

tial observer allows no great weight to the private accounts of travellers. For, when we consider the influence which egotism generally has upon their opinions, we must acknowledge, that we are not authorized to adopt them for oracles. The circle of observation of one or a few travellers is, besides, so limited, that they cannot properly draw from it any general conclusions. And finally, how many travellers are there, guided by an accurate spirit of observation, and thereby capable of abstracting general truths? How many, impelled by a criminal self-interest, spread abroad relations wilfully false?....A concurrence of many travellers would indeed bring us near the truth; but as they so often contradict each other, there is little to be learnt from their Journals.

There have indeed certainly been some travellers, gifted with genius and a spirit of observation, who have published faithful pictures of the nations which they visited. But, as even so many admirable faculties of the mind were not sufficient to procure for us true characterizing travels, unless when conducted by a rigorous love of truth, and a contempt of all personal considerations, I think I may, without offence, maintain, that they are rare phenomena, and that far the greater number must be reckoned among the class, which I have just mentioned.

Among the travellers, who have gone through the United States, and have published their remarks, Doctor Schöpf deserves to be mentioned as the man, who has painted things with the greatest likeness to the truth; and thus, in this instance too, the German nation has the merit of having done the most. *Brissot*, in his rapid journey through the country, either judged the people inaccurately, or purposely imputed to them other properties than those which he remarked.

For one of his friends in America assured me, that, according to his own expression, he described the quakers as a model of virtue, in order to hold up the French, at the beginning of their revolution, the image of a perfect republican for imitation. It was, forsooth, a singular idea, to consider the *Pennsylvanian* quakers as models for a lively and warlike nation like the French. *Chatellux*, who marched with the French army through part of the country, was not in a situation to make himself sufficiently acquainted with the character of the people. The remarks of a certain Italian count, and of Wangenheim, relate chiefly to inanimate nature; and those of an English officer, who settles, for instance, in the country town of Lancaster, ten thousand inhabitants, whereas it contains, even at this day, only three thousand five hundred, are equally trivial and inaccurate. The letters of an American farmer paint, with a *naïveté*, which forms the intermediate point between rusticity and civilization, the happy rural condition of a period, which ceased with the revolution. Finally, the writings of Americans themselves, such as *Inlay* and *Bartram*, are partially in favour of their country, at once heavy, declamatory, and ambitious to display unseasonable flowers of style. There is reason, therefore, to maintain, that what has hitherto been written of America, with respect to the character of the people, is insufficient.

We must, therefore, turn towards other sources than printed travels, for instructive information concerning the national character, and the principal of these sources can be no other than history. For as the assemblage of actions, or the life of an individual unfolds his character; so the actions of a people, which its history relates, are the best and most explicit commentary upon the national character. Are we not, for instance, sufficiently