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in Old France, by J. A. Hammerton**

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In the Track of
R. L. STEVENSON
and
Elsewhere in Old France

BY
J. A. HAMMERTON
AUTHOR OF "STEVENSONIANA"

WITH 92 ILLUSTRATIONS



BRISTOL
J. W. ARROWSMITH, 11 QUAY STREET
LONDON
SIMPKIN, MARSHALL, HAMILTON, KENT & COMPANY LIMITED

**IN THE TRACK OF R. L. STEVENSON
AND
ELSEWHERE IN OLD FRANCE**



FRONTISPIECE

THE SCHELDT AT ANTWERP

"We made a great stir in Antwerp Docks. In a stroke or two
the canoes were away out in the middle of the Scheldt."—
R. L. S.

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First published in 1907

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Note

The travel-sketches that go to the making of this little book have appeared, in part only, in certain literary magazines, here and in America; but the greater part of the work is now printed for the first time.

Perhaps the author should anticipate a criticism that might arise from the sequence of the first two papers. Had he gone to work on a set plan, he would naturally have undertaken his pilgrimage along the route of *An Inland Voyage* before visiting the scenes of *Travels with a Donkey*, as the one book preceded the other in order of publication, *An Inland Voyage*, which appeared originally in 1878, being properly Stevenson's first book. *Travels with a Donkey* was published in 1879. But he has preferred to give precedence to "Through the Cevennes," as it was the first of his Stevenson travel-sketches to be written. Moreover, these little journeys were as much, indeed more affairs of personal pleasure than of copy-hunting, and when the author went forth on them he had no intention of making a book about his experiences—at least, not one deriving its chief interest from association with the memory of R. L. S. He has been counselled, however, to bring together these chapters and their accompanying photographs in this form, on the plea that the interest in Stevenson's French travels is still so considerable that any straightforward account of later journeys over the same ground cannot fail to have some attraction for the admirers of that great master of English prose.

The book is but a very little sheaf from the occasional writings of its author on his wayfarings in old France, where in the last ten years he has travelled many thousands of miles by road and rail between Maubeuge and Marseilles, from Belfort to Bordeaux, and always with undiminished interest among a people who are eminently lovable and amid scenes of infinite variety and charm.



"In a little place called Le Monastier, in a pleasant Highland valley about fifteen miles from Le Puy, I spent a month of fine days."—R. L. S.



The Public Well

LE MONASTIER

1

Through the Cevennes

I.

Someone has accounted for the charm of story-telling by the suggestion that the natural man imagines himself the hero of the tale he is reading, and squares this action or that with what he would suspect himself of doing in similar circumstances. The romancer who can best beguile his reader into this conceit of mind is likely to be the most popular. It seems to me that with books of travel this mental make-believe must also take place if the reader is to derive the full measure of entertainment from the narrative. With myself, at all events, it is so, and Hazlitt may be authority of sufficient weight to justify the thought that my own experience is not likely to be singular. To me the chief charm in reading a book of travel is this fanciful assumption of the rôle of the traveller; and so far does it condition my reading, that my readiest appetite is for a story of

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wayfaring in some quarter of the world where I may hope, not unreasonably, to look upon the scenes that have first engaged my mind's eye. Thus the adventures of a Mr. Savage Landor in Thibet, or a Sir Henry Stanley in innermost Africa, have less attraction for me than the narrative of a journey such as Elihu Burritt undertook in his famous walk from London to John o' Groats, or R. L. Stevenson's *Travels with a Donkey in the Cevennes*. I will grant you that the delicious literary style of Stevenson's book is its potent charm, but I am persuaded that others than myself have had their pleasure in the reading of it sensibly increased by the thought that some day they might witness Nature's originals of the landscapes which the master painter has depicted so deftly. It had long been a dream of mine to track his path through that romantic region of old France; not in the impudently emulative spirit of the throaty tenor who, hearing Mr. Edward Lloyd sing a new song, hastens to the music-seller's, resolved to practise it for his next "musical evening;" not, forsooth, to do again badly what had once been done well; but to travel the ground in the true pilgrim spirit of love for him who

"Here passed one day, nor came again—
A prince among the tribes of men."

Well did I know that many of the places with which I was familiar romantically through Stevenson's witchery of words were drab and dull enough in reality: enough for me that here in his pilgrim way that "blithe and rare spirit" had rested for a little while.

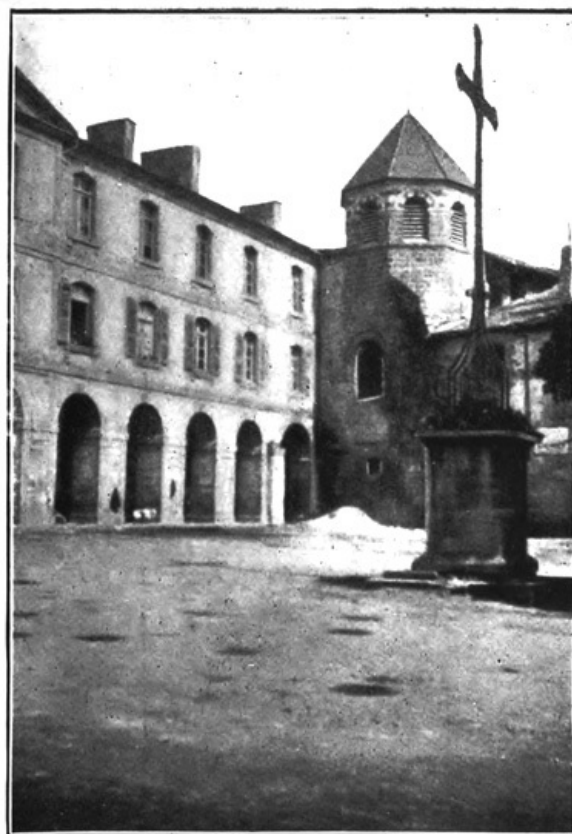
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II.

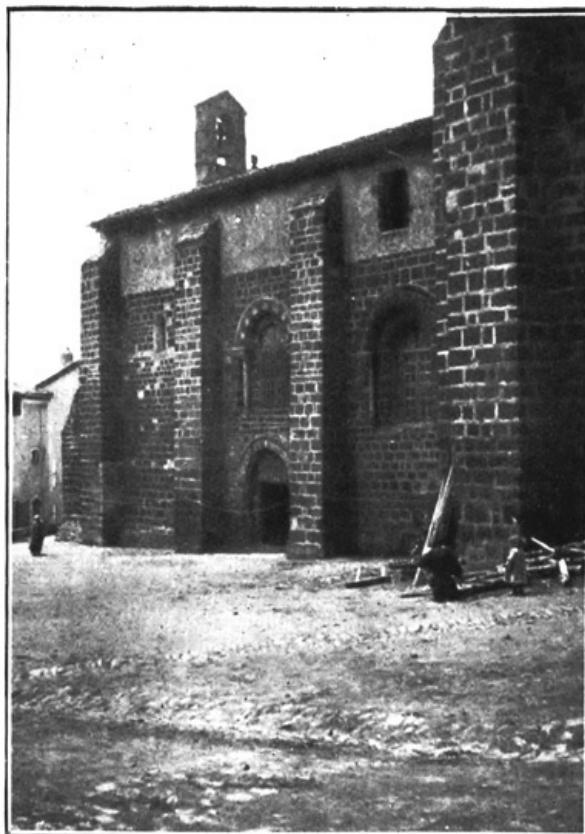
The mountainous district of France to which, somewhat loosely, Stevenson applies the name Cevennes, lies along the western confines of Provence, and overlaps on several departments, chief of which are Ardèche, Lozère, Gard, and Herault. In many parts the villages and the people have far less in common with France and the French than Normandy and the Normans have with provincial England. Here in these mountain fastnesses and sheltered valleys the course of life has flowed along almost changeless for centuries, and here, too, we shall find much that is best in the romantic history and natural grandeur of France. Remote from Paris, and happily without the area of the "cheap trip" organisers, it is likely to remain for ever "off the beaten track."

In order to visit the Cevennes proper, the beautiful town of Mende would be the best starting-place. But since my purpose was to strike the trail of R. L. S., after some wanderings awheel northward of Clermont Ferrand, I approached the district from Le Puy, a town which so excellent a judge as Mr. Joseph Pennell has voted the most picturesque in Europe. Besides, Stevenson himself had often wandered through its quaint, unusual streets, while preparing for his memorable journey with immortal Modestine. "I decided on a sleeping sack," he says; "and after repeated visits to Le Puy, and a deal of high living for myself and my advisers, a sleeping sack was designed, constructed, and triumphantly brought home." At that time the wanderer's "home" was in the mountain town of Le Monastier, some fifteen miles south-east of Le Puy, and there in the autumn of 1877 he spent "about a month of fine days," variously occupied in completing his *New Arabian Nights* and *Picturesque Notes on Edinburgh*, and conducting, with no little personal and general entertainment, the preliminaries of his projected journey through the Cevennes.

4



"Our first interview (with Father Adam) was in the Monastier market place."—R. L. S.



"The bell of Monastier was just striking nine, as I descended the hill through the common."—R. L. S.

LE MONASTIER

III.

Together with a friend I had spent some rainy but memorable days at Le Puy in the summer of 1903, waiting for fair weather to advance on this little highland town, which lies secure away from railways and can only be reached by road. A bright morning in June saw us gliding on our wheels along the excellent *route nationale* that carries us thither on a long, easy gradient. The town seen at a distance is a mere huddle of grey houses stuck on the side of a bleak, treeless upland, and at close quarters it presents few allurements to the traveller. But it is typical of the mountain villages of France, and rich in the rugged, unspoilt character of its inhabitants. Stevenson tells us that it is "notable for the making of lace, for drunkenness, for freedom of language, and for unparalleled political dissension." As regards the last of these features, the claim to distinction may readily be admitted, but for the rest they apply equally to scores of similar villages of the Cevennes. Certainly it is not notable for the variety or comfort of its hostelries, but I shall not regret our brief sojourn at the Hôtel de Chabrier.

5

Mine host was a worthy who will always have a corner in my memory. Like his establishment, his person was much the worse for wear. Lame of a leg, his feet shod with the tattered fragments of slippers such as the Scots describe with their untranslatable "bauchle," a pair of unclean heels peeping out through his stockings, he was the living advertisement of his frowsy inn, the ground floor of which, still bearing the legend *Café*, had been turned into a stable for oxen and lay open to the highway, a doubtful shelter for our bicycles. But withal, turning a shut eye to the kitchen as we passed, the cooking was excellent, and M. Chabrier assured us that he was renowned for game patties, which he sent to "all parts of Europe." The frank satisfaction with himself and his hotel he betrayed at every turn would have rejoiced the heart of so shrewd a student of character as R. L. S., and the chances are considerable that in that month of fine days, six-and-twenty years before, Stevenson may have gossiped with my friend of the greasy cap, for M. Chabrier was then, as now, making his guests welcome and baking his inimitable patties.

6

Did he know Stevenson? "*Oui, oui, oui, M'sieu!*" Stevenson was a writer of books who had spent some time there years ago. "*Oui, oui, parfaitement, M'sieu Stevenzong.*" What a memory the man had, and how blithely he recalled the distant past!

"Then, of course, you must have known the noted village character Father Adam, who sold his donkey to this Scottish traveller?"

"*Père Adam—oui, oui, oui—ah, non, non, je ne le connais pas,*" thus shuffling when I asked for some further details.

7

Mine host, who read the duty of an innkeeper to be the humouring of his patrons, could clearly supply me with the most surprising details of him whose footsteps I was tracing; but wishful not to lead him into temptation, I tested his evidence early in our talk by asking how many years had passed since he of whom we spoke had rested at Le Monastier, and whether he had patronised the Hôtel de Chabrier. He sagely scratched his head and racked his memory for a moment, with the result that this Scotsman—oh, he was sure he was a Scotsman—had stayed in that very hotel, and occupied bedroom number three, just four years back!

Obviously he was mistaken—not to put too fine a point upon it—and his cheerful avowal, in discussing another subject, that he was "a partisan of no religion," did not increase my faith in him. There were few Protestants in Le Monastier, he told me; but as I happened to know from my good friend the pasteur at Le Puy that the postmaster here, at least, stood by the reformed faith, and by that token might be supposed a man of some reading, I hoped there to find some knowledge of Stevenson, whose works and travels were familiar to the pasteur. Alas, "*J' n' sais pas*" was the burden of the postmaster's song.

To wander about the evil-smelling by-ways of Le Monastier, and observe the ancient crones busy at almost every door with their lace-making pillows, the bent and grizzled wood-choppers at work in open spaces, is to understand that, despite the lapse of more than a quarter of a century, there must be still alive hundreds of the village folk among whom Stevenson moved. But to find any who could recall him were the most hopeless of tasks; to identify the *auberge*, in the billiard-room of which "at the witching hour of dawn" he concluded the purchase of the donkey and administered brandy to its disconsolate seller, were equally impossible, and it was only left to the pilgrims to visit the market-place where Father Adam and his donkey were first encountered. So with the stink of the church, whose interior seemed to enclose the common sewer of the town, still lingering in our nostrils, we resumed our journey southward across the little river Gazeille, and headed uphill in the direction of St. Martin de Frugères, noting as we mounted on the other side of the valley the straggling lane down which Modestine, loaded with that wonderful sleeping sack and the paraphernalia of the most original of travellers, "tripped along upon her four small hoofs with a sober daintiness of gait" to the ford across the river, giving as yet no hint of the troubles she had in store for "the green donkey driver."

8

9



CHÂTEAU NEUF, NEAR LE MONASTIER

A drawing of this castle by Stevenson has been published.



GOUDET

"I came down the hill to where Goudet stands in a green end of a valley."—R. L. S.

IV.

Along our road were several picturesque patches formed of rock and pine, and notably the romantic ruins of Château Neuf, with the little village clustered at their roots, which furnished subjects for Stevenson's block and pencil. Among his efforts as a limner there has also been published a sketch of his that gives with striking effect the far-reaching panorama of the volcanic mountain masses ranging westward from Le Monastier, a scene of wild and austere aspect. A little beyond Château Neuf we were wheeling on the same road where he urged with sinking heart the unwilling ass, and while still within sight of his starting-place, showing now like a scar on the far hillside, we passed by the filthy village of St. Victor, the neighbourhood where the greenness of the donkey driver was diminished by the advice of a peasant, who advocated thrashing and the use of the magic word "Proot."

The road grew wilder as we advanced towards St. Martin de Frugères, to which village the sentimental traveller came upon a Sabbath, and wrote of the "home feeling" the scene at the church brought over him—a sentiment difficult to appreciate as we wandered the filth-sodden streets and inspected the ugly little church, whitewashed within and stuffed with cheap symbols of a religion that is anathema to descendants of the Covenanters. The silvery Loire far below in the valley to our right, we sat at our ease astride our wiry steeds and sped cheerfully down the winding road to Goudet, feeling that if our mode of progress was less romantic than Stevenson's, it had compensations, for there was nothing that tempted us to tarry on our way.

10

"Goudet stands in a green end of a valley, with Château Beaufort opposite upon a rocky steep, and the stream, as clear as crystal, lying in a deep pool between them." The scene was indeed one of singular beauty, the fertile fields and shaggy woods being in pleasant contrast to the barren country through which we had been moving. While still a mile away from the place, we foregathered with two peasants trudging uphill to St. Martin. I was glad to talk with them, as I desired to know which of the inns was the oldest. There were three, I was told, and the Café Rivet boasted the greatest age, the others being of recent birth, and none were good, my informant added, supposing that we intended to lodge for the night.

To the inn of M. Rivet we repaired, this being the only *auberge* that Goudet possessed at the time of Stevenson's visit. We found it one of the usual small plastered buildings, destitute of any quaintness, but cleaner than most, and sporting a large wooden tobacco pipe, crudely fashioned, by way of a sign. The old people who kept it were good Cevennot types, the woman wearing the curious headgear of the peasant folk, that resembles the tiny burlesque hats worn by musical clowns, and the man in every trait of dress and feature capable of passing for a country Scot. The couple were engagingly ignorant, and had never heard of Scotland, so it was no surprise to learn that they knew nothing of the famous son of that country who had once "hurried over his midday meal" in the dining-room where we were endeavouring to instruct Madame Rivet in the occult art of brewing tea. The Rivets had been four years in possession of the inn at the time of Stevenson's visit, and I should judge that the place had changed in no essential feature, though I missed the portrait of the host's nephew, Regis Senac, "Professor of Fencing and Champion of the Two Americas," that had entertained R. L. S. In return for our hints on tea-making, Madame Rivet charged us somewhat in excess of the usual tariff, and showed herself a veritable *grippe-sous* before giving change, by carefully reckoning the pieces of fly-blown sugar we had used, a little circumstance the cynic may claim as indicating a knowledge of the spirit if not the letter of

11

12

Scotland.

V.

It was late in the afternoon when we continued our journey from Goudet, intent on reaching that evening the lake of Bouchet, which Stevenson had selected as the camping-place for the first night of his travels. The highway to Ussel is one of the most beautiful on the whole route, lying through a wide and deep glen, similar to many that exist in the Scottish Highlands, but again unlike all the latter in its numerous terraces, that bear eloquent witness to the industry of the country-folk. Every glen in this region of France is remarkable for this handiwork of the toilers, and the time was, before the advent of the sporting nawbobs, when in some parts of the Scottish Highlands similar rude stonework was common in the glens.



CHÂTEAU BEAUFORT AT GOUDET



SPIRE OF OUR LADY OF PRADELLES

To those who have not seen this work of the poor hill-folk it is not easy to convey a proper idea of its effect on the landscape. In these bleak mountain regions the sheltered valleys and ravines are best suited for growing the produce of the field, but as the soil is scant and the ground too often takes the shape of a very attenuated V, it is impossible to cultivate the slopes of the valley in their natural condition; so, with infinite labour and the patience of their stolid oxen, the Cevennols begin by building near the banks of the stream a loose stone wall, and filling in the space between that and the upward slope with a level bedding of earth. Thus step by step the hillside is brought into cultivation, and the terraces will be found wherever it is possible to rear a wall and carry up soil; indeed, they are to be seen in many places where it would have been thought impossible to prepare them, and out of reason to grow crops upon them. Often they are not so large as an ordinary bedroom in area, and such a space one may see under wheat. A hillside so terraced looks like a flight of giant steps, and it is a unique spectacle to children of the plains to descry, perhaps on the twentieth story, so to say, a team of oxen ploughing one of these eerie fields. 13

Along this road, where on our right the terraces climbed upward to the naked basalt, and on the other side of the valley, now flooded with a pale yellow sunset that picked out vividly children at play tending a scanty herd of cattle on the hillside, our donkey driver of old had some of his bitterest experiences with that thrawn jade Modestine. We, fortunate in our more docile mounts, made excellent progress to Ussel, after walking a good two miles on foot. The road beyond that town was lively with bullock wagons, heavily freighted with timber, and carts, mostly drawn by oxen, filled with women returning from the market at Costaros, a little town on the highway between Le Puy and Pradelles; bullocks and people—the former to our embarrassment—being greatly interested in the wheel-travellers of these seldom cycled roads. 14

When we arrived at Costaros, a town that is drab and dismal beyond words, the evening was wearing out under a leaden sky, promising the stragglers from the market good use for their bulky umbrellas, and we had still eight kilometres of rough country roads between us and the lake. Stevenson, in his heart-breaking struggles with the wayward ass, must have crossed the highway in the dark some little distance south of Costaros to have arrived at the village of Bouchet St. Nicolas, two miles beyond the lake; and as we urged forward in the rain, which now fell pitilessly and turned the darkling mountains into phantom masses smoking with mist, we could appreciate to the full the satisfaction with which he abandoned his quest of the lake and spent his first night snug at the inn of Bouchet. As we wheeled through the mud into the large village of Cayres no straggler appeared in the streets, that steamed like the back of a perspiring horse; but a carpenter at work in a windy shed assured us that the chalet on the shore of the lake had opened for the season, and in our dripping state we pressed thither uphill, feeling that two miles more in the rain could not worsen our condition. It was a weird and moving experience—the ghostly woods on the hillside, the tuneless tinkle of bells on unseen sheep, the hissing noise of our wheels on the moist earth—and our delight was great when we heard the lapse of water on our left. For nearly a mile the latter part of the road lay through a pine forest, where the ground had scarcely suffered from the rain, but the way was dark as in a tunnel, and glimpses of the lake between the trees showed the water almost vivid as steel by contrast. 15

"I had been told," says R. L. S., "that the neighbourhood of the lake was uninhabited except by trout." He travelled in the days before the *Syndicat d'Initiative du Velay*, which I shall ever bless for its chalet by the Lac du Bouchet, whose lighted windows two weary pilgrims desecrated that night with joy unspeakable. Our arrival was the cause of no small commotion to the good folk who kept this two-storied wooden hostel. We were their first visitors of the season, and it was clear they hailed us with delight, despite the lateness of our arrival. Candles were soon alight in the dining-room upstairs, a fire of pine logs crackling in the open hearth, the housemaid briskly laying the table, the mistress bustling in the kitchen, doors banging cheerily in the dark night as the master went and came between outhouses, fetching food and firing for which our coming had suddenly raised the need. Our bedrooms opened off the dining-room, and were well if plainly furnished, the floors being sanded, and we had soon made shift to change our sodden garments as well as the limited resources of wheelmen's baggage would allow. Above all was the ceaseless noise of the lake, that seemed to lend a keener edge to the chilly air.

16



THE INN AT GOUDET

Where Stevenson was entertained by the old man and woman who still conduct it

We could scarcely believe it was the middle of June in the sunny south of France as we sat there shivering before the spluttering logs in a room "suitable for bandits or noblemen in disguise." But a deep sense of comfort was supplied by the savoury smells that issued from the lower regions of the house. Our blessings on the head of the landlady and the whole French nation of cooks were sincere, as we regaled ourselves with an excellent meal of perch, omelet, mutton chops, raisins, almonds, cheese, lemonade and coffee. Imagine yourself arriving after nine o'clock at night at a lonely inn anywhere in the British Isles and faring thus! Moreover, the tenants of the chalet—the two women especially—were the most welcome of gossips, and the elder had a gift of dry humour that must have served her well in so wet a season. For three weeks it had rained steadily, she said, and she feared it was nothing short of the end of the world. When we told her that we had come from Le Monastier by way of St. Martin and GouDET, she was highly amused, and the younger, a rosy-faced wench, laughed heartily at the thought of anybody visiting such places. The lake of Bouchet—ah, that was another matter! Lakes were few in France, and this one well worth seeing. There were many lakes in Scotland! This was news to them, and they wondered why we had come so far to see this of Bouchet,—as we did ourselves when next morning we surveyed a tiny sheet of water almost circular, no more than two miles in circumference and quite featureless. It is simply the crater of an ancient volcano, and receives its water from some underground springs, there being no obvious source of supply. The lake, at an altitude of 4,000 feet, is higher than the surrounding country.

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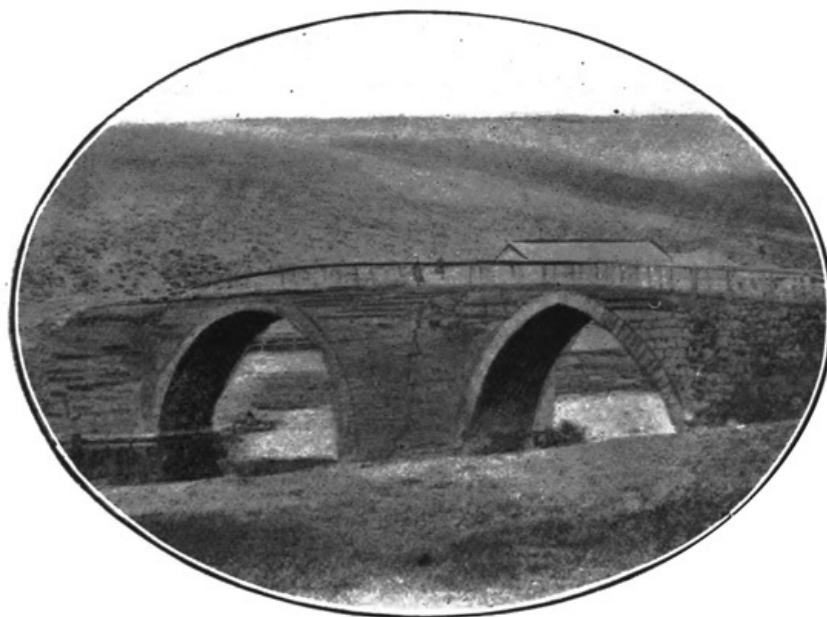
When we awoke in the morning and made ready for our departure the room was filled with the smoke of burning faggots, as though a censer had been swung in it by some early-rising acolyte; and the fire was again a welcome evidence of the landlady's thoughtfulness, for the outlook was grey and the early morning air bit shrewdly as the tooth of winter. Had the day promised better, we should have struck south from the lake to Bouchet St. Nicolas, at whose inn Stevenson uncorked a bottle of Beaujolais, inviting his host to join him in drinking it; and the innkeeper would take little, saying, "I am an amateur of such wine, do you see?—and I am capable of leaving you not enough." But the way thither is no better than a bullock-track, and several miles of similar road lie between Bouchet and the highway; so with a lowering sky ominous of more rain, and the knowledge that for three weeks the country had been soaking, we determined not to risk the bullock-track, and retraced our path to Costaros, passing on the way numerous ox wagons laden with timber.

The whole countryside was sweet with the morning incense of the faggot fires burning on many a cottage hearth. We overtook several young people driving cattle out to the pasture lands, and noting that without exception they carried umbrellas, our hopes of a good day were not high. But by the time we had reached the Gendarmerie, that stands at the crest of the hill on the high road out of Costaros, and were chatting with one of the officers whom we found idling at the door, the wind was rising and heaped masses of sombre clouds were being driven before it across the sky, though in their passage they disclosed no cheering hints of the blue behind. The gendarme admitted that the rising wind might be a good sign, but he was not very hopeful, and seemed to be more interested in meeting two travellers from a country he had never heard of than in discussing the weather. There are parts of France, especially Normandy and Brittany, where, to confess oneself a Scotsman is to be assured of a heartier welcome than would be accorded to one who came from England; but Stevenson's boast that "the happiest lot on earth is to be born a Scotsman" counts for little in these highlands of the south, where few of the village-folk have ever heard of Scotland. 19

The road south of Costaros even on a bright summer day must appear bleak and cheerless, and that morning our chief desire was to move along it as quickly as we could. Yet, as we advanced, the scene was not without elements of beauty, and the mists that veiled the distant mountains gradually lifting, produced a transformation entirely pleasing, while ere long there were great and welcome rifts in the grey above, and patches of blue sky heartened us on our way. By the time we had reached the hamlet of La Sauvetat the sun was peeping out fitfully, and on our right it suddenly flooded with amber light a meadow, yellow with marigolds, where cows were pasturing, attended by a small girl who was playing at skipping-rope. 20

VIII.

We had again joined the track of R. L. S., where, now armed with a goad, he drove his donkey. "The perverse little devil, since she would not be taken with kindness, must even go with pricking." We had but to sit in our saddles, and wheel rapidly down the long and exhilarating descent to Pradelles, a very tumbledown village with a great shabby square lying at an angle of almost forty-five degrees. The town occupies a little corrie on the hillside, and the ground slopes quickly on the west to the river Allier, beyond which the country rises again in mighty undulations as far as the eye can reach. For all its slanterness—perhaps, in some degree, because of that—Pradelles is a place of interest, perched here at an altitude of 3,800 feet above sea-level. 21



OLD BRIDGE AT LANGOGNE

"Just at the bridge at Langogne a lassie of some seven or eight addressed me in the sacramental phrase, '*D'où 'st-ce-que vous venez?*'"—R. L. S.



THE LOIRE NEAR GOUDET

"An amiable stripling of a river, which it seems absurd to call the Loire."—R. L. S.

More than any other place we saw in our journey, this old mountain town wears an unmistakable "foreign" appearance, and one walks its streets with the feeling that one is moving cautiously along the sloping roof of a house. Among its tumbledown buildings it still possesses fragments of considerable historic value, such as its ancient hospice, and a gateway from the top of which a village heroine killed some Huguenot heroes by throwing a stone at them while they were leading an assault against its walls. In the church of *Nôtre Dame* this episode in the history of the town is commemorated by a mural painting in vivid colours, the stone which the devout Catholic maiden is hurling at the devoted heads of the besiegers being large enough to warrant the assistance of a steam crane. The interior of the church is very quaint and unusual, and I am sorry that Stevenson did not yield to the urging of the landlady of the inn to visit *Our Lady of Pradelles*, "who performed many miracles, although she was of wood," for his impressions of the church could not have failed to be peculiarly piquant. The miraculous image of the virgin is a wooden doll, dressed in lace and set on the high altar. Pilgrims come in large numbers to its shrine every fifteenth of August; and one of the spirited paintings on the wall depicts the rescue of the idol from a burning of the church which, I should guess, took place about the time of the Revolution. Evidently the rescuers of *Our Lady* were not prepared to submit her to the crucial test a sister image at *Le Puy* survived—"burning for thirty-six hours without being consumed." Many and unfamiliar saints look down at us from the walls, and at the west end there is a loft such as might be seen in some of the very old Scottish churches, occupied at the time of our visit by a group of women, members no doubt of some pious confraternity.

22

R. L. S. has some picturesque notes on "The Beast of *Gévaudan*," whose trail he first struck at *Pradelles*; for we were now in the wild and uncultivated country of *Gévaudan*, "but recently disforested from terror of the wolves," whose grizzly exploits in the way of eating women and children seem to have engaged the imagination of our traveller. If the wolves have gone, they have left in their stead a flourishing progeny of wolf-like curs, who infest the highways and byways in extraordinary numbers, to the embarrassment of the wheelman.

23

IX.

From *Pradelles* to *Langogne* is a long and deep descent, and while walking our machines down an unrideable path, a young woman on a terrace near the road came forward to greet us, tripping unexpectedly over the tether of a goat, and landing softly and naturally on the ground, where after her moment's surprise she smilingly asked, "*Où allez vous promener?*" more usually our bucolic greeting than "*D'où 'st-ce-que vous venez?*" the latter "sacramental phrase," on which Stevenson remarks, being possibly suggested in his case by the odd appearance of the traveller and his beast of burden.

The bridge across the *Allier* at *Langogne*, where Stevenson met the "lassie of some seven or eight" who demanded whence he came, is now a crazy ruin, and a serviceable modern structure spans the river some little distance to the west of it. Near this place he camped for the night. He

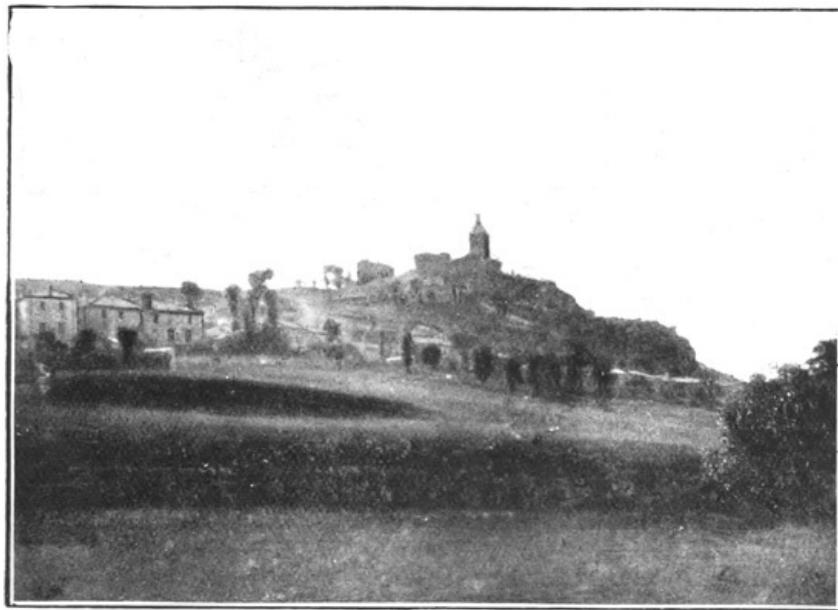
furnishes no information about his stay at Langogne, where, I should judge, he slept at one of the inns. The town must have altered greatly since he rested there, as it is now on the railway line to Villefort, and a considerable trade in coal seems to be carried on. It is also a popular summer resort, though one is at a loss to account for its attractions to holiday makers. Its church dates from the tenth century, and contains in a little chapel on the right, below the level of the nave, the image of Nôtre Dame de Tout-Pouvoir, which our landlady at the Cheval Blanc assured us was *très vénérée*, and the housemaid who conducted us thither took advantage of the occasion to tell her beads before the statue, keeping a roving eye on us as we wandered about the church.

24

X.

Stevenson's track now lay somewhat to the west of the course of the Allier, as he made for the little village of Cheylard l'Evêque, on the borders of the Forest of Mercoire, and in this stage of his journey he was more than usually faithful to his ideal of travel: "For my part, I travel not to go anywhere, but to go. I travel for travel's sake. The great affair is to move; to feel the needs and hitches of our life more nearly; to come down off this feather-bed of civilisation, and find the globe granite underfoot and strewn with cutting flints." There was no need for his quitting the highway, since his further objective lay due south through the pleasant valley of the Allier. But his diversion among the by-ways was rich in adventure, and furnished him with material for perhaps his best chapter, "A Camp in the Dark." He had the good fortune to lose his way after nightfall, and to be forced to camp in a wood of pines in happy ignorance of his whereabouts. When next morning he did reach Cheylard he was fain to confess that "it seemed little worthy of all this searching." With a less keen appetite for losing ourselves in a maze of muddy bullock-tracks, we pressed forward through the fresh green valley to Luc, and here rejoined the path of our adventurer once more. We had the road almost to ourselves, and among the few wayfarers I recall was a travelling knife-grinder, whom we passed near Luc engaged in the agreeable task of preparing his dinner, the first course of which, *potage au pain*, was simmering in a sooty pot over a fire of twigs. A nation of gourmets, verily, when the humblest among them can thus maintain the national art in the hedges.

25



VILLAGE AND CASTLE OF LUC

"Why anyone should desire to visit Luc is more than my much-inventing spirit can suppose."—R. L. S.



LA BASTIDE

"At a place called La Bastide I was directed to leave the river."—R. L. S.

"Why anyone should desire to visit either Luc or Cheylard is more than my much inventing spirit can suppose." Thus our vagabond. But journeying at a more genial season of the year, we found the neighbourhood of Luc not devoid of beauty. The valley of the Allier is here broken into wide and picturesque gorges, and in many ways the scenery is reminiscent of Glen Coe, where Alan Breck and David Balfour dodged the redcoats. But late in September it would bear a very different aspect, and Stevenson tells us that "a more unsightly prospect at this season of the year it would be hard to fancy. Shelving hills rose round it on all sides, here dabbled with wood and fields, there rising to peaks alternately naked and hairy with pines. The colour throughout was black or ashen, and came to a point in the ruins of the castle of Luc, which pricked up impudently from below my feet, carrying on a pinnacle a tall white statue of Our Lady." There is now a railway station at Luc, the line running near the road all the way to La Bastide and as we continued southward that sunny June day, it was only the shrill noise of the crickets and the unusual quilt work of the diligently husbanded hillsides that told us we were not looking on a Perthshire landscape. In a sweet corner of the valley lies La Bastide, a drowsy little town despite its long connection with the railway, which existed even at the time of Stevenson's visit.

26

Here, he tells us, "I was directed to leave the river, and follow a road that mounted on the left among the hills of Vivarais, the modern Ardèche; for I was now come within a little way of my strange destination, the Trappist monastery of Our Lady of the Snows." Thither we shall follow his steps, more closely than usual, as the road is too steep to admit of our cycling. For some distance the route lies through a great forest of pines, but when the crest of the hill is gained a far-reaching prospect greets the eye. "The sun came out as I left the shelter of a pine wood," writes R. L. S., "and I beheld suddenly a fine wild landscape to the south. High rocky hills, as blue as sapphire, closed the view, and between these lay ridge upon ridge, heathery, craggy, the sun glittering in veins of rock, the underwood clambering in the hollows, as rude as God made them at the first. There was not a sign of man's hand in all the prospect; and, indeed, not a trace of his passage, save where generation after generation had walked in twisted footpaths in and out among the beeches and up and down upon the channelled slopes." Only when the snow comes down and mantles these abundant hills would this description not apply. It is a perfect picture of what we saw. Presently we noted with no small satisfaction the white statue of the Virgin, which, standing by the highway at a point where a side road strikes northward through the pines, "directed the traveller to Our Lady of the Snows." He describes the pine wood as "a young plantation," but in the intervening years the trees have grown into a mighty forest, dark and mysterious, and the statue of Our Lady was so overshadowed by branches rich with cones, that it was impossible to get a satisfactory photograph of it. "Here, then," he continues, "I struck leftward, and pursued my way, driving my secular donkey before me, and creaking in my secular boots and gaiters, towards the asylum of silence." On our equally secular cycles we followed the same track, the roadway being dotted on each side with bundles of faggots gathered by the silent monks, probably for the use of the poor.

27

28

XI.

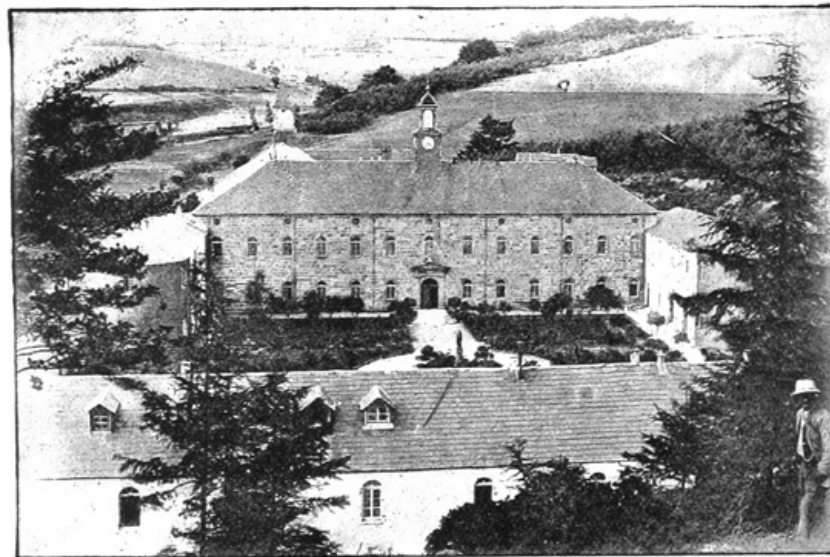
"I have rarely approached anything with more unaffected terror than the monastery of Our Lady of the Snows. This it is to have had a Protestant education," says Stevenson, as he recalls the feeling produced within him by the clanging of a bell at the monastery while he was not yet in sight of it. No bells clanged as we descended the road which Father Apollinaris was still in the

act of making when Stevenson encountered him. We emerged at length from the shelter of the trees into a wide hollow of land, from which on every side the hills rose up, and where on our right were the outer walls of the monastery, plain plastered buildings, with little barred windows on the ground floor and a row without bars on the second story. On our left was a large saw-mill, where steam saws were giving shrill advertisement of their use. Several monks were among the workers at the mill, and a brown-coated figure was walking along the road that opened on our left beyond the timber sheds to some large white buildings which, as we afterwards learned, comprised the farm belonging to the monastery. The first impression was not exactly to touch one's feeling for romance. Trappists in the timber trade suggests a heading for a "snippet" periodical, and if the monks were silent, here at least were noises that smote unpleasantly on the ear.



