

SOUTHERN PERSPECTIVES (1763-1765)

Excerpts from the book

"TRAVELS THROUGH FRANCE AND ITALY"

by

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BOULOGNE-SUR-MER : TWO TOWNS

Boulogne is divided into the Upper and Lower Towns. The former is a kind of citadel, about a short mile in circumference, situated on a rising ground, surrounded by a high wall and rampart, planted with rows of trees, which form a delightful walk. It commands a fine view of the country and Lower Town; and in clear weather the coast of England, from Dover to Folkestone, appears so plain, that one would imagine it was within four or five leagues of the French shore. The Upper Town was formerly fortified with outworks, which are now in ruins. Here is a square, a town-house, the cathedral, and two or three convents of nuns; in one of which there are several English girls, sent hither for their education. The smallness of the expense encourages parents to send their children abroad to these seminaries, where they learn scarce anything that is useful but the French language; but they never fail to imbibe prejudices against

the protestant religion, and generally return enthusiastic converts to the religion of Rome. This conversion always generates a contempt for, and often an aversion to, their own country. Indeed, it cannot reasonably be expected that people of weak minds, addicted to superstition, should either love or esteem those whom they are taught to consider as reprobated heretics. Ten pounds a year is the usual pension in these convents; but I have been informed by a French lady who had her education in one of them, that nothing can be more wretched than their entertainment.

The Lower Town is continued from the gate of the Upper Town, down the slope of a hill, as far as the harbor, stretching on both sides to a large extent, and is much more considerable than the Upper, with respect to the beauty of the streets, the convenience of the houses, and the number and wealth of the inhabitants. These, however, are all merchants, or bourgeoisie, for the noblesse or gentry live all together in the Upper Town, and never mix with the others. The harbor of Boulogne is at the mouth of the small river, or rather rivulet Liane, which is so shallow, that the children wade through it at low water. As the tide makes, the sea flows in, and forms a pretty extensive harbor, which, however, admits nothing but small vessels. It is contracted at the mouth by two stone *jetties* or piers, which seem to have been constructed by some engineer, very little acquainted with this branch of his profession; for they are carried out in such a manner, as to collect a bank of sand just at the entrance of the harbor. The road is very open and unsafe, and the surf very high when the wind blows from the sea. There is no fortification near the harbor, except a paltry fort mounting about twenty guns, built in the last war by the prince de Cruy, upon a rock about a league to the eastward of Boulogne. It appears to be situated in such a manner, that it can neither offend, nor be offended. If the depth of water would admit a forty- or fifty-gun ship to lie within cannon-shot of it, I apprehend it might be silenced in half an hour; but, in all probability, there will be no vestiges of it at the next rupture between the two crowns. It is surrounded every day by the sea, at high water; and when it blows a fresh gale towards the shore, the waves break over the top of it, to the terror and astonishment of the garrison, who have been often heard crying piteously for assistance. I am persuaded, that it will one day disappear in the twinkling of an eye. The neighborhood of this fort, which is a smooth sandy beach, I have chosen for my bathing place. The road to it is agreeable and romantic, lying through pleasant

cornfields, skirted by open downs, where there is a rabbit warren, and great plenty of the birds so much admired at Tunbridge under the name of *wheat-ears*. By the bye, this is a pleasant corruption of *white-a—se*, the translation of their French name *cul-blanc*, taken from their color for they are actually white towards the tail.

Upon the top of a high rock, which overlooks the harbor, are the remains of an old fortification, which is indiscriminately called, *Tour d'ordre*, and *Julius Caesar's fort*. The original tower was a light-house built by *Claudius Caesar*, denominated *Turris ardens*, from the fire burned in it; and this the French have corrupted into *Tour d'ordre*; but no vestiges of this Roman work remain; what we now see, are the ruins of a castle built by Charlemagne. I know of no other antiquity at Boulogne, except an old vault in the Upper Town, now used as a magazine, which is said to be part of an antient temple dedicated to Isis.

