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Gustav Friedrich Waagen

Excerpt

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THE

## TREASURES OF ART IN GREAT BRITAIN.

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### LETTER I.\*

Passage to London — First impressions of the Thames and the City — Arrival at the house of Mr. Edward Solly.

ONLY three days have passed since I wrote to you from Hamburg; but what great and, to me, interesting and new scenes have I enjoyed in that short time! Before I went on board *Châteauneuf* took me to the theatre, which, as you know, is built after a design by Schinkel. The lightness and elegance of the proportions of the spacious theatre gave me the agreeable impression of a farewell salutation of the arts on leaving home.

During the first part of the following day I remained well. Walking on the deck, I considered with great interest sometimes the motion of the wheels, which, with a loud noise, impelled us rapidly forwards, and the heaving of the waves, and sometimes the land as it gradually vanished behind us. Unhappily, in this my first attempt “to navigate the watery paths,” as Homer says, I was made sensible, like most other persons, that the powerful sea-god Neptune belongs to the family of *Æsculapius*, and in his own element shamefully meddles in the profession of his relation, by administering powerful emetics. I recollected that Goethe relates how, in his voyage from Naples to Sicily, he experienced relief, in similar distress, from a horizontal position; and, lying down on my bed in the cabin, found the remedy tolerably efficacious; but the constant creaking of the vessel, with the motion of the engine, the dashing of the waves, which tossed our boat like a nutshell, and the sense of oppression which always seizes me in any confined space, did not afford me a very agreeable substitute. However, I was not without companions in misfortune: a corpulent English-

\* This letter, in the original edition, was dated May 15, 1835. The large additions, however, and complete revision of the present edition, having brought the work up to the year 1853, the old dates have been expunged, though this letter and such other portions of the first edition as have been retained still belong to that time.

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man in particular had a tragi-comic appearance; he was in the berth below mine, with an immense tasselled white nightcap, which he had pulled over his ears, and which made a striking contrast with his red face, that was not unworthy of Bardolph. On the second day, when I was in tolerable spirits again, and looking about on deck, the sea running pretty high, the engine was suddenly stopped. "We shall have some fresh fish," said the captain, and at the same moment I perceived a boat which put off from a vessel at a considerable distance, and, now hid by a wave, now shooting down from its crest with the swiftness of an arrow, soon came alongside. There were three persons in the boat, one of whom, a negro boy, half naked, who fixed his eyes on our vessel with a wild, penetrating gaze, particularly struck me by his uncouth appearance. Though the waves ran rather high, a good number of the newly-caught inhabitants of the deep were brought, not without some trouble, on board our vessel; and, in return, two pitchers of brandy, which the captain filled with great care from a larger vessel, were let down. I shall never forget the wistful, greedy eyes with which the fishermen looked at those pitchers. This appeared to me natural enough, especially in the scantily-clothed negro, since I, though wrapped in a cloak, was shivering with cold, and his dark skin indicated that he came from a warmer country. The engine was again set to work, and the boat quickly vanished from our view on the desert of the ocean. On the third day the less violent motion of the waves indicated that we were approaching the land, which, in fact, soon appeared like a faint narrow stripe, rising from the sea, and agreeably breaking the monotony of the watery horizon. But when we came to the broad bay, into which the Thames empties itself, the great number of ships, near and at a distance, sailing in various directions, which animated the sea, soon made us sensible that we were drawing near to the centre of the commerce of the world, to which the productions of every quarter of the globe flow, like blood to the heart, to return, though partly in another shape, to all parts of the world. In proportion as the bay narrowed, till it was reduced to the Thames properly so called, the number of ships increased. From the largest man-of-war, to open boats, all moved conveniently together. I counted of steam-boats alone twenty-eight, which darted between the rest like arrows. Just at the right time I

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## LETTER I. FIRST IMPRESSIONS OF LONDON.

