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Edited by Constantia Maxwell

Excerpt

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TRAVELS &c.

There are two methods of writing travels; to register the journey itself, or the result of it. In the former case, it is a diary, under which head are to be classed all those books of travels written in the form of letters. The latter usually falls into the shape of essays on distinct subjects. Of the former method of composing, almost every book of modern travels is an example. Of the latter, the admirable essays of my valuable friend Mr Professor Symonds¹, upon Italian agriculture, are the most perfect specimens.

It is of very little importance what form is adopted by a man of real genius; he will make any form useful, and any information interesting. But for persons of more moderate talents, it is of consequence to consider the circumstances for and against both these modes.

The journal form hath the advantage of carrying with it a greater degree of credibility; and, of course, more weight. A traveller who thus registers his observations is detected the moment he writes of things he has not seen. He is precluded from giving studied or elaborate remarks upon insufficient foundations. If he sees little, he must register little; if he has few good opportunities of being well-informed, the reader is enabled to observe it, and will be induced to give no more credit to his relations than the sources of them appear to deserve. If he passes so rapidly through a country as necessarily to be no judge of what he sees, the reader knows it; if he dwells long in places of little or no moment with private views or for private business, the circumstance is seen; and thus the reader has the satisfaction of being as safe from imposition either designed or involuntary, as the nature of the case will admit; all which advantages are wanted in the other method.

But to balance them, there are on the other hand some weighty inconveniences; among these the principal is, the prolixity to which a diary generally leads; the very mode of writing almost making it inevitable. It necessarily causes repetitions of the same subjects and

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the same ideas; and that surely must be deemed no inconsiderable fault, when one employs many words to say what might be better said in a few. Another capital objection is, that subjects of importance, instead of being treated *de suite* for illustration or comparison, are given by scraps as received, without order, and without connection; a mode which lessens the effect of writing, and destroys much of its utility.

In favour of composing essays on the principal objects that have been observed, that is, giving the result of travels and not the travels themselves, there is this obvious and great advantage, that the subjects thus treated are in as complete a state of combination and illustration as the abilities of the author can make them; the matter comes with full force and effect. Another admirable circumstance is brevity; for by the rejection of all useless details, the reader has nothing before him but what tends to the full explanation of the subject. Of the disadvantages, I need not speak; they are sufficiently noted by showing the benefits of the diary form; for proportionably to the benefits of the one, will clearly be the disadvantages of the other.

After weighing the *pour* and the *contre*, I think that it is not impracticable in my peculiar case to retain the benefits of both these plans.

With one leading and predominant object in view, namely agriculture, I have conceived that I might throw each subject of it into distinct chapters, retaining all the advantages which arise from composing the result only of my travels.

At the same time, that the reader may have whatever satisfaction flows from the diary form, the observations which I made upon the face of the countries through which I passed; and upon the manners, customs, amusements, towns, roads, seats, etc., may, without injury, be given in a journal, and thus satisfy the reader in all those points, with which he ought in candour to be made acquainted, for the reasons above intimated.

It is upon this idea that I have reviewed my notes, and executed the work I now offer to the public.

But travelling upon paper, as well as moving amongst rocks and

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TRAVELS

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rivers, hath its difficulties. When I had traced my plan, and begun to work upon it, I rejected without mercy a variety of little circumstances relating to myself only, and of conversations with various persons which I had thrown upon paper for the amusement of my family and intimate friends. For this I was remonstrated with by a person, of whose judgment I think highly, as having absolutely spoiled my diary, by expunging the very passages that would best please the mass of common readers; in a word, that I must give up the journal plan entirely or let it go as it was written. To treat the public like a friend, let them see all, and trust to their candour for forgiving trifles. He reasoned thus.—*Depend on it, Young, that those notes you wrote at the moment are more likely to please than what you will now produce coolly, with the idea of reputation in your head; whatever you strike out will be what is most interesting, for you will be guided by the importance of the subject; and believe me, it is not this consideration that pleases so much as a careless and easy mode of thinking and writing, which every man exercises most when he does not compose for the press. That I am right in this opinion you yourself afford a proof. Your Tour of Ireland (he was pleased to say) is one of the best accounts of a country I have read, yet it had no great success. Why? Because the chief part of it is a farming diary, which, however valuable it may be to consult, nobody will read. If, therefore, you print your journal at all, print it so as to be read; or reject the method entirely, and confine yourself to set dissertations. Remember the travels of Dr — and Mrs —, from which it would be difficult to gather one single important idea, yet they were received with applause; nay, the bagatelles of Baretti¹, amongst the Spanish muleteers, were read with avidity.*

