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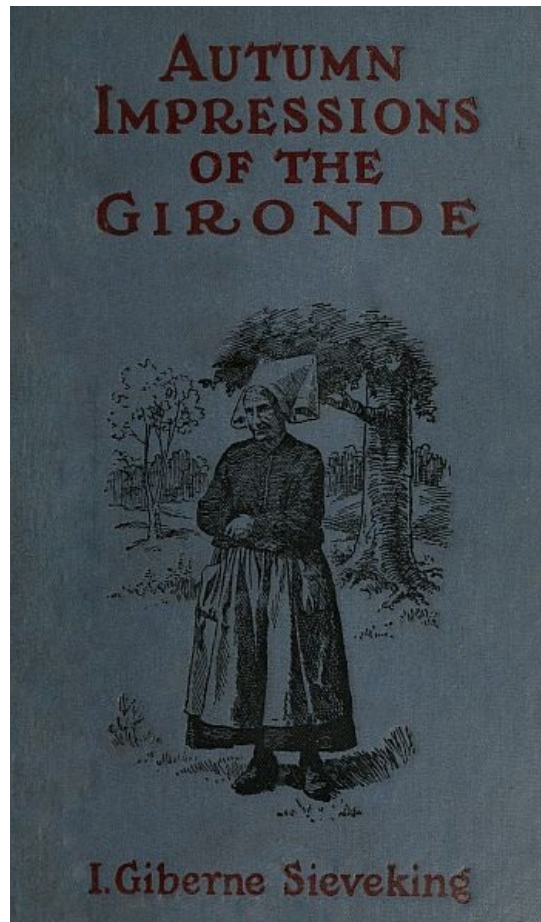
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*** START OF THE PROJECT GUTENBERG EBOOK AUTUMN IMPRESSIONS OF THE GIRONDE ***



**AUTUMN IMPRESSIONS
OF THE GIRONDE**

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RUSSIA OF TO-DAY

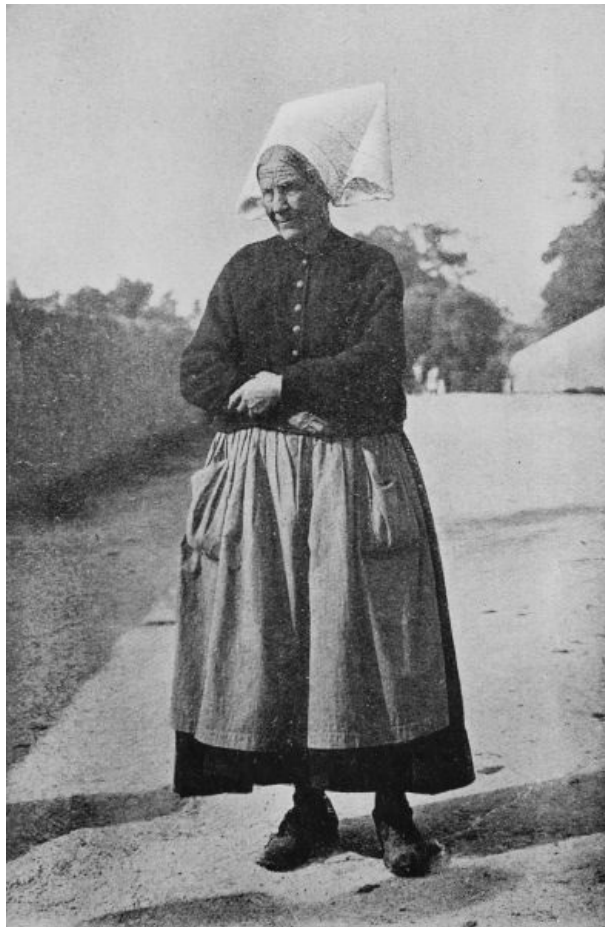
BY

E. VON DER BRÜGGEN

THE TIMES says:—

"Few among the numerous books dealing with the Russian Empire which have appeared of late years will be found more profitable than Baron von der Brüggens's 'Das Heutige Russland,' an English version of which has now been published. The impression which it produced in Germany two years ago was most favourable, and we do not hesitate to repeat the advice of the German critics by whom it was earnestly recommended to the notice of all political students. The author's reputation has already been firmly established by his earlier works on 'The Disintegration of Poland' and 'The Europeanization of Russia,' and in the present volume his judgment appears to be as sound as his knowledge is unquestionable."

[1]
[2]



ANCIENT HEADRESS IN AIRVAULT (DEUX SEVRES).

[*Frontispiece.*]

Autumn Impressions of the Gironde

BY

I. GIBERNE SIEVEKING

AUTHOR OF

"Memoir and Letters of Francis W. Newman," and
"A Turning Point of the Indian Mutiny."

[3]

Once or twice, in every life—it may be in one form, it may be in another—there comes one day the possibility of a glimpse through the Magic Gates of Idealism. Some of us are not close enough to the opening gates to catch a

sight of what lies beyond, but in the eyes of those who have seen—there is from that moment an ineffaceable, unforgettable longing.



WITH ILLUSTRATIONS

LONDON

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1910

[4]

TO FRANCE— THE COUNTRY OF MANY IDEALS

PREFACE

[5]

To each man or woman of us there is the Country of our Ideals. The ideals may be newly aroused; they may be of long standing. But some time or other, in some way or other, there is the country; there is the place; there is the sunny spot in our imagination-world which *calls* to us—and calls to us in no uncertain voice.

It is true we are not always susceptible to that call: it is true we are not always responsive, but it is there all the same. Sometimes there comes to us a day when that "call" is insistent, all-compelling, irresistible; a day in which it sounds with indescribable music, indescribable vibration, through that inner world into which we all go now and again, when days are monotonous or depressing.

It is impossible to conjecture why some country, some place, some woman, should make that indescribable appeal which lays a hand on the latch of those gates leading to that world of imagination which exists in most of us far, far below the placid, shallow waters of conventionalism. It is impossible to conjecture when or where the voice and the call will sound in our ears. The man who hears it will recognise what it means, but will in no way be able to account for it.

He will only know with what infinite satisfaction he is sensible of the touch which enables him to "slip through the magic gates," as a great friend once expressed it, into the world of Idealism, of Imagination.

True, the pleasure, the satisfaction, is elusive. He can lay no hand upon those wonderful moments which come thus to him. Even before he is aware that they have begun, he is conscious that they are already slipping out of his grasp.

[6]

What play has ever shown this more clearly than Maeterlinck's "Blue Bird"? Though the children go from glory to glory of lustrous imagination, though they can go back to the land of Old Memories, to the land of the Future, yet they cannot stay there. Though they see and rejoice to the full in the "Blue Bird," the spirit of Happiness, yet that one soft stroking of its feathers is all that is possible before it flies away. For every Ideal is winged: every Conception of Happiness but a passing vision. We have but to attempt to grasp them to find their elusiveness is a fact from which we cannot get away.

For me, the France about which I have written in the following pages is a country which calls to me from the world of my ideals, from the world of my imagination. From across the seas that call stirs me and thrills me indescribably. It is not the France of the Parisian; it is not the France of the automobilist; it is not the France of the Cook's tourist. It is the France upon whose shores one steps at once into *the land of many ideals*.

I should like here to thank three friends, Messieurs Henri Guillier, Goulon, and E. G. Sieveking, who have most kindly given me permission to print their photographs of the part of France through which I travelled, and more than all, the greatest friend of all, who alone made the journey possible.

I. Giberne Sieveking.

Autumn Impressions of the Gironde

[7]

CHAPTER I

"Mails first!" shouted the captain from the upper deck, as the steamer from Newhaven brought up alongside the landing stage at Dieppe, and the eager flow of the tide of passengers, anxious to forget on dry land how roughly the "cradle of the deep" had lately rocked them, was stayed.

I looked round on the woe-begone faces of those who had answered the call of the sea, and whose reply had been so long and so wearisome to themselves. Why is it that a smile is always ready in waiting at the very idea of sea-sickness? There is nothing humorous in its presentment; nothing in its discomfort to the sufferers; but yet to the bystander it invariably presents the idea of something comic, and, to the man whose inside turns a somersault at the first lurch of the wave against the side of the steamer, *mal-de-mer* seems both a belittling, as well as a very uncomfortable, part to play!

[8]

At Dieppe the train practically starts in the street; and while it waited for its full complement of passengers, two or three countrywomen came and knocked with their knuckles against the sides of the carriages, and held up five ruddy-cheeked pears for sale. (One uses the term "ruddy-cheeked" for apples, so why not for pears, which shew as much cheek as the former, only of a different shape?)

The Dining-Car Service of the "*Chemin de fer de L'Ouest*," at Dieppe airs some delightful "English" in its advertisement cards. For instance: "A dining-car runs ordinary with the follow trains." "Second and Third Class passengers having finished their meals can only remain in the Dining-Car until the first stopping place after the station at which a series of meals terminates and if the exigencies of the service will permit." "Between meals.—First class passengers have free use of the Restaurant at any time, and may remain therein during the whole or part of the journey, if the exigencies of the service will permit, and notably before the commencement of the first series of meals and after the last one." "Second and Third Class passengers can only be admitted to that section of the Restaurant which is very clearly indicated (sic) for their use, for refreshments or the purchase of provisions between two consecutive stopping points only. All Second and Third Class passengers infringing these conditions must pay the difference from second or third to first class for that part of the journey effected in the Dining-Car in infraction (sic) with the regulations." There is also this very tantalus-like notification: "Various drinks as per tariff exhibited in the cars!" One half expects to see this followed by: "Persons are requested not to touch the exhibits!"

[9]

Beyond Dieppe the country is mostly divided up into squares, flanked by rows of trees, looking in the distance more like rows of ninepins than anything else. From time to time, along the line, we passed cottages, in front of which stood a countrywoman in frilled cap and blue skirt, "at attention," as it were, holding in her hand, evidently as a badge of office and signal to our engine-driver, a round stick, sometimes red, sometimes purple.

[10]

Some of these signallers stood absorbed in the importance of the work in hand, (or rather stick in hand), but others had an eye to the main chance of their own households, which was being enacted in the cottage behind them, whether it concerned culinary arrangements or the goings-on of the children, and while she wielded the *baton* in the service of her country, she minded (as we have been so often assured is woman's distinctive, though somewhat narrowed, province!) things of low estate—such as her saucepan, her *pot-au-feu*, her baby.

In the far corner of our carriage, in black beaver, cassock and heavy cloak, with parchment-like countenance, much-lined brow, and controlled mouth, sat a young *curé*. He was engaged in saying a prolonged "Office," but this did not hinder him from taking occasionally, "for his stomach's sake, and his other infirmities," a little snuff from time to time.

[11]

We were bound for Paris, *en route* for Arcachon. The train, as it went along, disturbed crowds of finches, and amongst them here and there a large sort of bird with black head and wings and white back, which I could not identify, though it seemed to belong to the crow tribe, to judge by the shape of its body and manner of its flight.

From time to time we passed little sheltered villages: quiet, grey-roofed, sentinelled by the inevitable poplar, and traversed by a little softly-shining stream. The meadows were full of soft, feathery-plumaged trees, of all shades of delicate tints; from the yellow tint of the evening primrose to the pink of the campion, and the shade of a robin's breast. An old countrywoman in a full satiny skirt, carrying a long pole over her shoulder, was striding energetically across a field as we passed.

[12]

How one country gives the lie to another which holds as a dictum—immutable, irreversible—that outdoor labour is not possible for women! All over France men and women share equally the toil of the fields, and no one can say that it has not developed a strong, healthy type of woman, nor that the work is not effectively done. In some places I even saw women at work on the railway lines.

A few miles farther on we came upon an orchard of leafless fruit-trees sprawling across a soft green slope; behind them, a little forest of pine trees, their bare trunks *chassez-croisezing* against a pale saffron sky as we whirled by. Gnarled willows, with a diaphanous purple haze upon

their bare boughs, came into sight, a goat quietly grazing at their roots; little meandering streams pattering quietly along between willow trees; here and there splendid old slated-roofed farm-houses, some with climbing trees trained up the front in regular, parallel lines.

[13]

Soon little plantations appeared, covered over with diminutive vines trailed up stout, white sticks; at a little distance they looked like clusters of dried red-brown leaves tied up by the stem, and drooping at the top. Seen in the gloom, from a little distance in the train, these lines of *petits vignoles* looked like a detachment of foot soldiers marching in file, with rifle on shoulder. We had, of course, come just too late for the vintage; the day of the vines was over for this year.

Now and again we caught sight of long strips of some vivid green plant, unknown to me, but resembling nothing so much as a certain delicious chicory and cream omelet on which we had regaled ourselves at Paris! Magpies, here and there, fluttered over the white stretch of sandy road, giving the effect of black letter type on a dazzling white page of paper.

[14]

An old woman in a blue skirt presented, as she bent over the stubble, a sort of counter-paned back, patched with all sorts of different coloured pieces of cloth: a little further on, a man, in white apron and bib, was strolling along a furrow scattering handfuls of what looked like white flour from a basket slung over his left arm. Up a winding country road wound groups of blue-smocked villagers; the women frilled-capped, the men baggily-trousered. Under the roofs of some of the cottages were hanging bunches of some herb or other to dry. At the corner of the road a picturesque blue cart was lying on its side, making a useful bit of local colour, though *passé* as regards utilitarian purposes. On the higher ground were windmills, dotted about in profusion: some of them had taken up a position on the top of some pointed cottage roof.

Over some of the cultivated strips of land were placed, at intervals, sticks with what suggested a touzled head of hair, but which was in reality composed of loose strands of straw. Along the sides of these strips lie *citronnes* (which, on mature acquaintanceship with the district, I find are a sort of vegetable used largely in soup) strewn loosely and carelessly about on the ground to ripen. The trees not far from St. Pierre des Corps seem a great deal infested by various kinds of fungi: that kind, whose scientific name I forget, which grows bunchily, in shape like a bird's nest, and which give a sort of uncombed appearance to the branches.

[15]

We had intended, originally, to stop at Tours for the night but, finding that our doing so would involve two changes, we altered our minds, and determined to go straight on to Bordeaux. Then ensued the enormous difficulty of rescuing our luggage; for, as everyone who has travelled much abroad knows, the "red tape" which is always tied, with great outward ceremony and pomp of circumstance, round one's goods and chattels when travelling by train, is exceedingly difficult to undo, and especially so at short notice.

[16]

However, my companion plunged promptly *in medias res* when, at the Junction, the train allowed us a few minutes on the loose, and we contrived to get our luggage out of the consignment labelled for Tours—though it was at the very bottom of all the other trunks—and transferred into the Bordeaux train, while I secured from the buffet a basket of pears, some rolls and cold chicken, flanked by a bottle of *vin ordinaire*. And, while on the subject of *vin ordinaire*, though there is an old, well-worn saying to the intent that "good wine needs no bush," yet I cannot help planting a little shrub to the honour of the wine of the country in the fair country of the Gironde.

Without exception, I found it excellent, and I can say in all sincerity, that I do not desire a better meal or better wine to wash it down, while travelling, than is put before one in the restaurants of Bordeaux and the neighbourhood, especially in the country villages. Seldom have I spent happier meal-times than were those I passed opposite the two sentinelling bottles, one of white wine, the other of red, which flanked (without money and without price) the simple, excellently-cooked, second *déjeuner* or *table d'hôte*, whichever it might chance to be.

[17]

Dr. Thomas Fuller, of blessed memory, has left behind the wise injunction that no man should travel before his "wit be risen." An addendum might very well be added that he should not travel before his judgment be up as well, and if Englishmen, who travel so much more in body than in spirit, always saw to it that both their "wit" and their judgment accompanied them to valet their mental equipment on their travels, their somewhat insular views as regards foreign ways of doing things, and foreign productions (such as the much, and unjustly, decried *vin ordinaire*, for instance,) would be brushed up and cleared of the cobwebs of tradition that are, in so many cases, over them even in the present year of grace.

