Time for meditation he would have aplenty, but first Charles savored the novelty of life at sea. The *Milton* was no Leviathan—around five hundred tons burthen, maybe 140 feet long and 30 abeam. But she could carry a sky full of Lowell cotton duck on her three tall masts and “tack in a pint o’ water.” It followed that she rolled and tossed in even a moderate sea. Norton discovered with relief an immunity to seasickness. The fifteen or so crew members struck him as able, the captain intelligent and kindhearted, the *Milton* herself “an excellent ship.” Fair winds had her halfway to Africa by 1 June.¹

Norton’s days settled into routine. Along with his classmate Montgom­ery Ritchie and the first mate, he took his meals at the captain’s “excellently supplied” table. As supercargo, Norton had on shipboard the status of an officer and the substance of a wraith. Entirely responsible for cargo in port, he had no duties at sea. The steward woke him at half past six. After breakfast (at half past seven), Norton and Ritchie dawdled on deck for half an hour; after dinner (half past twelve), a cigar absorbed another half hour; after tea (six o’clock) they strolled the weather deck till dark, then lay down there “on our plaids to talk together, or to think of home.” “By nine we are in our berths.”²

Charles got stimulation from long hours reading in his cabin or, in fair weather, on deck. He exercised his German on Alexander von Humboldt’s *Kosmos*, his French on Victor Jacquemont’s travels, his Latin and Greek on Horace and Herodotus. He honed his powers of observation and narrative in lengthy letters home and a journal of the voyage. His “light reading” included Milton, Shakespeare, most often “some Eastern traveller.” Austen Layard’s account of the recent discovery of Nineveh fascinated the archae­ologist in him; Norton planned to see the excavations for himself. A well­informed selection of books on India prepared him for more immediate
encounters: Mountstuart Elphinstone’s *History of India* prior to the British conquest; James Mill’s *History of British India*; Edmund Burke’s speeches on India and Bishop Reginald Heber’s travels through it; the Koran and the *Laws of Manu*.

What Charles extracted from this Indian melange is hard to say except for two points: the low state of India, the lofty destiny of his own country. Even fairly sympathetic British observers thought that Indian civilization, once high, now lay sunk in ignorance, superstition, and immorality. His reading implicitly confirmed that he had left behind “the country which is the happiest on earth,” but one with “responsibilities” commensurate with its great privileges. As to whether India’s misery was “the fault of the people or of the government,” Norton felt uncertain. And he “missed more than anything else” his father’s “advice and judgement” upon such doubtful points, feeling constantly how much he “owed to the principles of thought and judgement” that Andrews had imparted.

Such musings were set against a flat infinity of sky and water. Week after monotonous week slipped by. When even his leather-bound tomes grew heavy, Charles amused himself by observing seabirds. The *Milton* plowed southward; the air chilled. By 22 July the ship was rounding the Cape of Good Hope. Five days later a gale lashed her with “immense waves” that sent the fore topgallant mast crashing down. Charley reported himself not terrified but exhilarated: a young man’s taste for adventure. After repairs, a cool Antarctic wind blew the ship north. On the afternoon of 29 August the watch at the masthead spied Ceylon to the west. An offshore breeze blew sweetly fragrant: Charles imagined walking past a bed of violets or lilies of the valley. On Saturday morning, 1 September, the *Milton* hove to off Madras, anchoring opposite the great white Ice House. She had made the fastest passage from Boston to Madras on record, 102 days.

Arrival at Madras tried a supercargo’s nerves. The city lacked a harbor for a ship to dock, so within half an hour *masoolah* boats built like a huge “transverse section of a pear or pumpkin” had crowded the *Milton’s* decks with “black & naked natives” who “knew few English words but ‘money’ & ‘eat.’” Norton sent a message to Bainbridge & Co., the British house engaged to handle the *Milton’s* business, introducing himself and requesting the long-awaited letters from home sent via London over the faster overland route. Three hours later a boat from Bainbridge arrived—but no letters from Shady Hill. “I never before had such a disappointment.” There was nothing for it. Norton and Ritchie ordered their trunks into Bainbridge’s *masoolab*
boat. Their feet dangling helplessly from planks laid across the high thwarts to serve as seats, an awning shielding them from relentless sun, the two Harvard boys met India.⁶

Bainbridge’s head invited Norton to stay with him at his house three miles in the country. Already, Charles “had learned enough of Indian customs” to hire a servant, who awaited in his chamber: a room fifty feet by twenty-five, with a ceiling twenty feet high (to let the heat rise) and a bathroom attached. The servant kept the punkah going. Norton was learning Anglo-Indian ways.⁷

In this strange new world Europeans enjoyed privilege in inverse proportion to their tiny numbers. The Honourable East India Company dominated the subcontinent. Its directors in London appointed both the soldiers who commanded the company’s mainly Indian troops and the “civilians” who staffed its bureaucracy and administered European justice. (The term “civilian” applied in India only to these company officials.) Fewer than forty thousand British troops and scarcely more than a thousand civilians ruled a
hundred million people directly and kept on a short leash another fifty million in “independent” principalities. A few thousand merchants, planters, missionaries, and miscellaneous others made up the rest of the European population. They lived, for the most part, in proconsular luxury that made the affluence of Shady Hill seem downright democratic. Norton discovered that, when a horse pulled a carriage, its groom had to run alongside, no matter how hot the sun, no matter how far or fast the travel. To Charley Guild he deplored the “things of this sort, & of much worse character in the treatment of the natives.” To his hosts he said nothing. He was there to make money and “to look about him.”

Making money left plenty of time to look about—to visit the mint, to investigate the noxious slums of Black Town (the Indian quarter), to dine with the artillery officers at nearby Saint Thomas Mount. Several days after arriving, Norton and Ritchie traveled the forty miles south to Mahabalipuram, ancient City of Seven Pagodas. To escape the wilting daytime sun, they set out in the evening, carried in palanquins, each borne by two alternating teams of six men apiece. They arrived at six o’clock in the morning and camped for the day in a deserted temple. The great rathas—the “pagodas”—with their complex scenes of Hindu mythology carved out of massive outcroppings of rock reduced Norton to puzzled admiration. Each temple “deserved the study of hours rather than the hasty glance of a tired traveller on a hot & sultry morning.” The traveler could identify a few gods, but the world they inhabited eluded his empathy. He sat and read Southey’s faux-Hindu “Curse of Kehama” (set partly at Mahabalipuram) and meditated on the “fallen gods” of Hinduism.

For the “fallen power” of “Brahmin” religion that he perceived in Mahabalipuram’s rathas gave the solidity of reality to the abstract schema of human history he had received. Charley’s education had taught him to look through such artifacts for the ideas and feelings, the rituals and customs, of the people who had carved them. But education—and recently Squier—had also taught him that these ancients belonged to the infancy of civilization. At best, Norton could bring to Mahabalipuram the appreciation of a man who reveres his ancestors but also sees how far they have been surpassed. And any reverence owed the carvers of Mahabalipuram was strictly limited, for their relatively primitive beliefs lay far behind the higher civilization of the Greeks, not to mention that of the divinely endowed Hebrews. Latter-day Hindus could at best excite pity. They were not, strictly speaking, “savages” (never risen above the state of nature) but miserable, degraded relics of a decayed civilization. Better the clean death that Nineveh had met.
Yet no degree of Indian degradation justified British brutality. All his reading had not prepared Norton for so many scenes “painful” to him “not merely as a republican but as [a] man.” He had expected better of the British. Anglo-Indians routinely treated “the natives” only as “useful for immediate objects.” This “short-sighted” attitude puzzled him, “for the native character seems to be such that it will advance with the most extreme slowness unless under the most direct influence of persons of a superior civilization.” Norton (forgetting American slavery) rejoiced “that his country is free from such evils.” Still, given “the influence of example” and the “apparently so degraded” character of the Indians, he wondered if “I should become a tyrant if I were to remain here long.”

He was not tempted. Letters from Shady Hill had finally arrived. Except for word that his father had again taken ill—hardly unexpected these days—the news was reassuring; and, business done, Norton had no further reason to linger in Madras. Filling the newly empty spaces in the Milton’s hold took some time, and rain delayed loading. But in dark of night on 15 September the sails were set to a fair wind across the Bay of Bengal.

