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The Reader's Passport

IF THE READERS OF THIS VOLUME will be so kind as to take their credentials for the different places which are the subject of its author's reminiscences from the author himself, perhaps they may visit them in fancy the more agreeably, and with a better understanding of what they are to expect.

Many books have been written upon Italy, affording many means of studying the history of that interesting country and the innumerable associations entwined about it. I make but little reference to that stock of information, not at all regarding it as a necessary consequence of my having had recourse to the storehouse for my own benefit that I should reproduce its easily accessible contents before the eyes of my readers.

Neither will there be found, in these pages, any grave examination into the government or misgovernment of any portion of the country. No visitor of that beautiful land can fail to have a strong conviction on the subject, but as I chose when residing there, a foreigner, to abstain from the discussion of any such questions with any order of Italians, so I would rather not enter on the enquiry now. During my twelve months' occupation of a house at Genoa, I never found that authorities constitutionally jealous were distrustful of me, and I should be sorry to give them occasion to regret their free courtesy, either to myself or any of my countrymen.

There is, probably, not a famous picture or statue in all Italy but could be easily buried under a mountain of printed paper devoted to dissertations on it. I do not, therefore, though an earnest admirer of painting and sculpture, expatiate at any length on famous pictures and statues.

This book is a series of faint reflections – mere shadows in the water – of places to which the imaginations of most people are

attracted in a greater or less degree, on which mine had dwelt for years, and which have some interest for all. The greater part of the descriptions were written on the spot and sent home, from time to time, in private letters. I do not mention the circumstance as an excuse for any defects they may present, for it would be none, but as a guarantee to the reader that they were at least penned in the fullness of the subject, and with the liveliest impressions of novelty and freshness.

If they have ever a fanciful and idle air, perhaps the reader will suppose them written in the shade of a sunny day, in the midst of the objects of which they treat, and will like them none the worse for having such influences of the country upon them.

I hope I am not likely to be misunderstood by professors of the Roman Catholic faith on account of anything contained in these pages. I have done my best, in one of my former productions,* to do justice to them – and I trust, in this, they will do justice to me. When I mention any exhibition that impressed me as absurd or disagreeable, I do not seek to connect it or recognize it as necessarily connected with any essentials of their creed. When I treat of the ceremonies of the Holy Week, I merely treat of their effect, and do not challenge the good and learned Dr Wiseman's* interpretation of their meaning. When I hint a dislike of nunneries for young girls who abjure the world before they have ever proved or known it, or doubt the ex-officio sanctity of all priests and friars,* I do no more than many conscientious Catholics both abroad and at home.

I have likened these pictures to shadows in the water, and would fain hope that I have, nowhere, stirred the water so roughly as to mar the shadows. I could never desire to be on better terms with all my friends than now, when distant mountains rise once more in my path. For I need not hesitate to avow that, bent on correcting a brief mistake I made, not long ago, in disturbing the old relations between myself and my readers, and departing for a moment from my old pursuits, I am about to resume them, joyfully, in Switzerland – where, during another year of absence, I can at

THE READER'S PASSPORT

once work out the themes I have now in my mind without interruption – and, while I keep my English audience within speaking distance, extend my knowledge of a noble country inexpressibly attractive to me.*

This book is made as accessible as possible, because it would be a great pleasure to me if I could hope, through its means, to compare impressions with some among the multitudes who will hereafter visit the scenes described, with interest and delight.

And I have only now, in passport wise, to sketch my reader's portrait, which I hope may be thus supposititiously traced for either sex:

Complexion	Fair
Eyes	Very cheerful
Nose	Not supercilious
Mouth	Smiling
Visage	Beaming
General Expression	Extremely agreeable

Going through France

ON A FINE SUNDAY MORNING in the midsummer time and weather of eighteen hundred and forty-four it was, my good friend, when... don't be alarmed: not when two travellers might have been observed slowly making their way over that picturesque and broken ground by which the first chapter of a middle-aged* novel is usually attained, but when an English travelling carriage of considerable proportions, fresh from the shady halls of the Pantechmicon near Belgrave Square,* London, was observed (by a very small French soldier – for I saw him look at it) to issue from the gate of the Hotel Meurice in the Rue Rivoli at Paris.

