

Excerpt from *Catlin's Notes of Eight Years' Travels and Residence in Europe* (1848).

George Catlin

Catlin (1796–1872) is best known as the first and finest painter of Native American life, so it is surprising to learn that most of his adult life, from 1839 until 1870, was spent in Europe—though what he was doing there, of course, was seeking attention and money for his “gallery” with its collection of Indian pictures. On the whole, he had greater success with it in London and Paris than in America itself, and in 1845 he took the “gallery” complete with a representative cross section of Iowa Indians with him to meet King Louis Philippe in Paris. Not surprisingly, these most “natural” of all the long line of “natural” Americans in Paris, from Ben Franklin to Tom Thumb to the great black jazz musicians, were a big hit with the French public and the French court. Catlin’s 1845 report of this encounter of the most original Americans of all with the ancient but soon-to-disappear-for-good monarchy in France is slightly surreal in its collision of cultural styles, but nonetheless (as our grandfathers would have said) does credit to all parties.

“There is no end to the amusements of Paris”

from

Catlin’s Notes of Eight Years’ Travels and Residence in Europe

On the morning of the day for their reception the long stem of a beautiful pipe had been painted a bright blue and ornamented with blue ribbons, emblematical of peace, to be presented by the chief to the King. Every article of dress and ornament had been put in readiness, and, as the hour approached, each one came out from his toilet in a full blaze of color of various tints, all with their wampum and medals on, with their necklaces of grizzly bears’ claws, their shields, and bows and quivers, their lances and war clubs, and tomahawks, and scalping-knives. In this way, in full dress, with their painted buffalo robes wrapped around them, they stepped into the several carriages prepared for them, and all were wheeled into the *Place Caroussel*, and put down at the entrance to the palace. We were met on the steps by half a dozen huge and splendid-looking porters,

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in flaming scarlet livery and powdered wigs, who conducted us in, and, being met by one of the King's aides-de-camp, we were conducted by him into His Majesty's presence, in the reception-hall of the Tuileries.

The royal party were advancing towards us in the hall, and as we met them Mr. Melody and myself were presented; and I then introduced the party, each one in person, according to his rank or standing, as the King desired. A sort of *conversazione* took place there, which lasted for half an hour or more, in which I was called upon to explain their weapons, costumes, &c., and which seemed to afford great amusement to the royal personages assembled around and amongst us, who were: their Majesties the King and the Queen, the Duchess of Orleans and Count de Paris, the Princess Adelaide, the Prince and Princess de Joinville, the Duke and Duchess d'Aumale, and His Royal Highness the Duke de Brabant.

His Majesty, in the most free and familiar manner (which showed that he had been accustomed to the modes and feelings of Indians), conversed with the chiefs, and said to Jeffrey, "Tell these good fellows that I am glad to see them; that I have been in many of the wigwams of the Indians in America when I was a young man, and they treated me everywhere kindly, and I love them for it. Tell them I was amongst the Senecas near Buffalo, and the Oneidas; that I slept in the wigwams of the chiefs; that I was amongst the Shawnees and Delawares on the Ohio, and also amongst the Cherokees and Creeks in Georgia and Tennessee, and saw many other tribes as I descended the Ohio River the whole length, and also the Mississippi to New Orleans, in a small boat, more than fifty years ago." This made the Indians stare, and the women, by a custom of their country, placed their hands over their mouths, as they issued groans of surprise.

"Tell them also, Jeffrey, that I am pleased to see their wives and little children they have with them here, and glad also to show them my family, who are now nearly all around me. Tell them, Jeffrey, that this is the Queen; this lady is my sister; these are two of my sons, with their wives; and these little lads (the Count de Paris and the Duc de Brabant) are my grandsons; this one, if he lives, will be King of the Belgians, and that one King of the French."

The King then took from his pocket two large gold medals with his own portrait in relief on one side of them, and told me he wished to present them to the two chiefs with his own hand, and wished Jeffrey to explain to them that after presenting them in that way, he wished them to

hand them back to him that he might have a proper inscription engraved on them, when he would return them, and silver medals of equal size to each of the others, with their names engraved upon them.

