

'Down the Thames in Victorian Days' 1886 Julia Isham Taylor – from "Where Thames Smooth Waters Glide"

... from the preface:

It was in 1886 when Julia was twenty years old, that she assisted in a family trip from Oxford to Windsor.

She steered, her brothers Charles and Sam rowed, with her mother and a little sister for passengers.

From notes made at the time she afterwards wrote the narrative printed here.

It was read to the St. Ursula Club, a group of girls whose friendship for each other and the Club lasted through life.

We made our Thames trip the first Week in September, Which happened to be unusually warm this year throughout Europe.

The roll-call of our party was as follows - one stroke oar, one bow oar, one inexperienced coxwain, one first class passenger, one small child, one black bag, two "other" bags, one rug strap and everybody's umbrella.

We were a mutually dependent crowd and were sworn in for better or for worse.

In order to enter properly into the spirit of the thing we all donned straw sailors with the exception of the first class passenger who never discards her bonnet.

We went up to Oxford one Monday afternoon.

The following morning was spent in making the necessary arrangements.

Owing to the popularity of the trip, these are very easily concluded.

Suitable boats are to be had at Salter's boathouse by the Folly Bridge at Oxford.

These can be left at almost any of the villages along the river.

Our boat was fairly broad, but it rowed easily.

Having alluded to expense in connection with our boat, I may as well add here a word as to the cost for the whole trip.

Notwithstanding the rather "roughing it" character of the excursion, the expenses of each day will amount to very nearly a pound for every person.

This will include of course all tips and etceteras.

The navigation of the river is very simple.

In Dickens'[sic] Dictionary of the Thames, directions are given with regard to the currents, locks, etc., which will enable a total stranger to steer a safe and prosperous course.

It was about two in the afternoon when we made our start.

There was a slight breeze on the stream, enough to keep the rowers cool without inciting them to any violent exertions.

Somebody secured the Guide-Book and informed us that the upper part Of the river is often alluded to as the Isis, but it is not till it is joined some miles below Oxford by the tiny Thame that all agree in calling it the Thames.

No strong argument can be brought forward, however, in favor of this Isis nomenclature, though its graceful euphony has recommended itself to many of the poetically inclined, and Warton quaintly speaks of "Beautiful Isis and her husband Thame."

In Roman days the river was known as the Tamesis and also by the Anglo-Saxon name Temese.

We had scarcely discussed all this etymology and decided in favor of the poets' action when we came upon our first lock close by the celebrated Iffley Mill.

To one familiar with English landscape-painting there is as much need of describing the beauties of Iffley Mill as there is of acquainting a Dresdener with the composition of the Sistine Madonna.

Scarcely a year passes without its figuring in oils or water-colors upon the walls of the Royal Exhibitions.

Just below the Mill stands St. Mary's of Iffley, about the finest example in England of Anglo Norman architecture, and forming, with its adjacent rectory a beautiful little vignette.

In fact the effect from our comfortable boat seats was so thoroughly satisfactory that no one dared suggest a landing and a conscientious examination of the architectural detail.

Doubtless it was to save our consciences for this omission that we twisted round so enthusiastically a quarter of an hour later to get the long low view back across the meadows of the Oxford towers and spires.

At Sandford lock we were ordered to disembark, for the member of the party "who had been there before" said we "must see Sandford church".

He obligingly offered to lounge by the river and watch the boat during our absence.

He pointed out the way and we started up the very English road, with its slightly jagged hedges broken at intervals by a rich old tree.

I had a feeling of trespassing that almost amounted to sneakiness.

What business had we Americans running over a country that did not belong to us, in this free and easy back-door manner!

We stopped before a cottage to make sure of our way and it seemed as though we ought to explain our position to the tidy pleasant-voiced woman who answered our inquiries.

It certainly was not fair and square in us to talk to a contented cottager beneath the very shadow of her genuine thatched roof, as if that were the kind of thing we had been used to from infancy.

Before I had settled the ethics of the situation we reached the church.

It was a low, dark grey stone structure considerably overgrown with ivy and what we call "Virginia Creeper."

Above the porch the latter vine partly concealed an inscription.

The leaves were beginning to don those warm colors so dear to American hearts.

