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Author: Hippolyte Taine
Illustrator: Gustave Doré
Translator: John Safford Fiske

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By Hippolyte Adolphe Taine

Translated by J. Safford Fiske

With Illustrations by

GUSTAVE DORÈ

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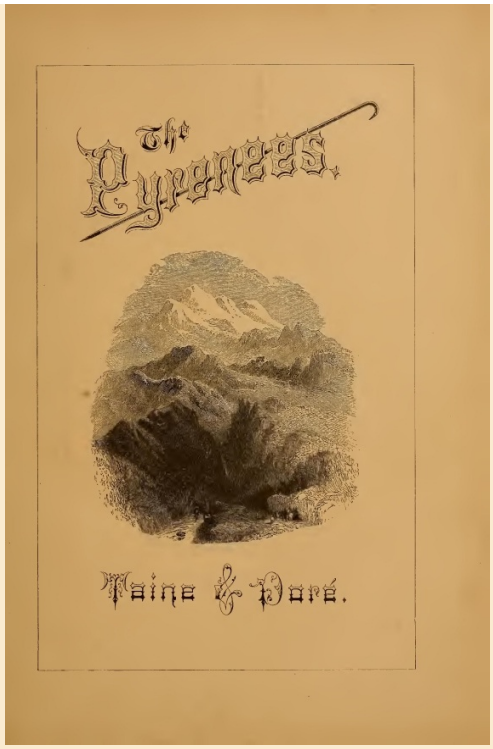

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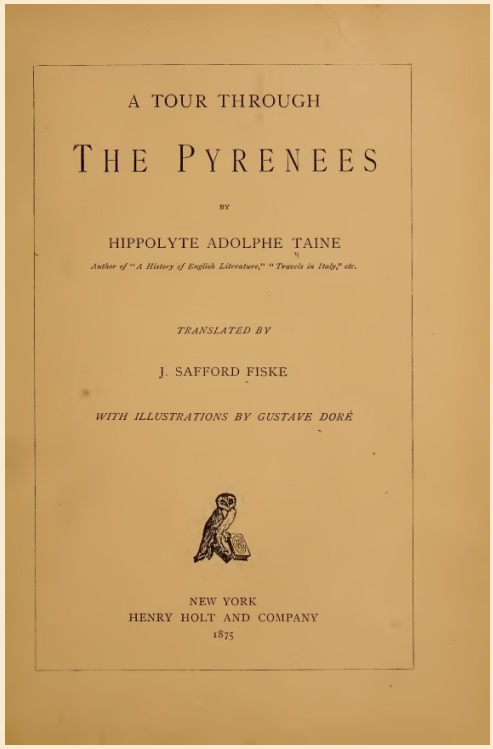
A TOUR THROUGH

THE PYRENEES

BY

HIPPOLYTE ADOLPHE TAINE

Author of "A History of English Literature," "Travels in Italy," etc.

TRANSLATED BY

J. SAFFORD FISKE

WITH ILLUSTRATIONS BY GUSTAVE DORÉ

NEW YORK
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The Publishers take pleasure in acknowledging their indebtedness to Mr. Henry Blackburn for valuable hints in the arrangement of this volume.

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TO MARCELIN.

(EMILE PLANAT.)

This, my dear Marcelin, is a trip to the Pyrenees; I have been there, and that is a praiseworthy circumstance; many writers, including some of the longest-winded, have described these scenes without leaving home.

And yet I have serious shortcomings to confess, and am deeply humbled thereat. I have not been the first to scale any inaccessible mountain; I have broken neither leg nor arm; I have not been eaten by the bears; I have neither saved any English heiress from being swept away by the Gave, nor yet have I married one; I have not been present at a single duel; my experiences include no tragic encounter with brigands or smugglers. I have walked much, and talked a little, and now I recount the pleasures of my eyes and ears. What sort of a man can he be who comes home from a long absence bringing all his limbs with him, is not the least in the world a hero, and yet does not blush to confess it? In this book I have talked as if with thee. There is a Marcelin whom the public knows, a shrewd critic, a caustic wit, the lover and delineator of every worldly elegance; there is another Marcelin, known to but three or four, a learned and thoughtful man. If there are any good ideas in this work, half of them belong to him; to him, then, I restore them.

H. TAINE.

BOOK I. THE COAST.

[003]

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CHAPTER I. BORDEAUX.—ROYAN.

I.

The river is so fine, that before going to Bayonne I have come down as far as Royan. Ships heavy with white sails ascend slowly on both sides of the boat. At each gust of wind they incline like idle birds, lifting their long wing and showing their black belly. They run slantwise, then come back; one would say that they felt the better for being in this great fresh-water harbor; they loiter in it and enjoy its peace after leaving the wrath and inclemency of the ocean. The banks, fringed with pale verdure, glide right and left, far away to the verge of heaven; the river is broad like a sea; at this distance you might think you saw two hedges; the trees dimly lift their delicate shapes in a robe of bluish gauze; here and there great pines raise their umbrellas on the vapory horizon, where all is confused and vanishing; there is an inexpressible [004] sweetness in these first hues of the timid day, softened still by the fog which exhales from the deep river. As for the river itself, its waters stretch out joyous and splendid; the rising sun pours upon its breast a long streamlet of gold; the breeze covers it with scales; its eddies stretch themselves, and tremble like an awaking serpent, and, when the billow heaves them, you seem to see the striped flanks, the taw-ney cuirass of a leviathan.

Indeed, at such moments it seems that the water must live and feel; it has a strange look, when it comes, transparent and sombre, to stretch itself upon a beach of pebbles; it turns about them as if uneasy and irritated; it beats them with its wavelets; it covers them, then retires, then comes back again with a sort of languid writhing and mysterious lovingness; its snaky eddies, its little crests suddenly beaten down or broken, its wave, sloping, shining, then all at once blackened, resembles the flashes of passion in an impatient mother, who hovers incessantly and anxiously about her children, and covers them, not knowing what she wants and what fears. Presently a cloud has covered the heavens, and the wind has risen. In a moment the river has assumed the aspect of a crafty and savage animal. It hollowed itself, and showed its [005] livid belly; it came against the keel with convulsive starts, hugged it, and dashed against it, as if to try its force; as far as one could see, its waves lifted themselves and crowded together, like the muscles upon a chest; over the flank of the waves passed flashes with sinister smiles; the mast groaned, and the trees bent shivering, like a nerveless crowd before the wrath of a fearful beast.

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Then all was hushed; the sun has burst forth, the waves were smoothed, you now saw only a laughing

expanse; spun out over this polished back a thousand greenish tresses sported wantonly; the light rested on it, like a diaphanous mantle; it followed the supple movements and the twisting of those liquid arms; it folded around them, behind them, its radiant, azure robe; it took their caprices and their mobile colors; the river[006] meanwhile, slumbrous in its great, peaceful bed, was stretched out at the feet of the hills, which looked down upon it, like it immovable and eternal.

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II.

The boat is made fast to a boom, under a pile of white houses: it is Royan.

Here already are the sea and the dunes; the right of the village is buried under a mass of sand; there are crumbling hills, little dreary valleys, where you are lost as if in the desert; no sound, no movement, no life; scanty, leafless vegetation dots the moving soil, and its filaments fall like sickly hairs; small shells, white and empty, cling to these in chaplets, and, wherever the foot is set, they crack with a sound like a cricket's chirp; this place is the ossuary of some wretched maritime tribe. One tree alone can live here, the pine, a wild creature, inhabitant of the forests and sterile coasts; there is a whole colony of them here; they crowd together fraternally, and cover the sand with their brown lamels; the monotonous breeze which sifts through them forever awakes their murmur; thus they chant in a plaintive fashion, but with a far softer and more harmonious voice [008]
than the other trees; this voice resembles the grating of the cicadæ when in August they sing with all their[009] heart among the stalks of the ripened wheat.

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At the left of the village, a footpath winds to the summit of a wasted bank, among billows of standing grasses. The river is so broad that the other shore is not distinguishable. The sea, its neighbor, imparts its refluence; its long undulations come one after another against the coast, and pour their little cascades of foam upon the sand; then the water retires, running down the slope until it meets a new wave coming up which covers it; these billows are never wearied, and their come and go remind one of the regular breathing[010] of a slumbering child. For night has fallen, the tints of purple grow brown and fade away. The river goes to rest in the soft, vague shadow; scarcely, at long intervals, a remnant glimmer is reflected from a slanting wave; obscurity drowns everything in its vapory dust; the drowsy eye vainly searches in this mist some visible point, and distinguishes at last, like a dim star, the lighthouse of Cordouan.

III.

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The next evening, a fresh sea-breeze has brought us to Bordeaux. The enormous city heaps its monumental houses along the river like bastions; the red sky is embattled by their coping. They on one hand, the bridge on the other, protect, with a double line, the port where the vessels are crowded together like a flock of gulls; [011] those graceful hulls, those tapering masts, those sails swollen or floating, weave the labyrinth of their movements and forms upon the magnificent purple of the sunset. The sun sinks down into the midst of the river and sets it all ablaze; the black rigging, the round hulls, stand out against its conflagration, and look like jewels of jet set in gold. [012]

CHAPTER II. LES LANDES.—BAYONNE.

Around Bordeaux are smiling hills, varied horizons, fresh valleys, a river peopled by incessant navigation, a succession of cities and villages harmoniously planted upon the declivities or in the plains, everywhere the richest verdure, the luxury of nature and civilization, the earth and man vying with each other to enrich and decorate the happiest valley of France. Below Bordeaux a flat soil, marshes, sand; a land which goes on growing poorer, villages continually, less frequent, ere long the desert. I like the desert as well.

Pine woods pass to the right and to the left, silent and wan. [013]
[014]

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Each tree bears on its side the scar of wounds where the woodmen have set flowing the resinous blood [015] which chokes it; the powerful liquor still ascends into its limbs with the sap, exhales by its slimy shoots and by its cleft skin; a sharp aromatic odor fills the air.

Beyond, the monotonous plain of the ferns, bathed in light, stretches away as far as the eye can reach. Their green fans expand beneath the sun which colors, but does not cause them to fade. Upon the horizon a few scattered trees lift their slender columns. You see now and then the silhouette of a herdsman on his stilts, inert and standing like a sick heron. Wild horses are grazing half hid in the herbage. As the train passes, they abruptly lift their great startled eyes and stand motionless, uneasy at the noise that has troubled their solitude. Man does not fare well here,—he dies or degenerates; but it is the country of animals, and especially of plants. They abound in this desert, free, certain of living. Our pretty, cutup valleys are but poor things alongside of these immense spaces, leagues upon leagues of marshy or dry vegetation, a level country, where nature, elsewhere troubled and tortured by men, still vegetates as in primeval days with a calm equal to its grandeur. The sun needs these savannas in order properly to spread out its light; from the rising exhalation, you feel that the whole plain is fermenting under its force; and the eyes filled by the limitless horizon divine [016] the secret labor by which this ocean of rank verdure renews and nourishes itself.

Night without a moon has come on. The peaceful stars shine like points of flame; the whole air is filled with a blue and tender light, which seems to sleep in the network of vapor wherein it lies. The eye penetrates it without apprehending anything. At long intervals, in this twilight, a wood confusedly marks its spot, like a rock at the bottom of a lake; everywhere around are vague depths, veiled and floating forms, indistinct and fantastic creatures melting into each other, fields that look like a billowy sea, clumps of trees that you might

take for summer clouds,—the whole graceful chaos of commingled phantoms, of things of the night. The mind floats here as on a fleeting stream, and nothing seems to it real, in this dream, but the pools which reflect the stars and make on earth a second heaven.

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Bayonne is a gay city, original and half Spanish. On all sides are men in velvet vest and small-clothes; you [017]
hear the sharp, sonorous music of the tongue spoken beyond the mountains. Squatty arcades border the principal streets; there is need of shade under such a sun.

A pretty episcopal palace, in its modern elegance, makes the ugly cathedral still uglier. The poor, abortive monument piteously lifts its belfry, that for three centuries has remained but a stump. Booths are stuck in its hollows, after the manner of warts; here and there they have laid on a rude plaster of stone. The old invalid is a sad spectacle alongside of the new houses and busy shops which crowd around its grimy flanks. I was quite [018]
troubled at this decrepitude, and when once I had entered, I became still more melancholy. Darkness fell from the vault like a winding-sheet; I could make out nothing but o o worm-eaten pillars, smoke-darkened pictures, expanses of greenish wall. Two fresh toilettes that I met increased the contrast; nothing could shock one more in this place than rose-colored ribbons.

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I was looking upon the spectre of the middle ages; how opposed to it are the security and abundance of modern life! Those sombre vaults, those slender columns, those rose windows, blood-dyed, called up dreams and emotions which are now impossible for us. You should feel here what men felt six hundred years ago, when they swarmed forth from their hovels, from their unpaved, six-feet-wide streets, sinks of uncleanness, and reeking with fever and leprosy; when their unclad bodies, undermined by famine, sent a thin blood to their brutish brains; when wars, atrocious laws, and legends of sorcery filled their dreams with vivid and melancholy images; when over the bedizened draperies, over the riddles of painted glass, the rose windows, like a conflagration or an aureole, poured their transfigured rays.

These are the remembrances of fever and ecstasy: to get rid of them I have come out to the port; it is a long alley of old trees at the side of the Adour. Here all is gay and picturesque. Serious oxen, with lowered heads, [019]
drag the beams that are being unloaded. Rope-makers, girt with a wisp of hemp, walk backward tightening their threads, and twining their ever-growing cable. The ships in file are made fast at the quay; the slender cordage outlines its labyrinth against the sky, and the sailors hang in it hooked on like spiders in their web.

Great casks, bales, pieces of wood are strewn pell-mell over the flags.

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You are pleased to feel that man is working and prosperous. And here nature too is as happy as man. The broad silver river unrolls itself under the radiance of the morning. Slender clouds throw out on the azure their band of mother-of-pearl. The sky is like an arch of lapis-lazuli. Its vault rests on the confines of the flood which advances waveless and effortless, under the glitter of its peaceful undulations, between two ranges of declivity, away to a hill where pine-woods of a tender green slope down to meet it, as graceful as itself. The [020] tide meanwhile rises, and the leaves on the oaks begin to shine, and to whisper under the feeble wind off the sea.

III.

It rains: the inn is insupportable. It is stifling under the arcades; I am bored at the café, and am acquainted with nobody. The sole resource is to go to the library. That is closed.

Fortunately the librarian takes pity on me, and opens for me. Better yet, he brings me all sorts of charters and old books; he is both very learned and very amiable, explains everything to me, guides, informs and installs me. Here I am then in a corner, alone at a table, with the documents of a fine and thoroughly enjoyable history; it is a pastoral of the middle ages. I have nothing better to do than to tell it over for my own benefit.

Pé de Puyane was a brave man and a skilful sailor, who in his day was Mayor of Bayonne and admiral; but he was harsh with his men, like all who have managed vessels, and would any day rather fell a man than take off his cap. He had long waged war against the seamen of Normandy, and on one occasion he hung seventy of them to his yards, cheek by jowl with some dogs. He hoisted on his galleys red flags signifying death and no [021] quarter, and led to the battle of Ecluse the great Genoese ship *Christophle*, and managed his hands so well that no Frenchman escaped; for they were all drowned or killed, and the two admirals, Quieret and Bahuchet, having surrendered themselves, Bahuchet had a cord tightened around his neck, while Quieret had his throat cut. That was good management; for the more one kills of his enemies, the less he has of them. For this reason, the people of Bayonne, on his return, entertained him with such a noise, such a clatter of horns, of cornets, of drums and all sorts of instruments, that it would have been impossible on that day to hear even the thunder of God.

It happened that the Basques would no longer pay the tax upon cider, which was brewed at Bayonne for sale in their country. Pe de Puyane said that the merchants of the city should carry them no more, and that, if any one carried them any, he should have his hand cut off. Pierre Cambo, indeed, a poor man, having carted two hogsheads of it by night, was led out upon the market-place, before Notre Dame de Saint-Léon, which was then building, and had his hand amputated, and the veins afterwards stopped with red-hot irons; after that he was driven in a tumbrel throughout the city, which was an excellent example; for the smaller folk [022] should always do the bidding of men in high position.

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Afterwards, Pé de Puyane having assembled the hundred peers in the town-house, showed them that the Basques being traitors, rebels toward the seigniory of Bayonne, should no longer keep the franchises which had been granted them; that the seigniory of Bayonne, possessing the sovereignty of the sea, might with justice impose a tax in all the places to which the sea rose, as if they were in its port, and that accordingly the Basques should henceforth pay for passing to Villefranche, to the bridge of the Nive, the limit of high tide. All [023] cried out that that was but just, and Pé de Puyane declared the toll to the Basques; but they all fell to laughing, saying they were not dogs of sailors like the mayor's subjects. Then having come in force, they beat the bridgemen, and left three of them for dead.

Pé said nothing, for he was no great talker; but he clinched his teeth, and looked so terribly around him, that none dared ask him what he would do, nor urge him on, nor indeed breathe a word. From the first Saturday in April to the middle of August, several men were beaten, as well Bayonnais as Basques, but still war was not declared, and, when they talked of it to the mayor, he turned his back.

The twenty-fourth day of August, many noblemen among the Basques, and several young people, good leapers and dancers, came to the castle of Miot for the festival of Saint Bartholomew. They feasted and showed off the whole day, and the young people who jumped the pole, with their red sashes and white breeches, appeared adroit and handsome. That night came a man who talked low to the mayor, and he, who ordinarily wore a grave and judicial air, suddenly had eyes as bright as those of a youth who sees the coming of his bride. He went down his staircase with four bounds, led out a band of old sailors who were come one by one, covertly, into the lower hall, and set out by dark night with several of the wardens, having closed the [024] gates of the city for fear that some traitor, such as there are everywhere, should go before them.

Having arrived at the castle they found the drawbridge down and the postern open, so confident and unsuspecting were the Basques, and entered, cutlasses drawn and pikes forward, into the great hall. There were killed seven young men who had barricaded themselves behind tables, and would there make sport with their dirks; but the good halberds, well pointed and sharp as they were, soon silenced them. The others, having closed the gates from within, thought that they would have power to defend themselves or time to flee; but the Bayonne marines, with their great axes, hewed down the planks, and split the first brains which happened to be near. The mayor, seeing that the Basques were tightly girt with their red sashes, went about saying (for he was usually facetious on days of battle): "Lard these fine gallants for me; forward the spit into their flesh justicoats;" and in fact the spits went forward, so that all were perforated and opened, some through and through, so that you might have seen daylight through them, and that the hall half an hour after was full of pale and red bodies, several bent over benches, others in a pile in the corners, some with their noses glued to the table like drunkards, so that a Bayonnais, looking at them, said: "This is the veal market." [025] Many, pricked from behind, had leaped through the windows, and were found next morning, with cleft head or broken spine, in the ditches.

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There remained only five men alive, noblemen, two named d’Urtubie, two de Saint-Pé, and one, de Lahet, whom the mayor had set aside as a precious commodity; then, having sent some one to open the gates of Bayonne and command the people to come, he ordered them to set fire to the castle. It was a fine sight, for the castle burned from midnight until morning; as each turret, wall or floor fell, the people, delighted, raised a great shout. There were volleys of sparks in the smoke and flames that stopped short, then began again [026] suddenly, as at public rejoicings; so that the warden, an honorable advocate, and a great literary man, uttered this saying: “Fine festival for Bayonne folk; for the Basques great barbecue of hogs.”

The castle being burned, the mayor said to the five noblemen that he wished to deal with them with all friendliness, and that they should themselves be judges, if the tide came as far as the bridge; then he had them fastened two by two to the arches until the tide should rise, assuring them that they were in a good place for seeing. The people were all on the bridge and along the banks, watching the swelling of the flood. Little by little it mounted to their breasts, then to their necks, and they threw back their heads so as to lift their mouths a little higher. The people laughed aloud, calling out to them that the time for drinking had come, as with the monks at matins, and that they would have enough for the rest of their days. Then the water entered the mouth and nose of the three who were lowest; their throats gurgled as when bottles are filled, and the people applauded, saying that the drunkards swallowed too fast, and were going to strangle themselves out of pure greediness. There remained only the two men, d’Urtubie, bound to the principal arch, [027] father and son, the son a little lower down. When the father saw his child choking, he stretched out his arms with such force that a cord broke: but that was all, and the hemp cut into his flesh without his being able to get any further. Those above, seeing that the youth’s eyes were rolling, while the veins on his forehead were purple and swollen, and that the water bubbled around him with his hiccough, called him baby, and asked why he had sucked so hard, and if nurse was not coming soon to put him to bed. At this the father cried out like a wolf, spat into the air at them, and called them butchers and cowards. That offended them so that they began throwing stones at him with such sure aim that his white head was soon reddened and his right eye gushed out; it was small loss to him, for shortly after, the mounting wave shut up the other. When the water was gone down, the mayor commanded that the five bodies, which hung with necks twisted and limp, should be left a testimony to the Basques that the water of Bayonne did come up to the bridge, and that the toll was justly due from them. He then returned home amidst the acclamations of his people, who were delighted that they had so good a mayor, a sensible man, a great lover of justice, quick in wise enterprises, and who rendered to every man his due. . [028]

As he was setting out, he had put sixty men at the entrance of the bridge, in the toll-tower, ordering them to look out well for themselves, and warning them that the Basques would not be slow in seeking to avenge themselves. But they flattered themselves that they still had at least one good night, and they busied their throats mightily with emptying flagons. Towards the middle of the night, there being no moon, came up about two hundred Basques; for they are alert as the antelope,* and their runners had awakened that morning more than twenty villages in the Soule with the story of fire and drowning. The younger men, with several older heads, had set out forthwith by crooked circuitous paths, barefoot, that they might make no noise, well armed with cutlasses, crampoons and several slender rope-ladders; and, adroit as foxes, they had stolen to the base of the tower, to a place on the eastern side where it plunges straight down to the bed of the river, a real quagmire, so that here there was no guard, and the rolling of the water on the pebbles might drown their slight noise, should they make any. They fixed their crampoons in the crannies of the stones, and, little by little, Jean Amacho, a man from Béhobie, a noted hunter ofmountain beasts, climbed upon the battlements of [029] the first wall, then, having steadied a pole against a window of the tower, he entered and hooked on two ladders; the others mounted in their turn, until there were about fifty of them; and new men were constantly coming, as many as the ladders would bear, noiselessly striding over the window-sill.

> ** Alertes comme des izards—The isard, or y’sard, is the chamois-antelope of the Pyrenees, often called a chamois.—Translator.*

They were in a little, low ante-room, and from thence, in the great hall of the first floor, six steps below them, they beheld the Bayonnais, of whom there were but three in this place, two asleep, and a third who had just waked up and was rubbing his eyes, with his back turned to the small door of the ante-room. Jean Amacho gave a sign to the two men who had mounted immediately after him, and all jumped together with a single leap, and so nicely that, at the same moment, their three knives pierced the throats of the Bayonnais, who, bowing their limbs, sank without a cry to the ground. The other Basques then came in, and waited at the verge of the great balustraded staircase leading into the lower hall where were the Bayonnais, some in a heap sleeping near the fireplace, others calling out and sharpset at feasting.

One of these feeling that his hair was moist, lifted his head, saw some little red streams running from between the joists of the ceiling, and began to laugh, saying that the greedy fellows up there could no longer [030]

hold their cups, and were wasting good wine, which was very wrong of them. But finding that this wine was quite warm, he took some on his finger, then touched his tongue, and saw, by the insipid taste, that it was blood. He proclaimed this aloud, and the Bayonnais starting up grasped their pikes and ran for the staircase. Thereupon the Basques who had waited, not being sufficiently numerous, wished to recover the moment and rushed forth; but the first comers felt the point of the pikes, and were lifted, just as bundles of hay are spitted on the forks to be thrown into a loft; then the Bayonnais, holding themselves close together, and bristling in front with pikes, began to mount.

Just then a valiant Basque, Antoine Chaho, and two others with him, dropped down along the wall, lizard fashion, making a cover of dead bodies; and gliding between the great legs of the sailors of Bayonne, began work with their knives upon their hamstrings; so that the Bayonnais, wedged in the stairway, and embarrassed by the men and the pikes that were falling crosswise, could neither get on nor wield their spits with such nicety. At this moment, Jean Amacho and several young Basques, having espied their moment, leaped more than twenty feet clear into the middle of the hall, to a place where no halberds were ready, and began cutting throats with great promptness, then, thrown upon their knees, fell to ripping open bellies; they [031]
killed far more than they lost, because they had deft hands, while many were well padded with wool and wore leather shirts, and besides, the handles to their knives were wound with cord and did not slip. Moreover the Basques from above, who now numbered more than a hundred, rolled down the staircase like a torrent of goats; new ones came up every moment, and in every corner of the hall, man to man, they began to run each other through.

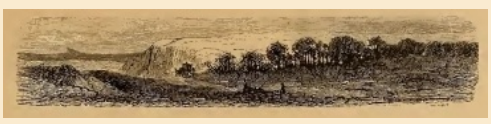
There died Jean Amacho in a sad enough fashion, and from no fault of his own; for after he had cut the throat of a Bayonnais,—his ordinary mode of killing, and, indeed, the best of all,—he held his head too near, and the jet from the two great veins of the neck spirted into his face like the froth from a jar of perry as it is uncorked, and suddenly shut up both his eyes; accordingly he was unable to avoid a Bayonnais who was at his left; the fellow planted his dagger in Jean's back, who spit out blood, and died a minute after.

But the Bayonnais, who were less numerous and less adroit, could make no stand, and at the end of half an hour there remained only a dozen of them, driven into a corner near a little cellar where were kept the jugs and bottles. In order the sooner to reduce these, the Basques gathered together the pikes, and began driving through this heap of men; and the Bayonnais, as anybody will on feeling an iron point prick through his skin, [032]
stepped back and rolled together into the cellar. Just at this moment the torches went out, and the Basques, in order not to wound each other, dressed the whole armful of pikes, and harpooned at random forward into the cellar during more than a quarter of an hour, so as to make sure that no Bayonnais remained alive; and thus, when all was become tranquil, and the torches were relighted, and they looked in, they saw that the cellar resembled a pork-butcher's chopping-block, the bodies being cut in twenty places, and separated from their heads, and the limbs being confusedly thrown together, till only salt was wanting to make a salting-tub of the place.

But the younger of the Basques, although there was nothing more to kill, rolled their eyes all around the hall, grinding their teeth like hounds after the quarry; they cried aloud continually, trembling in their limbs and clenching their fingers after the handles of their daggers; several, wounded and whitelipped, no longer felt their wounds or their loss of blood, remained crouching beside the man they had last killed, and then involuntarily leaped to their feet. One or two laughed with the fixity of madmen, and varied this with a hoarse roar; and there was in the room such a mist of carnage that any one seeing them reeling or howling thus, [033]
might have believed them drunk with wine.

At sunrise, when they had loosed the five drowned men from the arches, they cast all the Bayonnais upon the current of the stream, and said that they might go down thus to their sea, and that this cartful of dead flesh was such toll as the Basques would pay. The congealed wounds were opened again by the coldness of the water; it was a fine sight: by means of the blood that flowed, the river blushed red as a morning sky.

After this the Basques and the men of Bayonne fought several years more, man against man, band against band; and many brave men died on both sides. At the end, the two parties agreed to submit to the arbitration of Bernard Ezi, *Sire d'Albret.* The lord of Albret said that the men of Bayonne, since they had made the first attack, were in fault; he ordained that in future the Basques should pay no toll, that, on the contrary, the city of Bayonne should pay them fifteen hundred new golden crowns and should establish ten priestly prebendaryships, which should cost four thousand old crowns of the first coinage of France, of good gold and loyal weight, for the repose of the souls of the five gentlemen drowned without confession, which, perchance, were in purgatory, and had need of many masses in order to get out. But the Basques were unwilling that Pé [034]
de Puyane, the mayor, should be included in this peace, either he or his sons, and they reserved the right to pursue them until they had taken vengeance on his flesh and his race. The mayor retired to Bordeaux, to the house of the Prince of Wales, of whom he was a great friend and good servant, and during two o o years did not go outside of the city, excepting three or four times, well steeled, and attended by men-at-arms. But one day, when he had gone to see a vineyard he had bought, he withdrew a little from his troop to lift a great black vine-stock which was falling into the ditch; a moment after, his men heard a little sharp cry, like that of a thrush caught in a snare; when they had run up they saw Pé de Puyane dead, with a knife a fathom long which had entered by the armpit where he was unprotected by his cuirass. His elder son, Sebastian, who had fled to Toulouse, was killed by Augustin de Lahet, nephew of the man who was drowned; the other, Hugues, survived and founded a family, since, having gone by sea to England, he remained there, and received from King Edward a knight's fief. But neither he nor his children ever returned into Gascony; they did wisely, for they would have found their grave-diggers there. [035]



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CHAPTER III. BIARRITZ.—SAINT-JEAN-DE-LUZ.

I.

Half a league off, at the turning of a road, may be seen a hill of a singular blue: it is the sea. Then you descend, by a winding route, to the village.

A melancholy village, with the taint of hotels, white and regular, cafés and signs, ranged by stages upon the arid coast; for grass, patches of poor starveling turf; for trees, frail tamarisks which cling shivering to the earth; for harbor, a beach and two empty creeks. The smaller conceals in its sandy recess two barks without masts, without sails, to all appearance abandoned.

The waters consume the coast; great pieces of earth and stone, hardened by their shock, fifty feet away from the shore, lift their brown and yellow spine, worn, raked, gnawed, jagged, scooped out by the wave, [036] resembling a troop of stranded whales. The billow barks or bellows in their hollow bowels, in their deep yawning jaws; then, after they have engulfed it, they vomit it forth in jets and foam against the lofty shining waves that forever return to the assault. Shells and polished pebbles are incrusted upon their head. Here furzes have rooted their patient stems and the confusion of their thorns; this hairy mantle is the only one capable of clinging to their flanks, and of standing out against the spray of the sea.

THE PIERCED ROCK.

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To the left, a train of ploughed and emaciated rocks stretches out in a promontory as far as an arcade of [037] hardened beach, which the high tides have opened, and whence on three sides the eye looks down upon the ocean. Under the whistling north wind it bristles with violet waves; the passing clouds marble it with still more sombre spots; as far as the eye can reach is a sickly agitation of wan waves, chopping and disjointed, a sort of moving skin that trembles, wrenched by an inward fever; occasionally a streak of foam crossing them marks a more violent shock. Here and there, between the intervals of the clouds, the light cuts out a few sea-green fields upon the uniform plain; their tawny lustre, their unhealthy color, add to the strangeness and to the limits of the horizon. These sinister changing lights, these tin-like reflections upon a leaden swell, these white scoriæ clinging to the rocks, this slimy aspect of the waves suggest a gigantic crucible in which the metal bubbles and gleams.

But toward evening the air clears up and the wind falls. The Spanish coast is visible, and its chain of mountains softened by distance. The long dentation undulates away out of sight, and its misty pyramids at the last vanish in the west, between the sky and the ocean. The sea smiles in its blue robe, fringed with silver, wrinkled by the last puff of the breeze; it trembles still, but with pleasure, and spreads out its lustrous, many-hued silk, with voluptuous caprices beneath the sun that warms it. Meanwhile a few serene clouds poise [038] above it their down of snow; the transparency of the air bathes them in angelic glory, and their motionless flight suggests the souls in Dante stayed in ecstasy at the entrance of paradise.

It is night; I have come up to a solitary esplanade where is a cross, and whence is visible the sea and the coast. The coast, black, sprinkled with lights, sinks and rises in indistinct hillocks. The sea mutters and rolls with hollow voice. Occasionally, in the midst of this threatening breathing comes a hoarse hiccough, as if the slumbering wild beast were waking up; you cannot make it out, but from a nameless something that is sombre and moving, you divine a monstrous, palpitating back; in its presence man is like a child before the lair of a leviathan. Who assures us that it will continue to tolerate us to-morrow? On land we feel ourselves master; there our hand finds everywhere its traces; it has transformed everything and put everything to its service; the soil now-a-days is a kitchen-garden, the forests a grove, the rivers trenches, Nature is a nurse

and a servant. But here still exists something ferocious and untamable. The ocean has preserved its liberty and its omnipotence; one of its billows would drown our hive; over there in America its bed lifts itself; it will crush us without a thought; it has done it and will do it again; just now it slumbers, and we live clinging to its [039] flank without dreaming that it sometimes wants to turn itself about.

FULL-SIZE **--** ***Medium-Size***

II.

There is a light-house to the north of the village, an esplanade of beach and prickly plants. Vegetation here [040] is as rough as the ocean.

FULL-SIZE **--** ***Medium-Size***

Do not look to the left; the pickets of soldiers, the huts of the bathers, the ennuyés, the children, the invalids, the drying linen, it is all as melancholy as a caserne and a hospital. But at the foot of the light-house the beautiful green waves hollow themselves and scale the rocks, scattering upon the wind their plume of foam; the billows come up to the assault and mount one upon another, as agile and hardy as charging horsemen; the caverns rumble; the breeze whispers with a happy sound; it enters the breast and expands the muscles; you fill your lungs with the invigorating saltness of the sea. Farther on, ascending towards the [041] north, are paths creeping along the cliffs. At the bottom of the last, solitude opens out; everything human has disappeared; neither houses, nor culture, nor verdure. It is here as in the first ages, at a time when man had not yet appeared, and when the water, the stone, and the sand were the sole inhabitants of the universe. The coast stretches into the vapor its long strip of polished sand; the gilded beach undulates softly and opens its hollows to the ripples of the sea. Each ripple comes up foamy at first, then insensibly smooths itself, leaves behind it the flocks of its white fleece, and goes to sleep upon the shore it has kissed. Meanwhile another approaches, and beyond that again a new one, then a whole troop, striping the bluish water with embroidery of silver. They whisper low, and you scarcely hear them under the outcry of the distant billows; nowhere is the beach so sweet, so smiling—the land softens its embrace the better to receive and caress those darling creatures, which are, as it were, the little children of the sea.

III.

It has rained all night; but this morning a brisk wind has dried the earth; and I have come along the coast to Saint-Jean-de-Luz. [042]

FULL-SIZE **--** ***Medium-Size***

Everywhere the wasted cliffs drop perpendicularly down; dreary hillocks, crumbling sand; miserable grasses that strike their filaments into the moving soil; streamlets that vainly wind and are choked, pushed back by the sea; tortured inlets, and naked strands. The ocean tears and depopulates its beach. Everything suffers from the neighborhood of the old tyrant. As you contemplate here its aspect and its work, the antique superstitions seem true. It is a melancholy and hostile god, forever thundering, sinister, sudden in caprice, whom nothing appeases, nothing subdues, who chafes at being kept back from the land, embraces it [043] impatiently, feels it and shakes it, and to-morrow may recapture it or break it in pieces. Its violent waves start convulsively and twist themselves, clashing like the heads of a great troop of wild horses; a sort of grizzling mane streams on the edge of the black horizon; the gulls scream; they are seen darting down into the valley that is scooped out between two surges, then reappearing; they turn and look strangely at you with their pale eyes. One would say that they are delighted with this tumult and are awaiting a prey.

A little farther on, a poor hut hides itself in a bay. Three children ragged, with naked legs, were playing there in a stream that was overflown. A great moth, clogged by the rain, had fallen into a hole. They conducted the water to it with their feet, and dabbled in the cold mud; the rain fell in showers on the poor creature, which vainly beat its wings; they laughed boisterously, stumbling about and holding on to each other with their red hands. At that age and amidst such privation nothing more was wanting to make them happy.

The road ascends and descends, winding on high hills which denote the neighborhood of the Pyrenees. The sea reappears at each turn, and it is a singular spectacle, this suddenly lowered horizon, and that greenish triangle broadening toward heaven. Two or three villages stretch along the route, their houses dropping [044] down the heights like flights of stairs. From the white houses the women come out in black gown and veil to go to mass. The sombre color announces Spain. The men, in velvet vests, crowd to the public house and drink coffee in silence. Poor houses, a poor country; under a shed I have seen them cooking, in the guise of bread, cakes of maize and barley. This destitution is always touching. What is it that a day-laborer has gained by our thirty centuries of civilization? Yet he has gained, and when we accuse ourselves, it is because we forget history. He no longer has the small-pox, or the leprosy; he no longer dies of hunger, as in the sixteenth century, under Montluc; he is no longer burned as a witch, as happened indeed under Henry IV. here in this very place; he can, if he is a soldier, learn to read, become an officer; he has coffee, sugar, linen. Our descendants will say that that is but little; our fathers would have said that it is a good deal.

St. Jean-de-Luz is a little old city with narrow streets, to-day silent and decaying; its mariners once fought the Normans for the king of England; thirty or forty ships went out every year for the whale-fishery. Now-a-days the harbor is empty; this terrible Biscayan sea has thrice broken down its dike. Against this roaring surge, heaped up all the way from America, no work of man holds out. The water was engulfed in the channel [045] and came like a race-horse high as the quays, lashing the bridges, shaking its crests, grooving its wave; then it thundered heavily into the basins, sometimes with leaps so abrupt that it fell over the parapets like a mill-dam, and flooded the lower part of the houses. One poor boat danced in a corner at the end of a rope; no seamen, no rigging, no cordage; such is this celebrated harbor. They say, however, that half a league away, there are five or six barks in a creek.

FULL-SIZE **--** ***Medium-Size***

From the dike the tumult of the high tide was visible. A massive wall of black clouds girt the horizon; the sun blazed through a crevice like a fire through the mouth of a furnace, and overflowed upon the billow its [046] conflagration of ferruginous flames. The sea leaped like a maniac at the entrance of the harbor, smitten by a band of invisible rocks, and joined with its white line the two horns of the coast. The waves came up fifteen

feet high against the beach, then, undermined by the falling water, fell head foremost, desperate, with frightful howling; they returned however to the assault, and mounted each minute higher, leaving on the beach their carpet of snowy foam, and fleeing with the slight shivering of a swarm of ants foraging among dry leaves. Finally one of them came wetting the feet of the men who were watching from the top of the dike. Happily, it was the last; the city is twenty feet below, and would be only a mass of ruins if some great tide were urged on by a hurricane.

FULL-SIZE **--** ***Medium-Size***

IV.

A noble hotel, with broad halls, and grand antique apartments, displays itself at the corner of the first basin[047] facing the sea. Anne of Austria lodged there in 1660, at the time of the marriage of Louis XIV.

FULL-SIZE **--** ***Medium-Size***

Above a chimney is still to be seen the portrait of a princess in the garb of a goddess. Were they not goddesses? A tapestried bridge went from this house to the little church, sombre and splendid, traversed by balconies of black oak, and loaded with glittering reliquaries. The married pair passed through it between[048] two hedges of Swiss and bedizened guards, the king all embroidered with gold, with a hat ornamented with diamonds; the queen in a mantle of violet velvet sprinkled with fleur-de-lis, and, underneath, a habit of white brocade studded with precious stones, a crown upon her head.

FULL-SIZE **--** ***Medium-Size***

There was nothing but processions, entries, pomps and parades. Who of us now-a-days would wish to be a grand seigneur on condition of performing at this rate? The weariness of rank would do away with the [049] pleasures of rank; one would lose all patience at being an embroidered manikin, always exposed to public view and on exhibition. Then, that was the whole of life. When M. de Créqui was going to carry to the infanta the presents of the king, “he had sixty persons in livery in his suite, with a great number of noblemen and many friends.”

FULL-SIZE **--** ***Medium-Size***

The eyes took delight in this splendor. Pride was more akin to vanity, enjoyments were more on the surface. They needed to display their power in order to feel it. The courtly life had applied the mind to ceremonies. They learned to dance, as now-a-days to reflect; they passed whole years at the academy; they studied with [050] extreme seriousness and attention the art of bowing, of advancing the foot, of holding themselves erect, of playing with the sword, of setting the cane properly; the obligation of living in public constrained them to it; it was the sign of their rank and education; they proved in this way their alliances, their world, their place with the king, their title. Better yet, it was the poetry of the time. A fine manner of bowing is a fine thing; it recalled a thousand souvenirs of authority and of ease, just as in Greece an attitude recalled a thousand souvenirs of war and the gymnasium; a slight inclination of the neck, a limb nobly extended, a smile complaisant and calm, an ample trailing petticoat with majestic folds, filled the soul with lofty and courtly thoughts, and these great lords were the first to enjoy the spectacle they afforded. “I went to carry my offering,” said Mlle. de Montpensier, “and performed my *révérences* as did no one else of the company; I found myself suitable enough for ceremonial days; my person held its place there as my name in the world.” These words explain the infinite attention that was given to questions of precedence and to ceremonies; Mademoiselle is inexhaustible on this point; she talks like an upholsterer and a chamberlain; she is uneasy to [051] know at what precise moment the Spanish grandees take off their hats; if the king of Spain will kiss the queen-mother or will only embrace her: these important interests trouble her. In fact, at that time they were important interests. Rank did not depend, as in a democracy, upon proved worth, on acquired glory, on power exercised or riches displayed, but upon visible prerogatives transmitted by inheritance or granted by the king: so that they fought for a tabouret or a mantle, as now-a-days for a place or for a million. Among other treacheries they plotted to lodge Mademoiselle’s sisters with the queen. “The proposition displeased me; they would have eaten with her always, which I did not. That roused my pride. I was desperate at that moment.” The warfare was yet greater when it came to the marriage. “It occurred to somebody that it was necessary to carry an offering to the queen, so I could not bear her train, and it must be my sisters who would carry it with Mme. de Carignan. As soon as there was talk of bearing trains, the Duke de Roquelaure had offered to carry mine. They sought for dukes to carry those of my sisters, and, as not one was willing to do it, Mme. de Saugeon cried aloud that Madame would be in despair at this distinction.” What happiness to walk first upon the tapestried bridge, the train held up by a duke, while, the others go shamefully behind, with a train, but [052] without a duke! But suddenly others put in a claim. Mme. d’Uzès comes running up in a fright: it is question of an atrocious usurpation. “The princess palatine will have a train; will you not put a stop to that?” They get

together; they go to the king; they represent to him the enormity of the deed: the king forbids this new train as usurping and criminal, and the princess, who weeps and storms, declares that she will not be present at the marriage if they deprive her of her appendix. Alas! all human prosperity has its reverses; Mademoiselle, so happy in the matter of trains, could not get to kiss the queen, and, at this interdict, she remained all day plunged in the deepest grief. But, you see, the pursuits of rank had been, from infancy, her sole concern; she had wanted to marry all the princes in the world, and ever in vain; the person mattered little to her. First the cardinal infante, the reverse of an Amadis; at the age of dreams, on the threshold of youth, among the vague visions and first enchantments of love, she chose this old churl in a ruff to enthrone herself with him, in a fine arm-chair, in the government of the Low Countries. Then Philip IV. of Spain; the emperor Ferdinand, the arch-duke: negotiating with them herself, exposing her envoy to the risk of hanging. Then the king of Hungary, the future king of England, Louis XIV., Monsieur, the king of Portugal. [053]

FULL-SIZE **--** ***Medium-Size***

Who could count them? At a pinch, she went to work in advance: the princess of Condé being ill, then in the family way, this romantic head fancied that the prince was going to become a widower, and wanted to retain him for a husband. No one took this hand that she had stretched to all Europe. In vain she fired cannon in the Fronde; she remained to the end an adventuress, a state puppet, a weathercock, occasionally exiled, twenty times a widow, but always before the wedding, carrying over the whole of France the weariness and imaginations of her involuntary celibacy. At last Lauzun appeared; to marry her, and secretly at that, cost him [054] the half of his wealth; the king drew the dowry of his bastard from the misalliance of his cousin. It was an exemplary household: she scratched him: he beat her.—We laugh at these pretensions and bickerings, at these mischances and aristocratic quarrels; our turn will come, rest assured of that; our democracy too affords matter of laughter: our black coat is, like their embroidered coat, laced with the ridiculous; we have envy, melancholy, the want of moderation and of politeness, the heroes of George Sand, of Victor Hugo and of Balzac. In fact, what does it matter?

“Sifflez-moi librement; je vous le rends, mes frères.” So talked Voltaire, who gave to all the world at once the charter of equality and gayety.

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BOOK II. THE VALLEY OF OSSA

[057]

FULL-SIZE **--** ***Medium-Size***

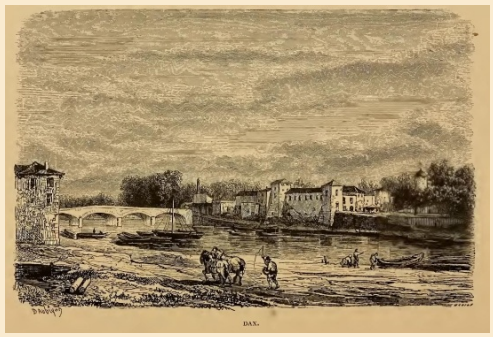
CHAPTER I. DAX.—ORTHEZ.

