LETTER XXIV.

MY DEAR S.:--

The next morning C. and I took the cars to go into the country, to Playford Hall. "And what's Playford Hall?" you say. "And why did you go to see it?" As to what it is, here is a reasonably good picture before you. As to why, it was for many years the residence of Thomas Clarkson, and is now the residence of his venerable widow and her family.

Playford Hall is considered, I think, the oldest of the fortified houses in England, and is, I am told, the only one that has water in the moat. The water which is seen girdling the wall, in the picture, is the moat: it surrounds the place entirely, leaving no access except across the bridge, which is here represented.

After crossing this bridge, you come into a green court yard filled with choice plants and flowering shrubs, and carpeted with that thick, soft, velvet-like grass which is to be found nowhere else in so perfect a state as in England.

The water is fed by a perpetual spring, whose current is so sluggish as scarcely to be perceptible, but which yet has the vitality of a running stream.

It has a dark and glassy stillness of surface, only broken by the forms of the water plants, whose leaves float thickly over it.

The walls of the moat are green with ancient moss, and from the crevices springs an abundant flowering vine, whose delicate leaves and bright yellow flowers in some places entirely mantle the stones with their graceful drapery.

The picture I have given you represents only one side of the moat. The other side is grown up with dark and thick shrubbery and ancient trees, rising and embowering the entire place, adding to the retired and singular effect of the whole. The place is a specimen of a sort of thing which does not exist in America. It is one of those significant landmarks which unite the present with the past, for which we must return to the country of our origin.

Playford Hall is peculiarly English, and Thomas Clarkson, for whose sake I visited it, was as peculiarly an Englishman--a specimen of the very best kind of English mind and character, as this is of characteristic English architecture.

We Anglo-Saxons have won a hard name in the world. There are undoubtedly bad things which are true about us.

Taking our developments as a race, both in England and America, we may be justly called the Romans of the nineteenth century. We have been

the race which has conquered, subdued, and broken in pieces other weaker races, with little regard either to justice or mercy. With regard to benefits by us imparted to conquered nations, I think a better story, on the whole, can be made out for the Romans than for us. Witness the treatment of the Chinese, of the tribes of India, and of our own American Indians.

But still there is in Anglo-Saxon blood, a vigorous sense of justice, as appears in our habeas corpus, our jury trials, and other features of state organization; and, when this is tempered, in individuals, with the elements of gentleness and compassion, and enforced by that energy and indomitable perseverance which are characteristic of the Anglo-Saxon mind, they form a style of philanthropy peculiarly efficient. In short, the Anglo-Saxon is efficient, in whatever he sets himself about, whether in crushing the weak or lifting them up.

Thomas Clarkson was born in a day when good, pious people imported cargoes of slaves from Africa, as one of the regular Christianized modes of gaining a subsistence and providing for themselves and their households. It was a thing that every body was doing, and every body thought they had a right to do. It was supposed that all the sugar, molasses, and rum in the world were dependent on stealing men, women, and children, and could be got in no other way; and as to consume sugar, molasses, and rum, were evidently the chief ends of human existence, it followed that men, women, and children must be stolen to the end of time.

Some good people, when they now and then heard an appalling story of the cruelties practised in the slave ship, declared that it was really too bad, sympathetically remarked, "What a sorrowful world we live in!" stirred their sugar into their tea, and went on as before, because, what was there to do?--"Hadn't every body always done it? and if they didn't do it, wouldn't somebody else?"

It is true that for many years individuals at different times had remonstrated, written treatises, poems, stories, and movements had been made by some religious bodies, particularly the Quakers, but the opposition had amounted to nothing practically efficient.

The attention of Clarkson was first turned to the subject by having it given out as the theme for a prize composition in his college class, he being at that time a sprightly young man, about twenty-four years of age. He entered into the investigation with no other purpose than to see what he could make of it as a college theme.

He says of himself, "I had expected pleasure from the invention of arguments, from the arrangement of them, from the putting of them together, and from the thought, in the interim, that I was engaged in an innocent contest for literary honor; but all my pleasures were damped by the facts which were now continually before me."

"It was but one gloomy subject from morning till night; in the daytime

I was uneasy, in the night I had little rest; I sometimes never closed my eyelids for grief."

It became not now so much a trial for academical reputation as to write a work which should be useful to Africa. It is not surprising that a work written under the force of such feelings should have gained the prize, as it did. Clarkson was summoned from London to Cambridge, to deliver his prize essay publicly. He says of himself, on returning to London, "The subject of it almost wholly engrossed my thoughts. I became at times very seriously affected while on the road. I stopped my horse occasionally, dismounted, and walked."

