

The History of Antony and Dorothea Gibbs & of the early years of Antony Gibbs and Sons

By John Arthur Gibbs - 1922

CHAPTER IV 1789-92 – Madrid

Antony's stay in Spain was intended to be a settlement there with his family for at least some years. For the expense of their outfit and journey the firm of Granger & Banfill, his brother George, and Mrs. Hucks together lent him £500. The party consisted of himself, his wife and the two children, a nurse, and maid, William Branscombe - a youth whom he engaged in Exeter, who will hereafter often appear in this history - and Elizabeth Gibbs, the daughter of Captain John Gibbs of Topsham.

Elizabeth Gibbs' mother had died in 1779; all her brothers must by now have been out in the world, and the house at Topsham given up. She alone was left to the care of Antony's father, who, as we have seen, had undertaken the responsibility of fathering these children. We find him in 1788 concerned in getting her out of an engagement to marry a man whom he had found out to be a swindler. Lately she had been living with Antony's family at Exwick, and it was thought that she would be a useful and cheerful companion to Dorothea in Spain, but in both respects she was to prove deficient.

Mrs. Hucks wrote to Dorothea in April 1790 concerning the apprentice Grogen, who had been left in Banfill's charge:-

He would do anything night or day that he thought would be of the least service to you, and indeed everybody that has ever worked for or lived with you would do the same. ... Mr. Townsend came to enquire after his dear master and mistress, honest man his tears ran plentifully; if the prayers of your dependants as well as friends in a higher class can avail, you certainly from henceforth must be happy and successful.

Antony and his party set off by sea to Corunna in the middle of August 1789 (in the week that King George III visited Exeter), and thence travelled overland to Madrid, but were delayed at Santiago by Dorothea taking an illness of which she nearly died. On arrival in Madrid Antony was received very well, and a friend whom he had previously made there, James O'Connor, who had a house of business there, took a furnished house for the party at 22 Calle de la Regna for £60 a year, but letters to them were at first addressed to the care of a firm called Patrick Joyes et Fils, also good friends of Antony's.

The earliest of Dorothea's letters in the Aldenham collection is one written in December 1789 to Sibella Gibbs, and it is chiefly from her letters to this correspondent that we gather some particulars of their life in Madrid. Antony's most informing letters with regard to his business are at this period those to his father. Of his letters to his wife a great number have been preserved

in all periods from now onwards. In her first letter to Sibella Gibbs Dorothea wrote: "I don't think you ever knew how much I loved you. Indeed, if our acquaintance had only begun last spring your kind attention and the affectionate manner in which you behaved would have endeared you to me forever, and your letters since have given me heartfelt pleasure."

They found the cost of living very high indeed compared with Exeter. Butter and cheese used to be sent them regularly from Exeter, and Mrs. Hucks and Mrs. Vicary Gibbs would sometimes take advantage of a friend going to Spain to send them a present of useful things. In December 1789 Dorothea wrote that their house, in Spanish style, was not very comfortable to their ideas, no chimney but in the kitchen, no windows except in three rooms, all the beds in alcoves. She found Madrid a very pretty, neat town, "but not a place for people like us to live in, everybody dresses very much, you can't go out without a carriage in the evening." In May 1790:-

We find Mrs. O'Connor a very agreeable friendly woman; we know but two other ladies here, indeed it is not the fashion for ladies to visit much except at a few houses which are open every night for company; we know a good many gentlemen, some of whom we see every night; one very unpleasant thing here is that we cannot refuse seeing whoever comes whether ill or well in bad spirits or good without giving great offence.

In the same month they took, at a rent of 1,500 "reales de vellon" per six months (£30 a year), and furnished for £80, an "apartment" in No. 6 Calle de Cantarranas' from one José de Mera. There they were more comfortable, and in December 1790 Dorothea wrote: "We have a very pleasant acquaintance and a much better way of seeing them than we used to have, for we have fixed two days a week to be at home in an evening, and we have a little music instead of cards, and all our friends are musical."