I.

I saw Dax in passing, and I recall only two rows of white walls of staring brightness, into which low doorways here and there sank their black arches with a strange relief. An old and thoroughly forbidding cathedral bristled its bell-turrets and dentations in the midst of the pomp of nature and the joyousness of the light, as if the soil, burst open, had once put forth out of its lava a heap of crystallized sulphur.

The postilion, a good fellow, takes up a poor woman on the way, and sets her beside him on his seat. What gay people! They sing in patois,—there, they are singing now. The conductor joins in, then one of the people [058] in the impériale. They laugh with their whole heart; their eyes sparkle. How far we are from the north! In all these southern folk there is *verve*; occasionally poverty, fatigue, anxiety crush it; at the least opening, it Gushes forth like living water in full sunlight.

This poor woman amuses me. She is fifty years old, without shoes, garments in shreds, and not a sou in her pocket. She talks familiarly with a stout, well-dressed gentleman, who is behind her. No humility; she believes herself the equal of the whole world. Gayety is like a spring rendering the soul elastic; the people bend but rise again. An Englishman would be scandalized. Several of them have said to me that the French nation have no sentiment of respect. That is why we no longer have an aristocracy.



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The chain of the mountains undulates to the left, bluish and like a long stratum of clouds. The rich valley resembles a great basin full to overflowing of fruit-trees and maize. White clouds hover slowly in the depths of heaven, like a flock of tranquil swans. The eye rests on the down of their sides, and turns with pleasure upon the roundness of their noble forms. They sail in a troop, carried on by the south wind, with an even flight, like a family of blissful gods, and from up above they seem to look with tenderness upon the beautiful earth which they protect and are going to nourish. [059]

[060]
[061]

II.

Orthez, in the fourteenth century, was a capital; of this grandeur there remains but the wreck: ruined walls and the high tower of the castle hung with ivy. The counts of Foix had there a little state, almost independent, proudly planted between the realms of France, England and Spain. The people have gained in something, I know; they no longer hate their neighbors, and they live at peace; they receive from Paris inventions and news; peace, trade and well-being are increased. They have, however, lost in something; instead of thirty active thinking capitals, there are thirty provincial cities, torpid and docile. The women long for a hat, the [062] men go to smoke at a café; that is their life; they scrape together a few empty old ideas from imbecile newspapers. In old times they had thoughts on politics and courts of love.

III.

FULL-SIZE **--** ***Medium-Size***

The good Froissart came here in the year 1388, having ridden and chatted about arms all along the route with the chevalier Messire Espaing de Lyon; he lodged in the inn of the Beautiful Hostess, which was then called the hotel of the Moon. The count Gaston Phoebus sent in all haste to seek him: “for he was the lord who of all the world the most gladly entertained the stranger in order to hear the news.” Froissart passed twelve weeks in his hotel: “for they made him good cheer and fed well his horses, and in all things also ordered well.”

Froissart is a child, and sometimes an old child. At that time thought was expanding, as in Greece in the [063] time of Herodotus. But, while we feel that in Greece it is going on to unfold itself to the very end, we discover here that an obstacle checks it: there is a knot in the tree; the arrested sap can mount no higher. This knot is scholasticism.

FULL-SIZE -- ***Medium-Size***

For, during three centuries already they had written in verse, and for two centuries in prose; after this long culture, see what a historian is Froissart. One morning he mounts on horseback with several valets, under a beautiful sun, and gallops onward; a lord meets him whom he accosts: “Sir, what is this castle?” The other [064] tells him about the sieges, and what grand sword-thrusts were there exchanged. “Holy Mary,” cried Froissart, “but your words please me and do me a deal of good, while you tell them off to me! And you shall not lose them, for all shall be set in remembrance and chronicled in the history which I am pursuing.” Then he has explained to himself the kindred of the seigneur, his alliances, how his friends and enemies have lived and are dead, and the whole skein of the adventures interwoven during two centuries and in three countries. “And as soon as I had alighted at the hotels, on the road that we were following together, I wrote them down, were it evening or morning, for the better memory of them in times to come; for there is no such exact retentive as writing.” All is found here, the pell-mell and the hundred shifts of the conversations, the reflections, the little accidents of the journey. An old squire recounts to him mountain legends, how Pierre de Beam, having once killed an enormous bear, could no longer sleep in peace, but thenceforward he awaked each night, “making such a noise and such clatter that it seemed that all the devils in hell should have carried away everything and were inside with him.” Froissart judges that this bear was perhaps a knight turned into a beast for some [065] misdeed; cites in support the story of Actæon, an “accomplished and pretty knight who was changed into a stag.” Thus goes his life and thus his history is composed; it resembles a tapestry of the period, brilliant and varied, full of hunting, of tournaments, battles and processions. He gives himself and his hearers the pleasure of imagining ceremonies and adventures; no other idea, or rather no idea. Of criticism, general considerations, reasoning upon man or society, counsels or forecast, there is no trace; it is a herald at arms who seeks to please curious eyes, the warlike spirit and the empty minds of robust knights, great eaters, lovers of thumps and pomps. Is it not strange, this barrenness of reason! In Greece, at the end of an hundred years, Thucydides, Plato and Xenophon, philosophy and science had appeared. By way of climax, read the verses of Froissart, those ballads, roundelays and virelays that he recited of evenings to the Count de Foix, “who took great solace in hearing them indeed,” the old rubbish of decadence, worn, affected allegories, the garrulousness of a broken-down pedant who amuses himself in composing wearisome turns of address. And the rest are all alike. Charles d’Orleans has a sort of faded grace and nothing-more, Christine de Pisan but an official solemnity.

Such feeble spirits want the force to give birth to general ideas; they are bowed down under the weight of [066] those which have been hooked on to them.

FULL-SIZE -- ***Medium-Size***

The cause is not far to seek; think of that stout cornific * doctor with leaden eyes, a confrère of Froissart, if you like, but how different! He holds in his hand his manual of canon-law, Peter the Lombard, a treatise on the syllogism. For ten hours a day he disputes in Baralipton on the *hicaeity*.

** Cornificien, a name given by Jean of Sarisberg to those who disfigured dialectics by their extravagant, cornus arguments.—Translator.*

As soon as he became hoarse, he dipped his nose again into his yellow folio; his syllogisms and quiddities [067] ended by making him stupid; he knew nothing about things or dared not consider them; he only wielded words, shook formulas together, bruised his own head, lost all common sense, and reasoned like a machine for Latin verses.* What a master for the sons of noblemen, and for keen poetic minds, and what an education was this labyrinth of dry logic and extravagant scholasticism. Tired, disgusted, irritated, stupefied, they forgot the ugly dream as soon as possible, ran in the open air, and thought only of the chase, of war and the ladies; they were not so foolish as to turn their eyes a second time towards their crabbed litany; if they did come back to it, that was out of vanity; they wanted to set some Latin fable in their songs, or some learned abstraction, without comprehending a word of it, donning it for fashion's sake, as the ermine of learning. With us of today, general ideas spring up in every mind,—living and flourishing ones; among the laity of that time their root was cut off, and among the clergy there remained of them but a fagot of dead wood. And so mankind was only the better fitted for the life of the body and more capable of violent passions; with regard to this the style of Froissart, artless as it is, deceives us. We think we are listening to the pretty garrulousness [068] of a child at play; beneath this prattle we must distinguish the rude voice of the combatants, bear-hunters and hunters of men too, and the broad, coarse hospitality of feudal manners.

** See the discourse of Jean Petit on the assassination of the Duke of Orleans.*

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At midnight the Count of Foix came to supper in the great hall. "Before him went twelve lighted torches, borne by twelve valets: and the same twelve torches were held before his table and gave much light unto the hall, which was full of knights and squires; and always there were plenty of tables laid out for any person who chose to sup." It must have been an astonishing sight, to see those furrowed faces and powerful frames, with [069] their furred robes and their justicoats streaked under the wavering flashes of the torches. One Christmas day, going into his gallery, he saw that there was but a small fire, and spoke of it aloud. Thereupon a knight, Ernauton d'Espagne, having looked out of the window, saw in the court a number of asses with "billets of wood for the use of the house. He seized the largest of these asses with his load, threw him over his shoulders and carried him up stairs" (there were twenty-four steps), "pushing through the crowd of knights and squires who were round the chimney, and flung ass and load, with his feet upward, on the dogs of the hearth, to the delight of the count, and the astonishment of all." Here are the laughter and the amusement of barbaric giants. They wanted noise, and songs proportioned to it. Froissart tells of a banquet when bishops, counts, abbés, knights, nearly one hundred in number, were seated at table. "There were very many minstrels in the hall, as well those belonging to the count as to the strangers, who, at their leisure, played away their minstrelsy. Those of the duke de Touraine played so loud and so well that the count clothed them 'with cloth of gold trimmed with ermine.'"

"This count," says Froissart, "reigned prudently; in all things he was so perfect that one could not praise [070] him too much. No great contemporary prince could compare with him in sense, honor and wisdom." In that case the great princes of the day were not worth much. With justice and humanity, the good Froissart scarcely troubles himself; he finds murder perfectly natural; indeed, it was the custom; they were no more astonished at it, than at a snap of the jaws in a wolf. Man then resembled a beast of prey, and when a beast of prey has eaten up a sheep nobody is scandalized thereby. This excellent Count de Foix was an assassin, not once only, but ten times. For example, he coveted the castle of Lourdes, and so sent for the captain, Pierre Ernault, who had received it in trust for the prince of Wales. Pierre Ernault "became very thoughtful and doubtful whether to go or not." At last he went, and the count demanded from him the castle of Lourdes. The knight thought awhile what answer to make. However, having well considered, he said: "My lord, in truth I owe you faith and homage, for I am a poor knight of your blood and country; but as for the castle of Lourdes, I will never surrender it to you. You have sent for me, and you may therefore do with me as you please. I hold the castle of Lourdes from the king of England, who has placed me there; and to no other person but to him [071] will I ever surrender it." The Count de Foix, on hearing this answer, was exceedingly wroth, and said, as he

drew his dagger, “Ho, ho, dost thou then say so? By this head, thou hast not said it for nothing.” And, as he uttered these words, he struck him foully with the dagger, so that he wounded him severely in five places, and none of the barons or knights dared to interfere.

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The knight replied, “Ha, ha, my lord, this is not gentle treatment; you sent for me here, and are murdering me.” Having received these five strokes from the dagger, the count ordered him to be cast into the dungeon, which was done; and there he died, for he was ill-cured of his wounds. This dominance of sudden passion, this violence of first impulse, this flesh and blood emotion, and abrupt appeal to physical force, are cropping out [072] continually in the people. At the slightest insult their eyes kindle and blows fall like hail.

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As we were leaving Dax, a diligence passed ours, grazing one of the horses. The conductor leaped down from his seat, a stake in his hand, and was going to fell his *confrère*. Those lords lived and felt something like our conductors, and the Count de Foix was such an one.

I beg pardon of the conductors; I wrong them grievously. The count, not having the fear of the police before his eyes, came at once not to fisticuffs, but to stabs. His son Gaston, while on a visit to the king of Navarre, received a black powder which, according to the king, must forever reconcile the count and his wife; the [073] youth took the powder in a little bag and concealed it in his breast; one day his bastard brother, Yvain, saw the bag while playing with him, wanted to have it, and afterward denounced him to the count. At this the count “began to have suspicions, for he was full of fancies,” and remained so until dinner-time, very thoughtful, haunted and harassed by sombre imaginings. Those stormy brains, filled by warfare and danger with dismal images, hastened to tumult and tempest. The youth came, and began to serve the dishes, tasting the meats, as was usual when the notion of poison was not far from any mind. The count cast his eyes upon him and saw the strings of the bag; the sight fired his veins and made his blood boil; he seized the youth, undid his pourpoint, cut the strings of the bag, and strewed some of the powder over a slice of bread, while the poor youth turned pale with fear, and began to tremble exceedingly. Then he called one of his dogs to him, and gave it him to eat. “The instant the dog had eaten a morsel his eyes rolled round in his head, and he died.” The count said nothing, but rose suddenly, and seizing his knife, threw himself upon his son. But the knights rushed in between them: “For God’s sake, my lord, do not be too hasty, but make further inquiries before you do any ill to your son.” [074]

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The count heaped malediction and insult upon the youth, then suddenly leaped over the table, knife in hand, and fell upon him like a wild beast. But the knights and the squires fell upon their knees before him weeping, and saying: “Ah, ah! my lord, for Heaven’s sake do not kill Gaston; you have no other child.” With great difficulty he restrained himself, doubtless thinking that it was prudent to see if no one else had a part in the matter, and put the youth into the tower at Orthez.

He investigated then, but in a singular fashion, as if he were a famished wolf, wedded to a single idea, bruising himself against it mechanically and brutally, through murder and outcry, killing blindly and without reflecting that his killing is of no use to him. He had many of those who served his son arrested, and “put to [075]
death not less than fifteen after they had suffered the torture; and the reason he gave was, that it was impossible but they must have been acquainted with the secrets of his son, and they ought to have informed him by saying, ‘My lord, Gaston wears constantly on his breast a bag of such and such a form.’ This they did not do and suffered a terrible death for it; which was a pity, for there were not in all Gascony such handsome or well-appointed squires.”

When this search had proved useless he fell back upon his son; he sent for the nobles, the prelates and all the principal persons of his country, related the affair to them, and told them that it was his intention to put the youth to death. But they would not agree to this, and said that the country had need of an heir for its better preservation and defence; “and would not quit Orthez until the count had assured them that Gaston should not be put to death, so great was their affection for him.” Still the youth remained in the tower of Orthez, “where was little light,” always lying alone, unwilling to eat, “cursing the hour that ever he was born or begotten, that he should come to such an end.” On the tenth day the jailer saw all the meats that had been served in a corner, and went and told it to the count. The count was again enraged, like a beast of prey who encounters a remnant of resistance after it has once been satiated; “without saying a word,” he came to the [076]
prison, holding by the point a small knife with which he was cleaning his nails. Then striking his fist upon his son’s throat, he pushed him rudely as he said: “Ha, traitor, why dost thou not eat?” and went away without saying more. His knife had touched an artery; the youth frightened and wan, turned without a word to the other side of the bed, shed his blood and died.

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The count was grieved beyond measure when he heard this, for those violent natures felt only with excess and by contrasts; he had himself shaven and clothed in black. “The body of the youth was borne, with tears and lamentations, to the church of the Augustine Friars at Orthez, where it was buried.” * But such murders left an ill-healed wound in the heart; the dull pain remained, and from time to time some dark shadow crossed [077] the tumult of the banquets. This is why the count never again felt such perfect joy as before.

** The passages from Froissart are from the version of Thomas Johnes. New York: J. Winchester, New World Press.*

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It was a sad time; there is hardly another in which one would have lived so unwillingly. Poetry was imbecile, chivalry was falling into brigandage, religion suffered degradation, the State, disjointed, was crumbling away; the nation, ground down by king, by nobles and by Englishmen, struggled for a hundred years in a slough [078] between the dying middle-age and the modern era which was not yet opened. And yet a man like Ernauton must have experienced a unique and splendid joy when, planted like a Hercules upon his two feet, feeling his shirt of mail upon his breast, he pierced through a hedge of pikes, and wielded his great sword in the sunlight.

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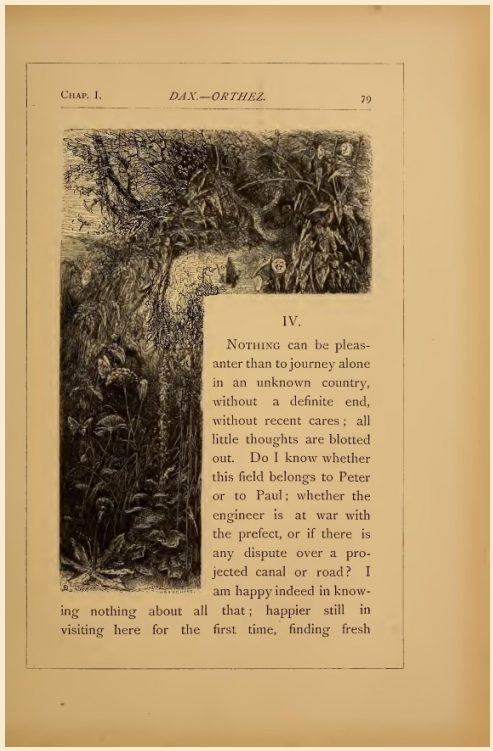
IV

[079]


CHAP. I. DAX.—ORTHEZ. 79

IV.

NOTHING can be pleasanter than to journey alone in an unknown country, without a definite end, without recent cares; all little thoughts are blotted out. Do I know whether this field belongs to Peter or to Paul; whether the engineer is at war with the prefect, or if there is any dispute over a projected canal or road? I am happy indeed in know-ing nothing about all that; happier still in visiting here for the first time, finding fresh

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Nothing can be pleasanter than to journey alone in an unknown country, without a definite end, without recent cares; all little thoughts are blotted out. Do I know whether this field belongs to Peter or to Paul; whether the engineer is at war with the prefect, or if there is any dispute over a projected canal or road? I am happy indeed in know-all that; happier still in first time, finding fresh sensations, and not being troubled by [080] comparisons and souvenirs. I can consider things through-general views, no longer regarding the soil as made the most of by mankind, can forget the useful, think only of the beautiful, and feel the movement of forms and the expression of colors.

The very road seems beautiful to me. What an air of resignation in those old elms. They bud and spread forth in branches, from head to foot, they have such a desire for life, even under this dust. Then come lustrous plane trees, tossing their beautiful and regular leaves. White bindweed, blue campanulas, hang at the edge of the ditches. Is it not strange that these pretty creatures remain so solitary, that they should be fated to die to-morrow, that they should scarcely have looked upon us an instant; that their beauty should have flourished only for its two seconds of admiration? They too have their world, this people of high grasses bending over on themselves; these lizards which wave the thicket of the herbs; these gilded wasps that hum in their chalices. This world here is well worth ours, and I find them happy in opening thus, then in closing their pale eyes to the peaceful whisper of the wind.

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The road, as far as the eye can reach, curves and lifts anew its white girdle around the hills; this sinuous movement is of infinite sweetness; the long riband tightens to their figure their veil of fair harvests or their robe of green meadows.

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These slopes and roundnesses are as expressive as human forms; but how much more varied, how much stranger and richer in attitudes? Those there on the horizon, almost hid behind a troop of others, smile dimly in their timidness, under their crown of vapory gauze; they form a round on the brink of heaven, a fleeting

round that the least disturbance of the air would put out of sight, and which yet regards with tenderness the fretted creatures lost in its bosom. Others, their neighbors, rudely dint the soil with their haunches and their brown slopes; the human structure here half peeps forth, then disappears under the mineral barbarism; here are the children of another age, ever powerful, severe still, unknown and antique races, whose mysterious history the mind searches without willing it. Tawny moors filled with herds mount upon their flanks to the summits; splendid meadows sparkle upon their back. Some among these plunge abruptly away down into depths where they disgorge the streams that they accumulate, and where is gathered all the heat of the burning vault which shines above under the most generous sun. It, meanwhile, embraces and broods over the country; from woods, plains, hills, the great soul of vegetation starts forth mounting to meet its rays. [084]

Here your neighbor, who is engaged in a warm dispute, pulls your sleeve, crying: “The gigot at Orthez doesn’t give cramps in the stomach, does it, sir?”

You start; then in another moment you turn your nose toward the window. But the sensation has disappeared: the mutton of Dax has blotted out everything. The meadows are so many kilogrammes of unmown hay, the trees are so many feet of timber, and the herds are only walking beefsteaks. [085]

AVENUE OF THE CHATEAU AT PAU.

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CHAPTER II. PAU.

I.

Pau is a pretty city, neat, of gay appearance; but the highway is paved with little round stones, the side-walks with small sharp pebbles: so the horses walk on the heads of nails and foot-passengers on the points of them. From Bordeaux to Toulouse such is the usage, such the pavement. At the end of five minutes, your feet tell you in the most intelligible manner that you are two hundred leagues away from Paris.

You meet wagons loaded with wood, of rustic simplicity, the invention of which goes back to the time of [086] Vercingetorix, but the only thing capable of climbing and descending the stony escarpments of the mountains. They are composed of the trunk of a tree placed across the axles and sustaining two oblique hurdles; they are drawn by two great whitish oxen, decked with a piece of hanging cloth, a net of thread upon the head and crowned with ferns, all to shield them from the gray flies. This suggests food for thought; for the skin of man is far more tender than that of the ox, and the gray flies have sworn no peace with our kind. Before the oxen ordinarily marches a peasant, of a distrustful and cunning air, armed with a long switch, and dressed in white woollen vest and brown breeches; behind the wagon comes a little bare-footed boy, very wide awake and very ragged, whose old velvet cap falls like the head of a wrinkled mushroom, and who stops struck with admiration at the magnificent aspect of the diligence.

Those are the true countrymen of Henry IV. As to the pretty ladies in gauzy hats, whose swelling and rustling robes graze the horns of the motionless oxen as they pass, you must not look at them; they would carry your imagination back to the Boulevard de Gand, and you would have gone two hundred leagues only to remain in the same place. I am here on purpose to visit the sixteenth century; one makes a journey for the [087] sake of changing, not place, but ideas. Point out to a Parisian the gate by which Henry IV. entered Paris; he will have great difficulty in calling up the armor, the halberts and the whole victorious and tumultuous procession that l’Etoile describes: it is because he passed by there to-day on such and such business, that yesterday he met there a friend, while last year he looked upon this gate in the midst of a public festival.

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All these thoughts hurry along with the force of habit, repelling and stifling the historic spectacle which was going to lift itself into full light and unroll itself before the mind. Set down the same man in Pau: there he knows neither hotels, nor people, nor shops; his imagination, out of its element, may run at random; no known object will trip him up and make him fall into the cares of interest, the passion of to-day; he enters into the past as a matter of course, and walks there as if at home, at his ease. It was eight o'clock in the morning; not a visitor at the castle, no one in the courts nor on the terrace; I should not have been too much astonished at meeting the Béarnais, "that lusty gallant, that very devil," who was sharp enough to get for himself the [088] name of "the good king."

His chateau is very irregular; it is only when seen from the valley that any grace and harmony can be found in it. Above two rows of pointed roofs and old houses, it stands out alone against the sky and gazes upon the valley in the distance; two bell-turrets project from the front toward the west; the oblong body follows, and two massive brick towers close the line with their esplanades and battlements. It is connected with the city by a narrow old bridge, by a broad modern one with the park, and the foot of its terrace is bathed by a dark but lovely stream. Near at hand, this arrangement disappears; a fifth tower upon the north side deranges the symmetry.

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The great egg-shaped court is a mosaic of incongruous masonry; above the porch, a wall of pebbles from the Gave, and of red bricks crossed like a tapestry design; opposite, fixed to the wall, a row of medallions in stone; upon the sides, doors of every form and age; dormer windows, windows square, pointed, embattled,

with stone mullions garlanded with elaborate reliefs. This masquerade of styles troubles the mind, yet not unpleasantly; it is unpretending and artless; each century has built according to its own fancy, without concerning itself about its neighbor.

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On the first floor is shown a great tortoise-shell, which was the cradle of Henry IV. Carved chests, dressing-tables, tapestries, clocks of that day, the bed and arm-chair of Jeanne d'Albret, a complete set of furniture in the taste of the Renaissance striking and sombre, painfully labored yet magnificent in style, carrying the mind at once back toward that age of force and effort, of boldness in invention, of unbridled pleasures and terrible toil, of sensuality and of heroism. Jeanne d'Albret, mother of Henry IV., crossed France in order that she might, according to her promise, be confined in this castle. "A princess," says d'Aubigné, "having nothing of the woman about her but the sex, a soul entirely given to manly things, a mind mighty in great affairs, a heart unconquerable by adversity." [092]

II.

She sang an old Bearnese song when she brought him into the world. They say that the aged grandfather rubbed the lips of the new-born child with a clove of garlic, poured into his mouth a few drops of Jurançon wine, and carried him away in his dressing-gown.

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The child was born in the chamber which opens into the tower of Mazères, on the south-west corner. "His grandfather took him away from his father and mother, and would have this child brought up at his door, reproaching his daughter and his son-in-law with having lost several of their children through French luxuries. And, indeed, he brought him up in the Bearnese manner, that is, bareheaded and barefoot, often with no more nicety than is shown in the bringing up of children among the peasantry. This odd resolution [093]

was successful, and formed a body in which heat and cold, unmeasured toil and all sorts of troubles were unable to produce any change, thus apportioning his nourishment to his condition, as though God wished at that time to prepare a sure remedy and a firm heart of steel against the iron knots of our dire calamities."

His mother, a warm and severe Calvinist, when he was fifteen years old, led him through the Catholic army to la Rochelle, and gave him to her followers as their general. At sixteen years old, at the combat of Arnay-le-Duc, he led the first charge of cavalry. What an education and what men! Their descendants were just now passing in the streets, going to school to compose Latin verses and recite the pastorals of Massillon.

Those old wars are the most poetic in French history; they were made for pleasure rather than interest. It was a chase in which adventures, dangers, emotions were found, in which men lived in the sunlight, on horseback, amidst flashes of fire, and where the body, as well as the soul, had its enjoyment and its exercise. [094] Henry carries it on as briskly as a dance, with a Gascon's fire and a soldier's ardor, with abrupt sallies, and pursuing his point against the enemy as with the ladies. This is no spectacle of great masses of well-disciplined men, coming heavily into collision and falling by thousands on the field, according to the rules of good tactics. The king leaves Pau or Nérac with a little troop, picks up the neighboring garrisons on his way, scales a fortress, intercepts a body of arquebusiers as they pass, extricates himself pistol in hand from the midst of a hostile troop, and returns to the feet of Mlle. de Tignonville.

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They arrange their plan from day to day; nothing is done unless unexpectedly and by chance. Enterprises are strokes of fortune. Here is one which Sully had recounted by his secretary; I like to listen to old words among old monuments, and to feel the mutual fitness of objects and of style: "The king of Navarre formed the [095] design of seizing on the city of Eause, which, by good right, was his, and where he had chance of fine fortune; for deeming that the inhabitants, who had not been willing to receive a garrison, should have respect for his person, who was their lord, he determined to march all day long in order to enter in with few people, so as to create no alarm, and, indeed, having taken only fifteen or sixteen of you, gentlemen, who placed yourselves nearest to him, among whom were you, with simple cuirasses under your hunting tunics, two swords and two pistols, he surprised the gate of the city and entered in before they of the guard were able to take up arms. But one of these gave the alarm to him who was sentinel at the portal, and he cut the cord in the slide of the portcullis, so that it fell immediately almost on the croup of your horse and that of your cousin, M. de Béthune the elder, and hindered the troop which was coming up on the gallop from entering, so that the king and you fifteen or sixteen alone remained shut up in this city, where all the people, being armed, fell upon you in divers troops and at divers times, while the tocsin rang furiously, and a cry of *'Arm, arm!' and 'Kill, Kill!* resounded on all sides,—seeing which, the king of Navarre, from the first troop which came up, some fifty strong, in part well, in part ill armed, he, I say, marching, pistol in hand, straight at them, called out to you: [096] 'Come now, my friends, my comrades; it is here that you must show courage and resolution, for thereon depends our safety; let each one then follow me and do as I do, and not fire until the pistol touches.' At the same time, hearing three or four cry out: 'Fire at that scarlet tunic, at that white plume, for it is the king of Navarre,' he charged on them so impetuously that, without firing more than five or six times, they took fright and withdrew in several troops. Others in like manner came against you three or four times; but as soon as they saw that they were broken, they fired a few times and turned away until, having rallied nearly two hundred together, they forced you to gain a doorway, and two of you went up to give a signal to the rest of the troop that the king was there, and that the gate must be burst open, as the draw-bridge had not been raised. Whereupon each one began working, and then several among that populace who loved the king, and others who feared to offend him, began raising a tumult in his favor; finally, after a few arquebusades and pistol-shots from both sides, there arose such dissension among them, some crying, 'We must yield;' others, 'We must defend ourselves;' that the irresolution afforded means and time for opening the gates, and for all the troops to present [097] themselves, at the head of whom the king placed himself, and saw most of the peoples fleeing and the consuls [098] with their chaperons crying: 'Sire, we are your subjects and your peculiar servants. Alas! allow not the sacking of this city, which is yours, on account of the madness of a few worthless fellows, who should be driven out. He placed himself, I said, at the head to prevent pillage: thus there was committed neither violence, nor disorder, nor any other punishment, except that four, who had fired at the white plume, were hung, to the joy of all the other inhabitants, who thought not that they should be quiet on such ood terms." [099]

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At Cahors he burst in the two gates with petard and axe, and fought five days and five nights in the city, carrying house after house. Are not these chivalric adventures and poetry in action? “So, so, cavaliers,” cried the Catholics at Marmande; “a pistol-shot for love of the mistress; for your court is too full of lovely ladies to know any lack of them.” Henry escaped like a true paladin, and lost his victory at Contras in order to carry to the beautiful Corisandre the flags that he had taken. To act, to dare, to enjoy, to expend force and trouble like a prodigal, to be given up to the present sensation, be forever urged by passions forever lively, support and search the extremes of all contrasts, that was the life of the sixteenth century. Henry at Fontenay “worked in [100] the trenches with pick and mattock.” On his return there was nothing but feasting.

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“We came together,” says Marguerite, “to take walks in company, either in a lovely garden where are long alleys of cypress and laurel, or in the park which I had caused to be made, in alleys three thousand paces long, which border the river; and the rest of the day was spent in all sorts of suitable pleasures, a ball ordinarily filling the afternoon and the evening.” The grave Sully “took a mistress like the rest.” In visiting the [101] restored dining-hall, you repeople it involuntarily with the sumptuous costumes described by Brantôme: ladies “clad in orange-color and gold lace, robes of cloth of silver, of crisped cloth of gold, stuffs perfectly stiff with ornaments and embroidery. Queen Marguerite in a robe of flesh-colored Spanish velvet, heavily loaded with gold lace, so decked out with plumes and precious stones as nothing ever was before.” I said to M. de Ronsard: “Do you not seem to see this beautiful queen, in such guise, appearing as the lovely Aurora, when she is going to spring up before the day, with her beautiful pale face, bordered with its ruby and carnation color?” At the ball in the evening, she loved to dance “the *pavane* of Spain and the Italian *pazzemano.* The passages in this were so well danced, the steps so judiciously conducted, the rests so beautifully made, that you knew not which most to admire, the beautiful manner of dancing, or the majesty of the steps, representing now gayety, now a fine and grave disdain.”

You may well believe that the good king was not sparing of sport.

“Il fut de ses sujets le vainqueur et le père”

The maids of honor of Marguerite could bear witness to this; hence intrigues, quarrels and conjugal [102]
comedies, one of which is very prettily and very artlessly told by the queen; Mlle. de Fosseuse was the heroine. “The pain seized her one morning, at the break of day, while in bed in the chamber of the maids, and she sent for my physician and begged him to go and inform the king my husband, which he did. We were in bed in the same chamber, but in separate beds, according to our custom. When the physician gave him this bit of news, he was in great trouble, not knowing what to do, fearful on the one hand lest she should be discovered, and on the other lest she should want help, for he loved her dearly. He determined, finally, to confess all to me, and to beg me go to her assistance, for he knew well that, whatever might have passed, he should always find me ready to serve him in anything that could please him. He opens my curtain and says to me: ‘Dearest, I have concealed from you one thing which I must confess to you: I beg you to excuse me for it, and not to remember all that I have said to you on this subject. But oblige me so much as to get up at once, and go to the assistance of Fosseuse, who is very ill; I am sure that you would not wish, when you see her in that condition, to resent what is past. You know how much I love her; I beg that you will oblige me in this matter.’ I told him that I honored him too much to be offended with anything coming from him. That I would [103]
be off and do as if it were my daughter; that in the mean time he should go to the chase and take everybody with him, so that no talk of it should be heard.

“I had her promptly removed from the chamber of the maids and put into a chamber apart, with my physician and women to wait upon her, and gave her my best assistance. God willed that it should be only a daughter, which moreover was dead. After the delivery, she was carried to the chamber of the maids, where, though all possible discretion was used, they could not prevent the report from spreading throughout the castle. When the king my husband was returned from the chase, he went to see her according to his custom; she begged him that I would come to see her, as I was accustomed to visit all my maids when they were ill, thinking to stop by this means the spread of the report. The king my husband came into the chamber and found that I had gone to bed again, for I was tired with getting up so early, and with the trouble I had had in rendering her assistance. He begged that I would get up and go to see her; I told him that I had done so when she had need of my aid, but now she no longer had occasion for it; that if I went there, I should reveal rather than cloak the truth, and that everybody would point their finger at me. He was seriously vexed with me, and [104]
this was far from pleasant to me, for it seemed that I had not deserved such a recompense for what I had done in the morning. She often put him into similar mood toward me.”

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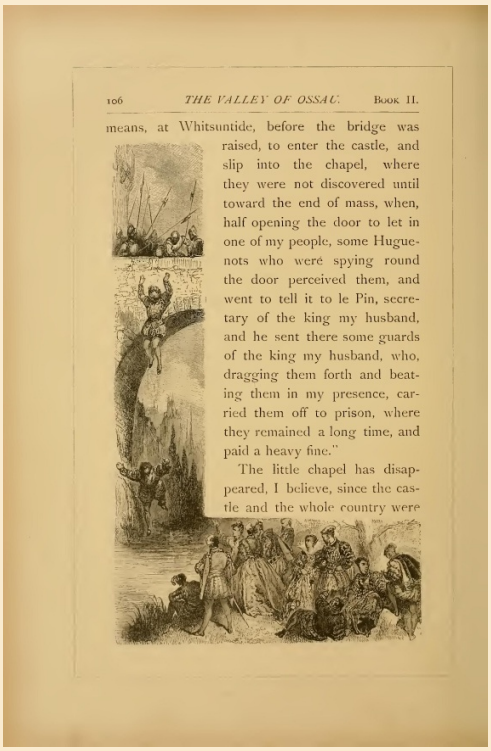
Compassionate souls, who admire the complaisance of the queen, do not pity her too much: she punished the king, by imitating him, at Usson and elsewhere.

And yet Pan was a lesser Geneva. Amidst these violences and this voluptuousness, devotion was warm; they [105]
went to sermons or to the church, with the same air as to the battle-field or the rendezvous. This is because religion then was not a virtue, but a passion. In such case, the neighboring passions, instead of extinguishing it, only inflame; the heart overflows on that side as on the others. When the lazzarone has stabbed his enemy, he finds a second pleasure, says Beyle, in prating about his anger, alongside a wire grating in a great box of black wood. The Hindoo that gets excited and howls at the feast of Juggernaut, to the hubbub of fifty thousand tom-toms, the American Methodist who weeps and cries aloud his sins in a revival, feels something the same sort of pleasure as an Italian enthusiast at the opera. That explains and reconciles the zeal and the gallantry of Marguerite.

“They only allowed me,” said she, “to have mass said in a little chapel not more than three or four paces long, which, narrow as it was, was full when there were seven or eight of us there. So when they wanted to say mass, they raised the bridge of the castle, for fear that the Catholics of the country, who had no exercise of their religion, should hear of it; for they had an infinite desire to assist at the holy sacrifice, of which they had been deprived for several years. And, urged by this sacred desire, the inhabitants of Pau found means, at [106]
Whitsuntide, before the bridge was raised, to enter the castle, and slip into the chapel, where they were not discovered until toward the end of mass, when, half opening the door to let in one of my people, some Huguenots who were spying round the door perceived them, and went to tell it to le Pin, secretary of the king my husband, and he sent there some guards of the king my husband, who, dragging them forth and beating them in my presence, carried them off to prison, where they remained a long time, and paid a heavy fine.”


106 THE VALLEY OF OSSAU. Book II.

means, at Whitsuntide, before the bridge was raised, to enter the castle, and slip into the chapel, where they were not discovered until toward the end of mass, when, half opening the door to let in one of my people, some Huguenots who were spying round the door perceived them, and went to tell it to le Pin, secretary of the king my husband, and he sent there some guards of the king my husband, who, dragging them forth and beating them in my presence, carried them off to prison, where they remained a long time, and paid a heavy fine."

The little chapel has disappeared, I believe, since the castle and the whole country were

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The little chapel has disappeared, I believe, since the castle and the whole country were restored to the [107]
Catholic worship. Besides, this treatment arose from humanity: Saint-Pont, at Macon, “afforded the ladies, as they went out from the banquets that he gave, the pleasure of seeing a certain number of prisoners leap off from the bridge.” Such were these men, extreme in everything, in fanaticism, in pleasure, in violence; never did the fountain of desires flow fuller and deeper; never did more vigorous passions unfold themselves with more of sap and greenness. Walking through these silent halls, disturbed from time to time by fair invalids or pale young consumptives who walk there, I fancied that enervation of the inner nature came from the enervation of the bodies. We spend our time within doors, taken up with discussions, reflections and reading; the gentleness of manners removes dangers from us, and industrial progress fatigues. They lived in the open air, ever following the chase and in war. “Queen Catherine was very fond of riding, up to the age of sixty and more, and of making great and active journeys, even after she had often fallen, to the great injury of her body, for she was several times so far hurt as to break her leg and wound her head.” The rude exercises hardened their nerves; their warmer blood, stirred by incessant peril, urged upon the brain impetuous caprices; they made history, while we write it. [108]

III.

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The park is a great wood on a hill, embedded among meadows and harvests. You walk in long solitary alleys, under colonnades of superb oaks, while to the left the lofty stems of the copses mount in close ranks upon the back of the hill. The fog was not yet lifted; there was no motion in the air; not a corner of blue sky, not a sound in all the country. The song of a bird came for an instant from the midst of the ash-trees, then sadly ceased. Is that then the sky of the south, and was it necessary to come to the happy country of the Béarnais to find such melancholy impressions? A little by-way brought us to a bank of the Gave: in a long pool [109] of water was growing an army of reeds twice the height of a man; their grayish spikes and their trembling leaves bent and whispered under the wind; a wild flower near by shed a vanilla perfume. We gazed on the broad country, the ranges of rounded hills, the silent plain under the dull dome of the sky. Three hundred paces away the Gave rolls between marshalled banks, which it has covered with sand; in the midst of the waters may be seen the moss-grown piles of a ruined bridge. One is at ease here, and yet at the bottom of the heart one feels a vague unrest; the soul is softened and loses itself in melancholy and tender revery. Suddenly the clock strikes, and one has to go and prepare to take his soup between two commercial travellers.

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IV.

To-day the sun shines. On my way to the *Place Nationale*, I remarked a poor, half-ruined church, which had [110]
been turned into a coachhouse; they have fastened upon it a carrier's sign. The arcades, in small gray stones, still round themselves with an elegant boldness; beneath are stowed away carts and casks and pieces of wood; here and there workmen were handling wheels. A broad ray of light fell upon a pile of straw, and made the sombre corners seem yet darker; the pictures that one meets with outweigh those one has come to seek.

From the esplanade which is opposite, the whole valley and the mountains beyond may be seen; this first sight of a southern sun, as it breaks from the rainy mists, is admirable; a sheet of white light stretches from one horizon to another without meeting a single cloud. The heart expands in this immense space; the very air is festal; the dazzled eyes close beneath the brightness which deluges them and which runs over, radiated from the burning dome of heaven. The current of the river sparkles like a girdle of jewels; the chains of hills, yesterday veiled and damp, extend at their own sweet will beneath the warming, penetrating rays, and mount range upon range to spread out their green robe to the sun. In the distance, the blue Pyrenees look like a [111]
bank of clouds; the air that bathes them shapes them into aerial forms, vapory phantoms, the farthest of which vanish in the canescent horizon—dim contours, that might be taken for a fugitive sketch from the lightest of pencils.

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In the midst of the serrate chain the peak du *Midi d' Ossau* lifts its abrupt cone; at this distance, forms are softened, colors are blended, the Pyrenees are only the graceful bordering of a smiling landscape and of the magnificent sky. There is nothing imposing about them nor severe; the beauty here is serene, and the pleasure pure. [112]

The statue of Henry IV., with an inscription in Latin and in patois, is on the esplanade; the armor is finished so perfectly that it might make an armorer jealous. But why does the king wear so sad an air? His neck is ill at ease on his shoulders; his features are small and full of care; he has lost his gayety, his spirit, his confidence in his fortune, his proud bearing. His air is neither that of a great nor a good man, nor of a man of intellect; his face is discontented, and one would say that he was bored with Pau. I am not sure that he was wrong: and yet the city passes for agreeable; the climate is very mild, and invalids who fear the cold pass the winter in it. Balls are given in the clubs; the English abound, and it is well known that in the matter of cookery, of beds and inns, these people are the first reformers in the universe.

They would have done well in reforming the vehicles: the rickety little diligences of the country are drawn by gaunt jades which descend the hills on a walk, and make stops in the ascent. All encouragements of the whip are thrown away on their backs; you could not bear them any grudge on that account, so piteous is their appearance, with their ridgy backbones, hanging ears, and shrunken bellies. The coachman rises on his seat, [113]
pulls the reins, waves his arms, bawls and storms, clambers down and up again; his is a rude calling, but he has a soul like his calling. His passengers are of small consequence to him; he treats them as useful packages, a necessary counterpoise over which he has rights. At the foot of a mountain, the machine got its wheel into a ditch and tilted over; every one leaped out after the manner of Panurge's sheep.

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He went running from one to another to get them back, especially exhorting the people from the impériale, and pointing out to them the danger to the vehicle, which was leaning back, and so needed ballast in front. They however remained cool, and went on afoot, while he followed grumbling and abusing their selfishness. [114]

VI.

The harvests, pale in the north, here wave with a reflex of reddish gold. A warmer sun makes the vigorous verdure shine more richly; the stalks of maize spring from the earth like discharges of rockets, and their strong, wrinkled leaves fall over in plumes; such burning rays are needed to urge the sap through those gross fibres and gild the massy spike.

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Toward Gan, the hills, over which undulates the road, draw nearer together, and you travel on through little green valleys, planted with ash and alder in clusters, according to the caprices of the slopes, and with their feet bathed in living water; a pellucid stream borders the road, with waters sombre and hurried under the [115] cover of the trees, and then, by fits and starts, brilliant and blue as the sky. Four times in the course of a league it encounters a mill, leaps and foams, then resumes its course, hurried and stealthy; during two leagues we have its company, half hid among the trees that it nourishes, and breathing the freshness it exhales. In these gorges, water is the mother of all life and the nurse of all beauty.

FULL-SIZE **--** ***Medium-Size***

At Louvie the valley of Ossau opens up between two mountains covered with brushwood, bald in places, spotted with moss and heather from which the rocks peep out like bones, while the flanks start forth in grayish embossments or bend in dark crevices. The plain of the harvests and meadows buries itself in the anfractuosities as if in creeks; its contour folds itself about each new mass; it essays to scale the lower ridges, and stops, vanquished by the barren rock. We go through three or four hamlets whitened by dust, whose roofs shine with a dull color like tarnished lead. Then the horizon is shut off; Mount Gourzy, robed in forests, [116] bars the route; beyond and above, like a second barrier, the peak of the Ger lifts its bald head, silvered with snows. The carriage slowly scales an acclivity which winds upon the flank of the mountain; at the turn of a rock, in the shelter of a small gorge, may be seen Eaux Bonnes.

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[117]

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CHAPTER III. EAUX BONNES.

I.

I thought that here I should find the country; a village like a hundred others, with long roofs of thatch or tiles, with crannied walls and shaky doors, and in the courts a pell-mell of carts with fagots, and tools, and domestic animals, in short, the whole picturesque and charming unconstraint of country life. I find a Paris street and the promenades of the Bois de Boulogne.

Never was country less countrified: you skirt a row of houses drawn up in line, like a row of soldiers when carrying arms, all pierced regularly with regular windows, decked with signs and posters, bordered by a side-walk, and having the disagreeably decent aspect of *hotels garnis.* These uniform buildings, mathematical lines, this disciplined and formal architecture make a laughable contrast with the green ridges that flank [118] them. It seems grotesque that a little warm water should have imported into these mountain hollows civilization and the cuisine.