"I frequently tried to persuade myself that the contents of my essay could not be true; but the more I reflected on the authorities on which they were founded, the more I gave them credit. Coming in sight of Wade's Mill, in Hertfordshire, I sat down disconsolate on the turf by the roadside, and held my horse. Here a thought came into my mind, that if the contents of the essay were true, it was time that somebody should see these calamities to an end."

These reflections, as it appears, were put off for a while, but returned again.

This young and noble heart was of a kind that could not comfort itself so easily for a brother's sorrow as many do.

He says of himself, "In the course of the autumn of the same year, I walked frequently into the woods, that I might think of the subject in solitude, and find relief to my mind there; but there the question still recurred, 'Are these things true?' Still, the answer followed as instantaneously, 'They are;' still the result accompanied it--surely some person should interfere. I began to envy those who had seats in Parliament, riches, and widely-extended connections, which would enable them to take up this cause.

"Finding scarcely any one, at the time, who thought of it, I was turned frequently to myself; but here many difficulties arose. It struck me, among others, that a young man only twenty-four years of age could not have that solid judgment, or that knowledge of men, manners, and things, which were requisite to qualify him to undertake a task of such magnitude and importance; and with whom was I to unite? I believed, also, that it looked so much like one of the feigned labors of Hercules, that my understanding would be suspected if I proposed it."

He, however, resolved to do something for the cause by translating his essay from Latin into English, enlarging and presenting it to the public. Immediately on the publication of this essay he discovered, to his astonishment and delight, that he was not the only one who had been interested in this subject.

Being invited to the house of William Dillwyn, one of these friends to

the cause, he says, "How surprised was I to learn, in the course of our conversation, of the labors of Granville Sharp, of the writings of Ramsey, and of the controversy in which the latter was engaged! of all which I had hitherto known nothing. How surprised was I to learn that William Dillwyn had, two years before, associated himself with five others for the purpose of enlightening the public mind on this great subject!

"How astonished was I to find that a society had been formed in America for the same object! These thoughts almost overpowered me. My mind was overwhelmed by the thought that I had been providentially directed to this house; the finger of Providence was beginning to be discernible, and that the daystar of African liberty was rising."

After this he associated with many friends of the cause, and at last it became evident that, in order to effect any thing, he must sacrifice all other prospects in life, and devote himself exclusively to this work.

He says, after mentioning reasons which prevented all his associates from doing this, "I could look, therefore, to no person but myself; and the question was, whether I was prepared to make the sacrifice. In favor of the undertaking, I urged to myself that never was any cause, which had been taken up by man, in any country or in any age, so great and important; that never was there one in which so much misery was heard to cry for redress; that never was there one in which so much

good could be done; never one in which the duty of Christian charity could be so extensively exercised; never one more worthy of the devotion of a whole life towards it; and that, if a man thought properly, he ought to rejoice to have been called into existence, if he were only permitted to become an instrument in forwarding it in any part of its progress.

"Against these sentiments, on the other hand, I had to urge that I had been designed for the church; that I had already advanced as far as deacon's orders in it; that my prospects there on account of my connections were then brilliant; that, by appearing to desert my profession, my family would be dissatisfied, if not unhappy. These thoughts pressed upon me, and rendered the conflict difficult.

"But the sacrifice of my prospects staggered me, I own, the most. When the other objections which I have related occurred to me, my enthusiasm instantly, like a flash of lightning, consumed them; but this stuck to me, and troubled me. I had ambition. I had a thirst after worldly interest and honors, and I could not extinguish it at once. I was more than two hours in solitude under this painful conflict. At length I yielded, not because I saw any reasonable prospect of success in my new undertaking,--for all cool-headed and cool-hearted men would have pronounced against it,--but in obedience, I believe, to a higher Power. And I can say, that both on the moment of this resolution and for some time afterwards, I had more sublime and happy feelings than at any former period of my life."

In order to show how this enterprise was looked upon and talked of very commonly by the majority of men in those times, we will extract the following passage from Boswell's Life of Johnson, in which Bozzy thus enters his solemn protest: "The wild and dangerous attempt, which has for some time been persisted in, to obtain an act of our legislature to abolish so very important and necessary a branch of commercial interest, must have been crushed at once, had not the insignificance of the zealots, who vainly took the lead in it, made the vast body of planters, merchants, and others, whose immense properties are involved in that trade, reasonably enough suppose that there could be no danger. The encouragement which the attempt has received excites my wonder and indignation; and though some men of superior abilities have supported it, whether from a love of temporary popularity when prosperous, or a love of general mischief when desperate, my opinion is unshaken.

