

***OLIVER WENDELL
HOLMES***



***OUR HUNDRED
DAYS IN EUROPE***

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Our Hundred Days in Europe

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INTRODUCTORY.

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A PROSPECTIVE VISIT.

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After an interval of more than fifty years, I propose taking a second look at some parts of Europe. It is a Rip Van Winkle experiment which I am promising myself. The changes wrought by half a century in the countries I visited amount almost to a transformation. I left the England of William the Fourth, of the Duke of Wellington, of Sir Robert Peel; the France of Louis Philippe, of Marshal Soult, of Thiers, of Guizot. I went from Manchester to Liverpool by the new railroad, the only one I saw in Europe. I looked upon England from the box of a stage-coach, upon France from the coupé of a diligence, upon Italy from the cushion of a carrozza. The broken windows of Apsley House were still boarded up when I was in London. The asphalt pavement was not laid in Paris. The Obelisk of Luxor was lying in its great boat in the Seine, as I remember it. I did not see it erected; it must have been an exciting scene to witness, the engineer standing underneath, so as to be crushed by the great stone if it disgraced him by falling in the process. As for the dynasties which have overlaid each other like Dr. Schliemann's Trojan cities, there is no need of moralizing over a history which instead of Finis is constantly ending with What next?

With regard to the changes in the general conditions of society and the advance in human knowledge, think for one moment what fifty years have done! I have often imagined

myself escorting some wise man of the past to our Saturday Club, where we often have distinguished strangers as our guests. Suppose there sat by me, I will not say Sir Isaac Newton, for he has been too long away from us, but that other great man, whom Professor Tyndall names as next to him in intellectual stature, as he passes along the line of master minds of his country, from the days of Newton to our own,--Dr. Thomas Young, who died in 1829. Would he or I be the listener, if we were side by side? However humble I might feel in such a presence, I should be so clad in the grandeur of the new discoveries, inventions, ideas, I had to impart to him that I should seem to myself like the ambassador of an Emperor. I should tell him of the ocean steamers, the railroads that spread themselves like cobwebs over the civilized and half-civilized portions of the earth, the telegraph and the telephone, the photograph and the spectroscope. I should hand him a paper with the morning news from London to read by the electric light, I should startle him with a friction match, I should amaze him with the incredible truths about anesthesia, I should astonish him with the later conclusions of geology, I should dazzle him by the fully developed law of the correlation of forces, I should delight him with the cell-doctrine, I should confound him with the revolutionary apocalypse of Darwinism. All this change in the aspects, position, beliefs, of humanity since the time of Dr. Young's death, the date of my own graduation from college!

I ought to consider myself highly favored to have lived through such a half century. But it seems to me that in walking the streets of London and Paris I shall revert to my

student days, and appear to myself like a relic of a former generation. Those who have been born into the inheritance of the new civilization feel very differently about it from those who have lived their way into it. To the young and those approaching middle age all these innovations in life and thought are as natural, as much a matter of course, as the air they breathe; they form a part of the inner framework of their intelligence, about which their mental life is organized. To men and women of more than threescore and ten they are external accretions, like the shell of a mollusk, the jointed plates of an articulate. This must be remembered in reading anything written by those who knew the century in its teens; it is not likely to be forgotten, for the fact betrays itself in all the writer's thoughts and expressions.

The story of my first visit to Europe is briefly this: my object was to study the medical profession, chiefly in Paris, and I was in Europe about two years and a half, from April, 1833, to October, 1835. I sailed in the packet ship Philadelphia from New York for Portsmouth, where we arrived after a passage of twenty-four days. A week was spent in visiting Southampton, Salisbury, Stonehenge, Wilton, and the Isle of Wight. I then crossed the Channel to Havre, from which I went to Paris. In the spring and summer of 1834 I made my principal visit to England and Scotland. There were other excursions to the Rhine and to Holland, to Switzerland and to Italy, but of these I need say nothing here. I returned in the packet ship Utica, sailing from Havre, and reaching New York after a passage of forty-two days.

