

Gleanings in Europe

England

Gleanings in Europe
England

by

James Fenimore Cooper

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Preface to the First Edition

THE American who should write a close, philosophical, just, popular, and yet comprehensive view of the fundamental differences that exist between the political and social relations of England and those of his own country would confer on the latter one of the greatest benefits it has received since the memorable events of July 4, 1776. That was a declaration of political independence only, while this might be considered the foundation of the mental emancipation which alone can render the nation great, by raising its opinion to the level of its facts.

This work lays no claim to a merit so distinguished. It is intended solely as a part of the testimony, of which an incalculable mass is yet required, that, under the slow operation of time, and in the absence of such an effort of genius as has just been named, it is to be hoped, will, sooner or later, produce something like the same result.

Some pains have been taken to persuade the reading world that the writer of this book is peculiarly prejudiced against Great Britain, and it may be expedient to clear the way for the evidence he is about to give, by a few explanations. He might be content to refer to the work itself, perhaps, for proofs to the contrary; but there are many who would still insist on seeing antipathies in truths, and rancour in principle.

There is no very apparent motive why the writer of this book should be particularly prejudiced against Great Britain. Personally, he was kindly treated by many of her most distinguished men; he is as strongly convinced as his worst enemy can be, that, as an author, he has been extolled beyond his merits; nor has he failed to receive quite as much substantial remuneration, as he can properly lay claim to. In no country has he ever been as *well* treated as in England; not even in his own; although, since some of his opinions have appeared, he has not escaped the usual abuse that seems to flow so easily from the Anglo-Saxon tongue.

The writer will now give his own account of what he conceives to be the origin of this erroneous notion. A part of the American travellers have earned for themselves a well-deserved reputation of being the most flagrant tuft-hunters, who enter the British empire. Of this amiable peculiarity, the writer has not yet been accused, and they who have the consciousness of not having always preserved their own self-respect in the English circles are a little too much disposed, perhaps, to quarrel with those who have.

Anecdotes have been circulated concerning the writer's "sayings and doings" while in England, some in print, and more verbally, and all to his prejudice. Many of

these tales have reached his ears, but he has, hitherto, been content to let them circulate without contradiction. This may be a proper time to say that not one of them is true. He has given an account of a little occurrence, of this nature, expressly with the view to show the reader the manner in which molehills become exaggerated into mountains, through the medium of three thousand miles, and with the hope that the better portion of his countrymen may see the danger of yielding credit to tales that have their origin in antipathies to their own nation.

The English do not like the Americans. There is a strong disposition in them to exaggerate and circulate any thing that has a tendency to throw ridicule and contumely on the national character—and this bias, coupled with the irritation that is a consequence of seeing others indifferent to things for which their own deference is proverbial, has given rise to many silly reports, that affect others besides the writer. On the other hand, so profound is the deference of the American to England, and so sensitive his feelings to her opinion, that he is disposed to overlook that essential law of justice which exacts proof before condemnation.

It is just to say that a traveller should go through a country observant, but silent as regards its faults; that, on the subject of the superior merits of his own system, modesty and deference to the feelings of others are his cue. But when we come to apply these rules they are liable to qualifications. If those he visits *will* provoke comparisons, they should not complain that they are made intelligently and with independence, so long as they are made temperately. Had the disposition in the English to comment freely and ignorantly on America before natives of the country been early met with manliness and a desire, in particular, *to sustain the institutions*, the idle tales alluded to would never have had an existence. It is as natural, as it is easy, for those who have fallen short of the mark in this respect to say that others have gone beyond it. Men who have been disposed to accept attentions on any terms are not always the best judges of propriety.

England has experienced essential changes since the period of these letters. It is said more knowledge of, and a better feeling towards, America now exist in the country. But, in carrying out the design of his whole work, the writer has been obliged to respect the order of time, and to portray things as he saw them when he was in the island. A future work may repair some of the faults that have arisen from this circumstance.

It is quite probable that this book contains many false notions. They are, however, the mistakes of a conscientious observer, and must be attributed solely to the head. Its opinions will run counter to the prejudices of much the largest portion of what are called the intelligent classes of America, and, quite as a matter of course, will be condemned. An attempt to derange any of the established opinions of this part of American society, more especially on subjects connected with the aristocratical features of the English government, meets with the success that usually accompanies all efforts to convince men against their wishes. There is no very

profound natural mystery in the desire to be better off than one's fellows. The philosopher who constructs a grand theory of government, on the personal envy, the strife, and the heart-burnings of a neighbourhood, is fitted by nature to carve a deity from a block of wood.

LETTER I

DEAR —,

IT was a fine February day, when we left the Hotel Dessin to embark for Dover. The quay was crowded with clamorous porters, while the *gendarmes* had an eye to the police regulations, lest a stray rogue, more or less, might pass undetected between the two great capitals of Europe. As I had placed myself in the hands of a regular *commissionnaire* belonging to the hotel, we had no other trouble than that of getting down a ladder of some fifteen steps, into the boat. The rise and fall of the water is so great, in these high narrow seas, that vessels are sometimes on a level with the quays, and at others three or four fathoms below them.

We had chosen the English steam-packet, a government boat, in preference to the French, from a latent distrust of Gallic seamanship. The voyage was not long, certainly, but, short as it was, we reaped the advantage of a good choice, in beating our competitor by more than an hour.

It is possible to see across the Strait of Dover, in clear weather, but, on this occasion, we had nothing visible before us but an horizon of water, as we paddled through the long entrance of the little haven, into the North Sea. The day was calm, and, an unusual circumstance in swift tides and narrow passages, the Channel was as smooth as a pond. Even the ground swell was too gentle to disturb the *omelettes* of M. Dessin's successor.

The difference of character in the two great nations, that lie so near each other as almost to hear each other's cocks crow, is even visible on the strait that separates them. On the coast of France, we saw a few fishing boats, with tanned sails, catering for the *restaurants* of Paris, while the lofty canvass of countless ships rose in succession from the bosom of the sea, as we shot over towards the English shore. I think we had made more than fifty square-rigged vessels, by the time we got close in with the land. Several were fine Indiamen, and not a few were colliers, bound to that focus of coal-smoke, London.