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recollected Goethe's lines on a mighty river: "The Atlas bears houses of cedar on his giant shoulders: a thousand flags float over his head in the air, testimonies of his glory." I was charmed to find the poetical expression for this new and grand scene in the poet of my own country, whose clear and noble genius has so often refreshed me in the course of my life, and of whom I could say at an early period, in his own words, "Thou hast powerfully attracted me; I have long drunk at thy fountain."

The banks of the Thames, which, after Gravesend, become here and there very animated, were clothed in a vernal green of the most wonderful brightness, so that England appeared to me to be really an Emerald isle, as Ireland is so often denominated. On the left bank I saw Woolwich, with the immense military arsenal, and soon afterwards Greenwich (an asylum for invalid seamen), the splendid buildings of which are adorned with numerous pillars. When we soon afterwards arrived at the port of London, and I expressed my surprise at the forest of masts, I was told that those ships were but a small portion; the far greater number were in vast artificial basins called Docks. Contrasted with such manifold and grand impressions of the most animated present, the lofty Tower, with its four corner turrets, rose as a remarkable monument of the past. Yet not to its advantage. For the images of the children of Edward IV., of Anne Boleyn, of Jane Grey, and of the many innocent victims murdered in the times of despotism and tyranny, passed like dark phantoms before my mind.

I must mention as a particularly fortunate circumstance, that the sea had gradually subsided from a state of violent agitation to a total calm; and as bright sunshine alternated with a clouded sky and flying showers, I had had an opportunity of observing, in succession, all the situations and effects which have been represented by the celebrated Dutch marine painters, William Van de Velde, and Backhuysen. Now, for the first time, I fully understood the truth of their pictures, in the varied undulation of the water, and the refined art with which, by shadows of clouds, shifting gleams of sunshine, and vessels animating the scene, they produce such a charming variety on the monotonous surface of the sea. As an appropriate conclusion to this series of pictures, Nature favoured us at last with a thunder-storm, but one fortunately of very short duration.

At the Custom-house, after two hours' waiting, I had an

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opportunity of admiring the strictness with which the English custom-house officers perform their duty; for they not only examined every portion of my luggage, but observed of the shoes, "The soles seem to be single." During this whole time I quelled my occasionally rising impatience by the saying of the noble sufferer Ulysses, "Bear, O thou dear heart; thou hast already borne much," which I have applied with the best success in the many great and little contrarities of life, ever since my tenth year, when I first drank of the pure fountain of poetry. I was, however, well contented when I had said to a hackney-coachman, in my broken English, "Mayfair, Curzon Street, No. 7," and was driven at my ease to that goal of my journey. So long as we were in the city, the ancient centre of the commerce and business of London, where, as Homer says, "most furiously the tumult rages," we proceeded very slowly, on account of the immense crowd of carriages of all kinds. At times, when we halted longer than usual, I had the best opportunity of observing the people busily at work in the shops of the shoemakers, smiths, &c., some of which, by picturesque grouping and striking light and shade, resemble pictures of Adrian Ostade, or Schalken, and far surpassed by their *naïveté* the artificially arranged modern pictures. At last, when we reached the West End, the more roomy and elegant part of the city, where the fashionable world live, we drove so much the more rapidly, and I soon stopped at the door of Mr. Edward Solly.

I never feel myself more solitary and forlorn than among a great number of people, none of whom know me; this feeling had come over me in my passage through the great city, where so many thousands of strange faces passed me. You may therefore easily imagine what a soothing impression I experienced on seeing the old familiar face of Mr. Solly, and, by the kindly reception which I met with in his family, found myself, as if by enchantment, suddenly at home. My gratification was enhanced by finding myself in the drawing-room surrounded by excellent Italian pictures of the time of Raphael, and thus, as it were, at once ushered into the sanctuary of the arts, the study of which was the sole object of my journey. The dining-room was ornamented in the same manner; so that at my first English dinner, which after my Neptunian course of physic I enjoyed heartily, I now and then willingly turned my eyes to the walls.

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LETTER II.

PHYSIOGNOMY OF LONDON.

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## L E T T E R   I I .