ROAD TO OUR LADY OF THE SNOWS

Made by Father Apollinaris "with his own two hands in the space of a year."



THE MONASTERY

**"Modestine was led away by a layman to the stables, and I and my pack were received into Our Lady of the Snows."—
R. L. S.**

The buildings of Our Lady of the Snows are quite devoid of any architectural beauty. They are set four-square in the hollow, and the hills trend gently upward on every side richly clad with trees, for the monks have reforested much of the surrounding land, which is the property of the fraternity. The south side is occupied by a long, two-storied building, which contains the main entrance—a plain, whitewashed, barn-like structure—and buildings of a similar type adjoin it east and west, while the north side of the quadrangle is filled by the more pretentious masonry of the church, the chapter-house, and other religious offices, though even here the essential note of the architecture is austerity, the clock-tower being devoid of decoration and purely utilitarian.

When endeavouring to photograph the buildings while the sun shone, an old man with a very red face, a very white beard and a very dirty white blouse came along, leaning feebly on his stick. He was delighted on being asked to become part of the picture, and begged me to wait a moment while he fixed on his left arm his *plaque*, whereon I read in brazen letters, "Gardien de la Propriété." This aged and infirm defender of the monastic estates was as proud of his *plaque* as if it had been a medal won in war. There must be few attacks upon the property of the monastery, which he informed me extended as far as we could see in this windswept hollow of the hills, if our friend of the snowy beard and ruddy face stood for its defence! We were cheered to learn from him that there would be no difficulty in visiting the monastery, and if we wished we might be able to pass the night there. This we desired most heartily for various reasons, but chiefly because it was now close on six in the evening, and days are short in these latitudes.

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XII.

We were told to go round to the chief gateway, and there to summon the Brother Porter by ringing the bell. This we did, with something of that "quaking heart" to which Stevenson confesses in the same act, for the clamour of a bell that one rings in a great silent building seems fraught with news of an offence for which one stands to receive the penalty. Nor do your spirits rise when a little shutter in the door is opened, and a grizzly-whiskered face in a brown hood peers through demanding your business. All was well, however. The Brother Porter admitted us to the courtyard, and went to summon one of the novitiates who, as Guest Father, would do us the honours of the monastery. He was, as I should judge, a young man of five-and-twenty, who came to us through a door on the right of the entrance that admitted to the hospice. Wearing the white flannel habit of the monks, with a black scapular hanging loose and bulky below the neck, he was of medium stature, his shaven face pleasant and comely, and his dark eyes of that unusual brilliance which Stevenson noted as "the only morbid sign" he could detect in the appearance of the monks. Our host bowed ceremoniously in shaking hands with us, and immediately escorted us across the trim garden to the monastic buildings at the other side of the quadrangle.

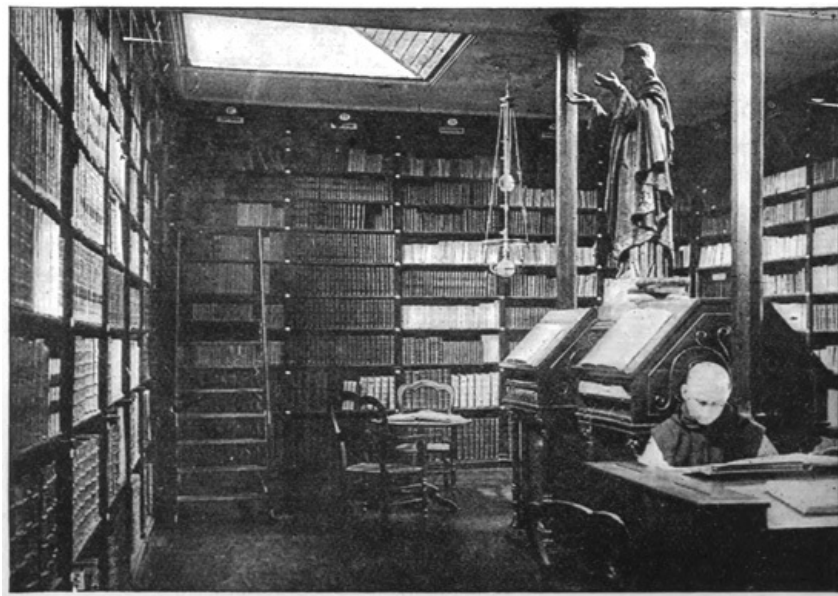
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During their period of novitiate, which lasts for three years, the monks have still the liberty to talk with strangers or with the lay brethren, but when their final vows are taken they are supposed to be inarticulate, except in performing the religious offices of each day. The Guest Father would in two years more be qualified for the silent life; meanwhile, he exercised his power of speech with so much grace that one felt truly sorry so excellent a talker should contemplate with cheerfulness the voluntary and useless atrophy of his divine gift. Very reverently he led us into the church, which is a plain but elegant building with a vaulted roof, the walls being whitewashed, and the woodwork, of which there is not too much, chastely carved. A number of good pictures are hung on the walls, and there is a series of statues of the saints on brackets, executed with some taste, and entirely free from the usual tawdry colouring of similar objects in French Catholic churches. The altar also is in welcome contrast to the common doll-show of the ordinary church, and although the oft-repeated references to the simplicity of the whole with which our excellent friend pointed out the various features of the place approached almost to affectation, one must bear ready witness to the apparent sincerity of these poor monks in their efforts towards a simpler circumstance of worship than the Roman Catholic Church in general practises.

33



Trappist Monks gathering roots for distilling



A Peep into the Library

OUR LADY OF THE SNOWS

The chapter-house is in keeping with the church in point of restraint in decoration, its beautifully panelled walls giving the apartment a genial touch of warmth by contrast with the cold white of its groined roof.

The library, which occupies a spacious room on the upper story of the north wing, is stocked with some twenty thousand volumes, chiefly in Latin and French, but including an excellent collection of works in Greek, religion and history being naturally the chief subjects represented. When we remember that many of the monks are men of no intellectual gifts and of small learning, being drawn largely from the peasant class and the military, we may doubt if the treasures of the library are in great request. The librarian, at least, must be a man of bookish tastes, since the collection is arranged in perfect order. Our guide assured us that the monastery possesses a copy of *Travels with a Donkey*, but he did not discover it for us.

The refectory is a large and bare chamber occupying the lower story of the east wing. Long narrow tables of plain wood stand around the room, and on these are laid the simple utensils of the meal. The monks sit on a rude bench, and for the greater part of the year they take but one meal in twenty-four hours; but during the summer months, when one might suppose their needs to be less, they, by special indulgence, go so far towards temporising with the flesh as to eat twice in one day.

34

R. L. S. was moved to a little disquisition on the subject of over-eating when he contemplated the dietetic restraint of the Trappist brethren. "Their meals are scanty, but even of these they eat sparingly," he writes; "and though each is allowed a small carafe of wine, many refrain from this indulgence. Without doubt, the most of mankind grossly overeat themselves; our meals serve not only for support, but as a hearty and natural diversion from the labour of life. Yet, though excess may be hurtful, I should have thought this Trappist regimen defective. And I am astonished, as I look back, at the freshness of face and the cheerfulness of manner of all whom I beheld. A happier nor a healthier company I should scarce suppose that I have ever seen. As a matter of fact, on this bleak upland, and with the incessant occupation of the monks, life is of an uncertain tenure, and death no infrequent visitor, at Our Lady of the Snows. This, at least, was what was told me. But if they die easily, they must live healthily in the meantime, for they seemed all firm of flesh and high in colour, and the only morbid sign that I could observe—an unusual brilliancy of the eye—was one that rather served to increase the general impression of vivacity and strength."

35

On the topmost floor of the east wing we were shown the dormitory, a long and, as I recall it, a somewhat low-roofed room, divided into numerous little cubicles, each enclosed on three sides, and screened from the passage by a curtain of red cloth. The couch consisted of a single mattress laid on boards, with the scantiest supply of bedclothes. Each of these little compartments bore in painted letters the monastic name of its occupant, and here every night, after the toils and vigils of the day, the brethren lay themselves down at eight o'clock in their ordinary habit of dress, being in this respect less fanatical than other fraternities of the same order, who sleep in their coffins, and even in unduly ready graves. "By two in the morning," says R. L. S., "the clapper goes upon the bell, and so on, hour by hour, and sometimes quarter by quarter, till eight, the hour of rest; so infinitesimally is the day divided among different occupations. The man who keeps rabbits, for example, hurries from his hutches to the chapel, the chapter-room, or the refectory all day long: every hour he has an office to sing, a duty to perform; from two, when he rises in the dark, till eight, when he returns to receive the comfortable gift of sleep, he is upon his feet, and occupied with manifold and changing business. I know many persons, worth several thousands in

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the year, who are not so fortunate in the disposal of their lives. Into how many houses would not the note of the monastery bell, dividing the day into manageable portions, bring peace of mind and healthful activity of body. We speak of hardships, but the true hardship is to be a dull fool, and permitted to mismanage life in our own dull and foolish manner."

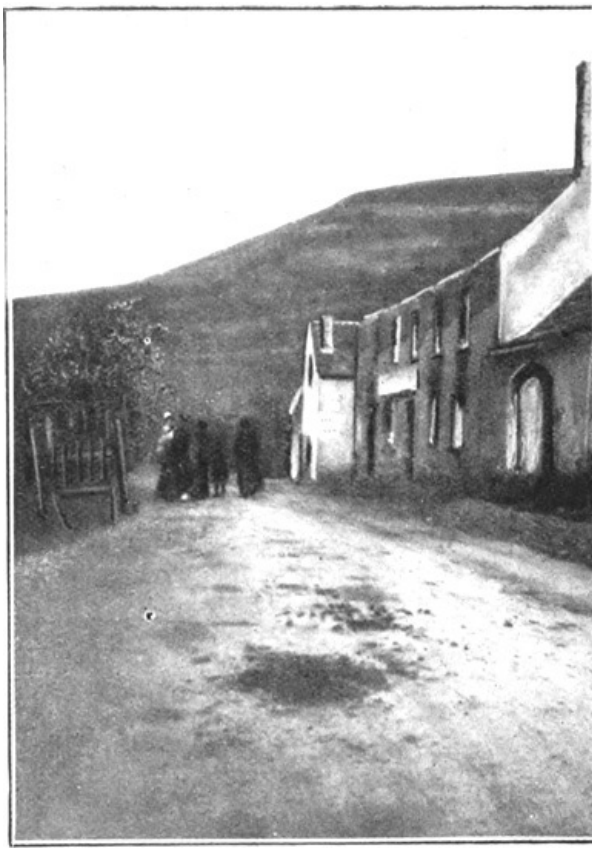
XIII.

On our way back to the hospice we learned with regret that Father Apollinaris, "so good and so simple," had been dead five years, and the right of the monastery to the title of Our Lady of the Snows was clearly established by the information that in the winter months it is buried for weeks on end, and our young friend of the shiny eyes shivered as he spoke of the *neige énorme*, which he is doomed to see every winter that he lives.



MAIN STREET, LE BLEYMARD

"From Bleymard I set out to scale a portion of the Lozère."—
R. L. S.



RUINS OF THE HÔTEL DU LOT

On the Villefort-Mende road, at La Remise, near Le Bleynard

In the hospice the apartments for the use of visitors and *retraitants* are situated. To the right of the gateway on the ground level are the kitchens and storerooms, and a door opening at the foot of the stair admits one into a small and barely furnished room, where supper had been prepared for us. A small table covered with American cloth, with chairs set about it to accommodate perhaps eight or ten guests, were the chief items of furniture. There were a few prints of a religious character hung upon the walls, and to the right of the fireplace stood a little bookcase, containing, however, no works of interest. The meal served to us was well cooked and savoury, and as an excellent omelet formed its *pièce de résistance*, with soup, potato salad, walnuts, figs and cheese included, it needed none of the profuse apologies for poverty of fare with which it was set before us.

37

We were afterwards shown our bedroom on the floor above, a fairly commodious room containing two iron bedsteads, with a more liberal supply of bedclothes than we saw in the dormitory of the monks, a small table and two chairs. A crucifix stood on the mantlepiece, and, as in some hotels, a printed sheet of regulations was fixed on the wall near the door. One may suppose it to have been a copy of that which Stevenson noted, for it wound up with an admonition to occupy one's spare time by examining one's conscience, confessing one's sins, and making good resolutions. "To make good resolutions, indeed!" comments R. L. S. "You might talk as fruitfully of making the hair grow on your head." So far as we could judge, the south wing at the time of our visit sheltered no other strangers than ourselves; nor did it appear there were any weary, world-worn laymen living here in retreat. At the time of Stevenson's sojourn among the monks there was quite a little company in the hospice, an English boarder, a parish priest, and an old soldier being some of the acquaintances he made in the little room where we had supped. But there is a constant and increasing number of visitors to the monastery, and immediately below our bedroom there was a large and well-stocked apartment that gave evidence of this. Here we found a varied supply of crucifixes and rosaries to suit all purses, samples of the different liqueurs distilled by the monks, and picture post cards in abundance. The Brother Porter, a simple boorish fellow, in vain spread his bottles in the sight of two who were not patrons of the stuff; but we reduced his stock of post cards and his rosaries. He took the money like a post office girl selling stamps.

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XIV.

When we took our places in the little gallery that extends across the west side of the chapel to hear the monks chanting the last service of the day, *Compline* and *Salve Regina*, we found that there was at least another visitor, in the person of a stout and blue-chinned *curé*. The white-robed monks were seated in their chairs in the choir, books upon their knees; while the organist in an elevated position on a level with the gallery played, unseen by us, "those majestic old

39

Gregorian chants that, wherever you may hear them (in Meredith's fine phrase) seem to build up cathedral walls about you." Paraffin lamps shed a dim, uncertain light, and the rich full voices of the singers resounded weirdly through the white-walled chapel, the door opening now and again as some of the lay brothers entered and, crossing themselves, bowed wearily towards the altar, moving to their places below the gallery. After the elevation of the Host, and when the service was almost ended, the organist came down, and we noticed that in making his way out of the chapel he hung back a little in passing the choir screen, that he might not meet on his way to the door any of the brethren who were now slowly leaving.

Of a similar service Stevenson writes: "There were none of those circumstances which strike the Protestant as childish or as tawdry in the public offices of Rome. A stern simplicity, heightened by the romance of the surroundings, spoke directly to the heart. I recall the whitewashed chapel, the hooded figures in the choir, the lights alternately occluded and revealed the strong manly singing, the silence that ensued, the sight of cowed heads bowed in prayer, and then the clear trenchant beating of the bell, breaking in to show that the last office was over, and the hour of sleep had come; and when I remember, I am not surprised that I made my escape into the court with somewhat whirling fancies, and stood like a man bewildered in the windy starry night." The effect of it all on the sentimental traveller was summed up in these fervent words: "And I blessed God that I was free to wander, free to hope, and free to love."

40

This, indeed, must be the impression all robust and unfettered minds will receive from a visit to Our Lady of the Snows. It is true that in their busy saw-mill which stands to the west of the monastery, and where the timber from the hills is turned to commercial use by the monks and their lay assistants, in their well-managed farm some distance westward, in the surrounding fields, in their many workshops—in these they have varied occupations, and of a manly character, but the terrible uselessness of it all is ever present to the mind of one coming from the stress and struggle of the zestful world. Poor men! in their sullen way they may believe they have chosen the better part; but, simple and devout as they may be, they are the real cowards of life, the shirkers of the battle we are meant to fight.

41



Malavieille, a mountain sheiling



"Buckled into my sack, and smoking alone in the pine woods,
between four and five thousand feet towards the stars."—

R. L. S.

ON THE LOZÈRE

We slept the sleep of tired men in our room upstairs, and heard none of those hourly bells Stevenson records. Our young friend, whose monastic name I foolishly omitted to ask, called us before eight in the morning, and after providing a capital breakfast, bade us a ceremonious good-bye, watching us from the door until the pine woods enclosed us.

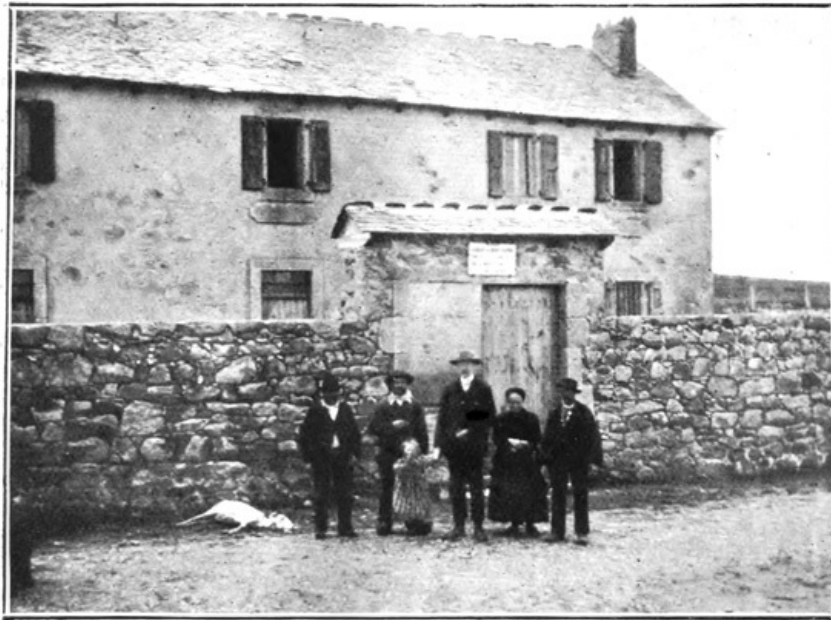
XV.

We made a swift descent to La Bastide, and by way of Chasseradès, where Stevenson slept in the common bedroom of the inn, reached Le Bleyard late in the afternoon, passing through a country of bare hills and poor villages clustered in gusty hollows or hanging like swallows' nests on craggy slopes. The valley of the Lot, rich and beautiful westward to Mende, possesses no elements of charm in the neighbourhood of Bleyard, and we found that town so mean and featureless, that we had no wish to pass the evening there. The inn we wanted was, so a crippled girl told us, at La Remise, on the high road, and we must have passed it. We remounted our cycles and retraced our path across the river, a distance of perhaps three furlongs, and lo! there stood the charred remains of the Hôtel du Lot, where we had hoped to rest ourselves. We had passed the place without noticing it, and the view of its gaunt and smoky walls, now that they had acquired so personal an interest, chilled our hearts, for the need to rest and refresh ourselves was pressing. It was after sundown, and there lay between us and Pont de Montvert a mountain higher than Ben Nevis. 42

Opposite the unlucky Hôtel du Lot stood a small *auberge*, kept by one Teissier. Two men were drinking absinth at a table by the doorway. One was a thick-set fellow, wearing eyeglasses, and clothed not unlike a foreman mechanic in England. The other was the familiar dark French type, thin of features, eyes bright as those of a consumptive, his beard ample and of a jet black, against which his ripe red lips showed noticeably. He was dressed like a clerk or *commerçant*. They made us welcome at their table, and we fell at once to discussing the situation, from which it was evident we could not hope to cross the Lozère that night. Some tourists had experienced a bad time traversing the mountain the previous Sunday, and as we could not hope to do more than reach the Baraque de Secours by nightfall, it would be madness to attempt the descent into the valley of the Tarn after dark, the road lying in many places along the lip of a precipice. Besides, this wayside inn was very well managed, said the absinth drinkers; they had lived there since being burned out across the way, a statement that cheered us not a little, as every other feature of the place was extremely uninviting. 43

The landlady, who had shown no interest in us whatever, I found busy at a large cooking-range in a tiny kitchen, which opened off the common sitting-room, and served also for the living-room of the servants and familiar loungers. She was a woman of austere countenance, displaying like so many middle-aged Frenchwomen a considerable moustache; but I noticed that her teeth were white. Yes, she would be glad to supply dinner if we were to stay overnight. We were, I confessed without enthusiasm; whereupon she specified glibly the resources of her kitchen. We could have soup, trout, jugged hare, chicken, fillet of beef, potatoes, pastries, cheese, and other things, and by naming one dish and connecting it to the next with *et puis*, an aldermanic banquet seemed about to be conjured up from the dirty little room and its greasy stove. The common room of the inn had a sanded floor, and was furnished with a plain deal table, round which some country bumpkins were sitting on rush-bottomed chairs drinking beer and spitting freely in the sand. A few cheap oleographs nailed on the dingy walls were the only efforts at decoration. Two drab and unattractive girls gossiping with the customers appeared to be the staff of the hotel. 44

I returned to the Frenchmen outside, and found that my companion, anxious not to enter the place until the last moment, was playing at a game resembling bowls with some village urchins, though understanding not one word of their speech. But he came up in a little while to learn the results of my inquiries within, and soon we were all engaged in a very entertaining discussion. It appeared that the Frenchmen were concerned in the zinc mines near Bleyard, him of the oily clothes being chief engineer, the other business manager. I suppose they would be the two best conditioned residents in the district, and here they were lodging at an hotel which, apart from cooking, was below the standard of comfort to be found in a crimp's den in the region of Ratcliffe Highway. The Frenchman is a wonderfully adaptable creature: give him a table to drink at, a chair to sit upon, and a bed anywhere under a roof, and he can contrive to be happy.



The Baraque de Secours



"The Lozère lies nearly east and west; its highest point, this Pic de Finiels, on which I was then standing, rises upwards of 5,600 feet above the sea."—R. L. S.

ON THE LOZÈRE

M. l'Ingénieur, although he spoke no English, had seen something of the world, and had even been to Klondyke. He could not understand why anyone should have wandered to such a hole as this—for pleasure! But he expected that next year's guide-books would describe Bleymard as notable for the ruins of the Hôtel du Lot. A wag, obviously. If we wanted to see places worth looking at, there was Nice and Nîmes, said his friend M. Barbenoire. Together they extolled, with a rare gush of adjectives, the beauty of these places, and promised to show us picture postcards that would lure us into visiting them. Tourists did come sometimes to climb the Lozère, from the top of which in clear weather one might see the Alps. The engineer laughed merrily at this, and said the story was as much legend as the exploits of the beast of Gévaudan. He discussed in a very practical mind the question of miners' wages, and thought that the Bleymard zinc workers were better off with four francs a day than English miners with five or six shillings.

45

Sooner than we had expected dinner was declared ready, and we went inside with no great avidity; but to our surprise we found the meal laid in a little room at the other end of the drinking den, tolerably clean though dingy and tasteless in its appointments. There we were joined by the wife of M. Barbenoire and two immense dogs of unfamiliar breed. The maid who served us was engagingly free from the usual formalities of the table, and between the courses would sit coyly on the knee of the engineer, munching a piece of bread; but for the rest, ours was no Barmecide feast. The aldermanic banquet appeared in all essentials save the serving, and we fared so well that we began to hope our bedroom would even be comfortable.

46

When, later in the evening, we took our courage in both hands and penetrated to the upper story by way of a spiral iron staircase through the kitchen roof and along a dark lobby of loose boards, we were heartened not a little to find in our room two good beds, clean and curtained. Sleep was thus assured, though the smell from the stable through the wall was redolent of rats. It was "a wonderful clear night of stars" when we looked out of our window before retiring, and we went to bed determined upon an early start. The bellowing of the oxen in the stable and the shouts of the *buveurs* below did not come long between us and the drowsy god.

XVI.

Alas! at dawn next day we looked forth on a blank wall of mist backing the ruins across the road. Not a hill was visible. We sought our beds again, and by nine o'clock the outlook was only slightly improved, the nearest hills, now resonant with sheep-bells, being in sight. The engineer comforted us with the assurance that this was the common weather in June, the best time of the year being from July to October, but he thought the mists might clear before noon. Presently it began to rain, and during the whole day there was not half an hour of clear weather. At times the atmosphere would thin a little, only to show us heavy clouds condensing on the higher hills. Thus 47
prisoned in our room, we contrived to be comfortable, and I believe that another day would have left us wondering why we had dreaded staying at the inn, so soon does the human mind adapt itself to circumstances. The rain-sodden streets actually provided entertainment. We watched with interest the coming and going of shepherds and their flocks, the former armed with commodious umbrellas and their sheep shorn in a way that left a lump of wool upon their backs making them comically like little camels. Many bullock wagons loaded with shale passed by, and we noticed that the slightest touch with the driver's wand served to direct the team, whose heads were, to quote our hero, "fixed to the yoke like those of caryatides below a ponderous cornice." Children played out and in the stables and among the ruins, and an old man, wearing the usual dress of the peasant, with pink socks showing above his sabots, his hands thrust deep in his pockets, and a stick under his arm, wandered aimlessly to and fro in the rain most of the day. The 48
stage-coach from Villefort to Mende rested for a time at the inn, causing a flicker of excitement, and in the evening again the mine officials were there to bear us company.

The engineer proved himself a thorough-paced sceptic of the modern French sort. His opinion of the country-folk was low—hypocrites, fools, money-grubbers all! Holding up a five-franc piece, he averred that for this they would sell mother, daughter, sister; and then similarly elevating a bundle of paper-money, he exclaimed: "*Voilà, le Grand Dieu.*"

"This is a Catholic countryside?" I said.

"Yes," he replied, "but that makes no difference."

"There is one Protestant in Bleynard," put in Barbenoire,—"*myself!*"

"And he isn't up to much," added the cynic.



"A cluster of black roofs, the village of Cocurès sitting among vineyards."—R. L. S.



Bridge over the Tarn at "Pont de Montvert of bloody memory," and view of the Hôtel des Cevennes where Stevenson stayed.

XVII.

"We shall set out at five in the morning," I said to the landlady before going upstairs, and the engineer signalled to us as we left the room the outstretched fingers of his right hand twice; wherein he proved something of a prophet, for it was nearer ten o'clock than five before we determined to risk the mountain journey, the sky being clear in parts and the rain clouds scudding before a high wind, that promised a comparatively dry day.

49

On the bridge across the Lot at Bleynard we were hailed by a man in labouring clothes, who smiled broadly and said, "Me speak Engleesh." As we had not met a single Frenchman between Orleans and this spot who pretended to have any knowledge of our native tongue, we tarried to have speech with this cheery-faced fellow, whose white teeth shone through a reedy black moustache. But his lingual claims did not bear inspection. Beyond saying that he had visited London and Liverpool, and knew what "shake hands" meant, and that English tobacco was better worth smoking than the French trash—a hint which I accepted by presenting my pouch—he could not go in our island speech; and so we had to continue our chat in French that was bad on both sides, his accent resembling a Yorkshireman's English, and mine—let us say an Englishman's French. He was certain we should have no more rain, as the wind was in the north, and if it kept dry to twelve o'clock we could depend on a good day. The weather prophet is the same in all lands, and we had not left him half an hour when we were sheltering from a sudden downpour.

For some miles we had to plod upward on foot in a wild and rocky gorge, with the merest trickle of water below. Yet every corner where a few square feet of clover could be coaxed into life had been cultivated by the dogged peasants, and patches were growing at heights where one would have thought it difficult to climb without the ropes of an Alpinist. Many of these mountain plots were miles away from any dwelling, a fact that conveys some idea of the barren nature of the country.

50

The tiny hamlet of Malavieille, about half-way up the mountain side, is the highest point permanently inhabited. It is a mere handful of dark-grey houses, covered on slates and walls with a vivid yellow fungus. Here the upland fields were densely spread with violets, narcissi and hyacinths, and a few dun cows were browsing contentedly on this fragrant fare, while a boy who attended them stood on his head kicking his heels merrily in the sunshine. He came up as we passed, staring at us stolidly; and when we asked if the snakes, of which we had just encountered two about three feet long, were dangerous, he answered, "*Pas bien*," and more than that we could not get him to say, though he walked beside us for a time eyeing curiously our bicycles.

51

XVIII.

When we had come within sight of the Baraque de Secours, we had reached a sort of table-land reaching east and west for some miles. Eastward lay the pine woods where our vagabond spent one of his most tranquil nights as described in his chapter, "A Night Among the Pines." It was there that, awaking in the morning, he beheld the daybreak along the mountain-tops of Vivarais—"a solemn glee possessed my mind at this gradual and lovely coming in of day." And it was there, too, that out of thankfulness for his night's rest he laid on the turf as he went along pieces of money, "until I had left enough for my night's lodging." Some of it may be there to this day, for there is small human commerce at this altitude, a shepherd or two being the only folk we saw

until we arrived at the shelter which we had seen for more than half an hour while we cycled arduously toward it.

The baraque is a plain two-storied building, with a rough stone wall and porch enclosing a muddy yard. It stands at a height of over five thousand feet, being thus fully five hundred feet higher than Ben Nevis. To the west the Lozère swells upward, a great treeless waste, to its highest point, the Pic de Finiels, 5,600 feet above sea-level; while a splendid mass of volcanic origin uprears its craggy head some little distance to the south-east. "The view, back upon the northern Gévaudan," says Stevenson, writing of what he saw as he passed near this point, "extended with every step; scarce a tree, scarce a house, appeared upon the fields of wild hill that ran north, east, and west, all blue and gold in the haze and sunlight of the morning." And then in a little, when he began the descent towards the valley of the Tarn, he says: "A step that seemed no way more decisive than many other steps that had preceded it—and, 'like stout Cortez when with eagle eyes he stared on the Pacific,' I took possession, in my own name, of a new quarter of the world. For behold, instead of the gross turf rampart I had been mounting for so long, a view into the hazy air of heaven, and a land of intricate blue hills below my feet." As he makes no mention of the baraque, I venture to suppose that it had not then been built, for one so eager of new experience would not have missed the opportunity of resting on his way at this high-set hostel. A dead sheep—one of several we had seen on the mountain—lay on the road by the gate, and propping our bicycles near it, we picked our way through the mud and knocked at the door.



Waterfall on the Lozère, on Stevenson's route between Finiels and Pont de Montvert



In the valley of the Tarn: Scene of Stevenson's camp under the chestnuts on the hillside

A gruff voice bade us enter. We stepped into a smoky room, with an earthen floor, containing a rough wooden table and two rude benches, and in a corner a small round table, a few chairs and a plain wooden dresser. The mouth that had emitted a very guttural "*Ongtray*" belonged to a man of small stature but brigandish appearance, who was seated at the smaller table eating industriously. We asked for lemonade and biscuits, but the fellow stared at the words and spoke in a patois that was Greek to me. But when I explained more sententiously that we desired something to eat and drink, he disappeared up a wooden stair, and we knew that a bottle of atrocious red wine, which we would welcome as so much vinegar, would be forthcoming. Meanwhile, the man's wife—a fair-haired little woman with cheeks like red apples, dressed in the universal black of the French country-wife—came in, leading a youngster by the hand. I repeated to her our wants, which she immediately proceeded to meet by breaking four eggs into a pan, the shells being dropped on the floor, and lo! an omelet was well on the way by the time her husband in his sabots came clattering down the stairs with the undesired wine, a few drops of which we used to colour the clear cold water we took in our tumblers from a pipe that ran ceaselessly into a basin set in the wall of the room that backed to the rising land.

53

There is one respect in which the Cevennols have progressed since Stevenson went among them. He writes: "In these Hedge-inns the traveller is expected to eat with his own knife; unless he ask, no other will be supplied: with a glass, a whang of bread, and an iron fork, the table is completely laid." Not so had we found it in any of the inns we visited, all had risen to the dignity of knives and forks; but here at this house in the wilds our table was laid precisely as Stevenson describes, and the bread being hard, it was a temptation to break it across the knee like a piece of wood. We had almost finished our meal when, after some whisperings between the man and woman, the fellow dived into his pockets and produced a great clasp knife, which he opened and handed to us.

54

While we sat and carried on a somewhat faltering conversation—for both man and woman spoke the dialect of Languedoc and were superbly ignorant—two men entered of the same brigandish type as the landlord, and, speaking better French, proffered their services as guides if we desired to scale the Pic de Finiels. This we had no desire to do, especially when they were frank enough to state that the view from the top was of very little interest. But they urged us to see the magnificent view over the entire range of the Cevennes from the more westerly peak, the Signal des Laubies. This, however, would have taken us some two hours, and we had a long way to travel that day. We were curious to know whether the baraque was tenanted in winter, and one of the guides told us that during the winter the whole of the uplands around us lay deep in snow, the roads being quite impassable. This shelter was only open from the beginning of June to the end of September, when its keepers retired downhill again to Malavieille. R. L. S. crossed the mountain on the second last day in September, so that the snows would soon be lying on his track. When we resumed our journey again we were once or twice beguiled into thinking that we saw some of the snows of yester year lying among the grey and lichened rocks, but a nearer approach turned the drifts into flocks of sheep, which the sombre background rendered snowy white by contrast.

55

We went forward into the country of the Camisards along a well-made road which gangs of labourers were leisurely repairing. So good are these mountain roads, and so diligently tended, that one is inclined to think they are used chiefly for the transit of stones to keep them in repair. That on which we travelled has been made since Modestine and her driver footed it through this same valley. In less than a mile from the baraque it begins to sweep swiftly downward. Stevenson thus describes his descent: "A sort of track appeared and began to go down a breakneck slope, turning like a corkscrew as it went. It led into a valley through falling hills, stubbly with rocks like a reaped field of corn, and floored farther down with green meadows. I followed the track with precipitation; the steepness of the slope, the continual agile turning of the line of descent, and the old unwearied hope of finding something new in a new country, all conspired to lend me wings. Yet a little lower and a stream began, collecting itself together out of many fountains, and soon making a glad noise among the hills. Sometimes it would cross the track in a bit of waterfall, with a pool, in which Modestine refreshed her feet. The whole descent is like a dream to me, so rapidly was it accomplished. I had scarcely left the summit ere the valley closed round my path, and the sun beat upon me, walking in a stagnant lowland atmosphere."

56



"CLARISSE"

The Waitress at the Hôtel des Cevennes, from a photograph supplied by the Pasteur at Pont de Montvert

"The features, although fleshy, were of an original and accurate design; her mouth had a curl; her nostril spoke of dainty pride."—R. L. S.

If his descent was thus, how much more so ours on our whirling wheels? We encountered numerous cattle-drovers, whose herds spread themselves across the path and rendered our progress somewhat perilous, as neither hedge nor stone stood between us and the abyss. There is but little population in the valley, and that centred in two small hamlets, though we observed a number of deserted cabins which Stevenson also notes. The river, too, as it nears the larger Tarn was all his magic pen had pictured; here it "foamed awhile in desperate rapids, and there lay in pools of the most enchanting sea-green shot with watery browns. As far as I have gone, I have never seen a river of so changeful and delicate a hue: crystal was not more clear, the meadows were not by half so green."

57

Our road brought us at length to Pont de Montvert "of bloody memory," which lies in a green and rocky hollow among the hills. To Stevenson "the place, with its houses, its lanes, its glaring river-bed, wore an indescribable air of the south." Why so, he was unable to say; as he justly observes, it would be difficult to tell in what particulars it differed from Monastier or Langogne or even Bleynard. One of the first buildings that the traveller encounters is the little Protestant temple perched on the rocky bank of the river, and perhaps it was again the Protestant education of

R. L. S. that led him to note a higher degree of intelligence among the inhabitants than he had found in the purely Catholic villages. For my part, with the best will to mark the difference, I found little to choose between the Catholic and Camisard townships, unless it were a more obvious effort after cleanliness in some of the latter.

58

XX.

Pont de Montvert is memorable as the place where the Covenanters of France struck the first blow against their Romish persecutors; here they "slew their Archbishop Sharpe." The Protestant pastor, a fresh-faced man about sixty, with a short white beard, and wearing no outward symbol of office, but dressed in an ordinary jacket suit and cloth cap, we found in his home in a building by the river-side near the bridge. Directly across the rock-strewn course was the Hôtel des Cevennes, where Stevenson sat at the "roaring table d'hôte," and was pleased to find three of the women passably good-looking, that being more than an average for any town in the Highlands of France. Our pastor—his wife and golden-haired daughter also—was more interested in discussing Stevenson's travels than the religious condition of his district, a subject on which my companion, pastor from "the Celtic fringe," was athirst for information.

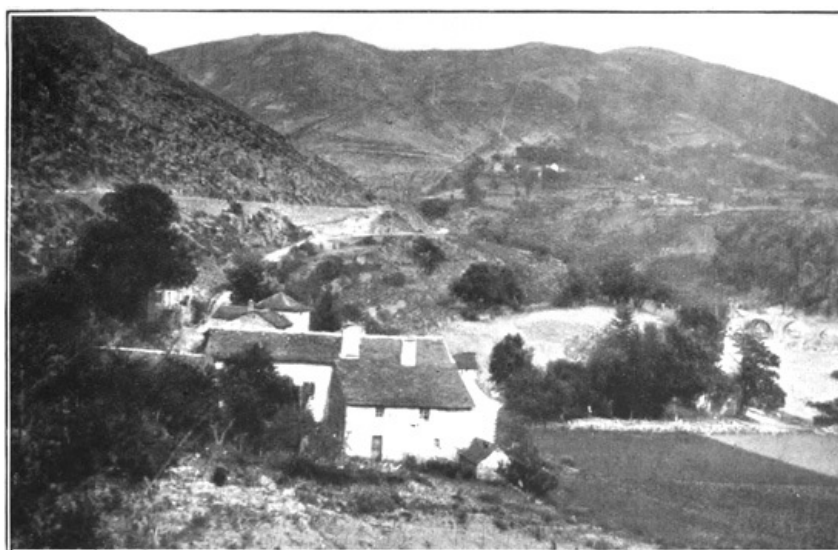
To my various questions regarding the position of the Reformed Church I received the barest answers; there was no glowing enthusiasm *chez le pasteur* for the Camisards who a stone's-throw from where we sat stabbed with many superfluous thrusts the Archpriest Du Chayla, their most brutal persecutor. But Stevenson and his donkey—ah, that was another matter! He knew all about them to the year, the day, the hour of their quaint and curious visit; he was himself only two years established in his charge at the time. And Clarisse! We knew, of course, what Stevenson had said of her? Would we care to see her photograph? She was now married, and settled in another town with a considerable family growing around her. One felt that after a quarter of a century, and with a family thrown in, Stevenson would have resolutely refused to look on the counterfeit presentment of Clarisse. But, less scrupulous, we chose to see her portrait, and the pastor was good enough to present me with a copy, as he possessed several which he had procured three years before when ordering one for an Englishman who had gone over the trail of R. L. S. The *carte* shows the table-maid of the hotel as still possessing some of the featural charms so minutely and faithfully noted by our author.