After the medals were thus presented and returned, the War-chief took out from under his robe the beautiful pipe which he had prepared, and advancing towards the King, and holding it with both hands, bent forward and laid it down at His Majesty's feet as a present.

We were now in charge of an officer of the household, who politely led us through the various magnificent halls of the palace, explaining everything as we passed, and at length introduced us into a room with a long table spread and groaning under its load of the luxuries of the season, and its abundance of the "*Queen's chickabobboo*." These were subjects that required no explanations; and all being seated, each one evinced his familiarity with them by the readiness with which he went to work. The healths of the King and the Queen were drank, and also of the Count de Paris, and the rest of the royal family. The *chickabobboo* they pronounced "first rate;" and another bottle being poured it was drank off, and we took our carriages, and, after a drive of an hour or so about the city, were landed again in our comparatively humble, but very comfortable, apartments.

Thus musing and moralizing on the events of the day, I left them to their conversation and their pipe, to attend myself where my presence was necessary, in arranging my collection, and preparing my rooms for their exhibitions. In this I had a real task—a scene of vexation and delay that I should wish never to go through again, and of which a brief account may be of service to anyone of my countrymen who may be going to Paris to open a public exhibition; at least, my hints will enable him, if he pays attention to them, to begin at the right time, and at the right end of what he has got to do, and to do it to the best advantage.

His first step is, for any exhibition whatever, to make his application to the chief of police for his license, which is in all cases doubtful, and in all cases also is sure to require two or three weeks for his petition to pass the slow routine of the various offices and hands which it must go through. If it be for any exhibition that can be construed into an interference with the twenty or thirty theater licenses, it may as well not be applied for or thought of, for they will shut it up if opened.

It is also necessary to arrange in time with the overseer of the poor, whether he is to take one-eighth or one-fifth of the receipts for the hospitals—for the *hospice*, as he is termed, is placed at the door of all exhibi-

tions in Paris, who carries off one-eighth or one-fifth of the daily receipts every night. It is necessary also, if catalogues are to be sold in the rooms, to lodge one of them at least two weeks before the exhibition is to open in the hands of the commissaire de police, that it may pass through the office of the préfet, and twenty other officers' hands, to be read, and duly decided that there is nothing revolutionary in it; and then to sell them, or to give them away (all the same), it is necessary for the person who is to sell, and who alone can sell them, to apply personally to the commissaire de police, and make oath that he was born in France, to give his age and address, &c., before he can take the part assigned him. It is then necessary, when the exhibition is announced, to wait until seven or eight guards and police, with muskets and bayonets fixed, enter and unbar the doors, and open them for the public's admission. It is necessary to submit to their friendly care during every day of the exhibition, and to pay each one his wages at night, when they lock up the rooms and put out the lights. In all this, however, though expensive, there is one redeeming feature. These numbers of armed police, at their posts, in front of the door, and in the passage, as well as in the exhibition rooms, give respectability to its appearance, and preserve the strictest order and quiet amongst the company, and keep a constant and vigilant eye to the protection of property.

During the time I was engaged in settling these tedious preliminaries, and getting my rooms prepared for their exhibition, the Indians were taking their daily rides, and getting a passing glimpse of most of the out-door scenes of Paris. They were admitting parties of distinguished visitors, who were calling upon them, and occasionally leaving them liberal presents, and passing their evenings upon their buffalo skins, handing around the never-tiring pipe, and talking about the King, and their medals, and curious things they had seen as they had been riding through the streets. The thing which as yet amused the Doctor the most was the great number of women they saw in the streets leading dogs with ribbons and strings. He said he thought they liked their dogs better than they did their little children. In London, he said he had seen some little dogs leading their masters, who were blind, and in Paris they began to think the first day they rode out that one half the Paris women were blind, but that they had a great laugh when they found that their eyes were wide open, and that instead of their dogs leading them, they were leading their dogs. The Doctor seemed puzzled about the custom of the women leading so many

dogs, and although he did not in any direct way censure them for doing it, it seemed to perplex him, and he would sit and smile and talk about it for hours together. He and Jim had at first supposed, after they found that the ladies were not blind, that they cooked and ate them, but they were soon corrected in this notion, and always after remained at a loss to know what they could do with them.

