

# PARIS

Philip Thicknesse (1719–1792)

Paris, 20 June 1766

After passing through Douay, Cambrai, and some other towns of less note, I arrived three days ago in this city. At Douay I was not admitted till I had filled up a printed paper with my name, quality, and destination; and as these orders were from the military governor, who commanded a large body of troops doing duty there, having declared myself an English officer, I thought it proper to wait upon him the next morning: He received me with great politeness, and asked me whether I had been properly accommodated at my hotel, and offered to render me any assistance or service in his power. I did not tell him the real truth, for I know not which was most disagreeable—the dirt of the house where I lodged or the civility of the hostess. Douay is a large fine town, but much inferior to Lisle; Cambrai still inferior to Douay; there I bought an ell of the finest cambric that is made, it cost fourteen livres (about twelve and sixpence English) they assured me it might be drawn with ease through a common size wedding ring, but I did not try the experiment. However, it is not prudent to buy any quantity of cambric here, as it is prohibited in the next province, and at Perrone the officers will examine your baggage rather closely; though, in general, the great politeness shown to strangers who travel in France ought to determine every gentleman not to abuse that confidence placed in him. The broad roads from Calais to this city, and all over France, are indeed wonderfully fine, paved all the way in the center, and planted on both sides with stately elms, poplars, etc. so that when you are many leagues distant from even a town, you are apt to think yourself in an avenue leading to some capital mansion house.

Neither the entrance into Paris nor the view of it at a distance give you anything like the idea of what a view of London must create in the eyes of a stranger; for the entrance gate excepted, which is strikingly fine, it has much the appearance of the busy part of Southwark; the streets are narrow, exceedingly crowded with people, and the houses very high.

As there is a duty upon every thing brought into Paris, even upon a chicken or a leg of mutton, your baggage must undergo an examination before you enter the city; a circumstance very disagreeable at the end of a journey, under the excitements, perhaps, of sleep, hunger, or curiosity. However, as I abhor coming into a town at night, even in my own country, I was determined to get early into Paris, and was at the gates before noon, and drove about the town a great while before I could find an hotel that could accommodate me and my horses, there not being inns at Paris, as in London, which will receive any horses but their own, and you must find a private hotel that has stables, which I did with great difficulty, and was well-lodged at six livres a day. Single gentlemen, however, or even families, cannot do better on their arrival at Paris than to go directly to the Hôtel d'York, rue d'Mauveux Garçon, Fauxbourg Saint Germain, where they may be accommodated with apartments at any price, and all very good. A single gentleman and his servant, of my acquaintance, is well-lodged there for eight livres a week. The street indeed is bad, but it is in that part of the town where the English chiefly reside, and indeed the best part of Paris. It is to be remarked that Paris, however, has no polite end of the town, as we call it; in every street almost are hotels of people of fashion.

Least it should escape my memory, I must now advise you to take out at Calais from your portmanteau and heavy baggage such linen and necessaries as you may have occasion for upon the road, and then have your portmanteau plombed at the custom house there; by this means, you will pass all the towns upon the road without interruption, and enter Paris, in particular, without a minute's delay. Before I had been half an hour at my lodgings, a well-dressed man waited upon me, and importuned me in the strongest manner to sell him my horses; nor could I get clear of his impertinence till I told him that such an application to a gentleman in England would entitle him to a horse-whip only.

A passion prevails here for English horses, nor is there a Frenchman of any condition who rides that has not one or two.

Philip Thicknesse *Observations on the Customs and Manners of the French Nation* (1766):27–31.