

Paris, May 22 - '51

Dear father & mother, I am indebted very much to you both for charming letters, since the last sheets were addressed to you - My letters are such weekly delights to me! - You must not think, dear father, because I have said nothing about it, I am not deeply interested in all the stirring events you have been participating in of late - And though I know that trial must have given you much labour & trouble, I cannot regret your share in it; for I feel an honest man's honest & strong conviction & earnest voice for the right, is never lost - Things worth having are never gained without good struggle; & English history of some 30 years ago, when the battles for putting down the slave trade & slavery were fought, how men who are almost sainted now-a-days were then denounced & abused, gives us good hope & encouragement - And the doctrine of right & wrong, instead of expedient or inexpedient, is the only thing that can ever hold our vast country, with its thousand interests, its clashing objects, firmly together - I do not think I ever in my life so valued religion, religious principle, & even a stern morality, as since I have been in France! And I had rather we went back to the intolerance of the Puritans & had with it their lofty spirit, than get to this acquiescence in all things, this faith in nothing, living & acting solely for the selfish present - It is the constant question with the French republic last? How can it when the French themselves seem to have no faith in it? When there is no definite aim or object, but each little clique works & flatters & intrigues for its own advantage - When they seem afraid to trust the right because it is right, when the lives of men are in discord with their words, when men are honored because they speak great things or write elevated thoughts or imagine lovely creations, & yet whose private lives are corrupt & impure; & yet it is said, "oh, that is admitted by society, they are forced to such things, one must not be too strict, they do as well as they can, & they are so noble & elevated in thought!" The great want of France is religious principle, & I have never felt till now how absolutely & imperatively we need God, revealed to us through Jesus Christ, how we must have the Bible as the final appeal in all doubtful questions, how human nature & human reason cannot stand alone, as when I see how people who would fain have good & right are led astray & blinded & imperfect, how far short they fall of the truth, when philosophy & moral nature take the place of religion - I long sometimes to be a missionary to France, did I not feel that it was a task for which I was too little - One thing we may be most happy for at home, & oh how blessed it is we do not know, we marry for love! - Even in England there is too much marriage for settlement - I was quite struck last autumn by a answer a lady made for & lovely herself, & who I am sure would never have married for such reasons, but seemed to see nothing but propriety

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not every one of the darker feelings, every feeling by which she is a woman, be smothered - That her personal character is so with marriage? And how can you expect her to look on her life as wife & mother bright & noble if such is its beginning? And yet I had almost rather she should feel it keenly, than take it as matter of course, & the necessary form of an introduction to society - If course there are exceptions, & of course many make such marriages happy by being free to learn to love each other - But still marriage is an arrangement of thine, marriage & affection, & de commencement, & nothing the sanctity of marriage. I had rather a girl run away for love than married against a way - though her choice might be ever so foolish - But I am sure I would rather a child grow up knowing only how to spell & read & read her bible, than send it to Paris to be educated - If course it is a different thing where people in travelling stay awhile here for the advantage - But the deliberate intention of sending a child from America to be educated in Paris! Good heavens! what are the few accomplishments gained, compared to the injury to the more & more delicate feelings, a child must receive who walks through the streets of Paris or looks into the shop windows! To be sure some may pass through it all pure, I hope many do, but who would run the risk? I do not consider the French are immodest & sensual, I only wonder they are as good as they are - But as long as we value truth & purity, & delicacy in manner & feeling, let us keep our children at home, where truth is truth, & right is right, & if the knowledge of evil cannot come, let it come when they are strong enough to fight it, & to see that wrong is wrong, & bad bad - Some may say that is him who evil thinks, & I say, but wrong is not right because you shut your eyes & won't see it - And our manners, our ways are so different, that we often cannot realize how different things are here - Nor what vices are run - And I am pained & wounded & saddened more than I can tell when French people say the young Americans are the most dissipated the worst of all the foreigners in French in Paris; & then say I thought your manners were very bad in America - I have written paragraphs, but I feel strongly & deeply, & I want you to know how I feel - And I don't think I came to Paris prejudiced; I see that many things are good, I see & agree in many many exceptions, & truly believe there is an earnest wish

stirring in many hearts for something better - But it is a long work,
& it is needed from the highest to the lowest - So I will turn to
something better, the outside glories of this magnificent, beautiful city
which encloses such a strange society in its midst -