I passed the Strait of Dover, as a sailor, four times, during the years 1806 and 1807. At that period England was still jealous of the views of Napoleon. In the autumn of the former year, in particular, I remember that we were off Dungeness, just as the day dawned, and a more eloquent picture of watchfulness cannot be imagined, than the Channel presented on that occasion. Near a hundred sail were in sight, and, including a fleet just anchoring in the Downs, much the greater portion of them were cruisers. The nearness of the two coasts enabled the French occasionally to

pick up a prize in the narrow waters, and all this care had become necessary to protect the trade of London. No better proof of the inferiority of the French as a maritime people need be given, than the simple fact that they have ports, which no skill can blockade, within thirty leagues of the mouth of the Thames, and that England maintained the commerce of her capital throughout the whole of a long and vindictive war. I think a maritime people would have driven half the trade to Liverpool, or Bristol, within the first five years. If the Yankees had a hole to run into, so near the river, it would be unsafe punting above the bridges.

The packet was admirably managed, though we had nothing but smooth water to contend with, it is true; still, the quiet and order that prevailed were good proofs that the people could have been used to a proper purpose at need. I was struck, however, with the diminutive appearance of the crew, which was composed of short little waddling fellows, who would have been bothered to do their work on the lower yard of a heavy ship. I have remarked this peculiarity, on several occasions, and I feel very certain that the specimens of English seamen that you and I formerly knew, at home, were much above the level of the class. High wages usually command a high quality of service, and to this circumstance, I presume, we must look for the explanation. Certainly, I never saw any of these little fry, under our flag, and our old friend, Jack Freeman, would have made three or four of them.

After a run of two hours, the cliffs of Dover became distinctly visible, the haze having concealed them until we got pretty close in with the English coast. Although these celebrated hills will bear no comparison with the glorious shores of the Mediterranean, so well known to you, they are noble eminences, and merit the distinction of being mentioned by Shakspeare.

The town of Dover lies partly in a ravine between two of the cliffs, and partly on the strand at their bases. It appears as if nature had expressly left a passage to the sea between the hills, at this point, for, while the latter cannot be much less than three or four hundred feet high, there is scarcely a perceptible rise in the road which runs into the interior. The place is both naturally and poetically fine, for, when one reflects that this accidental formation is precisely at the spot where the island is nearest to the continent it has the character of a magnificent gateway to a great nation. The cliffs extend several miles on each side of the town, melting away in swelling arable land, in the direction of Hastings and Dungeness. The latter is the point where the Conqueror landed, and I should think it the spot most favourable for a descent, any where on the English coast. The shore is still dotted with the remains of works erected during the period of the threatened invasion, and I well remember the time when they groaned under their bristling guns.

The view of Dover and of its cliffs, as we approached the shore, was pleasing, and, in some respects, fine. There was nothing of the classically picturesque in the artificial parts of the picture, it is true, but the place was crowded with so many recollections from English history, that even the old chimney-pots, with which the

cliffs had pretty well garnished the place, had a venerable and attractive look. The castle, too, which stands on the eastern or rather northern hill, is a reasonably suitable edifice, and may be conveniently peopled by the imagination. I believe some part of it is ascribed to that extensive builder Cæsar.

The port is small, but very convenient, lying fairly embosomed in the town. The entrance is altogether artificial, but I saw no gates. I believe that vessels of some size may enter, though the trade is chiefly confined to the communication with France. The pier is a fine promenade of itself, and the whole of the public works connected with it are solid and respectable. We glided quietly into this little haven about one o'clock, and landed on the soil of old England once more.

If we were struck with the contrast between England and France, on first reaching the latter country, I think we were still more so on returning to the former. Four hours before, we were in the region of politeness, vociferation, snatching, fun, and fraud, on the quay of Calais; and now we were in that of quiet, sulkiness, extortion, "thank'ees," and half-crowns, on that of Dover. It would be hard to say which was the worst, although, on the whole, one gets along best, I think, with the latter; for, provided he will pay, he gets his work done with the fewest words. The western people sometimes call a "rowdy" a "screamer," but they have nothing that deserves the name, in comparison with a true French *prolétaire*, who has his dinner still to earn. In England, a fellow will at least starve to death in silence.

We proceeded to Wright's Tavern, certainly one of the best in Dover, and it proved to be as unlike a French, or what an American inn would have been, in similar circumstances, as possible. The house was small, by no means as large as most of the village taverns at home, and altogether unworthy to be mentioned, as respects size, with the hotel we had just left, on the other side of the Channel; but it was quiet and clean. I do not know that it was any cleaner than Dessin's, or a good American house, but the silent manner in which the servants did their several duties was, of itself, an indescribable luxury. At a thoroughfare like this, we should cause a huge pile to be reared, with cells for bed-rooms, a vast hall for a dining-room, and a kitchen fit for barracks, and with this *respublica* of a structure, the travellers, without remorse, would indiscriminately be elevated, or depressed, to the same level of habits; it being almost an offence against good morals, in America, for a man to refuse to be hungry when the majority is ravenous, or to have an appetite when the mass has dined. In the midst of noise and confusion, one would be expected to allow, that in such a caravansary, he was living in what, in American parlance, is called "splendid style." "Splendid misery" would be a better term, were not the use of the first term, as applied to a tasteless shell, absurd.

I have long thought that the regularity, silence, order, cleanliness, and *decencies* of an English inn, added to the beds, elegance, table, and liquors of a French inn, would form the *ne plus ultra* of inn-ism; and the house at Calais, which has, in some measure, become Anglicised by its position, goes to prove that the notion is

not much out of the way. It quite puts its English competitor at Dover into the shade. We missed the mirrors, the service for the table, and the *manner*, but we got in their places a good deal of solid unpretending comfort.

While W— went to the custom house, Mrs. — and myself took a guide, and walked out to look at the cliffs. On one side the chalk rises like a wall, the houses clinging to its base, and, at this point, a shaft has been cut in it, containing a circular flight of steps, by which we ascended to the heights. This passage was made to facilitate the communications between the different military works. On quitting the stairs, we found ourselves on an irregular acclivity that forms the summit of the cliffs, and which was in grass. Of the perpendicular elevation, I should think about two-thirds of it was in the chalky precipices, looking towards the Channel and the town, and the other third in the verdant cap on which we stood.

