

The Roof of France

Matilda Betham-Edwards

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THE ROOF OF FRANCE

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OR

THE CAUSSES OF THE LOZERE

BY

M. BETHAM-EDWARDS

To M. SADI CARNOT.

THIS VOLUME, THE THIRD OF MY PUBLISHED TRAVELS IN FRANCE, IS
INSCRIBED WITH ALL RESPECT TO HER HONOURED PRESIDENT.

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INTRODUCTORY.

It is upon this occasion my rare and happy privilege to introduce the reader to something absolutely new. How many English-speaking tourists have found their way to the Roof of France--in other words, the ancient Gevaudan, the romantic department of the Lozere? How many English--or for the matter of that French travellers either--have so much as heard of the Causses, [Footnote: From calx, lime] those lofty tablelands of limestone, groups of a veritable archipelago, once an integral whole, now cleft asunder, forming the most picturesque gorges and magnificent defiles; offering contrasts of scenery as striking as they are sublime, and a phenomenon unique in geological history? On the plateau of the typical Causse, wide in extent as Dartmoor, lofty as Helvellyn, we realize all the sombreness and solitude of the Russian steppe. These stony wastes, aridity itself, yet a carpet of wild-flowers in spring, are sparsely peopled by a race having a peculiar language, a characteristic physique, and primitive customs. Here are laboriously cultivated oats, rye, potatoes--not a blade of wheat, not an apple-tree is to be discerned; no spring or rivulet freshens the parched soil. The length and severity of the winter are betokened by the trees and poles seen at intervals on either side of the road. But for such precautions, even the native wayfarer would be lost when six feet of snow cover the ground. Winter lasts eight months, and the short summer is tropical.

But descend these grandiose passes, dividing one limestone promontory from another--go down into the valleys, each watered by lovely rivers, and we are, as if by magic, transported into the South! The peach, the almond, the grape ripen out of doors; all is smilingness, fertility, and grace. The scenery of the Causses may be described as a series of exhilarating surprises, whilst many minor attractions contribute to the stranger's enjoyment.

The affability, dignity, and uprightness of these mountaineers, their freedom from vulgarity, subservience, or habits of extortion, their splendid physique and great personal beauty, form novel experiences of travel. The general character of the people--here I do not allude to the 'Causse-nard,' or dweller on the Causse alone, but to the Lozerien as a type--may be gathered from one isolated fact. The summer sessions of 1888 were what is called *_assizes blanches_*, there being not a single cause to try. Such an occurrence is not unusual in this department.

The Lozere, hitherto the Cinderella, poorest of the poor of French provinces, is destined to become one of the richest. Not only the Causses, but the Canon du Tarn, may be regarded in the light of a discovery by the tourist world. A few years ago the famous geographer, Joanne, was silent on both. Chance-wise, members of the French Alpine Club lighted upon this stupendous defile between the Causse de Sauveterre and the Causse Mejean; their glorious find became noised abroad, and now the Tarn is as a Pactolus flowing over golden sands--a mine of wealth to the simple country folk around. The river, springing from a cleft in the Lozere chain, winding its impetuous way, enriched by many a mountain torrent, through the Aveyron, Tarn, and Garonne, finally disembodying into the Garonne, has lavished all its witchery on its native place.

Every inch of the way between the little towns of St. Enimie and Le Rozier is enchanted ground by virtue of unrivalled scenery. In time the influx of tourists must make the river-side population rich. The sandy bed of the Tarn must attain the preciousness of a building site near Paris. This materialistic view of the question affords mixed feelings. I have in mind the frugality of these country folks, their laboriousness, their simple, upright, sturdy ways. I can but wish them well, even at the price of terrible disenchantment. Instead of rustic hostelries at St. Enimie, gigantic hotels after the manner of Swiss tourist barracks; the solitude of the Causses broken by enthusiastic tittle-tattle; tourist-laden flotillas bearing the ensign of Cook or Gaze skimming the glassy waters of the majestically environed Tarn!

On the threshold of the Lozere, just outside the limits of the department, lies another newly-discovered marvel, more striking, stranger than the scenery of the Causses--as beautiful, though in quite another way, as the Canon or Gorge of the Tarn. This is the fantastic, the unique, the eerie Cite du Diable, or Montpellier-le-Vieux, with its citadel, ramparts, watch-towers, amphitheatres, streets, arcades, terraces--a vast metropolis in the wilderness, a Babylon untenanted from the beginning, a Nineveh fashioned only by the great builder Nature. Little wonder that the peasants formerly spoke of the dolomite city, when forced to speak at all, with bated breath, and gave it so ill-omened a name. The once uncanny, misprized, even accursed city, since surnamed Montpellier-le-Vieux, from a fancied resemblance to Montpellier, is now very differently regarded by its humble owners.

Literally discovered in 1882, its first explorers being two members of the French Alpine Club, the Cite du Diable is already bringing in a revenue. French tourists, who first came by twos and threes, may now be counted by the hundred a month during the holiday season. Alert to the unmistakable rat-tat-tat of Dame Fortune at their front-doors, the good folks are preparing for the welcome invasions to come. The auberge is being transformed into an inn, roads are improving, a regular service of guides has been organized, and all charges for guides, carriages, and mules have been regulated by tariff. It is hardly possible to exaggerate the weird fascination and eldritch charm of this once dreaded, ill-omened place. Only one pen--that, alas! at rest for ever--could have done justice to such a theme. In the hands of the great Sand, Montpellier-le-Vieux might have afforded us a chef d'oeuvre to set beside 'La Ville Noire' or the adorable 'Jeanne.'

Fresh and interesting as is a sojourn on the Roof of France, a name in verity accorded to the Lozere, I have not restricted myself within such limits. The climbing up and the getting down offer many a racy and novel experience. I have given not only the middle of my journey, but the beginning and the end. Those of my country-folk who have traversed the picturesque little land of the French Morran, who have steamed from Lyons to Avignon, made their way by road through the Gard and the Aveyron, and sojourned in the cheese-making region of the Cantal--I fancy their number is not legion--may pass over my chapters thus headed. Had I one object in view only, to sell my book, I must have reversed the usual order of things, and put the latter half in place of the first. I prefer the more methodical plan, and comfort myself with the reflection that France, excepting Brittany, Normandy, the Pyrenees, the Riviera and the Hotel du Jura, Dijon, is really much less familiar to English travellers than Nijni-Novgorod or Jerusalem. I no more encountered anyone British born during my two journeys in the Lozere than I did a beggar. This privileged corner of the earth enjoys an

absolute immunity from excursionists and mendicants. Strong enthusiasts, lovers of France, moved to tread in my footsteps, will hardly accuse me of exaggerating either the scenery, the good qualities and good looks of the people, or the flawless charm of Lozerien travel. In years to come I may here be found too eulogistic of all classes with whom I came in contact, who shall say? A long period of increasing prosperity, a perpetually swelling stream of holiday-makers, may by degrees change, and perhaps ultimately pervert, the character of the peasants, so glowingly delineated in the following pages. Let us hope that such a contingency is at least very far off, and that many another may bring home the same cordial recollections of the boatmen of the Tarn, the aubergistes and voituriers of the Causses, the peasant owners of the Cite du Diable. I need hardly add that I give a mere record of travel. The geology of the strange district visited, its rich and varied flora, its wealth of prehistoric remains, are only touched upon. For further information the reader is referred to other writers. On the subject of agriculture I have occasionally dwelt at more length, being somewhat of a farmeress, as Arthur Young styles it, and having now studied a considerable portion of France from an agricultural point of view. The noble dictum of 'that wise and honest traveller'--thus aptly does our great critic describe the Suffolk squire--'the magic of property turns sands to gold,' will be here as amply illustrated as in my works on Eastern and Western France.

One word more. No one must undertake a journey in the Lozere with a scantily-furnished purse. A well-known artist lately contributed a paper to the Pall Mall Gazette in which he set forth--in the strangest English surely ever penned by man, woman, or child--the facilities and delights of cycling in France on seven francs a day. Why anyone in his sober senses should dream of travelling abroad on seven francs a day passes my comprehension. Money means to the traveller not only health, enjoyment, comfort, but knowledge. Why should we expect, moreover, to be wholesomely housed and fed in a foreign country upon a sum altogether inadequate to the tourist's needs at home? The little wayside inns in out-of-the-way places mentioned by me were indeed very cheap, but taking into account horses, carriages and guides, the exploration of the Causses, the Canon du Tarn and Montpellier-le-Vieux will certainly cost twenty-five francs per diem, this outlay being slightly reduced in the case of two or more persons. Of course, when not absolutely making excursions, when settling down for days or weeks in some rural retreat, expenses will be moderate enough as far as inns are concerned. But carriage-hire is costly all the world over, and the inquiring traveller must have his carriage. There will also be a daily call upon his purse in the matter of pourboire to guides and conductors. A pound a day is by no means too liberal an allowance for the wise bent upon having the best, of everything. Those content to put up with the worst may exist upon the half.

THE ROOF OF FRANCE

PART I.

MY FIRST JOURNEY IN SEARCH OF THE CAUSSES.

CHAPTER I. FROM LE PUY TO MENDE.

The traveller in France will not unseldom liken his fortunes to those of Saul the son of Kish, who, setting forth in search of his father's asses, found a kingdom; or, to use a homelier parable, will compare his case to that of the donkey between two equally-tempting bundles of hay.

Such, at least, was my luck when starting for my annual French tour in 1887. I had made up my mind to see something of the Lozere and the Cantal, settling down in two charming spots respectively situated in these departments, when, fortunately for myself, I was tempted elsewhere. Instead of rustivating for a few weeks in the country nooks alluded to, there observing leisurely the condition of the peasants and of agriculture generally, I took a contrary direction, thus ultimately becoming acquainted with one of the most romantic and least-known regions of Central France.

'Since you intend to visit the Lozere' wrote a correspondent to me, 'why not explore the Causses? The scenery is, I believe, very remarkable, and the geology deeply interesting.'

The Causses? the Causses? I had travelled east, west, north, south on French soil for upwards of thirteen years, yet the very name was new to me. Having once heard of the Causses, it was, of course, quite certain that I should hear of them twice.

Meeting by chance a fellow-countryman at Dijon, as enthusiastic a lover of French scenery as myself, and comparing our experiences, he suddenly asked:

'But the Causses? Have you seen the wonderful Causses of the Lozere?'

It was a curious and highly-characteristic fact that both my informants should be English, thus bearing out the assertion of an old French writer, author of the first real tourist's guide for his own country, that we are 'le peuple le plus curieux de l'Europe'; he adds, 'le plus observateur,' perhaps a compliment rather paid to Arthur Young than to the English as a nation. The work I refer to ('Itineraire descriptif de la France,' by Vaysse de Villiers, 1816) was evidently written under the inspiration of our great agriculturist.

From French friends and acquaintances I could learn absolutely nothing of the Causses. The region was a *_terra incognita_* to one and all. I might every whit as well have asked my way to Swift's Liliputia or Cloud Cuckoo Town, and the Island of Cheese of his precursor, the witty Lucian. People *_had_* heard of l'Ecosse; oh yes! but why an Englishwoman should seek information about Scotland in the heart of France, they could not quite make out.

There was nothing for me to do but trust to happy chance and the guide-book, and set out; and as a stray swallow is the precursor of myriads, so no sooner had I got an inkling of one marvel than I was destined to hear of half a dozen.

Wonderful the scenery of the Causses, still more wonderful the canon or gorge of the Tarn and the dolomite city of Montpellier-le-Vieux, so I now learned.

There were difficulties in the way of seeing all these. I had been unexpectedly detained at Dijon. It was the second week in September, and the Roof of France--in other words, the department of the Lozere--is oftentimes covered with snow before that month is out. My travelling companion was a young French lady, permitted by her parents to travel with me, and for whose health, comfort and safety I felt responsible. It seemed doubtful whether this year at least I should be able to realize my new-formed project, and penetrate into the solitudes of the Causses. However, I determined to try.

My journey begins at the ancient town of Le Puy, former capital of the Vivarais, chef-lieu of the department of the Haute Loire, and, it is unnecessary to say, one of the most curious towns in the world. We had journeyed thither by way of St. Etienne, and were bound for Mende, the little mountain-girt bishopric and capital of the Lozere.

We had to be up betimes, as our train for Langogne, corresponding with the Mende diligence, started at five in the morning. It might have been midnight when we quitted the Hotel Gamier--would that I could say a single word in its favour!--so blue black the frosty heavens, so brilliant the stars, the keen September air biting sharply.

More fortunate than a friend whose pocket was lately picked of twenty-five pounds at the railway-station here, I waited whilst the terribly slow business of ticket-taking and registration was got over, thankful enough that I had breakfasted overnight--that is to say, had made tea at three o'clock in the morning. Not a cup of milk, not a crust of bread, would that inhospitable inn offer its over-charged guests before setting out. As I have nothing but praise to bestow upon the hostelryes of the Lozere and the Cantal, I must give vent to a well-deserved malediction here.

By slow degrees the perfect day dawned, a glorious sun rising in a cloudless sky. We now discovered that our travelling companions were two sisters--the one, an admirable specimen of the belle villageoise, in her charming lace coiffe; the other, equally good-looking, but as much vulgarized by her Parisian costume as Lamartine's sea-heroine, Graziella, when she had exchanged her contadine's dress for modern millinery. These pretty and becoming head-dresses of Auvergne, made often of the richest lace and ribbon, may now be described as survivals, the bonnet, as well as the chimney-pot hat, making the round of the civilized world.

From Le Puy to Langogne, via Langeac, we traversed a region familiar to many a tourist as he has journeyed from Clermont-Ferrand to Nimes. The shifting scenes of gorge and ravine are truly of Alpine grandeur, whilst the railway is one of those triumphs of engineering skill to which Alpine travellers are also accustomed.

