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THE POINT OF VIEW

by Henry James

I. FROM MISS AURORA CHURCH, AT SEA, TO MISS WHITESIDE, IN PARIS.

. . . My dear child, the bromide of sodium (if that's what you call

it) proved perfectly useless. I don't mean that it did me no good,

but that I never had occasion to take the bottle out of my bag. It

might have done wonders for me if I had needed it; but I didn't,

simply because I have been a wonder myself. Will you believe that I

have spent the whole voyage on deck, in the most animated

conversation and exercise? Twelve times round the deck make a mile,

I believe; and by this measurement I have been walking twenty miles

a day. And down to every meal, if you please, where I have

displayed the appetite of a fish-wife. Of course the weather has

been lovely; so there's no great merit. The wicked old Atlantic has

been as blue as the sapphire in my only ring (a rather good one),

and as smooth as the slippery floor of Madame Galopin's dining-room.

We have been for the last three hours in sight of land, and we are

soon to enter the Bay of New York, which is said to be exquisitely

beautiful. But of course you recall it, though they say that

everything changes so fast over here. I find I don't remember

anything, for my recollections of our voyage to Europe, so many

years ago, are exceedingly dim; I only have a painful impression

that mamma shut me up for an hour every day in the state-room, and

made me learn by heart some religious poem. I was only five years

old, and I believe that as a child I was extremely timid; on the

other hand, mamma, as you know, was dreadfully severe. She is

severe to this day; only I have become indifferent; I have been so

pinched and pushed--morally speaking, bien entendu. It is true,

however, that there are children of five on the vessel today who

have been extremely conspicuous--ranging all over the ship, and

always under one's feet. Of course they are little compatriots,

which means that they are little barbarians. I don't mean that all

our compatriots are barbarous; they seem to improve, somehow, after

their first communion. I don't know whether it's that ceremony that

improves them, especially as so few of them go in for it; but the

women are certainly nicer than the little girls; I mean, of course,

in proportion, you know. You warned me not to generalise, and you

see I have already begun, before we have arrived. But I suppose

there is no harm in it so long as it is favourable. Isn't it

favourable when I say that I have had the most lovely time? I have

never had so much liberty in my life, and I have been out alone, as

you may say, every day of the voyage. If it is a foretaste of what

is to come, I shall take to that very kindly. When I say that I

have been out alone, I mean that we have always been two. But we

two were alone, so to speak, and it was not like always having

mamma, or Madame Galopin, or some lady in the pension, or the

temporary cook. Mamma has been very poorly; she is so very well on

land, it's a wonder to see her at all taken down. She says,

however, that it isn't the being at sea; it's, on the contrary,

approaching the land. She is not in a hurry to arrive; she says

that great disillusions await us. I didn't know that she had any

illusions--she's so stern, so philosophic. She is very serious; she

sits for hours in perfect silence, with her eyes fixed on the

horizon. I heard her say yesterday to an English gentleman--a very

odd Mr. Antrobus, the only person with whom she converses--that she

was afraid she shouldn't like her native land, and that she

shouldn't like not liking it. But this is a mistake--she will like

that immensely (I mean not liking it). If it should prove at all

agreeable, mamma will be furious, for that will go against her

system. You know all about mamma's system; I have explained that so

often. It goes against her system that we should come back at all;

that was MY system--I have had at last to invent one! She consented

to come only because she saw that, having no dot, I should never

marry in Europe; and I pretended to be immensely pre-occupied with

this idea, in order to make her start. In reality cela m'est

parfaitement egal. I am only afraid I shall like it too much (I

don't mean marriage, of course, but one's native land). Say what

you will, it's a charming thing to go out alone, and I have given

notice to mamma that I mean to be always en course. When I tell her

that, she looks at me in the same silence; her eye dilates, and then

she slowly closes it. It's as if the sea were affecting her a

little, though it's so beautifully calm. I ask her if she will try

my bromide, which is there in my bag; but she motions me off, and I

begin to walk again, tapping my little boot-soles upon the smooth

clean deck. This allusion to my boot-soles, by the way, is not

prompted by vanity; but it's a fact that at sea one's feet and one's

shoes assume the most extraordinary importance, so that we should

take the precaution to have nice ones. They are all you seem to see

as the people walk about the deck; you get to know them intimately,

and to dislike some of them so much. I am afraid you will think

that I have already broken loose; and for aught I know, I am writing

as a demoiselle bien-elevee should not write. I don't know whether

it's the American air; if it is, all I can say is that the American

air is very charming. It makes me impatient and restless, and I sit

scribbling here because I am so eager to arrive, and the time passes

better if I occupy myself. I am in the saloon, where we have our

meals, and opposite to me is a big round porthole, wide open, to let

in the smell of the land. Every now and then I rise a little and

look through it, to see whether we are arriving. I mean in the Bay,

you know, for we shall not come up to the city till dark. I don't

want to lose the Bay; it appears that it's so wonderful. I don't

exactly understand what it contains, except some beautiful islands;

but I suppose you will know all about that. It is easy to see that

these are the last hours, for all the people about me are writing

letters to put into the post as soon as we come up to the dock. I

believe they are dreadful at the custom-house, and you will remember

how many new things you persuaded mamma that (with my pre-occupation

of marriage) I should take to this country, where even the prettiest

girls are expected not to go unadorned. We ruined ourselves in

Paris (that is part of mamma's solemnity); mais au moins je serai

belle! Moreover, I believe that mamma is prepared to say or to do

anything that may be necessary for escaping from their odious

duties; as she very justly remarks, she can't afford to be ruined

twice. I don't know how one approaches these terrible douaniers,

but I mean to invent something very charming. I mean to say,

"Voyons, Messieurs, a young girl like me, brought up in the

strictest foreign traditions, kept always in the background by a

very superior mother--la voila; you can see for yourself!--what is

it possible that she should attempt to smuggle in? Nothing but a

few simple relics of her convent!" I won't tell them that my

convent was called the Magasin du Bon Marche. Mamma began to scold

me three days ago for insisting on so many trunks, and the truth is

that, between us, we have not fewer than seven. For relics, that's

a good many! We are all writing very long letters--or at least we

are writing a great number. There is no news of the Bay as yet.

Mr. Antrobus, mamma's friend, opposite to me, is beginning on his

ninth. He is an Honourable, and a Member of Parliament; he has

written, during the voyage, about a hundred letters, and he seems

greatly alarmed at the number of stamps he will have to buy when he

arrives. He is full of information; but he has not enough, for he

asks as many questions as mamma when she goes to hire apartments.

He is going to "look into" various things; he speaks as if they had

a little hole for the purpose. He walks almost as much as I, and he

has very big shoes. He asks questions even of me, and I tell him

again and again that I know nothing about America. But it makes no

difference; he always begins again, and, indeed, it is not strange

that he should find my ignorance incredible. "Now, how would it be

in one of your South-Western States?"--that's his favourite way of

opening conversation. Fancy me giving an account of the South-

Western States! I tell him he had better ask mamma--a little to

tease that lady, who knows no more about such places than I. Mr.

Antrobus is very big and black; he speaks with a sort of brogue; he

has a wife and ten children; he is not very romantic. But he has

lots of letters to people la-bas (I forget that we are just

arriving), and mamma, who takes an interest in him in spite of his

views (which are dreadfully advanced, and not at all like mamma's

own), has promised to give him the entree to the best society. I

don't know what she knows about the best society over here today,

for we have not kept up our connections at all, and no one will know

(or, I am afraid, care) anything about us. She has an idea that we

shall be immensely recognised; but really, except the poor little

Rucks, who are bankrupt, and, I am told, in no society at all, I

don't know on whom we can count. C'est egal. Mamma has an idea

that, whether or not we appreciate America ourselves, we shall at

least be universally appreciated. It's true that we have begun to

be, a little; you would see that by the way that Mr. Cockerel and

Mr. Louis Leverett are always inviting me to walk. Both of these

gentlemen, who are Americans, have asked leave to call upon me in

New York, and I have said, Mon Dieu, oui, if it's the custom of the

country. Of course I have not dared to tell this to mamma, who

flatters herself that we have brought with us in our trunks a

complete set of customs of our own, and that we shall only have to

shake them out a little and put them on when we arrive. If only the

two gentlemen I just spoke of don't call at the same time, I don't

think I shall be too much frightened. If they do, on the other

hand, I won't answer for it. They have a particular aversion to

each other, and they are ready to fight about poor little me. I am

only the pretext, however; for, as Mr. Leverett says, it's really

the opposition of temperaments. I hope they won't cut each other's

throats, for I am not crazy about either of them. They are very

well for the deck of a ship, but I shouldn't care about them in a

salon; they are not at all distinguished. They think they are, but

they are not; at least Mr. Louis Leverett does; Mr. Cockerel doesn't

appear to care so much. They are extremely different (with their

opposed temperaments), and each very amusing for a while; but I

should get dreadfully tired of passing my life with either. Neither

has proposed that, as yet; but it is evidently what they are coming

to. It will be in a great measure to spite each other, for I think

that au fond they don't quite believe in me. If they don't, it's

the only point on which they agree. They hate each other awfully;

they take such different views. That is, Mr. Cockerel hates Mr.

Leverett--he calls him a sickly little ass; he says that his

opinions are half affectation, and the other half dyspepsia. Mr.

Leverett speaks of Mr. Cockerel as a "strident savage," but he

declares he finds him most diverting. He says there is nothing in

which we can't find a certain entertainment, if we only look at it

in the right way, and that we have no business with either hating or

loving; we ought only to strive to understand. To understand is to

forgive, he says. That is very pretty, but I don't like the

suppression of our affections, though I have no desire to fix mine

upon Mr. Leverett. He is very artistic, and talks like an article

in some review, he has lived a great deal in Paris, and Mr. Cockerel

says that is what has made him such an idiot. That is not

complimentary to you, dear Louisa, and still less to your brilliant

brother; for Mr. Cockerel explains that he means it (the bad effect

of Paris) chiefly of the men. In fact, he means the bad effect of

Europe altogether. This, however, is compromising to mamma; and I

am afraid there is no doubt that (from what I have told him) he

thinks mamma also an idiot. (I am not responsible, you know--I have

always wanted to go home.) If mamma knew him, which she doesn't,

for she always closes her eyes when I pass on his arm, she would

think him disgusting. Mr. Leverett, however, tells me he is nothing

to what we shall see yet. He is from Philadelphia (Mr. Cockerel);

he insists that we shall go and see Philadelphia, but mamma says she

saw it in 1855, and it was then affreux. Mr. Cockerel says that

mamma is evidently not familiar with the march of improvement in

this country; he speaks of 1855 as if it were a hundred years ago.

Mamma says she knows it goes only too fast--it goes so fast that it

has time to do nothing well; and then Mr. Cockerel, who, to do him

justice, is perfectly good-natured, remarks that she had better wait

till she has been ashore and seen the improvements. Mamma rejoins

that she sees them from here, the improvements, and that they give

her a sinking of the heart. (This little exchange of ideas is

carried on through me; they have never spoken to each other.) Mr.