Here we found works of the modern school, consisting of the usual parapets, ditches, and glacis. The guide, who was anxious to show off his wares, led us up to a fort, into which we entered by a passage, from which he affirmed it was possible to abstract the air, a new device in warfare, and one that I should think rather supererogatory here, since the enemy that got as far as this gate at the *fas de charge*, would already be pretty short-winded. As we climbed, I more than once inquired, with old Gloucester, "When shall we come to the top of that same hill?" The honour of the invention was ascribed to the Duke of Wellington by our companion, who was an old campaigner. But the military features were the least of the attractions of the spot. We were on the very cliffs of the "samphire gatherers":—

"Half way down
Hangs one that gathers samphire; dreadful trade!
Methinks he seems no bigger than his head:
The fishermen, that walk upon the beach,
Appear like mice; and yon tall anchoring bark
Diminished to her cock; her cock a buoy
Almost too small for sight. The murmuring surge,
That on the unnumbered idle pebbles chafes,
Cannot be heard so high."

It is quite evident Edgar did not deal fairly with the old man, little of this fine description being more than poetically exact. After ascending to the summit of the height, which, without the stairs, could only be done from the rear, one would have to descend a long distance, across the verdant cap mentioned, in order to reach the verge of the cliffs.

Still the view was both imposing and beautiful. We overlooked the Channel of course, and, for a few moments, we had a glimpse of the cliffs of France. Tall ships

were stealing along the water, though neither their "cocks" nor "buoys" were visible. Dr. Johnson has complimented Shakspeare for his knowledge of nautical phrases, but this is a mistake into which neither you nor I will be so likely to fall. In the quotation I have just given you, the great bard makes the gradation in diminutiveness pass from the ship to her boat, and from the boat to the buoy! This is poetry, and as such it is above comment; but one of the craft would have been more exact.

About a dozen years ago, I made an essay in nautical description, a species of writing that was then absolutely new. Anxious to know what the effect would be on the public, I read a chapter to our old shipmate —, now Captain —, which contained an account of a ship's working off-shore, in a gale. It had been my aim to avoid technicalities, in order to be poetic, although the subject imperiously required a minuteness of detail to render it intelligible. My listener betrayed interest, as we proceeded, until he could no longer keep his seat. He paced the room furiously until I got through, and just as I laid down the paper he exclaimed, "It is all very well, but you have let your jib stand too long, my fine fellow!" I blew it out of the bolt-rope, in pure spite.

The part of the view from the heights of Dover, which struck us as altogether the most unusual, was the inland. France, from Paris to Calais, was brown, and altogether without vegetation, while we now found England covered with a dark verdure that I had never before seen in February. In short, this country was much greener than when we left it, in July, 1826. It is true, the fields were not covered with the lively green of young grasses, but it had a dark, rich look, that conveyed the idea of a strong soil and of good husbandry. Something of this might have been owing to local causes, for I think the peculiarity was less observable nearer London, than on the coast.

The absence of wood would have left a sense of nakedness and sterility, but for the depth of the verdure. As it was, however, the whole district, visible from the heights, had a sort of Sunday air, like that of a comfortable mechanic, who was just shaved and attired for the day of rest. Few buildings appeared in the fields, and most of those we saw, the castle and public works excepted, singularly reminded us of the small, solid, unpretending but comfortable brick abodes, that one sees in New Jersey, Maryland, and Delaware, rather than in any other part of America. This is just the section of the United States which most resembles the common English life, I think, and it is also the region in which the purest English is spoken. I believe it to be, on the whole, the nearest approach we have to England, in architecture, domestic habits, and language, and I ascribe the fact to the circumstance, that this part of the Union was principally settled with emigrants from the midland counties of the mother country. I now refer, however, solely to the every-day rustic habits and usages.

We looked at this view of England with very conflicting sensations. It was the land of our fathers, and it contained, with a thousand things to induce us to love it, a thousand to chill the affections. Standing, as it might be, in the very portal of the country, I imagined what was to occur in the next three months, with longing and distrust. Twenty-two years before, an ardent boy, I had leaped ashore, on the island, with a feeling of deep reverence and admiration, the fruits of the traditions of my people, and with a love almost as devoted as that I bore the land of my birth. I had been born, and I had hitherto lived, among those who looked up to England as to the idol of their political, moral, and literary adoration. These notions I had imbibed, as all imbibed them in America down even as late as the commencement of the last war. I had been accustomed to see every door thrown open to an Englishman, and to hear and think that his claim to our hospitality was that of a brother, divided from us merely by the accidents of position. Alas! how soon were these young and generous feelings blighted. I have been thrown much among Englishmen throughout the whole of my life, and for many I entertain a strong regard—one I even ranked among my closest friends—and I have personally received, in this kingdom itself, more than cold attentions; and yet among them all I cannot recall a single man, who, I have had the smallest reason to think, has ever given me his hand the more cordially and frankly because I was an American! With them, the tie of a common origin has seemed to be utterly broken, and when I have made friends, I have every reason to believe it has been in despite, and in no manner in consequence, of my extraction. Other Americans tell me the same, and I presume no one enters the country from our side of the water, who has not first to overcome the prejudice connected with his birth, before he can meet the people on an equality with other strangers. We may have occasion to look into this matter before the next three months shall be passed.

On returning to the inn, we found that our effects were passed, at some little cost, and that we were expected to present ourselves, in person, at the alien office. This ceremony, far more exacting than any thing we had hitherto encountered in Europe, was not of a nature to make us feel at home. We went, however, even to the child, and were duly enregistered. I shall not take it on myself to say the form is unnecessary, for the police of two such towns as London and Paris must require great vigilance; but it had an ungracious appearance to compel a lady to submit to such a rule. We were treated with perfect civility, in all other respects, and, as the law was then new, it is possible its agent had interpreted its provisions too literally.

Mrs. — had also to pay a heavy duty on one or two of her dresses, although they formed part of her ordinary wardrobe. This regulation, however, might very well be necessary also, in the situation of the two countries, and it was not an easy matter to make an available distinction, in this respect, between the natives of the country and mere travellers. I have had every reason to speak favourably of the English custom houses, which, on all occasions, have manifested a spirit of liberality, and, in one or two instances, in which I have been a party, a generous

and gentlemanlike feeling, that showed how well their officers understood the spirit of their duties. In my case, the revenue has never lost a farthing by this temper, and both parties have been spared much useless trouble.