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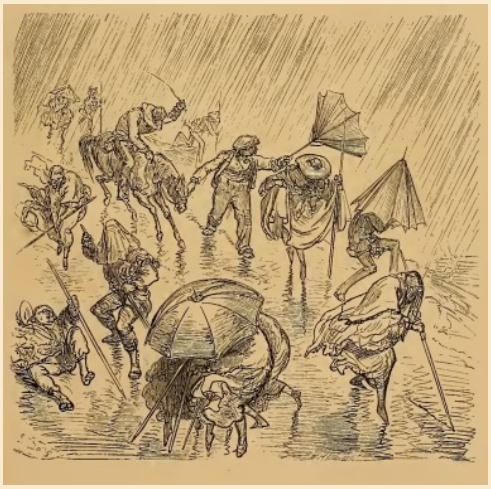
This singular village tries every year to extend itself, and with great difficulty, so straitened and stifled is it in its ravine; they break the rock, they open trenches on the declivity, they suspend houses over the torrent, they stick others, as it were, to the side of the mountain, they pile up their chimneys even to the roots of the beech-trees; thus they construct behind the principal street a melancholy lane which dips down or raises [119]

itself as it can, muddy, steep, half filled with temporary stalls and wooden wine-shops, lodging-places of artisans and guides; at last it drops down to the Gave, into a nook decked out with drying linen, which is washed in the same place with the hogs.



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Of all places in the world, Eaux Bonnes is the most unpleasant on a rainy day, and rainy days are frequent there; the clouds are engulfed between two walls of the valley of Ossau, and crawl slowly along half way up [120] the height; the summits disappear, the floating masses come together, accumulate because the gorge has no outlet, and fall in fine cold rain. The village becomes a prison; the fog creeps to the earth, envelopes the houses, extinguishes the light already obscured by the mountain; the English might think themselves in London.

The visitors look through the window-panes at the jumbled forms of the trees, the water that drips from the leaves, the mourning of the shivering and humid woods; they listen to the gallop of belated riders, who return with clinging and pendent skirts, like fine birds with their plumage disordered by the rain; they try whist in their despondency; some go down to the reading-room and ask for the most blood-stained pages of Paul Féval or Frédéric Souliê; they can read nothing but the gloomiest dramas; they discover leanings towards suicide in themselves, and construct the theory of assassination. They look at the clock and bethink themselves that the doctor has ordered them to drink three times a day; then they button up their overcoats with an air of resignation, and climb the long, stiff slope of the streaming road; the lines of umbrellas and soaked mantles are a pitiable spectacle; they come, splashing through the water, and seat themselves in the drinking-hall. Each one takes his syrup-flask from its numbered place on a sort of étagère, and the throng of the drinkers [121] form in line about the tap. For the rest, patience is soon acquired here; amid such idleness the mind goes to sleep, the fog puts an end to ideas, and you follow the crowd mechanically; you act only at the instigation of others, and you look at objects without receiving from them any reaction.

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After the first glass, you wait an hour before taking another; meanwhile you march up and down, elbowed by the dense groups, who drag themselves laboriously along between the columns. Not a seat to be had, except two wooden benches where the ladies sit, with their feet resting upon the damp stones: the economy of the administration supposes that the weather is always fine. Wearied and dejected faces pass before the eyes without awaking any interest. For the twentieth time you look over the marble trinkets, the shop with [122] razors and scissors, a map that hangs on the wall. What is there that one is not capable of on a rainy day, if obliged to keep moving for an hour between four walls, amidst the buzzing of two hundred people? You study the posters, contemplate assiduously some figures which pretend to represent the manners of the country: these are elegant and rosy shepherds, who lead to the dance smiling shepherdesses rosier than themselves. You stretch your neck out at the door only to see a gloomy passage where invalids are soaking their feet in a trough of warm water, all in a row like school-children on cleaning and excursion days. After these distractions you return to your lodging, and find yourselves tête-à-tête, in close conversation with your chest of drawers and your light-stand.

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II. [123]

People who have any appetite take refuge at the table; they did not count upon the musicians. First we saw a blind man come in, a heavy, thick-headed Spaniard, then the violinists of the country, then another blind man. They play pot-pourris of waltzes, country dances, bits from operas, strung one upon another, galloping along, above the note or below it, with admirable fearlessness, despoiling every repertory in their musical

race. The next day we had three Germans, tall as towers, stiff as stones, perfectly phlegmatic, playing without a gesture and passing the plate without a word; at least they play in time.

FULL-SIZE -- ***Medium-Size***

On the third day the musicians of a neighboring village appeared, a violin and flageolet; they executed their [124]
piece with such energy and discord, in tones so piercing, so long-drawn-out and rending, that, by universal consent, they were put out doors. They began again under the windows.

A good appetite is a consolation for all ills; so much the worse if you will, or so much the better for humanity. It is necessary to bear up against the tediousness, the rain and the music of Eaux Bonnes. The renewed blood then bears gayety to the brain, and the body persuades the soul that everything is for the best in the best of worlds. You will have pity on those poor musicians as you leave the table; Voltaire has proved that an easy digestion induces compassion, and that a good stomach gives a good heart. Between forty and fifty years of age, a man is handsome when, after dinner, he folds up his napkin and begins his indispensable promenade. He walks with legs apart, chest out, resting heavily on his stick, his cheeks colored by a slight warmth, humming between his teeth some old refrain of his youth; it seems to him that the universe is brought nicely together; he smiles and is bland, he is the first to reach you his hand. What machines we are! Yet why complain of it? My good neighbor would tell you that you have the key of your mechanism; turn the [125]
spring toward the side of happiness. This may be kitchen philosophy,—very well. He who practised it did not trouble himself about the name.

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III. [126]

FULL-SIZE -- ***Medium-Size***

On sunny days, we live in the open air. A sort of yard, called the English garden, stretches between the street and the mountain, carpeted with a poor turf, withered and full of holes; the ladies constitute it their drawing-room and work there; the dandies, lying on several chairs at once, read their journal and proudly smoke their cigar; the little girls, in embroidered pantalons, chatter with coquettish gestures and graceful little ways; they are trying in advance the parts they will play as lovely dolls. But for the red cassocks of the little jumping peasants, the aspect is that of the Champs Elysees. You leave this spot by beautiful shaded walks which mount in zigzags upon the flanks of the two mountains, one above the torrent, the other above [127] the city; toward noon, numbers of bathers may be met here lying upon the heather, nearly all with a novel in hand.

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These lovers of the country resemble the banker who loved concerts; he enjoyed them because then he could calculate his dividends. Pardon these hapless creatures; they are punished for knowing how to read and not knowing how to look about.

IV.

Anomalous beeches sustain the slopes here; no description can give an idea of these stunted colossi, eight feet high, and round which three men could not reach. Beaten back by the wind that desolates the declivity, [128] their sap has been accumulating for centuries in huge, stunted, twisted and interlaced branches; all embossed with knots misshapen and blackened, they stretch and coil themselves fantastically, like limbs swollen by disease and distended by a supreme effort.

FULL-SIZE **--** ***Medium-Size***

Through the split bark may be seen the vegetable muscles enrolling themselves about the trunk, and crushing each other like the limbs of wrestlers. These squat torsos, half overthrown, almost horizontal, lean toward the plain; but their feet bury themselves among the rocks with such ties, that sooner than break that [129] forest of roots, one might tear out a side of the mountain. Now and then a trunk, rotted by water, breaks open, hideously eventerated; the edges of the wound spread farther apart with every year; they wear no longer the shape of trees, and yet they live, and cannot be conquered by winter, by their slope, nor by time, but boldly put forth into their native air their whitish shoots. If, under the shades of evening, you pass by the tortured tops and yawning trunks of these old inhabitants of the mountains, when the wind is beating the branches, you seem to hear a hollow plaint, extorted by a century’s toil; these strange forms recall the fantastic creatures of the old Scandinavian mythology. You think on the giants imprisoned by fate, between walls that contracted day by day, and bent them down and lessened them, and then returned them to the light, after a thousand years of torture, furious, misshapen and dwarfed.

V.

Toward four o’clock the cavalcades return; the small horses of the country are gentle, and gallop without too much effort; far away in the sunlight gleam the white and luminous veils of the ladies; nothing is more

graceful than a pretty woman on horseback, when she is neither imprisoned in a black riding-habit, nor [130]
topped with a chimney-pot hat. Nobody here wears this funereal, poverty-stricken English costume; in a gay country people assume gay colors; the sun is a oood counsellor. It is forbidden to return at a gallop, o which is reason enough why everybody should return at that gait. Ah, the great art of imitating the coming in of the cattle! They bend in the saddle, the highway resounds, the windows quiver, they sweep proudly before the saunterers who stop to gaze; it is a triumph; the administration of Eaux Bonnes does not know the human heart, especially the heart of woman.

In the evening, everybody meets on a level promenade; it is a flat road half a league long, cut in the mountain of Gourzy. The remainder of the country is nothing but steeps and precipices; any one who for eight days has known the fatigue of climbing bent double, of stumbling down hill, of studying the laws of equilibrium while flat on his back, will find it agreeable to walk on level ground, and to move his feet freely without thinking of his head; it gives a perfectly new sensation of security and ease.

FULL-SIZE -- ***Medium-Size***

The road winds along a wooded hill-side, furrowed by winter torrents into whitish ravines; a few wasted springs slip away under the stones in their stream beds, and cover them with climbing plants; you walk under the [131]
[132]
massive beeches, then skirt along an inclined plane, peopled with ferns, where feed the tinkling herds; the [133]
heat has abated, the air is soft, a perfume of healthy and wild verdure reaches you on the lightest breeze; fair white-robed promenaders pass by in the twilight with ruffles of lace and floating muslins that rise and flutter like the wings of a bird. Every day we went to a seat upon a rock at the end of this road; from there, through the whole valley of Ossau, you follow the torrent grown into a river; the rich valley, a mosaic of yellow harvests and green fields, broadly opens out to the confines of the landscape, and allows the eye to lose itself in the dim distance of Béarn. From each side three mountains strike out their feet towards the river, and cause the outline of the plain to rise and fall in waves; the furthest slope down like pyramids, and their pale blue declivities stand out upon the rosy zone of the dim sky. In the depth of the gorges it is already dark; but turn around and you may see the summit of the Ger, gleaming with a soft carnation cherishing the last smile of the sun.

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[134]

FULL-SIZE -- ***Medium-Size***

VI.

On Sunday a procession of fine toilets goes up toward the church. This church is a round box, of stone and plaster, built for fifty persons but made to hold two hundred. Every half-hour the tide of the faithful ebbs and flows. Invalid priests abound and say as many masses as may be wanted: everything at Eaux Bonnes suffers for want of room; they form in line for prayers as for drinking, and are as crowded at the chapel as at the tap.

Occasionally a purveyor of public pleasures undertakes the duty of enlivening the afternoon; an eloquent poster announces the *jeu du canard*. They fasten a perch to a tree, a cord to the perch, and a duck to the cord; the most serious-minded people follow the preparation with marked interest. I have seen men who yawn at the opera form a ring, under a hot sun, for a whole hour in order to witness the decapitation of the poor hanging creature. If you are generous-minded and greedy of sensations in addition, you give two sous to a [135]
small boy; in consideration of which he has his eyes bandaged, is made to turn round and round, has an old sabre given to him, and is pushed forward, in the midst of the laughter and outcry of the spectators.

FULL-SIZE **--** ***Medium-Size***

“Right! left! halloo! strike! forward!” he knows not which to heed, and cuts away into the air. If by rare chance he hits the creature, if by rarer chance he strikes the neck, or if, indeed, he takes off the head by miracle, he carries off the duck to have it cooked, and eat it. The public is not exacting in matter of amusement. If it were announced that a mouse was to drown itself in a pool, they would run as if to a fire. "Why not?” said my neighbor, an odd, abrupt sort of man: “This is a tragedy and a perfectly regular one; see [136]
if it has not all the classic parts. First, the exposition; the instruments of torture that are displayed, the crowd which comes together, the distance that is marked, the animal that is fastened up. It is a protasis of the complex order, as M. Lysidas used to say. Secondly, the action; every time that a small boy starts, you are in suspense, you rise on tip-toe, your heart leaps, you are as interested in the pendent animal as in a fellow-creature. Do you say that the action is always the same? Simplicity is the characteristic of great works, and this one is after the Indian style. Thirdly, the catastrophe; if ever it was bloody it is so here. As to the passions, they are those demanded by Aristotle, terror and pity. See how shiveringly the poor creature lifts its head, when it feels the current of air from the sword! With what a lamentable and resigned look it awaits the stroke! The chorus of spectators takes part in the action, praises or blames, just as in the antique tragedy. In short, the public is right in being amused, and pleasure is never wrong.”

“You talk like la Harpe; this duck would accept his lot in patience, if he could hear you. And the ball, what do you say of that?”

“It is worth as much as the one at the Hôtel de France with fine people; our dancing is nothing but walking, [137]
a pretext for conversation. Look how the servants and the guides dance; such cuts and pigeon wings! they go into it from pure fun, with all their heart, they feel the pleasure of motion, the impulse of their muscles; this is the true dance invented by joy and the need of physical activity. These fellows fall to and handle each other like timbers. That great girl there is servant at my hotel; say, does not that tall figure, that serious air, that proud attitude, recall the statues of antiquity? Force and health are always the first of beauties. Do you think that the languid graces, the conventional smiles of our quadrilles would bring together all this crowd? We get further away from Nature with every day; our life is all in the brain, and we spend our time in composing and listening to set phrases. See how I am uttering them now; to-morrow, I turn over a new leaf, buy a stout stick, put on gaiters and tramp over the country. You do the same; let each go his own way, and try not to come together.”

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[138]

FULL-SIZE **--** ***Medium-Size***

CHAPTER IV. LANDSCAPES.

I.

I have determined to find some pleasure in my walks; have come out alone by the first path that offered itself, and walk straight on as chance may lead. Provided you have noted two or three prominent points, you are sure of finding the way back. You can now enjoy the unexpected, and discover the country. To know where you are going and by what way is certain boredom; the imagination deflowers the landscape in advance. It works and builds according to its own pleasure; then when you reach your goal all must be overturned; that spoils your disposition; the mind keeps its bent, and the beauty it has fancied prejudices that which it sees; it fails to understand this, because it is already taken up with another. I suffered a most [139] grievous disenchantment when I saw the sea for the first time: it was a morning in autumn; flecks of purplish cloud dappled the sky; a gentle breeze covered the sea with little uniform waves. I seemed to see one of those long stretches of beet-root that are found in the environs of Paris, intersected by patches of green cabbages and bands of russet barley. The distant sails looked like the wings of homeward-bound pigeons. The view seemed to me confined; the artists, in their pictures, had represented the sea as greater. It was three days before I could get back the sensation of immensity.

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II. [140]

The course of the Valentin is nothing but a long fall between multitudes of rocks. All along the *promenade Eynard,* for half a league, you may hear it rumbling under your feet.

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At the bridge of Discoo, its standing-ground fails it altogether; it falls into an amphitheatre, from shelf to shelf, in jets that cross each other and mingle their flakes of foam; then under an arcade of rocks and stones, it eddies in deep basins, whose edges it has polished, and where the grayish emerald of its waters diffuses a soft and peaceful reflection.

FULL-SIZE -- Medium-Size

[141]
[142]
[143]

Suddenly it makes a leap of thirty feet in three dark masses, and rolls in silver spray down a funnel of verdure. A fine dew gushes over the turf and gives life to it, and its rolling pearls sparkle as they glide along the leaves. Our northern fields afford no notion of such vividness; this unceasing coolness with this fiery sun is needed in order to paint the vegetable robe with such a magnificent hue.

I saw a great, wooded mountain-side stretch sloping away before me; the noonday sun beat down upon it; the mass of white rays pierced through the vault of the trees; the leaves glowed in splendor, either transparent or radiated. Over all this lighted slope no shadow could be distinguished; a warm, luminous evaporation covered all, like the white veil of a woman. I have often since seen this strange garb of the mountains, especially towards evening; the bluish atmosphere enclosed in the gorges becomes visible; it grows thick, it imprisons the light and makes it palpable. The eye delights in penetrating into the fair network of gold that envelopes the ridges, sensitive to the softness and depth of it; the salient edges lose their hardness, the harsh contours are softened; it is heaven, descending and lending its veil to cover the nakedness of the savage daughters of the earth. Pardon me these metaphors; I appear, perhaps, to be [144] studying turns of expression, and yet I am only recounting my sensations.

From this place a meadow-path leads to the gorge of the Serpent: this is a gigantic notch in the perpendicular mountain. The brook that runs through it crawls along overborne by heaped-up blocks; its bed is nothing but a ruin.

FULL-SIZE -- Medium-Size

You ascend along a crumbling pathway, clinging to the stems of box and to the edges of rocks; frightened lizards start off like an arrow, and cower in the clefts of slaty slabs. A leaden sun inflames the bluish rocks; the reflected rays make the air like a furnace. In this parched chaos the only life is that of the water, which glides, murmuring, beneath the stones. At the bottom of the ravine the mountain abruptly lifts its vertical wall

to the height of two hundred feet; the water drops in long white threads along this polished wall, and turns its reddish tint to brown; during the whole fall it does not quit the cliff, but clings to it like silvery tresses, or a [145] pendent garland of convolvulus. A fine broad basin stays it for an instant at the foot of the mountain, and then discharges it in a streamlet into the bog. [146]

FULL-SIZE **--** ***Medium-Size***

These mountain streams are unlike those of the plains; nothing sullies them; they never have any other bed [147] than sand or naked stone. However deep they may be, you may count their blue pebbles; they are transparent as the air. Rivers have no other diversity than that of their banks; their regular course, their mass always gives the same sensation; the Gave, on the other hand, is a forever-changing spectacle; the human face has not more marked, more diverse expressions. When the water, green and profound, sleeps beneath the rocks, its emerald eyes wear the treacherous look of a naiad who would charm the passer-by only to drown him; then, wanton that it is, leaps blindly between the rocks, turns its bed topsy-turvy, rises aloft in a tempest of foam, dashes itself impotently and furiously into spray against the bowlder that has vanquished it. Three steps further on, it subsides and goes frisking capriciously alongside the bank in changing eddies, braided with bands of light and shade, twisting voluptuously like an adder. When the rock of its bed is broad and smooth, it spreads out, veined with rose and azure, smilingly offering its level glass to the whole mass of the [148] sunlight. Over the bending plants, it threads its silent way in lines straight and tense as in a bundle of rushes, and with the spring and swiftness of a flying trout. When it falls opposite the sun, the hues of the rainbow may be seen trembling in its crystal threads, vanishing, reappearing, an aerial work, a sylph of light, alongside which a bee’s wine would seem coarse, and which fairy fingers would in vain strive to equal.

FULL-SIZE **--** ***Medium-Size***

Seen in the distance, the whole Gave is only a storm of silvered falls, intersected by splendid blue expanses. Fiery and joyful youth, useless and full of poetry; to-morrow that troubled wave will receive the filth of cities, [149] and quays of stone will imprison its course by way of regulation.

III.

At the bottom of an ice-cold gorge rolls the cascade of Larresecq. It does not deserve its renown: it is a sort of dilapidated stairway with a dirty stream, lost among stones and shifting earth, awkwardly scrambling down it; but, in getting there, you pass by a profound steep-edged hollow, where the torrent rolls along swallowed up in the caverns it has scooped out, obstructed by the trunks of the trees that it uproots. Overhead, lordly oaks meet in arcades; the shrubs steep their roots far below in the turbulent stream. No sunlight penetrates into this dark ravine; the Gave pierces its way through, unseen and icy. At the outlet where it streams forth, you hear its hoarse outcry; it is struggling among the rocks that choke it: one might fancy-it a bull stricken by the pangs of death.

This valley is solitary and out of the world; it is without culture; no tourists, not even herdsmen are to be found; three or four cows, perhaps, are there, busily cropping the herbage. Other gorges at the sides of the road and in the mountain of Gourzy are still wilder. There the faint trace of an ancient pathway may with [150] difficulty be made out.

FULL-SIZE **--** ***Medium-Size***

Can anything be sweeter than the certainty of being alone? In any widely known spot, you are in constant dread of an incursion of tourists; the hallooing of guides, the loud-voiced admiration, the bustle, whether of fastening horses, or of unpacking provisions, or of airing opinions, all disturb the budding sensation; civilization recovers its hold upon you. But here, what security and what silence! nothing that recalls man; [151] the landscape is just what it has been these six thousand years: the grass grows useless and free as on the first day; no birds among the branches; only now and then may be heard the far-off cry of a soaring hawk. Here and there the face of a huge, projecting rock patches with a dark shade the uniform plane of the trees: it is a virgin wilderness in its severe beauty. The soul fancies that it recognizes unknown friends of long ago; the forms and colors are in secret harmony with it; when it finds these pure, and that it enjoys them unmixed with outside thought, it feels that it is entering into its inmost and calmest depth—a sensation so simple, after the tumult of our ordinary thoughts, is like the gentle murmur of an Æolian harp after the hubbub of a ball.

IV.

Going down the Valentin, on the slope of the *Montagne Verte*, I found landscapes less austere. You reach the right bank of the Gave d'Ossau. A pretty streamlet slips down the mountain, encased between two walls of rounded stones all purple with poppies and wild mallows. Its fall has been turned to account in driving rows of saws incessantly back and forth over blocks of marble. A tall, bare-footed girl, in rags, ladles up sand [152] and water for wetting the machine; by the aid of the sand the iron blade eats away the block.

FULL-SIZE **--** ***Medium-Size***

A foot-path follows the river bank, lined with houses, huge oaks and fields of Indian corn; on the other side is an arid reach of pebbly shore, where children are paddling near some hogs asleep in the sand; on the [153] transparent wave, flocks of ducks rock with the undulations of the current: it is the country and culture after solitude and the desert. The pathway winds through a plantation of osiers and willows; the long, waving stalks that love the rivers, the pale pendent foliage, are infinitely graceful to eyes accustomed to the intense green of the mountains. On the right may be seen the narrow rocky ways that lead to the hamlets scattered over the slopes. The houses there lean their backs against the mountain, shelved one above another, so as to

look down upon the valley. At noon the people are all absent. Every door is closed; three or four old women, who alone are left in the village, are spreading grain upon the level rock which forms the street or esplanade. What more singular than this long, natural flag-stone, carpeted with gilded heads of grain. The dark and narrow church ordinarily rises from a terraced yard, enclosed by a low wall; the bell-tower is white and square, with a slated spire. Under the porch may be read a few epitaphs carved in the stone; these, for the most part, are the names of invalids who have died at Eaux Bonnes; I remarked those of two brothers. To die so far from home and alone! It is touching to read these words of sympathy graven upon a tomb; this sunlight is so sweet! the valley so beautiful! you seem to breathe health in the air; you want to live; one wishes, as the [154]
old poet says, “Se réjouir longtemps de sa force et de sa jeunesse.” The love of life is imparted with the love of light. How often, beneath the gloomy northern sky, do we form a similar desire?

At the turn of the mountain is the entrance into an oak wood that rises on one of the declivities. These lofty, roomy forests give to the south shade without coolness. High up, among the trunks, shines a patch of blue sky; light and shade dapple the gray moss like a silken design upon a velvet ground. A heavy, warm air, loaded with vegetable emanations, rises to the face; it fills the chest and affects the head like wine. The monotonous sound of the cricket and the grasshopper comes from wheat-land and meadow, from mountain and from plain; you feel that living myriads are at work among the heather and under the thatch; and in the veins, where ferments the blood, courses a vague sensation of comfort, the uncertain state between sleeping and dreaming, which steeps the soul in animal life and stifles thought under the dull impressions of the senses. You stretch yourself out, and are content with merely living; you feel not the passage of the hours, but are happy in the present moment, without a thought for past or future; you gaze upon the slender sprigs of [155]
moss, the grayish spikes of the grasses, the long ribands of the shining herbs; you follow the course of an insect striving to get over a thicket of turf, and clambering up and down in the labyrinth of its stalks. Why not confess that you have become a child again and are amused with the least of sights? What is the country but a means of returning to our earliest youth, of finding again that faculty of happiness, that state of deep attention, that indifference to everything but pleasure and the present sensation, that facile joy which is a brimming spring ready to overflow at the least impulse? I passed an hour beside a squadron of ants who were dragging the body of a big fly across a stone. They were bent upon the dismemberment of the vanquished; at each leg a little workwoman, in a black bodice, pulled and worked with all her might; the rest held the body in place. I never saw efforts more fearful; at times their prey rolled off the stone; then they had to begin over again. At last, fatigued by the toils of war, and wanting power to cut up and carry off the prey, they resigned themselves to eating it on the spot. [156]

V.

The view from Mount Gourzy is much admired; the traveller is informed that he will see the whole plain of Beam as far as Pau. I am obliged to take the word of the guide-book for it; I found clouds at the summit and saw nothing but the fog. At the end of the forest that covers the first slope lay some enormous trees, half rotten, and already whitened with moss. Some mummies of pine trees were left standing; but their pyramids of branches showed a shattered side. Old oaks split open as high up as a man’s head, crowned their wound with mushrooms and red strawberries. From the manner in which the ground is strewn it might be called a battle-field laid waste by bullets; it is the herdsmen who, for mere amusement, set fire to the trees.

My neighbor, the tourist, told me next day that I had not lost much, and gave me a dissertation against the views from mountain-tops. He is a resolute traveller, a great lover of painting, very odd, however, and accustomed to believing nothing but himself, enthusiastic reasoner, violent in his opinions and fruitful in paradox. He is a singular man; at fifty, he is as active as if he were but twenty. He is dry, nervous, always well and alert, his legs forever in motion, his head fermenting with some idea which has just sprung up in his [157]
brain and which during two days will appear to him the finest in the world. He is always under way and a hundred paces ahead of others, seeking truth with rash boldness, even to loving danger, finding pleasure in contradicting and being contradicted, and now and then deceived by his militant and adventurous spirit. He has nothing to hamper him; neither wife, children, place nor ambition. I like him, notwithstanding his want of moderation, because he is sincere; bit by bit he has told me his life, and I have found out his tastes; his name is Paul, and he was left, at the age of twenty, without parents and with an income of twelve thousand francs.

FULL-SIZE **--** ***Medium-Size***

From experience of himself and of the world, he judged that an occupation, an office or a household would weary him, and he has remained free. He found that amusements failed to amuse, and he gave up pleasures; he says that suppers give him the headache, that play makes him nervous, that a respectable mistress ties a man down, and a hired mistress disgusts him. So he has turned his attention to travelling and reading. “It is [158] only water, if you will,” said he, “but that is better than your doctored wine: at least, it is better for my stomach.” Besides, he finds himself comfortable under his system, and maintains that tastes such as his grow with age, that, in short, the most sensible of senses, the most capable of new and various pleasures is the brain. He confesses that he is dainty in respect of ideas, slightly selfish, and that he looks upon the world merely as a spectator, as if it were a theatre of marionettes. I grant that he is a thoroughly good fellow at heart, usually good-humored, careful not to step on the toes of others, at times calculated to cheer them up, and that, at least, he has the habit of remaining modestly and quietly in his corner. We have philosophized beyond measure between ourselves, or rather against one another; you may skip the following pages if you are not fond of dissertations.

He could not bear to have people go up a mountain in order to look down on the plain.

“They don’t know what they are doing,” said he. “It is an absurdity of perspective. It is destroying a landscape for the better enjoyment of it. At such a distance there are neither forms nor colors. The heights are mere molehills, the villages are spots, the rivers are lines drawn by a pen. The objects are all lost in one grayish tint; the contrast of lights and shades is blotted out; everything is diminished; you make out a [159] multitude of imperceptible objects,—a mere Liliputian world. And thereupon you cry out at the magnificence! Does a painter ever take it into his head to scale a height in order to copy the score of leagues of ground that may be seen from thence?”

FULL-SIZE **--** ***Medium-Size***

“That is good only for a land-surveyor. The basins, highways, tillage, are all seen as in an atlas. Do you go then in search of a map? A landscape is a picture; you should put yourself at the point of sight. But no; the beauty is all ciphered mathematically; it is calculated that an elevation of a thousand feet makes it a thousand times more beautiful. The operation is admirable, and its only fault is that it is absurd, and that it leads through a great deal of fatigue to immeasurable boredom.” But the tourists, when once at the summit, are [160] carried away with enthusiasm.

“Pure cowardice—they are afraid of being accused of dryness, and of being thought prosy; everybody now-a-days has a sublime soul, and a sublime soul is condemned to notes of admiration. There are still sheep-like minds, who take their admirations on trust and get excited out of mere imitation. My neighbor says that this is fine, the book thinks so too; I have paid to come up, I ought to be charmed; accordingly I am. I was one day on a mountain with a family to whom the guide pointed out an indistinct bluish line, saying, ‘There is Toulouse!’ The father, with sparkling eyes, repeated to the son, ‘There is Toulouse!’ And he, at sight of so much joy, cried with transport, ‘There is Toulouse!’ They learned to feel the beautiful, as any one learns to bow, through family tradition. It is so that artists are formed, and that the great aspects of Nature imprint forever upon the soul solemn emotions.”

Then an ascent is an error of taste?

“Not at all; if the plain is ugly, seen from above, the mountains themselves are beautiful; and indeed they are beautiful only from above. When you are in the valley they overwhelm you; you cannot take them in, you see only one side of them, you cannot appreciate their height nor their size. One thousand feet and ten [161] thousand are all the same to you; the spectator is like an ant in a well; at one moment distance blots out the beauty; the next, it is proximity does away with the grandeur.”

FULL-SIZE -- ***Medium-Size***

“From the top of a peak, on the other hand, the mountains proportion themselves to our organs, the eye wanders over the ridges and takes in their whole; our mind comprehends them, because our body dominates them. Go to Saint-Sauveur, to Bareges; you will see that those monstrous masses have as expressive a [162] physiognomy, and represent as well-defined an idea as a tree or an animal. Here you have found nothing but pretty details; the ensemble is tiresome.”

You talk of this country as a sick man of his doctor. What have you to say then against these mountains?

“That they have no marked character; they have neither the austerity of bald peaks nor the lovely roundings of wooded hills. These fragments of grayish verdure, this poor mantle of stunted box pierced by the projecting bones of the rock, those scattered patches of yellowish moss, resemble rags; I like to have a person either naked or clothed, and do not like your tatterdemalion. The very forms are wanting in grandeur, the valleys are neither abrupt nor smiling. I do not find the perpendicular walls, the broad glaciers, the heaps of bald and jagged summits which are seen further on. The country does not amount to much either as plain or mountain; it should either be put forward or held back.”

You give advice to Nature.

FULL-SIZE -- ***Medium-Size***

“Why not? She has her uncertainties and incongruities like any one else. She is not a god, but an artist whose genius inspires him to-day and to-morrow lets him down again. A landscape in [163] [164]

order to be beautiful must have all its parts stamped with the common idea and contributing to produce a [165]
single sensation. If it gives the lie here to what it says yonder, it destroys itself, and the spectator is in the presence of nothing but a mass of senseless objects. What though these objects be coarse, dirty, vulgar? provided they make up a whole by their harmony, and that they agree in giving us a single impression, we are pleased."

So that a court-yard, a worm-eaten hut, a parched and melancholy plain, may be as beautiful as the sublimest mountain.

"Certainly. You know the fields of the Flemish painters, how flat they are; you are never tired of looking at them. Take something that is still more trivial, an interior of Van Ostade; an old peasant is sharpening a chopping-knife in the corner, the mother is swaddling her nursling, three or four brats are rolling about among the tools, the kettles and benches; a row of hams is ranged in the chimney, and the great old bed is displayed in the background under its red curtains. What could be more common! But all these good people have an air of peaceful contentment; the babies are warm and easy in the over-wide breeches, glossy antiques transmitted from generation to generation. There must have been habits of security and abundance, for a scattered household to lie pellmell on the ground in this fashion; this comfort must have lasted from [166]
father to son, for the furniture to have assumed that sombre color and all the hues to harmonize. There is not an object here that does not point to the unconstraint of an easygoing life and uniform good-nature. If this mutual fitness of the parts is the mark of fine painting, why not of fine nature? Real or fancied, the object is the same; I praise or I blame one with as good right as the other, because the practice or the violation of the same rules produces in me the same enjoyment or the same displeasure."

FULL-SIZE **--** ***Medium-Size***

ABOVE GABAS.

Mountains then may have another beauty than that of grandeur? "Yes, since they sometimes have a [167]
different expression. Look at that little isolated chain, against which the *Thermes* support themselves: nobody climbs it; it possesses neither great trees, nor naked rocks, nor points of view. And yet I experienced a genuine pleasure there yesterday; you follow the sharp backbone of the mountain that protrudes its vertebrae through its meagre coating of earth; the poor but thickset turf, sunburnt and beaten by the wind, forms a carpet firmly sewn with tenacious threads; the half-dried mosses, the knotty heaths strike their stubborn roots down between the clefts of the rock; the stunted firs creep along, twisting their horizontal trunks. An aromatic and penetrating odor, concentrated and drawn forth by the heat, comes from all these mountain plants. You feel that they are engaged in an eternal struggle against a barren soil, a dry wind, and a shower of fiery rays, driven back upon themselves, hardened to all inclemencies, and determined to live. This expression is the soul of the landscape; now, given so many varied expressions, you have so many different beauties, so many chords of passion are stirred. The pleasure consists in seeing this soul. If you cannot distinguish it, or if it be wanting, a mountain will make upon you precisely the effect of a heap of pebbles."

That is an attack on the tourists; to-morrow I will test your reasoning in the gorge of Eaux-Chaudes, and see [168]
if it is right. [169]

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CHAPTER V. EAUX-CHAUDES.

I.

On the north of the valley of Ossau is a cleft; it is the way to Eaux-Chaudes. An entire skirt of the mountain was torn out in order to open it; the wind eddies through the hollows of this chilly pass; the precipitous cut, of a dark iron-color, lifts its formidable mass as if to overwhelm the passerby; upon the rocky wall opposite are perched twisted trees in rows, and their thin, feathery tops wave strangely among the reddish projections. The highway overhangs the Gave which eddies five hundred feet below. It is the stream which has hollowed out this prodigious groove, coming back again and again to the attack, and for [170] whole centuries together; two rows of huge rounded niches mark the lowering of its bed, and the ages of its toil; the day seems to grow dark as you enter; it is only a strip of sky that can be seen above the head.

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On the right, a range of giant cones rises into relief against the intense azure; their bellies crowd one upon another and protrude in rounded masses; but their lofty peaks swing upward with a dash, with a gigantic sort of flight, towards the sublime dome whence streams the day. [171]

FULL-SIZE -- ***Medium-Size***

[172]

The light of August falls on the stony escarpments, upon the broken walls, where the rock, damasked and [173] engraven, gleams like an oriental cuirass. Leprous spots of moss are there incrusted; stems of dried box dangle wretchedly in the crannies; but they are lost sight of in such heroic nakedness: the ruddy or blackened

colossi display themselves in triumph in the splendor of the heavens.

Between two channelled granite towers stretches the little village of Eaux-Chaudes. But who, here, pays any attention to the village? All thought is taken up by the mountains. The eastern chain, abruptly cut off, drops perpendicularly like the wall of a citadel; at the summit, a thousand feet above the highway, are esplanades expanding in forests and meadows, a crown green and moist, whence cascades ooze forth by the hundred. They wind broken and flaky along the breast of the mountain, like necklaces of pearls told off between the fingers, bathing the feet of the lustrous oaks, deluging the bowlders with their tempest, then at last spreading themselves out in long beds where the level rock lures them to sleep.

The wall of granite falls away; at the east, an amphitheatre of forests suddenly opens up. On all sides, as far as the eye can reach, the mountains are loaded with wood to the very top; several of them rise, in all their [174]
blackness, into the heart of the light, and their fringe of trees bristles against the pale sky. The charming cup of verdure rounds its gilded margin, then drops into hollows, overflowing with birch and oak, with tender, changeable hues that lend additional sweetness to the mists of morning. Not a hamlet is to be seen, no smoke, no culture; it is a wild and sunny nest, no doubt like to the valley that, on the finest day of the happiest springtide of the universe, received the first man.

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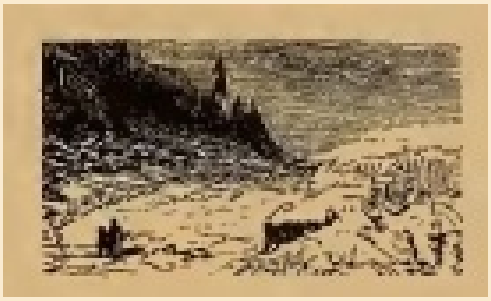
The highway makes a turn, and everything changes. The old troop of parched mountains reappears with a threatening air. One of them in the west is crumbling, shattered as if by a cyclopean hammer. It is strewn [175]
with squared blocks, dark vertebræ snatched from its spine; the head is wanting, and the monstrous bones, crushed and in disorder, scattered to the brink of the Gave, announce some ancient defeat. Another lying opposite, with a dreary air, extends its bald back a league away; in vain you go on or change your view: it is always there, always huge and melancholy. Its naked granite suffers neither tree nor spot of verdure; a few patches of snow alone whiten the hollows in its sides, and its monotonous ridge shifts sadly its lines, blotting out half the sky with its bastions.

Gabas is a hamlet in a barren plain. The torrent here rumbles underneath glaciers and among shattered tree-trunks; it descends, lost at the bottom of the declivity, between colonnades of pines, the mute inhabitants of the gorge. The silence and constraint contrast with the desperate leaps of the snowy water. It is cold here, and everything is sad; only, on the horizon may be seen the Pic du Midi in its splendor, lifting its two jagged piles of tawny gray into the serene light.



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II. [176]

In spite of myself I have been dreaming here of the antique gods, sons of Greece, and made in the likeness of their country. They were born in a similar country, and they spring to life again here in ourselves, with the sentiments which gave birth to them.

I imagine idle and curious herdsmen, of fresh and infantile souls, not yet possessed by the authority of a neighboring civilization and an established dogma, but active, hardy, and poets by nature. They dream—and of what, if not of the huge beings that all day long besiege their eyes? How fantastical are those jagged heads, those bruised and heaped-up bodies, those twisted shoulders! What unknown monsters, what melancholy, misshapen race, alien to humanity! By what-dread travail has the earth brought them forth from her womb, and what contests have their blasted heads sustained amidst clouds and thunderbolts! They still

threaten to-day; the eagles and the vultures are alone welcome to sound their depths. They love not man; their bowlders lie in wait to roll upon him, so soon as he shall violate their solitudes. With a shiver they hurl upon his harvests a tide of rocks; they have but to gather up a storm in order to drown him like an ant. [177]

FULL-SIZE **--** ***Medium-Size***

[178]

How changeable is their face, but always to be dreaded! What lightnings their summits hurl among the [179] creeping fogs! That flash causes fear like the eye of some tyrant god, seen for a moment, then hid again. There are mountains that weep, amidst their gloomy bogs, and their tears trickle down their aged cheeks with a hollow sob, betwixt pines that rustle and whisper sorrowfully, as if pitying that eternal mourning. Others, seated in a ring, bathe their feet in lakes the color of steel, and which no wind ever ruffles; they are happy in such calm, and gaze into the virgin wave at their silver helmet. How mysterious are they at night, and what evil thoughts do they turn over in winter, when wrapped in their shroud of snow! But in the broad day and in summer, with what buoyancy and how glorified rises their forehead to the sublimest heights of air, into pure and radiant realms, into light, to their own native country. All scarred and monstrous though they be, they are still the gods of the earth, and they have aspired to be gods of heaven.

But lo, where comes a second race, lovely and almost human, the choir of the nymphs, fleeting and melting creatures who are daughters of those misshapen colossuses. How comes it that they have begotten them? No one knows; the birth of the gods, full of mystery, eludes mortal eye. Some say that their first pearl has been [180] seen to ooze from an herb, or from a cranny beneath the glaciers, in the uplands. But they have dwelt long in the paternal bowels; some, burning ones, keep the memory of that inner furnace whose bubbling they have looked upon, and which, from time to time, still makes the ground to tremble; others, icy cold, have crossed the eternal winter that whitens the summits. At the outset, all retain the fire of their race; dishevelled, screaming, raving, they bruise themselves against the rocks, they cleave the valleys, sweep away trees, struggle and are sullied. What transport is here—maidenly and bacchanal! But, once they have reached the smooth beds which the rounded rock spreads out for them, they smile, they hush themselves in sleep, or they sport. Their deep eyes of liquid emerald have their flashes. Their bodies bow and rise again; in the vapors of morning, in sudden falls, their water swells, soft and satiny as a woman’s breast. With what tenderness, what delicately wild quiverings they caress the bended flowers, the shoots of fragrant thyme that thrive between two rocky edges on the bank! Then with sudden caprice they plunge deep down in a cavern, and scream and writhe as mad and wayward as any child. What happiness in spreading out thus to the sun! What strange [181] gayety, or what divine tranquillity, in that transparent wave as it laughs or eddies! Neither the eye nor the diamond has that changeful clearness, those burning and glaucous reflections, those inward tremblings of pleasure or of anxiety; women though they are, they are indeed goddesses. Without more than human might, would they have availed, with their soft wave, to wear these hard cliffs, to bore through these impregnable barriers? And by what secret virtue do they know, they, so innocent of aspect, how at one time to torture and slay him who drinks, and, again, to heal the infirm and the invalid? They hate the one and love the other, and, like their fathers, they bestow life and death at their pleasure.

Such is the poetry of the pagan world, of the childhood of mankind; thus each one framed it for himself, in the dawn of things, at the awaking of imagination and conscience, long before the age when reflection set up defined worship and studied dogmas. Among the dreams that blossomed in the morning of the world, I love only those of Ionia.

Hereupon Paul became vexed, and called me a classicist: “You are all like that! You take one step forward into an idea, and then stop short like cowards. Come now; there are a hundred Olympuses in Egypt, in [182]

Iceland, in India. Each one of those landscapes is an aspect of Nature; each of those Gods is one of the forms in which man has expressed his idea of Nature. Admire the god by the same standard as the landscape; the onion of Egypt is worth as much as Olympian Jove." That is too strong, yet I take you at your word; you shall stand by your assertion, and extract a god from your onion.

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"This very instant; but first transport yourself to Egypt, before the coming of warriors and priests, upon the river-ooze, among savages half naked in the mire, half drowned in water, half burned by the sun. What a sight is that of this great black shore steaming under the heat, where crocodiles and writhing fish lash the waters [183] of the pools! Myriads of mosquitoes buzz in the air; large-leaved plants lift their tangled mass; the earth ferments and teems with life; the brain grows giddy with the heavy exhalations, and man, made restless, shudders as he feels in the air and coursing through his limbs the generative virtue by whose means everything multiplies and grows green. A year ago nothing grew on this ooze: what a change! There springs from it a tall, straight reed, with shining thongs, the stem, swollen with juices, striking deep into the slime; with every day it expands and changes: green at the outset, it reddens like the sun behind the mists. Unceasingly does this child of the ooze suck therefrom juices and force; the earth broods over it and commits to it its every virtue. See it now, how, of its own accord, it lifts itself half-way, and at last wholly, and warms in the sun its scaly belly filled with an acrid blood; blood that boils, and so exuberant that it bursts the triple skin and oozes through the wound! What a strange life! and by what miracle is it that the point of the summit becomes a plume and a parasol? Those who first gathered it wept, as though some poison had burned their eyes; but in the winter-time, when fish fails, it rejoices him who meets it. Those enormous heaped-up globes, are they not the hundred breasts of the great nurse, mother Earth? New ones reappear as often as the waters [184] retire; there is some divine force hidden beneath those scales. May it never fail to return! The crocodile is god, because it devours us; the ichneumon is god, because it saves us; the onion is god, because it nourishes us."

The onion is god, and Paul is its prophet; you shall have some this evening, with white sauce. But, my dear friend, you frighten me; you blot out with one stroke three thousand years of history. You put on one level races of artists and races of visionaries, savage tribes and civilized nations. I like the crocodile and the onion, but I like Jupiter and Diana better. The Greeks have invented the arts and sciences; the Egyptians have only left some heaps of ashlar-work. A block of granite is not as good as either Aristotle or Homer. They are everywhere the first who, through clear reasoning, have reached a conception of justice and have made science. Then, however evil our time may be, it surpasses many another. Your grotesque and oriental hallucinations are beautiful, at a distance however; I am willing to contemplate them, but not to submit to them. Now-a-days we have no poetry, be it so; but we appreciate the poetry of others. If our museum is poor, we have the museums of all ages and all nations. Do you know what I get from your theories? Three times a month they will save me four francs; I shall find fairy-land in them, and shall have no further occasion for [185] going to the opera.

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[186]

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CHAPTER VI. THE INHABITANTS.

I.

On the eighth of August, at nine o’clock in the morning, the piercing note of a flageolet was to be heard at half a league’s distance from Eaux-Bonnes, and the bathers set out for Aas. The way there is by a narrow road cut in the Montagne Verte, and overhung with lavender and bunches of wild flowers. We entered upon a street six feet in width: it is the main street. Scarlet-capped children, wondering at their own magnificence, stood bolt upright in the doorways and looked on us in silent admiration. The public square, at the side of the lavatory, is as large as a small room; it is here that dances take place. [187]

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Two hogsheads had been set up, two planks upon the hogsheads, two chairs upon the planks, and on the chairs two musicians, the whole surmounted by two splendid blue umbrellas which did service as parasols; for the sky was brazen, and there was not a tree on the square.