[18]

To return, after this digression. After leaving Blois, the land was mapped out in larger squares of vineyards, in which a different kind of vine was growing: taller and bigger than the ones we had passed earlier in the day. These were dark brown in leafage, topped by a sort of flowery head. At the head of all the trees, that were denuded of foliage, there was a little round cap of yellow leaves, growing conically, and presenting a very curious effect when seen on the verge of a distant line of landscape. In France trees are assisted and instructed in their manner of growth.

Poitiers was our next stop; it was just growing dusk as we slowed into the station. Surely few cities offer more suggestive environment for mystery and romance than does Poitiers, seen by the fading light of a November afternoon. Dim heights surround the city; a broad, grey river, in parts a dazzle of steely points, flows round the outskirts; a glimpse is seen here and there, of spire, tower and battlements rising from out the midst of wooded heights; of grey, winding roads leading steeply down from the city on the hill, to the valleys and ravines beneath.

[19]

We had an additional adjunct to the general picturesqueness in a long procession of priests, some wearing birettas, some sombreros, accompanied by serried ranks of country-women in the long-backed white caps peculiar to the district, with long, stiff white strings hanging loose over the shoulder. It was evidently the end of some pilgrimage. Poitiers is a city of many priests and religious orders, both of men and women; of monasteries and nunneries.

When the procession had wended its way out of the station, the platform was appropriated by

men carrying baskets of eggs, coloured with cochineal. Now, as everyone who has travelled much in this part of France is aware, really new-laid eggs, and matches, are apparently not indigenous, so to speak, for neither can be procured without enormous difficulty. I could have made quite a fortune over a few little boxes of English safety matches I possessed! Nevertheless, sufficiently ill-advised as to buy some of these eggs, we found that the colour was distinctly appropriate; for the red of the eggs' autumn was upon them, both materially and metaphorically. [20]

This information was conveyed to us promptly on "taking their caps off" (as a child once happily expressed it to me). Their "autumn" tints were very much "turned" indeed, and, in consequence, they speedily made their "last appearance on any stage" on the road far beneath! I remember on one occasion when remonstrating with the proprietor of a hotel, regarding the flavour of much keeping that hung about his new-laid eggs, he remarked that he only "took them as the *poulets* laid them down!"

Directly after quitting Poitiers the air began to feel sensibly warmer, until, when near Bordeaux, it became quite soft and balmy. At Libourne, opposite our carriage was a cattle truck with this label upon it—"Un cheval, trois chèvres, deux chiens, non accompagnées" and, while reading it, from the dark interior—for oral information—there came two or three pathetic little bleats! Were they, we wondered, from one of the three goats, who were no longer unaccompanied, but too closely in company with one of the dogs? Before we had time for more than momentary speculation, the double blast of the guard's tin trumpet blared; there sounded his regulation short whistle, his hoarse cry of "*En voiture*," the final wave, then the tip-tap of his sabots along the platform; a final glimpse of his flat white cap, swinging hooded cloak, and swaying, four-sided lantern, while he turned to grasp the handle of his van, as the engine, started at last by reiterated suggestion, moved slowly out of the station. [21]

As the train had a prolonged wait at the first of the two Bordeaux stations, eventually we did not reach our end of Bordeaux till between ten and eleven o'clock at night, and far nearer to eleven than ten. Then ensued a long search for our possessions, sunk deep in the nether regions of the luggage van. When at length they were unearthed we started through darkened, noisy streets for our destination, which it seemed to take an eternity of jolting over rough cobbled stones to reach. However, we did reach it in course of time, and found the proprietor, a sleepy chambermaid, and a *concierge* in the hall of the hotel to receive us. [22]

As one steps over the threshold of any hotel, whether it be at morning, noon or night, one is conscious I think, at once, of being greeted by a whiff of the hotel's own local spiritual atmosphere: its personal note of individuality, so to speak; and, as it reaches one, there is an immediate instinct of self-congratulation (if the atmosphere be a pleasant one), or of regret at one's choice, if the reverse be the case. In this case it was the latter, but we had gone too far (and too late!) to retreat now. [23]

Nearly all French hotel bedrooms that I have ever been in seem to have a surplusage of doors; it may be due to the same idea as when, in the case of a theatre, numerous exits are provided to ensure the safety of the audience; but, whatever the reason, the fact remains that the doors are largely in excess of what we consider necessary in England. Sometimes, indeed, one can hardly see the room for the doors! Sometimes, again, besides having a few dozen doors on each side of the bedroom, the windows open on to a balcony which is connected with all the other bedrooms on that side of the hotel, and, to give as much insecurity as possible, the windows decline to shut! It is thus indeed brought home to me that the French are pre-eminently a sociable people!

A man told me that once he slept in a bedroom abroad which had eleven doors. Three or four of them opened into large *salons*. [24]

Then, too, there is so often a difficulty about the keys of the emergency (?) doors. In most cases that I remember there were no keys; either they had never been fitted with them, or else they had been found to be a superfluity and lost. And all the precaution the occupier of the room could take against invasion was a diminutive little bolt, too weak and flimsy to be of any real use.

I remember sleeping once in a room of this sort, where the doors were innocent of any locks or keys, and my companion and I took the precaution, therefore, before retiring to rest, of piling up a tower (which would have been a tower of Babel had it fallen!) of all sorts and kinds of articles. It reached, I think, almost to the top of the door.

In the morning, roused by the knock of the chambermaid, we only just remembered in time, after calling out the customary permission to her to enter, to rescind that permission. This last proved indeed a saving clause for her, as the door opened outwards! [25]

The bedroom at Bordeaux had three doors. And the proprietor and chambermaid to whom we showed our dissatisfaction at there being, as usual, no keys, evidently considered us very childish to make a fuss over such a trifle.

Some other gentleman was sleeping next door, and I furtively tried the bolt which was on our side, to see if it was pushed as far as it would go. This roused the proprietor's wrath, as he declared the gentleman was one of his oldest customers, and had been in bed some hours! After quieting him down, we barricaded the doors in such ways as were possible to us, after his and the chambermaid's departure, and, retiring to rest, passed an uneventful night. The next morning we made tracks for Arcachon. [26]

CHAPTER II

To go to Arcachon in autumn is to have spread before one's eyes, for almost the entire journey,

a perfect feast of colour. I never in my life saw such a magnificent revel of tints massed together in profusion, scattered broadcast over the country so lavishly and unstintingly, as passed rapidly before my eyes that day.

The vivid yellow of dwarf acacias; the brilliant crimson of some of the vines; the dazzling gold of others; the dark sombre, olive green of the dwarf pine-trees flecked here and there with splashes of vivid chrome yellow from the embroidery on their bark of some lichen; here and there a high ledge of thorn trees of pronounced terra-cotta. The prevailing note of colour everywhere was a deep russet; in some places merging into brilliant orange, picked out in sharp contrast with the pale yellow leaves of the acacia, and the fainter speckling of those of the silver birch, clear against the white glare of its trunk.

[27]

The whole of Nature's paint-box seemed flung into one passionate last declaration of colour on the canvas of the dying year. Flaming red, soft carmine, deepening into vermilion; rich orange fading to darker crimson; soft lilac changing swiftly to purple. The whole atmosphere, as far as the eye could reach, seemed flaming, shimmering with a glow as of a gorgeous sunset; red seemed literally painted deep into the air; it seemed pulsing with flame colour. High on the banks were piled the ferns in huge masses of crimson and rich chocolate brown; here and there turning to brick red the dying fronds carpeting thickly the ground all around and beneath the trees.

Now and again, coming as almost a relief from the very excess of vivid colour, would show up the welcome contrast given by a stretch of cold lilac slate, and in the middle distance a line of the faintest rose pink, delicate in tone, and indefinite as to outline. Beyond that, the pale blue of the distant pines, far up the rising ground upon the horizon. The stems of the pines are a rich, red brown, flaked in places, and covered, some of them, with various coloured lichens and fungi. These trees are, most of them, seamed and scarred with one slash down the middle for the resin. At a few inches from the ground is fastened a little cup, into which the resin flows, and at certain times men go round to collect the cupfuls. Each *résinier* has, in order to earn his livelihood, to notch three hundred pines each day; this is done with a sort of hatchet. The little cups were an invention of a Frenchman named Hughes, in 1844, but were never used until some time after his death; so he personally reaped no benefit from the invention.

[28]

After the oil is collected, it is subjected to many distillations, some of which, as it is well known, are used medically. Here and there in the woods are stacked, in the shape of a hut, sloped and sloping, little bundles of faggots. Under the trees, white against the sombre shade of the pines, gleam the sandy paths which traverse the wide heathy plains which, alternately with the forests, make up the landscape of this part of the Landes. These are varied, now and again, by roads the colour of rich iron ore. The fences here are all made of the thinnest lath striplings and seem put up more as suggestions than to compel!

[29]

On the plains, cows wandered, accompanied always by their own special woman (generally well on in years, with a huge overshadowing hat and large umbrella) in waiting, who paused when the cow paused, moved on when she moved on, ruminated when she ruminated,—“Where the cow goes, there go I,” her day's motto. We often saw a solitary cow meandering about up the middle path between two clumps of vines, and nibbling thoughtfully at the leaves of the vines themselves; these last looking like gooseberry bushes. Sometimes a countrywoman would drive three cows in front of her, and besides that would push a wheelbarrow full of cabbages. Other women, again, we noticed working on the line, and some washing in a stream, clad in red knickerbockers and huge boots.

[30]

As a rule, unlike our own spoilt meadows, the country is singularly little disfigured by advertisements, but everywhere we went we were confronted by the haunting words, “*Amer picon*,” sometimes in placards on a cottage wall, sometimes in a field, sometimes blazoned up on a platform. At last it became so inevitable and so familiar, that we used to feel quite lost if a day should go by without a trace of its mystical letters anywhere! It occurred as continually before our eyes as the word “*gentil*” sounds on one's ears from the lips of the French madame. And everyone knows how often *that* is!

Just before reaching the station of Arcachon, our carriage stopped close beside a line of trucks. French trucks, in this part of the country, have an individuality all their own. They have a little twisting iron staircase, a little covered box seat high above the trucks' business end, and very wonderful inscriptions along their sides. On these we made out that it was etiquette for “Hommes 32, 40,” and “Chevaux 8” to travel together! But if it were etiquette for them to do so, it would certainly, in practice, be as cramping and reasonless as are many of the injunctions of etiquette in social matters!

[31]

Arrived at Arcachon, we found an array of curious cabs, furnished inside with curtains on rings, of all kinds of flowrery patterns in which very fully-blown roses and enormous chrysanthemums figured largely. In one of these we drove to the hotel among the pines, to which as we thought we had been recommended. It turned out, later, that we had not been directed to that hotel at all, but then it was too late to change. No one in this hotel could speak a word of English intelligibly. We found later on that the *concierge* could say “va-terre,” “Rome,” “carrich” and “yes,” but as these words had to be said many times before they even approached the distant semblance of any English words one had ever heard, and as, even when understood, they did not convey much information, taken singly and not in connection with any previous sentence, his assistance as interpreter was not to be counted on.

[32]

I went the round of the bedrooms accompanied by the manageress. She managed a good deal with her hands in the way of language, and I managed some, with the aid of my little dictionary, which was my inseparable companion throughout our entire trip, always excepting the nights; and even then I am not sure if I did not have it under my pillow!

Somehow the hotel had an empty feeling about its passages and rooms, and the bedroom shutters were all barred and consequently, when opened by the manageress, gave a sort of

deserted, half drowsy air to the rooms, which prevented my being at all impressed with them. We descended the stairs again, my companion talking volubly but, to me, (owing to an unfortunate personal disability for all languages except my own), unintelligibly almost.

[33]

On our return to the entrance hall I found that an expectant group awaited us, consisting of the hotel proprietor, the *concierger*, a chambermaid, a daughter of the house, my friend and the coachman of the flowery-papered cab. Our luggage had also put in an appearance and was on the step by the door.

Nothing in the world—as far, of course, as regards minor matters of life—is so difficult or so unpleasant to retreat from, as is hotel, after you have been inspecting it in company with its authorities, when they definitely expect you mean to remain, and when your luggage has been removed from your cab by your too obsequious coachman! I felt my decision weaken, die in my throat. I had fully meant on the way downstairs to declare a negative to mine host's offer of accommodation. Presently I had swallowed it, for on what ground could I now trump up an excuse, and direct the removal of our portmanteaux to an adjoining hotel? and the next thing was to face the thing like a man and order our traps to be taken to our room.

[34]

And, after all, we were very fairly comfortable during our stay, until confronted by an exorbitant charge at the end—my disinclination to remain, in the first instance, being merely due to the somewhat forsaken, gloomy look of the rooms, giving a certain oppressive introductory atmosphere to the hotel.

November is the "off" season at Arcachon, and I can well understand that it should be so, for there seemed no particular reason why anybody should go and stay there at that time! I had been recommended, rather mistakenly as it afterwards proved, to try it for my health, but it was so bitterly cold the whole time of our stay that I rather regretted having gone there at all, as I had come abroad in search of a mild, warm climate. However, one good point in the hotel was that the *salle-à-manger* was always well warmed, and evenly warmed, with pipes round the walls, and it was exceedingly prettily situated in the midst of the pines.

[35]

There were but twelve of us who daily frequented it; and we might almost have belonged to the Trappist Order for all the conversation that was heard. Never have I been at such quiet *table d'hôtes* as those that took place there. The company consisted of an old man and his wife, who kept their table napkins in a flowery chintz case which the man never could tackle, but left to the woman's skill to manipulate each evening. Both seemed to think laughter was most wrong and improper in public. A consumptive, very shy young man who had to have a hot bottle for his feet; a consumptive older man whose continual cough approached sometimes, during the courses, to the very verge of something else, and who passed his handkerchief from time to time to his mother for inspection; a very bent and solitary man by the door who had "shallow" hair growing off his temples, deeply sunken eyes, black moustache and receding chin, and who had the air of a conspirator, and a few other uninteresting couples.

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The *menu* was delightfully worded sometimes. Such items as "Veal beaten with carrots," "Daubed green sauce," "Brains in butter," proved no more attractive to the palate than they were to the eye. But, apart from these delicacies, the fare was exceedingly appetising; oysters, as common as sparrows, played always a large part, (the charge per dozen, 1½ d.) Then, the last thing at night, our cheerful, bright-faced chambermaid used to bring us the most delicious iced milk.

There was a curious, but so far as we could see un-enforced, regulation hung up in the *salle-à-manger*, to the effect that if one was late for *table d'hôte* one would be punished by a fine of fifty centimes. The evenings we usually spent in our bedroom; it being the off-season there was practically nowhere else to go to. But it was cosy enough up there, with our pine log fire blazing up the chimney, its brown streams of liquid resin running down the surface of the wood, alight, and dripping from time to time in dazzling splashes on to the tiles below.

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The only drawback to our comfort—and it was a drawback—was that the young man who had such unpleasant coughs and upheavals during *table d'hôte* paced restlessly and creakily up and down overhead continuously, both in the evening as well as in the early morning, and was, to judge by the sounds, always trying the effects of his bedroom furniture in different parts of the room, and generally altering its geography. He had quite as pronounced a craze for patrolling as had John Gabriel Borkman.

There are few more irritating sounds, I think, than a creak, whether it be of the human boot or of a door. Of the many penances which have been devised from time to time could there be a more irritating form of nerve flagellation than an insistent, recurring squeak when you are vainly endeavouring to write an article, an important letter, or, if it be night, to get to sleep? A squeak in two parts, as this particular one was, was calculated to make one ready for any deed of violence! One knew so well when one must expect to hear it, that it got in time to be like the hole in a stocking which, as an old nurse's dictum ran, one "looks for, but hopes never to find!" Thus one half unconsciously listened for the creak. So great is the power of the Insignificant Thing!

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There were other sounds which broke the stillness of the night at Arcachon. In England cocks crow, according to well-authenticated tradition, handed down from cock to cock from primitive times, at daybreak; in Arcachon they crow all through the night and, indeed, keep time with the hours. They have, too, a more elaborate and ornate crow. They do not accentuate, as ours do, the final "doo," but introduce instead semi-quavers in the "dle;" so that it sounds thus: "Cock-a-doo-a-doo-dle-doo." I noticed that they had a tendency to leave off awhile at daybreak, while it was yet dark.

