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There are on this line a number of skew bridges built of brick on a plan invented by Mr Fox, the young gentleman with whom we made the excursion. He has promised to send me a copy of his paper on the subject through Dr Faraday.12

12 Skew bridges, built at oblique angles to the streams or roads they crossed, were developed in response to the need of canal and railroad builders to lay out long, straight paths which would not have to curve continually so as to intersect every obstacle to be crossed at right angles, as had all bridges prior to that time. The Henry Library contains a reprint of Fox’s article “On the Construction of Skew Arches,” Phil. Mag., April 1836, 3d ser. 8:299–305.

HENRY’S EUROPEAN DIARY
Henry Papers, Smithsonian Archives

Aug 1st [1837] Visited Mr Newman1—saw Prof Daniels new battery, took drawing of parts. See paper.2

1 John Frederick Newman.
2 Henry is probably referring to J. F. Daniell, “On Voltaic Combinations,” Phil. Trans., 1836, pp. 107–124, which has a scale drawing of Daniell’s “constant battery” (plate 9). Although Henry had been shown the battery by Daniell earlier (March 29), he evidently wanted a detailed drawing so that he could construct his own. Henry eventually did so, commencing on March 25, 1840.

TO HARRIET HENRY
Family Correspondence, Henry Papers, Smithsonian Archives


My Dear Dear Harriet,

I wrote to you a few days since1 and closed my letter some what in a hurry. I start tomorrow for Edinburgh and as I may not have an opportunity to send a letter in a week or two from this time I have taken time for one by the fore lock and written in advance of the packet. The good ship Wellington starts for the second time on the 10th and I intend this letter to go with her if a chance does not occur before.

I have entirely recovered from my indisposition and now feel much better than I have done in many months past. I have not enjoyed very good

1 Above, July 26–31, 1837.
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health since I landed in Europe. At first the smoke of London affected me and when I went to Paris the waters disagreed with me. I returned to London quite in low spirits and was for two or three days not a little homesick. Nearly all my acquaintances had left town and all things appeared to have changed aspect during my absence.

Henry James however has quite revived me and takes no little credit for the cure. I have called since I last wrote on several of my acquaintances and met with the same kind reception as before. Mr Faraday took me yesterday afternoon on an excursion to see the London and Birmingham rail road as far as it is completed. We started at 5 o'clock rode 25 miles and back again in about 3 hours. I was delighted with the jaunt, the road, the country & the company. All were plesant. We passed with great rapidity through two tunnels each more than a mile long, during most of the distance through we were moving with the speed of the wind in total darkness not a ray of light could be seen.

Mr Faraday has given me a letter to his Brotherinlaw an engineer in Edinburgh. I forgot to state in my last that I was much gratified to learn that the little dresses as well as the scarf pleased you. I intended one for each of the little girls. I had purchased some toys for Bub but could not put them in the bundle. Mr Robertson of the Royal Society (assistant secretary) packed the articles in a bundle from that Institution to the albany Institute. I informed him yesterday that they had arrived safely. He is quite an amiable youngish man, was pleased with the intelligence and requested as the "packer" to send his respects to Mrs Henry. I must also inform you that old William Vaughan always requests to be remembered to you when I receive a letter from him. I purchased for the old Gentleman a pulse glass and also a palm glass to show the boiling of ether by the heat of the hand while in Paris. They are known in that city by the name of the glasses of Franklin and on this account I though[t] they would be interesting to the old Philosopher nor was I disappointed. He laughed at the idea of my supposing he would be pleased by bubbles, but said they were philosophical ones & that he would try the pulses of all the ladies who came to see him. On the whole he appeared as much tickled as Bub would have been with the same articles.

Henry James has concluded to start for Ireland this week. I have roused him from a lethargy which he has been enjoying for three months past. He

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3 George Buchanan.
4 The pulse glass, a philosophical toy to show the boiling of fluids by the heat of the hand, is treated in Henry Papers, 1:85n. We assume the palm glass is a variation on this instrument. Hare's *Compendium of the Course of Chemical Instruction*, 4th ed. (Philadelphia, 1840), p. 38 and index, in fact lists the same item under both designations.
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has been living in London much at his ease with his books and a very few acquaintances. The time has passed very quietly and pLENTY with him. He has been waiting for a remittance of money from America; times were so bad when he came away that it was impossible for him to raise as much as he wished not for the mere expenses of the voyage but that he might assist his poor relatives in Ireland. He has also been stopping in London a greater part of this long time for the purpose of having a cork leg constructed. He has one now finished which is a very interesting article and adds much to his appearance.⁴

He brought with him a black man⁵ from Albany as a waiter who is a very good fellow in the serving line. He attracts much attention and is quite [a] Lion among the lower classes eats with the family with whom we lodge and would find no difficulty were he not married in getting a white wife. I have urged Henry James to start for Ireland that he may get through his business so as to meet me either in Scotland or at the meeting of the British association at Liverpool which takes place on the 11th of next month. I wish to start for home as soon after that as possible and now think it probable that we will come together and sail from London.

