

**THE IDLER IN ITALY:
IN TWO
VOLUMES. VOL. I**

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The Idler in Italy: In Two Volumes. Vol. I by Marguerite Blessington

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MARGUERITE BLESSINGTON

**THE IDLER IN ITALY:
IN TWO
VOLUMES. VOL. I**

Wm. Tiffany.

THE IDLER

IN
ITALY.

BY THE COUNTESS OF BLESSINGTON.

IN TWO VOLUMES.

VOL. I.

PHILADELPHIA.

CAREY & HART.

1839.

Wm. Tiffany.

JOURNAL OF A TOUR.

August 25th, 1822.—AND so, I am leaving my home—my happy home!—There is something sad in the thought. I looked often at the pictures, and the various objects of use, and decoration, in the apartments, with a sort of melancholy feeling, that I anticipated not I should experience, on undertaking a pleasurable tour—a tour I have so long desired to make. Yet now, that the moment of departure is nearly arrived, I almost wish I was not going. Yes, the quitting home for an indefinite period, makes one thoughtful. What changes, what dangers may come before I sleep again beneath its roof! Perhaps, I may never—but I must not give way to such sad forebodings. The taking leave of friends is painful, even those whose society afforded little pleasure, assume a new interest in the moment of parting. We remember only their good qualities; but, perhaps, this oblivion of their defects, proceeds from the anticipated release from their consequences. This it is that makes us often part from our friends with more kindness, than we feel in meeting them.

DOVER—Would be more agreeable, were it not associated in my mind with lurching steam packets, and qualmy passengers; to-morrow I shall be exposed to a contact with both, which, though of short duration, is, nevertheless, anything but pleasurable. Misery, it is said, makes us acquainted with strange companions. A
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steam-packet I am sure does; for I have never entered one, without beholding a most heterogeneous medley of people, the greater part with countenances indicative of sufferings actual, or prospective.

Heaven defend me from inn beds! where, stretched on a mattress harder than board, or sunk in a feather-bed breathing not of Araby the blest, one is condemned to count the weary hours of night, praying for day to release one from such discomfort. I see the packet, that is to convey us to Calais, tossing and heaving near the pier—would that the voyage were over!

CALAIS, 27th.—What a passage! Old Neptune seemed in a passion at our leaving his favorite isle; and assailed us with sundry waves, so judiciously applied, as to drench several of the pale voyagers, who in revenge returned the visits, far more offensively. The sky was gloomy and portentous, and the sea of a dingy leaden green, except when broken by the waves, which came like warriors on white coursers, speeding over its dark surface.

The packet was full, to overflowing; the cabins crowded, and the deck thronged. As I marked the rosy cheeks, and crisp curls, of many of my fair countrywomen, and the closely buttoned coats, and bluff countenances of the men, I was disposed to pity the misery that awaited them. Many of the ladies, and nearly all the males, declared that *they* never suffered from sea-sickness; but, before we had more than half crossed the channel, they had either disappeared, or were seen leaning over the ship's side, intently gazing on the sea.

Various sounds of wo, reached my ears, mingled with the hoarse voices of the sailors, and the loud wind that whistled through the sails—and the steward was continually demanded, in tones that betrayed the utter helplessness of those who uttered them. A new-married pair, proceeding to the Continent to spend the honey moon, and who entered the packet all smiles, and love, were amongst the first, to yield to the fearful influence of the briny element. The bridegroom had been encouraging the bride, by asserting that *he* was so used to the sea that

he heeded it not; an assurance, that seemed very consolatory to her. He sat by her, and supported her waist with his encircling arm, until an ejaculation of "Take me to the cabin, Henry, Oh! Oh!" broke from the lady. He attempted to assist her to descend to the cabin; but, alas! before he had moved three paces, he reeled, and crying "Steward, Steward," consigned his bride to the tender mercies of that useful person, who, basin in hand, escorted her below; while her liege lord eased his full breast over the vessel's side. Husbands left their wives, and lovers their mistresses, when assailed by this disgusting malady. Self—self—alone seemed remembered; but, in all this exhibition of our natural egotism, mothers, and mothers alone resisted—they, though half dead with sickness, could still think of their children, and forget their own sufferings, to alleviate those of their offspring.

What a pitiable sight, did the passengers present, when they rushed on deck to leave the ship! Pale faces, languid eyes, parched lips, uncurled locks, bulged bonnets, and rumped caps, frills, and draperies, were to be seen at every side. The poor bride's smart pink bonnet was shorn of its brightness, and looked nearly as altered, and faded as her cheeks; which, half shaded by her straight dark locks, betrayed the sufferings she had endured. The bridegroom met her, with a rueful countenance, declaring that, "It was very odd, quite unaccountable, that *he*, who had crossed the sea so often, without being ill, should now have suffered so much."

I thought she looked reproachfully at him, for having deserted her, in this her first trial in wedded life. Ah! fair lady, it will be well if you have not, hereafter, greater proofs of man's selfishness!

