22nd December 1887

Dear Mr. Pelikan,

Both my wife and I

send our and your husband warmest

greetings for Christmas and all good wishes for
the New Year. We sincerely hope both
of you are well and that the last fully
received from this ship operation.

I have a step-daughter and
she is the great-granddaughter of Lady Ritchie
(who was the daughter of W.M. Ritchie of the
Richards). Persons relatives once had heard
at the occasion when Lady Ritchie (Anna) was
taken to see Chopin in Paris. I thought the
account of this might interest you and I
am sending an extract from the recent biography
Of Anne Stokely Ritchie by Vinjut Cerin. 
The cover of the book is a charcoal portrait of Lady Ritchie by Sargent.

I have had no news of the Van Wyckes. We usually do a Christmas. 
I hope they are all right. If I have anything specific about them I will let you know.

Please give us a Telephone Call if you come to London.

Yours Very Warmly,
Robert Hickinson

Our brave Country is very much in our thoughts.
inclined to give her the credit. Between the two girls there was no sort of rivalry, their different natures perfectly complementing each other. To the surprise of the family, Mrs Butler left no ready money. It was Thackeray who sent over the £50 for her funeral expenses.

One event, never forgotten by Anny, occurred during this visit to Paris. She was taken to visit Chopin and heard him play. His devoted Scots admirers, Jane Sterling and her sister Mrs Erskine, hosts on his previous tours of Scotland, were friends of the Carmichael-Smyths and Miss Sterling was passing through Paris at this time. Knowing him already to be critically ill she had prepared a hamper of delicacies for him and was about to drive to his lodgings when Anny happened to call bearing a note from her grandmother. As she recorded later:

I had not the presence of mind to run away as I longed to do, and somehow in a few minutes found myself sitting in a little open carriage with the Scotch lady, and the basket on the opposite seat. I thought her, if possible, more terrible than ever - she seemed grave, preoccupied... We drove along the Champs Elysées towards the Arc, and then turned into a side street, and presently came to a house... at which the carriage stopped. The lady got out... and told me to follow, and we began to climb the shiny stairs... two flights I think; then we rang at a bell and the door was almost instantly opened. It was opened by a slight, delicate-looking man with long hair, bright eyes, and a thin, hooked nose. When Miss X. saw him she hastily put down her basket... caught both his hands in hers, began to shake them gently, and to scold him in an affectionate reproving way for having come to the door. He laughed, said he had guessed who it was, and motioned to her to enter, and I followed at her sign with the basket - followed into a narrow little room, with no furniture in it whatever but an upright piano against the wall and a few straw chairs... He made us sit down with some courtesy, and in reply to her questions said she was pretty well. Had he slept? He shook his head. Had he eaten? He shrugged his shoulders and turned to the piano. He had been composing something - I remember that he spoke in an abrupt, light sort of way - would Miss X. like to hear it? She would like to hear it, she answered, 'of course, she would dearly like to hear it, but it would tire him to play; it could not be good for him.' He smiled again, shook back his long hair, and sat down immediately; and then the music began, and the room was filled with continuous sound, he looking over his shoulder now and then to see if we were liking it. The lady sat absorbed and listening, and as I looked at her I saw tears in her eyes -... I can't, alas, recall that music! I would give anything to remember it now: but the truth is, I was so interested in the people that I scarcely listened. When he stopped at last and looked round, the lady started up. 'You mustn't play any more,' she said; 'no more, no more, it's too beautiful,' - and she praised him and thanked him in a tender, motherly pitying sort of way, and then hurriedly said we must go; but as we took leave she added almost in a whisper with a humble apologising look, - 'I have brought you some of that jelly, and my sister sent some of the wine you fancied the other day; pray, pray, try to take a little.' He again shook his head at her... 'It is very wrong; you shouldn't bring me these things,' he said in French. 'I won't play to you if you do,' - but she put him back softly, and hurriedly closed the door upon him... and hastened away... She looked hard at me as we drove away. 'Never forget that you have heard Chopin play,' she said with emotion, 'for soon no one will ever hear him play any more.'

The children's departure for Paris with Mrs Butler in September had made the termination of Miss Drury's engagement the easier for Thackeray, without recrimination on either side, but the search for the ideal governess had to be resumed. On 2 November, the day after his grandmother's death, he wrote to his mother to say he had found somebody suitable: 'I have just engaged with a nice plain kind-looking governess - about 28, with 6 or 7 brothers and sisters living at Richmond with their Pa and Ma - an ex-captain in the army... Miss Alexander is to come as soon as I like... Shall I send her over to you to bring the children back? - She has friends at Paris who would receive her.'

By Christmas the children were back in Young Street. Despite his joy in their return, their father was so late with his month's work as to be 'almost out of his mind', and held up for want of some special information about Madras, about which he didn't want 'to make blunders'.

Miss Alexander was duly installed, and fairly soon found to be far from ideal. On 7 January Thackeray reported to his mother: 'The governess is very good very honest very eager to do her duty... not by any means wise, or fit to guide Anny's mind. But she can teach her geography and music and what they call history and hemming - and my dear old Nan goes on thinking for herself, and no small beer of herself - I am obliged to snub her continually, with delight at what she says all the time. They are noble children. Thank God. And the governess - a nuisance.'