The whole formed an exceedingly pretty and original picture. Under the roof of the lavatory, a group of old [188] women leaned against the pillars in talk; a crystal stream gushed forth and ran down the slated gutter; three small children stood motionless, with wide-open, questioning eyes. The young men were at exercise in the pathway, playing at base. Above the esplanade, on points of rock forming shelves, the women looked down on the dance, in holiday costume; a great scarlet hood, a body embroidered in silver, or in silk with violet flowers; a yellow, long-fringed shawl; a black petticoat hanging in folds, close to the figure, and white woollen gaiters. These strong colors, the lavished red, the reflexes of the silk under a dazzling light, were delightful. About the two hogsheads was wheeling, with a supple, measured movement, a sort of roundelay, to an odd and monotonous air terminated by a shrill false note of startling effect. A youth in woollen vest and breeches led the band; the young girls moved gravely, without talking or laughing; their little sisters at the end of the file took great pains in practising the step, and the line of purple *capulets* slowly waved like a crown of peonies. Occasionally the leader of the dance gave a sudden bound with a savage cry, and recalled to our mind that we were in the land of bears, in the very heart of the mountains.

Paul was there under his umbrella, wagging his great beard with a look of delight. Had he been able, he [189] would have followed the dance.

FULL-SIZE **--** ***Medium-Size***

“Was I right? Is there a single things here out of harmony with the rest, and which the sun, the climate, the soil, do not make suitable? These people are poets. They must have been in love with the light to have invented these splendid costumes. Never would a northern sun have inspired this feast of color; their costume harmonizes with their sky. In Flanders, they would look like mountebanks; here they are as beautiful as their country. You no longer notice the ugly features, the sunburnt faces, the thick, knotty hands that yesterday offended you; the sun enlivens the brilliancy of the dresses, and in that golden splendor all ugliness disappears. I have seen people who laughed at the music; ‘the air is monotonous,’ they say, ‘contrary to all [190]
rule, it has no ending; those notes are false.’ At Paris, that may be; but here, no. Have you remarked that wild and original expression? How it suits the landscape! That air could have sprung up nowhere but among the mountains. The frou-frou of the tambourine is as the languid voice of the wind when it coasts the narrow valleys; the shrill tone of the flageolet is the whistling of the breeze when it is heard on the naked summits; that final note is the cry of a hawk in the depths of the air; the mountain sounds too are recognizable, hardly transformed by the rhythm of the song. And then the dance is as primitive, as natural, as suitable to the country as the music: they go wheeling about hand in hand. What could be more simple! It is thus that the children do at their play. The step is supple and slow; that is as the mountaineer walks; you know by experience that you must not be in too much haste if you would climb, and that here the stiff strides of a town-bred man will bring him to the ground. That leap, that seems to you so strange, is one of their habits, hence one of their pleasures. To make up a festival they have chosen what they found agreeable among the things to which their eyes, ears, and legs were habituated. Is not this festival then the most national, the truest, the most harmonious, and hence the most beautiful that can be imagined?” [191]

II.

Laruns is a market-town. Instead of a hogshead there were four times two hogsheads and as many musicians, all playing together, and each one a different portion of the same air. This clatter excepted and a few magnificent pairs of velvet breeches, the festival was the same as that at Aas. What we go there to see is the procession.

At first everybody attends vespers; the women in the sombre nave of the church, the men in a gallery, the small boys in a second gallery higher up, under the eye of a frowning schoolmaster. The young girls, kneeling close to the gratings of the choir, repeated *Ave Marias*, to which the deep voice of the congregation responded; their clear, metallic voices formed a pretty contrast to the hollow buzzing of the resounding responses. Some wolfish-looking old mountaineers, from thirty miles away, made the blackened wood of the balustrade creak as they clumsily bent the knee. A twilight fell on the dense crowd, and made yet darker the expression of those energetic countenances. One might have fancied himself in the sixteenth century. [192]
Meanwhile the little bells chattered joyously with their shrill voices, and made all possible noise, like a roost full of fowls at the top of the white tower.

FULL-SIZE -- *Medium-Size*

At the end of an hour, the procession arranged itself very artistically and went forth. The first part of the cortege was amusing: two rows of little scapegraces in red vests, their hands clasped over their bellies, in order to keep their book in place, tried to give themselves an air of compunction, and looked at each other [193] out of the corners of their eyes in a manner truly comical. This band of masquerading monkeys was led by a jolly stout priest, whose folded bands, cuffs, and hanging laces fluttered and waved like wings. Then a sorry beadle, in a soiled *douanier's* coat; then a fine maire in uniform, with his sword at his side; then two long seminarians, two plump little priests, a banner of the Virgin, finally all the douaniers and all the gendarmes of the country; in short, all the grandeurs, all the splendors, all the actors of civilization.

The Barbarians however were more beautiful: it was the procession of men and women who, taper in hand, filed by during three-quarters of an hour. I saw in it true Henry IV. faces, with the severe and intelligent expression, the proud and serious bearing, the large features of his contemporaries. Especially there were some old herdsmen in russet great-coats of hairy felt, their brows not wrinkled but farrowed, bronzed and burned by the sun, their glances savage as those of a wild beast, worthy of having lived in the time of Charlemagne. Surely those who defied Roland were not more savage in physiognomy. Finally appeared five or six old women, the like of whom I could never have imagined: a hooded cloak of white woollen stuff [194] enfolded them like a bed-blanket; only the swarthy countenance was visible, their eyes deep and fierce like the she-wolf's, their mumbling lips, that seemed to be muttering spells. They called to mind involuntarily the witches in Macbeth; the mind was transported a hundred leagues away from cities, into barren gorges, beneath lone glaciers where the herdsmen pass whole months amidst the snows of winter, near to the growling bears, without hearing one human word, with no other companions than the gaunt peaks and the dreary fir-trees. They have borrowed from solitude something of its aspect.

FULL-SIZE -- *Medium-Size*

[195]

THE PEAK OF THE GER,
FROM
THE VILLAGE OF AAS.

FULL-SIZE -- *Medium-Size*

III. [196]

The Ossalais, however, have ordinarily a gentle, intelligent, and somewhat sad physiognomy. The soil is too [197] poor to impart to their countenance that expression of impatient vivacity and lively spirit that the wine of the south and the easy life give to their neighbors of Languedoc. Three-score leagues in a carriage prove that the soil moulds the type. A little farther up, in the Cantal, a country of chest-nut-trees, where the people fill themselves with a hearty nourishment, you will see countenances red with sluggish blood and set with a thick beard, fleshy, heavy-limbed bodies, massive machines for labor. Here the men are thin and pale; their bones

project, and their large features are weatherbeaten like those of their mountains. An endless struggle against the soil has stunted the women as well as the plants; it has left in their eyes a vague expression of melancholy and reflection. Thus the incessant impressions of body and soul in the long run modify body and soul; the race moulds the individual, the country moulds the race. A degree of heat in the air and of inclination in the ground is the first cause of our faculties and of our passions.

Disinterestedness is not a mountain virtue. In a poor country, the first want is want of money. The dispute [198] is to know whether they shall consider strangers as a prey or a harvest; both opinions are true: we are a prey which every year yields a harvest. Here is an incident, trifling, but capable of showing the dexterity and the ardor with which they will skin a flint.

One day Paul told his servant to sew another button upon his trousers. An hour after she brings in the trousers, and, with an undecided, anxious air, as if fearing the effect of her demand: “It is a sou,” said she. I will explain later how great a sum the sou is in this place.

Paul draws out a sou in silence and gives it to her. Jeannette retires on tip-toe as far as the door, thinks better of it, returns, takes up the trousers and shows the button: “Ah! that is a fine button! (A pause.) I did not find *that* in my box. (Another and a longer pause.) I bought that at the grocer’s; it costs a sou!” She draws herself up anxiously; the proprietor of the trousers, still without speaking, gives a second sou.

It is clear that she has struck upon a mine of sous. Jeannette goes out, and a moment after reopens the door. She has resolved on her course, and in a shrill, piercing voice, with admirable volubility: “I had no thread; I had to buy some thread; I used a good deal of thread; good thread, too. The button won’t come off. I sewed it on fast: it cost a sou.” Paul pushes across the table the third sou. [199]

Two hours later, Jeannette, who has been pondering on the matter, reappears. She prepares breakfast with the greatest possible care; she takes pains to wipe the least spot, she lowers her voice, she walks noiselessly, she is charming in her little attentions; then she says, putting forth all sorts of obsequious graces: “I ought not to lose anything, you would not want me to lose anything; the cloth was harsh, I broke the point of my needle; I did not know it a while ago, I have just noticed it; it cost a sou.”

Paul drew out the fourth sou, saying with his serious air: “Cheer up, Jeannette; you will keep a good house, my child; happy the husband who shall lead you, pure and blushing, beneath the roof of his ancestors; you may go and brush the trousers.”

Beggars swarm. I have never met a child between the ages of four and fifteen years who did not ask alms of me; all the inhabitants follow this trade. No one is ashamed of it. You look at any one of the little girls, scarcely able to walk, seated at their threshold busy in eating an apple: they come stumbling along with their hands stretched out towards you. You find in a valley a young herdsman with his cows; he comes up and asks you for a trifle. A tall girl goes by with a fagot on her head; she stops and asks a trifle of you. [200]

A peasant is at work on the road. “I am making a good road for you,” says he; “give me just a trifle.” A band of scapegraces are playing at the end of a promenade; as soon as they see you, they take each other by the hand, begin the dance of the country, and end by collecting the usual trifle. And so it is throughout the Pyrenees. [201]

FULL-SIZE **--** ***Medium-Size***

And they are merchants as well as beggars. You rarely pass along the street without being accosted by a guide who offers you his services and begs you to give him the preference. If you are seated on the hillside, three or four children come dropping out of the sky, bringing you butterflies, stones, curious plants, bouquets of flowers.

If you go near a dairy, the proprietor comes out with a porringer of milk, and will sell it to you in spite of yourself. One day as I was looking at a young bull, the drover proposed to me to buy it.

This greediness is not offensive. I once went up the brook of la Soude, behind Eaux-Bonnes: it is a sort of tumbledown staircase which for three leagues winds among the box in a parched ravine. You have to clamber over pointed rocks, jump from point to point, balance yourself along narrow ledges, climb zigzag up the scarped slopes covered with rolling stones. The foot-path is enough to frighten the goats. You bruise your feet on it, and at every step run the risk of getting a sprain. I met there some young women and girls of twenty, all [202] barefooted, carrying to the village, one a block of marble in her basket, another three sacks of charcoal fastened together, another five or six heavy planks; the way is nine miles long, under a mid-day sun; and nine miles for the home journey: for this they are paid ten sous.

Like the beggars and the merchants, they are very crafty and very polite. Poverty forces men to calculate and to please; they take off their cap as soon as you speak to them and smile complaisantly; their manners are never brutal or artless. The proverb says very truly: “False and courteous Béarnais.” You recall to mind the caressing manners and the perfect skill of their Henry IV.; he knew how to play on everybody and offend nobody. In this respect, as in many others, he was a true Béarnais. With the aid of necessity, I have seen them trump up geological disquisitions. In the middle of July there was a sort of earthquake; a report was spread that an old wall had fallen down; in truth the windows had shaken as if a great wagon were passing by. Immediately half of the bathers quitted their lodgings: a hundred and fifty persons fled from Cauterets in two days; travellers in their night-shirts ran to the stable to fasten on their carriages, and to light themselves carried away the hotel lantern. The peasants shook their heads compassionately and said to me: “You see, sir, [203] they are going from the frying-pan into the fire; if there is an earthquake, the plain will open, and they will fall into the crevices, whereas here the mountain is solid, and would keep them safe as a house.”

That same Jeannette who already holds so honorable place in my history, shall furnish an example of the polite caution and the over-scrupulous reserve in which they wrap themselves when they are afraid that they shall be compromised. The master had drawn the neighboring church, and wanted to judge of his work after the manner of Molière.

“Do you recognize that, Jeanette.”

“Ah! monsieur, did you do that?”

“What have I copied here?”

“Ah! monsieur, it is very beautiful.”

FULL-SIZE **--** ***Medium-Size***

"But still, tell me what it is there.” [204]

She takes the paper, turns it over and over again, looks at the artist with a dazed air and says nothing.

“Is it a mill or a church?”

“Yes, indeed.”

“Is it the church of Laruns?”

“Ah! it’s very beautiful.”

You could never get her beyond that.

IV.

We had a wish to know if the fathers were equal to the sons; and we have found the history of Bearn in a fine red folio, composed in the year 1640, by Master Pierre de Marca, a Béarnais, counsellor of the king in his state and privy councils, and president in his court of the parliament of Navarre; the whole ornamented with a magnificent engraving representing the conquest of the Golden Fleece. Pierre de Marca makes several important discoveries in his book, among others, that of two kings of Navarre, personages of the ninth century, until then unknown: Séméno Ennéconis, and En-néco Séménonis.

Although filled with respect for Sémêno Ennéconis and Enneco Semenonis, we are desperately wearied with the recital of the suits, the robberies and the genealogies of all the illustrious unknown. Paul maintains [205] that learned history is only good for learned asses; a thousand dates do not make a single idea. The celebrated historian of the Swiss, Jean de Muller, once wanted to rehearse the list of all the Swiss nobility, and forgot the fifty-first descendant of some undiscoverable viscount; he became ill with grief and shame; it is as if a general should wish to know how many buttons each of his soldiers had on his coat.

We have found that these good mountaineers have ever loved gain and booty. It is so natural to wish to live, and live well too! Above all is it pleasant to live at the expense of others! Time was when, in Scotland, every shipwrecked vessel belonged to the coast-side people; the wrecked ships came to them like herrings in the season, a hereditary and legitimate harvest; they felt robbed if one of the crew attempted to keep his coat. It is so here with strangers. The rear-guard of Charlemagne, under Roland, perished here; the mountaineers rolled down upon it an avalanche of stone; then they divided the stuffs, the silver, mules and baggage, and each one betook himself to his den. In the like manner they treated a second army sent by Louis le Débonnaire. I fancy they regarded these passages as a blessing from heaven, a special gift from divine Providence. [206]

FULL-SIZE **--** ***Medium-Size***

Fine cuirasses, new lances, necklaces, well-lined coats, it was a perfect magazine of gold, iron, and wool. Very likely the wives ran to meet them, blessing the good husband who had been the most thoughtful of the

welfare of his little family, and brought back the greatest quantity of provisions. This artlessness in respect of theft still exists in Calabria. In Napoleon's time, a prefect was scolding a well-to-do peasant wild was behind-hand with his contributions; the peasant replied, with all the openness of an upright man: "Faith, your[207] Excellency, it's not my fault."

FULL-SIZE **--** ***Medium-Size***

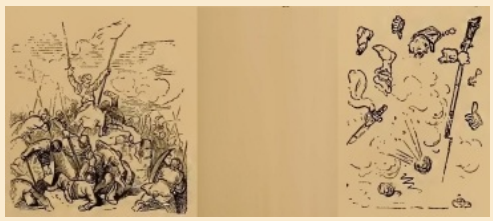
"For fifteen days now have I taken my carabine every evening, and have posted myself along the highway to see if no one would pass. Never a man goes by; but I give you my word I'll go back there until I have scraped together the ducats I owe you."

Add to this custom of thieving an extreme bravery! I believe the country is the cause of one as well as the other; extreme poverty removes timidity as well as scruples; they are leeches on the body of others, but then they are equally prodigal of their own; they can resist as well as take an advantage; if they willingly take another's goods, they guard their own yet more willingly. Liberty has thriven here from the earliest times, crabbed and savage, home-born and tough like a stem of their own boxwood. Hear the tone of the primitive charter: "These are the tribunals of Bearn, in which mention is made of the fact that, in old times, in Beam[208] they had no lord, and in those days they heard the praises of a certain knight. They sought him out, and made him their lord during one year; and after that, he was unwilling to maintain among them their tribunals and customs. And the court of Bearn then came together at Pau, and they required of him to maintain among them their tribunals and customs. And he would not, and thereupon they killed him in full court."

In like manner the land of Ossau preserved its privileges, even against its viscount. Every robber who brought his booty into the valley was safe there, and might the next day present himself before the viscount with impunity: it was only when the latter, or his wife in his absence, came into the valley to dispense justice that he was judged. This scarcely ever happened, and the land of Ossau was "the retreat of all the evil livers and marauders" of the country round.

V.

These rude manners, filled with chances and dangers, produced as many heroes as brigands. First comes the Count Gaston, one of the leaders of the first crusade; he was, like all the great men of this country, an[209] enterprising and a ready-minded man, a man of experience and one of the vanguard. At Jerusalem he went ahead to reconnoitre, and constructed the machines for the siege; he was held to be one of the wisest in counsel, and was the first to plant upon the walls the cows of Bearn. No one struck a heavier blow or calculated more exactly, and no one was fonder of calculating and striking. On his return, he fought against his neighbors, twice besieged Saragossa, and once Bayonne, and, along with king Alphonso, won two great battles against the Moors. Ah, what a time was that, for minds and muscles framed for adventure! No need then to seek for war; it was found everywhere, and profit along with it.



FULL-SIZE **--** ***Medium-Size***

Such a fine career as those cavalcades had among the marvellous cities of the Asiatic Saracens and of the Spanish Moors! What a quantity of skulls to cleave, of gold to bring home! It was thus that the overflow of force and imagination was discharg was no foolish affair of a random shot or clumsy bullet, in the midst of a[210] well-ordered manouvre. Then one encountered all the hazards, the unforeseen, of knight-errantry; the senses were all awake; the arms wrought and the body was a soldier; Gaston was killed as a private horseman in ambuscade, with the bishop of Huesca.

That which pleases me in history is the minor circumstances, the details of character. A mere scrap of a phrase indicates a revolution in the faculties and passions; great events are contained in it at their ease, as in their cause. Here in the life of Gaston is one of those words. The day that Jerusalem was taken, quarter had been granted to a large number of Mussulmans. "But the next day, the rest, displeased at seeing that there

were any infidels alive, mounted upon the roofs of the temple, and massacred and mangled all the Saracens, both men and women." * There was neither reasoning nor deliberation; at the sight of a Mussulman's dress, their blood mounted in wrath to their face, and they sprang forward, like lions or butchers, struck them down and dismembered them. Lope de Vega, an antique Christian, a severe Spaniard, renewed this savage and fanatical sentiment:

** The following fact is from the Siege of Antioch: "Many of our enemies died, and some of the prisoners were led before the gate of the city, and there their heads were cut off, in order to discourage those who remained in the city."*

Garcia Tello. Father, why have you not brought a Moor for me to see him! [211]

The elder Tello; (showing him the prisoners.) Well, Garcia, those are Moors.

Garcia. What? Those are Moors? They look like men.

Old Tello. And indeed they are men.

Garcia. They do not deserve to be.

Old Tello. And why?

Garcia. Because they believe neither in God nor in the Virgin Mary; the sight of them makes my blood boil, Father.

Old Tello. Are you afraid of them?

Garcia. No more than you, Father. (*Going toward the prisoners.*) Dogs, I would tear you in pieces with my hands; you shall know what it is to be a Christian. (He darts upon them and pursues them.)

Old Tello. Ah, the good little fellow! Gracious Heaven! He is fine as coral.

Tello. Mendo, see that he does them no harm.

Old Tello. Let him kill one or two; so do they teach a falcon to kill when he is young.

In fact, they are falcons or vultures. In the song of Roland, when the doughty knights ask from Turpin the absolution of their sins, the archbishop for penance recommends them to strike well.

But at the same time they have the mind and the soul of children. "Deep are the wells, and the valleys dark, the rocks black, the defiles marvellous." That is their whole description of the Pyrenees; they feel and speak *in a lump*. A child, questioned about Paris, which he had just seen for the first time, replied: "There are a [212] great many streets, and carriages everywhere, and great houses, and in two squares two tall columns." The poet of old times is like the child; he does not know how to analyze his impressions. Like him, he loves the marvellous, and takes delight in tales where all the proportions are gigantic.

FULL-SIZE* -- *Medium-Size

In the battle of Roncevaux everything is aggrandized beyond measure. The worthies kill the entire vanguard of the Saracens, a hundred thousand men, and, afterward, the army of King Marsile, thirty battalions, each composed of ten thousand men. Roland winds his horn, and the sound travels away thirty [213] leagues to Charlemagne, and is echoed by his sixty thousand hautboys. What visions such words awakened in those inexperienced brains! Then all at once the bow was unbent; the wounded Roland calls to mind "men of his lineage, of gentle France, of Charlemagne his lord who supports him, and cannot help but weep and sigh for them." At the conclusion of the carnage with which they filled Jerusalem, the crusaders, weeping and chanting, went barefoot to the holy sepulchre. Later, when a number of the barons wanted to leave the crusade of Constantinople, the others went to meet them, and entreated them on their knees; then all embraced each other, bursting into sobs. Robust children: that expresses the whole truth; they killed and howled as if they were beasts of prey, then when once the fury was calmed, they were all tears and tenderness, like a child who flings himself upon his brother's neck, or who is going to make his first communion.

VI.

I return to my Béarnais; they were the most active and circumspect of the band. The counts of Bearn fought and treated with all the world; they hover between the patronage of France, Spain and England, and are

subject to no one; they pass from one to the other and always to their own advantage, “drawn,” says Matthew [214]
Paris, “by pounds sterling, or crowns, of which they had both great need and great abundance.” They are always first where fighting is to be done or money to be gained; they go to be killed in Spain or to demand gold at Poitiers. They are calculators and adventurers; from imagination and courage lovers of warfare,—lovers of necessity and reflection.

FULL-SIZE **--** ***Medium-Size***

And in this manner their Henry won the crown of France, thinking much of his interests and little of his life, and always poor. After the camp at La Fère, when he was already recognized as king, he wrote: “I have only a pretence of a horse on which to fight, and no entire armor that I can put on; my shirts are in tatters, my pourpoints out at the elbows. My saucepan is many a time upset, and now these two days I have dined and supped with one and another, for my purveyors say that they see no way of furnishing my table any longer, [215]
especially since they have received no money for six months.”

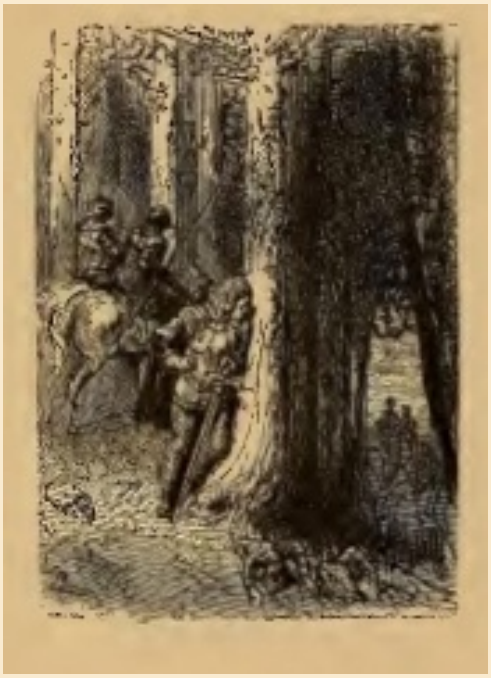
A month later, at Fontaine-Française, he charged an army at the head of eight hundred cavaliers, and fired off his pistol by way of sport, like a soldier. But at the same time this father of his people treated the people in the following manner: “The prisons of Normandy were full of prisoners for the payment of the duty on salt. They languished there in such wise that as many as six-score of their corpses were brought forth at one time. The parliament of Rouen besought His Majesty to have pity on his people; but the king had been told that a great revenue was coming from that tax, and said that he was willing that it should be raised, and seemed that he would wish to turn the rest into mockery.”

FULL-SIZE **--** ***Medium-Size***

A good fellow, no doubt, but a devil of a good fellow; we French are fond of such; they are likable, but sometimes deserve hanging. These had prudence into the bargain, and were made to be officers of fortune. "Gassion,” says Tallemant des Reaux, “was the fourth of five sons. When he had finished his studies, he was [216]
sent to the war; but otherwise he was but poorly furnished. For his sole horse his father gave him a docked pony, that might have been thirty years old; its like was not in all Bearn, and it was called, as a rarity, *Gassion’s Bob-tail.* Apparently the young man was scarcely better provided with money than with horses. This pretty courser left him four or five leagues from Pau, but that did not prevent him from going into Savoy, where he entered the troops of the duke, for there was then no war in France. But the late king having broken with this prince, all Frenchmen had orders to quit his service; this forced our adventurer to return to the service of the king.

“At the taking of the pass of Suze, he did so well, although only a simple cavalier, that he was made cornet;

but the company in which he was cornet was broken, and he came to Paris and asked for the mantle of a musketeer. He was refused on account of his religion. Out of spite, with several other Frenchmen he went over to Germany, and, although in his troop there were men of higher position than he, knowing how to talk in Latin, he was everywhere received for the chief of the band. One of these made the advances for a company of light-horse that they were going to raise in France for the king of Sweden; he was lieutenant of it; [217] his captain was killed, and now he is himself a captain. He soon made himself known as a man of spirit, so that he obtained from the king of Sweden the privilege of receiving orders only from His Majesty in person; this was on condition of marching always at the head of the army and of filling in a measure the position of forlorn hope. While thus employed, he received a frightful pistol-shot in the right side, the wound of which has since opened several times, now to the peril of his life, and now the opening answering as a crisis in other illnesses."



FULL-SIZE **--** ***Medium-Size***

He was a thorough soldier, and above all a lover of valor. A rebel peasant, at Avranches, fought admirably before a barricade, and killed the Marquis de Courtaumer, whom he took for Gassion. Gassion had search made everywhere for this gallant man, in order that he might be pardoned and to put him in his regiment. The Chancellor Séguier took the affair like a lawyer; some time after, having seized the peasant, he had him broken on the wheel. He treated civil affairs just as he did military ones. He sent word to a merchant in Paris [218] who had become bankrupt, owing him ten thousand livres, "that it would not be possible for him to let remain in the world a man who was carrying away his property." He was paid.

"He led men into war admirably. I have heard related an action of his, very bold and at the same time very sensible; before he was major-general, he asked several noblemen if they wished to join his party. They went with him. After having gone about the whole morning without finding anything, he said to them: 'We are too strong; the parties all fly before us. Let us leave here our horsemen, and go away alone.' The volunteers followed him; they went on until they were near to Saint-Omer. Just then two squadrons of cavalry suddenly appeared and cut off their way; for Saint-Omer was behind our people.

"'Messieurs,' said he to them, 'we must pass or die. Put yourselves all abreast; ride full speed at them and don't fire. The first squadron will be afraid, when they see that you mean to fire only into their teeth; they will rein back and overthrow the others.'" It happened just as he had said: our noblemen, well mounted, forced the two squadrons and saved themselves, almost to a man.

"Another, also very daring; which, however, seems to me a little rash. Having received notice that the [219] Croats were leading away the horses of the Prince d'Enrichemont, he wanted to charge upon them, accompanied by only a few of his horsemen, and, as there happened to be a great ditch between him and the enemy, he swam across it on his horse, without looking to see if any one followed him, so that he encountered the enemy alone, killed five of them, put the rest to flight, and returned with three of our men whom they had taken, and who perhaps helped him in the struggle. He led back all the horses."

The quondam light-horseman reappeared beneath the general's uniform. Thus he always remained the comrade of his soldiers. When any one had offended the least of his cavalrymen, he took the man with him and had satisfaction given in one way or another.

FULL-SIZE **--** ***Medium-Size***

“La Vieuxville, since superintendent, intrusted to him his eldest son to learn the trade of war. The young [220]
man treated Gassion magnificently at the army. 'You are trifling with yourself, Monsieur le Marquis,’ said he: ‘of what use are all these dainties? ‘S death! we only want good bread, good wine and good forage.’ He thought of his horse as much as of himself.”

FULL-SIZE **--** ***Medium-Size***

He was a poor courtier and troubled himself little about ceremonies. One day he went to the communion before the prince palatine, and the following Sunday, having found his place taken, he would never allow that a nobleman should give it up, and went to seek a place somewhere else. Nevertheless he was scarcely courtly towards ladies, and on this point not at all worthy of Henry IV.

“At court, many young ladies who were pleased with him, were wheedling him, and said: ‘Of a truth, [221]
monsieur, you have performed the finest possible deeds.’—‘That’s a matter of course,’ said he. When one said: ‘I should be glad to have a husband like M. de Gassion.’—‘I don’t doubt it,’ answered he.

“He said of Mlle, de Ségur, who was old and ugly, ‘I like that young woman; she looks like a Croat.’

“When Bougis, his *lieutenant de gendarmes*, stayed too long in Paris in the winter-time, he wrote to him: ‘You are amusing yourself with those women, and you will die like a dog; here you would find fine chances. What the devil do you find in the way of pleasure in going to court and making love! That is pretty business in comparison with the pleasure of taking a quarter!’”

His brother, Bergerê, seems to have had little taste for this pleasure. Gassion, then a colonel, on one occasion ordered him to charge at the head of fifty cavaliers, and declared that if he gave way he would run him through the body with his sword. An admirable method for forming men! Bergerê found his account in it, and afterwards went into action like any other man.

The two adventurers had a thoroughly military ending. Their brother the president, for economy’s sake, had Bergerê embalmed by a valet de chambre who mangled him shockingly. As for Gassion, he awaited burial during three months. "The president, tired of paying for the funeral hangings, had them returned, and others [222]
put up which cost him ten *sols* less a day. At last he had a small vault constructed between two gates in the

old cemetery; he had them interred one day when there was a sermon without any solemnity whatever, and so that no one could say that he had gone there on their account.” Three out of four heroes have been similarly buried, like dogs.

The last of the d’Artagnans, those heroic hunters after paying adventures, was (according to an inscription, said to be false) born at Pau, rue du Tran, No. 6. A drummer in 1792, he was in 1810 prince royal of Sweden. He had made his way, and along it he had lost his prejudices. Like Henry IV., he found that a kingdom was worth quite as much as a mass; he too made the perilous leap, but in a contrary direction, and laid aside his religion like an old cassock; a question of old clothes: a brand-new royal mantle was worth far more.

FULL-SIZE **--** ***Medium-Size***

[223]
[224]

BOOK III. THE VALLEY OF LUZ.

[225]

FULL-SIZE **--** ***Medium-Size***

CHAPTER I. ON THE WAY TO LUZ.

I.

The carriage leaves Eaux-Bonnes at dawn. The sun is scarcely yet risen, and is still hidden by the mountains. Pale rays begin to color the mosses on the western declivity. These mosses, bathed in dew, seem as if awakening under the first caress of the day. Rosy hues, of an inexpressible softness, rest on the summits, then steal down along the slopes. One could never have believed that these gaunt old creatures were capable of an expression so timid and so tender. The light broadens, heaven expands, the air is filled with joy and life. A bald peak in the midst of the rest, and darker than they, stands out in an aureole of flame. All at once, between two serrate points, like a dazzling arrow, streams the first ray of the sun. [226]

II.

Beyond Pau stretches a smiling country, golden with harvests, amongst which the Gave winds its blue folds between white and pebbly beaches. On the right, far away in a veil of luminous mist, the Pyrenees lift their

jagged tops, and the naked points of their black rocks. Their flanks, furrowed by the torrents of winter, are deeply scored and, as it were, turned up with an iron rake.

FULL-SIZE -- ***Medium-Size***

The picturesque country and the great mountains are seen to disclose themselves; the fences of the fields are of small rounded stones, in whose fissures abound waving grasses, pretty heaths, tufts of yellow sedum, and above all tiny pink geraniums, that shine in the sun like clusters of rubies. You are quite ready to seek for [227]
nymphs; we come across six in an orchard, not actually dancing, but dirty. They are eating bread and cheese, squatted on their heels, and stare at us with half-open mouth.

III.

Coarraze still preserves a tower and gateway, the remains of a castle. This castle has its legend, which Froissart recounts in a style so flowing and agreeable, so minute and expressive, that I cannot refrain from quoting it at length.

The Lord of Coarraze had a dispute with a clerk, and the clerk left him with threats. About three months after, when the knight least thought of it, and was sleeping in his bed with his lady, in his castle of Coarraze, there came invisible messengers, who made such a noise, knocking about everything they met with in the castle, as if they were determined to destroy all within it: and they gave such loud raps at the door of the chamber of the knight, that the lady was exceedingly frightened. The knight heard it all, but did not say a word, as he would not have it appear that he was alarmed, for he was a man of sufficient courage for any adventure. These noises and tumults continued, in different parts of the castle, for a considerable time, and [228]
then ceased. On the morrow, all the servants of the household assembled, and went to their lord,' and said, 'My lord, did you not hear what we all heard this night?' The Lord de Coarraze dissembled, and replied, 'What is it you have heard?'

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They then related to him all the noises and rioting they had heard, and that the plates in the kitchen had been broken. He began to laugh, and said, 'It was nothing, that they had dreamed it, or that it had been the wind.' 'In the name of God,' added the lady, 'I well heard it.' [229]

"On the following night the noises and rioting were renewed, but much louder than before, and there were such blows struck against the door and windows of the chamber of the knight, that it seemed they would break them down. The knight could no longer desist from leaping out of his bed, and calling out, 'Who is it that at this hour thus knocks at my chamber door?' He was instantly answered, 'It is I.' 'And who sends thee hither?' asked the knight. 'The clerk of Catalonia, whom thou hast much wronged; for thou hast deprived him of the rights of his benefice; I will, therefore, never leave thee quiet, until thou hast rendered him a just account, with which he shall be contented.'—'What art thou called,' said the knight, 'who art so good a messenger?'—'My name is Orthon.'—'Orthon,' said the knight, 'serving a clerk will not be of much advantage to thee; for if thou believest him he will give thee great trouble: I beg thou wilt therefore leave him and serve me, and I shall think myself obliged to thee.' Orthon was ready with his answer, for he had taken a liking to the knight, and said, 'Do you wish it?'—'Yes,' replied the knight; 'but no harm must be done to any one within these walls.'—'Oh, no,' answered Orthon; 'I have no power to do ill to any one, only to awaken thee and

disturb thy rest, or that of other persons.'—'Do what I tell thee,' added the knight, 'we shall well agree, and [230]
leave this wicked priest, for he is a worthless fellow, and serve me.'—'Well,' replied Orthon, 'since thou wilt have it so, I consent.'

"Orthon took such an affection to the Lord de Coarraze, that he came often to see him in the night-time, and when he found him sleeping, he pulled his pillow from under his head, or made great noises at the door or windows; so that when the knight was awakened, he said, 'Orthon, let me sleep.'—'I will not,' replied he, 'until I have told thee some news.' The knight's lady was so much frightened, the hairs of her head stood on end, and she hid herself under the bed-clothes. 'Well,' said the knight, 'and what news hast thou brought me?' Orthon replied, 'I am come from England, Hungary, or some other place, which I left yesterday, and such and such things have happened.' Thus did the Lord de Coarraze know by means of Orthon all things that were passing in different parts of the world; and this connection continued for five years; but he could not keep it to himself, and discovered it to the Count de Foix, in the manner I will tell you. The first year, the Lord de Coarraze came to the Count de Foix, at Orthès, or elsewhere, and told him, 'My lord, such an event has happened in England, in Scotland, Germany, or some other country,' and the Count de Foix, who found all [231]
this intelligence prove true, marvelled greatly how he could have acquired such early information, and entreated him so earnestly, that the Lord de Coarraze told him the means by which he had acquired his intelligence, and the manner of its communication.

"When the Count de Foix heard this, he was much pleased, and said, 'Lord de Coarraze, nourish the love of your intelligencer. I wish I had such a messenger; he costs you nothing, and you are truly informed of everything that passes in the world.'—'My lord,' replied the knight, 'I will do so.' The Lord de Coarraze was served by Orthon for a long time. I am ignorant if Orthon had more than one master; but two or three times every week he visited the knight and told him all the news of the countries he had frequented, which he wrote immediately to the Count de Foix, who was much delighted therewith, as there is not a lord in the world more eager after news from foreign parts than he is. Once, when the Lord de Coarraze was in conversation on this subject with the Count de Foix, the Count said, 'Lord de Coarraze, have you never yet seen your messenger?'—'No, by my faith, never, nor have I ever pressed him on this matter.'—'I wonder at that,' replied the count, 'for had he been so much attached to me, I should have begged of him to have shown himself in his own proper form; and I entreat you will do so, that you may tell how he is made, and what he is like. You have [232]
said that he speaks Gascon as well as you or I do.'—'By my faith,' said the Lord de Coar-raze, 'he converses just as well and as properly, and, since you request it, I will do all I can to see him.' It fell out when the Lord de Coarraze, as usual, was in bed with his lady (who was now accustomed to hear Orthon without being frightened), Orthon arrived and shook the pillow of the knight, who was asleep. On waking, he asked who was there. Orthon replied, 'It is I.'—'And where dost thou come from?'—'I come from Prague, in Bohemia.'—'How far is it hence?'—'Sixty days' journey,' replied Orthon. 'And hast thou returned thence in so short a time?'—'Yes, as may God help me: I travel as fast as the wind, or faster.'—'What, hast thou got wings?'—'Oh, no.'—'How, then, canst thou fly so fast?'—'That is no business of yours.'—'No!' said the knight. 'I should like exceedingly to see what form thou hast, and how thou art made.'—'That does not concern you to know,' replied Orthon; 'be satisfied that you hear me, and that I bring you intelligence you may depend on.'—'By God,' said the Lord de Coarraze, 'I should love thee better if I had seen thee.'—'Well,' replied Orthon, 'since you have such a desire, the first thing you shall see tomorrow morning, in quitting your bed, shall be [233]
myself.'—'I am satisfied,' said the knight; 'you may now depart; I give thee thy liberty for this night.'

"When morning came, the knight arose, but his lady was so much frightened she pretended to be sick, and said she would not leave her bed the whole day. The Lord de Coarraze willed it otherwise. 'Sir,' said she, 'if I do get up, I shall see Orthon; and, if it please God, I would neither see nor meet him.'—'Well,' replied the knight, 'I am determined to see him;' and leaping out of his bed, he seated himself on the bedstead, thinking he should see Orthon in his own shape; but he saw nothing that could induce him to say he had seen him. When the ensuing night arrived, and the Lord de Coarraze was in bed, Orthon came and began to talk in his usual manner. 'Go,' said the knight; 'thou art a liar. Thou oughtest to have shown thyself to me this morning, and hast not done so.'—'No!' replied Orthon; 'but I have.'—'I say, no.'—'And did you see nothing at all when you leaped out of bed?' The Lord de Coarraze was silent, and, having considered awhile, said, 'Yes; when sitting on my bedside, and thinking of thee, I saw two straws which were turning and playing together on the floor.'—'That was myself,' replied Orthon, 'for I had taken that form.' The Lord de Coarraze said, 'That will not satisfy me; I beg of thee to assume some other shape, so that I may see thee and know thee.' Orthon [234]
answered, 'You ask so much that you will ruin me and force me away from you, for your requests are too great.'—'You shall not quit me,' said the Lord de Coarraze; 'if I had once seen thee, I should not again wish it.'—'Well,' replied Orthon, 'you shall see me to-morrow, if you pay attention to the first thing you observe when you leave your chamber.'—'I am contented,' said the knight; 'now go thy ways, for I want to sleep.' Orthon departed.

FULL-SIZE **--** ***Medium-Size***

“On the morrow, about the hour of eight, the knight had risen and was dressed; on leaving his apartment, he went to a window which looked into the court of the castle. Casting his eyes about, the first thing he observed was an immensely large sow, but she was so poor, she seemed only skin and bone, with long [235] hanging ears all spotted, and a sharp-pointed, lean snout. The Lord de Coarraze was disgusted at such a sight, and, calling to his servants, said, ‘Let the dogs loose quickly, for I will have that sow killed and devoured.’ The servants hastened to open the kennel, and to set the hounds on the sow, who uttered a loud cry and looked up at the Lord de Coarraze, leaning on the balcony of his window, and was never seen afterwards; for she vanished, and no one ever knew what became of her.

FULL-SIZE **--** ***Medium-Size***

“The knight returned quite pensive to his chamber, for he then recollected what Orthon had told him, and said: ‘I believe I have seen my messenger Orthon, and repent having set my hounds on him, for perhaps I may never see him more: he frequently told me, that if I ever angered him, I should lose him.’ He kept his word; for never did he return to the hôtel de Coarraze, and the knight died the following year.” This Orthon, the [236] familiar spirits, queen Mab, are the poor little popular gods, children of the pool and the oak, engendered by the melancholy and awe-struck reveries of the spinning maiden and the peasant. A great state religion then overshadowed all thoughts; doctrine ready-made was imposed upon them; men could no longer, as in Greece or Scandinavia, build the great poem which suited their manners and mind. They received it from above, and repeated the litany with docility, yet not very well understanding it. Their invention produced only legends of

saints or churchyard superstitions. Since they could not reach God, they struck out for themselves goblins, hermits, and gnomes, and by these simple and fantastic figures they expressed their rustic life or their vague terrors. This Orthon, who storms at the door in the night and breaks the dishes, is he anything more than the night-mare of a half-wakened man, anxiously listening to the rustling of the wind that fumbles at the doors, and the sudden noises of the night magnified by silence! The child in his bed suffers similar fears when he covers eyes and ears that he may not see the strange shadow of the wardrobe, or hear the stifled cries of the thatch on the roof. The two straws that play convulsively on the floor, twined together like twins, and shine with mysterious brilliancy in the pale sunlight, leave a vague uneasiness in the disordered brain. [237]

FULL-SIZE **--** ***Medium-Size***

In this way is born the race of familiars and fairies, nimble creatures, swift travellers, as capricious and sudden as a dream, who amuse themselves maliciously in sticking together the manes of the horses, or in souring the milk, yet sometimes become tender and domesticated, attached like the cricket to its hearthstone, and are the penates of the country and the farm, invisible and powerful as gods, quaint and odd as children.

Thus all the legends preserve and set off vanished ways and sentiments, like to those mineral forces which, [238] deep down in the heart of the mountains, transform charcoal and stones into marble and the diamond.

FULL-SIZE **--** ***Medium-Size***

[239]

FULL-SIZE **--** ***Medium-Size***

[240]
[241]

IV.

We no sooner reach Lestelle, than we are assured on all sides that we must visit the chapel. We pass between rows of shops full of rosaries, basins for holy-water, medals, small crucifixes, through a cross-fire of offers, exhortations and cries. After which we are free to admire the edifice, a liberty which we are careful not to abuse. On the portal, indeed, there is a pretty enough virgin in the style of the seventeenth century, four evangelists in marble, and in the interior several tolerable pictures; but the blue dome starred with gold looks like a bonbonnière, the walls are disgraced with engravings from the rue Saint-Jacques, the altar is loaded with gewgaws. The gilded den is pretentious and gloomy; for such a beautiful country the good God seems but ill harbored.

The poor little chapel nestles close to a huge mountain wooded with crowded green thickets, which stretches out superbly in the light, and warms its belly in the sun. The highway is abruptly checked, makes a curve and crosses the Gave. The pretty bridge of a single arch rests its feet upon the naked rock and trails its ivy drapery in the blue-green eddies of the stream. We ascend beautiful wooded hills where the cows are grazing, and whose rounded slopes dip gently down to the river's brink. We are nearing Saint Pé, on the [242] confines of Bigorre and Beam.

Saint-Pe contains a curious Roman church writh sculptured doorway. A luminous dust was dancing in its warm shadows; the eyes penetrated with pleasure into the depths of the background; its reliefs seemed to swim in a living blackness. All at once comes a clatter of cracking whips, of rolling and grinding wheels, of hoofs that strike fire from the pavement; then the endless hedge of white walls running away to the right and the left, flecked with glaring lights; then the sudden opening of the heavens and the triumph of the sun, whose furnace blazes in the remotest depths of the air.

V.

FULL-SIZE **--** ***Medium-Size***

Near Lourdes, the hills became bald and the landscape sad. Lourdes is only a mass of dull, lead-colored roofs, heaped up below the highway. [243]

FULL-SIZE **--** ***Medium-Size***

[244]
The two small towers of the fort outline their slender forms against the sky. A single enormous, blackish rock [245]
lifts its back, corroded by mosses, above the enclosure of a slight wall that winds to shut it in, and suggests an elephant in a boarded shed. The neighborhood of the mountains dwarfs all human constructions.

Heavy clouds rose in the sky, and the dull horizon became encased between two rows of mountains, gaunt, patched with scant brushwood, cleft in ravines; a pale light fell on the mutilated summits and into the gray crevices. Bands of beggars, in relays, hooked themselves on to the carriage with hoarse inarticulate noises, with idiotic air, wry necks, and deformed bodies; the projecting sinews swelled the wrinkled skin, and, peeping through the rags and tatters, was seen the flesh, in color like a burned brick.

