

extended tour of Europe. Some accounts of Acklen's life suggest she had travelled abroad on other occasions, in particular at the time of her marriage to Joseph Acklen in 1849, but it is clear from a letter written to her mother from Newport, upon her return to the U.S. in the summer of 1866, that this trip was her first across the Atlantic. "I have had (more especially when young) an ardent desire to visit Europe, and see something of the world on the other side of the great Ocean," she wrote. "Now that wish is gratified and I hope too to the benefit of my children."¹³¹ Just a few of the letters Acklen wrote during the year she and the children spent away from the South survive, but those are rich in detail and description and not only provide a look at international travel in the nineteenth century, but Acklen's reactions to sights and sounds with which she was unfamiliar. "It is just four weeks today since we sailed from N York," she wrote her mother on July 28, 1865, from London's Langham Hotel, "I visited the *Tunnel* under the Thames yesterday & walked entirely through & back descending & ascending one hundred steps... It is considered one of the great curiosities here."¹³² Each letter contained news of the children and their activities, governesses engaged, schools attended, and the like. Considering the young ages of her children¹³³ makes Adelia's undertaking even more remarkable—even with the aid of servants—and lends understanding to her need, though she never discussed it, to put distance between herself and the U.S. South, at least for a time.

In September of 1865, the *New York Herald* reported, "American visitors who registered in Paris for the week ending August 10" included "Mrs. A. Acklen and family, Miss Acklen, Nashville."¹³⁴ It appears the family's stay in Paris was a lengthy one, lasting the entire fall and through the New Year, and necessitated enrolling Joseph in school and engaging tutors for the younger children. "Their delight," Acklen wrote her mother, "is to go to the 'Champs Elysees' where they meet so many little children.... It is a pleasure to take a promenade on the streets here... This is the nicest city I suppose in the world."¹³⁵ Acklen often shunned large gatherings at home in the United States—unless she was the host—and in many letters written from New Orleans over the years she recounts the operas and balls she opted not to attend, for one reason or another. In the France of Napoleon III, however, such invitations were not declined, and, as the newspapers reported in the winter of 1866: "At Napoleon's last court ball twenty-four American ladies and gentlemen were presented," among them, "Mrs. Acklen and daughter, of Tennessee."¹³⁶

A recurring topic in Acklen's letters from Europe was the plentitude of flowers to be found in almost every European city: "I have been enjoying the sweet flowers here so much," she wrote from Rome in February of 1866, and was particularly taken by the gift, "by a *Roman*" of "the most exquisite Camelias and a variety of other flowers that would fill a half bushel." Rome itself did not impress Acklen as had Paris, she found

it "not at all a handsome City and a very *dirty* one too," but she was taken by the culture and history, and wrote her mother, "I have been more interested here than at any place I have been except Paris... here it is of a different Character—The old Ruins the Palaces, Temples, Arches... are historical." More than seven months had passed since Acklen and her little entourage departed the United States, and it seems, at last, she missed home: "I have heard so much of the bright skies of Italy and gorgeous sun sets—I do not find them more bright than our own nor have I seen a sun-set to equal many I have witnessed at Belle Monte. I may be partial, but I think our own America the most beautiful Country after all—True we have no such city as *Paris* but I look in vain for the magnificent forests of America and beauty of natural scenery."¹³⁷

One of the most charming pictures from this family adventure occurred during a brief stopover at Nice, France, as the Acklens made their way back toward London. "I was delighted to find myself in so mild & spring like an atmosphere with fruit trees all in full bloom and every thing so green around," Adelia wrote. The children "were delighted standing on the beaches watching the surf and the breakers as they came crashing in to their feet forcing them to run from them," she continued, "and in picking up pebbles—Willie had his overcoat pockets filled with them."¹³⁸

By early July, they were back in New York, spending time with extended family and projecting a return to Tennessee

by late August; "I have promised Buddy he should go home and his session commences the 10th of Sept,"¹³⁹ Acklen wrote Corinne Lawrence on July 2 from the 5th Avenue Hotel. In the meantime, the family enjoyed some summer fun and relaxation at the shore in Newport, Rhode Island. "I think the sun-bathing and sea air has had a beneficial effect upon us all," Acklen wrote her mother, "the Children enjoy the bathing very much it is so entirely new to them." Newport's social goings-on during the summer season differed significantly from those she had recently experienced in Europe; "the company is still small—the Ladies dress very little, and it is very *quiet* which is much more to my taste for I do not at any time fancy crowds especially *fashionable* ones—I find the older I grow the more I shrink from fashionable society, and it becomes a bore to me."¹⁴⁰

"Sis Ade has returned home—all well,"¹⁴¹ Oliver B. Hayes, Jr., wrote Sallie Acklen in September of 1866, upon Adelia Acklen's return to Nashville. Sallie did not accompany the Acklens on their European tour as during the war she fell in love with, and subsequently married, Southard Hoffman, a Union soldier, and moved with him to New York.¹⁴² According to William Ackland, his mother resumed her position on Nashville's social ladder without delay, and in December of 1866 hosted a grand reception for visiting Alabama socialite, preservationist, and women's rights advocate, Octavia LeVert.¹⁴³ "Perhaps the profuse but refined hospitality for which the