We pushed the long sprays aside and as though to make us feel still more at home, the graven letters read:

Condidit me Eliza Isham, Anno Gratiae 1652 Porticus Patronae

Thanks to thy charitie religiose dame

Wch. found me olde and made me new againe

We may be in the direct line of descent from the generous Eliza or she may be a very distant twig upon the family tree, but in any case she calls forth my curious imagination.

That she had money is apparent, but whether she was a strongminded female with an intelligent interest in ecclesiastical architecture or a weak-minded spinster devoted to church embroidery, will never appear.

Looking toward the river from the church yard, the land sloped gently away and in the slight hollow lay a goodly collection of barns and haystacks encompassing an ancient farm house.

The farmyard where for 300 years the robust rites and ceremonies of Old English economy had been celebrated, was sheltered with becoming dignity by a few grand, veteran oaks.

Once more upon the river we approached the large Park surrounding Nuneham Courtney, the seat of the Harcourt family.

As soon as the house itself appeared, discussion arose and raged in our boat.

Nuneham Courtney may be taken as a fair example of an old English place, the superiority and beauties of which English fiction has ever delighted to honor.

The Park in this particular instance consists simply of a good many acres fairly covered with rather fine trees.

The house is a stucco color, but we could not see of what it was built.

It was plain in form to a degree almost justifying the assertion of one of our disputants that it looked like a factory..

It was placed upon a terrace and opened at one end upon a formal garden such as the pomposity of the last century deemed befittingly impressive.

Below the terrace stretched what in downright American, I must call a field sprinkled with handsome Oaks.

A fine lot of cattle were strung more or less effectively over this space and the bank of the river was edged with rushes knee-deep amongst which some of the cows had chosen to meditate.

Now, leaving out all the historical and literary associations of the house - and they are decidedly entertaining by the way, - not taking its library or ancestral gallery into account, considering it in short only from the outside, our Stroke Oar rose to insist that Nuneham Courtney was not what in America would be called a fine Country place.

The building could not be compared with hundreds of those at home.

Architecturally it had not a beauty.

Then take the grounds.

Of lawn, ancestral, blue-blooded lawn on which so much stress is laid, there was really but very little, just around the house.

And as for the Park, more care and money would be lavished on two acres at Newport, than had ever entered into the philosophy of Nuneham's sturdy oaks.

In America the Park would never have enjoyed any higher title than "the woods".

This and much more the Stroke Oar argued before us and not one word could we gainsay, yet we knew we would like nothing better than to live in a duplicate Nuneham Courtney, while it was the realization of a cherished ideal for the Stroke.

It looked so dignifiedly individual and yet like such a thoroughly comfortable home.

The plainness of the house was not ugliness but rather a gentlemanly reserve, a well-bred reticence about attracting attention.

And as for the Park one could gallop through it on a splendid horse unmindful of its lack of landscape gardening.

The present owner is very kind about permitting the public to enjoy his land, and it has become a favorite picnic resort.

A little below the house there is an island in the river connecting by a light rustic bridge with the right bank.

There is a charming cottage here which guards the landing place for the excursionists.

We found a pleasure party just preparing to leave.

The scene was one of the prettiest imaginable.

It was almost sunset and the atmosphere was thickening with the rich incense light.

The foliage of the wooded island and upon the right bank were as freshly luxuriant as in June and the polished green of the ivy over the cottage and the dull smoothness of the lawn showed off to perfection the white flannels and brilliant jackets of the young men.

There was some laughing and a calling to and fro, the voices all as pleasantly toned as the waning light.

Two girls had taken a few steps on the bridge and stood half leaning on the rail.

Their figures were strikingly graceful.

One was in white, the other in pink: the simplicity of line and color in the dresses making an excellent effect.

I know I shall see that rustic bridge With its pretty spring and those two handsome girls a little toward one end of it, - bright silhouettes of color against a lovely green as long as I remember '86 [1886].

The sunset was almost cloudless. Broad washes of mellow coloring crept up in the sky, greyed on their edge and slowly sank before the dusk.

The closing scene for the day was heartily applauded.

It included the round stone arches of Abingdon bridge, half in shade and half in light, with a few trees and a church tower rising behind and the well diversified roofs of Abingdon itself to the left.

The composition of the whole was beyond criticism.

How different was all this from a small town at home where the picturesque is so lamentably coy that only the most persistent artist can coax her to reveal herself.

In the Old World she greets one effusively at every turn.

Every arrangement would look well in a frame.

We left our boat at the Nag's Head landing place and inquired the way to the "Crown and Thistle".