We entered the gorge of Pierrefitte. The clouds had spread, and darkened the whole heaven; the wind swept along in sudden gusts and whipped the dust into whirlwinds. The carriage rolled on between two immense walls of dark rocks, slashed and notched as if by the axe of an infuriate giant; rugged furrows, seamed with yawning gashes, reddish wounds, torn and crossed by pallid wounds, scar upon scar; the perpendicular flank still bleeds from multiplied blows. Half-detached, bluish masses hung in sharp points over [246]
our heads; a thousand feet higher up, layers of blocks leaned forward, overhanging the way. At a prodigious height, the black, battlemented summits pierced the vapors, while, with every step forward, it seemed as if the narrow passage were coming to an end. The darkness was growing, and, under that livid light with its threatening reflexes, it seemed that those beetling monsters were shaking and would soon engulf everything. The trees, beaten against the rock, were bending and twisting. The wind complained with a long-drawn piercing moan, and beneath its mournful sound, the hoarse rumbling of the Gave was heard as it dashed madly against the rocks it could not subdue, and moaned sadly like a stricken soul that rebels against the torments it is powerless to escape.

The rain came and covered all objects with its blinding veil. An hour later, the drained clouds were creeping along half way up the height; the dripping rocks shone through a dark varnish, like blocks of polished mahogany. Turbid water went boiling down the swollen cascades; the depths of the gorge were still darkened by the storm; but a tender light played over the wet summits, like a smile bathed in tears. The gorge opened up; the arches of the marble bridges sprang lightly into the limpid air, and, sheeted in light, Luz was seen [247]
seated among sparkling meadows and fields of millet in full bloom.

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[248]

"HEAVY CLOUDS ROSE IN THE SKY."

FULL-SIZE **--** ***Medium-Size***

[249]

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[250]

OLD HOUSE OF THE TEMPLARS AT LUZ.

FULL-SIZE **--** ***Medium-Size***

CHAPTER II. LUZ.

I.

Luz is a little city, thoroughly rustic and agreeable. Streams of water run down the narrow, flinty streets; the gray houses press together for the sake of gaining a little shade. The morning sees the arrival of flocks of sheep, of asses laden with wood, of grunting and undisciplined hogs, and bare-footed peasant girls, knitting as they walk alongside of their carts. Luz is in a spot where four valleys come together. Men and beasts disappear on the market-place; red umbrellas are fixed in the ground. The women seat themselves alongside their wares; around them their red-cheeked brats are nibbling their bread, and frisking like so many mice; provisions are sold, stuffs are bought. At noon the streets are deserted; here and there in [251] the shadow of a doorway may be discerned the figure of an old woman sitting, but no sound is heard save the gentle murmur of the streams along their stony bed.

The faces here are pretty: the children are a pleasure to look upon, before toil and the sun have spoiled their features. They amble merrily through the dust, and turn toward the passer their bright round faces, their speaking eyes, with slight and abrupt movements. When the girls, with their red petticoats tucked up, and in capulets of thick red stuff, approach to ask alms of you, you see under the crude color the pure oval of a clear-cut, proud countenance, a soft, almost pale hue, and the sweet look of two great tranquil eyes.

II.

The church is cool and solitary; it once belonged to the Templars. These monk-soldiers obtained a foothold in the most out-of-the-way corners of Europe. The tower is square as a fortress; the enclosing wall has

battlements like a fortified city. The dark old door-way would be easily defended. Upon its arch, which is very low, may be distinguished a half-obliterated Christ, and two fantastic, rudely colored birds. As you enter, a [252] small uncovered tomb serves as font, and you are shown a low door through which passed the accursed race of the *bigots.* * Its first aspect is singular, but has nothing unpleasant about it. A good woman in a red capulet, knitting in hand, was praying near a confessional of badly planed boards, under an old brown gallery of turned wood. Poverty and antiquity are never ugly, and this expression of religious care seemed to suit well with the ruins and souvenirs of the middle ages scattered about us.

** Name applied among the Pyrenees to a people afflicted with Cretinism.—Translator.*

But deeply rooted in the people is a certain indefinable love of the ridiculous and absurd which succeeds in spoiling everything; in this poor church, tracery, from which the gilding is worn away, crosses a vault of scoured azure with tarnished stars, flames, roses and little cherubs with wings for cravats. A brownish pink angel, suspended by one foot, flies forward, bearing in its hand a golden crown. In the opposite aisle may be seen the face of the sun, with puffy cheeks, semicircular eyebrows, and looking as sapient as in an almanac. The altar is loaded with a profusion of tarnished gilding, sallow angels, with simple and piteous faces like those of children who have eaten too much dinner. All this shows that their huts are very dreary, naked and dull. [253]

RUINS OF Á CHATEAU NEAR LUZ.

FULL-SIZE **--** ***Medium-Size***

[254]

A people that has just emerged from the dirt is apt to love gilding. The most insipid sweetmeat is delicious [255] to one who has long eaten nothing but roots and dry bread.

III.

Luz was formerly the capital of these valleys, which formed together a sort of republic; each commune deliberated upon its own private interests; four or five villages formed a *vic* and the deputies from every four vics assembled at Luz.

The list of the assessments was, from time immemorial, made upon bits of wood called *totchoux,* that is to say, sticks. Each community had its *totchoti,* upon which the secretary cut with his knife Roman ciphers, the value of which was known only to himself. In 1784 the intendant of Auch, who knew nothing of this custom, ordered of the government officials to bring to him the ancient registers; the official came, followed by two cartloads of totchoux.

Poor country, free country. The estates of Bigorre were composed of three chambers which deliberated separately; that of the clergy, that of the nobility, and the third estate, made up of consuls or principal officers of the communes, and deputies from the valleys. In these assemblies the taxes were apportioned, and [256] all important matters were discussed. A valley is a natural fortified city, defended against the outside world and stimulating association. The enemy could be arrested on his way, and crushed beneath the rocks; in winter, the torrents and the snow shut him off from all entrance. Could knights in armor pursue the herdsman into his bogs? What could they have taken as prisoners, except a few half-starved goats? The daring climbers, hunters of the bear and wolf, would willingly have played at this game, sure of winning at it warm clothes, arms and horses. It is thus that independence has lasted in Switzerland.

Free country, poor country. I have already remarked that in the valley of Ossau. The plains are mere defiles

between the feet of two chains. Cultivation climbs the slope, wherever it is not too steep. If a morsel of earth exists between two rocks, it is put to seed. Man gets from the desert as much as he can wrest from it: so terraces of fields and harvests mottle the declivity with green strips and yellow squares. Barns and stables sprinkle it with white patches; it is streaked by a long grayish footpath. But this robe, torn by jutting rocks as it is, stops short half-way up, and the summit is clothed only with barren moss.

The harvest is gathered in July, without horses, of course, or carts. On these slopes, man alone can perform [257] the service of a horse: the sheaves are enclosed in great pieces of cloth and fastened with cords; the reaper takes the enormous bundle upon his head, and ascends with naked feet among the sharp-pointed stalks and stones, without ever making a false step.

FULL-SIZE **--** ***Medium-Size***

You find here ordinances reducing by half the number of men-at-arms required of the country, founded upon the proportion of harvests destroyed each year by hail and frost. Several times, during the religious wars, the country became a desert. In 1575, Montluc declares “that it is now so poor that the dwellers hereabouts are forced to quit their houses and take to begging.” In 1592, the people of Comminge having [258] devastated the country, “the peasants of Bigorre abandoned the culture of the land for want of cattle, and the greater part of them took the road into Spain.” It is not a hundred years since that, in all the country, there, were known to exist but three hats and two pairs of shoes. To this very day, the mountaineers are forced to renew with every year their sloping fields, wasted by the rains of winter. “They burn, for light, bits of resinous pine, and scarcely ever taste meat.”

What misery is contained in those few words! Yet how deep must be the wretchedness that can break the tie that binds man to his native soil! A threadbare text from history, a phrase of passionless statistics, contain within their limits years of suffering, myriads of deaths, flight, separations, degradation. Of a truth, there is too much ill in the world. With every century, man removes a bramble and a stone that had helped to obstruct the way over which he advances; but what signifies a bramble or a stone? There remain, and always will remain, more than enough to lacerate and kill him. Besides, new flints are falling into the way, new thorns are springing up. Prosperity increases his sensibility: an equal pain is inflicted by a less evil; the body may be better shielded, but the soul is more disordered. [259]

FULL-SIZE **--** ***Medium-Size***

[260]

The benefits of the Revolution, the progress of industry, the discoveries of science, have given us equality, [261] the comforts of life, liberty of thought, but at the same time a malevolent envy, the rage for success, impatience of the present, necessity of luxury, instability of government, and all the sufferings of doubt and over-refinement.

FULL-SIZE **--** ***Medium-Size***

Is a citizen of the year 1872 any happier than one of the year

1672? Less oppressed, better informed; furnished with more comforts, all that is certain; but I do not know if he is more cheerful. One thing alone increases—experience, and with it science, industry, power. In all else, we lose as much as we gain, and the surest progress lies in resignation. [262]

IV.

This valley is everywhere refreshed and made, fertile by running water. On the road to Pierrefitte two swift streams prattle under the shade of the flowering hedges: no travelling companion could be gayer. On both sides, from every meadow, flow streamlets that cross each other, separate, come together, and finally together spring into the Gave. In this way the peasants water all their crops; a field has five or six lines of streams which run hemmed in by beds of slate. The bounding troop tosses itself in the sunlight, like a madcap band of boys just let loose from school. The turf that they nourish is of an incomparable freshness and vigor; the herbage grows thick along the brink, bathes its feet in the water, or lies under the rush of the little waves, and its ribbons tremble in a pearly reflection under the ripples of silver. You cannot walk ten steps without stumbling upon a waterfall; swollen and boiling cascades pour down upon great blocks of stone; transparent sheets stretch themselves over the rocky shelves; threadlike streaks of foam wind from the verge to the very valley; springs ooze out alongside the hanging grasses and fall drop by drop; on the right rolls the Gave, and drowns all these murmurs with its great monotonous voice. The beautiful blue iris thrives along the marshy [263] slopes; woods and Crops climb very high among the rocks. The valley smiles, encircled with verdure; but on the horizon the embattled peaks, the serrate crests and black escarpments of the notched mountains rise into the blue sky, beneath their mantle of snow.

FULL-SIZE **--** ***Medium-Size***

Back of Luz is a bare, rounded eminence, called Saint-Pierre, crowned by a fragment of gray ruin, and commanding a view of the whole valley. When the sky has been overcast, I have spent here entire hours without a moment of weariness: beneath its cloudy Curtain the air is moderately warm. Sudden patches of sunlight stripe the Gave, or illumine the harvests hung midway on the mountain slope. The swallows, with shrill cries, wheel high in the creeping vapors; the sound of the Gave comes up, softened by distance into a [264] harmony that is almost aerial. The wind breathes, and dies away; a troop of little flowers flutters at the passage of its wing; the buttercups are drawn up in line; frail little pinks bury in the herbage their rosy-purple stars; slender-stemmed grasses nod over the broad slaty patches; the air is filled with the fragrance of thyme. Are they not happy, these solitary plants, watered by the dew, fanned by the breezes?

FULL-SIZE **--** ***Medium-Size***

This height is a desert; no one comes to tread them down; they grow after their own sweet will, in clefts of the rock, by families, useless and free, flooded by the loveliest sunlight. And man, the slave of necessity, begs and calculates under penalty of his life! Three children, all in rags, came upon the scene: “What are you [265] looking for here?”

“Butterflies.”

“What for?”

“To sell.”

The youngest had a sort of tumor on his forehead. “Please, sir, a sou for the little one who is ill.”

FULL-SIZE **--** ***Medium-Size***

[266]

CHAPTER III. SAUVT-SAUVEUR.—BARÉGES.

I.

Saint-Sauveur is a sloping street, both pretty and regular, bearing no trace of the extemporized hotel or of the scenery of an opera, and without either the rustic roughness of a village or the tarnished elegance of a city. The houses extend without monotony, their lines of windows encased in rough-hewn marble: on the right, they are set back to back against pointed rocks, from which water oozes; on the left they overhang the Gave, which eddies at the bottom of the precipice.

The bath-house is a square portico with a double row of columns, in style at once noble and simple; the blue-gray of the marble, neither dull nor glaring, is pleasing to the eye. A terrace planted with lindens [267] projects over the Gave, and receives the cool breezes that rise from the torrent toward the heights; these lindens fill the air with a delicate and agreeable perfume. At the foot of the breast-high wall, the water of the spring shoots forth in a white jet and falls between the tree-tops into a depth unfathomable by the eye.

FULL-SIZE **--** ***Medium-Size***

At the end of the village, the winding paths of an English garden descend to the Gave; you cross its dull blue waters on a frail wooden bridge, and mount again, skirting a field of millet as far as the road to Scia. The [268]

side of this road plunges down six hundred feet, streaked with ravines; at the bottom of the abyss, the Gave writhes in a rocky corridor that the noon-day sun scarce penetrates; the slope is so rapid that, in several places, the stream is invisible; the precipice is so deep that the roar reaches the ear like a murmur. The torrent is lost to sight under the cornices and boils in the caverns; at every step it whitens with foam the smooth stone. Its restless ways, its mad leaps, its dark and livid reflexes, suggest a serpent wounded and covered with foam. But the strangest spectacle of all is that of the wall of rocks opposite: the mountain has been cleft perpendicularly as if by an immense sword, and one would say that the first gash had been further mutilated by hands, weaker, yet still infuriate. From the summit down to the Gave, the rock is of the color of dead wood, stripped of the bark; the prodigious tree-trunk, slit and jagged, seems mouldering away there through the centuries; water oozes in the blackened rents as in those of a worm-eaten block; it is yellowed by mosses such as vegetate in the rottenness of humid oaks. Its wounds have the brown and veined hues that one sees in the old scars of trees. It is in truth a petrified beam, a relic of Babel. The geologists are a [269] fortunate race; they express all this, and many things besides, when they say that the rock is schistose.

After going a league we found a bit of meadow, two or three cottages situated upon the gentle slope. The contrast is refreshing. And yet the pasturage is meagre, studded with barren rocks, surrounded with fallen debris; if it were not for a rivulet of ice-cold water, the sun would scorch the herbage. Two children were sleeping under a walnut tree; a goat that had climbed upon a rock was bleating plaintively and tremblingly; three or four hens, with curious and uneasy air, were scratching on the brink of a trench; a woman was drawing water from the spring with a wooden porringer: such is the entire wealth of these poor households. Sometimes they have, four or five hundred feet higher up, a field of barley, so steep that the reaper must be fastened by a rope in order to harvest it.

II.

The Gave is strewn with small islands, which may be reached by jumping from one stone to another. These islands are beds of bluish rock spotted with pebbles of a staring white; they are submerged in winter, and now there are trunks stripped of their bark still lying here and there among the bowlders. In some hollows [270] are remains of ooze; from these spring clusters of elms like a discharge of fireworks, and tufts of grass wave over the arid pebbles; around the hushed water grows warm in the caverns. Meanwhile on two sides the mountain lifts its reddish wall, streaked with foam by the streamlets that wind down over the surface. Over all the flanks of the island the cascades rumble like thunder; twenty ravines, one above another, engulf them in their chasms, and their roar comes from all sides like the din of a battle. A mist flashes back and floats above all this storm: it hangs among the trees and opposes' its fine cool gauze to the burning of the sun.

III.

In clear weather I have often climbed the mountain before sunrise. During the night, the mist of the Gave, accumulated in the gorges, has filled them to overflowing; under foot there is a sea of clouds, and overhead a dome of tender blue radiant with morning splendor; everything else has disappeared; nothing is to be seen but the luminous azure of heaven and the dazzling satin of the clouds; nature wears her vesture of purity. The eye glides with pleasure over the softly rounded forms of the aerial mass. [271]

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[272]

THE GAVE AT SUNSET.

FULL-SIZE **--** ***Medium-Size***

In its bosom the crests stand forth like promontories; the mountain tops that it bathes rise like an [273] archipelago of rocks; it buries itself in the jagged gulfs, and waves slowly around the peaks that it gains. The harshness of the bald crests heightens the grace of its ravishing whiteness. But it evaporates as it rises; already the landscapes of the depths appear under a transparent twilight; the middle of the valley discovers itself. There remains of the floating sea only a white girdle, which trails along the declivities; it becomes torn, and the shreds hang for a moment to the tops of the trees; the last tufts take flight, and the Gave, struck by the sun glitters around the mountain like a necklace of diamonds.

IV.

Paul and I have gone to Bareges; the road is a continual ascent for two leagues.

An alley of trees stretches between a brook and the Gave. The water leaps from every height; here and there a crowd of little mills is perched over the cascades; the declivities are sprinkled with them. It is

amusing to see the little things nestled in the hollows of the colossal slopes. And yet their slated roofs smile and gleam among the foliage. There is nothing here that is not gracious and lovely; the banks of the Gave preserve their freshness under the burning sun; the small streams scarcely leave between themselves and it a [274] narrow band of green; one is surrounded by running waters; the shadow of the ashes and alders trembles in the fine grass; the trees shoot up with a superb toss, in smooth columns, and only spread forth in branches at a height of forty feet. The dark water in the trench of slate grazes the green stems in its course; it runs so swiftly that it seems to shiver.

FULL-SIZE **--** ***Medium-Size***

On the opposite side of the torrent, the poplars rise one above another on the verdant hill; their palish leaves stand out against the pure blue of the sky; they quiver and shine at the slightest wind. Flowering [275] brambles descend the length of the rock and reach the tips of the waves. Further off, the back of the mountain, loaded with brushwood, stretches out in a warm tint of dark blue. The distant woods sleep in this envelope of living moisture, and the earth impregnated by it seems to inhale with it force and pleasure.

FULL-SIZE **--** ***Medium-Size***

V.

Soon the mountains grow bald, the trees disappear; nothing upon the slopes but a poor brushwood. [276] Bareges is seen. The landscape is hideous. The flank of the mountain is creviced with whitish slides; the narrow and wasted plain disappears beneath the coarse sand; the poor herbage, dry and weighed down, fails at every step; the earth is as if ripped open, and the slough, through its yawning wound, exposes the very entrails; the beds of yellowish limestone are laid bare; one walks on sands and trains of rounded pebbles; the Gave itself half disappears under heaps of grayish stones, and with difficulty gets out of the desert it has made. This broken-up soil is as ugly as it is melancholy; the debris are dirty and mean; they date from yesterday; you feel that the devastation begins anew with every year. Ruins, in order to be beautiful, must be either grand or blackened by time; here, the stones have just been unearthed, they are still soaking in the mud; two miry streamlets creep through the gullies: the place reminds one of an abandoned quarry.

The town of Bareges is as ugly as its avenue; melancholy houses, ill patched up; at some distance apart are long rows of booths and wooden huts, where handkerchiefs and poor ironmongery are sold. It is because the avalanche accumulates every winter in a mountain crevice on the left, and as it slides down carries off a side of the street; these booths are a scar. The cold mists collect here, the wind penetrates and the little town is [277] uninhabitable in winter.

FULL-SIZE **--** ***Medium-Size***

The around is enshrouded un der fifteen feet of snow; all the inhabitants emigrate; seven or eight mountaineers are left here with provisions, to watch over the houses and the furniture. It often happens that these poor people cannot get as far as Luz, and remain imprisoned during several weeks.

The bathing establishment is miserable, the compartments are cellars without air or light; there are only sixteen cabinets, all dilapidated. Invalids are often obliged to bathe at night. The three pools are fed by water which has just served for the bathing-tubs; that for the poor receives the water discharged from the other two. These pools, *piscines,* are low and dark, a sort of stifling, under-ground prison. One must have pretty[278] good health in order to be cured in them.

FULL-SIZE **--** ***Medium-Size***

The military hospital, banished to the north of the little town, is a melancholy plastered building, whose windows are ranged in rows with military regularity. The invalids, wrapped in a gray cloak too large for them, climb one by one the naked slope, and seat themselves among the stones; they bask whole hours in the sun, and look straight before them with a resigned air. An invalid’s days are so long! These wasted faces resume an air of gayety when a comrade passes; they exchange a jest: even in a hospital, at Bareges even, a[279] Frenchman remains a Frenchman.

You meet poor old men on crutches, invalids, climbing the steep street. Those visages reddened by the inclement air, those pitiful bent or twisted limbs, the swollen or enfeebled flesh, the dull eyes, already dead, are painful to behold. At their age, habituated to misery, they ought to feel only the suffering of the moment, not to trouble themselves about the past, and no longer to care for the future. You need to think that their torpid soul lives on like a machine. They are the ruins of man alongside those of the soil.

The aspect of the west is still more sombre. An enormous mass of blackish and snowy peaks girdles the horizon. They are hung over the valley like an eternal threat. Those spines so rugged, so manifold, so angular, give to the eye the sensation of an invincible hardness. There comes from them a cold wind, that drives heavy clouds towards Bareges; nothing is gay but the two jewelled streamlets which border the street and prattle noisily over the blue pebbles.

FULL-SIZE **--** ***Medium-Size***

VI.

In order to console ourselves here, we have read some charming letters; here is one of them from the little Duc du Maine, seven years old, whom Mme. de Maintenon had brought here to be cured. He wrote to his mother Mme. de Montespan, and the letter must certainly pass under the king's eyes. What a school of style was that court!

"I am going off to write all the news of the house for thy diversion, my dear little heart, and I shall write far better when I shall think that it is for you, madame. Mme. de Maintenon spends all her time in spinning, and, if they would let her, she would also give up her nights to it, or to writing. She toils daily for my mind; she has good hope of making something of it, and the darling too, who will do all he can to have some brains, for he is dying with the desire of pleasing the king and you. On the way here I read the history of Cæsar, am at present reading that of Alexander, and shall soon commence that of Pompey. La Couture does not like to lend me Mme. de Maintenon's petticoats, when I want to disguise myself as a girl. I have received the letter you write to the dear little darling; I was delighted with it; I will do what you bid me, if only to please you, for I love you superlatively. I was, and am still, charmed with the little nod that the king gave me on leaving, but [281] was very ill pleased that thou didst not seem to me sorry: thou wast beautiful as an angel."

Could any one be more gracious, more flattering, insinuating or precocious? To please was a necessity at that time, to please people of the world, quick-witted people. Never were men more agreeable; because there was never greater need of being agreeable. This youth, brought up among petticoats, took on from the beginning a woman's vivacity, her coquetry and smiles. You see that he gets upon their knees, receives and gives embraces, and is amusing; there is no prettier trinket in the *salon.*

Mme. de Maintenon, devout, circumspect and politic, also writes, but with the clearness and brevity of a worldly abbess or a president in petticoats. "You see that I take courage in a place more frightful than I can tell you; to crown the misery, we are freezing here. The company is poor; they respect and bore us. All the women are ill continually; they are loungers who have found the world really great as soon as ever they have been at Etampes."

We have amused ourselves with this raillery, dry, disdainful, clear-cut and somewhat too short, and I have maintained to Paul that Mme. de Maintenon resembles the yews at Versailles, brushy extinguishers that are [282] too closely clipped. Whereupon I spoke very ill of the landscapes of the seventeenth century, of Le Nôtre, Poussin and his architectural nature, Leclerc, Perelle, and of their abstract, conventional trees, whose majestically rounded foliage agrees with that of no known species. He lectured me severely, according to his custom, and called me narrow-minded; he maintains that all is beautiful; that all that is necessary is to put yourself at the right point of view. His reasoning was nearly as follows:

He claims that things please us by contrast, and that beautiful things are different for different souls. "One day," said he, "I was travelling with some English people in Champagne, on a cloudy day in September. They found the plains horrible, and I admirable. The dull fields stretched out like a sea to the very verge of the horizon, without encountering a hill. The stalks of the close-reaped wheat dyed the earth with a wan yellow; the plain seemed covered with an old wet mantle. Here were lines of deformed elms; here and there a meagre square of fir-trees; further off a cottage of chalk with its white pool: from furrow to furrow the sun trailed its sickly light, and the earth, emptied of its fruits, was like a woman dead in child-bed whose infant they have taken away. [283]


THE FIRS.

FULL-SIZE **--** ***Medium-Size***

[284]
[285]
“My companions were utterly bored, and called down curses on France. Their minds, strained by the rude passions of politics, by the national arrogance, and the stiffness of scriptural morality, needed repose. They wanted a smiling and flowery country, meadows soft and still, fine shadows, largely and harmoniously grouped on the slopes of the hills..The sunburnt peasants, dull of countenance, sitting near a pool of mud, were disagreeable to them. For repose, they dreamed of pretty cottages set in fresh turf, fringed with rosy honeysuckle. Nothing could be more reasonable. A man obliged to hold himself upright and unbending finds a sitting posture the most beautiful..

“You go to Versailles, and you cry out against the taste of the seventeenth century. Those formal and monumental waters, the firs turned in the lathe, the rectangular staircases heaped one above another, the trees drawn up like grenadiers on parade, recall to you the geometry class and the platoon school. Nothing can be better. But cease for an instant to judge according to your habits and wants of the day. You live alone, or at home, on a third floor in Paris, and spend four hours weekly in the saloons of some thirty different people. Louis XIV. lived eight hours a day, every day the whole year long, in public, and this public included all the lords of France. He held his drawing-room in the open air; the drawing-room is the park at Versailles.
[286]
Why ask of it the charms of a valley? These squared hedges of hornbeam are necessary that the embroidered coats may not be caught. This levelled and shaven turf is necessary that high-heeled shoes may not be wetted. The duchesses will form a circle about these circular sheets of water. Nothing can be better chosen than these immense and symmetrical staircases for showing off the gold and silver laced robes of three hundred ladies. These large alleys, which seem empty to you, were majestic when fifty lords in brocade and lace displayed here their *cordons bleus* and their graceful bows. No garden is better constructed for showing one’s self in grand costume and in great company, for making a bow, for chatting and concocting intrigues of gallantry and business. You wish perhaps to rest, to be alone, to dream; you must go elsewhere; you have come to the wrong gate: but it would be the height of absurdity to blame a drawing-room for being a drawing-room.

“You understand then that our modern taste will be as transitory as the ancient; that is to say, that it is precisely as reasonable and as foolish. We have the right to admire wild, uncultivated spots, as once men had the right of getting tired in them. Nothing uglier to the seventeenth century than a true mountain. It recalled
[287]
a thousand ideas of misfortune.

FULL-SIZE **--** ***Medium-Size***

“The men who had come out from the civil wars and semi-barbarism thought of famines, of long journeys on horseback through rain and snow, of the wretched black bread mingled with straw, of the foul hostelries, infested with vermin. They were tired of barbarism as we of civilization. To-day the streets are so clean, the police so abundant, the houses drawn out in such regular lines, manners are so peaceful, events so small and so clearly foreseen, that we love grandeur and the unforeseen. The landscape changes as literature does: then literature furnished long sugary romances and elegant dissertations; now-a-days it offers spasmodic [288] poetry and a physiological drama. Landscape is an unwritten literature; the former like the latter is a sort of flattery addressed to our passions, or a nourishment proffered to our needs.

FULL-SIZE **--** ***Medium-Size***

“These old wasted mountains, these lacerating points, bristling by myriads, these formidable fissures whose perpendicular wall plunges with a spring down into invisible depths; this chaos of monstrous ridges heaped together, and crushing each other like an affrighted herd of leviathans; this universal and implacable [289] domination of the naked rock, the enemy of all life, refreshes us after our pavements, our offices and our shops. You only love them from this cause, and this cause removed, they would be as unpleasant to you as to Madame de Maintenon.”

FULL-SIZE -- *Medium-Size*

So that there are fifty sorts of beauty,—one for every age.

“Certainly.”

Then there is no such thing as beauty.

“That is as if you were to say that a woman is nude because she has fifty dresses.” [290]

FULL-SIZE -- *Medium-Size*

CHAPTER IV. CAUTERETS.

I.

Cauterets is a town at the bottom of a valley, melancholy enough, paved, and provided with an octroi. Innkeepers, guides, the whole of a famished population besieges us; but we have considerable force of mind, and after a spirited resistance we obtain the right of looking about and choosing.

Fifty paces further on, we are fastened upon by servants, children, donkey-hirers and boys, who accidentally stroll about us. They offer us cards, they praise up to us the site, the cuisine; they accompany us, cap in hand, to the very edge of the village; at the same time they elbow away all competitors: “The stranger is mine, I’ll baste you if you come near him.” Each hotel has its runners on the watch; they hunt the isard in [291] winter, the traveller in summer.

The town has several springs: that of the King cured Abarca, king of Aragon; that of Cæsar restored health, as they say, to the great Cæsar. Faith is needed in history as well as in medicine.

THE PATIENTS OF THE OLDEN TIME.

FULL-SIZE -- *Medium-Size*

For example, in the time of Francis I. the Eaux Bonnes cured wounds; they were called *Eaux d’arqtiebusades* ; the soldiers wounded at Pavia were sent to them. Now they cure diseases of the throat and [292] chest. A hundred years hence they will perhaps heal something else; with every century medicine makes an advance.

“Formerly,” said Signarelle, “the liver was at the right and the heart at the left; we have reformed all that.”

A celebrated physician one day said to his pupils: “Employ this remedy at once, while it still cures.” Medicines, like hats, have their fashions.

Yet what can be said against this remedy? The climate is warm, the gorge sheltered, the air pure, the gayety of the sun is cheering. A change of habits leads to a change of thoughts; melancholy ideas take flight. The water is not bad to drink; you have had a beautiful journey; the moral cures the physical nature; if not, you have had hope for two months—and what, I beg to know, is a remedy, if not a pretext for hoping? You take patience and pleasure until either illness or invalid departs, and everything is for the best in the best of

worlds.

II.

Several leagues away, among the precipices, sleeps the lake of Gaube. The green water, three hundred feet in depth, has the reflexes of an emerald. [293]

FULL-SIZE **--** ***Medium-Size***

[294]

The bald heads of the mountains are mirrored in it with a divine serenity. The slender column of the pines [295] is reflected there as clear as in the air; in the distance, the woods clothed in bluish mist come down to bathe their feet in its cold wave, and the huge Vignemale, spotted with snow, shuts it about with her cliffs. At times a remnant of breeze comes to ruffle it, and all those grand images undulate; the Greek Diana, the wild, maiden huntress, would have taken it for a mirror.

FULL-SIZE **--** ***Medium-Size***

How one sees her come to life again in such sites! Her marbles are fallen, her festivals have vanished; but in the shivering of the firs, at the sound of the cracking glaciers, before the steely splendors of these chaste [296] waters, she reappears like a vision. All the night long, in the outcries of the wind, the herdsmen could hear the baying of her hounds and the whistling of her arrows; the untamed chorus of her nymphs coursed over the precipices; the moon shone upon their shoulders of silver, and on the point of their lances. In the morning she came to bathe her arms in the lake; and more than once has she been seen standing upon a summit, her eyes fixed, her brow severe; her foot trod the cruel snow, and her virgin breasts gleamed beneath the winter sun.

III.

The Diana of the country is more amiable; it is the lively and gracious Margaret of Navarre, sister and liberatress of Francis I. She came to these waters with her court, her poets, her musicians, her savants, a poet and theologian herself, of infinite curiosity, reading Greek, learning Hebrew, and taken up with Calvinism. On coming out of the routine and discipline of the middle ages, disputes about dogma and the thorns of erudition appeared agreeable, even to ladies; Lady Jane Grey, Elizabeth took part in these things: it was a fashion, as two centuries later it was good taste to dispute upon Newton and the existence of God. The Bishop of Meaux wrote to Margaret: “Madame, if there were at the end of the world a doctor who, by a single [297] abridged verb, could teach you as much grammar as it is possible to know, and another as much rhetoric, and another philosophy, and so on with the seven liberal arts, each one by an abridged verb, you would fly there as to the fire.” She did fly there and got overloaded. The heavy philosophic spoil oppressed her already slender thought. Her pious poems are as infantile as the odes written by Racine at Port-Royal. What trouble we have had in getting free from the middle ages! The mind bent, warped and twisted, had contracted the ways of a choir-boy.

A poet of the country composed in her honor the following pretty song:—

“At the baths of Toulouse
There’s a spring clear and fair,
And three pretty doves
Came to drink and bathe there;
When at last they had bathed
Thus for months barely three,
For the heights of Cauterets
Left they fountain and me.
But why go to Cauterets,
What is there to be seen?

“It is there that we bathe
With the king and the queen. [298]
And the king has a cot
Hung with jasmin in flower;
The dear queen has the same,
But love makes it a bower.”

Is it not graceful and thoroughly southern? Margaret is less poetic, more French: her verses are not brilliant, but at times are very touching, by force of real and simple tenderness.

A moderate imagination, a woman’s heart thoroughly devoted, and inexhaustible in devotion, a good deal of naturalness, clearness, ease, the art of narration and of smiling, an agreeable but never wicked malice, is not this enough to make you love Margaret and read here the Heptameron? [299]

NEAR PONT D’ESPAGNE.

FULL-SIZE **--** ***Medium-Size***

IV. [300]

FULL-SIZE -- ***Medium-Size***

She wrote the Heptameron here; it seems that a journey to the waters was then less safe than now-a-days. [301]

The first day of the month of September, as the baths of the Pyrenees mountains begin to have virtue, were found at those of Caulderets several persons, from France and Spain as well as other places; some to drink [302] the water, others bathe in it, others to take the mud, which things are so marvellous, that invalids abandoned by the physicians return from them completely cured. But about the time of their return, there came on such great rains, that it seemed that God had forgotten the promise given to Noah never again to destroy the world by water; for all the cabins and dwellings of the said Caulderets were so filled with water that it became impossible to live in them.

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“The French lords and ladies, thinking to return to Tarbes as easily as they had come, found the little brooks so swollen that they could scarcely ford them. But when they came to pass the Bearnese Gave, which was not two feet deep when they first saw it, they found it so large and impetuous, that they made a circuit to [303] look for the bridges, which, being nothing but wood, were swept away by the vehemence of the water.

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[304]

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"And some, thinking to break the violence of the course by assembling several together, were so promptly [305] swept away, that those who would follow them lost the power and the desire of going after.” Whereupon they separated, each one seeking a way for himself. “Two poor ladies, half a league beyond Pierrefitte, found a bear coming down the mountain, before which they galloped away in such great haste that their horses fell dead under them at the entrance of their dwelling; two of their women, who came a long time after, told them that the bear had killed all their serving men.

“So while they are all at mass, there comes into the church a man with nothing on but his shirt, fleeing as if some one were chasing and following him up. It was one of their companions by the name of Guébron, who recounted to them how, as he was in a hut near Pierrefitte, three men came while he was in bed; but he, all in his shirt as he was, with only his sword, wounded one of them so that he remained on the spot, and, while the

other two amused themselves in gathering up their companion, thought that he could not escape if not by flight, as he was the least burdened by clothing. [306]

"The abbé of Saint-Savin furnished them with the best horses to be had in Lavedan, good Bearn cloaks, a quantity of provisions, and pretty companions to lead them safely in the mountains."

But it was necessary to busy themselves somewhat, while waiting for the Gave to go down. In the morning they went to find Mme. Oysille, the oldest of the ladies; they devoutly listened to the mass with her; after which "she did not fail to administer the salutary food which she drew from the reading of the acts of the saints and glorious apostles of Jesus Christ." The afternoon was employed in a very different fashion: they went into a beautiful meadow along the river Gave, where the foliage of the trees is so dense, "that the sun could neither pierce the shade nor warm the coolness, and seated themselves upon the green grass, which is so soft and delicate that they needed neither cushions nor carpets." And each in turn related some gallant adventure with details infinitely artless and singularly precise. There were some relating to husbands and yet more about monks. The lovely theologian is the grand-daughter of Boccaccio, and the grand-mother of La Fontaine.

This shocks us, and yet is not shocking. Each age has its degree of decency, which is prudery for this and blackguardism for another. [307]

FULL-SIZE **--** ***Medium-Size***

[308]

The Chinese find our trousers and close-fitting coat-sleeves horribly immodest; I know a lady, an Englishwoman in fact, who allows only two parts in the body, the foot and the stomach: every other word is indecent; so that when her little boy has a fall, the governess must say: "Master Henry has fallen, Madame, on the place where the top of his feet rejoins the bottom of his stomach. [309]

The habitual ways of the sixteenth century were very different. The lords lived a little like men of the people; that is why they talked somewhat like men of the people. Bonnivet and Henri II. amused themselves in jumping like school-boys, and leaping over ditches twenty-three feet wide. When Henry VIII. of England had saluted Francis I. on the field of the cloth of gold, he seized him in his arms and tried to throw him, out of pure sportiveness; but the king, a good wrestler, laid him low by a trip. Fancy to-day the Emperor Napoleon at Tilsitt receiving the Emperor Alexander in this fashion. The ladies were obliged to be robust and agile as our peasants. To go to an evening party they had to mount on horseback; Margaret, when in Spain, fearful of being detained, made in eight days the stages for which a good horseman would have required fifteen days; one had, too, to guard one's self against violence; once she had need of her two fists and all her nails against Bonnivet. In the midst of such manners, free talk was only the natural talk; the ladies heard it every day at [310] table, and adorned with the finest commentaries. Brantôme will describe for you the cup from which certain lords made them drink, and Cellini will relate you the conversation that was held with the Duchess of Ferrara. A milkmaid now-a-days would be ashamed of it. Students among themselves, even when they are tipsy, will scarce venture what the ladies of honor of Catherine de Medicis sang at the top of their voice and with all their heart. Pardon our poor Margaret; relatively she is decent and delicate, and then consider that two hundred years hence, you also, my dear sir and madam, you will perhaps appear like very blackguards.

V.

Sometimes here, after a broiling day, the clouds gather, the air is stifling, one feels fairly ill, and a storm bursts forth. There was such an one last night. Each moment the heavens opened, cleft by an immense flash, and the vault of darkness lifted itself entire like a tent. The dazzling light marked out the limits of the various cultures and the forms of the trees at the distance of a league. The glaciers flamed with a bluish glimmer; the jagged peaks suddenly lifted themselves upon the horizon like an army of spectres. [311]

FULL-SIZE **--** ***Medium-Size***

[312]
[313]
The gorge was illumined in its very depths; its heaped-up blocks, its trees hooked on to the rocks, its torn ravines, its foaming Gave, were seen under a livid whiteness, and vanished like the fleeting visions of an unknown and tortured world.

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Soon the voice of the thunder rolled in the gorges; the clouds that bore it crept midway along the mountain side, and came into collision among the rocks; the report burst out like a discharge of artillery. The wind rose and the rain came on. The inclined plane of the summits opened up under its squalls; the funeral drapery of [314]
the pines clung to the sides of the mountain. A creeping plain came out from the rocks and trees. The long streaks of rain thickened the air; under the flashes you saw the water streaming, flooding the summits, descending the two slopes, sliding in sheets over the rocks, and from all sides in hurried waves running to the Gave. In the morning the roads were cut up with sloughs, the trees hung by their bleeding roots, great patches of earth had fallen away, and the torrent was a river.

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[315]

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CHAPTER V. SAINT-SAVIN.

I.

Upon a hill, at the end of a road, are the remains of the abbey of Saint-Savin. The old church was, they say, built by Charlemagne; the stones, eaten and burned, are crumbling, the disjointed flags are incrusted with moss; from the garden the eye takes in the valley, brown in the evening light; the winding Gave already lifts into the air its trail of pale smoke.

It was sweet here to be a monk; it is in such places that the *Imitation* should be read; in such places was it written. For a sensitive and noble nature, a convent was then the sole refuge; all around wounded and repelled it.

Around what a horrible world! Brigand lords who plunder travellers and butcher each other; artisans and soldiers who stuff themselves with meat and yoke themselves together like brutes; peasants whose huts they[316] burn, whose wives they violate, who out of despair and hunger slip away to tumult.

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No remembrance of good, nor hope of better. How sweet it is to renounce action, company, speech, to hide one’s self, forget outside things, and to listen, in security and solitude, to the divine voices that, like collected springs, murmur peacefully in the depths of the heart!

How easy is it here to forget the world! Neither books, nor news, nor science; no one travels and no one thinks. This valley is the whole universe; from time to time a peasant passes, or a man-at-arms. A moment more and he is gone; the mind has retained no more trace of him than the empty road. Every morning the

eyes find again the great woods asleep upon the mountain's brow, and the layers of clouds stretched out on [317]
the edge of the sky. The rocks light up, the summit of the forests trembles beneath the rising breeze, the shadow changes at the foot of the oaks, and the mind takes on the calm and the monotony of these slow sights by which it is nourished. Meanwhile the responses of the monks drone confusedly in the chapel; then their measured tread resounds in the high corridors. Each day the same hours bring back the same impressions and the same images. The soul empties itself of worldly ideas, and the heavenly dream, which begins to flow within, little by little heaps up the silent wave that is going to fill it.

Far from it are science and treatises on doctrine. They drain the stream instead of swelling it. Will so many words augment peace and inward tenderness? "The kingdom of God consisteth not in word, but in power." The heart must be moved, tears must flow, the arms must open toward an unseen place, and the sudden trouble will not be the work of the lips, but the touch of the hand divine. This hand it is which doth "lift up the humble mind;" this it is which teaches "without noise of words, without confusion of opinions, without ambition of honor, without the scuffling of arguments." A light penetrates, and all at once the eyes see as it were a new heaven and a new earth. [318]

FULL-SIZE **--** ***Medium-Size***

The men of the age perceive in its events only the events themselves; the solitary discovers behind the veil of things created the presence and the will of God. He it is who by the sun warms the earth, and by the rain refreshes it. He it is who sustains the mountains and envelops them at the setting of the sun in the repose of night. The heart feels everywhere, around and inside of things, an immense goodness, like a vague ocean of light which penetrates and animates the world; to this goodness it intrusts and abandons itself, like a child that drops asleep at evening on its mother's knees. A hundred times a day divine things become palpable to it. The light streams through the morning mist, chaste as the brow of the virgin; the stars shine like celestial [319]
eyes, and yonder when the sun goes down the clouds kneel at the brink of heaven, like a blazing choir of seraphim.

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[320]

FULL-SIZE **--** ***Medium-Size***

The heathen were indeed blind in their thoughts upon the grandeur of nature. What is our earth, but a [321]

narrow pass between two eternal worlds! Down there, beneath our feet, are the damned and their pains; they howl in their caverns and the earth trembles; without the sign of God, these walls would to-morrow be swallowed up in their abyss; they often come out thence by the bare precipices; the passers-by hear their shouts of laughter in the cascades; behind those gnarled beeches, glimpses have been caught of their grimacing countenances, their eyes of flame, and more than one herdsman, wandering at night towards their haunt, has been found in the morning with hair on end and twisted neck. But up there, in the azure, above the crystal, are the angels; many a time has the vault opened, and, in a long trail of light, the saints have appeared more radiant than molten silver, suddenly visible, then all at once vanished. A monk saw them; the last abbot was informed by them, in a vision, of the spring which healed his diseases. Another, long time ago, hunting wild beasts one day, saw a great stag stop before him with eyes filled with tears; when he had looked, he saw upon its antlers the cross of Jesus Christ, fell on his knees, and, on his return to the convent, lived for [322]
thirty years doing penance in his cell, without any desire to leave it. Another, a very young man, who had gone into a forest of pines, heard far off a nightingale which sang marvellously; he drew near in astonishment, and it seemed to him that everything was transfigured; the brooks flowed as it were a long stream of tears, and again seemed full of pearls; the violet fringes of the firs shone magnificently, like a stole, upon their funereal trunks. The rays ran along the leaves, empurpled and azured as if by cathedral windows; flowers of gold and velvet opened their bleeding hearts in the midst of the rocks. He approached the bird, which he could not see among the branches, but which sang like the finest organ, with notes so piercing and so tender, that his heart was at once torn and melted. He saw nothing more of what was about him, and it seemed to him that his soul detached itself from his breast, and went away to the bird, and mingled itself with the voice which rose ever vibrating more and more in a song of ecstasy and anguish, as if it had been the inner voice of Christ to his Father when he was dying on the cross. When he returned towards the convent, he was astonished to find that the walls, which were quite new, had become brown as through age, that the little lindens in the garden were now great trees, that no face among the monks was familiar to him, and that [323]
no one remembered to have seen him. Finally an infirm old monk called to mind that in former times they had talked to him of a novice who had gone, a hundred years before, into the pine forest, but who had not come back, so that no one had ever known what had happened to him. Thus transported and forgotten will those live who shall hear the inner voices. God envelops us, and we have only to abandon ourselves to him in order to feel him.