Cockerel, as I say, is extremely good-natured, and he carries out

what I have heard said about the men in America being very

considerate of the women. They evidently listen to them a great

deal; they don't contradict them, but it seems to me that this is

rather negative. There is very little gallantry in not

contradicting one; and it strikes me that there are some things the

men don't express. There are others on the ship whom I've noticed.

It's as if they were all one's brothers or one's cousins. But I

promised you not to generalise, and perhaps there will be more

expression when we arrive. Mr. Cockerel returns to America, after a

general tour, with a renewed conviction that this is the only

country. I left him on deck an hour ago looking at the coast-line

with an opera-glass, and saying it was the prettiest thing he had

seen in all his tour. When I remarked that the coast seemed rather

low, he said it would be all the easier to get ashore; Mr. Leverett

doesn't seem in a hurry to get ashore; he is sitting within sight of

me in a corner of the saloon--writing letters, I suppose, but

looking, from the way he bites his pen and rolls his eyes about, as

if he were composing a sonnet and waiting for a rhyme. Perhaps the

sonnet is addressed to me; but I forget that he suppresses the

affections! The only person in whom mamma takes much interest is

the great French critic, M. Lejaune, whom we have the honour to

carry with us. We have read a few of his works, though mamma

disapproves of his tendencies and thinks him a dreadful materialist.

We have read them for the style; you know he is one of the new

Academicians. He is a Frenchman like any other, except that he is

rather more quiet; and he has a gray mustache and the ribbon of the

Legion of Honour. He is the first French writer of distinction who

has been to America since De Tocqueville; the French, in such

matters, are not very enterprising. Also, he has the air of

wondering what he is doing dans cette galere. He has come with his

beau-frere, who is an engineer, and is looking after some mines, and

he talks with scarcely any one else, as he speaks no English, and

appears to take for granted that no one speaks French. Mamma would

be delighted to assure him of the contrary; she has never conversed

with an Academician. She always makes a little vague inclination,

with a smile, when he passes her, and he answers with a most

respectful bow; but it goes no farther, to mamma's disappointment.

He is always with the beau-frere, a rather untidy, fat, bearded man,

decorated, too, always smoking and looking at the feet of the

ladies, whom mamma (though she has very good feet) has not the

courage to aborder. I believe M. Lejaune is going to write a book

about America, and Mr. Leverett says it will be terrible. Mr.

Leverett has made his acquaintance, and says M. Lejaune will put him

into his book; he says the movement of the French intellect is

superb. As a general thing, he doesn't care for Academicians, but

he thinks M. Lejaune is an exception, he is so living, so personal.

I asked Mr. Cockerel what he thought of M. Lejaune's plan of writing

a book, and he answered that he didn't see what it mattered to him

that a Frenchman the more should make a monkey of himself. I asked

him why he hadn't written a book about Europe, and he said that, in

the first place, Europe isn't worth writing about, and, in the

second, if he said what he thought, people would think it was a

joke. He said they are very superstitious about Europe over here;

he wants people in America to behave as if Europe didn't exist. I

told this to Mr. Leverett, and he answered that if Europe didn't

exist America wouldn't, for Europe keeps us alive by buying our

corn. He said, also, that the trouble with America in the future

will be that she will produce things in such enormous quantities

that there won't be enough people in the rest of the world to buy

them, and that we shall be left with our productions--most of them

very hideous--on our hands. I asked him if he thought corn a

hideous production, and he replied that there is nothing more

unbeautiful than too much food. I think that to feed the world too

well, however, that will be, after all, a beau role. Of course I

don't understand these things, and I don't believe Mr. Leverett

does; but Mr. Cockerel seems to know what he is talking about, and

he says that America is complete in herself. I don't know exactly

what he means, but he speaks as if human affairs had somehow moved

over to this side of the world. It may be a very good place for

them, and Heaven knows I am extremely tired of Europe, which mamma

has always insisted so on my appreciating; but I don't think I like

the idea of our being so completely cut off. Mr. Cockerel says it

is not we that are cut off, but Europe, and he seems to think that

Europe has deserved it somehow. That may be; our life over there

was sometimes extremely tiresome, though mamma says it is now that

our real fatigues will begin. I like to abuse those dreadful old

countries myself, but I am not sure that I am pleased when others do

the same. We had some rather pretty moments there, after all; and

at Piacenza we certainly lived on four francs a day. Mamma is

already in a terrible state of mind about the expenses here; she is

frightened by what people on the ship (the few that she has spoken

to) have told her. There is one comfort, at any rate--we have spent

so much money in coming here that we shall have none left to get

away. I am scribbling along, as you see, to occupy me till we get

news of the islands. Here comes Mr. Cockerel to bring it. Yes,

they are in sight; he tells me that they are lovelier than ever, and

that I must come right up right away. I suppose you will think that

I am already beginning to use the language of the country. It is

certain that at the end of a month I shall speak nothing else. I

have picked up every dialect, wherever we have travelled; you have

heard my Platt-Deutsch and my Neapolitan. But, voyons un peu the

Bay! I have just called to Mr. Leverett to remind him of the

islands. "The islands--the islands? Ah, my dear young lady, I have

seen Capri, I have seen Ischia!" Well, so have I, but that doesn't

prevent . . . (A little later.)--I have seen the islands; they are

rather queer.

II. MRS. CHURCH, IN NEW YORK, TO MADAME GALOPIN, AT GENEVA.

October 17, 1880.

If I felt far away from you in the middle of that deplorable

Atlantic, chere Madame, how do I feel now, in the heart of this

extraordinary city? We have arrived,--we have arrived, dear friend;

but I don't know whether to tell you that I consider that an

advantage. If we had been given our choice of coming safely to land

or going down to the bottom of the sea, I should doubtless have

chosen the former course; for I hold, with your noble husband, and

in opposition to the general tendency of modern thought, that our

lives are not our own to dispose of, but a sacred trust from a

higher power, by whom we shall be held responsible. Nevertheless,

if I had foreseen more vividly some of the impressions that awaited

me here, I am not sure that, for my daughter at least, I should not

have preferred on the spot to hand in our account. Should I not

have been less (rather than more) guilty in presuming to dispose of

HER destiny, than of my own? There is a nice point for dear M.

Galopin to settle--one of those points which I have heard him

discuss in the pulpit with such elevation. We are safe, however, as

I say; by which I mean that we are physically safe. We have taken

up the thread of our familiar pension-life, but under strikingly

different conditions. We have found a refuge in a boarding-house

which has been highly recommended to me, and where the arrangements

partake of that barbarous magnificence which in this country is the

only alternative from primitive rudeness. The terms, per week, are

as magnificent as all the rest. The landlady wears diamond ear-

rings; and the drawing-rooms are decorated with marble statues. I

should indeed be sorry to let you know how I have allowed myself to

be ranconnee; and I--should be still more sorry that it should come

to the ears of any of my good friends in Geneva, who know me less

well than you and might judge me more harshly. There is no wine

given for dinner, and I have vainly requested the person who

conducts the establishment to garnish her table more liberally. She

says I may have all the wine I want if I will order it at the

merchant's, and settle the matter with him. But I have never, as

you know, consented to regard our modest allowance of eau rougie as

an extra; indeed, I remember that it is largely to your excellent

advice that I have owed my habit of being firm on this point. There

are, however, greater difficulties than the question of what we

shall drink for dinner, chere Madame. Still, I have never lost

courage, and I shall not lose courage now. At the worst, we can re-

embark again, and seek repose and refreshment on the shores of your

beautiful lake. (There is absolutely no scenery here!) We shall

not, perhaps, in that case have achieved what we desired, but we

shall at least have made an honourable retreat. What we desire--I

know it is just this that puzzles you, dear friend; I don't think

you ever really comprehended my motives in taking this formidable

step, though you were good enough, and your magnanimous husband was

good enough, to press my hand at parting in a way that seemed to say

that you would still be with me, even if I was wrong. To be very

brief, I wished to put an end to the reclamations of my daughter.

Many Americans had assured her that she was wasting her youth in

those historic lands which it was her privilege to see so

intimately, and this unfortunate conviction had taken possession of

her. "Let me at least see for myself," she used to say; "if I

should dislike it over there as much as you promise me, so much the

better for you. In that case we will come back and make a new

arrangement at Stuttgart." The experiment is a terribly expensive

one; but you know that my devotion never has shrunk from an ordeal.

There is another point, moreover, which, from a mother to a mother,

it would be affectation not to touch upon. I remember the just

satisfaction with which you announced to me the betrothal of your

charming Cecile. You know with what earnest care my Aurora has been

educated,--how thoroughly she is acquainted with the principal

results of modern research. We have always studied together; we

have always enjoyed together. It will perhaps surprise you to hear

that she makes these very advantages a reproach to me,--represents

them as an injury to herself. "In this country," she says, "the

gentlemen have not those accomplishments; they care nothing for the

results of modern research; and it will not help a young person to

be sought in marriage that she can give an account of the last

German theory of Pessimism." That is possible; and I have never

concealed from her that it was not for this country that I had

educated her. If she marries in the United States it is, of course,

my intention that my son-in-law shall accompany us to Europe. But,

when she calls my attention more and more to these facts, I feel

that we are moving in a different world. This is more and more the

country of the many; the few find less and less place for them; and

the individual--well, the individual has quite ceased to be

recognised. He is recognised as a voter, but he is not recognised

as a gentleman--still less as a lady. My daughter and I, of course,

can only pretend to constitute a FEW! You know that I have never

for a moment remitted my pretensions as an individual, though, among

the agitations of pension-life, I have sometimes needed all my

energy to uphold them. "Oh, yes, I may be poor," I have had

occasion to say, "I may be unprotected, I may be reserved, I may

occupy a small apartment in the quatrieme, and be unable to scatter

unscrupulous bribes among the domestics; but at least I am a PERSON,

with personal rights." In this country the people have rights, but

the person has none. You would have perceived that if you had come

with me to make arrangements at this establishment. The very fine

lady who condescends to preside over it kept me waiting twenty

minutes, and then came sailing in without a word of apology. I had

sat very silent, with my eyes on the clock; Aurora amused herself

with a false admiration of the room,--a wonderful drawing-room, with

magenta curtains, frescoed walls, and photographs of the landlady's

friends--as if one cared anything about her friends! When this

exalted personage came in, she simply remarked that she had just

been trying on a dress--that it took so long to get a skirt to hang.

"It seems to take very long indeed!" I answered. "But I hope the

skirt is right at last. You might have sent for us to come up and

look at it!" She evidently didn't understand, and when I asked her

to show us her rooms, she handed us over to a negro as degingande as

herself. While we looked at them I heard her sit down to the piano

in the drawing-room; she began to sing an air from a comic opera. I

began to fear we had gone quite astray; I didn't know in what house

we could be, and was only reassured by seeing a Bible in every room.

