

Wheatland 17 December 1866

My dear niece,

I rejoice to learn that yourself & you little boy are getting along so well. May the blessing of Heaven rest upon you both! May his life and his health be preserved & may he live to be a blessing to his parents and a wise & useful citizen of the Country! I hope you may soon be released from the restrictions imposed by the Doctor.

I feel inclined to present Becky Shunk a Christmas gift, but know not what it ought to be. Will you select & purchase it for me? It ought to be a piece of jewelry which she could preserve. She is a sprightly and agreeable companion and I have found much pleasure in her society & that of her husband. He is a man of much ability as a writer and abounds in wit & anecdotes. You cannot now of course attend to the purchase but I wish you would inform me that you had received the commission so that I may say so to Becky. The cost might be eighty or a hundred dollars.

I had supposed Harriet Buchanan would be at home when I visited Oxford. I presume she would very much desire to be there when her reverend lover will be released from his divinely studies during the Christmas Holidays. Perhaps she may have found another of the same more agreeable to her taste in Baltimore; always provided she is not engaged. The family expects "Bob & Cecil" to spend the Christmas Holidays with them.

Your sister Mrs. Lane is in Philadelphia or New York I know not which but understand she is expected home this week. A short time before I visited Baltimore I passed an hour with her at her own house and she was overflowing with kindness. I believe & still believe she was sincere. She was to come out & spend the next day with me and the weather was fine for several days after. She did not come nor have I seen her since except a casual meeting on the street when she was sitting in Reynolds' Carriage at his door. There is an influence behind the scenes which controls her action. The guardian of the children & Mr. Reynolds as her agent combined to transfer their property to their mother at little more than half its value and they will never forgive my defeat of this arrangement. I then felt a deep interest for their children; but this has in a great degree vanished. They are strangers to me and whilst I would have treated them kindly as the grand children of my dear Sister the conduct of their relations on their mother's side has rendered this impossible. They need training & restraint very much, and this, I fear, they do not receive.

My visit to Oxford was peculiarly agreeable: and I passed two days with the family very happily & satisfactorily. Lois appears to have recovered her health & I thought her quite pretty which I had never done before. Henrietta says that Cecil has abandoned her & I was not dissatisfied. There may be too much of a good thing.

I know of no local news which would interest you.

With my kindest regards to Mr. Johnston I remain yours affectionately,

James Buchanan

Mrs. Henry E. Johnston

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