Calcutta, the City of Palaces, was not only British India’s most elegant city but its largest and busiest. In the interstices of a European population of several thousands dwelt hundreds of thousands of Indians. On the ghat, Norton stepped into an exotic bustle he had not seen in comparatively sleepy Madras. His palanquin wended its way through crowded streets to the office of Bullard & Lee’s agent, Richard Lewis; there, he devoured letters and newspapers and, for an hour, was back home. The outcry in the United States to annex Canada alarmed him; but he took a less “desponding” view than his father of the European situation following the revolutions of 1848: amid the continent’s “war and misery & want of principle,” the “great mass of the nations are darkly groping for something better than they have had.”

Only after this longed-for draught of home did he settle into his rooms in Spence’s Hotel (the best in Calcutta, though “very inferior” by American standards) and turn to business. The Milton had to be unloaded, her goods sold, and new merchandise bought for the return voyage. As Bullard & Lee’s agent, Richard Lewis handled much of the work that had fallen to Norton in Madras, the more willingly as Charles’s talent for companionship quickly made him “a dear friend.” Norton himself scoured the bazaars and in two days got much of his buying out of the way.

Business then elided into “looking about.” Norton had been in Calcutta scarcely three days when he set about learning what he could of Hindustani, meeting each morning with a “moonshee” he hired for the purpose. Soon he
was spending hours in the collections of the Asiatic Society. On 1 October, Norton and Ritchie called on Aushootas Day, a wealthy Indian merchant. Day's full-length portrait of Washington and his European style of entertainment (calculated to appeal to Americans, Charles assumed) disappointed. Norton wanted India, not Boston.15

Calcutta offered it raw. Even Madras had not inured Norton to seeing the “greatest wealth” jostling the “most miserable poverty.” The “low mud hovels of the natives” crowding “between the large and often handsome houses of the English” ruined European Calcutta, the City of Palaces. Government House shared in the general blight; the dirt, neglect, and shabbiness of its spacious rooms shocked him. His business in the bazaars, located in “the wholly native parts of the city,” disoriented his sensibilities: “dirty”—but—“picturesque.” Open drains “filthy beyond description” separated streets so narrow as to be “mere lanes” from “low and very damp” windowless mud houses lining them.16

Darkest shadow and brightest light mingled in the most confusing ways. Charles had the luck to arrive amid Durga Puja, a festival celebrating the triumph of good over evil. He watched the people parade their “images of the goddess Durja [Durga]” amid “the most horrid noise of drums, cymbals and buffaloe [sic] horns,” then “carry them down to the bank of the river and drown them.” That evening he drove through the streets, his eyes riveted by the brightly dressed statues of the goddess and her attendants, set against the masses of dark Hindus, they set in turn against their white garments. To Boston correspondents he waved away the whole show as ignorant superstition, but perfunctory dismissal joined with suspiciously fervid description. His pen found words, many of them; his Protestant imagination, no effective categories. In the end he could only contrast the spectacle with a Fourth of July crowd.17

The Anglo-Indians puzzled him less and pleased him little. Norton’s letters of introduction set in train a month of lunches, dinners, and house­­stays—with an army surgeon, a barrister, other “civilians,” a celebrated mes­­meric doctor, Calcutta’s chief newspaper editor, the American consul. On 18 October, at a town hall meeting to discuss which Boston firm Calcutta should buy its ice from, Norton observed the Anglo-Indian population en masse. He found them unedifying. Experience quickly taught him the loose construction of “Calcutta honesty”; and Company officials proved no better than the merchants. Both treated Indians with harshness and caprice, paying “not the least attention” to “the feelings of the lower classes, very little to those of men who are superior in manner at least to those who slight &
wound them.” There were exceptions, such as Hugh Falconer, distinguished botanist and paleontologist, with whom Norton stayed for three days at the famous botanical gardens down the Hooghly. A cultivated bachelor of “gentlemanly bearing,” Falconer respected Indian feelings and took a broad view of India’s current state and future prospects—subjects on which Charles pumped him for hours. No wonder, Norton wrote home, that a man of Falconer’s fastidiousness eschewed Anglo-Indian society. Charles himself gravitated to “the best native society”—“an infinitely more curious circle.”

He slaked his curiosity in long visits to Rajah Apurva Krishna Bahadur, the “Poet Laureate of Delhi,” to another Indian man of letters, Juggernath Persaud Mullich, and to Prince Ghoolam Mahommad, son of Tippoo Sultan. But only the merchant and physician Rajinder Dutt commanded his respect. Their business began with cashmere shawls; it soon ran to very different matters. Norton thought Dutt “by far the most intelligent and cultivated Hindu” he had met, “very remarkable for having struggled successfully against immense disadvantages of position.” They shared “very long and interesting” conversations covering religion, Dutt’s family, his aspirations, his sufferings. Like most Europeans, Dutt judged traditional Hinduism “Brahmanical thraldom [sic].” At the same time, he defended other Indian ways, asserted the talents of his people, and deplored Anglo-Indian prejudice.

“My dear Norton Sahib” became a regular guest in the Dutt household, headed by old Doorga Chara Dutt. Norton aimed to treat the Dutts as equals (simply behaving as a gentleman, he said, which “few do”); and the family welcomed him, “the more so as they see that I am interested in the Hindus & desirous to see all that I can of their characteristic customs and habits.” He sat with the Dutts on their second-story verandah and tried to comprehend an “opera” (evidently based on a story from the Mahabharata) in the torch-lit courtyard below. He watched Doorga Chara Dutt sacrifice three goats to the goddess Juggudchatri. (Although “very glad” to see the ceremony, Charles nonetheless thought it odd in a family conversant with “the literature and science and, more than all, the religion of the West.”) When the Dutts staged a spectacular nautch (an entertainment by professional dancing girls) nominally closed to Europeans, Rajinder outfitted Charles with Indian clothing—loose white muslin trousers, pink satin vest, muslin gown buttoned at the waist, “a round high cap of Cashmere”—and the nom de guerre “Nondolal Shan” (chosen to sound like “Norton”).

For Charles was a terrier, scratching up information about India; all told, his conclusions were cheerless. Ordinary Indians seemed to him super-
stitious, fawning, devious, ignorant: debasement he explained as a result partly of British abuse but also of “native character.” Yet Norton distinguished between a lower and higher type of Indian. The demarcation hinged, not on wealth or even on education as such, but on whether privileged Hindus used “their education and intelligence” to “raise the character of their people.” Of those who did, like Rajinder Dutt, there seemed hardly a saving remnant; and even they aped English culture instead of revitalizing Indian. No one had filled the place of the great reformer Rammohun Roy, dead for sixteen years. Only by unchaining their country from “the most revolting superstition that human imagination ever concocted” could Indians set it on the road to progress; yet the grip of custom and fear of losing caste induced even “the most intelligent Hindus” publicly to approve “superstition” that they privately reviled. India’s potential leaders failed to summon the needed mental independence and moral courage. “Opposition to change” formed “one of the most striking features of the Hindu character.”

To alter that character would require shifting the weight of India’s history off its peoples’ shoulders. Lacking education, imprisoned within the caste system, “ruled as a conquered nation,” subject to “an enervating climate,” deprived of “animating examples” and “glorious aspirations,” Indians could not possibly develop “patriotism” and a “manly spirit.” One could hardly expect “the nobler qualities among a people without any moral guide”; their religion itself dissolved “common sympathies” and “united objects.” Yet Norton’s calculations did not point to despair, for it never occurred to him (as it did to some of his contemporaries) that biology had condemned an Indian “race” to unalterable degradation. True, British railroads and irrigation projects could never remove “the great drawback” to India’s prosperity, “the want of energy among her people”; nor could a horde of missionaries eradicate the superstition chiefly to blame for this inertia, Christian doctrine being “utterly incomprehensible” to the Hindu mind. The “only hope” lay in gradually overcoming India’s history by “diffusing education” among its people.

This insistence on the primacy of a people’s moral condition in fixing their political and economic state, this stress on the rootedness of that moral condition deep in the people’s history, and this faith in education as the only long-term cure for moral feebleness—these principles flowed directly from Norton’s Boston background; they would flow out into every phase of his adult thinking. India helped to channel that stream.