One remark only I make by the way. The sarcasms levelled against the system of peasant proprietorship, that would be cruel were they not silly, are here silenced for once and for all. Nothing can be more self-evident than the beneficial result of small holdings to the State, wholly setting aside the superiority of the peasant-owner's position, moral, social and material, to that of the English farm labourer. Even

a prejudiced observer must surely be touched by the indomitable perseverance, the passionate love of the soil, evinced by the small cultivators in the valley of the Allier, and, indeed, witnessed throughout every stage of our day's journey.

Wherever exists a patch of cultivable soil, we see crops of rye, buckwheat and potatoes, some of these plots being only a few yards square, and to all appearances inaccessible. In many places earth has been carried by the basketful to narrow, lofty ledges of rock, an astounding instance of toil, hopefulness and patience. No matter the barrenness of the spot, no matter its isolation or the difficulty of approach, wherever root or seed will grow, there the French peasant owner plies hoe and spade, and gradually causes the wilderness to blossom as the rose.

So true it is, as Arthur Young wrote a hundred years ago, 'Give a man secure possession of a black rock, and he will turn it into a garden.' A considerable proportion of the land hereabouts has been quite recently laid under cultivation, and on every side we see bits of waste being ploughed up.

At Langeac, a little junction between Le Puy and St. Georges d'Aurac, we had a halt of over two hours, easily spent amid charming scenery. The air is sweet and fresh, everyone is busy in the fields, and as we saunter here and there, people look up from their work to greet us with a smile of contentment and bonhomie. It is a scene of peace and homely prosperity. A short railway jaunt to Langogne; a bustling breakfast at the little restaurant; then begins the final packing of the diligence. The crazy old berline looks as full as it can be before our four boxes and numerous small packages are taken from the railway van, and the group of bag and basket laden folks standing round, priests, nuns, and commis-voyageurs, evidently waiting for a place. Surely room can never be found for all these! Just then a French tourist came up and accosted us, smiling ruefully.

'Ah!' he said, shaking his head with affected malice, 'just like you English--you have secured the best places.'

True enough, the English when they travel are as the wise virgins, and secure the best places. The French are as the foolish virgins, and trust oftentimes to chance.

I had, of course, telegraphed from Le Puy the day before for two seats in the coupe. Our interlocutor, an army surgeon, making a holiday trip with his wife, was obliged to relinquish the third good place to madame, placing himself beside the driver on the banquette. The little disappointment over, we became the best of friends, a highly desirable contingency in such terribly close quarters.

Once securely packed, we stood no more chance of being unpacked than potted anchovies on their way from Nantes to Southampton. There we were, and there perforce we must remain till we reached our destination. To move a finger, to stir an inch, was out of the question. Nothing short of physical torture for the space of six hours seemed in store for us--for the three occupants of that narrow coupe, like fashionable ladies of old,

'Close mewed in their sedans for fear of air.'

We could at least enjoy the selfish satisfaction of faring better than our neighbours. The unlucky occupants inside were as short of elbow-room as ourselves, and had not the enjoyment of the view; the passengers of the banquette were literally perched on a knife-board, whilst one old man, a cheery old fellow, supernumerary of the service, hung mid-air on one side of the vehicle, literally sitting on nothing. Like the Indian jugglers and the Light Princess of George Macdonald's wonderful fairy-tale, he had found means to set at nought the law of gravity.

There he hung, and as the sturdy horses set off at a fast trot, and we were whirled round one sharp corner after another, I at first expected to see him lose balance and fall with terrible risk to life and limb. But we soon discovered that he had mastered the accomplishment of sitting on air, and was as safe on his invisible seat as we on our hard benches; old as he was, he seemed to glory in the exploit--exploit, it must be allowed, of the first water.

Once fairly off, our own bodily discomforts were entirely forgotten, so splendid the sunshine, so exhilarating the air, so romantic the scenery. The forty miles' drive passed like a dream.

Our companion, like her husband, was full of health, spirits and information. She could see nothing of the military surgeon but a pair of neat, well-polished boots, as he sat aloft beside the driver; every now and then she craned forward her neck with wifely solicitude and interrogated the boots:

'Well, love, how do you get on?'

And the boots would make affectionate reply:

'As well as possible, my angel--and you?'

'We couldn't be better off,' answered the enthusiastic little lady cheerily. Nor in one sense could we; earth could hardly show fairer or more striking scenes than these highlands of the Lozere.

The first part of our way lay amid wild mountain passes, deep ravines, dusky with pine and fir, lofty granite peaks shining like blocks of diamond against an amethyst heaven. Alternating with such scenes of savage magnificence are idyllic pictures, verdant dells and glades, rivers bordered by alder-trees wending even course through emerald pastures, or making cascade after cascade over a rocky bed. On little lawny spaces about the sharp spurs of the Alps, we see cattle browsing, high above, as if in cloudland. Excepting an occasional cantonnier at work by the roadside, or a peasant woman minding her cows, the region is utterly deserted. Tiny hamlets lie half hidden in the folds of the hills or skirting the edges of the lower mountain slopes; none border the way.

During the long winter these fine roads, winding between steep precipices and abrupt rocks, are abandoned on account of the snow. The diligence ceases to run, and letters and newspapers are distributed occasionally by experienced horsemen familiar with the country and able to trust to short cuts.

What the icy blasts of January are like on these stupendous heights we can well conceive. At one point of our journey we reach an altitude

above the sea equal to that of the Puy de Dome. This is the lofty plateau of granitic formation called Le Palais du Roi, a portion of the Margeride chain, and as the old writer before mentioned writes, 'la partie la plus neigieuse de la route'--the snowiest bit of the road. On this superb September day, although winter might be at hand, the temperature was of an English July. As we travelled on, amid scenes of truly Alpine grandeur and loveliness, the thought arose to my mind, how little even the much-travelled English dream of the wealth of scenery in France! Our cumbersome old diligence carried only French passengers. Nowhere else in Europe does the English tourist find himself more isolated from the common-place of travel.

Many of the landscapes now passed recall scenes in Algeria, especially as we get within sight of the purple, porphyritic chain of the Lozere. We gaze on undulations of delicate violet and gray, as in Kabylia, whilst deep down below lie oases of valley and pasture, the dazzling golden green contrasting, with the aerial hues of distant mountain and cloud.

Nothing under heaven could be more beautiful than the shifting lights and shadows on the remoter hills, or the crimson and rosy flush of sunset on the nearer rocks; at our feet we see well-watered dales and luxuriant meadows, whilst on the higher ground, here as in the valley of the Allier, we have proofs of the astounding, the unimaginable patience and laboriousness of peasant owners.

In many places rings of land have been cleared round huge blocks of granite, the smaller stones, wrenched up, forming a fence or border, whilst between the immovable, columnar masses of rock, potatoes, rye, or other hardy crops, have been planted. Not an inch of available soil is wasted. These scenes of mingled sternness and grace are not marred by any eyesore: no hideous chimney of factory with its column of black smoke, as in the delicious valleys of the Jura; no roar of millwheel or of steam-engine breaks the silence of forest depths. The very genius of solitude, the very spirit of beauty, broods over the woods and mountains of the Lozere. The atmospheric effects are very varied and lovely, owing to the purity of the air. As evening approaches, the vast porphyry range before us is a cloud of purple and ruddy gold against the sky. And what a sky! That warm, ambered glow recalls Sorrento. By the time we wind down into the valley of the Lot night has overtaken us. We dash into the little city too hungry and too tired, it must be confessed, to think of anything else but of beds and dinner; both of which, and of excellent quality, awaited us at the old-fashioned Hotel Chabert.

CHAPTER II. MENDE.

Mende was the last but one of French bishoprics and chef-lieux to be connected with the great highroads of railway.

That tardy piece of justice only remained due to St. Claude in the Jura when, owing to the Republic, Mende obtained its first iron road. Much time and fatigue will henceforth be spared the traveller by these new lines of railway, now spreading like a network over every part of

France; yet who can but regret the supersession of the diligence--that antiquated vehicle recalling the good old days of travel, when folks journeyed at a jog-trot pace, seeing not only places, but people, and being brought into contact with wholly new ideas and modes of life?

The benefits of the railway in the Lozere and the Jura are incalculable from an economic point of view, to say nothing of the convenience and comfort thereby placed within reach of all classes. It is an English habit to rail at the lavish expenditure of the French Government. Cavillers of this kind wholly lose sight of the tremendous strides made during the last fifteen years in the matter of communication. Surely money thus laid out is a justifiable expenditure on the part of any State?

I lately revisited the Vendee after twelve years' absence. I found the country absolutely transformed--new lines of railway intersecting every part, increased commercial activity in the towns, improved agriculture in rural districts, schools opened, buildings of public utility erected on all sides--evidences of an almost incredible progress. In Anjou the same rapid advance, social, intellectual, material, strikes the traveller whose first acquaintance with that province was made, say, fifteen years ago. Take Segre by way of example; compare its condition in 1888 with the state of things before the Franco-Prussian War. And this little town is one instance out of hundreds.

It was high time that something should be done for Mende. No town ever suffered more from wolves and wolf-like enemies in human shape. Down almost to our own day the depredations of wolves were frightful. The old French traveller before cited, writing in 1816, speaks of the large number of children annually devoured by these animals in the Lozere. The notorious 'Bete du Gevaudan,' at an earlier period, was the terror of the country. It is an exciting narrative, that of the gigantic four-footed demon of mischief, how, after proving the scourge of the country for years, desolating home after home, in all devouring no less than a hundred old men, women, and children, he was at last caught in 1767 by a brave monster-destroying baron, the Hercules and the Perseus of local story. The ravages of wild beasts were a trifle compared to the enormities committed by human foes.

It is not my intention to do more than touch upon the religious wars of the Cevennes. Those blood-stained chronicles have been given again and again elsewhere. No one, however, can make a sojourn at Mende without recalling the atrocities perpetrated in the name of religion, and compared to which the excesses of the Jacquerie and the Terror sink into insignificance. If any of my readers doubt this, let them turn to the impartial pages of the eminent French historian, the late M. Henri Martin; or, to take a shorter road to conviction, get up the history of the Gevaudan, or of this same little town of Mende.

On a smaller scale, the horrors of the siege of Magdeburgh were here repeated, the Tilly of the campaign being the Calvinist leader Merle.

Devastated in turn by Catholic and Protestant, Royalist and Huguenot, Mende was taken by assault on Christmas Day, 1579, and during three days given up to fire, pillage, and slaughter. A general massacre took place; the cathedral was fired and partially destroyed, the bells, thirteen in number--one of these called the 'Nonpareil,' and reputed the most sonorous in Christendom--being melted down for cannon. All that fiendish cruelty and the demon of destruction could do was done.

In vain Henry of Navarre tried to put down atrocities committed in his name. A second time Merle possessed himself of Mende, only consenting to go forth on payment of a large sum in gold.

The history of Mende is the history of Marvejols, of one town after another visited by the traveller in the Cevennes; and in the wake of the burnings, pillagings and massacres of that horrible period follows the more horrible period still of the guerilla warfare of the Camisards, quelled by means of the rack, the stake, and the wheel.

The Revolution, be it ever remembered, abolished all these; torture ended with the Ancien Regime; and, although M. Taine seems of opinion that the new state of things could have been brought about by a few gentlemen quietly discussing affairs in dress-coats and white gloves, we read of no great social upheaval being thus bloodlessly effected. At such times a spirit of lawlessness and vengeance will break loose beyond the power of leaders to hold in check.

The approach to Mende is very fine, and the little city is most romantically placed; above gray spires, slated roofs and verdant valley, framing it in on all sides, rise bare, brown and purple mountains.

The cathedral presents an incongruity. Its twin-towers, each crowned with a spire, recall two roses on a single stem, the one full-blown, beautiful, a floral paragon, the other withered, dwarfed, abortive.

The first towers over its brother by a third, and is a lovely specimen of Gothic architecture in the period of later efflorescence. The second is altogether unbeautiful, and we wonder why such a work should ever have been undertaken at all. Far better to have left the cathedral one-towered, as those of Sens and Auxerre.

The town itself would be pleasant enough if its aediles were more alive to the importance of sanitation. It never seems to occur to the authorities in these regions to have the streets scoured and swept. Just outside Mende is a delicious little mountain-path, commanding a wondrous panorama: although this walk to the hermitage of St. Privat is evidently the holiday-stroll of the inhabitants, accumulations of filth lie on either side. [Footnote: The same remark might be made by a Frenchman of the lanes near Hastings!] No one takes any notice. As Mende has without doubt an important future before it, let us hope that these drawbacks will not afflict travellers in years to come. The little capital of the Lozere must by virtue of position become a tourist centre; surely the townsfolk will at last wake up to the importance of making their streets clean and wholesome.

To obtain the prettiest view of this charming, albeit tatterdemalion, little city, we follow a walk bordered with venerable willows to the railway station. Here is seen a belt of beautifully kept vegetable gardens and orchards, all fresh and green as if just washed by April showers. These are the property of peasant-owners, who dispose of their crops here and at Langogne. As yet the good townsfolk are hardly alive to the benefits of a railway. One of our drivers complained that it ruined the trades alike of carriage proprietor, conductor, and carter; another averred that the local manufacture of woollen goods, formerly of considerable account, was at a standstill owing to the importations of cheaper cloths. These grumblers will doubtless ere long take a different tone, as the glorious scenery of the Lozere becomes more

widely known and Mende is made the tourists' headquarters. Our hotel, situated in the middle of the town, offers good beds, good food, dirty floors, charges low enough to please Mr. Joseph Pennell, and a total absence of anything in the shape of modern ideas. The people are charming, and the house is a mousy, ratty, ramshackle place hundreds of years old.

It may be as well to mention that folk assured me I was the first English-speaking lady ever seen at Mende. A short time before no little excitement had been created by the appearance of six young Englishmen in knickerbockers, footing it with knapsack on shoulder. But lady-tourists from the other side of La Manche? Never! Be this as it may, it is as well for my country-women, if any follow me hither, to avoid insular eccentricities of dress. The best plan, before exploring wholly remote regions of France, is to buy the neatest possible head-gear and travelling-costume in Paris. Without meaning to be impertinent, bystanders will stand agape at the sight of any strangers, English or French. Even my young French companion was stared at, just because she was not a native of the place. Very obligingly, she offered to fetch my letters from the poste restante, and look out for photographs. As she had spent some time in England and acquired certain habits of independence, I accepted. But not twice!