A sea voyage, however short its duration, is a most unfavorable medium for judging mankind; and they who wish to preserve the illusions of love, would do well to eschew this ordeal; which, like the grave, separates those whom the wily archer has united. It is difficult for a man, to believe in the divinity of a beautiful woman, after he has seen her heaving, like a Pythoness, with extended jaws, upturned eyes, and ——— But for a

woman, who, conscious of her own helplessness, relies for succor on the man she loves, what can restore her confidence in his supposed strength and superiority, when she has beheld him—oh! degradation of the manly character—overpowered by sickness in its most revolting shape; and heard him uttering sounds that betray at once the internal strife, and his consequent probable oblivion of her very existence!

Oh! the comfort of a French bed! commend me to its soft and even mattresses, its light curtains, and genial *couvre pied* of eider down. Commend me, also, to a French cuisine with its soup, *sans pepper*, its cutlets *a la minute*, and its *poulet au jus*, its *café a la creme*, and its dessert. But defend me from the slamming of French doors, and the shaking of French windows; and above all, from pye-dishes, as substitutes for washing-basins; and from the odors of cigars, with which the clothes of the waiters of all French inns are impregnated.

ROUEN, 28th.—To avoid the uninteresting, and often traversed route of Abbeville, we have taken that of Rouen; and have been repaid, by passing through a much prettier country, and, above all, by seeing the cathedral.

This is, indeed, a noble pile, and inspires one with a respect for its founders. There is something highly imposing in the sight of such an edifice, with its towers and spire; and all the picturesque decoration of Gothic architecture with which it abounds. *They* surely must have truly worshipped the Deity, who took such pains to build a temple for His homage: though persons are not wanting who declare, that such temples owe their foundation less to devotion, than to superstition.

The church of St. Ouen is beautiful, and the gorgeous stained glass windows, add to its rich effect. We do not sufficiently employ stained glass, in our domestic decorations; it being generally objected to on the plea, that our sky is too obscure to admit of our exclusion of any portion of its light. Yet if instead of staring without impediment at our leaden clouds, their rays came to us in hues almost as beautiful as those of the prism, this ad-

vantage would be more than an equivalent for a slight diminution of their brilliancy.

At the Benedictine Abbey, they showed us a MS. missal, richly ornamented; the adornment of which, is said to have employed a monk for thirty years. What a waste of time! yet he who could so pass thirty years, was not likely to make a more judicious use of it. *Nous avons changé tout cela.* Who would now give thirty months to a work, unless he was assured of receiving a large remuneration for it, either in gold, or in immediate celebrity? Time is become more valuable; and men are proportionably less disposed to devote more than a limited, and a well paid portion of it, to posterity. Posterity! how few work for it, how few think of it, and how few live for it! Luckily for our generation, we have had a Wellington; and *his* fame will preserve our times from oblivion.

The Museum at Rouen contains some passable pictures, chiefly by French masters; but as I as much dislike filling my pages, as my head, with catalogues, their names shall find no place in my journal.

I wish the English had not to answer for the death of Joan of Arc. It was an unnecessary barbarism, that I liked not to be reminded of, and that casts a stain on our country. Some fragments of a tower, in which it is asserted that she was confined, were pointed out to us. Poor enthusiast! her courage deserved a better fate!

Who could pass through Rouen, without remembering that it gave birth to Corneille! Glorious privilege of genius, which can render a name deathless, and awaken sympathy for the spot that gave it life. Fontenelle, Fleury, and Vertot, also, were born at Rouen, but one forgets *them*, in the stronger interest excited by the memory of Corneille; that mighty mover of the passions, and powerful delineator of their struggles and results. Yet Fontenelle, too, deserves to be remembered, if it were only for his "Plurality of Worlds;" a delightful work that renders a gratifying homage to my sex, by making one of it the medium of conveying lightly and pleasantly many of the most valuable elements of philosophy, in a

dialogue full of sense, vivacity, and refinement. His dramatic works fall infinitely short of those of his uncle Corneille; but his "Dialogues of the Dead," and his "Reflections on Dramatic Poetry," are excellent.

One is often tempted to wish, that anecdotes, derogatory to literary characters, were less generally known. Who can think as well of those writers, whose works have charmed us, after having ascertained that they were cold, selfish, and unfeeling? Thus, many of the anecdotes related of Fontenelle have left a prejudice against him in my mind that renders me less disposed to remember him with complacency. None of them is more illustrative of the selfishness of his disposition than that related of him by Grimm, who states, that Fontenelle, having a great partiality to asparagus dressed with oil, was, on a certain day, that he intended to regale himself with his favorite dish, surprised by a visit from the Abbe Terrasson, who proposed staying to dine with him. Fontenelle told him of the asparagus, when the Abbe Terrasson declared, he would only eat it dressed with butter. The host explained the sacrifice he made, in consenting that one half should be dressed with butter; but shortly after, the Abbe Terrasson fell from his chair, struck dead by apoplexy, when Fontenelle ran to the door of his kitchen, exclaiming,

"All the asparagus to be dressed with oil—all to be dressed with oil!"

Dining at Lord Hyde's a few days after, he remarked, that the anecdote of the Abbe Terrasson had brought asparagus into fashion, and increased the price. With an esprit the most caustic, and epigrammatic, he was inordinately fond of praise. A person one day said, that to praise Fontenelle required the finesse and talent of Fontenelle.

"*N'importe,*" replied the latter, "*Louez moi, toujours.*"

Vertot's works are very voluminous, and his "Histories of Revolutions," of which he wrote no less than three, are worth perusal.