A few notes from my recollections will serve to recall the period of my first visit to Europe, and form a natural introduction to the experiences of my second. I take those circumstances which happen to suggest themselves.

After a short excursion to Strasbourg, down the Rhine, and through Holland, a small steamer took us from Rotterdam across the Channel, and we found ourselves in the British capital.

The great sight in London is--London. No man understands himself as an infinitesimal until he has been a drop in that ocean, a grain of sand on that sea-margin, a mote in its sunbeam, or the fog or smoke which stands for it; in plainer phrase, a unit among its millions.

I had two letters to persons in England: one to kind and worthy Mr. Petty Vaughan, who asked me to dinner; one to pleasant Mr. William Clift, conservator of the Hunterian Museum, who asked me to tea.

To Westminster Abbey. What a pity it could not borrow from Paris the towers of Notre Dame! But the glory of its interior made up for this shortcoming. Among the monuments, one to Rear Admiral Charles Holmes, a descendant, perhaps, of another namesake, immortalized by Dryden in the "Annus Mirabilis" as

"the Achates of the general's fight."

He accompanied Wolfe in his expedition which resulted in the capture of Quebec. My relative, I will take it for granted, as I find him in Westminster Abbey. Blood is thicker than water,--and warmer than marble, I said to myself, as I laid my hand on the cold stone image of the once famous Admiral.

To the Tower, to see the lions,--of all sorts. There I found a "poor relation," who made my acquaintance without introduction. A large baboon, or ape,--some creature of that family,--was sitting at the open door of his cage, when I gave him offence by approaching too near and inspecting him too narrowly. He made a spring at me, and if the keeper had not pulled me back would have treated me unhandsomely, like a quadrumanous rough, as he was. He succeeded in stripping my waistcoat of its buttons, as one would strip a pea-pod of its peas.

To Vauxhall Gardens. All Americans went there in those days, as they go to Madame Tussaud's in these times. There were fireworks and an exhibition of polar scenery. "Mr. Collins, the English PAGANINI," treated us to music on his violin. A comic singer gave us a song, of which I remember the line,

"You'll find it all in the agony bill."

This referred to a bill proposed by Sir Andrew Agnew, a noted Scotch Sabbatarian agitator.

To the opera to hear Grisi. The king, William the Fourth, was in his box; also the Princess Victoria, with the Duchess of Kent. The king tapped with his white-gloved hand on the ledge of the box when he was pleased with the singing.--To a morning concert and heard the real Paganini. To one of the lesser theatres and heard a monologue by the elder Mathews, who died a year or two after this time. To another theatre, where I saw Listen in Paul Pry. Is it not a relief that I am abstaining from description of what everybody has heard described?

To Windsor. Machinery to the left of the road. Recognized it instantly, by recollection of the plate in "Rees's Cyclopaedia," as Herschel's great telescope.--Oxford. Saw only its outside. I knew no one there, and no one knew me.--Blenheim,--the Titians best remembered of its objects on exhibition. The great Derby day of the Epsom races. Went to the race with a coach-load of friends and acquaintances. Plenipotentiary, the winner, "rode by P. Connelly." So says Herring's picture of him, now before me. Chestnut, a great "bullock" of a horse, who easily beat the twenty-two that started. Every New England deacon ought to see one Derby day to learn what sort of a world this is he lives in. Man is a sporting as well as a praying animal.

Stratford-on-Avon. Emotions, but no scribbling of name on walls.--Warwick. The castle. A village festival, "The Opening of the Meadows," a true exhibition of the semi-barbarism which had come down from Saxon times.--Yorkshire. "The Hangman's Stone." Story told in my book called the "Autocrat," etc. York Cathedral.--Northumberland. Alnwick Castle. The figures on the walls which so frightened my man John when he ran away from Scotland in his boyhood. Berwick-on-Tweed. A regatta going on; a very pretty show. Scotland. Most to be remembered, the incomparable loveliness of Edinburgh.--Sterling. The view of the Links of Forth from the castle. The whole country full of the romance of history and poetry. Made one acquaintance in Scotland, Dr. Robert Knox, who asked my companion and myself to breakfast. I was treated to five entertainments in Great Britain: the breakfast just mentioned; lunch with Mrs. Macadam,--the good old lady gave me bread, and not a