After dining, which was done without napkins, a change we instantly observed on coming from France, I made my arrangements to proceed. The French *calèche* had of course been left at Calais, but Mr. Wright gave me a regular post-coach, that held us very comfortably, together with the whole of the luggage. This vehicle differed but little from a stage coach, resembling what the *amateur* Jehus of London call a "drag."

As this equipage drove up to the door, we had, at once, a proof of the superiority of English over French travelling. The size and weight of the vehicle compelled me to order four horses, which appeared in the shape of so many blooded animals, a little galled in the withers, it is true, but in good heart, and which were under the management of two smart postilions, in top-boots, white hats, and scarlet jackets.

I inquired as to the condition of the roads. "Very bad, sir," exclaimed Mr. Wright, who had a well-fed, contented air, without a particle of sulkiness about him, "quite rotten, sir." I was curious to see a rotten road. The word was given, and we moved off at a pace that did credit to the stables of Dover. The day was raw and windy, and the "boys," one of whom was fifty years old, got off at a turnpike, and concealed their finery under great coats. I took the opportunity to inquire when we should reach the "rotten roads," and was told that we were then on them. Occasionally the water lay on the surface, and cavities were worn an inch or two deep, and this was termed a rotten road! W— laughed, and wondered what these fine fellows would think of a road in which "the bottom had fallen out," and of which we have so many in America.

The rate at which we moved did not appear very rapid, the whole team quite evidently travelling perfectly at their ease, and yet we did the distance between Dover and Canterbury, some sixteen miles, in about an hour and a half. French cattle, to do this, would have been on a cowish jump the whole time.

The road was quite narrow, following the natural windings of the ground, and, in all respects, its excellence excepted, resembled one of our own country roads. Indeed it is not usual to find so little space between the fences, as there was between the hedges of this great thoroughfare, most of the way. We passed a common or two, and a race-course over an uneven track. The scenery was *petite*, if you can make out the meaning of such an expression, by which I would portray narrow vales, low swells, and limited views. This, I think, is the prevailing character of English scenery, which owes its beauty to its finish, and a certain air of rural snugness and comfort, more than to any thing else. We missed the wood of France, for, at this season, the hedges are but an indifferent substitute.

We found Canterbury on a plain, and drove to another Mr. Wright's, for, to make a bad travelling pun, it was literally "all Wright" on this road. We had four of the name, including Dover and London. We ordered tea, and it was served redolent of home and former days. The hissing urn, the delicious toast, the fragrant beverage, the warm sea-coal fire, and the perfect snugness of every thing, were indeed grateful, after so many failures to obtain the same things in France. Commend me to a French breakfast, and to an English or an American "tea!"

LETTER II

DEAR —,

EARLY the following morning, on looking out of my window, I saw a gentleman in a scarlet coat, and a hunting-cap, mounting in the yard of the inn. He had been hunting the previous day, and had evidently made a night of it. Soon after, we went to look at the metropolitan church of England.

Canterbury itself is a place of no great magnitude, but it is neat. Coming from France, the houses struck us as being diminutively low, though they are very much the same sort of buildings one sees in the country towns of the older parts of the middle states. Burlington, Trenton, Wilmington, Bristol, Chester, &c., will give you a very accurate idea of one of these small provincial towns, as will Baltimore, its night-caps apart, of one of the larger. It is usual to say that Boston is more like an English town, than any other place in America, but I should say that the resemblance is stronger in Baltimore, as a whole, and in Philadelphia, in parts. There are entire quarters of the latter town, which, were it not for their extreme regularity, might be taken for parts of London, though there are others which are quite peculiar to Philadelphia itself. As for New York, it is a perfect rag fair, in which the tawdry finery of ladies of easy virtue is exposed in the same stall, and in close proximity to, the greasy vestments of the pauper.

As we walked through the streets of Canterbury, I directed the attention of my companions to the diminutive stature of the people. I feel certain that the average height of the men we have met since landing is fully an inch below that of one of our own towns. And yet we were in the heart of Kent, a county that the English say contains the finest race of the island. Though short, and not particularly sturdy, the people had a decent air, that is wanting in the French of the same classes, with all their *manner*. Mrs. — was delighted with this peculiarity in her own sex, which strongly reminded her of home. Even the humblest wore some sort of a hat in the streets, and a large proportion wore those scarlet cloaks that used to be so common among the farmers' wives in America. In this particular, the common people had the appearance of having adhered to fashions that our own population dropped some forty years since.

The cathedral of Canterbury is a fine church, without being one of the best of its class. It is neither as large nor as rich as some others in England even, and in both respects it is much inferior to many on the continent. Still it is large and noble, its length exceeding five hundred feet. Like all the great English churches, this

cathedral is free from the miserable adjuncts that clerical cupidity has stuck against the walls of similar edifices, in France. It stands isolated from all other buildings, with grass growing prettily up to its very walls. This, of itself, was a great charm, compared to the filthy pavements, and the garbage that is apt to defile the temple, on the other side of the Channel.

We found the officials at morning prayers, in the choir. It sounded odd to us, to hear our own beautiful service, in our own tongue, in such a place, after the Latin chants of the deep-mouthed canons, and we stood listening with reverence, although without the screen. These English cathedrals maintain so much of the Romish establishments as still to possess their chapters, but instead of the ancient cloisters, the Protestants having wives, there is a sort of square of snug houses around the edifice, for the residences of the prebendaries and other officials. I believe this is called a *close*, a word that we do not use, but which has the same signification as place, or *cul-de-sac*, not being a thoroughfare. Perhaps the term *close fellow* came from these churchmen; no bad etymology, since it has a direct reference to the pocket. It has always been matter of astonishment to me, that a man of liberal attainments should possess one of these clerical sinecures, grow sleek and greasy on its products, eat, drink, and be merry, and fancy, all the while, that he was serving God! Men become accustomed to any absurdity. Were Christ to reappear on earth, and preach again his doctrine of self-denial and humility, he who should attempt to practise on his tenets, according to modern notions, would be regarded as not only a fool himself, but as believing others weak as himself; but time has hallowed the abuses that were begotten by cupidity on ignorance.