"To abolish a status which in all ages God has sanctioned, and man has continued, would not only be robbery to an innumerable class of our fellow-subjects, but it would be extreme cruelty to the African savages, a portion of whom it saves from massacre or intolerable bondage in their own country, and introduces into a much happier state of life; especially now, when their passage to the West Indies, and their treatment there, is humanely regulated. To abolish this trade would be to '--shut the gates of mercy on mankind.'"

One of the first steps of Clarkson and his associates was the formation of a committee of twelve persons, for the collection and dissemination of information on the subject.

The contest now began in earnest, a contest as sublime as any the world ever saw.

The abolition controversy more fully aroused the virtue, the talent, and the religion of the great English nation, than any other event or crisis which ever occurred.

Wilberforce was the leader of the question in Parliament. The other members of the antislavery committee performed those labors which were necessary out of it.

This labor consisted principally in the collection of evidence with regard to the traffic, and the presentation of it before the public mind. In this labor Clarkson was particularly engaged. The subject was hemmed in with the same difficulties that now beset the antislavery cause in America. Those who knew most about it were precisely those whose interest it was to prevent inquiry. An immense moneyed interest was arrayed against investigation, and was determined to suppress the agitation of the subject. Owing to this powerful pressure, many, who were in possession of facts which would bear upon this subject, refused to communicate them; and often, after a long and wearisome journey in search of an individual who could throw light upon the

subject, Clarkson had the mortification to find his lips sealed by interest or timidity. As usual, the cause of oppression was defended by the most impudent lying; the slave trade was asserted to be the latest revised edition of philanthropy. It was said that the poor African, the slave of miserable oppression in his own country, was wafted by it to an asylum in a Christian land; that the middle passage was to the poor negro a perfect Elysium, infinitely happier than any thing he had ever known in his own country. All this was said while manacles, and handcuffs, and thumbscrews, and instruments to force open the mouth, were a regular part of the stock for a slave ship, and were hanging in the shop windows of Liverpool for sale.

For Clarkson's attention was first called to these things by observing them in the shop window, and on inquiring the use of one of them, the man informed him that many times negroes were sulky, and tried to starve themselves to death, and this instrument was used to force open their jaws.

Of Clarkson's labor in this investigation some idea may be gathered from his own words, when, stating that for a season he was compelled to retire from the cause, he thus speaks:--

"As far as I myself was concerned, all exertion was then over. The nervous system was almost shattered to pieces. Both my memory and my hearing failed me. Sudden dizzinesses seized my head. A confused singing in the ear followed me wherever I went. On going to bed the

very stairs seemed to dance up and down under me, so that, misplacing my foot, I sometimes fell. Talking, too, if it continued but half an hour, exhausted me so that profuse perspiration followed, and the same effect was produced even by an active exertion of the mind for the like time.

"These disorders had been brought on by degrees, in consequence of the severe labors necessarily attached to the promotion of the cause. For seven years I had a correspondence to maintain with four hundred persons, with my own hand; I had some book or other annually to write in behalf of the cause. In this time I had travelled more than thirty-five thousand miles in search of evidence, and a great part of these journeys in the night. All this time my mind had been on the stretch. It had been bent, too, to this one subject, for I had not even leisure to attend to my own concerns. The various instances of barbarity which had come successively to my knowledge, within this period, had vexed, harassed, and afflicted it. The wound which these had produced was rendered still deeper by those cruel disappointments before related, which arose from the reiterated refusals of persons to give their testimony, after I had travelled hundreds of miles in quest of them. But the severest stroke was that inflicted by the persecution, begun and pursued by persons interested in the continuance of the trade, of such witnesses as had been examined against them, and whom, on account of their dependent situation in life, it was most easy to oppress. As I had been the means of bringing these forward on these occasions, they naturally came to me, when thus persecuted, as the author of their miseries and their ruin. From their

supplications and wants it would have been ungenerous and ungrateful to have fled. These different circumstances, by acting together, had at length brought me into the situation just mentioned; and I was, therefore, obliged, though very reluctantly, to be borne out of the field where I had placed the great honor and glory of my life."