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Then, sounding mysteriously and from afar on one's ear, came the quick tones of the bell calling to early Mass from the little church in the village street below.

Of ancient history Arcachon has its share. It was, in the thirteenth century, the port of the Boiens, and in old records one finds it mentioned under the name "Aecaixon" or "Arcasson,"

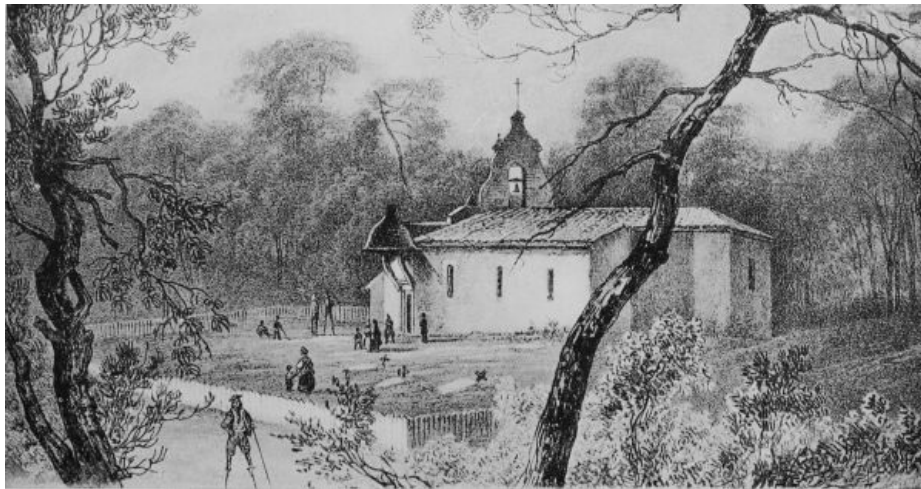
"Arcanson" being a word used to designate one of the resin manufactures. In the beginning of things, Arcachon was nothing but a desert, its forest surrounding the little chapel founded by Thomas Illyricus for the seamen. During the whole of the middle ages the country had the entire monopoly of the pine oil industry, which was turned to account in so many ways.

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CHAPTER III

At Arcachon there is an old *Chapelle miraculeuse de Notre Dame*, adjoining the newer church, founded about 1520 by Thomas Illyricus. It contains many of the fishermen's votive offerings, such as life-belts, stilts, pieces of rope, and boats and wreaths. I noticed, too, a barrel, on which were the words "*Echappé dans le golfe du Mexique, 1842.*" These offerings are hung up near the chancel, and give a distinct character to it.

As we came into the little church, a child's funeral was just leaving it, the coffin borne by children. We waited by the door till the sad little procession had gone by, and before me, as I write, there rises in my memory the expression on the father's face. It had something in it that was absolutely unforgettable.



ARCACHON, MIRACULOUS CHAPEL, 1722.

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As we passed down the village street, we passed another little procession; two acolytes in blue cassocks and caps, bearing in their hands the vessels of sacred oil, a priest following them in biretta, surplice and cassock, and by his side a server. I noticed that each man's cap was instantly lifted reverently, as it passed him. As they turned in at a cottage, the whole street down which they had passed seemed full of the lingering fragrance of the incense carried by the acolytes.

[41]

Arcachon, at one time, must have been exceedingly quaint and picturesque, but since then an alien influence has been introduced which has—for all artistic purposes—spoilt it. Facing the chief street—dominating it, as it were—is the Casino; an ugly, flashy, vulgar building, out of keeping structurally with everything near it. It resembles an Indian pagoda, and when we were there in November its huge, bleary eyes were shut as it took its yearly slumber, deserted by Fashion. It was like an enormous pimple on the quiet, picturesque, unpretending countenance of this village of the Landes which had been subjected to its obsession, and that of the two hotels in immediate attendance.

[42]

The people, however, appear unspoilt and unsophisticated. At each cottage door sit the women knitting; and, as one passes, they pass the time of day, or make some remark or other, with a pleasant smile.

When we were at Arcachon telegraph poles were being put up. The method of setting up these eminences was distinctly curious, to the English eye. There was an immense amount of propping up, and many anxious glances bestowed on the poles before anything could be accomplished. The men on whom this tremendous labour devolves have to wear curious iron clasps strapped on to their boots, so that they should be able to dig into the bark as they swarm up the poles for the poles are just trunks of pine trees stripped of their branches, and many of them look very crooked.

In many of the gardens poinsettias were flowering, and hanging clusters of a vivid red flower which our hotel proprietress called "Songe de Cardinal." It was the same tint of scarlet as the berries called "Archutus" or "Arbousses," which grow here in abundance by the side of the road on bushes, and are like a large variety of raspberry, a cross between that and a strawberry. It has a very pleasant flavour when eaten with cream: this our waiter confided to me, and, after tasting the mixture, I quite agreed with him, although the proprietress had treated the idea with scorn.

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In November the roads, in places, are red with the fallen fruit of this plant. There are also curious long brown seed cases which had dropped from trees something like acacias, but which

have a smaller leaf than our English variety. The tint of the pods is a warm reddish brown; they are about the length of one's forearm, the inner edges all sticky with resin.

In the village street the inevitable little stream, which is encouraged in most French towns, runs beside the roadside, and is fed by all the pailfuls of dirty water that are flung from time to time into its midst. The *plage* at Arcachon is not attractive in autumn, and it is difficult to understand how it can be a magnet at a warmer time of the year to the hundreds that frequent it. An arm of land stretches all round the little inland pool—for it is not much more than a pool—in which in summer time the bathers disport themselves. In November, of course, it requires an enormous effort of imagination to picture it full of sailing ships and pleasure boats.

Murray mentions a particular kind of boat, long, pointed, narrow and shallow, which was much to the fore in 1867, and which he imagined to be indigenous to the soil, so to speak. But, apparently, they have changed all that. I only saw one that was built as he describes, and this was green and black in colour. He also mentions stilts being worn by the peasants at Arcachon and the neighbourhood near the village, but of these we saw few traces. There were pictures of them in an old print of the *chapelle* built in 1722, and in a photo of the shepherds of the plains. The photos, indeed, are numerous in the whole country of the Gironde of *anciens costumes*, but when one sets oneself to try and find their counterparts in real life, evidences are practically nil. All that remains of them in these matter-of-fact, levelling days, in which so much that is quaint, characteristic and peculiar is whittled down to one ordinary dead level of likeness, are the stiff white caps, varied in shape and size, according to the district, and the sabots. Some of the peasants here often go about the streets in woollen bed-slippers, but most of them use wooden sabots—pointed, and with leathern straps over the foot.

One gets quite used to the sight of two sabots standing lonely without their inmates in the entrance to some shop, their toes pointing inwards, just as they have been left (as if they were some conveyance or other—in a sense, of course, they are—which is left outside to await the owner's return). Continually the women leave them like this, and proceed to the interior of the shop in their stockings feet.

Sometimes the countrywomen go about without any covering at all to their heads, and it is quite usual to see them thus in church as well as in the streets. The men wear a little round cap, fitting tightly over the head like a bathing cap, and very full, baggy trousers, close at the ankles, dark brown or dark blue as to colour, and very frequently velveteen as to material.

At La Teste, a village close to Arcachon, the women much affect the high-crowned black straw hat, blue aprons and blue knickerbockers. At most of the cottage doors were groups of them, knitting and chatting; and, as we passed, the old grandmother of the party would be irresistibly impelled to step out into the road to catch a further glimpse of the strangers within their borders—clad in quite as unusual garments as their own appeared to ours.

There are no lack of variety of occupations open to the feminine persuasion: the women light the street lamps; they arrange and pack oysters; fish, and sell the fish when caught. They work in the fields; they tend the homely cow, as well as the three occupations which some folk will persist in regarding as the only ones to which women—never mind what their talents or capabilities—can expect to be admitted, viz: the care of children and needlework and cooking! I saw one quite old woman white-washing the front of her cottage with a low-handled, mop-like broom, very energetically, while her husband sat by and watched the process, at his ease.

La Teste stands out in my memory as a village of musical streets, though of course in the Gironde it is the exception when one does not hear little melodious sentences set to some street call or other. As we passed up the village street, a woman was coming down carrying a basket of rogans, a little silvery fish with dazzling, gleaming sides, and crying, "*Derrr ... verai!*" "*Derrr ... verai!*" with long sustained accent on the final high note. "*Marchandise!*" was another call which sounded continually, and its variation, "*Marchan-dis ... e!*"

Passing through Bordeaux, I remember a very curiously sounding street-hawk note: it did not end at all as one expected it to end. I could not distinguish the words, and was not near enough to see the ware.

But the human voice was not the only street music, for as we sat on one of the benches that are so thoughtfully placed under the lee of many of the cottages at La Teste, there fell on our ears a sound from a distance which somehow suggested the approach of a Chinese procession: "Pom-pom-pom-pom-pom-pom!" mixed with the sharp "ting-ting" of brass, and the duller, flatter tone of wood, sweet because of the suggestion of the trickling of water which it conveys.

A procession of cows turned the corner of the long street and moved sedately towards us, their bells keeping time with their footsteps, their conductor, as seems the custom in these parts, leading the detachment. It was followed by a little cart drawn by two dogs, in which sat a countrywoman, much too heavy a weight for the poor animals to drag.

La Teste itself is a picturesque little village, and larger than it looks at first sight. Each cottage has its own well, arched over. Up each frontage, lined with outside shutters, is trained the home vine, while little plantations of vines abound everywhere. The women travel by train with their heads loosely covered with shawls, when not wearing the stiff caps or hats, and it is very usual for them to carry, as a hold-all, a sort of little waistcoat buttoning over a parcel; a waistcoat embroidered with some device or other.



THE GIRONDE SHEPHERDS.

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Coming back to Arcachon, we met a typical old peasant woman, with two huge straw baskets—
one white and one black, a big stick, and a black handkerchief tied over her head, and a most
characteristic face, crumpled, seamed and lined with all the different hand-writings over it that
the pencil of Fate had drawn during a long lifetime. When young, the peasant women of the
Landes are not striking. The peculiar characteristics of the face are unvarying; you meet with
them everywhere all about the Gironde and Bordeaux. The faces are sallow, low-browed, with
dark hair and eyes. They are brisk-looking, but just escape being either pretty or noticeable. Most
of the women, too, that we saw, were of small stature and insignificant looking. It is when they
are old that the beauty to which they are heir, is developed. The women of the Landes are
evening primroses: the striking quality of their faces comes out after the heyday of life is over. It
seems that the face of the Gironde woman needs many seasons of sun and heat to bring out the
sap of the character. The autumn tints are beautiful in faces, as in trees. Theirs is the beauty that
Experience—that Teacher of the Thing-as-it-is—brings; and it is in the clash of the meeting of the
peculiar personality with the experience from outside, that character springs to the birth. You see
—if you can read it—their life, in the eyes of the dweller by the countryside. In a more civilised
class one can but read too often, what has been put on with intention, as a mask. Civilisation and
convention eliminate individuality, as far as possible, and they recommend dissimulation, and we,
oftener than not, take their recommendation.

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So in all countries, and in all ages, Jean François Millet's idea is the right one—that to find life
at its plainest, at its fullest, one should study it, *au fond*, in the lives of the sons and daughters of
the soil. Their open-air life prints deep on their faces the divine impress of Nature, obtainable, in
quite the same measure, in no other way; they have become intimate with Nature, and have lived
their everyday life close to her heart-beats. What she gives is incommunicable to others: it can
only be given by direct contact, and can never be passed on, for only by direct contact can the
creases of the mind, caused by the life of towns and great cities, be smoothed out, and a calm,
strong, new breadth of outlook given.

[52]

I remember a typical face of this kind. We had been out for a day's excursion from Arcachon,
and, coming home, at the station where we took train, there got into our carriage, a mother and
daughter. After getting into conversation with them—a thing they were quite willing to do, with
ready natural courtesy of manner,—we learned that the mother was eighty-one years old and had
worked as a *parcheuse* in her young days. She had a fine old face, wrinkled and lined with a
thousand life stories. Kindly, pathetic, had been their influence upon her, for her eyes and
expression were just like a sunset over a beautiful country: it was the beauty that is only reached
when one has well drunk at the goblets of life—some of us to the bitter dregs—and set them
down, thankful that at last it is growing near the time when one need lift them to one's lips no
more.

[53]

The mother told me that the women *parcheuses* could not earn so much as the men, three
francs a day—perhaps only thirty centimes—being their ordinary wage. She turned to me once,
so tragically, with such a sudden world of sorrow rising in her eyes. "I have worked all my life in

the fields, and at fishing, and now, one by one, all whom I love have left me, and I am so lonely left behind."

"Ah, *c'est malheureux!*" exclaimed the daughter, turning sympathetically to her.

We parted at Arcachon station, but how often since, have I not seen the face of the old mother looking sadly out of our carriage window, the tears gathering slowly in her eyes as she remembered those with whom she had started life, and whom death had distanced from her now, so far.

There are two distinguishing characteristics of the villages of the Landes as we saw them, and these are the absence of beggars and of drunkenness—I didn't see a single drunken man. As one knows, it is somewhat rare to meet with them in other parts of France, and one remembers the story of the English barrister who was taken up by the police and thought to be drunk (so seldom had they been enabled to diagnose drunkenness), and taken off to the lock-up! It turned out that he was only suffering from an over-emphasised Anglicised pronunciation of the French language, studied (without exterior aid) at home, before travelling abroad. [54]

Thrift and sobriety are two virtues which generally go in company—they are very much in evidence in the country of the Gironde to-day. Happy the land where this is the case! Unfortunately it is not the case in England now, nor has been indeed for many a long year. Think of the difference too there is in manner between the countrymen of our own England and that of France. One cannot travel in this part of France without meeting everywhere that simple, native courtesy which is so spontaneously ready on all occasions. It is a perfect picture of what the intercourse of strangers should be. [55]

As a nation, we are apt to be stiff and awkward in our initial conversation with a stranger. We require so long a time before we thaw and are our natural selves; our introductory chapters are so long and tiresome.

But to the Frenchman, *you are there!* that is all that matters. You do not require to be labelled conventionally to be accepted; there is such a thing, in his eyes, as an intimate strangership, and it is this very immediateness of friendliness and smile, that makes the charm of those unforgettable day-fellowships of intercourse which are so possible in France and—so difficult in England. How many such little cordial acts of *camaraderie* come back to my mind, perhaps some of them only ten minutes in duration, perhaps even less than that, and consisting solely in some spontaneous sympathy during travelling incidents; in the kindly, ready recognition of a difficulty, in the quick appreciation maybe of the humour of some idyll of the road. Whatever it is, you are at home and in touch at once for a happy moment, even if nothing more is to come of the brief encounter. [56]

In a garden near the post-office at Arcachon we came upon this startling notice: "Beware of the wild boar!" Then there followed an injunction to the wild boar himself: "Beware of the snare," in the same sort of way as "Mind the step" is sometimes written up! Making inquiries later at the hotel, I found that there were plenty of wild boars in the forest of Arcachon, and that in winter time they often ventured into the town. Hunting parties, for the purpose of limiting family developments, are organised from time to time throughout the winter.



As regards the forest of Arcachon, we were struck specially by the fungi of all sorts and colours, that grow at the foot of the trees, and on the vivid green branching, long-stalked moss that envelops the surface of the ground: deep violet, orange, soft blue, brilliant yellow, scarlet and black spotted, dingy ink-black were some of the colours that I noted. Indeed, I did more than "note" them, for I picked a fair-sized basket full, took them back to the hotel, did them up carefully and despatched them to the post-office, where they refused to send them to England, saying that, owing to recent stipulations, they were not allowed to send such commodities by parcel post any longer. Crestfallen and disappointed, I had to unpack that gorgeous paint-box of colours again, and left them on my window ledge to enjoy them myself before they deliquesced.

