

LETTER XXI

May 13. Dear father:--

To-day we are to go out to visit your Quaker friend, Mr. Alexander, at Stoke Newington, where you passed so many pleasant hours during your sojourn in England. At half past nine we went into the Congregational Union, which is now in session. I had a seat upon the platform, where I could command a view of the house. It was a most interesting assemblage to me, recalling forcibly our New England associations, and impressing more than ever on my mind how much of one blood the two countries are. These earnest, thoughtful, intelligent-looking men seemed to transport me back to my own country. They received us with most gratifying cordiality and kindness. Most naturally Congregationalism in England must turn with deep interest and sympathy to Congregationalism in America. In several very cordial addresses they testified their pleasure at seeing us among them, speaking most affectionately of you and your labors, and your former visit to England. The wives and daughters of many of them present expressed in their countenances the deepest and most affectionate feeling. It is cheering to feel that an ocean does not divide our hearts, and that the Christians of America and England are one.

In the afternoon we drove out to Mr. Alexander's. His place is called Paradise, and very justly, being one more of those home Edens in which England abounds, where, without ostentation or display, every

appliance of rational enjoyment surrounds one.

We were ushered into a cheerful room, opening by one glass door upon a brilliant conservatory of flowers, and by another upon a neatly-kept garden. The air was fresh and sweet with the perfume of blossoming trees, and every thing seemed doubly refreshing from the contrast with the din and smoke of London. Our chamber looked out upon a beautiful park, shaded with fine old trees. While contemplating the white draperies of our windows, and the snowy robings of the bed, we could not but call to mind the fact, of which we were before aware, that not an article was the result of the unpaid toil of the slave; neither did this restriction, voluntarily assumed, fetter at all the bountifulness of the table, where free-grown sugar, coffee, rice, and spices seemed to derive a double value to our friends from this consideration.

Some of the Quakers carry the principle so far as to refuse money in a business transaction which they have reason to believe has been gained by the unpaid toil of the slave. A Friend in Edinburgh told me of a brother of his in the city of Carlisle, who kept a celebrated biscuit bakery, who received an order from New Orleans for a thousand dollars worth of biscuit. Before closing the bargain he took the buyer into his counting room, and told him that he had conscientious objections about receiving money from slaveholders, and that in case he were one he should prefer not to trade with him. Fortunately, in this case, consistency and interest were both on one side.

Things like these cannot but excite reflection in one's mind, and the query must arise, if all who really believe slavery to be a wrong should pursue this course, what would be the result? There are great practical difficulties in the way of such a course, particularly in America, where the subject has received comparatively little attention. Yet since I have been in England, I am informed by the Friends here, that there has been for many years an association of Friends in Philadelphia, who have sent their agents through the entire Southern States, entering by them into communication with quite a considerable number scattered through the states, who, either from poverty or principle, raise their cotton by free labor; that they have established a depot in Philadelphia, and also a manufactory, where the cotton thus received is made into various household articles; and thus, by dint of some care and self-sacrifice, many of them are enabled to abstain entirely from any participation with the results of this crime.

As soon as I heard this fact, it flashed upon my mind immediately, that the beautiful cotton lands of Texas are as yet unoccupied to a great extent; that no law compels cotton to be raised there by slave labor, and that it is beginning to be raised there to some extent by the labor of free German emigrants. [Footnote: One small town in Texas made eight hundred bales last year by free labor.] Will not something eventually grow out of this? I trust so. Even the smallest chink of light is welcome in a prison, if it speak of a possible door which courage and zeal may open. I cannot as yet admit the justness of the

general proposition, that it is an actual sin to eat, drink, or wear any thing which has been the result of slave labor, because it seems to me to be based upon a principle altogether too wide in extent. To be consistent in it, we must extend it to the results of all labor which is not conducted on just and equitable principles; and in order to do this consistently we must needs, as St. Paul says, go out of the world. But if two systems, one founded on wrong and robbery, and the other on right and justice, are competing with each other, should we not patronize the right?

I am the more inclined to think that some course of this kind is indicated to the Christian world, from the reproaches and taunts which proslavery papers are casting upon us, for patronizing their cotton. At all events, the Quakers escape the awkwardness of this dilemma.

In the evening quite a large circle of friends came to meet us. We were particularly interested in the conversation of Mr. and Mrs. Wesby, missionaries from Antigua. Antigua is the only one of the islands in which emancipation was immediate, without any previous apprenticeship system; and it is the one in which the results of emancipation have been altogether the most happy. They gave us a very interesting account of their schools, and showed us some beautiful specimens of plain needlework, which had been wrought by young girls in them. They confirmed all the accounts which I have heard from other sources of the peaceableness, docility, and good character of the negroes; of their kindly disposition and willingness to receive

instruction.

