

London, June 1st. 1849-

My Dear Father, I have been so busy for two weeks past, running to and fro in this world of London, that I almost, at times, began to fancy myself a sort of wandering Jew, and to fear that I should never again find time to write to you - and I have now such a stock of things which might be communicated, that I hardly know where to begin - But I think you still feel enough kind interest in me to receive an account first of my own immediate concerns with willingness - I have been constantly favored with very good health, my only personal discomfort having been the blistering of my feet, and occasionally getting so tired that I could hardly go to bed. I have found no difficulty and hardly any annoyance in the abandonment of Tobacco, though I sometimes feel a lingering affection for my old companion - My pecuniary arrangements are complete, but it is much more expensive to live with comfort here than in America, and though I use all the economy possible, I shall not stay so long perhaps in England as I at first anticipated. I have introduced myself to Mr. Bancroft, who received me politely; and my pass-port (which I received at the N. Y. Post. Office) is duly registered and certified at his office, so that I can rely on protection as an American if it is necessary - The present very disturbed state of political affairs on the Continent, and their future uncertainty seem, at first, rather forbidding as far as the conveniences of travelling are concerned; but I am told by those who ought to know, that I have little trouble to fear on that account especially as I am an American. Indeed, I already find cause every day to thank God that I am now, and am to remain, a citizen of our land of liberty, and to be more and more fully convinced that we are the happiest people on the earth - My anticipations regarding the objects of interest here, were, contrary to the usual course, less brilliant than the reality; such has been the case, always, even as Virgil found it, when people allow themselves "parva componere magnis". It is difficult at first to fully comprehend the vast extent of London: one can rarely see the whole, and it does not seem that there are miles and miles of buildings thronged with human beings on every side of one sitting quietly in his own room.

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Maine Historical Society

MMN #31741

Date: June 1, 1849

Description: Josiah Pierce on visit to London

Its size is best perceived, (as are the magnitudes of its great buildings) by referring it to some known space: its diameter is in each direction from 12 to 15 miles in length, and I accustom myself to think of a similar extent of country near my own home and imagine London placed upon it - But continuous lines of houses reach for a great distance along all the roads from London, and in three or four excursions which I have made of 12 or 15 miles from the city, it seemed as if I never was fairly out of it -

For some days after my arrival, I was quite confused by the strangeness of everything about me, the ceaseless din and noise which never ceases till long after midnight, the crowds in the streets of business of continually thronging and changing people and carriages; and in the effort to keep my senses sufficiently about me to attend properly to my necessary matters of business, and to accustom myself to the new ways & things around me I could observe very little clearly enough for recollection -

After, however, traversing the city pretty completely and fixing in my mind its prominent divisions and marked localities, I began my "sight-seeing" - and though I have in this short time been through with nearly the whole round of the more noted objects of interest here, yet I have tried to devote such a thorough and systematic attention to them as will leave the recollection of them firmly fixed in my memory for future pleasure and advantage -

I could not give you a fair description of the many interesting things I have seen, in the compass of a dozen letters: but I may tell you where I have been - I have visited the Tower with its associations of deeds of blood and violence, of long & sad imprisonments, with its effigies of kings and warriors of ages long past with the very armor which they wore, of Queen Bess, in her own robes, on horseback, with her strong vanity & energy of purpose well expressed in her face, with its repertory of ancient instruments of torture and implements of war, its glittering royal gewgaws, the maintenance of whose possession has cost so much blood: but I cared about nothing there so much as for the writing with a nail on the stone in Sir Walter Raleigh's prison.

I have climbed the Monument, losing my knowledge of the points of the compass & getting derry in the ascent.