On the other side of the harbor, opposite to the Lower Town, there is a house built, at a considerable expense, by a general officer, who lost his life in the late war. Never was situation more inconvenient, unpleasant, and unhealthy. It stands on the edge of an ugly morass formed by the stagnant water left by the tide in its retreat: the very walks of the garden are so moist, that, in the driest weather, no person can make a tour of it, without danger of the rheumatism. Besides, the house is altogether inaccessible, except at low water, and even then, the carriage must cross the harbor, the wheels up to the axle-tree in mud: nay, the tide rushes in so fast, that unless you seize the time to a minute, you will be in danger of perishing. The apartments of this house are elegantly fitted up, but very small; and the garden, notwithstanding its unfavorable situation, affords a great quantity of good fruit. The ooze, impregnated with sea salt, produces, on this side of the harbor, an incredible quantity of the finest *samphire* I ever saw. The French call it *passe-pierre*; and I suspect its English name is a corruption of *sang-pierre*. It is generally found on the faces of bare rocks that overhang the sea, by the spray of which it is nourished. As it grew upon a naked rock, without any appearance of soil, it might be naturally enough called *sang du pierre*, or *sangpierre*, blood of the rock; and hence the name *samphire*. On the same side of the harbor there is another new house, neatly built, belonging to a gentleman who has obtained a grant from the king of some ground which was always overflowed at high water. He has raised dykes at a

considerable expense, to exclude the tide, and if he can bring his project to bear, he will not only gain a good estate for himself, but also improve the harbor, by increasing the depth at high-water.

In the Lower Town of Boulogne there are several religious houses, particularly a seminary, a convent of Cordeliers, and another of Capuchins. This last, having fallen to decay, was some years ago repaired, chiefly by the charity of British travelers, collected by father Graeme, a native of North-Britain, who had been an officer in the army of king James II. and is said to have turned monk of this mendicant order, by way of voluntary penance, for having killed his friend in a duel. Be that as it may, he was a well-bred, sensible man, of a very exemplary life and conversation; and his memory is much revered in this place. Being superior of the convent, he caused the British arms to be put up in the church, as a mark of gratitude for the benefactions received from our nation. I often walk in the garden of the convent, the walls of which are washed by the sea at high-water. At the bottom of the garden is a little private grove, separated from it by a high wall, with a door of communication; and hither the Capuchins retire, when they are disposed for contemplation. About two years ago, this place was said to be converted to a very different use. There was among the monks one *pere Charles*, a lusty friar, of whom the people tell strange stories. Some young women of the town were seen mounting over the wall, by a ladder of ropes, in the dusk of the evening; and there was an unusual crop of bastards that season. In short, *pere Charles* and his companions gave such scandal, that the whole fraternity was changed; and now the nest is occupied by another flight of these birds of passage. If one of our privateers had kidnapped a Capuchin during the war, and exhibited him, in his habit, as a show in London, he would have proved a good prize to the captors; for I know not a more uncouth and grotesque animal, than an old Capuchin in the habit of his order. A friend of mine (a Swiss officer) told me, that a peasant in his country used to weep bitterly, whenever a certain Capuchin mounted the pulpit to hold forth to the people. The good father took notice of this man, and believed he was touched by the finger of the Lord. He exhorted him to encourage these accessions of grace, and at the same time to be of good comfort, as having received such marks of the divine favor. The man still continued to weep, as before, every time the monk preached; and at last the Capuchin insisted upon knowing what it was, in his discourse or appearance, that made such an impression upon his heart "Ah, father! (cried

the peasant) I never see you but I think of a venerable goat, which I lost at Easter. We were bred up together in the same family. He was the very picture of your reverence--one would swear you were brothers. Poor *Baudouin*! he died of a fall—rest his soul! I would willingly pay for a couple of masses to pray him out of purgatory."

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NICE : NATURE'S EMPORIUM

When I stand upon the rampart and look round me, I can scarce help thinking myself enchanted. The small extent of country which I see, is all cultivated like a garden. Indeed, the plain presents nothing but gardens, full of green trees, loaded with oranges, lemons, citrons, and bergamots, which make a delightful appearance. If you examine them more nearly, you will find plantations of green peas ready to gather; all sorts of sallading, and pot-herbs, in perfection; and plats of roses, carnations, ranunculus, anemones, and daffodils, blowing in full glory, with such beauty, vigor, and perfume, as no flower in England ever exhibited.