I may as well add here that a Mr. Whitbread, to whom Clarkson mentioned this latter cause of distress, generously offered to repair the pecuniary losses of all who had suffered in this cause. One anecdote will be a specimen of the energy with which Clarkson pursued evidence. It had been very strenuously asserted and maintained that the subjects of the slave trade were only such unfortunates as had become prisoners of war, and who, if not carried out of the country in this manner, would be exposed to death or some more dreadful doom in their own country. This was one of those stories which nobody believed, and yet was particularly useful in the hands of the opposition, because it was difficult legally to disprove it. It was perfectly well known that in very many cases slave traders made direct incursions into the country, kidnapped and carried off the inhabitants of whole villages; but the question was, how to establish it. A gentleman whom Clarkson accidentally met on one of his journeys informed him that he had been in company, about a year before, with a sailor, a very respectable-looking young man, who had actually been engaged in one of these expeditions; he had spent half an hour with him at an inn; he described his person, but knew nothing of his name or the place of his abode; all he knew was, that he belonged to a ship

of war in ordinary, but knew nothing of the port. Clarkson determined that this man should be produced as a witness, and knew no better way than to go personally to all the ships in ordinary, until the individual was found. He actually visited every seaport town, and boarded every ship, till in the very last port, and on the very last ship, which remained, the individual was found, and found to be possessed of just the facts and information which were necessary. By the labors of Clarkson and his contemporaries an incredible excitement was produced throughout all England. The pictures and models of slave ships, accounts of the cruelties practised in the trade, were circulated with an industry which left not a man, woman, or child in England uninstructed. In disseminating information, and in awakening feeling and conscience, the women of England were particularly earnest, and labored with that whole-hearted devotion which characterizes the sex.

It seems that after the committee had published the facts, and sent them to every town in England, Clarkson followed them up by journeying to all the places, to see that they were read and attended to. Of the state of feeling at this time Clarkson gives the following account:--

"And first I may observe, that there was no town through which I passed in which there was not some one individual who had left off the use of sugar. In the smaller towns there were from ten to fifty, by estimation, and in the larger from two to five hundred, who made this sacrifice to virtue. These were of all ranks and parties. Hich and

poor, churchmen and dissenters, had adopted the measure. Even grocers had left off trading in the article in some places. In gentlemen's families, where the master had set the example, the servants had often voluntarily followed it; and even children, who were capable of understanding the history of the sufferings of the Africans, excluded, with the most virtuous resolution, the sweets, to which they had been accustomed, from their lips. By the best computation I was able to make, from notes taken down in my journey, no fewer than three hundred thousand persons had abandoned the use of sugar." It was the reality, depth, and earnestness of the public feeling, thus aroused, which pressed with resistless force upon the government; for the government of England yields to popular demands quite as readily as that of America.

After years of protracted struggle, the victory was at last won. The slave trade was finally abolished through all the British empire; and not only so, but the English nation committed, with the whole force of its national influence, to seek the abolition of the slave trade in all the nations of the earth. But the wave of feeling did not rest there; the investigations had brought before the English conscience the horrors and abominations of slavery itself, and the agitation never ceased till slavery was finally abolished through all the British provinces. At this time the religious mind and conscience of England gained, through this very struggle, a power which it never has lost. The principle adopted by them was the same so sublimely adopted by the church in America in reference to the foreign missionary cause:

"The field is the world." They saw and felt that, as the example and practice of England had been powerful in giving sanction to this evil, and particularly in introducing it into America, there was the greatest reason why she should never intermit her efforts till the wrong was righted throughout the earth.

Clarkson, to his last day, never ceased to be interested in the subject, and took the warmest interest in all movements for the abolition of slavery in America.

At the Ipswich depot we were met by a venerable lady, the daughter of Clarkson's associate, William Dillwyn. She seemed overjoyed to meet us, and took us at once into her carriage, and entertained us all our way to the hall by anecdotes and incidents of Clarkson and his times. She read me a manuscript letter from him, written at a very advanced age, in which he speaks with the utmost ardor and enthusiasm of the first antislavery movements of Cassius M. Clay in Kentucky. She described him to me as a cheerful, companionable being, frank and simple-hearted, and with a good deal of quiet humor.

It is remarkable of him that, with such intense feeling for human suffering as he had, and worn down and exhausted as he was by the dreadful miseries and sorrows with which he was constantly obliged to be familiar, he never yielded to a spirit of bitterness or denunciation.

The narrative which he gives is as calm and unimpassioned, and as free from any trait of this kind, as the narratives of the evangelists.
Thus riding and talking, we at last arrived at the hall.

The old stone house, the moat, the draw bridge, all spoke of days of violence long gone by, when no man was safe except within fortified walls, and every man's house literally had to be his castle.

To me it was interesting as the dwelling of a conqueror, as one who had not wrestled with flesh and blood merely, but with principalities and powers, and the rulers of the darkness of this world, and who had overcome, as his great Master did before him, by faith, and prayer, and labor.

We were received with much cordiality by the widow of Clarkson, now in her eighty-fourth year. She has been a woman of great energy and vigor, and an efficient co-laborer in his plans of benevolence.