The poor girl found so many eyes following her, that she took refuge in the cathedral. As there chanced to be an abbe in the confessional handy, she very sensibly seized the opportunity by the forelock, and performed the duty of confession. But I did not permit her to roam about alone after that.

Meantime, the medecin militaire and his wife had set out for the Causses and the Canon du Tarn, and their enthusiasm but served to heighten my own. That shooting of the rapids, too, I now heard of for the first time, lent a spice of exhilarating hazard and adventure to the excursion. They were going to shoot the rapids of the Tarn. Why should I not follow their example?

Sorely tempted as I was to carry out the same programme, once more I hesitated. I could obtain very little precise information as to the real difficulties, if any, that beset the way, but everyone agreed that it was not at all a commonplace journey--in other words, not a very easy one. The long drive across the solitary Causse to St. Eminie or Florac, the four relays of boatmen necessary for the descent of the Tarn, the doubtfulness of the accommodation at the different halting-places--all these details had to be considered. Touring it through the Causses seemed, indeed, beset with difficulties. You have not only to take food with you for horse and man, but water also--ay, and make sure that your driver, besides being trustworthiness and sobriety itself, carries a revolver in his pocket. The Caussenards, or dwellers on these steppes, are said to be harmless enough, but suspicious-looking tramps from a distance, who always go in pairs, may sometimes be met. Wayside inns there are none, and as relays are therefore unattainable, the traveller must quit civilization as soon as dawn breaks, and contrive to reach it before overtaken by nightfall. Lastly, during the brief summer, the heat is torrid, and if you start on your travels towards its close, say the middle or end of September, today's scorching sun may be followed by tomorrow's snowstorm. And to be caught in a snowstorm on the Causses would be an Alpine adventure with no chance of a rescuing St. Bernard.

Had I been alone I might have ventured, but, as before-mentioned, my companion was a young French lady confided to my care by her parents. On the whole, therefore, and with keenest regret, I felt it more prudent to defer the undertaking, for undertaking it undoubtedly was, till another year. Next summer, I said to myself, as soon as the snows were melted, I would again climb the Roof of France. And delightful as was the society of a bright, amiable, ready-witted girl, I would instead find a travelling companion of maturer years, and responsible for her own safety.

There was one compensation within reach. If we could not enter the land of Canaan, we could at least behold it from Mount Pisgah. So I engaged a carriage with sturdy horses and a trustworthy driver, and we set off for the plateau rising over against Mende in a south-easterly direction, the veritable threshold of the Causses.

CHAPTER III. A GLIMPSE OF THE CAUSSES.

The drive from Mende to the plateau of Sauveterre is a curious experience. Here the Virgilian and Dantesque schemes are reversed: Pluto's dread domain, the horrible Inferno, lies above; deep down below are the Fields of the Blest and the celestial Paradise.

Dazzlingly bright the verdure, fertile and sunny the valleys we now leave behind--arid and desolate beyond the power of words to express the tableland reached so laboriously.

Between these two extremes, Elysium and Tartarus, we pass shifting, panoramic scenes of wondrous beauty, stage upon stage of pastoral charm, picture after picture of idyllic sweetness and grace. Long we can glance behind us and see the little gray town, its spires outlined in steely gray against the embracing hills, its gardens and orchards bright as emerald--towering above all, the bare, purple, wide-stretching Lozere.

The weather is superlative, and the clear, gemlike lines of sky and foliage are as brilliantly contrasted as in an Algerian spring.

All this time we seemed to be climbing a mountain; we are, in reality, ascending the steep, wooded sides or walls of the Causse de Mende, prototype on a smaller scale of the rest--a vast mass of limestone, its summit a wilderness, its shelving sides a marvel of luxuriant vegetation.

Every step has to be made at a snail's pace, the precipitous slopes close under our horses' hoofs being frightful to contemplate. This drive is an excellent preparation for an exploration of the Lozere. We are always, metaphorically, going up or coming down in a balloon.

After two hours' climb, the features of the landscape change. One by one are left behind meandering river, chestnut and acacia groves, meadows fragrant with newly-mown hay, grazing cattle, and cheerful homesteads.

We now behold a scene grandiose indeed as a panorama, but unspeakably wild and dreary.

Here and there are patches of potatoes, buckwheat and rye, the yellow and green breaking the gray surface of the rocky waste; not a habitation, not a living creature, is in sight. Before us and around stretch desert upon desert of bare limestone, the nearer undulations cold and slaty in tone, the remoter taking the loveliest, warmest dyes --gold brown, deep orange, just tinted with crimson, reddish purple and pale rose. We are on the threshold of the true Caussien region. Sterility of soil, a Siberian climate, geographical isolation, here reach their climax, whilst at the base of these lofty calcareous tablelands lie sequestered valleys fertile fields and flowery gardens, oases of the Lozerien Sahara.

Above, not a rill, not a beck, refreshes the spongy, crumbling earth; we must travel far, penetrate the openings just indicated by the dark-blue shadows in the distance, and descend the lofty walls of the Causses to find silvery cascades, impetuous rivers, and fountains gushing from mossy clefts. The showers of spring, the torrential rains of autumn, the snows of winter, have filtered to a depth of several thousand feet.

We are not within sight of the grand Causse Mejean, nor of the Black Causse, or Causse Noir, and only on the threshold of Sauveterre, yet some idea may be gathered here of what M. E. Reclus calls a 'Jurassic archipelago,' once a vast Jurassic island. Imagine, then, a group of promontories, their area equal to that of Salisbury Plain, Dartmoor and Exmoor combined, with the varying altitudes of the loftiest Devonshire tor and Cumberland hill.

Such a comparison may convey some feeble notion of the three Causses just named, two of which belong to the Lozere. The Causse Noir is partly in the Aveyron. Their extraordinary conformation must be seen and studied by all who would familiarize themselves with this geological phenomenon.

No solitude can be more complete than these wastes, except when a leaden sky replaces the warm sunshine of to-day, and a deep, impenetrable mantle of snow covers the plateau from end to end. Then the little life that animates it is hushed, and none from the outer world penetrates the fastnesses of the Causses.

We drive on for a mile or two till we reach the summit of the plateau. Here, at a height of 2,952 feet above the sea-level, is a ruined chateau turned into a farmhouse, where we rest our horses a little and prepare to make tea. The farmer's wife and two children come out to chat with our driver and look at us, evidently welcoming such a distraction. And no wonder! I brought out our bonbon box--one must never take a drive in France unprovided with sweetmeats--and tried to tame the children; but they clung to mother's skirts, and only consented to have the bonbons popped into their mouths, with faces shyly hidden in her apron.

'Would you like a cup of tea?' I asked.

But madame shook her head, giggling, and I do not suppose ever heard of such an infusion in her life.

Meantime, tea-making on that breezy eminence was no easy matter. The little flames of my spirit-lamp were blown hither and thither--anywhere but in the right direction. At last our excellent driver, resourceful as a true son of Gaul is bound to be, lifted up the tiny machine, all afire as it was, and thrust it into that convenient box behind the caleche all travellers know of. The good man burnt his fingers, but had the satisfaction of making the water boil, and there for the first time, without doubt, tea was made after the English fashion. No place could be better adapted for a holiday resort. In summer these sweeps are one gorgeous mosaic of wild-flowers, and the short stunted grass shoots up, making verdure everywhere.

As I sipped tea, squatted gipsy-wise on the ground, the thought occurred to my mind what a delightful, a unique villegiatura this spot might make. A clean, comfortable inn on the site of the ruined chateau, a sympathetic companion, a trusty guide, plenty of tea and one book--the book absolutely necessary to existence--perhaps mine would be Spinoza's Ethics or Schiller's 'Letters on the Aesthetic Education of Mankind'--under these conditions, months would glide by like an hour in such eerie, poetic, inspiring solitudes.

The existence of a chateau on the borders of a veritable desert need not surprise us. The entire department of the Lozere was devastated by religious and seigneurial wars, and although the Causses themselves were not invaded, offering as they did no temptation to the thirsters after blood and spoil, the feudal freebooters had their strongholds near.

The treeless condition of the Lozere chain and other once well-wooded regions was thus brought about. The Government is replanting many bare mountain-sides here, as in the Hautes Alpes, in order to improve the soil and climate. The barrenness of the Causses arises, as will be seen, from natural causes.

Even in autumn--at least, on such a day as this--with these wild scenes is mingled much fairy charm and loveliness. Just as the distant scenery is made up of sharp contrasts--on the lofty plateaux, weird solitude and desolation; below, almost a southern luxuriance--so every square yard of rocky waste shows fragrant plant and sweet flower. We have only to stretch out our hands as we lie to gather half a dozen spikes of lavender, wild thyme, rosemary, Deptford pink, melilot, blue pimpernel, and white scabious. But the afternoon is wearing on. We must collect our tea-things, give the children a farewell sweetmeat, cast a last look round, and depart.

It cost me many a pang to turn my back upon that farmhouse, boundary-mark between savagery and civilization, romance and the terre-a-terre of daily existence.

Yonder diverging roads both led to fairy land and worlds of marvel--the one to Florac, so majestically placed under the colossal shadow of the Causse Mejean and above the lovely valley of the Jonte; the other across the steppe of Sauveterre and by the strange dwellings of the Caussenards to the picturesque little town of St. Eminie, the rapids of the Tarn, and the dolomite city.

There was, however, the consolatory hope of seeing all the following year. Who could tell? Perhaps that very day twelve months later I might delight the children with my bonbon box, and a second time make tea on

their breezy playground. At any rate, I entertained the project, and

'Should life be dull and spirits low,
'Twill soothe us in our sorrow,
That earth has something yet to show,
The bonny holms of Yarrow.'

We are overtaken by two pedestrians only on our way home--ill-looking fellows enough, strangers in these parts, our driver assured us. 'No Caussenards, they,' he said. 'The Caussenard is harmless enough, only a trifle slow.'

We get magnificent views of Mende and the Valley of the Lot--some slight recompense for having had to retrace our footsteps--and what was equally valuable, much useful information.

'Is the land cut up into small parcels here?' I asked.

We were just then on the outskirts of the town, and he pointed with his whip to a large, well-built farmhouse, with solid, walled-in buildings.

'Most of the land round about Mende is farmed by the monsieur who lives there,' he replied. 'There he is, true enough, with his wife and children.'

Just then we passed a hooded carriage, in which were seated father, mother, two little ones, and nursemaid, all taking a holiday jaunt, the day being Sunday.

'That is the owner of the farm,' he went on: 'several hundred acres--I can't say how many--but it is stocked with two hundred sheep, ten oxen, besides cows and pigs. There you have an idea of the size,'

'Are there no small farms here, then?'

'There are all sorts: little farms, big ones, and betwixt and between,' he replied. 'Everybody has his little bit' (Tout le monde a son petit lot); 'but the land immediately round the town is farmed by the neighbour you saw in the caleche.'

'Is he a peasant?' I asked.

'A peasant if you like. He is a cultivator' (Un paysan si vous voulez. C'est un cultivateur), was the answer.

When a French peasant becomes what in rustic phraseology is called a substantial man, owning or hiring a considerable extent of land, he ceases to be called 'paysan,' and is designated 'cultivateur.' The very word 'peasant,' as I have shown elsewhere, will, in process of time, become a survival, so steady and sure is the social upheaval of rural France. The most eminent Frenchmen of the day, witness the late Paul Bert, are often peasant-born; and hardly a village throughout the country but sends some promising son of the soil to Paris, destined for one of the learned professions. I know of a village baker's son near Dijon now studying for the Bar--one instance out of many. In one of her clever novelettes, 'Un Gascon,' Madame Th. Bentzon gives us for hero the village doctor, son of a peasant. The portrait of this young man, devoted to duty, high-minded, self-sacrificing, is no mere ideal, as experience proves. But if readers, compelled to make the acquaintance

of French peasants on paper, will accept Zola and certain English writers as a guide to his moral and material condition, they will be landed on some conclusions strangely at variance with experience. [Footnote: I may add that I have received appreciative testimony from various French journals--_L'Economiste_, and others--also from no less an authority than M. Henri Baudrillart, of the Institut, of my studies of the French peasant, notably the contribution to the _Fortnightly Review_, August, 1887, in which I have summed up the experiences of twelve years' French residence and travel.]

CHAPTER IV. ON THE TOP OF THE ROOF.

The temperature of the Lozere is excessively variable. The traveller must always be provided with winter wraps and the lightest summer clothing. We had enjoyed almost tropic sunshine on the plateau of Sauveterre. Next day (September 19th), when half-way to St. Flour, the very blasts of Siberia seemed to overtake us. The weather was splendid at starting, and for some hours we had a brisk air only, and unclouded skies; but there were signs of a change, and I began to doubt whether I should accomplish even my second programme. Having relinquished the Causses, the rapids of the Tarn, and Montpellier-le-Vieux for this year, I had hired a carriage, intending to drive straight across the Lozere, sleeping at St. Chely, to St. Flour, chef-lieu of the Cantal, thence making excursions to the two departments. I wanted especially to see Condat-es-Feniers and La Chaldette, the two sweet spots already alluded to. The hire of the carriage with two good horses was eighty francs--forty for the two days' drive thither, and forty for the return.

It is a striking journey from Mende to St. Amans-la-Lozere, half-way halting-place between Mende and St. Chely. The region traversed is very solitary, the Causse itself hardly more so, and now, as yesterday, we follow a road wonderfully cut round the mountain-sides. Here also we find certain English notions concerning peasant property entirely disproved. So far is French territory from being cut into minute portions of land, that on this side of Mende farms are let, not by the hectare, but by the tract, many tenant farmers being unable to tell you of how many hectares their occupation consists. The extent of land is reckoned not by acreage, but by the heads of cattle it will keep.