I am no more bound to explain why the English family travelling by this carriage, inside and out, should be starting for Italy on a Sunday morning, of all good days in the week, than I am to assign a reason for all the little men in France being soldiers and all the big men postilions – which is the invariable rule. But they had some sort of reason for what they did, I have no doubt, and their reason for being there at all was, as you know, that they were going to live in fair Genoa for a year – and that the head of the family purposed, in that space of time, to stroll about, wherever his restless humour carried him.

And it would have been small comfort to me to have explained to the population of Paris generally that I was that head and chief, and not the radiant embodiment of good humour who sat beside me in the person of a French courier – best of servants and most beaming of men! Truth to say, he looked a great deal more patriarchal than I, who, in the shadow of his portly presence, dwindled down to no account at all.

There was, of course, very little in the aspect of Paris – as we rattled near the dismal Morgue* and over the Pont Neuf – to reproach us for our Sunday travelling. The wine shops (every

second house) were driving a roaring trade; awnings were spreading and chairs and tables arranging outside the cafés, preparatory to the eating of ices and drinking of cool liquids later in the day; shoeblacks were busy on the bridges; shops were open; carts and wagons clattered to and fro; the narrow, uphill, funnel-like streets across the river were so many dense perspectives of crowd and bustle, particoloured nightcaps, tobacco pipes, blouses, large boots and shaggy heads of hair – nothing at that hour denoted a day of rest, unless it were the appearance, here and there, of a family pleasure party, crammed into a bulky old lumbering cab, or of some contemplative holidaymaker in the freest and easiest dishabille, leaning out of a low garret window, watching the drying of his newly polished shoes on the little parapet outside (if a gentleman) or the airing of her stockings in the sun (if a lady) with calm anticipation.

Once clear of the never-to-be-forgotten-or-forgiven pavement which surrounds Paris, the first three days of travelling towards Marseilles are quiet and monotonous enough. To Sens. To Avallon. To Chalon.* A sketch of one day's proceedings is a sketch of all three – and here it is.

We have four horses and one postilion, who has a very long whip and drives his team something like the Courier of St Petersburg in the circle at Astley's or Franconi's* – only he sits his own horse instead of standing on him. The immense jackboots worn by these postilions are sometimes a century or two old, and are so ludicrously disproportionate to the wearer's foot that the spur, which is put where his own heel comes, is generally halfway up the leg of the boots. The man often comes out of the stable yard with his whip in his hand and his shoes on, and brings out, in both hands, one boot at a time, which he plants on the ground by the side of his horse with great gravity, until everything is ready. When it is – and oh, Heaven, the noise they make about it! – he gets into the boots, shoes and all, or is hoisted into them by a couple of friends; adjusts the rope harness, embossed by the labours of innumerable pigeons in the stables; makes all the horses kick and

plunge; cracks his whip like a madman; shouts “*En route – hi!*” and away we go. He is sure to have a contest with his horse before we have gone very far – and then he calls him a “thief”, and a “brigand”, and a “pig”, and whatnot, and beats him about the head as if he were made of wood.