Sunday morn. Dr. Fay & I set out at a good hour, meaning to go to Notre Dame to
hear the Te Deum, which was to be sung there as the first public performance of
the day - We stopped to see if the Lowell's had returned, & found them at breakfast,
& that they had got back the noon before, having travelled all night on their return
from Nantes - They were quite charmed with their visit to Madame Jaumot, the eldest
of Mrs. Cousin's daughters - She lives in a country-house not far from Nantes, very plea-
santly situated, about Lizzy said, prettily & comfortably furnished, & everything so
comfortable & in such fine order; & M. Jaumot she was also quite charmed with,
so sensible & intelligent & such a good husband & father; they were quite charmed
with having seen such a pleasant & good & happy French family - There were
two daughters, the oldest is perhaps, the youngest - After a few minutes we took
our way to Notre Dame, which is on the island in the middle of the Seine, which
was formerly all there was of Paris, though now it has extended so immensely on
each side - The front of Notre Dame you are all familiar with, but conveying
give but an imperfect idea - The interior I was somewhat disappointed with, for
though very high & grand it is whitewashed or sort of yellow washed, which makes
it look cold & bare - We were before mass, but did not know when the Te Deum was
to be, & as kind two chairs to wait - Part of the body of the church is filled with
chairs which are let indiscriminately to whoever wishes them - The priests were
very splendidly robed, at least the principal ones, in ^{prison} velvet cloaks which
reback the ground, & a pelmine, as it were, over, of white beautifully embroidered
with colored flowers, & fringed with gold; but they looked like two stout ladies, as
their backs were turned to us, richly dressed in the fashion - The soldiers' faces in
France are generally bad, but I must say the priests are worse - You naturally
expect that men especially consecrated to a holy life should have something of
it in their looks; & when their faces are coarse & low, often ill tempered in expres-
sion, it seems incongruous with their profession - Some have good faces & look
earnest, but as far as I have seen they are the exceptions - And they do not in-
spire any confidence from their appearance, or give the impression that clea-
rness ranks among their virtues - I am surprised to see so few in the streets - I want
to see more of the Catholic service till I can understand it, for one cannot whol-
ly condemn a thing they don't understand - But at present nothing gives me
a more profound sadness than the Catholic service - It seems such a thing of
mere form, & all seem to practice it; & such such a contrast to the religion
Christ came to preach! - I was disappointed in the music, for though parts
were fine, the Cathedral is so large it is not sufficiently filled by the priests &
choristers voices so far off in the choir - The Te Deum did not come until after
mass, when new priests came in in even more gorgeous robes, & the Archbishop was
there - They quite filled the choir with chairs for the members of government, but only
about 20 soldiers came, who were stationed on each side the choir, & 9 or 10 members
of government, so that there was a blank display of empty seats, & it sounded strangely

