OUR OLD HOME
A Series of English Sketches
(1863)

by Nathaniel Hawthorne

To Franklin Pierce,
As a Slight Memorial of a College Friendship,
prolonged through Manhood, and retaining
all its Vitality in our Autumnal Years,
This Volume is inscribed by NATHANIEL
HAWTHORNE.

TO A FRIEND.

I have not asked your consent, my dear General, to the foregoing inscription, because it
would have been no inconsiderable disappointment to me had you withheld it; for I have long
desired to connect your name with some book of mine, in commemoration of an early
friendship that has grown old between two individuals of widely dissimilar pursuits and
fortunes. I only wish that the offering were a worthier one than this volume of sketches, which
certainly are not of a kind likely to prove interesting to a statesman in retirement, inasmuch as
they meddle with no matters of policy or government, and have very little to say about the
deeper traits of national character. In their humble way, they belong entirely to aesthetic
literature, and can achieve no higher success than to represent to the American reader a few of
the external aspects of English scenery and life, especially those that are touched with the
antique charm to which our countrymen are more susceptible than are the people among
whom it is of native growth.

I once hoped, indeed, that so slight a volume would not be all that I might write. These and
other sketches, with which, in a somewhat rougher form than I have given them here, my
journal was copiously filled, were intended for the side-scenes and backgrounds and exterior
adornment of a work of fiction of which the plan had imperfectly developed itself in my
mind, and into which I ambitiously proposed to convey more of various modes of truth than I
could have grasped by a direct effort. Of course, I should not mention this abortive project,
only that it has been utterly thrown aside and will never now be accomplished. The Present,
the Immediate, the Actual, has proved too potent for me. It takes away not only my scanty
faculty, but even my desire for imaginative composition, and leaves me sadly content to
scatter a thousand peaceful fantasies upon the hurricane that is sweeping us all along with it, possibly, into a Limbo where our nation and its polity may be as literally the fragments of a shattered dream as my unwritten Romance. But I have far better hopes for our dear country; and for my individual share of the catastrophe, I afflict myself little, or not at all, and shall easily find room for the abortive work on a certain ideal shelf, where are reposited many other shadowy volumes of mine, more in number, and very much superior in quality, to those which I have succeeded in rendering actual.

To return to these poor Sketches; some of my friends have told me that they evince an asperity of sentiment towards the English people which I ought not to feel, and which it is highly inexpedient to express. The charge surprises me, because, if it be true, I have written from a shallower mood than I supposed. I seldom came into personal relations with an Englishman without beginning to like him, and feeling my favorable impression wax stronger with the progress of the acquaintance. I never stood in an English crowd without being conscious of hereditary sympathies. Nevertheless, it is undeniable that an American is continually thrown upon his national antagonism by some acrid quality in the moral atmosphere of England. These people think so loftily of themselves, and so contemptuously of everybody else, that it requires more generosity than I possess to keep always in perfectly good-humor with them. Jotting down the little acrimonies of the moment in my journal, and transferring them thence (when they happened to be tolerably well expressed) to these pages, it is very possible that I may have said things which a profound observer of national character would hesitate to sanction, though never any, I verily believe, that had not more or less of truth. If they be true, there is no reason in the world why they should not be said. Not an Englishman of them all ever spared America for courtesy's sake or kindness; nor, in my opinion, would it contribute in the least to our mutual advantage and comfort if we were to besmear one another all over with butter and honey. At any rate, we must not judge of an Englishman's susceptibilities by our own, which, likewise, I trust, are of a far less sensitive texture than formerly.

And now farewell, my dear friend; and excuse (if you think it needs any excuse) the freedom with which I thus publicly assert a personal friendship between a private individual and a statesman who has filled what was then the most august position in the world. But I dedicate my book to the Friend, and shall defer a colloquy with the Statesman till some calmer and sunnier hour. Only this let me say, that, with the record of your life in my memory, and with a sense of your character in my deeper consciousness as among the few things that time has left as it found them, I need no assurance that you continue faithful
forever to that grand idea of an irrevocable Union, which, as you once told me, was the earliest that your brave father taught you. For other men there may be a choice of paths,—for you, but one; and it rests among my certainties that no man's loyalty is more steadfast, no man's hopes or apprehensions on behalf of our national existence more deeply heartfelt, or more closely intertwined with his possibilities of personal happiness, than those of FRANKLIN PIERCE.

THE WAYSIDE, July 2, 1863.
OUR OLD HOME.

CONSULAR EXPERIENCES.

The Consulate of the United States, in my day, was located in Washington Buildings (a shabby and smoke-stained edifice of four stories high, thus illustriously named in honor of our national establishment), at the lower corner of Brunswick Street, contiguous to the Gorec Arcade, and in the neighborhood of scone of the oldest docks. This was by no means a polite or elegant portion of England's great commercial city, nor were the apartments of the American official so splendid as to indicate the assumption of much consular pomp on his part. A narrow and ill-lighted staircase gave access to an equally narrow and ill-lighted passageway on the first floor, at the extremity of which, surmounting a door-frame, appeared an exceedingly stiff pictorial representation of the Goose and Gridiron, according to the English idea of those ever-to-be-honored symbols. The staircase and passageway were often thronged, of a morning, with a set of beggarly and piratical-looking scoundrels (I do no wrong to our own countrymen in styling them so, for not one in twenty was a genuine American), purporting to belong to our mercantile marine, and chiefly composed of Liverpool Blackballers and the scum of every maritime nation on earth; such being the seamen by whose assistance we then disputed the navigation of the world with England. These specimens of a most unfortunate class of people were shipwrecked crews in quest of bed, board, and clothing, invalids asking permits for the hospital, bruised and bloody wretches complaining of ill-treatment by their officers, drunkards, desperadoes, vagabonds, and cheats, perplexingly intermingled with an uncertain proportion of reasonably honest men. All of them (save here and there a poor devil of a kidnapped landsman in his shore-going rags) wore red flannel shirts, in which they had sweltered or shivered throughout the voyage, and all required consular assistance in one form or another.

Any respectable visitor, if he could make up his mind to elbow a passage among these sea-monsters, was admitted into an outer office, where he found more of the same species, explaining their respective wants or grievances to the Vice-Consul and clerks, while their shipmates awaited their turn outside the door. Passing through this exterior court, the stranger was ushered into an inner privacy, where sat the Consul himself, ready to give personal
attention to such peculiarly difficult and more important cases as might demand the exercise of (what we will courteously suppose to be) his own higher judicial or administrative sagacity.