Norton hoped to learn more farther upcountry; but to “look about him” in Calcutta or Madras was one thing, in the interior quite another. Hotels
were nonexistent, and the *dak* bungalows maintained by the company for its mail relays made a wretched substitute. The wayfarer might shelter there against the heat of the day, but he needed to carry everything: food, bedding, his own interpreter. The India Post Office aided travelers by arranging relays of bearers for palanquins and supplies, but it disclaimed responsibility for “the Misfortunes and disappointments which are inseparable from Dak Travelling.” In Ritchie, Norton at least had a fellow sufferer in misfortunes and disappointments. Meanwhile, from Calcutta friends he collected letters of introduction to civilians and officers upcountry: men who could teach him more of India.\(^{23}\)

On 5 November, Norton held a reception for his Indian acquaintances. Rajinder gave him “a complete Hindu dress” as a going-away gift. Palanquins were purchased, trunks shipped round to Bombay, business settled for the *Milton’s* departure. On Thursday, 8 November 1849, Charles handed Lewis his last letters for home; and around half past three he and Ritchie climbed into their palanquins. Charles hoped that the scenery, disappointing so far, would improve. Where was “the splendor of tropical vegetation”?\(^{24}\)

Not in the first leg. They followed the new Grand Trunk Road northwest into the dull and dusty plains of Bihar. Scenery failing, Norton watched the passing cavalcade: “Men showily dressed riding on horses covered with red or blue hangings, others traveling in jingling, gaudy, awkward square carts with a high covering over them, disbanded Sepoys, way worn travellers with their worldly goods tied up in one end of their turbans hanging at their side, haggard and horrible old women, white bearded old men, venerable and stooping, bands of fettered criminals working on the road.” Once they passed a fakir measuring the road with his body—throwing himself down full-length, rising, walking as far as his hands had reached, then flinging himself down again.\(^{25}\)

Covering fifty miles a night, they came to Sasaram in the darkness of 14–15 November. Norton and Ritchie breakfasted at sunrise on “thin & tough chicken” then set off to see the ruined splendor of the Mughal ruler Sher Shah. From a high mound they stared down on a scene “one of the most striking I have ever looked at.” A vast open stone-lined pool stretched out before them. Around it lay “many sculptured tombs and scattered bits of sandstone that had once formed the sepulchres of some of the Faithful.” And from its midst arose the great sandstone mausoleum of Sher Shah himself, a five-layered hexagon towering 150 feet to a huge dome. A younger Charley had marveled at it in a volume of the *Oriental Annual*. Now he
waded fifty yards through waist-high water and clambered up its broken base to study the “faded colors” of the paintings, the “arabesque” carving of the arches, the “graceful stone tracery” of the walls. These “delicate beauties” were “well worth twice the trouble that we had taken to see them.”

West of Sasaram they cut north, reaching the sacred Ganges at daybreak on 16 November, Charley’s twenty-second birthday and, as he wrote to his family, the first “ever spent away from you.” “Am I, I frequently incline to question myself, the same youth to whom India Wharf was a year ago so familiar, am I the same, whom dearest Shady Hill with all its peace and pleasantness, nourished in unadventurous and delightful quiet.” He could hardly believe so. “But you may trust that caelum non animum mutat qui trans mare currit.”

Now he crossed only the river, a half-mile wide, to Ghazipur. There his Harvard classmate Fitzedward Hall had settled to study Indian languages and literature, beginning a distinguished career in philological scholarship. Hall drained Norton of news from Harvard and home, while Norton squeezed from Hall information about India. Norton and Ritchie also saw the sights of Ghazipur, streets cleaner, houses more commodious, bazaars more flourishing than among the Bengalis. The company’s local “collector” (magistrate) gave them dinner before sending them on their way around midnight, equipped with a letter of introduction to a fellow magistrate in Benares.

Benares fascinated Charles—its naked beggars and well-fed Brahmins, its ghats where corpses burned and lingams stood along the sacred Ganges, its labyrinth of streets so narrow he could almost touch the houses from his tonjon (a kind of sedan chair), its hundreds of temples where wandering bulls munched undisturbed the marigold wreaths bedecking the gods while Brahmins passed out sacred water and tended the holy fire. The ruins of the observatory impressed him with the advanced state of Indian science three centuries earlier. Norton was discovering an India deeper than it had seemed in Calcutta.

He was also discovering more palatable Anglo-Indians. In St. George Tucker, a Benares magistrate scarcely older than himself, Norton found “one of the most agreeable, intelligent and public spirited men that I have met in India.” The attraction proved mutual. “I am usually very slow in forming friendships,” Tucker wrote after Norton had left, “but your open & unre­served manner convinced me from the first that you can be as sincere a friend as you are a pleasant acquaintance.” Letters from home also awaited
in Benares, but these turned expectancy to anxiety. Andrews had fallen seriously ill again in early September. All Charley could do was to try to turn his mind to other thoughts.\textsuperscript{30}

India made this easier. For two weeks, Norton and Ritchie used Benares as their base, riding on elephants to see the nearby caravanserai, traveling upriver to visit the British fort at Chunar, stalking deer on the rajah of Benares’s hunting estate. On 30 November, traveling separately, Norton and Ritchie set off for Lucknow. Two nights later, Norton’s bearers deserted; brandishing a pistol only sped their flight. A passing party of sepoys scoured the area without result; but messages sent into the vicinity, promising great baksheesh, lured replacements in several hours.\textsuperscript{31}

The country now turned rougher, for Norton had entered the shakily independent Moslem kingdom of Oudh. The land was less cultivated, dotted with mango groves instead of fields: tropical vegetation at last. Almost everyone Norton saw carried sabrelike swords, ancient matchlocks, or iron-tipped bamboo spears. At Lucknow, Oudh’s capital, Norton reconnected with Ritchie. Lucknow was “full of interest,” “by far the most Oriental” and the “most Mahommedan” city yet seen. The architecture captivated Norton, and he arranged for his Anglo-Indian host to hire a draughtsman to make drawings for him. Then, clattering down the new paved road—the first in Oudh, secured against highwaymen only weeks earlier—the travelers crossed the Ganges and, some twelve hours later, arrived in Cawnpore, back in British India. From Cawnpore, again leaving Ritchie to follow, Charles struck out for one of his main goals: the Upper Ganges Canal, under construction in the Northwest Provinces. Its irrigation would open vast new acreage for agriculture. Here, a merchant’s eye could see what British rule might do for India’s prosperity.\textsuperscript{32}

On 15 December, Charles arrived in Roorkee, a small settlement on the canal, the Himalayan foothills visible in the distance. The authorities gave him a room in the new engineering college, set up to train English superintendents and Indian foremen. By the seventeenth he had “seen all the works to the greatest advantage” and recorded a mass of data in his journal. Around midnight, his palanquin—with Norton bundled against the cold in “a thick wadded suit,” a coat over it, his “plaid” on top, and “a thin native blanket” around his feet—left for Haridwar, at the head of the canal. There he bought two brass statues of Hindu deities, dipped them in the sacred Ganges, and then headed for the mountains. At Dehra Dun he met Ritchie, abandoned the palanquin for a horse, and rode up the steep road to the white cottages of Mussoorie, “scattered like sheep about the summits.” The
two Americans got someone to open the little summer hotel for them; bought firewood, milk, eggs, and bread; cooked themselves a meal of sorts; and brewed tea over their fire. They rose early to climb to Landour peak, nine hundred feet above Mussoorie. 33

As they ascended the hill’s southern flank, “a sudden turn in the path opened to us one of the most splendid views I have ever seen.” A “sea of hills” spread before them, “stretching for miles after miles on every side, till they were bounded by the snowy peaks of the highest range of the Himalayas which rose towering above them bright and beautiful in the light.” Charles’s “heart beat quick.” Of all he saw in India, this was and remained the view he “would first choose” to see again. The “sublimity and the beauty of the scene” defeated his “powers of description”—and made him hungry for the Alps. 34

There was more of India to see first. Delhi’s modern buildings, reached just before Christmas, Norton thought beautiful but not so impressive as the “dark remains of palaces, of forts, and of tombs” that lay “in splendid desolation around the wall which encloses the gilded mosques, the gay houses, the crowded streets of the present town.” The preference was characteristic. Qutb Minar, just outside Delhi, remained Norton’s surpassingly lovely memory of India. A red stone column over six centuries old, it towered nearly 250 feet into the sky, “surrounded by ruins of various & exquisite beauty.” Qutb Minar summed up India in other ways as well. From its top Norton looked out over “many miles of mouldering ruins.” Without question, there was “something very impressive in a scene like this,” strewn “with the memorials of many generations.” Yet—though “the fate of nations have [sic] been decided” on this ground—“it is unconsecrated by actions the memory of which might be honored & cherished through age after age. It has not one stirring association connected with noble deeds; it is barren of all history that might awaken any high ambition, & one turns away from it only with a sigh.” 35

Norton had stored up not only impressive views and romantic sighs. His experience traveling across India had reinforced lessons learned in Madras and Calcutta. Among the company rulers he had seen abuse of power and “great oppression.” Among the Indian ruled he had perceived “a very small minority of them advancing under the influence & example of the English,” the overwhelming majority uniting “the vices of barbarism & civilization.” 36

All this had fortified the opinions with which he had arrived: the dangers of aristocratic power and the value of republican institutions; the determining hand of history in shaping a people’s institutions and underlying culture; the
heavy weight of culture, especially religion in its ethical dimensions, in constraining or undergirding progress; the dependence of progress primarily on a people’s moral character; and the strengthening of a people’s character as a glacially slow achievement chiefly through education.