It was only a step.

The Inn was built plumb on the street and we entered under a passage way into a small cobble-paved courtyard much enlivened with red geraniums and nasturtiums in full bloom.

This display against the dull yellow walls was truly commendable.

I caught sight of an individual whom I recognized at once as a stable-boy though I could not remember having encountered this literary "supe" in the flesh before.

I suppose Dickens is responsible for the idiotic pleasure with which we greet these degenerate institutions and customs of English life.

My attention was diverted by the landlady.

She stood in the door of her little room opening on the passage way and wanted to know what we would have for dinner.

She was old and large, dressed in dowdy black with a good deal of white lace and a gold chain about her neck.

On her head was the inevitable cap, rather more elaborate and less fresh than could be desired.

By her side stood her daughter, thin, with sandy hair and large features.

Her black dress was neat and trim, and as they stood together the two were quite typical of the new and old order of things in innkeeping.

The old lady asked if we would have fowl or cutlets or a good duck that had just come in.

Nothing is ever ready at an English tavern.

The dinner has to be ordered at least an hour beforehand.

On going up stairs to our rooms we found the hallway very dark and narrow with little falls and rises in unexpected places.

The rooms were clean however and the allowance of hot water generous.

The time until dinner was spent walking about the town.

The market place had a large porticoed building on one side giving it quite an air.

The little shops were old and irregular in build.

The principal interest of the town centres around the remains of a great Abbey supposed to have been founded in the 7th Century.

By the time of the Domesday Book it had reached that happy condition of being which in an individual would be described as "fair, fat and forty".

The gateway tower is its best preserved ruin and though blackened and defaced its ornamentation still retains that expression of jolly amiability which warms one's heart towards all the early Gothic.

Lusty masses of ivy and the growing darkness prevented our getting any very clear idea of the other remains.

Returning to the Coffee Room of the "Crown and Thistle" we found dinner was not yet forthcoming though it was past eight o'clock.

I tried to divert my feelings by looking at everything the room contained.

There were four old colored prints on the walls depicting a stage coach at different hours during the day.

The colors were soft and truthful while the subject was so well treated that I began to covet the series.

One called "Waking up" rendered capitally the grey chilliness of a discouraging November sunrise and the wretchedly unsatisfactory attitudes of people who have been trying to sleep in a sitting posture.

I actually began to feel cramped and hungry for breakfast.

This last sensation was not at all imaginary.

It also existed in each member of the Party and an opinion prevailed that 8:30 was a rather unnecessarily fashionable hour for dinner.

We met round the breakfast table the next morning with the best of weather and spirits.

Even the execrable coffee could be drunk under such circumstances.

While the boat was made ready I walked round to a little shop, noted the night before, where fruit and vegetables were displayed.

The difficulty of procuring fruit always bothered us.

Plums seemed more plenty than anything else, but good ones, even in the midst of the season, cost from a penny to two pence a piece.

I bought my green gages of a well-mannered woman and while she twisted up the end of my paper bag a servant girl came to the door.

"No I haven't any this morning - tell the Doctor, they're all gone," called the woman.

Then turning to me she continued "I know what she wants.

The Doctor is so fond of tomatoes.

He wants his salad every morning for breakfast.

He thinks they're very healthy.

It's wonderful how the Doctor has been recommending tomatoes lately."

She bade me a cheery good morning and somehow I remember our little interview and the Doctor's predilection for tomatoes with much pleasure.

The banks of the river are low for some distance beyond Abingdon and the character of the views remains the same, very slight hills, clumps of vigorous trees or single ones at irregular distances, alone break the sky line.

It is this gentle flatness without hardness or a depressing effect which is so pleasingly typical of many of the English counties.

In France and Germany the lines of the landscape are clearer and harder the trees more stiff.

I think these sterner lines make one realize on the continent the dreariness and inexorable labor of the peasant's life.

As they bend over the furrows in their patiently tilled fields the compact lines of earth and sky meeting about them threaten to crush such puny inequalities to the ground.

In England on the contrary, life in the open air wears a mild almost idyllic aspect.

One feels sure that the hedges will hold up the sky and allow the people to walk along comfortably without bending their heads.

How much of England's character and history those hedges illustrate!

There is Dr. Holmes' autocratic comparison "In England" he said "you have hedges; at home we have wire fences.

They don't show so much but they keep people apart just as effectually."

There is a whole volume of Republican sociology with the remark.