After tea Mr. S. and I walked out a little while, first to a large cemetery, where repose the ashes of Dr. Watts. This burying ground occupies the site of the dwelling and grounds formerly covered by the residence of Sir T. Abney, with whom Dr. Watts spent many of the last years of his life. It has always seemed to me that Dr. Watts's rank as a poet has never been properly appreciated. If ever there was a poet born, he was that man; he attained without study a smoothness of versification, which, with Pope, was the result of the intensest analysis and most artistic care. Nor do the most majestic and resounding lines of Dryden equal some of his in majesty of volume. The most harmonious lines of Dryden, that I know of, are these:--

"When Jubal struck the chorded shell,
His listening brethren stood around,
And wondering, on their faces fell,
To worship that celestial sound.
Less than a God they thought there could not dwell
Within the hollow of that shell,
That spoke so sweetly and so well."

The first four lines of this always seem to me magnificently harmonious. But almost any verse at random in Dr. Watts's paraphrase of the one hundred and forty-eighth Psalm exceeds them, both in melody and majesty. For instance, take these lines:--

"Wide as his vast dominion lies,
Let the Creator's name be known;
Loud as his thunder shout his praise,
And sound it lofty as his throne.

Speak of the wonders of that love
Which Gabriel plays on every chord:
From all below and all above,
Loud hallelujahs to the Lord."

Simply as a specimen of harmonious versification, I would place this paraphrase by Dr. Watts above every thing in the English language, not even excepting Pope's Messiah. But in hymns, where the ideas are supplied by his own soul, we have examples in which fire, fervor, imagery, roll from the soul of the poet in a stream of versification, evidently spontaneous. Such are all those hymns in which he describes the glories of the heavenly state, and the advent of the great events foretold in prophecy; for instance, this verse from the opening of one of his judgment hymns:--

"Lo, I behold the scattered shades;
The dawn of heaven appears;
The sweet immortal morning sheds
Its blushes round the spheres."

Dr. Johnson, in his Lives of the Poets, turns him off with small praise, it is true, saying that his devotional poetry is like that of others, unsatisfactory; graciously adding that it is sufficient for him to have done better than others what no one has done well; and, lastly, that he is one of those poets with whom youth and ignorance may safely be pleased. But if Dr. Johnson thought Irene was poetry, it is not singular that he should think the lyrics of Watts were not.

Stoke Newington is also celebrated as the residence of De foe. We passed by, in our walk, the ancient mansion in which he lived. New River, which passes through the grounds of our host, is an artificial stream, which is said to have been first suggested by his endlessly fertile and industrious mind, as productive in practical projects as in books.

It always seemed to me that there are three writers which every one who wants to know how to use the English language effectively should study; and these are Shakspeare, Bunyan, and Defoe. One great secret of their hold on the popular mind is their being so radically and thoroughly English. They have the solid grain of the English oak, not venerated by learning and the classics; not inlaid with arabesques from other nations, but developing wholly out of the English nationality.

I have heard that Goethe said the reason for the great enthusiasm with which his countrymen regarded him was, that he did know how to write German, and so also these men knew how to write English. I

think Defoe the most suggestive writer to an artist of fiction that the English language affords. That power by which he wrought fiction to produce the impression of reality, so that his Plague in London was quoted by medical men as an authentic narrative, and his Life of a Cavalier recommended by Lord Chatham as an historical authority, is certainly worth an analysis. With him, undoubtedly, it was an instinct.

One anecdote, related to us this evening by our friends, brought to mind with new power the annoyances to which the Quakers have been subjected in England, under the old system of church rates. It being contrary to the conscientious principles of the Quakers to pay these church rates voluntarily, they allowed the officers of the law to enter their houses and take whatever article he pleased in satisfaction of the claim. On one occasion, for the satisfaction of a claim of a few pounds, they seized and sold a most rare and costly mantel clock, which had a particular value as a choice specimen of mechanical skill, and which was worth four or five times the sum owed. A friend afterwards repurchased and presented it to the owner.

We were rejoiced to hear that these church rates are now virtually abolished. The liberal policy pursued in England for the last twenty-five years is doing more to make the church of England, and the government generally, respectable and respected than the most extortionate exactions of violence.

We parted from our kind friends in the morning; came back and I sat a while to Mr. Burnard, the sculptor, who entertained me with various anecdotes. He had taken the bust of the Prince of Wales; and I gathered from his statements that young princes have very much the same feelings and desires that other little boys have, and that he has a very judicious mother.

In the afternoon, Mr. S., Mrs. B., and I had a pleasant drive in Hyde Park, as I used to read of heroines of romance doing in the old novels. It is delightful to get into this fairyland of parks, so green and beautiful, which embellish the West End.