The cathedral of Canterbury was the scene of Becket's murder. His shrine was here, and for centuries, it was the resort of pilgrims. It merited canonization to be slain at the horns of the altar. The building still contains many curious relics of this nature, but mere descriptions of such things are usually very unsatisfactory.

After passing most of the morning exploring, and taking a tea breakfast, *à l'Anglaise*, we proceeded. The road took us through Rochester, Sittingbourne, Chatham, Gravesend, and the edge of Woolwich. The distance was fifty-five miles, and we passed at least five towns, which contained, on an average, ten thousand souls. Although the day was windy and raw, I stuck to the box the whole time, preferring to encounter the marrow-chilling weather of an English February, to missing the objects that came within our view. In the course of the morning we saw a party of horsemen, with a pack of hounds, dashing through a turnip field, but what they were after could not be seen.

You probably know that a principal naval station is at Sheerness, on the Medway. We did not pass immediately through this town, though Chatham forms almost a part of it. The river was full of ships, as was the Thames in a reach above Gravesend. Most of the vessels in the latter place were frigates. They lay in tiers, and appeared to be well cared for. These ships were chiefly of the class of the old

thirty-eights, or vessels that we call thirty-sixes, mounting eight-and-twenty eighteens below, and two-and-twenty lighter guns above.

It may be known to you, that after our last war, the English admiralty altered its mode of rating. The old thirty-eights are now called forty-sixes, though why, it is not easy to see. The pretext that we under-rated our ships, because we did not number the guns, is absurd, since we derived the usage directly from the English themselves; nor do their changes meet the difficulty, as no large vessel is now probably rated exactly according to her armament. The number of the guns, moreover, is no criterion of the force of a vessel, since the metal and powers of endurance make all the difference in the world. An old-fashioned English thirty-two, mounted twenty-six twelves below, with as many light guns as she could conveniently carry on her quarter-deck and forecastle, differs from the thirty-six merely in the weight of metal, which, in the latter, was that of eighteens. I have seen a thirty-two that carried as many guns as a thirty-six, and yet the latter was at least a fourth heavier, if not a third. Fetches of this nature are every way unworthy of two such navies as those of England and America, nor can they mislead any but the extremely ignorant. In my estimation the Duke of Wellington deserves more credit for the frank simplicity of his account of the battles he has fought, than for the victories he has gained; other men having been successful as well as himself, though few, indeed, are they who have been content with the truth.

It is a point of honour with the post-boys, on an English road, to pass all the stage coaches. For this purpose they use cattle of a different mould, animals that possess foot rather than force. The loads are lighter, usually, and in this manner they are able to carry their point. I was pleased with the steady, quiet, earnest manner in which this essential object was always attained, every thing like the appearance of strife and racing being studiously avoided.

The terrible Shooter's Hill offered no longer any terrors, and as for Blackheath, it had more the air of a village green than of a waste. The goodness of the roads, the fleetness of the cattle, and, more than all, the system of credits, have rendered highwaymen and footpads almost unknown in England. Robberies of this nature are now much more frequent in France than in this island, for several flagrant instances have lately occurred in the former country. A single footpad is said to have rifled a *diligence*, sustained by a platoon of *-paddies*, armed with sticks, and arrayed by moonlight! The story is so absurd, that one wishes it may be true.

In travelling along these beautiful roads, at the rate of ten or eleven miles the hour, in perfect security, we are irresistibly led to recall the pictures of Fielding, with his carriers, his motley cargoes, and his footpads'

London met us, in its straggling suburbs, several miles down the river. I cannot give you any just idea of our *carte de route*, but it led us through a succession of streets lined by houses of dingy yellow bricks, until we suddenly burst out upon

Waterloo Bridge. Crossing this huge pile, we whirled into the Strand, and were set down at the hotel of Mrs. Wright, Adam-street, Adelphi. Forty years since we should have been in the very focus of the fashionable world, so far as hotels were concerned, whereas we were now at its *Ultima Thule*. The Strand, as its name signifies, runs parallel to the river, and at no great distance from its banks, leaving room, however, for a great number of short streets between it and the water. Nearly all these streets, most of which are in fact "places," having no outlets at one end, are filled with furnished lodging-houses, and, in some of the best of them, I believe it is still permitted to a gentleman to reside. When, however, I mentioned to a friend that we were staying in Adam-street, he exclaimed that we ought, on no account, to have gone east of Charing Cross. These were distinctions that gave us very little concern, and we were soon refreshing ourselves with some of worthy Mrs. Wright's excellent tea.

One of the merits of England is the perfect order in which every thing is kept, and the perfect method with which every thing is done. One sees no cracked cups, no tea-pots with broken noses, no knives thin as wafers, no forks with one prong longer than the other, no coach wanting a glass, no substitute for a buckle, no crooked poker or tongs loose in the joint, no knife that won't cut, no sugar cracked in lumps too big to be used, no hat unbrushed, no floor with a hole in it, no noisy servants, no bell that won't ring, no window that won't open, no door that won't shut, no broken pane, nor any thing out of repair that might have been mended. I now speak of the eyes of him who can pay. In France, half of these incongruities are to be met with amid silken curtains and broad mirrors, though France is rapidly improving in this respect; but, at home, we build on a huge scale, equip with cost, and take refuge in expedients as things go to decay. We are not as bad as the Irish are said to be, in this respect, but he who insists on having things precisely as they ought to be, is usually esteemed a most unreasonable rogue, more especially in the interior. We satisfy ourselves by acknowledging a standard of merit in comforts, but little dream of acting up to it. We want servants, and mechanical labour is too costly. The low price at which comforts are retailed here has greatly surprised me. I feel persuaded that most of the common articles of English manufacture come to the consumer in America, at about thrice their original cost.