There is little more than one variety in the appearance of the country, for the first two days: from a dreary plain to an interminable avenue, and from an interminable avenue to a dreary plain again. Plenty of vines there are, in the open fields, but of a short, low kind, and not trained in festoons, but about straight sticks. Beggars innumerable there are, everywhere, but an extraordinarily scanty population, and fewer children than I ever encountered. I don't believe we saw a hundred children between Paris and Chalon. Queer old towns, drawbridged and walled, with odd little towers at the angles, like grotesque faces, as if the wall had put a mask on and were staring down into the moat; other strange little towers, in gardens and fields, and down lanes, and in farmyards, all alone, and always round, with a peaked roof, and never used for any purpose at all; ruinous buildings of all sorts – sometimes an *hôtel de ville*, sometimes a guardhouse, sometimes a dwelling house, sometimes a chateau with a rank garden, prolific in dandelion and watched over by extinguisher-topped turrets and blink-eyed little casements – are the standard objects, repeated over and over again. Sometimes we pass a village inn with a crumbling wall belonging to it, and a perfect town of outhouses, and painted over the gateway “Stabling for Sixty Horses” – as indeed there might be stabling for sixty score, were there any horses to be stabled there, or anybody resting there, or anything stirring about the place but a dangling bush, indicative of the wine inside, which flutters idly in the wind, in lazy keeping with everything else, and certainly is never in a green old age, though always so old as to be dropping to pieces. And all day long, strange little narrow wagons, in strings of six or eight, bringing cheese from Switzerland, and frequently in charge, the whole line, of one man or even boy

– and he very often asleep in the foremost cart – come jingling past, the horses drowsily ringing the bells upon their harness, and looking as if they thought (no doubt they do) their great blue woolly furniture of immense weight and thickness with a pair of grotesque horns growing out of the collar, very much too warm for the midsummer weather.

Then there is the diligence, twice or thrice a day, with the dusty outsides in blue frocks, like butchers, and the insides in white nightcaps, and its cabriolet head on the roof, nodding and shaking like an idiot's head, and its Young France passengers* staring out of window, with beards down to their waists and blue spectacles awfully shading their warlike eyes, and very big sticks clenched in their national grasp. Also the malle-poste,* with only a couple of passengers, tearing along at a real good daredevil pace, and out of sight in no time. Steady old curés come jolting past, now and then, in such ramshackle, rusty, musty, clattering coaches as no Englishman would believe in, and bony women dawdle about in solitary places, holding cows by ropes while they feed, or digging and hoeing, or doing field work of a more laborious kind, or representing real shepherdesses with their flocks – to obtain an adequate idea of which pursuit and its followers, in any country, it is only necessary to take any pastoral poem or picture, and imagine to yourself whatever is most exquisitely and widely unlike the descriptions therein contained.

You have been travelling along, stupidly enough, as you generally do in the last stage of the day, and the ninety-six bells upon the horses – twenty-four apiece – have been ringing sleepily in your ears for half an hour or so, and it has become a very jog-trot, monotonous, tiresome sort of business, and you have been thinking deeply about the dinner you will have at the next stage, when, down at the end of the long avenue of trees through which you are travelling, the first indication of a town appears, in the shape of some straggling cottages, and the carriage begins to rattle and roll over a horribly uneven pavement. As if the equipage were a great firework and the mere sight of a smoking cottage

chimney had lighted it, instantly it begins to crack and splutter as if the very Devil were in it. Crack, crack, crack, crack. Crack-crack-crack. Crick-crack. Crick-crack. Helo! Hola! *Vite! Voleur! Brigand!** Hi hi hi! *En r-r-r-r-r-route!* Whip, wheels, driver, stones, beggars, children... crack, crack, crack... Helo! Hola! *Charité, pour l'amour de Dieu!*... * crick-crack-crick-crack... crick, crick, crick... bump, jolt, crack, bump, crick-crack... round the corner, up the narrow street, down the paved hill on the other side... in the gutter... bump, bump... jolt, jog, crick, crick, crick... crack, crack, crack... into the shop windows on the left-hand side of the street, preliminary to a sweeping turn into the wooden archway on the right... rumble, rumble, rumble... clatter, clatter, clatter... crick, crick, crick – and here we are in the yard of the Hôtel de l'Écu d'Or... used up, gone out, smoking, spent, exhausted... but sometimes making a false start unexpectedly, with nothing coming of it... like a firework to the last!