Have we anything, though, in this new world so delightful to the eye as the rural English bridges?

I can think of nothing to compare with those low reposeful arches of dark moss-smear'd stone rising from the shallow meadow streams, their every line in rhythm with the sluggish water and the placid fields.

They are the very epitome of English pastoral.

The whole distance by river from Oxford to London Bridge is one hundred and eleven miles.

We had made about eight miles Tuesday afternoon and determined to allow sixteen for Wednesday morning's work.

This would take us through four locks and bring us to Wallingford for luncheon.

Locking is a truly diverting pastime.

I think with the exception of those we passed the first day, that we always had the company of other boats going through the locks.

The keepers live in storybook cottages close by the gates.

Every one of them has a more or less immaculate little garden extending along one or both sides of the lock.

Every plant seemed blooming at this season and the flowers verged upon riotousness in their profusion and colorings.

The keepers are justly proud of these displays and several have a local reputation for the taste of their decorations. This is only one instance of the universal love and care shown by the poor for flowers.

On approaching the lock, if they do not find it open the boaters raise the cry of Lock! Lock!

There is a general scrambling round after the boat hooks (which are also paddles) with which the boat is carefully guided within the gates.

Some restless passenger generally prefers to get out and try the bank for a while until his party are through.

While within the lock all conversation in different boats can be heard, and we listened to a good deal of genial though not exactly airy British chaff.

As the water runs out before one sinks beyond his reach, the keeper hastens to collect his toll.

You give him 3^d for a four oared boat and he returns you a tiny colored slip of paper.

There is a sign board by every lock bearing its name and the distances from London and Oxford.

A keeper's life must be rather trying.

He can be called out at any moment of the night or day to pass a boat.

In the winter there is probably very little to be done, but in the summer boats are continually going through - the evening parties sometimes keeping out till after midnight.

Further down the river the locks increased in liveliness.

Small boys appeared selling fruit and at one place the Keeper's whole family were engaged in a flourishing trade in green gages and pears.

At Wallingford we went to "The Four Arms".

We were allowed to wander in and take possession of the Coffee-Room unquestioned.

The eternal cold meats were on the sideboard flanked by the large yellow triangle of cheese.

Pickles and a pale crusted half cut up ball of bread were stranded.

We rang for plates and helped ourselves.

We may all live to see immense changes in England, but while the solar system lasts these clammy luncheons will endure.

Since '83 [1883] jams and marmalade seem to have invaded the inns and hotels.

They almost invariably are served you for breakfast, and if left upon the table will be allowed to mitigate the rigors of the nation at luncheon.

The church of St. Peters at Wallingford contains the bones of Sir William Blackstone who was buried there in 1780.

An unkind tradition accuses Sir William of the design and erection of St. Peters' fearfully mean looking spire, but we made it a point to be generously skeptical about this legend.

A previous acquaintance with Justice Blackstone's writings enabled our rowers to derive much cheerful satisfaction from the sight of his last resting place.

I could not share these emotions but my remembrance of the quaint rhymes in the 400 Points of Good Husbandry was green enough to make me gratefully welcome a few traces of old Tusser.

He was reported by the guide book to have been educated at Wallingford and after arriving at years of discretion, he thus frankly wrote of it.

*Oh painful time for every crime
What X X X X X hellish tales
What robes now bare, what colledge fare
What bread now stale, what pennie ale*

*Then Wallingford how wert thou abhor'd
Of sillie boies.*

[*What Thomas Tusser actually wrote and published in 1557 was:*

*O painful time for every crime!
What touzed ears, like baited bears!
What bobbed lips, what jerks, what nips!
What hellish toys!
What robes how bare, what college fare
What bread how stale, what penny ale
Then Wallingford, how wert thou abhor'd
Of seely boys!]*

All the beauties of a perfect summer's afternoon were lavished upon us between Wallingford and Streatley. There was scarcely any rowing done and we drifted with the lazy current past several charming places. I saw a number of boats hugging the banks or resting blissfully half screened beneath the shade of overhanging trees. The light boating apparel of the youth and his companion always betrayed these retirements. It is not necessary, I presume, to add that the number of companions was strictly limited to one. They and their pretty poses were thoroughly in keeping with the day. The whole thing was such a correct reproduction of the average English novel that the boatload of American spectators brimmed with approval.