[57]

In the forest here is no sound of birds. Too many have been shot for that to be possible any longer, and consequently a strange, eerie silence prevails over everything. Alas! I saw no birds at all, except a few long-tailed tits. The sunlight lay roughly gleaming on the red-brown needles below the dark pine trees, and grey and soft on the white, silvery sand. No other colour broke the sombre, olive green of the foliage overhead, but here and there flecks of vivid yellow, from the heather growing sparsely in clumps, spattered like a flung egg upon the banks. The stems of the pines are a rich red-brown, flaked and covered in places with soft, green lichen.

[58]

The hotel was not a place where one got much change in the matter of guests, but people came in for lunch now and again *en route* for somewhere else; and I shall never forget one such party. It consisted of a father, mother and two small infants of about one and a half and two and a half years of age. The children fed as did the parents. I watched with interest the courses which were packed into these children's mouths. Radishes, roast rabbit, egg omelet, *vin ordinaire* and milk, mixed (or one after the other, I really forget which!) From time to time they were attacked by spasms of whooping-cough, which rendered the process of digestion even more difficult than it would otherwise have been. One of the children had a cherubic face, and each time a doubtful morsel was crammed into his mouth he turned up his eyes seraphically to heaven as he admitted it, but—if he disliked its taste—only for time enough to turn it over once in his mouth previous to ejecting it! The parents never seemed to be in the least deterred from pressing these morsels on him, however often they returned.

[59]

The *concierge* at our hotel, (he who knew four words of English), was a distinct character. He would often come up to our room after *table d'hôte* for a chat, on the pretence of making up our already glowing log fire. But whenever a bell rang he would instantly stop talking and cock his ears to hear if it were two peals or one, for two peals were *his* summons, and one only the chambermaid's. Before we left we added to his stock of English, and it was a performance during the hearing of which no one could have kept grave. "Ah, *c'est difficile*," he exclaimed after trying ineffectually to achieve a correct pronunciation: "*Pad-dool you-r-y-owe carnoo!*"

[60]

He told us that, as a rule, a *concierge* was paid only fifty francs, but sometimes he got as much as 250 francs a month in *pourboires* from the guests in the hotel. A *femme de chambre* would make twenty-five francs a month at a hotel. Neither *concierge* nor *femme de chambre* would be given more than eight days' notice if sent away. At this hotel he had no room to himself, no seat even (we often found him sitting on the stairs in the evening) and up most nights until half-past twelve, and yet he had to rise up and be at work, each morning by half-past five.

In the summer months it seemed the custom to go further south to some hotel or other, guests spending half the year at one place, and half at another.



GUJAN-MESTRAS,
Huts of the Fishermen, and "Parcheurs" (Oyster Catchers).

CHAPTER IV

By far the most interesting village in the neighbourhood of Arcachon, is Gujan-Mestras.

Gujan-Mestras is the centre of the oyster fishery, and that of the royan, which is a species of sardine. Nearly all royans indeed are caught there. The *patois* of the *parcheurs* and *parcheuses* (oyster catchers) we were told, is partly Spanish. They can talk our informant said, very good French, but when any strangers are present they talk a sort of Spanish *patois*. "For instance, *une fille* would be *la hille*," he explained. "The Spaniards talk very slowly, as do the Italians; it is only *les Anglais qui, je trouve, parlent très vite*." The oysters of Gujan-Mestras are of worldwide renown. Among others, it will be remembered, Rabelais praised highly the oysters of the Bassin d'Arcachon. And indeed, it cannot fail to be one of the most important places for oyster-culture and the breeding ground of the young oyster, considering what the annual production is—more than a million of oysters, young, middle-aged, and infants under age. [62]

The day I first saw Gujan-Mestras there was a grey, lowering sky, and everything was dun-coloured. But the port was alive with activity, interest, and excitement. The huts, which face the bay, are built all on the same pattern—of one story, dark brown in colour, wooden-boarded, and roofed with rounded, light yellow tiles, which look in the distance like oyster shells. Over the doors of some are little inscriptions: over some a red cross is chalked, or a *fleur de lys*. The *parcheurs* do not sleep here; they live in the village above, but these huts are simply for use while they are at work during the day.

A road leads up from the station lined with these huts, and a long row of them faces the bay and skirts one side of it. Beside the water are many clumps of heather tied up at the stalks, which are for packing purposes: and there are also many wooden troughs, sieves, and trestles. The boats used for fishing are mostly long and narrow, black or green as to colour, and with pointed prows. Most of them had the letters "ARC," and a number painted on them: for instance, I noticed "ARC. 4S 47" upon one name-board. All the boats have regular, upright staves placed all along the inner sides, and are planked with the roughest of boarding. [63]

The first day I saw Gujan-Mestras, as I came up to the landing stage, the boats were all rounding the corner of the headland, which is crowned by the big crucifix, and crowding into the little harbour. As they swung rapidly round, down came the sails with a flop, and in a moment the gunwales bent low to the surface of the water. A moment later still, they grounded on the little beach, and were instantly surrounded by a great crowd of excited, jabbering *parcheurs*, gesticulating and arguing energetically. They seemed to be expecting some one who had failed to put in an appearance. [64]

The baskets were soon full of glistening, steely fish, their greenish, speckled backs in strong contrast to the grey, oval baskets in which they lay, heap upon heap.

The women helped unlade the boats, and also in cleaning and sorting the fish. One woman whom I noticed, in an enormous overhanging, black sun-bonnet, slouched far over her face, her dress, made of some material like soft silk, tucked up and pinned behind her, went clattering along in her wooden sabots, wheeling the fish before her in a rough wheelbarrow. They shone literally with a dazzling centre of light. Then came slowly lumbering along the road, one of the typical waggons of the neighbourhood, which are disproportionately long for their breadth, with huge wheels; at either end two upright poles, and on each side a sort of fence of staves, yellow for choice.

Presently this was succeeded by a diminutive donkey cart, loaded with *marchandise*, and covered over in front with a wide tarpaulin. Inside, I caught sight of a large pumpkin (presumably), sliced open, its yellow centre showing up vividly against its dark background, some cauliflowers, watercress, etc., while its owner, a burly countryman in a full blue blouse and cap, excitedly gesticulated and called out, "*En avant! Allez!*" to the meek and diminutive one in front. [65]

Under a sort of open shelter were rows of barrels; some arranged in blocks, some arranged all together in one position. The whole effect against the glaring yellow of the vine leaves being a strongly effective contrast, the barrels being the palest straw colour.

We were told that the *parcheuses* cannot make as much as the men: perhaps three francs a day would be their outside wage. Indeed sometimes they found it impossible to earn more than thirty centimes; and, notwithstanding the low wage, the life of a *parcheuse* is every bit as hard as that of her countrywoman in the fields. [66]

At most of the street corners the groups of peasant women sit and knit behind their wares, wearing flounced caps, (ye who belong to the sex that needleworks these garments, forgive it, if I have appropriated to the use of the headgear the adjective that of right belongs to the petticoat!) and many coloured neckerchiefs. Sometimes they sit in little sentry boxes, their wares by their side, but oftener they sit, in open defiance of the weather, with no shelter above their heads.

As for the boys, it is almost impossible to see them without the inevitable short golf cape, with hood floating out behind, which is so much affected in that Order! It is difficult to understand quite why this particular costume has had such a "run," for one would imagine it to be rather an impeding garment for a boy.



GUJAN-MESTRAS, OYSTER CATCHERS.

[Page 67.]

Before I came away that afternoon the fishing nets were being hung up to dry, and, as we went along, we could see groups of men and women cleaning, sorting, and chopping oysters, and placing them in the characteristic shallow baskets that one sees all over the Landes, and some, on other trestles, were packing them up for transport. One woman near by was loading a cart with manure, while her companion—one of that half of mankind which possesses the most rights, but does not always (in France) do the most work—was calmly watching the process, without attempting to help! It is true that, in their dress, there was not much to distinguish the one sex from the other, as most of the women wore brilliant blue, or red, knickerbockers, no skirt, and coats, aprons, and big sabots. Some of the latter had very striking faces, though weather-beaten. Anything like the vivid contrast afforded by the arresting colours of their knickerbockers, backed by the cold, even grey of the huts, against which the *parcheuses* were standing, as they worked, it would be difficult to imagine.

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I believe at La Hume, the adjoining village to Gujan-Mestras, which appeared to be dedicated to the goddess of laundry work, even as this place was dedicated to pisciculture, the women go about in the same gaudy leg gear, but I only saw it from the train, as we had not time to make an expedition to the spot.

As we were coming back to the train we came upon a line of bare tables and chairs, looking empty, forlorn, and forsaken (the rain had apparently driven the oyster workers to the shelter of the huts) beside the *plage*. Somehow they suggested to me an empty bandstand, and indeed the *parcheurs* and *parcheuses* are the factors of the entire local "music" of the place. Without them it were absolutely characterless—devoid of life and meaning.



GUJAN-MESTRAS, NEAR ARCACHON.

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At the station a number of *parcheuses* were waiting. Suddenly, without any note of warning, a sudden storm of discussion, heated and menacing, swept the humble, bare little waiting-room. It arose with simply a puff of conversation, but it spread in a moment to thunder clouds of invective, gesticulations of threatening import, lightning flashes of anger from eyes that, only an instant previously, had been bathed in the depths of phlegm. It seemed to be concerned (as usual!) with a matter affecting both sexes, for the *facteur*, and a young man who accompanied him, kept suddenly turning round on the women, and literally flinging impulsive shafts of fiery retort, beginning with, "*Pourquoi? Vous êtes vous-même,*" etc., etc. The dispute raged with terrific force for a few minutes, then it was suddenly spent, and, as unexpectedly as it had begun, it fell away into a complete silence.

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One of the most spontaneous, infectious laughs that I have ever heard, was in the market place at Bordeaux, from a market woman keeping one of the stalls. It was like the trill of a lark springing upwards for pure, light-hearted impulse of gaiety. In it seemed impressed the whole soul of humour.

There is so much in a laugh. Some laughs make one instantly desire to be grave: some are absolutely mirthless, but are part of one's conventional equipment, and come in handy when some sort of a conversational squib has been thrown into the midst of a drawing-room full of people, and does not go off as it was expected to do. But the laugh born of the very spirit of humour itself is rare indeed.

The laugh of the woman in the market place at Bordeaux, was one of these last. What provoked it I have forgotten, but I rather fancy it was in some way connected with my camera, as a few moments later she was exclaiming to her companions, her whole face beaming with pleasure, "*Ah! je suis pris! je suis pris!*" Her voice was like a little, dancing, sparkling Yorkshire beck that is continually and musically, garrulous. It was full of those little sympathetic descents, when pitying or condoling, which never fall on one's ear so delicately as from a Frenchwoman's tongue. How heavily drag most of our own chariot wheels of voice modulation compared with hers! For her sentences in this respect are all coloured, and ours are often inexpressive, often humourless.

It may be—and perhaps this is a possible hypothesis—that our words mean more than hers, but to be bald, if only in expression, is almost as bad as to be bald on the top of one's head!

In the market our first glimpse in the dull gloom of the tarpaulins, was of huge pumpkins sliced open, their vivid yellow showing in sharp outline against the sooty black of the flapping canvas: cool pineapples wearing still their soft prickly leaves and stalks; the dull crimson of the beetroot: the large open baskets filled with *ceps*, (the fungus common in the neighbourhood, which is like a mushroom, only much larger, and with tiny roots at its base), and with the curious looking bits of warty earth, or dried, dingy sponges, which truffles resemble more than anything else, when first gathered. There was a continuous conversation from all quarters going on as we entered the market, which fell on one's ears like the roar of surf on a distant shore.

In one corner, a little party of four stall holders was sitting down to dinner. The inevitable little bottle of red wine figured on the table, and some hot stew had just been produced, accompanied by the familiar twisted roll of bread which is always a welcome adjunct to any board, whether of high degree or low—the medium betwixt the bread and lip of course being the knife of peculiar shape which one sees everywhere.

Everywhere one met with a ready smile, charming courtesy and kindly interest. For some unknown reason we were taken for Americans in almost every place to which we went! Occasionally, I must confess, I received more "interest" than I care for. For instance, when sketching in the Rue Quai-Bourgeois, I was sometimes aimed at from an upper window with bits of stale bread and apple parings, which luckily failed of their mark and fell harmlessly at my feet! And when trying to "take" some old doorway, people, now and again governed by the idea that human nature must always surpass in interest their dwellings, would strike a pose in the doorway, or leaning against the doorpost itself, hinder one's getting sight of it in its entirety.

Not content even with this, it did on occasion happen that a man would come so close to the lens of the camera that he literally blocked it up! Once a whole family party came down and stood, or sat, in becoming attitudes before the door, all having assumed the pleasing smile which they consider to be a *sine quâ non* on such occasions. It really went to my heart not to take them, but I was reserving my last plate that afternoon for a particularly charming old doorway farther on. As I turned away I saw with the tail of my eye the smiles smoothing themselves out, the man's arm slipping down from the waist of the girl beside him, the surprised disappointment sweeping across the group of faces like a cloud across the sun, and I almost "weakened" on my doorway!

I remember once, some years ago, in Belgium, my modest camera attracted so much attention that I speedily became the centre of an enormous crowd, which increased every minute in bulk, so that at last the street was blocked and all traffic suspended.

Bordeaux is a city of barrels. They are the first thing you see as you leave the station. They line the quay side: barrels yellow, barrels green, barrels blue. They meet you daily as you pass along the streets, whether they lie along the road, or whether they are being conveyed in one of the large, fenced-in carts, whose horses are covered with a faded "art-green" horse cloth, and who wear over the collar a curious black wool top-knot.

CHAPTER VI

Bordeaux has a fine quay side. Bridges, shipping, old buildings, spread of river, variety of local colour, all combine to give it this.

Of course to-day it has gained many modern aids to commerce, notably among these the steam tram with its toy trumpet; and what it has gained in these aids it has lost in picturesqueness. But still it has kept variety, that saving clause, in colour. About the streets you can see the reign of colour still in office. Cocked-hat officials, brilliantly red-coated; the labourers loading and unloading on the quay side in blue knickers, with lighter blue coat surmounting them; the stone masons in weather-beaten and weather-faded scarlet coats; costumes of soft grey-green, with sparkling glisten of silver buttons down the front; and everywhere in evidence the flat-topped,

round cap, gathered in at its base.



[From Collection of Mr Gustavus A. Sieveking.
THE QUAY, BORDEAUX, 1842.

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The expression of the French boy is not as that of the English boy, in the same way as the expression of the French dog differs widely from that of his English relation. Somehow it always seems to me that the French boy misses the jolly bluntness of demeanour of our boys, though he has a quiet, collected, reflective look. But when you come to the French dog, whether it be the poodle, or that peculiar spotted yellow, squinting variety which is the street arab of Bordeaux, you understand the difficulty an English dog finds in translating a French dog's bark.

Along the quay side, is a sort of rough gutter market; chock full of stalls, which are crowded with all sorts of colours, and a perfect babel as regards noise. Some of the stalls were placed under big tarpaulin umbrellas, some striped blue, some a dirty olive-green, others under tents—dirty yellowish white for choice—one under a carriage umbrella, or what had once been a carriage umbrella, but had lost its handle and its claims to consideration by "carriage folk."

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All the stalls were in close proximity; and pots and pans of all sorts and sizes, harness of all sorts—generally out of sorts—long broom handles, chestnuts peeled and unpeeled, little yellow cakes on the simmer over a brazier, fruits, vegetables, saucepans, kitchen utensils, nails, knives, scissors and every variety of implement jostled each other, with no respect of articles. Each booth possessed a curious, arresting smell of its own. It met you immediately on your entrance, accompanied you a foot or so as you moved on, and then suddenly let go of you, as you were assailed by the smell that was indigenous to the stall coming next in order. It was a kaleidoscope of colour, a German band as to noise.

One old woman, with a faded green pin-cushion on her head, tied with black tape over her striped handkerchief, a broad red handkerchief over her shoulders, and carrying coils of ropes, was ubiquitous. One met her everywhere, and she carried her own perfume thick upon her wherever she went, but she always left sufficient behind in her own particular booth to keep up its character and special personal note. As I left the excited, jabbering crowd, a countrywoman, seeing the prey about to make its escape, darted out from her stall and seized me by the shoulder, pressing on me at the same time two large fish arranged on a cabbage leaf.