Much of the soil between Mende and St. Amans-la-Lozere is very stony and unproductive; we heard even of a farm of several hundred acres let at a rental of fifty pounds a year. And here, as in the valley of the Allier, and on the road from Langogne to Mende, it is wonderful to see the uncompromising devotion of the French peasant to Mother Earth--neither stones, brushwood, nor morass daunting his energy. These tenant farmers are almost invariably small freeholders also, but to read certain English writers one might suppose that no such thing as a tenant farm, much less one of a thousand acres, existed in France at all, the entire superficies of the country, according to their account, being cut up into minute patches, each by a process of subdivision, growing smaller by degrees and beautifully less; in fact, the French peasant owner of the future, according to these theorists, will possess about as much of his native soil as can be got into a flower-pot, the

contents of the said flower-pot being mortgaged for a hundred times its value.

By the time we have driven for an hour and a half we obtain a most beautiful view, looking back upon Mende, the gray and purple hills set in a glowing semicircle round it, showing loveliest light and shadow. The verdure of the valley is fresh as in May, and sweet scents of newly mown hay, the autumn crop, reach us as we go. We look down on smooth, lawn-like meadows, little rivers winding between alder-trees, tan-coloured cows and orange-brown sheep browsing at their ease. The contours of the pine and fir clad hills are bold and varied, whilst deep gorges and ravines alternate with the more smiling aspects. Fruit-trees and flowers are wholly absent from the sparsely scattered villages, and there is little in the way of farming going on, only the second hay-crops being turned, and the land ploughed for autumn sowing. Buckwheat, rye, oats and hay form the chief crops. The road is set on either side by young trees, service berry and mountain ash, or granite pillars almost the height of a man. These columns, recalling Druidic stones, are completely hidden by snow in winter.

Fortunately, in another year or two the Lozere will be traversed by railway, and its comparative isolation during several months of the year cease for once and for all.

Meantime we were anxiously looking out for St. Amans and our promised breakfast, and here let me note a failing of the French rustic. His notions of time and distance are often not in the very least to be relied on. Thus, a countryman will tell you such and such a place lies at a distance of 'une petite lieue,' and you will find you have to walk or drive six miles instead of three. Again, a village conductor will assure you that you will arrive at your destination 'dans une petite demi-heure,' and you find on arriving that an hour and a half have elapsed since putting the question. We were terribly tried by this habit now. Our old driver--not the master, who had accompanied us to the plateau, but his employe--seemed to have no more idea of the real distance of St. Amans than of Spitzbergen. Again and again my young companion put her head out of the window and cried: 'Well, driver, how many kilometres _now_ to St. Amans?'

And the reply would be:

'Three more' or 'Two more--just two, mademoiselle.'

Whereas mademoiselle laughingly counted half a dozen by the milestones between each inquiry. We had fondly looked forward to a fair inn and a good meal at noon--it was nearly two o'clock when our driver triumphantly deposited us before the dirtiest, most repulsive-looking hostelry it was ever my fate to enter.

In the kitchen, with walls blackened by smoke, hens and chickens disported at will; the uneven, floor was innocent of broom or scrubbing-brush as the road; in the salle-a-manger, gendarmes, soldiers, carters, and gamekeepers were smoking, drinking and discussing at the tops of their voices.

The old man whispered a word in the ear of the patrone--a veritable hag to look at--and she immediately begged us to walk upstairs.

'You will find no elegance, but comfort here' ('Vous ne trouvez pas le

luxe, mais le confortable ici),' she said.

Then, with evident pride, she threw open the door of what was evidently the public bedchamber of the inn.

Let not the reader take alarm. In these out-of-the-way places such accommodation is often all that is offered the traveller, namely, a spacious room, set round with four posters, each well curtained, so as to form a tiny room in itself. As women never, or very rarely, travel in such regions, the chief patrons being commis-voyageurs and soldiers, the inconvenience is not great. The bedding looked good and clean, and the room was airy.

We opened the window. Madame complacently spread a snowy cloth, then, with the airy aplomb of a head waiter of some famous restaurant, say, the Chapeau Rouge at Bordeaux, asked:

'And what would these ladies like for breakfast?'

There seemed cruel, double-edged irony in the question. What could we expect in such a place but just something to stay the cravings of hunger: that something rendered uneatable by the terribly dirty--no, let me say, smoke-dried--look of the speaker, who seemed to be cook and waitress in one?

'Suppose we have an omelette?' suggested my young friend.

An omelette cooked by those hands! The very notion took away my appetite; however, there were new-laid eggs, and no matter the unwashed condition of the cook, the inside of a boiled egg may always be eaten with impunity. We could have anything we chose by waiting a little, our hostess said--mutton cutlets, roast chicken, partridges, fish, vegetables; the resources of that rustic larder seemed inexhaustible. Then she had choice wine, Burgundy and Bordeaux, besides liqueurs, in the cellar.

We had no time or inclination for a feast, but made an excellent meal--what with the eggs and a tiny leg of cold-boiled mutton, I do honestly believe the very best I ever tasted in my life.

The mountain-fed mutton of these regions is renowned, and the country folk boil it with just a slice of garlic by way of a flavour.

This dingy little wayside hostelry could really offer a first-rate ordinary, and, on principles not to be controverted, guests here pay, not according to what they order, but the quantity they eat. Would that all restaurant-keepers were equally conscientious!

When we went downstairs and asked for the reckoning, the old woman, who was all obligingness and good-nature, charming, indeed, but for her neglected personal appearance, replied:

'I must first see how much you have eaten, of course.'

And true enough we were charged so much per item. Here let me give the traveller a hint: never venture in out-of-the-way parts of France without a well-filled muffineer and pepper-box; but for our dry clean pepper and salt brought from England, even the eggs would have been swallowed with a painful effort.

In the large kitchen I took note of extensive preparations going on for dinner, huge caldrons bubbling above the wood fire; heaps of vegetables, leeks, onions, garlic predominating, prepared for the pot, with ample provision in the shape of flesh and fowl.

At St. Amans the sun shone warm and bright, and the blue sky was of extraordinary depth and softness. I was reminded of Italy. As we sauntered about the long straggling village, a scene of indescribable contentment and repose met our eyes. We are in one of the poorest departments of France, but no signs of want or vagrancy are seen. The villagers, all neatly and suitably dressed, were getting in their hay or minding their flocks and herds, with that look of cheerful independence imparted by the responsibilities of property. Many greeted us in the friendliest manner, but as we could not understand their patois, a chat was impossible. They laughed, nodded, and passed on.

No sooner were we fairly on our way to St. Chely than the weather changed. The heavens clouded over, and the air blew keenly. We got out our wraps one by one, wanting more. If the scenery is less wildly beautiful here than between Mende and St. Amans, it is none the less charming, were we only warm enough to enjoy it. The pastoralness of many a landscape is Alpine, with brilliant stretches of turf, scattered chalets, groups of haymakers, herds and flocks browsing about the rocks. Enormous blocks of granite are seen everywhere superimposed after the manner of dolmens, and everywhere the peasant's spade and hoe is gradually redeeming the waste. It is nightfall when we reach St. Chely d'Apcher, reputed the coldest spot in France, and certainly well worthy of its reputation.

It stands on an elevation of 980 metres--_i.e._, over 3,000 feet above the sea-level. If the Lozere is aptly termed the Roof of France, then St. Chely may be regarded as its Chimney top. Summer here lasts only two months. No wonder that the searching wind seemed as if it would blow not merely the clothes off our shoulders, but the flesh off our bones. Yet the people of the inn smiled and said: 'Wait here another month, and you will find out what WE call cold.'

The little Hotel Bardol wore a look of cheerfulness and welcome, nevertheless. There were white and pink oleanders before the door, geraniums in the window, testifying to the fact that winter this year, at all events, had not yet begun. Men and maids bustled about intent on our comfort. Soon the big logs crackled on the hearth; with curtains drawn, tea and a good fire, the discomforts of the last hour or two were soon forgotten. Needless, perhaps, to say that we found in this small old-fashioned inn beds of first-rate quality, a good dinner, and really fine old Bordeaux.

St. Chely will necessarily become a junction town of considerable importance when the new line of railway, by way of St. Flour, is completed to Neussargues. As the proprietor of the Hotel Bardol seems fully alive to the requirements of tourists and the progress of ideas, future visitors will doubtless find many improvements--well-appointed rooms, bells, and other comforts. I hope myself to pay this obliging host another visit ere long.

The rain poured down all night, and next morning it was evident that the projected journey by road to St. Flour must be given up. A long day's drive across country in the teeth of biting wind and downpour was

not to be thought of, though both my young friend and myself had set our minds upon seeing the wonderful Pont de Garabit, a tour de force of engineering, worthy to be set beside the Eiffel Tower, and an achievement of the same genius. But we were now within reach of the railway. At the cost of a great disappointment and a forfeiture of sixty francs, I determined to send the carriage back to Mende, and reach the Cantal by way of Rodez, in the Aveyron. The Pont de Garabit, like the Causses, all well, should be seen another year.

Never shall I forget the amazement of my host.

'To make a round-about journey like that by rail, when you have your own carriage and horses!' he cried. 'Are you mad? Are you a millionaire,' his face said, 'to pay eighty francs for one day's drive? And the weather--the rain? you have glass windows; you can shut yourselves in; you won't take any harm.'

Say what I would, I could not convince him that it was wiser to forfeit sixty francs than drive across the Lozere in a storm of wind and rain, with the thermometer rapidly falling to freezing-point.

CHAPTER V. RODEZ AND AURILLAC.

To travel from St. Chely d'Apcher to Rodez is like descending a snow-capped Alpine peak for the flowery, sunbright valley below. Instead of the stern grandeur of the Lozere, frowning peaks, sombre pine-forests, vast stony deserts and wintry blasts, we glide swiftly into a balmy region of golden vineyards, rich chestnut woods, softly murmuring streams, and the temperature of July. The transformation is magical. It is like closing a volume of Ossian and opening the pages of Theocritus.

We had spent our morning indoors at St. Chely, cloaked and shawled over a blazing wood fire, quitting at one o'clock p.m. ice-cold rain, biting winds, and a gloomy sky. By sundown we had reached the chef-lieu of the Aveyron; we were in the South indeed! The scenery during the latter part of the way is beautiful and exhilarating, every feature showing the ripest, most brilliant tints--hills clothed with the yellowing chestnut, soil of deep purplish red, the bright gold foliage of the vine, and between spring-like greenery and azure sky, close to the railway, the crystal-clear Aveyron.

And here all is new and fresh; no familiar tourist element enters into the day's experience. As our train stops at one picturesque village after another, we see young soldiers, reservistes, alight, returning home after the twenty-eight days' service, nuns, cures, village folks, family groups, not an English traveller but myself.

Rodez is superbly situated on a lofty, sunny plateau, surrounded by hills and far mountain chains; but between these and the city, which is almost encircled by the Aveyron, lies a broad belt of fertile country, the soil of a deep claret colour.

Just as Venice should be approached by sea at dawn, so all travellers should reach Rodez at sunset.

Never shall I forget the first enchanting view of its glorious cathedral that September afternoon, the three-storied tower of Flamboyant Gothic dominating the vast landscape, the rich red stone flushed to a warmer dye, the noble masonry of the whole glowing with the lustre and solidity of copper against the clear heavens.

This lofty, triple-terraced tower is called the marvel of Southern France, and no wonder. The cathedral of Antwerp itself is not more captivatingly lightsome and lovely. High above the ancient city, with its encompassing river and wide-stretched plain, confronting the far-off mountains, almost on a level with their summits, visible from afar as a lighthouse in mid-ocean, rises this belfry of Rodez.

Certain places, as well as certain individualities, exercise extraordinary fascination. The old capital of Rouergne, and later of the Comte of Rodez, is one. Many and many a French city I have visited of far greater architectural and historic importance; Poitiers among these--Troyes is another; yet I should never go out of my way to revisit Poitiers or Troyes, whilst certain other towns in France I visit regularly once a year. They are like old friends, and every visit makes them more precious. I determined to revisit Rodez during the following summer. The cathedral is rich within and without. Its rood-loft, carved stalls, altar screen, and monuments require a chapter to themselves. Let us hope that some future traveller, more learned than myself in such matters, will give us their history in detail. The town, too, possesses some fine remains of Renaissance architecture, and the views from the ancient ramparts are magnificent.

But the memory I carry away is of that lovely three-storied tower, the whole carved delicately as lace-work; the colour, deep terra-cotta; above it a warm southern sky.

Such a sight is worth a long journey, and the discomforts of a dingy hotel, dirty floors, foul-smelling passages, broken chairs, scant toilet appliances, as usual, in part compensated by excellent beds, good food, good wine, and very moderate charges. The oddest part of these experiences is that the dirtier the inn the better the fare. Wherever we found a little smartness and tidiness, there we were sure to find also a decided falling-off in the cuisine.

Perhaps herein is to be found the true philosophical cause of our own poor cookery. English cooks and housewives are ready to go mad on the subject of scouring pots and pans, but pay scant heed to what goes into, much less what comes out of them. In France the quality of the dinner is the first question of national importance, after the recovery of Alsace-Lorraine!

The railway takes us direct to Aurillac, chef-lieu of the Cantal, and ancient capital of Haute Auvergne. At first the scenery resembles that passed through the day before, close under the embankment, the river flowing clear and bright between green slopes, hanging chestnut-woods, and sweeps of vineyards. The earth everywhere seems soaked with claret; and this wine-red colour of the soil, contracted with the golden-leaved vine, makes a landscape of wonderful brilliance.

The aspect of the country changes as we quit the bright valley of the Aveyron, and enter the department of the Cantal at Capdenac, where we join the main line from Clermont-Ferrand to Toulouse. We just touch the

department of the Lot at Figeac, a quaint town, birthplace of the great Orientalist Champollion, then enter the valley of the Cere, and are soon at Aurillac.