Physiognomy of London — Mode of building — Architectural irregularities of Nash — Club-houses — History of the collection of works of art in England — King Henry VIII. — King Charles I., extent and value of his collections — Collections of the Earl of Arundel and the Duke of Buckingham — Fate of those treasures of art — Kings Charles II. and James II. as collectors — Character of the private collections of the 18th century — Orleans Gallery and other collections brought over from France, Italy, Belgium, Holland, and Spain, consequent on the French Revolution and the wars of Napoleon — List of collectors since 1792 — Collections of drawings — MSS. with miniatures — Engravings — Grecian antiquities — Elgin marbles — Increasing encouragement of the arts by Government — Chief collections formed since 1835 in all departments of art.

By the kindness of Mr. Solly, who has generously given up his time to me, I have in these few days become sufficiently acquainted with this most colossal of all cities to find my way about pretty tolerably.

The outside of the common brick houses of London is very plain, and has nothing agreeable in the architecture, unless it be the neat and well-defined joints of the brickwork. On the other hand, many of the great palace-like buildings are furnished with architectural decorations of all kinds—with pillars, pilasters, &c. There are, however, two reasons why most of them have rather a disagreeable effect. In the first place, they are destitute of continuous simple main lines, which are indispensable in grand architectural effects, and to which even the richest decoration must be strictly subordinate. Secondly, the decorative features are introduced in a manner entirely arbitrary, without any regard to their original meaning, or to the destination of the edifice. This absurdity is carried to the greatest excess in the use of columns: these, originally supporting members, which, placed in rows in the buildings of the ancients, produce the combined effect of a pierced wall, bearing one side of a space beyond, are here ranged in numberless instances, as wholly unprofitable servants, directly before a wall. This censure applies in an especial manner to most of the works of the lately-deceased architect Nash. In truth, he has a peculiar knack of depriving masses of considerable

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dimension of all effect by breaking them into a number of little projecting and receding parts; while, in the use of the most diverse forms and ornaments, he is so arbitrary that many of his buildings—for instance, the new palace of Buckingham House, and some buildings in the neighbourhood of Waterloo-place—look as if some wicked magician had suddenly transformed some capricious stage scenery into solid reality. This architect is even more capricious in his churches; for instance, All Souls', in Langham-place, a circular building in two stories, with Ionic and Corinthian columns, surmounted by a pointed sugar-loaf. But what shall we say to the fact that the English, who first made the rest of Europe acquainted with the immortal models of the noblest and chastest taste in architecture and sculpture of ancient Greece, when it was resolved a few years ago to erect a monument to the late Duke of York, produced nothing but a bad imitation of Trajan's pillar? This kind of monument, we know, first came into use among the Romans, a people who, in respect to the gift of invention in the arts and in matters of taste, always appear, in comparison with the Greeks, as semi-barbarians. The very idea of isolating the column proves that the original destination, as the supporting member of a building, was wholly lost sight of. Besides this, the statue placed on it, though as colossal as the size of the base will allow, necessarily appears little and puppet-like, compared with the column; while the features and the expression of the countenance, which are the most important indications of the intellectual character of the person commemorated, are wholly lost to the spectator. In Trajan's pillar, the bas-reliefs on the shaft give at least the impression of a lavish profusion of art; but this Duke of York's column, with its naked shaft (which, besides, has not the advantage of the entasis), has a very mean, poor appearance.

If the immense sums expended in architectural undertakings had always been judiciously applied, London must infallibly have become the finest city in the world. I must, however, add that several buildings are honourable exceptions. Among the older ones, I would only mention Somerset House, which, by the combination of simple proportions with great extent, produces the effect of a royal palace; and of modern buildings, the new Post Office, built by the younger Smirke, the exterior and interior of which, in elegant Ionic order, has a noble effect.

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LETTER II.

CHARLES I.'s COLLECTION.

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Amongst the most stately buildings at the west end of the town are the club-houses. Each of these houses is provided with magnificent apartments for reading-room and library, and also with a complete culinary establishment. The whole arrangement is so extremely elegant, and they are such agreeable places of resort, that the ladies declaim with some justice against these establishments, as tempting the gentlemen away from the family circle.