When we came down our musical hostess expressed no hope that the

rooms had pleased us, and seemed quite indifferent to our taking

them. She would not consent, moreover, to the least diminution, and

was inflexible, as I told you, on the subject of wine. When I

pushed this point, she was so good as to observe that she didn't

keep a cabaret. One is not in the least considered; there is no

respect for one's privacy, for one's preferences, for one's

reserves. The familiarity is without limits, and I have already

made a dozen acquaintances, of whom I know, and wish to know,

nothing. Aurora tells me that she is the "belle of the boarding-

house." It appears that this is a great distinction. It brings me

back to my poor child and her prospects. She takes a very critical

view of them herself: she tells me that I have given her a false

education, and that no one will marry her today. No American will

marry her, because she is too much of a foreigner, and no foreigner

will marry her because she is too much of an American. I remind her

that scarcely a day passes that a foreigner, usually of distinction,

doesn't select an American bride, and she answers me that in these

cases the young lady is not married for her fine eyes. Not always,

I reply; and then she declares that she would marry no foreigner who

should not be one of the first of the first. You will say,

doubtless, that she should content herself with advantages that have

not been deemed insufficient for Cecile; but I will not repeat to

you the remark she made when I once made use of this argument. You

will doubtless be surprised to hear that I have ceased to argue; but

it is time I should tell you that I have at last agreed to let her

act for herself. She is to live for three months a l'Americaine,

and I am to be a mere spectator. You will feel with me that this is

a cruel position for a coeur de mere. I count the days till our

three months are over, and I know that you will join with me in my

prayers. Aurora walks the streets alone. She goes out in the

tramway; a voiture de place costs five francs for the least little

course. (I beseech you not to let it be known that I have sometimes

had the weakness . . .) My daughter is sometimes accompanied by a

gentleman--by a dozen gentlemen; she remains out for hours, and her

conduct excites no surprise in this establishment. I know but too

well the emotions it will excite in your quiet home. If you betray

us, chere Madame, we are lost; and why, after all, should any one

know of these things in Geneva? Aurora pretends that she has been

able to persuade herself that she doesn't care who knows them; but

there is a strange expression in her face, which proves that her

conscience is not at rest. I watch her, I let her go, but I sit

with my hands clasped. There is a peculiar custom in this country--

I shouldn't know how to express it in Genevese--it is called "being

attentive," and young girls are the object of the attention. It has

not necessarily anything to do with projects of marriage--though it

is the privilege only of the unmarried, and though, at the same time

(fortunately, and this may surprise you) it has no relation to other

projects. It is simply an invention by which young persons of the

two sexes pass their time together. How shall I muster courage to

tell you that Aurora is now engaged in this delassement, in company

with several gentlemen? Though it has no relation to marriage, it

happily does not exclude it, and marriages have been known to take

place in consequence (or in spite) of it. It is true that even in

this country a young lady may marry but one husband at a time,

whereas she may receive at once the attentions of several gentlemen,

who are equally entitled "admirers." My daughter, then, has

admirers to an indefinite number. You will think I am joking,

perhaps, when I tell you that I am unable to be exact--I who was

formerly l'exactitude meme. Two of these gentlemen are, to a

certain extent, old friends, having been passengers on the steamer

which carried us so far from you. One of them, still young, is

typical of the American character, but a respectable person, and a

lawyer in considerable practice. Every one in this country follows

a profession; but it must be admitted that the professions are more

highly remunerated than chez vous. Mr. Cockerel, even while I write

you, is in complete possession of my daughter. He called for her an

hour ago in a "boghey,"--a strange, unsafe, rickety vehicle, mounted

on enormous wheels, which holds two persons very near together; and

I watched her from the window take her place at his side. Then he

whirled her away, behind two little horses with terribly thin legs;

the whole equipage--and most of all her being in it--was in the most

questionable taste. But she will return, and she will return very

much as she went. It is the same when she goes down to Mr. Louis

Leverett, who has no vehicle, and who merely comes and sits with her

in the front salon. He has lived a great deal in Europe, and is

very fond of the arts, and though I am not sure I agree with him in

his views of the relation of art to life and life to art, and in his

interpretation of some of the great works that Aurora and I have

studied together, he seems to me a sufficiently serious and

intelligent young man. I do not regard him as intrinsically

dangerous; but on the other hand, he offers absolutely no

guarantees. I have no means whatever of ascertaining his pecuniary

situation. There is a vagueness on these points which is extremely

embarrassing, and it never occurs to young men to offer you a

reference. In Geneva I should not be at a loss; I should come to

you, chere Madame, with my little inquiry, and what you should not

be able to tell me would not be worth knowing. But no one in New

York can give me the smallest information about the etat de fortune

of Mr. Louis Leverett. It is true that he is a native of Boston,

where most of his friends reside; I cannot, however, go to the

expense of a journey to Boston simply to learn, perhaps, that Mr.

Leverett (the young Louis) has an income of five thousand francs.

As I say, however, he does not strike me as dangerous. When Aurora

comes back to me, after having passed an hour with the young Louis,

she says that he has described to her his emotions on visiting the

home of Shelley, or discussed some of the differences between the

Boston Temperament and that of the Italians of the Renaissance. You

will not enter into these rapprochements, and I can't blame you.

But you won't betray me, chere Madame?

III. FROM MISS STURDY, AT NEWPORT, TO MRS. DRAPER, IN FLORENCE.

September 30.

I promised to tell you how I like it, but the truth is, I have gone

to and fro so often that I have ceased to like and dislike. Nothing

strikes me as unexpected; I expect everything in its order. Then,

too, you know, I am not a critic; I have no talent for keen

analysis, as the magazines say; I don't go into the reasons of

things. It is true I have been for a longer time than usual on the

wrong side of the water, and I admit that I feel a little out of

training for American life. They are breaking me in very fast,

however. I don't mean that they bully me; I absolutely decline to

be bullied. I say what I think, because I believe that I have, on

the whole, the advantage of knowing what I think--when I think

anything--which is half the battle. Sometimes, indeed, I think

nothing at all. They don't like that over here; they like you to

have impressions. That they like these impressions to be favourable

appears to me perfectly natural; I don't make a crime to them of

that; it seems to me, on the contrary, a very amiable quality. When

individuals have it, we call them sympathetic; I don't see why we

shouldn't give nations the same benefit. But there are things I

haven't the least desire to have an opinion about. The privilege of

indifference is the dearest one we possess, and I hold that

intelligent people are known by the way they exercise it. Life is

full of rubbish, and we have at least our share of it over here.

When you wake up in the morning you find that during the night a

cartload has been deposited in your front garden. I decline,

however, to have any of it in my premises; there are thousands of

things I want to know nothing about. I have outlived the necessity

of being hypocritical; I have nothing to gain and everything to

lose. When one is fifty years old--single, stout, and red in the

face--one has outlived a good many necessities. They tell me over

here that my increase of weight is extremely marked, and though they

don't tell me that I am coarse, I am sure they think me so. There

is very little coarseness here--not quite enough, I think--though

there is plenty of vulgarity, which is a very different thing. On

the whole, the country is becoming much more agreeable. It isn't

that the people are charming, for that they always were (the best of

them, I mean, for it isn't true of the others), but that places and

things as well have acquired the art of pleasing. The houses are

extremely good, and they look so extraordinarily fresh and clean.

European interiors, in comparison, seem musty and gritty. We have a

great deal of taste; I shouldn't wonder if we should end by

inventing something pretty; we only need a little time. Of course,

as yet, it's all imitation, except, by the way, these piazzas. I am

sitting on one now; I am writing to you with my portfolio on my

knees. This broad light loggia surrounds the house with a movement

as free as the expanded wings of a bird, and the wandering airs come

up from the deep sea, which murmurs on the rocks at the end of the

lawn. Newport is more charming even than you remember it; like

everything else over here, it has improved. It is very exquisite

today; it is, indeed, I think, in all the world, the only exquisite

watering-place, for I detest the whole genus. The crowd has left it

now, which makes it all the better, though plenty of talkers remain

in these large, light, luxurious houses, which are planted with a

kind of Dutch definiteness all over the green carpet of the cliff.

This carpet is very neatly laid and wonderfully well swept, and the

sea, just at hand, is capable of prodigies of blue. Here and there

a pretty woman strolls over one of the lawns, which all touch each

other, you know, without hedges or fences; the light looks intense

as it plays upon her brilliant dress; her large parasol shines like

a silver dome. The long lines of the far shores are soft and pure,

though they are places that one hasn't the least desire to visit.

Altogether the effect is very delicate, and anything that is

delicate counts immensely over here; for delicacy, I think, is as

rare as coarseness. I am talking to you of the sea, however,

without having told you a word of my voyage. It was very

comfortable and amusing; I should like to take another next month.

You know I am almost offensively well at sea--that I breast the

weather and brave the storm. We had no storm fortunately, and I had

brought with me a supply of light literature; so I passed nine days

on deck in my sea-chair, with my heels up, reading Tauchnitz novels.

There was a great lot of people, but no one in particular, save some

fifty American girls. You know all about the American girl,

however, having been one yourself. They are, on the whole, very

nice, but fifty is too many; there are always too many. There was

an inquiring Briton, a radical M.P., by name Mr. Antrobus, who

entertained me as much as any one else. He is an excellent man; I

even asked him to come down here and spend a couple of days. He

looked rather frightened, till I told him he shouldn't be alone with

me, that the house was my brother's, and that I gave the invitation

in his name. He came a week ago; he goes everywhere; we have heard

of him in a dozen places. The English are very simple, or at least

they seem so over here. Their old measurements and comparisons

desert them; they don't know whether it's all a joke, or whether

it's too serious by half. We are quicker than they, though we talk

so much more slowly. We think fast, and yet we talk as deliberately

as if we were speaking a foreign language. They toss off their

sentences with an air of easy familiarity with the tongue, and yet

they misunderstand two-thirds of what people say to them. Perhaps,

after all, it is only OUR thoughts they think slowly; they think

their own often to a lively tune enough. Mr. Antrobus arrived here

at eight o'clock in the morning; I don't know how he managed it; it

appears to be his favourite hour; wherever we have heard of him he

has come in with the dawn. In England he would arrive at 5.30 p.m.

He asks innumerable questions, but they are easy to answer, for he

has a sweet credulity. He made me rather ashamed; he is a better

American than so many of us; he takes us more seriously than we take

ourselves. He seems to think that an oligarchy of wealth is growing

up here, and he advised me to be on my guard against it. I don't

know exactly what I can do, but I promised him to look out. He is

fearfully energetic; the energy of the people here is nothing to

that of the inquiring Briton. If we should devote half the energy

to building up our institutions that they devote to obtaining

information about them, we should have a very satisfactory country.