A bit of dull prose after a glorious poem! Whilst it is difficult to tear one's self away from Rodez, despite its ill-kept hotel, there is nothing whatever to detain the ordinary tourist at Aurillac beyond an hour or two. It is prettily situated in a fair open country, watered by the river Jordanne, and is an excellent centre for the study of rural life.

I had come hither provided with a letter introductory to the State-paid professor of agriculture, and here let me explain matters a little. The French State, stanch to the maxim of the great Sully, 'Le labourage et le paturage sont les deux mamelles de France,' is making tremendous efforts on behalf of agricultural progress throughout the country. A few years since, professorships of agriculture were appointed by the Government in the various departments. The duties of these professors is two-fold: they hold classes on the theory and practice of agriculture in the Ecole Normale, or training-school for male teachers, in winter, and in summer give free lectures, out of doors, in the various towns and villages. Recruited from the great agricultural schools of Grand Jouan, near Nantes, Grignan in the Seine, and Oise and Montpellier, these lecturers have had the benefit of a thoroughly practical training, and by little and little will doubtless effect quite a revolution in out-of-the-way places.

Among the least progressive regions, agriculturally speaking, must be pronounced the Cantal. As yet the use of machinery and artificial manure is almost unknown. The professor gets the peasants together on a Sunday afternoon and discourses to them in an easy, colloquial way on the advantages of scientific methods. The conference over, he shows specimens of superphosphates, top-dressings, new seeds, roots, etc., and here and there succeeds in inducing the more adventurous than the rest to try an experiment.

The agricultural shows have much effect in stimulating progress. The country folks delight to obtain prizes for their cattle, cheese and other products. They are, as a rule, averse to innovation, especially when it involves expenditure. The departmental professor will have to bring proof positive to bear out his theories ere he can induce his listeners to spend their savings--in French phrase, 'argent mignon'--upon unknown good, instead of investing in Government three per cents.

Other interesting facts I learned here, all confirmatory of my former accounts of the French peasant. These Cantal farmers, many of them hiring land on lease, others small owners, are well-to-do; L1,200 is not infrequently given as a dowry to the daughter of a small proprietor; I was told of one, possessor of a few hectares only, who had just before invested in the funds L80, one year's savings.

Avarice, I admit, is not infrequently the besetting sin of the French peasant in these parts, but other characteristics of the Auvergnat, such as roughness of manner, suspiciousness of strangers, a habit of extortion, did not come under my notice during this stay in the Cantal.

One of my pleasantest experiences, indeed, of French rural life, is that of an afternoon visit paid to a farmer in the neighbourhood of Aurillac. No well-bred gentleman, no lady accustomed to society, could

have received an entire stranger with more urbanity, kindliness and grace, than did this peasant of the Cantal and his wife. A charming drive of an hour through well-wooded and neatly cultivated country brought us to the farmstead called Le Croizet, a group of buildings lying a hundred yards or so from the roadside.

In front of the well-built, roomy dwelling-house was a fruit and vegetable garden, with a border of flowers and ornamental shrubs. The place was not perhaps so neatly kept as English farm premises, but the general look betokened comfort and well-being.

The farmer and his wife were absent, and their daughter-in-law received us somewhat awkwardly. She seemed puzzled by the fact of English ladies wanting to see a farm, but after a little her shyness vanished. Her husband, she told us, was just then minding his own farm; he was a small proprietor, possessing a bit of land and a cow or two. Two cows, she informed us, as we chatted on, would suffice for the maintenance of a family of five persons. Such reckoning, of course, only holds good of thrifty, homely France. The magic of property not only turns sands to gold: it teaches the great lesson of looking forward, of confronting the morrow--realizing 'the unseen time.'

Soon the housewife came up, all cheeriness and hospitality. She made us sit down in the large, airy, well-furnished kitchen--hitherto we had chatted outside--and my curiosity being explained by the fact that I was an English author, travelling for information, she readily answered any questions I put to her.

'My husband will be here in a minute. He can tell you much more about farming than I can,' she said.

She was a pleasant-looking, well-mannered, intelligent woman--a peasant born and bred. Meantime I glanced round the kitchen.

The floor certainly was of uncarpeted stone and uneven, but the place was clean and tidy, and everything in order. Against the wall were rows of well-scoured cooking vessels; also shelves of china--evidently reserved for high days and holidays--and a few pictures for further adornment.

True, the curtained bedstead of master and mistress stood in one corner, but leading out of the kitchen was a second room for the son and son's wife; whilst the hired women-servants occupied in the dairy slept upstairs.

It may here be mentioned that the habit of sleeping in the kitchen arises from the excessive cold. I found on lately revisiting Anjou, and in the Berri, that the better-off peasants are building houses with upper bedrooms.

'It is tidier' (C'est plus propre), said a Berrichon to me. This custom, therefore, of turning the kitchen into a bedchamber may be considered as on the wane.

Our hostess now brought out one local dainty after another--galettes, or flat cakes of rye and oaten flour, peculiar in flavour, and said to be extremely nutritious; cream, curds and whey, fresh butter, and wine--and was quite distressed that we could not make a hearty afternoon meal. Then the master came in, one of Nature's gentlemen, if ever any

existed--stalwart, sunburnt to the complexion of an Arab, with a frank, manly, shrewd face. He wore sabots, and, like his wife, was stockingless. Stockings are objected to by French country-folks in hot weather, and it seems to me on good grounds. His clothes were clean, neat, and appropriate, and all of the material that goes into the weekly wash-tub. Like his wife, he was most willing to give me any information, and a pleasant and instructive time I had of it.

My host leased his farm. He was a tenant farmer precisely as the name is understood here, with this difference--he owned a little land as well. He could not tell me the exact size of his occupation in hectares; land here, as in the Lozere, being computed instead by heads of cattle, one hectare and a half of pasture allowed for each cow. Some notion of its extent may be gathered from the fact that he possessed 120 cows. Besides these 200 hectares of pasturage, the farm comprised arable land, the whole making up a total of nearly 1,000 acres. Much larger farms, he told me, were to be found in the Cantal. The notion of France being cut up into tiny parcels of land amused him not a little. The crops here consist of wheat, barley, maize, rye, oats, buckwheat, clover--a little of everything.

'But this is a cheese-making country. We don't grow anything like corn enough for ourselves in the Cantal,' he said. 'Large quantities are imported every year. It is our cows that pay.'

The principal stock kept is this beautiful Cantal cow, a small, red, glossy-coated breed, very gentle, and very shy. The enormous quantities of milk afforded by these dairy farms are sold in part at Aurillac for home consumption. By far the larger proportion is used in the cheese-makers' huts, or 'burons,' on the surrounding hills. The pleasant, mild-flavoured Cantal cheese has hitherto not been an article of export. It is decidedly inferior to Roquefort, fabricated from ewes' milk in the Aveyron, and to the Gruyere of the French Jura. As the quality of the milk is first-rate, a delicious flavour being imparted by the fragrant herbs that abound here, this inferiority doubtless arises from want of skill, or, perhaps, want of cleanliness in the preparation. The numerous schools for dairy-farming that now exist in France, and the new State-paid teachers of agriculture, will most likely ere long revolutionize the art of cheese-making throughout the department. We may then expect to find Cantal cheese at every English grocer's.

Many more interesting facts I learned, my host chatting leisurely.

'It is usual in these parts,' he said, 'for the eldest son to inherit an extra fourth part of land, he, in return, being bound to maintain his parents in old age. A heritage is often thus divided during the life-time of father and mother, the old folks not caring any longer to be burdened with the toil of business.'

Much he told me also concerning the rights of 'pacage,' or pasturage on commons--privileges upheld rather by custom than law. These rights of pasturing cattle on common-grounds date from the earliest times, and we read in French history of certain communes being ruined by the mortgage of their 'pacage.'

After a stay of more than an hour we took leave, our host accompanying us to the road, where the carriage waited.

I have before alluded to the excessive timidity of the cattle here, perhaps arising from the infrequency of strangers in these regions. As we now walked up the narrow lane separating the farm from the road, we met three separate droves of cows returning to their stalls. It was curious to note the suspiciousness of the gentle creatures, also their quickness of observation. Had we been a couple of peasant women from a distance, they would have passed us without hesitation. I had evidently an outlandish look in their eyes. Only by dint of coaxing and calling each animal by name could the master get them to go by.

'It is always well to be careful with beasts that don't know you,' he said, as he planted himself between us and each drove. 'Gentle as my cows are, they might give a stranger a kick.'

When all were gone, he extricated my gown from a bramble, then, baring his head, bade us adieu with the courtesy of a polished gentleman.

CHAPTER VI. THE LAND OF THE BURON.

Vic-sur-Cere, half an hour distant from Aurillac, is an earthly paradise, a primitive Eden, as yet unspoiled by fashion and utilitarianism. The large 'Etablissement des Bains,' described in French and English guide-books, has long ceased to exist; bells, carpets, curtains, and other luxuries are unknown; but the unfastidious traveller, who prefers homeliness and honesty to elegance and extortion, may here drink waters rivalling those of Spa without being exposed to the exorbitant prices and insolence of the Spa hotel-keepers. Rustic inns, or rather pensions, may be had at Vic-sur-Cere, in which the tourist is wholesomely lodged and handsomely 'tabled' at a cost that would enrapture Mr. Joseph Pennell. Two or three hundred visitors, chiefly from the neighbouring towns, spend the summer holidays here, one and all disappearing about the middle of September.

When we arrived, we had the entire place to ourselves--inn, river-side walks, and dazzlingly green hills. No palm island in mid-Pacific could offer a sweeter, more pastoral halting-place. It is indeed a perfect little corner of earth, beauty of the quiet kind here reaching its acme; and neither indoors nor abroad is there any drawback to mar the traveller's enjoyment.

From the windows of our hotel, close to the station, we enjoy a prospect absolutely flawless--Nature in one of her daintiest moods is here left to herself. The inn stands amid its large vegetable, fruit and flower gardens; looking beyond these, we see the prettiest little town imaginable nestled in a beautiful valley, around it rising romantic crags, wooded heights, and gentle slopes, fresh and verdant as if the month were May. Through the smooth meadows between the encompassing hills winds the musically-named stream, the Iraliot, and from end to end the broad expanse of green is scented with newly-mown hay. The delightful scenery, the purity of the air, the excellent quality of the waters, ought to turn Vic-sur-Cere into a miniature Vichy. Fortunately for the lovers of rusticity and calm, such has not as yet been the case, and the simple, straightforward character of the people is still unspoiled by contact with the outer world. Here, also,

the pervading aspect is of well-being and contentment. 'Everybody can live here,' we were told by an intelligent resident; 'only the idle, the drunkard, and the thriftless need come to want.'

Vagrancy is altogether absent; the children are neatly dressed and very clean; the men and women have all a look of cheerful independence as they toil on their little farms or mind their small flocks and herds.

Here also, as elsewhere, the greatest variety exists in the matter of holdings. We find tiny freeholds and large tenant farms side by side. With few exceptions, all possess a house and bit of land. Folks toil hard and fare hard, but live in no terror of sickness or old age. The house and bit of land will not support a family; with the savings of a man's best years, it is the harbour of refuge when work is past.

Without meeting here the urbanity and hospitable welcome that awaited us near Aurillac, we found the peasant farmers exceedingly civil to strangers; and when once made to understand the motives of my inquisitiveness, they were quite ready to give me any information I required.

One farm I visited in the neighbourhood was a tenant-holding of about 1,000 acres, let at a fixed rental of L600 a year, and this is far from the largest farm hereabouts. The stock consisted of seventy-eight cows, five horses, four pair of team oxen, besides large numbers of sheep, pigs, and poultry. Five women-servants were boarded in the house, and several cheese-makers employed on the alps during summer.

The farmer's wife received us pleasantly, and after a little explanation, when she quite understood the reason of my visit, answered all questions with ease and intelligence. She was resting from the labours of the day, a piece of knitting in her hands, which she politely laid aside whilst chatting.

The kitchen was large, clean, and airy, its principal ornaments consisting of rows of prize medals on tablets, awarded at different agricultural shows. On the shelves were rows of copper cooking vessels, burnished as those of a Dutch interior. The bed-chambers were apart.

Certainly, the housewife's personal appearance left something to desire, but we were assured that on Sundays she turned out for Mass gloved, veiled and bonneted like any town lady. French peasants will not set about the day's labour in smart or shabby-genteel clothes.

Here, as near Aurillac, modern agricultural methods, machinery and artificial manures are not yet the order of the day. As an instance of what peasant farmers in France can effect whilst following old plans, let me cite the predecessor of my hostess's husband. This man had lately retired, having saved up enough money to live upon. He had, in fact, become a rentier.

Another tenant farm near consisted of 1,000 acres, stocked with 120 cows, eight pair of team oxen, besides sheep, horses and pigs. Adjoining such large holdings are small freeholds farmed by their peasant owners--dairy farms of a few acres, market-gardens of one or two, and so on.

Metayage, or the system of half-profits, is rarely found in the Cantal. Tenancy at a fixed rental is preferred, as less complicated and

troublesome. [Footnote: I have described the metayage of Berri in a contribution to *Macmillan's Magazine*, 'In George Sand's Country,' 1886.] It was pleasant to see the people working in their little field or garden, or minding their goats and sheep, their decent appearance, cheerfulness and healthful looks testifying to the satisfactory conditions of existence.

I do not for a moment aver that such a state of things exists in every part of France; but everywhere we find the same qualities--independence, thrift and foresight--called forth by the all-potent agency of possession. I have somewhere seen the fact mentioned, and adduced as an argument against peasant property, that the owner of seven cows had not a wardrobe in which to hang so much as his wife's clothes; they were suspended on a rope. Was the writer aware of the money-value of seven cows, the capital thereby represented, and could she point to any farm-labourer in England, however well off in the matter of cupboards and clothes-pegs, possessed of seven cows, their stalls and pasture-ground--in other words, a capitalist to the extent of several hundred pounds? Few French peasants, we fancy, would exchange their house, land and stock for the furniture of an English labourer's cottage, wardrobe included. As a matter of fact, most of these small farmers own furniture, clothes and house-linen in abundance.