The high opinion I have of the judgment of my friend induced me to follow his advice; in consequence of which, I venture to offer my itinerary to the public, just as it was written on the spot; requesting my reader, if much should be found of a trifling nature, to pardon it, from a reflection, that the chief object of my travels is to be found in another part of the work², to which he may at once have recourse, if he wish to attend only to subjects of a more important character.

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PART I
JOURNAL

1787

The strait that separates England, so fortunately for her, from all the rest of the world must be crossed many times before a traveller ceases to be surprised at the sudden and universal change that surrounds him on landing at Calais. The scene, the people, the language, every object is new; and in those circumstances in which there is most resemblance, a discriminating eye finds little difficulty in discovering marks of distinction.

The noble improvement of a salt marsh, worked by Mons. Mouron of this town, occasioned my acquaintance some time ago with that gentleman; and I had found him too well-informed, upon various important objects, not to renew it with pleasure. I spent an agreeable and instructive evening at his house.—165 miles.

MAY 17TH. Nine hours rolling at anchor had so fatigued my mare, that I thought it necessary for her to rest one day; but this morning I left Calais. For a few miles the country resembles parts of Norfolk and Suffolk; gentle hills, with some enclosures around the houses in the vales, and a distant range of wood. The country is the same to Boulogne. Towards that town, I was pleased to find many seats belonging to people who reside there. How often are false ideas conceived from reading and report! I imagined that nobody but farmers and labourers in France lived in the country; and the first ride I take in that kingdom shows me a score of country seats. The road excellent.

Boulogne is not an ugly town; and from the ramparts of the upper part the view is beautiful, though low water in the river would not let me see it to advantage. It is well known that this place has long

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been the resort of great numbers of persons from England, whose misfortunes in trade, or extravagance in life, have made a residence abroad more agreeable than at home. It is easy to suppose that they here find a *level* of society that tempts them to herd in the same place. Certainly it is not cheapness, for it is rather dear. The mixture of French and English women makes an odd appearance in the streets; the latter are dressed in their own fashion; but the French heads are all without hats, with close caps, and the body covered with a long cloak that reaches to the feet. The town has the appearance of being flourishing: the buildings good, and in repair, with some modern ones; perhaps as sure a test of prosperity as any other. They are raising also a new church, on a large and expensive scale. The place on the whole is cheerful, and the environs pleasing; and the sea-shore is a flat strand of firm sand as far as the tide reaches. The high land adjoining is worth viewing by those who have not already seen the petrification of clay; it is found in the stony and argillaceous state, just as what I described at Harwich. (*Annals of Agriculture*, vol. VI, p. 218.)—24 miles.

MAY 18TH. The view of Boulogne from the other side, at the distance of a mile, is a pleasing landscape; the river meanders in the vale, and spreads in a fine reach under the town, just before it falls into the sea, which opens between two high lands, one of which backs the town. The view wants only wood; for if the hills had more, fancy could scarcely paint a more agreeable scene. The country improves, more enclosed, and some parts strongly resembling England. Some fine meadows about Bonbrie [Pont-de-Briques], and several châteaux. I am not professedly in this diary on husbandry, but must just observe, that it is to the full as bad as the country is good; corn miserable and yellow with weeds, yet all summer fallowed with lost attention. On the hills, which are at no great distance from the sea, the trees turn their heads from it, shorn of their foliage; it is not therefore to the S.W. alone that we should attribute this effect.