A melancholy accident happened in London last week which you have probably seen mentioned in the papers. A man had invented a parachute or article to attache to a balloon and by which he supposed he could descend to the earth from a great height without the danger of the oscillations which had attended the other forms of the apparatus before tried. He ascended from one of the public gardens amid a crowd of many thousand persons suspended from the basket of the balloon in which were two persons and when he attained the altitude of about a mile and a half he cut loose. The balloon released from his weight sprang upwards to an immense height to the eminent danger of the persons in the car. The parachute descended as rapidly towards the Earth broke in its descent and precipitated the unfortunate adventurer head long to the ground, from which he was raised a short time before in helth and high hopes. Mr Faraday happened to go to the garden was called to by the adventurer who had known him many years before. Mr F asked him if he was certain all parts of his apparatus was of sufficient strength and his principles well tested. The answer was there is no fear of me but I have some apprehension for the persons in the balloon above me. Much excitement has prevailed on account of this accident. The owners of the garden have been blamed for permitting him to ascend &

⁴ See Henry to Bache, May 28, 1837, above.
Henry James, Sr.’s reminiscences of his trip to Ireland are recalled by his son Henry James in Notes of a Son and Brother (New York, 1914), pp. 265–270.
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Mr Faraday has been obliged to publish a letter in the Times relative to his knowledge of the affair.⁶ Notwithstanding all this, last night there were two balloons sent up from different parts of London each containing a man and a woman. They ran a race in the air over the whole length of the city much to the delight of the citizens who would rather that many lives should be lost than they deprived of any pleasure. The more barbarus the sport the more highly it is relished by the multitude here and in this respect I think they are more savage than the multitude in America. In some respects we are in advance of any part of Europe I have yet seen particularly in the condition of females in the lower classes. In France women are every where seen working in the fields. In Belgium you will see women on the road with a hand waggon picking up the horse dung as it is dropped by the animal. This is sold by the load to the farmer and thus a subsistence is earned by means unheard of with us.

In Paris the streets are swept by women in some quarters, and almost at every little nook in the side of the street you will find a coblers stall and this not unfrequently occupied by a woman. The lighter kind of Ladies slippers are made by females. In London in all the public streets women are arranged along the side walk on the edge of the gutter with large baskets filled with apples cherries and other fruit forming a large load which is supported by a strap around the loins for hours together. During the coldest and wetest weather you will find a female stationed at a cross walk with a birch broom in one hand and the other supporting an infant constantly sweeping the stones asking a penny of every passenger. The greater number of these pass her by unheaded, occasionally one gives her a copper.⁷ I have as yet been in company with but few females since I came to Europe

⁶ The spectacular parachute accident of the landscape painter Cocking received extensive newspaper and magazine coverage in England. Picking up stories from the London papers, the Franklin Institute Journal (1837, 20:219–227) analyzed the mishap in an illustrated article. Cocking's fatal parachute experiment was reportedly the second ever attempted in England. The previous descent, done thirty years earlier by Garnerin, was endangered by extreme oscillations, a problem Cocking endeavoured to remedy by reversing aspects of Garnerin's design. In a balloon piloted by two other aeronauts, Cocking began his ascent from Vauxhall on July 24. According to observers, his parachute collapsed shortly after its separation from the balloon at an altitude of 5000 feet. The London Times (issue of July 26) reported that Cocking's demise was an occasion for further regret when "the landlord at the inn at which the body lies was guilty of a violation of the ordinary forms of decency, by admitting the public to view the remains of the unfortunate gentleman, as well as the parachute, at 6d. a-head, ... ."

In a letter to the Times (August 1, 1837), Michael Faraday defended himself against the charge made by Monk Mason at the Cocking inquest that Faraday encouraged Cocking to ascend against Mason's advice. Faraday claimed he had pointed out to Cocking structural defects in his parachute but, seeing that Cocking was determined to continue, refrained from disturbing his concentration further.

⁷ For additional remarks in this vein see Henry's first letter to his wife of July 5, 1837.
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except in Paris where I met with several but they were principally Americans. Most of the English Ladies I have met with have been very intelligent and asked many questions about america particularly <inquires> about the negro population. They cannot understand our prejudices relative to them and cannot see why they should not have all the priviledges of a white man. I was obliged on one occasion to ask a lady if she could ever think of marr[y]ing a black man. She said she certainly would not fancy the colour but that there should be no legal objection to prevent those who pleased from marr[y]ing together.