I must tell you, that presents of carnations are sent from hence, in the winter, to Turin and Paris; nay, sometimes as far as London, by the post. They are packed up in a wooden box, without any sort of preparation, one pressed upon another: the person who receives them, cuts off a little bit of the stalk, and steeps them for two hours in vinegar and water, when they recover their full bloom and beauty. Then he places them in water-bottles, in an apartment where they are screened from the severities of the weather; and they will continue fresh and unfaded the best part of a month.

Amidst the plantations in the neighborhood of Nice, appear a vast number of white *bastides*, or country-houses, which make a dazzling shew. Some few of these are good villas, belonging to the noblesse of this county; and even some of the bourgeois are provided with pretty lodgeable *cassines*; but in general, they are the habitations of the peasants, and contain nothing but misery and vermin. They are all built square; and, being whitened with lime or plaster, contribute greatly to the richness of the view. The hills are shaded to the tops with olive-trees, which are always green; and those hills are over-topped by more distant mountains, covered with snow. When I turn myself towards the sea, the view is bounded by the horizon; yet, in a clear morning, one can perceive the high lands of Corsica. On the right hand, it is terminated by Antibes, and the mountain of Esterelles, which I described in my last. As for the weather, you will conclude, from what I have said of the oranges, flowers, etc. that it must be wonderfully mild and serene: but of the climate, I shall speak hereafter. Let

me only observe, *en passant*, that the houses in general have no chimneys, but in their kitchens; and that many people, even of condition, at Nice, have no fire in their chambers, during the whole winter. When the weather happens to be a little more sharp than usual, they warm their apartments with a *brasiere* or pan of charcoal.

I shall now take notice of the vegetables of Nice. In the winter, we have green peas, asparagus, artichokes, cauliflower, beans, French beans, celery, and endive; cabbage, coleworts, radishes, turnips, carrots, betteraves, sorrel, lettuce, onions, garlic, and shallot. We have potatoes from the mountains, mushrooms, champignons, and truffles. Piedmont affords white truffles, counted the most delicious in the world: they sell for about three livres the pound. The fruits of this season are pickled olives, oranges, lemons, citrons, citronelles, dried figs, grapes, apples, pears, almonds, chestnuts, walnuts, filberts, medlars, pomegranates, and a fruit called azerolles,¹ about the size of a nutmeg, of an oblong shaft, red color, and agreeable acid taste. I might likewise add the cherry of the *Laurus cerasus*, which is sold in the market; very beautiful to the eye, but insipid to the palate. In summer we have all those vegetables in perfection. There is also a kind of small *courge*, or gourd, of which the people of the country make a very savory ragout, with the help of eggs, cheese, and fresh anchovies. Another is made of the badenjean, which the Spaniards call *berenjena*:² it is much eaten in Spain and the Levant, as well as by the Moors in Barbary. It is about the size and shape of a hen's egg, enclosed in a cup like an acorn; when ripe, of a faint purple color. It grows on a stalk about a foot high, with long spines or prickles. The people here have different ways of slicing and dressing it, by broiling, boiling, and stewing, with other ingredients: but it is at best an insipid dish. There are some caper-bushes in this neighborhood, which grow wild in holes of garden walls, and require no sort of cultivation: in one or two gardens, there are palm-trees; but the dates never ripen. In my register of the weather, I have marked the seasons of the principal fruits in this country. In May we have strawberries, which continue in season two or three months. These are of the wood kind; very grateful, and of a good flavor; but the scarlets

¹ [Footnote in original] The Italians call them *Lazerraoli*.