stone; dinner with Mr. Vaughan; one with Mr. Stanley, the surgeon; tea with Mr. Clift,--for all which attentions I was then and am still grateful, for they were more than I had any claim to expect. Fascinated with Edinburgh. Strolls by Salisbury Crag; climb to the top of Arthur's Seat; delight of looking up at the grand old castle, of looking down on Holyrood Palace, of watching the groups on Calton Hill, wandering in the quaint old streets and sauntering on the sidewalks of the noble avenues, even at that time adding beauty to the new city. The weeks I spent in Edinburgh are among the most memorable of my European experiences. To the Highlands, to the Lakes, in short excursions; to Glasgow, seen to disadvantage under gray skies and with slippery pavements. Through England rapidly to Dover and to Calais, where I found the name of M. Dessein still belonging to the hotel I sought, and where I read Sterne's "Preface Written in a Désobligeante," sitting in the vehicle most like one that I could find in the stable. From Calais back to Paris, where I began working again.

All my travelling experiences, including a visit to Switzerland and Italy in the summer and autumn of 1835, were merely interludes of my student life in Paris. On my return to America, after a few years of hospital and private practice, I became a Professor in Harvard University, teaching Anatomy and Physiology, afterwards Anatomy alone, for the period of thirty-five years, during part of which time I paid some attention to literature, and became somewhat known as the author of several works in prose and verse which have been well received. My prospective visit will not be a professional one, as I resigned my office in

1882, and am no longer known chiefly as a teacher or a practitioner.

BOSTON, *April*, 1886.

OUR HUNDRED DAYS IN EUROPE

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I.

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I begin this record with the columnar, self-reliant capital letter to signify that there is no disguise in its egoisms. If it were a chapter of autobiography, this is what the reader would look for as a matter of course. Let him consider it as being such a chapter, and its egoisms will require no apology.

I have called the record *our* hundred days, because I was accompanied by my daughter, without the aid of whose younger eyes and livelier memory, and especially of her faithful diary, which no fatigue or indisposition was allowed to interrupt, the whole experience would have remained in my memory as a photograph out of focus.

We left Boston on the 29th of April, 1886, and reached New York on the 29th of August, four months of absence in all, of which nearly three weeks were taken up by the two passages; one week was spent in Paris, and the rest of the time in England and Scotland.

No one was so much surprised as myself at my undertaking this visit. Mr. Gladstone, a strong man for his years, is reported as saying that he is too old to travel, at least to cross the ocean, and he is younger than I am,--just four months, to a day, younger. It is true that Sir Henry Holland came to this country, and travelled freely about the world, after he was eighty years old; but his pitcher went to the well once too often, and met the usual doom of fragile articles. When my friends asked me why I did not go to Europe, I reminded them of the fate of Thomas Parr. He was only twice my age, and was getting on finely towards his two hundredth year, when the Earl of Arundel carried him up to London, and, being feasted and made a lion of, he found there a premature and early grave at the age of only one hundred and fifty-two years. He lies in Westminster Abbey, it is true, but he would probably have preferred the upper side of his own hearth-stone to the under side of the slab which covers him.

I should never have thought of such an expedition if it had not been suggested by a member of my family that I should accompany my daughter, who was meditating a trip to Europe. I remembered how many friends had told me I ought to go; among the rest, Mr. Emerson, who had spoken to me repeatedly about it. I had not seen Europe for more than half a century, and I had a certain longing for one more sight of the places I remembered, and others it would be a delight to look upon. There were a few living persons whom I wished to meet. I was assured that I should be kindly received in England. All this was tempting enough, but there was an obstacle in the way which I feared, and, as it proved,

not without good reason. I doubted whether I could possibly breathe in a narrow state-room. In certain localities I have found myself liable to attacks of asthma, and, although I had not had one for years, I felt sure that I could not escape it if I tried to sleep in a state-room.