On one of their drives, the Doctor and Jim, supplied with a pencil and a piece of paper, had amused themselves by counting, from both sides of the omnibus, the number of women they passed leading dogs in the street, and thus they made some amusement with their list when they got home. They had been absent near an hour, and driving through many of the principal streets of the city, and their list stood thus:

Women leading one little dog	432
Women leading two little dogs	71
Women leading three little dogs	5
Women with big dogs following (no string)	80
Women carrying little dogs	20
Women with little dogs in carriages	31

The poor fellows insisted on it that the above was a correct account, and Jim, in his droll way (but I have no doubt quite honestly), said that “it was not a very good day either.”

I was almost disposed to question the correctness of their estimate until I took it into my head to make a similar one, in a walk I was one day taking, from the Place Madeleine, through a part of the Boulevard, Rue St. Honoré and Rue Rivoli, and a turn in the garden of the Tuileries. I saw so many that I lost my reckoning, when I was actually not a vast way from the list they gave me as above, and quite able to believe that their record was near to the truth. While the amusement was going on about the ladies and the little dogs, Daniel, who had already seen many more of the sights of Paris than I had, told the Indians that there was a *dog hospital* and a *dog market* in Paris, both of them curious places and well worth their seeing. This amused the Doctor and Jim very much. The Doctor did not care for the *dog market*, but the *hospital* he *must* see. He thought the hospital must be a very necessary thing, as there were such vast numbers; and he thought it would be a good thing to have a hospital for their mistresses also. Jim thought more of the market, and must see it in a day or two, for it was about the time they should give a feast of thanksgiving, and “a *dog*

feast was always the most acceptable to the Great Spirit." It was thus agreed all around that they should make a visit in a few days to the dog market and the dog hospital.

Jim got Daniel to enter the above list in his book as a very interesting record, and ordered him to leave a blank space underneath it, in order to record anything else they might learn about dogs while in Paris.

* * *

The first evening party they were invited to attend in Paris was that of the lady of Mr. Greene, the American banker. They were there ushered into a brilliant blaze of lamps, of beauty, and fashion, composed chiefly of Americans, to whom they felt the peculiar attachment of countrymen, though of a different complexion, and anywhere else than across the Atlantic would have been strangers to.

They were received with great kindness by this polite and excellent lady and her daughters, and made many pleasing acquaintances in her house. The old Doctor had luckily dressed out his head with his red crest, and left at home his huge head-dress of horns and eagles' quills, which would have been exceedingly unhandy in a squeeze, and subjected him to curious remarks amongst the ladies. He had loaded on all his wampum and other ornaments, and smiled away the hours in perfect happiness, as he was fanning himself with the tail of a war eagle, and bowing his head to the young and beautiful ladies who were helping him to lemonade and blanc mange, and to the young men who were inviting him to the table to take an occasional glass of the "*Queen's chickabobboo*." Their heavy buffalo robes were distressing to them (said the Doctor) in the great heat of the rooms, "but then, as the ladies were afraid of getting paint on their dresses, they did not squeeze so hard against us as they did against the other people in the room, so we did not get so hot as we might have been."

It amused the Doctor and Jim very much to see the gentlemen take the ladies by the waist when they were dancing with them, probably never having seen waltzing before. They were pleased also, as the Doctor said, with "the manner in which the ladies showed their beautiful white necks and arms, but they saw several that they thought had better been covered." The many nice and sweet and frothy little things that the ladies gave them in tea-saucers to eat, with little spoons, were too sweet, and they did not like them much; and in coming away they were sorry

they could not find the good lady to thank her, the crowd was so great; but the chickabobboo (champagne), which was very good, was close to the door, and a young man with yellow hair and moustaches kept pouring it out until they were afraid, if they drank any more, some of the poor fellows who were dancing so hard would get none.