² [Footnote in original] This fruit is called *Melanzana* in *Italy* and is much esteemed by the Jews in Leghorn. Perhaps *Melanzana* is a corruption of *Malamsana*.

and hautboys are not known at Nice. In the beginning of June, and even sooner, the cherries begin to be ripe. They are a kind of bleeding hearts; large, fleshy, and high flavored, though rather too luscious. I have likewise seen a few of those we call Kentish cherries, which are much more cool, acid, and agreeable, especially in this hot climate. The cherries are succeeded by the apricots and peaches, which are all standards, and of consequence better flavored than what we call wall-fruit. The trees, as well as almonds, grow and bear without care and cultivation, and may be seen in the open fields about Nice: but without proper culture, the fruit degenerates. The best peaches I have seen at Nice are the amberges, of a yellow hue, and oblong shape, about the size of a small lemon. Their consistence is much more solid than that of our English peaches, and their taste more delicious. Several trees of this kind I have in my own garden. Here is likewise plenty of other sorts; but no nectarines. We have little choice of plums. Neither do I admire the pears or apples of this country: but the most agreeable apples I ever tasted, come from Final, and are called *pomi carli*. The greatest fault I find with most fruits in this climate, is, that they are too sweet and luscious, and want that agreeable acid which is so cooling and so grateful in a hot country. This, too, is the case with our grapes, of which there is great plenty and variety, plump and juicy, and large as plums. Nature, however, has not neglected to provide other agreeable vegetable juices to cool the human body. During the whole summer, we have plenty of musk melons. I can buy one as large as my head for the value of an English penny: but one of the best and largest, weighing ten or twelve pounds, I can have for twelve sols, or about eight-pence sterling. From Antibes and Sardinia, we have another fruit called a water-melon, which is well known in Jamaica, and some of our other colonies. Those from Antibes are about the size of an ordinary bomb-shell: but the Sardinian and Jamaica water-melons are four times as large. The skin is green, smooth, and thin. The inside is a purple pulp, studded with broad, flat, black seeds, and impregnated with a juice the most cool, delicate, and refreshing, that can well be conceived. One would imagine the pulp itself dissolved in the stomach; for you may eat of it until you are filled up to the tongue, without feeling the least inconvenience. It is so friendly to the constitution, that in ardent inflammatory fevers, it is drunk as the best emulsion. At Genoa, Florence, and Rome, it is sold in the streets, ready cut in slices; and the porters, sweating under their burthens, buy and eat them as they pass. A porter of London quenches his thirst with a draught of strong beer: a porter of Rome, or

Naples, refreshes himself with a slice of water-melon, or a glass of iced-water. The one costs three half-pence; the last, half a farthing — which of them is most effectual? I am sure the men are equally pleased. It is commonly remarked, that beer strengthens as well as refreshes. But the porters of Constantinople, who never drink anything stronger than water, and eat very little animal food, will lift and carry heavier burthens than any other porters in the known world. If we may believe the most respectable travelers, a Turk will carry a load of seven hundred weight, which is more (I believe) than any English porter ever attempted to carry any length of way.

WINTRY ROAD TO TURIN

Turin is about thirty leagues from Nice, the greater part of the way lying over frightful mountains covered with snow. The difficulty of the road, however, reaches no farther than Coni, from whence there is an open highway through a fine plain country, as far as the capital of Piedmont, and the traveler is accommodated with chaise and horses to proceed either post, or by *cambiatura*, as in other parts of Italy. There are only two ways of performing the journey over the mountains from Nice; one is to ride a mule-back, and the other to be carried in a chair. The former I chose, and set out with my servant on the seventh day of February at two in the afternoon. I was hardly clear of Nice, when it began to rain so hard that in less than an hour the mud was half a foot deep in many parts of the road. This was the only inconvenience we suffered, the way being in other respects practicable enough; for there is but one small hill to cross on this side of the village of L'Escarene, where we arrived about six in the evening. The ground in this neighborhood is tolerably cultivated, and the mountains are planted to the tops with olive trees. The accommodation here is so very bad, that I had no inclination to be a-bed longer than was absolutely necessary for refreshment; and therefore, I proceeded on my journey at two in the morning, conducted by a guide, whom I hired for this purpose at the rate of three livres a day. Having ascended one side, and descended the other, of the mountain called Braus, which took up four hours, though the road is not bad, we at six reached the village of Sospello, which is agreeably situated in a small valley, surrounded by prodigious high and barren mountains. This little plain is pretty fertile, and being watered by a pleasant stream, forms a delightful contrast with the hideous rocks that surround it. Having reposed myself and my mules two hours at this place, we continued our journey over the second mountain, called Brovis, which is rather more considerable than the first, and in four hours arrived at La Giandola, a tolerable inn situated betwixt the high road and a small river, about a gunshot from the town of Brieglie, which we leave on the right. As we jogged along in the grey of the morning, I was a little startled at two figures which I saw before me, and began to put my pistols in order. It must be observed that these mountains are infested with *contrabandiers*, a set of smuggling peasants, very bold and desperate, who make a traffic of selling tobacco, salt, and other merchandize, which have not payed duty, and sometimes lay travelers under contribution. I