The landlady of the Hôtel de l'Écu d'Or is here, and the landlord of the Hôtel de l'Écu d'Or is here, and the *femme de chambre** of the Hôtel de l'Écu d'Or is here, and a gentleman in a glazed cap, with a red beard like a bosom friend, who is staying at the Hôtel de l'Écu d'Or is here, and Monsieur le Curé is walking up and down in a corner of the yard by himself, with a shovel hat upon his head and a black gown on his back, and a book in one hand and an umbrella in the other – and everybody, except Monsieur le Curé, is open-mouthed and open-eyed for the opening of the carriage door. The landlord of the Hôtel de l'Écu d'Or dotes to that extent upon the courier that he can hardly wait for his coming down from the box, but embraces his very legs and boot-heels as he descends. “My courier! My brave courier! My friend! My brother!” The landlady loves him, the *femme de chambre* blesses him, the *garçon** worships him. The courier asks if his letter has been received. It has, it has. Are the rooms prepared? They are, they are. The best rooms for my noble courier. The rooms of state for my gallant courier – the whole house is at the service of

my best of friends! He keeps his hand upon the carriage door, and asks some other question to enhance the expectation. He carries a green leathern purse outside his coat, suspended by a belt. The idlers look at it – one touches it. It is full of five-franc pieces. Murmurs of admiration are heard among the boys. The landlord falls upon the courier's neck, and folds him to his breast. He is so much fatter than he was, he says! He looks so rosy and so well!

The door is opened. Breathless expectation. The lady of the family gets out. Ah, sweet lady! Beautiful lady! The sister of the lady of the family gets out. Great Heaven, Mam'selle is charming! First little boy gets out. Ah, what a beautiful little boy! First little girl gets out. Oh, but this is an enchanting child! Second little girl gets out. The landlady, yielding to the finest impulse of our common nature, catches her up in her arms. Second little boy gets out. Oh, the sweet boy! Oh, the tender little family! The baby is handed out. Angelic baby! The baby has topped everything. All the rapture is expended on the baby! Then the two nurses tumble out – and the enthusiasm swelling into madness, the whole family are swept upstairs as on a cloud, while the idlers press about the carriage and look into it, and walk round it, and touch it. For it is something to touch a carriage that has held so many people. It is a legacy to leave one's children.

The rooms are on the first floor, except the nursery for the night, which is a great rambling chamber, with four or five beds in it – through a dark passage, up two steps, down four, past a pump, across a balcony, and next door to the stable. The other sleeping apartments are large and lofty – each with two small bedsteads, tastefully hung, like the windows, with red and white drapery. The sitting room is famous. Dinner is already laid in it for three, and the napkins are folded in cocked-hat fashion. The floors are of red tile. There are no carpets, and not much furniture to speak of, but there is abundance of looking glass, and there are large vases under glass shades, filled with artificial flowers – and there are plenty of clocks. The whole party are in motion. The brave

courier, in particular, is everywhere, looking after the beds, having wine poured down his throat by his dear brother the landlord and picking up green cucumbers – always cucumbers (Heaven knows where he gets them) – with which he walks about, one in each hand, like truncheons.

Dinner is announced. There is very thin soup; there are very large loaves – one apiece; a fish; four dishes afterwards; some poultry afterwards; a dessert afterwards; and no lack of wine. There is not much in the dishes, but they are very good, and always ready instantly. When it is nearly dark, the brave courier, having eaten the two cucumbers, sliced up in the contents of a pretty large decanter of oil and another of vinegar, emerges from his retreat below, and proposes a visit to the cathedral, whose massive tower frowns down upon the courtyard of the inn. Off we go, and very solemn and grand it is, in the dim light – so dim, at last, that the polite, old, lantern-jawed sacristan has a feeble little bit of candle in his hand to grope among the tombs with, and looks among the grim columns very like a lost ghost who is searching for his own.

