A Visit to Paris in 1749

Author(s): P. Y. and J. J. Champenois

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MISCELLANEOUS NOTES.

A VISIT TO PARIS IN 1749.

THE following unpublished letter¹ deserves to be known for two reasons: first, it throws some light on the social relations between England and France in the middle of the eighteenth century, and, in the second place, the vivid way in which it illustrates the cosmopolitan spirit of the age, testifies once more to the existence in both countries of parallel forces which led to the evolution of one and the same intellectual type: 'l'abbé Birch' and l'abbé Sallier.

Philip Yorke² to Daniel Wray³.

PARIS *Sept^r the 1st
12th* 1749.

DEAR WRAY,

Your Letters have the merit of choice Closet Peices, wch being rarely to be met with, & highly finished, are greatly valued by the Curious. You entertain me with an Account of your Summer Amusements, but drop one wch I think the most remarkable, & wch I shd scarce credit, if I had it not upon the best Authority, that instead of Della Valle your old Friend, or those of later date the Alcoran & Mynheer Kemfer, you were actually found wth a volume of Sir L. Jenkin's Negotiations before you, & were afterwards content to take up wth the humbler occurrences of Master Garrard. You say nothing of your Literary Repasts in Kew Lane wch makes me doubt whether you have exercised that Hospitality to the Learned wch you engaged to do: but you will alledge perhaps in excuse for the omission that the Literate of London like those of Paris are now breathing a fresher Air; & not easily to be picked up in the Purlieus of Tom's or Crane Court. Abbé Birch⁴ I imagine resides as constantly in his Barge at Norfolk Street, as the Abbé Sallier⁵ does in his appartments at the Bibliotheque Royale: and this leads me to tell you that I have twice visited that Collection, wch is indeed a noble one, & does honor to the Generosity of the Royal Founders, & the Taste of Those who have had the conduct of it. There are not fewer than 140,000 volumes of all sorts printed & manuscript in the Library; the Former are ranged with great method in 3 long Gallerys & one large Ante Room: there is a 4th Gallery finishing for the reception of the rest, wch are not yet in such exact order. The MSS are very numerous, & put up in smaller appartments. Those relating to the French History are out of

¹ B.M.Sl., 4325, fol. 10-12.

² Philip Yorke, F.R.S., eldest son of Lord Chancellor Hardwicke.

³ Daniel Wray, F.R.S., wrote the *Athenian Letters* in collaboration with Philip and Charles Yorke, T. Birch and some others.

⁴ T. Birch, D.D., the secretary and the historian of the Royal Society.

⁵ Keeper of the King's Library and best remembered as one of the earliest contributors to the *Encyclopédie*. Cf. Discours préliminaire, edit. Picavet, p. 142.

the Cabinet of Card: Mazarin, Mons^r Colbert etc. there is also a Species of Literature wch is not to be met with anywhere else, I mean several parcels of Chinese Tartarran, & Indian Books, wth short Accounts of the Contents from the Missionaries who sent them over. The Cabinet of Medals, I have not yet had an opportunity of seeing, as Mons^r Boze¹ who is the keeper of it has been out of Town; but I have turned over some volumes of the Collection of Prints, wch seems a very perfect and compleat one, & the Abbé who has y^e care of it was very desirous I shd renew my visit.—The Library is now lodged at the Hotel de Nevers Rue Richelieu where the Bank was kept in the time of Lawe, & the 10th volume of the Catalogue is now in the Press, but I despair of getting the Memoire Historique wch you spoke to me about by itself, tho' I told Abbé Sallier It would be a great satisfaction to many of our Savans, whose Finances wd be too far reduced by the purchase of so many thick Folios.—I have had an opportunity of presenting the President's² Letter to Mons^r Reaumur, & seeing his Collection tho' in a more cursory way than I could have wished, but that was owing to the numerous Company who saw it with me. The old Gentleman was extremely civil to me, & if he comes back to Paris before I leave it, I shall certainly visit him, en Philosophe & alone.—Mons^r Buffons [sic] has been unluckily in the Country ever since my arrival, and is not like to return in any reasonable time; I have made however one attempt, (& meditate another) to see the Jardin du Roi & le Cabinet thro' ye Canal of Mons^r Daubenton his Deputy, but he was also out of Town, tho' like your worship's his Residences en campagne are but short. I sent the Presidents Letter to Mons^r Fontenelle, & visited him upon the strength of it a day or two after. He behaved to me with great Politeness, Spoke very honorably of the English & their Productions, & was very glad to hear of y^e King's Bounty to the R. Observatory at Greenwich; He told me He had been upward of 40 years Secy to the Academy, & had written 70 or if I mistake not 80 eloges. I replied It was happy for y^e memory of his Brethren of the Academy, that he had outlived so many of them, since witht a Compliment no one had filled that difficult Province so ably as himself. He mentioned something but I did not well understand what, wch Mr. Foulkes had omitted answering, out of a former Letter of his. perhaps if you give the President a hint of it when you see him, He may know what it is wch Mons^r F. meant. I desire you wd make him my particular Compliments at the same time, wth many thanks for the advantages of his Recommendations.—By the Civility of Abbé Guasco an Italian, & an honorary member of the Academy of Belles Lettres I was admitted to one of their meetings. I heard 2 Papers read one upon the *Miroirs* of the Ancients, & the other upon the Chronology of y^e *Lydian Kings*, but I thought the first very trifling, & y^e other very dry, & I question whether either of them will be preserved in their printed Memoirs. that Academy is now employed by the orders of Mons^r D'Argenson about a Medallic History of the present Reign, & I suppose with a particular view to the Successes of the last War.