59

"What shall I say of Clarisse?" he writes. "She waited the table with a heavy placable nonchalance, like a performing cow; her great grey eyes were steeped in amorous langour; her features, although fleshy, were of an original and accurate design; her mouth had a curl; her nostrils spoke of dainty pride; her cheek fell into strange and interesting lines. It was a face capable of strong emotion, and with training it offered the promise of delicate sentiment.... Before I left I assured Clarisse of my hearty admiration. She took it like milk, without embarrassment or wonder, merely looking at me steadily with her great eyes; and I own the result upon myself was some confusion. If Clarisse could read English, I should not dare to add that her figure was unworthy of her face. Hers was a case for stays; but that may perhaps grow better as she gets up in years."

60

When I look again at the photograph, I fear that even this hope for her who was "left to country admirers and a country way of thought," has not been fulfilled.



THE TARN VALLEY AT LA VERNÈDE

"It was but a humble place, called La Vernède, with less than a dozen houses and a Protestant chapel on a knoll. There, at the inn, I ordered breakfast."—R. L. S.

The pastor came with us to point out Du Chayla's house, which stands on the river side westward of his own, the spire of the modern Catholic church showing above the roof. Perhaps it was only natural that he should look upon so familiar an object without any show of emotion, though my fellow-traveller set it down to the cold Christless teaching of the *Eglise libérale*, to which section of the French Reformed Church Pont de Montvert is attached. In that three-storied house, with its underground dungeons and stout-walled garden trending down to the river, the Archpriest carried on "the Propagation of the Faith" by such ungentle methods as plucking out the hairs of the beard, enclosing the hands of his Protestant prisoners upon live coal, "to convince them," as R. L. S. quaintly observes, "that they were deceived in their opinions." On the 24th July, 1702, led by their "prophet" Séguier, a band of some fifty Camisards attacked the house of the Archpriest, to which they at length set fire, and thus forced Du Chayla and his military guard to attempt escape. The Archpriest, in lowering himself from an upper window by means of knotted sheets, fell and broke his leg, and there in the garden, where a woman was to-day hanging out shabby clothes to dry, the Covenanters had their vengeance of stabs. "'This,' they said, 'is for my father broken on the wheel. This for my brother in the galleys. That for my mother or my sister imprisoned in your cursed convents.' Each gave his blow and his reason; and then all kneeled and sang psalms around the body till the dawn." Save for a new roof, the building remains much as it was two hundred years ago.

61

XXI.

The road, for close on two miles out of Pont de Montvert, goes uphill past the Catholic church—the town being now about equally divided in the matter of religion—and then it is a long and gentle descent to Florac. In no respect has the road changed since Stevenson wrote of it, nor is there any likelihood that it will be altered ere the crack of doom. "A smooth sandy ledge, it runs about half-way between the summit of the cliffs and the river in the bottom of the valley; and I went in and out, as I followed it, from bays of shadow into promontories of afternoon sun. This was a pass like that of Killiecrankie; a deep turning gully in the hills, with the Tarn making a wonderful hoarse uproar far below, and craggy summits standing in the sunshine far above."

62

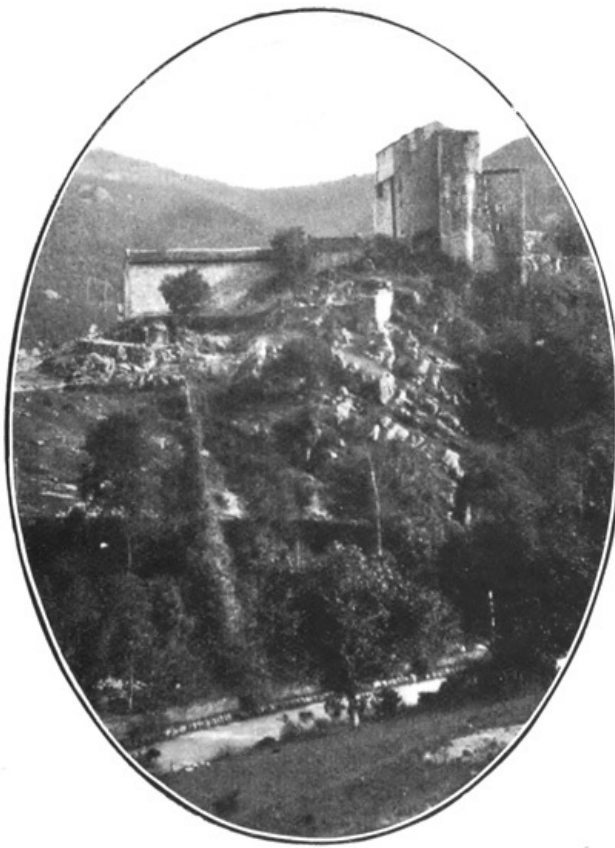
The slopes of the valley have been terraced almost to the sky-line, not for baby-fields of wheat, but to furnish ground for chestnut trees, that clothe the hills with rich and sombre foliage, and give forth "a faint, sweet perfume," which tinctures the air with balsamic breath. R. L. S. goes into raptures over these chestnuts;—"I wish I could convey a notion of the growth of these noble trees; of how they strike out boughs like the oak, and trail sprays of drooping foliage like the willow; of how they stand on upright fluted columns like the pillars of a church; or, like the olive, from the most shattered bole can put out smooth and useful shoots, and begin a new life upon the ruins of the old.... And to look down upon a level filled with these knolls of foliage, or to see a clan of old, unconquerable chestnuts clustered 'like herded elephants' upon the spur of a mountain, is to rise to higher thoughts of the powers that are in Nature." It was on a terrace and under one of these trees that he camped for the night, having to scramble up some sixty feet above the place he had selected for himself, which was as high as that from the road, before he could find another terrace with space enough for his donkey. He was awakened in the morning by peasants coming to prune the trees, and after going down to the river for his morning toilet—"To wash in one of God's rivers in the open air seems to me a sort of cheerful solemnity or semi-pagan act of worship"—he went on his way "with a light and peaceful heart, and sang psalms to the spiritual ear as I advanced."

63

Some little way from where he had slept he foregathered with an old man in a brown nightcap, "clear-eyed, weather-beaten, with a faint, excited smile," who said to him after a while, "*Connaissez-vous le Seigneur?*" The old fellow was delighted when the donkey-driver answered, "Yes, I know Him; He is the best of acquaintances," and together they journeyed on, discussing the spiritual condition of the country-folk. "Thus, talking like Christian and Faithful by the way, he and I came upon a hamlet by the Tarn. It was but a humble place, called La Vernède, with less than a dozen houses, and a Protestant chapel on a knoll. Here he dwelt, and here at the inn I ordered my breakfast. The inn was kept by an agreeable young man, a stonebreaker on the road, and his sister, a pretty and engaging girl."

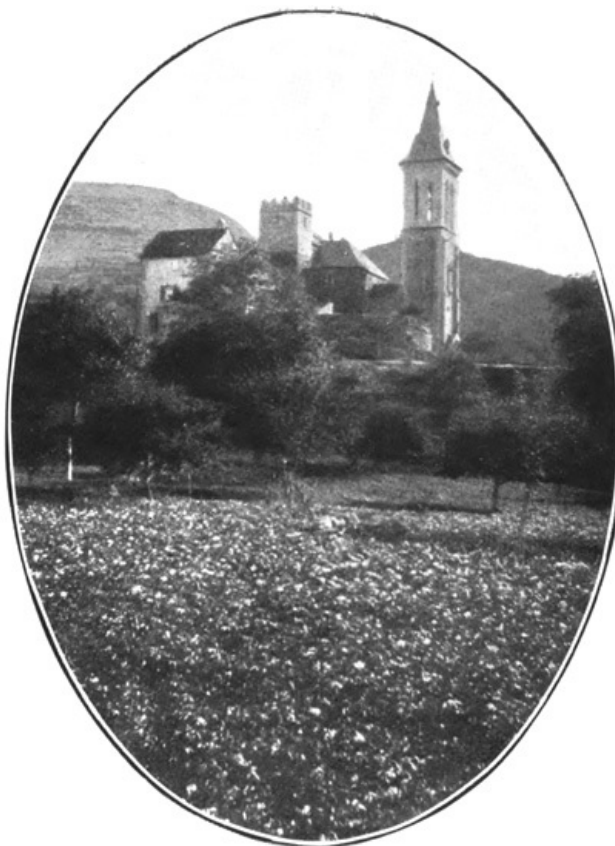
64

We found this little hamlet even smaller than we expected, some half-dozen houses and a tiny place of worship, the whole lying below the level of the main road, so that one could have thrown a stone on their roofs, well-tilled fields and meadows stretching down to the river. A *cantonier* who was busy breaking stones by the roadway helped us to identify the place, and was proud to confess himself a Protestant, in common with the little handful of his fellow-villagers. The country grows richer and more fruitful as we approach Florac, passing on our way the old castle of Miral and a picturesque church compounded of an ancient battlemented monastery and some modern buildings with a tall tower.



IN THE VALLEY OF THE TARN

**"The road led me past the old Castle of Miral on a steep."—
R. L. S.**



NEAR FLORAC

**"Past a battlemented monastery long since broken up and
turned into a church and parsonage."—R. L. S.**

The influence of a country on its people suggested to R. L. S. an interesting comparison as he journeyed through "this landscape, smiling although wild." "Those who took to the hills for

conscience sake in Scotland had all gloomy and bedevilled thoughts," he writes; "for once that they received God's comfort, they would be twice engaged with Satan; but the Camisards had only bright and supporting visions.... With a light conscience, they pursued their life in these rough times and circumstances. The soul of Séguier, let us not forget, was like a garden. They knew they were on God's side, with a knowledge that has no parallel among the Scots; for the Scots, although they might be certain of the cause, could never rest confident of the person." A singularly inapposite comparison. It was not in pleasant valleys such as these, or in cosy little towns like Pont de Montvert, that the Camisards fought out their war with "His Most Christian Majesty Louis, King of France and Brittany," but on the bare and rocky plateaus westward of the Cevennes, and on such mountain-tops as the Lozère. Stevenson had never seen the Causse Méjan or the Causse du Larzac, to the southward of the region through which he travelled, or he would have realised that their conditions were even less likely to foster "bright and supporting visions" in the Camisards than those of the mountain-hunted Scots, though much better from a strategic point of view.

65

XXII.

Florac is a small town of white houses, cuddled between the eastern front of the Causse Méjan and the western foothills of the Cevennes, with the river Tarnon, joined by the Mimente to the south, running northward on its outskirts. There are only two thousand inhabitants, but the number and excellence of Florac's hotels are accounted for by its being an important centre for tourists visiting the gorges of the Tarn, which, totally unknown to the outer world at the time of Stevenson's journey, are now admitted to possess the finest scenery in Europe. Our French guide-book frankly stated that Florac is a place "of few attractions," but R. L. S. makes the most of these in a sentence or two, describing the town as possessing "an old castle, an alley of planes, many quaint street-corners, and a live fountain welling from the hill." The old castle is quite without interest, and is indeed the local prison, while the alley of planes, called the Esplanade, is a dusty open space, with many cafés lining it, and the grey, featureless Protestant Temple at its southern end.

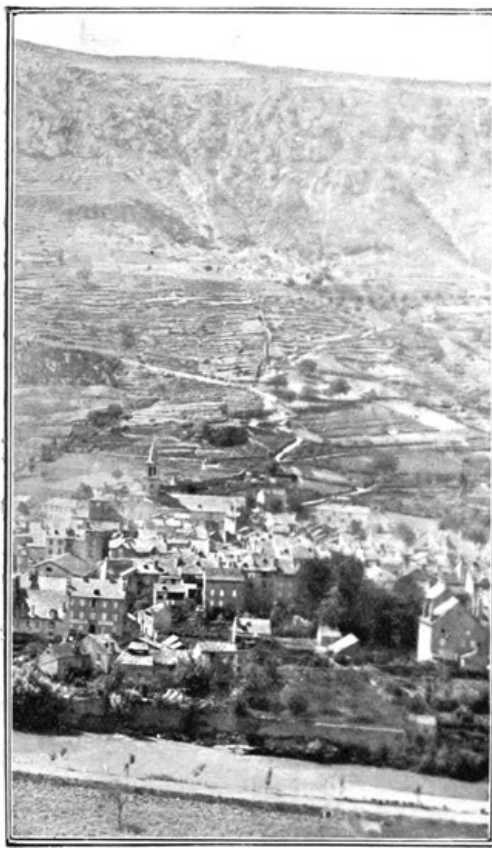
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"It is notable, besides," he adds, "for handsome women, and as one of two capitals, Alais being the other, of the country of the Camisards." I do not recall having noticed an unusual number of handsome women, though the wife of the Free Church minister was quite the prettiest French woman we saw in the Cevennes, and the Established Church pastor's wife perhaps the most cultured. R. L. S. found the townsfolk anxious to talk of the part played by Florac in the days of the Camisards, and was delighted to see Catholic and Protestant living together in peace and amity. But it may be that the conspicuous absence of all windows from the lower parts of the Protestant churches is a memorial of times when the adherents of the reformed religion were subjected to the prying eyes and perchance the more dangerous attentions of the Catholics without. Most of the public officials were named to us as Protestants, and the religious differences are as strongly marked between the two sects of the latter as between them and their townsmen of the Roman communion. The larger and State-supported church is Rationalistic, corresponding to our Unitarian, and the smaller a Free Church, with a symbol of the open Bible above its doorway.

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In what we might call the Free Manse, really an extension of the church for the housing of the minister, a door communicating between the place of worship and the domestic apartments, we found M. Illaire and his wife at play with their children—homely folk, who gave us a cordial welcome, the heartier for the fact that Mme. Illaire had stayed for a year in that "quaint, grey-castled city, where the bells clash of a Sunday, and the wind squalls, and the salt showers fly and beat"—Stevenson's own romantic birth-town. She could thus speak our native tongue, and my companion, for once in a way, needed none of my interpreting. M. Illaire, an essential Frenchman, swarthy of features, slight of build, voluble and gesticulative, discoursed with shining eyes of Protestantism, but was something of a pessimist, and seemed to think that at best a cold, bloodless Dieism would rule the intellectual France of the future. I gathered that, as in the old days of enmity between the Established and Free kirks of Scotland, there was no traffic between the two Protestant churches in Florac, for Mme. Illaire confessed that she had never seen the inside of the Temple, which we had thoroughly inspected earlier in the afternoon, receiving the key from the pastor's wife, whose husband unfortunately was absent on a visit to Montpellier.

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FLORAC

"On a branch of the Tarn stands Florac. It is notable as one of the two capitals, Alais being the other, of the country of the Camisards."—R. L. S.

XXIII.

The route of R. L. S. now lay along the valley of the Mimente, which branches eastward a little south of Florac, and penetrates a country very similar to that traversed between the Lozère and this point. It was only a few miles from Florac that he spent his last night *à la belle étoile* in the valley of this little river, noting in one of his finest sentences the coming of night: "A grey pearly evening shadow filled the glen; objects at a little distance grew indistinct and melted bafflingly into each other; and the darkness was rising steadily like an exhalation." At Cassagnas he was in the very heart of the Camisard country, where there is little to engage one but the historic associations of the district. At St. Germain de Calberte, six miles to the south-west, reached by a rough and difficult road more suitable for the foot than the wheel, he slept at the inn, and the next afternoon (Thursday, 3rd October) he accomplished the eight remaining miles through the waterless valley of the Gardon to St. Jean du Gard—"fifteen miles and a stiff hill in little beyond six hours."

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There came the parting with the companion of his travels, Modestine finding a ready purchaser at much below prime cost. "For twelve days we had been fast companions," he writes on his last page: "we had travelled upwards of a hundred and twenty miles, crossed several respectable ridges, and jogged along with our six legs by many a rocky and many a boggy by-road. After the first day, although sometimes I was hurt and distant in manner, I still kept my patience; and as for her, poor soul! she had come to regard me as a god. She loved to eat out of my hand. She was patient, elegant in form, the colour of an ideal mouse, and inimitably small. Her faults were those of her race and sex; her virtues were her own. Farewell! and if for ever— Father Adam wept when he sold her to me; after I had sold her in my turn, I was tempted to follow his example; and being alone with the stage driver and four or five agreeable young men, I did not hesitate to yield to my emotion."

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We are to imagine R. L. S. thus tearfully occupied in the stage-coach bearing him east to Alais, an important industrial town on the main line northward through Le Puy, whither there is no call to follow him. We have the romantic regions of the Causses and the Tarn gorges still to explore. Our way, no longer a pilgrim's path, lies westward.

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Along the Route of "An Inland Voyage"

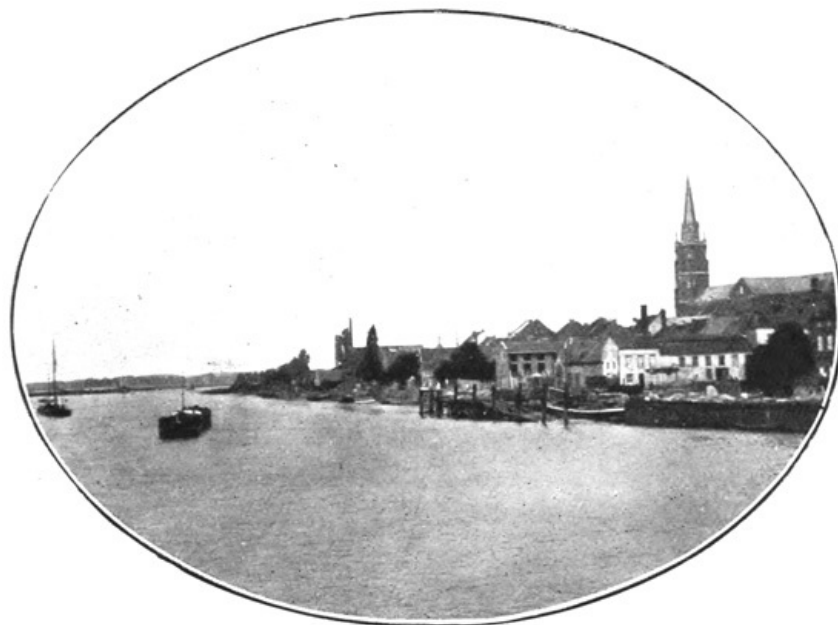
"Now, to be properly enjoyed, a walking tour should be gone upon alone. If you go in company, or even in pairs, it is no longer a walking tour in anything but name. It is something else, and more in the nature of a picnic. A walking tour should be gone upon alone, because freedom is of the essence; because you should be able to stop and go on, and follow this way or that as the freak takes you, and because you must have your own pace, and neither tramp alongside a champion walker, nor mince in time with a girl. And then you must be open to all impressions, and let yourself take colour from what you see. You should be as a pipe for any wind to play upon."

I.

Thus wrote Stevenson in one of his essays, but I doubt if he ever put into practice this engaging theory of his. He came nearest to being alone when he undertook his famous tour through the Cevennes; yet a donkey, and one of so much character as his Modestine, is company of a sort. When he made the first of his little journeys with a literary end in view, he had a companion after his own heart in the late Sir Walter Simpson, to whom the first of his books, *An Inland Voyage*, is dedicated. That was, however, an enterprise of some adventure, and it was well that the author had a companion, for had he fared forth alone in his frail canoe, as did his great exemplar John MacGregor, in the *Rob Roy*, it is doubtful if *An Inland Voyage*—not to say all that came after it—had ever been written. In a letter sent from Compiègne during the voyage, he gives a very cheerless picture of the business: "We have had deplorable weather, quite steady ever since the start; not one day without heavy showers, and generally much wind and cold wind forby.... Indeed, I do not know if I would have stuck to it as I have done if it had not been for professional purposes." I suspect that no less potent an influence than "professional purposes" in raising his courage to the height of the occasion, was the companionship of "My dear Cigarette," as he addresses Sir Walter, whose canoe had been named *Cigarette*, that of Stevenson sporting the classic title *Arethusa*. Fortunately for the reading world, the voyage, despite its discomforts, had happy issue in one of the most charming books that came from the pen of the essayist, and although hints are not lacking of the shadows through which the canoeists passed, the sunshine of a gay and bright spirit is radiant on every page.

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BOOM ON THE RUPEL

"Boom is not a nice place."—R. L. S.



VILLEVORDE ON THE WILLEBROEK CANAL

"The rest of the journey to Villevorde, we still spread our canvas to the unfavouring air."—R. L. S.

As it had been my pleasant fortune in the summer of 1903, together with a friend, to follow the footsteps of Stevenson in his travels among the Cevennes, and the pilgrimage having proved plentiful of literary interest, it seemed to me that one might find in a journey by road along the route of "An Inland Voyage" as much of interest, and certainly some measure of personal pleasure. Moreover, with the disciple's daring, often greater than the master's, I desired to test the plan of going alone. But it was more by happy chance than any planning of mine that I betook myself, with my bicycle, to Antwerp at precisely the same season that, eight-and-twenty years before, Stevenson and his companion set out upon their canoe voyage by river and canal, from that ancient port to the town of Pontoise, near the junction of the Seine and Oise, and within hail of Paris.

In the preface to the first edition of *An Inland Voyage*, its author expresses the fear that he "might not only be the first to read these pages, but the last as well," and that he "might have pioneered this very smiling tract of country all in vain, and found not a soul to follow in my steps." That others have been before me in my late pilgrimage is more than probable, although I have found no trace of them; but perhaps I have not searched with care, for I would fain flatter myself that here, as in the Cevennes, I found a field of interest where there had been no passing of many feet.

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II.

Antwerp seems a town so antique that no change of modern handiwork can alter in any vital way its grey old features. Yet in my own acquaintance with it, on its outward quarters at least, it has taken on surprisingly the veneer of modern Brussels, though by the river-side it remains much as it was when, in the later days of August, 1876, the *Cigarette* and the *Arethusa*, with their adventurous occupants, were launched into the Scheldt to the no small excitement of the loungers about the docks. There must have been some excitement, too, in the breasts of the voyagers, but, like the true Scots they were, we can well believe they gave no show of it. Stevenson had never been in a canoe under sail before, and to tie his sheet in so frail a craft in the middle of a wide and busy river called for no contemptible degree of courage. But he tied his sheet.

"I own I was a little struck by this circumstance myself," he writes. "Of course, in company with the rest of my fellow-men, I had always tied the sheet in a sailing-boat; but in so little and crank a concern as a canoe, and with these charging squalls, I was not prepared to find myself follow the same principle, and it inspired me with some contemptuous views of our regard for life. It is certainly easier to smoke with the sheet fastened; but I had never before weighed a comfortable pipe of tobacco against an obvious risk, and gravely elected for the comfortable pipe. It is a common-place that we cannot answer for ourselves before we have been tried. But it is not so common a reflection, and surely more consoling, that we usually find ourselves a great deal braver and better than we thought."

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There is but little of interest up the river, which waters a level, unpicturesque country to Rupelmonde, where the canoeists would bid good-bye to the Scheldt and steer to the south-east up the Rupel, a broad and smooth-flowing stream that joins the greater water at this point. Against the current they would urge their tiny prows until they arrived after a journey of a few miles at the town of Boom, whence the canal extends to Brussels in an almost straight line:

As I made my way that grey autumn morning through the little villages and along the tree-lined highway, the brown leaves flickering down in the cold wind that stirred among the branches, it pleased me to fancy how Stevenson, had his youth fallen in the days of the bicycle, would have enjoyed the privilege of riding on the Belgian footpath, which to us who live in a land where no

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cyclist dare mount his machine except on the highway affords a delightful sensation of lawlessness. It is well to observe, however, that but for this right of the footpath there would be no cyclist in all Flanders or Northern France, since highways and by-ways there are made of the most indiscriminate cobbles, and in the remote country places a cart on the lonely road moves with as great a clatter as one on the stony streets of Edinburgh.

III.

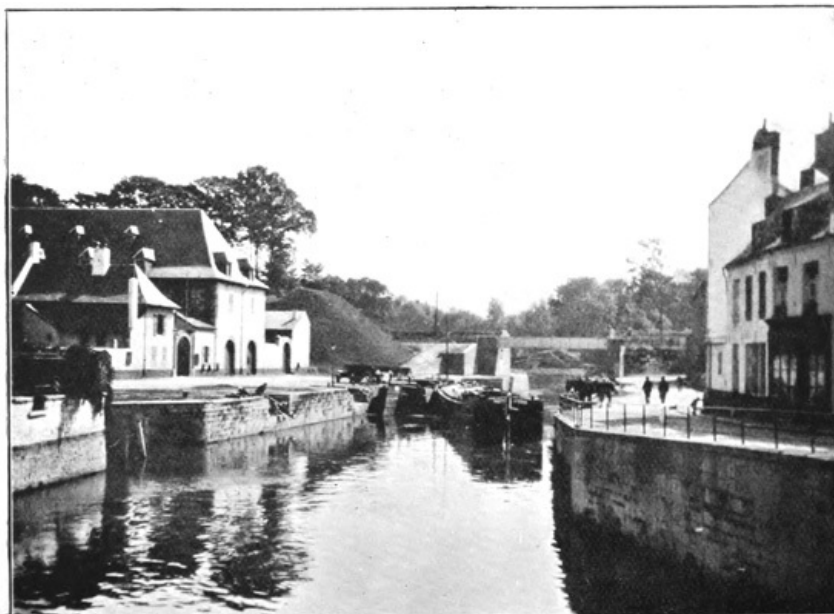
I was no great way from Boom when I saw advancing a high and narrow structure, drawn by a horse, that progressed to the weird and irregular clangor of a heavy bell, reminding me curiously of Stevenson's moving description of the leper bell in *The Black Arrow*. When I came up with the horse and its burden, I found the latter to consist of a large circular tank, set on four wheels, with a tall box in front for the driver, above whose head a large bell was suspended. The word "Petrol," painted on the tank, indicated its contents. Here, surely, was something that made the days of the canoe voyage seem remote indeed; the peddling vendor of petrol belongs emphatically to the new century.

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THE ALLEE VERTE AT LAEKEN

The head-quarters of the "Royal Sport Nautique" is hidden among the trees on the left of the picture.



THE SAMBRE AT MAUBEUGE

It was at this point, "on the Sambre canalised," that the canoe voyage began in earnest.

"Boom is not a nice place, and is only remarkable for one thing: that the majority of the habitants have a private opinion that they can speak English, which is not justified by fact." I can heartily endorse our canoeist's opinion of the town, but this linguistic pride of its inhabitants is surely a vanity of the past. I found none—and I spoke to several—who had any delusions as to their knowledge of English, and, indeed, few of them had more than a smattering of French. A pleasant fellow on a cycle, who had insisted on riding close to me through the outlying districts of the town, which are entirely taken up by extensive brickworks, where I noticed the labourers all went bare-footed, I found capable of understanding a few words of broad Scots, and when I said, "Boom, is't richt on?" or "Watter, richt on?" he nodded brightly, and replied in Flemish, which was comically like the Scots.

The Hôtel de la Navigation, where the paddlers put up for the night, and of which Stevenson gives so bad an account, I found no trace of, nor did I tarry any length of time in Boom, since its attractions were so meagre. The "great church with a clock, and a wooden bridge over the river," remain the outstanding features of the town, and viewed from the south side of the river, it makes by no means an unpleasing picture.

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IV.

The canal was simply packed with barges and great ungainly scows in the vicinity of the town, awaiting their turn to slip through the locks into the freer water of the Rupel, and heigh! for Antwerp, or even the coastwise towns of Holland. It was good to feel as one proceeded along the tow-path that here, in this world of change, was a stream of life flowing onward through the generations serene and changeless. "Every now and then we met or overtook a long string of boats with great green tillers; high sterns with a window on either side of the rudder, and perhaps a jug or flowerpot in one of the windows; a dinghy following behind; a woman busied about the day's dinner, and a handful of children." Every day since R. L. S. paddled in this same stretch of water the canal has presented the same picture of life, and thirty years hence, it is safe to prophesy, the wayfarer will find no change, as these canals remain the great highways of Belgium and France for the transport of goods that are in no haste; and when we come to think of it, a great proportion of the commodities of life may be carried from place to place in no gasping hurry for prompt delivery.

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Stevenson has many profitable reflections on the life of the canal-folk, with which in the course of his journey he was to become so familiar. "Of all the creatures of commercial enterprise," he writes, "a canal barge is by far the most delightful to consider. It may spread its sails, and then you see it sailing high above the tree-tops and the windmill, sailing on the aqueduct, sailing through the green corn-lands, the most picturesque of things amphibious. Or the horse plods along at a foot-pace, as if there were no such thing as business in the world; and the man dreaming at the tiller sees the same spire on the horizon all day long.... There should be many contented spirits on board, for such a life is both to travel and to stay at home.... I am sure I would rather be a bargee than occupy any position under heaven that required attendance at an office. There are few callings, I should say, where a man gives up less of his liberty in return for regular meals." But our philosopher, when he goes on to enhance his comfortable picture of a bargee's life, is scarcely correct in saying that "he can never be kept beating off a lee shore a whole frosty night when the sheets are as hard as iron." For these great clumsy craft know well the scent of the brine, and there are times when the snug outlook on the towing-path, and the slow business of passing through innumerable locks are changed for floundering in heavy seas and a straining look-out for a safe harbour. Not all their days are smooth and placid, and sometimes, we may imagine, the dainty pots of geraniums, that look so gay against the windows as we pass, must be removed to safer places, while the family washing, drying on deck to-day, has to be stowed elsewhere, and the tow-haired children, now playing around the dog-kennel on the top of the hatches, have to be sent below when salt waves break over the squat prow of the vessel.

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The journey along the canal bank was to me a very pleasant one, and I had hopes of being more fortunate than the canoeists in reaching Brussels with a dry skin. They had to paddle in an almost continual drizzle, and even made shift to lunch in a ditch, with the rain pattering on their waterproofs. But when I got as far as Villevorde, where gangs of men were labouring on the extensive works in connection with the railway and the new water supply, the rain began, and I was wet to the skin long before I had reached the royal suburb of Laeken, where, for evidence of Belgium's industrial progress, witness the splendid improvement on the canal at this point, soon to become a system of docks and water-ways resembling in extent a great railway junction.

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THE GRAND CERF MAUBEUGE

Where R. L. S. and his companion stayed for some days awaiting the arrival of the canoes by rail from Brussels.

V.

One of the most amusing episodes in "An Inland Voyage" was the encounter of the canoeists with the young boatmen of the "Royal Sport Nautique," who in their enthusiasm for rowing gave a warm welcome to the strangers, and by assuming the latter to be mighty men of the paddle, led them into the most unwarranted boasting about the sport. "We are all employed in commerce during the day," said the Belgians, "but in the evening, *voyez-vous, nous sommes sérieux*." An admirable opening for a characteristic bit of Stevensonian philosophy: "For will anyone dare to tell me that business is more entertaining than fooling among boats?"

Whether or not the newer generation of Brussels boatmen are as serious as the youths of thirty years ago I cannot say. The next afternoon, being Sunday, I came out again from Brussels to make enquiries concerning the "Royal Sport Nautique," and found a commodious brick building occupying the site of the boathouse wherein Stevenson had been entertained, but no signs of nautical life about it. There was the slip where the *Cigarette* and the *Arethusa* were drawn up out of the canal, and on the roadway opposite stood this new boathouse and clubroom, with the dates 1865—94 indicating, as the only member whom I found on the premises explained, that the club had been founded in the former year, and the building erected in the latter. But he was a churlish fellow, this coxcomb in his Sunday dress, and barely answered my questions. If I too, had paddled my own canoe, perhaps it might have been otherwise! The day was fine, and the canal was busy with little excursion steamers that were well patronised by holiday-makers, and were covered almost to the water-line with flaring advertisements of Scotch whiskies and English soaps, only one out of a dozen advertisements being of local origin: a circumstance that would, we may be sure, have drawn from Stevenson some pages of gay philosophy.

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VI.

Following the example of the original travellers, I took train from Brussels to the French frontier town of Maubeuge, where in real earnest their canoe voyage began. To the traveller who has wandered the highways of France south and west of Paris, such a town as this presents some uncommon features, and I cannot but think that R. L. S. gives a wrong impression of it. "There was nothing to do, nothing to see," he tells us, and his only joy seems to have been that he got excellent meals at the "Grand Cerf," where he encountered the dissatisfied driver of the hotel omnibus, who said to him: "Here I am. I drive to the station. Well! Then I drive back again to the hotel. And so on every day and all the week round. My God! is that life?" And you remember Stevenson's comment: "Better a thousand times that he should be a tramp, and mend pots and

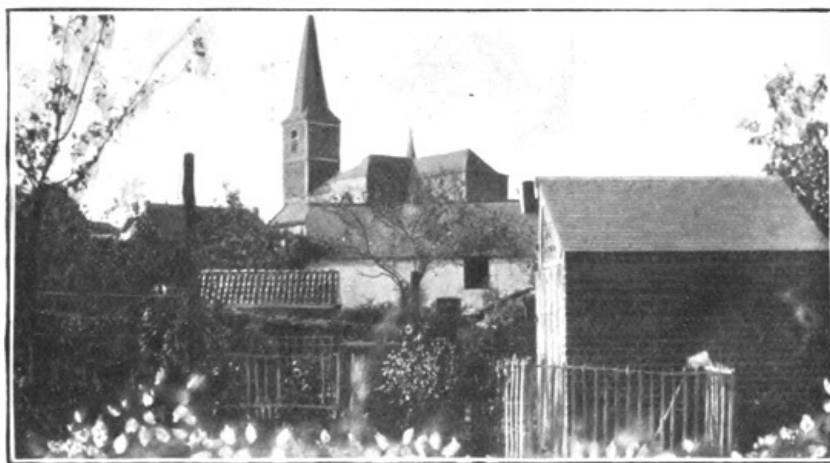
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pans by the wayside, and sleep under the trees, and see the dawn and the sunset every day above a new horizon." Here spoke the lover of romance; but the facts are quite otherwise.

Maubeuge I found a bright little town, surrounded by mighty ramparts with spacious gates and bridges over the fosse. It is picturesquely situated on the river Sambre, on whose banks stand large warehouses and manufactories, while the shops bear evidence of prosperity. Even *l'art nouveau* has reached out from Paris and affected the business architecture of the town. There is a bustling market-place, a handsome little square with a spirited monument to the sons of the country-side who have fallen for France, a grey old church, and a pleasure-ground with a bandstand and elaborate arrangements for illumination on gala nights. Indeed, I can imagine life to be very tolerable in Maubeuge, which is really the residential centre of an immense industrial district resembling more closely than any other part of France our own Black Country.

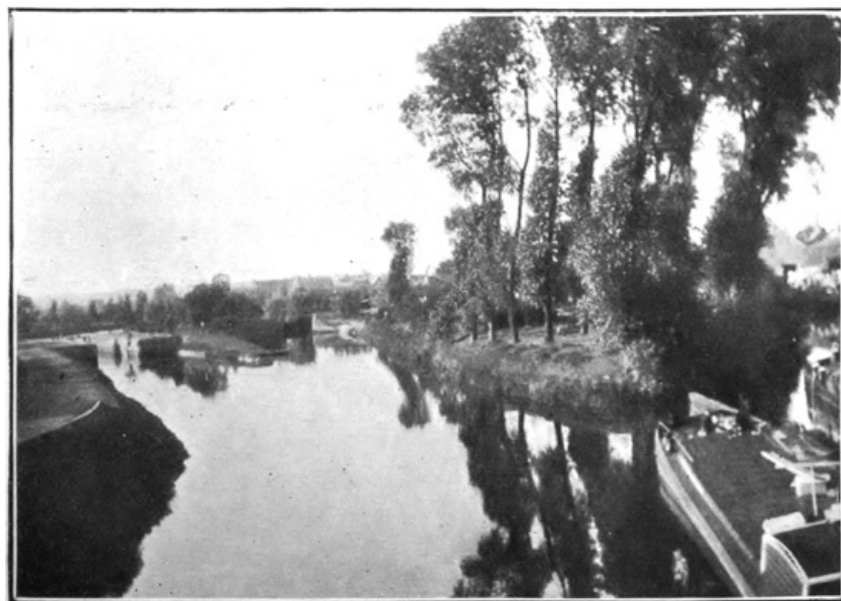
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Stevenson makes no mention of having visited the church, which is interesting in one respect at least. Beneath the stucco casts of the stations of the cross some *curé* of an evangelical turn of mind has ventured on a series of little homilies unusual in my experience of French churches. Thus, under the representation of Christ falling while bearing His cross we read: "Who is it that causes Jesus to fall a second time? You, unhappy person, who are for ever falling in your faults, because you lack resolution. Ask, therefore, of God that you may henceforth become more faithful unto Him."



THE CHURCH AT QUARTES

"A miry lane led us up from Quartes with its church and bickering windmill."—R. L. S.



THE SAMBRE FROM THE BRIDGE AT PONT

Where "the landlady stood upon the bridge, probably lamenting she had charged so little," when the canoeists arrived back by river from Quartes after having been treated like pedlars at Pont.

Only in the most insignificant way can Maubeuge have changed since Sir Walter Simpson was

nearly arrested for drawing the fortifications, "a feat of which he was hopelessly incapable," so that I suspect something of misplaced sentiment in Stevenson's impressions of the place. For my part, I should find it difficult to mention a town of the same size in England or Scotland to compare with Maubeuge as a place to pass one's days in. That omnibus driver with the soul of a Raleigh may have been in some measure a creature of the romancer's fancy. At all events, it is likely enough that he has travelled far since 1876, as I take him to have been a man of middle age then. The hotel omnibus with its two horses still makes its journey to and from the station, but the driver is a stout young fellow of florid face, who, I am sure, is perfectly contented with his lot, and enjoys his meals. "*C'est toujours la même ici*," said Veuve Bonnaire, the landlady of the "Grand Cerf," when I chatted with her in the bureau after luncheon. Yet not always the same, for where was M. Bonnaire? And I fear that our canoeists, if they could visit the hostelry again would scarce recognise in this lady of gross body their hostess of thirty years ago. The building itself is quite unchanged, I was assured, and I ate my food in the same room and in just such company as the voyagers dined—military officers all absurdly alike in sharp features, small moustache and tuft on chin, and ungallant baldness of head; and three or four commercial travellers, each with a tendency to "a full habit of body."

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VII.