In that house their son William was born on 22 May 1790, and in spite of taking smallpox soon seemed a strong and healthy infant.

In a very pleasant letter dated 3 March 1790 from George Abraham Gibbs to Dorothea he says that the Crawleys were thinking of going abroad, and he proposed (laughingly) "though an old man, to accompany them and even to extend my journey to Madrid." He went on:

You thought it seems that I was angry with you—and so I am very angry with you—for thinking so. I thought you had known me better than to suppose that I could keep any such thing in myself for so long time. I hold it to be very bad surgery to suffer such kind of matter as anger to be rankling in the breast ... and so have performed many great cases on myself in a quarter of an hour which I might not otherwise have effected for many months. Whenever I see reason to be angry with you I shall take the earliest opportunity of letting you know it. But I do not expect to have any such opportunity very soon.

In the summer Dorothea became very ill with fever and ague, and in the great heat of Madrid recovered with difficulty. Antony was at Barcelona, but returned early in September, and in December Dorothea wrote to Sibella Gibbs:-

It was a happy thing for me that Antony returned at the time he did, if he had not my joys and griefs would have been soon over. As soon as he returned he sent for another physician who ordered me to take 3 times the quantity of bark that I had taken before, it was the only thing that did me any good; besides, my dear Bell, after I had once seen Antony I felt myself perfectly reconciled to what everybody

expected: the contented state of mind and the great attention that my dearest Husband showed me (which was even beyond anything you have an idea of) I believe did more for me than anything else. Notwithstanding I thought I never should see Antony return from Barcelona, yet I would not let anybody write to him for fear it might be a loss to his business, so that no one need fear I take up too much of his time.

Antony's business took him a great deal away from Madrid, so that Dorothea was often left there alone, sometimes for months together.

The textile manufacturers who had given him their agencies for obtaining orders were, Granger & Banfill of Exwick, from whom he got a salary of £250 a year and probably a commission as well); William Taylor Son & Casenave of Norwich, who gave him £150 and 2 per cent. on orders over the value of £8,000 in a year; Alexander Turner & Co. of Leeds; and Benjamin Smith of Rochdale. After some experience of the last-named agency Antony thought it would bring him in £500 or £600 a year. There does not seem to have been a salary from either of the two last. How he had obtained the Norwich and Yorkshire agencies does not appear, but it is possible that the latter at least had come through friends of the Hucks family. In 1790 he began to receive in Madrid goods sent him on consignment for sale, viz., muslins from Baulaine Loserre & Co. of Geneva, Irish linens from Vaughan Baugh & Co. of Bristol, woollens from someone else, and a certain amount of tin plates and other hardware, and in order to deal with these goods he had to take a warehouse in Madrid and a clerk to attend to the outside work. He had indeed more consignments than was quite convenient as he had to lock up money, in the payment of duties and charges, which he would otherwise have sent home. From 1 January 1791 he also had the agency for a certain part of Spain of Amadé Duscher y Gendre Ainé, woollen manufacturers of Schmiedeburg in Prussian Silesia, and expected to earn £300 a year from orders for their goods.

This latter firm had another agent in Spain named Bridel, and in later years we find the firm of Courant Bridel & Co., of whom Jacques Courant, a Swiss, was the head, acting in Cadiz for the Silesia house. With Courant, of whom we shall hear more later, Antony was already very friendly. He stayed in his house in Cadiz (1790), and it was very possibly through him that he got this important agency.

