CLASSICS TO GO

A SENTIMENTAL JOURNEY

THROUGH FRANCE AND ITALY

LAURENCE STERNE

A Sentimental Journey Through France and Italy

Laurence Sterne

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 précieuse* 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 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 reverenced 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.

As I pronounced the words *great claims*, he gave a slight glance with his eye downwards upon the sleeve of his tunic:—I felt the full force of the appeal—I acknowledge it, said I:—a coarse habit, and that but once in three years with meagre diet,—are no great matters; and the true point of pity is, as they can be earn’d in the world with so little industry, that your order should wish to procure them by pressing upon a fund which is the property of the lame, the blind, the aged and the infirm;—the captive who lies down counting over and over again the days of his afflictions, languishes also for his share of it; and had you been of the *order of mercy*, instead of the order of St. Francis, poor as I am, continued I, pointing at my portmanteau, full cheerfully should it have been open’d to you, for the ransom of the unfortunate.—The monk made me a bow.—But of all others, resumed I, the unfortunate of our own country, surely, have the first rights; and I have left thousands in distress upon our own shore.—The monk gave a cordial wave with his head,—as much as to say, No doubt there is misery enough in every corner of the world, as well as within our convent—But we distinguish, said I, laying my hand upon the sleeve of

his tunic, in return for his appeal—we distinguish, my good father! betwixt those who wish only to eat the bread of their own labour—and those who eat the bread of other people’s, and have no other plan in life, but to get through it in sloth and ignorance, *for the love of God*.

The poor Franciscan made no reply: a hectic of a moment pass’d across his cheek, but could not tarry—Nature seemed to have done with her resentments in him;—he showed none:—but letting his staff fall within his arms, he pressed both his hands with resignation upon his breast, and retired.

THE MONK.

CALAIS.

My heart smote me the moment he shut the door—Psha! said I, with an air of carelessness, three several times—but it would not do: every ungracious syllable I had utter'd crowded back into my imagination: I reflected, I had no right over the poor Franciscan, but to deny him; and that the punishment of that was enough to the disappointed, without the addition of unkind language.—I consider'd his gray hairs—his courteous figure seem'd to re-enter and gently ask me what injury he had done me?—and why I could use him thus?—I would have given twenty livres for an advocate.—I have behaved very ill, said I within myself; but I have only just set out upon my travels; and shall learn better manners as I get along.

THE DESOBLIGEANT.

CALAIS.

WHEN a man is discontented with himself, it has one advantage however, that it puts him into an excellent frame of mind for making a bargain. Now there being no travelling through France and Italy without a chaise,—and nature generally prompting us to the thing we are fittest for, I walk'd out into the coach-yard to buy or hire something of that kind to my purpose: an old *désobligeant* [562] in the furthest corner of the court, hit my fancy at first sight, so I instantly got into it, and finding it in tolerable harmony with my feelings, I ordered the waiter to call Monsieur Dessein, the master of the hotel:—but Monsieur Dessein being gone to vespers, and not caring to face the Franciscan, whom I saw on the opposite side of the court, in conference with a lady just arrived at the inn,—I drew the taffeta curtain betwixt us, and being determined to write my journey, I took out my pen and ink and wrote the preface to it in the *désobligeant*.

PREFACE.
IN THE DESOBLIGEANT.

It must have been observed by many a peripatetic philosopher, That nature has set up by her own unquestionable authority certain boundaries and fences to circumscribe the discontent of man; she has effected her purpose in the quietest and easiest manner by laying him under almost insuperable obligations to work out his ease, and to sustain his sufferings at home. It is there only that she has provided him with the most suitable objects to partake of his happiness, and bear a part of that burden which in all countries and ages has ever been too heavy for one pair of shoulders. 'Tis true, we are endued with an imperfect power of spreading our happiness sometimes beyond *her* limits, but 'tis so ordered, that, from the want of languages, connections, and dependencies, and from the difference in education, customs, and habits, we lie under so many impediments in communicating our sensations out of our own sphere, as often amount to a total impossibility.

It will always follow from hence, that the balance of sentimental commerce is always against the expatriated adventurer: he must buy what he has little occasion for, at their own price;—his conversation will seldom be taken in exchange for theirs without a large discount,—and this, by the by, eternally driving him into the hands of more equitable brokers, for such conversation as he can find, it requires no great spirit of divination to guess at his party—

This brings me to my point; and naturally leads me (if the see-saw of this *désobligeant* will but let me get on) into the efficient as well as final causes of travelling—

Your idle people that leave their native country, and go abroad for some reason or reasons which may be derived from one of these general causes:—

Infirmity of body,
Imbecility of mind, or
Inevitable necessity.

The first two include all those who travel by land or by water, labouring with pride, curiosity, vanity, or spleen, subdivided and combined *ad infinitum*.

The third class includes the whole army of peregrine martyrs; more especially those travellers who set out upon their travels with the benefit of the clergy, either as delinquents travelling under the direction of governors recommended by the magistrate;—or young gentlemen transported by the cruelty of parents and guardians, and travelling under the direction of governors recommended by Oxford, Aberdeen, and Glasgow.

There is a fourth class, but their number is so small that they would not deserve a distinction, were it not necessary in a work of this nature to observe the greatest precision and nicety, to avoid a confusion of character. And these men I speak of, are such as cross the seas and sojourn in a land of strangers, with a view of saving money for various reasons and upon various pretences: but as they might also save themselves and others a great deal of unnecessary trouble by saving their money at home,—and as their reasons for travelling are the least complex of any other species of emigrants, I shall distinguish these gentlemen by the name of

Simple Travellers.