The whole establishment of the "Grand Cerf" accompanied the canoeists to the water's edge when they were ready to take their leave. Madame Bonnaire, however, has quite forgotten that exciting episode of her middle life; but there, we have Stevenson's word for it, and the good woman must accept the fame. The day was a dismal one, we are told—wind and rain, and "a stretch of blighted country" to pass through. I heartily wished for a speedy end to that same stretch. For six or seven miles the road is lined with factories and dirty cottages, while dirty electric cars rattle along, well-laden with passengers, for here France is at work and grimy; here is the France of which the tourist along the beaten tracks has no notion. A stout gentleman with whom I conversed by the wayside was very proud of the varied industries of the district. "Look you; we have glass works, pottery works, iron foundries, engine works, copper, and many other industries in the neighbourhood." Still, I was glad when, a mile or two beyond Hautmont, I found myself outside this region of smoke and growling factories and advancing into a pleasant pastoral country, the river only a little way from the road. Stevenson's word picture of the scene is photographic in its accuracy, but his art environs it with that ethereal touch the old engravers could give to a landscape, an art that has been lost to us by the vogue of cheap modern "processes."

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"After Hautmont," he writes, "the sun came forth again and the wind went down; and a little paddling took us beyond the ironworks and through a delectable land. The river wound among low hills, so that sometimes the sun was at our backs, and sometimes it stood right ahead, and the river before us was one sheet of intolerable glory. On either hand, meadows and orchards bordered, with a margin of sedge and water-flowers, upon the river. The hedges were of a great height, woven about the trunks of hedgerow elms; and the fields, as they were often small, looked like a series of bowers along the stream. There was never any prospect; sometimes a hill-top with its trees would look over the nearest hedgerow, just to make a middle distance for the sky; but that was all. The heaven was bare of clouds.... The river doubled among the hillocks, a shining strip of mirror glass; and the dip of the paddles set the flowers shaking along the brink."

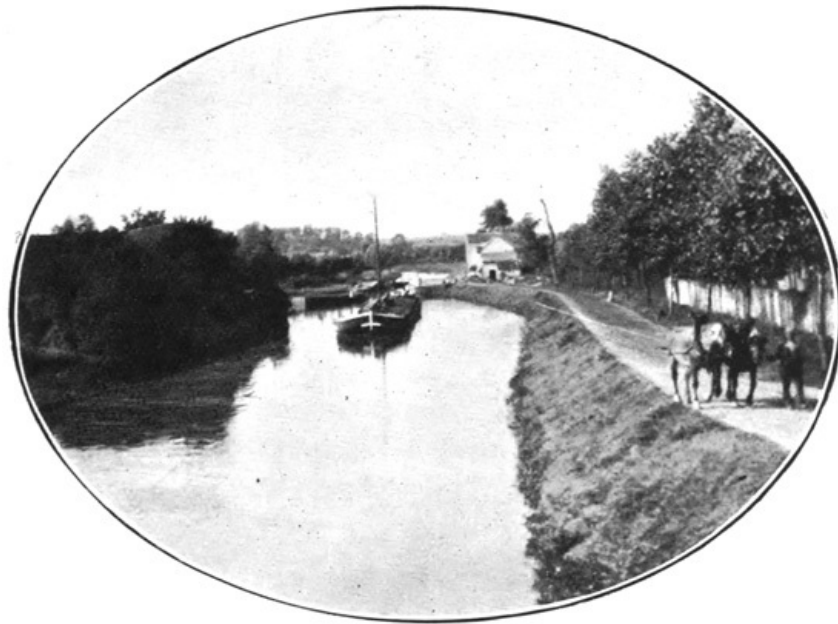
In this land of many waters every male creature seems to be a disciple of Sir Isaak Walton. A prodigious number of anglers will be encountered; I must have seen hundreds. Every day and all day they are dotted along the canals and rivers as patient as posts, and apparently as profitably employed. It was a continual wonder to me how they could spare the time; and a pleasure also, for it is cheering to know that so many fellow-creatures can afford to take life so leisurely, and that the factory may whistle and the suburban train shriek laden to the town without causing them to turn a hair. "They seem stupefied with contentment," says R. L. S. in a fine passage, "and when we induced them to exchange a few words with us about the weather, their voices sounded quiet and far away."

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VIII.

At the little hamlet of Quartes, "with its church and bickering windmill"—the latter gone these many years—the canoeists went in search of a lodging for the night, but had to trudge with their packs to the neighbouring village of Pont sur Sambre for accommodation. They would have fared better at Quartes to-day, as there is now a clean little *auberge* hard by the bridge, kept by a jovial fellow, who told me that his son had taken up photography, with deplorable results. "He takes my photograph, I assure you, M'sieu, and makes me look like a corpse in the Morgue"—and the landlord would laugh and show two rows of dusky teeth beneath his wiry moustache—"and when I say I'm not so awful as that, he will say that now I see myself as I really am, for, look you, the camera must tell the truth." He laughs again, and rising, says: "But come with me here," throwing open the door of a private room. "Now there's a portrait I had done in Brussels, and I'm really a decent-looking chap in that. So I say to my son, whenever he makes a new and worse picture of me: 'There's your papa to the life, done by a real photographer.'"

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ON THE SAMBRE AT QUARTES



SCENE AT PONT-SUR-SAMBRE

"Away on the left, a gaunt tower stood in the middle of the street."—R. L. S.

I am sure they are a happy family at the inn at Quartes, and they enjoy life, the score or two of barges and boats that pass their door every day keeping them in touch with the outer world of towns. The landlord informed me that he had several times been as far as Paris by the rivers and canals, and that there are excursions all that distance—nearly 200 miles by water—every summer.

IX.

Pont sur Sambre is a long thin village, a mile or so from Quartes, and different from other villages only in the possession of a strange lone tower that stands in the middle of the wide street. Stevenson makes note of it, and says: "What it had been in past ages I know not; probably a hold in time of war; but nowadays it bore an illegible dial-plate in its upper parts, and near the bottom an iron letter-box." As I was preparing to take a photograph of this landmark, a buxom woman came up and begged that I might photograph her. I protested my inability to do so with any satisfaction, having no stand for my camera. "But you have a camera; isn't that enough? And I am so anxious for a photograph." What would you in such a case? Especially as she said she could wait a month or more for me to send a print from England. So the widow Cerisier poses in the foreground of my picture of the strange tower at Pont—a tower which, she told me, has weird underground passages leading away into regions of mystery.

It was at a little ale-house within sight of the tower that Stevenson and his friend passed the night, the landlady treating them as pedlars, and they enjoying the experience. Here, too, they fell in with a real pedlar, Monsieur Hector Gaillard of Maubeuge, who travelled in grand style with a tilt-cart drawn by a donkey, and was accompanied by his wife and his young son. Pedlars' fortunes seem to have improved since those days, as I found a travelling cheap-jack at Pont, with a very commodious wagon, which must have required two horses to move it about, cunningly contrived to open into a veritable bazaar, around which housewives and children clustered like bees. Another packman was showing his wares hard by on a lorry equally commodious, where he displayed to advantage an immense assortment of second-hand clothes and remnants of cloth, while his wife was inducing the thrifty women of Pont to buy.

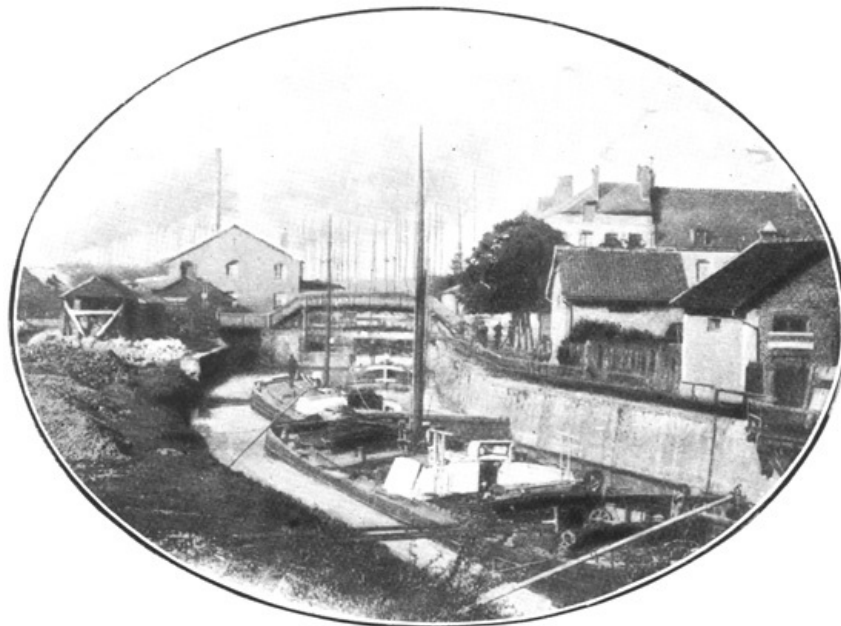
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The Sambre at Pont looks very alluring, especially when the sun shines and projects the green shadows of the waving willows across its sluggish waters. Barges pass under the bridge at a snail's pace, and away among the winding avenue of poplars and willows that marks the river's zigzag course through the rich and restful meadow-land we see the masts of other boats moving with consummate slowness. R. L. S. illustrates the erratic course of the river by stating that while they could walk from Quartes to Pont in about ten minutes, the distance by river was six kilometres, or close on four miles. The folk at the ale-house were amazed when their guests, after walking to Quartes next morning, arrived by river an hour or so later as the owners of two dainty canoes. "They began to perceive that they had entertained angels unawares. The landlady stood upon the bridge, probably lamenting she had charged so little; the son ran to and fro, and called out the neighbours to enjoy the sight; and we paddled away from quite a crowd of wrapt observers. These gentlemen pedlars indeed! Now you see their quality too late."

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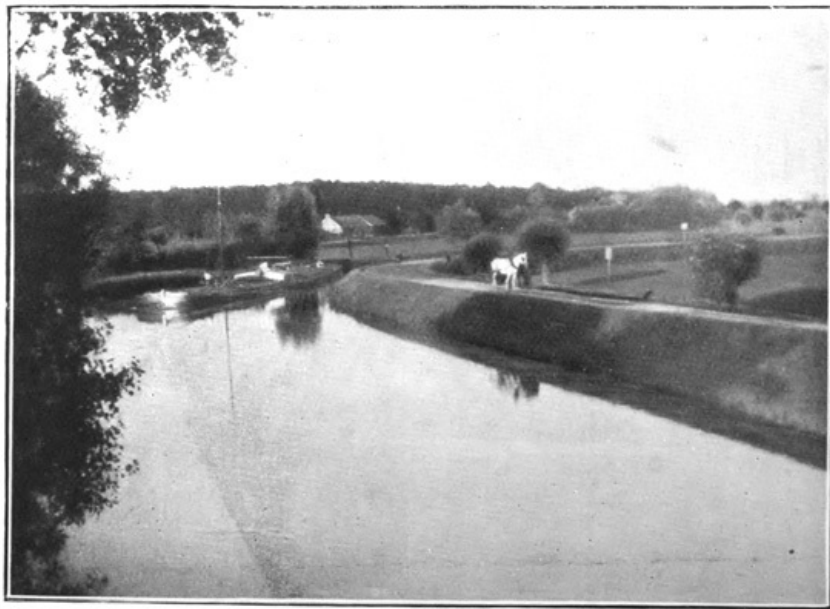
X.

The country between Pont and Landrecies wears many signs of quiet prosperity; houses are numerous, orchards well-stocked, the people—and never is the highway utterly deserted—smiling and contented, to all appearance. The river at a point about six miles from Landrecies skirts a part of the forest of Mormal, and our sentimental traveller turns the occasion to profit thus:



THE SAMBRE CANAL AT LANDRECIES

As it was at the time of "An Inland Voyage."



THE FOREST OF MORMAL FROM THE SAMBRE

**"We were skirting the Forest of Mormal, a sinister name to the ear, but a place most gratifying to sight and smell."—
R. L. S.**

"There is nothing so much alive, and yet so quiet, as a woodland; and a pair of people, swinging past in canoes, feel very small and bustling by comparison. And surely of all smells in the world, the smell of many trees is the sweetest and most fortifying. The sea has a rude, pistolling sort of odour, that takes you in the nostrils like snuff, and carries with it a fine sentiment of open water and tall ships; but the smell of a forest, which comes nearest to this in tonic quality, surpasses it by many degrees in the quality of softness. Again, the smell of the sea has little variety, but the smell of a forest is infinitely changeful; it varies with the hour of the day, not in strength merely, but in character; and the different sorts of trees, as you go from one zone of the wood to another, seem to live among different kinds of atmosphere. Usually the resin of the fir predominates. But some woods are more coquettish in their habits; and the breath of the forest of Mormal, as it came aboard upon us that showery afternoon, was perfumed with nothing less delicate than sweetbriar."

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Further on he says: "Alas! the forest of Mormal is only a little bit of a wood, and it was but for a little way that we skirted by its boundaries." So it may have seemed to the canoeists, who saw only a scrap of the great forest, that thrusts southward to the river at a place called Hachette. But it was not without some misgiving that I found myself suddenly plunged into the woodland, and discovered that I had six miles of it to penetrate and roads to ride which a little boy in a cart described eloquently by stretching his arm to its limit and then sweeping it down to the cart, and up and down half a dozen times! The forest has indeed, as R. L. S. observes, "a sinister name to the ear," and I felt—if I must speak the truth—a little quickening of the pulse when I had ridden about half an hour through its lonely rough roads, with rabbits and other wild creatures of the undergrowth making strange rustlings among the leaves by the wayside. The sun had been going down as I came into the forest, but the air among the trees was chilling and wintry after the warm high-road, not a slanting ray of sunshine penetrating the dense growth of trees. The only pedestrians whom I met were a party of rough sportsmen, who eyed me as a curious bird when, in answer to their questions, I said I had come from London. I had wandered from the direct road through the forest, it appeared, and one of the men, having a map, was able to work out a route for me; but it was another half-hour—which seemed like half a day—before I caught a welcome glimpse of the clear evening sky among the lower branches, and presently emerged on the main road into Landrecies, at a place suggestively named Bout du Monde.

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XI.

If there is another town so dead as Landrecies in all the department of Le Nord, I have a great wish not to pass a night within its walls. It is changed times there since the passage of R. L. S., although it was *triste* enough when "Arethusa" and "Cigarette" spent two days at the roomy old Hôtel de la Tête d'Or. "Within the ramparts," he says, "a few blocks of houses, a long row of barracks and a church, figure, with what countenance they may, as the town. There seems to be no trade; and a shopkeeper, from whom I bought a sixpenny flint-and-steel, was so much affected that he filled my pockets with spare flints into the bargain. The only public buildings that had any interest for us were the hotel and the café. But we visited the church. There lies Marshal Clarke; but as neither of us had heard of that military hero, we bore the associations of the spot with fortitude."

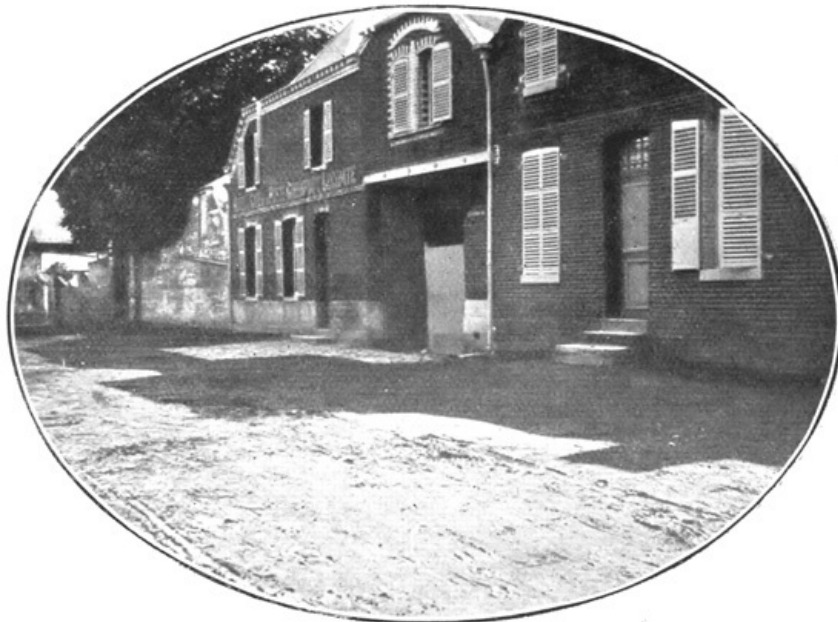
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Marshal Clarke, whose tomb looks as new as though it had been set up yesterday, was one of Napoleon's generals, and, as his epitaph reminds us, sometime minister of war. Had he hailed from Scotland instead of Ireland he might have been more interesting to R. L. S.

If Landrecies was so dull thirty years ago, picture it to-day, with its barracks almost empty, its ramparts demolished, and its less than 4,000 inhabitants in bed by nine o'clock! "It was just the place to hear the round going by at night in the darkness, with the solid tramp of men marching, and the startling reverberations of the drum. It reminded you, that even this place was a point in the great warfaring system of Europe, and might on some future day be ringed about with cannon smoke and thunder, and make itself a name among strong towns." Alas! the barking of a melancholy dog and the clock of the Hôtel de Ville ringing out the lazy hours were the only sounds I heard that night, though just before dusk a wandering camelot selling in the street a sheet of "all the latest Paris songs" made a welcome diversion. I sampled his stock, and found it to consist of doggerel rhymes about the Russo-Japanese War, mingled with some amorous ditties, and a piece of a devotional kind! "*C'est une ville morte*," said a dumpy lady with a scorbutic face, who drank her after-dinner coffee in the dining-room with me. "Think of Paris, and then—this!" she sighed. I wondered what had brought her there, and doubtless she thought I was some cycling fellow who had lost his way.

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But if the military glory of Landrecies is departed, it makes a brave effort to recall the past with an elegant column near the site of the north gate, whereon are recorded the sieges which Landrecies withstood, the last being in the Franco-German War. Also erected since Stevenson's time is a striking monument to the great Joseph François Dupleix, whose gallant effort to found an Indian empire for France was frustrated by Clive, and who, born in Landrecies, spent his substance for his fatherland, only to die in poverty and neglect.



THE INN AT MOY

"Sweet was our rest in the 'Golden Sheep' at Moy."—R. L. S.



THE VILLAGE STREET, MOY

The landlord of the hotel assured me that he remembered the visit of my heroes, even mentioning the hour of their arrival and departure. He was a young man then; but to-day his hair is streaked with grey. The *Juge de Paix*, who entertained the travellers, is still to the fore: a bachelor then, he is a widower now. 97

I noticed an odd feature of the hotel: its meat safe was the roof of the passage to the courtyard. Here, hanging from hooks fixed in the roof, were joints of beef, legs of mutton, hares, rabbits, and so forth—an abundant display; and when the cook was in need of an item, she came out with a long pole and reached down the piece she wanted.

XII.

The canoeists left Landrecies on a rainy morning, the judge under an umbrella seeing them off. My lot was pleasanter, for the morning was fine and the landlord's son, a bright lad, with those babyish socks which French boys wear, escorted me some way out of the town on his bicycle, chatting merrily about the state of the roads, and evincing great surprise when he heard that we would be fined for cycling on the footpath in England.

My route lay along the highway to Guise for a time and close to the canal, passing through a gentle undulating country with far views of thickly-wooded fields and little hills. The hamlets by the way were surrounded by hop fields, the great poles with their fantastic coverings of the vine being the most noticeable feature of the wayside, just as R. L. S. had observed them when the hop-growers of to-day were *bien jeune*, as the old gentleman at the play in Paris described Stevenson himself. Etreux, where the canal journey ended, I found a thriving and agreeable little town, the rattle of the loom being heard from many an open door, and the thud, thud of flails in the farm-steadings on the outskirts. At Etreux the canoes were placed on a light country cart one morning, and the travellers walked to Vadencourt by way of Tupigny, a village where I was served with a make-shift lunch at a little inn, the landlady doing the cooking and laying the table with a baby held in her left arm! Vadencourt is full of weavers, and here close by the old bridge over the river the *Arethusa* and *Cigarette* were launched in the fast-flowing water of the River Oise. 98

XIII.

The canoeists were now in the full swing of perhaps the most enjoyable part of their journey. Let a canal be never so beautiful, it is still a canal, and no adventure need be looked for there; but a river that runs wild and free is a possible highway to the enchanted kingdom of Romance. We have the avowal of R. L. S. that on this sedgy stream, wriggling its devious ways by field and woodland, he had some of the happiest moments of his life. 99

"We could have shouted aloud," he says in a glowing passage. "If this lively and beautiful river were, indeed, a thing of death's contrivance, the old ashen rogue had famously outwitted himself with us. I was living three to the minute. I was scoring points against him every stroke of my paddle, every turn of the stream. I have rarely had better profit of my life. For I think we may look upon our little private war with death somewhat in this light. If a man knows he will sooner or later be robbed upon a journey, he will have a bottle of the best in every inn, and look upon all his extravagances as so much gained upon the thieves. And above all, where, instead of simply spending, he makes a profitable investment for some of his money, when it will be out of risk of loss. So every bit of brisk living, and above all when it is healthful, is just so much gained upon the wholesale filcher, death. We shall have the less in our pockets, the more in our stomach, when he cries, 'Stand and deliver.' A swift stream is a favourite artifice of his, and one that brings him in a comfortable thing per annum; but when he and I come to settle our accounts, I shall whistle in his face for these hours upon the upper Oise." 100

Indeed, he came near to settling accounts with old Death more readily than he could have cared; for not many miles from Vadencourt, in attempting to shoot below the over-hanging trunk of a fallen tree, the lively "Arethusa" was caught in its branches, while his canoe went spinning down stream relieved of its paddler. He succeeded in scrambling on to the tree-trunk, though he "seemed, by the weight, to have all the water of the Oise in my trouser-pockets." But through all, he still held to his paddle. "On my tomb, if ever I have one, I mean to get these words inscribed: 'He clung to his paddle.'" Brave heart, this is in truth but a humorous phrasing of the stately requiem on the stone upon Vaea Top.

It was a dripping "Arethusa" that got into Origny Sainte-Benoîte that night, and but for the ready and resourceful "Cigarette" the adventure might have ended less happily. Although Origny is a dusty little village, as dull as any in all Picardy, the canoeists rested there a day, and had good profit of the people they met at the inn, as Stevenson's pages witness. The landlord was a shouting, noisy fellow, a red Republican. "'I'm a proletarian, you see.' Indeed, we saw it very well. God forbid that I should find him handling a gun in Paris streets! That will not be a good moment for the general public." 101



VEUVE BAZIN

Hastily and unnecessarily "tidying herself" while being photographed at her door.



THE BAZINS' INN AT LA FÈRE

**"Little did the Bazins know how much they served us."—
R. L. S.**

XIV.

An accident to my bicycle in the neighbourhood of Origny made it necessary for me to go on to Moy by train, on a quaint little railway worked chiefly by women, who act as station-mistresses, ticket-clerks, restaurant-keepers, and guards of the level crossings. The carriages were filled chiefly with anglers, and every little station had a gang of them armed with a prodigious number of rods and lines, and each carrying a pail with a brass lid. I gathered that the pails were empty almost without exception, as sport had been extremely bad, though numerous patient creatures with rod and line were still to be seen in the drizzling rain along the river, which is here broken

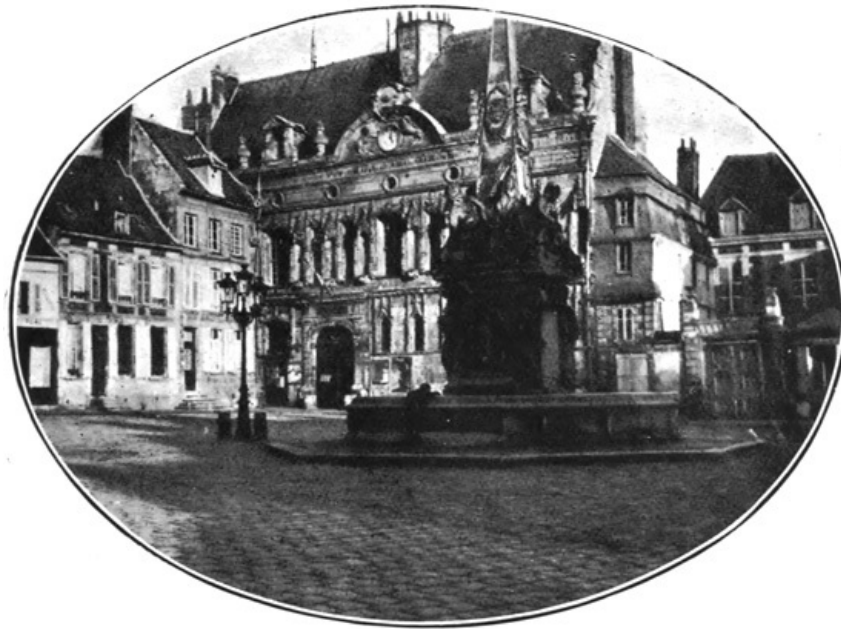
into many backwaters, lying in flat land among scraggy pine woods and good green meadows. One sturdy fellow who, like his companions, bore his ill-fortune with a smiling face, averred that though he'd fished all day and caught nothing, he had bagged fifteen *broche* the previous day between one o'clock and half-past two, and between three and five he had caught an unbelievable number of trout. Anglers are the same in all lands, I suspect.

"Moy (pronounced Moy) was a pleasant little village, gathered round a château in a moat," as our author records. "The air was perfumed with hemp from neighbouring fields. At the 'Golden Sheep' we found excellent entertainment." I asked for the "Golden Sheep," and was directed to an establishment that was named the Hôtel de la Poste. I passed on and asked another villager, but he sent me back, as I found on following his instructions, to the same hotel. The postman put me right at length by explaining that the landlord had rechristened his house three months before in honour of the new post office across the way, a shoddy little building where I bought stamps from a middle-aged woman next morning. The landlady of the hotel, who might pass in every particular, save the myopia, for the "stout, plain, short-sighted, motherly body, with something not far short of a genius for cookery," described by R. L. S., agreed with me that her husband had made a sad mistake in dropping the old sign of the "Collier d'Or," "but he would have his own way, and there you are!" If I could have got the fellow—a fat, jolly mortal—to understand that to have the name of his hotel in a book by R. L. S. was an honour worth living up to, perhaps the old sign would have been fished out, regilded and placed in its old position. But he had not been the *patron* thirty years ago, and he did not care a straw for anything so remote, though his wife had a gleam of pleasure when I quoted to her Stevenson's note: "Sweet was our rest in the 'Golden Sheep' at Moy." 102 103

It is a progressive place, although it seems to go to bed at eight o'clock, for there is a good supply of electric light—furnished by water power, of course—in the hotel and other establishments; but not a solitary street lamp to pierce the blue-black of an autumn night. I must tell you that I was the only guest at the inn, yet a splendid dinner was prepared for me. Soup, fish with mayonaise, fillet of beef with mushrooms, green haricots *au beurre*, cold chicken, and a delicious salad of white herbs with a suspicion of garlic, a sweet omelet, pears, grapes, cheese, bread and butter, and, if I had cared, a whole bottle of red wine. An excellent *café noir* followed, in the *estaminet*, where my hostess apologised for lighting only one electric lamp "*pour l'économie, vous savez.*" My bedroom was commodious and well-appointed, and I had a good French *petit déjeuner* next morning. The bill? Three shillings and ninepence, I declare! *Pour l'économie!* Madame, I sympathise, and some day I must return to make a visit more profitable to you. 104

XV.

From Moy to La Fère is a very short journey even by the river, but the canoeists had lingered till late afternoon before leaving the former place, which "invited to repose," and it was dark when they got to La Fère in their chronic state of dampness. "It was a fine night to be within doors over dinner, and hear the rain upon the windows." They had heard that the principal inn at the place was a particularly good one, and cheery pictures of their comfortable state there arose in their minds as they stowed their canoes and set forth into the town, which lies chiefly eastward of the river, and is enclosed by two great lines of fortification. But they reckoned without their hostess! The lady of the inn mistook them for pedlars, and rushed them back into the dismal night. "Out with you—out of the door!" she screeched. "*Sortez! Sortez! Sortez par la porte!*" Stevenson's picture of the incident is full of sly humour, but the feelings of the travellers must indeed have been poignant. "We have been taken for pedlars again," said the baronet, "Good God, what it must be to be a pedlar in reality!" says his companion of the pen. "Timon was a philanthropist alongside of him." He prayed that he might never be uncivil to a pedlar. But after all, it was for the best. That cosy inn would not have afforded the essayist such interesting matter for reflection as he found at "la Croix de Malte," a little working-class *auberge* at the other end of the town, where the Porte Notre-Dame gives exit to the straggling suburbs. 105



THE TOWN HALL, NOYON



HÔTEL DU NORD, NOYON

Where the travellers stayed

"The Hotel du Nord lights its secular tapers within a stone-cast of the church."—R. L. S.

XVI.

There is no passage in the whole of *An Inland Voyage* so moving, so simple in its intense humanity, as that wherein its author sets down in his own inimitable way his impressions of the humble folk who kept this inn. Scarcely hoping that I might be so fortunate as to find either of the Bazins alive, I asked at one of the numerous cafés opposite the great barracks, whence crashed forth the indescribable noise of a brass band practising for the first time together, if there was an inn in the town kept by one Bazin. To my delight I was told there was, and you may be sure I made haste to be there. I found the place precisely as Stevenson pictures it, noting by the way a tiny new Protestant chapel with the legend "Culte Evangélique" over its door, a cheering sight to Protestant eyes in so Catholic a country as the north of France.

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"Bazin, Restaurateur Loge à pied,"—there was the altered sign on the cream-coloured walls of the house. In the common room of the little inn, which was full of noisy reservists that memorable night when the canoeists sought shelter there, I found two or three rough but honest-looking fellows drinking, while a grey-haired woman, pleasant and homely of appearance, sat at lunch with a young woman and a youth, the latter wearing glasses and being in that curious condition of downy beard which we never see in England. I stood on the sandy floor by the little semi-

circular bar, with its shining ranks of glasses, waiting the attention of a young woman who was serving the customers with something from an inner room, when the old lady, looking up at me through her spectacles, asked what I wanted. "To speak with the *patron*," I replied. "Well?" she said. "Have I the pleasure of addressing Madame Bazin?" I asked, and on her answering with a slight show of uneasiness, I proceeded to explain that I had come to see the inn out of interest in a celebrated English author, who had once stayed there and had written so charmingly about Madame and Monsieur Bazin. In an instant the old lady and the younger folk were agitated with pleasure, and, to my surprise, they knew all about the long-ago visit of R. L. S. and his friend. "Perhaps he was your papa," Madame suggested as the likeliest reason for my having come so far on a matter so sentimental. And the good soul's eyes brimmed with tears when she told me that her husband had been dead these three years. Stevenson had sent them a copy of his book, and they had got the passage touching the voyagers' stay at the inn translated by a young friend at college, so that worthy old Bazin had not been suffered to pass away without knowing how he and his good wife had ministered to the heart of one of the best beloved writers of his generation. You will remember Stevenson's beautiful reference to these worthy people. But let me quote it, for it may be read many times with increase of profit:

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"Bazin was a tall man, running to fat; soft spoken, with a delicate, gentle face. We asked him to share our wine; but he excused himself, having pledged reservists all day long. This was a very different type of the workman-innkeeper from the bawling, disputatious fellow at Origny. He also loved Paris, where he had worked as a decorative painter in his youth. He had delighted in the museums in his youth, 'One sees there little miracles of work,' he said; 'that is what makes a good workman; it kindles a spark.' We asked him how he managed in La Fère. 'I am married,' he said, 'I have my pretty children. But, frankly, it is no life at all. From morning to night I pledge a pack of good enough fellows who know nothing,' ... Madame Bazin came out after a while; she was tired with her day's work, I suppose; and she nestled up to her husband, and laid her head upon his breast. He had his arm about her, and kept gently patting her on the shoulder. I think Bazin was right, and he was really married. Of how few people can the same be said!

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"Little did the Bazins know how much they served us. We were charged for candles, for food and drink, and for the beds we slept in. But there was nothing in the bill for the husband's pleasant talk, nor for the pretty spectacle of their married life. And there was yet another item uncharged. For these people's politeness really set us up again in our own esteem. We had a thirst for consideration; the sense of insult was still hot in our spirits, and civil usage seemed to restore us to our position in the world.

"How little we pay our way in life! Although we have our purses continually in our hand, the better part of service goes still unrewarded. But I like to fancy that a grateful spirit gives as good as it gets. Perhaps the Bazins knew how much I liked them? Perhaps they also were healed of some slights by the thanks that I gave them in my manner?"



NOYON CATHEDRAL FROM THE EAST

**"We had the superb east end before our eyes all morning
from the window of our bedroom."—R. L. S.**

Is that not a lovely monument to have? Many of us who have made a greater clatter in the world than old Bazin will be less fortunate than he in this respect. And you see that although he had little affection for La Fère, he lived five-and-twenty quiet years there after Stevenson came his way. Yet not, in one sense, quiet, as the bugles are for ever braying, and even the street boys whistle barrack calls instead of music-hall ditties. As Madame told me, the town exists solely for the military, and we may be sure that it is none the sweeter on that account. But her little inn struck me as a wholesome and entirely innocent establishment. Those "pretty children" are men and women now, and the young man with the nascent whiskers, whom I took to be a clerk in the town, was a grandson of the old folk. Not a feature of the *auberge* has changed, except that the

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Maltese Cross, having served its day, has been taken down. Stevenson—who has lighted a little lamp of fame on this humble shrine—and Sir Walter Simpson and old Bazin have all passed away, while children's children sit in the old seats; truly the meanest works of man's hands are more enduring than man himself. Madame Bazin, to my regret, made a quick effort to throw aside her apron, and needlessly to tidy her bodice, when I asked her to face the camera. She was caught in the act by the instantaneous plate. Even here, you see, the apron signifies servitude, and must not appear in pictures; yet it and the cap, which latter I have seldom seen north of Paris, are the only redeeming features of the country Frenchwoman's dress. The women of rural France give one the impression of being in permanent mourning, and consequently, when they do go into real mourning, they have to emphasise the fact with ridiculous yards of flowing crape. Madame Bazin had never heard of Stevenson's death, and I felt curiously guilty of an ill deed in telling her about that grave in far Samoa.

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XVII.

The Oise runs through a stretch of pastoral country south of La Fère, known as "the Golden Valley," but a strath rather than a valley in character. It was a grey day on which I journeyed, and little that was golden did I see. But the quaint old town of Noyon, as grey and hoar as any in France, is rich in the gold of history; "a haunt of ancient peace." It stands on a gentle hill, about a mile away from the river, and is one of the cleanest of the old French towns that I have visited, reminding me somewhat of Lichfield; in atmosphere, I imagine, rather than in any outward resemblance, since I would be at a loss to point to the likeness if I were asked. R. L. S. had no more agreeable resting-place on all his voyage than at Noyon. The travellers put up at a very prosperous-looking hostelry, the Hôtel du Nord, which stands withdrawn a little way from the east end of the grand old cathedral—the glory of Noyon, and one of the gems of early French Gothic, though perhaps the least known to English tourists.

111

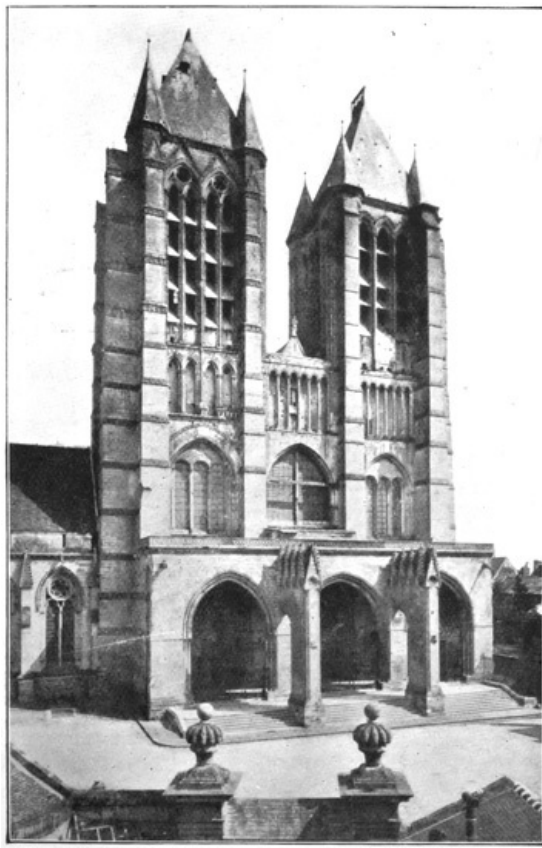
Seldom in France do we find the cathedral so regally free of surrounding buildings. No shabby structures lean unworthy heads against its old grey walls, and where, on the north side, the canons' library, with its crumbling timbers of the fifteenth century, nestles under the wing of the church, the effect is entirely pleasing. At the west front, too, where there is a spacious close, with well-cared-for houses and picturesque gateways, one has a feeling of reverence which the surroundings of French cathedrals so often fail to inspire. There is a pleasant touch of humour in Stevenson's description of the exterior of the beautiful apse:

"I have seldom looked on the east end of a church with more complete sympathy. As it flanges out in three wide terraces, and settles down broadly on the earth, it looks like the poop of some great old battleship. Hollow-backed buttresses carry vases which figure for the stern lanterns. There is a roll in the ground, and the towers just appear above the pitch of the roof, as though the good ship were bowing lazily over an Atlantic swell. At any moment it might be a hundred feet away from you, climbing the next billow. At any moment a window might open, and some old admiral thrust forth a cocked hat, and proceed to take an observation. The old admirals sail the sea no longer ... but this, that was a church before ever they were thought upon, is still a church, and makes as brave an appearance by the Oise. The cathedral and the river are probably the two oldest things for miles around and certainly they have both a grand old age."

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Inside the cathedral he found much to engage his mind, and the somewhat perfunctory performances of certain priests jarred with the noble serenity of the building. "I could never fathom how a man dares to lift up his voice to preach in a cathedral. What is he to say that will not be an anti-climax?" But, on the whole, he "was greatly solemnised," and he goes on to say: "In the little pictorial map of our whole Inland Voyage, which my fancy still preserves and sometimes unrolls for the amusement of odd moments, Noyon Cathedral figures on a most preposterous scale, and must be nearly as large as a department. I can still see the faces of the priests as if they were at my elbow, and hear '*Ave Maria, ora pro nobis,*' sounding through the church. All Noyon is blotted out for me by these superior memories, and I do not care to say more about the place. It was but a stack of brown roofs at the best, where I believe people live very respectably in a quiet way; but the shadow of the church falls upon it when the sun is low, and the five bells are heard in all quarters telling that the organ has begun. If ever I join the Church of Rome, I shall stipulate to be Bishop of Noyon on the Oise."

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NOYON CATHEDRAL: WEST FRONT

"The Sacristan took us to the top of one of the towers, and showed us the five bells hanging in their loft."—R. L. S.