It was an apartment of very moderate size, painted in imitation of oak, and duskily lighted by two windows looking across a by-street at the rough brick-side of an immense cotton warehouse, a plainer and uglier structure than ever was built in America. On the walls of the room hung a large map of the United States (as they were, twenty years ago, but seem little likely to be, twenty years hence), and a similar one of Great Britain, with its territory so provokingly compact, that we may expect it to sink sooner than sunder. Farther adornments were some rude engravings of our naval victories in the War of 1812, together with the Tennessee State House, and a Hudson River steamer, and a colored, life-size lithograph of General Taylor, with an honest hideousness of aspect, occupying the place of honor above the mantel-piece. On the top of a bookcase stood a fierce and terrible bust of General Jackson, pilloried in a military collar which rose above his ears, and frowning forth immitigably at any Englishman who might happen to cross the threshold. I am afraid, however, that the truculence of the old General's expression was utterly thrown away on this stolid and obdurate race of men; for, when they occasionally inquired whom this work of art represented, I was mortified to find that the younger ones had never heard of the battle of New Orleans, and that their elders had either forgotten it altogether, or contrived to misremember, and twist it wrong end foremost into something like an English victory. They have caught from the old Romans (whom they resemble in so many other characteristics) this excellent method of keeping the national glory intact by sweeping all defeats and humiliations clean out of their memory. Nevertheless, my patriotism forbade me to take down either the bust, or the pictures, both because it seemed no more than right that an American Consulate (being a little patch of our nationality imbedded into the soil and institutions of England) should fairly represent the American taste in the fine arts, and because these decorations reminded me so delightfully of an old-fashioned American barber's shop.

One truly English object was a barometer hanging on the wall, generally indicating one or another degree of disagreeable weather, and so seldom pointing to Fair, that I began to consider that portion of its circle as made superfluously. The deep chimney, with its grate of bituminous coal, was English too, as was also the chill temperature that sometimes called for a fire at midsummer, and the foggy or smoky atmosphere which often, between November and March, compelled me to set the gas aflame at noonday. I am not aware of omitting anything important in the above descriptive inventory, unless it be some book-shelves filled
with octavo volumes of the American Statutes, and a good many pigeon-holes stuffed with
dusty communications from former Secretaries of State, and other official documents of
similar value, constituting part of the archives of the Consulate, which I might have done my
successor a favor by flinging into the coal-grate. Yes; there was one other article demanding
prominent notice: the consular copy of the New Testament, bound in black morocco, and
greasy, I fear, with a daily succession of perjured kisses; at least, I can hardly hope that all the
ten thousand oaths, administered by me between two breaths, to all sorts of people and on all
manner of worldly business, were reckoned by the swearer as if taken at his soul's peril.

Such, in short, was the dusky and stifled chamber in which I spent wearily a considerable
portion of more than four good years of my existence. At first, to be quite frank with the
reader, I looked upon it as not altogether fit to be tenanted by the commercial representative
of so great and prosperous a country as the United States then were; and I should speedily
have transferred my headquarters to airier and loftier apartments, except for the prudent
consideration that my government would have left me thus to support its dignity at my own
personal expense. Besides, a long line of distinguished predecessors, of whom the latest is
now a gallant general under the Union banner, had found the locality good enough for them; it
might certainly be tolerated, therefore, by an individual so little ambitious of external
magnificence as myself. So I settled quietly down, striking some of my roots into such soil as
I could find, adapting myself to circumstances, and with so much success, that, though from
first to last I hated the very sight of the little room, I should yet have felt a singular kind of
reluctance in changing it for a better.

Hither, in the course of my incumbency, came a great variety of visitors, principally
Americans, but including almost every other nationality on earth, especially the distressed and
downfallen ones like those of Poland and Hungary. Italian bandits (for so they looked),
proscribed conspirators from Old Spain, Spanish-Americans, Cubans who processed to have
stood by Lopez and narrowly escaped his fate, scarred French soldiers of the Second
Republic,—in a word, all sufferers, or pretended ones, in the cause of Liberty, all people
homeless in the widest sense, those who never had a country or had lost it, those whom their
native land had impatiently flung off for planning a better system of things than they were
born to,—a multitude of these and, doubtless, an equal number of jail-birds, outwardly of the
same feather, sought the American Consulate, in hopes of at least a bit of bread, and, perhaps,
to beg a passage to the blessed shores of Freedom. In most cases there was nothing, and in
any case distressingly little, to be done for them; neither was I of a proselyting disposition,
nor desired to make my Consulate a nucleus for the vagrant discontents of other lands. And
yet it was a proud thought, a forcible appeal to the sympathies of an American, that these unfortunates claimed the privileges of citizenship in our Republic on the strength of the very same noble misdemeanors that had rendered them outlaws to their native despotisms. So I gave them what small help I could. Methinks the true patriots and martyr-spirits of the whole world should have been conscious of a pang near the heart, when a deadly blow was aimed at the vitality of a country which they have felt to be their own in the last resort.

As for my countrymen, I grew better acquainted with many of our national characteristics during those four years than in all my preceding life. Whether brought more strikingly out by the contrast with English manners, or that my Yankee friends assumed an extra peculiarity from a sense of defiant patriotism, so it was that their tones, sentiments, and behavior, even their figures and cast of countenance, all seemed chiselled in sharper angles than ever I had imagined them to be at home. It impressed me with an odd idea of having somehow lost the property of my own person, when I occasionally heard one of them speaking of me as "my Consul"! They often came to the Consulate in parties of half a dozen or more, on no business whatever, but merely to subject their public servant to a rigid examination, and see how he was getting on with his duties. These interviews were rather formidable, being characterized by a certain stiffness which I felt to be sufficiently irksome at the moment, though it looks laughable enough in the retrospect. It is my firm belief that these fellow-citizens, possessing a native tendency to organization, generally halted outside of the door to elect a speaker, chairman, or moderator, and thus approached me with all the formalities of a deputation from the American people. After salutations on both sides,— abrupt, awful, and severe on their part, and deprecatory on mine,—and the national ceremony of shaking hands being duly gone through with, the interview proceeded by a series of calm and well-considered questions or remarks from the spokesman (no other of the guests vouchsafing to utter a word), and diplomatic responses from the Consul, who sometimes found the investigation a little more searching than he liked. I flatter myself, however, that, by much practice, I attained considerable skill in this kind of intercourse, the art of which lies in passing off commonplaces for new and valuable truths, and talking trash and emptiness in such a way that a pretty acute auditor might mistake it for something solid. If there be any better method of dealing with such junctures,—when talk is to be created out of nothing, and within the scope of several minds at once, so that you cannot apply yourself to your interlocutor's individuality,—I have not learned it.

Sitting, as it were, in the gateway between the Old World and the New, where the steamers and packets landed the greater part of our wandering countrymen, and received them again
when their wanderings were done, I saw that no people on earth have such vagabond habits as ourselves. The Continental races never travel at all if they can help it; nor does an Englishman ever think of stirring abroad, unless he has the money to spare, or proposes to himself some definite advantage from the journey; but it seemed to me that nothing was more common than for a young American deliberately to spend all his resources in an aesthetic peregrination about Europe, returning with pockets nearly empty to begin the world in earnest. It happened, indeed, much oftener than was at all agreeable to myself, that their funds held out just long enough to bring them to the door of my Consulate, where they entered as if with an undeniable right to its shelter and protection, and required at my hands to be sent home again.