Antony "had flattering proposals" some time in 1790 to start a warehouse in Madrid for the sale of woollens for ready money, which it was thought would pay well owing to the high prices under the prevalent credit system. He could not entertain the idea, but wrote to tell his father of it, to whom he had also written: "Let me beg you to believe, my dearest Sir, that I never think lightly of any advice you give me but that I make the greatest account of it on all occasions." His father's shrewd comment on the present proposal was:-

What you do for ready money those from whom you receive the goods must do with you upon a certain credit [Antony not being in a position to pay cash down], and if they should consider themselves as running any considerable risk by that credit would they not be likely to indemnify themselves for that risk by putting a high price upon their goods or sending such as are of an inferior quality

The districts in the Peninsula in which Antony had to work for orders were, besides Madrid itself, Andalusia (chiefly Cadiz, Seville, and Malaga), where he was from December 1789 to

February 1790, December 1790 to January 1791, and January and February 1792; the West (Zaragossa, Barcelona, and Valencia), which he visited August 1790, October and November 1791, and June 1792 ; and the East (Lisbon, Oporto, Santiago), visited March to May 1791 (with an interval in Andalusia and another in Madrid).

His correspondence was very heavy, and, in default of the more modern mechanical copiers, involved double labour in copying out his letters. Sometimes (when away) he would send those for foreign mails to Madrid to be copied and posted there; thus, on one occasion he sent letters for Elizabeth Gibbs and Branscombe to copy which he said would take them five hours, and on another a letter which would take eight hours to copy. Dorothea too was sometimes called in to help at this work.

In June 1790 he had the satisfaction of being able to tell his father that his former partners Granger & Banfill had expressed themselves in a very flattering way with regard to his work for them, and had even asked him to draw on them for any money he might require, but he added that he had of course no intention of availing himself of this liberty.

About this firm he wrote to his father in February 1791 that their profits in the Exeter business were now less than those of any in the other manufacturing places he knew: "I think you will find very few more beginners in Exeter who will do well." Granger & Banfill were able still to do a very considerable business in Spain by only dealing with very safe customers and in those classes of goods on which there was most profit. Their Italian business he said had lessened as they could not afford to keep a good traveller there while pushing the Spanish business and the risks were much greater in Italy, but in Frankfort their business was increasing and was remarkably safe.

Antony had in a very short time got together a considerable though very laborious business, and his earnings (on paper) left a good margin over his expenses, but, as will be seen presently, they were slow to become available in cash. In his first year he earned nearly £1,000. In 1791 he estimated that he would make £1,500 that year. His travelling expenses in the Peninsula, which were of course a heavy item, seem to have been deducted to arrive at these figures. Other expenses and those of the family in Madrid were not much over £400 a year.

He now proposed that, in order to make some provision for his own family, he should insure his life, and, with the ready concurrence of his parents and "the whole family," including his brothers, this was carried out through Townley Ward's partner Greaves to the extent of £1,500. The amount was afterwards increased to £2,000. Antony used also always to insure himself specially for each of his voyages by sea.

When Antony was in Madrid in 1788 William Eden (afterwards Baron Auckland), to whom he had letters of introduction, was there as our Ambassador Extraordinary, but he had left, and now Anthony Merry was *Chargé d'affaires pro tem.* and was one of the earliest friends made by Antony and Dorothea when they arrived together at Madrid. We read of his sending his carriage to take Dorothea to dinner at his house, and of escorting her to see the pictures in the Royal Palace. Another friend whom they made in Madrid was a Mr. Fisher, who seems to have been on the staff of Lord St. Helens who is mentioned below.

Antony was plunged into great uncertainty from May to July 1790 owing to Spain coming on the verge of war with England in consequence of the seizure of British ships by Spanish in Nootka Sound (Vancouver). Negotiations had been carried on through Anthony Merry, but, at

the end of May, Alleyne Fitzherbert (created Baron St. Helens 1791 for his services in this matter) arrived at Madrid as our Ambassador Extraordinary. Both countries made great preparations for war, but Spain was in a weak state, and could have made no head in a war without the cooperation of France. She might have had this, but, frightened by the democratic principles of the French Revolution from joining hands with that country, she gave in to England by a declaration made on 24 July, on the basis of which a convention was finally signed 28 October. War was avoided by the treaty, but it cut into the monopoly which Spain claimed of settlement on the West Coast of America and of navigating and fishing in the South Seas, and was consequently felt to be humiliating by the Spaniards, who showed their resentment by taking various measures against British trade.