This pretty fancy of his need lose none of its prettiness when we know that Noyon has not had a bishop since the Revolution, when the cathedral became a dependency of the Bishop of Beauvais, though it had been a bishopric so long ago as the year 531. But I am sorry R. L. S. was evidently not aware that when at Noyon he was in the town where John Calvin was born in 1709, his father being procurator-fiscal and secretary of the diocese; for surely here was an opening for some real Stevensonian *obiter scripta*? The beautiful old Town House, of Gothic and Renaissance architecture, dates back to the end of the fifteenth century, but all the ancient buildings of Noyon fall long centuries short of its history in age, as King Pippin was crowned here in 752, and his infant son Carloman was at the same time created King of Noyon, while in 771 the town saw the coronation of Pippin's eldest son, the mighty Charlemagne, no less.

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XVIII.

The last wet day of the voyagers was that on which they set out from Noyon. "These gentlemen travel for pleasure?" asked the landlady of the little inn at Pimprez. "It was too much. The scales fell from our eyes. Another wet day, it was determined, and we put the boats into the train." Happily, "the weather took the hint," and they paddled and sailed the rest of the voyage under clear skies. At Compiègne they "put up at a big, bustling hotel, where nobody observed our presence." My impression of the famous town scarcely justified this, as in the day that I lingered there I seemed to meet everybody a dozen times over, and the company at a little café chantant in the evening was like a gathering of old friends, so many of the faces were familiar. Yet the town is populous, having some 17,000 inhabitants (about 2,000 of whom are English residents), and I was prepared for busier streets than I found.

There can be few towns in France more agreeable to live in. It is pleasantly situated on the river Oise, here wide and lively with barge-traffic, and spanned by an elegant bridge. The older town lies south of the river in a sort of amphitheatre; its streets are narrow and tortuous, but with bright shops and cafés in the neighbourhood of the Place de l'Hôtel de Ville, while the fashionable suburbs extend, in splendid quiet avenues, eastward and south from the centre of the town, by the historic palace built in Louis XV.'s reign and the Petit Parc, which is really very large. While a great many of the English residents have chosen the town for the same reason that my hostess at Moy put on one electric light—*pour l'économie, vous savez*—together with its healthy and beautiful surroundings in the great forest of Compiègne, many more are there for the employment afforded by the important felt hat factory of Messrs. Moore, Johnson & Co., whose commodious works stand near the station on the north of the river. Despite its shops, its business prosperity, its red-legged soldiers, its visitors, Compiègne is dull enough of an evening, and the brightly lighted but almost empty cafés leave one wondering how the business pays.

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"My great delight in Compiègne," says inland voyager, "was the town-hall. I doted upon the town-hall. It is a monument of Gothic insecurity, all turreted and gargoyled, and slashed and bedizened with half a score of architectural fancies. Some of the niches are gilt and painted, and in a great square panel in the centre, in black relief on a gilt ground, Louis XII. rides upon a pacing horse, with hand on hip and head thrown back. There is royal arrogance in every line of him; the stirruped foot projects insolently from the frame; the eye is hard and proud; the very horse seems to be treading with gratification over prostrate serfs, and to have the breath of the trumpet in his nostrils. So rides for ever, on the front of the town-hall, the good king Louis XII., the father of his people.

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"Over the king's head, in the tall centre turret, appears the dial of a clock; and high above that, three little mechanical figures, each one with a hammer in his hand, whose business it is to chime out the hours and halves and quarters for the burgesses of Compiègne. The centre figure has a gilt breast-plate; the two others wear gilt trunk-hose; and they all three have elegant, flapping hats like cavaliers. As the quarter approaches, they turn their heads and look knowingly one to the other; and then, *kling* go the three hammers on the three little bells below. The hour follows, deep and sonorous, from the interior of the tower; and the gilded gentlemen rest from their labours with contentment.

"I had a great deal of healthy pleasure from their manœuvres, and took care to miss as few performances as possible; and I found that even the 'Cigarette,' while he pretended to despise my enthusiasm, was more or less a devotee himself. There is something highly absurd in the exposition of such toys to the outrages of winter on a housetop. They would be more in keeping in a glass case before a Nürnberg clock. Above all, at night, when the children are abed, and even grown people are snoring under quilts, does it not seem impertinent to leave these ginger-bread figures winking and tinkling to the stars and the rolling moon? The gargoyles may, fitly enough, twist their ape-like heads; fitly enough may the potentate bestride his charger, like a centurion in an old German print of the *Via Dolorosa*; but the toys should be put away in a box among some cotton, until the sun rises, and the children are abroad again to be amused."

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COMPIÈGNE TOWN HALL

"My great delight in Compiègne was the Town Hall."—R. L. S.

XIX.

There is but little interest in the remaining stages of Stevenson's journey; not because the towns through which the canoeists now passed are less worthy of note than any already described, but for the ample reason that R. L. S. had, in some measure, lost his earlier delight in the voyage. He pretends that on the broadening bosom of the Oise the canoes were now so far away from the life along the riverside, that they had slipped out of touch with rural folk and rural ways. But this is not strictly true, when we know that the river, as far as Pontoise, is seldom greatly wider than the canals on which the *Arethusa* and the *Cigarette* had set out with high hopes of adventure a fortnight before. The towns are quaint and sleepy. The voyagers were nearing the end, the river

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ran smooth, the sky was bright, and a packet of letters at Compiègne had set them dreaming of home. Here was the secret; the spell was broken; their appetite for adventure had been slaked; every mile of easy-flowing water was taking them not away to unknown things, but homeward to familiar ones.

Pont Sainte Maxence, the end of their first stage below Compiègne, is a featureless little town, the Oise making a brave show through the centre of it, and I do not suspect its church of any stirring history. R. L. S. found its interior "positively arctic to the eye." It was here he noticed the withered old woman making her orisons before all the shrines; "like a prudent capitalist with a somewhat cynical view of the commercial prospect, she desired to place her supplications in a great variety of heavenly securities." I passed through Creil and Précy in the afternoon, following close to the river, which now skirts a country of gentle hills on the east, but westward fringes a vast level plain, with nothing but groves of poplar to break the line of the distant horizon.

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XX.

In the gloaming I arrived at Pontoise, where I was told a fête was in progress; but the only signs of hilarity were two booths for the sale of pastries and sweet stuffs on the square in front of the station, and one small boy investing two sous in a greasy-looking puff. The rues of Pontoise have high-sounding names, but they are dull beyond words, though only eighteen miles away the "great sinful streets" of Paris are gleaming with their myriad lights.

Pontoise in the daylight might have been different; but seen in the dusk, I decided upon the eight o'clock train to Paris, and so ended my pilgrimage. Nor did I feel any lowering enthusiasm at the end, for Stevenson has nothing to tell us of the place beyond saying, "And so a letter at Pontoise decided us, and we drew up our keels for the last time out of that river of Oise that had faithfully piloted them, through rain and sunshine, for so long." He has not a word for the twelfth-century church of St. Maclou, his "brither Scot," or the tomb of St. Gautier at Nôtre Dame de Pontoise.

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THE OISE AT PONTOISE



GENERAL VIEW OF LE PUY

"At Pontoise we drew up our keels for the last time out of that river of Oise that had faithfully piloted them through rain and sunshine so long."—R. L. S.

"You may paddle all day long," he concludes; "but it is when you come back at nightfall, and look in at the familiar room, that you find Love or Death awaiting you beside the stove; and the most beautiful adventures are not those we go to seek." Yet he was ever an adventurer in search of beauty, and who shall say his quest was vain?

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"The Most Picturesque Town in Europe"

"After repeated visits to Le Puy, and a deal of high living for myself and my advisers, a sleeping sack was designed, constructed, and triumphantly brought home."—R. L. STEVENSON.

I.

There will, of course, be differences of opinion as to which is the town most worthy of this description; but there is surely no better judge than Mr. Joseph Pennell, who has seen every place of any historic or natural attraction on the Continent, and whose taste for the picturesque none will call in question. He is the author of the phrase that heads this chapter, as applied to the little-known town of Le Puy, "chief place" of the Department of Haute Loire in the south of France. It is one of the few towns that have more than justified the mental pictures I had formed of them before seeing the real thing. But Le Puy is not only the most conceivably picturesque of towns; it is deeply interesting in its character and history, no less than in its appearance.

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With the exception of Mr. Pennell, and among a circle of people who have travelled much in France, I have met none who have ever visited Le Puy. A young English governess to whom I spoke at a little Protestant temple in the town had been staying there for close upon a year, and had not met a single English visitor; so it would appear one has an opportunity here to write of a place that is still untrampled by the tourist hordes that devastate fair Normandy.

There are many and excellent reasons why few English or American tourists make their way to this quaint and beautiful town of the French highlands. It lies 352 miles by rail from Paris, and can only be reached by a fatiguing journey in trains that seem to be playing at railways, and have no serious intention of arriving anywhere. A good idea of the roundabout railway service will be gathered from the fact that the actual distance of the town from Paris is nearly 100 miles less than the length of the railway journey. It can be reached by leaving the Mediterranean line at Lyons and continuing for the best part of a day on tiresome local trains; or via Orleans and Clermont Ferrand, which would surely require the best part of two days. It was by the latter route, and in easy stages, that I first arrived there in the early evening of a grey June day four years ago.

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Between Clermont Ferrand and Le Puy the railway traverses some of the most beautiful scenery in Europe, but nothing that one sees on the way prepares one for the sensation of the first glimpse of this wonderful mountain-town. The train has been steadily puffing its slow way by green valleys and pine-clad hills, across gorges as deep as the deepest in Switzerland, and past little red-roofed hamlets for hours, when suddenly, as it seems, a great peak thrusts itself heavenward, carrying on its back a mass of tiny buildings, and on the top of all an immense statue of the Virgin. Then another seems to spring up from the valley, holding a church upon its head, and the whole country now, as far as eye can reach, is studded with great conical hills thrown up in some far-off and awful boiling of earth. Curiously, the train seems turning tail on this wonderful scene, and one by one the different objects that had suddenly attracted our attention are lost to view, while we pursue a circuitous route, which in a quarter of an hour brings them all into view again, and presently we have arrived at the station of Le Puy, by the side of the little river Dolezon, between which and the broader Borne extends the hill whereon the town is built.

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II.

The modern part of the town lies close to the railway in the level of the valley, and as there is a population of more than 20,000 people, the life of the streets is brisk enough to suggest a town of five times that size in England. Along the Avenue de la Gare, the Boulevard St. Jean, and the Rue St. Haon we go, wary of the electric trams, to our hotel opposite the spacious Place du Breuil, where spouts a handsome fountain to the memory of a local metal-worker who furnished the town

with its beautiful Musée Crozatier, and where the elegant architecture of the Municipal Theatre, the Palais de Justice and the Préfecture supply a touch of modern dignity that contrasts not unpleasantly with the ancient and natural grandeur of the town.



LE PUY: CATHEDRAL AND ROCHER DE CORNEILLE FROM PLACE DU BREUIL

I have stayed in many a strange hotel, but that of the "Ambassadeurs," whither we repaired, is perhaps the most uncommon in my experience. It was reached from the main street through a long, dark tunnel, opening at the end into a badly-lighted court, whence a flight of stairs gave entrance to the hotel building, which inside was like an old and partially-furnished barracks, with wide stone stairs and gloomy passages eminently adapted for garrotting. But the bedroom was commodious, and its windows gave on another market-place, where had been the original frontage of the hotel. For all its cheerless appearance, the "Ambassadeurs" was by no means uncomfortable, and, needless to say, the cooking was excellent.

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There are some towns that ask of you only to wander their streets, and others that challenge you to closer acquaintance with their sights. Paris or Brussels, for example, pours its bright life through boulevard and park, and you are charmed to walk about with no urgent call to any place in particular; but who can linger in Princes Street of Edinburgh with the grey old castle inviting him to climb up to it, or the Calton Hill boldly advertising itself with its mock Roman remains? Le Puy has both the charm of the quaintest kinds of street life and the challenge of its rare and curious monuments.

One has a restless feeling, a sense of things that "must be done," when one catches a glimpse of the stately old cathedral standing high on the hill, and the massive Rock of Corneille with the great figure of Notre Dame de France on top, or the church of St. Michel pricking up so confidently on its isolated rock. The natural curiosity of man is such that he cannot be content until he has clambered to these and other high places in and around Le Puy. One makes first for the cathedral, and a bewildering labyrinth of ancient and evil-smelling lanes has to be wandered through before the building is reached. These little streets are all paved with cobbles of black lava, and many of the houses are built in part of the same material. Their dirtiness is unqualified, and yet the people seem to live long amid their squalor, for at every other door we note women of old years busy with their needles and pillows making the lace, which is one of the chief industries of the town.

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III.

The nearer we come to the cathedral the more difficult is it to observe its general proportions, and, indeed, it can only be seen to advantage from one or other of the neighbouring heights. But it is a building that, in almost any position, would still be remarkable, as it is a striking example of Romanesque architecture. The great porch is reached by a splendid flight of steps, sixty in number, where in the second week of August each year pilgrims come in their thousands to kneel and worship the Black Virgin, the chief glory of the town in the eyes of its inhabitants. The builders of the cathedral have striven to combine dignity and austerity, and the impression which the outside of the building makes upon the visitor is strangely at variance with the flummery that surrounds the worship of the Black Virgin within. One feels that the men who back in the twelfth century reared these massive walls and built this beautiful cloister had not their lives dominated by a cheap and ugly wooden doll such as their fellows of to-day bow down before. We found the sacristan a young man of most amiable disposition; so friendly indeed that on one of our subsequent visits, and during the office of High Mass, when he was attending upon the celebrant, he nodded familiarly to us on recognising us among the congregation. If the truth must be told, we were more interested in the contents of the sacristy than in the cathedral itself. Here were stored many rare and beautiful examples of ancient wood-carving, picture frames, missals, altar vessels, and, above all, a manuscript Bible of the ninth century. This last-mentioned we were shown only on condition that we would tell no one in the town. Then opening a great oaken

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cupboard, he produced first a brass monstrance, similar to the usual receptacle for the consecrated wafer of the Eucharist, but containing instead behind the little glass disc a tiny morsel of white feather sewn to a bit of cloth.

"This," said he, "is a piece of the wing of the angel who visited Joan of Arc."

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"Indeed," I remarked, with every evidence of surprise, "and who got hold of the feather first?"

"The mother of Joan," he replied, as though he were giving the name of his tailor; and he proceeded to describe with much circumstance and detail the wonderful things that had been done by this bit of feather. "It is, M'sieu, an object of the greatest veneration, and has attracted pilgrims from far parts of France. It has cured the most terrible diseases; it has brought riches to those who were poor; it has brought children to barren women,"—and many other wonders I have forgotten.



MARKET DAY AT LE PUY, SHOWING TYPES OF THE AUVERNGATS



LACEMAKERS AT LE PUY

In a very similar setting he showed us a tiny thorn. "This, M'sieu, is a thorn from the crown that Jesus wore on the Cross," and while we were still gazing upon the sacred relic he produced a small box sealed with red wax and having a glass lid, behind which was preserved a good six inches of "the true Cross." I thought of a Frenchman whom I had met at an hotel recently—an unbelieving fellow—who said that there was as much wood of "the true Cross" preserved in the churches of France as would make a veritable ladder into heaven. Most wonderful of all, the sacristan dived his hand into a sort of cotton bag, and produced a Turkish slipper, worn and battered, but probably no more than fifty years old. The good man handled the thing as if it had been a cheap American shoe he was offering for sale. Then looking us boldly in the face, he said, "*Voici, le soulier de la Sainte Vierge.*" The shoe of the holy Virgin! One did one's best to be overcome with emotion, but I claim no success in that effort. The ecclesiastical showman drew our attention to the pure Oriental character of the workmanship of the sacred slipper, but I declare frankly that it was not until the Protestant pastor of the town mentioned the fact next day that I realised that the shoe was "a No. 9!" Among the other contents of the sacristy we noted two maces, one of elaborate design richly ornamented in silver, and the other of plain wood only slightly carved. We were told they were carried in funeral processions, "the ornamental one for people of good family and the plain one for common folk." Oh, land of liberty, equality, fraternity!

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After exhibiting to us the costly vestments of the bishops, canons, and other dignitaries of the

church, the sacristan came with us to point out the far-famed Black Virgin of the cathedral, which a first inspection of the interior had failed to reveal to us. We now found it to be a small and ugly image fixed above the high altar. It was hardly bigger than a child's doll, and was dressed in a little coat of rich brocade. From the middle of the idol a smaller head, presumably that of the Holy Child, projected through the cloth, and this, like the head of the larger figure, wore a heavy crown of bright gilt. I do not pretend to remember one tithe of the miracles attributed to this most venerated object by our good friend, but I know at least that he assured me it had burned for thirty-six hours during the Revolution without being consumed, and had thrice been thrown by sacrilegious hands into the river Borne, only to reappear mysteriously in its place over the altar. This story does not run on all fours with the curt description of the image given by M. Paul Joanne in his guide to the Cevennes—"an imitation of the old Madonna destroyed in the Revolution." It is eminently a case in which "you pays your money and you takes your choice." I reckoned the entertainment provided by the sacristan cheap at a franc.

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IV.

Enough, perhaps, has been indicated to give some idea of the superstitious character of the people of Le Puy. Nowhere in France have I found so many evidences of mediæval superstition; the Black Virgin is throned supreme in the minds of the people, and, unlike most French communities—if we except the priest-ridden peasantry of Brittany—the men-folk of Le Puy seem to be as devoted as their women to the church. The black coats of the clergy swarm in street and alley. In the town itself there are many institutions packed with young priests, and some little way out, on the banks of the Borne, there is a training school as large as a military barracks, with the pale faces of black-gowned youths peeping from many windows. Almost every conceivable type of priest is to be encountered here, from the gaunt, ascetic enthusiast to the fat and ruby-nosed Friar Tuck. The people of the southern highlands, like the old-fashioned folk of Scotland, have had for generations a passion to see at least one of their family in the priesthood, apart very often from any consideration of fitness, moral or intellectual. Here, as I should judge, is the reason for one's seeing so many coarse and ignorant faces among the priests of Le Puy.

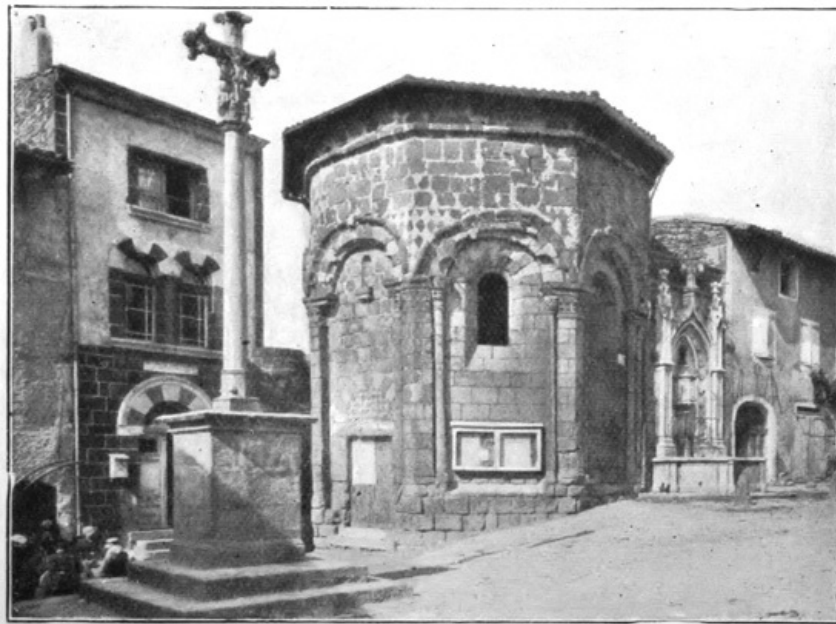
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The gigantic figure of the Virgin crowning the rock of Corneille, behind the cathedral, is reached by a long and toilsome pathway, but the view from the top—for the statue is hollow, and contains a stairway inside with numerous peep-holes—is perhaps unequalled in the whole of France. For mile upon mile the country stretches away in great billowy masses of dark mountain and green plain, and the little white houses with their red roofs are sprinkled everywhere around Le Puy, suggesting a sweet and wholesome country life that is hard to reconcile with the dark superstition of the town. This monument, however, is of little interest—a vulgar modern affair cast from 213 guns taken at Sebastopol. More to our taste is the quaint little building called the Baptistery of St. John, which, standing near the cathedral, takes us back to the fourth century, and earlier still, for it is built on the foundation of an ancient Roman temple. You see, Le Puy was a flourishing Roman town when our forefathers in England were living in wattle huts. We have made some progress in England since those far-off days, but here, though changes rude and great have taken place, one may reasonably doubt whether there is much to choose between the present condition of Le Puy and that vanished past.

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Image of the Black Virgin in the Cathedral



***Remains of Roman Temple, Le Puy, with a fountain to Virgin,
a Calvary, and the Mairie***

LE PUY

V.

Threading our way downhill among the filthy *ruelles*, we pass into the wide and modern Boulevard Carnot, where the Sunday market is being held and everything may be bought, from a tin-opener to a donkey, from a rosary to a cow. A spirited statue of the great La Fayette, who was born not far away, at the castle of Chavagnac, stands at the top of this street, where the new Boulevard Gambetta strikes westward with its clanging electric trams. Down near the river-side, where the market comes to an end, we visit the old church of the Dominicans, dedicated to St. Laurence, and in a dark and musty corner we are shown a tomb with a recumbent figure carved upon it. Here reposes, we are told, the dust of the greatest of the heroes of old France—none other than that mighty warrior Du Guesclin, memories of whom the wanderer in French by-ways meets with as often as the tourist in England comes upon a house that sheltered Charles II. after the battle of Worcester. There is every reason for believing that the valorous but ugly Du Guesclin—he was an "object of aversion" to his own parents—was buried at St. Denis, but my excellent M. Joanne assures me that this statue is an authentic likeness of the hero; and the *Encyclopædia Britannica* (which in another place mentions St. Denis as the place of burial) says that the church of St. Laurence "contains the remains of Du Guesclin." What will you? 133

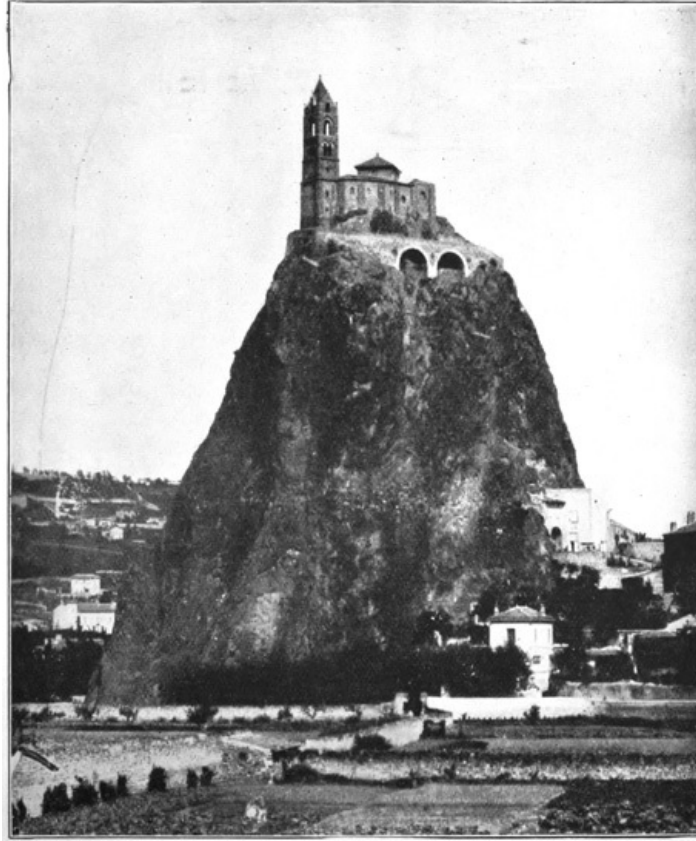
The electric tram lands us at the suburb of Espaly, and from the high road we could almost throw a stone to the massive rock, with its castle-like walls enclosing on the top a little garden of trees. But it is another matter to pick our way, ankle-deep in mire, to the entrance-gate, through the hovels that surround it. Clustering to the rock we pass are buildings from which priests and "sisters" come and go with a surprising mingling of the sexes, and when we have climbed to the top a dark-eyed sister shows us for half a franc a collection of the most extraordinary Romish trash we have ever looked upon. The chapel is free to us, and within its incense-laden interior we find several comfortable priests poring over books or sitting with insensate stare at the candles burning on a particularly tawdry altar. The place is in a way unique, as the chapel is not a building at all, but is hewn out of the volcanic rock, being thus an artificial grotto consecrated to worship. Its rough walls are hung with votive tablets and studded with crude stuccos of many saints, giving it the appearance of a toy bazaar. Only recently the large bronze statue of St. Joseph that crowned the rock of Espaly, above the grotto-chapel, was blown down, and visitors are invited to contribute towards the cost of replacing it. 134

A little distance away is the higher and more remarkable volcanic mass known as the Pic d'Aiguille, with a handsome and well-proportioned church upon its summit. One has to climb a long and winding footpath and then close on three hundred steps to reach the building, which we found quite deserted, some village lads doing the "cake-walk" around an angelic form with a box of donations to St. Michael, the patron saint of the deserted sanctuary. These *gamins* also seemed to derive much pleasure from ringing the bell still hanging in the ancient tower. It was a matter of speculation why the priests should continue to use the stuffy and unwholesome grotto of St. Joseph, with this airy, noble building lying vacant. We can only suppose that the toil of climbing the higher rock is greater than their zeal. Near by the base of the Pic d'Aiguille one notices a curious conjunction of old paganism and modern mariolatry—an ancient temple of Diana flanked by a massive crucifix on the one hand and a modern Gothic fountain and shrine to the Virgin on the other. 135

After all, and somewhat unwillingly, I find that I have written rather of the religious side of this interesting town than of its picturesqueness. But sensational as the first impression of its unique and beautiful outlines undoubtedly is, it is not that, nor yet the quaint and entertaining habits of the people, that comes uppermost in the mind after some days' acquaintance with the place. One leaves Le Puy convinced, almost at a glance, of its claim to be considered the most picturesque town in Europe, but depressed with the abounding evidence that its people, despite their electric trams and their fine modern buildings, are still largely the thralls of darkest superstition. For the difference between the religion that here passes for Roman Catholicism and that we know by the same name in England is greater than the difference between the latter and the most Calvinistic Protestantism. To me, at least, Le Puy will be ever the city of the Black Virgin.

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THE CHURCH OF ST. MICHAEL, LE PUY



HOUSE OF DU CHAYLA, AT PONT DE MONTVERT

"Du Chayla's house still stands, with a new roof, beside one of the bridges of the town; and if you are curious you may see the terrace-garden into which he dropped."—R. L. S.

The Country of the Camisards

"These are the Cevennes with an emphasis: the Cevennes of the Cevennes."—R. L. STEVENSON.

I.

The word Camisard in the south of France, like Covenanter in Scotland, recalls

"Old, unhappy, far-off things,
And battles long ago."

Both describe people who had much in common, for the Camisards were the Covenanters of France. The origin of the term need not detain us more than a moment. It is variously attributed to the "Children of God" having worn a *camise*, or linen shirt, as a sort of uniform; to *camisade*, which means a night attack, that having been a feature of their warfare; while some historians have derived it from *camis*, a road runner. Enough that it stands for a race of people whose devotion to the Reformed Faith, whose fearless stand for religious liberty, entitles them to rank among the heroes of Protestantism.

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As one may suppose that the general reader, however well informed, is likely to be somewhat hazy in his knowledge of the Camisards—unless, indeed, he has had the good fortune to read one of the later, as it is one of the best, of Mr. S. R. Crockett's romances, *Flower-o'-the-Corn*, which gives a vivid and moving picture of the Protestant rebellion in the Cevennes—it may be well that I set down at once a brief outline of the events which, two centuries ago, made these highlands of the South one of the historic regions in storied France.

The revocation of the Edict of Nantes, in 1685, was a transforming episode in the history of Europe. It represented the triumphant issue of the sinister policy of the Jesuits, who had long been scheming to undo the work of the Huguenot wars, whereby the rights of Protestants to hold public worship and to take part in the government of the country had been recognised as a sort of political compromise.

The atrocities inflicted by the Roman Catholics on their fellow-citizens of the Protestant faith during the reign of terror, which began in October of 1685, need not be recalled; they are among the blackest pages in the annals of Romish tyranny. But we must know that in the mountainous regions of the south of France, where the work of the Reformation had been fruitful, and blessed in inverse ratio to the poverty of the people and the barrenness of their country, these hardy hill folk were too poor to quit their villages, and too devoted to their religious faith to submit meekly to the new order. Like all peoples whose lot it is to scrape a scanty living from a grudging soil, the inhabitants of the Cevennes resemble in many ways the Highlanders of Scotland and Wales. We find in them the same qualities of sturdy independence, patience, endurance; the same strain of gravity, associated with a deep fervour for the things that are eternal. Thus isolated in their mountain fastnesses, hemmed in by the ravaging hordes of Catholicism and constituted authority, they determined to fight for the faith they valued more than life. In this hour of awful trial it was not surprising that, out of the frenzy of despair, strange things were born, and an era of religious hysteria began, simple women, poor ignorant men, children even, in great numbers, being thought to come under the direct inspiration of God, arising as "prophets" to urge the rude mountaineers into a holy war with "His Most Christian Majesty, Louis, King of France and Brittany."

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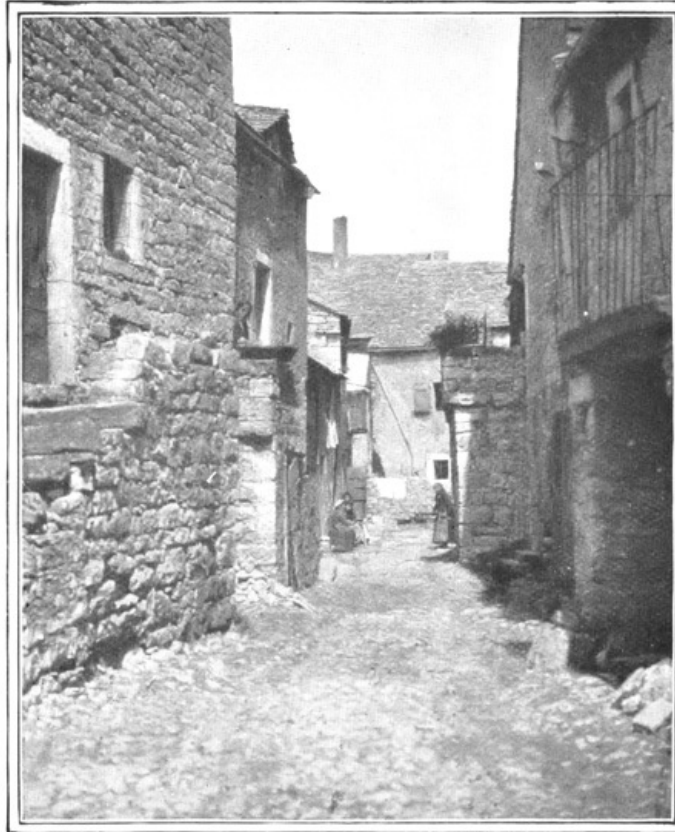
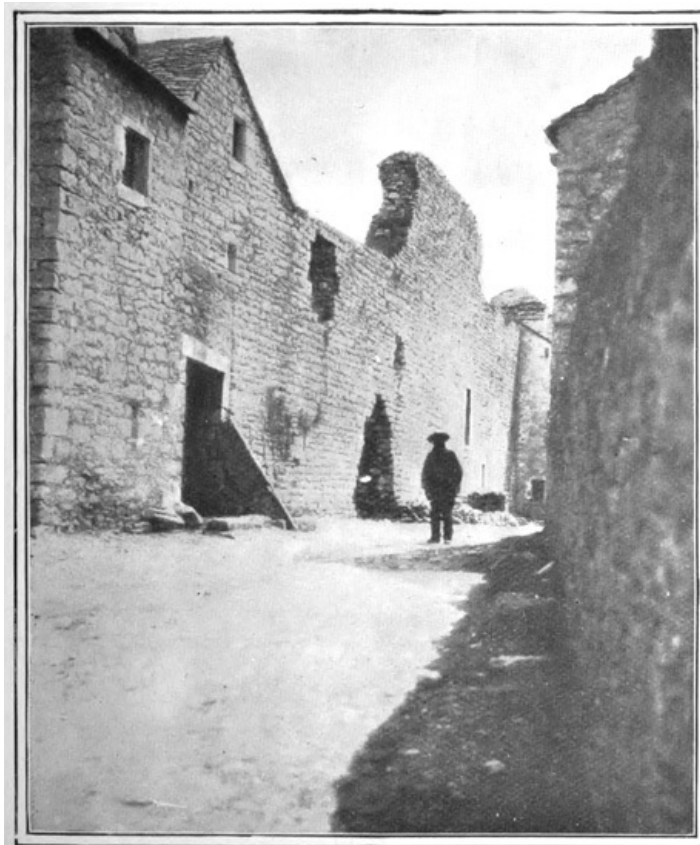
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But although there had been many encounters of an irregular kind between the Camisards and the leagued officials of Pope and King in the closing years of the seventeenth century, it was not until that weird figure, Spirit Séguier, who has been called the "Danton of the Cevennes," planned the murder of the Archpriest du Chayla at the little town of Pont de Montvert, on the 23rd of July, 1702, that the first blow in the Protestant rebellion may be said to have been struck. Of this tragic event R. L. Stevenson writes:

"A persecution, unsurpassed in violence, had lasted near a score of years, and this was the result upon the persecuted: hanging, burning, breaking on the wheel, had been in vain; the dragoons had left their hoof-marks over all the country side; there were men rowing in the galleys, and women pining in the prisons of the Church; and not a thought was changed in the heart of any upright Protestant."

On the 12th of August, nineteen days after the murder of the Archpriest, the right hand of Séguier was stricken from his body, and he was burned alive at the spot where he had driven home the first knife into the oppressor of his people.

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TWO VIEWS IN THE VILLAGE OF LA CAVALERIE

Scene of Mr. Crockett's romance "Flower-o'-the-Corn."

II.

So began the war of the Camisards, for the faggots that burned the prophet only added to the fire he lighted when he struck at Du Chayla. Presently his place, as leader of the revolt, was taken by an old soldier named Laporte, who gave the rising a touch of military discipline, and soon the Camisards had many captains, all men who believed themselves endowed with the gift of prophecy.

The Protestants of the Cevennes, thorough in every habit of life, took up their arms and set about the making of entrenchments and works of defence with the determination of men prepared to

fight to a finish. It is easy for us in these peaceful days to deprecate their vengeful deeds, but let us remember, in charity, that if they met blood-thirstiness with the same, they were maddened by a system of oppression so brutal as to be almost beyond our belief. Their leader, Roland, issued a dispatch which for callous suggestion has seldom been equalled in the annals of war: "We, Count and Lord Roland, Generalissimo of the Protestants of France, we decree that you have to make away with, in three days, all the priests and missionaries who are among you, under pain of being burned alive, yourselves as well as they." 142

But the most picturesque figure among the Camisards was introduced when Jean Cavalier, a baker's apprentice at Geneva, returned to his native mountains, and by sheer force of a military genius to which history offers few parallels became the chief leader of the Camisards while still in his teens. The story of his life is romantic beyond the invention of any novelist. Not only did he succeed over a period of three years in defending many important parts of the Cevennes from organised attacks, but in the course of that time he met and defeated successively Count de Broglie and three Marshals of France—Montrevel, Berwick, and Villars—although at one time there was a force of 60,000 soldiers in the field against him. At Nages, a little village in the southern Cevennes, he encountered Montrevel, and, outnumbered by five to one, he succeeded, after a desperate conflict, in effecting a successful retreat with more than two thirds of his thousand men. Not even the blessings of the Pope on the royalist troops, and on the "holy militia," raised among the Catholic population, brought the submission of the Camisards one day nearer. Commander after commander retired baffled, and Montrevel's policy of extermination—during which four hundred and sixty-six villages in the Upper Cevennes were burned, and most of the population put to the sword—left Cavalier, still a mere lad, master of the southward mountains, threatening even to attack the great city of Nimes. 143

Marshal Villars, a renowned soldier, recognised the hopelessness of continuing the methods of barbarism pursued by his predecessors, and succeeded in concluding an honourable peace with Cavalier in the summer of 1704, whereby the Camisards were granted certain important rights affecting the liberty of conscience and of person. But Roland and the more fanatical section of the Protestant army held out until January of 1705, their battle-cry being, "No peace until we have our churches," Cavalier's treaty having recognised the right to assemble outside walled towns, but not in churches.

It is this extraordinary baker's apprentice—who at twenty-four had concluded a long and desperate war, in which he played a part entitling him to be remembered with national heroes such as William Tell and Sir William Wallace—that Mr. S. R. Crockett has made the chief figure in his brilliant romance of the Cevennes, *Flower-o'-the-Corn*. 144

III.

The little-known region of the Causses is "the Cevennes of the Cevennes," but Stevenson in his travels did not visit the innermost Cevennes, and was during most of his journey only on the outskirts of the real country of the Camisards. The chief of these great plateaux is the Causse de Sauveterre, which extends south-west from the town of Mende for upwards of forty miles, and is in parts at least twenty miles wide. It is divided from the Causse Méjan on the south by the splendid gorges of the river Tarn, and due south of the Méjan, with the beautiful valley of the Jonte between, lies the Causse Noir, some twenty miles east and west, and ten from the Jonte on its north to the no less beautiful glen on its south, where flows the river Dourbie. Still southward, and with only this waterway dividing, extends the splendid mass of the Causse du Larzac, some thirty miles in length, from the neighbourhood of Millau to the ancient Roman town of Lodève, which boasted a continuous bishopric from the year 323 to the Revolution, and is now a bright and populous industrial centre. These are the more notable of the Causses, and all, no doubt, formed one mighty plateau in prehistoric times; but numerous swift flowing rivers have through the ages worn them asunder, producing a series of magnificent ravines that contain some of the finest scenery in France, and on whose sides we can trace the slow and steady work of the streams wearing down to their present courses through the limestone, the local name for which is *cau*, whence *causse*. 145



LA CAVALERIE, WITHIN THE CAMISARD WALL

(From a photograph by Mr. S. R. CROCKETT)



ST. VERNAN, IN THE VALLEY OF THE DOUBIE

To describe the character of the Camisard country, and to convey some idea of it to English readers, is no easy matter, since there is nothing in the British Islands, and little elsewhere in Europe, to which it may be readily compared. Yet the effort must be made, since the peculiar nature of the country is of first importance to the understanding of its people and their historic resistance of all the might of France two centuries ago.