I did not escape it, and I am glad to tell my story about it, because it excuses some of my involuntary social shortcomings, and enables me to thank collectively all those kind members of the profession who trained all the artillery of the pharmacopoeia upon my troublesome enemy, from bicarbonate of soda and Vichy water to arsenic and dynamite. One costly contrivance, sent me by the Reverend Mr. Haweis, whom I have never duly thanked for it, looked more like an angelic trump for me to blow in a better world than what I believe it is, an inhaling tube intended to prolong my mortal respiration. The best thing in my experience was recommended to me by an old friend in London. It was Himrod's asthma cure, one of the many powders, the smoke of which when burning is inhaled. It is made in Providence, Rhode Island, and I had to go to London to find it. It never failed to give at least temporary relief, but nothing enabled me to sleep in my state-room, though I had it all to myself, the upper berth being removed. After the first night and part of the second, I never lay down at all while at sea. The captain allowed me to have a candle and sit up in the saloon, where I worried through the night as I best might. How could I be in a fit condition to accept the attention of my friends in Liverpool, after sitting up every night for more than a week; and how could I be in a mood for the catechizing of interviewers, without having once lain

down during the whole return passage? I hope the reader will see why I mention these facts. They explain and excuse many things; they have been alluded to, sometimes with exaggeration, in the newspapers, and I could not tell my story fairly without mentioning them. I got along well enough as soon as I landed, and have had no return of the trouble since I have been back in my own home. I will not advertise an assortment of asthma remedies for sale, but I assure my kind friends I have had no use for any one of them since I have walked the Boston pavements, drank, not the Cochituate, but the Belmont spring water, and breathed the lusty air of my native northeasters.

My companion and I required an attendant, and we found one of those useful androgynous personages known as *courier-maids*, who had travelled with friends of ours, and who was ready to start with us at a moment's warning. She was of English birth, lively, short-gaited, serviceable, more especially in the first of her dual capacities. So far as my wants were concerned, I found her zealous and active in providing for my comfort.

It was no sooner announced in the papers that I was going to England than I began to hear of preparations to welcome me. An invitation to a club meeting was cabled across the Atlantic. One of my countrywomen who has a house in London made an engagement for me to meet friends at her residence. A reverend friend, who thought I had certain projects in my head, wrote to me about lecturing: where I should appear, what fees I should obtain, and such business matters. I replied that I was going to England to spend money, not to make it; to hear speeches,

very possibly, but not to make them; to revisit scenes I had known in my younger days; to get a little change of my routine, which I certainly did; and to enjoy a little rest, which I as certainly did not, at least in London. In a word, I wished a short vacation, and had no thought of doing anything more important than rubbing a little rust off and enjoying myself, while at the same time I could make my companion's visit somewhat pleasanter than it would be if she went without me. The visit has answered most of its purposes for both of us, and if we have saved a few recollections which our friends can take any pleasure in reading, this slight record may be considered a work of supererogation.

The Cephalaria was to sail at half past six in the morning, and at that early hour a company of well-wishers was gathered on the wharf at East Boston to bid us good-by. We took with us many tokens of their thoughtful kindness; flowers and fruits from Boston and Cambridge, and a basket of champagne from a Concord friend whose company is as exhilarating as the sparkling wine he sent us. With the other gifts came a small tin box, about as big as a common round wooden match box. I supposed it to hold some pretty gimcrack, sent as a pleasant parting token of remembrance. It proved to be a most valued daily companion, useful at all times, never more so than when the winds were blowing hard and the ship was struggling with the waves. There must have been some magic secret in it, for I am sure that I looked five years younger after closing that little box than when I opened it. Time will explain its mysterious power.