In my first simplicity,—finding them gentlemanly in manners, passably educated, and only tempted a little beyond their means by a laudable desire of improving and refining themselves, or, perhaps for the sake of getting better artistic instruction in music, painting, or sculpture than our country could supply,—I sometimes took charge of them on my private responsibility, since our government gives itself no trouble about its stray children, except the seafaring class. But, after a few such experiments, discovering that none of these estimable and ingenuous young men, however trustworthy they might appear, ever dreamed of reimbursing the Consul, I deemed it expedient to take another course with them. Applying myself to some friendly shipmaster, I engaged homeward passages on their behalf, with the understanding that they were to make themselves serviceable on shipboard; and I remember several very pathetic appeals from painters and musicians, touching the damage which their artistic fingers were likely to incur from handling the ropes. But my observation of so many heavier troubles left me very little tenderness for their finger-ends. In time I grew to be reasonably hard-hearted, though it never was quite possible to leave a countryman with no shelter save an English poorhouse, when, as he invariably averred, he had only to set foot on his native soil to be possessed of ample funds. It was my ultimate conclusion, however, that American ingenuity may be pretty safely left to itself, and that, one way or another, a Yankee vagabond is certain to turn up at his own threshold, if he has any, without help of a Consul, and perhaps be taught a lesson of foresight that may profit him hereafter.

Among these stray Americans, I met with no other case so remarkable as that of an old man, who was in the habit of visiting me once in a few months, and soberly affirmed that he had been wandering about England more than a quarter of a century (precisely twenty-seven years, I think), and all the while doing his utmost to get home again. Herman Melville, in his excellent novel or biography of "Israel Potter," has an idea somewhat similar to this. The individual now in question was a mild and patient, but very ragged and pitiable old fellow,
shabby beyond description, lean and hungry-looking, but with a large and somewhat red nose. He made no complaint of his ill-fortune, but only repeated in a quiet voice, with a pathos of which he was himself evidently unconscious, "I want to get home to Ninety-second Street, Philadelphia." He described himself as a printer by trade, and said that he had come over when he was a younger man, in the hope of bettering himself, and for the sake of seeing the Old Country, but had never since been rich enough to pay his homeward passage. His manner and accent did not quite convince me that he was an American, and I told him so; but he steadfastly affirmed, "Sir, I was born and have lived in Ninety-second Street, Philadelphia," and then went on to describe some public edifices and other local objects with which he used to be familiar, adding, with a simplicity that touched me very closely, "Sir, I had rather be there than here!" Though I still manifested a lingering doubt, he took no offence, replying with the same mild depression as at first, and insisting again and again on Ninety-second Street. Up to the time when I saw him, he still got a little occasional job-work at his trade, but subsisted mainly on such charity as he met with in his wanderings, shifting from place to place continually, and asking assistance to convey him to his native land. Possibly he was an impostor, one of the multitudinous shapes of English vagabondism, and told his falsehood with such powerful simplicity, because, by many repetitions, he had convinced himself of its truth. But if, as I believe, the tale was fact, how very strange and sad was this old man's fate! Homeless on a foreign shore, looking always towards his country, coming again and again to the point whence so many were setting sail for it,—so many who would soon tread in Ninety-second Street,—losing, in this long series of years, some of the distinctive characteristics of an American, and at last dying and surrendering his clay to be a portion of the soil whence he could not escape in his lifetime.

He appeared to see that he had moved me, but did not attempt to press his advantage with any new argument, or any varied form of entreaty. He had but scanty and scattered thoughts in his gray head, and in the intervals of those, like the refrain of an old ballad, came in the monotonous burden of his appeal, "If I could only find myself in Ninety-second Street, Philadelphia!" But even his desire of getting home had ceased to be an ardent one (if, indeed, it had not always partaken of the dreamy sluggishness of his character), although it remained his only locomotive impulse, and perhaps the sole principle of life that kept his blood from actual torpor.

The poor old fellow's story seemed to me almost as worthy of being chanted in immortal song as that of Odysseus or Evangeline. I took his case into deep consideration, but dared not incur the moral responsibility of sending him across the sea, at his age, after so many years of
exile, when the very tradition of him had passed away, to find his friends dead, or forgetful, or irretrievably vanished, and the whole country become more truly a foreign land to him than England was now,— and even Ninety-second Street, in the weedlike decay and growth of our localities, made over anew and grown unrecognizable by his old eyes. That street, so patiently longed for, had transferred itself to the New Jerusalem, and he must seek it there, contenting his slow heart, meanwhile, with the smoke-begrimed thoroughfares of English towns, or the green country lanes and by-paths with which his wanderings had made him familiar; for doubtless he had a beaten track and was the "long-remembered beggar" now, with food and a roughly hospitable greeting ready for him at many a farm-house door, and his choice of lodging under a score of haystacks. In America, nothing awaited him but that worst form of disappointment which comes under the guise of a long-cherished and late-accomplished purpose, and then a year or two of dry and barren sojourn in an almshouse, and death among strangers at last, where he had imagined a circle of familiar faces. So I contented myself with giving him alms, which he thankfully accepted, and went away with bent shoulders and an aspect of gentle forlornness; returning upon his orbit, however, after a few months, to tell the same sad and quiet story of his abode in England for more than twenty-seven years, in all which time he had been endeavoring, and still endeavored as patiently as ever, to find his way home to Ninety-second Street, Philadelphia.

I recollect another case, of a more ridiculous order, but still with a foolish kind of pathos entangled in it, which impresses me now more forcibly than it did at the moment. One day, a queer, stupid, good-natured, fat-faced individual came into my private room, dressed in a sky-blue, cut-away coat and mixed trousers, both garments worn and shabby, and rather too small for his overgrown bulk. After a little preliminary talk, he turned out to be a country shopkeeper (from Connecticut, I think), who had left a flourishing business, and come over to England purposely and solely to have an interview with the Queen. Some years before he had named his two children, one for her Majesty and the other for Prince Albert, and had transmitted photographs of the little people, as well as of his wife and himself, to the illustrious godmother. The Queen had gratefully acknowledged the favor in a letter under the hand of her private secretary. Now, the shopkeeper, like a great many other Americans, had long cherished a fantastic notion that he was one of the rightful heirs of a rich English estate; and on the strength of her Majesty's letter and the hopes of royal patronage which it inspired, he had shut up his little country-store and come over to claim his inheritance. On the voyage, a German fellow-passenger had relieved him of his money on pretence of getting it favorably exchanged, and had disappeared immediately on the ship's arrival; so that the poor fellow was
compelled to pawn all his clothes, except the remarkably shabby ones in which I beheld him, and in which (as he himself hinted, with a melancholy, yet good-natured smile) he did not look altogether fit to see the Queen. I agreed with him that the bobtailed coat and mixed trousers constituted a very odd-looking court-dress, and suggested that it was doubtless his present purpose to get back to Connecticut as fast as possible. But no! The resolve to see the Queen was as strong in him as ever; and it was marvellous the pertinacity with which he clung to it amid raggedness and starvation, and the earnestness of his supplication that I would supply him with funds for a suitable appearance at Windsor Castle.

