

**ITALY: WITH SKETCHES OF  
SPAIN AND PORTUGAL, IN  
TWO VOLUMES, VOL. I**

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Italy: With Sketches of Spain and Portugal, in Two Volumes, Vol. I by William Beckford

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**WILLIAM BECKFORD**

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ITALY:

WITH SKETCHES OF

SPAIN AND PORTUGAL.

BY THE AUTHOR OF "VAPHEK."

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IN TWO VOLUMES.

VOL. I.

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PHILADELPHIA:  
KEY & BIDDLE, MINOR STREET.  
1834.

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## ADVERTISEMENT.

Some justly admired authors having condescended to glean a few stray thoughts from these letters, which have remained dormant a great many years; I have been at length emboldened to lay them before the public. Perhaps as they happen to contain passages which persons of acknowledged taste have honoured with their notice, they may possibly be less unworthy of emerging from the shade into daylight than I imagined.

Most of these letters were written in the bloom and heyday of youthful spirits and youthful confidence, at a period when the old order of things existed with all its picturesque pomps and absurdities: when Venice enjoyed her piombi and submarine dungeons; France her battle; the peninsula her holy inquisition. To look back upon what is beginning to appear almost a fabulous era in the eyes of the modern children of light, is not unamusing or uninteresting; for, still better to appreciate the present, we should be led not unfrequently to recall the intellectual muzziness of the past.

But happily these pages are not crowded with such records; they are chiefly filled with delineations of landscape and those effects of natural phenomena which it is

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not in the power of revolutions or constitutions to alter or destroy.

A few moments snatched from the contemplation of political crimes, bloodshed, and treachery, are a few moments gained to all lovers of innocent illusion. Nor need the statesman or the scholar despise the occasional relaxation of light reading. When Jupiter and the great deities are represented by Homer as retiring from scenes of havoc and carnage to visit the blameless and quiet Ethiopians, who were the farthest removed of all nations, the Lord knows whither, at the very extremities of the ocean,—would they have given ear to manifestos or protocols? No, they would much rather have listened to the Tales of Mother Goose.

*London, June 12th, 1834.*

**THE LOW COUNTRIES**

**AND**

**GERMANY.**



THE  
LOW COUNTRIES AND GERMANY.

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LETTER I.

Passage to Ostend—The Capuchin church—Ghent—Quiet and content, the presiding deities of Flanders—Antwerp—The Place de Mair—Silence and solitude of the town, contrasted with the tumult and uproar of London.

Ostend, 21st June, 1780.

We had a rough passage, and arrived at this imperial haven in a piteous condition. Notwithstanding its renown and importance, it is but a scurvy place—preposterous Flemish roofs disgust your eyes when cast upwards—swaggering Dutch skippers and mongrel smugglers are the principal objects they meet with below; and then the whole atmosphere is impregnated with the fumes of tobacco, burnt peat, and garlick. I should esteem myself in luck, were the nuisances of this seaport confined only to two senses; but, alas! the apartment above my head proves a squalling brattery, and the sounds which proceed from it are so loud and frequent, that a person might think himself in limbo, without any extravagance.

In hope of some relief, I went to the Capuchin church,

a large solemn building, in search of silence and solitude; but here again was I disappointed. There happened to be an exposition of the holy wafer with ten thousand candles; and whilst half a dozen squeaking fiddles fugged and flourished away in the galleries, and as many paralytic monks gabbled before the altars, a whole posse of devotees, in long white hoods and flannels, were sweltering on either side.

This papal piety, in warm weather, was no very fragrant circumstance; so I sought the open air again as fast as I was able. The serenity of the evening—for the black huddle of clouds, which the late storms had accumulated, were all melted away—tempted me to the ramparts. There, at least, thought I to myself, I may range undisturbed, and talk with my old friends the breezes, and address my discourse to the waves, and be as romantic and fanciful as I please; but I had scarcely begun a poetic apostrophe, before out flaunted a whole rank of officers, with ladies and abbés and puppy dogs, singing, and flirting, and making such a hubbub, that I had not one peaceful moment to observe the bright tints of the western horizon, or enjoy those ideas of classic antiquity which a calm sunset never fails to bring before my imagination.

Finding, therefore, no quiet abroad, I returned to my inn, and should have gone immediately to bed, in hopes of relapsing into the bosom of dreams and delusions; but the limbo I mentioned before grew so very outrageous, that I was obliged to postpone my rest till sugarplums and nursery eloquence had hushed it to repose. At length peace was restored, and about eleven o'clock I fell into a slumber. My dreams anticipated the classic scenes of Italy, the proposed term of my excursion.

Next morning I arose refreshed with these agreeable

J. V. N.

impressions. No ideas, but such as Nemi and Albano suggested, haunted me whilst travelling to Ghent. I neither heard the coarse dialect which was talking around me, nor noticed the formal avenues and marshy countries which we passed. When we stopped to change horses, I closed my eyes upon the dull prospect, and was transported immediately to those Grecian solitudes which Theocritus so enchantingly describes.

To one so far gone in the poetic lore of ancient days, Ghent is not the most likely place to recall his attention; and I know nothing more about it, than it is a large, ill-paved, plethoric, pompous-looking city, with a decent proportion of convents and chapels, monuments, brazen gates, and gilded marbles. In the great church were several pictures by Rubens, so striking, so masterly, as to hold me broad awake; though, I must own, there are moments when I could contentedly fall asleep in a Flemish cathedral, for the mere chance of beholding in vision the temple of Olympian Jupiter.

But I think I hear, at this moment, some grave and respectable personage chiding my enthusiasm—"Really, sir, you had better stay at home, and dream in your great chair, than give yourself the trouble of going post through Europe, in search of places where to fall asleep. If Flanders and Holland are to be dreamed over at this rate, you had better take ship at once, and doze all the way to Italy." Upon my word, I should not have much objection to that scheme; and, if some enchanter would but transport me in an instant to the summit of *Ætna*, any body might alop through the Low Countries that pleased.

Being, however, so far advanced, there is no retracting; and I am resolved to journey along with quiet and content for my companions. These two comfortable deities