Yet India did not merely confirm received views. It connected them with reality, deepened their complexity, made them into tools for deciphering actuality rather than only abstract schemata. It planted a developmental scheme of history firmly in Norton’s worldview. And it stretched the twenty-two-year-old’s mind. It made him sensitive to wider ranges of personalities and cultural backgrounds; it unsettled some expectations and questioned some easy Boston answers; its exotic and mind-expanding scenes opened an already receptive young man to new experiences and novel worlds. He would subsequently see even Europe with eyes wider open than those of most Bostonians.

Around eight in the morning on 2 January 1850, his bearers carried Norton’s palanquin up to the dak bungalow at Agra, where Ritchie awaited. Charley immediately sent for an expected packet of letters; the most recent, written on 24 October by William Bullard, had followed him from stop to stop until finally catching him in Agra. Andrews’s condition had deteriorated. He might not live.37

At once Charley wrote to Bombay to book passage on the Suez steamer. The 750 miles from Agra to Bombay ran through native states and sparsely settled areas. There was no regular dak; he could be two hundred miles from an Englishman if his bearers deserted. He hired twenty-five of them and a cook, sent word to Indore (halfway along and with a British Resident) to have fresh bearers ready, saw the Taj Mahal, bid farewell to Ritchie, and on Friday morning, 4 January, supported “by that faith in God, in his infinite goodness, in our constant connection through him” that he “felt sure” was supporting his family as well, set out for home.38

On 30 January his train walked into Bombay. The “excellent set of fellows” had averaged almost thirty miles a day. A “large batch of letters” awaited, which Richard Lewis had received in Calcutta on 18 December with Bullard & Lee’s request to forward them as rapidly as possible. Charles unwrapped the packet, found the letter with the latest postmark, ripped it open, and “with a thrill of happiness & gratitude” read: “‘All well.’ ‘I felt twenty years younger than I had two minutes before.’” Bullard’s alarming note had, it turned out, been sent at the crisis of Andrews’s illness. By early December improvement surpassed even Charley’s hopes; and he could feel easy traveling in Europe, where communication with home was fast. He did
cancel plans to see Syria, Palestine, and Constantinople; he would not, he assured his parents, regret what he had not seen, only be “glad that I had seen so much.” “You know,” he wrote them, “that my only desire is to do that which will really please you best, & my chief hope is to prove my affection to you by doing all that lies in my power for you.” 39

There was time in Bombay to take account of its flourishing market and the popularity of American textiles: “an excellent opportunity” for “establishing an American House.” Norton also arranged to talk with the celebrated merchant Sir Jamsetjee Jeejeebhoy, adding the resulting data about Parsees to his “famous journal.” He sent off some “Caubur preserves” to Mrs. Everett, packed the tiger skin sent by one of his hunting companions, and on 4 February 1850 boarded the steamer *Victoria* bound for Suez. 40

From Suez a cramped horse-drawn van carried him across the desert—with a view of the pyramids that thrilled him—to Cairo. A night steamer down the Nile took him to Alexandria and the boat to Europe. His ship called at Smyrna (giving him time for a twenty-five-mile ride through robber-infested hills to see a “monument of Sisostris”) and Corfu before docking at Trieste on Tuesday, 19 March. 41

Then Venice floated around Charles, a golden dream. By day a gondola wafted him through its watery lace; by night his footsteps echoed solemnly on the stone bridges that arched each little rio. From atop the campanile in Piazza San Marco he looked out over the island-flecked laguna. He wandered the narrow streets, where buildings four or five stories high closed him in; it was like walking through high canyons, tunnels back into time. Entering the “glorious churches,” standing “in the Place of St. Mark,” Charles luxuriated in “the associations of the past.” He half expected to encounter at the next turning “some new triumph of the art of Titian or of Sansovino” and did find bits of fresco by Giorgione and Tintoretto still clinging to palazzo walls. 42

An entire frescoed ceiling crowned the capacious rooms that Norton engaged at his own palazzo, the Guistiniani, reduced by 1850 to playing Hôtel de l’Europe. He stood at his windows, looking out at the Isola della Giudecca, which Canaletto engravings hanging at Shady Hill had made “a familiar and friendly place.” But to look at a copy was one thing; another altogether was to see the glorious original. A cast of a statue might represent it fairly; no engraving could reproduce a church or do justice to a painting. Wandering through the Accademia gallery Norton saw color and light and shadow as he had never imagined. Titian’s *Assumption of the Virgin* hung
before him like the door into an unknown country: “until I saw it I had no idea of the powers of painting in these respects.” For in Boston’s third-hand culture, Norton had mostly learned about art not even from casts and engravings but from books.43

Yet, even with Venice glowing before him, a pale imagining come to full-blooded life, he still saw it through books. His Venice was a Shakespearean city of history and “associations.” He wandered for two days through the Palazzo Ducale, where “the gratitude of Petrarch” lived on in the library and “the beheading of Marino Faliero” cast a pall over the courtyard—references revealing the visitor’s considerable interest in Italian history.44 Perhaps this leaning explains why Venice’s historic buildings fascinated Norton even more than its paintings, why the architectural merits of
the palace evoked less emotion than its “wonderful associations.” “At each step you stop to look at some object which awakens a new train of thoughts.” Or at least you did if you had read as much about Italy as Norton had. He wanted to wander alone through the grand and solemn rooms—with a book for a companion.45

Yet he also saw what he could not have read. He gazed in wonderment at the “great variety and beauty of the coloring” of San Marco, at the Palladian harmonies of the Redentore. His eye, trained by flower collecting, now admired the “exquisite finish which is carried into the innumerable details” of the Doges’ Palace, such as the way in which “a running pattern of leaves giv[es] a general similarity” to the array of pillars, while a unique capital made each distinct. He was haphazardly starting to teach himself—the Boston path of self-culture—how to look at buildings.46

He took Italy seriously; Italy in turn, while validating and enriching his inherited assumptions, also nibbled, very quietly, on them. The traces of erosion came more from how he saw than from what he heard, for Norton’s “powers of conversation in Italian” were still “of the most limited kind.” On 29 March he went to San Marco for Good Friday services; he had, it appears, never witnessed a Roman Catholic liturgy. He found it “very strange and very painful,” a “theatrical display” that “travestied” the “most sacred history” commemorated in Holy Week. Never had the “simpler creed” of Boston “seemed so precious.”47

He returned for Holy Saturday. A Boston allergy to incense blinded Charley to his own confusions. “Theatrical display” repelled when wearing vestments but not, somehow, when wearing marble: Norton thought San Marco “a treasure house of beauties,” and on every visit he felt the basilica’s glories more deeply.48

Norton repressed these contradictions with the aid of the Unitarian version of history. Of course, gems of truth glittered under the putrescent crust of Catholicism. After all, Luther, Calvin, and their Unitarian improvers like Andrews Norton had not invented Christianity; they had only scraped away superstitions that distorted the message of Jesus, a message so bright that even the “corruptions and the evils of the Roman Catholic creed” had not entirely obscured it. Catholicism certainly clogged the wheels of progress. (Hence, Norton was convinced, educated Italians only kept up a pretense of Catholic faith.) But Romanists were not trapped in a blind alley as Hindus were, for Catholics glimpsed dimly the living truth that Unitarians saw clearly.49

Yet the fact that papist Neanderthals were directly ancestral to Homo
sapiens nortonensis did not clear up all the mysteries. How could these be-nighed souls have glued together mosaics infinitely more beautiful than anything in enlightened Boston? The Unitarian story of the progress of religion—man slowly learning to understand a divine truth revealed to primitive Hebrews—did not answer the question. Neither did the Scottish Enlightenment account of the progress of civilization—man slowly rising from barbarism pure and simple. (Nor, for that matter, did these two tales themselves jibe, though Andrews and Harvard had taught both.) And neither fitted with the Boston conviction that might explain San Marco: the idea that great art embodied timeless beauty, so that a young Unitarian seeing a mosaic in 1850 resonated to it in the same key as the Catholic who had designed it in 1250.