About five o'clock some one proposed landing for an hour or so to try how we would look sitting on the bank. The boat was pulled up under some Pollards fringing the shore and we lounged in the long soft grass and took turns in reading aloud "the adventures of Mrs. Aleshine and Mrs. Lecks".
["*The Casting Away of Mrs. Lecks and Mrs. Aleshine*" by Frank Stockton was published in 1886.]
Several boats passed that were towing. They seem to tow a great deal, particularly going up stream, and it affords a welcome change from constant rowing. Over the good level tow-path it seems no effort to pull a small boat briskly along. I remember a large white boat that passed us one day drawn by a team of hearty boys and containing three most effective young girls and a twanging banjo.

We timed ourselves to reach Streatley at sunset. The low rustic building of the Swan Inn appealed to our artistics as we landed at its wharf. The Swan is one of the most popular houses on the river and its rooms are often engaged ahead for weeks at a time. But thewherefore of this state of affairs none of us could divine. The interior is extremely old, rickety and stuffy. The upper floor carries the eccentricities of age decidedly too far. The Coffee Room is small and very low. Midges swarmed upon its whitewashed rafters, and succeeded in sticking to everything we ate. Bassanio's words apply too truly to the saucer-like roses that clamber over the entire facade, and the other delusive attractions of the Swan's exterior. They are indeed "But the beauteous scarf veiling an Indian". A pert maid in a mussy pink calico managed to bring in our dinner between distracting summons of the bell-rope from various quarters of the house.

Thursday morning was cold, grey and rainy. The water fell in that even business-like way which denotes that it has the whole day before it and therefore will not hurry about getting down. We wiled away as much time as possible over breakfast, and then for two hours restlessly watched the sullen mist outside. Finally it did lighten somewhat. The rain wavered into a drizzle and we concluded to start on. A rubber sheet and one rubber coat went far toward making us comfortable in the boat.

The rain ceased half an hour later but the sky remained the same and the atmosphere seemed saturated with cold perspiration.

It was one of those cold moist days, dispiriting to look at but gratefully refreshing in the midst of summer heat.

A little quiet melancholy can be appreciated after a long period of hilarity and the English, although they malign such days as nasty, manage to extract thorough enjoyment from them.

This was Perhaps our most characteristic morning on the river.

There were lots of people out.

The darkness and absence of wind had suggested the delights of angling to both the masculine and feminine mind.

There were fishers in boats and fishers on banks, fishers in groups and solitary fishers.

Those out in the stream were all in punts.

The partiality toward punting in this region is amazing and the punters pushing around with their long poles vaguely recall Italian gondoliers.

When any one really intends to fish seriously from a punt he or she takes a chair along and the effect of three or four people in a row sitting on kitchen chairs and each holding a fishing rod straight before him would impress the most thoughtless observer.

The dark Mackintoshes and rubber hats impart a touch of absolute weirdness to these determined figures.

The feminine anglers wore suitable yet pleasing clothes.

Their small caps and trim rubber cloaks were not ungraceful, and when their capes or long sleeves blew back one generally saw a boating jacket of cheering vividness beneath.

There was an entire absence of that bedraggled look which so woefully betrays the attempts of other nationalities to amuse themselves in the rain.

The scenery was pretty the entire way.

The river had been broadening gradually since Abingdon and was now a considerable stream.

The banks were higher and beautifully wooded for long stretches.

Just above Pangborne we passed several large country seats.

The houses were all big and suggestive of free hospitality, but none laid any claims to magnificance.

On toward Maple Durham lock the views increased in beauty and variety.

The clouds resumed work about two o'clock and it was agreed to stop for luncheon at the "Roebuck" whose red brick gables rose above the trees upon the high wooded bank to our right.

The railway ran at the foot of this bank for a short distance and the "Roebuck" almost overhung the track.

Nevertheless it was a pleasant enough spot when one climbed up to it.

The house was modern with clean airy rooms and in the Coffee Room was an extensive bay window commanding the river for some distance.

After luncheon it still rained methodically, and we were glad to make arrangements for spending the night where we were.

We secured the last vacant rooms in the house.

Everything about the "Roebuck" was practical and progressive.

The businesslike female who showed us over the house was an excellent specimen of her class.

She ably combined the functions of bartender and hotel clerk.

She would have been a man with us and I think it is distasteful to most Americans to find a woman in this position, particularly in connection with the bar.