I never had so satisfactory a perception of a complete booby before in my life; and it caused me to feel kindly towards him, and yet impatient and exasperated on behalf of common-sense, which could not possibly tolerate that such an unimaginable donkey should exist. I laid his absurdity before him in the very plainest terms, but without either exciting his anger or shaking his resolution. "O my dear man," quoth he, with good-natured, placid, simple, and tearful stubbornness, "if you could but enter into my feelings and see the matter from beginning to end as I see it!" To confess the truth, I have since felt that I was hard-hearted to the poor simpleton, and that there was more weight in his remonstrance than I chose to be sensible of, at the time; for, like many men who have been in the habit of making playthings or tools of their imagination and sensibility, I was too rigidly tenacious of what was reasonable in the affairs of real life. And even absurdity has its rights, when, as in this case, it has absorbed a human being's entire nature and purposes. I ought to have transmitted him to Mr. Buchanan, in London, who, being a good-natured old gentleman, and anxious, just then, to gratify the universal Yankee nation, might, for the joke's sake, have got him admittance to the Queen, who had fairly laid herself open to his visit, and has received hundreds of our countrymen on infinitely slighter grounds. But I was inexorable, being turned to flint by the insufferable proximity of a fool, and refused to interfere with his business in any way except to procure him a passage home. I can see his face of mild, ridiculous despair, at this moment, and appreciate, better than I could then, how awfully cruel he must have felt my obduracy to be. For years and years, the idea of an interview with Queen Victoria had haunted his poor foolish mind; and now, when he really stood on English ground, and the palace-door was hanging ajar for him, he was expected to turn brick, a penniless and bamboozled simpleton, merely because an iron-hearted consul refused to lend him thirty shillings (so low had his demand ultimately sunk) to buy a second-class ticket on the rail for London!
He visited the Consulate several times afterwards, subsisting on a pittance that I allowed him in the hope of gradually starving him back to Connecticut, assailing me with the old petition at every opportunity, looking shabbier at every visit, but still thoroughly good-tempered, mildly stubborn, and smiling through his tears, not without a perception of the ludicrousness of his own position. Finally, he disappeared altogether, and whither he had wandered, and whether he ever saw the Queen, or wasted quite away in the endeavor, I never knew; but I remember unfolding the "Times," about that period, with a daily dread of reading an account of a ragged Yankee's attempt to steal into Buckingham Palace, and how he smiled tearfully at his captors and besought them to introduce him to her Majesty. I submit to Mr. Secretary Seward that he ought to make diplomatic remonstrances to the British Ministry, and require them to take such order that the Queen shall not any longer bewilder the wits of our poor compatriots by responding to their epistles and thanking them for their photographs.

One circumstance in the foregoing incident—I mean the unhappy storekeeper's notion of establishing his claim to an English estate—was common to a great many other applications, personal or by letter, with which I was favored by my countrymen. The cause of this peculiar insanity lies deep in the Anglo-American heart. After all these bloody wars and vindictive animosities, we have still an unspeakable yearning towards England. When our forefathers left the old home, they pulled up many of their roots, but trailed along with them others, which were never snapt asunder by the tug of such a lengthening distance, nor have been torn out of the original soil by the violence of subsequent struggles, nor severed by the edge of the sword. Even so late as these days, they remain entangled with our heart-strings, and might often have influenced our national cause like the tiller-ropes of a ship, if the rough gripe of England had been capable of managing so sensitive a kind of machinery. It has required nothing less than the boorishness, the stolidity, the self-sufficiency, the contemptuous jealousy, the half-sagacity, invariably blind of one eye and often distorted of the other, that characterize this strange people, to compel us to be a great nation in our own right, instead of continuing virtually, if not in name, a province of their small island. What pains did they take to shake us off, and have ever since taken to keep us wide apart from them! It might seem their folly, but was really their fate, or, rather, the Providence of God, who has doubtless a work for us to do, in which the massive materiality of the English character would have been too ponderous a dead-weight upon our progress. And, besides, if England had been wise enough to twine our new vigor round about her ancient strength, her power would have been too firmly established ever to yield, in its due season, to the otherwise immutable law of
imperial vicissitude. The earth might then have beheld the intolerable spectacle of a sovereignty and institutions, imperfect, but indestructible.

Nationally, there has ceased to be any peril of so inauspicious and yet outwardly attractive an amalgamation. But as an individual, the American is often conscious of the deep-rooted sympathies that belong more fitly to times gone by, and feels a blind pathetic tendency to wander back again, which makes itself evident in such wild dreams as I have alluded to above, about English inheritances. A mere coincidence of names (the Yankee one, perhaps, having been assumed by legislative permission), a supposititious pedigree, a silver mug on which an anciently engraved coat-of-arms has been half scrubbed out, a seal with an uncertain crest, an old yellow letter or document in faded ink, the more scantily legible the better,—rubbish of this kind, found in a neglected drawer, has been potent enough to turn the brain of many an honest Republican, especially if assisted by an advertisement for lost heirs, cut out of a British newspaper. There is no estimating or believing, till we come into a position to know it, what foolery lurks latent in the breasts of very sensible people. Remembering such sober extravagances, I should not be at all surprised to find that I am myself guilty of some unsuspected absurdity, that may appear to me the most substantial trait in my character.

I might fill many pages with instances of this diseased American appetite for English soil. A respectable-looking woman, well advanced in life, of sour aspect, exceedingly homely, but decidedly New-Englandish in figure and manners, came to my office with a great bundle of documents, at the very first glimpse of which I apprehended something terrible. Nor was I mistaken. The bundle contained evidences of her indubitable claim to the site on which Castle Street, the Town Hall, the Exchange, and all the principal business part of Liverpool have long been situated; and with considerable peremptoriness, the good lady signified her expectation that I should take charge of her suit, and prosecute it to judgment; not, however, on the equitable condition of receiving half the value of the property recovered (which, in case of complete success, would have made both of us ten or twenty fold millionaires), but without recompense or reimbursement of legal expenses, solely as an incident of my official duty. Another time came two ladies, bearing a letter of emphatic introduction from his Excellency the Governor of their native State, who testified in most satisfactory terms to their social respectability. They were claimants of a great estate in Cheshire, and announced themselves as blood-relatives of Queen Victoria,—a point, however, which they deemed it expedient to keep in the background until their territorial rights should be established, apprehending that the Lord High Chancellor might otherwise be less likely to come to a fair decision in respect to them, from a probable disinclination to admit new members into the
royal kin. Upon my honor, I imagine that they had an eye to the possibility of the eventual succession of one or both of them to the crown of Great Britain through superiority of title over the Brunswick line; although, being maiden ladies, like their predecessor Elizabeth, they could hardly have hoped to establish a lasting dynasty upon the throne. It proves, I trust, a certain disinterestedness on my part, that, encountering them thus in the dawn of their fortunes, I forbore to put in a plea for a future dukedom.

Another visitor of the same class was a gentleman of refined manners, handsome figure, and remarkably intellectual aspect. Like many men of an adventurous cast, he had so quiet a deportment, and such an apparent disinclination to general sociability, that you would have fancied him moving always along some peaceful and secluded walk of life. Yet, literally from his first hour, he had been tossed upon the surges of a most varied and tumultuous existence, having been born at sea, of American parentage, but on board of a Spanish vessel, and spending many of the subsequent years in voyages, travels, and outlandish incidents and vicissitudes, which, methought, had hardly been paralleled since the days of Gulliver or De Foe. When his dignified reserve was overcome, he had the faculty of narrating these adventures with wonderful eloquence, working up his descriptive sketches with such intuitive perception of the picturesque points that the whole was thrown forward with a positively illusive effect, like matters of your own visual experience. In fact, they were so admirably done that I could never more than half believe them, because the genuine affairs of life are not apt to transact themselves so artistically. Many of his scenes were laid in the East, and among those seldom-visited archipelagoes of the Indian Ocean, so that there was an Oriental fragrance breathing through his talk and an odor of the Spice Islands still lingering in his garments. He had much to say of the delightful qualities of the Malay pirates, who, indeed, carry on a predatory warfare against the ships of all civilized nations, and cut every Christian throat among their prisoners; but (except for deeds of that character, which are the rule and habit of their life, and matter of religion and conscience with them) they are a gentle-natured people, of primitive innocence and integrity.