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I came along the quay side later in the evening and all the sails—I mean the booths—were furled, carriage umbrella and all; and the low row of furled umbrellas, standing asleep and casting long dark shadows in the dim light, like so many owls, gave a quaint, extraordinary effect to the whole scene.

In the daytime it is difficult to imagine a finer, more striking effect than the quay side, and the stone buildings, most of them with crests over the doorway, fine ironwork balconies, and jalousied windows. The two ancient gates: La Porte du Cailha, and La Porte de l'hotel de Ville, standing solemn, grim and grey, aloof (how could it be otherwise?) from the modern life of to-day, its trams, its tin trumpets, its electric lights—but permitting in its dignified isolation, the traffic which has revolutionised the entire neighbourhood. Most of the old part of Bordeaux is near the quay side. There are many delightful old houses in Rue Quai-Bourgeois, Rue de la Halle, Rue Porte des Pontanets, Rue de la Fusterie, Rue St. Croix and others. The poetry of past ages, past doings, past individualities, is thick in the air as one passes down these narrow, dimly-lighted, old-world streets. Stories of adventures, of dark deeds, of sudden disappearances, are no longer so difficult to picture when one has stood under these long, broad doorways, in the darkest and most sombre of entrance halls, and seen dim, hardly distinguishable staircases away in the shadow beyond. The only sounds that break on one's ear are the dull, booming drone of the steamer away in the harbour, the loose, uneven rattle of the cumbrous waggons over the cobbles; and, when that has passed, the quick tap-tap perhaps of some stray foot-passenger's sabots.

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[From Collection of Mr Gustavus A. Sieveking.
BORDEAUX, 1842.

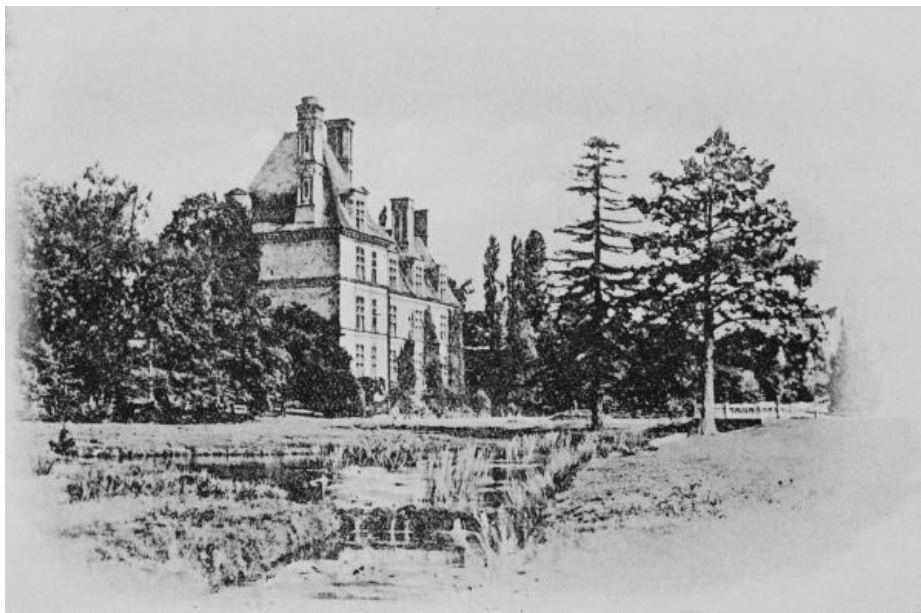
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This district of Bordeaux is full of the narrow, winding alleys, which further north we call "wynds:"—all narrow; the houses, abutting them on either side, being mostly five stories high, with all the lower windows barred, and "squints" on each side of the doorways. In front of each house stretches a little strip of pathway about two feet in breadth, tiled diagonally; token of the time when everyone was bound to subscribe thus to the duties of public paving.

In Rue de la Halle the houses are mostly six stories in height, some having lovely floriated doorways, and over them wrought iron balconies in all varieties of design; over some of the windows I noticed dog-tooth mouldings in perfect repair, and sometimes statues. Now and again one would come upon a specially fine old mansion, with carved doorways and, inside the entrance hall, panelled walls and grand old oak staircase. As often as not, one would find big baskets and sacks of flour arranged all round the hall, showing plainly enough for what purpose it was used now.

Now and again one of the heavy corn waggons would come lumbering down the narrow street, driving one perforce on the extremely cramped allowance of inches, called a pathway here: the dark blue smocks, (shading off into a lighter tint for the trousers), of the carters, making the most perfect foil to the quiet, sombre grey houses which were beside them on either side.

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CHATEAU DE LA GUIGNARDIERE, LA VENDEE.

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Now and again as one turned out of one narrow, corkscrew road into another, one would catch sight, above the towering heights of the overhanging stories, of the spires, reared far beyond the houses of men, of the old churches, which vary the monotony of the roofs of the city, and stand steadfastly through the ages all along, as witnesses of the past: its faith and its aims. I am not *au fait* in the architectural points of churches, or I should like to enlarge on the beauties of the churches of St. André, St. Seurin, and one or two others of ancient fame, which help to make Bordeaux the splendid city it is. Adverse faiths, and the violent way in which they expressed themselves in the past, have terribly spoilt and desecrated much of the old work—work so beautiful that it is difficult to imagine how the hand of Vandalism could bear to destroy it as ruthlessly as it has done. We went to see the cathedral church of St. André one Sunday afternoon. The chancel was literally one blaze of light for Benediction and Vespers. The whole service was magnificently rendered, a first rate orchestra supplementing the grand organ, and the voices of priests and choir beyond all praise. What was, however, infinitely to be condemned, was the irreverent pushing and jostling which was indulged in *ad nauseam* by many of the congregation. That any one was kneeling in prayer, seemed to be no deterrent whatever; for the rough, purposeful shove of hand and arm, to enable its possessor to get a better view of the proceedings, went forward just as energetically.

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The curious custom of collecting pennies for chairs, as in our parks at home, was in vogue here, as elsewhere in this country's churches and a smiling *bourgeoise* came round to each of us in turn with suggestive outstretched palm. At the church of St. Croix there was, I remember, a notice hung on the walls which put one in mind, somewhat, of the familiar little tablet that faces one when driving in the favourite little conveyance *à deux* of our own London streets—"Tarif des chaises," was printed in clear letters: "10 pour grand messe, Vêpres ordinaires 5, Vêpres avec sermon 10."

On thinking over the pros and cons of both systems; that of some of our English pew-rented churches, giving rise to the evil passions frequently excited in the mind of some seat-holder when, arriving late in his parish church, he finds someone else in temporary possession of his own hired pew, and that of the payment for only temporary privileges and luxuries "while you wait," I must frankly own that the latter infinitely more commends itself to my personal judgment!

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Not once, or twice only, but many times have I been witness to selfish, jealous outbursts in civilised communities, all on account of some bone of contention, in the way of a private pew (what an expression it is, too, when you come to think of it!) which has been seized by some man first in the field—I mean the church—when its legal owner happened to be absent, and unexpectedly returns.

Sometimes the incident is so entirely upsetting to the moral equilibrium of the possessor of the private pew, who finds himself suddenly in the position of not being able to enter his own property, that his a Sunday expression, which has unconsciously to himself been put on (*a thing peculiarly English*) is absolutely in ruins, and nothing visible of it any more! Moreover, his chagrin is such that he is often unable to control the outward expression of his feelings!

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St. Emilion is within easy reach, by rail, of Bordeaux, and the bit of country through which one passes to reach it is very characteristic of that part of France.

The vineyards between Bordeaux and St. Emilion stretch in almost one continuous line. They are like serried ranks; the ground literally bristles with them. The sticks to which the vines are attached are not more than two feet in height, (sometimes not that). In one district they were all under water—a broad, grey sheet. Here and there in among the vines were trees—vivid yellow in leafage, with one obtrusively flaring blood-red in colour in their midst. The cows that browsed

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near the vines were tied by the leg to some big plank of wood, which they had to drag along after them as they walked. Most awkward appendage, too, it must have been. Though everywhere accompanied by this "drag upon the wheel," yet they were also governed and directed by the invariable peasant woman, at a little distance in the rear. Cocks and hens are also allowed to disport themselves up and down the vine rows, and seem to be given *carte blanche* in the way of pickings.

Possibly, now one comes to think of it, this may account for the odd taste some of the eggs have: it may be that some of the weaker vessels among the hens are tempted to help themselves to the wine in embryo, (in the same sort of way as do some butlers in cellars), and that this spicy flavour gets into the eggs without the hens being aware of it! It may not be the fault of the cocks. What can one cock do, in the way of restraint, among so many flighty hens?

I shall never forget one of the oddest scenes, in connection with cocks and hens, that I ever witnessed. I had, in the course of a walk, got over a high gate which led into a field. No sooner was I on *terra firma* again than I perceived, by the scuttling and flounce of feathers, and general fussy cackling, that I had stepped into the midst of a conclave which the lord and master of that particular harem was holding: his better halves (?) were around him. I am sorry to have to admit that he did not hesitate an instant, but, having no hands ready in which to take his courage, he left it behind him, in a most ignominious fashion and was the first to hurry to a place of shelter at some distance from me. When the shelter—in the shape of an old outhouse—was secured, he leant out of it and, anxiety for the safety of his household eloquently expressed on his red face, he chortled in his eager injunctions and exhortations to his hens to come and be protected. They obeyed, and I could hear an animated story or recital of some sort being given them by him.

Was he reading them a sermon on the imperative necessity of suppressing the feminine (?) vice of curiosity, which might lead them to venture out imprudently again into the danger just escaped and averted by his watchful vigilance? or was he explaining away his own apparent failure in courage lately shown them? Whichever it was, they lent him their ears—all but one hen, and she perhaps had formed the habit of making up her judgments independently on current events, without the aid of the masculine mind, for she peeped round the corner repeatedly at me, and finally, seeing I appeared to be a harmless individual enough, she, without consulting the cock, ventured to come and inspect, and remained, by my side with a modicum of caution, for some time.

But to return. Underneath some of the elms, which back-grounded the vineyards, the bronze coinage of dead leaves lay thick in handfuls. Past them came slowly and musically, from time to time, a roomy cart; its big bell—note of warning of its approach—hanging in a sort of little belfry of its own behind the horse. Here, there would be a belt of tawny trees against one of dark myrtle; there, a wood, soft pink and russet, and in the midst of it, piled bundles of faggots.

We had provided ourselves with our *second déjeuner*, but only the butter and bread and Médoc were beyond reproach; the Camembert had reached an uncertain age, and the ham had gone up higher! *Mais que voulez-vous?* You can hardly expect a feast out of doors as well as indoors, a feast to the mouth as well as to the eye. And outside was the most royally satisfying banquet of colours that any eye could desire. Colours at their richest, contrasts at their completest period.

Before reaching Coutras, you come again into the region dominated by poplars. And that they do dominate the district in which they appear, no one can doubt. Poplars give a peculiar character to the land; a special personal note to the scenery. They are atmosphere-making. Presently we came upon Angoulême, upon the slope of a hill; all white and red in vivid contrast.

CHAPTER VII

Then, a little later still, we arrived at the end of our journey—St. Emilion.

At St. Emilion, the past insists upon being recognised, and, more than that, on being a potent factor in the present. The modern buildings are in evidence, right enough, but somehow they have an air of not being so much in authority as the ancient ones. Beside its splendid remains, which have lasted through many a long age, the present day town looks but a pigmy.

The day on which we saw the place was one of those quiet, sleepily-sunshiny days; and the very spirit of a gone-by age seemed to be brooding over it. The very pathway leading up to one of its ancient gates has a sacred bit of past history connected with it, for was it not a convent of the Cordeliers, founded by that saint of old, Francis of Assisi, in 1215?



ANCIENT CONVENT DES CORDELIERS, S. EMILION.

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The cloisters and a staircase and some of the walls still remain, trees and shrubs growing wild within its precincts. Beside it are many other ruins of ancient churches, convents and cloisters, amongst which one might name the convent of the Jacobins, the grand, lonely, gaunt fragment of the first convent of the *Frères Prêcheurs* or *Grandes Murailles*, which stands in solitary majesty at the entrance to the town, and which can date back before 1287, and the first church of St. Emilion, which was the underground, rock-hewn collegiate church of the 12th century. Besides these, there is the ruined castle, built by Louis VIII, whose great square keep-tower is the first striking piece of old masonry (among many striking examples) which towers over one on entering the town from the station road; and the crenellated ramparts, watch-doors and gates, built in the days when it was one of the *bastides* founded by Edward I.

As regards the gates, Murray declares the original six are still in existence, but though I tried my best to discover any remains of them, I could only find two, the one at the edge of the town leading to the open land outside St. Emilion, commanding a fine view of the "fair meadows of France," some lying faintly red-brown in the rays of a rather sulky-looking sunset, and others, further away, a dark mauve. In the immediate foreground was a splash of vivid yellow, making a gorgeous focus of light.

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An old woman sitting beside the road (who informed us her age was ninety-two) told us that she still worked in the vineyards, (think of it, at ninety-two!) and that champagne was made in this district, as well as the claret named after the place. St. Emilion is a place whose houses—some three hundred years old—are built at all levels; up and down hill, and in most unexpected crooked corners; some, too, of the dwellings are caves simply. In the *Arceau de la Cadène* there is the splendid old house of the *perruquier* Troquart, and beyond it an old timbered house built of dark oak with crest and sculptures.

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Over many of the doors I had noticed little bunches of dead flowers, or bundles of wheat or corn, some in the form of a cross,—hung up. On asking the *femme de chambre*, who brought in our *second déjeuner* at the little old inn near this gate, she told me that on every festival of St. Jean, the people go to church in large numbers, pass up the aisle carrying these little bunches, and the priest blesses them as they go by, and then on the return home they are hung up over the door of each household, to remain there for the whole of the year until the festival comes round again. To the French, the Idea is everything. To us, it is too often only revered according to its money value.

Some of the vines at St. Emilion are on banks, on rising ground, flanked by two stone pillars at one end, with an iron gate and a flight of steps, generally deeply mossed, leading up to the vines. Here and there a vivid touch of colour from some fallen leaf, mauve or yellow, lay in strong contrast on the sandy path. There was the flaring yellow of the marigolds, too, which grew plentifully in the banks between the espaliers. A hollowed piece of limestone, for the water to drain off from the vineyards, marked the bank at regular intervals the whole way along. Red and white valerian hung in clustering branches over the edges of the rocks.

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We spent a long time in the *place du marché*, under the lee of the high earthwork, with holes like burrows set in it at regular intervals on which the superstructure of the newer church is built over the ancient subterranean one. This latter is only opened, we were informed, once a year.

The market place, which the modern church overshadows, is a quiet, dreamy, tranquil little square. An acacia was meditatively shedding its garments, in the shape of leaves, on to the little green strip of turf in the middle. Underneath its branches lay already a soft heap of yellow, from its previous exertions.

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Two travelling pedlars—a man and a woman—were plying on this little lawn a cheerful trade. He was mending the flotsams and jetsams of St. Emilion household crockery and unwarily drinking water from the flowing stream that descends from the tap's mouth. As he mended, he sang snatches of some of those little jaunty, gay, *roulade-y* songs which the French peasant loves: "*Je marche à soir*," "*Ah! tirez de votre poche un sous!*" were bits that caught my ear most often; perhaps they were meant to be, in a sense, topical songs, with an eye (or a voice) to the main chance.