If the French have not husbandry to show us, they have roads; nothing can be more beautiful, or kept in more garden order, if I may use the expression, than that which passes through a fine wood of Mons. Neuvillier's; and indeed for the whole way from Samer it is

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1787]

ABBEVILLE

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wonderfully formed; a vast causeway, with hills cut to level vales; which would fill me with admiration, if I had known nothing of the abominable *corvées*¹, that make me commiserate the oppressed farmers, from whose extorted labour this magnificence has been wrung. Women gathering grass and weeds by hand in the woods for their cows is a trait of poverty.

Pass *turbarries*², near Montreuil, like those at Newbury. The walk round the ramparts of that town is pretty; the little gardens in the bastions below are singular. The place has many English; for what purpose not easy to conceive, for it is unenlivened by those circumstances that render towns pleasant. In a short conversation with an English family returning home, the lady, who is young, and I conjecture agreeable, assured me I should find the Court of Versailles amazingly splendid. Oh! how she loved France, and should regret going to England if she did not expect soon to return! As she had crossed the kingdom of France, I asked her what part of it pleased her best; the answer was such as a pair of pretty lips would be sure to utter, "Oh! Paris and Versailles." Her husband, who is not so young, said "Touraine." It is probable, that a farmer is much more likely to agree with the sentiments of the husband than of the lady, notwithstanding her charms.—24 miles.

MAY 19TH. Dined, or rather starved, at Bernay, where for the first time I met with that wine of whose ill-fame I had heard so much in England, that of being worse than small beer. No scattered farm-houses in this part of Picardy, all being collected in villages which is as unfortunate for the beauty of a country, as it is inconvenient to its cultivation. To Abbeville, unpleasant, nearly flat, and though there are many and great woods, yet they are uninteresting. Pass the new chalk château of Mons. St Maritan, who, had he been in England, would not have built a good house in that situation, nor have projected his walls like those of an almshouse.

Abbeville is said to contain 22,000 souls; it is old, and disagreeably built; many of the houses of wood, with a greater air of antiquity than I remember to have seen; their brethren in England have been long ago demolished. Viewed the manufacture of Van Robais³, which was established by Louis XIV and of which Voltaire and

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others have spoken so much. I had many inquiries concerning wool and woollens to make here; and, in conversation with the manufacturers, found them great politicians, condemning with violence the new commercial treaty with England.—30 miles.

MAY 21ST. It is the same flat and unpleasing country to Flixecourt.—15 miles.

MAY 22ND. Poverty and poor crops to Amiens; women are now ploughing with a pair of horses to sow barley. The difference of the customs of the two nations is in nothing more striking than in the labours of the sex; in England, it is very little that they will do in the fields except to glean and make hay; the first is a party of pilfering, and the second of pleasure; in France, they plough and fill the dungcart. Lombardy poplars seem to have been introduced here about the same time as in England.

Picquigny has been the scene of a remarkable transaction, that does great honour to the tolerating spirit of the French nation. Mons. Colmar, a Jew, bought the seignory and estate, including the viscounty of Amiens, of the Duke of Chaulnes¹, by virtue of which he appoints the canons of the cathedral of Amiens. The bishop resisted his nomination, and it was carried by appeal to the Parliament of Paris, whose decree was in favour of Mons. Colmar. The immediate seignory of Picquigny, but without its dependencies, is resold to the Count d'Artois².

At Amiens, view the cathedral³, said to be built by the English; it is very large and beautifully light and decorated. They are fitting it up in black drapery, and a great canopy, with illuminations for the burial of the Prince de Tingry⁴, colonel of the regiment of cavalry, whose station is here. To view this was an object among the people, and crowds were at each door. I was refused entrance, but some officers being admitted, gave orders that an English gentleman without should be let in, and I was called back from some distance and desired very politely to enter, as they did not know at first that I was an Englishman. These are but trifles, but they show liberality, and it is fair to report them. If an Englishman receives attention in France, *because he is an Englishman*, what return ought to be made to a Frenchman in England is sufficiently obvious. The *château d'eau* or

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CHANTILLY

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machine for supplying Amiens with water is worth viewing; but plates only could give an idea of it. The town abounds with woollen manufactures. I conversed with several masters who united entirely with those of Abbeville in condemning the Treaty of Commerce.—15 miles.