But his best story was about a race of men (if men they were) who seemed so fully to realize Swift's wicked fable of the Yahoos, that my friend was much exercised with psychological speculations whether or no they had any souls. They dwelt in the wilds of Ceylon, like other savage beasts, hairy, and spotted with tufts of fur, filthy, shameless, weaponless (though warlike in their individual bent), tool-less, houseless, language-less, except for a few guttural sounds, hideously dissonant, whereby they held some rudest kind of communication among themselves. They lacked both memory and foresight, and were wholly
destitute of government, social institutions, or law or rulership of any description, except the immediate tyranny of the strongest; radically untamable, moreover, save that the people of the country managed to subject a few of the less ferocious and stupid ones to outdoor servitude among their other cattle. They were beastly in almost all their attributes, and that to such a degree that the observer, losing sight of any link betwixt them and manhood, could generally witness their brutalities without greater horror than at those of some disagreeable quadruped in a menagerie. And yet, at times, comparing what were the lowest general traits in his own race with what was highest in these abominable monsters, he found a ghastly similitude that half compelled him to recognize them as human brethren.

After these Gulliverian researches, my agreeable acquaintance had fallen under the ban of the Dutch government, and had suffered (this, at least, being matter of fact) nearly two years’ imprisonment, with confiscation of a large amount of property, for which Mr. Belmont, our minister at the Hague, had just made a peremptory demand of reimbursement and damages. Meanwhile, since arriving in England on his way to the United States, he had been providentially led to inquire into the circumstances of his birth on shipboard, and had discovered that not himself alone, but another baby, had come into the world during the same voyage of the prolific vessel, and that there were almost irrefragable reasons for believing that these two children had been assigned to the wrong mothers. Many reminiscences of his early days confirmed him in the idea that his nominal parents were aware of the exchange. The family to which he felt authorized to attribute his lineage was that of a nobleman, in the picture-gallery of whose country-seat (whence, if I mistake not, our adventurous friend had just returned) he had discovered a portrait bearing a striking resemblance to himself. As soon as he should have reported the outrageous action of the Dutch government to President Pierce and the Secretary of State, and recovered the confiscated property, he purposed to return to England and establish his claim to the nobleman's title and estate.

I had accepted his Oriental fantasies (which, indeed, to do him justice, have been recorded by scientific societies among the genuine phenomena of natural history), not as matters of indubitable credence, but as allowable specimens of an imaginative traveller's vivid coloring and rich embroidery on the coarse texture and dull neutral tints of truth. The English romance was among the latest communications that he intrusted to my private ear; and as soon as I heard the first chapter,—so wonderfully akin to what I might have wrought out of my own head, not unpractised in such figments,—I began to repent having made myself responsible for the future nobleman's passage homeward in the next Collins steamer. Nevertheless, should his English rent-roll fall a little behindhand, his Dutch claim for a hundred thousand dollars
was certainly in the hands of our government, and might at least be valuable to the extent of thirty pounds, which I had engaged to pay on his behalf. But I have reason to fear that his Dutch riches turned out to be Dutch gilt, or fairy gold, and his English country-seat a mere castle in the air,—which I exceedingly regret, for he was a delightful companion and a very gentlemanly man.

A Consul, in his position of universal responsibility, the general adviser and helper, sometimes finds himself compelled to assume the guardianship of personages who, in their own sphere, are supposed capable of superintending the highest interests of whole communities. An elderly Irishman, a naturalized citizen, once put the desire and expectation of all our penniless vagabonds into a very suitable phrase, by pathetically entreating me to be a "father to him"; and, simple as I sit scribbling here, I have acted a father's part, not only by scores of such unthrifty old children as himself, but by a progeny of far loftier pretensions. It may be well for persons who are conscious of any radical weakness in their character, any besetting sin, any unlawful propensity, any unhallowed impulse, which (while surrounded with the manifold restraints that protect a man from that treacherous and lifelong enemy, his lower self, in the circle of society where he is at home) they may have succeeded in keeping under the lock and key of strictest propriety,—it may be well for them, before seeking the perilous freedom of a distant land, released from the watchful eyes of neighborhoods and coteries, lightened of that wearisome burden, an immaculate name, and blissfully obscure after years of local prominence,—it may be well for such individuals to know that when they set foot on a foreign shore, the long-imprisoned Evil, scenting a wild license in the unaccustomed atmosphere, is apt to grow riotous in its iron cage. It rattles the rusty barriers with gigantic turbulence, and if there be an infirm joint anywhere in the framework, it breaks madly forth, compressing the mischief of a lifetime into a little space.

A parcel of letters had been accumulating at the Consulate for two or three weeks, directed to a certain Doctor of Divinity, who had left America by a sailing-packet and was still upon the sea. In due time, the vessel arrived, and the reverend Doctor paid me a visit. He was a fine-looking middle-aged gentleman, a perfect model of clerical propriety, scholar-like, yet with the air of a man of the world rather than a student, though overspread with the graceful sanctity of a popular metropolitan divine, a part of whose duty it might be to exemplify the natural accordance between Christianity and good-breeding. He seemed a little excited, as an American is apt to be on first arriving in England, but conversed with intelligence as well as animation, making himself so agreeable that his visit stood out in considerable relief from the monotony of my daily commonplace. As I learned from authentic sources, he was somewhat
distinguished in his own region for fervor and eloquence in the pulpit, but was now compelled to relinquish it temporarily for the purpose of renovating his impaired health by an extensive tour in Europe. Promising to dine with me, he took up his bundle of letters and went away.

The Doctor, however, failed to make his appearance at dinner-time, or to apologize the next day for his absence; and in the course of a day or two more, I forgot all about him, concluding that he must have set forth on his Continental travels, the plan of which he had sketched out at our interview. But, by and by, I received a call from the master of the vessel in which he had arrived. He was in some alarm about his passenger, whose luggage remained on shipboard, but of whom nothing had been heard or seen since the moment of his departure from the Consulate. We conferred together, the captain and I, about the expediency of setting the police on the traces (if any were to be found) of our vanished friend; but it struck me that the good captain was singularly reticent, and that there was something a little mysterious in a few points that he hinted at rather than expressed; so that, scrutinizing the affair carefully, I surmised that the intimacy of life on shipboard might have taught him more about the reverend gentleman than, for some reason or other, he deemed it prudent to reveal. At home, in our native country, I would have looked to the Doctor's personal safety and left his reputation to take care of itself, knowing that the good fame of a thousand saintly clergymen would amply dazzle out any lamentable spot on a single brother's character. But in scornful and invidious England, on the idea that the credit of the sacred office was measurably intrusted to my discretion, I could not endure, for the sake of American Doctors of Divinity generally, that this particular Doctor should cut an ignoble figure in the police reports of the English newspapers, except at the last necessity. The clerical body, I flatter myself, will acknowledge that I acted on their own principle. Besides, it was now too late; the mischief and violence, if any had been impending, were not of a kind which it requires the better part of a week to perpetrate; and to sum up the entire matter, I felt certain, from a good deal of somewhat similar experience, that, if the missing Doctor still breathed this vital air, he would turn up at the Consulate as soon as his money should be stolen or spent.