All the usual provisions for comfort made by seagoing experts we had attended to. Impermeable rugs and fleecy shawls, head-gear to defy the rudest northeasters, sea-chairs of ample dimensions, which we took care to place in as sheltered situations as we could find,--all these were a matter of course. Everybody stays on deck as much as possible, and lies wrapped up and spread out at full length on his or her sea-chair, so that the deck looks as if it had a row of mummies on exhibition. Nothing is more comfortable, nothing, I should say, more indispensable, than a hot-water bag,--or rather, *two* hot-water bags; for they will burst sometimes, as I found out, and a passenger who has become intimate with one of these warm bosom friends feels its loss almost as if it were human.

Passengers carry all sorts of luxuries on board, in the firm faith that they shall be able to profit by them all. Friends send them various indigestibles. To many all these well-meant preparations soon become a mockery, almost an insult. It is a clear case of *Sic(k) vos non vobis*. The tougher neighbor is the gainer by these acts of kindness; the generosity of a sea-sick sufferer in giving away the delicacies which seemed so desirable on starting is not ranked very high on the books of the recording angel. With us three things were best: grapes, oranges, and especially oysters, of which we had provided a half barrel in the shell. The "butcher" of the ship opened them fresh for us every day, and they were more acceptable than anything else.

Among our ship's company were a number of family relatives and acquaintances. We formed a natural group at one of the tables, where we met in more or less complete

numbers. I myself never missed; my companion, rarely. Others were sometimes absent, and sometimes came to time when they were in a very doubtful state, looking as if they were saying to themselves, with Lear,--

"Down, thou climbing sorrow,
Thy element's below."

As for the intellectual condition of the passengers, I should say that faces were prevailingly vacuous, their owners half hypnotized, as it seemed, by the monotonous throb and tremor of the great sea-monster on whose back we were riding. I myself had few thoughts, fancies, emotions. One thing above all struck me as never before,-- the terrible solitude of the ocean.

"So lonely 'twas that God himself
Scarce seemed there to be."

Whole days passed without our seeing a single sail. The creatures of the deep which gather around sailing vessels are perhaps frightened off by the noise and stir of the steamship. At any rate, we saw nothing more than a few porpoises, so far as I remember.

No man can find himself over the abysses, the floor of which is paved with wrecks and white with the bones of the shrieking myriads of human beings whom the waves have swallowed up, without some thought of the dread possibilities hanging over his fate. There is only one way to get rid of them: that which an old sea-captain mentioned to me, namely, to keep one's self under opiates until he wakes up in the harbor where he is bound. I did not take this as serious advice, but its meaning is that one who has all his senses about him cannot help being anxious. My old friend,

whose beard had been shaken in many a tempest, knew too well that there is cause enough for anxiety.

What does the reader suppose was the source of the most ominous thought which forced itself upon my mind, as I walked the decks of the mighty vessel? Not the sound of the rushing winds, nor the sight of the foam-crested billows; not the sense of the awful imprisoned force which was wrestling in the depths below me. The ship is made to struggle with the elements, and the giant has been tamed to obedience, and is manacled in bonds which an earthquake would hardly rend asunder. No! It was the sight of the *boats* hanging along at the sides of the deck,--the boats, always suggesting the fearful possibility that before another day dawns one may be tossing about in the watery Sahara, shelterless, fireless, almost foodless, with a fate before him he dares not contemplate. No doubt we should feel worse without the boats; still they are dreadful tell-tales. To all who remember Géricault's Wreck of the Medusa,--and those who have seen it do not forget it,--the picture the mind draws is one it shudders at. To be sure, the poor wretches in the painting were on a raft, but to think of fifty people in one of these open boats! Let us go down into the cabin, where at least we shall not see them.