The taste for collecting works of art in England originated with the court. King Henry VIII., a friend of the fine arts, and a great patron of Holbein, was the first who formed a collection of pictures. It was, however, of moderate extent, since, including miniatures, it contained no more than 150 works. The glory of first forming a gallery of paintings on a large scale belongs to King Charles I., who lived a century later. As this prince united an extraordinary love for works of art with the most refined taste, and spared neither pains nor expense, he succeeded in forming a collection of paintings, which was not only the richest of that age in masterpieces of the time of Raphael, but is perhaps scarcely to be equalled even in our days. The king began to collect before he ascended the throne. After the death of his elder brother, Prince Henry, who was likewise a lover of the arts, the gallery was increased by the addition of his cabinet. But the chief portion consisted of the collection of the Dukes of Mantua, purchased through the Duke of Buckingham, most probably of Duke Charles I., in the year 1629.\* He is said to have paid 80,000*l.* for it—a very large sum in those days. That collection was, however, one of the first in Italy; the family of Gonzaga at Mantua, who reigned till 1627, having been 150 years in forming it; and this family was second only in patronage of the arts to that of the Medici. In the fifteenth century they attracted the great Andrea Mantegna to their court, and in the sixteenth Raphael's greatest scholar, Giulio Romano. In this collection there were then, besides several other pictures by the first-named master, his celebrated Triumphal Procession of Julius Cæsar, and by Giulio

\* This date appears to be determined beyond question by a picture by Domenico Feti in the Belvedere Gallery at Vienna, on the back of which, besides the usual C. R. and the crown, which distinguished the pictures of the collection of Charles I., there is a ticket with the words "From Mantua, 1629, No. 159."

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Romano a number of capital easel-pictures. Raphael probably painted for the Gonzagas the famous Holy Family, now known in the Escorial by the name of the *Pearl*; Correggio painted his Education of Cupid, now in the English National Gallery, and two allegorical pictures; Titian, among many others, the celebrated Entombment, now in the Louvre, and the twelve first Cæsars. All these and admirable works by other masters were purchased for England. The king obtained also, through the intervention of Rubens, the seven celebrated cartoons by Raphael. Three-and-twenty fine pictures of the Italian school were purchased of one Frosley. Lastly, foreign sovereigns and his own subjects vied with each other in adding to the collection by most valuable presents. On his visit to Madrid when Prince of Wales, King Philip IV. of Spain gave him the famous picture by Titian, called after the palace where it had so long been kept, the *Venus del Pardo*. The subject is properly Jupiter and Antiope, in one of the grandest and finest landscapes by Titian with which we are acquainted. It is now in the Louvre. Louis XIII. King of France presented him by his ambassador, M. de Lyancourt, with a St. John the Baptist, a highly-finished picture, by Leonardo da Vinci, now likewise an ornament of the Louvre. Among the many Englishmen who presented the king with pictures, those who above all distinguished themselves were Thomas Howard, Earl of Arundel, the Lord Marshal,—the Earl of Pembroke, Lord High Chamberlain,—the Earl of Suffolk, Lord Hamilton, and Lord Abbot Montague.

Though the king preferred the great Italian masters, he duly appreciated the principal painters of the German and Flemish schools. Of the earlier masters of the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries he possessed works by Gerhard van Harlem, Holbein, Albert Durer, George Pens, Lucas Cranach, Lucas Van Leyden, and Antonio More. He endeavoured to induce Rubens, the greatest painter of his time, to settle in England; and failing in this, he loaded him with marks of favour, and not only engaged him to paint the ceiling of the banqueting-room in the palace of Whitehall, built by Inigo Jones, but also purchased some of his best easel-pictures. On the other hand, he was so fortunate as to attach entirely to his service the most distinguished of the scholars of Rubens, Vandyck; and the number of masterly pictures which



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this painter executed for him, from the year 1632 to his death in 1642, was very considerable.

