

The American College for Girls

Assembly, Feb. 27, 1952

This morning I want to take you on a journey to England. I would like to talk to you about places and people whom you already know... places that you have grown familiar with in connection with your lessons in English literature, people, whose writings you have read and studied. One could make a hundred literary pilgrimages in England and not come to the end of them; this morning I shall have time to mention only a handful. (They are vivid in my mind because I spent last summer in the British Isles and made pilgrimages myself.) What I would like to do is to make them a little clearer ^{to you} ~~in your minds~~, so that perhaps you can see the places in your mind's eye, and feel that you know the people a little better.

Literature is not something only to know about. It is something to enjoy. Authors are not names; they are people, like you and me, who have similar experiences, but who know how to put them down on paper so well, so beautifully, that we can share those experiences with delight.

One of the commonest ways to approach England is to cross the Channel from Calais in France. As you steam across that narrow strip of water, you see, coming out of the mists, great white cliffs that drop straight to the sea, with a beach of white sand at their feet.... these are the white cliffs of Dover, a symbol to many people, of England. Dover is a small, ancient town looking out across the Channel to France but its beauty and its position as an outpost,

so to speak, of England, have made it a subject for poetry and song. Matthew Arnold, that serious-minded poet of the mid-nineteenth century wrote a poem called Dover Beach. He likened the ebb and flow of the water to a spiritual problem that occupied his mind... but the first part of the poem describes the situation of Dover and the sound of the sea washing its shores...let me read you a few lines:

From Dover Beach by Matthew Arnold:

The sea is calm to-night,
 The tide is full, the moon lies fair
 Upon the straits; --on the French coast, the light
 Gleams and is gone; the cliffs of England stand
 Glimmering and vast, out in the tranquil bay.
 Come to the window, sweet is the night air!
 Only, from the long line of spray
 Where the ebb meets the moon-blanch'd sand,
 Listen! You hear the grating roar
 Of pebbles which the waves draw back, and fling,
 At their return, up the high strand,
 Begin and cease and then again begin,
 With tremulous cadence slow, and bring
 The eternal note of sadness in.

Those of you who know David Copperfield will remember that Betsey Trotwood lived in Dover...and you will recall, that when David was very miserable, he ran away from his cruel stepfather, and walked all the way to Dover to find his greataunt there. What adventures he had along the road and how tired and footsore and desperate he was by the time he reached his aunt's house. This is how he introduced himself to his aunt, who had not seen him since he was a tiny baby and who had no idea that he was anywhere near her home.

From David Copperfield by Charles Dickens:

I knew her immediately to be Miss Betsey, for she came stalking out of the house, exactly as my poor mother had so often described her... "Go away!" said Miss Betsey, shaking her head, "go along! No boys here!"

I watched her, with my heart at my lips, as she marched to a corner of her garden, and stooped to dig up some root there. Then, without a scrap of courage, but with a great deal of desperation, I went softly in and stood beside her, touching her with my finger.

"If you please, ma'am," I began.

She started and looked up.

"If you please, Aunt."

"EH?" exclaimed Miss Betsey in a tone of amazement I have never heard approached.

"If you please, aunt, I am your nephew."

"Oh, Lord," said my aunt. And sat down flat on the garden path.

If we are going to London from Dover, we can stop at Canterbury, as it is in the same county and not very far away. We can take the old Roman Road, travelled by thousands ^{of people}, for a thousand years and more.

I expect there is hardly a student here that has not heard of Canterbury...that lovely old medieval town, with its famous cathedral, its rich history, its narrow streets and the pleasant fields surrounding it. As we approach the town, we see the huge tower of the Cathedral dominating the countryside. The city is so ancient that when it was bombed during the war, and parts of the town were destroyed, under the old buildings were found even older ones built in the time of the Romans. Who has not heard of the Canterbury Pilgrims? The first great English poet, Geoffrey Chaucer, who lived 600 years ago, wrote his famous poem, The Canterbury Tales, telling how 29 pilgrims, men and women, rode on horseback from Southwark, a part of London, all the way to Canterbury Cathedral to worship at the shrine of an archbishop, who had been murdered there two centuries before. And on their way they each told a

story to beguile their journey. So well did Chaucer describe these people..nun and priest, squire and student, miller and knight, that we feel as if we know them, though they have been dust these hundreds of years. The story of the murder of the archbishop, Thomas a Becket, has fascinated historians and poets even during our own day...I wonder if anyone here has read T.S. Eliot's Murder in the Cathedral, a play, retelling the story of the martyr, whom Chaucer's pilgrims came to honor.