Conceive, then, a vast expanse of rugged and rock-strewn land, covering it may be an area of two

or three hundred square miles, and terminating abruptly on every side in mighty ravines, or ending in precipitous cliffs, that look down on wide and fertile valleys, frown on smiling plains. This is what the word Causse stands for, and the wonder is that folk should be content to live in dreary little villages high up on these stony fields, when a thousand feet and more in the plains and valleys below rich and fruitful soil invites the husbandman. But so it is, and in this region of France we have the strange circumstance of two peoples, differing in many essentials of character, living within a day's walk of each other, and mingling but little in the intercourse of life. As you thread your way through the valleys of the Tarn, the Dourbie, or any of the other streams that follow the rifts between the Causses, you realise that up there among the clouds live people who have small commerce with their fellows in the valleys, and in such a town as Millau, whose inhabitants must look each day of their lives at the giant walls of the Causse Noir and the Larzac, upreared to the immediate east of their own paved streets, there are thousands who have never scaled these heights. 146

Mr. Crockett gives us this graphic word-picture of the Larzac:

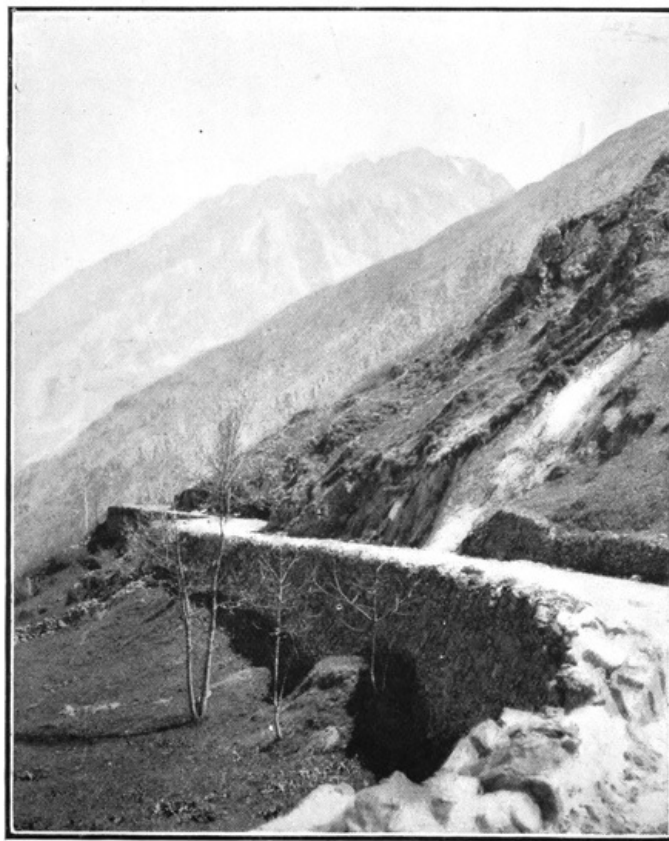
"The surface of the Causse—once Yvette had attained to the higher levels—spread out before her, plain as the palm of a hand, save for those curiously characteristic rocks, which, apparently without connection with the underlying limestone, stand out like icebergs out of the sea, irregular, pinnacled, the debris of temples destroyed or ever foot of man trod there—spires, gargoyles, hideous monsters, all dejected in some unutterable catastrophe, and become more horrible in the moonlight, or, on the other hand, modified to the divine calm of the Bhudda himself, by some effect of illumination or trick of cloud umbration.... 147

"A wonderful land, this of the Causses, where the rain never comes to stay. Indeed, it might as well rain on a vast dry sponge, thirty miles across and four or five thousand feet in height. The sheep up there never drink. They only eat the sparse tender grass when the dew is upon it. Yet from their milk the curious cheese called Roquefort is made, which, being kept long in cool limestone cellars—the cellules of the stony sponge—puts on something of the flavour of the rock plants—thyme, juniper, dwarf birch, honeysweet heath—from which it was distilled."

IV.

A country better adapted to the exigencies of defence against an attacking army from the plains could not be imagined, for, as the novelist says in another passage, "It seemed impossible for any living thing to descend those frowning precipices. Even in broad daylight the task appeared more suited to goats than to men." The roads which now connect these great uplands with the lower country are marvels of engineering, and you can count as many as twenty or thirty "elbows" in the track, from the point at which it leaves the valley until it disappears over the edge of the table-land, the entire length of it being in view at one stroke of the eye. The task of ascending is laborious in the extreme, and much sitting at cafés, which is the habit of the townsfolk, does not equip them for the undertaking. Few wayfarers are encountered, and when the summit of the Causse is gained the signs of life are still meagre. The roads, now flat and dusty, lie like bright ribbons on a dull and melancholy stretch of earth. Here and there a lonely shepherd is seen tending a flock of shabby-looking sheep, that crop the sparse herbage in fields where stones are more plentiful than grass. 148

Miss M. Betham-Edwards is one of the few writers who have visited this little-known corner of France, and in the following passage she refers to what is perhaps its most curious feature:



THE WAY OVER THE LARZAC

(From a Photograph by Mr. S. R. CROCKETT)

"Another striking feature of the arid, waterless upper region is the *aven*, or yawning chasm, subject of superstitious awe and terror among the country people. Wherever you go you find the *aven*; in the midst of a field—for parts of this sterile soil have been laid under cultivation—on the side of a vertical cliff, of divers shapes and sizes: these mysterious openings are locally known as 'Trous d'enfer' (mouths of hell). Alike, fact and legend have increased the popular dread. It was known that many an unfortunate sheep or goat had fallen into some abyss, never, of course, to be heard of after. It was said that a jealous seigneur of these regions had been seen thus to get rid of his young wife—one tradition out of many. According to the country-folk of Padirac, the devil, hurrying away with a captured soul, was overtaken by St. Martin on horseback. A struggle, amid savage scenery, ensued for possession of the soul. 'Accursed saint,' cried Satan, 'thou wilt hardly leap my ditch'—with a tap of his heel opening the rock before them, splitting it in two—the enormous chasm, as he thought, making pursuit impossible. But St. Martin's steed leaped it at a bound, the soul was rescued, and the prince of darkness, instead of the saint, sent below."

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Many of the *avens* have been explored by M. E. A. Martel, and his adventures in these underground tunnels and caves have rarely been equalled in modern exploration.

V.

The scene of *Flower-o'-the-Corn*, so far as it is laid in the Cevennes, occupies but a small part of that splendid chain of mountains, but it is perhaps the most picturesque part. Much of the action is centred in the little Camisard town of La Cavalerie, situate at an altitude of nearly 2,500 feet on the lonely plateau of the Larzac, some ten miles along the main road from Millau, a beautiful and important cathedral town in the valley of the Tarn. To-day, as in the past, the innkeeper is usually the man of most importance in these mountain towns, but I have visited no *auberge* that would compare, in romantic situation, with that so graphically described by Mr. Crockett under the style of "le Bon Chrétien" at La Cavalerie:

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"To those unacquainted with the plan of such southern houses, it might have been remarkable how quickly the remembrance of the strange entrance-hall beneath was blotted out. At the first turn of the staircase the ammoniacal stable smell was suddenly left behind. At the second, there, in front of the ascending guest, was a fringed mat lying on the little landing. At the third Maurice found himself in a wide hall, lighted from the front, with an outlook upon an inner courtyard in which was a Judas-tree in full leaf, with seats of wicker and rustic branches set out. Here and there in the shade stood small round tables, pleasantly retired, all evidencing a degree of refinement to which Maurice had been a stranger ever since he left those inns upon the post-roads of England, which were justly held to be the wonder of the world."

151

One fears that the "good old times" have disappeared from the Causses, as most of the inns, built,

like many of the houses, in sunk positions by the roadside, so that one enters on the top flat, sometimes by way of a crazy wooden bridge, are sad advertisements of poverty. The houses are often like that in which Mr. Crockett's heroine lodged in the little Camisard town of St. Vernan, in the valley of the Dourbie, "built out like a swallow's nest over the abyss." For it is noteworthy that most of these highland villages cluster along the river courses, as though the hill-folk were fain to have the sound of the glad waters in their ears. In the valley of the Jonte I marvelled often at these "swallows' nests." Many of the cottages have a scrap of garden, surrounded by a wall not higher than three feet, from the base of which the cliff sweeps down at an acute angle to the river bed, six hundred feet below. Children play in these tiny eeries with as little concern as youngsters in a city court.

Not all the surface of these great table-lands lies flat and stone-strewn; one will often come on dark forests of pines, and sometimes the woodman has a better return for his labour than the shepherd. But on every hand the conditions of life are primitive beyond anything in our own land. Here, more frequently than in his native Normandy, may we find the sullen clod depicted by Millet in the "Man with the Hoe." "Stolid and stunned, a brother to the ox," as Markham has described him in his powerful poem. It is, indeed, difficult to realise that among these crumbling villages and beggarly fields we are in the heart of fair France.

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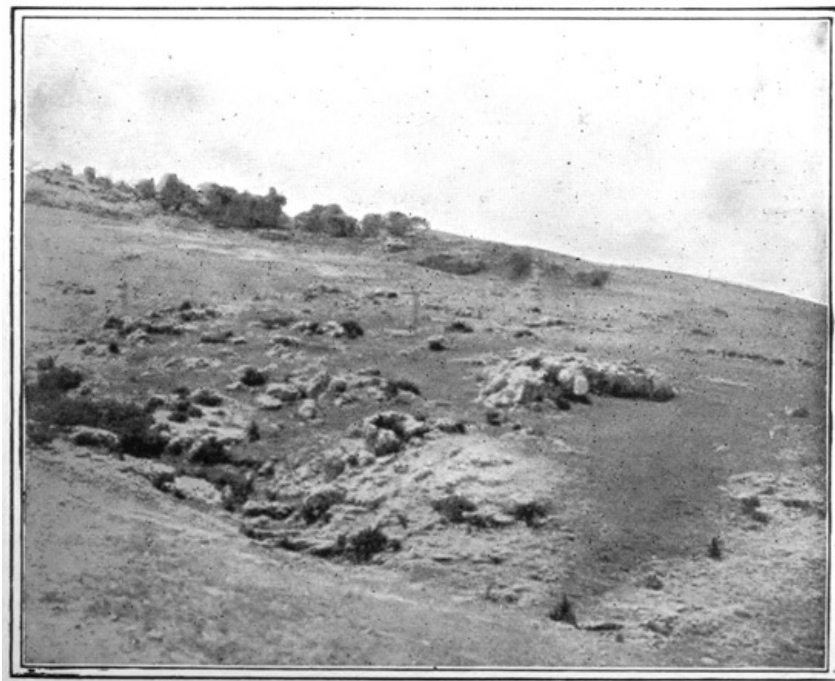
VI.

There is little to choose between the Catholic and Protestant villages; all are more or less in a state of dilapidation, all have poverty written on their walls; but to mingle with the people and discuss affairs with them, quite apart from all questions of religion, is a sure and ready way to discover how great is the difference between the two classes. The one is usually a sullen and unintelligent mortal, tied neck and crop to the stony soil on which he has been born; the other bright, receptive of ideas, quick with life and hope, and, if he be old, happy in the knowledge that his sons have gone forth from this bare land equipped by the liberal training of the Protestant schools to take dignified part in the great life of the Republic. For you will find that even in the veritable strongholds of a debased and superstitious Catholicism all the important officials are Protestants.

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MILLAU, WITH VIEW OF THE CAUSSE NOIR



ON THE CAUSSE DU LARZAC

The Protestants of to-day are no unworthy descendants of the men whom Cavalier led against the forces of civil and religious tyranny, and though these lonely mountains shelter also many who are still willing slaves of the yoke which the sturdy "Sons of God" endeavoured to shake off for ever, the Camisards of two centuries ago did not fight and die in vain; their children's children are to-day the little leaven that may yet "leaven the whole lump."

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The Wonderland of France

I.

"Whatever you do, you must not miss the valley of the Tarn—the finest scenery in Europe." Thus wrote a celebrated novelist and traveller to me when sending some hints on my projected tour in the Cevennes, a district which to Mr. S. R. Crockett is almost as familiar as his own romantic Galloway. I have good reason to be grateful for his advice, as the river Tarn is the waterway through what I shall venture to call the Wonderland of France. A clever writer has observed that "there are landscapes which are insane," and truly in this little-known corner of southern France nature has performed some of her maddest, most fantastic freaks. Here she is seen in a mood more sensational than the weird imaginings of a Gustave Doré; there is no scenery that I have looked upon or read about in any other part of Europe comparable with this of the Tarn. In the old world at least it is unique, and we have to go for comparison to the renowned cañons of the Colorado.

156

Not the least curious feature of the story of the Tarn, its awesome gorges and wondrous caverns, is the fact that less than thirty years ago the region was "discovered" to France by M. E. A. Martel, the celebrated grotologist, with as much éclat as it had been an island in an unknown sea. Of course, the whole district, like every other part of France, had long ago taken its place in history and romance; but although many a generation of peasant folk and monkish fraternities had lived out their lives in these southern fastnesses, the Tarn country-side had not before been explored by one in search of the picturesque or the wonders of Nature. Thus, in every sense of the word, M. Martel is to be reckoned a discoverer, and the surprise is that, despite a somewhat tiresome journey, there are so few English tourists who find their way to this enchanted land. The journey is no more fatiguing than that to Geneva or Lucerne, which in the summer months swarm with English visitors, and, for all their beauties, possess nothing to equal the natural glories of the Tarn.



ON THE TARN

"One sits as in a cockle shell on the Enchanted Sea, gliding along magically amid scenes of unequalled splendour."

There are several ways of reaching this little-known corner of France, but the best is undoubtedly by way of Mende, a fine town 434 miles south of Paris, "chief place" of the Department of the Lozère. Mende, although one of the cleanest and brightest of the French towns, with a population of less than 10,000, and pleasantly situated in a wide green valley, with low and sparsely-timbered hills billowing on every side under a sky so blue and in atmosphere so clear that the eye seems to acquire an unusual power of vision, would scarcely be worth the journey for itself alone. But it is the real starting-place for the descent of the Tarn gorges, and it possesses many excellent hotels and an ample service of coaches for the journey across the great plateau of the Causse de Sauveterre to Ste. Enimie, a distance of about eighteen miles. This would be the most convenient route for the traveller who depended upon the train and coach for his locomotion, but those who, like the writer, make use of the bicycle, would be well advised to make Florac their starting-point, as not the least beautiful part of the river scenery lies between that pretty little town and Ste. Enimie.

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II.

It fitted well with my plans one summer to explore a much longer reach of the Tarn than most visitors are in the habit of following, and I should have been sorry indeed to have missed any part of the journey. In company with another friend of the wheel, I struck eastward from Mende along the lovely valley of the Lot, and crossing the great mountain range that gives its name to the Department of the Lozère we first came upon the Tarn at Pont de Montvert, some fourteen miles north-east of Florac, at which point R. L. Stevenson began his acquaintance with the river. From this sleepy old town the river runs through a deep and narrow valley, the slopes thick with mighty chestnut trees, and the scenery in parts somewhat reminiscent of our Scottish Highlands, and totally unlike those reaches which, in its south-westerly course, render it unique among the rivers of Europe. For a few miles beyond Florac the aspect of the country is somewhat similar in kind, but on a more massive scale, the valley wider and more pastoral; but when one has reached the little town of Ispagnac, which sits snugly amid its fruitful orchards, the real character of the Tarn begins to reveal itself.

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It was after sunset when we had come thus far on our journey to Ste. Enimie, a distance of about seven miles from Florac, and never am I likely to forget the weird and thrilling impression of our passage from Ispagnac to Ste. Enimie, a matter of fifteen miles. The night comes quickly in that latitude, and as we advanced along the well-made road that follows the sinuous course of the river, at first mounting steadily until the noise of the water is heard but faintly far below, and then for mile upon mile gradually tending downward, the gloaming deepened into dark, and the gorge of the river, at all times awe-inspiring, took on in many a strange and mysterious shadow of the night a moving touch of Dantesque grandeur. We had left behind us all the tree-bearing slopes, and the river now ran in a great chasm of volcanic cliffs, shooting their fantastic pinnacles a thousand feet into the darkling sky, and presenting many an outline that might have been mistaken for the towers and bastions of some eerie stronghold. Not a soul was passed on all the miles of road, no sound was heard but the varying noise of the water, nothing moved in our path except an occasional bat, that zigzagged its noiseless flight across the road. One sat on the saddle with a tight hold on the handle bars, and kept as close as possible to the uprising rock, for towards the river was a sheer drop of some 500 feet, and only a low coping stood between us and disaster. So tortuous was the road, that, being at one time some little distance in advance of my

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companion, I awaited his approach, and could see the light of his lamp shoot out like a will-o'-the-wisp into the middle of an abyss, and then disappear in a hollow of the rocks, only to emerge again and flash upon an uncanny bridge across some gaping gully. For a considerable time we gazed enraptured on Venus, which is here seen with a radiance seldom witnessed in England, and seemed to lie like a glittering gem on the very brow of a mighty cliff. Presently summer lightning began to play along the riven lips of the valley, and continued at thrilling intervals to add a touch of dramatic intensity to a scene already sensational enough.

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The only place of habitation through which we passed was the little village of Prades, where the lighted window of a café with noise of merriment within, and the solemn grunting of oxen in an open stable, gave one a little human encouragement though the street lay void and black. As you may suppose, it was with no small satisfaction that we at length wheeled into Ste. Enimie at half-past nine o'clock, and found mine host of the Hôtel de Paris delighted to welcome two belated voyagers.

III.

Ste. Enimie, which has a population of 1,000, is the chief town of its canton, and is cosily tucked away close by the river side in a great amphitheatre of hills and cliffs, the meeting-place of three important highways: that by which we had come, and the road across the Sauveterre from La Canourgue, and that across the other mighty plateau, the Causse Méjan. The town is of great antiquity, and is said to owe its origin to a certain princess named Enimie, daughter of Clotaire II., who, being tainted with leprosy, was cured by some waters at this place, and founded a monastery here at the close of the sixth century. This religious house became one of the richest in all Gévaudan, but was suppressed, like so many of its kind, at the time of the great Revolution. The remains of the building are still an interesting feature of the place, and high on the cliff above is the hermitage of the saint, a little chapel built about the cave in which she is supposed to have slept. The river is here crossed by a splendid bridge, which the builders were busy improving at the time of our visit.

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A ROCKY DEFILE ON THE TARN

Showing the mass of the Causse Méjan rising on the left



IN THE GORGE OF THE TARN

"The river roars between precipices, that rise sheer and stupendous from its brink."

While the mistress of the hotel was preparing what we later pronounced a most excellent meal, mine host was telling me surprising things in the dining-room, to which one gained access through a fine old-fashioned kitchen. With one of Taride's large scale maps before me, whereon was shown a "national road" right through the gorges of the Tarn to Millau, I asked for some particulars of the route, and was smilingly informed that it did not yet exist.

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"But it is here, shown by a thick red line, on this map."

"Quite so, m'sieu; many cyclists come here with a map like that and think they can cycle all the way. But there is no road as yet, though in five years or six there will be one. The only way to descend the Tarn from here to Le Rozier is in a barque."

Now, experience has made me doubtful of anything a hotel-keeper in a tourist resort will tell you about boats and coaches, for you never know to what extent he is financially interested in the matter, and he of the Hôtel de Paris was avowedly the agent of the company to whom belong the boats used for the descent of the river. Although his hotel had a modern and well-appointed annexe—token of the growing popularity of the place where hotels are rapidly increasing—in person he resembled a brigand grown stout with easeful days, and one naturally grew more suspicious when he protested that it would not make the difference of a sou to him whether we went by boat or toiled ourselves to death across the mountains. A good friend at Florac—none other than the Free Church minister—had also assured us there was no road beyond Ste. Enimie, but that the boat charges were not dear. "Nor are they," said the hotel-keeper; "it is only thirty-six francs (thirty shillings) all the way, which is very cheap." We were unable to see eye to eye with him then, but subsequently came round to his opinion when we knew how much labour and skill could be purchased for this modest outlay.

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IV.

You must know that the Tarn and its ways are not to be measured by the ordinary experiences of holiday travel. At seven o'clock in the morning you wake and breakfast without loss of time, in order to set out without delay and reach Le Rozier, thirty miles to the south, in time for six o'clock dinner. On the beach, close by the hotel, lie a number of flat-bottomed barques, rudely constructed affairs, exactly similar to fishing-punts used in shallow English waters. A plank of wood with a back to it, and covered with a loose cushion, is laid athwart the primitive craft, and here you take your seat. It is possible, I believe, for six passengers to be carried, but personally I should be loath to trust myself in such a boat with more than four, for two boatmen are necessary to each punt. The charge is for the boat irrespective of numbers, so that we might have had two more in ours without adding to the cost, but our bicycles helped us to square matters. Our

boatmen were rough, half-shaven fellows, and he who took his place at the stern seemed to have been drinking unnecessarily early in the morning. But both knew their business thoroughly, and were alive to every current and whirlpool in the river.

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Their system of navigation is at once simple and effective, the only possible method of using the water-way. Armed with a strong pole, they stand, the one in front and the other behind, and allow the barque to glide down the swift current of the river, which runs, as I should judge, at six or eight miles an hour. Its course is broken up by innumerable gravel beds and rocky snags, and while we seem to be on the very instant of dashing into a seething whirlpool one of the boatmen will, with admirable precision, jab his pole into a hidden gravel bank and thrust the boat once more into the main current. Beautiful was it to watch how skilfully the men made use of this current, and that, guiding the frail craft straight into what seemed a perilous swirl of breakers, only that they might avail themselves of a different current resulting therefrom, and pilot us into a quiet pool by the beach on the very lip of a thundering weir.



THE CHATEAU DE LA CAZE ON THE TARN

"One of the most beautiful and romantic pictures is supplied by the ancient Castle of La Caze, which occupies a sheltered corner in a bend of the river."

It is indeed difficult to convey any adequate idea of the sensation of such a journey, where the water itself is at once the element and the cause of the progress. One sits as in a cockle shell on the enchanted sea, gliding along magically amid scenes of unequalled splendour; but, alas! the bronzed youth at the prow and the hairy wine-bibber at the stern are no creatures of fairyland, but the very serviceable mortals without whose aid the wonders of the Tarn would have remained to this day as distant as the realms of faëry.

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The panorama, which seems to pass us slowly on both sides of the river—for the absence of mechanical propulsion gives one the illusion of sitting still while the cliffs on each hand move past the boat—is of ceaseless change. For a time the hills reach up, green and carefully cultivated, to the higher basaltic cliffs, that rise perpendicular to the edge of the plateau, a thousand feet or more above our level, and then as they suddenly narrow, with never a foothold for the tiniest of creatures, the river roars between precipices that soar sheer and stupendous from its water, or in some cases lean forward so that at a little distance both sides seem to meet and form an arch across the stream. And the whole is rich in colour, the prevailing grey of the rocks being varied by great masses in which warm reds and browns occur, while every crevice is picked out with greenery, and wherever the foot of venturesome man can scramble there have been those bold enough to terrace patches of the slopes where vines and even tiny crops of wheat contrive to grow. One of the most beautiful and romantic pictures is supplied by the ancient castle of La Caze, which occupies a sheltered corner in a bend of the river, where above it the cliffs uprear with great hollows and rotundities, illustrating how in the unknown ages the water has eaten its way down from the upper level to its present bed.

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The Château de La Caze is set about by many tall and leafy trees, and one could imagine no holiday more enjoyable than a few days passed here, for—Oh, ye romantic and practical Frenchmen!—the castle has been transformed into an hotel, where all the appointments and even the costumes of the servants recall the Middle Ages in which it was built. As we approached, one of our boatmen took up a large conch and, blowing into it, set the gorge echoing as from a foghorn; but we had decided not to visit the château, as it was our purpose to lunch farther down at La Malene, and the sounding of the conch was meant only to attract the attention of some of the servants, to whom our boatmen shouted that we had thrown on the river-bank about a quarter of a mile above the castle a sack of loaves for its inmates.

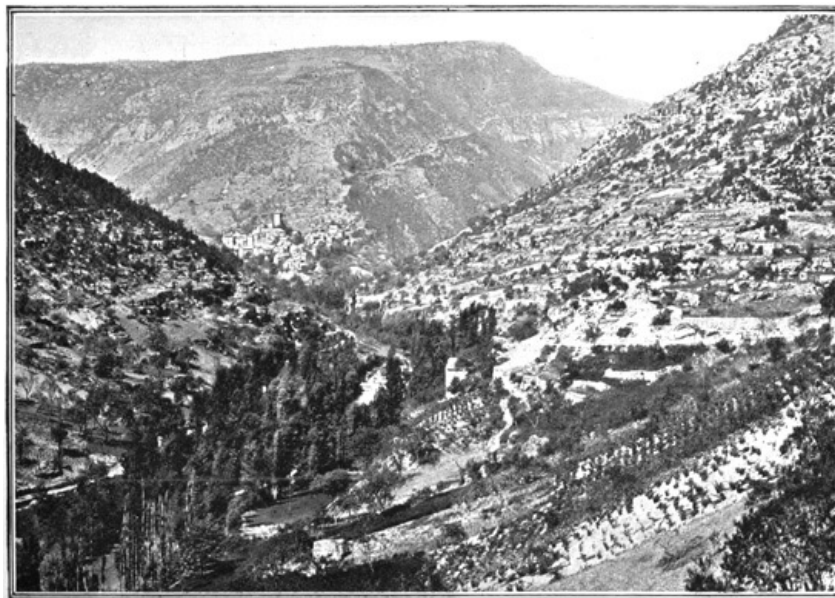
Between Ste. Enimie and La Malène there are four or five points at which we have to change our barque, where the river leaps over dangerous weirs, and several changes are necessary on the lower beach. It is due to this manœuvring and to a wait of nearly two hours at La Malène, while the bateliers lunch and gossip boisterously at one of the hotels—the voyageurs also being not unmindful of refreshment—that Le Rozier is not reached until six o'clock, despite the rapid course of the river.

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La Malène is one of the three places south of Ste. Enimie, and still in the real cañon of the Tarn, where the river is crossed by bridges; all splendid structures, designed to withstand the spring floods when the current carries with it many a mighty block of ice and all sorts of debris from the hills. The first and newest of the bridges is passed at St. Chely, a small and dirty, but extremely picturesque, hamlet half-way between Ste. Enimie and La Malène, where we explored a wonderful series of ancient cave dwellings, and where, by the way, an enterprising photographer has joined the modern to the prehistoric by painting an advertisement of his wares on the face of the cliff overlooking the former haunts of the Troglodites.

La Malène is, to my thinking, one of the most beautiful points on the route. The little town sits in the mouth of a great ravine that reaches far into the Causse de Sauveterre, and on the opposite side the majestic mass of the Causse Méjan climbs to well-nigh 1,800 feet above the river, the mountain road wriggling upward from the bridge in a series of wonderful twists and turns, "exactly like an apple paring thrown over the shoulder of the engineer," as Mr. Crockett has said of another highway in the farther south. It takes a man, walking at his best, more than an hour to climb that same road, as I can testify, and never for a moment during the ascent is the little town at the foot out of view. This will convey some idea of the barrenness of the mountain-side, where cattle and sheep crop a scanty herbage on fields that slope like the roof of a house and are thickly strewn with stones and boulders. At La Malène also there is a mediæval castle, which, like La Caze, is the property of that great tourist agency, "La France Pittoresque," and now serves as a hotel; but we were more interested in the old church of Romanesque design, where we saw the common grave of the thirty-nine villagers who were slain by the Republican troops during the Terror, and are remembered throughout the Cevennes as "the Martyrs of La Malène." It is striking proof of the terrible thoroughness of that bloody regime that even to this remote and sequestered nook the gory hand of the Terror stretched out.

168



PEYRELAU, IN THE VALLEY OF THE JONTE

The French are the best of all road-makers; more than any of the Latin peoples they have retained and fostered this gift of their Roman forebears. The highway they are now constructing along the Tarn was almost completed between St. Enimie and La Malène, at the time of our passing, and a splendid road it promised to be, here running like a gallery along the face of a cliff and there tunnelling some mighty bluff that juts out into the cañon. But the river will always remain the real highway, as the scenery can only be viewed to full advantage from a seat in a barque, and the bateliers need not fear the competition of the road that is in the making.

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VI.

If one were innocent enough to believe the boatmen who live by the tourist traffic, it would be difficult to know which part of the Tarn is the most beautiful. At St. Enimie you would be assured, in the event of your being undecided as to the whole trip, that the stretch between that town and La Malène was by far the best; while at La Malène you would find the local boatmen emphatic as to the unrivalled beauty of the cañon between that point and Les Vignes, where the third bridge

stands; and as surely when you arrived there you would be told the Tarn was only beginning to be worth seeing from there to Le Rozier! Naturally, it is impossible for two boatmen to take you a voyage which, occupying twelve hours, requires more than double that time and many times more energy, to bring the empty boats back to the starting-places. Thus the bateliers are prejudiced in favour of their own particular part of the journey, and the only way is to make the entire trip; but indeed that is for all who do not cycle imperative, as the expense of reaching a railway station from any of the places mentioned before Le Rozier would be prohibitive, and one must continue the journey from the last-named place to Millau by coach and train, for which only a small charge is made.

170

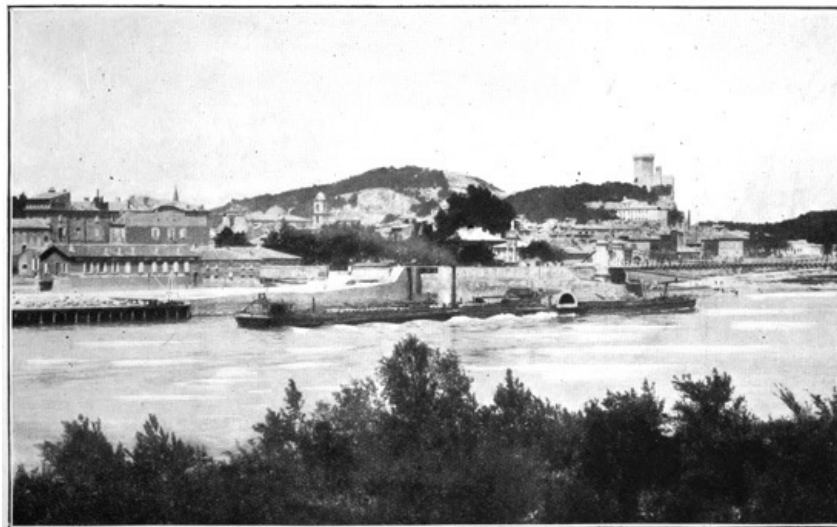
My own impression, if one can distinguish among scenes so differently beautiful, is that the cañon between La Malène and Les Vignes presents its most surprising aspect. At Les Detroits the giant walls lean forward in a bold and menacing way, and further on, at the Cirque des Baumes and Les Baumes Basses, we see some of Nature's most picturesque effects, while the Pas de Soucy is a wild and thrilling part of the journey, where the great basaltic masses are scattered about as if an awful earthquake had but recently shaken them into their fantastic positions.

But really there seems to be no end to the beauty of the Tarn, and when one has arrived at Le Rozier fresh wonders await the eye, and scenes rivalling anything we have witnessed are still to behold, if we will make a short detour into the valley of the Jonte, where the ancient town of Peyreleau sits like a queen enthroned among enfolding hills. If one can go a little farther along this tributary of the Tarn and visit the famous grotto of Dargilan, discovered by M. Martel in 1884, a strange and beautiful underworld, before which the most extravagant fantasies of the Arabian Nights pale into insignificance, will be revealed. There, by the light of torches, we can wander through gigantic caverns of stalactite greater and more awe-inspiring than any cathedral, and journey by canoe on underground rivers, in what—those practical Frenchmen once again!—is "the property of the Society 'La France Pittoresque.'"

171

Even that part of the Tarn between Le Rozier and Millau, no longer a gorge, but broadening into a smiling and fruitful valley, with the great impregnable wall of the Causse Noir frowning along its eastern length, is full of beautiful vistas; but the wild and rugged grandeur of the cañon has given place to scenes of pleasant pastoral life, and we cycle along a highway fringed with cherry trees in fruit, passing many a populous little town before we enter the leafy boulevards of the historic and prosperous city of Millau.

173



BEUCAIRE: SHOWING CASTLE AND BRIDGE ACROSS THE RHONE TO TARASCON

The Town of "Tartarin"

I.

The custom observed by English authors of giving fictitious names to places described in works of romance—as for example, Mr. Hardy's "Casterbridge" (Dorchester) and Mr. Barrie's "Thrums" (Kirriemuir)—has so brought their readers to accept the most faithful realism for romance, that when they take up a French novel they are apt to think the places mentioned therein are treated in the same way. But those who have any acquaintance with French fiction will know that the novelists across the Channel follow a method entirely opposed to ours. An English reader who

may have enjoyed to the full the famous trilogy of "Tartarin" books may well be excused if he supposes that the town of Tarascon is largely a creation of their author, Alphonse Daudet. It is true that if he has ever travelled from Paris to Marseilles by way of Lyons and Avignon he will have passed through Tarascon, with its wide and open station perched high on a viaduct, and the porter bawling in his rich, southern tongue, "Tarascon, stop five minutes. Change for Nîmes, Montpellier, Cette." And if he has—as he cannot fail to have—delightful memories of the incomparable Tartarin, his feet will itch to be out and wander the dusty streets in the hope of looking upon the scenes of the hero's happy days; to peep perchance at his tiny white-washed villa on the Avignon Road with its green Venetian shutters, where the little bootblacks used to play about the door and hail the great man as his portly figure stepped forth, bound for the Alpine Club "down town." There would certainly be small other reasons for tarrying at this ancient town of France; it owes such interest as it possesses chiefly to the genius of Daudet, whose inimitable humour has vivified and touched it with immortality. 174

I had been wandering a-wheel over many a league of these fair southern roads one summer before I found myself at the ancient Roman city of Nîmes, the rarest treasure of France, and it was a visit to Daudet's birthplace there that suggested the idea of going on to Tarascon a desire intensified by the ardour of a gentleman from that town whom I met at a hotel, and who perspired with indignation as he denounced "that Daudet" for libelling the good folk of Tarascon. "Tartarin! The whole thing's a farce. There never was such a man!" But he asserted that the town was well worth seeing, if I could only forget Daudet's ribald nonsense. 175

It went well with my plans for reaching the main route back to Paris to make a little journey through the fragrant olive groves along the high road to Remoulins in order to visit the world-famous Roman aqueduct known as the Pont du Gard, near to which a gipsy told Tartarin he would one day be a king, and thence by the banks of the river Gardon to Beaucaire and Tarascon. Not often have I made a literary pilgrimage of so pleasant or profitable a nature.

II.

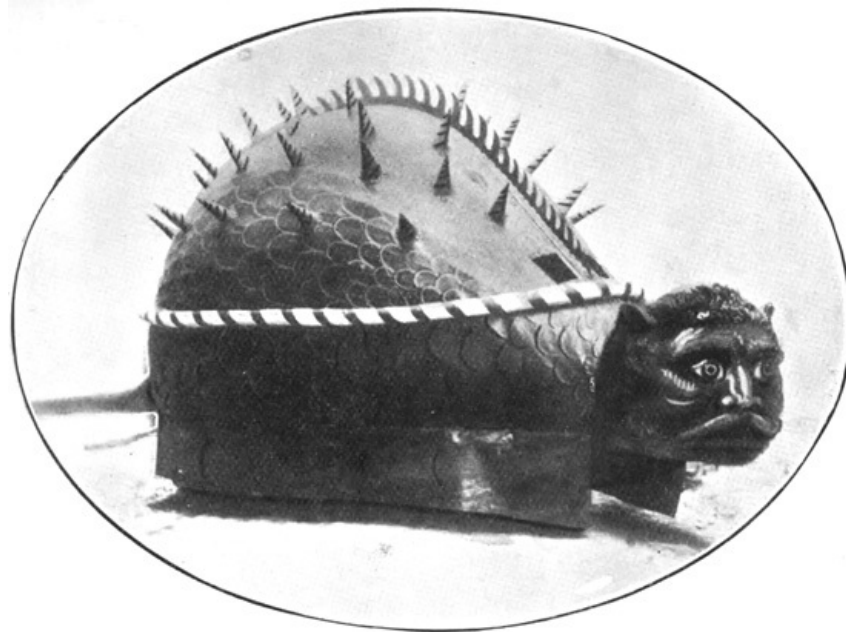
You must know, of course, what a rare fellow this Tartarin was—*Coquin de bon sort!* I am not sure that I should speak of him in the past tense; although his creator eventually gathered him to his fathers, Tartarin was built for immortality, and at most his passing was a translation; he is for all time the archetype of southern character, and Tarascon is alive with him to-day. Of medium height, stout of body, scant of hair on his head, but bushy-whiskered and jovial-faced, you will see his like sipping absinth at any café on the promenade of the sleepy old town, or playing a game of billiards with the grand manner of a Napoleon figuring out a campaign. 176

Tartarin, blessed with all the imagination of the generous south, was indeed an ineffectual Bonaparte, in the body of a good-natured provincial. "We are both of the south," he observed to his devoted admirer Pascalon, when that faithful henchman, at a crisis in his hero's career, pointed out the similarity between him of Corsica and him of Tarascon. Daudet makes him, in a bright flash of self-knowledge, describe himself as "Don Quixote in the skin of Sancho Panza," and Mr. Henry James has in this wise elaborated the point with his usual deftness:

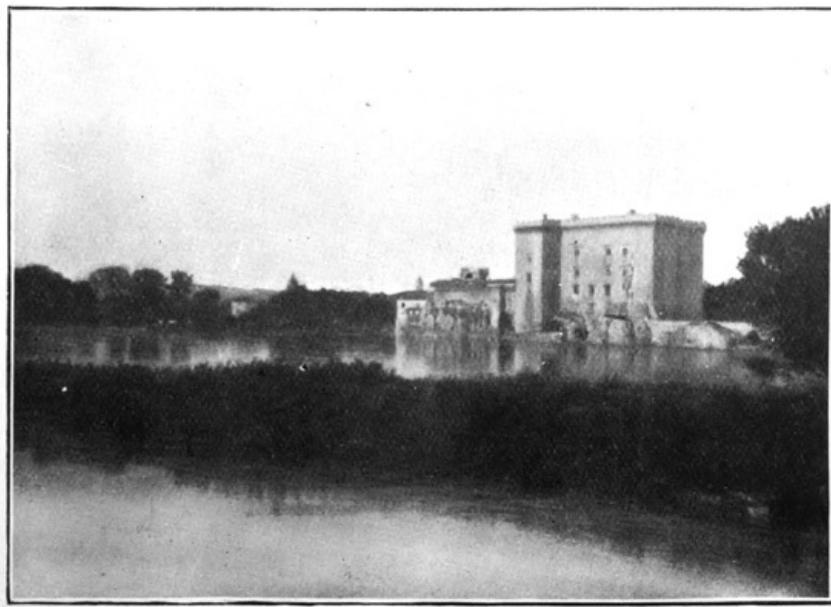
"There are two men in Tartarin, and there are two men in all of us; only, of course, to make a fine case, M. Daudet has zigzagged the line of their respective oddities. As he says so amusingly in *Tartarin of Tarascon*, in his comparison of the very different promptings of these inner voices, when the Don Quixote sounds the appeal, 'Cover yourself with glory!' the Sancho Panza murmurs the qualification, 'Cover yourself with flannel!' The glory is everything the imagination regales itself with as a luxury of reputation—the *regardelle* so prettily described in the last pages of *Port Tarascon*; the flannel is everything that life demands as a tribute to reality—a gage of self-preservation. The glory reduced to a tangible texture too often turns out to be mere prudent underclothing." 177



TARASCON: THE PUBLIC MARKET



THE TARASQUE



THE CASTLE OF TARASCON

It is true that a good deal of the humour that attaches to Tartarin is of the unconscious sort. He and his brethren of Provence stand in relation to their fellow-countrymen much as the Irish to the English in the matter of humour, but in that only. They are often the butt of northern witticisms, and are said to be experts in drawing the long bow. Tarascon in this respect no more than many a score of little towns in the Midi; but it suited the author's purpose admirably to locate the home of his hero there, as the place possesses many quaint little peculiarities of its own which fitted in admirably with the scheme of Tartarin's remarkable career.