to hear the orders to the soldiers coming in in the pauses of a great anthem. We spent a good part of the day later sitting with Aunt Lizzie - Two of their French acquaintances, a lady & daughter, came to call - To invite them to the young lady's wedding the 15th. of May - She had been engaged about a fortnight before, & it was mentioned as an unusual & very happy occurrence, as "un mariage d'inclination!" - On our way back Dr. Gray & I went down into the Place de la Concorde where they were making great preparations for the Egi's illumination - But unfortunately a heavy rain had set in, & the Place looked as if hung with black from the clouds of umbrellas - But though there was such a crowd I never saw one more good-natured, laughing & joking, & so little rude pushing - We wanted to get on to the bridge to see the great figures raised in the middle, of Neptune & his horses surmounting a pile of rocks out of which here & there sprang a tree, & over which a torrent flowed; but we could not pass for the crowd, as a boat race was going on - Under the rose, Neptune & steeds were plaster, & the rocks were of painted boards & canvas - But the trees & water were real, & the effect was very good - The Place looked finely with flag-staffs hung with colors & sundry decorations, the tops of the columns adorned with baskets of flowers, & the fountains also - We returned to our lodgings hoping the rain would cease before coming - At six o'clock the Lowells came round for us, & Madame joining us we went out, well wrapped in shawls & under umbrellas, for the miserable rain still poured down - The front of the Madeleine was lighted by a huge electric light thrown on it from the front, & it was a beautiful effect like moonlight, only bringing out the beautiful minutiae of ornament & the carving more perfectly almost than sunlight, but one could not stand to look long with the rain pouring down, & we took our way to the Place - It would have been most magnificent had there been only fine weather! But how could little lanterns burn half filled with water? & the rain was heavy enough to extinguish any gentle flame - On the front of the Buildings of Public Offices they had a long line of gas, & a stream of light blazing in wide stars - And the fountains were surrounded with baskets peacefully twisted from willows, & flowers bursting out all over the sides, lighted by rows of lamps, & over all fell gently this water - It was perfectly lovely! But Dr. Gray said it looked too damp for the occasion! - And we could not stay long in such a rain. I was sadly disappointed, for one could see how beautiful it would be were the weather only fine! - Monday I passed pretty much with the Lowells & we all dined together at the Gros faïces, Brengamp - But I fear French cooking is lost upon them, as little Lowells eats no meat, & the children will not touch anything but the simplest roasts & boils, such as they get at home - I am afraid they will starve this summer in Germany - Aunt Lizzie cannot enjoy it - And I think it quite an amusement in travelling to see & taste the different foods of different countries. - Tuesday morn'g. I spent writing

very curious & scientific observations on causing varieties in plants, &c. &c. & is a very intelligent man - We went afterwards into his study where he showed us some curious things with the microscope. Some of them observations & discoveries of his wife. Who is really a remarkable woman, and so sweet & charming! She complimented me very much on my progress in ^{speaking} French, & we talked very busily all day together - Before dinner who do you think arrived, Frichaux the younger, who travelled so much in America when young, & who with his father wrote the famous book on American Trees - He came 15 leagues to meet Dr. Gray, & is still a vigorous, hale, old man, though 81; he speaks English well, & it was indeed a very interesting thing to meet him - I thought of you, Will, & how much you would have liked to see him - We were soon after ushered in to dinner - All the rooms on that lower floor seemed paved with marble, but in the saloon a carpet was laid down, & also just under the table in the dining room - We had such a nice dinner. First soup very thick with rice - Then bouilli beef very delicate & potatoes handed with it - Then boiled chicken with some milk sauce over it & some cakes around it that seemed as if made of Indian meal - Then a roti of fish of real most delicately larded & cooked - Before that came some exceedingly nice ham dried in juniper smoke - Then some delicious asparagus, a separate dish; then cauliflower with cheese grated over it & browned; then a nice plum pudding, or cake called a savarin, half pudding, half cake, baked in a ring - And after a salad, ^{your plate is changed between each of these dishes but not your knife & fork;} the dessert was put on; oranges, delicate candied fruits, most delicious maccaroons & little cakes made by Madame Vilmosin herself, & pretty confitures of pear & guinea, preserved raspberries, &c. &c. I did not taste everything! But neither do I care to tell you how much I did taste! - But all was very nice, & I came to the conclusion Madame V. was a wonder as housekeeper as well as for every thing else! - The two eldest children dined at table & behaved very well - They had some red wine to drink in their water as matter of course - Scarcely anyone drinks pure water - Cafe noir was handed after dinner, & then we all left the table together, & soon the omnibus came, & we had to say good-bye! I could not forbear giving Madame a French salutation at parting, of a kiss on each of her soft round cheeks, & I think Dr. Gray would like to have joined me, he admires her so heartily - I had my flowers tenderly wrapped like a baby in my shawl, it was a huge bunch, & made our room quite gay for a long time! - We rode all the way to Paris in the bus, by the great road in old times to Orleans, wider than the neck, & trees on each side, but uncomfortably paved - It used to be crowded with carriages & vehicles before the opening of the R.R. but now it is almost deserted - We took a fiacre after leaving the bus & were home about 10 -



Gray, Jane Loring. 1851. "Gray, Jane May 22, 1851 [to Loring]." *Asa and Jane Gray travel correspondence*

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