Miss Martineaus book on America has just appeared and is making something of a sensation here. It is very hard on America in reference to the slave question also our politics religion &c.

I have not as yet seen the book but read to day a review of it. She gives some stories relative to the horrors of slavery which are really revolting but which cannot be true. We are surrounded on all sides by men in a savage state and where civilized and savage man come in approximation a semi-barbarism is produced more productive of crime and cruelty than the entirely savage state since all the wickedness of civilized man is found in this without the controlling principles. From this class of persons extending along the western side of the Missis[sippi] along the southern coast including New orleans & Florida an English tourest may find ample materials to make a book of american atrocities which with a little colouring and well chosen examples may render us black in the eyes of the world as crime can make us. But these scarcely belong more to the United States than the barbarism of the British East Indian possessions do to this country.8 There

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8 Henry's perception of blacks as a less civilized, if not actually inferior, race was a view common to Northerners of his time. Opposed to the idea of human slavery, but convinced that the varying degrees of black and white civilization would inhibit the peaceful coexistence of the two races, Henry supported the early plans for African recolonization. Like most of his fellow Northerners, Henry was not prepared to endorse the abolition of slavery if it entailed the subsequent entrance of Black people into White society. Instead, he wrote to Asa Gray (May 22, 1862) that he was "warmly in favour of colonization," the construction of "an empire in Africa which will be so attractive to the negro that under the repulsive influence of caste in this country he will be voluntarily impelled in that direction." (Historic Letter File, Gray Herbarium Library, Harvard University.) Thus in 1839, Henry pledged three dollars to the Princeton Colonization Society for the furthering of such a plan.

Although Henry was opposed to slavery and dismayed at the condition of blacks in the South, the issue was not one which loomed large in his life. In rejecting an offer of the Chair of Natural Philosophy at the University of Virginia, Henry expressed some distaste at the thought of living in a slave state, but conceded that the high salary and other advantages of the institution outweighed his revulsion and that he would have accepted the offer had other conditions been different. (Henry Papers, 2:248). He was, however, extremely sensitive to criticism from outsiders, whose perspectives he believed to be distorted. America could not be held responsible for the inevitable consequences of the close association of two races of such different levels of development. The United States, he felt, was being taken to task unfairly.
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are many things connected with America which are much to be regretted and which every reflecting traveler must feel. When at a distance we see with less predjudice the good and bad qualities of our home and no person can have a proper ide[a] of America who has not viewed it from a distance and in connection or in comparison with other countries. We have too exalted an opinion of our influence and the share of attention we occupy in the minds of Europe. We are too far removed to exert any direct influence and the great mass of people in France and England are too ignorant of our affairs to be much influenced by them. The French have but little respect for the Americans. They hate the English but do not despise them; they have no more love for the Americans and far less respect. The Americans in Paris receive no attention, they are never admitted into fashionable society. Col Thorns' family is the only exception and for this privilege he has it is said paid very dearly and is not allowed to invite to his table only persons of a certain rank who may have been desig[nated] to him. Very few of the Americans who go to Paris can speak French sufficiently well to enjoy conversation in that Language. The smattering they get before going abroad is like the English spoken by Mr Jager. They soon acquire enough to know that they speak very badly. The result is that they make few attempts to get into French society and these are unsuccessful. Most of our people of wealth who travel on the continent might as well stay at home.

They come without an object and

Henry's chauvinism was typical of the response of many Americans to European criticism. The second quarter of the nineteenth century brought hundreds of Europeans to the United States to see the "great experiment in action." Scores of travelogues, personal accounts, letters, and articles ensued, stirring up a flurry of nationalistic reaction on both sides. Imbued with a sense of the superiority of their own culture and institutions, European observers were often harsh in their judgement of a young nation that had challenged their cultural and political traditions. Americans eager to be accepted by Europeans as cultural equals were at the same time proud of their differences. They found it difficult to accept any sort of criticism, particularly when the validity of their democratic practices was questioned. The institution of slavery was an especially sensitive issue.

Harriet Martineau, whose book *Society in America* was published in London in 1837, was one of a great wave of Europeans appraising the new nation, and Henry, one of the many Americans who reacted negatively against it. Apt as many of her criticisms were, Martineau, according to her biographer, Robert K. Webb, had a tendency to regard her limited experience in America as representative of the whole, and to expect too much of the country too soon. Likewise, Henry, at the writing of this letter, had not actually read Martineau's work and thus failed to recognize the strong current of respect and admiration that lay beneath her criticisms.


*Colonel Herman Thorn, an American residing in Paris in the 1830s. Formerly a purser in the navy, Thorn lived in high style at the Hotel Monaco, once the residence of Talleyrand. Foster Rhea Dulles, *Americans Abroad: Two Centuries of European Travel* (Ann Arbor, 1964), p. 77.

10 The letter breaks off here.