It has been said, and very correctly, that there is no end to the amusements of Paris; and to the Indians, to whose sight everything was new and curious, the term no doubt more aptly applied than to the rest of the world. Of those never-ending sights there was one now at hand which was promising them and "all the world" a fund of amusement, and the poor fellows were impatient for its arrival. This splendid and all-exciting affair was the King's fête on the 1st of May, 184-, his birthday, as some style it, though it is not exactly such; it is the day fixed upon as the annual celebration of his birth. This was, of course, a holiday to the Indians, as well as for everybody else, and I resolved to spend the greater part of it with them.

Through the aid of some friends I had procured an order to admit the party of Indians into the apartments of the Duke d'Aumale in the Tuileries, to witness the grand concert in front of the palace, and to see the magnificent fireworks and illumination on the Seine at night. We had the best possible position assigned us in the wing of the palace overlooking the river in both directions, up and down, bringing all the bridges of the Seine, the Deputies, and Invalides, and other public buildings, which were illuminated, directly under our eyes. During the day Mr. Melody and Jeffrey and Daniel had taken, as they called it, "a grand drive" to inspect the various places of amusement and the immense concourse of people assembled in them. Of these, the Barrières, the Champs Elysées, &c., they were obliged to take but a passing glance, for to have undertaken to stop and to mix with the dense crowds assembled in them would have been dangerous, even to their lives, from the masses of people who would have crowded upon them. The Indians themselves were very sagacious on this point, and always judiciously kept at a reasonable distance on such occasions. It was amusement enough for them during the day to ride rapidly about and through the streets, anticipating the pleasure they were to have in the evening, and taking a distant view from their carriages of the exciting emulation of the Maypole and a glance at the tops of the thousand booths and "flying ships" and "merry-go-rounds" of the Champs Elysées.

At 6 o'clock we took our carriages and drove to the Tuileries, and, being conducted to the splendid apartments of the Duke d'Aumale, who was then absent from Paris, we had there, from the windows looking down upon the Seine and over the Quartier St. Germain, and the windows in front, looking over the garden of the Tuileries and Place Concorde, the most general and comprehensive view that was to be had from any point that could have been selected. Under our eyes in front, the immense area of the garden of the Tuileries was packed with human beings, forming but one black and dotted mass of some hundreds of thousands who were gathered to listen to the magnificent orchestra of music, and to see and salute, with "Vive le Roi!" "Vive la Reine!" and "Vive le Comte de Paris!" the royal family as they appeared in the balcony. Though it appeared as if every part of the gardens was filled, there was still a black and moving mass pouring through Rue Rivoli, Rue Castiglione, Rue Royale, and Place Concorde, all concentrating in the garden of the Tuileries. This countless mass of human beings continued to gather until the hour when their Majesties entered the balcony, and then, all hats off, there was a shout, as vast and incomputable as the mass itself, of "Vive le Roi! Vive le Roi! Vive la Reine! Vive le Comte de Paris!" The King then, with his chapeau in his hand, bowed to the audience in various directions; so did Her Majesty the Queen and the little Comte de Paris. The band then struck up the national air, and played several pieces, while the royal family was seated in the balcony, and the last golden rays of the sun, that was going behind the Arc de Triomphe, was shining in their faces. Their Majesties then retired as the twilight was commencing, and the vast crowd began to move in the direction of the Seine, the Terrace, and Place Concorde, to witness the grand scene of illumination and "feu d'artifice" that was preparing on the river.

As the daylight disappeared, the artificial light commenced to display its various characters, and the Indians began to wonder. This scene was to be entirely new to them, and the reader can imagine better than I can explain what was their astonishment when the King's signal rocket was fired from the Tuileries, and in the next moment the whole river, as it were, in a blaze of liquid fire, and the heavens burst asunder with all their luminaries falling in a chaos of flames and sparkling fire to the earth! The incessant roar and flash of cannons lining the shore of the river, and the explosion of rockets in the air, with the dense columns of white, and yellow, and blue, and blood-red smoke, that were rising from the bed of the

river, and all reflected upon the surface of the water, heightened the grandeur of its effect, and helped to make it unlike anything on earth, save what we might imagine to transpire in and over the deep and yawning crater of a huge volcano in the midst of its midnight eruption.

This wonderful scene lasted for half an hour.