

Sheba Blake Publishing

A SENTIMENTAL
JOURNEY
THROUGH FRANCE AND ITALY

Laurence Sterne



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*A Sentimental Journey through France
and Italy*

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*A Sentimental Journey through France
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A Sentimental Journey through France and Italy



They order, said I, this matter better in France.—You have been in France? said my gentleman, turning quick upon me, with the most civil triumph in the world.—Strange! quoth I, debating the matter with myself, That one and twenty miles sailing, for 'tis absolutely no further from Dover to Calais, should give a man these rights: — I'll look into them: so, giving up the argument,—I went straight to my lodgings, put up half a dozen shirts and a black pair of silk breeches,—“the coat I have on,” said I, looking at the sleeve, “will do;”—took a place in the Dover stage; and the packet sailing at nine the next morning,—by three I had got sat down to my dinner upon a fricaseed chicken, so incontestably in France, that had I died that night of an indigestion, the whole world could not have suspended the effects of the droits d'aubaine;—my shirts, and black pair of silk breeches,—portmanteau and all, must have gone to the King of France;—even the little picture which I have so long worn, and so often have told thee, Eliza, I would carry with me into my grave, would have been torn from my neck!—Ungenerous! to seize upon the wreck of an unwary passenger, whom your subjects had beckoned to their coast!—By heaven! Sire, it is not well done; and much does it grieve me, 'tis the monarch of a people so

civilized and courteous, and so renowned for sentiment and fine feelings, that I have to reason with! -

But I have scarce set a foot in your dominions. -

CALAIS.

When I had fished my dinner, and drank the King of France's health, to satisfy my mind that I bore him no spleen, but, on the contrary, high honour for the humanity of his temper,—I rose up an inch taller for the accommodation.

- No—said I—the Bourbon is by no means a cruel race: they may be misled, like other people; but there is a mildness in their blood. As I acknowledged this, I felt a suffusion of a finer kind upon my cheek—more warm and friendly to man, than what Burgundy (at least of two livres a bottle, which was such as I had been drinking) could have produced.

- Just God! said I, kicking my portmanteau aside, what is there in this world's goods which should sharpen our spirits, and make so many kind-hearted brethren of us fall out so cruelly as we do by the way?

When man is at peace with man, how much lighter than a feather is the heaviest of metals in his hand! he pulls out his purse, and holding it airily and uncompressed, looks round him, as if he sought for an object to share it with.—In doing this, I felt every vessel in my frame dilate,—the arteries beat all cheerily together, and every power which sustained life, performed it with so little friction, that 'twould have confounded the most physical precieuse in France; with all her materialism, she could scarce have called me a machine. -

I'm confident, said I to myself, I should have overset her creed.

The accession of that idea carried nature, at that time, as high as she could go;—I was at peace with the world before, and this finish'd the treaty with myself. -

- Now, was I King of France, cried I—what a moment for an orphan to have begg'd his father's portmanteau of me!

THE MONK. CALAIS.

I had scarce uttered the words, when a poor monk of the order of St. Francis came into the room to beg something for a his convent. No man cares to have his virtues the sport of contingencies—or one man may be generous, as another is puissant;—sed non quoad hanc— or be it as it may,—for there is no regular reasoning upon the ebbs and flows of our humours; they may depend upon the same causes, for aught I know, which influence the tides themselves: 'twould oft be no discredit to us, to suppose it was so: I'm sure at least for myself, that in many a case I should be more highly satisfied, to have it said by the world, "I had had an affair with the moon, in which there was neither sin nor shame," than have it pass altogether as my own act and deed, wherein there was so much of both.

- But, be this as it may,—the moment I cast my eyes upon him, I was predetermined not to give him a single sous; and, accordingly, I put my purse into my pocket—buttoned it—set myself a little more upon my centre, and advanced up gravely to him; there was something, I fear, forbidding in my look: I have his figure this moment before my eyes, and think there was that in it which deserved better.

The monk, as I judged by the break in his tonsure, a few scattered white hairs upon his temples, being all that remained of it, might be about seventy;—but from his eyes, and that sort of fire which was in them, which seemed more temper'd by courtesy than years, could be no more than sixty: —Truth might lie between—He was certainly sixty-five; and the general air of his countenance, notwithstanding something seem'd to have been planting-wrinkles in it before their time, agreed to the account.

It was one of those heads which Guido has often painted,—mild, pale—penetrating, free from all commonplace ideas of fat contented ignorance looking downwards upon the earth;—it look'd forwards; but look'd as if it look'd at something beyond this world.—How one of his order came by it, heaven above, who let it fall upon a monk's shoulders best knows: but it would have suited a Bramin, and had I met it upon the plains of Indostan, I had revered it.

The rest of his outline may be given in a few strokes; one might put it into the hands of any one to design, for 'twas neither elegant nor otherwise, but as character and expression made it so: it was a thin, spare form, something above the common size, if it lost not the distinction by a bend forward in the figure,—but it was the attitude of Intreaty; and, as it now stands presented to my imagination, it gained more than it lost by it.

When he had entered the room three paces, he stood still; and laying his left hand upon his breast (a slender white staff with which he journey'd being in his right)—when I had got close up to him, he introduced himself with the little story of the wants of his convent, and the poverty of his order;—and did it with so simple a grace,—and such an air of deprecation was there in the whole cast of his look and figure,—I was bewitch'd not to have been struck with it.

- A better reason was, I had predetermined not to give him a single sous.

THE MONK. CALAIS.

- 'Tis very true, said I, replying to a cast upwards with his eyes, with which he had concluded his address;—'tis very true,—and heaven be their resource who have no other but the charity of the world, the stock of which, I fear, is no way sufficient for the many GREAT CLAIMS which are hourly made upon it.