An old woman hobbled across the square bringing an old brown jug to be riveted, and he

besought her, as she was going away, to "*cassez une autre.*"

We did not leave St. Emilion until twilight had fallen, and there was no light to see anything else. Then there was a little loitering about to be done, while we waited for the local omnibus which plied between Libourne and St. Emilion. There was very little room inside when we at last boarded it, but we presently overtook, a belated and garrulous *voyageur*, a weather-beaten countryman who talked to me without cessation during the whole journey. I was not sitting next to him, but that did not seem to deter him in the least; he talked insistently, loudly and urgently, leaning across the lap of the man who sat between us. He insisted on taking for granted that all the other passengers were near relations of mine, and asked questions as to ages, names, place of residence, etc., in strident tones, till the man beside me was convulsed with laughter. I have never known a conversation all on one side (for, after the first, none of us attempted to put in a word) kept up, intermittently, for forty minutes on end, as this was! Once before, I own, I succeeded in conversing for ten whole minutes entirely off my own bat, with no assistance from the opposite side, with a young Hawaiian friend of my uncle's who was dining at the house in which I was staying, but that was really in self-defence, because I dared not venture with him across the borders of the English language, having heard specimens of his conversation before, and never having been able to distinguish his nouns from his verbs, or his adverbs from his interjections! But though mutual understanding was difficult, there was yet between us that curious tacit sympathy which is independent of any words.

At last we reached Libourne, with a minute to spare for catching our train, and happily succeeded in boarding it. Just outside Libourne we could see great bunches of yellow bananas hanging up outside the cottage walls. The trees here were the softest carmine, mixed with others of burnt sienna, while some resembled nothing so much as a new door-mat. After Luxé begin the little low walls of loose stones separating meadow from meadow and then, later, a flat, dull-coloured stretch of country. On Ruffec platform the garment which the men here seemed most to affect was a sort of dark puce loose coat, with little pleats down the front. The women wore a sort of close lace cap, with streamers floating over their shoulders.

Out in the open again we came upon alternate dark green of broom and cloth of gold of foliage everywhere. The curtain of heavy cloud had lifted a little, and beneath shone a gorgeous flame sunset low over meadows of red-brown soil, the darker brick-red of dying bracken over the cold grey of the cottages, and the white gleam of the twisting stream winding in and out between the meadows.

CHAPTER VIII

One cannot but regret that in most parts of France to-day, the picturesque costumes of the peasants are almost a thing of the past. In out-of-the-way districts, it is true, they still linger here and there, but they have to be searched for, as a rule, to be seen.

"*Ah! ces jolies costumes sont perdues,*" said the manageress of our hotel at Poitiers, and she assured us they were only now to be found far away in the country. However, we discovered a few examples at market time in the city. Some of the caps fit close to the head, and have a frill round the face. The opportunity for a little individuality in pattern occurs at the back, where is the fullness and body of the cap. Some again consist only of a plain fold of linen, and boast two long streamers at the back; while others have the added dignity of a high peak (as given in picture,) which always confers a certain air upon its wearer, "an air of distinguishment" which impresses itself always upon the beholder.

The long, striped, navy-blue blouses which the men affect here, reach to below the knees, and are loose and open at the neck. Over them they wear, in bad weather, the invariable loose black cape with pointed hood drawn over the head. I saw one or two blouses of soft lilac silk, fastened at the neck with quaintly shaped little silver buckles.

A French market is the purgatory of the innocent.

This was ruthlessly shewn forth on market day at Poitiers. The squealing, the clucking, the squawking are unceasing and insistent everywhere. No one can fail to hear them. But it requires the quiet, observant, sympathetic eye to see the other, less evident, forms of distress. By means of this last, however, one sees the mute suffering in the eyes of the turkeys, for instance. Sometimes a turkey would be blinking hard with one eye, while the lid of the other rose miserably every now and again. While I was standing by, some passing boy, with fiendish cruelty, set his dog at a pair of turkeys lying close at his feet, helpless and terrified, their feet tied tightly together. At a little distance off I could see one of these unhappy creatures hanging head downwards, its poor limp wing being brushed roughly and jerked carelessly by all who passed that way.

Then there were the rabbits. What words could describe the excruciating panic to which they are subjected, when one remembers their timidity and nervousness in a wild state. No worse misery could be devised for them than the prodding and punching and tossing up and down which they receive on all hands as they await, amidst the babel of noise around them, their last fate. The only members of the dumb creation who seemed fairly indifferent to their surroundings, and indeed to regard them with a certain grim humour, were the ducks. Everyone is aware that there exists in France the equivalent of our Society for Prevention of Cruelty to Animals, but my experience convinced me that it is not *nearly* so energetic as is our own society.

Many of the men were shouting their loudest at the stalls over which they presided. One, I

noticed, who offered for sale a curious little collection of odds and ends was proclaiming their value thus:—

"*Voilà! toute la service—Toute la Séminée! Tous les articles! Tous les articles!*"

Another was crying out, "*Toute la soir!*" as he lifted on high a bundle of coloured measures.

The "coloured end" of the market was undeniably the fruit and vegetable stalls. There, side by side, everywhere one's eye roamed, lay long sticks of celery, cooked brown pears, little flat straw baskets full of neat little, bright green broccoli; the soft olive green of the heart shaped leaves of the fig throwing into vivid contrast the delicate peach and tawny brown of the *déneufles* (medlars). Here, the deep flaring orange of the sliced *citronne* would jostle the cool white, veined, and unobtrusive green of a neighbouring leek, its long, trailing roots lying on the counter like unravelled string. There, would be the *céleri rave* with its round, bulgy, cream-coloured stumps exchanging contrasts with the deep myrtle tint of the crinkled leaves, puckered and rugged, of a certain species of broccoli.

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All around reigned a pandemonium of sound. Upon a cart close to the grey old church of Notre Dame, stood a woman singing "*Des Chants Républicains*," to the accompaniment of a concertina. Her audience was mixed, and somewhat inattentive. It consisted of soldiers, market women, children, all jabbering, jostling, laughing, and singing little catchy bits of the song. Overhead was a gigantic, brilliant red umbrella. The whole scene was fenced by market carts of all sizes and shapes whose coverings presented to the eye every variety of green linen.

The Church of Notre Dame has three magnificent doorways, full of the most exquisite design and moulding, in perfect preservation. Indeed the whole outward presentment of the church is exceedingly fine, so that one is sensible of keen disappointment, when, on going inside, one is confronted with painted pillars and tawdry, artificial flowers flaunting everywhere. The singing here is very inferior to that which we heard in the churches of Bordeaux; and in neither Notre Dame, nor the cathedral, was the great organ used at High Mass, nor at Vespers.

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During the service of Vespers at which I was present, one of the priests played the harmonium, surrounded by a number of choir boys. Whenever it seemed to him that some boy was not attending, he would strike a note, reiteratingly, until he managed to catch that boy's eye, when he frowned in reproof. It was a case of the many suffering because of the misdoings of the one! One of the oldest of the smaller churches at Poitiers is that of St. Parchaise. This church, I found, is kept open all night, and a stove kept burning during the winter months, for the sake of the aged and infirm poor, who have no other refuge.

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When I went in at five in the afternoon, it was already growing dark, and a priest was just lighting the lamps; the stove had already comfortably warmed the building, and I could see sitting about in obscure corners, old peasant women. Others were standing quietly before some pictures, or kneeling before a side altar.

By far the most interesting building to the antiquary in Poitiers, is the curious old Baptistery de St. Jean, dating back to the fourth century. It is filled with old stone tombs of the seventh or eighth century, and some as early as the sixth. Upon one of the latter is the inscription: "*Ferro cinetus filius launone*." On another was: "*Aeternalis et servilla vivatisiando*." I noticed a curious double tomb for a man and a woman: in length about five feet. Père Camille de la Croix discovered this baptistery, and was instrumental in having it preserved, and the tombs carefully examined.

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Père Camille himself is one of those striking personalities at whose presence the great dead past lights its torch, and once more stands, a living power, before the eyes of the present. Such a personality breathes upon the dry bones beside our path to-day, and they rise from silent oblivion and lay their arresting hands upon our sleeves.

He is a splendid-looking old man, with long white beard and eyes that are living fires of energy and enthusiasm. When I first met him, he was sitting cataloguing MSS at a side table, in the *musée*, in a very minute, neat handwriting, sombrero on head. I stayed talking to him for some little time, and amongst other things, he said rather bitterly, "The monuments and baptistery belonged to France; if they had belonged to Poitiers they'd have been destroyed long ago." I had made a few little rough sketches of the tombs, and as he turned over the leaves of my sketch-book to tell me the probable dates of each, he gave vent to a resounding "*Hurr—!*" and pursed his lips together. When I mentioned that I had been told by someone that he spoke three languages, he said decisively and emphatically, "*Il dit faux*."

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He lives in a curious, high, narrow house by the river, with small windows and iron gates; and the greater part of his time is given up to the deciphering of old manuscripts, and writing records of them; records which will be an invaluable gift to posterity.

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CHAPTER IX

Poitiers abounds in antiquities of one kind or another; and there is a great variety and originality in its old buildings. Old stone doorways and steep conical roofs are to be seen, specially in Pilory Square. Hemming them in were purple-tinted trees, which made a fringe of delicate embroidery against the cold slate of the houses. Under one of the houses in Rue Cloche Perse were magnificent cellars, or caves, with massive round arches, and the ceiling of rough masonry blackened with age. The men who showed me the place declared the "*caillou*" was known to be Roman work, and the door above to be thirteenth century, or earlier. Some of the old houses are tiled all down their frontage, and the effect on the eye is a soft violet of diagonal

pattern. Some are square, some pointed. The house to which St. Jeanne d'Arc came in 1428 is one of the latter. Over the door is the inscription: "Ne hope, ne fear, Safe in mid-stream;" and these words placed there by *La Société des Antiquaires de l'Ouest, Mars, 1892.*

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*Ici était
 l'hôtellerie de la Rose,
 Jeanne d'Arc y logea
 en Mars, 1429 (sic)
 Elle en partit, pour alier délivrer
 Orléans
 Assiégé par les Anglais.*

It is evident that formerly there was some crest affixed to the frontage. Inside the old black fireplace in one of the front rooms had been a statue in days gone by. The house of Diane de Poitiers is roofed in greyish lilac slates, alternating with red tiles.

One cannot come to Poitiers without being insistently aware of the *charbonnier*—the minstrel of the street. The shrill characteristic "Root-toot-toot-toot-toot-toot-toot-TOO—" of his little brass trumpet every three minutes during most parts of the day, sometimes *crescendo*, sometimes *diminuendo* according to its distance are special features of the streets of Poitiers. He is accompanied by his little covered cart, with its flapping green curtains, in which sit Madame, and his stock of charcoal.

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Most of the street cries here are in the minor key—are in fact exactly like the first part of a Gregorian chant, and sound very melodiously on one's ear when heard at a little distance. I met a woman pushing a barrow once, containing a little of everything: fish, endive, apples, sweets, and little odds and ends, so to speak, waifs and strays of food. She was singing to a little melody of her own, "*Des pe ... tites choses! des pe ... tites choses!*"

Round about Poitiers are many charming old *châteaux*, each one so distinctly French in character and individuality, that they could, by no possibility, have their nationality mistaken. At Neuville-de-Poitou are some curious old monumental stones: "*Dolmen de la Pierre-Levée.*"



CASTLE AVANTON, VIENNE.

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In our hotel, every evening, regularly at *table d'hôte*, appeared a genuine old specimen of the *haute-noblesse*. He was all one had ever dreamed of as an old marquis of an extinct *régime*! A sour, disappointed expression, (which he fed by drinking quantities of lemon-juice,) dominated his face, though through this could be seen an air of faded dignity which set him apart from the common herd who sat to right and left of him. Somehow or other, he conveyed to that noisy *salle-à-manger* the subtle atmosphere of some old castle in other days. One saw the splendid old panelled room in which he might have sat among the family portraits of many generations around him. Surrounding him many signs and tokens of ancient nobility, and that great army of unseen retainers that fenced him about wherever he went—his traditions. It was true he had to sit cheek by jowl with the *commis voyageur*, the *bourgeois*, the Cook's tourist, and *seemed* to be of them,

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but in reality he lived in another atmosphere. And as all the world knows, nothing separates one man from another so completely, so finally, as a certain essence of spiritual atmosphere.

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Along the line from Poitiers to Rouen were trees of flaming tawny and russet tints. The effect of the snow which had fallen over the fields the previous night, was that of beaten white of egg having settled itself flat, and having been forked over in a regular pattern. The cabbages looked pinched and shrunken with the curl all out of their plumage. The whole landscape was backed by a deep lilac flush over the rising woodlands on the horizon. There is something in the straight, unswerving upward growth of the poplar which relieves the plains from their otherwise dead level monotony. This is the secret of all life. It must have contrast. It is not like to like which saves in the crucial moment of crisis, it is rather the power of the sudden, startling contrast.

After passing Orléans we came upon trees only partly despoiled of their leaves, which looked gorgeous in their new livery of white and gold, for the snow had fallen only upon the bare boughs. As the afternoon grew darker, the cold white glare of the fields shone more and more vividly, broken only by the whirl of the succeeding furrows, and the little copses of violet brown brushwood as the train raced along. Then, later, came a long sombre belt of pines, the light shewing dimly between the trunks. Anon, a chalk cutting, now a winking flare from the lights of some passing wayside station.

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As we neared Rouen, we could see the Seine flowing close below the line of rail. It was moonlight, and the trees which lined its banks shone reflected clear and delicately outlined in the swirling water below. Every now and then a ripple caught the dazzling, steely glitter, and blazed up, as if the facets of a diamond had flashed them back, as the waves rose and fell. To the right, in the middle distance, long lines of undulating hills lay gloomy and sombre. Then—the train slowed into the vast city of innumerable traditions, and mediæval romance—Rouen.

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CHAPTER X

To me Rouen is like no other city. The effect it makes on one is immediate, indescribable, bewildering. It speaks to one out of its vast antiquity. It has a thousand mediæval voices sounding solemnly in the ears of those who can recognise them; it has stories of adventure and daring; of bloodshed and tragedy; of calm stoicism and undeterred resolve; of plagues and burnings; that would fill many and many a thick volume. And it has its modern side, which flares blatantly and noisily across the other. The effect, for instance, of the modern electric tram in the midst of a city like Rouen is nothing less than extraordinary.



LA GROSSE HORLOGE, 1902

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We took "our ease at" an "inn," which faced one of the chief streets appropriated by this

blustering modern mode of progression, and I shall never forget the effect it had on me. The persistent, reiterated strumming, as it were, with one finger on its one high note, as it came tearing along up the street every three minutes, hurriedly, fussily, with loose disjointed jolt, humming always with a deep whirr in its voice, (often the octave of its much-used high note), or anon singing up the scale, with a burr on every note, was the most absolute contrast to the Other Side of Rouen; the "other side" of the deep, quiet, wonderful past. The tram was like some enormous bee flying restlessly, tiresomely, out of one's reach with incessant buzz: a buzz which seemed, after a time, to have got literally inside one's head.

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I defy anyone to find a more complete contrast in noise anywhere than could be found between the great, deep, ponderous boom of the many-a-decade-year-old bell of the Cathedral de Notre Dame and the fussy, flurried, treble ping-ping of the electric tram. It was a perfect representation of "Dignity and Impudence," as illustrated in sound.

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The next evening I was reminded of this again while standing in the square facing the cathedral of Our Lady. A group of students strode cheerfully and briskly up the street under its shadow, which lay like a great, dark mass lined off by the moonlight, shining white on the cobbles. As they walked along, one of them struck into a song, which had, at the end of each stanza, a peculiarly inspiring refrain, which was taken up in turns by students across the street, crossing it, and far ahead. When all this had died away, a passing *fiacre*, rolling over the stones, broke the silence again, and then the clocks began to strike the hour.



[From Collection of Mr Gustavus A. Sieveking.
CATHEDRAL NOTRE DAME.
ROUEN, 1842.

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As the sweet, mellow, solemn bell of the cathedral sounded, and before it had struck three notes, a blatant tin kettle of a clock, from a hotel near by, raspily announced its own rendering of the time. Then here, then there, from all quarters, came shrill, discordant editions of the same fact, and the great thrilling, arresting reminder of the dignified past was silenced. So have I sometimes seen a modern, fashionable woman, decked out in all the tinsel fripperies of Paris, outshine some quiet, delicate, other-world beauty in a crowded room, so that the latter was, to all intents and purposes, completely shelved, so to speak. She needed her own environment, her own quiet background before her personal note could be heard; before she could shine in people's eyes, as she should have shone.