Cheese-making is the chief industry of the place. Far away on the summit of every green hill may be descried the red-roofed hut, or buron, of the cheese-maker. Here, with his dog, and sometimes a shepherd, he spends the summer months, descending to the valleys before the first snow falls. The dairyman, or fromager, is generally a hired workman, specially trained for the work. He is paid at the rate of L25 or L30 a year, besides board and lodging. As soon as the snows melt and the cows can be driven afield, he betakes himself to his buron on the alp, if married, leaving his wife in the valley below.

Have the fromager of the Cantal hills and the Caussenard of the Lozerien steppe their legends, folklore, songs? Have their love-stories been chronicled by some French Auerbach, their ballads found a translator in a French Hebel? Without doubt this sequestered life of shepherd and mountain has its vein of poetry and romance as well as any other. To reach one of these cheese-makers' huts is quite an expedition, and on foot is only practicable to hardy pedestrians. It is a beautiful drive from the valley of the Cere to the open pasture-ground, dotted with burons, behind its steep green hills on the southern side. As the road winds upwards, we see the crags and slopes clothed with the delicate greenery of young fir and pine. These are seedlings planted by the State; here, as in other departments, some strenuous efforts being made to replant the ancient forests. Goats are no longer permitted to browse on the mountain-sides promiscuously, as in former days, and thus slowly, but surely, not only the soil, but the climate and products of these re-wooded districts, will undergo complete transformation. And who can tell? Perhaps the Causse itself will, generations hence, cease to exist, and the Roof of France become a vast flowery garden. The country people here all speak a patois, and the fromager is not communicative. It is always well to be accompanied by a blue-bloused native on these visits. The dogs, too, that keep guard over the buron, like the cows, are very suspicious of strangers.

More attractive than the interior of the cheese-maker's hut--often dark, ill-ventilated, and malodorous--is the scene without, a wide

prospect of pastoral, idyllic charm. The Cantal offers many a superb mountain panorama and grandiose scene. Nowhere is to be found more sweetness, graciousness and repose than in the valley of the Cere.

After a few days' sojourn we journeyed to Clermont-Ferrand, which I found much embellished since my long stay in that city, just ten years before. Thence, seeing the Puy de Dome flushed with the red light of the rising sun, a sight compensating for much insolence and discomfort at the Hotel de l'Univers, we proceeded to St. Germain-des-Fosses, where we parted, my young companion taking the train to Autun, I proceeding by way of Lyons to Gap, on a visit to a beloved French friend.

The weather had remained brilliantly fine throughout our expedition, although the cold of early morning was now piercing. And brilliantly fine it remained till my departure for England, early in October.

PART II

MY SECOND JOURNEY IN SEARCH OF THE CAUSSES.

CHAPTER I. THROUGH THE MORVAN.

Of the four hundred and fifty passengers who crossed with us from Dover to Calais, in August, 1888, we lost every trace when quitting the Paris-Lyon-Mediterranee line at La Roche. Writing a hundred years ago, the great agriculturist, Arthur Young, gave his countrymen the following excellent piece of advice, which, it need hardly be said, has been generally neglected from that day to this: 'It may be useful to those who see no more of France than by once passing to Italy, to remark that if they would view the finest parts of the kingdom they should land at Dieppe, and follow the Seine to Paris, then take the great road to Moulins, and thence quit it for Auvergne, and pass to Viviers, the Rhone, and so by Aix to Italy. By such a variation from the frequented road the traveller might suffer for want of good inns, but would be repaid by the sight of a much finer and more singular country than the common road by Dijon offers, which passes in a great measure through the worst parts of France.'

The Suffolk squire who rode through France on the eve of the Great Revolution, in spite of his conscientious desire to see all that the country had to show, lost much from want of roads, maps, and any kind of accommodation. Nowadays, as will be seen from the following pages, good food and good beds await the traveller in the most remote districts; but in vain! Ninety-nine tourists out of a hundred remain of the poet Shelley's opinion--there is nothing to see in France--and hurry on as fast as the express can carry them to Geneva.

At the clean, bright, friendly little town of Auxerre we find ourselves as isolated from the beaten track as well can be. We are free to roam, sketch, stare at will, and no one notices us; not even an importunate beggar molests the sketcher as she brings out her book in the middle of

the street.

This immunity from observation and annoyance forms a minor charm of French travel.

Auxerre possesses a beautiful little cathedral. It is one-towered, as that of Sens, a circumstance probably due to want of funds for the completion.

We always carry away in the memory some striking characteristic of French cathedrals, and no one can forget the exquisite tint of the building-stone here, a ruddy hue as of gold lighting up the dark, richly-sculptured mass without, nor the charming cluster of airy columns joining the Lady Chapel to the choir within, daintiest bit of architectural fancy. Whilst we were revelling in the contrast afforded by the intense glow of the stained glass and the pure white marble--the interior being one of the loveliest, if least spacious, in France--the sacristan's wife came up and said that if we waited a few minutes longer we should see a wedding.

'Although,' she added with an air of apology, 'a wedding of the third class.'

Now, whilst fairly familiar with French ways, I had never heard of marriages being divided after the manner of railway-carriages, into first, second, and third class. Our informant hastened to enlighten us. It seems that only wedding-parties of the first and second classes are entitled to enter by the front-door, to music of the full church orchestra, and to carpets laid down from porch to altar, every detail of pomp and ceremony depending on the price paid.

I must say that were I a French bride I should bargain for a wedding of the first class at any sacrifice. To have the big doors of the front portal flung open at the thrice-repeated knock of the beadle's staff; to hear Mendelssohn's 'Wedding March' pealed from the great organ; to march in solemn procession up the aisle, preceded by that wonderful figure in cocked hat, red sash, pink silk stockings, and shoes sparkling with huge buckles, all the congregation a-titter--it seems to me it were worth while being married simply for the intoxication of such a moment.

The third-class wedding-party, entering by a small side-door, and passing without music to the altar, made nevertheless a pretty picture: the bride, a handsome demoiselle de boutique, or shop assistant, in white, with veil and wreath; behind her, girls in bright dresses bearing enormous bouquets; bridegroom and supporters, all in spick and span swallow-tail coats, with white ties and gloves, like beaux in a French comedy, backwards and forwards; the priests looking gorgeous, although in their second-best robes, their gold plates shining as they collected the money; for whether married first, second or third class, the Church exacts its due. I felt real commiseration for these middle-class, evidently hard-working people, as the gold plate was presented again and again, first, I presume, for the Church; secondly, for the poor; thirdly, for Heaven knows what. Then two of the bridesmaids, each taking the arm of a white-gloved, swallow-tailed cavalier, made the round of the wedding guests, begging money of them. In fact, there seemed no end to the giving. Small wonder that marriages are on the decline in France! We left the bridal party still on their crimson velvet fauteuils--twelve being the number allotted to a wedding of the

third class, the remaining guests being accommodated on rush-bottomed chairs--and next visited the underground Church of St. Germain.

What a contrast it presented to the lightness, brilliancy, and gaiety, if we may use such a word, of the cathedral! There the effect on the mind is of pure delight; we feel the exhilaration, not the austerity, of religion. Very different is the impression produced by St. Germain, which may be described as a church of tombs, a temple consecrated to the dead. Although on a smaller scale, this ancient burial-place of saints and martyrs recalls the awful mausoleum of Spanish kings. The Escorial itself is hardly more impressive.

The upper church stands airily in the garden of the town hospital, its fine tower all that is left of the original building. The lower remains intact. We descend into a perfect little Gothic interior, with naves, choir, and chapel, all in darkness but for the feeble glimmer of the sacristan's candle, every part showing ancient frescoes in wonderful preservation. In huge niches of the walls and under our feet, the enormous lids of the tombs yielding to our guide's touch, lie the bones of saints deposited there nearly a thousand years ago, 'English saints, many of them, who crossed the water with St. Germain,' our cicerone said with animation, evidently thinking the fact would interest us extremely. No less curious than these tombs are the frescoes, illustrating, among other subjects, the life of St. Maxime, companion of St. Germain, whose bones lie here. 'St. Maxime, St. Maxime,' I said, as I laboriously deciphered the Latin inscription on the tomb. 'Does this name, then, belong to a woman?'

'Si fait,' rejoined our guide, no little astonished at such ignorance, 'we have many names in France that do for both sexes, and she belonged to your own country.'

I did not feel in a position to contradict the statement, but no matter to what country she belonged, St. Maxime has secured double immortality--first, in the saints' calendar; secondly, in the mausoleum of Auxerre. Alike these tombs and frescoes, with the sepulchres of the Pharaohs, seem able to defy the encroachments of Time.

During the Revolution, great consternation prevailed concerning the precious relics. The bones of the saintly bishop were disinterred and hidden elsewhere for safety, and in the after-confusion were never replaced, but buried elsewhere.

The huge sarcophagus in the wall is a cenotaph.

No similar panic is likely to create a second disturbance of the sacred relics in this subterranean abbey church. And who can say? Centuries hence, devout Catholics, dark-skinned descendants of races only just emerging from cannibalism, may make a solemn pilgrimage hither and find the pictured story of St. Maxime still intact on the walls! Be this as it may, no travellers within reach of Auxerre should fail to visit its two beautiful and perfect churches, the one with its majestic front and single tower rising airily above the level landscape, its noble proportions standing out in the bright sunshine, radiant and lightsome alike within and without; the other, hidden in the bowels of the earth, giving no visible evidence of its existence, aisle, vaulted roofs, vistas of delicate columns, only to be realized in the glimmer of a semi-twilight.

But Auxerre possesses other antiquities and many ancient houses, in one of which, the Fontaine Hotel, the traveller is comfortably and reasonably housed. When we descended to our late supper in the *salle à manger*, we found master, mistress, and their children dining with the entire staff of servants. Such a circumstance indicates the difference between English and French ways. In an English hotel, would the chef sit down to talk with boots?--the lady bookkeeper condescend to break bread with the kitchen-maid? Just as in France there is nothing like our differentiation of domestic labour, one servant there fulfilling what are called the duties of three here, so there is no parallel to our social inequalities, kept up even in the kitchen.

The chef here, who obligingly quitted the table and the company to cook our cutlets, was a strikingly handsome man, as so many head-cooks are. The connection between cookery as a fine art and personal beauty I leave to others to discover. I must say that after a considerable acquaintance with these officials I can hardly call to mind any of mean appearance. One of the handsomest, I remember, was an accomplished young chef, who gave me lessons in the art of omelette-making at the well-known, home-like Hotel du Jura, Dijon.

Auxerre, although possessing a cathedral, is not a bishopric, its See having been annexed to that of Sens, after the Revolution.

Formerly capital of the Auxerrois part of the kingdom of Burgundy, Auxerre is now chef-lieu of the department of the Yonne, the little river making such pretty pictures between Sens and La Roche.

Between Auxerre and Autun much of the scenery has an English look. We might be in Surrey or Sussex. Lofty hedges enclosing fields and meadows, stretches of heath-covered waste, oak woods, and homesteads half hidden by orchards form the landscape. As our train crawls on, stopping at every station, we have ample time to enjoy the scenery and scrutinize the agriculture, here somewhat backward. These very slow trains off the great lines should always be resorted to by the inquiring traveller, the *Bommelzug* as it is called in German, the train *de boeufs* in French. What can be seen from the windows of the flying *Rapide*? Here we might almost alight and pluck the wild flowers growing so temptingly on the embankment. Brisk tourists might even turn the long halt at Avallon to good account, and get a hasty peep of one of the most wonderful sites in this part of France, not so much as hinted at from the railway. It was hard to pass Avallon by, 'most musical name, recalling the "Idylls of the King," a place that may be compared with Granada, with anything;' harder still, not to revisit the abbey church of Vezelay, beautiful in itself, so celebrated in history; so majestically placed on a ridge overlooking the two departments of the Yonne and the Nièvre, but Goethe's invaluable maxim must be that of the conscientious traveller, 'An der Naechste muss man denken' (We must think of the nearest, the most important thing). Time did not now admit of a two days' halt here. As I have described Avallon and Vezelay fully elsewhere, [Footnote: I allude to several papers contributed to the *Pall Mall Gazette* whilst under the editorship of Mr. John Morley (September and October, 1881), also to my edition of Murray's 'Handbook to France,' part ii., 1884.] I will only now assure all tempted to take this suggestion and visit both, that they cannot be disappointed. So the train crawled on till the pretty home-like landscape was lost in the twilight, and night over took us.

It was late when we reached Autun, not too late, however, to receive a

right cordial welcome from the author of 'Round my House,' who had ridden from his country home in the starlight to welcome us.

CHAPTER II. THROUGH THE MORVAN (continued).

A delightful Sunday spent among delightful English and French friends, long bright hours of perfect weather, long bright hours of genial and affectionate intercourse, English sobriety lightened with French esprit and playfulness-such reminiscences, however precious to the possessor, hardly form materials for a chapter. I pass on to say something about Autun itself, a town so rarely visited by my country-folk, that the principal hotels have not as yet set up a teapot. The people, however, are so obliging that they will let you go into the kitchen and there make your own tea, even a plum-pudding, if you want it.

First some will ask the meaning of a name at the head of my page. The Morvan-what may that be? I must explain, then, without going over ground I have already described, that the Morvan, accessible as a tourist-ground from Avallon, Autun, or Nevers, is a little Celtic kingdom, isolated till recent times from the rest of France, alike by position, language, and customs.

The name is familiar to French ears as Wales is to our own. Just as we talk of such-and-such a place being in Wales, instead of specifying the particular shire, so French folks will tell you that they have just made a journey into the Morvan, that so-and-so lives in the Morvan, without naming the department--Saone-et-Loire, the Yonne or Nièvre, in each of which a portion of the Morvan lies. In the very heart of the country, especially round about Chateau-Chinon, its marvellously placed little capital, we still see the saie, a garment identical with the Gallic sagum, and the Morvandial, although gradually losing his once so strongly-marked characteristics, prefers his own dialect to French. Throughout the entire country, indeed, Morvandial is spoken.