I hear the Design for a new Square is dropt, but that the old Front of Versailles to the Court wch is you remember a very ugly one, will be taken down this winter & rebuilt in a more elegant Taste.

There is little stirring at present en fait de Literature here,—even Novels and Plays are during this dead season kept up in the Authors Garrets till after the St Martin when the Town is fuller. I am told that Voltaire is writing a *Catiline*³ wch will put Mons^r Crebillon's⁴ out of Countenance, but that you will say is no hard matter. The waspish Generation of Criticks has so far disgusted him, that he has neither printed his *Semiramis*⁵ nor his *Nannire*⁶; the last is taken from our Pamelas, but had no great run. I have you may believe, frequented their Spectacles a good

¹ Claude Gros de Boze (1680–1753), perpetual secretary of the Académie des Inscriptions et Belles-lettres.

² i.e. Martin Folkes who was elected President of the Royal Society in 1741.

³ Voltaire's *Catiline* was first performed on Feb. 24, 1752.

⁴ Dec. 20, 1748, published 1749.

⁵ A mistake; *Semiramis* (Aug. 29, 1748) was published in April, 1749.

⁶ i.e. *Nanine* (June 16, 1749), published in Nov. of that year.

deal; I am a great admirer of Mlles Dumenil & Gaussin¹, the first is excellent for the higher parts in Tragedy² as Rodogune and Merope in wch I have seen her, & the last in the tender & soft. I am not much struck with any of their men, & Grandval their best Actor, is to me a disagreeable one. He is very stiff, has no variety of manner, & cannot hit the passionate & affecting strokes as Garrick does. I have scribbled you a long letter, & tis Time to leave off, only Let me desire you to send Ld D—s medals, & Birch's Historical Account to Mons^r Faget as soon as you can. Direct them to Mr. Walters the King's Agent at Rotterdam, with a note to recomend them to his Conveyance. I am much obliged to Mr. Edwards for the Trouble he was pleased to take about the Root house [?]. Your compliment to him is a very just one, & I prefer his good Doctrine greatly to Mr. Hiteroft's. I hope we shall pass some days together quietly & sociably before the Parliament meets, for if I know myself at all, I am not made for a Citizen of Paris.—We abound at present with English, & amongst the rest my good Lord Lond—y your old Disciple at Cambridge whom I saw the other night very gallantly carrying off 3 Ladys in his Chariot, lui-meme le quatrieme from the Opera. I may trust this anecdote to your Prudence, tho' the Fact was not committed in a corner. If you was not so necessary as a carefull Sheperd to the little Flock at [!] W——r I should wish for you here, to visit the Palais Royal & the Churches. I am also in great want of Pond³ witht whose Judicious Eye I may bring home a very bad Cargo from Mariette's⁴. Pray tell him that his Burgomaster Sixte is a better Rembrandt than one saw at the King's Library. I hope he & his pencil flourishes. Is your Portrait yet taken for a further Improvem^t.

Yours &c.
P. Y.

J. J. CHAMPENOIS.

LONDON.

'LA JOURNÉE DES DUPES.'

La Journée des Dupes: pièce tragi-politi-comique. This political satire, published in the year 1790 by one of the deputies of the National assembly, and containing trenchant criticisms of the policy of Mirabeau and the character of Lafayette, together with an eye-witness's account of the events of October 5 and 6, 1789, seems to have escaped the recognition it deserves. This may be due partly to the form of the satire, which was described as a 'pièce représentée sur le Théâtre National' by 'les grands comédiens de la Patrie.' It has therefore been classified at the British Museum with 'pièces d'actualité' performed on the stage. In examining the lesser plays of the period I came upon the satire, bound up with three plays of the 'vaudeville' type⁵.

Both external and internal evidence point to Nicolas Bergasse (1750–1832) as the author of this piece: a copy in the British Museum contains

¹ Cf. Bengesco, *Les comédiennes de Voltaire*.

² Garrick had the same opinion, cf. Bengesco, *op. cit.*, p. 103.

³ Arthur Pond, the painter and engraver, Wray's and Yorke's intimate friend.

⁴ The famous dealer in prints and engravings.

⁵ *La Journée des Dupes* has also been sometimes confused with a play of Népomucène Lemercier's, written in 1821 under the same title. Lemercier's play refers to the original 'Journée des Dupes' in the Fronde, and has no connection with the satire of 1790.