MAY 23RD. To Breteuil the country is diversified, woods everywhere in sight the whole journey.—21 miles.

MAY 24TH. A flat and uninteresting chalky country continues almost to Clermont, where it improves; is hilly and has wood. The view of the town as soon as the dale is seen, with the Duke of Fitz-James' plantations¹, is pretty.—24 miles.

MAY 25TH. The environs of Clermont are picturesque. The hills about Liancourt are pretty and spread with a sort of cultivation I had never seen before, a mixture of vineyards (for here the vines first appear), garden and corn. A piece of wheat, a scrap of lucerne, a patch of clover or vetches, a bit of vines; with cherry and other fruit trees scattered among all, and the whole cultivated with the spade; it makes a pretty appearance, but must form a poor system of trifling.

Chantilly! magnificence is its reigning character, it is never lost. There is not taste or beauty enough to soften it into milder features; all but the château² is great, and there is something imposing in that; except the gallery of the great Condé's battles and the cabinet of natural history, which is rich in very fine specimens, most advantageously arranged, it contains nothing that demands particular notice; nor is there one room which in England would be called large. The stable is truly great and exceeds very much indeed anything of the kind I had ever seen. It is 580 feet long and 40 broad, and is sometimes filled with 240 English horses. I had been so accustomed to the imitation in water of the waving and irregular lines of nature, that I came to Chantilly prepossessed against the idea of a canal, but the view of one here is striking and had the effect which magnificent scenes impress. It arises from extent and from the right lines of the water uniting with the regularity of the objects in view. It is Lord Kames³, I think, who says, the part of the garden contiguous to the house should partake of the regularity of the building; with much magnificence about a place this is unavoidable. The

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effect here, however, is lessened by the parterre before the castle, in which the division and the diminutive *jets d'eau* are not of a size to correspond with the magnificence of the canal. The menagerie is very pretty, and exhibits a prodigious variety of domestic poultry, from all parts of the world; one of the best objects to which a menagerie can be applied; these, and the Corsican stag, had all my attention. The *hameau* contains an imitation of an English garden; the taste is but just introduced into France, so that it will not stand a critical examination. The most English idea I saw is the lawn in front of the stables; it is large, of a good verdure, and well-kept; proving clearly that they may have as fine lawns in the north of France as in England. The labyrinth is the only complete one I have seen, and I have no inclination to see another; it is in gardening what a rebus is in poetry. In the *Sylvae* [Parc-de-Sylvie] are many very fine and scarce plants. I wish those persons who view Chantilly, and are fond of fine trees, would not forget to ask for the great beech; this is the finest I ever saw; straight as an arrow, and, as I guess, not less than 80 or 90 feet high; 40 feet to the first branch, and 12 feet diameter at five from the ground. It is in all respects one of the finest trees that can anywhere be met with. Two others are near it, but not equal to this superb one. The forest around Chantilly, belonging to the Prince of Condé¹, is immense, spreading far and wide; the Paris road crosses it for ten miles, which is its least extent. They say the *capitainerie*, or paramountship, is above 100 miles in circumference. That is to say, all the inhabitants for that extent are pestered with game, without permission to destroy it, in order to give one man diversion. Ought not these *capitaineries*² to be extirpated?

At Luzarches, I found that my mare, from illness, would travel no farther; French stables, which are covered dunghills, and the carelessness of *garçons d'écuries*, an execrable set of vermin, had given her cold. I therefore left her to send for from Paris, and went thither post; by which experiment I found that posting in France is much worse, and even, upon the whole, dearer than in England. Being in a post-chaise I travelled to Paris, as other travellers in post-chaises do, that is to say, knowing little or nothing. The last ten miles I was eagerly on the watch for that throng of carriages which near London