On 5 April, Norton climbed the campanile in Piazza San Marco “to take a farewell look.” The coach carried him first to Padua, where Giotto’s frescoes crowded the Arena Chapel: most Americans did not bother to see them; Norton did. Then he was off to Vicenza and its Palladian villas. Their “fine” proportions and “elegant” details impressed Norton more than Giotto had. In the Biblioteca Capitolare at Verona he searched for “some unedited poems of Dante,” found instead “a splendid collection of early editions” of the Tuscan poet and some magnificent ancient and medieval manuscripts. Philology was bred in Norton’s bones. Everywhere he regretted his ignorance, wished some great scholar were accompanying him. At Mantua he gave himself another lesson in critical vision. The frescoes in the Palazzo del Te were “very striking”; but, he concluded, they lacked “that beauty which interests the feelings and affects the imagination.” “The coloring is violent, and the designs though full of force are wanting in grace”; and the mixture of pagan and Christian symbolism “jars upon the taste,—either alone would be striking,—the combination of the two is bad.” Lacking some great scholar as his guide, he was haphazardly educating himself.50

The education involved more than frescoes and villas. The misery of Italy’s governance sounded persistent counterpoint, in Norton’s scoring, to the splendor of its art. These strains were hardly surprising from any American, almost inevitable from a Norton. At Shady Hill, little Charley had half comprehendingly heard Italian refugees fume at Austrian tyranny. When he was older he had scanned his mother’s translation of the memoirs of one of them. Still later, he had rushed to Uncle Ticknor with the heady news of the revolutions of 1848. That revolutionary heat had given birth to a Venetian republic, but it fell to the old Habsburg master only months before Norton’s arrival. Charles believed that “oppression” had only “forced back into its
crater to boil” an inevitable “eruption” of liberty. Eventually, Italian hatred would smash Austrian guns. What then?  

Norton saw issues here transcending Italy. He understood himself to be studying European politics from a perspective precisely the reverse of that from which he studied European art: gazing up at the Old Masters from the lowlands of American art; peering down at the swamp of continental politics from the alps of American republicanism. In paintings and buildings, European antiquity implied ripened beauty; in government, merely ancient oppression. Only in the happy Kingdom of Piedmont, of all Italy, did republican institutions flourish, forming ramparts against tyranny and “red republicanism” alike. But a more telling case study lay down the road.  

Norton picked up his pace, hoping to reach Paris in time for the French elections on 28 April. From Turin the post road climbed through dramatic Alpine views up Mount Cenis Pass, before winding down into France. A brief stay in Lyon showed Norton a threat to republicanism more insidious than Habsburg tyranny: radical silk weavers on the Left and reactionary Jesuits on the Right pinned the city between “two great elements of danger.” (He also found in a shop some “curious old engravings by Albert Durer” and “etchings by Rembrandt,” the whole lot for fifteen francs. His thirst for collecting was at last finding chances to slake itself.) From Lyon, an icy nine-hour voyage up the Saône, followed by a chilly night’s diligence ride and a cold railroad train, brought Charles into Paris on Friday, 26 April.  

Bone tired, he did nothing that afternoon but read the waiting mail. The next day, he ran into a young Boston lawyer named Burlingame, the first person he had recognized since leaving Ritchie in Agra. Paris was full of familiar faces. On Sunday, Charles saw Edward Cabot and Tom Appleton; on Monday, Eliza Follen and Miss Cabot; on Tuesday he was reunited with Frank Child, en route to join their classmate George Lane at the University of Göttingen. The long foreign winter had suddenly thawed.  

But Norton’s business lay with France, not Boston. As tallies from Sunday’s election dribbled in, Norton tried to read in these entrails the destiny of France’s infant republic. Eighteen-forty-eight had broken down the old principles of order; no new ones seemed to be emerging. The Journal des Debats announced the triumph of anarchism. Norton found the Journal hysterical, the state of politics not quite so bad as he had expected. The voting, at least, had gone off “with the most entire and perfect quiet.” “From what I can learn,” the election seemed a qualified victory “of the friends of the republic over the friends of reaction.”  

Behind Norton’s interest in France’s politics lay concern about Americ-
ica’s. As, twenty years earlier, the young Frenchman Tocqueville had studied the United States to infer the future of democracy in Europe, so the young American now scrutinized France to decipher the prospects of republican government in the United States. For, at moments in the spring of 1850, his own nation seemed to teeter on the brink of dissolution. It had been pushed there by conflict over whether slavery should expand into territory recently wrested from Mexico in the odious war that most New Englanders had decried as the dirty work of slaveowners. Charles, far from home, worried about his country; from home, Mr. Longfellow reassured him. Politics were “raging furiously” but would not rip the Union apart. His father, too, wrote calmly; the compromise supported by Webster would “restore the peace of the country.” But that compromise included a law requiring Northerners to aid in recapturing fugitive slaves, and this appalled Andrews. Charley was young. He read American omens in the cheeriest light. “Everything,” he felt sure, “will work out for good in our republic.”

In Europe the story might end differently. Charley expected that a desperate political struggle would engulf France within a year or two. (It turned out to be Louis Napoleon’s coup d’état.) Andrews advised him to hope for nothing from the “bloody revolutions” to which the continent seemed prone, for they “do not touch the seat of the evils that pervade society in Europe”—principally “the long continued want of true religious faith,” which “alone can bind man to his fellowmen in a community of feeling, as members of the same immortal family.” Absent religion, “gross selfishness springs up in its place; and becomes the only restraint on what it prompts men to do—to prey upon each other.” France did not need another revolution; it needed “moral renovation of the character of communities.” Italian and French postrevolutionary politics were a furnace. In its intense glare Charles was beginning to see his inherited republicanism more sharply; in its blazing heat, to refine his ideas.

In Paris, though, he meant to study more than politics. He was well prepared. Patrician Boston had long-standing commercial ties with France and routinely tutored its children in French; its fledglings felt more at home in Paris than in Berlin or Venice. Uncle Ticknor’s cosmopolitan influence left Charles, even by Boston standards, exceptionally well connected in Paris, unusually receptive to it. With his inbred seriousness of approach, Norton set out to bolster these advantages: in Calcutta he had hired a tutor to teach him Hindi; in Paris he engaged one to improve his ragged French. But first he had to find a tailor, “for to confess the truth I reached Paris completely out of clothes.”
On 30 April, Charles encountered Joseph Coolidge, a friend of Andrews and Catharine’s, strolling one of the boulevards. This chance meeting proved a happy one; for Coolidge, who “knows the persons who are worth knowing” in Parisian society, offered his services as cicerone. The next day he escorted Charles to meet Uncle Ticknor’s great friend Adolphe, comte de Circourt. “I have rarely heard a man who talked better.” His vast “fund of knowledge,” coined in striking turns of phrase, spread its wealth “upon any subject that may come up.” Circourt’s salon became a haunt of Norton’s, always stocked with a surfeit of duchesses and a few luminaries like Alfred de Vigny.59

The comte metaphorically on one arm, Coolidge on the other, Norton hardly needed his packet of introductions. He soon moved to Coolidge’s quiet little hotel on the rue de la Paix, just north of the Place Vendôme. Together, they visited the Jardin des Plantes and the Museum of Morbid Anatomy, attended the opera, shopped for furniture for Coolidge’s new Boston house (“an excellent opportunity for cultivating my taste in these articles of household decoration”). With Coolidge’s son Algernon, Norton heard the Assemblée Nationale debate at the Palais Bourbon; the “republican simplicity” of its hall pleased him. Norton found other comrades among the Bostonians swarming Paris, predictable ones, such as solid John Lowell and William Bullard’s brother Stephen, but also less likely companions, like Thomas Appleton and William Story. Both Tom and William were a little too flippant, a little too bon vivant, a little too ardent about painting and sculpture to be entirely approved by Andrews and even, perhaps, by his son.60

Charles was learning to taste what he could not quite swallow. On 9 May he visited one of the celebrated soirées of the Virginia expatriate Mrs. Edward Lee Childe. He found her “a woman completely denationalized, & very little to my taste.” He also found himself thereafter much in her presence. He did not (he assured Mother and Father) admire her frivolous worldliness; but being abroad “for the sake of seeing the world in all its sides,” he was “glad to have made Mrs. C’s acquaintance.”61

Other acquaintances, famous rather than risqué, proved heady to meet, occasionally interesting to talk with: Alexis de Tocqueville, Alphonse de Lamartine, Nassau Senior. The last was one of many Britons in Paris with whom Norton dined. (Charles was, after all, George Ticknor’s nephew.) Lady Elgin, widow of the Scottish earl who had hijacked the Parthenon frieze, turned out “rather a dull old lady” but one with a charming daughter, twenty-seven-year-old Lady Augusta Bruce. The Elgins invited Charles to
stay with them in Scotland later that summer. Richard Monckton Milnes—
“Dicky” Milnes, with his fizzy reputation as wit, poet, raconteur, patron of
young writers, and reforming politician—had Charles to breakfast. Norton
did not much like him. Milnes, in contrast, found the young American
intriguing enough to cultivate. 62