Underneath the balcony, when we return, the inferior servants of the inn are supping in the open air at a great table – the dish a stew of meat and vegetables, smoking hot, and served in the iron cauldron it was boiled in. They have a pitcher of thin wine, and are very merry – merrier than the gentleman with the red beard, who is playing billiards in the light room* on the left of the yard, where shadows with cues in their hands and cigars in their mouths cross and recross the window constantly. Still the thin curé walks up and down alone, with his book and umbrella. And there he walks, and there the billiard balls rattle, long after we are fast asleep.

We are astir at six next morning. It is a delightful day, shaming yesterday's mud upon the carriage, if anything could shame a carriage in a land where carriages are never cleaned. Everybody is brisk – and as we finish breakfast, the horses come jingling into the yard from the post-house. Everything taken out of the carriage is put back again. The brave courier announces that all is

ready, after walking into every room and looking all round it to be certain that nothing is left behind. Everybody gets in. Everybody connected with the Hôtel de l'Écu d'Or is again enchanted. The brave courier runs into the house for a parcel containing cold fowl, sliced ham, bread and biscuits for lunch, hands it into the coach and runs back again.

What has he got in his hand now? More cucumbers? No. A long strip of paper. It's the bill.

The brave courier has two belts on, this morning: one supporting the purse, another a mighty good sort of leathern bottle, filled to the throat with the best light Bordeaux wine in the house. He never pays the bill till this bottle is full. Then he disputes it.

He disputes it now, violently. He is still the landlord's brother, but by another father or mother. He is not so nearly related to him as he was last night. The landlord scratches his head. The brave courier points to certain figures in the bill and intimates that, if they remain there, the Hôtel de l'Écu d'Or is thenceforth and for ever an hotel de l'Écu de Cuivre.* The landlord goes into a little counting house. The brave courier follows, forces the bill and a pen into his hand, and talks more rapidly than ever. The landlord takes the pen. The courier smiles. The landlord makes an alteration. The courier cuts a joke. The landlord is affectionate, but not weakly so. He bears it like a man. He shakes hands with his brave brother, but he don't hug him. Still, he loves his brother, for he knows that he will be returning that way, one of these fine days, with another family, and he foresees that his heart will yearn towards him again. The brave courier traverses all round the carriage once, looks at the drag, inspects the wheels, jumps up, gives the word, and away we go!

It is market morning. The market is held in the little square outside, in front of the cathedral. It is crowded with men and women in blue, in red, in green, in white, with canvassed stalls and fluttering merchandise. The country people are grouped about, with their clean baskets before them. Here, the lace sellers;

there, the butter and egg sellers; there, the fruit sellers; there, the shoemakers. The whole place looks as if it were the stage of some great theatre, and the curtain had just run up for a picturesque ballet. And there is the cathedral to boot, scene-like – all grim and swarthy and mouldering and cold, just splashing the pavement in one place with faint purple drops as the morning sun, entering by a little window on the eastern side, struggles through some stained-glass panes on the western.

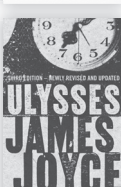
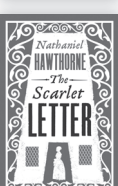
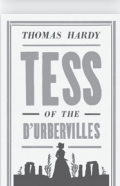
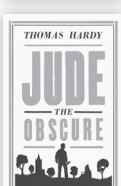
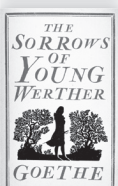
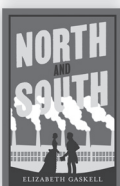
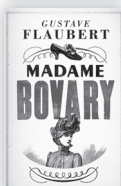
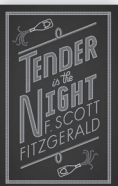
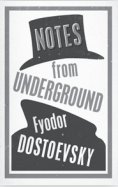
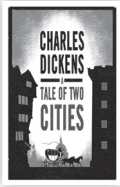
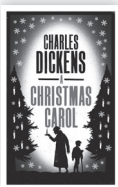
In five minutes we have passed the iron cross with a little ragged kneeling place of turf before it in the outskirts of the town, and are again upon the road.

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