As part of this policy they prohibited the import of cheap muslins (which came from England), in the sale of which Antony had been at great pains to obtain a share. He wrote to his father in April 1791:-

I wish this prohibition of muslins may be the last effect of the ill temper into which we have thrown Spain, or that before we had driven her into this disposition to hurt us we had lessened the abundant means she has of doing so, but it will not be seen till its cost is felt that we have been demanding the payment of pence without looking to the account of pounds against us. The manufacturers and trade of England will pay for the whole, and, as my friends all lie that way, the glorious convention, as it is called, appears to me to be nothing more than a shameful sacrifice of greater interests to lesser ones.

Antony may well be excused in his position of a merchant for regarding the British trade with Spain as of more importance than the fisheries in the Pacific. Even Pitt himself did not see the far-reaching effects of the convention in paving the way for British colonisation in North-West America, and in driving a new wedge into Spain's monopoly in the South Pacific and thence into her close commercial system in all Spanish America. Still less could Antony foresee that this convention was a step in the evolution from his present business of a great trade (Antony Gibbs & Sons') with South America, in the first beginning of which he himself was to take part.

Among the letters is an original document, dated July 1791, in which Ignacio Luzuriaga and Juan de Hirigoite, physician and surgeon respectively to His Catholic Majesty, certify to Antony's perfect health, both at that date and in the previous March. It is not stated that such medical examinations were imposed as part of the anti-British policy; possibly they were part of a general system of registration of foreigners, for even in January 1790 Antony had to get Merry to apply for leave for him and his family to reside in Spain. In January 1791 however he speaks of a new order relating to foreigners' residence.

The immediate effect of the order about muslins was after all beneficial to Antony. Sixty days' grace was allowed before the prohibition was to take effect. He was in Lisbon in March, and had become acquainted there with Lewis Stephens, of whom he soon became a very close friend, partly perhaps because Stephens was of a Devonshire family. Stephens' firm, Lewis Stephens & Co., who had £50,000 worth of muslins in stock in Lisbon, offered Antony a commission on any he could sell in Spain in the short time allowed. Antony hurried to Madrid and to Andalusia, and, after successfully obtaining large orders for the muslins, and credits on Lisbon to pay for them, returned to Lisbon, and despatched his purchases, in one ship to Cadiz, and in a second to

Seville. He was greatly pleased with the confidence shown him on all hands, and had the satisfaction of seeing his buying friends all make money out of their purchases, while his own commission and profit, on an interest which he himself took in the venture, brought him eventually well over £1,000.

Principally because the Madrid summer was found to be dangerous to Dorothea, and because the cost of the family living in Madrid was so much higher than it would be at home, Antony had arranged to take his family home in the spring of 1791, and to leave them there, returning himself to Spain with the intention of making a trip home every year in future. His business occupations were taking him so much away from his family that it seemed that he might by this plan still see almost as much of them as at present, and from the point of view of his business the time would not be wasted as it was very desirable that he should pay occasional visits to the manufacturers for whom he was acting. For this year, however, Antony, much to his father's disappointment, had to give up the plan, for his child William became ill, his affairs throughout Spain demanded his presence, and in Madrid he had had to dismiss his clerk, who had stolen £50 from him, and he had no one in whose hands he could leave his business there, for Branscombe, though "a sterling good lad," was too young.

For this summer of 1791 therefore Dorothea, as she could not live in Madrid, went with the children to San Ildefonso (otherwise La Granja), the town in the Sierra de Guadarrama, where is the summer palace of the Court of Spain. She had a good house there with a large garden for £12 from July to October. Several friends were there, and the place suited her and the children well. Antony remained to conduct his business in Madrid and was only able to pay one short visit to his family.