III.

Since I visited the town the Tarasconians have proved worthy of their reputation, as a picture post card has been put in circulation bearing a photograph of "*La Maison de Tartarin*." It shows a square and comfortable white house, flat-roofed, with a series of loop-hole windows that give it a murderous look. In front is a large garden, where an old baobab stretches forth its branches and innumerable exotics mingle their strange leaves in the beautiful disorder of the primeval forest. So, at least, I gather from a French journal. Yet, while pointing out the mendacity of the picture post card, the journal in question publishes with every evidence of sincerity an equally apocryphal account of the real Tartarin, who we are told, was a person named originally Jean Pittalouga, a native of the south of Sardinia, not a Frenchman at all. He was bought out of slavery by the Brotherhood of the Trinity, and came to Tarascon to manage the property of the fraternity in that town. As Sidi-Mouley-Abdallah was the superior of Morocco and that country was part of Barbary, Pittalouga became known in Tarascon, because of his romantic experience among the Moors, first as *Sidi-Barbari*, and then as *Barbarin*. The time came when the Trinity fraternity had to clear out, and with them Barbarin, who now rented a neighbouring farm on the outskirts of the town—the veritable "*Maison de Tartarin*" of the post card. But he did not die there. He went away with the Trinity fathers into Africa, and is believed to have been devoured entirely by some terrible wild beast, with whom he had disputed the sovereignty of the desert. To all of which, as Daudet remarks of the member of the Jockey Club travelling *avec sa nièce*, "Hum! hum!"

178

179

One may note here that the author did first write of his comic hero as Barbarin; but as the French law affords the fullest measure of protection to living people whose names may be introduced in works of fiction, and as there lived in Tarascon a certain M. Barbarin, who wrote to Daudet a letter worthy of his hero, wherein he threatened the utmost rigour of the law unless the novelist ceased to make sport of "what was dearer to him than life itself, the unspotted name of his ancestors," Daudet altered the name to Tartarin, and was inclined to think in after years, when the fame of his creation had travelled around the globe, that his hero would never have been so popular under his original name. It may have been a case of "apt alliteration's artful aid"; but one may suppose that Tartarin would have been equally popular by any other name. He embodies the extravagant, and not the least lovable, side of French character, as truly as Uriah Heep and Mr. Pecksniff represent English humbug and hypocrisy; he has many points of similarity with Mr. Pickwick, but the last-mentioned can hardly be compared with him as reality seen through the eye of kindly caricature.

180

IV.

Tartarin was, in a word, an epitomy of innocent vanities; large-hearted, generous, he had the Cæsarian ambition to be the first man in his town; he was imbued with the national hunger for "*la Gloire*," and many were the amusing ways in which he sought to demonstrate his prowess. To

impress his townsmen, the dear old humbug surrounded himself with all sorts of foreign curiosities. His garden was stuffed with exotics from every clime, most notable of all the wonderful baobab, which he grew in a flower-pot, although that is the unmatched giant of the tree kingdom! His study was decked with the weapons of many strange and savage people, and, like a miniature museum, his possessions were ticketed thus: "Poisoned arrows! Do not touch!" "Weapons loaded! Have a care!"

His earliest exploits were as chief of the "cap-hunters," for, you see, in those days the good folk of Tarascon were great sports, and the whole country-side having been denuded of game, they were reduced to the device of going forth in hunting-parties, and after a jolly picnic they would throw up their caps in the air and shoot at them as they fell! "The man whose hat bears the greatest number of shot marks is hailed as champion of the chase, and in the evening, with his riddled cap stuck on the end of his rifle, he makes a triumphal entry into Tarascon, midst the barking of dogs and fanfares of trumpets."

181



TARASCON: THE MAIRIE

Tartarin, however, determined to cover himself with glory—as well as flannel—by making an expedition into Algeria and Morocco, there to try his prowess on the lions of the Atlas. His ludicrous adventures on this great enterprise—how he shot a donkey and a blind lion, and returned to Tarascon pursued by his devoted camel—form the theme of the first of Daudet's three charming stories. The years pass with Tartarin lording it at Baobab House, and at the club every evening spinning his untruthful yarns, beginning: "Picture to yourself a certain evening in the open Sahara." Then comes the further adventures of "Tartarin in the Alps," and I confess that when, a good many years ago, I first clambered up a portion of Mont Blanc it was of Tartarin's famous ascent I thought rather than of Jacques Balmat's; the fiction was more vivid in my mind than the fact; and again at the Castle of Chillon—I say it fairly—the comic figure of Tartarin imprisoned there was more engaging to the imagination than that of Bonnivard; and, by the bye, in the famous dungeon one can see scratched on the wall the signatures of both Lord Byron and Alphonse Daudet.

182

The last, and in some respects the best, of all the Tartarin books—like Mulvaney, the mighty Tarasconian has his fame "dishpersed most notoriously in sev'ril volumes"—is *Port Tarascon*, wherein are detailed the mirthful misadventures of the great man, and many of his townsmen who, under his direction, set sail to found a colony in Polynesia, an undertaking that proved fatal to his fame, and ended eventually in his self-exile across the river to Beaucaire, where he died soon after; of sheer melancholy we may suppose.

V.

It was into the busy little town of Beaucaire, which lies around its ancient castle of Bellicardo, on the west bank of the broad Rhone, glaring across at Tarascon, that I wheeled one bright day in June. Beaucaire, for all its canal, wharves, and signs of prosperous industry, is as tidy a town as I have seen, and the fine old castle, ruined by Richelieu, where in the golden age of Languedoc's

poesy the troubadors sang their ballads at the Court of Love, is beautifully situated on a little hill by the river-side, quite near to the magnificent suspension bridge which figures so humorously in *Port Tarascon*. The rivalry between the two towns, their mutual jealousies, furnished Daudet with many an opportunity to poke fun at them. "Separated by the whole breadth of the Rhone, the two cities regard each other across the river as irreconcilable enemies. The bridge that has been thrown between them has not brought them any nearer. This bridge is never crossed—in the first place, because it's very dangerous. The people of Beaucaire no more go to Tarascon than those of Tarascon go to Beaucaire." As the gentleman I met at Nîmes would have said, "Zut! It is not true." But that is neither here nor there.

183

Tartarin, up to his forty-ninth year, had never spent a night away from his own home. "The very limit of his travels was Beaucaire, and yet Beaucaire is not far from Tarascon, as there is only the bridge to cross. Unhappily that beastly bridge had been so often swept away by the storms; it is so long, so rickety, and the Rhone so broad there that—zounds, you understand!... Tartarin preferred to have a firm grip of the ground." But this must have referred to the old bridge that made way for the present magnificent structure, which crosses the river in four spans and is 1,456 feet in length. However, it was this suspension bridge, and no other, across which the hero's cronie Bompard came with such bravery to witness for his friend, when Tartarin, fallen from his high estate, was on trial at the court of Tarascon for having been party to a gigantic swindle in the great colonising fraud of Port Tarascon, a charge from which, as we know, he was rightly acquitted. Bompard at the time of the trial was in hiding at Beaucaire, where he had become conservator of the Castle and warden of the Fair Grounds—Beaucaire's annual fair is famed all over France—"but when I saw that Tartarin was really dragged into the dock between the myrmidons of the law, then I could hold out no longer; I let myself go—I crossed the bridge! I crossed it this morning in a terrible tempest. I was obliged to go down on all fours the same way as when I went up Mont Blanc.... When I tell you that the bridge was swinging like a pendulum, you'll believe I had to be brave. I was, in fact, heroic."

184

VI.

The view from the bridge as one crosses to Tarascon is as pleasant a picture as may be seen in any part of old France. The noble stream, broken by sedgy inlands, sweeps on between its low banks, and rising sheer from the water's edge on a firm rock-base, almost opposite the picturesque mass of Bellicardo, are the massive walls of the ancient castle of Tarascon, founded by Count Louis II. in the fourteenth century and finished by King René of Anjou in the fifteenth, and at one time tenanted by Pope Urbain II., but now, like many another palace of kings, fallen to the condition of a common prison. Within these grim walls Tartarin passed some of his inglorious days, but days not lacking romance, for was not Bompard from the opposite height signalling o' nights to him by means of mysterious lights?

185



A WOMAN OF TARASCON

(Summer costume)

If one has never seen photographs of Tarascon it will be a surprise, as it is surely a pleasure, to note how faithfully the artists who illustrated Daudet's books have reproduced in their charming little vignettes the chief features of the actual town. There to the south of the bridge is the tiny quay from which we are to suppose the *Tootoopumpum* sailed away with the flower of Tarascon's aristocracy on that ill-starred expedition to the South Seas. Daudet is careful to preserve some slight respect for the truth by explaining that the vessel was of shallow draft; but, even so, the Rhone is here not navigable to ocean-going steamers.

Proceeding straight into the town, we arrive in a minute or so at the Promenade, with its long rows of plane trees, as in most French towns, only in Tarascon the trees seem to grow higher and leafier than anywhere else. It opens out a short distance from the riverside, and although it cannot be strictly called the "Walk Round" for the reason which the author gives—that it encircles the town—it certainly traverses a goodly portion of Tarascon, and takes in *en route* that "bit of a square" to which he makes so many sly allusions. 186

Almost the first thing one notices after crossing the bridge is the "Hotel of the Emperors," close by the Hospice at the opening of the Promenade. This title is worthy of Daudet himself! Along the south side of the Promenade stand the chief cafés and shops; as one sits by a table at a door watching the passers-by, the scene is entirely agreeable. Everybody seems to have walked out of Daudet's page. The men are of two types chiefly—those of the stout and bearded figure, such as Tartarin himself possessed, and the thin and sharp-featured fellows of Italian caste, like Bezuquet and Costecalde, with their bright, black eyes and fierce moustachios. Most of them, this sunny day, are abroad in their shirt sleeves, and almost to a man they wear the soft black felt hats such as our English curates affect. 187

VII.

There is a musical jingle of spurs, as some baggy-trousered soldiers pass on their way to the fine cavalry barracks which the town possesses. There go a pair of comfortable-looking priests in their long black gowns, their good fat fingers twined behind them; but nowhere do we see the white habit of the friars, whose monastery of Pampérigouste the gallant Tartarin and his crusaders defended from the Government troops so long ago! The women-folk whom one sees about are nearly all hatless, but they wear a dainty substitute in the shape of a little cap of white muslin and lace, and a pelerine of the same material over their shoulders and breast. Small, plump, swarthy, they are true daughters of the south, and by that token better to look upon than their sisters of the north. Here and there one may see a woman touched with something of the Paris fashion, members of that local aristocracy to which belonged the charming Clorinda of Pascalon's hopeless passion.

There is a constant toot-toot or tinkle of bells as cyclists go by, for the wheel has come into great popularity here as elsewhere since Tartarin made his tragic exit across the bridge. Perhaps the most unmistakable evidences of provincialism are supplied by the antiquated types of vehicles with their fat-faced drivers and their unshorn horses, many of the latter being harnessed with the most extravagant kinds of collars and saddles that project a couple of feet or more above the level of the animals' backs. 188

The whole scene is one of peaceful and happy life, and it is good to look upon people who are in no hurry to do business and seem to take things easily. Across the way, there, the chemist is standing at his door, with those great glasses of coloured water, that seem to have gone out of fashion in England, shining in his window, while he rolls a cigarette for the white-legged postman who has stopped to give him a letter, and chats with him in the passing. He might be Bezuquet himself, did we not know of the misfortune that befell the latter, when he was tattooed out of recognition by the South Sea Islanders, and had to wear a mask when he came home!



TARASCON: "THE BIT OF A SQUARE"

Going down a street that leads northward from the Promenade, we pass the Mairie, a quaint old building from whose balcony floats, not the Tarasque, but the tricolor, and by whose doorway are posted notices of coming bull-fights, for Tarascon is still keen on its ancient sport despite the restrictive legislation. Near by is the public market, and the whole district swarms with dogs of every breed. We peep into the church of St. Martha, which is no bad example of the Pointed Gothic and occupies the site of an old Roman Temple. One of the kings of Provence is buried here, but more interesting is the tomb of the saint to whom the church is dedicated.

189

VIII.

St. Martha and the Tarasque are the peculiar glories of the Tarasconians, who, you must know, would almost strike you if you breathed the word "Tartarin" to them, and have never forgotten Daudet for his satires on the town. We cannot do better than go to Daudet for the legend of St. Martha and the beast.

"This Tarasque, in very ancient days, was nothing less than a terrible monster, a most alarming dragon, which laid waste the country at the mouth of the Rhone. St. Martha, who had come into Provence after the death of our Lord, went forth and caught the beast in the deep marshes, and binding its neck with a sky-blue ribbon, brought it into the city captive, tamed by the innocence and piety of the saint. Ever since then, in remembrance of the service rendered by the holy Martha, the Tarasconians have kept a holiday, which they celebrate every ten years by a procession through the city. This procession forms the escort of a sort of ferocious, bloody monster, made of wood and painted pasteboard, who is a cross between the serpent and the crocodile, and represents, in gross and ridiculous effigy, the dragon of ancient days. The thing is not a mere masquerade, for the Tarasque is really held in veneration; she is a regular idol, inspiring a sort of superstitious, affectionate fear. She is called in the country the Old Grannie. The creature has herself stalled in a shed especially hired for her by the town council."

190

Daudet's light sketch of the Tarasque may be supplemented by a more circumstantial account of the strange ceremony from a writer on old customs (William S. Walsh), who informs us that "the famous Miracle Play of 'Sainte Marthe et la Tarasque,' instituted, it was said, by King René in 1400, was one of the last Provençal *coronlas* to disappear, as in its day it was one of the most popular. Even after the Mystery Play was itself abandoned, a remnant of it lingered on until the middle of the nineteenth century in the annual procession of La Tarasque, celebrated on July 29th, not only at Tarascon, but also at Beaucaire. The main feature was the huge figure of a dragon, made of wood and canvas, eight feet long, three feet high, and four feet broad in the middle. The head was small, there was no neck, the body, which was covered with scales, was shaped like an enormous egg, and at the nether extremity was a heavy beam of wood for a tail. Sixteen mummers, gaily caparisoned and known as the Knights of la Tarasque were among its attendants. Eight of the knights concealed themselves within the body to represent those who had been devoured, and furnished the motive power, besides lashing the tail to right and left, at imminent risk to the legs of the spectators. The other eight formed the escort, and were followed by drummers and fifers and a long procession of clergy and laity. The dragon was conducted by a girl in white and blue, the leading string being her girdle of blue silk. When the dragon was especially unruly and frolicsome she dashed holy water over it. A continuous rattle of torpedoes and musketry was kept up by those who followed in the dragon's train."

191

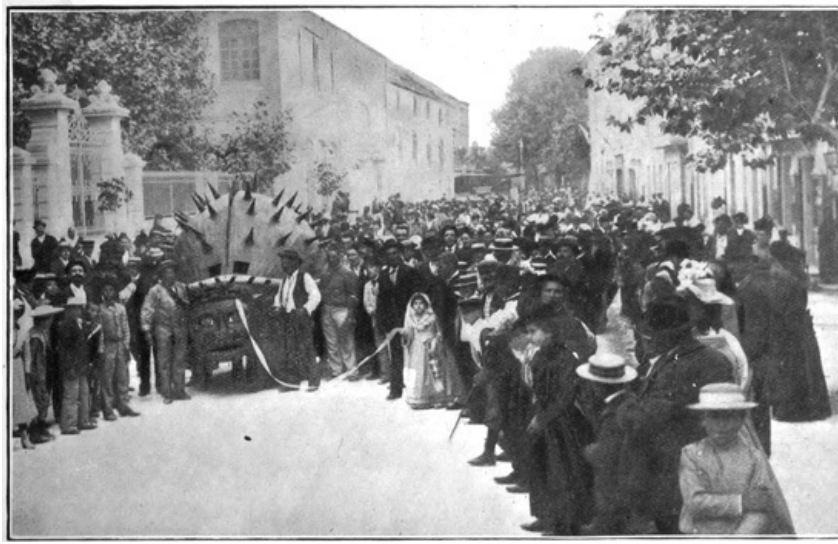
The celebration of the Tarasque has taken place several times, I believe, since the prohibition, while the procession of St. Martha is held annually; but as my visit did not synchronise with either, I had to be content with securing photographs from a local photographer, who was more inclined to discuss the weather and smoke his cigarette than sell his wares, and left his wife—at the time of my call, in a state of partial undress between changing her visiting costume for an indoor dress—to do the business of hunting up prints for me. It will be remembered by those who have read *Port Tarascon* that Tartarin foresaw his own downfall from the day on which, under the impression that he was shooting at a whale, he planted a bullet in the gross carcase of the Tarasque, which had been taken with the emigrants to the South Seas and was swept overboard to become a waif of the waves.

192

IX.

One of the peculiarities of Tarascon is its railway station on the outskirts of the town. It is situated some thirty feet above the level of the street, and you gain the platform by climbing several long flights of stairs, up which it is no light task to carry a heavily-burdened bicycle. During most of the day there is little evidence of life in or around the station, and a clerk will cheerfully devote a quarter of an hour to explain to you the absurdities of the railway time table; but five or six times a day the place wakes up on the arrival of a train from or to the capital, for all the trains in France seem to have a connection, however tardy and remote, with the octopus of Paris. Then there is much ringing of bells and blowing of trumpets, and you almost expect to see the quaint and portly form of Tartarin himself returning from his great adventure in the Sahara or his ascent of Mont Blanc. But you reflect that these and many other of his doings were much too good to be true, and take your place in the corner of the carriage, making yourself comfortable for the long and dreary journey to Paris.

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TARASCON: THE PROCESSION OF THE TARASQUE

The little girl leading the monster represents Saint Martha

The last thing you see as the train steams away is the white stretch of the Avignon Road lying between the railway and the river, its little white houses and modern villas close-shuttered and growing indistinct in the soft southern twilight.

195

"La Fête Dieu"

I.

For centuries the 19th of June has been to the people of France a day of high festival. No one who has happened to be travelling in Normandy or Brittany—or indeed in almost any of the French provinces—about this time of the year can have failed to notice the celebration of the Fête Dieu, and many may have wondered what it was all about. It has existed so long as one of the national customs, varying in its observance in different parts of the country, and having passed through many periods of change, that a few years ago he would have been accounted a rash and uninspired prophet who would have foretold that the Republican Government might have the temerity to lay its embargo on this sacred institution. But, behold the day when the secular hand of M. Combes had stretched out into the remotest parts of fair France, and following hard upon the upsetting of monastic peace, came the prohibition of religious processions in public. The effect of this order was to limit the fête in many places to a mere perambulation of the exterior of the church, and in others the procession was confined entirely to the interior, though here and there, it would seem, the function took place just as it did generations before M. Combes and the anti-clericals arose into power.

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The festival is clearly of pagan origin, like so many of the ceremonies of the Christian church; it corresponds with the Corpus Feast in Spain, the exhibition of the holy sacrament having been grafted on to the heathenish rights very early in the Christian era. There seems to be evidences of the ceremony having been observed in some form or other centuries before 673, as in that year an ecclesiastical council, held at Braga in Spain, spoke of "the ancient and traditional custom of solemnly carrying the Host on the shoulders." It was Pope Urbain IV., who vainly endeavoured to stir up a new crusade on behalf of his former diocese of Jerusalem, that officially recognised and instituted as regular offices of the church in 1264 the ceremonies connected with the Fête Dieu. But, despite this papal ordinance, the festival did not become one of general observance until, some generations later, there had grown around the purely religious part of it a mass of painfully secular tomfoolery, which turned the fête into a great saturnalia. In the days of that merry monarch, King René, it had assumed such proportions that an entire week was devoted to the celebration, "courts of love," tournaments, jousts, mystery plays, and many other amusements being associated with the solemn procession of the sacred sacrament. Flourishing more or less, the fête continued annually, without interruption until the great Revolution, which gave short shrift to the old taste for processions; but under Louis XVIII. it was re-established, and the State even furnished troops as escorts for those taking part in the processions. Times are changed indeed when we find *Le Pèlerin*, an illustrated weekly newspaper devoted entirely to the

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interests of pilgrimages, publishing cartoons which show the police dispersing the pious participants in the procession of the Fête Dieu, while rowdy socialists are permitted to wave their red rags in the highway.



PROCESSION OF LA FÊTE DIEU

Photographed at Morlaix, in Brittany

II.

The festival, which has thus fallen upon evil times, might possibly have gone more steadily downhill to the limbo of old customs if the Government had left it alone, as of recent years it has not been gaining in popularity, and, practically speaking, only women and children have shown active interest in it under the direction of the priests and lay officials. Throughout Normandy it was a rare thing to see men taking part; but in Brittany, and especially at the quaint old town of Morlaix, which is famed for its high railway bridge and its Fête Dieu, and holds an extremely jolly kermesse, with dancing and the selling of cheap rubbish, immediately after the holy sacrament has been carried through the streets, a larger proportion of men were to be seen engaging in the ceremony; while in the far south, among the peasants of Provence and Aveyron, the men have long been as attached to this and similar fêtes of the church as the women, taking part with a comic gravity of demeanour absurdly out of keeping with their usually gay and careless behaviour. Generally speaking, the Fête Dieu, as celebrated during modern years, has been a picturesque, but brief and inoffensive ceremonial, that did not greatly disturb anybody, and seemed to please the women and children. In the course of time it might have died out as a public institution, though it must always survive, in some manner, as a religious festival; but the Government, in its crusade against the enemies of the Republic—for such undoubtedly are the Catholic priests—may find that it has, by its very prohibition, reawakened interest in this ancient and decrepid institution of the church.

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As for the familiar procession of the Fête Dieu, there is not very much to describe: a brief notice of one may be taken as typical of all. The first indication that the visitor would have of something unusual toward was the strewing of the principal streets with rushes. Almost every shopkeeper would be seen with an armful of the green blades, laying them down to fullest advantage in the middle of the road. This done, the next thing was to bring out long sheets of white linen, which were tacked a little way below the windows of the first story, and hung downward to within a foot or so of the ground, the entire route being thus lined with a continuous stretch of white, whereon busy hands had pinned roses and other flowers, sometimes attempting designs such as a heart or a cross, or the monogram "I H S." Each shopkeeper seemed to vie with his or her neighbour to produce a more elaborate evidence of pious interest in the coming procession; but I have noticed frequently that many performed their part in the most perfunctory manner, only rushing up their white linen and sticking on a flower or two when the head of the procession was actually in sight, and whipping off the sheets as soon as it had passed by.

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III.

In many parts of the town, often in the front garden of a private house, in some outside corner of a church or in a market-place, elaborate shrines, made of wood, covered with cloth, and decorated with rushes and flowers, would be erected. In one small town I have counted upwards of a dozen such erections, enclosing gaudy statues of the saints, especially well disposed towards those who supplied the money for the shrines. But here again I have noticed the proverbial economy of the French nation asserting itself, the attendant at such a gorgeous shrine lighting the numerous candles only on the approach of the procession, and blowing them out the instant it had passed, when also the dismantling of the shrine would begin! I recall a particularly gorgeous shrine which I saw many years ago in the town of Falaise. At a considerable distance the numerous candles seemed to be burning so brilliantly, that I was not altogether surprised on going up and examining them to find the supposed candles were actually incandescent electric lamps. Thus the preliminary arrangements of the populace for the coming of the procession.

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The route was, as a rule, one that had been followed for years, but the erection of a particularly elaborate shrine by some person blessed with pelf and piety, in a street not within the usual itinerary, would be regarded as sufficient to justify a detour.

I have never witnessed the procession without being refreshed by its suggestion of old-world ease. "Build your houses as if you meant them to last for ever," was Ruskin's advice. "Proceed as if your procession had started at the Flood and was going on till Doomsday," would seem to be the motto that inspires the demonstrators in the Fête Dieu.

In the distance the sound of music is heard, and after a time at the far end of the road the head of the procession is seen moving towards us at a pace as much slower than a funeral as that is slower than a horse race. First comes the beadle, or church officer attached to the cathedral, whose blue or red uniform, with cocked hat, knee breeches, white hose and buckled shoes, remind one of the dress of our soldiers in the seventeenth century, a get-up very similar to that of the Swiss Guard at the Vatican, these beadles being, indeed, generally known as the "Swiss," though they are loutish and ignorant fellows, with as much regard for religion as the chucker-out at a roaring London tavern. But for all that, the Swiss makes a mighty picturesque figure at the head of the procession, his sword hanging at his hip, and a long mace carried in his hand as he steps out slowly and endeavours to combine dignity with scowls at the children who follow him, the little girls in their white muslin dresses, made for their first communion, and the little boys in the sort of midshipman's suit universally worn by French lads at the time of their confirmation, a white armlet being donned on this occasion and a rosary tied around it. Following the children, who carry banners with various religious devices, come bands of music and different groups of men and women, who also march under certain banners that indicate their membership of some brotherhood or sisterhood.

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IV.

There are brotherhoods of the Holy Sacrament in many parts of France whose credentials date back to the Middle Ages, and who seem to exist solely for the purpose of being privileged to walk in religious processions, with a ludicrous gown lavishly trimmed, and having on the front, after the manner of a herald's tabard, a picture of Christ. The brethren of the various "charities," which in France correspond in some degree to our friendly societies, also wear uniforms, and, in some parts of the country assist in the procession. In the past many unseemly disturbances arose out of the rivalry of these brotherhoods as to their respective privileges in the Fête Dieu, and the sacred function was often marred by the most disgraceful scenes of rowdyism as the rivals fought for precedence, and especially for the right of bearing the canopy under which the Holy Sacrament is carried through the streets.

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The approach of the Host is heralded by the acolytes in their scarlet gowns with lace tunics, who come singing, and precede the white-robed members of the choir, lay brethren and priests, who are either diligently reading from books, or mumbling unintelligently the orisons provided for the occasion. Succeeding these come more acolytes, swinging censers, and others who, walking backwards, bear large baskets of rose leaves, and scatter their fragrant burdens in handfuls on the road in front of the bishop. The latter, arrayed in his most gorgeous vestments, advances slowly, holding aloft, with well-assumed solemnity, to impress beholders with the awful sacredness of his charge, the elaborate brass monstrance or cabinet which encloses the consecrated wafer. The bishop, who thus displays before the just and the unjust the Holy Sacrament, walks under a canopy of richly embroidered cloth, carried on four posts by specially chosen members of some of the brotherhoods, or perhaps by some unusually devout laymen, whose purses have not been altogether closed when the clerical hat has gone round.

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Previously to the approach of the dais covering the bishop and his holy burden, the spectators in the street have been laughing and joking with and about the demonstrators, and some of the children in the procession have shown lamentable forgetfulness of the solemn nature of the function by putting out their tongues at us, and turning back to say derisively, "les Anglais!"—for this was before the days of the *Entente*. But the moment the bishop and the Host come up, down flop the spectators on their knees, crossing themselves, the men removing their hats, though I confess with pleasure that many a time I have seen groups of men showing as much reverence to the sacred wafer as Cockney crowds do to the Lord Mayor's coachman on show day.



A WOMAN OF SAINTE ENIMIE

The procession is now at an end so far as our particular standpoint is concerned, and already the white sheets are disappearing all along the road, shopkeepers turning their attention to business again. But it is winding its way through other streets, pausing to make special obeisance before the temporary shrines, and to rehearse prayers cunningly adapted to the peculiar requirements of the saints to whom the shrines are dedicated. And so after, it may be, two or three hours perambulation, the demonstrators return to the cathedral, where High Mass is celebrated; this over, they are free to make merry to their heart's desire. And they do.

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"M'sieu Meelin of Dundae"

I.

Please do not consider it an affectation of superior knowledge if I begin by saying it is improbable that one out of a hundred of my readers has ever heard of Morbihan and the wonderful druidical remains in the Commune of Carnac. To be quite frank, I had never heard of them myself until one dusty summer day when I cycled into the little village of Carnac away on the south coast of Brittany, and within sight of the historic bay of Quiberon. The village of Carnac, whose population numbers only some six hundred souls, is one of the most interesting in Brittany, where almost every hamlet has some historic touch to engage the attention of the visitor. It consists practically of a little square of houses surrounding the ancient parish church, dedicated to Saint Corneille. This saint is the patron of cattle, and in September the town is the centre of a series of most picturesque celebrations, the peasants journeying hither from all parts of the surrounding country, accompanied by their cattle, horses, and even their pigs, for the pig is as notable a feature of rural life in Brittany as it is in Ireland. Saint Corneille, for a reason which will be explained further on, is supposed to take a very personal interest in the welfare of the Breton's cattle, and to see the simple peasants on their pilgrimage to his shrine, and later in the ceremonies of parading their beasts around the church and kneeling before his statue on the west front of the tower, kneeling again and sometimes even fighting for a dip in the water from his fountain, is to realise how sincere is their belief in his powers. But this is only by the way; my present intention is not to spend any more time in describing the quaint ceremonies that have long made Carnac a centre of pilgrimage, and have been the theme of many a story and poem by French writers.

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THE FAMOUS DRUIDICAL REMAINS AT CARNAC



(The second view is a continuation of the first)

Leaving the little square and striking eastward along the main road, I noticed a small, plain building, almost the last of the few straggling houses in that direction, bearing in bold letters the legend "Musée Miln." The name had a pleasant suggestion of my ain countree, and in a trice I was knocking at the door, curious to know what lay behind. A tall, well-knit, clean-shaven Breton of about forty years of age opened and bade me welcome. He was carelessly dressed like any village shopkeeper in his shirt sleeves, and wearing a pair of carpet slippers; certainly presenting no aspect of the antiquary or the scholar, although it was not long before I found that he was a man of remarkable attainments in archæology. As far as I remember, the charge for admission was one franc, and although at first it seemed a large price to pay for looking at a roomful of things in glass cases, I left with the conviction that I had made an excellent bargain.

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The museum I found to consist of an extremely valuable assortment of relics of the Stone and Bronze Ages. Admirably arranged and catalogued were hundreds of flint arrowheads and axes, some of the latter being of that earliest type before man had the sense to pierce the axe-head for the handle, but stuck the wedge-like head of the axe through a hole in the shaft. There were also many examples of rude instruments belonging to the Bronze Age, some Roman swords and a skeleton in a prehistoric stone coffin. The interest of these curiosities lay not only in their intrinsic value to the antiquary, but in the fact that they had all been dug up from the tumuli in the Commune of Carnac. But to me they assumed at once a far more vivid interest, when the custodian explained that the antiquary who had discovered most of them, and whose money had founded the museum, was "M'sieu Meelin of Dundae." When I explained that I was a countryman of this Mr. Miln, the curator launched into a warm description of that worthy's abounding good qualities, and recalled with the fervour of the French his own personal association with Mr. Miln in the work of excavation. He pointed with pride to a very ordinary oil painting of his old friend and master, which disclosed him as a fresh-complexioned, white-haired gentleman of unmistakable Scottish type, and assured me that he was "*un homme très intéressant et très aimable*." I could readily believe the eulogy, as it was a kindly old Scotch face that looked out of the canvas at me.

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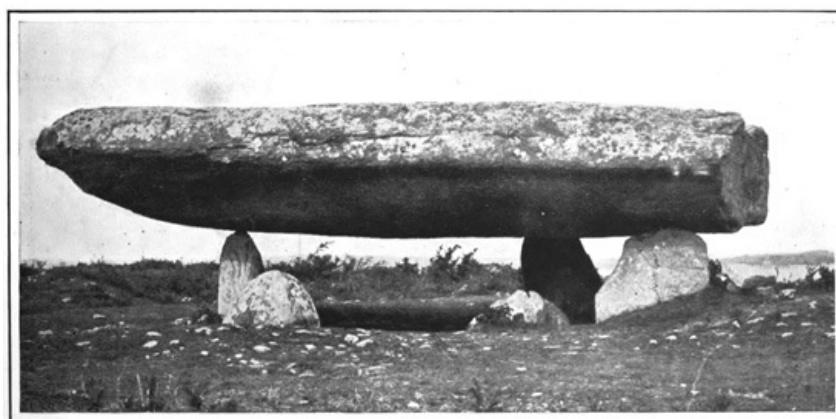
I wonder if the memory of Mr. Miln is treasured in Dundee. The chances are that what I have to tell of him may be news to his fellow-townsmen of to-day. A reference to that excellent work, *Chambers's Biographical Dictionary*, discloses the fact that he is remembered there to the extent of exactly two lines:

"Miln, James (1819-81), a Scotch antiquary made excavations at Carnac in Brittany, 1872-80."

That is all, but behind these two lines lie the long story of a romantic life in a foreign land and a little measure of fame among an alien people. In this respect the life of James Miln resembles curiously the lives of so many of his fellow-countrymen, who have wandered to the ends of the earth in the pursuit of their avocations, and left traces of their work everywhere except in the place of their birth. 211

My knowledge of the life of this notable Scotsman and his work is gleaned from the scholarly little brochure written by M. Zacharie le Rouzic, the slippered custodian of the "Musée Miln." It appears that James Miln was born at Woodhill in 1819, and while still young travelled in India, China, and spent some years in other parts of the far east. On his return to Scotland he threw himself with enthusiasm into antiquarian research and scientific studies. He succeeded to the estate of Murie in Perthshire on the death of his father, James Yeanan Miln, of Murie and Woodhill, and later to that of Woodhill in Forfarshire at the death of his brother, to whom that property had descended. His particular line of study for nearly forty years of his life would seem to have been the origin and development of portable firearms, and for a man of such peaceful pursuits it is strange to be told that he was especially ardent in encouraging every experiment for the perfection of rifles. Another of his hobbies was concerned with the improvement of the telescope; but all kinds of scientific instruments seem to have been objects of his study and inventive genius. In the experimental days of photography he speedily achieved success with the camera, and made a large collection of photographs of ancient sculptures in the east of Scotland. An accomplished linguist and something of an artist, he illustrated with his own pencil all his works on archæology, which M. Le Rouzic assures us was always his favourite study. 212

It was during the summer of 1873 that Miln first visited Carnac, where he encountered his friend, Admiral Tremlett, of Tunbridge Wells, who was interested in the wonderful neolithic remains in the neighbourhood, and became his guide in a series of explorations. Miln's enthusiasm was immediately aflame when he contemplated this rich and sparsely-explored field of research awaiting the excavator. His first idea was to purchase the ground on which some of the most interesting remains were standing, but finding this impossible, he approached the farmers on whose land the unbroken mounds, which represented burial-places of prehistoric people, were situated, and obtained leave from them to commence the work of excavation, to which he immediately resolved to devote himself during 1875 and 1876. The result was a series of important discoveries. Perhaps the most important of the remains unearthed were those of a Roman villa, consisting of eleven chambers, and surrounded by several other buildings, among which were baths and a small temple, that were believed to date back to the first half of the fourth century. Numerous examples of Roman pottery, glass, jewellery, money, a bronze statue of a bull, and many other curiosities were dug up. Within sight of the museum, and only a few minutes' walk away, is a tumulus surmounted by a little chapel to Saint Michael, and here in 1876 Miln made many notable discoveries, including the remains of an eleventh-century monastery. 213



THE MERCHANTS' TABLE

One of the great dolmens near Carnac

III.

The results of these excavations were described in a large work written and illustrated by himself, and issued in Edinburgh and Paris. By January of 1877 he was busily prosecuting his explorations at Kermaric, a gunshot distant from Carnac, and the work went steadily on with the most fruitful results in many other parts of the district until the end of 1880, when Miln returned to Edinburgh in order to produce another book describing his researches. Unhappily, in the midst

of his literary labour, he was seized with a brief illness, which at the end of six days resulted in his death on Friday, 28th January, 1881, at twelve minutes to eleven, as the faithful M. le Rouzic records.

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James Miln was a member of the Scottish Society of Antiquaries, la Société royale des Antiquaries du Nord, the Academy of Copenhagen, and several learned societies in England and the Continent. "*C'est avec une douloureuse émotion que l'on apprit, à Carnac, la nouvelle de sa mort,*" to quote again his faithful henchman. The museum with its precious contents was secured to Carnac through the efforts of Mr. Robert Miln, the son of the antiquary, and his friend Admiral Tremlett, and was opened on the 22nd May, 1882, since when it has remained a centre of great interest and importance to all antiquarian students, and an enduring monument to "M'sieu Meelin of Dondae."

This is a brief outline of the life of a little-known Scotsman, which is worth recalling as an example of the quiet, unostentatious way in which the Scot will carry on any enterprise that lies near to his heart, with no eye to personal advertisement, but out of sheer pleasure in the work his hand has found to do. Thus it is that one meets with traces of our countrymen in the remote and unfrequented corners of earth, and at the ring of an old name the mind of the wanderer is carried back across "the waste of seas" to the land whose sons, by some strange irony of fate, are prone to find their life-work far from home.

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IV.

But my story must not end here, although we take our leave of James Miln and his museum. It is almost impossible to describe in any adequate way the historic value of this part of Brittany. Stonehenge, in England, is a national monument which we zealously treasure, yet its value, compared with the neolithic remains of Morbihan, is as a drop in a bucket of water. In the region to the east and north of Carnac druidical remains are as plentiful as blackberries in an autumn hedge. The sight of what are known as "*les alignements de Carnac*" is one never to be forgotten. Standing on the little mound by the chapel of Saint Michael already mentioned, and looking northward across the plain, we see an enormous range of menhirs or druidical stones standing like an army at attention. There are no fewer than 2,813 of these massive stones to be seen from this point, and the imagination is busy at once striving to picture the strange rites practised here by unknown people before the dawn of history. Dotted all over the vast plains are dolmens and cromlechs of varying size.