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I have visited old Guild-hall with its images of Gog and Magog, and its Court of the Lord Mayor & Alderman in their tassel'd robes of another age: the Lord Mayors house with its magnificent appointments - the fine Royal Exchange, of stone 308 by 175 feet - the Bank, massive & fortified, covering 8 acres of ground and employing 800 clerks - the vast Docks, 100 acres in extent, with their immense and seemingly-endless warehouses, and great wine vaults, one of which into which I went, and which is full of Port wine alone is about 11 acres in extent, holding 17000 pipes -

The Tunnel, and the magnificent bridges "which must be seen to be appreciated" - Sir John Soane's Museum, where among many other wonderful and interesting works of ancient and modern art is the celebrated Egyptian sarcophagus of alabaster, found by Belzoni, the finest in the world - the British Museum, that immense collection of all things, which, as even the description books do not pretend to describe, how can I - I can only say, that I was occupied with delight and wonder from morning till evening, in going through only 4 of its rooms. (Of course I have not finished seeing it yet.) The collection of paintings & statuary in the rooms of the National Gallery and the Royal Academy, where are the original works of Raphael, Rubens, Rembrandt, Titian, Guido, Claude, Murillo, Hogarth & all the great painters - a celebrated show "Madam Tussauds" wax work figures, which are really life like of the most distinguished characters of the present century, and correct likenesses & the glorious old Westminster Abbey, grand and solemn enough in itself as a fine old Gothic cathedral; but with this distinction altogether eclipsed by the honor of its ^{character, as a monument of the} illustrious dead -

Westminster Hall, where was nursed and grew into the strength of manhood our noble laws; which has been the theatre of the display of human pomp and intellectual greatness since the time when Richard 2^d feasted 10,000 persons there, down to the present: where Burke's eloquence echoed along the ~~carved~~ ^{carved & arched} roof in the trail of Hasting's - where Charles 1st was condemned to die - Where Queen Caroline was tried - Where Coke & Bacon & Mansfield & Hale, and the many other legal sages meditated & walked: with hardly

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4) Any alteration, probably in its structure or appearance during that time - I visited the courts of Queens Bench, Lord Denman presiding; of Exchequer with Chief Baron Pollock at its head, of Common Pleas, and the Vice Chancellors court - The Lord Chancellor Cottenham was unwell and I did not see him - The Court-rooms are smaller than ours, with seats and wainscots of oak & high ceilings - The Judges sit on a high platform each with a little separate desk before him - The clerks sit just below them, in front; and below them on the ground floor, with their backs to the judges and their faces to the barristers sit the the attorneys - The barristers in their benches, ranged one above another as in an amphi theatre, are perhaps a little more dignified than our counsellors, but there is not more of the dignity that appears at a Law term of our Supreme Court - The Judges appeared even less grave than ours; some of them munching ~~biscuit~~ -

The Attornies wore neither wigs or gowns - Their honors wore larger wigs, the Sergeants, ^{wore the} next in size, with a little honorary ^{frizzling} of the hair, ^{or silk gowns} then those of the counsel and lastly of the clerks - The ushers or criers, who performed the duty of our deputy-sheriff in court wore gowns without wigs -

These decorations (or disfigurements, if you please) of the outer man don't seem to me to give any additional dignity, some of the wearers even, looked a little like foxes, with their thin sharp faces, thin and colorless, peering out from the stiff hair -

In examining witnesses or making their arguments, the counsel adopt a manner which I have never seen with us: they attempt by expressions of countenance which I might almost call grimaces, to manifest contempt, incredulity, sympathy or other feelings in a very marked manner. Of course, I can tell but little of the true worth of things I have observed so hastily; but I thought, that I knew gentlemen at our Cumberland bar, who would come off very creditably indeed from a contest with the Westminster Hall lawyers whom I heard = and that our judges would suffer no dishonor from a comparison with their Lordships here -

The courts are generally more orderly, as the "oi wolloi", the "outer barbarians are made to feel an inferiority and to keep at a distance;

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The courts are generally more orderly, as the "oi wolloi", the "outer barbarians are made to feel an inferiority and to keep at a distance;

There appears to be a general similarity in disposing of the cases after they are once brought forward: the preliminary arrangements are very slow; they have much the advantage of us in method and system, but probably our practice is quite as convenient and answers the ends of justice as well as theirs.