did not doubt but there was a gang of these freebooters at hand; but as no more than two persons appeared, I resolved to let them know we were prepared for defense, and fired one of my pistols, in hope that the report of it, echoed from the surrounding rocks, would produce a proper effect: but, the mountains and roads being entirely covered with snow to a considerable depth, there was little or no reverberation, and the sound was not louder than that of a pop-gun, although the piece contained a good charge of powder. Nevertheless, it did not fail to engage the attention of the strangers, one of whom immediately wheeled to the left about, and being by this time very near me, gave me an opportunity of contemplating his whole person. He was very tall, meagre, and yellow, with a long, hooked nose, and small twinkling eyes. His head was eased in a woolen night-cap, over which he wore a flapped hat; he had a silk handkerchief about his neck, and his mouth was furnished with a short wooden pipe, from which he discharged wreathing clouds of tobacco-smoke. He was wrapped in a kind of capot of green bays, lined with wolf-skin, had a pair of monstrous boots, quilted on the inside with cotton, was almost covered with dirt, and rode a mule so low that his long legs hung dangling within six inches of the ground. This grotesque figure was so much more ludicrous than terrible, that I could not help laughing; when, taking his pipe out of his mouth, he very politely accosted me by name. You may easily guess I was exceedingly surprised at such an address on the top of the mountain Brovis: but he forthwith put an end to it too, by discovering himself to be the marquis M——, whom I had the honor to be acquainted with at Nice. After having rallied him upon his equipage, he gave me to understand he had set out from Nice the morning of the same day that I departed; that he was going to Turin, and that he had sent one of his servants before him to Coni with his baggage. Knowing him to be an agreeable companion, I was glad of this encounter, and we resolved to travel the rest of the way together. We dined at La Giandola, and in the afternoon rode along the little river Roida, which runs in a bottom between frightful precipices, and in several places forms natural cascades, the noise of which had well-nigh deprived us of the sense of hearing; after a winding course among these mountains, it discharges itself into the Mediterranean at Ventimiglia, in the territory of Genoa. As the snow did not lie on these mountains, when we cracked our whips, there was such a repercussion of the sound as is altogether inconceivable. We passed by the village of Saorgio, situated on an eminence, where there is a small fortress which commands the whole pass, and in five

hours arrived at our inn, on this side the Col de Tende, where we took up our quarters, but had very little reason to boast of our entertainment. Our greatest difficulty, however, consisted in pulling off the marquis's boots, which were of the kind called Seafarot, by this time so loaded with dirt on the outside, and so swelled with the rain within, that he could neither drag them after him as he walked, nor disencumber his legs of them, without such violence as seemed almost sufficient to tear him limb from limb. In a word, we were obliged to tie a rope about his heel, and all the people in the house assisting to pull, the poor marquis was drawn from one end of the apartment to the other before the boot would give way: at last his legs were happily disengaged, and the machines carefully dried and stuffed for next day's journey.

