Cambridge June 14

Dear Harry,

Your long letter of March 10th (!) stares me in the face reproachfully—and well it may. In it you, with excess of moderation, ask for a note only—and that combined with L’s offer of a vehicle confirms my flagging purpose. Just half of your letter is devoted to your reasons why you should not follow my suggestion of a notice of Miss Blagden’s poems. I had not the faintest idea that the rose (so to speak) which I thoughtlessly asked for wd. be so hard of attainment—no impossible indeed—nor that [.]it[.] wd. cost you so much time & space to explain conscientiously the reasons why it was impossible. How cd. you think I ever supposed you cd. go into the details of private life, or emulate in any degree Mr. Austin’s biog notice? I supposed a critique of the poems, if they pleased you, wd. be a good subject for your pen, & that a wholly impersonal sketch of Bellosguardo might be a fitting frame for your sketch—You hint that her biographer’s has gone to the dogs—But a sketch of her character wd. be wanting in a leading trait if her bold assertion of the rights of dumb canines were left out. I think A’s a model of biography, if the object of such a work is to give a complete idea of the subject. Is not Boswell’s Johnson always cited as a model? & who wd. wish any of the details omitted? It certainly reflects no credit on the writer, & I can’t conceive of you degrading yourself to such work—but for all that, scavengers are useful & necessary members of society.—Not that I mean at all to imply that Mr. A. has placed himself at all
in the Boswell category. You speak of intrusive “invasive & indelicate gossip”, & there are many to whom such a publication wd. be highly distasteful—to none, I can easily believe, more so than to yourself—but I have a conviction that it wd. not be so to Miss B.; & if she is where she can read it, I know she wd. enjoy it—or rather I ought to say, if she were still alive & only supposed dead, (as I have just heard a man is whose memorial in stone is let into the walls of our neighboring Hall). My theory is that A. wrote the notice as a debt of gratitude. You say I cannot have the heart to accuse you of slighting my friend. My friend indeed! I have known her more years than you have hours, but no such poem was ever addressed to me as to you.—

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

I wish you had seen & known the old landlord at Sienna—L. took his portrait, & he used to talk over the history of his life. I think I must have re-told it to you. It was he who saved the younger Hallam’s estate from going wholly to his courier & giving it minus 21
£4000 to his sisters—For this service the family sent him the portraits of father & son
which he has hung up in our (then) sitting-room with himself between them—Yet, (such
is human justice!) Tennyson cd. find no place for him in the In Memoriam. The waiter
you have hit off well. He was a character—One of his sayings I remember was that
marriage “è l’avanguardia dell’ultima corbelleria—” This was explained by his own ill
luck, his wife having played him false & run away not long after the ceremony—We are
very glad to hear you are coming back—You’ll find us corner of Quincy & Cambridge
streets—Till then farewell—Yours very truly F B
Notes

5  L’s offer of a vehicle • Presumably Francis Boott was going to mail his letter in the same envelope that Lizzie Boott was using for her 13 June 1874 letter to Henry James

6-7  Miss Blagden’s poems • Poems by the late Isa Blagden with a Memoir appeared in 1873 (Edinburgh: Blackwood)

11  Mr. Austin’s biog notice • The Memoir to Isabella Blagden’s Poems was by future poet laureate Alfred Austin (1835-1913)

13  Bellosguardo • Both the Bootts and Isabella Blagden (1816-1873) had long resided in this picturesque suburb of Florence

26  our neighboring Hall • Harvard’s Memorial Hall

30  your notice of the Bernese anatomy • “An Autumn Journey,” Galaxy April 1873: 536-44 (although the article is reprinted as “The St. Gothard” in Transatlantic Sketches, the passage in question is cut in “The Old Saint-Gothard” in Italian Hours)

36  your enthusiastic letters of the descent into Italy • “An Autumn Journey”


43  the younger Hallam • Arthur Henry Hallam (1811-33), Tennyson’s university friend who became the subject of “In Memoriam”

44  father • Henry Hallam (1777-1859), English historian and father of Arthur Henry Hallam

48  è l’avanguardia dell’ultima corbelleria • is the vanguard of the final foolishness

50-51  corner of Quincy & Cambridge streets • See Mary Walsh James to Henry James, 12 September [1873]
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