The greatest treat was visiting the house of the fashionable painter Ary
Scheffer, on the southern edge of Montmartre. On 11 May, after examining
with Coolidge an exhibit of Sèvres porcelain and Gobelin tapestries at the
Palais Royale, Charles called on Sophie Scheffer, two months earlier con­
verted from mistress to wife. (The liaison did not ruffle Norton: the French,
like the Hindus, had their own ways.) Mme Scheffer ushered him into “a
studio most tastefully arranged & hung with the finest of Scheffer's paint­
ings.” “My heart beat quick at seeing the works of so great an artist and with
which I had so many tender associations.” Scheffer’s Saint Augustin et Sainte
Monique showed saint and mother sitting side by side and hand in hand,
staring worshipfully and vacuously toward the upper right of the picture.
Norton gazed at the canvas as reverently as Augustine and Monica gazed
into the empyrean. Mme Scheffer took Charles into her husband’s working
atelier. The great man, who knew a rich American when he saw one, laid
down his brush to receive Charles “most kindly.” Norton was not duped, but
two nights later he happily came back to dine. These were the first of several
visits to “the most delightful place in Paris.” 63

Charles was realizing how deep was his fondness for pictures and evolv­
ing his own sense of what mattered in them. Scheffer painted the deepest
feelings of the heart better than “any other”; “in point of expression” his
Christus Consolator seemed the finest picture Norton had ever seen, better
than Titian. But Charles gave himself plenty of chances to compare. Mme
de Circourt took him to “a fine gallery of modern painting”; he viewed
contemporary French paintings in the Luxembourg; twice he visited the
Louvre. The lighting there was bad, the paintings in disrepair, good pictures
swamped in a sea of bad ones; and he had seen enough in Italy to realize that
the “greatest Italian masters are without exception badly represented.” Still,
the Louvre’s “chief treasures”—which he thought its Murillos, Van Dycks,
and some of the Rembrandts—merited careful study. “How I wish,” he
wrote home, “that you could see the fine galleries of pictures in Europe with
me; for I am sure that your admiration of paintings would grow with mine.
It is to me an unexpected and entirely new pleasure to find these works of art
so beautiful.” 64

Buildings, too, as in Venice, he observed with interest, pleasure, and
growing sophistication. Notre Dame impressed him as “by far the finest specimen of the florid French Gothic architecture that I have seen,” with “some very beautiful points and peculiarities.” And like San Marco, “it is full of interest from its antiquity and from the events of which it has been the scene.” The Pantheon, however, suffered in Norton’s opinion: spiritually, from the relics of Rousseau and Voltaire (the Federalist in him shuddered); materially, from the disharmony of its exterior elements and the breaking up of its interior space by “overornamented pillars[,] pilasters and vaultings.” Despite a fine dome and portico, “the grandeur of its size and proportions is quite lost.” His eye was still only a tourist’s but keener and more active than most.65

When not peering at a pilaster, he was apt to be watching Racine. The days Norton had spent in the countinghouse with that fanatic of the footlights Henry Lee can only have sharpened the taste for theater cultivated at Shady Hill. But where American managers staged plays to showcase some well-known actor, Parisian theaters, Norton learned, did not depend on “one star to light the whole performance.” The “completeness” of Paris performances enthralled him, with their “attention to the minute details by which the illusion & the effect of the acting is wonderfully increased.” He attended at least six performances by the Alsatian actress Rachel Félix, including Virginie, Phèdre, and Adrienne Lecouvreur, “her greatest role.” The waifish Rachel clearly gave him a sexual frisson. But, much more, Norton’s fondness for dramatic expression was shaping the way he conceived history, literature, and even painting, a tendency abetted by the setting of all these plays in the historic past.66

Some of them he saw with Quincy Shaw, a young New Yorker on the homeward leg of eighteen months abroad. When they dined together on 29 May at the Café de Paris, Shaw brought along “his traveling companion, a young man from New York named Curtis”—George William Curtis. For all three, the time approached to leave Paris, and they decided to travel together.67

Charles was ready to go. The more he saw of French “high society,” the more he thought it “very frivolous and very selfish.” (A hint of self-reproach? Was Norton pulling back from a side of himself that he had recognized with a guilty start in the salons and theaters and cafés?) Even the comte de Circourt’s judgments depended “more upon his temporary state of feeling than upon any fixed rules.” True, Paris charmed. What delight to live in one of the high-roofed, narrow-windowed, red-brick houses in the Place Royale, where everything “bears the marks of age and freedom from
change”! But even this “air of quiet and repose” would grow malodorous when aristocratic titles mattered more than personal character. Perhaps, Charles mused, it was only because Europe “has been presented to us so often in glowing, not to say, exaggerated colors, that the dark side strikes me the more forcibly.” In any case he was “delighted & almost surprised to find that in all the comparisons which I draw the result is favorable to our own country.” His travels were teaching him that Americans had “cause for an increase of self respect”: “just now the great deficiency of our people as a nation.”

The boat train left Paris on the morning of 6 June; Charles pulled into London fifteen hours later. London seemed to Charles “not in appearance so gay as Paris,” hardly a surprise considering that it was nearly midnight. Next morning, the city appeared no gayer. At least his rooms at Fenton’s Hotel, between Pall Mall and Piccadilly, put fashionable London within a few minutes’ walk. Fenton’s was also convenient to Russell and Julia Sturgis’s house on Harley Street, where Norton went the evening after his arrival to meet “all the Americans who are in town.” In this case, “America” extended about as far west as the Back Bay, for Russell Sturgis was an old Boston merchant settled in London.

The web of acquaintance enveloping Charley in London made his Paris connections look skimpy. He was about to experience the thickness of Boston’s transatlantic network, as scientific and literary London opened wide to him. Hensleigh Wedgwood, philologist and London official, cousin and intellectual companion of Charles Darwin, entertained him. The distinguished geologist and public man Leonard Horner had him to dine with the mathematician Charles Babbage (even then tinkering with his analytical engine) and the historian Henry Hallam. The still more eminent geologist Charles Lyell (a friend of Uncle Ticknor) invited him to a party where he met Henry Rawlinson, the army major who had deciphered Darius’s cuneiform inscription at Behistun, and John Ruskin, the young art critic whose surprising Modern Painters Charles had read. Another old friend of Ticknor, the amiable John Kenyon, gave Charles a series of meals to meet the older generation of literary London. Ticknor also provided entree to Earl Fitzwilliam’s more aristocratic table, at which Charles dined with Lord Brougham, “who talked a great deal, almost always about himself.”

The young Bostonian proved capable also of opening doors for himself, though whether they would have swung so wide had he not been “the nephew of Mr. Ticknor” is open to question. Norton got himself invited to a party given by old Joseph Hume, Bentham’s disciple, where he chatted at
length with Richard Cobden. Richard Monckton Milnes turned out far "pleasanter in London than in Paris"; and at Milnes's famous breakfasts Norton met Prosper Merimée, Louis Blanc, Arthur Penryn Stanley, a German called Dr. Waagen "with a profound knowledge of art" (or so Norton then thought), and "a young Tennysonian poet" with the Tennysonian name of Coventry Patmore. The Prussian scholar-diplomat Christian Bunsen asked him to a "family dinner." London was looking much gayer. With George Curtis he visited the tourist spots in and around the metropolis. Curtis was becoming a constant companion, as were William and Emelyn Story. The four of them took to lunching together almost every day at the Sturgises'.

Norton was immensely enjoying this vast and growing acquaintance; he was also putting it to use. For London, like Paris and Venice and Calcutta, he conceived as a stage of his education. Sometimes the learning was low keyed, incidental. Dinner conversation with Babbage, a long talk with Cobden, gave some expert insight into scientific work or practical political economy; a day at the London docks, a morning at the Bank of England, added to his own mercantile expertise. But Charles also pursued knowledge self-consciously, drawing on his connections. He toured Westminster Abbey under the expert guidance of the ecclesiastical historian Henry Hart Milman. Thousands of tourists in 1850 gaped at the monumental winged bulls with men's heads, at the great stone reliefs of battles and sacrifices, newly dug up at Nineveh and put on display in the British Museum; but not many had the Assyriologist Henry Rawlinson to explain what they were staring at.

