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GLANCES AT EUROPE:

IN A

Series of Letters

FROM

GREAT BRITAIN, FRANCE, ITALY, SWITZERLAND, &c.

DURING

THE SUMMER OF 1851.

INCLUDING NOTICES OF THE

GREAT EXHIBITION, OR WORLD'S FAIR.

BY HORACE GREELEY.



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NO APOLOGY.

If there be any reader impelled to dip into notes of foreign travel mainly by a solicitude to perfect his knowledge of the manners and habits of good society, to which end he is anxious to learn how my Lord Shuttleton waltzes, what wine Baron Hob-and-nob patronizes, which tints predominate in Lady Highflyer's dress, and what is the probable color of the Duchess of Double-hose's garters, he will only waste his time by looking through this volume. Even if the species of literature he admires had not already been overdone, I have neither taste nor capacity for increasing it. It was my fortune sometimes while in Europe to "sit at good men's feasts," but I brought nothing away from them for the public, not even the names of my entertainers and their notable guests. If I had felt at liberty to sketch what struck me as the personal characteristics of some gentlemen of note or rank whom I met, especially in England, I do not doubt that the popular interest in these letters would have been materially heightened. I did not, however, deem myself authorized to do this. In a few instances, where individuals challenged observation and criticism by consenting to address public gatherings, I have spoken of the matter and manner of their speeches and indicated the impressions they made on me. Beyond this I did not feel authorized to go, even in the case of public men speaking to the public through reports for the daily press; while those whom I only met privately or in the discharge of kindred duties, as Jurors at the Exhibition, I have not felt at liberty to bring before the public at all. Having thus explained what will seem to many a lack of piquancy, in the following pages, implying a privation of social opportunities, I drop the subject.

No one can realize more fully than the writer the utter absence of literary merit in these Letters. He does not deprecate nor seek to disarm criticism;

he only asks that his sketches be taken for what they profess and strive to be, and for nothing else. That they are superficial, their title proclaims; that they were hurriedly written, with no thought of style nor of enduring interest, all whom they are likely to interest or to reach must already know. A journalist traveling in foreign lands, especially those which have been once the homes of his habitual readers or at least of their ancestors, cannot well refrain from writing of what he sees and hears; his observations have a value in the eyes of those readers which will be utterly unrecognized by the colder public outside of the sympathizing circle. For the habitual readers of *The Tribune* especially were these Letters written, and their original purpose has already been accomplished. Here they would have rested, but for the unsolicited offer of the publishers to reproduce them in a book at their own cost and risk, and on terms ensuring a fair share of any proceeds of their sale to the writer. Such offers from publishers to authors who have no established reputation as book-makers are rarely made and even more rarely refused. Therefore, Sir Critic! whose dog-eared manuscript has circulated from one publisher's drawer to another until its initial pages are scarcely readable, while the ample residue retain all their pristine freshness of hue, you are welcome to your revenge! Your novel may be tedious beyond endurance; your epic a preposterous waste of once valuable foolscap; but your slashing review is sure to be widely read and enjoyed.

My aim in writing these Letters was to give a clear and vivid daguerreotype of the districts I traversed and the incidents which came under my observation. To this end I endeavored to see, so far as practicable, through my own eyes rather than those of others. To this end, I generally shunned guide-books, even those of the "indispensable" Murray, and relied mainly for routes and distances on the shilling hand-book of Bradshaw. That I have been misled into many inaccuracies and some gross blunders as to noted edifices, works of art, &c., is quite probable; but that I have truthfully though hastily indicated the topography, rural aspects, agricultural adaptations and more obvious social characteristics of the countries I traversed, I am nevertheless confident. I made a point of penning my impressions of each day's journey within the succeeding twenty-four hours if practicable, for I found that even a day's postponement impaired the distinctness of my recollections of the ever-varying panorama of hill and dale, moor and mountain, with long, level or undulating stretches of intermingled woods, grain, grass, &c., &c. I trust the picture I have attempted to give of out-door life in Western Europe, the workers in its fields and the clusters in its streets, will be recognized by competent judges as substantially correct.

The opinions expressed with respect to national characteristics or aptitudes will of course appear crude and rash to those who regard them as based exclusively on the few days' personal observation in which they may seem to have originated. To those who regard them as grounded in some knowledge of history and of the present political and social condition of those nations, corrected and modified indeed by the personal observation aforesaid, their crudity and audacity will be somewhat less astounding. No one will doubt that other travelers in Europe have been far better qualified to observe and to judge than I was, yet I see and think, and am not forbidden to speak. We know already how Europe appears in the eyes of the learned and wise; but if some Nepaulese Ambassador or vagrant Camanche were to publish his "first impressions" of Great Britain or Italy, should we utterly refuse to open it because Baird or Thackeray could give us more accurate information on that identical theme? Would not the Camanche's criticisms possess some value as his, quite apart from their intrinsic worth or worthlessness? Might they not afford some insight into Indian modes of thought, if none into European modes of life?

I deeply regret that the general impression made on me by the Italians was such that my estimate of their character and capabilities gave offence to their brethren now settled in this country. Their feeling is a natural, creditable one; I will not reply to their strictures, yet I must let what I wrote in Italy of the Italians stand unmodified. I shall be most happy indeed to confess my mistake whenever it shall have been proved such, but I cannot as yet perceive it. And to those who, not unreasonably, dilate on the rashness of such judgment on the part of one who was only some few weeks in Italy, and did not even understand its people's language, I beg leave to commend a perusal of "Casa Guidi Windows," by Elizabeth Barrett Browning. I had not seen it when I wrote, and the coincidence of its estimate of the Italians with mine is of course utterly unpremeditated. Mrs. Browning speaks Italian and knows the Italians; she lived among them throughout the late eventful years; she sympathizes with their sufferings and prays for their deliverance, but without shutting her eyes to the faults and grave defects of character which impede that deliverance if they do not render it doubtful. To those who will read her brief but noble poem, I need say no more; on those who refuse to read it, words from me would be wasted. Believing that among the most imminent perils of the Republican cause in Europe is the danger of a premature, sanguinary, fruitless insurrection in Italy, I have done what I could to prevent any such catastrophe. When Liberty shall have been re-vindicated in France and shall thereupon have triumphed in Germany, the reign of despotism will