From many points of view this region of survivals is full of interest. Till half-way through the present century, village communism existed here in full force, having withstood the shocks of the French Revolution. The last village commune was not broken up till 1848.

The ancient industry of wood-floating, or flottage à buches perdues, is still actively carried on. The logs, which are cut in summer, each being marked with the owner's name, are floated down the rivers in winter to Paris, women and children doing the greater part of the work. This simple system of water transport, without any kind of vehicle, was invented by a Parisian, Rouvet by name, so long ago as 1569.

More interesting than these facts, perhaps, to most travellers, is the delightful scenery of the Morvan, and the beauty of its white oxen, a race apart. We find these gentle, majestic creatures everywhere tenderly cared for, as perhaps no other animals are in France, and lending wonderful picturesqueness and charm to every landscape. No matter whither you go, winding up the forest-girt mountain road, from Autun to Chateau-Chinon, traversing the romantic valley of the Cure, from Avallon to Vezelay, exploring the pretty, Surrey-like woods and

hills around the gay little watering-place of St. Honore-les-Bains, are to be seen the white, lustrous-skinned, majestic creatures, who almost make us forgive the ungallant refrain of Pierre Dupont's famous song: 'J'aime bien Jeanne, ma femme, mais j'aimerais mieux la voir mourir, que de voir mourir mes boeufs' (I love my wife Jane, but I would rather see her die than my oxen).

The best plan for the tourist wishing to see the Morvan is to hire one of the light carriages called a caleche, and drive, not only round the country so called, but right through--a journey occupying about a fortnight when leisurely made.

Travellers pressed for time may, however, visit Chateau-Chinon in a day from Autun. This five hours' drive to the former capital of the Morvan, one continued ascent, gives one an excellent idea of the Morvandian scenery, and in clear weather is delightful. From the not too comfortable coupe of the cumbersome old vehicle, we come ever upon wider and more magnificent prospects; on either side are brilliant green pastures, watered by little rivers clear as crystal, lofty alders fringing their banks, and the grand white oxen pasturing peacefully here and there; beyond these gracious scenes rise wooded hills, or masses of granite, taking weird forms; while as we journey further on we get tremendous panoramas, with a background of violet hills. These heights are about equal to the Cumberland range, the loftiest peak of the Morvan rising to that of Skiddaw.

Far away the famous Mont Beuvray, the Bibracte of the 'Commentaries' lying half-way between Chateau-Chinon and Autun, is a bold, grand outline to day, under a cold, gray sky. Wild crags to climb and romantic sites abound, also scenes of quiet caressing grace and smiling pastoralness. Nowhere can be found more beautiful pastures, winding lanes, tossing streams. The country round about is wonderfully solitary, but newly-built schools in the scattered villages tell of progress.

Meantime driver and passengers alight whilst our steady horses climb one sharp ascent after another. As we wind about the hills we catch sight of tiny hamlets perched on airy crests, recalling the castellated villages of the African Kabylia.

Arrived at our destination, the ancient capital and stronghold of the Celtic Morvan, the whole country lies at our feet as a map--sunny pasture and cornland, glen and dale, mountain stream, tumbling river and glittering cascade, alternating with sterner and grander features--dark forests covering vast spaces, rugged peaks towering aloft, wild sweeps of heather-covered moorland. Seen as I saw this region, under a wind-tossed lowering heaven, the impression was of extreme desolation and wildness; only a glimpse of sunshine was needed to bring out the witchery of each shifting scene. Nothing can be prettier in a quiet way than these countless rivers and rivulets, each fringed with lofty alders, these velvety glades and winding lanes. Forests abound, and I was assured by a peasant that the poor never need buy any firewood. They can pick up enough to last them all winter.

Immediately below Chateau-Chinon opens a fair valley, threaded by the river Yonne. Bewildering is the sense of space and atmosphere we obtain here, as we look straight down into the cliffs below, or allow the eye to wander over the vast panorama stretching around.

A town perched on a height two thousand feet above the sea-level, so placed as to command an entire kingdom, should have a history, and the history of Chateau-Chinon goes very far back indeed. The fortified citadel of the seigneurie was built on the site of a Gallo-Roman camp, or castrum, the castrum on that of a Gallic oppidum. The once warlike, grim little place, that often defied its enemies in the seigneurial wars, is now the most dead-alive, sleepy little provincial place imaginable.

'We will breakfast together,' said the gray-haired conductor of the diligence to me; 'and you will afterwards have time to look round before we start home.'

Although pure Celts, the Morvandiaux have not the proud reserve and, perhaps, distrust of strangers found among the Bretons. I have driven for miles across country alone with a Breton peasant, and he would never once open his lips. Had I carried bags of gold about me, I should have been perfectly safe under such protection. But a sociable invitation to chat over the ordinary of an auberge would never have entered the head of a diligence-driver in the Morbihan or Finistere.

The little inn looked temptingly rustic and primitive, and the smiling, round-faced, rosy-cheeked landlady might have just walked out of a picture. Exactly such a landlady I remember at Llangollen years ago.

I had, however, no time to stay, and we drove v back to Autun, making the descent at a rapid rate, catching by the way the glimpse of a stately peasant, with the Gallic saie, or mantle, thrown over his shoulders. He might have sat for a study of Vercingetorix! It was worth while going to Chateau-Chinon for the sight of such a piece of antiquity as that!

Alas! Chateau-Chinon is to have a railway, and alike the mantle worn by Vercingetorix and his countrymen, the ancient Gallic speech--even the time-honoured system of log-floating--are doomed. Instead of being invited to breakfast with the blue-bloused pleasant driver of the diligence, I shall expect to find at table-d'hote half a score of English undergraduates, members of the bicyclist club, or a party of enterprising ladies from Chicago.

A word about Autun itself, a town that improves marvellously on acquaintance. This was my third visit, and I found it more attractive than ever. The beauty of its site is best appreciated from the lower ground beyond its western suburb. And beautiful it is--the graceful cathedral, with its airy spire and twin towers, pencilled in soft, silvery gray against the dimpled green hills, every feature of the landscape in harmony with it, as if, indeed, made to be in harmony with it. Turning from the cathedral in an opposite direction, in order to make the circuit of the city, we realize how grand was the predecessor of modern Autun the Augustodunum of Gallic Rome. Keeping to this higher ground, we can follow with the eye the tremendous span of the Roman wall, fragmentary for the most part, yet perfect in places, and built neither of bricks nor blocks of stone, but of small stones.

Inside the enclosure we see the mediaeval wall and picturesque watch-towers of the French king Francis. Picturesque as these are--also the bits of ordinary domestic architecture between airily-perched dormers, stone balconies filled with flowers, little terraced gardens rising one above the other--the mind is too much occupied with the grand Roman

aspect of the place to dwell as yet upon minor points. The circuit of the city, so made as to visit its two magnificent Roman gateways, and equally fine so-called Temple of Janus, is beyond the reach of moderate walkers. All are noble specimens of Augustan architecture, more especially the Porte d'Arroux. This stands on the north side of the town, beyond the suburbs, its lofty arches spanning the road, and wearing, from the distance, the look of an aqueduct. It is built of huge blocks of stone adjusted without cement. Between the upper tiers of arches are sculptured Corinthian columns, all happily uninjured. So massive is this structure, so firmly it stands, that we feel as if, like the Pyramids, it might last for ever.

Beyond, on either side, stretches the pleasant open country-fields and meadows and market-gardens; whilst far away, in bright sunny weather looking like a violet cloud, is the vast height of Bibracte, so celebrated in the 'Commentaries.'

But the most curious monument at Autun is the so-called Pierre de Couhard. From all parts of the city may be seen, rising conspicuously from its green eminence, this stately relic-maybe of Roman or Gallic times, perhaps raised of remoter date still--a vast pyramid of stone, worthy to be compared to the great tomb of Caius Sextius in Rome.

It is a pleasant walk to what the townsfolk call the Pierre de Quare. Leaving behind us the cathedral and suburbs, we follow a road winding in a south-easterly direction to the little village of Couhard, watered by a gurgling stream, and sheltered by a fair green hill. As we quit the highroad to reach the monument, we come upon pretty pastoral groups. It is supper-time-l'heure de la soupe, as French rustics say--and before every cottage-door are squatted family groups, eating their pottage on the doorsteps. Around are the dogs and cats, chickens, pigs and goats. To every humble homestead is attached orchard, garden, even a patch of corn or vineyard. All is peace and contentment.

Certainly these rural interiors would not satisfy everybody. Neatness and cleanliness do not always prevail among poor folks in France, any more than in England. But, alike, young and old are neatly and wholesomely dressed. Beggars are almost nil, and the prevailing aspect is one of unforgettable well-being, independence, and cheerfulness.

In strange contrast with these domestic pictures--pet kittens and children playing close under its shadow, tiny cabbage and tomato beds planted to its very edge--stands the huge, angular, pyramidal pile called the Pierre de Quare.

Very striking is the effect of the huge, solid brown mass, tapering to a point, from summit to base reaching half the height of the cathedral-spire, its original height in all probability having been much loftier.

The whole is a ruin, yet intact, if I may be pardoned the paradox. Whilst the inner part of the monument remains uninjured, its sides have been stripped of the marble slabs or polished stones that once in all probability covered and adorned them. The outer surface now shows a rough, jagged ensemble of masses of stone rudely put together, the entire pyramid being solid.

We walked home in the evening light, getting dozens of charming pictures in the twilight--pictures already familiar to me, yet ever bringing a sense of newness. French towns, like French scenery, should

be revisited thus, and I hope ere very long to pay Autun my fourth visit, and to take, for a second time, those delightful drives from Avallon to Vezelay, and from the modern capital of the little Celtic kingdom to the ancient, perched so airily above the surrounding hills.

CHAPTER III. FROM LYONS TO AVIGNON BY THE RHONE.

From Autun to Lyons is a journey that calls for little comment, unless made, as wise Arthur Young made it a hundred years ago, on horseback; or unless we take the steamer at Chalon, and enjoy the scenery of the Saone, Mr. Hamerton's favourite river.

We were too impatient, however, to reach the Causses to stop, even for the sake of a sail on the Saone, and made haste to catch the very next Gladiateur bound to Avignon. Why all these Rhone steamers should be called Gladiateur I don't know, but so it is.

By half-past five this bright August day we are on the deck of the little steamer, to find a scene of indescribable liveliness and bustle. All kinds of merchandise were being stowed away--bedding, fruit, bicycles, bird-cages, passengers' luggage, cases, and packages of every imaginable description.

A stream of peasants poured in, bound for various stations on the way, all heavily laden, some accompanied by their pet dogs. First-class passengers were not numerous. We had an elderly bridegroom, who might have been a small innkeeper, with his youthful bride, evidently making a cheap wedding-trip; a family party or two; an excitable man with a sick wife; a couple of pretty girls with two or three youths--brothers or cousins; a sprinkling of priests and nuns--that was all. The peasants with their baskets and bundles, at the other end of the vessel, made picturesque groups, and the whole scene was as French as French could be.

I was just thinking how pleasant it was thus to escape the routine of travel, to find one's self in a purely foreign atmosphere, among French people, picking up by the way French habits and ways of thought, when one of the officials of the company bustled up to me.

'Pray pardon me, madame,' he said, bringing out a note-book. 'I see that you are English. Will you be so very kind as to give me the name and address of the great tourist agency in London? We are organizing an entirely new service between Lyons and Avignon; we are going to make our steamers attractive to tourists. You will oblige us extremely by giving a little information.'

Crestfallen and with a sinking of the heart, I took his pencil--I could, of course, not do otherwise--and wrote in big letters:

MM. Thomas Cook et Cie.,
Ludgate Hill,
Londres.

But those few words I had written sufficed to dispel the delightful visions of the moment before. Another year or two, then, and the Rhone will be then handed over to Messrs. Cook, Gaze and Caygill--benefactors of their kind, no doubt, but ruthless destroyers of the romance of travel.

Instead of French folk, with whom we can chat about their crops, rural affairs, the passing scenes, gaining all kinds of information, feeling that we are really in France, and forgetting for awhile old associations, henceforth we shall find on board these steamers our near neighbours, whom, no matter how much respected, we are glad to quit for a time. From end to end of the vessel we shall hear the voices of English and Transatlantic tourists, one and all most probably 'disappointed in the Rhone;' but, indeed, for the river, we should as well be at home! However, all this disenchantment happily belongs to the future; let us enjoy the present experience--one long bright summer day, so full of impressions as to seem many days rolled into one.

The whistle sounds, punctually to the stroke of six; we are off.

It is a noble sight as we steam out of the quay de la Charite: the vast city rearing its stately front between green hills and meeting rivers; above, white chateaux and villas dotting the greenery--below, the quays, bordered with warehouses that might be palaces, so lofty and handsome are they, and avenues of plane-trees.

The day promises to be splendid, but mists as yet hang over the scene. Leaving behind us majestic cities and suburbs and the confluence of the Rhone and the Saone--one silvery sheet flowing into the other--we glide between low-lying banks bordered with poplars, and soon reach the little village of Irigny, its sheltering green hills dotted with country houses. As we go swiftly on we realize the appropriateness of the epithet ever applied to the Rhone. Truly in Michelet's phrase, 'C'est un taureau furieux descendu des Alpes, et qui court a la mer.' If we are in haste to reach our destination in the heart of the Cevennes, the Rhone seems still more in haste to reach the sea. This swift current of the bright blue waters and the unspeakable freshness and purity of the air make our journey very exhilarating. Past Irigny we are so near the low, poplar-bordered shore to our left that we could almost reach it with a pebble, whilst to the right lies Millery. From this point the river winds abruptly, and we see far-off hills and gentle declivities nearer shore, with vineyards planted on the slopes. The country on both sides is beautifully wooded, and very verdant.