More to the point, Norton stood prepared to take advantage of his advantages. He had read Austen Layard's book on the discovery of Nineveh (and probably discussed it with its two Boston reviewers) before he met Rawlinson. And his growing fascination with such diverse products of the human imagination as Assyrian palace ornaments and hammer-beam roofs impelled him to spend hours trying to comprehend them. He put in a long morning at the British Museum studying the Elgin Marbles; he stood silently in the British Institution's gallery, his protruding eyes searching the paintings; he secured an invitation to see "Lord Ashburton's splendid collection of pictures." Two weeks after Milman escorted him through Westminster Abbey, he returned for a morning alone.

The many hours produced results. On 28 June, with Julia Sturgis, Curtis, and the Storys, he made a second trip to Windsor to see the castle gallery and chapel. He assessed the Van Dyck portraits with a confidence and specificity inconceivable three months before: "I doubt if any painter has
been superior to him in taking expressive and animated likenesses.” Saint George’s Chapel—“one of the most highly finished and complete specimens of Gothic architecture I have seen”—interested him as “belonging to the same style as Henry the VIIth’s Chapel at Westminster Abbey.” He took George Curtis to visit the medieval Westminster Hall; its hammer-beam ceiling he declared “the finest roof I have seen in England.” He was on target. Norton’s was not an expert eye, but it was becoming an informed one. Yet it remained one that saw “stirring memories” in a building as readily as fine woodwork. 74

Art, archaeology, and architecture competed for attention with politics, political economy, and the many faces of power. The exact relation of culture to polity, past to present, imagination to action remained foggy in Norton’s mind. But that all somehow cohered in his self-tutelage he did not doubt.

Norton had (as Francis Parkman observed) “too much sense to be bitten by the John Bull mania which is the prevailing disease of Boston.” His “first strong impression of the English” was that they fawned on “rank and position”; the drawing rooms teeming with “white cravatted flunkeys” and “snobbish looking men” disgusted him. This reflex was normal in Americans. Even among Boston Anglophiles, republican distrust of aristocracy had long complicated admiration of English culture, ancestral hostility to the British Lion confounding pseudonostalgia for the Old Home. Norton’s months in India had heightened these reflexes. In all his use of the word “race,” he attached scant importance to somatic differences among human beings: even as the Victorian intellectual consensus began to shift toward stressing the gravity of physical ancestry, Norton did not budge from his certainty of the determining force of cultural descent. As he saw it, the English benefited from a superior culture; the weight of an inferior one bore down the Indians. These fortunes of history gave no one a moral warrant to lord it over others. But most Anglo-Indians behaved as if they held one. 75

That same swagger, and the sycophancy that was its obverse, he saw in Lord Ashburton’s drawing rooms—where, Norton noted acidly, Ashburton had mounted a Murillo showing “St. Thomas dividing his garment among the poor beggar children.” Charles quoted a mot of John Kenyon: “In France there has always been social liberty and political servitude, in England there has been political liberty & social servitude.” “For my part,” Norton added, “I don’t know which is the worse.” He had no problem with the principle that a superior class should govern, an inferior follow. How else did his own relatives see their duty in Boston? Yet it was quite another
matter, a wholesale violation of Christian ethics and the Boston ethos, to treat the unfortunate as means to gratify the pride and desires of the powerful. 76

The unfortunate were properly subjects for improvement; and Charles followed closely English discussions of the social question, collecting official reports on schooling and attending a Commons debate on the subject. While conceding that the “great questions for England of national education and the relief of pauperism” excited “as usual” some public attention, Norton thought the attention “quite inadequate to the demands.” Housing schemes for “workmen & laborers” caught his eye as especially promising, but the “bigotry” and “selfishness” of the English aristocracy augured ill for any reform. 77

Charles’s own education was getting more delightful by the day. On 29 June he, Emelyn Story, and the Sturgises took the train for Cambridge, to join there Emelyn’s husband William, George Curtis, and “a pleasant, intelligent Englishman,” C. C. Black. After walking about the colleges, they “sat up till one o’clock discussing various pleasant subjects of art and literature” with “a young fellow of Pembroke, Mr. Brown.” An excursion to Ely provided “a splendid study” for Norton, the cathedral there combining “all the styles of English Gothic architecture.” The restoration then under way, moreover, was being carried out “with uncommon taste.” Charles had, he told his family, “grown very fond of architecture” since arriving in Europe. “I have been reading a good deal about it so as to look at fine buildings with some intelligence, & to be able to carry away with me a more distinct impression of their beauties.” 78

Norton returned to London on 1 July to spend a couple more weeks of sightseeing, socializing, and indulging his passion for old-book shops. His new friend C. C. Black gave him dinner, and there he met Richard Baird Smith, an engineer on the Ganges project that had so interested Charles. Baird Smith told Norton of plans to visit the United States in 1851 to see American public works. Sir Arthur Helps, whose Friends in Council Norton had got published in America, also sought him out. 79

Into these overfilled last days in London broke startling news from Shady Hill. William Bullard had asked Louisa to marry him. Her brother seemed taken entirely by surprise; and Louisa herself needed convincing that a man raised under circumstances so different from Shady Hill, accustomed more to the countinghouse than the library, too shy to banter easily in a crowded drawing room, wanting in “that intellectual cultivation
and development” to which Louisa was used, would make her the ideal husband. Perhaps she only needed assurance that life could go on outside the gates of Shady Hill. Charley believed it could, at least for Louisa, and repeated his “great respect and esteem for Bullard.”

While his sister fretted, Charley packed. He bid reluctant farewell to George Curtis, whose friendship had blossomed into the “warmest love,” and on 17 July set out to see the rest of Britain on the standard tourist route. Along it, he delighted in historic “associations” and Van Dycks, lamented the poverty of the country folk on which such wealth depended, marveled at the quiet uncomplaining way in which they bore their oppression. He arrived in Edinburgh just in time for the annual meeting of the British Association for the Advancement of Science, where the Ethnological Section intrigued him, another sign of the bent of his mind toward the forces shaping behavior and mores. Edinburgh also brought a reunion with Lady Elgin’s daughter, Augusta Bruce. The “very warm intimacy” that continued between the two indicated how Charles’s friendliness could negotiate even the Victorian delicacies of gender. Two weeks touring the Highlands—where he ran into Captain Baird Smith again (it was shooting season)—were followed by the conventional pilgrimage to the Lake District: “oh, shades of Scott and of ye Lake Poets how do ye preside over this wild vale.”

By 6 September, Charles was back in London, preparing to return to the Continent. He did find time to go with Julia Sturgis to Tottenham to see the Windus collection of Turners: the one “which gave Ruskin his enthusiastic admiration for the painter.” In declaring Turner’s watercolors “beyond all comparison finer than any other landscapes I remember having seen in truth to nature,” Norton was probably paraphrasing Ruskin.

Yet possibly not, for day after day of comparing pictures and buildings had built up a store of artistic and architectural knowledge that approached the beginnings of expertise. Expertise, not original insight: like most cultivated Americans, Charles favored Renaissance masters in painting (Scheffer and J. M. W. Turner being the exceptions) and Gothic construction in architecture. His intellectual growth had not been limited to the arts. Although Europe had not altered his inherited principles of social order, confrontation with aristocratic hauteur and grinding poverty had enlarged his knowledge and honed his belief in America’s superiority. American republicanism represented a new and higher stage of human political development—even while American artistic and literary culture limped behind its European parents. Travel had also taught him something about personal qualities. He realized how rare were the “great and undisturbable aimiability
[sic] and thoughtfulness for others” that he admired in Russell and Julia Sturgis. But the rarity in others of these attributes so admired at Shady Hill only emphasized the need to cultivate them in oneself.83

Norton stayed in Paris only long enough to get a dentist to drill an aching tooth and to pick up the winter clothes he had stored there. On the Rhine steamer between Bonn and Koblenz, he met a “thorough specimen of a Cockney” who waxed persistent on the superiority of the Thames to the Rhine. Eventually the man conceded, “It’s very remarkable that the Rhine always runs one way, isn’t it?” To this observation, Charles said, “one naturally assented.”84

Mostly, however, Norton absorbed the splendors of the great Gothic cathedrals along his route. He tried to grasp what he was seeing, but growing experience made him realize how deep was his “ignorance.”

I know so little about what I see compared to what is to be known, there are such treasures of history, & of romance, such studies of art and of life which I have never even approached, & which I long to unfold. I know enough to awaken my enthusiasm and my admiration, but I feel as if it were a waste of opportunities to see so much and not to know more.