The second night we were in London, a party of street musicians came under the window and began to play. They had tried several tunes without success, for I was stretched on a sofa reading, but the rogues contrived, after all, to abstract half a crown from my pocket, by suddenly striking up "Yankee Doodle!" It is something, at all events, to have taught John Bull that we take pride in that tune. You can scarcely imagine the effect it produced on my nerves to hear it in the streets of London, though you and I have heard it "rolling off for grog" so often with perfect indifference. I have since been told by a music-master, that the air is German. He touched it for me, though with a time and cadence that completely changed its character. The English took the tune of an old song beginning with "Miss Nancy

Locket lost her pocket," and adapted their words of derision to it; but there is strictly no such thing as an English school of music. Most of their songs, I believe, have the *motifs* of German airs. The prevalent *motive* of all English music, however, is gold.

I cannot tell you how many furnished apartments and lodging-houses London contains, but the number is incredible. They can be had at all prices, and with nearly every degree of comfort and elegance. The rush of people to town is so great, during the season, that there are periods when it is not easy to have a choice, notwithstanding, though we were sufficiently early to make a selection. In one thing I was disappointed. The English unquestionably are a neat people, in all that relates to their houses, and yet the furnished lodgings of London are not generally as tidy as those of Paris. The general use of coal may be a reason, but after passing a whole day in examining rooms, we scarcely met with any that appeared sufficiently neat. The next morning I tried a new quarter, where we did a little better, though the effects of the coal-dust met us every where.

We finally took a small house in St. James's-place, a narrow *inlet* that communicates with the street of the same name, and which is quite near the palace and the parks. We had a tiny drawing-room, quite plainly furnished, a dining-room, and three bed-rooms, with the use of the offices, &c., for a guinea a day. The people of the house cooked for us, went to market, and attended to the rooms, while our own man and maid did the personal service. I paid a shilling extra for each fire, and as we kept three, it came to another guinea weekly. This, you will remember, was during the season, as it is called; at another time the same house might have been had, quite possibly, for half the money.

Many people take these furnished houses by the year, and more still, by the quarter. I was surprised to find those in our neighbourhood gradually filling with people of condition, many of the coaches that daily stood before their doors having coronets. Perhaps more than half of the peers of the three kingdoms lodge in this way when in town, and I believe a smaller proportion still actually own the houses in which they reside. Even in those cases in which the head of a great family has a town-house of his own, the heir and younger children, if married, seldom reside in it, the English customs, in this respect, being just the reverse of those of France.

There is a great convenience in having it in one's power to occupy a house that is in all respects private, ready furnished, and to come and go at will. Were the usage introduced into our own towns, hundreds of families would be induced to pass their winters in them, that now remain in the country from aversion to the medley and confusion of a hotel, or a boarding-house, as well as their expense. We have a double advantage for the establishment of such houses, in New York at least, in the fact that we have two seasons, yearly, the winter and the summer. Our own people would occupy them during the former portion of the year, and the southern travellers in the warm weather. The introduction of such houses would, I think,

have a beneficial influence on our deportment, which is so fast tending towards mediocrity, under the present gregarious habits of the people. When there is universal suffrage at a dinner-table, or in the drawing-room, numbers will prevail, as well as in the ballot-boxes, and the majority in no country is particularly polite and well bred. The great taverns that are springing up all over America are not only evils in the way of comfort and decency, but they are actually helping to injure the tone of manners. They are social Leviathans.

LETTER III

DEAR —,

A LONDON season lasts during the regular session of parliament, unless politics contrive to weary dissipation. Of course this rule is not absolute, as the two houses are sometimes unexpectedly convened, but the ordinary business of the country usually begins after the Christmas holidays, and, allowing for a recess at Easter, continues until June, or July. This division of time seems unnatural to us, but all national usages of the sort can commonly be traced to sufficient causes. The shooting and hunting seasons occupy the autumn and early winter months; the Christmas festivities follow; then the country in winter, apart from its sports, is less dreary in England than in most other parts of the world, the verdure being perhaps finer than in the warm months, and London, which is to the last degree unpleasant as a residence from November to March, is most agreeable from April to June. The government is exclusively in the hands of the higher classes, or so nearly so as to render their convenience and pleasure the essential points, and these inhabit a quarter of the town, in which one misses the beauties of the country far less than in most capitals. The west end is so interspersed with parks and gardens and the enclosures of squares, that, aided by high culture and sheltered positions, vegetation not only comes forward earlier in Westminster than in the adjacent fields, but it is more grateful to the eye and feelings. The men are much on horseback of a morning, and the women take their drives in the parks, quite as agreeably as if they were at their own country residences.

The season has gradually been growing later, I believe, though Bath of old, and Brighton and Cheltenham, and other watering places of late, attracted, or still attract, the idler, in the commencement of the winter. Since the peace, the English have much frequented the continent, after June; Paris, the German watering places, and Switzerland being almost as easy of access as their own houses. It is made matter of reproach against the upper classes of England, that they spend so much of their time abroad, but, without adverting to the dearth of living at home, and the factitious state of society, both of which are strong inducements to multitudes to quit the island, I fancy we should do the same thing were we cooped up in a country so small and with roads so excellent that it could be traversed from one end to the other in eight and forty hours, having the exchanges always in our own favour, and with an easy access to novel and amusing scenes. Travelling never truly injured any one, and it has sensibly meliorated the English character.

A day or two after our arrival in London, an English friend asked me if I were not struck with the crowds in the streets; particularly with the confusion of the carriages. Coming from Paris I certainly was not, for, during the whole of March, the movement, if any thing, was in favour of the French capital.

As usual, I came to London without a letter. It may be an error, but on this point I have never been able to overcome a repugnance to making these direct appeals for personal attentions. In the course of my life, I do not think, much as I have travelled, that I have delivered half a dozen. I am fully aware of their necessity if one would be noticed, but, right or wrong, I have preferred to be unnoticed to laying an imposition on others that they may possibly think onerous. The unreflecting and indelicate manner in which the practice of giving and asking for letters is abused, in America, may have contributed to my disgust at the usage. Just before I left home, a little incident occurred, connected with the subject, that, in no degree, served to diminish this reluctance to asking favours and civilities of strangers. I happened to be present when an improper application was made to the son of one of our ministers in Europe, for letters to the father. Surprised that such a request should be granted, I was explicitly told that a private sign had been agreed upon, between the parties, whereby all applicants should be gratified, though none were really to have the benefit of the introduction but those who bore the stipulated mark! This odious duplicity had its rise in the habits of a country, in which men are so apt to mistake their privileges. The practice of deferring leads to frauds in politics, and to hypocrisy in morals. Some will tell you this case was the fruits of democracy, but I shall say it savoured more of an artifice of aristocracy, and such, in fact, was the political bias of both father and son. Democracy merits no other reproach in the affair, than the weakness of allowing itself to be deceived by agents so hollow.