Mr. Antrobus seemed to think very well of us, which surprised me, on

the whole, because, say what one will, it's not so agreeable as

England. It's very horrid that this should be; and it's delightful,

when one thinks of it, that some things in England are, after all,

so disagreeable. At the same time, Mr. Antrobus appeared to be a

good deal pre-occupied with our dangers. I don't understand, quite,

what they are; they seem to me so few, on a Newport piazza, on this

bright, still day. But, after all, what one sees on a Newport

piazza is not America; it's the back of Europe! I don't mean to say

that I haven't noticed any dangers since my return; there are two or

three that seem to me very serious, but they are not those that Mr.

Antrobus means. One, for instance, is that we shall cease to speak

the English language, which I prefer so much to any other. It's

less and less spoken; American is crowding it out. All the children

speak American, and as a child's language it's dreadfully rough.

It's exclusively in use in the schools; all the magazines and

newspapers are in American. Of course, a people of fifty millions,

who have invented a new civilisation, have a right to a language of

their own; that's what they tell me, and I can't quarrel with it.

But I wish they had made it as pretty as the mother-tongue, from

which, after all, it is more or less derived. We ought to have

invented something as noble as our country. They tell me it's more

expressive, and yet some admirable things have been said in the

Queen's English. There can be no question of the Queen over here,

of course, and American no doubt is the music of the future. Poor

dear future, how "expressive" you'll be! For women and children, as

I say, it strikes one as very rough; and moreover, they don't speak

it well, their own though it be. My little nephews, when I first

came home, had not gone back to school, and it distressed me to see

that, though they are charming children, they had the vocal

inflections of little news-boys. My niece is sixteen years old; she

has the sweetest nature possible; she is extremely well-bred, and is

dressed to perfection. She chatters from morning till night; but it

isn't a pleasant sound! These little persons are in the opposite

case from so many English girls, who know how to speak, but don't

know how to talk. My niece knows how to talk, but doesn't know how

to speak. A propos of the young people, that is our other danger;

the young people are eating us up,--there is nothing in America but

the young people. The country is made for the rising generation;

life is arranged for them; they are the destruction of society.

People talk of them, consider them, defer to them, bow down to them.

They are always present, and whenever they are present there is an

end to everything else. They are often very pretty; and physically,

they are wonderfully looked after; they are scoured and brushed,

they wear hygienic clothes, they go every week to the dentist's.

But the little boys kick your shins, and the little girls offer to

slap your face! There is an immense literature entirely addressed

to them, in which the kicking of shins and the slapping of faces is

much recommended. As a woman of fifty, I protest. I insist on

being judged by my peers. It's too late, however, for several

millions of little feet are actively engaged in stamping out

conversation, and I don't see how they can long fail to keep it

under. The future is theirs; maturity will evidently be at an

increasing discount. Longfellow wrote a charming little poem called

"The Children's Hour," but he ought to have called it "The

Children's Century." And by children, of course, I don't mean

simple infants; I mean everything of less than twenty. The social

importance of the young American increases steadily up to that age,

and then it suddenly stops. The young girls, of course, are more

important than the lads; but the lads are very important too. I am

struck with the way they are known and talked about; they are little

celebrities; they have reputations and pretentions; they are taken

very seriously. As for the young girls, as I said just now, there

are too many. You will say, perhaps, that I am jealous of them,

with my fifty years and my red face. I don't think so, because I

don't suffer; my red face doesn't frighten people away, and I always

find plenty of talkers. The young girls themselves, I believe, like

me very much; and as for me, I delight in the young girls. They are

often very pretty; not so pretty as people say in the magazines, but

pretty enough. The magazines rather overdo that; they make a

mistake. I have seen no great beauties, but the level of prettiness

is high, and occasionally one sees a woman completely handsome. (As

a general thing, a pretty person here means a person with a pretty

face. The figure is rarely mentioned, though there are several good

ones.) The level of prettiness is high, but the level of

conversation is low; that's one of the signs of its being a young

ladies' country. There are a good many things young ladies can't

talk about; but think of all the things they can, when they are as

clever as most of these. Perhaps one ought to content one's self

with that measure, but it's difficult if one has lived for a while

by a larger one. This one is decidedly narrow; I stretch it

sometimes till it cracks. Then it is that they call me coarse,

which I undoubtedly am, thank Heaven! People's talk is of course

much more chatiee over here than in Europe; I am struck with that

wherever I go. There are certain things that are never said at all,

certain allusions that are never made. There are no light stories,

no propos risques. I don't know exactly what people talk about, for

the supply of scandal is small, and it's poor in quality. They

don't seem, however, to lack topics. The young girls are always

there; they keep the gates of conversation; very little passes that

is not innocent. I find we do very well without wickedness; and,

for myself, as I take my ease, I don't miss my liberties. You

remember what I thought of the tone of your table in Florence, and

how surprised you were when I asked you why you allowed such things.

You said they were like the courses of the seasons; one couldn't

prevent them; also that to change the tone of your table you would

have to change so many other things. Of course, in your house one

never saw a young girl; I was the only spinster, and no one was

afraid of me! Of course, too, if talk is more innocent in this

country, manners are so, to begin with. The liberty of the young

people is the strongest proof of it. The young girls are let loose

in the world, and the world gets more good of it than ces

demoiselles get harm. In your world--excuse me, but you know what I

mean--this wouldn't do at all. Your world is a sad affair, and the

young ladies would encounter all sorts of horrors. Over here,

considering the way they knock about, they remain wonderfully

simple, and the reason is that society protects them instead of

setting them traps. There is almost no gallantry, as you understand

it; the flirtations are child's play. People have no time for

making love; the men, in particular, are extremely busy. I am told

that sort of thing consumes hours; I have never had any time for it

myself. If the leisure class should increase here considerably,

there may possibly be a change; but I doubt it, for the women seem

to me in all essentials exceedingly reserved. Great superficial

frankness, but an extreme dread of complications. The men strike me

as very good fellows. I think that at bottom they are better than

the women, who are very subtle, but rather hard. They are not so

nice to the men as the men are to them; I mean, of course, in

proportion, you know. But women are not so nice as men, "anyhow,"

as they say here. The men, of course, are professional, commercial;

there are very few gentlemen pure and simple. This personage needs

to be very well done, however, to be of great utility; and I suppose

you won't pretend that he is always well done in your countries.

When he's not, the less of him the better. It's very much the same,

however, with the system on which the young girls in this country

are brought up. (You see, I have to come back to the young girls.)

When it succeeds, they are the most charming possible; when it

doesn't, the failure is disastrous. If a girl is a very nice girl,

the American method brings her to great completeness--makes all her

graces flower; but if she isn't nice, it makes her exceedingly

disagreeable--elaborately and fatally perverts her. In a word, the

American girl is rarely negative, and when she isn't a great success

she is a great warning. In nineteen cases out of twenty, among the

people who know how to live--I won't say what THEIR proportion is--

the results are highly satisfactory. The girls are not shy, but I

don't know why they should be, for there is really nothing here to

be afraid of. Manners are very gentle, very humane; the democratic

system deprives people of weapons that every one doesn't equally

possess. No one is formidable; no one is on stilts; no one has

great pretensions or any recognised right to be arrogant. I think

there is not much wickedness, and there is certainly less cruelty

than with you. Every one can sit; no one is kept standing. One is

much less liable to be snubbed, which you will say is a pity. I

think it is to a certain extent; but, on the other hand, folly is

less fatuous, in form, than in your countries; and as people

generally have fewer revenges to take, there is less need of their

being stamped on in advance. The general good nature, the social

equality, deprive them of triumphs on the one hand, and of

grievances on the other. There is extremely little impertinence;

there is almost none. You will say I am describing a terrible

society,--a society without great figures or great social prizes.

You have hit it, my dear; there are no great figures. (The great

prize, of course, in Europe, is the opportunity to be a great

figure.) You would miss these things a good deal,--you who delight

to contemplate greatness; and my advice to you, of course, is never

to come back. You would miss the small people even more than the

great; every one is middle-sized, and you can never have that

momentary sense of tallness which is so agreeable in Europe. There

are no brilliant types; the most important people seem to lack

dignity. They are very bourgeois; they make little jokes; on

occasion they make puns; they have no form; they are too good-

natured. The men have no style; the women, who are fidgety and talk

too much, have it only in their coiffure, where they have it

superabundantly. But I console myself with the greater bonhomie.

Have you ever arrived at an English country-house in the dusk of a

winter's day? Have you ever made a call in London, when you knew

nobody but the hostess? People here are more expressive, more

demonstrative and it is a pleasure, when one comes back (if one

happens, like me, to be no one in particular), to feel one's social

value rise. They attend to you more; they have you on their mind;

they talk to you; they listen to you. That is, the men do; the

women listen very little--not enough. They interrupt; they talk too

much; one feels their presence too much as a sound. I imagine it is

partly because their wits are quick, and they think of a good many

things to say; not that they always say such wonders. Perfect

repose, after all, is not ALL self-control; it is also partly

stupidity. American women, however, make too many vague

exclamations--say too many indefinite things. In short, they have a

great deal of nature. On the whole, I find very little affectation,

though we shall probably have more as we improve. As yet, people

haven't the assurance that carries those things off; they know too

much about each other. The trouble is that over here we have all

been brought up together. You will think this a picture of a

dreadfully insipid society; but I hasten to add that it's not all so

tame as that. I have been speaking of the people that one meets

socially; and these are the smallest part of American life. The

others--those one meets on a basis of mere convenience--are much

more exciting; they keep one's temper in healthy exercise. I mean

the people in the shops, and on the railroads; the servants, the

hackmen, the labourers, every one of whom you buy anything or have

occasion to make an inquiry. With them you need all your best

manners, for you must always have enough for two. If you think we

are TOO democratic, taste a little of American life in these walks,

and you will be reassured. This is the region of inequality, and

you will find plenty of people to make your courtesy to. You see it

from below--the weight of inequality is on your own back. You asked

me to tell you about prices; they are simply dreadful.

IV. FROM THE HONOURABLE EDWARD ANTROBUS, M.P., IN BOSTON, TO THE

HONOURABLE MRS. ANTROBUS.

October 17.

My Dear Susan--I sent you a post-card on the 13th and a native

newspaper yesterday; I really have had no time to write. I sent you

the newspaper partly because it contained a report--extremely

incorrect--of some remarks I made at the meeting of the Association

of the Teachers of New England; partly because it is so curious that

I thought it would interest you and the children. I cut out some

portions which I didn't think it would be well for the children to

see; the parts remaining contain the most striking features. Please

point out to the children the peculiar orthography, which probably

will be adopted in England by the time they are grown up; the

amusing oddities of expression, etc. Some of them are intentional;

you will have heard of the celebrated American humour, etc. (remind

me, by the way, on my return to Thistleton, to give you a few

examples of it); others are unconscious, and are perhaps on that

account the more diverting. Point out to the children the

difference (in so far as you are sure that you yourself perceive

it). You must excuse me if these lines are not very legible; I am

writing them by the light of a railway lamp, which rattles above my

left ear; it being only at odd moments that I can find time to look

into everything that I wish to. You will say that this is a very

odd moment, indeed, when I tell you that I am in bed in a sleeping-

car. I occupy the upper berth (I will explain to you the

arrangement when I return), while the lower forms the couch--the

jolts are fearful--of an unknown female. You will be very anxious

for my explanation; but I assure you that it is the custom of the

country. I myself am assured that a lady may travel in this manner

all over the Union (the Union of States) without a loss of

consideration. In case of her occupying the upper berth I presume

it would be different; but I must make inquiries on this point.

