the aspect of a very ill man. If his introspective genius made things worse for him for a while, it probably did more to pull him through in the end than the—to our present-day understanding—harsh and unnecessary treatments, regimens, water-cures, courses of exercise, galvanisms, and blistering to which he subjected himself.

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