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One of the largest dolmens that I visited is known as the Merchants' Table. It stands near Locmariaquer, and consists of an enormous stone laid flat on the top of a series of smaller stones. Originally the supporting stones would be only slightly imbedded in the earth, but in the ages that have passed the soil has accumulated until they are now sunk six or eight feet deep, but still project above the ground to the height of four or five feet. The roof-stone must weigh some hundred tons, and one of the mysteries is how a people, whose instruments were of the most primitive kind, could place such a mammoth block in so elevated a position. The dolmens, of which the Merchants' Table is one of the finest examples, were probably places of burial, and are always approached by a smaller chamber of the same rude construction. The interior of the one in question bears many strange carvings, that remain an enigma even to the most erudite.

Some authorities believe these structures may have been used as houses; others suppose them to have been altars, so that it will be seen their purpose has not yet been decided upon by their most learned students. The cromlechs, which are a series of stones standing in a circle, were most probably sanctuaries, and there is reason to believe that it was here the Druid priests practised their unknown rites. They are generally to be found at the end of an "alignment," and are oriented, so that the likelihood is the worshippers stood within the long rows of stones, which would correspond to the choir of a cathedral, and the priests were in the cromlech looking toward the rising of the sun.

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To return for the last time to the great army of menhirs, or single stones, seen from St. Michael's chapel near Carnac, the legend popular in the district is that when St. Corneille, a Pope of Rome, was being pursued by an army of pagan soldiers, he had with him two oxen, which carried his belongings and sometimes himself when he was fatigued. One evening, when he had arrived near a village where he would have rested the night, he determined to press on beyond it because he had heard a young girl insult her mother! He saw soon afterwards that the soldiers, who had been following him, were arranged in line of battle, and he was between them and the sea. So he stopped, and transformed the entire army into stones. This is at least a picturesque way for accounting for those marvellous remains that have baffled the minds of men to explain.

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I.

The rambler in old France can seldom undertake a little journey during the summer without coming upon some town where a fair is in progress. At least, that has been my own experience, and in the course of wide wanderings through the highways and by-ways of the most delightful land in Europe I have witnessed many fairs in towns so far apart as Morlaix and Montluçon, Orleans and Beaucaire, Rennes and Lisieux. Nowhere does the distinctive character of a people show itself more strongly than in its public fairs and rejoicings. Thus, if one desired to get at a glance a glimpse into the different natures of the Briton and the Gaul, a visit to Glasgow Fair or Nottingham's famous Goose Fair, followed by a look round the great fair of Rennes or Orleans, would do more for one's education in this regard than a great deal of book learning.

An extensive and peculiar knowledge of Scottish and English holiday-making, which the vagrant life of journalism has enabled me to acquire, goes far to justify in my mind, when I think of the Frenchman and his merry-making, the charge directed against us by our friends across the Channel—that we take our pleasures sadly. There is very little to choose between an English and Scottish festival of the common people, though that little of brightness and genuine high spirits is in favour of the former. A more vulgar, tasteless, saddening spectacle than a Scottish saturnalia it is difficult to conceive. For ill manners, foul speech, stupid and low diversions, I have seen nothing so lacking in all the elements of joy as an Ayrshire country fair; it has made me blush for my countrymen. But when such a melancholy festival has awakened memory's contrasts of sights seen in merry France, I have been glad to believe that, speaking generally, while a fair in Scotland or in England stirs up the less worthy elements in the people's character, such an occasion in France, on the contrary, calls forth some of the better traits of the people.

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Familiar types



A Lacemaker at Le Monastier

WOMEN OF THE CEVENNES

In our own time, and due in some measure to the growth of refinement arising out of our improved education, the institution of the public fair in this country has been steadily declining in popularity; but in France it still flourishes. There are other reasons for this, though the chief is—again accepting a French criticism—that we are essentially a nation of shopkeepers. The origin of the fair was, of course, the bringing together of people with goods to sell or barter, and a touch of pleasure was given to the business by the association of amusements therewith. Time was when Nottingham Goose Fair was an event of the highest importance in the commercial life of the district, and continued over a period of a month; but with the rise of the shopkeeper, who has ever a jealous eye on the huckster, this, like many another of our fairs, has been gradually curtailed, on the plea of its interfering with regular business, until it is now limited to a week, and is threatened with reduction to three days. In France, however, many of the fairs still last for a month, although the most celebrated of all, that of Beaucaire, which is almost continental in its importance and is less a festival than a commercial institution, is held for one week only. At Orleans one of the finest fairs in France takes place annually in June, and continues for a whole month. It may be taken as typical of these provincial carnivals, and in endeavouring to give my readers some idea of its leading features, I shall be describing to them the character of French fairs in general.

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II.

Most of the towns in France are peculiarly adapted for the holding of festivals, with their wide main street and "bit of a square"; but Orleans is especially fortunate in this respect. Although it is a town of not more than seventy thousand inhabitants, it possesses a series of spacious boulevards and public squares which would be thought remarkable in an English city of three or four times that population. The chief part of Orleans lies on the north bank of the wide and swiftly-flowing Loire, and the boulevards, following roughly the outline of an arc, compass the town with the river for base. The great width of these highways—at a moderate estimate six times that of the Strand—makes it possible for an immense number of booths and stalls to be ranged along them without in any degree obstructing the regular road traffic. Thus, if you arrive at the railway station during the fair month, you will find the entire stretch of the northern thoroughfares—close on a mile and a half as I should estimate—occupied by the show people, who have created a boulevard within a boulevard, as the fair-ground is one long avenue of booths, with a wide promenade between and roadways as roomy as an English turnpike still remaining free to ordinary traffic on the outer edges.

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If it were the first affair of its kind you had seen in France, you would be immediately impressed by the remarkable cleanliness of the shows and of the attendants at the numerous stalls, where every variety of goods are on sale. What may be described as the business part of the fair is

distinct from that devoted to amusements, and the high-class character of the stalls and their keepers is explained when we know that the tradesmen of the town have become hucksters for the nonce, most of these temporary structures being fitted up and conducted by local shopkeepers. The appointments of some of them are elaborate to a surprising degree, but never defaced by such crude and tasteless displays as we find at English fairs.

III.

To mention the varieties of business represented by these stalls would be to enumerate every trade in the town, and a few more. Bakers and pastrycooks are there in abundance; the stalls at which a bewildering choice of sweetmeats is displayed are marvels of neatness, and their name is legion. As many as five or six smartly-dressed young women with white oversleeves will be busy at one counter supplying the customers, who are endeavouring to increase the purchasing value of their coppers by speculating at the roulette table kept by the proprietor, for at such time the Frenchman introduces the gambling element into every transaction where it can be applied. At the miscellaneous stalls, where all sorts of fancy goods are on sale, the "wheel of fortune" is practically the only method of exchange. Many of the places are run on the principle of "all one price," and thrifty housewives may be seen deliberating on the respective merits of knives and forks, cruet-stands, butter-dishes, and scores of minor household utensils, each to be had at the price of half a franc (fivepence). It is clear that the women-folk regard the occasion as an opportunity for getting unusual value for their money. Peasants may purchase an entire suit of clothes at some of the stalls, and if they are wishful of a crucifix or an image of the sacred heart, here they are in abundance, with rosaries, bambinoes, and all the brightly-coloured symbols of Catholic worship. 224

But the real interest of the fair, and, of course, its most picturesque part, lies in the great Boulevard Alexandré Martin, which stretches eastward from the railway station. Here are congregated most of the places of entertainment. These, no less than the temporary shops of the tradesmen, present a striking contrast to anything one may see at an English fair. The Frenchman's instinctive feeling for art is everywhere noticeable, and the exterior decoration of the shows exhibits a lightness and daintiness of touch quite unknown in the same connection in England. The gilded horror of the ghost-show exterior, so familiar a feature of our own fairs, has no counterpart in France, but the booths wherein are exhibited "freaks of Nature" are curiously similar in both countries, the crude pictures on the canvas fronts being preposterous exaggerations of the objects to be seen within. 225

IV.

What strikes one particularly in wandering through the fair-ground at Orleans is that while all is different from an English festival, the difference is one of degree and not of kind. Here, for example, are several circuses, where performances very similar to those given by any travelling circus in our own land are "about to commence." On the outside platform two clowns are shouting to the crowd to walk up; the gorgeous ring-master with his whip joins in the general advertisement; a girl and a boy are dancing to the music of a small but noisy orchestra. There is this difference, however, between a French circus and an English one: the whole enterprise wears a more noticeable appearance of success, is better housed, the place being brilliantly lighted by electricity generated by an excellent portable plant, the performers better dressed. But curiously enough, the finest travelling circus I have ever seen in any land was Anderson's "Cirque Féérique," which I came upon during a flying visit to the industrial town of Vierzon, some hundred and twenty-five miles south of Paris. The proprietor was a Scotsman! "Mother Goose" was the chief item of the performance, and the coloured posters of the old lady and her goose had been printed in England! 226

Pitched close to such a circus stands a large wooden opera-house, capable of holding from six to eight hundred people, the seats being arranged on an inclined plane, the higher priced ones as substantial and comfortable as the stalls of one of our provincial theatres. The stage is commodious, and the performers as accomplished as any touring company that visits the second-class English towns. Indeed, their performance of "Les Cloches de Corneville" was given with a *verve* and a finish not seldom lacking in more ambitious opera companies one has seen at home. Instead of an orchestra, a very clever and good-looking young lady pianist played the accompaniments throughout the entire performance. 227

The travelling theatres, too, force comparison with the regular playhouses in the smaller English towns, rather than with the wretched "tuppenny" shows that represent the drama at an English fair. Like the opera-house just described, they are fitted up substantially, and in good taste, the charges for admission ranging from half a franc to three or four francs. Many notable French actors have graduated from these portable theatres, and, indeed, those who perform in them are of a class considerably above the mummers who exhibit in our "fit-ups"; they are the best type of "strolling-players."

One of the most detestable features of an English fair is the appalling noise created by mechanical organs. This is happily absent from the French fête, and of the few contrivances of the kind which I remember at Orleans there was only one designed solely for the sake of noise.

Perhaps the most remarkable of these orchestrions was a real triumph of musical machinery, around which, and contained within an immense and brilliantly lighted wooden building, whirled an endless chain of fairy coaches, hobby horses, swan boats, and other fantastic vehicles, eminently contrived for the purpose of producing giddiness. This was truly the *pièce de résistance* of the Orleans Fair, and it would be impossible to conceive a more striking contrast than that between this really magnificent construction and the familiar English merry-go-round. Externally the building would have borne favourable comparison with a "Palace of Electricity" at some of our international exhibitions. The façade was of Byzantine style, and myriads of beautifully-coloured electric lamps picked out the design, two huge peacocks with outspread tails, also composed of coloured lights, being introduced with most artistic effect on each side of the glittering archway. Inside, the decorations were gorgeous "to the *n*th degree," as Mr. W. E. Henley might have said, but the scheme of colours was in perfect harmony, the whole making up a veritable feast of light that must dazzle and fascinate the simple country-folk wherever this wonderful merry-go-round is set up. At a moderate estimate, I should name £10,000 as the cost of this single show, and perhaps that will indicate the lavish way in which the French are catered for by their travelling showmen.

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Cinematographs there were in profusion, most of them exhibiting scenes of a kind which would speedily be suppressed on this side the Channel; shooting galleries galore, exactly like our own; peep-shows, marionette theatres, panoramas; a booth with a two-headed bull and other monsters, a Breton bagpiper playing his instrument outside being worthy of inclusion in the list; but one saw no "fat women"—possibly because they are such common objects of French life! A large switchback railway seemed to be very popular, and, like all the rival attractions, its proprietors claimed for it the distinction of having come "direct from the Paris Exhibition," where it had been awarded first prize. The smallest side-shows, consisting of perhaps a few distorting mirrors, had all been "exhibited at Paris," and the two-headed bull was advertised by a huge painting showing all the crowned heads of Europe and President Loubet examining the beast, which, on inspection, turned out to be only a little removed from the normal by having a head slightly broader than usual, with the incipient formation of a third eye in its forehead, and a muzzle remotely suggestive of two joined together.

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V.

A performance which I enjoyed not a little was given by a quack doctor. An enormous carriage, resembling in outline an old stage-coach, but decorated with much carved moulding and thickly covered with gilt and crimson, which produced a most bizarre effect, stood in an open space. Seated on the roof was a boy, who turned a machine which emitted the only hideous noise to be heard at the fair. In the open fore-part, richly cushioned, a man stood dressed in a dazzling suit of brass armour, his glittering helmet lying in front of him, and in his hand a small bottle of clear liquid. He was of the southern type, swarthy, wonderfully fluent of speech. He assured a gaping crowd that his medicine could cure any disease from toothache to tetanus, and he invited any sufferer to step up. Immediately one did so, the boy ground out the hideous din above, and the doctor sat for a few noisy seconds while his patient told him his trouble! Then the racket was stopped with a wave of the quack's hand, and he explained for five minutes, in vivid words, the terrible nature of the patient's disease, and invited the poor wretch to pick any bottle from the stock in front of him. This done, he had to open his waistcoat and shirt—for it was a severe pain in the left side from which he suffered—and the quack in armour struck the bottom of the bottle on his knee, thus causing the cork to pop out. He now shook the bottle vigorously with his forefinger on the neck, and the fluid changed into green, brown, and finally black, whereat the simpletons around marvelled, as they were meant to do. The comic practitioner next thrust the bottle into the open shirt-front of his patient, and shook the contents of it against the victim's skin, pressing his hand for a few moments on the part. Then he asked the fellow to step down as cured, and go among the crowd "telling his experience." A dozen cases were treated in less than half an hour—people with neuralgia, sprained wrists and ankles—and always the same formula as to consultation, explanation, application! A handful of liquid applied to a man's cheek evaporated mysteriously and worked wonders. Intending patients were told that the doctor could be consulted at the hotel near by during certain hours each day, and many must have gone to him there, for the fluent humbug had every appearance of driving a prosperous practice.

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VI.

But the feature of this fair which, more than any other, distinguished it sharply from anything to be seen in our country, was "The Grand Theatre of the Walkyries and of the Passion of N. S. J. C." The mysterious initials stand for the French of "Our Lord Jesus Christ." A gentleman with a shaggy head of hair, dressed in a well-fitting frock-coat, and possessed of an excellent voice, stood on the platform outside, surrounded by oil paintings of sacred pictures and a dozen or more performers in the costumes of Roman soldiers, apostles and other Biblical characters. Judas was readily distinguished by his red hair, Mary by her nunlike garb. The showman announced that the performance was "about to commence," and urged us to walk up and witness the most pleasing spectacle of the fair. A hand-bill distributed among the crowd described the entertainment as a "mimodrame biblique" of the Passion, played, sung, interpreted and mimicked by forty persons! "This spectacle, unique in France, will leave in the minds of the inhabitants of this town an

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unforgettable memory. It is not to be confounded with anything else you may have seen; it is no mere series of living pictures. At each performance M. Chaumont, the originator, will present twenty-one tableaux, three hundred costumes will be used, and three apotheoses will be shown. The establishment is comfortable, lighted by electricity from a plant of thirty-horse power. It is a spectacle of the best taste, pleasing to everyone, and families may come here with the fullest confidence. Balloons will be distributed to the children every Thursday." So ran the circular, which also contained the information (mendacious, I doubt not) that the entertainment was the property of a limited company with a capital of £20,000.

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When the signal to begin was given the place was not more than half filled, and the audience seemed in no reverential mood. A pianist began to play on a very metallic piano, and outside the voice of the manager was still heard urging the crowd to "walk up" and "be in time." The drop-curtain was rolled up, and the manager stepped inside the building as a number of characters in the sacred drama filed on to the stage. He explained, in a rapid torrent of words, what they were supposed to be doing, but Judas jingled the filthy lucre so lustfully that the pantomime was very obvious in its purport. The curtain fell again, and the manager stepped outside to harangue the crowd while the second tableau was being prepared; but the ringing of a bell brought him in again, and so on through the whole series.

It must be confessed that the performance was carried out with no small dramatic ability, and M. Chaumont gave a wonderfully realistic interpretation of the rôle of Christ, some of the tableaux being strikingly conceived, as, for examples, the kiss of Judas and Christ before Pilate, the latter character being admirably represented by a performer who looked a veritable Roman proconsul, and washed his hands with traditional dignity. The Crucifixion, too, was represented with vivid reality; but the audience was disposed to laugh at the writhing of the malefactors on their crosses, and did indeed giggle when the soldier held up the sponge of vinegar to the dying Saviour. It was obvious that the whole performance, although really discharged by the actors with remarkable fidelity to tradition, and a commendable assumption of reverence, was more amusing than impressive to the spectators, who, though moved to laughter when St. Veronica pressed her handkerchief to the face of Christ and, turning to the audience, displayed the miraculous impression of His features, applauded the more dramatic scenes liberally. What interested me personally was M. Chaumont's idea of a miracle. Save that of St. Veronica, I have forgotten the others enacted; they were quite unfamiliar to me, but in the instant of each miracle a limelight was flashed for two or three seconds from "the flies," and this was supposed to betoken the super-natural character of the affair.

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VII.

Of course, such a spectacle as I have described would be quite impossible in our country to-day, although time was in our history, when miracle plays were a recognised feature of the church in England. It was in no sense comparable with any of the passion plays still performed periodically in some continental towns, and while the incongruous surroundings of "The Grand Theatre of the Passion of N.S.J.C." were not calculated to induce a spirit of reverence in the spectators, it was a saddening spectacle to find an audience of Catholic people taking so lightly the representation of scenes which, however wrong in the light of history, should have been to them sacred subjects of faith.

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It was characteristically French that immediately opposite the theatre wherein this Biblical pantomime was presented stood a large exhibition containing an enormous collection of pathological models and curiosities. This was, without doubt, the foulest display of unspeakable horrors to be seen in any civilised country in our time, for under the hypocritical plea of illustrating, by wax models and otherwise, the obstetrics of human life and the diseases of the body, its proprietor—a woman, if you will believe me—had gathered together a collection of incredible horrors which men and women, and even young people, were allowed to inspect on the payment of one franc. The same exhibition, which is probably not over-valued at £20,000, was actually brought to London some few years ago, but the police speedily cleared it out of our country.

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These blots, however, are the only blemishes on the Orleans Fair, and for brightness, gaiety, and general good taste, I must conclude as I began, by saying that a French carnival is in every sense a more pleasing spectacle than any of our English or Scottish fairs present.

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The Palace of the Angels

I.

It was in Evreux, while cycling through Normandy one summer, that my wife and I met three "new women," who were also touring the country a-wheel. Their route was for the most part the reverse of ours, but not so extended, and in discussing the country with them I asked how long they had spent at Mont St. Michel. "Oh, we have not gone there," was the reply; "we were told it wasn't interesting, and so we have kept away from it." We were saddened to find that three English women, especially of the "advanced type," could know so little of the monuments of France as to accept the irresponsible opinion of some one-eyed tourist, who in his or her idle babble had said Mont St. Michel was not worth visiting.

Not interesting, indeed! There is not in the whole of Normandy, in all France, in historic England even, an example of so much interest concentrated in so small a space. An enthusiastic Frenchman has described it as the eighth wonder of the world. Victor Hugo has said that Mont St. Michel is to France what the Pyramids are to Egypt. Large and deeply interesting volumes have been written about it. It will form a theme for writers for generations to come, and artists will employ their pencils here so long as a vestige of the wonderful buildings remains.

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There is a strong temptation in writing of Mont St. Michel to fall into the style of the junior reporter, who will blandly tell you that a thing is indescribable, and immediately proceed to describe it. One is persuaded that this marvellous monument of the Middle Ages cannot be adequately described in plain prose, however apt the pen, yet one is equally desirous of making the attempt. But I shall promise my readers on this occasion to make no effort at an elaborate description, which, indeed, the space of a single chapter renders impossible, and to attempt no more than a general sketch of the most noteworthy features of the Mount.

II.

To begin with, I take it for granted that the reader, if he or she has not already visited Mont St. Michel, is at least aware that it is situated in the bay of the same name, near the point where the coasts of Normandy and Brittany merge, and thus some forty-three miles south-east of Jersey. The story of Mont St. Michel, even had the hand of man never reared upon the rock one of the most remarkable structures the human mind has conceived, could scarcely have failed to be interesting. During the Roman occupation of France, or Gaul as it was then called, the great stretch of sea that lies to-day between the Mount and Jersey was then a vast forest, through which some fourteen miles of Roman military road were constructed. But in the third century the invasion of the sea compelled the Romans to alter the course of their road, and in the next century both the Mount and the small island of Tombelaine, which lies scarcely two miles away, were isolated at high tide. So on from century to century the sea has gradually eaten away this part of Normandy, until now some hundred and ninety square miles of land are entirely submerged at high tide. This alone is sufficient to invest the Mount with a peculiar interest, for one can stand upon it to-day and, gazing far away to sea, contemplate the absolute mastery of Neptune, whose ravages have left of all the great forest of Scissy nothing more than a handful of trees growing sturdily among the rocks on the north side of the Mount.

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But it is the human interest attaching to Mont St. Michel that outweighs everything else. The rock is steeped in religious lore, and in the annals of war there is no place in France more historic. Originally a monastery, it became in time an impregnable fortress as well; the rough warrior lived side by side upon it with the studious monk, and there the clash of battle was as regular an occurrence for years on end as the mass and vespers. In its old age it became a prison, one of the most dreaded in a land of terrible prisons, and just as it had been absolutely impregnable to attack (the English without success besieging it for eleven years in the fifteenth century), so was it an inviolable prison, only one man ever having been able to effect his escape, and even in his case escape would have been impossible but for the facilities unconsciously placed in his hands by his gaolers.

III.

The first thought that comes to the visitor as he views the Mount from the shore is, What could have induced anyone to choose so difficult a site for the foundation of a monastery? But here legend conveniently steps in and explains all. In the eighth century Aubert, the Bishop of Avranches, one of the most pious in an age of piety, was in the habit of retiring to the Mount for rest and meditation, and during one of his visits there the Archangel Saint Michael, the Prince of the Armies of the Lord, appeared to him and told him to build on the top of the Mount a sanctuary in his honour. From which it will be seen that even angels in those days were not above self-advertisement. But Aubert, though a bishop, was "even as you and I," and when he awoke in the morning he had some doubt as to whether he had been dreaming or had really entertained the Archangel; so he prolonged his stay in the hope of receiving another visit; nor was he disappointed. A few days later Saint Michael appeared to him once more, and rather sharply repeated his command. But even now Aubert was not convinced, and he determined to give Saint Michael a third chance, which the Saint was nothing loath to accept, repeating his instructions in a most peremptory manner. He also touched the bishop's head, leaving a hole in the skull "for a sign." We have heard of a surgical operation to introduce a joke, but this is the only case on record where a saint has found it necessary to perform a surgical operation for the introduction of a command into the head of a bishop, and Aubert, like a sensible man, concluding that one

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hole in his skull was sufficient, immediately set about the building of "the Palace of the Angels." Aubert's skull is still preserved in the Church of Saint Gervais at Avranches, and the startling effect of Saint Michael's touch may be seen to this day!

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This is only one of the innumerable legends relating to the origin of the Abbey. Another is worthy of mention, illustrating, as it does, the advantages of co-operation with an angel when one is performing so difficult a task as Aubert took up. On the top of the Mount were two large rocks which interfered seriously with building, and could be moved by no human efforts. Saint Michael, therefore, appeared to a devout peasant who lived on the coast and bore the familiar name of Bain, telling him to take his sons to the Mount and move the rocks. Despite the Caledonian flavour of his name, Bain did not wait to have his skull perforated by the Archangel, but went forthwith together with eleven of his children and tried to move the rocks. They could not stir them one hair's-breadth, however; whereupon Aubert asked Bain if he had brought all his children, and the good man explained that they were all there except the baby, which was with its mother. The Bishop then instructed him to go at once and fetch the infant, "for God often chooses the weak to confound the strong." The child was brought, and at a touch of his little foot the rocks went tumbling down the Mount, in proof of which one of them may be seen to this day with a little chapel to Saint Aubert built on the top of it.

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One more of the many miracles associated with the beginning of the great work should not be left unmentioned. Saint Aubert was naturally much exercised as to where he should rear his sanctuary, the pinnacle of a lonely rock being an unusual place to build on even in those unusual days, but here again the Archangel, who had manifested so much personal interest in the work, came to his rescue, and caused a heavy dew to fall on the Mount, leaving a dry space on the top. Upon this dry space was the church to be built.

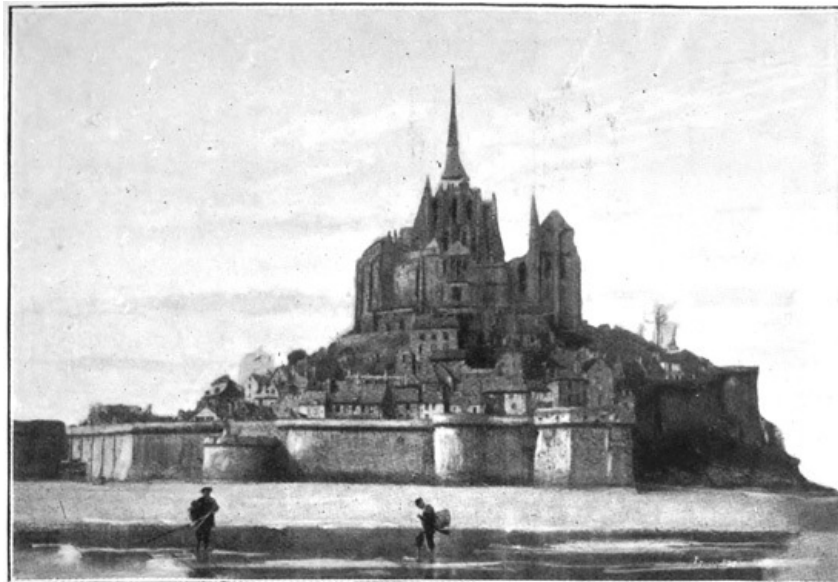
In 709 Saint Aubert had practically completed the structure, and the church was dedicated to Saint Michael after two precious relics (namely, a piece of a scarlet veil, which the Archangel had left on the occasion of his famous appearance at Monte Gargano in Naples, together with a piece of the marble on which he had stood) had been placed in a casket on the altar. Not a vestige of the oratory built by Saint Aubert, nor of the church erected in 963 by Richard, remains. The oldest part of the buildings now existing represents a church founded in 1020 by Richard, second Duke of Normandy, and constructed under the direction of the Abbot Hildebert II. The transepts, the greater part of the nave, and the crypts date back to this period.

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IV.

The whole scheme of the wonderful memorial that fascinates the eye of the latter-day tourist owed its conception to this eleventh-century abbot, and surely no heaven-born architect ever conceived a more audacious plan. His project was not merely to occupy the limited space on the summit of the Mount with his religious buildings, but to start far down the sides of the rock, and, by utilising the Mount just as the sculptor makes use of a skeleton frame whereon to plaster the clay in which he models his statue, so to rear upward gigantic walls and buttresses which at the top would carry a huge platform to hold the superstructures, creating thus a collection of vast buildings with the live rock thrust up in the centre for foundation. It is to the glory of Saint Michael that for no less than five centuries this colossal scheme of Hildebert's was carried out with absolute unity of purpose by his successors, an achievement only possible among religious workers. The result was that this lonely Mount gradually became clothed with a series of most beautiful buildings, which to the eye of the beholder seem to have grown by some natural process out of the rock itself.

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GENERAL VIEW OF MONT ST. MICHEL

To the student of architecture it would be impossible to mention any monument more worthy of study than this. Not only do we find within its innumerable cloisters, crypts, and halls, specimens of the purest Gothic that exists, but at every turn we are presented with structures that conform to the very highest ideals of art, in being at once useful and beautiful. There is not a single buttress, not a window, not an arch, not a pillar, that does not discharge some duty, and the removal of which would not weaken in some degree a part of the scheme.

V.

The best way to secure an intelligible notion of the work of these monkish builders is to walk around the Mount at low tide and study the buildings from the outside. The feature that will most impress one in following this course is the wonderful north side of the Mount, known as the Merveille, which rears its massive walls sheer from the rock face, supported along its entire length by enormous buttresses, that spring with a fine suggestion of strength and permanency from their rocky base. The principal buildings, apart from the church, are contained within these massive walls. To the west we have, in three stories, the Cellar, the Salle des Chevaliers, and above the latter the open Cloister, the most perfect example of its kind in the world. The eastern part begins with the Almonry, above which is the Salle des Hôtes, and on the top of that the Refectory. 246

The whole effect of the Merveille is superb, yet what is it more than a great wall, held up by mighty buttresses, pierced in different ways to light the chambers within and to make each suitable for its particular office? The most perfect economy has been observed throughout, the buttresses are terminated the moment their services are not required, and the Refectory, which carries a light wooden roof, is lighted by means of long narrow lancets which give to the wall far more strength than would have been possible had it been pierced by wide windows; still, the lighting within is perfect. In brief, the Merveille, apart from the numerous other buildings that went to form the monastic and military establishment, is enough to send an architect into raptures, and might, if he knew not the dangers of the incoming tide, which has to cover nine miles of land at the rate of a race-horse, induce him to tarry over long in feasting his eyes on this marvellous achievement. It is beautiful beyond description, and yet we may be certain that its builders never thought of mere beauty in its construction, but built purely to meet the exigencies of the situation, and to provide the best possible accommodation for the inhabitants of the monastery and their dependants. As one writer has put it, "the beauty just happened." It is only when we find builders striving after effect that we are face to face with decadent art. 247

Continuing our walk round the rock on those sands that have been the scene of many a bitter battle, we pass under the ramparts, beginning with the Tour du Nord at the eastern end of the Merveille. Here, again, the beautiful union of art and Nature is observed, this magnificent tower seeming to be but the natural growth of the shelving rocks at its base. It is no surprise to know that through the ages which knew not the Maxim or the 100-ton gun, the splendid fortifications successfully resisted every attack of the envious English, the Bretons, and the Huguenots. The modern town is huddled picturesquely between the ramparts and the Abbey to the east and south. 248

VI.

Having completed the tour around the Mount, the visitor should proceed along the ramparts, and reach the entrance to the Abbey by the staircase known as the Grand Degré, which leads into the Barbican, and through the massive and beautiful Châtelet into the more ancient entrance of the Abbey, known as Belle-Chaise, where are situated the Guard Room and the Government Room. Here the guide will take us in hand, and march us from point to point of interest in the interior. But it is impossible, in the space of a short chapter, to attempt a description of this, that would follow in any detail the stipulated round of the apartments at present shown to the public.

Suffice it to say that you will first be taken to the Church, which is now, and likely to be for many years, in the hands of the restorers. Only four bays of the seven that went to the making of the great Norman nave remain, and these have had to be much restored; but here it is a pleasure to record that the restoration has been carried out with perfect taste, so that the latter-day visitor has an excellent idea of the appearance of the Abbey and its dependent buildings as these were in the heyday of Mont St. Michel's prosperity. 249

From the Church we shall enter the Cloister, already mentioned as being the topmost of the three western stories of the Merveille. Here was the recreation ground of the monks, and nothing could be more exquisite than the elegant proportions of the slender pillars that support the vaulted roofs of the double arcade. From the Cloister we visit the Refectory, where many a strange gathering of monks has taken place in days of old, for it is one of the interesting things in the history of Mont St. Michel that, while in its earlier ages it was a centre of learning and genuine religion, it became corrupt and scandalous under the commendatory abbots, who were men neither of morals nor religion, and who allowed all sorts of abuses within these sacred walls. At one time, indeed, the Abbot of Mont St. Michel was the five-year-old son of Louis the Just. In the south-west corner of the Refectory is the pit that formerly contained a lift whereby provisions could be hauled up from the bottom story, and the leavings of the monks sent down to the

Almonry for distribution among the poor.

The Salle des Chevaliers, which will next be visited, is described by a learned writer as "perhaps the finest Gothic chamber in the world," and is believed to have been built as a great workroom for the monks, but received its present name either from the fact that the first investitures of the Order of St. Michael were made herein, or that it was the lodging of the 190 knights who came to the Mount to defend it against the English. In this beautiful apartment, lighted and ventilated in a way that is a model to present-day builders, the monks wrote and illuminated the manuscripts which earned for the abbey the title of "The City of Books." Reached from this room is the Salle des Hôtes, wherein the grand visitors were entertained by the abbot in a style befitting their rank, as under the rule of St. Benedict it was forbidden for laymen to enter the apartments reserved for the monks. Like all the other buildings, however, it has served many another purpose than that for which it was originally designed, and at one time was actually used as a *Plomberie* where the lead was worked for roofing and other purposes connected with the Abbey.

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The Cellar is, in its way, as beautiful as any of the other apartments, although nothing was attempted by its builders but to provide a capacious storeroom for the inhabitants of the Mount, and to secure, in its strong pillars, strength to support the buildings rising above it. The provisions were hauled up from the sands by means of a great wheel and a rope, the latter being carried out on a little drawbridge to enable it to drop clear of the rocks. This arrangement, by the way, is associated with one of the most audacious attempts to secure the Abbey during the wars of the Huguenots. A traitor within arranged with two Huguenot leaders that on the day of St. Michael, in September, at eight o'clock in the evening, in the year 1591, he would haul up their men by means of this rope, and introduce them to the Cellar, while the monks were engaged in devotions, so placing the Mount at their mercy. But he proved a double traitor, for after seventy-eight men had been so hauled up, and, with one exception, quietly killed by the soldiers of the garrison as they arrived, the leaders below became suspicious of a trap, and asked that a monk should be thrown down as evidence that the plot was successful. The Governor immediately had one of the murdered Huguenots dressed in the gown of a monk and thrown down, but the Sieur Montgomery was not satisfied with this, and he called up that one of his men should come out on the drawbridge and assure them below that all was well. So the Governor sent the one man he had spared and instructed him to answer down that the Huguenots were masters of the Abbey. He was faithful to death, however, and called down that they were betrayed. Instead of being immediately killed, the Governor was so impressed with his courage, that he spared him, and the Huguenots hastily rode away.

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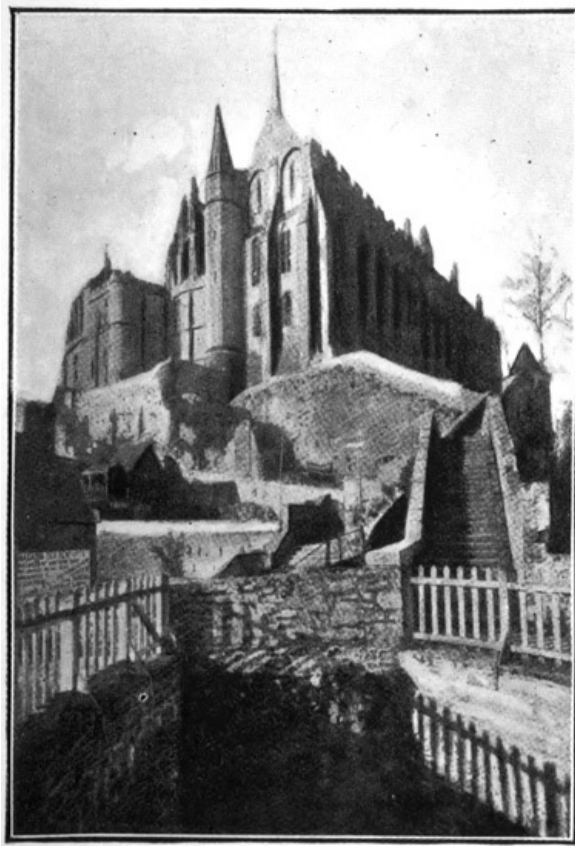
The Almonry is the last of the great apartments which are contained in the Merveille, and it is from this that visitors make their exit into the courtyard of the Abbey; but many other interesting chambers are shown, such as the Crypte de l'Aquilon, the Charnier, the Promenoir or ancient cloister, and the famous Crypte des Gros-Piliers, which is also known as l'Eglise Basse, its pillars, of enormous girth, being designed to support the heavy masonry of the Abbey above. The Cachots, or prisons, are also an important feature of the sights described by the guide, and many harrowing tales are told of famous prisoners who went mad during their incarceration in these dread dungeons. But it is a pity that this part is shown at all, as the recollection of these hideous holes is likely to confuse many visitors' impressions of the place.

VII.

Here, then, is a very brief and a sadly-imperfect sketch of this rare legacy which the Middle Ages have left to lucky France. It need only be added that not one visit, nor two, is sufficient to an adequate appreciation of the beauties of Mont St. Michel; several days, instead of several hours, as is too often the custom of the breathless tourist, should be spent on the Mount. There is accommodation in plenty, for the three hotels, all kept by members of the same family (and each at daggers drawn with the others), give splendid entertainment at moderate rates; and practically all the houses are annexes to one or other of these establishments, so that except during August and September accommodation is never difficult to obtain. Nor are the buildings of the Abbey and the Merveille the only things of interest on the Mount to-day, for though it is a strangely-different scene from that in the olden days of pilgrimage, it is, perhaps, as interesting if we choose to regard as pilgrims the countless tourists who swarm here from all the ends of the earth, and we shall find among them even more material for study than was afforded to the monks in ages past. Then if rain should keep us prisoner for an hour or two at times, we need not weary sitting at our window, watching the carriages and bicycles arriving at the entrance to the Cour de l'Avancée, where they are immediately besieged by representatives of each of the hotels, and probably a simple Briton, innocent of French or the ways of this curious community, will find himself divided into three, his luggage being captured by the representative of Poulard *aîné*, his bicycle being taken by the tout for Poulard *jeune*, and he himself led captive by the buxom female who canvasses for *veuve* Poulard.

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The Merveille



Interior of the Abbey

MONT ST. MICHEL

We remember one occasion when, at a high tide, which necessitated the use of a boat for debarking visitors, a solitary English female, of the type so properly satirised by French caricaturists, arrived by the diligence, and was rowed in lonely state through the entrance to the outer court. As the boat grounded she stood up, an angular vision in drab, with dark blue spectacles and a straw hat. In answer to the inquiring shouts of the hotel representatives, she innocently replied in the one word she knew, "Poulard," and there was a rush for her, in which the elder Poulard, thanks to exceptional height and strength, was able to dispose of his rivals,

and lift this representative of British womanhood bodily into the kitchen of his hotel. She would probably be as much surprised as most of us are on visiting the place for the first time, to discover that after leaving this kitchen and ascending two stairs in the hope of arriving immediately at our bedroom, the maid calmly opens a door, and we find ourselves in another street, that rises step after step for one hundred yards or so, and brings us to one of the dependencies of the hotel, where probably we may have two or three stories to climb. You have a feeling all the time you are on the Mount that, somehow, you are living on the top of slates, as the houses look down upon each other, and in many cases you can walk from the top flat out on to a street at the back. 255

In a word, Mont St. Michel is unique. A stay here is an experience unlike any to be had elsewhere in Europe. "Not worth visiting" forsooth!

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Transcriber's Note:

Obvious typographical errors have been corrected. Inconsistent spelling and hyphenation in the original document have been preserved.

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