Thus the whole circle of travellers may be reduced to the following *heads*:—

Idle Travellers,

Inquisitive Travellers,

Lying Travellers,

Proud Travellers,

Vain Travellers,

Splenetic Travellers.

Then follow:

The Travellers of Necessity,

The Delinquent and Felonious Traveller,

The Unfortunate and Innocent Traveller,

The Simple Traveller,

And last of all (if you please) The Sentimental Traveller, (meaning thereby myself) who have travell’d, and of which I am now sitting down to give an account,—as much out of *Necessity*, and the *besoin de Voyager*, as any one in the class.

I am well aware, at the same time, as both my travels and observations will be altogether of a different cast from any of my forerunners, that I might have insisted upon a whole nitch entirely to myself;—but I should break in upon the confines of the *Vain* Traveller, in wishing to draw attention towards me, till I have some better grounds for it than the mere *Novelty of my Vehicle*.

It is sufficient for my reader, if he has been a traveller himself, that with study and reflection hereupon he may be able to determine his own place and rank in the catalogue;—it will be one step towards knowing himself; as it is great odds but he retains some tincture and resemblance, of what he imbibed or carried out, to the present hour.

The man who first transplanted the grape of Burgundy to the Cape of Good Hope (observe he was a Dutchman) never dreamt of drinking the same wine at the Cape, that the same grape produced upon the French mountains,—he was too phlegmatic for that—but undoubtedly he expected to drink some sort of vinous liquor; but whether good or bad, or indifferent,—he knew enough of this world to know, that it did not depend upon his choice, but that what is generally called *choice*, was to decide his success: however, he hoped for the best; and in these hopes, by an intemperate confidence in the fortitude of his head, and the depth of his discretion, *Mynheer* might possibly oversee both in his new vineyard; and by discovering his nakedness, become a laughing stock to his people.

Even so it fares with the Poor Traveller, sailing and posting through the politer kingdoms of the globe, in pursuit of knowledge and improvements.

Knowledge and improvements are to be got by sailing and posting for that purpose; but whether useful knowledge and real improvements is all a lottery;—and even where the adventurer is successful, the acquired stock must be used with caution and sobriety, to turn to any profit:—but, as the chances run prodigiously the other way, both as to the acquisition and application, I am of opinion, That a man would act as wisely, if he could prevail upon himself to live contented without foreign knowledge or foreign improvements, especially if he lives in a country that has no absolute want of either;—and indeed, much grief of heart

has it oft and many a time cost me, when I have observed how many a foul step the Inquisitive Traveller has measured to see sights and look into discoveries; all which, as Sancho Panza said to Don Quixote, they might have seen dry-shod at home. It is an age so full of light, that there is scarce a country or corner in Europe whose beams are not crossed and interchanged with others.—Knowledge in most of its branches, and in most affairs, is like music in an Italian street, whereof those may partake who pay nothing.—But there is no nation under heaven—and God is my record (before whose tribunal I must one day come and give an account of this work)—that I do not speak it vauntingly,—but there is no nation under heaven abounding with more variety of learning,—where the sciences may be more fitly woo'd, or more surely won, than here,—where art is encouraged, and will so soon rise high,—where Nature (take her altogether) has so little to answer for,—and, to close all, where there is more wit and variety of character to feed the mind with:—Where then, my dear countrymen, are you going?—

We are only looking at this chaise, said they.—Your most obedient servant, said I, skipping out of it, and pulling off my hat.—We were wondering, said one of them, who, I found was an *Inquisitive Traveller*,—what could occasion its motion.—'Twas the agitation, said I, coolly, of writing a preface.—I never heard, said the other, who was a *Simple Traveller*, of a preface wrote in a *désobligeant*.—It would have been better, said I, in a *vis-a-vis*.

—*As an Englishman does not travel to see Englishmen*, I retired to my room.

CALAIS.

I PERCEIVED that something darken'd the passage more than myself, as I stepp'd along it to my room; it was effectually Mons. Dessein, the master of the hôtel, who had just returned from vespers, and with his hat under his arm, was most complaisantly following me, to put me in mind of my wants. I had wrote myself pretty well out of conceit with the *désobligeant*, and Mons. Dessein speaking of it, with a shrug, as if it would no way suit me, it immediately struck my fancy that it belong'd to some *Innocent Traveller*, who, on his return home, had left it to Mons. Dessein's honour to make the most of. Four months had elapsed since it had finished its career of Europe in the corner of Mons. Dessein's coach-yard; and having sallied out from thence but a vampt-up business at the first, though it had been twice taken to pieces on Mount Sennis, it had not profited much by its adventures,—but by none so little as the standing so many months unpitied in the corner of Mons. Dessein's coach-yard. Much indeed was not to be said for it,—but something might;—and when a few words will rescue misery out of her distress, I hate the man who can be a churl of them.

—Now was I the master of this hôtel, said I, laying the point of my fore-finger on Mons. Dessein's breast, I would inevitably make a point of getting rid of this unfortunate *désobligeant*;—it stands swinging reproaches at you every time you pass by it.

Mon Dieu! said Mons. Dessein,—I have no interest—Except the interest, said I, which men of a certain turn of mind take,