At the end of July an alarming decree was issued ordering a census to be taken of all foreigners in Spain, and commanding them to leave Spain in 15 days, or to subscribe to Roman Catholicism, and to naturalise themselves as Spaniards. Spain had been foremost among the nations in endeavouring to suppress the democratic ideas emanating from France and to support Louis XVI. The Prime Minister, Florida Blanca, who saw that the Revolution was the real cause of his inability to resist the English demands in the matter of Nootka Sound, had accentuated this policy, till finally, stung by the insults heaped on him by the French National Assembly, he issued this decree, aimed against Frenchmen in Spain; but the Queen's party in the Court, fearing that he would drive Spain into war with France, procured his deposition from Carlos IV and the appointment in his stead of the Count of Aranda. The decree had been rigorously put in force at first, but Antony alone among the foreigners in Madrid had not been summoned, and Lord St. Helens (who had lately called on him and invited him to dinner) of his own initiative obtained for him and his family from the Prime Minister six months' leave of residence. An original letter from Aranda to Lord St. Helens, dated Aranjuez 16 March 1792, granting to Antony six months' further leave is among the Aldenham letters.

Early in October 1791 Dorothea and the children returned to Madrid, to remain there, and to see Antony for a few days before he should start off again to Zaragossa and Barcelona. "Sitting writing from morning till night in the great heat of Madrid" he had, unknown to his wife, been very ill with fainting attacks, but was now better. At this time. Dorothea wrote to Sibella Gibbs about the children:-

little William is a fine little fellow, a sad little pet. Henry and Harriet like much more to speak English than Spanish; they are quiet and shy as ever before strangers, and Henry as stiff as a quaker when he has any compliments to make; he can talk Spanish as quick as English to Harriett and his master and with great propriety and good pronunciation and reads it better than English for when he is reading to me he Spanishises all his words.

Here may be inserted an extract from a letter from Antony to his wife dated Oporto 7 May 1791 showing the interest which he took in the education of his son George Henry:-

I have been thinking very much on the health, disposition and constitution of our dear little Henry and I will let thee know the result of my reflections, which have arisen from some little anxiety on his account and the most ardent and affectionate wishes that we may through our mutual observation and love for him adopt such a system in our bringing him up as is most likely to tend to his and your future comfort. Health and the improvement of his understanding are the two points in view, and as the attainment of the latter would be of little value if we fail in the former, we must be very careful to do nothing for the sake of bringing him forward, which may relax the natural strength of his constitution, or rather increase the weakness of it, for he is certainly not very robust. Much exercise of the mental faculties is, I am sure, very prejudicial to children in general, stops the growth of their understanding, and prevents their ripening as they otherwise would; but setting this general principle aside, we have had repeated warnings of it with respect to Henry. The being twice attacked by something like the jaundice, and the general bilious habit which has been discovered, plainly indicate that anything like long application at a time, or poring over the same thing for hours, must be prejudicial to his health, and feed the natural defect which he seems to have in his constitution; besides this, I am firmly convinced that it must increase the defect he has, and which he inherits from me, in the temper of his mind. He is averse to long application or anything like steadiness, and loves to fly about from one thing to another, and if we wish him to excel in anything, we must correct as far as we can this defect, which will otherwise grow with his years. ... Without a habit of attention whilst engaged in any pursuit and a fixed principle of doing what is to be done at once, no advancement can ever be made in this world. Some have an inclination to this naturally, and others as natural an aversion to it. Where the aversion is discovered we have only to endeavour to supply as well as we can by habit what nature has withheld, and in these cases, the defect being already discovered, I hold it to be a sacred obligation on those who have the care of children at school, to see that, on their return home at evenings or on holidays, they regularly learn their tasks the first thing. It soon becomes a habit, they feel the advantage of it as they go on, and as the understanding opens reason confirms the practice. This disposition from nature is one of the greatest blessings she has in her gifts, but it must be confirmed, and may be acquired from habit. I have gone further than I intended, and will now return to our dear Henry who set me a going; his health requires that play and amusement should be his principal occupation for some time, and, besides the hours of Don Pablo, I would make it a rule to engage him in lessons only one half-hour in the morning and as much in the afternoon: those half-hours I would give up entirely to him, and take particular care that in that short time he does as much as a child of his age can do. I mean that he should not, if possible, trifle away a minute of it (and you will thus begin to lay the foundation of a habit of attention whilst he is engaged in anything), and I am not sure that in half an hour spent in this way he will not do more than in two or three hours with the book in his hands in the usual way, which I am sure tends very much to increase the natural failing in his disposition which we should endeavour to correct.