Whether it be the fact that a mysterious being of another sex has

retired to rest behind the same curtains, or whether it be the swing

of the train, which rushes through the air with very much the same

movement as the tail of a kite, the situation is, at any rate, so

anomalous that I am unable to sleep. A ventilator is open just over

my head, and a lively draught, mingled with a drizzle of cinders,

pours in through this ingenious orifice. (I will describe to you

its form on my return.) If I had occupied the lower berth I should

have had a whole window to myself, and by drawing back the blind (a

safe proceeding at the dead of night), I should have been able, by

the light of an extraordinary brilliant moon, to see a little better

what I write. The question occurs to me, however,--Would the lady

below me in that case have ascended to the upper berth? (You know

my old taste for contingent inquiries.) I incline to think (from

what I have seen) that she would simply have requested me to

evacuate my own couch. (The ladies in this country ask for anything

they want.) In this case, I suppose, I should have had an extensive

view of the country, which, from what I saw of it before I turned in

(while the lady beneath me was going to bed), offered a rather

ragged expanse, dotted with little white wooden houses, which looked

in the moonshine like pasteboard boxes. I have been unable to

ascertain as precisely as I should wish by whom these modest

residences are occupied; for they are too small to be the homes of

country gentlemen, there is no peasantry here, and (in New England,

for all the corn comes from the far West) there are no yeomen nor

farmers. The information that one receives in this country is apt

to be rather conflicting, but I am determined to sift the mystery to

the bottom. I have already noted down a multitude of facts bearing

upon the points that interest me most--the operation of the school-

boards, the co-education of the sexes, the elevation of the tone of

the lower classes, the participation of the latter in political

life. Political life, indeed, is almost wholly confined to the

lower middle class, and the upper section of the lower class. In

some of the large towns, indeed, the lowest order of all

participates considerably--a very interesting phrase, to which I

shall give more attention. It is very gratifying to see the taste

for public affairs pervading so many social strata; but the

indifference of the gentry is a fact not to be lightly considered.

It may be objected, indeed, that there are no gentry; and it is very

true that I have not yet encountered a character of the type of Lord

Bottomley,--a type which I am free to confess I should be sorry to

see disappear from our English system, if system it may be called,

where so much is the growth of blind and incoherent forces. It is

nevertheless obvious that an idle and luxurious class exists in this

country, and that it is less exempt than in our own from the

reproach of preferring inglorious ease to the furtherance of liberal

ideas. It is rapidly increasing, and I am not sure that the

indefinite growth of the dilettante spirit, in connection with large

and lavishly-expended wealth, is an unmixed good, even in a society

in which freedom of development has obtained so many interesting

triumphs. The fact that this body is not represented in the

governing class, is perhaps as much the result of the jealousy with

which it is viewed by the more earnest workers as of its own--I dare

not, perhaps, apply a harsher term than--levity. Such, at least, is

the impression I have gathered in the Middle States and in New

England; in the South-west, the North-west, and the far West, it

will doubtless be liable to correction. These divisions are

probably new to you; but they are the general denomination of large

and flourishing communities, with which I hope to make myself at

least superficially acquainted. The fatigue of traversing, as I

habitually do, three or four hundred miles at a bound, is, of

course, considerable; but there is usually much to inquire into by

the way. The conductors of the trains, with whom I freely converse,

are often men of vigorous and original minds, and even of some

social eminence. One of them, a few days ago, gave me a letter of

introduction to his brother-in-law, who is president of a Western

University. Don't have any fear, therefore, that I am not in the

best society! The arrangements for travelling are, as a general

thing, extremely ingenious, as you will probably have inferred from

what I told you above; but it must at the same time be conceded that

some of them are more ingenious than happy. Some of the facilities,

with regard to luggage, the transmission of parcels, etc., are

doubtless very useful when explained, but I have not yet succeeded

in mastering the intricacies. There are, on the other hand, no cabs

and no porters, and I have calculated that I have myself carried my

impedimenta--which, you know, are somewhat numerous, and from which

I cannot bear to be separated--some seventy, or eighty miles. I

have sometimes thought it was a great mistake not to bring

Plummeridge; he would have been useful on such occasions. On the

other hand, the startling question would have presented itself--Who

would have carried Plummeridge's portmanteau? He would have been

useful, indeed, for brushing and packing my clothes, and getting me

my tub; I travel with a large tin one--there are none to be obtained

at the inns--and the transport of this receptacle often presents the

most insoluble difficulties. It is often, too, an object of

considerable embarrassment in arriving at private houses, where the

servants have less reserve of manner than in England; and to tell

you the truth, I am by no means certain at the present moment that

the tub has been placed in the train with me. "On board" the train

is the consecrated phrase here; it is an allusion to the tossing and

pitching of the concatenation of cars, so similar to that of a

vessel in a storm. As I was about to inquire, however, Who would

get Plummeridge HIS tub, and attend to his little comforts? We

could not very well make our appearance, on coming to stay with

people, with TWO of the utensils I have named; though, as regards a

single one, I have had the courage, as I may say, of a life-long

habit. It would hardly be expected that we should both use the

same; though there have been occasions in my travels, as to which I

see no way of blinking the fact, that Plummeridge would have had to

sit down to dinner with me. Such a contingency would completely

have unnerved him; and, on the whole, it was doubtless the wiser

part to leave him respectfully touching his hat on the tender in the

Mersey. No one touches his hat over here, and though it is

doubtless the sign of a more advanced social order, I confess that

when I see poor Plummeridge again, this familiar little gesture--

familiar, I mean, only in the sense of being often seen--will give

me a measurable satisfaction. You will see from what I tell you

that democracy is not a mere word in this country, and I could give

you many more instances of its universal reign. This, however, is

what we come here to look at, and, in so far as there seems to be

proper occasion, to admire; though I am by no means sure that we can

hope to establish within an appreciable time a corresponding change

in the somewhat rigid fabric of English manners. I am not even

prepared to affirm that such a change is desirable; you know this is

one of the points on which I do not as yet see my way to going as

far as Lord B-- . I have always held that there is a certain social

ideal of inequality as well as of equality, and if I have found the

people of this country, as a general thing, quite equal to each

other, I am not sure that I am prepared to go so far as to say that,

as a whole, they are equal to--excuse that dreadful blot! The

movement of the train and the precarious nature of the light--it is

close to my nose, and most offensive--would, I flatter myself, long

since have got the better of a less resolute diarist! What I was

not prepared for was the very considerable body of aristocratic

feeling that lurks beneath this republican simplicity. I have on

several occasions been made the confidant of these romantic but

delusive vagaries, of which the stronghold appears to be the Empire

City,--a slang name for New York. I was assured in many quarters

that that locality, at least, is ripe for a monarchy, and if one of

the Queen's sons would come and talk it over, he would meet with the

highest encouragement. This information was given me in strict

confidence, with closed doors, as it were; it reminded me a good

deal of the dreams of the old Jacobites, when they whispered their

messages to the king across the water. I doubt, however, whether

these less excusable visionaries will be able to secure the services

of a Pretender, for I fear that in such a case he would encounter a

still more fatal Culloden. I have given a good deal of time, as I

told you, to the educational system, and have visited no fewer than

one hundred and forty--three schools and colleges. It is

extraordinary, the number of persons who are being educated in this

country; and yet, at the same time, the tone of the people is less

scholarly than one might expect. A lady, a few days since,

described to me her daughter as being always "on the go," which I

take to be a jocular way of saying that the young lady was very fond

of paying visits. Another person, the wife of a United States

senator, informed me that if I should go to Washington in January, I

should be quite "in the swim." I inquired the meaning of the

phrase, but her explanation made it rather more than less ambiguous.

To say that I am on the go describes very accurately my own

situation. I went yesterday to the Pognanuc High School, to hear

fifty-seven boys and girls recite in unison a most remarkable ode to

the American flag, and shortly afterward attended a ladies' lunch,

at which some eighty or ninety of the sex were present. There was

only one individual in trousers--his trousers, by the way, though he

brought a dozen pair, are getting rather seedy. The men in America

do not partake of this meal, at which ladies assemble in large

numbers to discuss religions, political, and social topics. These

immense female symposia (at which every delicacy is provided) are

one of the most striking features of American life, and would seem

to prove that men are not so indispensable in the scheme of creation

as they sometimes suppose. I have been admitted on the footing of

an Englishman--"just to show you some of our bright women," the

hostess yesterday remarked. ("Bright" here has the meaning of

INTELLECTUAL.) I perceived, indeed, a great many intellectual

foreheads. These curious collations are organised according to age.

I have also been present as an inquiring stranger at several "girls'

lunches," from which married ladies are rigidly excluded, but where

the fair revellers are equally numerous and equally bright. There

is a good deal I should like to tell you about my study of the

educational question, but my position is somewhat cramped, and I

must dismiss it briefly. My leading impression is that the children

in this country are better educated than the adults. The position

of a child is, on the whole, one of great distinction. There is a

popular ballad of which the refrain, if I am not mistaken, is "Make

me a child again, just for to-night!" and which seems to express the

sentiment of regret for lost privileges. At all events they are a

powerful and independent class, and have organs, of immense

circulation, in the press. They are often extremely "bright." I

have talked with a great many teachers, most of them lady-teachers,

as they are called in this country. The phrase does not mean

teachers of ladies, as you might suppose, but applies to the sex of

the instructress, who often has large classes of young men under her

control. I was lately introduced to a young woman of twenty-three,

who occupies the chair of Moral Philosophy and Belles-Lettres in a

Western college, and who told me with the utmost frankness that she

was adored by the undergraduates. This young woman was the daughter

of a petty trader in one of the South western States, and had

studied at Amanda College, in Missourah, an institution at which

young people of the two sexes pursue their education together. She

was very pretty and modest, and expressed a great desire to see

something of English country life, in consequence of which I made

her promise to come down to Thistleton in the event of her crossing

the Atlantic. She is not the least like Gwendolen or Charlotte, and

I am not prepared to say how they would get on with her; the boys

would probably do better. Still, I think her acquaintance would be

of value to Miss Bumpus, and the two might pass their time very

pleasantly in the school-room. I grant you freely that those I have

seen here are much less comfortable than the school-room at

Thistleton. Has Charlotte, by the way, designed any more texts for

the walls? I have been extremely interested in my visit to

Philadelphia, where I saw several thousand little red houses with

white steps, occupied by intelligent artizans, and arranged (in

streets) on the rectangular system. Improved cooking-stoves,

rosewood pianos, gas, and hot water, aesthetic furniture, and

complete sets of the British Essayists. A tramway through every

street; every block of equal length; blocks and houses

scientifically lettered and numbered. There is absolutely no loss

of time, and no need of looking for anything, or, indeed, at

anything. The mind always on one's object; it is very delightful.