Precisely a week after this reverend person's disappearance, there came to my office a tall, middle-aged gentleman in a blue military surtout, braided at the seams, but out at elbows, and as shabby as if the wearer had been bivouacking in it throughout a Crimean campaign. It was buttoned up to the very chin, except where three or four of the buttons were lost; nor was there any glimpse of a white shirt-collar illuminating the rusty black cravat. A grisly mustache was just beginning to roughen the stranger's upper lip. He looked disreputable to the last degree, but still had a ruined air of good society glimmering about him, like a few specks of
polish on a sword-blade that has lain corroding in a mud-puddle. I took him to be some American marine officer, of dissipated habits, or perhaps a cashiered British major, stumbling into the wrong quarters through the unrectified bewildement of last night's debauch. He greeted me, however, with polite familiarity, as though we had been previously acquainted; whereupon I drew coldly back (as sensible people naturally do, whether from strangers or former friends, when too evidently at odds with fortune) and requested to know who my visitor might be, and what was his business at the Consulate. "Am I then so changed?" he exclaimed with a vast depth of tragic intonation; and after a little blind and bewildered talk, behold! the truth flashed upon me. It was the Doctor of Divinity! If I had meditated a scene or a coup de theatre, I could not have contrived a more effectual one than by this simple and genuine difficulty of recognition. The poor Divine must have felt that he had lost his personal identity through the misadventures of one little week. And, to say the truth, he did look as if, like Job, on account of his especial sanctity, he had been delivered over to the direst temptations of Satan, and proving weaker than the man of Uz, the Arch Enemy had been empowered to drag him through Tophet, transforming him, in the process, from the most decorous of metropolitan clergymen into the rowdiest and dirtiest of disbanded officers. I never fathomed the mystery of his military costume, but conjectured that a lurking sense of fitness had induced him to exchange his clerical garments for this habit of a sinner; nor can I tell precisely into what pitfall, not more of vice than terrible calamity, he had precipitated himself,—being more than satisfied to know that the outcasts of society can sink no lower than this poor, desecrated wretch had sunk.

The opportunity, I presume, does not often happen to a layman, of administering moral and religious reproof to a Doctor of Divinity; but finding the occasion thrust upon me, and the hereditary Puritan waxing strong in my breast, I deemed it a matter of conscience not to let it pass entirely unimproved. The truth is, I was unspeakably shocked and disgusted. Not, however, that I was then to learn that clergymen are made of the same flesh and blood as other people, and perhaps lack one small safeguard which the rest of us possess, because they are aware of their own peccability, and therefore cannot look up to the clerical class for the proof of the possibility of a pure life on earth, with such reverential confidence as we are prone to do. But I remembered the innocent faith of my boyhood, and the good old silver-headed clergyman, who seemed to me as much a saint then on earth as he is now in heaven, and partly for whose sake, through all these darkening years, I retain a devout, though not intact nor unwavering respect for the entire fraternity. What a hideous wrong, therefore, had the backslider inflicted on his brethren, and still more on me, who much needed whatever
fragments of broken reverence (broken, not as concerned religion, but its earthly institutions
and professors) it might yet be possible to patch into a sacred image! Should all pulpits and
communion-tables have thenceforth a stain upon them, and the guilty one go unrebuked for
it? So I spoke to the unhappy man as I never thought myself warranted in speaking to any
other mortal, hitting him hard, doing my utmost to find out his vulnerable part, and prick him
into the depths of it. And not without more effect than I had dreamed of, or desired!

No doubt, the novelty of the Doctor's reversed position, thus standing up to receive such a
fulmination as the clergy have heretofore arrogated the exclusive right of inflicting, might
give additional weight and sting to the words which I found utterance for. But there was
another reason (which, had I in the least suspected it, would have closed my lips at once) for
his feeling morbidly sensitive to the cruel rebuke that I administered. The unfortunate man
had come to me, laboring under one of the consequences of his riotous outbreak, in the shape
of delirium tremens; he bore a hell within the compass of his own breast, all the torments of
which blazed up with tenfold inveteracy when I thus took upon myself the Devil's office of
stirring up the red-hot embers. His emotions, as well as the external movement and expression
of them by voice, countenance, and gesture, were terribly exaggerated by the tremendous
vibration of nerves resulting from the disease. It was the deepest tragedy I ever witnessed. I
know sufficiently, from that one experience, how a condemned soul would manifest its
agonies; and for the future, if I have anything to do with sinners, I mean to operate upon them
through sympathy, and not rebuke. What had I to do with rebuking him? The disease, long
latent in his heart, had shown itself in a frightful eruption on the surface of his life. That was
all! Is it a thing to scold the sufferer for?

