It seems relevant when referring to Pasteur and Great Britain to remind one of the time when, over 30 years ago, Britain was fighting single-handedly, struggling while France was anxiously awaiting the time of liberation. When D-Day came at last, a child of seven was present at the jubilee celebrations at the Sorbonne. When he observed Lord Lister embracing his grandfather in public, he asked: "Do all grandfathers have a Jubilee?"

In 1944, that child had become a professor of medicine and was soon to become a member of the Académie Française; Pasteur Valéry-Radot was his name, or P.V.R. as students called him. He could think of nothing better, as a token of his admiration for Britain, than to send his friend, Sir Henry Dale, a few lines written by his grandfather in 1856.

This was Pasteur’s thanks for the Rumford Medal, awarded him by the Royal Society for his work on crystallography, work about which he had asked for support from Professor Miller, the mineralogist, a Fellow of that Society. It was his first contact with British scientists. When he was later able to show that fermentation is due to living bodies and to explain its mode of action, he was also awarded the Copley Medal by the Royal Society. Thus, until his death, we see that scientists from Britain acknowledged and encouraged each step of Pasteur's scientific career, whereas for many years to come in France, he had to fight for his ideas. This no doubt accounts for his admiration for Britain, which prevailed throughout his life.

From the start, by practical realization. Pasteur’s research has been beneficial to industry: wine, vinegar, and beer are part of his studies. Later he tackled the diseases of the silkworm, and it can be said that, from 1877 onward, he was led from veterinary pathology to human pathology. As Roux points out, Pasteur’s study on the silkworm can be considered a real landmark in his career. It was
Jean-Baptiste Dumas, then Minister for Agriculture, who incited him to tackle it.

Although Pasteur was neither a medical doctor nor a surgeon, no one has done more for medicine, surgery, and hygiene than he. Indeed, in 1874, Sir Joseph Lister wrote to him from London saying: "Allow me to thank you most heartily for you have by your brilliant researches proved the validity of the theory of putrefaction by germs. Thus you have given me the only principles which could bring the antiseptic method to completion." Pasteur inserted this letter at the beginning of his study on beer.

Four years later, in 1878, in his paper read at the Académie des Sciences at a time when French physicians, Professor Michel Peter, for one, were still much opposed to him, he declared: "I wish to repeat here the words of an eminent member of the medical and surgical section of that academy, who said that the theory of germs will give rise to a new surgery which is already applied by the well known English surgeon, Dr. Lister (sic), who is one of the first to have realized its use. . . ."

It is interesting that Pasteur never used the word "microbe," which was invented by Sédillot in 1876 and which he discussed at length with Littré. Yet thanks to him the word soon became widely used.

In 1871 Pasteur first went to Britain. He visited the Whitbread Breweries and astonished the brewers by recognizing the quality of beer by mere microscopic examination. On his advice, a bifocal microscope was bought, which was the start of laboratories in breweries. This microscope has been carefully preserved and is shown as an historical entity in the famous Chiswell Street City of London brewery, where, by the way, mighty horses are still seen pulling large noisy lorries, horses which Whitbread prides itself in lending for official and royal processions.

It seems fitting to quote a letter from Pasteur to Dr. Godelier on December 24, 1876. In it he refers to yet another letter, from Professor Tyndall, which this time he inserts at the end of his work on beer. Pasteur wrote: ". . . since back from my holidays my mind is filled with the name of Dr. Bastian referred to by Prof. Tyndall in his letter which I have reproduced. This Bastian is an M.D. and works at the London Hospitals. As a professor of anatomy he is in favor of spontaneous generation and of the spontaneity of all diseases." He adds that "those in England who have studied typhoid fever are categorically against the spontaneity of this terrible illness." How dreadful it must have been for Pasteur to have watched, powerless, in 1859, one of his daughters die from this "terrible" illness, as he called it.

In 1881, Pasteur went to London again for the International Congress of Medicine held at St. James Hall. His fame was such that, when he entered timidly at the arm of his own son, the room was filled with applause and resounding cheers; yet he humbly leaned toward Jean-Baptiste and said: "It must be the Prince of Wales making his entry." "But it is you they are welcoming," retorted the President of the Congress, Sir James Paget.

When the time came for Bastian to read his paper, Pasteur, who was sitting beside Lister, asked what it was all about. "He still believes in spontaneous generation" was the answer, whereupon Pasteur asked if he might reply. So convincing were his words that they were immediately translated and with true British efficiency distributed to all members of Parliament.

In 1884, once more in Britain—but this time only passing through London—on their way to Edinburgh, Pasteur and Ferdinand de Lesseps—of the Suez Canal—were representing France at the 300th anniversary of that university. This was to be the last of Pasteur's visits to the British Isles.

There is a long letter from Pasteur to my father written from London. It shows once more how considerate he was of those around him and particularly of those working for him. I already tried to stress this in a previous article in these columns. This letter starts with these words: "... why have you caught such a bad sore throat? Take care of yourself and remain at home until you are well again ..." He goes on to tell of the tremendous receptions and festivities and ends by: "... however tiring, for the sake of France, one had to come."

His speech to the students at the old Scottish University was a tremendous success, perhaps because it came after several rather dull ones, or was it because it was in French, a language that is traditionally liked in Scotland? "We have in France," he said, "a proverb which tells that variety always pleases people. I for a hundred reasons will speak in French. After a victory Henry the IVth of France, of course, was traveling throughout the conquered country when outside a town the governor approached him saying: 'Sire, we have not fired a salute of guns at your approach for a hundred reasons, firstly, we have no guns.' Henry angrily interrupted: 'I will excuse you from relating the other ninety-nine.' " Pasteur ended by saying, "Gentlemen, please forgive me. I do
not speak English.” Then, most seriously, as he did in his famous “Discourse a l’Académie Francaise,” he went on to refer to the most beautiful word of our language, an inheritance from Greek, “‘enthusiasm,’ without which nothing great can ever be achieved.”