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What is it that makes foreign churches a living centre of daily concern? That they are so, can hardly be disputed. Why they should be so is another matter, and reasons are bandied about. But whether they have a reasonable basis, is questionable. The reason chiefly given, of course, is the influence of the priest, and the background he can produce at will to the home life picture, if his suggestion in daily life are not carried out. But it remains to be proved if this reason can carry the weight that is laid upon its back by its supporters.

One afternoon about two o'clock I waited in the square opposite the cathedral for forty

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minutes, in order to see what manner of men and women were constrained to go through the little swinging door underneath one of those splendid archways. Every other moment, for the whole of that forty minutes, some one passed in and out: well-dressed women; countrywomen in white frilled cap, apron and sabots; hatless peasants; beggars; "sisters;" infirm people, healthy people; old people, young people, children. Some would come out slowly, stiffly; some with mackintosh flying behind; some accompanied, some unaccompanied.

There was no service; (for I went inside myself, to see, and found a quiet church—no one about but those who had come for a quiet "think," or a quiet prayer); it was evidently done simply to satisfy a need—a need that affected equally all sorts and conditions of men and women. Just as someone, during a sudden pause in the middle of the day's business, takes a quiet quarter of an hour aside for a chat with some chosen comrade; just as a mother, perhaps, during the "noisy years" of her children's lives, steals a quiet ten minutes of solitude to restore the balance of her thoughts, which have been unsettled by the quarrels and disputes of baby tongues. It is the time when the soul puts off the official robe of pressing business for a few short minutes and takes a deep drink at "the things that endure;" the time when the soul can stretch its tired, cramped spiritual limbs, and take a long breath; the hour when the burden that each of us carries is slipped for a time, and shrinks in stature. To bring the spiritual and the material to speaking terms has always been a crucial point of difficulty. England, to-day, belongs pre-eminently to a materialistic age, and it is full of people who are trying—some of them fairly successfully—to persuade themselves—knowing how difficult a matter it is to combine the spiritual element and the material,—that it is safest and happiest to divorce them as completely as possible. Where in this country does one see the compelling necessity at work with all classes on a week day, to go aside into some quiet, empty church, and draw from spiritual stores? One may safely affirm that this occurs somewhat rarely, out of London.

There was a good deal of garden drapery at our hotel, (a good deal of drapery too, as to prices, but this we did not find out until the last day of our stay!) Every night white tablecloths were spread over the beds of heather and chrysanthemums in the front garden. Every morning a very curious effect was caused by the snow, which had fallen during the night, having made deep folds in their sides and middles, so that at first sight it looked as if some enormous hats had been deposited there in the night. One evening, between eight and nine o'clock, while sitting quietly at the *table d'hôte*, which was presided over by a youthful master of ceremonies, who walked up and down in goloshes, (his invariable, though unexplainable, custom) there came the distant but rousing sound of bugles. Instantly chairs were pushed back, diners rose hastily, and presently the whole room emptied, and a shifting population tumultuously made its way across the hall, and through into the garden where the table-clothed flowers slept in their night wrappers,—and away to the gates. As we reached them the dark street was raggedly lit up by the flickering jerk of the red glare from moving torches: there was a sudden stir of music in the air: the bugles came nearer, accompanied by the quick tramp past of many feet: the rattle of the drums worked up the tune to its climax: then the call of the bugle again, exciting, questioning, hurrying: a moment later, the music dancing and edging off by rapid paces, till all the awakened emotion and excitement, stirred to vivid life of the passing, trenchant movement, sank—as it seemed, finally—quite suddenly, to a flicker in the socket, and ceased. The street in front of us grew emptier; and, the requirement of the inner man and inner woman again beginning to re-assert themselves, the garden witnessed the return to the deserted *table d'hôte*, of most of the crowd, who had, some minutes earlier, started up to follow the drum.

But I still waited on at the gate. The whole scene, but just enacted, had put me back many, many years, to a night long ago in very early childhood; when the torches and tar-barrels of a certain fifth of November celebration at St. Leonards, had flashed as startlingly, as brilliantly, an arrestingly on the panes of our sitting-room; and I, a little child playing quietly by myself on the floor, had been roused suddenly to instant attention by the glare and fantastic dancing reflections on the wall as the procession of shouting torch bearers came striding up the street to the stirring sound of the bugle. The whole incident had made an ineffaceable impression on my mind, and I had often recalled to myself the dark window, the sudden flickering glare, the roar of the flaming tar-barrels, the whole scene swaying ruddily up the street outside, the excited sense of something strange and new happening; but never till this evening, had I been taken right back, and my feet, as it were, planted once again on the same spot of the old sensation, from which the push of so many passing years had displaced the "me" of those days when the spring of life's year was but just beginning.

In the Rue des Ours there is a little humble restaurant to which I went again and again. It stands in a narrow, cobbled street, with old black timbered houses opposite it and beside it. It is itself of no mean age. Most of the more well-to-do restaurants in Rouen have indeed *cartes* fixed up in prominent places outside, but they are *cartes* without the horse of "*Prix fixe*" harnessed to them.

But if you once know your restaurant, then the thing to do is, in this case not to "find out men's wants and meet them there," but to "find out" what particular dish it is really good at cooking and "meet it there" by coming regularly for that very dish, not venturing out into the unknown, and often greasy, waters of a stew, a *hors d'œuvre*, or *entremet*. This is knowledge acquired by experience, for I have, in the craving that sometimes besieges one for variety, gone much farther and—fared much worse, so now I am content to stay where I fare fairly well, if plainly, at moderate expenditure. One can pass a very happy hour at the little restaurant in the Rue des Ours; they can fry kippers to a turn, and one or two other simple things. Some people I know wouldn't care to come in and have kippers for *second déjeuner*: all I can say is, then they can stay out—go somewhere else and make greater demands on their trouser pockets.

But for those who can appreciate plain fare, the little restaurant in the Rue des Ours will

answer well their midday needs. There are few things more difficult to get than plain things done to perfection at a restaurant which thinks great guns—I mean great *entrées*—of itself. The most appetising breakfast dish I have ever had in my life—even now my lips long to make a certain appreciative sound in memory of it!—consisted of certain slices of bacon cooked at a little fire on an island, during a camping-out excursion on the river near Marlow some years ago. I may as well add that I had no share in the cooking of it, only in the eating of it.

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Everybody sits at the little, narrow, long tables which are set at intervals over the little room with its sanded floor, at my restaurant, with the exception of those who sit at marble ones, which are there also, only in less numbers. I remember one special day when a paper had provided great food for excitement for two men who sat smoking in a corner and discussing matters of state over two cups of black coffee, which had been aided and abetted by two liqueurs. The woman, who was the middle-woman between the cook—or manufacturer—and the consumer, went to and fro rapidly, shouting from time to time, "*Plats!*" with the names of those required, with an added and imperative "*Vite! Vite!*"

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From time to time a burning match from the pipes of the two conspirators fell as softly on the sanded floor as, on a November night, a shooting star sinks, and is extinguished on the dark sky. Presently, a bustling little man in a wide-awake entered with a huge pile of pink and yellow advertisement leaflets, it recommended some *horloges*, which had but recently swum "into the ken" of the inhabitants who live on the outskirts of Rue des Ours.

Immediately on entering, he saluted with confident and easy grace, and handed round with characteristic aplomb and dignity, the leaflets with which he identified himself for the time, though having no connection with the business with which they were concerned, save that of a purely temporary one. No Englishman could deliver leaflets like that. He would never take the trouble to attempt unfamiliar "airs and graces" to push someone else's concern. He would deliver simply and baldly, and would consider that good measure for his pay.

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But the Frenchman's is "good measure running over," and his manner in doing it is half the battle, though the Englishman cannot understand how this can be so. I remember in this connection, an Englishwoman, who had lived much in France, saying to me the other day, *à propos* of Frenchwomen:

"They make charming speeches and compliments which one likes exceedingly to hear, until you find suddenly in some practical matter, some emergency, that they really mean nothing at all by them,—well then, when I recognised that, I just felt as if I'd no ground to go on at all, and I didn't care any longer for any of their professions.

"There is no real courtesy in the streets of Paris. Men jostle women right and left, it being at the passenger's own risk that the crossing of the street is performed.

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"I never felt that I was a woman till I came to Paris: and there it is forced on one daily. The Parisian's view of a woman is not an ideal one."

To the diner, whose purse is light and whose needs are heavy and not satisfied by the fare of the restaurant in Rue des Ours, I would suggest the restaurant which is cheek by jowl with "Grosse Horloge." There, simplicity is more fully mated to variety, for you can depend upon three *plats*, and, unless one is a slave to luxury, these *plats*, well cooked even if plain, are amply sufficient to satisfy the cravings which begin below the belt, and end—in a good square meal. By the way, many waiters in these restaurants go upon some co-operative system, and all the "tips" that they receive at restaurants are put into a common box, which is placed on the desk of the *chargé d'affaires*. As each table empties, the waiter, in passing, drops his *douceur* through the narrow slit. My conviction is, that the workmen who are given *pourboires* do the same thing in the way of co-operation.

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Over the little restaurant of which I have been speaking is the old gateway and tower of La Grosse Horloge. The bell here, called "Rouvel," dating back more than six centuries, has not been rung now for eight months, owing to its having become cracked. It weighs 1,500 kilogrammes. We went once into the belfry where the poor old bell, in its dotage, still hangs. Here in the draughty shuttered twilight, which is its constant environment, sounds unceasingly through each day and night, its mechanical heart-beats of "Teck-took"—"Teck-took"—"Teck—took," solemnly, slowly, unmelodiously.

Here in the half-lights, with stray gusts of wind blowing in through the interstices of the shutters which shut in the belfry, it has rung for ages on end, the warning *couvre feu*, the solemn message of the passing hours. The only sounds which came filtering in to one's ears from the world far below are the distant shriek of the engine, and the rattle of the carriages. Below is a chamber where the weight of the clock rising and falling is the only object between a wilderness of dark timbers and the planks of the stairs.

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Here, at the first news of fire in the city, is sounded the fire-alarm. If the fire is at a great distance the alarm is prolonged.

Right at the top of the tower is a grand view of the hills standing round about the city;—(when I was there)—brown, befogged, misty,—the broad river lying clear cut and silvery in the middle distance; while nearer in, one could see old decrepit, black-timbered houses which abutted on to the flagged courts below them, on whose surface the hail dripped whitely, and leapt merrily. Two hundred steps lead up to the top of the tower through a winding, twisting stone stairway.

The gateway below, in the street, is the same age as the tower: but the age of the outer gilt clock, which faces the street, is not more than the sixteenth century.

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CHAPTER XI

In a straight line from the Rue Grosse-Horloge, it is not five minutes to the *vieux marché* where St. Jeanne d'Arc was martyred.

There is nothing to mark the spot but a tablet let in on the path, and the words:

Jeanne d'Arc
30 Mai
1431.

Nothing else.

Beside it on one of the huge market halls hang many dirty, artificial wreaths, and under them a marble tablet, with these words inscribed on it:—

"*Sur cette place s'éleva le bûcher de Jeanne d'Arc.*

"*Les cendres de la glorieuse victoire furent jetées à la Seine.*"

And below it is a map of old Rouen (1431) shewing that the *piloi* was close to the spot where Joan of Arc was burnt, as was also the Church of St. Saviour (which has completely disappeared). The square now is surrounded almost entirely by modern buildings and hotels, and the two large iron market halls take up nearly all the space.

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I cannot imagine a greater demand on one's powers of imagination than is required of one who stands, under these modern conditions, and tries to conceive the scene that took place there six centuries ago.

The woman who dared much, ventured much, and suffered much, for the sake of that which is "not seen, only believed," standing there in the midst of the fire, her eyes on that Other Figure which, under the form of the uplifted crucifix, was present with her, unseen by the rabble; the English bishops who only wanted to get to their dinner; the coarse crowd who came to gloat over her sufferings; the whole brutal scene which was to be the last which should meet her eyes before the door into the spirit-world should open.

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Conditions of life, points of view, are so completely, so absolutely changed, that one cannot realise the tragedy which was acted out to its grim finish on that spot. And one looks again at the dirty, begrimed tablet at one's feet:

Jeanne d'Arc,
30 Mai
1431,

and yet one *cannot* realise it all, cannot mentally see it happening.

Nevertheless it did take place, and it remains for ever a stained page in the volume of the deeds of England: a stained page of blackest ingratitude in the annals of France.

I stood by that stone a long time. For there, on that very spot, is sacred ground. There, six hundred years ago, a human soul dared death in its most terrible aspect, for—the sake of an Idea. There are very few to-day, men or women, who would dare so much for the sake of an idea: even when that idea is backed by faith, as hers was. And yet there is nothing greater, nothing more powerful, if one could see it in its true light, than an idea of the kind that was hers.

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A little side street leading out of the Place de Vieux Marché brings one into the quiet little Place de la Pucelle. Here, there is a statue (not in the least inspiring, however) to St. Jeanne d'Arc, hung round with the inevitable artificial wreaths, so dear to the French, in honour of her memory. The statue itself is blackened and covered with a soft mantle of green from much wreath-bearing. There is also a Latin inscription. The square itself is diamond-shaped, and only one black-timbered house remains to it of all that graced it in Joan's days. There is, it is true, standing back in its own courtyard, that wonderful Hotel Bourgtheroulde, (which was begun in the sixteenth century,) but this is not easily seen if you enter the square from the further end.

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FONTAINE DE ST. CROIX, ROUEN.

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I saw it at dusk. The quiet figure rising dark against the twilight sky; some white-capped peasants crossing the street quietly; the distant cries and laughter of children playing about the fountain in the midst; the windows of the houses gleaming redly against the cobbled pavement; steep roofs rising all round, standing out in the half light distinct and sharp, made an impression on one's memory not easily to be wiped out.

Rouen is the happy hunting-ground of the antiquary: the old houses are almost inexhaustible. Streets upon streets of them, untouched in all their splendid picturesqueness. One strikes up some narrow, cobbled passage between timbered houses, rising high on either side, a narrow strip of blue sky shewing far above, and one comes suddenly upon lovely old corbels, exquisite bits of old sculpture, by some corner across which strikes the soft shine from the blue lilac slate of some steep roof immediately above it. At one's foot is the inevitable little border to almost every old street—the trickling stream gleaming where the sun slants down on it.

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The only sound that breaks on one's ear in these old streets is the clatter of sabots, and the sedate, slow-paced *carillon* from the cathedral bells close by. Sometimes in one's wanderings one comes upon one or other of the numerous old carved stone fountains which stand here and there at street corners in Rouen—sculptured, but generally much discoloured and defaced.

Quite unexpectedly, again, one chances on flagged courtyards, the houses round having magnificent, old black oak staircases giving on to them. One street was especially full of characteristic corners. I remember once passing down it when the whole place seemed asleep: and the only sounds that struck on one's ear were the plaintive, soft lament of an unseen dove, and the distant wail of a violin from some projecting upper story of a gabled house.

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Beside a panelled door, hanging loosely on its hinges, hopped a tame rook, rather out at elbows as touching its wing plumage, pecking at the rain-water which had dripped into an old silver plate of quaint design which lay tilted against the kerb stone. Further up was a house with a bulging front, as of someone who has lived too well and attained thereby his corporation. In some streets the houses are slated down the entire frontage, and only the ground floor timbered. Many of the houses are labelled "*Ancienne Maison*," and the name beneath, and some—but only some, alas!—have the date over the door. There are some exceedingly quaint dedications over one or two of the shops in Rouen. One, which specially arrested our attention, was over a shop in the Rue Grosse-Horloge, and ran thus:—"Au pauvre diable et à St. Herbland réunis!" Another was to "Father Adam"; another to "*Petit St. Herbland*"; another to "*St. Antoine de Padue*:" this last was a very favourite dedication, and one came across it in all parts of the city. Though, when one saw how often he was the patron saint of "Robes and Modes," I must say one wondered what the connection was between the saint and a milliner's shop. Was it a reminder of that one of his temptations in which three beautiful maidens, scantily attired, appeared and danced before him? Only, if so, surely the *double entendre* suggested by the dedication would act as a deterrent, if it acted at all, on those who were tempted by the chiffons, *draperies et soieries*, displayed in the shop window, to go within. One could see that there was a singular fitness in "Father Adam" being the patron of an eating shop, as was the case in one street.