While Antony was at Barcelona John Hucks came from England to stay with the family in Madrid. He had been with his regiment at Dublin, but had sold out in December 1790 and taken

a farm in the North of Ireland. His debts had been a constant drain on Mrs. Hucks' resources, so that she felt the expenses of her other son Joseph at Eton very heavy (over £100 a year), and when the latter went to Catherine Hall, Cambridge, in November 1790 she even doubted if she could afford to have him come to her at Exeter every vacation, the journey to Cambridge and back costing £20. In January 1791 Mrs. Hucks wrote that "John [now 21] is living on his little all being now his own master." Hearing the state of things Antony had generously proposed that John should join them in Spain, hoping that Dorothea would have a better chance of bringing him to a sense of his real situation than his indulgent mother, but he wisely resisted an idea of Mrs. Hucks that he should take him into his business, and gave his opinion that only hardship and suffering would bring him to himself. He wrote from Barcelona (November 1791) excellent advice to Dorothea as to how she should treat her brother. He considered that the way in which he had wasted his own time at Exwick deprived him of the right to lecture John, but for Dorothea, though she was to avoid reproaches, yet

without this you can let him see the sense you have of his past conduct and how distressed you are on his account and on your mother's. It may be of service to him perhaps to consider the miserable slavish life which I submit to lead for the sake of being able to retrieve my lost time.... How fortunate it was for me however that I was in the beginning obliged to prepare myself for some line of life by a forced application to business.

It was proposed that John should devote himself to learning Spanish as a slight test of his having some command over himself. Antony after returning to Madrid took him with him to Andalusia and found him "attentive to me on the whole but totally averse to any advice from his mother, me, or anyone else, alive to the foibles of all others, and unconscious of his own deficiencies."

Antony's business had continued to thrive in the main, but a considerable amount of commissions due to him, especially from Benjamin Smith of Rochdale, had not been paid. There had been a quarrel with the latter, now made up, on account of the bad quality of his goods, which were rejected by the buyers and had to be resold by Antony. He also had sums due to him in Spain temporarily locked up in connection with his business, but all quite safe as he believed, and his accounts, which his brother George was to inspect when he should arrive home, apparently showed that if all were got in he would have a surplus of about £2,000 over what he had spent.

It was now settled that Antony should take all his party home early this summer (1792). He had not yet been able to repay what he had borrowed for setting up in Madrid, much less to begin making remittances to his father as he had hoped to do before paying a visit home, so that "the circumstance which would so much help to make me easy and happy among my friends in England will be wanting," but his parents earnestly wished that he should not again delay his coming.

But, though his finances were not in the position he desired, before setting out he was able to conclude arrangements for a very promising new business. He was to join partnership from 1 July 1793 with Juan Pomar of Malaga in a firm whose business was to be the export thence of Spanish produce, chiefly wines, and fruit. Pomar was

an honest, industrious, frugal man, and as understanding in the business of Malaga, which is by much the best in Spain, as anyone there. He has been the best friend to me that I have met with in Spain and has from the beginning taken as much pains to increase my connections as if he had been himself interested in the result: indeed I have met with great protection and friendship from various quarters in this country, and this has helped to carry me more comfortably through such a life as I have led here.