V. FROM LOUIS LEVERETT, IN BOSTON, TO HARVARD TREMONT, IN PARIS.

November.

The scales have turned, my sympathetic Harvard, and the beam that

has lifted you up has dropped me again on this terribly hard spot.

I am extremely sorry to have missed you in London, but I received

your little note, and took due heed of your injunction to let you

know how I got on. I don't get on at all, my dear Harvard--I am

consumed with the love of the farther shore. I have been so long

away that I have dropped out of my place in this little Boston

world, and the shallow tides of New England life have closed over

it. I am a stranger here, and I find it hard to believe that I ever

was a native. It is very hard, very cold, very vacant. I think of

your warm, rich Paris; I think of the Boulevard St. Michel on the

mild spring evenings. I see the little corner by the window (of the

Cafe de la Jeunesse)--where I used to sit; the doors are open, the

soft deep breath of the great city comes in. It is brilliant, yet

there is a kind of tone, of body, in the brightness; the mighty

murmur of the ripest civilisation in the world comes in; the dear

old peuple de Paris, the most interesting people in the world, pass

by. I have a little book in my pocket; it is exquisitely printed, a

modern Elzevir. It is a lyric cry from the heart of young France,

and is full of the sentiment of form. There is no form here, dear

Harvard; I had no idea how little form there was. I don't know what

I shall do; I feel so undraped, so uncurtained, so uncushioned; I

feel as if I were sitting in the centre of a mighty "reflector." A

terrible crude glare is over everything; the earth looks peeled and

excoriated; the raw heavens seem to bleed with the quick hard light.

I have not got back my rooms in West Cedar Street; they are occupied

by a mesmeric healer. I am staying at an hotel, and it is very

dreadful. Nothing for one's self; nothing for one's preferences and

habits. No one to receive you when you arrive; you push in through

a crowd, you edge up to a counter; you write your name in a horrible

book, where every one may come and stare at it and finger it. A man

behind the counter stares at you in silence; his stare seems to say

to you, "What the devil do YOU want?" But after this stare he never

looks at you again. He tosses down a key at you; he presses a bell;

a savage Irishman arrives. "Take him away," he seems to say to the

Irishman; but it is all done in silence; there is no answer to your

own speech,--"What is to be done with me, please?" "Wait and you

will see," the awful silence seems to say. There is a great crowd

around you, but there is also a great stillness; every now and then

you hear some one expectorate. There are a thousand people in this

huge and hideous structure; they feed together in a big white-walled

room. It is lighted by a thousand gas-jets, and heated by cast-iron

screens, which vomit forth torrents of scorching air. The

temperature is terrible; the atmosphere is more so; the furious

light and heat seem to intensify the dreadful definiteness. When

things are so ugly, they should not be so definite; and they are

terribly ugly here. There is no mystery in the corners; there is no

light and shade in the types. The people are haggard and joyless;

they look as if they had no passions, no tastes, no senses. They

sit feeding in silence, in the dry hard light; occasionally I hear

the high firm note of a child. The servants are black and familiar;

their faces shine as they shuffle about; there are blue tones in

their dark masks. They have no manners; they address you, but they

don't answer you; they plant themselves at your elbow (it rubs their

clothes as you eat), and watch you as if your proceedings were

strange. They deluge you with iced water; it's the only thing they

will bring you; if you look round to summon them, they have gone for

more. If you read the newspaper--which I don't, gracious Heaven! I

can't--they hang over your shoulder and peruse it also. I always

fold it up and present it to them; the newspapers here are indeed

for an African taste. There are long corridors defended by gusts of

hot air; down the middle swoops a pale little girl on parlour

skates. "Get out of my way!" she shrieks as she passes; she has

ribbons in her hair and frills on her dress; she makes the tour of

the immense hotel. I think of Puck, who put a girdle round the

earth in forty minutes, and wonder what he said as he flitted by. A

black waiter marches past me, bearing a tray, which he thrusts into

my spine as he goes. It is laden with large white jugs; they tinkle

as he moves, and I recognise the unconsoling fluid. We are dying of

iced water, of hot air, of gas. I sit in my room thinking of these

things--this room of mine which is a chamber of pain. The walls are

white and bare, they shine in the rays of a horrible chandelier of

imitation bronze, which depends from the middle of the ceiling. It

flings a patch of shadow on a small table covered with white marble,

of which the genial surface supports at the present moment the sheet

of paper on which I address you; and when I go to bed (I like to

read in bed, Harvard) it becomes an object of mockery and torment.

It dangles at inaccessible heights; it stares me in the face; it

flings the light upon the covers of my book, but not upon the page--

the little French Elzevir that I love so well. I rise and put out

the gas, and then my room becomes even lighter than before. Then a

crude illumination from the hall, from the neighbouring room, pours

through the glass openings that surmount the two doors of my

apartment. It covers my bed, where I toss and groan; it beats in

through my closed lids; it is accompanied by the most vulgar, though

the most human, sounds. I spring up to call for some help, some

remedy; but there is no bell, and I feel desolate and weak. There

is only a strange orifice in the wall, through which the traveller

in distress may transmit his appeal. I fill it with incoherent

sounds, and sounds more incoherent yet come back to me. I gather at

last their meaning; they appear to constitute a somewhat stern

inquiry. A hollow impersonal voice wishes to know what I want, and

the very question paralyses me. I want everything--yet I want

nothing--nothing this hard impersonality can give! I want my little

corner of Paris; I want the rich, the deep, the dark Old World; I

want to be out of this horrible place. Yet I can't confide all this

to that mechanical tube; it would be of no use; a mocking laugh

would come up from the office. Fancy appealing in these sacred,

these intimate moments, to an "office"; fancy calling out into

indifferent space for a candle, for a curtain! I pay incalculable

sums in this dreadful house, and yet I haven't a servant to wait

upon me. I fling myself back on my couch, and for a long time

afterward the orifice in the wall emits strange murmurs and

rumblings. It seems unsatisfied, indignant; it is evidently

scolding me for my vagueness. My vagueness, indeed, dear Harvard!

I loathe their horrible arrangements; isn't that definite enough?

You asked me to tell you whom I see, and what I think of my friends.

I haven't very many; I don't feel at all en rapport. The people are

very good, very serious, very devoted to their work; but there is a

terrible absence of variety of type. Every one is Mr. Jones, Mr.

Brown; and every one looks like Mr. Jones and Mr. Brown. They are

thin; they are diluted in the great tepid bath of Democracy! They

lack completeness of identity; they are quite without modelling.

No, they are not beautiful, my poor Harvard; it must be whispered

that they are not beautiful. You may say that they are as beautiful

as the French, as the Germans; but I can't agree with you there.

The French, the Germans, have the greatest beauty of all--the beauty

of their ugliness--the beauty of the strange, the grotesque. These

people are not even ugly; they are only plain. Many of the girls

are pretty; but to be only pretty is (to my sense) to be plain. Yet

I have had some talk. I have seen a woman. She was on the steamer,

and I afterward saw her in New York--a peculiar type, a real

personality; a great deal of modelling, a great deal of colour, and

yet a great deal of mystery. She was not, however, of this country;

she was a compound of far-off things. But she was looking for

something here--like me. We found each other, and for a moment that

was enough. I have lost her now; I am sorry, because she liked to

listen to me. She has passed away; I shall not see her again. She

liked to listen to me; she almost understood!

VI. FROM M. GUSTAVE LEJAUNE, OF THE FRENCH ACADEMY, TO M. ADOLPHE

BOUCHE, IN PARIS.

Washington, October 5.

I give you my little notes; you must make allowances for haste, for

bad inns, for the perpetual scramble, for ill-humour. Everywhere

the same impression--the platitude of unbalanced democracy

intensified by the platitude of the spirit of commerce. Everything

on an immense scale--everything illustrated by millions of examples.

My brother-in-law is always busy; he has appointments, inspections,

interviews, disputes. The people, it appears, are incredibly sharp

in conversation, in argument; they wait for you in silence at the

corner of the road, and then they suddenly discharge their revolver.

If you fall, they empty your pockets; the only chance is to shoot

them first. With that, no amenities, no preliminaries, no manners,

no care for the appearance. I wander about while my brother is

occupied; I lounge along the streets; I stop at the corners; I look

into the shops; je regarde passer les femmes. It's an easy country

to see; one sees everything there is; the civilisation is skin deep;

you don't have to dig. This positive, practical, pushing

bourgeoisie is always about its business; it lives in the street, in

the hotel, in the train; one is always in a crowd--there are

seventy-five people in the tramway. They sit in your lap; they

stand on your toes; when they wish to pass they simply push you.

Everything in silence; they know that silence is golden, and they

have the worship of gold. When the conductor wishes your fare he

gives you a poke, very serious, without a word. As for the types--

but there is only one--they are all variations of the same--the

commis-voyageur minus the gaiety. The women are often pretty; you

meet the young ones in the streets, in the trains, in search of a

husband. They look at you frankly, coldly, judicially, to see if

you will serve; but they don't want what you might think (du moins

on me l'assure); they only want the husband. A Frenchman may

mistake; he needs to be sure he is right, and I always make sure.

They begin at fifteen; the mother sends them out; it lasts all day

(with an interval for dinner at a pastry-cook's); sometimes it goes

on for ten years. If they haven't found the husband then, they give

it up; they make place for the cadettes, as the number of women is

enormous. No salons, no society, no conversation; people don't

receive at home; the young girls have to look for the husband where

they can. It is no disgrace not to find him--several have never

done so. They continue to go about unmarried--from the force of

habit, from the love of movement, without hopes, without regret--no

imagination, no sensibility, no desire for the convent. We have

made several journeys--few of less than three hundred miles.