To conclude this wretched story, the poor Doctor of Divinity, having been robbed of all his
money in this little airing beyond the limits of propriety, was easily persuaded to give up the
intended tour and return to his bereaved flock, who, very probably, were thereafter conscious
of an increased unction in his soul-stirring eloquence, without suspecting the awful depths
into which their pastor had dived in quest of it. His voice is now silent. I leave it to members
of his own profession to decide whether it was better for him thus to sin outright, and so to be
let into the miserable secret what manner of man he was, or to have gone through life
outwardly unspotted, making the first discovery of his latent evil at the judgment-seat. It has
occurred to me that his dire calamity, as both he and I regarded it, might have been the only
method by which precisely such a man as himself, and so situated, could be redeemed. He has
learned, ere now, how that matter stood.
For a man, with a natural tendency to meddle with other people's business, there could not possibly be a more congenial sphere than the Liverpool Consulate. For myself, I had never been in the habit of feeling that I could sufficiently comprehend any particular conjunction of circumstances with human character, to justify me in thrusting in my awkward agency among the intricate and unintelligible machinery of Providence. I have always hated to give advice, especially when there is a prospect of its being taken. It is only one-eyed people who love to advise, or have any spontaneous promptitude of action. When a man opens both his eyes, he generally sees about as many reasons for acting in any one way as in any other, and quite as many for acting in neither; and is therefore likely to leave his friends to regulate their own conduct, and also to remain quiet as regards his especial affairs till necessity shall prick him onward. Nevertheless, the world and individuals flourish upon a constant succession of blunders. The secret of English practical success lies in their characteristic faculty of shutting one eye, whereby they get so distinct and decided a view of what immediately concerns them that they go stumbling towards it over a hundred insurmountable obstacles, and achieve a magnificent triumph without ever being aware of half its difficulties. If General McClellan could but have shut his left eye, the right one would long ago have guided us into Richmond. Meanwhile, I have strayed far away from the Consulate, where, as I was about to say, I was compelled, in spite of my disinclination, to impart both advice and assistance in multifarious affairs that did not personally concern me, and presume that I effected about as little mischief as other men in similar contingencies. The duties of the office carried me to prisons, police-courts, hospitals, lunatic asylums, coroner's inquests, death-beds, funerals, and brought me in contact with insane people, criminals, ruined speculators, wild adventurers, diplomatists, brother-consuls, and all manner of simpletons and unfortunates, in greater number and variety than I had ever dreamed of as pertaining to America; in addition to whom there was an equivalent multitude of English rogues, dexterously counterfeiting the genuine Yankee article. It required great discrimination not to be taken in by these last-mentioned scoundrels; for they knew how to imitate our national traits, had been at great pains to instruct themselves as regarded American localities, and were not readily to be caught by a cross-examination as to the topographical features, public institutions, or prominent inhabitants of the places where they pretended to belong. The best shibboleth I ever hit upon lay in the pronunciation of the word "been," which the English invariably make to rhyme with "green," and we Northerners, at least (in accordance, I think, with the custom of Shakespeare's time), universally pronounce "bin."
All the matters that I have been treating of, however, were merely incidental, and quite distinct from the real business of the office. A great part of the wear and tear of mind and temper resulted from the bad relations between the seamen and officers of American ships. Scarcely a morning passed, but that some sailor came to show the marks of his ill-usage on shipboard. Often, it was a whole crew of them, each with his broken head or livid bruise, and all testifying with one voice to a constant series of savage outrages during the voyage; or, it might be, they laid an accusation of actual murder, perpetrated by the first or second officers with many blows of steel-knuckles, a rope's end, or a marline-spike, or by the captain, in the twinkling of an eye, with a shot of his pistol. Taking the seamen's view of the case, you would suppose that the gibbet was hungry for the murderers. Listening to the captain's defence, you would seem to discover that he and his officers were the humanest of mortals, but were driven to a wholesome severity by the mutinous conduct of the crew, who, moreover, had themselves slain their comrade in the drunken riot and confusion of the first day or two after they were shipped. Looked at judicially, there appeared to be no right side to the matter, nor any right side possible in so thoroughly vicious a system as that of the American mercantile marine. The Consul could do little, except to take depositions, hold forth the greasy Testament to be profaned anew with perjured kisses, and, in a few instances of murder or manslaughter, carry the case before an English magistrate, who generally decided that the evidence was too contradictory to authorize the transmission of the accused for trial in America. The newspapers all over England contained paragraphs, inveighing against the cruelties of American shipmasters. The British Parliament took up the matter (for nobody is so humane as John Bull, when his benevolent propensities are to be gratified by finding fault with his neighbor), and caused Lord John Russell to remonstrate with our government on the outrages for which it was responsible before the world, and which it failed to prevent or punish. The American Secretary of State, old General Cass, responded, with perfectly astounding ignorance of the subject, to the effect that the statements of outrages had probably been exaggerated, that the present laws of the United States were quite adequate to deal with them, and that the interference of the British Minister was uncalled for.

The truth is, that the state of affairs was really very horrible, and could be met by no laws at that time (or I presume now) in existence. I once thought of writing a pamphlet on the subject, but quitted the Consulate before finding time to effect my purpose; and all that phase of my life immediately assumed so dreamlike a consistency that I despaired of making it seem solid or tangible to the public. And now it looks distant and dim, like troubles of a century ago. The origin of the evil lay in the character of the seamen, scarcely any of whom were American,
but the offscourings and refuse of all the seaports of the world, such stuff as piracy is made of, together with a considerable intermixture of returning emigrants, and a sprinkling of absolutely kidnapped American citizens. Even with such material, the ships were very inadequately manned. The shipmaster found himself upon the deep, with a vast responsibility of property and human life upon his hands, and no means of salvation except by compelling his inefficient and demoralized crew to heavier exertions than could reasonably be required of the same number of able seamen. By law he had been intrusted with no discretion of judicious punishment, he therefore habitually left the whole matter of discipline to his irresponsible mates, men often of scarcely a superior quality to the crew. Hence ensued a great mass of petty outrages, unjustifiable assaults, shameful indignities, and nameless cruelty, demoralizing alike to the perpetrators and the sufferers; these enormities fell into the ocean between the two countries, and could be punished in neither. Many miserable stories come back upon my memory as I write; wrongs that were immense, but for which nobody could be held responsible, and which, indeed, the closer you looked into them, the more they lost the aspect of wilful misdoing and assumed that of an inevitable calamity. It was the fault of a system, the misfortune of an individual. Be that as it may, however, there will be no possibility of dealing effectually with these troubles as long as we deem it inconsistent with our national dignity or interests to allow the English courts, under such restrictions as may seem fit, a jurisdiction over offences perpetrated on board our vessels in mid-ocean.

In such a life as this, the American shipmaster develops himself into a man of iron energies, dauntless courage, and inexhaustible resource, at the expense, it must be acknowledged, of some of the higher and gentler traits which might do him excellent service in maintaining his authority. The class has deteriorated of late years on account of the narrower field of selection, owing chiefly to the diminution of that excellent body of respectably educated New England seamen, from the flower of whom the officers used to be recruited. Yet I found them, in many cases, very agreeable and intelligent companions, with less nonsense about them than landsmen usually have, eschewers of fine-spun theories, delighting in square and tangible ideas, but occasionally infested with prejudices that stuck to their brains like barnacles to a ship's bottom. I never could flatter myself that I was a general favorite with them. One or two, perhaps, even now, would scarcely meet me on amicable terms. Endowed universally with a great pertinacity of will, they especially disliked the interference of a consul with their management on shipboard; notwithstanding which I thrust in my very limited authority at every available opening, and did the utmost that lay in my power, though with lamentably small effect, towards enforcing a better kind of discipline. They thought, no doubt (and on
plausible grounds enough, but scarcely appreciating just that one little grain of hard New England sense, oddly thrown in among the flimsier composition of the Consul's character), that he, a landsman, a bookman, and, as people said of him, a fanciful recluse, could not possibly understand anything of the difficulties or the necessities of a shipmaster's position. But their cold regards were rather acceptable than otherwise, for it is exceedingly awkward to assume a judicial austerity in the morning towards a man with whom you have been hobnobbing over night.

With the technical details of the business of that great Consulate (for great it then was, though now, I fear, wofully fallen off, and perhaps never to be revived in anything like its former extent), I did not much interfere. They could safely be left to the treatment of two as faithful, upright, and competent subordinates, both Englishmen, as ever a man was fortunate enough to meet with, in a line of life altogether new and strange to him. I had come over with instructions to supply both their places with Americans, but, possessing a happy faculty of knowing my own interest and the public's, I quietly kept hold of them, being little inclined to open the consular doors to a spy of the State Department or an intriguer for my own office. The venerable Vice-Consul, Mr. Pearce, had witnessed the successive arrivals of a score of newly appointed Consuls, shadowy and short-lived dignitaries, and carried his reminiscences back to the epoch of Consul Maury, who was appointed by Washington, and has acquired almost the grandeur of a mythical personage in the annals of the Consulate. The principal clerk, Mr. Wilding, who has since succeeded to the Vice-Consulship, was a man of English integrity,—not that the English are more honest than ourselves, but only there is a certain sturdy reliableness common among them, which we do not quite so invariably manifest in just these subordinate positions,—of English integrity, combined with American acuteness of intellect, quick-wittedness, and diversity of talent. It seemed an immense pity that he should wear out his life at a desk, without a step in advance from year's end to year's end, when, had it been his luck to be born on our side of the water, his bright faculties and clear probity would have insured him eminent success in whatever path he might adopt. Meanwhile, it would have been a sore mischance to me, had any better fortune on his part deprived me of Mr. Wilding's services.