The first morning at sea revealed the mystery of the little round tin box. The process of *shaving*, never a delightful one, is a very unpleasant and awkward piece of business when the floor on which one stands, the glass in which he looks, and he himself are all describing those complex curves which make cycles and epicycles seem like simplicity itself. The little box contained a reaping machine, which

gathered the capillary harvest of the past twenty-four hours with a thoroughness, a rapidity, a security, and a facility which were a surprise, almost a revelation. The idea of a guarded cutting edge is an old one; I remember the "Plantagenet" razor, so called, with the comb-like row of blunt teeth, leaving just enough of the edge free to do its work. But this little affair had a blade only an inch and a half long by three quarters of an inch wide. It had a long slender handle, which took apart for packing, and was put together with the greatest ease. It was, in short, a lawn-mower for the masculine growth of which the proprietor wishes to rid his countenance. The mowing operation required no glass, could be performed with almost reckless boldness, as one cannot cut himself, and in fact had become a pleasant amusement instead of an irksome task. I have never used any other means of shaving from that day to this. I was so pleased with it that I exhibited it to the distinguished tonsors of Burlington Arcade, half afraid they would assassinate me for bringing in an innovation which bid fair to destroy their business. They probably took me for an agent of the manufacturers; and so I was, but not in their pay nor with their knowledge. I determined to let other persons know what a convenience I had found the "Star Razor" of Messrs. Kampf, of New York, without fear of reproach for so doing. I know my danger,--does not Lord Byron say, "I have even been accused of writing puffs for Warren's blacking"? I was once offered pay for a poem in praise of a certain stove polish, but I declined. It is pure good-will to my race which leads me to commend the Star Razor to all who travel by land or by sea, as well as to all

who stay at home. With the first sight of land many a passenger draws a long sigh of relief. Yet everybody knows that the worst dangers begin after we have got near enough to see the shore, for there are several ways of landing, not all of which are equally desirable. On Saturday, May 8th, we first caught a glimpse of the Irish coast, and at half past four in the afternoon we reached the harbor of Queenstown. A tug came off, bringing newspapers, letters, and so forth, among the rest some thirty letters and telegrams for me. This did not look much like rest, but this was only a slight prelude to what was to follow. I was in no condition to go on shore for sight-seeing, as some of the passengers did.

We made our way through the fog towards Liverpool, and arrived at 1.30, on Sunday, May 9th. A special tug came to take us off: on it were the American consul, Mr. Russell, the vice-consul, Mr. Sewall, Dr. Nevins, and Mr. Rathbone, who came on behalf of our as yet unseen friend, Mr. Willett, of Brighton, England. Our Liverpool friends were meditating more hospitalities to us than, in our fatigued condition, we were equal to supporting. They very kindly, however, acquiesced in our wishes, which were for as much rest as we could possibly get before any attempt to busy ourselves with social engagements. So they conveyed us to the Grand Hotel for a short time, and then saw us safely off to the station to take the train for Chester, where we arrived in due season, and soon found ourselves comfortably established at the Grosvenor Arms Hotel. A large basket of Surrey primroses was brought by Mr. Rathbone to my companion. I had set before me at the hotel a very handsome floral harp, which my friend's friend had offered me as a tribute. It

made melody in my ears as sweet as those hyacinths of Shelley's, the music of whose bells was so

"delicate, soft, and intense,
It was felt like an odor within the sense."

At Chester we had the blissful security of being unknown, and were left to ourselves. Americans know Chester better than most other old towns in England, because they so frequently stop there awhile on their way from Liverpool to London. It has a mouldy old cathedral, an old wall, partly Roman, strange old houses with overhanging upper floors, which make sheltered sidewalks and dark basements. When one sees an old house in New England with the second floor projecting a foot or two beyond the wall of the ground floor, the country boy will tell him that "them haouses was built so th't th' folks upstairs could shoot the Injins when they was tryin' to git threew th' door or int' th' winder." There are plenty of such houses all over England, where there are no "Injins" to shoot. But the story adds interest to the somewhat lean traditions of our rather dreary past, and it is hardly worth while to disturb it. I always heard it in my boyhood. Perhaps it is true; certainly it was a very convenient arrangement for discouraging an untimely visit. The oval lookouts in porches, common in our Essex County, have been said to answer a similar purpose, that of warning against the intrusion of undesirable visitors. The walk round the old wall of Chester is wonderfully interesting and beautiful. At one part it overlooks a wide level field, over which the annual races are run. I noticed that here as elsewhere the short grass was starred with daisies. They are not considered in place in a well-kept lawn. But