Thomas Becket acted by Henry Irving
 Canterbury is associated in our minds again with David Copperfield, for that is where his aunt sent him to School...indeed the whole of the county of Kent is Dickens country.. Even the dignified guide-book which I possess says: " Canterbury was where David Copperfield went to school and where Uriah Heep lived."

But we ought to hurry on to London, for there are so many literary landmarks connected with almost every part of that immense city, that I shall have great difficulty in choosing only a few to tell you of. In the first place, London isn't very far from Canterbury. it takes about two and a half hours by car (how slowly the pilgrims must have ridden in the fourteenth century!) and less by train. Two things impress one on coming to London for the first time... the huge area it covers and the importance of the River Thames, which winds like a serpent through the whole extent of the city and beyond. Someone has called the Thames, "Liquid History" and indeed if you walk along its banks, or take a launch downstream, at every turn there will be some picturesque association with an event

in history, a novel by a favorite author, a poem you are familiar with. Shakespeare's theatre stood near the Thames... Bernard Shaw and J.M. Barrie's apartments looked out over the Thames. The Archbishop of Canterbury's London home..a hoary pile called Lambeth Palace, is on the edge of the Thames by Lambeth Bridge. The river is crossed by many bridges , each with an interesting name..London Bridge, Westminster Bridge, Waterloo Bridge, Albert Bridge, Charing Cross Bridge. Many people have been impressed with the huge city as they stood on one or other of the bridges. Once ^{The jewel} Wordsworth journeyed from his country home in the Lake District to London on his way to the continent and he happened to stand early one morning on Westminster Bridge. He was struck anew with the vast heart of the city. Some of you will remember his sonnet, Upon Westminster Bridge. I shall read only the first few lines, which express his awe at the beauty and the vastness of the city:

From Upon Westminster Bridge by William Wordsworth:

Earth has not anything to show more fair:
 Dull would he be of soul who could pass by
 A sight so touching in its majesty:
 This city now doth like a garment wear
 The beauty of the morning: silent, bare,
 Ships, towers, domes, theatres and temples lie
 Open unto the fields, and to the sky:
 All bright and glittering in the smokeless air.

When one thinks of the literary landmarks of London one is bewildered. Where to begin? Shall I take you to Westminster Abbey, where so many of England's poets are commemorated in Poets' Corner, or to the Tower where Sir Walter Raleigh wrote his History of the World, when he was in prison, or to the quiet Temple grounds off the Strand, where

Charles Lamb worked for 25 years and about which he wrote so charmingly in his autobiographical essays, or to No. 10 Downing Street, an old-fashioned house on a tiny side street, where ^{the prime} Winston Churchill lives?)

No. Instead I shall take you to an eighteenth century house in one of the busiest parts of London...just off Fleet Street, but in so quiet a lane that you would never believe you were in the center of one of the largest cities in the world. It is No. 17 Gough Sq. and here Dr. Samuel Johnson lived for ten years, from 1748-1758. I saw the house for the first time (this past summer and) quite fell in love with it. I wouldn't mind living there myself. It has generous windows and deep sills, pleasant light rooms and a staircase with a fine banister. In the attic of this house, Dr. Johnson wrote his huge dictionary. Today the place is neat and clean ^{but} ~~and~~ I am sure when Dr. Johnson lived there it was very untidy, stacked with dusty papers, and the stairs echoed with the steps of those helpers, who were assisting him in the great task, which took him eight years to finish. He was poor during those days and wanted help from some generous patron, but when he tried to attract the attention of Lord Chesterfield, he was rebuffed and kept waiting at that nobleman's door. When at last, you remember, he had published his dictionary and become known, and Lord Chesterfield took notice of him, he wrote that famous letter in which he voiced the wounded feelings of all poor writers.

Dr. Johnson's dictionary was the only standard for years. You remember Becky Sharp in Vanity Fair? She lived some sixty years

later but at the beginning of the story, when she was leaving school in a carriage with her friend, Amelia Sedley, she was presented with Dr. Johnson's Dictionary by her teacher. And she promptly threw it out of the window!

Dr. Johnson was a fat, rough, ungainly person but an editor and an essayist, a very wise man and a wonderful conversationalist. Some of his sayings have come down to us through the years:

He said:

"A man, sir, should keep his friendship in constant repair."