Enormous trains, enormous waggons, with beds and lavatories, and

negroes who brush you with a big broom, as if they were grooming a

horse. A bounding movement, a roaring noise, a crowd of people who

look horribly tired, a boy who passes up and down throwing pamphlets

and sweetmeats into your lap--that is an American journey. There

are windows in the waggons--enormous, like everything else; but

there is nothing to see. The country is a void--no features, no

objects, no details, nothing to show you that you are in one place

more than another. Aussi, you are not in one place, you are

everywhere, anywhere; the train goes a hundred miles an hour. The

cities are all the same; little houses ten feet high, or else big

ones two hundred; tramways, telegraph-poles, enormous signs, holes

in the pavement, oceans of mud, commis-voyageurs, young ladies

looking for the husband. On the other hand, no beggars and no

cocottes--none, at least, that you see. A colossal mediocrity,

except (my brother-in-law tells me) in the machinery, which is

magnificent. Naturally, no architecture (they make houses of wood

and of iron), no art, no literature, no theatre. I have opened some

of the books; mais ils ne se laissent pas lire. No form, no matter,

no style, no general ideas! they seem to be written for children and

young ladies. The most successful (those that they praise most) are

the facetious; they sell in thousands of editions. I have looked

into some of the most vantes; but you need to be forewarned, to know

that they are amusing; des plaisanteries de croquemort. They have a

novelist with pretensions to literature, who writes about the chase

for the husband and the adventures of the rich Americans in our

corrupt old Europe, where their primaeval candour puts the Europeans

to shame. C'est proprement ecrit; but it's terribly pale. What

isn't pale is the newspapers--enormous, like everything else (fifty

columns of advertisements), and full of the commerages of a

continent. And such a tone, grand Dieu! The amenities, the

personalities, the recriminations, are like so many coups de

revolver. Headings six inches tall; correspondences from places one

never heard of; telegrams from Europe about Sarah Bernhardt; little

paragraphs about nothing at all; the menu of the neighbour's dinner;

articles on the European situation a pouffer de rire; all the

tripotage of local politics. The reportage is incredible; I am

chased up and down by the interviewers. The matrimonial

infelicities of M. and Madame X. (they give the name), tout au long,

with every detail--not in six lines, discreetly veiled, with an art

of insinuation, as with us; but with all the facts (or the

fictions), the letters, the dates, the places, the hours. I open a

paper at hazard, and I find au beau milieu, a propos of nothing, the

announcement--"Miss Susan Green has the longest nose in Western New

York." Miss Susan Green (je me renseigne) is a celebrated

authoress; and the Americans have the reputation of spoiling their

women. They spoil them a coups de poing. We have seen few

interiors (no one speaks French); but if the newspapers give an idea

of the domestic moeurs, the moeurs must be curious. The passport is

abolished, but they have printed my signalement in these sheets,--

perhaps for the young ladies who look for the husband. We went one

night to the theatre; the piece was French (they are the only ones),

but the acting was American--too American; we came out in the

middle. The want of taste is incredible. An Englishman whom I met

tells me that even the language corrupts itself from day to day; an

Englishman ceases to understand. It encourages me to find that I am

not the only one. There are things every day that one can't

describe. Such is Washington, where we arrived this morning, coming

from Philadelphia. My brother-in-law wishes to see the Bureau of

Patents, and on our arrival he went to look at his machines, while I

walked about the streets and visited the Capitol! The human machine

is what interests me most. I don't even care for the political--for

that's what they call their Government here--"the machine." It

operates very roughly, and some day, evidently, it will explode. It

is true that you would never suspect that they have a government;

this is the principal seat, but, save for three or four big

buildings, most of them affreux, it looks like a settlement of

negroes. No movement, no officials, no authority, no embodiment of

the state. Enormous streets, comme toujours, lined with little red

houses where nothing ever passes but the tramway. The Capitol--a

vast structure, false classic, white marble, iron and stucco, which

has assez grand air--must be seen to be appreciated. The goddess of

liberty on the top, dressed in a bear's skin; their liberty over

here is the liberty of bears. You go into the Capitol as you would

into a railway station; you walk about as you would in the Palais

Royal. No functionaries, no door-keepers, no officers, no uniforms,

no badges, no restrictions, no authority--nothing but a crowd of

shabby people circulating in a labyrinth of spittoons. We are too

much governed, perhaps, in France; but at least we have a certain

incarnation of the national conscience, of the national dignity.

The dignity is absent here, and I am told that the conscience is an

abyss. "L'etat c'est moi" even--I like that better than the

spittoons. These implements are architectural, monumental; they are

the only monuments. En somme, the country is interesting, now that

we too have the Republic; it is the biggest illustration, the

biggest warning. It is the last word of democracy, and that word

is--flatness. It is very big, very rich, and perfectly ugly. A

Frenchman couldn't live here; for life with us, after all, at the

worst is a sort of appreciation. Here, there is nothing to

appreciate. As for the people, they are the English MINUS the

conventions. You can fancy what remains. The women, pourtant, are

sometimes--rather well turned. There was one at Philadelphia--I

made her acquaintance by accident--whom it is probable I shall see

again. She is not looking for the husband; she has already got one.

It was at the hotel; I think the husband doesn't matter. A

Frenchman, as I have said, may mistake, and he needs to be sure he

is right. Aussi, I always make sure!

VII. FROM MARCELLUS COCKEREL, IN WASHINGTON, TO MRS. COOLER, NEE

COCKEREL, AT OAKLAND, CALIFORNIA.

October 25.

I ought to have written to you long before this, for I have had your

last excellent letter for four months in my hands. The first half

of that time I was still in Europe; the last I have spent on my

native soil. I think, therefore, my silence is owing to the fact

that over there I was too miserable to write, and that here I have

been too happy. I got back the 1st of September--you will have seen

it in the papers. Delightful country, where one sees everything in

the papers--the big, familiar, vulgar, good-natured, delightful

papers, none of which has any reputation to keep up for anything but

getting the news! I really think that has had as much to do as

anything else with my satisfaction at getting home--the difference

in what they call the "tone of the press." In Europe it's too

dreary--the sapience, the solemnity, the false respectability, the

verbosity, the long disquisitions on superannuated subjects. Here

the newspapers are like the railroad trains, which carry everything

that comes to the station, and have only the religion of

punctuality. As a woman, however, you probably detest them; you

think they are (the great word) vulgar. I admitted it just now, and

I am very happy to have an early opportunity to announce to you that

that idea has quite ceased to have any terrors for me. There are

some conceptions to which the female mind can never rise. Vulgarity

is a stupid, superficial, question-begging accusation, which has

become today the easiest refuge of mediocrity. Better than anything

else, it saves people the trouble of thinking, and anything which

does that, succeeds. You must know that in these last three years

in Europe I have become terribly vulgar myself; that's one service

my travels have rendered me. By three years in Europe I mean three

years in foreign parts altogether, for I spent several months of

that time in Japan, India, and the rest of the East. Do you

remember when you bade me good-bye in San Francisco, the night

before I embarked for Yokohama? You foretold that I should take

such a fancy to foreign life that America would never see me more,

and that if YOU should wish to see me (an event you were good enough

to regard as possible), you would have to make a rendezvous in Paris

or in Rome. I think we made one (which you never kept), but I shall

never make another for those cities. It was in Paris, however, that

I got your letter; I remember the moment as well as if it were (to

my honour) much more recent. You must know that, among many places

I dislike, Paris carries the palm. I am bored to death there; it's

the home of every humbug. The life is full of that false comfort

which is worse than discomfort, and the small, fat, irritable

people, give me the shivers. I had been making these reflections

even more devoutly than usual one very tiresome evening toward the

beginning of last summer, when, as I re-entered my hotel at ten

o'clock, the little reptile of a portress handed me your gracious

lines. I was in a villainous humour. I had been having an over-

dressed dinner in a stuffy restaurant, and had gone from there to a

suffocating theatre, where, by way of amusement, I saw a play in

which blood and lies were the least of the horrors. The theatres

over there are insupportable; the atmosphere is pestilential.

People sit with their elbows in your sides; they squeeze past you

every half-hour. It was one of my bad moments; I have a great many

in Europe. The conventional perfunctory play, all in falsetto,

which I seemed to have seen a thousand times; the horrible faces of

the people; the pushing, bullying ouvreuse, with her false

politeness, and her real rapacity, drove me out of the place at the

end of an hour; and, as it was too early to go home, I sat down

before a cafe on the Boulevard, where they served me a glass of

sour, watery beer. There on the Boulevard, in the summer night,

life itself was even uglier than the play, and it wouldn't do for me

to tell you what I saw. Besides, I was sick of the Boulevard, with

its eternal grimace, and the deadly sameness of the article de

Paris, which pretends to be so various--the shop-windows a

wilderness of rubbish, and the passers-by a procession of manikins.

Suddenly it came over me that I was supposed to be amusing myself--

my face was a yard long--and that you probably at that moment were

saying to your husband: "He stays away so long! What a good time

he must be having!" The idea was the first thing that had made me

smile for a month; I got up and walked home, reflecting, as I went,

that I was "seeing Europe," and that, after all, one MUST see

Europe. It was because I had been convinced of this that I came

out, and it is because the operation has been brought to a close

that I have been so happy for the last eight weeks. I was very

conscientious about it, and, though your letter that night made me

abominably homesick, I held out to the end, knowing it to be once

for all. I sha'n't trouble Europe again; I shall see America for

the rest of my days. My long delay has had the advantage that now,

at least, I can give you my impressions--I don't mean of Europe;

impressions of Europe are easy to get--but of this country, as it

strikes the re-instated exile. Very likely you'll think them queer;

but keep my letter, and twenty years hence they will be quite

commonplace. They won't even be vulgar. It was very deliberate, my

going round the world. I knew that one ought to see for one's self,

and that I should have eternity, so to speak, to rest. I travelled

energetically; I went everywhere and saw everything; took as many

letters as possible, and made as many acquaintances. In short, I

held my nose to the grindstone. The upshot of it all is that I have

got rid of a superstition. We have so many, that one the less--

perhaps the biggest of all--makes a real difference in one's

comfort. The superstition in question--of course you have it--is

that there is no salvation but through Europe. Our salvation is

here, if we have eyes to see it, and the salvation of Europe into

the bargain; that is, if Europe is to be saved, which I rather

doubt. Of course you'll call me a bird of freedom, a braggart, a

waver of the stars and stripes; but I'm in the delightful position

of not minding in the least what any one calls me. I haven't a

mission; I don't want to preach; I have simply arrived at a state of

mind; I have got Europe off my back. You have no idea how it

simplifies things, and how jolly it makes me feel. Now I can live;

now I can talk. If we wretched Americans could only say once for

all, "Oh, Europe be hanged!" we should attend much better to our

proper business. We have simply to live our life, and the rest will

look after itself. You will probably inquire what it is that I like

better over here, and I will answer that it's simply--life.

Disagreeables for disagreeables, I prefer our own. The way I have

been bored and bullied in foreign parts, and the way I have had to

say I found it pleasant! For a good while this appeared to be a

sort of congenital obligation, but one fine day it occurred to me

that there was no obligation at all, and that it would ease me

immensely to admit to myself that (for me, at least) all those

things had no importance. I mean the things they rub into you in

Europe; the tiresome international topics, the petty politics, the

stupid social customs, the baby-house scenery. The vastness and

freshness of this American world, the great scale and great pace of

our development, the good sense and good nature of the people,

console me for there being no cathedrals and no Titians. I hear

nothing about Prince Bismarck and Gambetta, about the Emperor

William and the Czar of Russia, about Lord Beaconsfield and the

Prince of Wales. I used to get so tired of their Mumbo-Jumbo of a

Bismarck, of his secrets and surprises, his mysterious intentions

and oracular words. They revile us for our party politics; but what

are all the European jealousies and rivalries, their armaments and

their wars, their rapacities and their mutual lies, but the

intensity of the spirit of party? what question, what interest, what

idea, what need of mankind, is involved in any of these things?