A fair amount of common-sense, some acquaintance with the United States Statutes, an insight into character, a tact of management, a general knowledge of the world, and a reasonable but not too inveterately decided preference for his own will and judgment over those of interested people,—these natural attributes and moderate acquirements will enable a consul to perform many of his duties respectably, but not to dispense with a great variety of
other qualifications, only attainable by long experience. Yet, I think, few consuls are so well accomplished. An appointment of whatever grade, in the diplomatic or consular service of America, is too often what the English call a "job"; that is to say, it is made on private and personal grounds, without a paramount eye to the public good or the gentleman's especial fitness for the position. It is not too much to say (of course allowing for a brilliant exception here and there), that an American never is thoroughly qualified for a foreign post, nor has time to make himself so, before the revolution of the political wheel discards him from his office. Our country wrongs itself by permitting such a system of unsuitable appointments, and, still more, of removals for no cause, just when the incumbent might be beginning to ripen into usefulness. Mere ignorance of official detail is of comparatively small moment; though it is considered indispensable, I presume, that a man in any private capacity shall be thoroughly acquainted with the machinery and operation of his business, and shall not necessarily lose his position on having attained such knowledge. But there are so many more important things to be thought of, in the qualifications of a foreign resident, that his technical dexterity or clumsiness is hardly worth mentioning.

One great part of a consul's duty, for example, should consist in building up for himself a recognized position in the society where he resides, so that his local influence might be felt in behalf of his own country, and, so far as they are compatible (as they generally are to the utmost extent), for the interests of both nations. The foreign city should know that it has a permanent inhabitant and a hearty well-wisher in him. There are many conjunctures (and one of them is now upon us) where a long-established, honored, and trusted American citizen, holding a public position under our government in such a town as Liverpool, might go far towards swaying and directing the sympathies of the inhabitants. He might throw his own weight into the balance against mischief makers; he might have set his foot on the first little spark of malignant purpose, which the next wind may blow into a national war. But we wilfully give up all advantages of this kind. The position is totally beyond the attainment of an American; there to-day, bristling all over with the porcupine quills of our Republic, and gone to-morrow, just as he is becoming sensible of the broader and more generous patriotism which might almost amalgamate with that of England, without losing an atom of its native force and flavor. In the changes that appear to await us, and some of which, at least, can hardly fail to be for good, let us hope for a reform in this matter.

For myself, as the gentle reader would spare me the trouble of saying, I was not at all the kind of man to grow into such an ideal Consul as I have here suggested. I never in my life desired to be burdened with public influence. I disliked my office from the first, and never
came into any good accordance with it. Its dignity, so far as it had any, was an encumbrance; the attentions it drew upon me (such as invitations to Mayor's banquets and public celebrations of all kinds, where, to my horror, I found myself expected to stand up and speak) were—as I may say without incivility or ingratitude, because there is nothing personal in that sort of hospitality—a bore. The official business was irksome, and often painful. There was nothing pleasant about the whole affair, except the emoluments; and even those, never too bountifully reaped, were diminished by more than half in the second or third year of my incumbency. All this being true, I was quite prepared, in advance of the inauguration of Mr. Buchanan, to send in my resignation. When my successor arrived, I drew the long, delightful breath which first made me thoroughly sensible what an unnatural life I had been leading, and compelled me to admire myself for having battled with it so sturdily. The newcomer proved to be a very genial and agreeable gentleman, an F. F. V., and, as he pleasantly acknowledged, a Southern Fire Eater, —an announcement to which I responded, with similar good-humor and self-complacency, by parading my descent from an ancient line of Massachusetts Puritans. Since our brief acquaintanceship, my fire-eating friend has had ample opportunities to banquet on his favorite diet, hot and hot, in the Confederate service. For myself, as soon as I was out of office, the retrospect began to look unreal. I could scarcely believe that it was I,—that figure whom they called a Consul,—but a sort of Double Ganger, who had been permitted to assume my aspect, under which he went through his shadowy duties with a tolerable show of efficiency, while my real self had lain, as regards my proper mode of being and acting, in a state of suspended animation.

The same sense of illusion still pursues me. There is some mistake in this matter. I have been writing about another man's consular experiences, with which, through some mysterious medium of transmitted ideas, I find myself intimately acquainted, but in which I cannot possibly have had a personal interest. Is it not a dream altogether? The figure of that poor Doctor of Divinity looks wonderfully lifelike; so do those of the Oriental adventurer with the visionary coronet above his brow, and the moonstruck visitor of the Queen, and the poor old wanderer, seeking his native country through English highways and by-ways for almost thirty years; and so would a hundred others that I might summon up with similar distinctness. But were they more than shadows? Surely, I think not. Nor are these present pages a bit of intrusive autobiography. Let not the reader wrong me by supposing it. I never should have written with half such unreserve, had it been a portion of this life congenial with my nature, which I am living now, instead of a series of incidents and characters entirely apart from my own concerns, and on which the qualities personally proper to me could have had no bearing.
Almost the only real incidents, as I see them now, were the visits of a young English friend, a scholar and a literary amateur, between whom and myself there sprung up an affectionate, and, I trust, not transitory regard. He used to come and sit or stand by my fireside, talking vivaciously and eloquently with me about literature and life, his own national characteristics and mine, with such kindly endurance of the many rough republicanisms wherewith I assailed him, and such frank and amiable assertion of all sorts of English prejudices and mistakes, that I understood his countrymen infinitely the better for him, and was almost prepared to love the intensest Englishman of them all, for his sake. It would gratify my cherished remembrance of this dear friend, if I could manage, without offending him, or letting the public know it, to introduce his name upon my page. Bright was the illumination of my dusky little apartment, as often as he made his appearance there!

The English sketches which I have been offering to the public comprise a few of the more external and therefore more readily manageable things that I took note of, in many escapes from the imprisonment of my consular servitude. Liverpool, though not very delightful as a place of residence, is a most convenient and admirable point to get away from. London is only five hours off by the fast train. Chester, the most curious town in England, with its encompassing wall, its ancient rows, and its venerable cathedral, is close at hand. North Wales, with all its hills and ponds, its noble sea-scenery, its multitude of gray castles and strange old villages, may be glanced at in a summer day or two. The lakes and mountains of Cumberland and Westmoreland may be reached before dinner-time. The haunted and legendary Isle of Man, a little kingdom by itself, lies within the scope of an afternoon's voyage. Edinburgh or Glasgow are attainable over night, and Loch Lomond betimes in the morning. Visiting these famous localities, and a great many others, I hope that I do not compromise my American patriotism by acknowledging that I was often conscious of a fervent hereditary attachment to the native soil of our forefathers, and felt it to be our own Old Home.