I had made the acquaintance of Mr. William Spencer, in Paris, a gentleman well known in England as the author of "A Year of Sorrow," and several very clever pieces of fugitive poetry. Hearing that I was about to visit London, he volunteered to give me letters to a large circle of acquaintances, literary and fashionable. Pleading my retired habits, I endeavoured to persuade him not to give himself the trouble of writing, but, mistaking the motive, he insisted on showing this act of kindness. Trusting to his known indolence, I thought little of the matter, until the very morning of the day we left Paris, when this gentleman appeared, and, instead of the letters, he gave me a list of the names of some of those he wished me to know, desiring me to leave cards for them, on reaching London, in the full assurance that the letters would be sent after me! I put the list in my pocket, and, as you will readily imagine, thought the arrangement sufficiently queer. The list contained, however, the names of several whom I would gladly have known, could it be done with propriety, including, among others, those of Rogers, Campbell, Sotheby, Lord Dudley, &c.

Under these circumstances, I took quiet possession of the house in St. James's-place, with no expectation of seeing any part of what is called society, content to look at as much of the English capital as could be viewed on the outside, and to pursue my own occupations. This arrangement was rendered the less to be regretted by the circumstance that we had been met in London, by the unpleasant intelligence of the death of Mr. De—. Of course it was the wish of your aunt to be retired. While things were in this state, I went one morning to a bookseller's, where the Americans are in the habit of resorting, and learned, to my surprise, that several of the gentlemen named on Mr. Spencer's list, had been there to inquire for me. This looked as if he had actually written, and to this kindness on his part, and to an awkward mistake, by which I was supposed to be the son of an Englishman of the same name and official appellation as those of your grand-father, I am indebted to nearly all of the acquaintances I made in England, some of whom I should have been extremely sorry to have missed.

The first visit I had, out of our own narrow circle of Americans, occurred about a fortnight after we were established in St. James's-place. I was writing at the time, and did not attend particularly when the name was announced, but supposing it was some tradesman, I ordered the person to be admitted. A quiet little old man appeared in the room, and we stood staring near a minute at each other, he, as I afterwards understood, to ascertain if he could discover any likeness between me and my supposed father, and I wondering who the diminutive little personage might be. I question if the stature of my visitor much exceeded five feet, though his frame was solid and heavy. He was partly bald, and the hair that remained was perfectly white. He had a fine head, a benevolent countenance, and a fresh colour. After regarding me a moment, and perceiving my doubt, he said simply, "I am Mr. Godwin. I knew your father, when he lived in England, and hearing that you were in London, I have come, without ceremony, to see you." After expressing my gratification at having made his acquaintance on any terms, I gave him to understand there was some mistake, as my father had never been out of America. This led to an explanation, when he took his seat and we began to chat. He was curious to hear something of American literature, which I have soon discovered is very little known in England. He wished to learn, in particular, if we had any poets. "I have seen something of Dwight's, and Humphrey's, and Barlow's," he said, "but I cannot say that either pleased me much." I laughed and told him we could do better than that, now. He begged me to recite something—a single verse, if possible. He could not have applied to a worse person, for my memory barely suffices to remember facts, of which I trust it is sufficiently tenacious, but I never could make any thing of a quotation. As he betrayed a childish eagerness to hear even half a dozen lines, I attempted something of Bryant's, and a little of "Alnwick Castle," which pretty much exhausted my whole stock. I was amused at the simplicity with which he betrayed the little reverence he felt for our national

intellect, for it was quite apparent he thought "nothing good could come out of Nazareth."

Mr. Godwin sat with me an hour, and the whole time the conversation was about America, her prospects, her literature, and her politics. It was not possible to believe that he entertained a favourable opinion of the country, notwithstanding the liberal tendency of his writings, for prejudice, blended with a few shrewd and judicious remarks, peeped out of all his notions. He had almost a rustic simplicity of manner, that, I think, must be as much attributed to the humble sphere of life in which he had lived, as to character, for the portion of his deportment which was not awkward seemed to be the result of mind, while the remainder might easily enough be traced to want of familiarity with life. At least, so both struck me, and I can only give you my impressions. As Mr. Godwin has long enjoyed a great reputation, and the English of rank are in the habit of courting men of letters (though certainly in a way peculiar to themselves), I can only suppose that the tendency of his writings, which is not favourable to aristocracy, has prevented him from enjoying the usual advantages of men of celebrity.

It would savour of empiricism to pretend to dive into the depths of character, in an interview of an hour, but there was something about the manner of Mr. Godwin that strongly impressed me with the sincerity of his philosophy, and of his real desire to benefit his race. I felt several times, during his visit, as if I wished to pat the old man's bald head, and tell him "he was a good fellow." Indeed, I cannot recall any one, who, on so short an acquaintance, so strongly impressed me with a sense of his philanthropy; and this too, purely from externals, for his professions and language were totally free from cant. This opinion forced itself on me, almost in spite of my wishes, for Mr. Godwin so clearly viewed us with any thing but favourable eyes, that I could not consider him a friend. He regarded us as *speculating* rather than as a *speculative* people, and such is not the character that a philosopher most esteems.

I returned the visit of Mr. Godwin, in a few days, although I was indebted for his presence to a mistake, and found him, living in great simplicity, in the midst of his books. On this occasion he manifested the peculiarities already named, with the same disposition to distrust the greatness of the "twelve millions." I fancy my father has not sent him very good accounts of us.