When one thinks of it, it does not seem right that three fourths of the liquor drunk in England should be poured out by women's hands.

They are a quick, intelligent lot, evidently the sole possessors of "gumption" in the Kingdom.

In the matter of compact dressing, the grooms are their only competitors.

Friday morning was not a very brilliant affair, but we were under way by ten.

The 8 o'clock breakfast inspires as much terror in an English establishment as a six o'clock one at home.

Nine is the hour patronized by the healthy minded.

We used to order for half-past eight, appear ourselves a quarter of an hour later and expect to see some food by nine.

Between lush green banks and placid meadows, occupied by rich toned cattle, we passed down to Caversham.

Then came Sonning with its pretty bridge and the White Hart and French Horn Inns.

Wooded chalk cliffs and several little islands varied the Views beyond.

Beyond Worgrave[sic] beautiful parks, manors and courts lined the left hand shore, but the side of the river where the tow path passes is obliged by the public right of way to be free and open.

Somewhere along here we met our first swans.

They are very numerous upon the lower reaches of the Thames and their history accounts somewhat for the choice

of this name by so many of the inns.

Long ago they were an exclusively royal bird.

At the time of Edward IV no one was permitted to keep swans who did not possess a freehold of at least 5 marks annual value - except the king's son.

As a great honor this right to keep a "game of swans" was accorded to the Dyers and Vintners Companies.

The exact date of this gracious remission I cannot find but it has been cherished with pride to this democratic day. The Crown, the Dyers and the Vintners have each a distinguishing mark which is placed upon the upper mandibles of their respective birds.

The tavern sign of "the Swan with two necks" originated with the two nicks with which the Vintners decorate their property.

The process of marking, termed "swan upping", is made quite ceremonious.

My authority says it occurs in July or August and is frequently watched from steam launches by the dignitaries of the companies.

In other words they turn it into a good excuse for a first class picnic.

The whole number of birds is limited to 610; 500 belonging to the Crown, 65 to the Dyers and 45 to the Vintners.

Nothing is more indicative of the fondness of the English for the river life than the popularity of the house boats.

"Arks" they are dubbed and the name is unusually descriptive.

The fashion was introduced by artists, wishing out-door studios for protracted work.

Parties spend from a week to a whole summer in them.

If possessed by the restless spirit of travel, they hire a horse to tow them during the day, but the correct genius of an Ark inclines more towards long periods of anchored repose.

Those we saw were mostly situated like Moses - "Among the bullrushes".

Some were gaily inviting.

Others suggested the ant rather than the butterfly.

The butterfly species was large with pretty window curtains, bright awnings and plenty of flowering plants in gaudy jars.

The roofs were flat, and parti-colored wicker chairs and small tables showed their use as piazzas.

It all looked agreeable enough for a certain length of time.

It is a placid substitute for camping out, but I doubt if it will ever meet with American approval.

It is too much like "fixing up" to stay on at Mt. Ararat after the waters had subsided.

Marsh Lock, just above Henley was being repaired and our boat had to be taken round.

This appeared somewhat of a botheration and a disagreeable undertaking, but a miller had recognized his opportunity and was possessing himself as rapid as possible of the silver lining to the cloud.

For two shillings our belongings were taken safely over.

Henley Bridge was in sight and the three of us preferred walking on to the town where we lunched.

The famous stretch where the regattas are held is just below.

It was warm and sunny as we rowed over the course, and the bow oar considerably gave us a few points on the Henley regatta in '84.

The house boats were drawn up all along one bank, he said, and behind them came the coaches, well barricaded in the rear with their luncheon hampers.

On the other side of the river were the small boats and the tow path bank was crowded with spectators, all in the full glory of summer attire.

Our rower admitted it was the prettiest effect in crowds he had ever seen.

The men in spotless flannels "showed up" wonderfully well, though closely rivalled in this respect by the very light toilettes of the young girls.

In fact the English are most happy at present in their boating costumes.

Nowhere do they look so well as on their rivers and lawns.

Sir Roger de Coverley prefaces one of his benignant conversations by remarking that it is worth while to consider the force of dress, and with his authority I am emboldened to bring the subject even before an intellectual Club.

The gloriously striped blazers and the bright hued gowns of British youth are peculiarly pleasing against their low-keyed backgrounds.

Perhaps in the glare of our sunlight, the same thing would be offensively loud or showy, but the English girl can carry her colors without a trace of vulgarity.