Again:

"When a man is tired of London, he is tired of life: for there is in London all that life can afford."

Dr. Johnson with all his wisdom was, in some ways, ridiculously prejudiced. He never liked the Scotch, for instance, and said so very plainly. One of his sayings runs:

"The noblest prospect which a Scotchman ever sees is the high road that leads him to England."

By the irony of fate, or perhaps in poetic justice, it was a Scotchman, James Boswell, who admired Johnson so much that he kept a strict record of his conversations and wise sayings, found out all about his early life, described his habits and his character, his weaknesses and his great qualities so remarkably well that he was able to write one of the finest biographies in the English language. And today we know more about Samuel Johnson than we do about any other eighteenth century figure, because of the extraordinary ability of this man from Scotland.

London is rich in parks. Many of them belonged to kings and queens, but now they are enjoyed by everyone. You have all heard of Hyde Park, which lies in the center of the residential part of the city. Then there is St. James' Park, belonging at one time to St. James' Palace, and Green Park, and Kensington Gardens, which surround Kensington Palace, where Queen Victoria lived as a little girl. ^{There is Regent Park where Shakespeare's plays are acted in} Further out along the Thames are Kew Gardens, ^{the} a lovely large park, renowned for its flowers, which bloom for ^{summer} many months in the temperate, damp, gentle climate of England. In the spring, when all England seems like a garden, Kew is particularly lovely. A modern poet, Alfred Noyes, has written a poem in praise of Kew, when the lilacs are in bloom and when the inhabitants of London, though living in a large city, can taste the joys of the countryside. Do you remember it?

From The Barrel Organ by Alfred Noyes:

Go down to Kew in lilac-time, in lilac-time, in lilac-time;
 Do down to Kew in Lilac-time (it isn't far from London!)
 And you shall wander hand in hand with love in summer's wonderland
 Go down to Kew in Lilac-time, (it isn't far from London.)

The cherrytrees are seas of bloom and soft perfume and sweet perfume
 The cherry-trees are seas of bloom and (oh, so near to London)
 And there they say, when dawn is high and all the world's a blaze of
 sky
 The cuckoo, though he's very shy, will sing a song for London.

After London I could take you to half a hundred places in England on a literary pilgrimage. Of all these I have chosen Cambridge...not only because it is brimful of associations with books and poems you have studied and the memories of famous men, but because it is

one of the most beautiful cities in all England and the one that I love best. Like Oxford, Cambridge is a university town. But what does it look like? It is situated on a flat plain about 50 miles northeast of London and through it runs a charming small river called the Cam. Spires and towers pierce the sky. The university is composed of a score and more colleges, each complete in itself, with buildings for teachers and students, a separate dining hall, a library and a chapel. These colleges are built around courts...quads...they are called, and each has a history and an individuality of its own. Most of them are very, very old. They were founded by all kinds of interesting people, by kings and queens, by bishops and doctors, by the mothers of princes, and by pious titled ladies. Many of them began in the 13th and 14th centuries as monasteries and convents. The oldest is Peterhouse, which was founded in 1281 and the latest is ^{being built now - Churchill Coll.} Selwyn built in 1882. You can imagine how hallowed and beautiful these buildings have become through the centuries, how the thoughts and actions of hundreds and hundreds of students seem to haunt, like ghosts, the narrow stairs, the choir stalls, and library alcoves of these places of learning.

The town itself has kept much of its original character for the English love tradition and know the value of it. Though buses now do go through Cambridge, the city authorities will not widen the narrow streets; though the houses are now wired for electricity, only candles are used for lighting in the peerless Gothic King's Chapel, which is the glory of the university; though open spaces

exist on immediate outskirts, they belong to colleges and no one can build on them to spoil their green, open beauty. The colleges have beautiful names, many religious, for originally of course, as in so many other countries, education was in the hands of the religious orders. There is Kings for instance and Queens, Trinity and St. John's, Magdolene and Emmanuel, Jesus and Pembroke, St. Catherine's and Sidney Sussex.