Pomar was to put in 60,000 "current dollars" (£10,000) and to have 40 per cent. of profit and loss, Antony 6,000 dollars and to have 30 per cent., and two clerks in Malaga 5 per cent. each. "A cosin and agent in this country of Mr. Portales of Ostend" was to have the remaining 20 per cent. This man was to work the business in Switzerland, Germany, and France, but his name was not to appear in the style of the firm, which was to be Juan Pomar Gibbs & Co. Antony was to be allowed to retain for himself a portion of his present business, "worth at least £700 a year," and he was to spend five months in each year in England "to form connections for the House and manage its concerns there," but "in all human probability it will be necessary for me after some years to take up my residence entirely in England." As to the 6,000 dollars required of Antony, "I have considerably more than that offered me by Messrs. Joyes of Madrid and another good friend, who both think the establishment a most desirable thing for me," but he did not fear that he would have to call on them, nor that the payment would interfere with his remitting his father "the first £200 I see clear of my own," which was the sum that he had determined to pay his father every year. He also wrote:-

The partnership has not been settled on light speculative grounds but is the result of a well digested plan founded on an excellent establishment: many in the same line have made fortunes in a short time, and did not begin with such advantages as we shall have. . . . It promises fair to furnish me afterwards, and as it goes on, with means beyond what I could ever have expected.

In every way the arrangement was devised exactly to suit Antony's circumstances, and, containing as it did "the extraordinary advantage of retaining a considerable part of my present line till the other has been put to the proof," the risk involved was reduced to a minimum. He had the satisfaction of hearing that both his brother George and George's senior partner Munckley thought well of the plan.

But he also with dismay heard that his father was very unwell. He wrote to him:-

If your health should be indifferent every enjoyment will lose its relish. God in His mercy grant that you may live to see me expiate in some measure by the steadiness of my present conduct for the folly of what is past. Be of good heart let me entreat you, my dearest Sir. After having gone thro' all, if your spirits should sink just as the hope of being able to repair our losses opens upon us, what will become of me or how shall I continue my occupations with such a weight upon my mind? By unremitted employment and with the prospect of your being a witness to a happy change, and a partaker of it, I can drive off gloomy reflections and summon up spirit to go thro' anything that can contribute to so happy a purpose in which my dearest wife too and all whom I most love are so nearly interested.

His father (who was staying at Vicary Gibbs' house in Bloomsbury Square) replied to this on 6 July. He speaks of his constitution being naturally far from strong, but is thankful that at the age of 70 he can say he has enjoyed and still enjoys many blessings, and is "free from any

painful distemper” though suffering from certain complaints incidental to his age, and he goes on:-

I can assure you the prospect of your success affords us the highest gratification. We trust it will please God to prosper your new undertaking and enable you to fulfil the honourable purposes you have in view. In the meantime we have the fullest confidence in the sincerity of your professions and we have not the least doubt of your future conduct being perfectly conformable to them. Vicary said just now that he thought the latter part of your life with all its difficulties had been much happier than the former part of it. I heartily concur, and I daresay you are ready to bear witness to the truth of it, for what can be more encouraging or more grateful to the mind than the confidence which you appear to enjoy with your commercial friends; unless it be the consciousness of deserving it? With these advantages on your side, if it please God to give you health (of which you ought to take every prudent care), I hope you will find yourself a match for the fatigue which must necessarily attend your present pursuits however successful they may be in the final result of them.

Meanwhile Antony's journey had been delayed. Dorothea, who had suffered a disappointment in an expected increase of the family, was ill, and so were all the children, William very seriously so with fever and ague. The Custom House at Seville being burnt down with all the goods in it, Antony had to attend to the interests of some of his friends who were concerned. Lastly he had to pay another visit to Barcelona for his Norwich friends.

At length, having let their house to the Secretary of the Prussian Embassy, and sold part of their furniture, they started homewards on 18 July, the party including Jacques Courant of Cadiz (who had been staying with them in Madrid), and travelled in the diligence in six days to Bayonne. John Hucks went home by sea from Bilbao, and two of the servants by sea from Bayonne or Bilbao. Dorothea was so ill at Bayonne that Antony “partly engaged with a captain to give him £100 to go with his vessel to Topsham,” for, though she greatly feared the sea, having had a very bad experience on her way to Spain, it seemed that it might be better to go that way in the circumstances; but she recovered, and they continued overland, left Bordeaux on the 8th, and arrived at Paris on 13 August.