A few days later I got an invitation to be present at an evening party, given by a literary man, with whom I had already a slight acquaintance. On this occasion, I was told a lady, known a little in the world of letters, was desirous of making my acquaintance, and, of course, I had only to go forward and be presented. "I had the pleasure of knowing your father," she observed, as soon as my bow was made. Forgetting Mr. Godwin and his visit, I observed that she had then been in America. Not at all; she had known my father in England. I then explained to her that I was confounded with another person, my father being an American, and never out of

his own country. This news produced an extraordinary change on the countenance and manner of my new acquaintance, who, from that moment, did not deign to speak to me, or hardly to look at me! As her first reception had been quite frank and warm, and she herself had sought the introduction, I thought this deportment a little decided. I cannot explain the matter, in any other way, than by supposing that her inherent dislike of America suddenly got the better of her good manners, for the woman could hardly expect that I was to play imposter for her particular amusement. This may seem to you extraordinary, but I have seen many similar and equally strong instances of national antipathy betrayed by these people, since my residence in Europe. I note these things, as matter of curious observation.

In the course of the same week I was indebted to the attention of Mr. Spencer for another visit, which led to more agreeable consequences. The author of the "Pleasures of Memory" was my near neighbour in St. James's-place, and, induced by Mr. Spencer, he very kindly sought me out. His visit was the first I actually received from the "list," and it has been the means of my seeing most of what I have seen, of the interior of London. It was followed by an invitation to breakfast for the following morning.

I certainly have no intention to repay Mr. Rogers for his many acts of kindness, by making him and his friends the subjects of my comments, but, to a certain degree he must pay the penalty of celebrity, and neither he nor any one else has a right to live in so exquisite a house, and expect every body to hold their tongues about it.

It was but a step from my door to that of Mr. Rogers, and you may be certain I was punctual to the appointed hour. I found with him Mr. Cary, the translator of Dante, and his son. The conversation during breakfast was general, the subject of America being incidentally introduced. Our host told many literary anecdotes, in a quiet and peculiar manner that gave them point. I was asked if the language of America differed essentially from that of England. I thought not so much in words and pronunciation, as in intonation and in the signification of certain terms. Still I thought I could always tell an Englishman from an American, in the course of five minutes' conversation. The two oldest gentlemen professed not to be able to discover any thing in my manner of speaking to betray me for a foreigner. But the young gentleman fancied otherwise. "He thought there was something peculiar—provincial—he did not know what exactly." I could have helped him to the word—"something that was not cockney." The young man however was right in the main, for I could myself have pronounced that all three of my companions were not Americans, and I do not see why they might not have said that I was no Englishman. The difference between the enunciation of Mr. Rogers and Mr. Cary and one of our educated men of the middle States, it is true, was scarcely perceptible, and required a nice ear and some familiarity with both countries to detect, but the young man could not utter a sentence, without showing his origin.

Mr. Rogers had the good nature to let me see his house, after breakfast. It stands near the head of the place, there being a right-angle between his dwelling and mine, and its windows, in the rear, open on the Green Park. In every country in which men begin to live for enjoyment and taste, it is a desideratum to get an abode that is not exposed to the noise and bustle of a thoroughfare. One who has intellectual resources, and elegant accomplishments, in which to take refuge, scarcely desires to be a street gazer, and I take it to be almost a test of the character of a population, when its higher classes seek to withdraw from publicity, in this manner. One can conceive of a trader who has grown rich wishing to get a "good stand," even for a house, but I am now speaking of men of cultivated minds and habits.

On this side of the Green Park there is no street between the houses and the field. The buildings stand in a line, even with the place on one side, and having small gardens between them and the park. Of course, all the good rooms overlook the latter. The Green Park, and St. James's Park, are, in fact, one open space, the separation between them being merely a fence. The first is nothing but a large field, cropped down like velvet, irregularly dotted with trees, and without any carriage way. Paths wind naturally across it, cows graze before the eye, and nursery maids and children sprinkle its uneven surface, whenever the day is fine. There is a house and garden belonging to the ranger, on one of its sides, and the shrubbery of the latter, as well as that of the small private gardens just mentioned, help to relieve the nakedness. I should think there must be sixty or eighty acres in the Green Park, while St. James's is much larger. On one side the Green Park is open to Piccadilly; on another it is bounded by a carriage way in St. James's; a third joins St. James's; and the fourth is the end on which stands the house of Mr. Rogers.

It strikes me the dwellings which open on these two parks (for more than half of St. James's Park is bounded by houses in the same manner) are the most desirable in London. They are central as regards the public edifices, near the court, the clubs, and the theatres, and yet they are more retired than common. The carriage way to them is almost always by places, or silent streets, while their best windows overlook a beautiful rural scene interspersed with the finer parts of a capital. As a matter of course, these dwellings are in great request. On the side of the Green Park is the residence of Sir Francis Burdett, Spencer House, Bndgewater House, so celebrated for its pictures, and many others of a similar quality, while a noble new palace stands at the point where the two parks meet, that was constructed for the late Duke of York, then heir presumptive of the crown.

The house of Mr. Rogers is a *chef-d'œuvre* for the establishment of a bachelor. I understood him to say that it occupied a part of the site of a dwelling of a former Duke of St. Albans, and so well is it proportioned that I could hardly believe it to be as small as feet and inches demonstrate. Its width cannot be more than eighteen

feet, while its depth may a little exceed fifty. The house in which we lodge is even smaller. But the majority of the town-houses, here, are by no means distinguished for their size. Perhaps the average of the genteel lodging-houses, of which I have spoken, is less than that of Mr. Rogers's dwelling.

This gentleman has his drawing-room and dining-room lined with pictures, chiefly by the old masters. Several of them are the studies of larger works. His library is filled with valuable books; curiosities, connected principally with literature, history, and the arts, are strewn about the house; and even some rare relics of Egyptian sculpture find a place in this tasteful abode. Among other things of the sort, he has the original agreement for the sale of "Paradise Lost!" The price, I believe, was twenty-five pounds. It is usual to rail at this meanness, but I question if there is a bookseller, now in London, who would pay as much for it.

I was much interested with a little circumstance connected with these rarities. In the drawing-room stands a precious antique vase, on a handsome pedestal of carved wood. Chantrey was dining with the poet, as a group collected around the spot, to look at the vase. "Do you know who did this carving?" asked the sculptor, laying his hand on the pedestal. Mr. Rogers mentioned the carver he employed. "Yes, yes, he had the job, but *I* did the *work*,"—being then an apprentice, or a journeyman, I forget which.