The above particulars will alone give you a very favourable idea of the collection of King Charles I. A comparison of three existing catalogues, however, will bring the treasures of this collection more fully and also more particularly before you. One of them is an extract from a catalogue of all the pictures and works of sculpture which the king possessed, with a statement of their estimated value, and the price for which they were sold by auction after the lamentable execution of the king. It appears that the number of pictures in all the royal palaces was 1387, and that of the works of sculpture, 399. Of all these, only 88 pictures are particularly mentioned as capital works, and the estimated value and sale-price added. The second document is a catalogue drawn up about the year 1679, by Vanderdoort, keeper of the royal collections, which comprehends 77 smaller pictures in St. James's Palace, and all the works of art in the palace of Whitehall, which was the principal gallery. The number of pictures there, including the miniatures, was 497, and of works of sculpture, 79. But of the 574 pictures inserted in this catalogue, there are only 38 of the 88 specially enumerated in the above-mentioned extract. Now, as besides these 38 pictures, there are among the 574 enumerated by Vanderdoort 216 by eminent masters, among which are works of the highest class, such as the Education of Cupid by Correggio, Christ with the Disciples at Emmaus by Titian, we may infer with great probability that, besides the other 50 pictures out of the 88, which came from the king's other palaces, Somerset House, Hampton Court, and the greater part from St. James's, there was in them, as well as in Whitehall, a considerable number of other valuable pictures. This inference is partly confirmed by the third document, a catalogue of the collection of King James II. We find in it, in the first place, two paintings marked as by Raphael, two by Giorgione, two by Parmegiano, and one by Titian, of which it is expressly stated that they were part of the collection of Charles I., but which are not included in the selection of 88 pictures, nor in Vanderdoort's catalogue. With the addition of those seven, we still have only 629 out of the 1387 which Charles I. possessed. But there is in the catalogue of King James II.'s collection a con-

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siderable number of other pictures under the names of Leonardo da Vinci, Raphael, Giulio Romano, Giorgione, Titian, the two Palmas, Paul Veronese, Tintoretto, Bassano, Parmegianino, Dosso Dossi, Holbein, Rubens, and Vandyck, which are not named either among those 88, or in Vanderdoort's catalogue, most of which, I am convinced, were part of the 758 pictures in King Charles I.'s collection, respecting which we have no information. But if we look only to what, according to these three catalogues, certainly belonged to the collection, we are astonished at the number of works by the greatest masters which it contained. Of the Florentine school there were, by Leonardo da Vinci, one; by Andrea del Sarto, three: of the Roman school, by Raphael, thirteen; by Giulio Romano, twenty-seven; by Perino del Vaga, one; by Garofalo, one: of the Lombard school, by Luini, one; by Correggio, nine; by Parmegianino, eleven: of the Venetian school, by Giorgione, five; by Titian, forty-five; by Pordenone, four; by Sebastian del Piombo, one; by Palma Vecchio, five; by Paul Veronese, four: of the Bolognese school, by Annibale Carracci, two; by Guido Reni, four: of the German school, by Albert Durer, three; by Hans Holbein, eleven; by George Pens, two; by Aldegrever, one: of the Flemish school, by Lucas Van Leyden, seven; by Mabuse, two; by Rubens, six; by Vandyck, eighteen. Now, though it may be assumed that the genuineness of many of these pictures was doubtful, or that many were not remarkable; yet by far the greater number were of the highest class. To give you a more accurate idea of all the principal pictures in these catalogues, I send you a list of them, to which I have added, in order to complete it, those in the catalogue of James II. which probably likewise belonged to the collection of Charles I.\*

Among so many works, the king had selected the finest of all to be placed where he could daily enjoy the pleasure of contemplating them; for the forty-six pictures which adorned the three rooms in which he lived at Whitehall, were, with the exception of one by Michael Coxie, only by Raphael, Correggio, Titian, Giulio Romano, Polidoro da Caravaggio, Andrea del Sarto, Giorgione, Luini, and Parmegianino. In his private gallery adjoining he had a collection of portraits of different princely houses of Europe, particularly of the kings of England, and of his own family.

\* See Appendix A at the end of the volume.