She is now quite feeble. I was placed under the care of a respectable female servant, who forthwith installed me in a large chamber overlooking the court yard, which had been Clarkson's own room; the room where, for years, many of his most important labors had been conducted, and from whence his soul had ascended to the reward of the just.

The servant who attended me seemed to be quite a superior woman, like

many of the servants in respectable English families. She had grown up in the family, and was identified with it; its ruling aims and purposes had become hers. She had been the personal attendant of Clarkson, and his nurse during his last sickness; she had evidently understood, and been interested in his plans; and the veneration with which she therefore spoke of him had the sanction of intelligent appreciation.

A daughter of Clarkson, who was married to a neighboring clergyman, with her husband, was also present on this day.

After dinner we rode out to see the old church, in whose enclosure the remains of Clarkson repose. It was just such a still, quiet, mossy old church as you have read of in story books, with the graveyard spread all around it, like a thoughtful mother, who watches the resting of her children.

The grass in the yard was long and green, and the daisy, which, in other places, lies like a little button on the ground, here had a richer fringe of crimson, and a stalk about six inches high. It is, I well know, the vital influence from the slumbering dust beneath which gives the richness to this grass and these flowers; but let not that be a painful thought; let it rather cheer us, that beauty should spring from ashes, and life smile brighter from the near presence of death. The grave of Clarkson is near the church, enclosed by a railing, and marked by a simple white marble slab; it is carefully

tended, and planted with flowers. In the church was an old book of records, and among other curious inscriptions was one recording how a

pious committee of old Noll's army had been there, knocking off saints' noses, and otherwise purging the church from the relics of idolatry.

Near by the church was the parsonage, the home of my friends, a neat, pleasant, sequestered dwelling, of about the style of a New England country parsonage.

The effect of the whole together was inexpressibly beautiful to me. For a wonder, it was a pleasant day, and this is a thing always to be thankfully acknowledged in England. The calm stillness of the afternoon, the seclusion of the whole place, the silence only broken by the cawing of the rooks, the ancient church, the mossy graves with their flowers and green grass, the sunshine and the tree shadows, all seemed to mingle together in a kind of hazy dream of peacefulness and rest. How natural it is to say of some place sheltered, simple, cool, and retired, here one might find peace, as if peace came from without, and not from within. In the shadiest and stillest places may be the most turbulent hearts; and there are hearts which, through the busiest scenes, carry with them unchanging peace. As we were walking back, we passed many cottages of the poor.

I noticed, with particular pleasure, the invariable flower garden

attached to each. Some pansies in one of them attracted my attention by their peculiar beauty, so very large and richly colored. On being introduced to the owner of them, she, with cheerful alacrity, offered me some of the finest. I do not doubt of there being suffering and misery in the agricultural population of England, but still there are multitudes of cottages which are really very pleasant objects, as were all these. The cottagers had that bright, rosy look of health which we seldom see in America, and appeared to be both polite and self-respecting.

In the evening we had quite a gathering of friends from the neighborhood--intelligent, sensible, earnest people, who had grown up in the love of the antislavery cause as into religion. The subject of conversation was, "The duty of English people to free themselves from any participation in American slavery, by taking means to encourage the production of free cotton in the British provinces."

It is no more impossible or improbable that something effective may be done in this way than that the slave trade should have been abolished. Every great movement seems an impossibility at first. There is no end to the number of things declared and proved impossible which have been done already, so that this may become something yet.

Mrs. Clarkson had retired from the room early; after a while she sent for me to her sitting room. The faithful attendant of whom I spoke was with her. She wished to show me some relics of her husband, his watch

and seals, some of his papers and manuscripts; among these was the identical prize essay with which he began his career, and a commentary on the Gospels, which he had written with great care, for the use of his grandson. His seal attracted my attention--it was that kneeling figure of the negro, with clasped hands, which was at first adopted as the badge of the cause, when every means was being made use of to arouse the public mind and keep the subject before the public. Mr. Wedgwood, the celebrated porcelain manufacturer, designed a cameo, with this representation, which was much worn as an ornament by ladies. It was engraved on the seal of the Antislavery Society, and was used by its members in sealing all their letters. This of Clarkson's was handsomely engraved on a large, old-fashioned carnelian; and surely, if we look with emotion on the sword of a departed hero,--which, at best, we can consider only as a necessary evil,--we may look with unmingled pleasure on this memorial of a bloodless victory.

When I retired to my room for the night I could not but feel that the place was hallowed: unceasing prayer had there been offered for the enslaved and wronged race of Africa by that noble and brotherly heart. I could not but feel that those prayers had had a wider reach than the mere extinction of slavery in one land or country, and that their benign influence would not cease while a slave was left upon the face of the earth.