He could scarcely realize—no American could, least of all a twenty-two-year-old—how much he had to learn. He decided to give up northern Germany rather than to see both it and Italy “superficially.”85

Switzerland and Bavaria intervened. For three days, with a guide, Charles walked and rode among the mountains and glaciers under the shadow of Mont Blanc. In a hut on the summit of La Flegere he found William Bullard’s and another friend’s names in the “book of visitors.” He proceeded alone, by mule and foot, over the Gemmi Pass to Interlaken and then hiked the Brünig Pass to Lungern: a lot of Alps, a lot of mileage on his boots. At Lucerne on 11 October he reentered the world of newsprint and learned with gratitude that America’s political “trouble has been got over.” Clouds still dotted the Republic’s horizon, but “on the whole our future is very bright.” “God grant that it may continue so, for our country is the hope of the world. Religion and education are its only safeguards.”86

As he passed through the massive city gates of Nuremberg on 17 October, the Middle Ages grabbed him with a force not felt since his first sight of Venice. Nuremberg’s “treasures of art & antiquity”—Peter Vischer’s bronzes, Adam Kraft’s sculptures, Albrecht Dürer’s engravings—could have held him “for weeks.” (Norton’s admiration of Dürer lasted a lifetime.) Yet what ignited Charles in Nuremberg was not the city’s array of great pieces of
art but its gestalt. Nuremberg endured as if the Middle Ages had never faded. The thick, stern miles of grayish-brown stone wall girding the city, the “thousands of traditions & pleasant histories” clustering round it, its finely detailed Gothic churches, the very house in which Dürer lived, all this came together to plunge Charles imaginatively into the Middle Ages, “a period which seems to me little known & understood.” Somehow, in two days in Nuremberg all his experience of art and of history since Venice fused in a kind of epiphany. “I have not been so sorry to leave any place, where the parting was unconnected with saying farewell to friends, as I was to bid good bye to Nuremberg this afternoon.”

He never really would say goodbye. His fascination with the “little known & understood” Middle Ages—already kindled perhaps in his Harvard dissertation on Santa Croce, fanned by Venice, but bursting into full flame in Nuremberg—formed a leitmotif of his career.

Arriving in Munich on 19 October, Charles learned that Louisa had at last decided to hand her vacillating heart over to William Bullard (who, Catharine said, “has gained our confidence, our esteem and our affection”). Charley, though eighteen months away from the nest physically, had never flown Shady Hill emotionally. His letter home gushed with happiness and family sympathy. The only shadow cast by Louisa’s engagement was that it “must in some part alter that familiar course in which our lives have run most happy and unchanged for so long.” He wished “with all my heart” to be with his family now.

To tell the truth, a good part of his heart wished to be in Italy. He arrived there at the beginning of November. Having traveled Europe, Norton feared that Venice on second acquaintance would have lost its original luster. His “fears were vain”: “all is picturesque, all belongs to the past, and all is tinged with melancholy that adds to its loveliness.” Still, he could spare only four days there. He took a few hours in Padua to revisit the Giottos in the Arena Chapel, liking them much better this time for understanding how they compared with other works of the kind and with the limits and efforts of the artist. Interest in Giotto indicated in 1850 an advanced taste, almost avant-garde.

Within the medieval walls of Florence, Charles planned to settle for the winter. Amid peddlers crying “Signori miei! Un’ paolo soltanto!” he set out to find lodging. For twelve dollars a month he got three rooms and a servant in a house on the central Piazza di Santa Maria Novella; with breakfast for fifteen cents at the Café Doney and dinner at “the table d’hote of one of the hotels where I shall meet the strangers who are in town,” this scheme would
be cheaper than living in a hotel. The saving would buy books and engravings. It also helped to pay for an Italian tutor.\textsuperscript{90}

Indeed, he seemed now more student than tourist, working at Italian for hours each day, much of the rest of the time immersing himself in the galleries. He spent the morning of 16 November, his twenty-third birthday (his second abroad), at the Uffizi, struck especially by “the first efforts of Cimabue and Giotto, in which the desire of expression is checked by the want of knowledge.” The same want depressed him, and he came away “half sorrowful because there was so much to know and I knew so little.” On the way back to his rooms he stopped by a bookstore, gave himself a birthday present of Vasari and Machiavelli. The next day he visited the Franciscan church of Santa Croce, laying eyes at last on the monuments that he had limned in his Harvard commencement dissertation. Four long years had passed since that Cambridge morning, yet he seemed barely to have begun.\textsuperscript{91}

Two days after his arrival, his London acquaintance C. C. Black knocked on the door of his rooms: a pleasant surprise followed shortly by a call from the poet Robert Browning, to whom Norton had addressed one of his infinite letters of introduction. For the next weeks the Blacks and the Brownings formed the poles of his social world. When not in the Uffizi or Pitti galleries or the studios of the American sculptors Horatio Greenough and Hiram Powers, Norton was apt to be at Robert and Elizabeth Browning’s, discussing Italian liberalism and Catholic superstition, or driving out into the olive-covered hills to talk with Black (something of an authority on Italian art) about painters. These were the pleasantest of classrooms.\textsuperscript{92}

Norton’s lease expired on 14 December. He planned to spend then a leisurely week traveling to Rome via Siena and Perugia. But in early December letters from home arrived with news of Louisa’s wedding plans. Charley took an hour’s walk and made up his mind. “The pleasure or advantage” of a few more months in Europe could not compare “with the happiness of being with you, dearest Louisa, at your wedding, and with you, dearest Father and Mother, after Louisa, Jane & William are gone.” He hoped eventually that Louisa and William would build a house on the grounds of Shady Hill.\textsuperscript{93}

Now he booked his own passage home. A week in Paris gave him time to buy gifts, to revisit the salons of the Circourts and Mrs. Childe, and to worship again Rachel Félix. He returned to Ary Scheffer’s studio to commission a painting (at nine thousand francs) as a wedding gift for William and Louisa. In London the season was over, and most of Norton’s friends had vacated the city. But Charles had “a little pleasant talk” with Dickens
“sobered somewhat in his dress and manner since I saw him in America”), met Mrs. Gaskell and Edwin Landseer, dined again with Sturgis and Babbage. On 4 January the Asia steamed from Liverpool, carrying a musing Charles Norton.94

With a hundred passengers chattering away in the first-class salon, meals gave little chance to think; nor did the promenade deck encourage meditation in a North Atlantic winter. But in the ship’s little library and his own tiny cabin Charles could mull over what had passed. One conclusion needed no thought. Italy was his beloved, Venice its chieﬂest jewel: “no other city is half so peculiar, half so beautiful.” Italy meant frescoes, churches, statues, oils, medallions. What had surprised him there was more in himself than in the land: a passion of unforeseen depth for the astonishingly various incarnations of art, a capacious love that had grown with his knowledge.95

England, in contrast, land of “selfishness and ﬂunkeyism,” had chilled his inherited Anglophilia. Even Paris, for all its superﬁciality, for all the looseness of its mores and morals, he preferred to London. Possibly New England even had something to learn from Paris salons, where not only men talked of diplomacy, history, politics. “I wish our ladies would so far follow this Parisian fashion as to allow themselves to be addressed about something more than the Opera, a sleighride, or the last novel.” He did not mean the ladies at Shady Hill, for in this happy respect they were more Parisian than American.96

Norton had also found in Paris a model for himself, one that did not displace Andrews but expanded and elaborated the paternal pattern. The comte de Circourt impressed Charles “as the most remarkable man I have ever seen for the variety, the extent, the readiness of his knowledge, combined with natural talent & esprit.” Someone averred that Europe had not known his equal since Pico della Mirandola, and Charles was ready to believe it. One afternoon in Scheffer’s atelier “in the course of half an hour” Circourt had

quoted Homer, Petrarch, & our President’s message, analyzed the characteristics of the Venetian school of painting, referred to some of the technical difficulties of art, told Madame Scheffer where Washington Irving lived, gave her an account of [Sir James] Stephen the new History professor at Cambridge, and said that he had been all the forenoon on duty as a National Guard.97

Circourt lacked some of Andrews’s best qualities; his morals were Parisian, his judgments ﬂickle. That was not the point. Boston had outfitted Charles with solidity and earnestness to last a lifetime. What Circourt
supplied—and in this Circourt stood for the Continent, draped in a frock coat of specially elegant cut—was a fuller idea of what might arise on such a foundation. The comte stretched Charles’s imagination; the mind’s eye saw an Andrews Norton more polished, more variously learned, more sophisticated in taste, more at ease in the wide world. Charles was imagining himself, though surely not very self-consciously. He was barely twenty-three, wriggling out of his chrysalis.