Whom have you studied who spent his youth in Cambridge? You will be surprised when I tell you of only a few. If we go to Trinity College, for instance, you can see in the Chapel a white marble statue of Tennyson, one of its distinguished sons. It was here at college that Tennyson formed his friendship with Arthur Hallam, who died, you remember very young and who inspired Tennyson's best known poem, In Memoriam. In the same college you will be shown rooms that the novelist Thackeray occupied as a student. In the library of Trinity College is another marble statue, that of Byron, who was a student here. Before he was 21 he published his first book of poems, Hours of Idleness, some of which were translations from Greek and Latin poems, which he wrote as exercises while a student ^{at} in Trinity. *Byron's Poems* *Edinburgh Review*

If we go to another college, Christ's College, we can see an old mulberry tree in a garden at the back, which Milton used to know. He sometimes studied under its shade. You remember, Milton loved Cambridge. He came to Christ's College when he was sixteen in 1624 and spent seven years there. No wonder his work is full of learned

words, of allusions to Latin and Greek, for it was these two ancient languages that formed the principal part of the curriculum of that day.

(In another college is a very fine small building which houses Pepys library for Pepys wanted his old college, Magdalene, to have his diary and his books and prints after his death.) And in St. John's college you will see on the wall of the dining hall, the portrait of William Wordsworth, who was a student here. He wrote exhaustively of his college days in his long poem The Prelude. ^{Cambridge at Jesus College - a beautiful one seen in his notes.} Is it not extra-^{now} ordinary that so many poets studied in Cambridge? Is it not possible that the beauty of the town and the river and the lovely gardens were something of an inspiration?

Sloping down to the River Cam behind some of the colleges are superb green lawns, trim and smooth as velvet. Once a visitor asked an old gardener how he was able to make ^{such} ~~so~~ fine ~~a~~ lawns. "Well, you see, sir," said the gardener, "we roll them and roll them for about four hundred years, and then they look like this."

You will have heard that one of the great attractions of England are the many delightful hamlets and villages hidden away off the beaten track. The countryside around Cambridge is no exception. There are half a dozen charming old villages within easy walking distance of the city. One of the loveliest is the hamlet of Grantchester, about two miles away. Here are thatched cottages, a few larger houses, an ancient parish church and an atmosphere of old world quietness. In this village on the upper Cam is an Apple Orchard owned by people who serve tea in the summer under the apple trees, not far from the river. My

husband and I had tea there this ^{one} past summer and a simpler, more delightful place it would be hard to find. A poet, whom you may have heard of, Rupert Brooke, was a student in Cambridge forty ⁵⁰ years ago. He happened to live in Grantchester and bicycled to his lectures every day. He lived in a house called the Old Vicarage, It stood near a pool and hard by was an old mill, famous since Tennyson's day. Once, when Rupert Brooke was travelling in Germany, sitting in a German café, he had a sudden terrible attack of homesickness, for Cambridge and Grantchester, for the Orchard where he had sometimes had tea under the apple trees. He wrote a poem called The Old Vicarage, Grantchester in which he recalled the happy times he had had as a student and resident of this characteristic English hamlet. It is far too long to read, but I must give you just the last few lines:

From The Old Vicarage, Grantchester by Rupert Brooke:

Ah God! To see the branches stir
 Across the moon in Grantchester!
 To smell the thrilling-sweet and rotten
 Unforgettable, unforgotten
 River smell, and hear the breeze
 Sobbing in the little trees.

.....

O, is the water sweet and cool
 Gentle and brown above the pool?
 And laughs the immortal river still
 Under the mill, under the mill?
 Say, is there Beauty still to find?
 And Certainty? And Quiet Mind?
 Deep meadows yet, for to forget
 The lies and truths and pain...oh yet
 Stands the Church clock at ten to three?
 And is there honey still for tea?

Except a living man, there is nothing
more wonderful than a book!

a message to us from human souls
we never saw. ... And yet these arouse
us, terrify us, teach us, comfort us,
open their hearts to us as brothers.

Kingsley.

Have I taken you too far away? Has the journey to England fatigued you? I hope not. I repeat, do not forget that books are living things. They were written by people, living in a college, or a house, or a room, in places you can find on the map or see with your own eyes, someday, and they will mean something to you, if you have imagination enough to look into the past. Books are not just volumes to be studied and forgotten. They are the spirits of men and women telling us what they thought of life and love and death and all the myriad experiences that confront humanity. ^{CK.} My attempt today has been to try to make some English people whom you can never see, and the places which you have never visited...a little more real to you. I shall be happy if I have succeeded in that.

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Kişisel Arşivlerle İstanbul'da Bilim, Kültür ve Eğitim Tanıtı

Scott Ailesi Koleksiyonu



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