For he does not hold communion through outside things only; he is within us, and our thoughts are his words. He who retires within himself, who listens no more to the news of this world, who effaces from his mind its reasonings and imaginations, and who holds himself in expectancy, in silence and solitude, sees little by little a thought rise in him which is not his own, which comes and goes without his will, and, whatever he may will, which fills and enchants him, like those words, heard in a dream, which make tranquil the soul with their mysterious song. The soul listens and no longer perceives the flight of the hours; all its powers are arrested, and its movements are nothing but the impressions which come to it from above. Christ speaks, it answers; it asks, and he teaches; it is afflicted, and he consoles. “My son, now will I teach thee the way of peace and true liberty. O Lord, I beseech thee, do as thou sayest, for this is delightful for me to hear. *Be* [324]
desirous, my son, to do the will of another rather than thine own, choose always to have less rather than more. Seek always the lowest place, and to be inferior to every one. Wish always, and pray, that the will of God may be wholly fulfilled in thee. Behold such a man entereth within the borders of peace and rest. O Lord, this short discourse of thine containeth within itself much perfection. It is little to be spoken, but full of meaning, and abundant in fruit.” How languid is everything alongside of this divine company! How all which departs from it is unsightly! “When Jesus is present, all is well, and nothing seems difficult: but when Jesus is absent everything is hard. When Jesus speaks not inwardly to us, all other comfort is nothing worth; but if Jesus speak but one word, we feel great consolation. How dry and hard art thou without Jesus! How foolish and vain, if thou desire anything out of Jesus! Is not this a greater loss than if thou shouldest lose the whole world? He that findeth Jesus, findeth a good treasure, yea, a Good above all good. And he that loseth Jesus, loseth much indeed, yea, more than the whole world! Most poor is he who liveth without Jesus; and he most rich who is well with Jesus. It is matter of great skill to know how to hold converse with Jesus; and to know how to keep Jesus, a point of great wisdom. Be thou humble and peaceable, and Jesus will be with thee. Be [325]
devout and quiet, and Jesus will stay with thee..Thou mayest soon drive away Jesus and lose his favor if thou wilt turn aside to outward things. And if thou shouldest drive him from thee, and lose him, unto whom wilt thou flee, and whom wilt thou seek for thy friend? Without a friend thou canst not well live; and if Jesus be not above all a friend to thee, thou shalt be sad and desolate.”—“Behold! My God, and all things.” What can I wish more, and what happier thing can I long for? “My God, and all things.” To him that understandeth, enough is said; and to repeat it often is delightful to him that loveth.

Some died of this love, lost in ecstasies or drowned in a divine languor. These are the great poets of the middle ages.

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[326]

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CHAPTER VI. GAVARNIE.

I.

From Luz to Gavarnie is eighteen miles. It is enjoined upon every living creature able to mount a horse, a mule, or any quadruped whatever, to visit Gavarnie; in default of other beasts, he should, putting aside all shame, bestride an ass. Ladies and convalescents are taken there in sedan-chairs.

Otherwise, think what a figure you will make on your return.

“You come from the Pyrenees; you’ve seen Gavarnie?”

“No.”

What then did you go to the Pyrenees for?

You hang your head, and your friend triumphs, especially if he was bored at Gavarnie. You undergo a description of Gavarnie after the last edition of the guide-book. Gavarnie is a sublime sight; tourists go sixty [327] miles out of their way to see it; the Duchess d’Angoulême had herself carried to the furthest rocks; Lord Bute, when he saw it for the first time, cried: “If I were now at the extremity of India, and suspected the existence of what I see at this moment, I should immediately leave in order to enjoy and admire it!” You are overwhelmed with quotations and supercilious smiles; you are convicted of laziness, of dulness of mind, and, as certain English travellers say, of *unæsthetic insensibility.*

There are but two resources: to learn a description by heart, or to make the journey. I have made the journey, and am going to give the description.

II.

We leave at six o’clock in the morning, by the road to Scia, in the fog, without seeing at first anything beyond great confused forms of trees and rocks. At the end of a quarter of an hour, we hear along the pathway a noise of sharp cries drawing near: it was a funeral procession coming from Scia. Two men bore a small coffin under a white shroud; behind came four herdsmen in long cloaks and brown capuchons, silent, with bent heads; four women followed in black mantles. It was they who uttered those monotonous and [328] piercing lamentations; one knew not if they were wailing or praying. They walked with long steps through the cold mist, without stopping or looking at any one, and were going to bury the poor body in the cemetery at Luz.

FULL-SIZE **--** ***Medium-Size***

At Scia the road passes over a small bridge very high up, which commands another bridge, gray and abandoned. The double tier of arches bends gracefully over the blue torrent; meanwhile a pale light already floats in the diaphanous mist; a golden gauze undulates above the Gave; the aërial veil grows thin and will [329] soon vanish.

[330]

FULL-SIZE **--** ***Medium-Size***

Nothing can convey the idea of this light, so youthful, timid and smiling, which glitters like the bluish wings [331] of a dragon-fly that is pursued and is taken captive in a net of fog. Beneath, the boiling water is engulfed in a narrow conduit and leaps like a mill-race. The column of foam, thirty feet high, falls with a furious din, and its glaucous waves, heaped together in the deep ravine, dash against each other and are broken upon a line of fallen rocks. Other enormous rocks, debris of the same mountain, hang above the road, their squared heads crowned with brambles for hair; ranged in impregnable line, they seem to watch the torments of the Gave, which their brothers hold beneath themselves crushed and subdued.

III.

We turn a second bridge and enter the plain of Gèdres, verdant and cultivated, where the hay is in cocks; they are harvesting; our horses walk between two hedges of hazel; we go along by orchards; but the mountain is ever near; the guide shows us a rock three times the height of a man, which, two years ago, rolled down and demolished a house. We encounter several singular caravans: a band of young priests in [332] black hats, black gloves, black cassocks tucked up, black stockings, very apparent, novices in horsemanship who bound at every step, like the Gave; a big, jolly round man, in a sedan-chair, his hands crossed over his belly, who looks on us with a paternal air, and reads his newspaper; three ladies of sufficiently ripe age, very slender, very lean, very stiff, who, for dignity's sake, set their beasts on a trot as we draw near them. The cicisbeo is a bony cartilaginous gentleman, fixed perpendicularly on his saddle like a telegraph-pole. We hear a harsh clucking, as of a choked hen, and we recognize the English tongue.

As for the French nation, it is but poorly represented at Gèdres. First appears a long, mouldy custom-house officer, who indorses the permission to pass of the horses; with his once green coat the poor man had the air of having sojourned a week in the river. No sooner has he let us go, than a blackguard band, boys and girls, pounces upon us; some stretch out their hands, others wish to sell stones to us; they motion to the guide to stop; they claim the travellers; two or three hold the bridle of each horse, and all cry in chorus: "The grotto! the grotto!" There is nothing for it but to resign ourselves and see the grotto. [333]

FULL-SIZE **--** ***Medium-Size***

[334]
A servant opens a door, makes us descend two staircases, throws a lump of earth in passing into a lagune, [335]
to awaken the sleeping fish, takes half-a-dozen steps over a couple of planks. “Well, the grotto?”—“Behold it, Monsieur.” We see a streamlet of water between two rocks overhung with ash-trees. “Is that all?” She does not understand, opens her eyes wide and goes away. We ascend again and read this inscription: *The charge for seeing the grotto is ten cents.* The matter is all explained. The peasants of the Pyrenees are not wanting in brains.

IV.

Beyond Gèdres is a wild valley called Chaos, which is well named. After quarter of an hour’s journey there, the trees disappear, then the juniper and the box, and finally the moss; the Gave is no longer seen; all noises are hushed. It is a dead solitude peopled with wrecks. Three avalanches of rocks and crushed flint have come down from the summit to the very bottom. The horrid tide, high and a quarter of a league in length, spreads out like waves its myriads of sterile stones, and the inclined sheet seems still to glide towards inundating the gorge. These stones are shattered and pulverized; their living fractures and thin harsh points wound the eye; they are still bruising and crushing each other. Not a bush, not a spear of grass; the arid grayish train burns [336]
beneath a sun of brass; its débris are scorched to a dull hue, as in a furnace. A ruined mountain is more desolate than any human ruin.

A hundred paces further on, the aspect of the valley becomes formidable. Troops of mammoths and mastodons in stone lie crouching over the eastern declivity, one above another, and heaped up over the whole slope. These colossal ridges shine with a tawny hue like iron rust; the most enormous of them drink the water of the river at their base. They look as if warming their bronzed skin in the sun, and sleep, turned over, stretched out on their side, resting in all attitudes, and always gigantic and frightful. Their deformed paws are curled up; their bodies half buried in the earth; their monstrous backs rest one upon another. When you enter into the midst of the prodigious band, the horizon disappears, the blocks rise fifty feet into the air; the road winds painfully among the overhanging masses; men and horses seem but dwarfs; these rusted edges mount in stages to the very summit, and the dark hanging army seems ready to fall on the human insects which come to trouble its sleep.

Once upon a time, the mountain, in a paroxysm of fever, shook its summits like a cathedral that is falling in. [337]

FULL-SIZE **--** ***Medium-Size***

[338]
A few points resisted, and their embattled turrets are drawn out in line on the crest; but their layers are [339]
dislocated, their sides creviced, their points jagged.

FULL-SIZE **--** ***Medium-Size***

The whole shattered ridge totters. Beneath them the rock fails suddenly in a living and still bleeding wound. The splinters are lower down, strewn over the declivity. The tumbled rocks are sustained one upon another, and man today passes in safety amidst the disaster. But what a day was that of the ruin! It is not very ancient,

perhaps of the sixth century, and the year of the terrible earthquake told of by Gregory of Tours. If a man could without perishing have seen the summits split, totter and fall, the two seas of rock come bounding into [340] the gorge, meet one another and grind each other amidst a shower of sparks, he would have looked upon the grandest spectacle ever seen by human eyes.

On the west, a perpendicular mole, crannied like an old ruin, lifts itself straight up towards the sky. A leprosy of yellowish moss has incrusted its pores, and has clothed it all over with a sinister livery. This livid robe upon this parched stone has a splendid effect. Nothing is uglier than the chalky flints that are drawn from the quarry; just dug up, they seem cold and damp in their whitish shroud; they are not used to the sun; they make a contrast with the rest. But the rock that has lived in the air for ten thousand years, where the light has every day laid on and melted its metallic tints, is the friend of the sun, and carries its mantle upon its shoulders; it has no need of a garment of verdure; if it suffers from parasitic vegetations, it sticks them to its sides and imprints them with its colors. The threatening tones with which it clothes itself suits the free sky, the naked landscape, the powerful heat that environs it; it is alive like a plant; only it is of another age, one more severe and stronger than that in which we vegetate. [341]

V.

Gavarnie is a very ordinary village, commanding a view of the amphitheatre we are come to see. After you have left it, it is still necessary to go three miles through a melancholy plain, half buried in sand by the winter inundations; the waters of the Gave are muddy and dull; a cold wind whistles from the amphitheatre; the glaciers, strewn with mud and stones, are stuck to the declivity like patches of dirty plaster. The mountains are bald and ravined by cascades; black cones of scattered firs climb them like routed soldiers; a meagre and wan turf wretchedly clothes their mutilated heads. The horses ford the Gave stumblingly, chilled by the water coming from the snows. In this wasted solitude you meet, all of a sudden, the most smiling parterre. A throng of the lovely iris crowds itself into the bed of a dried torrent: the sun stripes with rays of gold their velvety petals of tender blue; the harvest of plumes winds with the sinuosities of the bank, and the eye follows over the whole plain the folds of the rivulet of flowers.

We climb a last eminence, sown with iris and with stones. There is a hut where you breakfast and leave the horses. You arm yourself with a stout stick, and descend upon the glaciers of the amphitheatre. [342]

FULL-SIZE **--** ***Medium-Size***

These glaciers are very ugly, very dirty, very uneven, very slippery; at every step you run the risk of falling, and if you fall it is on sharp stones or into deep holes. They look like heaps of old plaster-work, and those who have admired them have a stock of admiration for sale.

The water has pierced them so that you walk upon bridges of snow. These bridges have the appearance of kitchen air-holes; the water is swallowed up in a very low archway, and, when you look closely, you get a distinct sight of a black hole. An Englishman who wished to enjoy the view, allowed himself to fall, and came out half dead, “with the rapidity of a trout.” We left such experiments to the trout and the English. [343]

VI.

FULL-SIZE -- ***Medium-Size***

After the glaciers we find a sloping esplanade; we climb for ten minutes bruising our feet upon fragments of sharp rock. Since leaving the hut we have not lifted our eyes, in order to reserve for ourselves an unbroken sensation. Here at last we look. A wall of granite crowned with snow hollows itself before us in a gigantic [344] amphitheatre. This amphitheatre is twelve hundred feet high, nearly three miles in circumference, three tiers of perpendicular walls, and in each tier thousands of steps.

FULL-SIZE -- ***Medium-Size***

The valley ends there; the wall is a single block, and impregnable. The other summits might fall, but its massive layers would not be moved. The mind is overwhelmed by the idea of a stability that cannot be shaken and an assured eternity. There is the boundary of two countries and two races; this it is that Roland wanted to break, when with a sword-stroke he opened a breach in the summit. But the immense wound disappeared in the immensity of the conquered wall. [345]

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[346]

FULL-SIZE -- ***Medium-Size***

Three sheets of snow are spread out over the three tiers of layers. The sun falls with all its force upon; this [347] virginal robe without being able to make it shine. It will preserve its dead whiteness. All this grandeur is austere; the air is chilled beneath the noonday rays; great, damp shadows creep along the foot of the walls. It is the everlasting winter and the nakedness of the desert. The sole inhabitants are the cascades assembled to form the Gave.

FULL-SIZE **--** ***Medium-Size***

The streamlets of water come by thousands from the highest layer, leap from step to step, cross their stripes of foam, wind, unite and fall by a dozen brooks that slide from the last layer in flaky streaks to lose themselves in the glaciers of the bottom. The thirteenth cascade on the left is twelve hundred and sixty-six feet high. It falls slowly, like a dropping cloud, or the unfolding of a muslin veil; the air softens its fall; the eye [348] follows complacently the graceful undulation of the beautiful airy veil. It glides the length of the rock, and seems to float rather than to fall. The sun shines, through its plume, with the softest and loveliest splendor. It reaches the bottom like a bouquet of slender waving feathers, and springs backward in a silver dust; the fresh and transparent mist swings about the rock it bathes, and its rebounding train mounts lightly along the courses. No stir in the air; no noise, no living creature in this solitude. You hear only the monotonous murmur of the cascades, resembling the rustle of the leaves that the wind stirs in the forest.

On our return, we seated ourselves at the door of the hut. It is a poor, squat little house, heavily supported upon thick walls; the knotty joists of the ceiling retain their bark. It is indeed necessary that it should be able to stand out alone against the snows of winter. You find everywhere the imprint of the terrible months it has gone through. Two dead fir-trees stand erect at the door. The garden, three feet square, is defended by enormous walls of piled-up slates. The low and black stable leaves neither foot-hold nor entry for the winds. A lean colt was seeking a little grass among the stones. [349]

THE CASCADE AS SEEN FROM THE INN.

FULL-SIZE -- ***Medium-Size***

[350]

A small bull, with surly air, looked at us out of the sides of his eyes; the animals, the trees and the site, wore [351] a threatening or melancholy aspect. But in the clefts of a rock were growing some admirable buttercups, lustrous and splendid, which looked as if painted by a ray of sunshine.

At the village we met our companions of the journey who had sat down there.. The good tourists get fatigued, stop ordinarily at the inn, take a substantial dinner, have a chair brought to the door, and digest while looking at the amphitheatre, which from there appears about as high as a house. After this they return, praising the sublime sight, and very glad that they have come to the Pyrenees.

FULL-SIZE -- ***Medium-Size***

[352]

FULL-SIZE -- Medium-Size

CHAPTER VII. THE BER GONZ.—THE PIC DU MIDI.

I.

We ought to be useful to our fellow-mortals; I have climbed the Bergonz in order to have at least one ascent to tell about.

A stony, zigzag pathway excoriates the green mountain with its whitish track. The view changes with every turn. Above and below us are meadows with girls making hay, and little houses stuck to the declivity like swallows' nests. Lower down, an immense pit of black rock, to which from all sides hasten streams of silver. The higher up we are, the more the valleys are contracted and fade from sight; the more the gray mountains enlarge and spread themselves in all their hugeness. Suddenly, beneath the burning sun, [353] the perspective becomes confused; we feel the cold and damp touch of some unknown and invisible being. A moment after, the air clears up, and we perceive behind us the white, rounded back of a beautiful cloud fleeing into the distance, and whose shadow glides lightly over the slope. The useful herbage soon disappears; scorched mosses, thousands of rhododendrons clothe the barren escarpments; the road is damaged by the force of the hidden springs; it is encumbered with rolling stones. It turns with every ten paces, in order to conquer the steepness of the slopes. You reach at last a naked ridge, where you dismount from your horse; here begins the top of the mountain. You walk for ten minutes over a carpet of serried heather, and you are upon the highest summit.

What a view! Everything human disappears; villages, enclosures, cultivations, all seem like the work of ants. I have two valleys under my eyes, which seem two little bands of earth lost in a blue funnel. Nothing exists here but the mountains. Our roads and our works have scratched upon them an imperceptible point; we are mites, who lodge, between two awakings, under one of the hairs of an elephant. Our civilization is a pretty, miniature toy, with which nature amuses herself for a moment, and which presently she will break. [354]

FULL-SIZE -- Medium-Size

You see nothing but a throng of mountains seated under the burning dome of heaven. They are ranged in an amphitheatre, like a council of immovable and eternal being's. All considerations are overpowered by the sensation of immensity: monstrous ridges which stretch themselves out, gigantic, bony spines, ploughed flanks that drop down precipitously into indistinguishable depths. [355]

THE EAGLES.

FULL-SIZE **--** ***Medium-Size***

[356]
[357]
It is as though you were in a bark in the middle of the sea. The mountain-chains clash like billows. The tops are sharp and jagged like the crests of uplifted waves; they come from all sides, athwart each other, piled one above another, bristling, innumerable, and the flood of granite mounts high into the sky at the four corners of the horizon. On the north, the valleys of Luz and Argelès open up in the plain by a bluish vista, shining with a dead splendor resembling two ewers of burnished pewter. On the west the chain of Bareges stretches like a saw as far as the Pic du Midi, a huge, ragged-edged axe, marked with patches of snow; on the east, lines of leaning fir-trees mount to the assault of the summits. In the south an army of embattled peaks, of ridges cut to the quick, squared towers, spires, perpendicular escarpments, lifts itself beneath a mantle of snow; the glaciers glitter between the dark rocks; the black ledges stand out with an extraordinary relief against the deep blue. These rude forms pain the eye; you are oppressively alive to the rigidness of the masses of granite which have burst through the crust of our planet, and the invincible ruggedness of the rock that is lifted above the clouds. This chaos of violently broken lines tells of the effort of forces of which we have no longer any idea. Since then Nature has grown mild; she rounds and softens the forms she moulds; she embroiders in [358]
the valleys her leafy robe, and, as an industrious artist, she shapes the delicate foliage of her plants. Here, in her primitive barbarism, she only knew how to cleave the blocks and heap up the rough masses of her Cyclopean constructions. But her monument is sublime, worthy of the heaven it has for a vault and the sun which is its torch.

II.

Geology is a noble science. Upon this summit theories grow lively; the arguments of the books breathe new life into the story of the mountains, and the past appears grander than the present. This country was in the beginning a solitary and boiling sea, then slowly cooled, finally peopled by living creatures and built up by their debris. Thus were formed the ancient limestones, the slates of transition and several of the secondary rocks. What myriads of ages are accumulated in a single phrase! Time is a solitude in which we set up here and there our boundaries; they reveal its immensity, but do not measure it.

This crust cleaves, and a long wave of molten granite heaves itself up, forming the lofty chain of the Gave, [359]
of the Nestes, the Garonne, the Mala-detta, Néouvielle.

MONT PERDU.

FULL-SIZE -- *Medium-Size*

[360]
From here you see Néouvielle in the north-east. How this wall of fire worked in lifting itself amidst this [361]
upturned sea, the imagination of man will never conceive. The liquid mass of granite formed a paste among the rocks; the lower layers were changed into slate beneath the fiery blast; the level grounds rose up, and were overturned. The subterranean stream rose with an effort so abrupt, that they were stuck to its flanks in layers almost perpendicular. “It was congealed in torment, and its agitation is still painted in its petrified waves.”

How much time rolled away between this revolution and the next? Monuments are wanting; the centuries have left no traces. There is a page torn out in the history of the earth. Our ignorance like our knowledge overwhelms us. We see one infinity, and from it we divine another which we do not see.

At last the ocean changed its bed, perhaps from the uplifting of America; from the south-west came a sea to burst upon the chain. The shock fell upon the dark embattled barrier that you see towards Gavarnie. There was a frightful destruction of marine animals: Their corpses have formed the shelly banks that you cross in mounting to la Brèche; several layers of la Brèche, of the Taillon and of Mont Perdu, are fields still fetid with [362]
death. The rolling sea, tearing up its bed, drifted it against the wall of rocks, piled it against the sides, heaped it upon the summits, set mountain upon mountain, covered the immense rock, and oscillated in furious currents in its ravaged basin.

FULL-SIZE -- *Medium-Size*

I seemed to see on the horizon the oozy surface coming higher than the summits, lifting its waves against the sky, eddying in the valleys, and howling above the drowned mountains like a tempest.

That sea was bringing half of the Pyrenees; its raging waters overlaid the primitive declivity with calcareous strata, tilted and torn; upon these the quieted waters deposited the high horizontal layers. Yonder, [363]
in the south-west, the Vignemale is covered with them. In order to raise up the summits, generations of marine creatures were born and died silent and inert populations which swarmed in the warm ooze, and watched through their green waves the rays of the blue-tinged sun. They have perished along with their sepulchre; the storms have torn open the banks where they had buried themselves, and these shreds of their wreck scarce tell how many myriads of centuries this shrouded world has seen pass away.

One day at last, the great mountains which form the horizon on the south were seen to grow, Troumousse, the Vignemale, Mont Perdu, and all the summits that surround Gèdres. The soil had burst open a second time. A wave of new granite arose, laden with the ancient granite, and with the prodigious mass of the limestones; the alluvia rose to more than ten thousand feet; the ancient summits of pure granite were surpassed; the beds of shells were lifted into the clouds, and the upheaved tops found themselves forever above the seas.

Two seas have dwelt upon these summits; two streams of burning rock have erected these chains. What will be the next revolution? How long time will man yet last? A contraction of the crust which bears him will cause a wave of lava to gush forth or will displace the level of the seas. We live between two accidents of the soil; [364]
our history occupies, with room to spare, a line in the history of the earth; our life depends upon a variation in the heat; our duration is for a moment, and our force a nothing. We resemble the little blue forget-me-nots which you pluck as you go down the slope; their form is delicate, their structure admirable; nature lavishes them and crushes them; she uses all her industry in shaping them, and all her carelessness in destroying them. There is more art in them than in the whole mountain. Have they any ground for pretending that the mountain was made for them?

III.

Paul has climbed the Pic du Midi of Bigorre: here is his journal of the trip:—

“Set out in the mist at four o’clock in the morning. The pastures of Tau through the mist; the mist is distinctly visible. The lake of Oncet through the mist; same view.

“Howker of the Five Bears. Several whitish or grayish spots on a whitish or grayish ground. To form an idea of it, look at five or six wafers, of a dirty white, stuck behind a leaf of blotting-paper.

“Beginning of the steep rise; ascent at a footpace, head of one to tail of another; this recalls to me Leblanc’s [365]
riding-school, and the fifty horses advancing gracefully in the saw-dust, each one with his nose against the

tail of the one before him, and his tail against the nose of his follower, as it used to be on Thursdays, the school-day for going out and for the riding lesson. I cradle myself voluptuously in the poetical remembrance.

FULL-SIZE -- ***Medium-Size***

“First hour: view of the back of my guide and the hind-quarters of his horse. The guide has a vest of bottle-green velvet, darned in two places, on the right and on the left; the horse is a dirty brown and bears the marks of the whip. Several big pebbles in the pathway. Fog. I meditate on German philosophy. "Second hour: [366] the view enlarges; I perceive the left eye of the guide’s horse. That eye is blind; it loses nothing.

“Third hour: the view broadens more. View of the hind-quarters of two horses and two tourists’ vests fifteen feet above us. Gray vests, red girdles, berets. They swear and I swear; that consoles us a little. .

“Fourth hour: joy and transports; the guide promises me for the summit the view of a sea of clouds.

“Arrival: view of the sea of clouds. Unhappily we are in one of the clouds. Appearance that of a vapor bath when one is in the bath.

“Benefits: cold in the head, rheumatism in the feet, lumbago, freezing, such happiness as a man might feel who had danced attendance for eight hours in an ante-chamber without fire.

“And this happens often?

“Twice out of three times. The guides swear it does not.”

FULL-SIZE -- ***Medium-Size***

[367]

FULL-SIZE -- ***Medium-Size***

CHAPTER VIII. PLANTS AND ANIMALS.

I.

The beeches push high upon the declivities, even beyond three thousand feet. Their huge pillars strike down into the hollows where earth is gathered. Their roots enter into the clefts of the rock, lift it, and come creeping to the surface like a family of snakes. Their skin, white and tender in the plains, is changed into a grayish and solid bark; their tenacious leaves shine with a vigorous green, beneath the sun which cannot penetrate them. They live isolated, because they need space, and range themselves at intervals one above another like lines of towers. From afar, between the dull heather, their mound rises splendid with light, and sounds with its hundred thousand leaves as with so many little bells of horn. [368]

II.

But the real inhabitants of the mountains are the pines, geometrical trees, akin to the ferruginous blocks hewn by the primitive eruptions. The vegetation of the plains unfolds itself in undulating forms with all the graceful caprices of liberty and wealth. The pines, on the other hand, seem scarcely alive; their shaft rises in a perpendicular line along the rocks; their horizontal branches part from the trunk at right angles, equal as the radii of a circle, and the entire tree is a cone terminated by a naked spike. The dull little blades that answer for leaves have a melancholy hue, without transparency or lustre; they seem hostile to the light; they neither reflect it, nor allow it to pass, they extinguish it; hardly does the noonday sun fringe them with a bluish reflection. Ten paces away, beneath such an aureole, the black pyramid cuts the horizon like an opaque mass. They crowd together in files under their funereal mantles. Their forests are silent as solitudes; the whistle of the wind makes there no noise; it glides over the stiff beard of the leaves without stirring or rubbing them together. One hears no sound save the whispering of the tops and the shrivelling of the little yellowish lamels which fall in showers as soon as you touch a branch. [369]

THE PINES.

FULL-SIZE -- ***Medium-Size***

[370]

The turf is dead, the soil naked; you walk in the shade beneath an inanimate verdure, among pale shafts [371] which rise like tapers. A strong odor fills the air, resembling the perfume of aromatics. The impression is that made by a deserted cathedral, while, after a ceremony, the smell of incense still floats under the arches, and the declining day outlines far away in the obscurity the forest of pillars.

They live in families and expel the other trees from their domain. Often, in a wasted gorge, they may be seen like a mourning drapery descending among the white glaciers. They love the cold, and in winter remain clothed in snow. Spring does not renew them; you see only a few green lines run through the foliage; they soon grow dark like the rest. But when the tree springs from a spot of deep earth, and rises to a height of a hundred feet, smooth and straight as the mast of a ship, the mind with buoyancy follows to the very summit the flight of its inflexible form, and the vegetable column seems as grand as the mountain which nurtures it.

III.

Higher up, on the barren steeps, the yellowish box twists its knotty feet beneath the stones. It is a melancholy and tenacious creature, stunted and thrust back upon itself; overborne amidst the rocks, it dares[372] not shoot upward nor spread. Its small thick leaves follow each other in monotonous rows, clumsily oval and of a formal regularity. Its stem, short and grayish, is rough to the touch; the round fruit encloses black capsules, hard as ebony, that must be broken open for the seed. Everything in the plant is calculated with a view to utility: it thinks only of lasting and resisting; it has neither ornaments, elegance, nor richness; it expends its sap only in solid tissues, in dull colors, in durable fibres. It is an economical and active housewife, the only thing capable of vegetating in the quagmires that it fills.

If you continue to ascend, the trees begin to fail. The brush-fir creeps in a carpet of turf. The rhododendrons grow in tufts and crown the mountain with rosy clusters. The heather crowds its white bunches, small, open, vase-shaped flowers, from which springs a crown of garnet stamens. In the sheltered hollows, the blue campanulas swing their pretty bells; the least wind lays them low; they live for all that, and smile, trembling and graceful.

But, among all these flowers nourished with light and pure air, the most precious is the thornless rose. Never did petals form a frailer and lovelier corolla; never did a vermilion so vivid color a more delicate tissue.[373]

A SHOWER IN A FOREST OF BRUSH-FIRS.

FULL-SIZE **--** ***Medium-Size***

IV. [374]

At the summit grow the mosses. Battered by the wind, dried by the sun, they lose the fresh green tint they[375] wear in the valleys and on the brink of the springs. They are reddened with tawny hues, and their smooth filaments have the reflexes of a wolf’s fur. Others, yellowed and pale, cover with their sickly colors the bleeding crevices. Then there are gray ones, almost white, which grow like remnants of hair upon the bald rocks. Far away, upon the back of the mountain, all these tints are mingled, and the shaded fur emits a wild gleam.

The last growths are reddish crusts, stuck to the walls of rock, seeming to form part of the stone, and which you might take, not for a plant, but for a scurf. Cold, dryness, and the height have by degrees transformed or killed vegetation.

V.

The climate shapes and produces animals as well as plants.

The bear is a serious beast, a thorough mountaineer, curious to behold in his great-coat of felted hair, yellowish or grayish in color. It seems formed for its domicile and its domicile for it. Its heavy fur is an[376] excellent mantle against the snow. The mountaineers think it so good, that they borrow it from him as often as they can, and he thinks it so good that he defends it against them to the best of his ability. He likes to live alone, and the gorges of the heights are as solitary as he wishes.

FULL-SIZE **--** ***Medium-Size***

The hollow trees afford him a ready-made house; as these are for the most part beeches and oaks, he finds in them at once food and shelter. For the rest, brave, prudent, and robust, he is an estimable animal; his only faults are that he eats his little ones, when he runs across them, and that he is a poor dancer. [377]

FULL-SIZE **--** ***Medium-Size***

In hunting him, they go into ambush and fire on him as he passes. Lately, in a battue, a superb female was tracked. When the foremost hunters, who were novices, saw the glitter of the little fierce eyes, and perceived the black mass descending with great strides, beating the underbrush, they forgot all of a sudden that they had guns, and kept whist behind their oak. A hundred paces further on, a brave fellow fired. The bear, which was not hit, came up on a gallop. The man, dropping his gun, slipped into a pit. Reaching the bottom, he felt of his limbs, and by some miracle found himself whole, when he saw the animal hesitating above his head, [378] busy in examining the slope, and pressing her foot upon the stones to see if they were firm. She sniffed here and there, and looked at the man with the evident intention of paying him a visit. The pit was a well; if she reached the bottom, he must resign himself to a tête-à-tête. While the man reflected on this, and thought of the animal's teeth, the bear began to descend with infinite precaution and address, managing her precious person with great care, hanging on to the roots, slowly, but without ever stumbling. She was drawing near, when the hunters came up and shot her dead.

FULL-SIZE **--** ***Medium-Size***

The isard dwells above the bear, upon the naked tops, in the region of the glaciers. He needs space for his leaps and gambols. He is too lively and gay to shut himself, like the heavy misanthrope, in the gorges and forests. No animal is more agile; he leaps from rock to rock, clears precipices, and keeps his place upon [379] points where there is just room for his four feet You sometimes hear a hollow bleating on the heights: it is a band of isards cropping the herbage amidst the snow; their tawny dress and their little horns stand out in the blue of the heavens; one of them gives the alarm and all disappear in a moment.

VI.

FULL-SIZE **--** ***Medium-Size***

You often hear for a half-hour a tinkling of bells behind the mountain; these are the herds of goats changing their pasture. Sometimes there are more than a thousand of them. You find yourself stopped in crossing the bridges until the whole caravan has filed over. They have long hanging hairs which form their coat; with their black mantle and great beard, you would say that they were dressed for a masquerade. Their yellow eyes [380] stare vaguely, with an expression of curiosity and gentleness. They seem to wonder at their walking in such orderly fashion on level ground. Only to look at that dry leg and horny foot, you feel that they are framed to wander at random and leap about on the rocks. From time to time the less disciplined ones stop, set their fore feet against the mountain, and crop a bramble or a blossom of lavender. The others come and push them on; they start off again with a mouthful of herbage, and eat as they walk. All their physiognomies are intelligent, resigned and melancholy, with flashes of caprice and originality. You see the forest of horns waving above the black mass, and their smooth hair shining in the sun. Enormous dogs, with woolly coat, spotted with white, walk gravely along the sides, growling when you draw near. The herdsman comes behind in his brown cloak,

with an eye fixed, glittering, void of thought, like that of the animals; and the whole band disappears in a cloud of dust, out of which comes a sound of shrill bleating.

VII.

Why should not I speak of the happiest animal in creation? A great painter, Karel du Jardin, has taken a liking for it: he has drawn it in all its attitudes, and has shown all its pleasures and all its tastes. [381]

FULL-SIZE -- ***Medium-Size***

[382]

The rights of prose are indeed equal to those of painting, and I promise that travellers will take pleasure in [383] considering the hogs. There, the word is out. Now mind that in the Pyrenees they are not covered with tainting filth, as on our farms; they are rosy or black, well washed, and live upon the dry gravel, alongside the running waters.

FULL-SIZE -- ***Medium-Size***

They make holes in the heated sand, and sleep there in groups of five or six, close set in lines, in admirable order. When any one draws near, the whole mass moves; the corkscrew tails frisk fantastically; two crafty, philosophic eyes open beneath the pendent ears; the mocking noses stretch forth and snuff; they all grunt in concert; after which, becoming accustomed to the intrusion, they are quieted, they lie down again, the eyes close in sanctimonious fashion, the tails retire into place, and the blessed rogues return to their digestion and [384] enjoyment of the sun. All these expressive snouts seem to cry shame upon prejudices, and invoke enjoyment; there is something reckless and derisive about them; the whole countenance is directed towards the snout, and the end of the entire head is in the mouth. Their lengthened nose seems to sniff and take in from the air all agreeable sensations. They spread themselves so complacently on the ground, they wag their ears with such voluptuous little movements, they utter such penetrating ejaculations of pleasure, that you get out of patience with them. Oh genuine epicureans, if sometimes in your sleep you deign to reflect, you ought to think, like the goose of Montaigne, that the world was made for you, that man is your servant, and that you are the privileged creatures of nature. There is but one moment of trouble in their whole life, that is when they are killed. Still they pass quickly away and do not foresee this moment.

VIII.

Myriads of lizards nestle in the chinks of slate and in the walls of rounded pebbles. On the approach of a passer-by, they run like a streak across the road. If you stand quiet for a moment, you see their little restless, [385] sly heads peep out between two stones; the rest of the body shows itself, the tail wriggles, and, with an abrupt movement, they climb zigzag upon the gravelly ledges. There they have as much sun as they please, sun to roast alive in; at noon, the rock burns the hand. This powerful sun heats their cold blood, and gives spring and action to their limbs. They are capricious, passionate, violent, and fight like men. Sometimes you may see two of them rolling the whole length of a rock, one over the other, in the dust, get up again dimmed and dirty, and run briskly away, like cowardly and insubordinate schoolboys taken in a misdeed. Some of them lose their tails in these adventures, so that they look as if they wore a coat that is too short for them; they hide, ashamed of being so ill dressed. Others in their gray justi-coats have slight, graceful motions, an air at once so coquettish and timid that it takes away all desire to harm them. When they are asleep on a slab of stone, you can see their whitish throat and their small, intelligent mouth; but they scarcely, ever sleep, they are always on the lookout; they scamper off at the least sound, and, when nothing troubles them, they trot, frolic, climb up and down, make a hundred turns for pleasure. They love company, and live near or with one another. No animal is prettier or has more innocent ways; with the charming white and yellow sedum, it [386] enlivens the long walls of stone, and both live on dryness, as other things on moisture.

The sun, the light, the vegetation, animals, man, are so many books wherein Nature has, in different characters, written the same thought. If the hogs have a clean and rosy skin, it is because the boiling granite and the sea swarming with fish have during millions of years accumulated and uplifted ten thousand feet of rock.

FULL-SIZE -- ***Medium-Size***

BOOK IV. BAGNE RES AND LUCHON.

FULL-SIZE -- ***Medium-Size***

[389]

CHAPTER I. FROM LUZ TO BAGNERES-DE-

BIGORRE.

I.

Here one must submit to long, stifling ascents; the horses trudge on at a foot-pace or pant; the travellers sleep or sweat; the conductor grumbles or drinks; the dust whirls, and, if you go out, your throat is parched or your eyes smart. There is only one way of passing the evil hour: it is to tell over some old story of the country, as, for example, the following:—

Bos de Bénac was a good knight, a great friend of the king Saint Louis; he went on a crusade into the land of Egypt, and killed many Saracens for the salvation of his soul. But finally the French were beaten in a great [390] battle, and Bos de Bénac left for dead. He was taken away prisoner along the river, towards the south, into a country where the skin of the men was quite burned by the heat, and there he remained ten years. They made him herdsman of their flocks, and often beat him because he was a Frank and a Christian.

FULL-SIZE **--** ***Medium-Size***

One day when he was afflicted and lamenting his lot in a solitary place, he saw appear before him a little black man, who had two horns to his forehead, a goat's foot, and a more wicked air than the most wicked of [391] Saracens. Bos was so used to seeing black men, that he did not make the sign of the cross. It was the devil, who said, sneering, to him: "Bos, what good has it done thee to fight for thy God? He leaves thee the servant of my servants of Nubia; the dogs of thy castle are better treated than thou. Thou art thought dead and tomorrow thy wife will be married. Go then to milk thy flock, thou good knight."

Bos uttered a loud cry and wept, for he loved his wife; the devil pretended to have pity on him, and said to him: "I am not so bad as thy priests tell. Thou hast fought well; I like brave men; I will do for thee more than thy friend, the crucified one. This night shalt thou be in thy beautiful land of Bigorre. Give me in exchange a plate of nuts from thy table: what, there thou art embarrassed as a theologian! Dost thou think that nuts have souls? Come, decide."

Bos forgot that it is a mortal sin to give anything to the devil, and stretched out to him his hand. Immediately he was borne away as in a whirlwind; he saw beneath him a great yellow river, the Nile, which stretched out, like a snake, between two bands of sand; a moment afterward, a city spread on the strand like a cuirass; then innumerable waves ranged from one end of the horizon to the other, and on them black vessels like unto swallows; further on, a triple-coasted island, with a hollow mountain full of fire and a plume [392] of tawny smoke; then again the sea. Night fell, when a range of mountains lifted itself into the red bands of the sunset. Bos recognized the serrate tops of the Pyrenees and was filled with joy.

The devil said to him: "Bos, come first to my servants of the mountain. In all conscience, since you return to the country, you owe them a visit. They are more beautiful than thy angels, and will love thee, since thou art my friend."

The good knight was horrified to think that he was the friend of the devil, and followed him reluctantly. The hand of the devil was as a vice; he went swifter than the wind. Bos traversed at a bound the valley of Pierrefitte and found himself at the foot of the Bergonz, before a door of stone which he had never seen. The door opened of itself with a sound softer than a bird's song, and they entered a hall a thousand feet high, all of crystal, flaming as if the sun were inside it. Bos saw three little women as large as one's hand, on seats of agate; they had eyes clear as the green waters of the Gave; their cheeks had the vermilion of the thornless rose; their snowy robe was as light as the airy mist of the cascades; their scarf was of the hues of the rainbow. Bos believed he had seen it formerly floating on the brink of the precipices, when the morning fog [393] evaporated with the sun's first rays. They were spinning, and their wheels turned so fast that they were invisible. They rose all together, and sang with their little silvery voices: "Bos is returned; Bos is the friend of our master; Bos, we will spin thee a cloak of silk in exchange for thy crusader's mantle."

A moment later he was before another mountain, which he recognized by the light of the stars. It was that of Campana, which rings when misfortune comes upon the country. Bos found himself inside without knowing how it happened, and saw that it was hollow to the very summit. An enormous bell of burnished silver descended from the uppermost vault; a troop of black goats was attached to the clapper. Bos perceived that these goats were devils; their short tails wriggled convulsively; their eyes were like burning coals; their hair trembled and shrivelled like green branches on live coals; their horns were pointed and crooked like Syrian swords. When they saw Bos and the demon they came leaping around them with such abrupt bounds and such strange eyes that the good knight felt his heart fail within him. Those eyes formed cabalistic figures, and

danced after the manner of the will-o'-the-wisp in the grave-yard; then they ranged themselves in single file and ran forward; the steel clapper flew against the sounding wall, an immense voice came rolling forth from [394] the vibrant silver. Bos seemed to hear it in the depths of his brain; the palpitations of the sound ran through his whole body; he shuddered with anguish like a man in delirium, and distinctly heard the bell chanting: "Bos has returned; Bos is the friend of our master; Bos, it is not the bell of the church, it is I who ring thy return."

He felt himself once more lifted into the air; the trees rooted in the rock bent before his companion and himself as beneath a storm; the bears howled mournfully; troops of wolves fled shivering over the snow. Great reddish clouds flew across the sky, jagged and quivering like the wings of bats. The evil spirits of the valley rose up and eddied through the night. The heads of the rocks seemed alive; the army of the mountains appeared to shake themselves and follow him. They traversed a wall of clouds and stopped upon the peak of Anie. At that very moment, a flash cleft the vapory mass. Bos saw a phantom tall as a huge pine, the face burning like a furnace, enveloped in red clouds. Violet aureoles flamed upon his head; the lightning crept at his feet in dazzling trains; his whole body shone with white flashes. The thunder burst forth, the neighboring summit fell, the upturned rocks smoked, and Bos heard a mighty voice saying: "Bos has returned; Bos is the friend of our master; Bos, I illumine the valley for thy return better than the tapers of thy church." [395]

FULL-SIZE **--** ***Medium-Size***

The poor Bos, bathed in a cold sweat, was suddenly borne to the foot of the chateau of Bénac, and the devil said to him: "Good knight, go now, find again thy wife!" Then he began to laugh with a noise like the cracking of a tree, and disappeared, leaving behind a smell of sulphur. [396]

FULL-SIZE **--** ***Medium-Size***

Morning dawned, the air was cold, the earth damp, and Bos shivered under his tatters, when he saw a superb cavalcade draw near. Ladies in robes of brocade seamed with silver and pearls; lords in armor of polished steel, with chains of gold; noble palfreys beneath scarlet housings, conducted by pages in doublets of black velvet; then an escort of men-at-arms, whose cuirasses glittered in the sun. It was the Sire d'Angles [397] coming to marry the lady of Bénac. They filed slowly along the ascent and were buried beneath the darkness

of the porch.

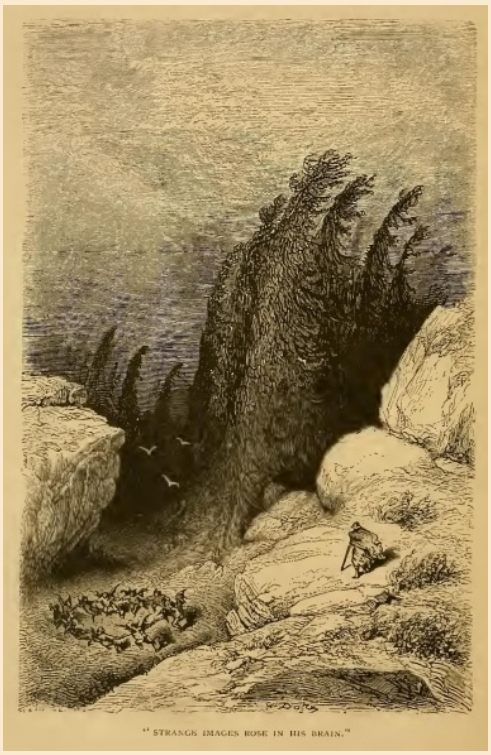
Bos ran to the gate; but they repelled him, saying: “Come back at noon, my good man, thou shalt have alms like the rest.”

Bos sat down upon a rock, tormented with grief and rage. Inside the castle he heard the flourish of trumpets and the sounds of rejoicing. Another was going to take his wife and his goods; he clenched his fists and revolved thoughts of murder; but he had no weapons; he determined to be patient, as he had so often been among the Saracens, and waited.

All the poor of the neighborhood were gathered together, and Bos placed himself among them. He was not humble as the good king Saint Louis, who washed the feet of the beggars; he was heartily ashamed of walking among these pouch-bearers, these maimed and halt, with crooked legs and bent backs, ill clad in poor, torn and patched cloaks, and in rags and tatters; but he was still more ashamed when, in passing over the moat filled with clear water, he saw his burnt face, his locks bristling like the hair of a wild beast, his haggard eyes, his whole body wasted and bruised; then he remembered that his only garment was a torn sack and the skin of a great goat, and that he was more hideous than the most hideous beggar. These cried aloud [398] the praises of the wedded ones, while Bos ground his teeth with rage.