In the evening we had an engagement at two places--at a Highland School dinner, and at Mr. Charles Dickens's. I felt myself too much exhausted for both, and so it was concluded that I should go to neither, but try a little quiet drive into the country, and an early retirement, as the most prudent termination of the week. While Mr. S. prepared to go to the meeting of the Highland School Society, Mr. and Mrs. B. took me a little drive into the country. After a while they alighted before a new Gothic Congregational college, in St. John's Wood. I found that there had been a kind of tea-drinking there by the Congregational ministers and their families, to celebrate the opening of the college.

On returning, we called for Mr. S., at the dinner, and went for a few moments into the gallery, the entertainment being now nearly over.

Here we heard some Scottish songs, very charmingly sung; and, what amused me very much, a few Highland musicians, dressed in full costume, occasionally marched through the hall, playing on their bagpipes, as was customary in old Scottish entertainments. The historian Sir Archibald Alison, sheriff of Lanarkshire, sat at the head of the table--a tall, fine-looking man, of very commanding presence.

About nine o'clock we retired.

May 15. Heard Mr. Binney preach this morning. He is one of the strongest men among the Congregationalists, and a very popular speaker. He is a tall, large man, with a finely-built head, high forehead, piercing, dark eye, and a good deal of force and determination in all his movements. His sermon was the first that I had heard in England which seemed to recognize the existence of any possible sceptical or rationalizing element in the minds of his hearers. It was in this respect more like the preaching that I had been in the habit of hearing at home. Instead of a calm statement of certain admitted religious facts, or exhortations founded upon them, his discourse seemed to be reasoning with individual cases, and answering various forms of objections, such as might arise in different minds. This mode of preaching, I think, cannot exist unless a minister cultivates an individual knowledge of his people.

Mr. Binney's work, entitled How to make the best of both Worlds, I

have heard spoken of as having had the largest sale of any religious writing of the present day.

May 16. This evening is the great antislavery meeting at Exeter Hall. Lord Shaftesbury in the chair. Exeter Hall stands before the public as the representation of the strong democratic, religious element of England. In Exeter Hall are all the philanthropies, foreign and domestic; and a crowded meeting there gives one perhaps a better idea of the force of English democracy--of that kind of material which goes to make up the mass of the nation--than any thing else.

When Macaulay expressed some sentiments which gave offence to this portion of the community, he made a defence in which he alluded sarcastically to the bray of Exeter Hall.

The expression seems to have been remembered, for I have often heard it quoted; though I believe they have forgiven him for it, and concluded to accept it as a joke.

The hall this night was densely crowded, and, as I felt very unwell, I did not go in till after the services had commenced--a thing which I greatly regretted afterwards, as by this means I lost a most able speech by Lord Shaftesbury.

The Duchess of Sutherland entered soon after the commencement of the exercises, and was most enthusiastically cheered. When we came in, a

seat had been reserved for us by her grace in the side gallery, and the cheering was repeated. I thought I had heard something of the sort in Scotland, but there was a vehemence about this that made me tremble. There is always something awful to my mind about a dense crowd in a state of high excitement, let the nature of that excitement be what it will.

I do not believe that there is in all America more vehemence of democracy, more volcanic force of power, than comes out in one of these great gatherings in our old fatherland. I saw plainly enough where Concord, Lexington, and Bunker Hill came from; and it seems to me there is enough of this element of indignation at wrong, and resistance to tyranny, to found half a dozen more republics as strong as we are.

A little incident that occurred gave me an idea of what such a crowd might become in a confused state of excitement. A woman fainted in a distant part of the house, and a policeman attempted to force a way through the densely-packed crowd. The services were interrupted for a few moments, and there were hoarse surgings and swellings of the mighty mass, who were so closely packed that they moved together like waves. Some began to rise in their seats, and some cried "Order! order!" And one could easily see, that were a sudden panic or overwhelming excitement to break up the order of the meeting, what a terrible scene might ensue.

"What is it?" said I to a friend who sat next to me.

"A pickpocket, perhaps," said she. "I am afraid we are going to have a row. They are going to give you one of our genuine Exeter Hall 'brays.'"

I felt a good deal fluttered; but the Duchess of Sutherland, who knew the British lion better than I did, seemed so perfectly collected that I became reassured.

The character of the speeches at this meeting, with the exception of Lord Shaftesbury's, was more denunciatory, and had more to pain the national feelings of an American, than any I had ever attended. It was the real old Saxon battle axe of Brother John, swung without fear or favor. Such things do not hurt me individually, because I have such a radical faith in my country, such a genuine belief that she will at last right herself from every wrong, that I feel she can afford to have these things said.

Mr. S. spoke on this point, that the cotton trade of Great Britain is the principal support to slavery, and read extracts from Charleston papers in which they boldly declare that they do not care for any amount of moral indignation wasted upon them by nations who, after all, must and will buy the cotton which they raise.

The meeting was a very long one, and I was much fatigued when we

returned.

To-morrow we are to make a little run out to Windsor.