Their big, pompous armies, drawn up in great silly rows, their gold

lace, their salaams, their hierarchies, seem a pastime for children;

there's a sense of humour and of reality over here that laughs at

all that. Yes, we are nearer the reality--we are nearer what they

will all have to come to. The questions of the future are social

questions, which the Bismarcks and Beaconsfields are very much

afraid to see settled; and the sight of a row of supercilious

potentates holding their peoples like their personal property, and

bristling all over, to make a mutual impression, with feathers and

sabres, strikes us as a mixture of the grotesque and the abominable.

What do we care for the mutual impressions of potentates who amuse

themselves with sitting on people? Those things are their own

affair, and they ought to be shut up in a dark room to have it out

together. Once one feels, over here, that the great questions of

the future are social questions, that a mighty tide is sweeping the

world to democracy, and that this country is the biggest stage on

which the drama can be enacted, the fashionable European topics seem

petty and parochial. They talk about things that we have settled

ages ago, and the solemnity with which they propound to you their

little domestic embarrassments makes a heavy draft on one's good

nature. In England they were talking about the Hares and Rabbits

Bill, about the extension of the County Franchise, about the

Dissenters' Burials, about the Deceased Wife's Sister, about the

abolition of the House of Lords, about heaven knows what ridiculous

little measure for the propping-up of their ridiculous little

country. And they call US provincial! It is hard to sit and look

respectable while people discuss the utility of the House of Lords,

and the beauty of a State Church, and it's only in a dowdy musty

civilisation that you'll find them doing such things. The lightness

and clearness of the social air, that's the great relief in these

parts. The gentility of bishops, the propriety of parsons, even the

impressiveness of a restored cathedral, give less of a charm to life

than that. I used to be furious with the bishops and parsons, with

the humbuggery of the whole affair, which every one was conscious

of, but which people agreed not to expose, because they would be

compromised all round. The convenience of life over here, the quick

and simple arrangements, the absence of the spirit of routine, are a

blessed change from the stupid stiffness with which I struggled for

two long years. There were people with swords and cockades, who

used to order me about; for the simplest operation of life I had to

kootoo to some bloated official. When it was a question of my doing

a little differently from others, the bloated official gasped as if

I had given him a blow on the stomach; he needed to take a week to

think of it. On the other hand, it's impossible to take an American

by surprise; he is ashamed to confess that he has not the wit to do

a thing that another man has had the wit to think of. Besides being

as good as his neighbour, he must therefore be as clever--which is

an affliction only to people who are afraid he may be cleverer. If

this general efficiency and spontaneity of the people--the union of

the sense of freedom with the love of knowledge--isn't the very

essence of a high civilisation, I don't know what a high

civilisation is. I felt this greater ease on my first railroad

journey--felt the blessing of sitting in a train where I could move

about, where I could stretch my legs, and come and go, where I had a

seat and a window to myself, where there were chairs, and tables,

and food, and drink. The villainous little boxes on the European

trains, in which you are stuck down in a corner, with doubled-up

knees, opposite to a row of people--often most offensive types, who

stare at you for ten hours on end--these were part of my two years'

ordeal. The large free way of doing things here is everywhere a

pleasure. In London, at my hotel, they used to come to me on

Saturday to make me order my Sunday's dinner, and when I asked for a

sheet of paper, they put it into the bill. The meagreness, the

stinginess, the perpetual expectation of a sixpence, used to

exasperate me. Of course, I saw a great many people who were

pleasant; but as I am writing to you, and not to one of them, I may

say that they were dreadfully apt to be dull. The imagination among

the people I see here is more flexible; and then they have the

advantage of a larger horizon. It's not bounded on the north by the

British aristocracy, and on the south by the scrutin de liste. (I

mix up the countries a little, but they are not worth the keeping

apart.) The absence of little conventional measurements, of little

cut-and-dried judgments, is an immense refreshment. We are more

analytic, more discriminating, more familiar with realities. As for

manners, there are bad manners everywhere, but an aristocracy is bad

manners organised. (I don't mean that they may not be polite among

themselves, but they are rude to every one else.) The sight of all

these growing millions simply minding their business, is impressive

to me,--more so than all the gilt buttons and padded chests of the

Old World; and there is a certain powerful type of "practical"

American (you'll find him chiefly in the West) who doesn't brag as I

do (I'm not practical), but who quietly feels that he has the Future

in his vitals--a type that strikes me more than any I met in your

favourite countries. Of course you'll come back to the cathedrals

and Titians, but there's a thought that helps one to do without

them--the thought that though there's an immense deal of plainness,

there's little misery, little squalor, little degradation. There is

no regular wife-beating class, and there are none of the stultified

peasants of whom it takes so many to make a European noble. The

people here are more conscious of things; they invent, they act,

they answer for themselves; they are not (I speak of social matters)

tied up by authority and precedent. We shall have all the Titians

by and by, and we shall move over a few cathedrals. You had better

stay here if you want to have the best. Of course, I am a roaring

Yankee; but you'll call me that if I say the least, so I may as well

take my ease, and say the most. Washington's a most entertaining

place; and here at least, at the seat of government, one isn't

overgoverned. In fact, there's no government at all to speak of; it

seems too good to be true. The first day I was here I went to the

Capitol, and it took me ever so long to figure to myself that I had

as good a right there as any one else--that the whole magnificent

pile (it IS magnificent, by the way) was in fact my own. In Europe

one doesn't rise to such conceptions, and my spirit had been broken

in Europe. The doors were gaping wide--I walked all about; there

were no door-keepers, no officers, nor flunkeys--not even a

policeman to be seen. It seemed strange not to see a uniform, if

only as a patch of colour. But this isn't government by livery.

The absence of these things is odd at first; you seem to miss

something, to fancy the machine has stopped. It hasn't, though; it

only works without fire and smoke. At the end of three days this

simple negative impression--the fact is, that there are no soldiers

nor spies, nothing but plain black coats--begins to affect the

imagination, becomes vivid, majestic, symbolic. It ends by being

more impressive than the biggest review I saw in Germany. Of

course, I'm a roaring Yankee; but one has to take a big brush to

copy a big model. The future is here, of course; but it isn't only

that--the present is here as well. You will complain that I don't

give you any personal news; but I am more modest for myself than for

my country. I spent a month in New York, and while I was there I

saw a good deal of a rather interesting girl who came over with me

in the steamer, and whom for a day or two I thought I should like to

marry. But I shouldn't. She has been spoiled by Europe!

VIII. FROM MISS AURORA CHURCH, IN NEW YORK, TO MISS WHITESIDE, IN

PARIS.

January 9.

I told you (after we landed) about my agreement with mamma--that I

was to have my liberty for three months, and if at the end of this

time I shouldn't have made a good use of it, I was to give it back

to her. Well, the time is up today, and I am very much afraid I

haven't made a good use of it. In fact, I haven't made any use of

it at all--I haven't got married, for that is what mamma meant by

our little bargain. She has been trying to marry me in Europe, for

years, without a dot, and as she has never (to the best of my

knowledge) even come near it, she thought at last that, if she were

to leave it to me, I might do better. I couldn't certainly do

worse. Well, my dear, I have done very badly--that is, I haven't

done at all. I haven't even tried. I had an idea that this affair

came of itself over here; but it hasn't come to me. I won't say I

am disappointed, for I haven't, on the whole, seen any one I should

like to marry. When you marry people over here, they expect you to

love them, and I haven't seen any one I should like to love. I

don't know what the reason is, but they are none of them what I have

thought of. It may be that I have thought of the impossible; and

yet I have seen people in Europe whom I should have liked to marry.

It is true, they were almost always married to some one else. What

I AM disappointed in is simply having to give back my liberty. I

don't wish particularly to be married; and I do wish to do as I

like--as I have been doing for the last month. All the same, I am

sorry for poor mamma, as nothing has happened that she wished to

happen. To begin with, we are not appreciated, not even by the

Rucks, who have disappeared, in the strange way in which people over

here seem to vanish from the world. We have made no sensation; my

new dresses count for nothing (they all have better ones); our

philological and historical studies don't show. We have been told

we might do better in Boston; but, on the other hand, mamma hears

that in Boston the people only marry their cousins. Then mamma is

out of sorts because the country is exceedingly dear and we have

spent all our money. Moreover, I have neither eloped, nor been

insulted, nor been talked about, nor--so far as I know--deteriorated

in manners or character; so that mamma is wrong in all her

previsions. I think she would have rather liked me to be insulted.

But I have been insulted as little as I have been adored. They

don't adore you over here; they only make you think they are going

to. Do you remember the two gentlemen who were on the ship, and

who, after we arrived here, came to see me a tour de role? At first

I never dreamed they were making love to me, though mamma was sure

it must be that; then, as it went on a good while, I thought perhaps

it WAS that; and I ended by seeing that it wasn't anything! It was

simply conversation; they are very fond of conversation over here.

Mr. Leverett and Mr. Cockerel disappeared one fine day, without the

smallest pretension to having broken my heart, I am sure, though it

only depended on me to think they had! All the gentlemen are like

that; you can't tell what they mean; everything is very confused;

society appears to consist of a sort of innocent jilting. I think,

on the whole, I AM a little disappointed--I don't mean about one's

not marrying; I mean about the life generally. It seems so

different at first, that you expect it will be very exciting; and

then you find that, after all, when you have walked out for a week

or two by yourself, and driven out with a gentleman in a buggy,

that's about all there is of it, as they say here. Mamma is very

angry at not finding more to dislike; she admitted yesterday that,

once one has got a little settled, the country has not even the

merit of being hateful. This has evidently something to do with her

suddenly proposing three days ago that we should go to the West.

Imagine my surprise at such an idea coming from mamma! The people

in the pension--who, as usual, wish immensely to get rid of her--

have talked to her about the West, and she has taken it up with a

kind of desperation. You see, we must do something; we can't simply

remain here. We are rapidly being ruined, and we are not--so to

speak--getting married. Perhaps it will be easier in the West; at

any rate, it will be cheaper, and the country will have the

advantage of being more hateful. It is a question between that and

returning to Europe, and for the moment mamma is balancing. I say

nothing: I am really indifferent; perhaps I shall marry a pioneer.

I am just thinking how I shall give back my liberty. It really

won't be possible; I haven't got it any more; I have given it away

to others. Mamma may recover it, if she can, from THEM! She comes

in at this moment to say that we must push farther--she has decided

for the West. Wonderful mamma! It appears that my real chance is

for a pioneer--they have sometimes millions. But, fancy us in the

West!

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