FULL-SIZE -- ***Medium-Size***

They followed the lofty corridor, and Bos saw through the door the old banqueting hall. His arms still hung there; he recognized the antlers of stags that he had shot with his bow, the heads of bears that he had slain with his bear-spear. The hall was full; the joy of the banquet rose high beneath the vault; the wine of Languedoc flowed generously in the cups, the guests were drinking the health of the betrothed. The lord of Angles was talking very low to the beautiful lady, who smiled and turned towards him her gentle eyes. [399]



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[400]

When Bos saw those rosy lips smiling and the black eyes beaming beneath the scarlet capulet, he felt his [401] heart gnawed with jealousy, bounded into the hall and cried out with a terrible voice: “Out of this, ye traitors!

I am master here, Bos de Bénac.”

“Beggar and liar!” said the lord of Angles. “We saw Bos fall dead on the banks of the Egyptian stream, Who art thou, old leper? Thy face is black like those of the damned Saracens. You are all in league with the devil; it is the evil spirit who has led thee hither. Drive him out, and loose the dogs upon him.”

But the tender-hearted lady begged them to have mercy on the unhappy madman. Bos, pricked by his conscience, believing that everybody knew his sin, fled with his face in his hands, in horror of himself, and stayed not until he had reached a solitary bog. Night came, and the bell of Mount Campana began to toll. He heard the wheels of the faeries of the Bergonz humming. The giant clad in fire appeared on the peak of Anie. Strange images, like the dreams of a sick man, rose in his brain. The breath of the demon was on him. A legion of fantastic visages galloped through his head to the rustle of infernal wings, and the ravishing smile of the lovely lady pricked him to the heart like the point of a poniard. The little black man appeared near him, [402] and said to him: “How, Bos, art thou not invited to the wedding of thy wife? The lord of Angles espouses her at this very hour. Friend Bos, he is not courteous!”

“Accursed of God, what art thou here to do?”

“Thou art scarcely grateful; I have led thee out of Egypt, as Moses did his loafing Israelites, and I have transported thee, not in forty years but in a day, into the promised land. Poor fool, whose amusement is tears! Dost thou wish thy wife? Give me thy faith, nothing more. Indeed, thou art right; to-morrow, if thou art not frozen, and if thou pleadest humbly with the lord of Angles, he will make thee keeper of his kennels; it is a fine situation. To-night, sleep on the snow, good knight. Yonder, where the lights are, the lord of Angles embraces thy wife.”

Bos was stifling, and thought he was going to die. “Oh Lord my God,” said he, falling on his knees, “deliver me from the tempter!” And he burst into tears.

The devil fled, driven by this ardent prayer; the hands of Bos clasped over his breast touched his marriage ring which he carried in his scapulary. He trembled with joy! “Thanks, O Lord, and bring me there in time.”

He ran as if he had wings, crossed the threshold at a bound, and hid himself behind a pillar of the gallery. [403] The procession advanced with torches. When the lady was near him, Bos rose, took her hand and showed her the ring. She recognized it and threw herself into his arms. He turned towards those who were present and said: “I have suffered like our Saviour, and like Him been denied. Men of Bigorre, who have maltreated and denied me, I pray that you will be my friends as of old.”

On the morrow Bos went to pour a dish of nuts into a black gulf, where often was heard the voice of the devil; after that he left to confess himself to the pope. On his return he became a hermit in a cavern of the mountain, and his wife a nun in a convent at Tarbes. Both piously did penance, and were worthy after their death to behold God.

FULL-SIZE **--** ***Medium-Size***

II. [404]

FULL-SIZE -- ***Medium-Size***

A little beyond Lourdes begins the plain, and the sky opens out over an immense space: the azure dome grows pale toward the edges, and its tender blue, graded down by insensible shades, loses itself on the horizon in an exquisite whiteness. These colors, so pure, so rich, so sweetly blended, are like a great concert [405] where one finds himself enveloped in harmony; the light comes from all sides; the air is penetrated with it, the blue vault sparkles from the dome to the very horizon. Other objects are forgotten; you are absorbed in a single sensation; you cannot help enjoying this unchangeable serenity, this profusion of brightness, this overflowing of golden, gushing light playing in limitless space. This sky of the south corresponds to but one state of the soul, joy; it has but one thought, one beauty, but it gives rise to the conception of full and durable happiness; it sets in the heart a spring of gayety ever ready to flow; man in this country ought to wear life lightly. Our northern skies have a deeper and more varied expression; the metallic reflections of their changing clouds accord with the troubled souls; their broken light and strange shadings express the sad joy of melancholy passions they touch the heart more deeply and with a keener stroke. But blue and white are such lovely hues! From here the north seems an exile; you would never have thought that two colors could give so much pleasure. They vanish into each other, like pleasant sounds that grow into harmony and are blended together. The distant white softens the garish light and imprisons it in a haze of thickened air. The [406] azure of the dome deadens the rays under its dark tint, reflects them, breaks them, and seems strewn with spangles of gold. This glitter in the sky, these horizons drowned in a misty zone, this transparence of the infinite air, this depth of a heaven without clouds, is worth as much as the sight of the mountains.

III.

FULL-SIZE -- ***Medium-Size***

Tarbes is a good-sized city that looks like a market town, paved with small stones, mediocre in appearance. You alight in a place where great dusty elms make a shade. At noon the streets are empty; it is evident that you are near the sun of Spain. A few women merely, with red foulards on the head, were selling peaches at [407] the corners. A little further on some cavalry soldiers stretched their great awkward legs in the narrow shadow of their wall. You run across a square of four buildings, in the midst of which rises a bell-tower flaring at the base. It is the church; it has but a single aisle, very high, very broad, very cool, painted in dark colors, which contrast with the stifling heat outside and the glare of the white walls; above the altar, six columns of mottled marble, surmounted with a baldachin, make a pretty effect. The pictures are like those everywhere else: A Christ, mingled fresh butter and pale rose in hue, a passion in colored engravings at six sous each. A few, hung very high in dark corners, seem better because you can make nothing out of them. A little further on they have just built a court-house, clean and new as a judge’s robe; the ashler work is well dressed, and the walls perfectly scraped. The front is adorned with two statues: Justice, who looks like a fool, and Force, who looks like a girl. Force has on low boots and the skin of an animal. Instead of fine statues we have ugly riddles. Since they had a fancy for symbols, could they not have dressed Force as a policeman? To compensate ourselves for the statues, we went to visit the horses. In this place, the homely city becomes an

elegant city. The buildings of the stud are simple and in good taste. Turf, rosebushes, stairways filled with [408]
flowers, a beautiful meadow of high grass; in the distance are poplars ranged as a screen to the limpid horizon. The habitation of the horses is a pleasure-house. There are fifty beasts in a long stable that might serve at need for a ball-room; they are superb creatures with shining coats, firm croup, gentle eye, calm front: they feed peaceably in their stalls, having a double mat under their litter; everything is brushed, wiped, rubbed. Grooms in red vests come and go incessantly to clean them and see that nothing is wanting. Man in the earthly paradise was less happy.

IV.

Poor mankind has no city which is not full of lamentable memories. The Protestants took this one in 1570 and butchered all the inhabitants. One of them had taken refuge in a tower whose only ascent was by a narrow staircase; they sent one of his friends, who called to him under pretext of a parley; no sooner had he put his head at the window than he was killed by an arquebusade. The peasants who came to give burial to the dead interred two thousand of them in the ditches. Five years after, the country was almost a desert. [409]

Patience! the Catholics were no gentler than the Protestants; witness that siege of Rabastens, twelve miles distant from Tarbes.

“Suddenly,” says Montluc, “I saw that others besides our foot soldiers should have a hand here, and said to the nobility: ‘Gentlemen, my friends, follow boldly, and give, and be not wonder-struck; for we could not choose a more honorable death.’ And so we all marched with as good a will as ever I saw in my life to the assault, and I twice looked back; I saw that all were closed up so as to touch one another. I had caused three or four ladders to be carried to the brink of the moat, and as I turned backward to order them to bring up two ladders, a volley was given me in the face from the corner of a barricade which adjoined the tower. I was suddenly covered with blood, for I bled from the mouth, nose and eyes. Then almost all the soldiers, and nearly all the nobles too, began to be affrighted and would retreat. But I cried out to them, although I could scarcely speak for the quantity of blood which gushed from my mouth and nose: 'Where will you go? Will you be frightened on my account? Do not stir, and do not abandon the fight.’ And said to the nobles, ‘I am going to get my wounds dressed: let no one follow me, and avenge me as you love me.’ I took a nobleman by the [410]
hand, and so was led to my lodging, where I found a surgeon of M. de Goas’ regiment, named Maître Simon, who dressed my wound and pulled out the bones from both cheeks with his two fingers, so large were the holes, and cut off much flesh from my face, which was covered with wounds.

“Here now is M. de Madaillan, my lieutenant, who was at my side when I went to the charge, and M. de Goas on the other, who was come to see if I were dead, and said to me: ‘Rejoice, monsieur, take courage, we are inside. There are the soldiers with hands that kill everybody; be assured then that we will avenge your wound.’ Then I said to him: ‘I praise God, because I see that victory is ours before I die. At present I feel no concern at dying. I beg you will go back, and show me all the affection you have borne me, *and take care that no one escapes unkilled.*

“And immediately he went away, and even my servants all went; so that there remained along with me only two pages, and the advocate de Las and the surgeon. They wanted to save the minister and the captain of the garrison, named Ladous, so as to have them hung before my quarters. But the soldiers had nearly killed them themselves, and took them away from those who held them and tore them into a thousand pieces. The [411]
soldiers made fifty or sixty who had withdrawn into the great tower, leap from the top into the moat, and these were drowned. It turns out that two who had hidden themselves were saved. There was a certain prisoner who wanted to give four thousand crowns. But never a man would hear of any ransom, and most of the women were killed.”

With such fits of madness how has the human race managed to endure? “In vain you drain it,” says Mephistopheles, “the fresh spring of living blood forever reappears.”

FULL-SIZE **--** ***Medium-Size***

[412]

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CHAPTER II. BAGNÈRES-DE-BIGORRE.

I.

You set out for Bagnères at five o'clock in the afternoon, in the dust and amidst a train of *coucous* laden with people. The road is blocked, like the roads in the suburbs of Paris on a Saturday evening. The diligence, in passing, takes up as many peasants as it meets; they are put in heaps under the tilt, among the trunks, alongside the dogs; they seem proud and pleased with their lofty place. Legs, arms and heads, dispose themselves as best they can; they sing, and the coach appears like a music-box. It is in this triumphal equipage that you reach Bagnères, after sunset. You dine in haste, are taken to the *Promenade des Coustous*, and find, to your utter surprise, the Boulevard de Gand among the Pyrenees. Four rows of dusty [413] trees; regular benches at equal intervals; on both sides, hotels of modern aspect, one of which is occupied by M. de Rothschild; rows of illuminated shops, of cafés chantants surrounded by crowds; terraces filled with seated spectators; upon the roadway, a black throng streaming under the lights. Such is the spectacle beneath your eyes. The groups form, dissolve, close up; you follow the crowd; you learn again the art of getting on without stepping on the feet of those you meet, of grazing everybody without elbowing anybody; of not getting crushed and of not crushing others; in short, all the talents taught by civilization and the asphaltum. You meet again with the rustle of dresses, the confused hum of conversations and steps, the offensive splendor of artificial lights, the obsequious and wearied faces of traffic, the skilful display of the shops, and all the sensations you wanted to leave behind. Bagnères-de-Bigorre and Luchon are in the Pyrenees the capitals of polite life, the meeting place of the pleasures of the world and of fashion—Paris, six hundred miles away from Paris.

The next morning, in the sunlight, the aspect of the city is charming. Great alleys of old trees cross it in every direction. Little gardens bloom upon the terraces. The Adour rolls along by the houses. Two streets are islands connected with the highway by bridges laden with oleanders, and their green windows are mirrored [414] in the clear wave. Streamlets of limpid water run from all the open places and all the streets; they cross, dive under ground, reappear, and the city is filled with their murmurs, their coolness, and their gayety. A little girl, seated upon a slab of slate, bathes her feet in the current; the cold water reddens them, and the poor little thing tucks up her worn gown with great care, for fear of wetting it. A woman on her knees is washing linen at her door; another bends over and draws water for her saucepan. The two black and shining trenches hedge in the white road, like two bands of jet. In the inner court or in the vestibule of each house the assembled women sew and spin, some on the steps of the stairway, others at the feet of a ville; they are in the shade, but on the crest of the wall the beautiful green leaves are traversed by a ray of sunlight.

In the neighboring place, some men ranged in two lines were threshing wheat with long poles and heaping up masses of golden grain. Under its borrowed luxury the city preserves some rustic customs; but the rich light blends the contrasts, and the threshing of the wheat has the splendor of a ball. Further on are some buildings where the stream works the marbles. Slabs, blocks, piles of chips, shapeless material, fill the court for a length of three hundred paces, among clusters of rosebushes, flowery borders, statues, and kiosks. In [415] the workshops, heavy gearings, troughs of muddy water, rusty saws, huge wheels—these are the workmen. In the storerooms, columns, capitals of an admirable polish, white chimney-pieces bordered with leaves in relief, carved vases, sculptured basins, trinkets of agate—that is the work. The quarries of the Pyrenees have, all of them, given a specimen to panel the walls; it is a library of marbles. There are white ones like alabaster, rosy like living flesh, brown speckled like a guinea fowl's breast—the Griotte is of a blood-red. The black Baudéan, veined with white threads, emits a greenish reflection. The Ronce de Bise furrows its fawn-colored dress with dark bands. The grayish Sarrancolin has a peculiar glitter, is marked all over with scales, striped with pale tints, and stained with a broad blood-red spot. Nature is the greatest of painters; her infiltrations and subterranean fires could alone have invented this profusion of shades and patterns: it needed the audacious originality of chance and the slow toil of the mineral forces, to turn lines so capricious and assort tints so complex.

A stream of swift water rolls beneath the workshops; another glides in front of the house, in a lovely meadow, under a screen of poplars. In the pale distance you see the mountains. It is a fortunate spot [416] considering that it is a sawer of stone.

II.

The bathing-house is a beautiful white building, vast and regular; the long front, quite unornamented, is of a very simple form. This architecture, akin to the antique, is more beautiful in the south than in the north; like

the sky, it leaves in the mind an impression of serenity and grandeur.

A half of the river washes the façade, and precipitates under the entrance bridge its black sheet bristling with sparkling waves. You enter into a great vestibule, follow a huge staircase with double balustrade, then corridors ending in noble porticos and commanding the terraces. Bathing rooms panelled with marble, a verdant garden, fine points of view everywhere, high vaults, coolness, simple forms, soft hues that rest the eye and contrast with the crude, dazzling light, that out of doors falls on the dusty place and the white houses; all attracts, and it is a pleasure to be ill here.

The Romans, a people as civilized and as bored as we, did as we do, and came to Bagnères. The inhabitants of the country, good courtiers, constructed, on the public place, a temple in honor of Augustus. The temple became a church that was dedicated to St. Martin, but retained the pagan inscription. In 1641, they removed [417] the inscription to above the fountain of the southern entrance, where it still is.

In 1823, they discovered on the site of the bathhouse, columns, capitals, four piscinæ cased with marbles and adorned with mouldings, and a large number of medals with effigies of the first Roman emperors. These remains, found after a lapse of eighteen centuries, leave a deep impression, like that one experiences in measuring the great limestone beds, antediluvian sepulchres of buried races. Our cities are founded upon the ruins of extinct civilizations, and our fields on the remains of subverted creations.

Rome has left its trace everywhere at Bagnères. The most agreeable of these souvenirs of antiquity are the monuments which those who had been healed erected in honor of the Nymphs, and whose inscriptions still remain. Lying in the *baignoires* of marble, they felt the virtue of the beneficent goddess penetrating their limbs; with eyes half-closed, dozing in the soft embrace of the tepid water, they heard the mysterious spring dripping, dripping with a song, from the recesses of the rock, its mother; the outpoured sheet shone about them with dim, greenish reflexes, and before them passed like a vision the strange eye and magic voice of the unknown divinity, who came to the light in order to bring health to hapless mortals. [418]

Behind the bath-house is a high hill, covered with admirable trees, where wind sequestered walks. Thence you see under your feet the city, whose slated roofs reflect the powerful light of the burning sky and stand out in the limpid air with a tawny and leaden hue. A line of poplars marks on the great green plain the course of the river; towards Tarbes it strikes endlessly into the vaporous distance, amidst tender hues. Opposite, wooded and cultivated hills rise, round-topped, to the very horizon. On the right, the mountains, like so many pyramids, descend in long regular quoins. These hills and mountains cut out a sinuous line on the radiant border of the sky. From the white and smiling horizon, the eye mounts by insensible shades to the deep burning blue of the dome. This whiteness imparts a tender and delicious sensation, mingling of revery and pleasure; it touches, troubles and delights, like the song of Cherubino in Mozart. A fresh wind comes from the valley; the body is as comfortable as the mind; one finds in his nature a harmony hitherto unknown; he no longer bears the weight of his thought or of his mechanism; he does nothing but feel; he becomes thoroughly animal, that is to say, perfectly happy.

In the evening we walk in the plain. There are in the fields of maize retired paths where one is alone. The [419] tops, seven feet high, form, as it were, a copse of trees. The great sheaf of green leaves ends in slender little columns of rosy grains, and the slanting sun slips its arrows of gold among the stalks. You find meadows cut by streams which the peasants dam up, and which, for several hours, overflow to refresh the fields. The day declines, the huge shadow of the mountains darkens the verdure; clouds of insects hum in the heavy air. The whisper of an expiring breeze makes the leaves to shiver for a moment. Meanwhile the carriages and the cavalcades return on all the roads, and the courts are illuminated for the evening promenade.

FULL-SIZE -- ***Medium-Size***

[420]

FULL-SIZE -- ***Medium-Size***

CHAPTER III. THE PEOPLE.

I.

Everybody agrees that life at watering-places is very poetic, abounding in adventures of every sort, especially adventures of the heart. Read the novels *L'Anneau d'Argent* of Charles de Bernard, George Sand's *Lavinia*, etc.

If watering-place life is a romance, it is in the books that it is so. To see great men in these places, you must carry them bound in calf in your trunk.

It is equally agreed that conversation at watering-places is extremely brilliant, that you meet only artists, superior men, people of the great world; that ideas, grace and elegance are lavished there, and that the flower of all pleasures and all thought there comes into bloom. The truth is that you use up a great many hats, [421] eat a great many peaches, say a great many words, and, in the matter of men and of ideas, you find very much what you find elsewhere.

Here is the catalogue of a *salon* better made up than many another:

An old nobleman, somewhat resembling Balzac's M. de Mortsauf, an officer previous to 1830, very brave, and capable of reasoning exactly, when he was hard pushed. He had a great long cartilaginous neck, that turned all together and with difficulty, like a rusty machine; his feet shook about in his square-toed shoes; the skirts of his frock-coat hung like flags about his legs. His body and his clothes were stiff, awkward, old-fashioned and scant, like his opinions; a dotard, moreover, fastidious, peevish, busy all day long in sifting over nothings and complaining about trifles; he pestered his servant a whole hour about a grain of dust overlooked on the skirt of his coat, explaining the method of removing dust, the danger of leaving dust, the defects of a negligent spirit, the merits of a diligent spirit, with so much monotony and tenacity and so slowly, that at last one stopped up one's ears or went to sleep. He took snuff, rested his chin on his cane, and looked straight ahead with the torpid, dull expression of a mummy. Rustic life, the want of conversation and action, the fixedness of mechanical habits, had extinguished him. [422]

FULL-SIZE **--** ***Medium-Size***

Beside him sat an English girl and her mother. The young woman had not succeeded in extinguishing herself, she was frozen at her birth; however, she was motionless as he. She carried a jeweller's shop on her arms, bracelets, chains, of every form and all metals, which hung and jingled like little bells. The mother was one of those hooked stalks of asparagus, knobby, stuck into a swelling gown, such as can flourish and come to seed only amidst the fogs of London. They took tea and only talked with each other.

In the third place one remarked a very noble young man, dressed to perfection, curled every day, with soft hands, forever washed, brushed, adorned and beautified, and handsome as a doll. His was a formal and serious self-conceit. His least actions were of an admirable correctness and gravity. He weighed every word [423] when he asked for soup. He put on his gloves with the air of a Roman emperor. He never laughed; in his calm gestures you recognized a man penetrated with self-respect, who raises conventionalities into principles. His complexion, his hands, his beard, and his mind, had been so scoured, rubbed, and perfumed by etiquette, that they seemed artificial.

FULL-SIZE **--** ***Medium-Size***

Ordinarily he gave the cues to a Moldavian lady, who kept the conversation alive. This lady had travelled all over Europe, and related her travels in such a piercing and metallic voice, that you wondered if she had not a clarion somewhere in her body. She held forth unassisted, sometimes for a quarter of an hour together, principally about rice and the degree of civilization among the Turks, on the barbarism of the Russian generals, and on the baths of Constantinople. Her well-filled memory only overflowed in tirades: it was almost as amusing as a gazetteer.

Near her was a pale, slender, meagre Spaniard, with a face like a knife-blade. We knew, by some words he [424] let fall, that he was rich and a republican. He spent his life with a newspaper in his hand,—he read twelve or fifteen of them in a day, with little dry, jerking movements, and nervous contractions that passed over his face like a shiver. He sat habitually in a corner, and you saw gleaming in his countenance feeble desires of proclamations and professions of faith. In the very same moment his glance died away like a too sudden fire that blazes up and falls again. He only spoke in monosyllables, and to ask for tea. His wife knew no French, and sat all the evening motionless in her arm-chair.

FULL-SIZE **--** ***Medium-Size***

Must we speak of an old lady from Saumur, a frequenter of the baths, watchful of the heat, the cold, the currents of air, the seasoning, determined not to enrich her heirs any sooner than it was necessary, who trotted about all day, and played with her dog in the evening? Of an abbé and his pupil, who dined apart, to escape the contagion of worldly conversation? etc. The truth is that there is nothing to paint, and that in the next restaurant you will see the same people.

Now, in good faith, what can be the conversation in such a society? As the answer is important, I beg the [425] reader to run over the subjoined classification of interesting conversations; he will judge for himself as to the likelihood of meeting at a watering-place with anything similar.

First sort: Circumlocutions, oratorical argumentation, exordiums full of insinuation, smiles and bows, which may be translated by the following phrase: “Monsieur, help me to make a thousand francs.” Second sort: Periphrases, metaphysical disquisitions, the voice of the soul, gestures and genuflexions, ending in this phrase: “Madame, allow me to be your very humble servant.”

Third sort: Two persons who have need of each other are together; abstract of their conversation: “You are a great man.”

“And so are you.” Fourth sort: You are seated at the fireside with an old friend; you stir up the embers and talk of—no matter what, for instance: “Would you like some tea? My cigar is out.” Or, what is better, you say nothing at all, and listen to the singing of the tea-kettle; all actions, which mean: “You are a good fellow, and

would do me a service in case of need.”

Fifth sort: New general ideas and freely expressed; sort lost sight of these hundred years. It was known in the salons of the eighteenth century; genus to-day fossil.

Sixth, and last sort: Discharges of wit, fireworks of brilliant speeches, images struck out, colors displayed, [426] profusion of animation, originality and gayety. A sort infinitely rare and diminished every day, by the fear of compromising one’s self, by the important air, by the affectation of morality.

These six sorts wanting—and they are evidently wanting—what remains? Conversation such as Henri Monnier paints, and M. Prudhomme makes. Only the manners here are better; for instance, we know that we ought to help ourselves last to soup, and first to salad; we are provided with certain proper phrases which we exchange for other proper phrases; we answer to an anticipated motion by an anticipated motion, after the fashion of the Chinese; we come to yawn inwardly and smile outwardly, in company and in state. This comedy of affectations and the commerce of *ennui* form the conversation at the springs and elsewhere.

Accordingly many people go to take the air in the streets.

II.

The street is full of downcast faces; lawyers, bankers, people tired with office work, or bored with having too much fortune and too little trouble. In the evening, they go to Frascati or watch the loungers who elbow each other among the shops on the course. During the day they drink and bathe a little, ride and smoke a [427] good deal. The bloated patients, stretched on arm-chairs, digest their food; the lean study the newspapers; the young men talk with the ladies about the weather; the ladies are busy in rounding their petticoats aright: the old, who are critics and philosophers, take snuff, or look at the mountains with glasses, to ascertain if the engravings are exact. It is not worth the trouble of having so much money, merely to have so little pleasure.

This *ennui* proves that life resembles the opera; to be happy there, you must have money for your ticket, but, also, the sentiment of music. If the money is wanting, you remain outside in the rain among the boot-blacks; if you have no taste for music, you sleep sullenly in your superb box. I conclude that we must try to earn the four francs for the parterre, but above all to make ourselves acquainted with music.

The promenades are too neat and recall the Bois de Boulogne; here and there a tired broom leans against a tree its slanting silhouette. From the depths of a thicket the *sergents de ville* cast on you their eagle glance, and the dung decorates the alleys with its poetic heaps.

An invalid always brings with him one or more companions. Where is the being so disinherited by heaven as [428] not to have a relation or friend who is bored? And where is the friend or relation so thankless as to refuse a service which is a pleasure party? The invalid drinks and bathes; the friend wears gaiters or rides, hence the species of tourists.

FULL-SIZE **--** ***Medium-Size***

This species comprises several varieties, which are distinguished by the song, the plumage, and the gait. These are the principal:

FIRST.

The first has long legs, lean body, head bent forward, large and powerful feet, vigorous hands, excellent at [429] grasping and holding on. It is provided with canes, ferruled sticks, umbrellas, cloaks, india-rubber top-coats. It despises dress, shows itself but little in society, knows thoroughly guides and hotels. It strides over the ground in an admirable manner, rides with saddle, without saddle, in every way and all possible beasts. It walks for the sake of walking, and to have the right of repeating several fine, ready-made phrases.

I found, and picked up, at Eaux-Chaudes, the journal of one of these walking tourists. It is entitled: *My Impressions*.

“15th July.—Ascent of Vignemale. Set out at midnight, came back at ten o’clock in the evening. Appetite on the summit; excellent dinner, pate, fowls, trout, claret, kirsch. My horse stumbled eleven times. Feet galled. Rondo, good guide. Total: sixty-seven francs.

“20th July.—Ascent of the Pic du Midi de Bigorre. Fifteen hours. Sanio, fair guide; knows neither songs nor stories. Good sleep for an hour at the top. Two bottles broken, which rather spoiled the provisions. Thirty-eight francs.

“21st July.—Excursion to the Valley of Héas. Too many stones in the road. Twenty-one miles. Must exercise every day. To-morrow will walk twenty-four. "24th July.—Excursion to the Valley of Aspe. Twenty-seven miles. [430]

"1st August.—Lake of Oo. Good water, very cold; the bottles were well cooled.

"2d August.—Valley of the Arboust. Met three caravans; two of donkeys, one of horses. Thirty miles. Throat raw. Corns on the feet.

"3d August.—Ascent of the Maladetta. Three days. Sleep at the Rencluse de la Maladetta. My large double cloak with the fur collar keeps me from being frozen. In the morning I make the omelette myself. Punch with snow. Second night in the Vale of Malibierne. Passage of the Glacier. My right shoe gets torn. Arrival at the summit. View of three bottles left by the preceding tourists. For amusement, I read a number of the *Journal des Chasseurs*. On my return, I am entertained by the guides. Bagpipes in the evening at my door; great bouquet with a ribbon. Total: one hundred and sixty-eight francs.

"15th August.—Leave the Pyrenees. Three hundred and ninety-one leagues in a month, on foot as well as on horse and in carriage. Eleven ascents, eighteen excursions. I have used up two ferruled sticks, a top-coat, three pairs of trousers, five pairs of shoes. Good year.

"P.S.—Sublime country. My spirit bows beneath these great emotions." [431]

THE LAC D'OO.

FULL-SIZE **--** ***Medium-Size***

[432]
[433]

SECOND.

The second variety comprises thoughtful methodical people, generally wearing spectacles, endowed with a passionate confidence in the printed letter. You know them by the guide-book, which they always carry in their hand. This book is to them the law and the prophets. They eat trout at the place named in the book, make all the stops advised by the book, dispute with the innkeeper when he asks more than is marked in the book. You see them at the remarkable points with their eyes fixed on the book, filling themselves with the description, and informing themselves exactly of the sort of emotion which it is proper to feel. On the eve of an excursion, they study the book and learn in advance the order and connection of the sensations they ought to experience: first, surprise; a little further on a tender impression; three miles beyond, chilled with horror; finally a calm sensibility. They do and feel nothing but with documents in hand and on good authority. On reaching a hotel, their first care is to ask their neighbor at the table if there is any place of reunion; at what hour people meet there; how the different hours of the day are filled up; what walk is taken in the afternoon; what other in the evening. The next day they follow all these directions conscientiously. They are clad in [434] watering-place fashion; they change their dress as many times as the custom of the places deems proper; they make all the excursions they ought to make at the necessary hour, in the proper equipage. Have they any taste? It is impossible to say; the book and public opinion have thought and decided for them. They have the consolation of thinking that they have walked in the broad road and are imitators of the human kind. These are the *docile tourists.*

THIRD.

FULL-SIZE **--** ***Medium-Size***

The third variety walks in troops and makes its excursions by families. You see from afar a great peaceable[435] cavalcade; father, mother, two daughters, two tall cousins, one or two friends and sometimes donkeys for the little boys.

FULL-SIZE **--** ***Medium-Size***

They beat the donkeys, which are restive; they advise the fiery youths to be prudent; a glance retains the young ladies about the green veil of the mother. The distinctive traits of this variety are the green veil, the bourgeois spirit, the love of siestas and meals on the grass; an unfailing sign is the taste for little social games. This variety is rare at Eaux-Bonnes, more common at Bagnères de Bigorre and at Bagnères de Luchon. It is remarkable for its prudence, its culinary instincts, its economical habits. The individuals making the excursion stop at a spot selected the day before; they unload pâtés and bottles.

If they have brought nothing, they go and knock at the nearest hut for milk; they are astonished at having to pay three sous a glass for it: they find that it strongly resembles goat's milk, and they say to each other, after they have drunken, that the wooden spoon was not over-clean. They look curiously at the dark stable,[436] half underground, where the cows ruminate on beds of heather; after which, the great fat men seat themselves or lie down. The artist of the family draws out his album and copies a bridge, a mill, and other album views. The young girls run and laugh, and let themselves drop out of breath upon the grass; the young men run after them. This variety, indigenous in the great cities, in Paris above all, wishes to revive among the Pyrenees the pleasure parties of Meudon or Montmorency.

FOURTH.

FULL-SIZE **--** ***Medium-Size***

Fourth kind: dining tourists. At Louvie, a family from Carcassonne, father, mother, son, daughter and servant, alighted from the interior. For the first time in their life they were undertaking a pleasure trip. The[437] father was one of those florid bourgeois, pot-bellied, important, dogmatic, well-clad in fine cloth, carefully preserved, who educate their cooks, arrange their house *en bonbonnière*, and establish themselves in their comfort, like an oyster in its shell. They entered stupefied into a dark dining-room, where the half-empty bottles strayed among the cooling dishes. The cloth was soiled, the napkins of a doubtful white. The father, indignant, asked for a cup of tea, and began walking up and down with a tragic air. The rest looked at each other mournfully and sat down. The dishes came helter-skelter, all of them failures. Our Carcassonne friends helped themselves, turned the meat over on their plates, looked at it, and did not eat. They ordered tea a second time; the tea did not appear; the travellers were called for the coach, and the landlord demanded twelve francs. Without saying a word, with a gesture of concentrated horror, the head of the family paid. Then, approaching his wife, he said to her: “It was your wish, madam!” A quarter of an hour later the storm burst forth: he poured his complaint into the bosom of the conductor. He declared that the company would fail if it changed horses at such a poisoner’s; he trusted that disease would soon carry off such dirty people. They told him that everybody in the country was so, and that they lived happily for eighty years. He raised his[438] eyes to heaven, repressed his grief, and directed his thoughts toward Carcassonne.

FIFTH.

Fifth variety; rare: learned tourists.

FULL-SIZE **--** ***Medium-Size***

One day, at the foot of a damp rock, I saw a little lean man coming toward me, with a nose like an eagle’s beak; a hatchet face, green eyes, grizzling locks, nervous, jerky movements, and something quaint and earnest in his countenance. He had on huge gaiters, an old black, rain-beaten cap, trousers spattered to the knee with mud, a botanical case full of dents on his back, and in his hand a small spade. Unfortunately I was[439] looking at a plant with long, straight, green stalk, and white, delicate corolla, which grew near some hidden springs. He took me for a raw fellow-botanist. “Ah, here you are, gathering plants! What, by the stalk, clumsy? What will it do in your herbarium without roots? Where is your case? your weeder?”

“But, sir—”

“Common plant, frequent in the environs of Paris, *Parnassia palustris*: stem simple, erect, a foot in height, glabrous, radical leaves petiolate (sheathing caulis, sessile), cordiform, entirely glabrous; simple flower, white, terminal, the calix with lanceolate leaves, petals rounded, marked with hollow lines, nectaries ciliate and furnished with yellow globules at the extremity of the cilia resembling pistils; helleboraceous. Those nectaries are curious; good study, plant well chosen. Courage! you’ll get on.”

“But I am no botanist!”

“Very good, you are modest. However, since you are in the Pyrenees, you must study the flora of the country; you will not find another such opportunity. There are rare-plants here which you should absolutely carry away. I gathered near Oleth, the Menziesra Daboeci, an inestimable godsend. I will show you at the house the *Ramondia Pyrenaica,* solanaceous with the aspect of the primrose. I scaled Mont Perdu to find the[440] *Ranunculus parnassifolius* mentioned by Ramond, and which grows at a height of 2,700 mètres. Hah! what is that! the *Aquilcgia Pyrenaica!*”

And my little man started off like an isard, clambered up a slope, carefully dug the soil about the flower, took it up, without cutting a single root, and returned with sparkling eyes, triumphant air, and holding it aloft like a banner.

“Plant peculiar to the Pyrenees. I have long wanted it; the specimen is excellent. Come, my young friend, a

slight examination: you don’t know the species, but you recognize the family?”

“Alas! I don’t know a word of botany.”

He looked at me stupefied. “And why do you gather plants?”

“To see them, because they are pretty.”

He put his flower into his case, adjusted his cap, and went off without adding another word.

SIXTH.

Sixth variety; very numerous: *sedentary tourists.* They gaze on the mountains from their windows; their excursions consist in going from their room to the English garden, from the English garden to the promenade. They take a siesta upon the heath, and read the journal stretched on a chair; after which they [441] have seen the Pyrenees.

SEVENTH.

There was a grand ball yesterday. Paul presented there a young creole from Venezuela in America; the young man has as yet seen nothing; he has just left ship at Bordeaux, whence he comes here; a very fine fellow, however, of a fine, olive complexion; great hunter, and better fitted for frequenting mountains than drawing-rooms. He comes to France to form himself, as they say; Paul pretends that it is to be deformed.

We have taken our place in a corner; and the young man has asked Paul to define to him a ball.

“A great funereal and penitential ceremony.”

“Pshaw!”

“No doubt of it, and the custom goes back a long way.”

“Indeed?”

“Back to Henry III. who instituted assemblies of flagellants. The men of the court bared their backs, and met together to lash one another over the shoulders. Nowadays there is no longer any whipping, but the sadness is the same. All the men who are here come to expiate great sins or have just lost their relations.” "That is the reason why they are dressed in black.” [442]

“Precisely.”

“But the ladies are in magnificent dresses.”

“They mortify themselves only the better for that. Each one has hung around the loins a sort of haircloth, that horrible load of petticoats which hurts them and finally makes them ill. This is after the example of the saints, the better to work out salvation.”

“But all the men are smiling.”

“That is the finest thing about it; cramped as they are, shut up in their winding-sheet of black cloth. They impose restraint on themselves, and give proof of virtue. Go forward six steps, you will see.”

The young man advanced; not yet used to the movements of a drawing-room, he stepped on the feet of a dancer and smashed the hat of a melancholy gentleman. He returned, covered with confusion, to hide himself beside us.

“What did your two poor devils say to you?”

“I don’t at all understand. The first, after an involuntary wry face, looked at me amiably. The other put his hat under his other arm and bowed.”

“Humility, resignation, a wish to suffer in order to enhance their merits. Under Henry III. they thanked him who had strapped them the best. I will make a musician talk; listen. Monsieur Steuben, what quadrille are [443] you playing there?”

“*L’Enfer*, a fantastic quadrille. It is the legend of a young girl carried off alive in the clutches of the devil.”

“It is, indeed?”

“Very expressive. The finale expresses her cries of grief and the howling of the demons. The young girl makes the air, the demons the bass.

“And you play after that?”

“Some contra-dances on *di tanti palpiti.*”

“Won’t you please give me the idea of that air.”

“It is at the return of Tancred. The point is to paint the most touching sadness.”

“Excellent choice. And no mazurkas, no waltzes?”

“Presently; here is a great book of Chopin, he is our favorite. What a master! What fever! what cries, sorrowful, uncertain, broken! All these mazurkas make one want to weep.

“That is why they are danced; you see, my dear child, only afflicted people could select such music. By the way, how do they dance in your country?”

“With us? we jump and stir about, we laugh out, shout, perhaps.”

“What comical folks! and why?”

“Because they are happy and want to stir their limbs." [444]

“Here, four steps forward, as many back, a turn cramped by the conflict of neighboring dresses, two or three geometric inclinations. The cotton-spinners in the prison at Poissy make precisely the same motions.”

“But these people talk.”

“Go forward and listen; there is nothing inconsiderate about it, I assure you.”

He returns after a minute.

“What did the man say?”

“The gentleman came up briskly, smiled delicately, and, with a gesture as of a happy discoverer, he remarked that it was warm.”

“And the lady?”

“The lady’s eyes flashed. With an enchanting smile of approval, she answered that it was indeed.”

“Judge what constraint they must have imposed on themselves. The gentleman is thirty years old; for twelve years he has known his phrase; the lady is twenty-two, she has known hers for seven years. Each has made and heard the question and answer three or four thousand times, and yet they appear to be interested, surprised. What empire over self! What force of nature! You see clearly that these French who are called light [445] are stoics on occasion.”

“My eyes smart, my feet are swollen, I have been swallowing dust; it is one o’clock in the morning, the air smells bad, I should like to go. Will they remain much longer?”

“Until five o’clock in the morning.”

EIGHTH.

Two days after there was a concert. The creole said in coming out that he was very tired, and had understood nothing of all that buzzing, and begged Paul to explain to him what pleasure people found in such noise.

“For,” said he, “they have enjoyed it, since they paid six francs for admission, and applauded vehemently.”

“Music awakes all sorts of agreeable reveries.”

“Let us see.”

“Such an air suggests scenes of love; such another makes you imagine great landscapes, tragic events.”

“And if you don’t have these reveries, the music bores you?”

“Certainly; unless you are professor of harmony.” "But the audience were not professors of harmony?” [446]

“No indeed.”

“So that they have all had all those reveries you talk about, otherwise they would be bored; and, if they were bored, they would neither have paid nor applauded.”

FULL-SIZE **--** ***Medium-Size***

“Well argued.”

“Explain then to me the reveries they have had; for example, that serenade mentioned in the programme, the serenade from Don Pasquale.”

“It paints a happy love, full of pleasure and unconcern. You see a handsome youth with laughing eyes and blooming cheek, in a garden in Italy; under a tranquil moon, by the whispering of the breeze, he awaits his mistress, thinks of her smile, and little by little, in measured notes, joy and tenderness spring harmoniously [447] from his heart.”

“What, they imagined all that! What happy country-folk are your people! What fulness of emotion and thought! What discreet countenances! I should never have suspected, to see them, that they were having so sweet a dream.”

“The second piece was an andante of Beethoven.”

“What about Beethoven?”

FULL-SIZE **--** ***Medium-Size***

“A poor, great man, deaf, loving, misunderstood, and a philosopher, whose music is full of gigantic or sorrowful dreams.”

“What dreams?”

“‘Eternity is a great eyry, whence all the centuries, like young eaglets, have flown in turn to cross the [448]
heavens and disappear. Ours is in its turn come to the brink of the nest; but they have clipped its wings, and it awaits death while gazing upon space, into which it cannot take flight.’”

“What is that you are reciting to me?”

“A sentence of de Musset, which translates your andante.”

“What! In three minutes they passed from the first idea to this. What men! What flexibility of spirit! I should never have believed in such readiness. Without tripping, as a matter of course, they entered this reverie on leaving a serenade? What hearts! What artists! You make me thoroughly ashamed of myself: I shall never again dare to say a word to them.”

“The third piece, a duo of Mozart’s, expresses quite German sentiments, an artless candor, melancholy, contemplative tenderness, the half-defined smile, the timidity of love.”

“So that their imagination, which was still in a perfect state of distraction, is in a moment so transformed as to represent the confidence, the innocence, the touching agitation of a young girl?”

“Certainly.”

“And there are seven or eight pieces in a concert?”

“At least. Moreover, these pieces being taken from three or four countries and two or three centuries, the [449]
audience must suddenly assume the sentiments, opposite as they are and varied, of all these centuries and of all these countries.”

“And they were crowded on benches, under a glaring light.”

“And in the pauses, the men talked railroads, the ladies dresses.”

“I am getting confused. I, when I dream, want to be alone, at my ease, or at most with a friend. If music touches me, it is in a little dark room, when some one plays airs of one sort, that suit my state of mind. It is not necessary that any one should talk to me about positive things. Dreams do not come to me at will; they fly away in spite of me. I see clearly that I am on another continent, with an entirely different race. One learns in travelling.”

A suspicion seized him: “Perhaps they had come there for penance? When they came out, I saw them yawning, and dejected in countenance.”

“Don’t believe anything of it. It is because they restrain themselves. Otherwise, they would burst into tears and throw themselves on your neck.”

NINTH.

In the evening our creole, who had been thinking, said to Paul:

"Since you are such musicians in France, your well-educated girls must all learn music?” [450]

“Three hours of scales every day, for thirteen years, from seven to twenty; total, fourteen thousand hours.”

“They profit by it?”

“One out of eight; of the other seven, three become good hand-organs, four poor hand-or-gans.”

“I suppose for a compensation they are made to read?”

“Le Ragois, La Harpe, and other dictionaries, all sorts of little treatises of florid piety.”

“What then is your education?”

“A pretty case embalmed with incense, perfumed, securely padlocked, where the mind sleeps while the finders turn a bird-organ.”

“Well, that is encouraging for the husband. And what does *he* do?”

“He receives the key of the case, opens it; a little devil in a white dress jumps at his nose, eager to dance and get out.”

“Very well, the husband serves as guide. Has he other cares?”

“Perhaps so.”

“For instance?”

“An apartment, third floor, costs two thousand francs, the dress of the wife fifteen hundred, the education [451]
of a child, a thousand; the husband earns six thousand.”

“I understand; while dancing, they think of all sorts of melancholy things.”

“Of economizing, keeping up appearances, flattering, calculating.”

“What then is marriage with you?”

“An act of society between a minister of foreign relations and a minister of the interior.”

“And for preparation they have learned—”

“To roll off scales, to shine in trills, to shift their wrists. Prestidigitation instructs in housekeeping.”

“Decidedly, you Europeans have a fine logic. And the eighth girl, the one who does not become a hand-organ?”

“The piano forms her too. It answers for everything, everywhere. Beneficent machine!”

“How is that?”

“It exalts and refines. Mendelssohn surrounds them with ardent, delicate, morbid imaginings. Rossini fills their nerves with an expansive and voluptuous joy. The sharp, tormented desires, the broken, rebel cries of modern passions, rise from every strain of Meyerbeer. Mozart awakens in them a swarm of affections and dim longings. They live in a cloud of emotions and sensations.”

“The other arts would do as much.”

“Not a bit of it. Literature is a living psychology, painting a living physiology. Music alone invents all, copies [452]
nothing, is a pure dream, gives free rein to dreams.”

“And probably they strike out into it.”

“With all the ardor of their ignorance, their sex, imagination, idleness, and their twenty years.”

“Well, of evenings they have the poetry of the family and the world for pasture.”

“In the evening, a night-capped gentleman, their husband, talks to them of his reports and his practice. The children in their cradle are spoiled or grumble. The cook brings her account. They bow to fifteen men in their *salon*, and compliment fifteen ladies on their dresses. In addition, once in awhile, the penitential and funereal ceremony you saw three days ago.”

“But then the piano seems chosen expressly.”