Many of these glimpses on the Thames made me think that we are scarcely just to our day when we affirm that modern existence is but a thin-blooded, dull-toned grimy affair and that we must turn way back to the middle ages and the Renaissance to find exuberant animal vitality and scenes that have the color pulse.

Cycles hence, perchance, as people peer through the glasses of a museum case upon the faded tatters of a blazer or the worthy remains of a tam, they will exclaim "What an instinct for color those 19th century people!"

Future Alma Tademas may win eternal fame by depicting historically correct tennis, and stained glass saints will undoubtedly wear our pretty boating suits, with archaeological straw sailors, adapted to halos. Yes, let us own that our days are bright ones, let us try to make our apparel becomingly festive.

The Princess of Wales by her good taste and quiet elegance has been of more practical benefit to England than any other woman of the century.

The Queen is good but dowdy, her German predecessors have not been good but have surpassed her in dowdiness. Under them the English woman's appearance was notoriously gawky.

I have a suspicion that those charmingly voluminous dresses of mistily clinging white in which Sir Joshua clothes his bright-eyed women, were in reality wretchedly unmanageable and mussed gowns.

I am confirmed in this View by an examination of contemporary French robes where things are combined and held together in a much more shipshape manner.

But the Princess of Wales has unerringly dictated to her adopted countrywomen the methods by Which they can appear to the greatest advantage, and their sheeplike following of her lead has achieved for them a unique style, an independent national fashion.

No one can question the resulting benefits to trade.

The uniformity of the dressing is very marked.

formity of the dressing is very marked.

Every one seems to fit into the same general outlines and even the types of faces are few and well marked.

ll marked.

Coton Woodville in the illustrated papers reproduces the average girl altogether truthfully and Caldecott's sketches have hosts of originals.

The weather tried to retract its impoliteness of the day before and from Henley to Marlow its conduct was irreproachable.

The ever widening river was roughened by the wind into tiny waves that caught the sunlight bewitchingly.

The gauzy white atmosphere of English midsummer tempered the cloudless sky and shaded all distant greens into pale blue.

Patches of sloping lawn lay basking in the sunshine as though happy to escape the dark unmottled shadows stretching out from beneath the dense foliage.

The trees were all sturdy and heavily framed, with leaves presented to the sun's rays like the scales of ancient armour.

All along here the river ran through what Curtis calls our Spanish estates.

Do we own any property more familiar to us than these fair English homes?

Ever since we were old enough to read, we have dined and danced in their halls and made love in their gardens.

Late in the afternoon we passed Medmenham Abbey.

That bête noir of self-restrained respectability in the 18th century is now a strikingly neat reformed appearing ruin and is probably trying to atone for the wildly defiant orgies of its past.

Close by was a pretty little river hotel and a party were having afternoon tea upon the trim lawn.

As we neared Marlow the pleasure boats grew very numerous.

Every one seemed to prefer the sunset combined with a little rowing.

We stopped at Bisham church which, with its manor house, anciently an Abbey, makes one of the most interesting estates on the river.

The history of the house goes back to King Stephen's time and is complete in ghostly legends, visits from Queen Elizabeth and endless minor attractions.

Our rooms for the night were in a cottage annex of the "Complete Angler" close by Marlow Bridge.

The Angler proved more complete in guests than in other respects and we could hardly get waited on.

The impudence of these small inns in their charges for service is amazing.

They represent absolutely nothing.

In a private house the service is a miracle of soothing respectful constancy.

A good English servant has not his equal.

An Eastern slave may be as devoted to your interest, but his servile attentions will never give you that sense of moral greatness which the complete devotion of one British subject confers.

The following morning a violent thunder shower delayed our start.

with this exception I can echo Burrough's clever criticism of British skies - "There is one thing they do not have in England that we can boast of at home, and that is a good masculine type of Weather: it is not even feminine: it is childish and puerile."

I saw nothing but petulant little showers and prolonged juvenile sulks.
 The clouds have no reserve, no dignity and if there is a drop of water in them, - and there generally are several drops - out it comes.
 There is no cloud scenery as with us, no mass and solidity, no height nor depth.
 The clouds seem vague and vapory, immature, indefinite inconsequential youth!
 After the short storm the sun came out with amiable determination and, by the time Cookham Lock was reached, had pretty well cleared its heavenly path.