Meanwhile their friends in England had heard of the events in Paris of 10 August (the capture of the Tuileries and imprisonment of Louis XVI.), and were very apprehensive for them, though George Gibbs pointed out that in the greatest tumults in Paris strangers had never yet been in danger. Antony wrote from Paris on 14 August:-

We received at Blois an account of the dreadful proceedings at this place on the 10th, and should have taken another route if we could have left the Kingdom without fresh passports from our Ambassador and the Government here. By the revolution of the 10th the Government of this country is now in the hands of a few members of the National Assembly who have the confidence of the Paris people. All opposition to the Jacobins is considered by them, and they have the power in their hands, as disaffection to the common cause, and it is become so dangerous to incur any suspicion of this kind that not the least shadow of opposition to them in or out of the Assembly has been made since the 10th, not even from the party which is perhaps the most numerous in the Kingdom and wishes for a consolidation of the new Constitution without further innovations; so that everything is now perfectly quiet here and one would not suppose that such shocking scenes had pass'd but a few days since. Passports to foreigners will be granted again in a few days.

They got their passports on 20 August, and, on arrival in London, stayed with the Wards in Soho Square. On 13 September they went to Stowe, where Antony's parents were staying with the Crawleys. Thence to George Gibbs' at Bristol, and then to Exeter. There are several letters from Sibella Gibbs (from George Gibbs' house in Bristol) to her parents showing with what pleasure the family had all been looking for Antony's return, and his father had written to him that his plans were entirely subject to the main object of spending as much time with you as we can during your short residence in England." It must have been a very pleasing thing to the family that Vicary Gibbs was able to report from London, shortly before Antony's arrival, that Lord St. Helens, who had just returned (temporarily) from Madrid, "speaks in the highest terms of Antony and says that all the people in the country respect and esteem him and his family in the greatest degree."

Their friend Jacques Courant became at this time intimate with the Wards, to whom no doubt he was introduced by Antony and Dorothea, and at once fell in love with Louisa Oakden, who still lived with the Wards and was treated by them as an adopted daughter. We shall hear more of this affair further on.

As has been hinted already, Elizabeth Gibbs had been remiss in her behaviour to Dorothea in Spain; so much was this the case that Antony and his wife had often thought of sending her home, but for her sake refrained. Dorothea had written from Bayonne to Antony's mother generously begging that the family, instead of showing any resentment, should, out of consideration for her friendless situation, pay her even more attention than before. On arrival in England Dorothea took her to stay with the Wards, but meanwhile it came out that she had been accusing Dorothea of unkindness to her in letters to her friends. On this matter Antony wrote to his wife:-

You have the unspeakable satisfaction of knowing that you have done all in your power to prevent her feeling any serious consequences which she might have done from her ungrateful treatment of you, I know from George that her behaviour is silently and severely condemned by all, but the callings of humanity in them as well as you are stronger than those of sentiment; [in future] it would be inconsistent and even imprudent to let your regard for her extend beyond the bounds of kindness and civil attention; anything like intimate friendship or confidence would in my mind be shocking; now the scene is changed she will be full of attention for you, but never let this betray you into a behaviour which you would not observe towards a person whose character you can never esteem and who is not susceptible of disinterested friendship. I can hardly see how she will stand with those people to whom she has written so much of your unkindness to her in Spain. I think she will wish to retract, but this is her business.

Staying with George Gibbs in Bristol in October she became engaged to his partner James Richards, whom she soon married. Her husband took her to live in the house at Abbots Leigh near Bristol (belonging to the Miles family of Leigh Court) which was afterwards (from 1822 or 1823) occupied by my grandfather Robert Bright, who was a partner in George Gibbs' firm from 1818.