I have had some conversation with several gentlemen connected with the law; but have formed no acquaintance with them, and probably shall not have, as I have not yet had, time to do so - I hoped to have placed myself in a legal atmosphere by getting lodgings in the Temple - but the rooms there are not leased for less than half a year - It is very pleasant to stroll among the quiet courts & grounds of the Temple and the other Inns - the buildings are ancient - there are plenty of trees, some fountains &c: no carriages enter there - it seems strange to hear your own foot fall, after being in such a bustle as you have left: and it is like being in some old enchanted city, where all animation is suspended, but every thing is still fit for habitation.

But around the courts of your own peculiar branch of the law, the ecclesiastical courts in Doctors Commons, things are dark and gloomy, but uninteresting - I went there the other day, and going into the Heralds office, looked over some ancient books, the records prior to 1630, for the name of Peirse -

I only examined the books for this county & for Devonshire. It was there recorded, that one Richard Peirse, was standard bearer of King Richard II, at Bosworth field, and then lost a leg, but lived many years after - and a coat of arms and a number of generations were there in recorded of the Peirse family, until the days of John Peirse, gentleman sewer in ordinary to Charles I. who had two sons John (about whom nothing particular was said) and Richard who removed to Northallerton -

Whether this leg-less Peirse was my ancestor or not, the inquiry is bootless, and I shall not continue it: but I shall long remember the old, dark Heralds college, its ancient books and quaint carving in wood over the fireplace & black wainscot -

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I have seen some noted scene's of out-door existence too —
On Wednesday of last week I attended the famous Epsom races,
on the Derby day, which is considered a national festival —
From an illustrated paper which I send you, can be obtained
a tolerable idea of the event. The account therein is supposed
to be given by a French National-Guards-man, who has visited
England, like myself, for the sights. All classes of society were there
in thousands — and all seemed excited & deeply interested —

On the celebration of the Queen's birthday, a very great number
of the nobility & foreign ambassadors, all in gorgeous court-dresses,
attended her levee at St. James' Palace, an unsightly old brick building.
I saw many of the brilliantly dressed court, as they got out and in
their handsome carriages (attended by servants in livery & having beautiful
horses — Two or three regiments of troops, foot and horse were in
attendance — but that did not prevent the Queen's being shot at,
that afternoon — The crowd in the Parks was very great —

The Parks at this season are extremely beautiful: and when
they are filled with well-dressed people, (a notice is posted at the gates
that no others are allowed to enter) as is the case on every pleasant
afternoon or great occasion, the scene is very interesting —

They are planted with noble trees, and have fine gravelled walks,
and are surrounded by handsome and stately buildings —

Look on the map of London. Hyde Park is 395 acres in
Extent: on Sunday afternoons, the broad path from Hyde Park corner
to Kensington garden is so crowded with carriages, horse men and
people on foot, that it is difficult to move: 50,000 persons are
frequently seen here — Regent Park occupies 360 acres —

I saw the Queen, Prince Albert, and the eldest Little Prince
and Princess, a day or two after she was shot at —

I was not much affected: very few of our "smart" Yankee girls
would not do as well or better — Her pink bonnet appeared to
great advantage — She seems very popular if we may credit the
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loyalty ^{of the all.} that I saw, on account of her escape from assassination -
The three first days of this week were the "Whitsuntide Holidays" -
and as then occurred the famous Greenwich fair I went to see it -
It was a most curious affair - multitudes of people were there,
showing the most uproarious hilarity - I was much interested in
the Hospital & the old pensioners - Punch & Judy were
Exhibited among other ancient and national amusements in
the streets: and I had my fortune told by a veritable
old Gipsy in a red cloak.

~~But~~ I went on Wednesday to Hampton Court,
Palace, Cardinal Wolseys residence, a most delightful
spot, the Palace having many rooms filled with the
finest and most valuable paintings of the old masters -
and the park & grounds being most interesting -

But it would be in vain for me to go on. I might
write a week of what I have seen and not tell you all;
but I shall be ready to answer all questions when I
get home - After a few more days of riding on omnibuses,
and sailing on steam boats, and walking till I am ready
to drop with fatigue & staring & gazing at every thing here,
I shall start on a limited tour through Great Britain
of which I will further inform you -

I hope you received my letter dated the 18th ult.
Please write voluminously - Give my warm regards to all
my friends & love to the family and believe me

Ever your affectionate son
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