“To resign them at the outset to the meanness of a commonplace condition, the nothingness of the feminine condition, the wretchedness of the human condition. It is plain that all will be content, that none will become languishing or sharp. Dear and beneficent instrument! Salute it with respect, when you enter a room. It is the source of domestic concord, of feminine patience and conjugal bliss.”

“Saint Jacques, I swear that my wife shall not know music!” [453]

“You are making bachelor’s vows, my dear friend. Nowadays every girl who wears gloves has made her fingers run over that machine; otherwise she would think herself no better than a washerwoman.”

“I will marry my washerwoman.”

“The day after your wedding she will have a piano brought in.”

Paul has sprained his foot and spent two days in his room, occupied in watching a poultry yard. He improved the occasion by writing the following little treatise for the use of the young creole, a sort of viaticum, with which he will nourish himself for the better understanding of the world. I thought the treatise melancholy and skeptical. Paul replies, that one should be so at first, in order not to be afterward, and that it is well to be a little skeptical if you wish not to be too skeptical. [454]

FULL-SIZE **--** ***Medium-Size***

LIFE AND PHILOSOPHICAL OPINIONS OF A CAT.

I.

I was born in a cask, at the back of a hay-loft: the light fell on my closed eyelids, so that the first eight days, everything appeared rose-colored to me.

The eighth, it was still better; I looked, and saw a great fall of light upon the dark shade; the dust and insects danced in it. The hay was warm and fragrant; the spiders hung in sleep from the tiles; the gnats hummed; everything seemed happy; that emboldened me; I wanted to go and touch the white patch where those little diamonds were whirling and which rejoined the roof by a column of gold. I rolled over like a ball;

my eyes were burned, my sides bruised; I was choking, and I coughed till nightfall. [455]

II.

When my paws had become firm, I went out and soon made friends with a goose, an estimable creature, for she had a warm belly; I cowered underneath, and during this time her philosophic conversation was forming me. She used to say that the poultry yard was a republic of allies; that the most industrious, man, had been chosen for chief, and that the dogs, although turbulent, were our guardians. I shed tears of emotion under my kind friend's belly.

One morning the cook appeared looking as if butter would not melt in her mouth, and showing a handful of barley. The goose stretched forth her neck, which the cook grasped, drawing a big knife. My uncle, an active philosopher, ran up and began to exhort the goose, which was uttering indecorous cries: "Dear sister," said he, "the farmer, when he shall have eaten your flesh, will have a clearer intelligence, and will watch better over your welfare; and the dogs, nourished with your bones, will be the more capable of defending you." Thereupon the goose became silent, for her head was cut off, and a sort of red pipe stuck out beyond the bleeding neck. My uncle ran for the head and carried it nimbly away; as for me, a little frightened, I drew [456] near to the pool of blood, and, without thinking, I dipped my tongue into it; the blood was very good, and I went to the kitchen to see if I could not have some more of it.

III.

My uncle, a very old and experienced animal, taught me universal history.

FULL-SIZE **--** ***Medium-Size***

At the beginning of things, when he was born, the master being dead, the children at the funeral and the servants at a dance, all the animals found themselves free. It was a frightful hubbub; a turkey, whose feathers were too fine, was stripped by his comrades. In the evening, a ferret, which had slipped in, sucked the jugular vein of three-quarters of the combatants, who, naturally, made no further outcry. The spectacle in the [457] farmyard was fine; here and there was a dog swallowing a duck; the horses in pure sportiveness were breaking the backs of the dogs; my uncle himself crunched a half-dozen little chickens. That was the golden age, said he.

In the evening, when the people came home, the whipping began. Uncle received a lash which took off a strip of his fur. The dogs, well flogged and tied up, howled with repentance and licked the hands of their new master. The horses resumed their burden with administrative zeal. The fowls, protected, clucked their benedictions; only, six months after, when the dealer passed, they killed fifty at once. The geese, among whose number was my late kind friend, flapped their wings, saying that everything was in good order, and praising the farmer, the public benefactor.

IV.

My uncle, although surly, acknowledges that things are better than they used to be. He says that at first our race was savage, and that there are still in the woods cats who are like our first ancestors, which, at long intervals, catch a mole or dormouse, but oftener the contents of a shot-gun. Others, lean, short-haired, run [458] over the roofs and think that mice are very rare. As for us, brought up on the summit of earthly felicity, we whisk a flattering tail in the kitchen, we utter tender little mewings, we lick the empty plates, and at the utmost we put up with a dozen cuffs in the course of the day.

V.

FULL-SIZE **--** ***Medium-Size***

Music is a heavenly art, and it is certain that our race has the privilege of it; it springs from the depths of [459]
our entrails; men know this so well that they borrow them from us when they want to imitate us with their violins.

Two things inspire in us these heavenly songs: the view of the stars and love. Men, clumsy copyists, cram themselves ridiculously into a low hall, and skip about thinking to equal us. It is on the summit of the roofs, in the splendor of the night, when all the skin shivers, that the divine melody can find vent. Out of jealousy they curse us and fling stones at us. Let them burst with rage. Never will their expressionless voice attain to those serious rumblings, those piercing notes, mad arabesques, inspired and unexpected fancies, which soften the soul of the most stubborn she, and give her over to us, all trembling, while up above the voluptuous stars twinkle and the moon grows pale with love.

How happy is youth, and how hard it is to lose its holy illusions! And I too, I have loved and have haunted the roofs, modulating the while the roll of my bass. One of my cousins was touched thereby, and two months after brought into the world six pink and white kittens. I ran to them and wanted to eat them; I certainly had a right, since I was their father. Who would believe it! My cousin, my spouse, to whom I was willing to give her share of the banquet, flew at my eyes. This brutality roused my indignation, and I strangled her on the [460]
spot; after which I swallowed the entire litter.

But the hapless little rogues were good for nothing, not even to nourish their father: their flabby flesh weighed on my stomach for three days. Disgusted with the strong passions, I gave up music, and returned to the kitchen.

VI.

I have thought much on the ideal happiness, and I think I have made thereupon some notable discoveries.

It evidently consists, in warm weather, in sleeping near the barnyard pool. A delicious odor arises from the fermenting dung; lustrous straws shine in the sunlight. The turkeys ogle lovingly, and let their crest of red flesh fall on their beak. The fowls scratch up the straw, and bury their broad bellies to take in the rising heat. The pool gleams, swarming with moving insects which make the bubbles rise to its surface. The harsh whiteness of the walls renders yet deeper the bluish recesses where the gnats hum. With eyes half closed you dream; and, as you have almost ceased to think, you no longer wish for anything. In winter, happiness is in [461]
sitting at the fireside in the kitchen. The little tongues of flame lick the log and shoot amidst the sparks; the twigs snap and writhe, while the twisted smoke rises in the dark chimney to the very sky. Meanwhile the spit turns with a harmonious and pleasing ticktack. The fowl that is impaled reddens, turns brown, becomes splendid; the fat which moistens it softens its hues; a delightful odor irritates the olfactories; your tongue involuntarily caresses your lips; you take in the divine emanations of the fat; with eyes lifted to heaven in a serious transport, you wait till the cook takes off the creature and offers you the part that belongs to you.

FULL-SIZE -- *Medium-Size*

He who eats is happy, he who digests is happier, he who sleeps while digesting is happier still. All the rest is only vanity and vexation of spirit. The fortunate mortal is he who, warmly rolled into a ball with his belly [462] full, feels his stomach in operation and his skin expand. A delightful tickling penetrates and softly stirs the fibres. The outer and the inner creature enjoy with their every nerve. Surely if the universe is a great and blessed God, as our sages say, the earth must be an immense belly busy through all eternity digesting the creatures, and warming its round skin in the sun.

VII.

My mind has been greatly enlarged by reflection. By a sure method, sound conjectures and sustained attention, I have penetrated some of the secrets of nature.

The dog is an animal so deformed, of such an unruly character, that from the earliest times it has been considered to be a monster, born and moulded in despite of all laws. Indeed, when rest is the natural state, how explain an animal that is forever in motion and busy, and that without aim nor need, even when he is gorged and not afraid? When beauty universally consists in suppleness, grace and prudence, how allow an animal to be forever brutal, howling, mad, jumping at the nose of people, running after kicks and rebuffs? When the favorite and masterpiece of creation is the cat, how understand an animal that hates it, runs at it, [463] without having received a single scratch from it, and breaks its ribs without any desire to eat its flesh?

These contradictions prove that dogs are condemned beings; without a doubt the souls of the guilty and punished pass into their bodies. They suffer there; that is why they worry one another, and fret unceasingly. They have lost their reason, so they spoil everything, incite to battle, and are chained three-quarters of the day. They hate the beautiful and the good, consequently they try to throttle us.

FULL-SIZE -- *Medium-Size*

VIII.

Little by little the mind frees itself from the prejudices in which it was reared; light dawns; it thinks for [464] itself; thus it is that I have attained to the true explanation of things.

Our first ancestors (and the gutter cats have retained this belief) said that heaven is a very lofty granary, well covered, where the sun never hurts the eyes.

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In this granary, my great-aunt used to say, there are troops of rats so fat that they can hardly walk, and the [465] more we eat of them, the more there are to eat.

But it is evident that this is the opinion of poor devils, who, since they have never eaten anything but rat, cannot imagine a better diet. Besides, granaries are wood-color or gray, and the sky is blue, which finishes

their confusion.

In truth, they rest their opinion upon a sufficiently shrewd remark: “It is evident,” they say, “that the sky is a granary of straw or flour, for there come out of it very often clouds light, as when the wheat is winnowed, or white, as when bread is sprinkled in the kneading-trough.”

But I reply to them that the clouds are not formed by the chaff of grain or the dust of flour; for when they fall, it is water that we receive.

Others, more refined, have maintained that the Dutch oven was God, saying that it is the fount of every blessing, turns unceasingly, goes to the fire without being burned, and that the sight of it is enough to throw one into ecstasy.

In my opinion they have erred here only because they saw it through the window, from a distance, in a poetic, colored, sparkling smoke, beautiful as the sun at evening. But I, who have sat near it during whole hours, I know that it has to be sponged, mended, wiped; and in acquiring knowledge, I have lost the innocent illusions of heart and stomach. The mind must be opened to conceptions more vast, and reason by more [466] certain methods. Nature is everywhere uniform with herself, and in small things offers the image of the great.

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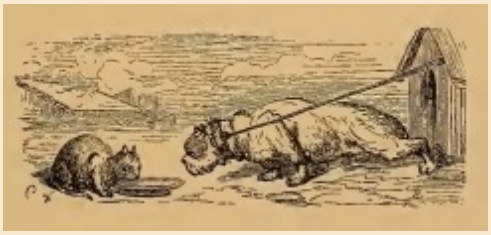
From what do all animals spring? from an egg; the earth then is a very great egg; I even add that it is a broken egg.

You will convince yourself of this if you examine the form and the limits of this valley, which is the visible world. It is concave like an egg, and the sharp edges by which it rejoins the sky are jagged, are keen-edged and white like those of a broken shell.

The white and the yolk, pressed into lumps, have formed these blocks of stone, these houses and the whole [467] solid earth. Some parts have remained soft and form the surface that men plough; the rest runs in water and makes the pools, the rivers; each spring-time there runs a little that is new.

As to the sun, nobody can doubt its use; it is a great red firebrand that is moved back and forth above the egg to cook it gently; the egg has been broken on purpose, in order that it may be the better impregnated with the heat; the cook always does so. The world is a great beaten egg.

Now that I have reached this stage of wisdom, I have nothing more to ask of nature, nor of men, nor of any one; except, perhaps, some little tidbits from the roaster. In future I have only to cradle myself to rest in my wisdom; for my perfection is sublime, and no thinking cat has penetrated into the secret of the world so far as I.



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CHAPTER IV. THE ROAD TO BA GNÈRES-DE-LUCHON.

I.

Every man who has the use of his eyes and ears ought, in travelling, to climb up to the imperial. The highest places are the most beautiful; ask those who occupy them. You break your neck if you fall from them; consult the same people about this. But you enjoy yourself while you are there.

In the first place, you see the landscape, which produces descriptions that you offer to the public. In the coupé, your only spectacle is the harness of the horses; in the interior, you see through a tiny window the trees trooping by like soldiers carrying arms; in the rotunda, you are in a cloud of dust that dims the [469] landscape and strangles the traveller.

In the second place, at the top you will have comedy. In the lower places, the people preserve decorum and are silent. The peasants here perched aloft, who are your companions, the postilion and the conductor, make open-hearted confidences: they talk of their wives, their children, their property, trade, neighbors, and above all of themselves; so that at the end of an hour you imagine their housekeeping and their life as clearly as if you were at home with them. It is a novel of manners that you skim through on the road. Not one of them gives ideas so vivid and so truthful. You get to know the people only by living with them, and the people from three-quarters of the nation. These bits of conversation teach you the number of their ideas and the hue of their passions; now, on these ideas and passions depend all the great events. Besides their rude manners, their loud bursts of laughter, their frank respect for bodily strength, their acknowledged inclination for the pleasure of eating and drinking, offer a contrast to the humbug of our politeness and our affectation of refinement. The conductor told the postilion how the evening before they had eaten the half of a sheep among three of them. It was good, fat mutton; they served up no better at the Hotel of the Great Sun: there were [470] sirloins, cutlets, a neat leg of mutton. They had emptied six bottles. The other made him tell it over, and seemed to eat in imagination, by the reaction, by recoil, as it were.

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After the banquet, he had made the horses gallop; he had passed by Ribettes. Ribettes had swallowed dust for a whole hour; Ribettes wanted to get ahead again, but wasn’t able. Ribettes grew very angry. They had dared Ribettes. The story of Ribettes and the mutton was told eight times in an hour, and seemed the last time as delightful and as new as the first. They laughed like the blest.

In the third place, that is the only spot where you can breathe. The other divisions are sweating-rooms whose partitions and black cushions hold and concentrate the heat. Now, there is no man, no matter how he may love colors and lines, who can enjoy a landscape shut up in a box without air. When the creature is cramped, the soul is cramped. Admiration presupposes comfort, and when you are broiled by the sun you [471] curse the sun.

II.

The coach starts very early in the morning and climbs a long ascent under the gray brightness of the dawn. The peasants come in troops; the women have five or six bottles of milk on the head, in a basket. Oxen, with lowered brows, drag carts as primitive and Gallic as at-Pau. The children, in brown *berets*, run in the dust, alongside their mothers. The village is coming to nourish the city.

Escaladieu shows at the wayside the remains of an ancient abbey. The chapel is still standing and preserves fragments of gothic sculpture. A bridge is at the side, shaded by tall trees. The pretty river Arros runs, with *moiré* reflexes and guipures of silver, over a bed of dark pebbles. No one could choose a situation better than the monks: they were the artists of the time.

Mauvoisin, an ancient stronghold of robber-knights, lifts its ruined tower above the valley. Froissart relates how they besieged these honest folk; of a truth, in those times, they were as good as their neighbors, and the Duke of Anjou, their enemy, had done more harm than they. "A Gascon squire, an able man-at-arms, named [472] Raymonet de l’Epèe, was at that time Governor of Malvoisin. There were daily skirmishes at the barriers,

where many gallant feats were done by those who wished to advance themselves....

"The castle of Malvoisin held out about six weeks, there were daily skirmishes between the two armies at the barriers, and the place would have made a longer resistance, for the castle was so strong it could have held a long siege; but the well that supplied the castle with water being without the walls, they cut off the communication: the weather was very hot, and the cisterns within quite dry, for it had not rained one drop for six weeks, and the besiegers were at their ease, on the banks of this clear and fine river, which they made use of for themselves and horses.

"The garrison of Malvoisin were alarmed at their situation, for they could not hold out longer. They had a sufficiency of wine, but not one drop of sweet water. They determined to open a treaty; and Raymonet de l'Epêe requested a passport to wait on the duke, which, having easily obtained, he said: 'My lord, if you will act courteously to me and my companions, I will surrender the castle of Malvoisin.' 'What courtesy is it you ask?' replied the Duke of Anjou: [473]

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[474]

"'Get about your business each of you to his own country, without entering any fort that holds out against [475] us; for if you do so, and I get hold of you, I will deliver you up to Jocelin, who will shave you without a razor.' 'My lord,' answered Raymonet, 'if we thus depart we must carry away what belongs to us, and what we have gained by arms and with great risk.' The duke paused awhile, and then said, 'I consent that you take with you whatever you can carry before you in trunks and on sumpter horses, but not otherwise; and if you have any prisoners, they must be given up to us.' 'I agree,' said Raymonet. Such was the treaty, as you hear me relate it; and all who were in the castle departed, after surrendering it to the Duke of Anjou, and carrying all they could with them. They returned to their own country, or elsewhere, in search of adventures."

These good folk who wished to keep the fruits of their labor, had spent their time "in fleecing the merchants" of Catalonia, as well as of France, "and in making war on and harrying them of Bagnères and Bigorre." Bagnères was then "a good, big, closed city." People fortified everywhere, because there was fighting everywhere. They went out only with a safe-conduct and an escort: instead of gendarmes they met plunderers; instead of umbrellas they carried off lances. A secure house was a fine house; when a man had [476] immured himself in a thick tower built like a well, he breathed freely, he felt at his ease. Those were the good old times, as every one knows.

III.

Encausse is very near here, at the turn of the road. Chapelle and Bachaumont came there to restore their stomachs, which needed and deserved it well, for they used them more than some do. They wrote their travels, and their style flows as easily as their life.

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They go by short stages, drink, chat, feast among the friends they have everywhere, court the ladies, make game very pleasantly of the provincial folk. They drink the health of the absent, enjoy the muscatel as much [477] as possible, and trifle in prose and verse. They are the epicureans of their time, easy poets who are troubled about nothing, not even about glory; graze all that they touch, and write only for their own amusement.

“Encausse,” say they, “is far from all commerce, and a man can have no other diversion in it than that of watching the return of his health. A small stream that, a score of paces away from the village, winds among willows and the greenest fields imaginable, was our only consolation. We used to go every morning to take our water in this pretty spot, and after dinner to walk there. One day when we were on the brink, seated on the grass, there came suddenly from the midst of the reeds that were nearest a man who had apparently been listening to us; it was an old man, all white, pale and lean, whose beard and locks hung below his girdle, such (an one) as Melchisedec is painted; or rather the figure is that of a certain old Greek bishop, who, with many a salaam, tells everybody’s fortune; for he wore a top-piece like a cauldron-lid, but of exceeding size, which answered him for a hat. And this hat, whose broad brim went drooping upon his shoulders, was made of branches of willow, and covered nearly all his body. His coat of greenish hue was woven of rushes, the whole covered with great bits of a thick and bluish crystal. [478]

“At sight of this apparition, fear caused us to make the sign of the cross twice over, and go three paces backward. But curiosity prevailed over fear, and we resolved, although with some little palpitation of heart, to await the extraordinary old man, whose approach was thoroughly courteous, and who spoke to us very civilly as follows:

“Gentlemen, I am not surprised that with my unexpected appearance you should be a little startled in mind, but when you shall have learned in what rank the fates have set my birth to you unknown, and the motive of my coming, you will calm your minds.

"I am the god of this stream, who, with an ever inexhaustible urn, tilted at the foot of that hill, take the task [479] in this meadow of pouring unceasingly the water, which makes it so green and flowery. For eight days now, morning and evening, you come regularly to see me without thinking to pay me a visit. It is not that I do not deserve that you should pay me this respect; for, in short, I have this advantage, that a channel so pure and clear is the place of my appanage. In Gascony such a portion is very neat for a cadet.”

The two travellers were talking of the tides of the Garonne, and of the reasons for them given by Gassendi [480] and Descartes. This very obliging god relates to them how Neptune thereby punishes an ancient rebellion of the rivers. “Then the honest river-god takes himself off, and when he has gone a score of paces the good soul is melted entirely into water.”

Nowadays this mythology seems unmeaning, and the thought flat. Look at the environs, the surroundings save it. Carelessness, intoxication, are on one side. It is born between two glasses of good wine thoroughly relished, in the midst of an unpremeditated letter. Are people so very nice at table? It is a refrain they are humming; flat or not, is of no consequence. The main thing is good humor and the inclination to laugh. I picture to myself the honest fellows, well-dressed, portly, their eyes still shining from the long dinner of yesterday, with rubies on their cheeks, perfectly ready to sit down to dine at the first inn and to bedevil the maid. La Fontaine did so, especially when he travelled. They made stops, forgot themselves, the broad jokes flew. [481]

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They didn’t cross France as nowadays, after the fashion of a cannon-ball or an attorney; they allowed five [483] days for going to Poitiers, and in the evening, on going to bed, they fed the body. It was the last age of the good corporeal life, that heavy *bourgoisie* which had its flower and its portrait in Flemish art. It was already disappearing; aristocratic propriety and lordly salutes were taking possession of literature; Boileau gave us serious verse, thoroughly useful and solid, like pairs of tongs. Nowadays when the middle-class man is a philosopher, ambitious, a man of business, it is far worse. Let us not speak ill of those who are happy; happiness is a sort of poetry; it is in vain that we boast ourselves, that poetry we have not.

IV.

The road is bordered with vines, each of which carries up its tree, elm or ash, the crown of a fresh verdure, and lets its leaves and tendrils fall again in plumes. The valley is a garden long and narrow, between two chains of mountains. On the lower slopes are beautiful meadows where the living waters run in orderly fashion in trenches, nimble, prattling irrigators; the villages are seated alone the little river; vine-stocks climb [484] alone the dusty wall. The mallows, straight as tapers, lift above the hedges their round flowers, brilliant as roses of rubies. Orchards of apples pass continually on both sides of the coach; cascades fall in every hollow of the chain, surrounded with houses that seek a shelter. The heat and the dust are so terrible that they are obliged every time we pass a spring to sponge the nostrils of the horses. But at the end of the valley a mass of dark, rugged mountains lifts itself, with tops that are white with snow, feeding the river and closing the

horizon. Finally, we pass beneath an alley of fine plane-trees, between two rows of villas, gardens, hotels, and shops. It is Luchon, a little city as Parisian as Bigorre. [485]

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CHAPTER V. LUCHON.

I.

The street is a broad alley, planted with large trees, and lined with rather handsome hotels. It was opened by the intendant d'Ètigny, who, for this misdeed, was near being stoned. It was necessary to call in a company of dragoons to force the Luchonnais to endure the prosperity of their country.

At the end of the alley a pretty chalet, like those in the Jardin des Plantes, shelters the *du Pr'e* spring. Its walls are a fantastic trellis of gnarled branches, adorned with their bark; its roof is thatched; its ceiling is a tapestry of moss. A young girl sitting at the taps distributes to the bathers glasses of sulphurous water. The [486] elegant toilettes come about four o'clock. Meanwhile you sit in the shade on benches of woven wood, and watch the children playing on the turf, the rows of trees descending toward the river, and the broad green plain, sprinkled with villages.

Below the spring are the bathing-houses, nearly finished, and which will be the finest in the Pyrenees. At present the neighboring field is still strewn with materials; the lime smokes all day, and makes the air to flame and quiver.

The court of the baths contains a large votive altar, bearing on one of its faces an amphora and this inscription:

Nymph is.

Aug.

Sacrum.

They have preserved in two:

Nymphis T. Claudius Rufus

V. S. L. M.

This god Lixo, they say, was in the time of the Celts the tutelary deity of the country. Hence the addition these other name of Luchon.

Lixoni Deo Fabia Festa

V. S. L. M.

He is maimed and not destroyed. The gods are tenacious of life. [487]

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There are several balls, and orchestras in certain cafés. These orchestras are strolling families, hired at so much a week, to make the house uninhabitable. One of these, composed of a flute, male, and four violins, female, used fearlessly to play the same overture every evening. The privileged beings who had paid were in [488] the hall among the music stands. A throng of peasants always crowded at the door, with open mouths; they formed in a circle and mounted on the benches to see.

The tradespeople of every sort turn their shops into a lottery: lottery of plate, of books, of little objects of ornament, etc. The tradesman and his wife distribute cards, price one sou, to the servant-maids, soldiers, and children, who compose the crowd. Somebody draws; the gallery and those interested stretch their necks eagerly forward. The man reads the number; a cry is heard, the unguarded sign of an overflowing joy. “It’s I that have won, I, monsieur the merchant.” And you see a little serving-maid, blushing all over, lift herself on tiptoe and stretch out her hands. The merchant dexterously seizes a pot, parades it above his head, and makes everybody about remark it. “A fine mustard-pot; a mustard-pot worth three francs, threaded with gold. Who wants numbers?” The assembly lasts four hours. It begins anew every day; the customers are not wanting for a single moment.

These people have a genius for display. One day we heard the roll of drums, followed by four men marching solemnly, swathed in shawls and pieces of cloth. The children and the dogs follow the procession with hubbub; it is the opening of a new shop. The next day I copied the following handbill printed on yellow paper: [489]

“Orpheonic festival in the grotto of Gargas.

“The Orpheonic Society from the city of Montrejean will execute

“The polka;

“Several military marches;

“Several waltzes;

“Divers other pieces from the works of the great masters.

“Among other amateurs who will allow themselves to be heard, one will sing some stanzas on eternity.

“Finally, an exquisite voice, which wishes to remain anonymous in order to avoid those deserved praises that people are fond of lavishing on its sex, will sing also a number of pieces analogous to the circumstances.

“It will be delicious and even seraphic to lend an ear to the echo of the sonorous concretions of the stalactites, which will unite with the vibrating echo of the vault to repeat the harmonious notes; and when the divine voice shall be heard, the intoxicating charm of the spell will surpass every impression which can have been left in the soul by the most delightful of musical reunions.

“Price of admission: 1 franc.”

These people are descendants of Clemence Isaure. Their advertisements are odes. By way of compensation [490] many odes are advertisements.

In fact, you are here not far from Toulouse; like the character, the type is new. The young girls have fine, regular, clear-cut faces, of a lively and gay expression. They are small, with a light step, brilliant eyes, the nimbleness of a bird. In the evening, about a lottery-shop, these pretty faces stand out animated and full of passion beneath the flickering light, fringed with a black shadow. The eyes sparkle, the red lips tremble, the neck tosses with the little abrupt movements of the swallow; no picture can be more full of life.

If you leave the lighted and tumultuous alley, at the distance of an hundred paces, you find silence, solitude and obscurity. At night, the valley is of great beauty; it is framed and drawn out between two chains of parallel mountains, huge pillars which stretch in two files and support the dark vault of heaven.

Their arches mark it out like a cathedral ceiling, and the immense nave vanishes several leagues away, radiant with stars; these stars fling out flames. At this moment, they are the only living things; the valley is black, the air motionless; you can only distinguish the tapering tops of the poplars, erect in the tranquil night, wrapt in their mantle of leaves. The topmost branches stir, and their rustle is like the murmur of a prayer [491] echoed by the distant hum of the torrent.

III.

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The valley is not a gorge, but a beautiful level meadow marked with trees and fields of maize, among which the river runs, but does not leap. Luchon is surrounded with alleys of plane-trees, poplars and lindens. You leave these alleys for a pathway which follows the waves of the Pique and winds amidst the high grass. The ashes and oaks form a screen along the two banks; big brooks come from the mountains; you cross them on trunks laid bridge-wise or on broad slabs of slate. All these waters flow in the shade, between knotted roots [492] which they bathe, and which form trellises on both sides. The bank is covered with hanging herbage; you see nothing but the fresh verdure and the dark waters. It is here that at noon the pedestrians take refuge; along the sides of the valley wind dusty roads where stream the carriages and the horsemen. Higher up, the mountains, gray or browned with moss, display their soft lines and noble forms as far as the eye can reach. They are not wild as at Saint Sauveur, nor bare as at Eaux-Bonnes; each of these chains advances nobly toward the city and behind it leaves its vast ridge to undulate to the very verge of the horizon.

IV.

Above Luchon is a mountain called Super-Bagnères. At the outset I run across the Fountain of Love; it is a hut of planks where beer is sold.

A winding staircase, crossed by springs, then steep pathways in a black forest of firs lead you in two hours to the pastures on the summit. The mountain is about five thousand feet high. These pastures are great undulating hills, ranged in rows, carpeted with short turf and thickset, fragrant thyme; here and there in crowds are broad tufts of a sort of wild iris, the flower of which fades in the month of August. [493]

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You reach there fatigued, and on the grass of the highest point you may sleep in the sunlight with the utmost pleasure in life. Clouds of winded ants eddied in the warm rays. In a hollow beneath us we heard the bleating of sheep and of goats. A quarter of a league off, on the back of the mountain, a pool of water was [494] glittering like burnished steel. Here, as on Mount Bergonz and the Pic du Midi, you look on an amphitheatre of mountains. These have not the heroic severity of the primal granite, black rocks clothed with luminous air and white snow. On one side alone, toward the Crabioules mountains, the naked and jagged rocks were silvered with a girdle of glaciers. Everywhere else, the slopes were without escarpment, the forms softened, the angles dulled and rounded. But, although less wild, the amphitheatre of the mountains was imposing. The idea of the simple and imperishable entered with an entire dominion into the subdued mind. Peaceful sensations cradled the soul in their mighty undulations. It harmonized itself with these huge and immovable creatures. It was like a concert of three or four notes indefinitely prolonged and sung by deep voices.

The day was declining, clouds dimmed the chilled sky. The woods, the fields, the mossy moors, the rocks of the slopes, took various hues in the waning light. But this opposition of hues, obliterated by distance and the greatness of the masses, melted into a green and grayish shade, of a melancholy and tender effect, like that of a vast wilderness half stocked with verdure. The shadows of the clouds travelled slowly, darkening the tawny summits. All was in harmony, the monotonous sound of the wind, the calm march of the clouds, the [495] waning of the day, the tempered colors, the softened lines.

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Here it is the second age of nature. The earth conceals the rocks, the mosses clothe the earth, the rounded undulations of the upheaved soil resemble the tired waves an hour after the tempest. Luchon is not far from [496] the plains; its mountains are the last billows of the subterranean storm which lifted the Pyrenees; distance has diminished their violence, tempered their grandeur, and softened their steeps.

Toward evening we descended into the hollow where the goats were passing. A spring was running there, caught in the hollowed trunks of trees which answered for watering-troughs to the herds. It is a delicious pleasure after a day's tramp to bathe hands and lips in the cold fountain. Its sound on this solitary plateau was charming. The water trickled through the wood, among the stones, and everywhere that it glided over the blackened earth the sun covered it with splendor. Lines of reeds marked its track to the brink of the pool. Herdsman and animals had gone down; it was the sole inhabitant of this abandoned field. Was it not singular to meet with a marsh at the height of five thousand feet?

V.

Toward the south the river becomes a torrent. Half a league from Luchon it is swallowed up in a deep defile of red rocks, many of which have fallen; the bed is choked with blocks; the two walls of rock close together in the north, and the dammed-up water roars to get out of its prison; but the trees grow in the crevices, and [497] along the wall the white flowers of the bramble hang in locks.

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Very near here, on a round eminence of bare rock, rises the ruin of a Moorish tower, named Cas-tel-Vieil. Its side is bordered with a frightful mountain, black and brown, perfectly bald and resembling a decayed amphitheatre; the layers hang one over another, notched, dislocated, bleeding; the sharp edges and fractures are yellowed with wretched moss, vegetable ulcers that defile with their leprous patches the nudity of the stone. The pieces of this monstrous skeleton hold together only by their mass; it is crannied with deep [498] fissures, bristling with falling blocks, broken to the very base; it is nothing but a ruin dreary and colossal, sitting at the entrance of a valley, like a battered giant.

There was an old beggar-woman there, with naked feet and arms, who was worthy of the mountain. For a dress she had a bundle of rags of every color sewn together, and remained the whole day long crouched in the dust. One might have counted the muscles and tendons of her limbs; the sun had dried her flesh and burned her skin; she resembled the rock against which she was sitting; she was tall, with large, regular features, a brow seamed with wrinkles like the bark of an oak, beneath her grizzled lids a savage black eye, a mat of white hair hanging in the dust. If a sculptor had wished to make a statue of Dryness, the model was there.

The valley narrows and ascends; the Gave rolls between two slopes of great forests, and falls in a constant succession of cascades. The eyes are satiated with freshness and verdure; the trees mount to the very sky, thickset, splendid; the magnificent light falls like a rain on the immense slope; the myriads of plants suck it in, and the mighty sap that gorges them overflows in luxury and vigor. [499]

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On all hands the heat and thewater invigorate and propagate them; they accumulate; enormous beeches hang above the torrent; ferns people the brink; moss hangs in green garlands on the arcades of roots; wild flowers grow by families in the crevices of the beeches; the long branches go with a leap to the further brink; the water glides, boils, leaps from one bank to the other with a tireless violence, and pierces its way by a succession of tempests.

Further on some noble beeches climb the slope, forming an inclined plane of foliage. The sun gives lustre to their rustling tops. The cool shadow spreads its dampness between their columns, over the ribbons of sparse grass, and on strawberries red as coral. From time to time the light falls through an opening, and gushes in cataracts over their flanks which it illuminates; isles of brightness then cleave the dim depths; the topmost leaves move softly their diaphanous shade; the shadow almost disappears, so strong and universal is the splendor. Meanwhile a small hidden spring beads its necklace of crystal among the roots, and great velvet butterflies wheel in the air in broken starts, like falling chestnut-leaves.

At the bottom of a hollow filled with plants, appears the hospice of Bagnères, a heavy house of stone, which serves as a refuge. The mountains open opposite it their amphitheatre of rock, a huge and blasted pit; to [502] crown the whole the clouds have gathered, and dull the rent enclosure which fences off the horizon—enclosure that winds with dreary air, perfectly barren, with the grinning army of its pinnacles, its raw cuts, its murderous steeps; beneath the dome of clouds, wheels a band of screaming crows. This well seems their eyry; wings are needed to escape the hostility of all those bristling points, and of so many yawning gulfs which draw on the passer in order to dash him to atoms.

Soon the road seems brought to an end; wall after wall, the serried rocks obstruct every outlet; still you advance, zigzag, among rounded blocks, along a falling stairway; the wind sweeps down these, howling. No sign of life, no herbage; everywhere the horrible nakedness and the chill of winter. Squat rocks lean beetling over the precipice; others project their heads to meet one another; between them the eye plunges into dark gulfs whose bottom it cannot reach. The violent juttings of all parts advance and rise, piercing the air; down there, at the bottom, they spring forward in lines, climbing over one another, in heaps, bristling against the sky their hedge of pikes. Suddenly in this terrible battalion a cleft is opened; the Maladetta springs up like a great spectre; forests of shivered pines wind about its foot; a girdle of black rocks embosses its arid breast, and the glaciers make it a crown. [503]

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[505]

FULL-SIZE **--** ***Medium-Size***

Nothing is dead, and in respect to this our feeble organs deceive us; those mountain skeletons seem to us inert because our eyes are used to the mobile vegetation of the plains; but nature is eternally alive, and its forces struggle together in these sepulchres of granite and snow, as well as in the human hives or the most [506] flourishing forests. Each particle of rock presses or supports its neighbors; their apparent immobility is an equilibrium of forces; everything works and struggles; nothing is calm and nothing uniform. Those blocks that the eye takes to be massive are networks of atoms infinitely removed from each other, drawn by innumerable and contrary attractions, invisible labyrinths where unceasing transformations are wrought out, where ferments the mineral life, as active as other lives, but grander. And ours, what is it, confined within the experience of a few years and the memory of a few centuries? What are we, but a transitory excrescence, formed of a little thickened air, grown by chance in a cleft of the eternal rock? What is our thought, so high in dignity, so little in power? The mineral substance and its forces are the real possessors and the only masters of the world. Pierce below this crust which sustains us as far as that crucible of lava which tolerates us. Here strive and are developed the great forces, the heat and the affinities which have formed the soil, have composed the rocks which support our life, have furnished its cradle for it, and are preparing its tomb. Everything here is transformed and stirs as in the heart of a tree; and our race, nested on a point of the bark, perceives not that silent vegetation which has lifted the trunk, spread the branches, and whose invincible [507] progress brings in turns flowers, fruits and death. Meanwhile a vaster movement bears the planet with its companions around the sun, borne itself toward an unknown goal, in the infinite space wherein eddies the infinite people of the worlds. Who will say that they are not there merely to decorate and fill it? These great rolling masses are the first thought and the broader development of nature; they live by the same right with ourselves, they are sons of the same mother, and we recognize in them our kin and elders.

FULL-SIZE **--** ***Medium-Size***

But in this family there are ranks. I know I am but an atom; to annihilate me, the least of these stones

would suffice; a bone half as thick as my thumb is the wretched cuirass that defends my thought from delirium and death; my entire action and that of all the machines invented within sixty centuries would not avail to scrape one of the leaves of the mineral crust that supports and nurtures me. And yet in this all-[508] powerful nature I count for something. If among her works I am the most fragile, I am also the last; if she confines me within a corner of her expanse, it is in me that she ends. It is in me that she attains the indivisible point where she is concentred and perfected; and this mind through which she knows herself opens to her a new career in reproducing her works, imitating her order, penetrating her work, feeling its magnificence and eternity. In it is opened a second world reflecting the other, reflecting itself also, and, beyond itself and that other, grasping the eternal law which engenders them both. To-morrow I shall die, and I am not capable of displacing any portion of this rock. But during one moment I have thought, and within the limits of that thought nature and the universe were comprehended.

FULL-SIZE **--** ***Medium-Size***

[509]

FULL-SIZE **--** ***Medium-Size***

CHAPTER VI. TOULOUSE.

I.

When, after a two months’ sojourn in the Pyrenees, you leave Luchon, and see the flat country near Martres, you are delighted and breathe freely: you were tired, without knowing it, of those eternal barriers that shut in the horizon; you needed space. You felt that the air and light were usurped by those monstrous protuberances, and that you were not in a land of men, but in a land of mountains. Unknown to yourself you longed for a real champaign, free and broad. That of Martres is as level as a sheet of water, populous, fertile, stocked with good plants, well cultivated, convenient for life, a realm of abundance and security. There is no doubt that a field of brown earth, broadly ploughed with deep furrows, is a noble[510] sight, and that the labor and happiness of civilized man are as pleasant to behold as the ruggedness of the untamed rocks.

FULL-SIZE -- ***Medium-Size***

A highway white and flat led in a straight line to the very horizon, and ended in a cluster of red houses; the peaked belfry lifted its needle into the sky; but for the sun, it would pass for a Flemish landscape. [511]

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[512]

FULL-SIZE -- ***Medium-Size***

In the streets there were Van Ostade's interiors. Old houses, roofs of uneven thatch, leaning one upon another, machines for hemp displayed in the doorways, little courtyards filled with tubs, wheelbarrows, straw, children, animals—a gay and well-to-do air; above all the great illuminator of the country, the universal decorator, the everlasting giver of joy, the sun poured in profusion its beautiful warm light over the walls of ruddy brick, and patched with strong shadows the white roughcast. [513]

II.

Toulouse appears, all red with bricks, amidst the red dust of evening.

A melancholy city, with narrow and flinty streets. The town hall, called *Capicole*, has but one narrow entrance, commonplace halls, a pronounced and elegant façade in the taste of the decorations for public festivals. In order that no one may doubt its antiquity, they have inscribed on it the word *Capitolium.* The cathedral, dedicated to St. Stephen, is remarkable only for one pleasant memory:

"Towards the year 1027," says Pierre de Marca,

"It was the custom at Toulouse to box a Jew's ears in public on Easter day, in the Church of St. Stephen. Hugues, chaplain to Aimery, Viscount de Rochechouart, being at Toulouse in his master's suite, dealt the Jew [514] a blow with such force that it crushed his head and made his brains and eyes to fall out, as Adhémar has observed in his chronicle."

The choir where Adhémar made this observation is wanting in neither beauty nor grandeur; but what strikes you most on leaving the mountains, is the museum. You find anew thought, passion, genius, art, all the most beautiful flowers of human civilization.

It is a broad, well-lighted hall, flanked by two small galleries of greater height, which form a semicircle, and filled with pictures of all the schools, some of which are excellent. A Murillo, representing *St. Diego and his Monks*; you recognize in it the monastic harshness, the master's sentiment of reality, his originality of expression and earnest vigor. A *Martyrdom of St. Andrew,* by Caravaggio, black and horrible. Several pictures by the Caracci, Guercino and Guido. A *Ceremony of the Order of the Holy Ghost* in 1635, by Philip de Champagne. These most real, delicate and noble faces are portraits of the time; you see the contemporaries of Louis XIII. in life. Here are the correct drawing, temperate color, conscientious but not literal exactness of a Fleming become a Frenchman. [515]

SAINT-SERNIN, AT TOULOUSE.

FULL-SIZE **--** ***Medium-Size***

[516]
[517]
A charming *Marquise dc Largillere* with a wasp waist in blue velvet, elegant and haughty. A *Christ Crucified,* by Rubens, the eyes glassy, flesh livid—a powerful sketch, wherein the cold whiteness of the faded tints exhales the frightful poetry of death.

I name only the most striking; but the liveliest sensation comes from the modern pictures. They transport the mind all at once to Paris, into the midst of our discussions, into the inventive and troubled world of the modern arts, the immense laboratory where so many fruitful and opposing forces weave the work of a renewing century: A celebrated picture by Glaize, the *Death of St. John the Baptist*; the half-naked butcher who holds the head is a superb brute, a careless instrument of death which has just done its work well. An elegant and affected painting by Schoppin, *Jacob before Laban and his two Daughters*. The daughters of Laban are pretty drawing-room misses who have just disguised themselves as Arabs. *Muley Abd-el-Rhaman,* by Eugene Delacroix. He is motionless on a bluish and melancholy horse. Files of soldiers are presenting arms, packed in masses in a stifling atmosphere; dull heads, stupid and real, hooded with the white bournous; ruined towers are piled behind them under a leaden sun. The crude colors, the heavy garments, bronzed limbs, massive parasols, that lifeless and animal expression are the revelation of a land where thought sleeps [518] overwhelmed and buried under the weight of barbarism, of the religion and the climate. In a corner of the small gallery is the first brilliant stroke of Couture, *The Thirst of Gold.* All misery and every temptation come to solicit the miser: a mother and her starving child, an artist reduced to beggary, two half-nude courtesans. He gazes at them with sorrowful ardor, but the hooked fingers cannot let go the gold. His lips shrivel, his cheeks glow, his burning eyes are fastened to their wanton bosoms. It is the torture of the heart torn by the rebellion of the senses, the concentrated despair of repressed desire, the bitter tyranny of the ruling passion. Never did face better express the soul. The drawing is bold, the color superb, more daring than in the *Romans of the Decadence*, so lively that you forget to notice a few crude tones, hazarded in the transport of composition.

It is perhaps too much praise. All these moderns are poets who have determined to be painters. One has sought out dramas in history, another scenes of manners; one translates religions, another a philosophy. Such an one imitates Raphael, such another the early Italian masters; the landscapist employs trees and clouds to compose odes or elegies. No one is simply a painter; they are all archaeologists, psychologists, giving setting to some memory or theory. They please our learning, our philosophy. Like ourselves, they are full and [519] overflowing with general ideas, Parisians uneasy and curious. They live too much by the brain, and too little by the senses; they have too much wit and too little artlessness. They do not love a form for its own sake, but for what it expresses; and if they chance to love it, it is voluntarily, with an acquired taste, from an antiquary's superstition.

CHURCH OF ST. ETIENNE, TOULOUSE.

FULL-SIZE **--** ***Medium-Size***

They are children of a wise generation, harassed and thoughtful, in which men who have won equality and the freedom of thought, and of shaping each for himself his religion, rank, and fortune, wish to find in art the [520] expression of their anxieties and meditations. They are a thousand leagues away from the first masters, workmen or cavaliers, who lived out-of-doors, scarcely read at all, and thought only of giving a feast for their eyes. It is for that that I love them; I feel like them because I am of their century. Sympathy is the best source of admiration and pleasure.

III.

Below the museum is a square tower enclosed by a gallery of slender columns, which towards the top bend and are cut into trefoils, forming a border of arcades. They have gathered under this gallery all the antiquities of the country: fragments of Roman statues, severe busts of emperors, ascetic virgins of the middle ages, bas-reliefs from churches and temples, knights of stone lying all armed upon their tombs. The court was deserted and silent; tall slender trees, tufted shrubbery, were bright with the loveliest green. A dazzling sunlight fell on the red tiles of the gallery; an old fountain, loaded with little columns and heads of animals, murmured near to a bench of rose-veined marble. A statue of a young man was seen amidst the branches; stems of green hops climbed up around broken columns. [521]

THE MUSEUM AT TOULOUSE.

FULL-SIZE -- ***Medium-Size***

[522]

This mixture of rustic objects and objects of art, these wrecks of two dead civilizations and the youth of [523]
flowery plants, the joyous rays on the old tiles, united in their contrasts all that I had seen for two months.

THE END.

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