Of all the Locks, Cookham is considered to have the loveliest situation.
 It lies under the woods of Hadsor and Cliveden, and passing through it one enters an ideal vista between Formosa Island and the remarkably beautiful banks of Cliveden Park.
 This latter is the seat of the Duke of Westminster.
 The scenery along this stretch has the peculiar refined elegance of the most delicate engravings.
 The swans that float upon the stream emphasize the air of ancestral sentiment and aristocratic pleasuring.
 One has the feeling that the whole thing is an illustration and that there must be slightly old-fashioned rhetoric in excellent print on the opposite page.
 It has a great reputation at the present day as a watery lovers' lane.

I had an unaccountable satisfaction in seeing Maiden Head [*sic*].
 I think it was its quaint name which had lodged itself in my fancy.
 In looking up a derivation, I found that the latest authorities think it comes from Maiden "Hythe" the new Wharf, but there is a delightfully credulous tradition of St. Ursula's virgins - probably brought there as a relic.
 A mile further on we sighted the pretty Village of Bray with the church for whose sake the appreciative Vicar so persistently dodged the spoils system of the 17th century.

Then came our first View of Windsor.
 The river winds so much that one had ever changing glimpses of the Castle, each a trifle more distinct than the preceding.
 In the thick blue haziness it appeared to grow as slowly and imperceptibly as an imagined thing.
 It was too vast, too bewildering and incomprehensible for a reality and it rose against the sky more like a vision of a battlemented Paradise.
 Our boat brought up at one of Salters branches on the bank opposite Windsor town and just by the bridge.
 We could not own to ourselves that we left it this time for good.
 We all talked about Monday and the probability that some of us at least would make the time for one more day on the river.
 Crossing the bridge we walked up the hills and signified our desire to spend Sunday at the Castle Hotel.
 For air and view we mounted three flights of stairs and my window overlooked the market place.
 This was brightened while daylight lasted by the Autumn fruits, flowers and vegetables amid a jumble of baskets, tables and old women.
 In the evening it was filled by an uncanny crowd half Visible beneath flaring torches collected about a peddling auctioneer.
 His indistinguishable and darkly fantastic surroundings made rather a demoniac whole.
 It was a suggestion, luckily much more metaphorical than real, of those horrible dregs of senseless stolid brutality lying at the very bottom of this social system.
 What a contrast to the Cathedral service in St. George's chapel on Sunday morning!
 Here in the individual stalls, with arms, devotion comfortably seated listened amidst red velvet cushions and gilded prayer-books to an incomparable harmony of words, music and thought.

Monday, the force of circumstances necessitated the return of the whole party to London.
 The flannels and the sailors were called in and a properly subdued company took the train for Paddington.

Americans are going more and more into English Society.
 There is much discussion in this country with regard to what kind of people one should associate with in England.
 Let me advise the Ursulites to place Father Thames on their visiting list and trust to his guidance through some of the fairest portions of "our old home".
 And now I would like to tie a moral tail on to this lightest of paper kites.
 You will probably recognize the stuff of which it is made, as I am greatly addicted to its use, and have doubtless wrapped up some of my previous presentations in its tissue.

When I ask myself the wherefore of this pleasure we had in England and things English, I get the somewhat metaphysical answer "Association of ideas".

The better one knows English Literature the more one can enjoy Great Britain.

And in this literature, next to those great thoughts which belong to no time or country, what is it that gives us the greatest pleasure?

Is it not the virulent home sentiment?

The sentiment of the blazing Yule log and the full country house?

It is so warm-hearted, so liberal and noble, this English home hospitality that it disarms us and makes us captives.

But why should we not all - and we American women especially - learn the secrets of our generous conquerors?

To the women of a country belongs its social culture.

If we can make our homes truly comfortable and ourselves physically and mentally attractive we may be able to divert or modify that fever of gain at present threatening the minds and morals of American men.

Why should we not make our Society the most delightful and intelligent in the world?

Why not, you may answer, transport ourselves, bag and baggage to Utopia!

But even if the ideal is impossible its pursuit certainly does involve improvement and We are all capable of that.

The duties of the different generations change as completely as their material surroundings.

We are proud of our first American women, strong, self-sufficient yet self-sacrificing heroines.

Are we conscious of the debt we owe them?

They began this work of making a country.

They did their hard part well.

How are we getting on with the rest of it?

I assure you that it lies with us to make this country brighter than France, more lovable than Germany, happier than Italy and better than England.