We took our departure from hence at three in the morning, and at four, began to mount the Col de Tende, which is by far the highest mountain in the whole journey: it was now quite covered with snow, which at the top of it was near twenty feet thick. Half way up, there are quarters for a detachment of soldiers, posted here to prevent smuggling, and an inn called La Ca, which in the language of the country signifies the house. At this place, we hired six men to assist us in ascending the mountain, each of them provided with a kind of hough to break the ice, and make a sort of steps for the mules. When we were near the top, however, we were obliged to alight, and climb the mountain supported each by two of those men, called Coulants who walk upon the snow with great firmness and security. We were followed by the mules, and though they are very sure-footed animals, and were frost-shod for the occasion, they stumbled and fell very often; the ice being so hard that the sharp-headed nails in their shoes could not penetrate. Having reached the top of this mountain, from whence there is no prospect but of other rocks and mountains, we prepared for descending on the other side by the Leze, which is an occasional sledge made of two pieces of wood, carried up by the Coulants for this purpose. I did not much relish this kind of carriage, especially as the mountain was very steep, and covered with such a thick fog that we could hardly see two or three yards before us. Nevertheless, our guides were so confident, and my companion, who had passed the same way on other occasions, was so secure, that I ventured to place myself on this machine, one of the coulants standing behind me, and the other sitting before, as the conductor, with his feet paddling among the snow, in order to moderate the velocity of its descent. Thus accommodated, we descended the

mountain with such rapidity, that in an hour we reached Limon, which is the native place of almost all the muleteers who transport merchandize from Nice to Coni and Turin. Here we waited full two hours for the mules, which travelled with the servants by the common road. To each of the coulants we paid forty sols, which are nearly equal to two shillings sterling. Leaving Limon, we were in two hours quite disengaged from the gorges of the mountains, which are partly covered with wood and pasturage, though altogether inaccessible, except in summer; but from the foot of the Col de Tende, the road lies through a plain all the way to Turin. We took six hours to travel from the inn where we had lodged over the mountain to Limon, and five hours from thence to Coni. Here we found our baggage, which we had sent off by the carriers one day before we departed from Nice; and here we dismissed our guides, together with the mules. In winter, you have a mule for this whole journey at the rate of twenty livres; and the guides are payed at the rate of two livres a day, reckoning six days, three for the journey to Coni, and three for their return to Nice. We set out so early in the morning in order to avoid the inconveniencies and dangers that attend the passage of this mountain. The first of these arises from your meeting with long strings of loaded mules in a slippery road, the breadth of which does not exceed a foot and a half. As it is altogether impossible for two mules to pass each other in such a narrow path, the muleteers have made doublings or elbows in different parts, and when the troops of mules meet, the least numerous is obliged to turn off into one of these doublings, and there, halt until the others are past. Travelers, in order to avoid this disagreeable delay, which is the more vexatious, considering the excessive cold, begin the ascent of the mountain early in the morning before the mules quit their inns. But the great danger of travelling here when the sun is up, proceeds from what they call the Avalanches. These are balls of snow detached from the mountains which over-top the road, either by the heat of the sun, or the humidity of the weather. A piece of snow thus loosened from the rock, though perhaps not above three or four feet in diameter, increases sometimes in its descent to such a degree, as to become two hundred paces in length, and rolls down with such rapidity, that the traveler is crushed to death before he can make three steps on the road. These dreadful heaps drag everything along with them in their descent. They tear up huge trees by the roots, and if they chance to fall upon a house, demolish it to the foundation. Accidents of this nature seldom happen in the winter while the weather is dry; and yet scarce a year passes in which some mules and their

drivers do not perish by the avalanches. At Coni we found the countess C—— from Nice, who had made the same journey in a chair, carried by porters. This is no other than a common elbow-chair of wood, with a straw bottom, covered above with waxed cloth, to protect the traveler from the rain or snow, and provided with a foot-board upon which the feet rest.

It is carried like a sedan-chair; and for this purpose, six or eight porters are employed at the rate of three or four livres a head per day, according to the season, allowing three days for their return. Of these six men, two are between the poles carrying like common chairmen, and each of these is supported by the other two, one at each hand: but as those in the middle sustain the greatest burthen, they are relieved by the others in a regular rotation. In descending the mountain, they carry the poles on their shoulders, and in that case, four men are employed, one at each end.