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At midday the street leading into the cathedral square is a scene of multitudinous interests. A little boys' school, marshalled solemnly by a master—spectacled and sticked—the boys all stiff-capped and starched looking; a square, closed-in cart, with neatly packed rows of those appetising long loaves lying cosily side by side; a huge cart, *messengeries Parisiennes*, drawn by splendid cart-horses, five bells on each side of their splendid collars—collars edged with brass nails, and brass facings with pink background—the peasant conducting it, wearing the high-crowned black hat and loose, navy-blue blouse reaching to knee, and opening wide at collar; a barrow of some sweet-smelling stuff pushed over the cobbles by a costermonger who, as he passed, stretched out a disengaged hand to re-arrange his truck of oranges to make the vacant places of those gone before seem less deserted and more enticing to a possible customer. The stream beside the way was swinging merrily along in a succession of weirs, forming itself into different patterns as it went along, owing to its course being over rough, uneven cobbles. Here, as it turned a corner, the sun shone full on it, and from being a stream of doubtful reputation—being in most instances the receptacle of the castaway Flotsam and Jetsam of many a household—it straightway became a river of pure molten steel. [141]

Then, down another street as I accompanied it, its tide turned—the tide which is swelled by many pailfuls from the doors that lie beside its route—and like the bottle imp, it dwindled into a tiny thing, and flowed along weakly—creased and lined. [142]

The Guide-book urges one on from Rouen, to Caudebec-en-Caux. But I found so much to see in the way of old streets and old buildings in Rouen itself, that I postponed our day's journey to Caudebec till just before we were leaving. Then our choice fell on a day when the powers of the weather fought against us in our courses, and it rained almost continuously for the whole day long. But there are special beauties which are abroad in these times, which those who have seen them once, recognise at their true value, and would not forego. [143]

In this case there was a driving white scud of rain slanting across the meadows. It swept over steep slopes redly orange with fallen leaves lying thick in layers everywhere. The tree trunks stood, yellow in contrast, over streams in which the rain made spear pricks, which swiftly became pin-point centres of ever widening circles. Cows moving lazily on, in their grazing, stepped in the squelching gravel of the deeply-rutted roads, shining up dully, in dark slate colour. Here and there, but not often, black-timbered barns came into sight, sparsely covered with vivid green moss. [144]

Then would come a field with mangy patches of colourless grass, the trees standing sharply outlined in all shades of vivid emerald green: an orchard of gnarled branches of the very palest green imaginable—a sort of etherealized mildew, backed by a fine old slated farm-house. Close beside it a farmyard, the ground literally dotted all over with black hens, busy over remunerative pickings. A little further on was another orchard, this time filled with whitened skeletons of trees, their bark all being stripped from off the trunks. The hedgerows were crowned with quick successions of briary—the grey hair of the dying year—and at the end of one of them was an avenue of gnarled dwarf willows bordered by a winding stream; their rounded heads shewing soft purple against the green meadow. [145]

At Duclair it was evidently market-day. The train was ushered in by a clatter and jabber of voices, shrill and hoarse mixed: all shouting at the top of their voices. The platform was littered with various coloured sacks, well filled out; market baskets in all positions, and little wooden barred cages for the poor cramped domestic fowl. Beyond Duclair the trees look like brooms the wrong way up: as if grown on the principle of the received tradition in London markets as to the correct complexion of asparagus—long bare trunks and only at the latter end a little bit of spread green to shew that it was the business end. [146]

These trees were presently merged in a dark belt of forest, standing clear against a soft grey lilac horizon of distant land shouldering the sky. Deep-roofed cottages, velvety with moss and lichen; an old *château* with steep slate gables; alternate green and red brown meadow, picked out in places with sombrely dark brushwood, with delicate, incisive, clear cut edge against the softer foliaged trees. Then a broad band of glittering steel encircling the hills which rose abruptly behind it. [147]

Most of the cottages here have a sort of hem of arabesque ornamentation from the flowers which grow freely all along the tops of the roofs. The Seine, like the Jordan of old, overflowed its banks pretty considerably this autumn, to judge by the look of the land in this district. Just before the train slowed into the little primitive terminus of Caudebec, the rain, which had held up for half an hour or so, came on again, whipping the river's surface into long weals. [148]

Caudebec itself is on the banks of the river, with rising ground almost surrounding it. Were it not for the modern element which has, as usual, played ducks and drakes with the picturesque element, Caudebec would be unique. [149]

Indeed, not so very long ago it evidently did possess an individuality in ancient buildings, which set it quite apart by itself. But *nous avons changé tout cela*; and now, though it has three charming old streets with black-timbered houses and a mill stream racing beneath them, and a little bridge, its features are considerably altered. Here again, as everywhere else where I went, with the exception of Gujan-Mestras, the same absence of costumes was a keen disappointment. They are not forgotten, it is true; the numerous photographs of them prevent that, but they themselves are an unknown quantity. [150]

Coming away from Caudebec, there was a temporary cessation from showers, and a brilliant, narrow strip of sunshine fell across the hillocky, spattered surface of the river, which a freshening wind was driving before it. It shone fitfully through the straight, close-clipped line of poplars which lined the river bank on the farther side. A few moments later and the sun was setting in a flare of yellow light, and a flood of misty radiance lay full on the dancing ripples. [151]

At Rouen the pavement was all a medley of colour: red, soft green, yellow, and dull grey, so

that the flags beneath one's feet shone like a tessellated flow of many colours. Overhead the blue, lurid flashes of lightning from the electric wires shot up and died away every now and then. The light from the arc lights made the wet asphalt shine like a crinkled sea under the moonlight. We went to bed that night with the soft pattering of the rain upon our window panes: now hesitating, now hurried, now in triplets, that suggested to one's mind gentle strumming on an old spinet.

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CHAPTER XII

As I said, I think, before, the country between Rouen and Dieppe is not striking. But yet it is, in its way, full of picturesqueness; of beautiful little miniatures; of delicate etchings, exquisite as to colour and form; and all this is visible even to the traveller passing rapidly through by train.

There broods over the quiet meadows, over the stiff lines of poplars, over the cool soft-toned colours in blouse, skirt, or apron, the true spiritual atmosphere of the heart of the land, if one may so call it,—its deep simplicity, its own interpretation of life. The peasants seem to belong to the land upon which their hard-working days are spent, and, in working, to drink in, in effect, the divine secret of the earth, which only men possessed of true inner perceptions, like Jean François Millet, R. L. Stevenson and others like them in mental calibre, can apprehend.

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Nearer Dieppe we came upon numerous farm-houses, many of which are built upon trestles, and all of which are covered with the usual soft green embroidery of moss and nestling cosily in the midst of beautiful orchards, or clustering vineyards.

In Normandy the street cries seem to be all in the major key. I noticed this especially at Rouen, and here again at Dieppe; the minor key is absent in them. They are, too, a distinctly musical sentence in themselves. A sweet little melody was being sung up one street in Dieppe along which I was passing, by two fish-women carrying a basket of fish between them. One man who came along playing bagpipes, from time to time, to notify the approach of his wares, paused to cry out in a loud tone what sounded like: "I have not got it to-day, but I shall have it to-morrow!"

Dieppe has the same sort of blank-Casino-stare-of-sightless eyes, as had Arcachon; only the former place, being a town on its own foundation, as it were, and not brought into prominence by the parasitical growth in its midst, of the Casino, is not so dominated by it. The two venerable round towers, with their conical, red-tiled peaks stand alone, unaffected by the modern hotels and buildings on the front, which surround them. Somehow, though, I could never understand exactly why they should so insistently suggest Tweedledum and Tweedledee, yet they did again and again bring those worthies into my mind whenever I looked at them. They stand at some little distance from the grand old castle which has seen the things that they have also seen in those far-away bygone ages. The castle, stands greyly aloof and apart, high on its hill, banked up by serrated chalk cliffs and grey expanse of wall.

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The hotel at which we put up in the town was a charming old panelled house, dating two or three hundred years back; perhaps longer even than that. The ceilings slanted, and the walls contained those delightful deep cupboards which are such a joy to those who possess them. Also there were the little steps up and down leading from one room into another; steps which project the unwary into the future, sometimes too soon for their comfort.

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Opening out of the first floor was an outside promenade, with balcony which led one out among a perfect wilderness of roofs; steep roofs of ancient, well-worn red tiles, whereon the soft velvet feet of the moss climb down step by step to the edge of sudden precipitous gables, crowned with white pinnacles, all backed by a venerable-looking red brick wall which had lost a tooth here and there of its first row, and never had others to fill the holes. Then, further along, through a gap in the wall, one caught sight of the splendid, deep, wavy red brick roof of the house opposite, with three little holes pierced above, two tiny dormer windows, and, below these, two larger ones. Below them, again, the soft yellow-cream cob wall.

It was quite an ideal spot in which to dream on a hot summer's day; but though to admire, yet not to linger in during a November one.

The town crier here is a wonderful personage. He is dressed in official black cape and square cap, and he beats an imperative tattoo, as a summons to the citizens, on a big drum which is slung round his neck. But when that was performed and when, presumably, he had gained their attention, he only mumbled a few indistinct words and then hurried on, or rather more correctly, shambled on into the next street.

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The market at Dieppe is one of the most picturesque affairs I have ever seen in France, barring that at Poitiers, which was quite unsurpassable in its varied pageantry of colour. The peasants at the Dieppe market all stand on the pathway of the principal street, their baskets in front of them on the curb. The unfortunate animals for sale, as usual, I saw over and over again taken up, with no regard to their feelings, or as to which side up they were in the habit of living, and dangled, or swung, head downwards *ad lib*. Then bounced—literally bounced—up and down by intending purchasers (who dumped them down to test their weight), and by doubtful purchasers also. One woman held a number of fowls in one hand—their legs all tied together—as unconcernedly as if they were some parcel out of a milliner's shop. It is not an inspiring sight. People's stomachs pitted against their hearts, and winning by an easy length in each case. In one instance it was not a case of the lion lying down with the lamb, but of the hen being forced to lie down with the duck, who, profiting by her propinquity to the other, curled her long neck and pillowed it on the hen's shoulder.

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In the afternoons the merry-go-round was in full swing just in front of the church, but instead of

our predominant and wearisome fog-horn effect, it was soft, and with a hint of brass instruments in the distance, and the tinkling "rat-tat-tat," of the drum was distinctly realistic.

One of the prettiest little incidents that I have seen for a long while occurred when I was passing through one part of the market here. An old shrivelled, but apple-cheeked, market woman came by, and as she turned the corner of a stall she found herself face to face with a Sister. The latter, instantly recognising her, gave her the most courteous bow and smile I have ever seen, and I shall never forget the pleased, elated expression on the old woman's face as she passed on, after receiving the salutation. Once before, I saw courtesy and respect shewn as unmistakeably, and that was in England.

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I was on the top of a city omnibus, and as another omnibus was just passing us, our driver—an old, red-faced, weather-beaten man—lifted his hat and swept it low, with such a profound air of reverence—such an unusual thing to see now-a-days—that I turned hastily to see who was the recipient of this obeisance. It was a hospital nurse; and I caught sight of the pleasant smile with which she greeted, as I supposed, one of her former patients. A minute or two later my conjecture was confirmed, and I heard our driver relating to his left-hand neighbour the story of how splendidly she had nursed him through a serious illness.

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On Sunday afternoon we went to the catechising in church, and were treated to a long dissertation, of quite an hour's duration, on the early divisions and heresies of the church. Through all this recital, the "world" outside was infinitely distracting. Bursts of "Carmen," or some popular waltz, came in alluringly from the windows in gusts of melody, enough to interfere very seriously with the thread of so dry and stiff an argument as was M. le Curé's, even had his congregation been composed of grown-up people; much more so in the case of children.

But these children, one and all, were irreproachable in their behaviour. Not a movement, not a fidget, not a sound broke the perfect quietude with which they faced him. There were but three or four Sisters in charge of them and these sat facing their respective classes. Perhaps one of the secrets of their absorbed attention and utter alienation from the distracting sounds from without, may have been that each child—even the little tinies—had a notebook and pencil and was busily engaged, from the beginning of the disquisition to the very end of it, in taking down word for word the preacher's lecture (for after meditation?) Yes, even to the jaw-breaking names of some of the heretics, which were spelt over carefully and slowly once or twice, as they occurred, by M. le Curé.

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And when at last the long discourse was ended, there was no music, no singing of hymns to assist in lifting up their hearts after the past depressing hour! Each class filed out of church, sedately, quietly, composedly; first the girls, and then the boys. These last had a mind to start a little before their time for filing out had arrived, but their idea was promptly sat upon, and squashed, by one short severe word from the figure in the pulpit, which stood solemn and upright until the last boy had left the church.

It struck me, in connection with this service, that we English might possibly find one of the plans in this catechising at the church in Dieppe, useful in our own children's services. Everyone who knows anything at all of children knows well how keenly most of them enjoy the simple fact of writing down notes in a notebook. Why should not we use that aid to attention in our services? Something to do with their fingers is a wonderful preservative of attention for children, and even if the notes are not of very much use afterwards, (as might very possibly be the case with the younger children!), still it would be an interest to all. For the very handling of pencil and book, would certainly take away a very remunerative employment from someone who is reputed to be always ready with graduated mischief suitable for small hands that are folded aimlessly on the lap.

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Later on in the day we met a Sister escorting out a battalion of boys who, tired of going tramp-tramp regularly and in order along the road, had broken step and were careering all over the place after their hats, which a gust of wind had just whisked off. I saw, a minute later, that the joy of each boy was to lay the hat when rescued from the gutter, or wherever it had chanced to light, very lightly and gingerly on his head, to court the gusts in the hope—not altogether vain—that the gusts would catch—the hats, and thus inaugurate of course, a fresh chase along the road. This went on until the poor Sister was almost distracted, and at her wits' end; for the facts were equally undeniable, that the hats must be recovered, and that the gusts of wind could not be prevented. After vainly endeavouring to collect the forces at her command—which consisted, I am sorry to say, of only three or four of the steadier boys—she changed her tactics, and instead of pursuing her way up the street, she sounded a recall and retraced her steps down a less gusty street, followed, after some delay, by the rest of the boys.

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On the beach, after some rough gales, we found crowds of men and women picking up huge black stones, and putting them all together in the large chip baskets which the peasants carry. These baskets are pointed at the bottom and, when filled, are slung over their shoulders, being strapped under the arm. Before they filled them we could see the men placing them about at intervals on the beach, each on a sort of easel. I found out that the town authorities give about twenty-five centimes for each basket of these stones—*galées* as Madame at our hotel informed me they were called.

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Talking about Madame reminds me that I have never mentioned how small was the size of the very diminutive water jug which we were given in our bedroom here. When I first saw it, it brought vividly back the story of an old friend's experience in an out-of-the-way town in Germany of many years ago, when, finding in the bedrooms water jugs the size of a fair sized tea-cup, inquired if a bath was procurable and was met with amazed and blank countenances. They had never even heard of such a thing. Tea cups had always amply satisfied their own requirements. Dirt did not settle so readily upon them as it apparently did on the skin of Englishmen. But they could perhaps have it made at the expense of the Englishman, and so a drawing was given of the

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sized bath required, and eventually, after many searchings of heart, this implement of water warfare was constructed.

Our water jug, it is true, was larger than a tea cup, but it stood not so very much higher than my sponge.

The last glimpse of France that one carries away with one, when the land grows ever dimmer and dimmer from one's standpoint on board ship, as one leans over the taffrail, are three landmarks—the domed spire of St. Jacques, the castellated tower of St. Remy, and, further to the north, the old castle, standing apart and grey, towering above its ramparts. Finally, even these fade away into a soft mystery of grey-blue haze, and one regretfully realises that one is severed from the land of sunshine and fair vineyards.

THE END

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