The first halt is made at Givors, a little manufacturing town set round with vine-clad banks; here the little river Giers flows into the Rhone, one of the numerous tributaries gathered on the way. Just below the town is a graceful suspension-bridge. But for the mists we should have a lovely view a little further on, where the hills run nearer together, the wooded escarpments running steep down to the water's edge. On both right and left banks the scenery is now charming. Close to our left hand rise banks fringed with silvery-green willows, and above a bold line of hills, part wood, part vineyards, with white houses peeping here and there; on our right, a little island-like group of poplar, the whole picture very sweet and pastoral.

For the most part our passengers, alike first and second class, pay scant heed to the scenery; the tiny salle-a-manger below and the resources of the kitchen seem more attractive.

The excitable man with the sick wife, however, no sooner caught sight of me with pencil and note-book than he rushed up, anxious to impart information, also to pour out his own troubles.

'That sick lady yonder is my wife; does she not look ill? Oh, the misfortune to have a sick wife!'

Then he went on to relate to me the history of his wife's long illness, dilating on his own unhappiness in being so afflicted. It never seemed to occur to him that it might be worse to be ill one's self, even than to inflict one's illnesses on others. He had tried every imaginable remedy, and now, as a last expedient, was about to take her to her paternal home in the South, to see what native air might do. Poor lady! ill and depressed she looked indeed.

As we get nearer Vienne the aspect of the country changes. There is an Italian look about the vines trellised on trees, and festooned under the tiled roofs of the little riverside chalets.

The approach to the ancient city itself is very striking. A light suspension-bridge spans the river-banks just where Vienne faces the village of St. Colombe, ancient as itself. On the right we see the massive old town built by Philippe de Valois; to the left, behind the houses, crowded together pell-mell, rises the massive pile of Vienne Cathedral. Here another tributary, the Gere, flows into the Rhone. Vienne was reputed a fosterer of poetry in classic times. At 'beautiful Vienne,' Martial boasted that his works were read with avidity. The scenery now shows more variety and picturesqueness. In one spot the river winds so abruptly that we seem all on a sudden to be landlocked, the hills almost meeting where the swift, impetuous stream has forced a way. The cleft hills as they slope down to the shore show little dells and combes deliciously fresh and verdurous. Everywhere we see the vine, and with every bend we seem nearer the South. Between Vienne and Roussillon the aspect is no longer French, but Italian--the distant undulations dark purple, flecked with golden shadow, the nearer terraced with the yellowing vine.

Our next halting-place is Condrien, on the right bank, celebrated for its white wines, a pretty, Italian-looking little town, with vineyards and gardens close to the riverside, the bright foliage of the acacia and vine contrasting with the soft yellows and grays of the building-stone. Above the straggling town on the sunny hill are deep-roofed chalets, and close to us--we could almost gather them--patches of glorious sunflowers in the riverside gardens. The mists had now cleared off, and we were promised a superb day.

The traveller's mind is all at once struck by the extreme solitude of this noble, vast-bosomed, swift-flowing river. We had been on our way for hours without seeing a steamer or vessel of any kind, our little craft having the wide water-way all to itself. Whilst the Saone is the most navigable river in the world, quite opposite is the character of its brother Rhone. Not inaptly has the one river--all gentleness, yieldingness, and suavity--won a feminine, the other--all force, impetuosity and stern will--obtained for itself a masculine, appellative! And well has the Lyonnais sculptor given these characteristics in his charming statues adorning the Hotel de Ville of his native city.

The Rhone has been called 'un chemin qui marche trop vite'; the rapidity of its currents and the difficulties of navigation up-stream are obstructions to traffic. But before the great line of railway was laid down between Paris and Marseilles, it was nevertheless very important. If we converse with French folk whose memory goes back to a past generation, we shall find that the journey South was invariably made this way. Formerly sixty-two steamers daily plied with passengers and goods between these riverside towns, now connected by railway. At the present time seven or eight suffice for the work.

To render the Rhone adapted for navigation on a large scale, extensive works are necessary in order to regulate its current and deepen its bed. The question has long occupied the leading Chambers of Commerce throughout France. Plans of the proposed ameliorations have been made; works have even been begun. But the Rhone has that terribly powerful Compagnie de Paris-Lyon-Mediterranee to contend with. It remains to be seen whether wide public interests will be finally sacrificed to a grasping railway company. For myself, I owe the P.-L.-M. a great and lasting grudge.

I am in the habit of paying yearly visits to French friends living in and near Dijon; but for the P.-L.-M., I could pleasantly vary these annual visits to the delightful Burgundian capital, going by way of Sens and Tonnerre, and returning by the Ligne de l'Est through Champagne.

But no! The latter company is not permitted by the P.-L.-M. to set down passengers in the Dijon railway-station. Those travellers desirous of making the journey Paris-ward via Troyes are therefore forced to take tickets to Is-sur-Tille, half an hour by rail from Dijon, on the Ligne de l'Est. There they are permitted, and not before, to take through tickets and register baggage to Paris. I rejoice to hear, however, that influential Dijonnais are taking the matter up, and I yet live in hopes of being able to avoid the P.-L.-M. line to and from Dijon.

It must be admitted that the great solitude of the Rhone adds to its majesty and impressiveness. Our little craft seems insignificant as a feather--a mere bird skimming the vast blue surface. After the clearing of the mists, we have a spell of unbroken blue sky and bright sunshine, followed by a deliciously cool, gray English heaven, with sunny glimpses and varied cloudage.

Passing Serrieres, with pastures and meadows close to the water's edge, and groups of cattle grazing under the trees, we reach Annonay, crested by a quaint ruin, the birth-place of the great balloonists, the brothers Montgolfier. The first balloon ascent was made from this little town in 1783. Boissy d'Anglas, the heroic president of the Assembly in its stormiest days, was also born here.

Next comes St. Vallier, an ancient little town close to the river-side, with its castle of the beauty who never grew old, Diane de Poitiers--she whose mysterious cosmetic was a daily plunge in cold water; so say the initiated in historic secrets. Opposite to St. Vallier rises a chain of sunny, vine-covered hills, with sharp clefts showing deep shadow.

At Arras, on the right bank, is seen another picturesque ruin. No river in Europe boasts of more ruins than the Rhone. Then we reach the legendary rock called the Table du Roi. Just as Aeneas and his

companions made of their flat loaves, plates, and so fulfilled the Sibyl's prediction, St. Louis saw in this tabular block a dinner-table, providentially designed for the use of himself and his ministers. The great advantage of such a table lay in its immunity from listeners, thus the story runs. This al-fresco banquet above the banks of the Rhone took place on the eve of the Seventh Crusade.

At this point the river is magnificent. Beyond the nearer hills rise the crumbling walls of a feudal stronghold, another ruin of imposing aspect. One hoary tower only is seen, half hidden by the folds of a valley. On every steep slope the vines make golden patches, little terraces being planted close to the rocky summits. This persistence in a phylloxera-ravaged district is quite touching.

Passing Tournon and Tain, we soon come in sight of the famous little village of the Hermitage, a sunburnt, granitic slope, its three hundred acres once being a mine of gold. Formerly a hectare of this precious vineyard was worth 30,000 francs. The phylloxera, alas! has invaded it.

We now see in the far distance the blue range of the Dauphinnois Alps, and can it be--is yonder silvery glimmer on the farthest horizon the mighty Mont Blanc? Nothing can be lovelier than these wide mountain vistas, far above broad blue river, plain, and hill.

Passing the stately Gothic chateau of Chateaubourg, where sojourned St. Louis, we get a glimpse of the sharply-outlined limestone heights bordering on the vineyards of St. Peray, no less celebrated than those of the Hermitage. On the topmost crag stand out in bold relief the superb ruins of Crussol. At every turn we see gray walls of feudal strongholds frowning above the bright, broad river. By the time we reach Valence, soon after mid-day, we have passed one barge only.

Valence is beautifully situated. [Footnote: In the early part of this century the Rhone threw up gold-dust here. The beaver, be it also mentioned, had his home then on the banks of this river, but it lived in isolation, showing little of the intelligence of the Canada beaver.] Facing the river and tawny, abrupt rocks rises the splendid panorama of the French Alps. Here we ought to stay, were we not in such feverish flurry to reach the Causses. And here we leave more than half our passengers and merchandise. The cook, having now nothing to do, comes on deck to chat with a friendly traveller. I may as well mention that we fare as well on this little steamer as at a second-class table-d'hote. There is a small dining-room below, as well as a very fairly comfortable saloon. The attendants are exceedingly civil, and charges regulated by a tariff.

As an instance of the prevailing desire to please, I cite the following piece of amiability on the part of the chef. I had given tea and a teapot, with instructions, to the waiter. The chef, however, anxious that there should be no blunder, came up to me and begged for information at first hand.

'Pray excuse me,' he said; 'but I did not understand whether the milk and sugar were to form part of the decoction.'

I gave him a little dissertation on tea-making, with the result that future travellers by the Gladiateur will obtain a fragrant cup admirably prepared. Even a French chef cannot be expected to know everything in the vast field of cookery.

Below Valence the scenery changes. The hills on either side of the river recede, and we look above low reaches and lines of poplar upon the far-off mountain-range of Dauphine and Savoy. Here and there are little farmsteads close to the shore, with stacks of wheat newly piled and cattle grazing--everywhere a look of homely plenty and repose. The river winds in perpetual curves, giving us new horizons at every turn.

Lavoutte, on the right bank, is a picturesque congeries of red-tiled houses massed round a square chateau. The town indeed looks a mere appendage of this chateau, so conspicuous is the ancient stronghold of the Vivarais. Livron, perched on a hill, looks very pretty. Soon we come to perhaps the grandest ruin cresting the bank of the Rhone, the donjon and chateau fort of Rochemaure, standing out formidably from the dark, jagged peaks, running sheer down to the river's edge.

After Le Teil is passed the clouds gradually clear. We have the deep warm blue of a southern sky and burning sunshine.

Viviers--ancient capital of the Vivarais, to which it gave the name--is most romantically placed on the side of a craggy hill, its ancient castle and old Romanesque cathedral conspicuous above the house-roofs. Just above the verdant river-bank run its mediaeval ramparts tapestried with ivy, the yellowish stone almost the colour of the rocks.

The scenery here is wild and striking. Far away the grand snow-tipped Mont Ventoux, the limestone cliffs dazzlingly white against the warm heavens, deep purple shadows resting on the vine-clad slopes, whilst close to the water's edge are stretches of velvety turf and little shady dells. At one point the opposite coasts are as unlike in aspect as summer and winter; the right bank all grace and fertility, the left all barrenness and desolation. And still we have the noble river to ourselves as it winds between rock and hill. Pont St. Esprit is another old-world town with a wonderful old bridge, making a charming picture. It stands close to the water's edge, the houses grouped lovingly round its ancient church with tall spire. Here we do at last meet a steamer bound for Valence.

After leaving Pont St. Esprit the scenery grows less severe, till by degrees all sternness is banished, and we see only a gentle pastoral landscape on either side.

Bagnols, with its handsome old stone bridge, church, with perforated tower, facing the river, makes a quaint and picturesque scene. This curious old town, one of the most characteristic passed throughout the entire journey, lies so close to the water's edge that we could almost step from the steamer into its streets. Meantime, the long, bright afternoon, so rich in manifold impressions, draws on; cypresses and mulberry-trees announce the approach to Avignon. A golden softness in the evening sky, a heavy warmth and languor in the air, proclaim the South. Every inch of the way is varied and rememberable. Feudal walls still crest the distant heights, as we glide slowly between reedy banks and low sandy shores towards the papal city.

At last it comes in sight, rather more than twelve hours since quitting the quay of Lyons, and well rewarded were we for having preferred the slower water-way to the four hours' flight in the railway express.

The approach to Avignon by the Rhone may be set side by side in the

traveller's mind with the first glimpse of Venice from the Adriatic, or of Athens from the AEgean.

The river, after winding amid cypress-groves, makes a sudden curve, and we see all of a sudden the grand old Italian-looking city, its watch-towers, palaces, and battlements pencilled in delicate gray against a warm amber sky, only the cypresses by the water's edge making dark points in the picture. Far away, over against the city towers, the stately snow-crowned Mont Ventoux and the violet hills shutting in Petrarch's Vaucluse. How warm and southern--nay, Oriental--is the scene before us, although painted in delicatest pearly tints! It is difficult to believe that we are still in France; we seem suddenly to have waked up in Jerusalem!

CHAPTER IV. AVIGNON AND ORANGE.

My first business at Avignon was, of course, to visit the tomb of our great countryman, John Stuart Mill.

As we drive to the cemetery this cloudless August day there is little to remind us of northern latitudes: warm yellow walls, burning blue heaven, venerable fig-trees white with dust, peach and olive orchards--all combine to conjure up a vision of the far-off East. The perpetual wind, however, cools the air, and if it has not the delicious freshness of the desert breeze tasted towards nightfall near Cairo, at least it makes August in that apparently tropic region bearable. Avignon should without doubt be visited in the height of summer, otherwise we lose this Oriental aspect, which is its most striking and, at the same time, most beautiful characteristic.

Passing the colossal palace of the popes--pity such superb masonry should be linked with the memories of crimes so horrible!--we reach the public gardens, containing the statue of a comparatively humble individual, who did more for the public weal than perhaps all the popes and anti-popes put together. This is Althen, who, by the introduction of the madder-root into France, promoted the peaceful industry and wellbeing of thousands of honest families. From the lofty terrace of this promenade--a natural precipice overlooking the river--we obtain a glorious panorama--the entire city, with its towers, palace, and churches, spread before us as a map, the glory of the Dauphinnois Alps, the magnificent Mont Ventoux stretching across the northern horizon, under the shadow of its sunny crest the pale violet hills of Vaucluse, and, to complete the picture, the Rhone, silvery bright--I protest it is not always muddy as some writers insist!--flowing swiftly between green banks towards the sea.

An avenue of stone pines leads to the cemetery--announced by flower-stalls and stonemasons' yards--and we soon find the head-gardener--an ancient man, proud to show us the tomb of the 'grand Anglais.'

'Do my country-people often come here to pay their respects to this grave?' I asked.

'Oh, many, many!' he said; 'and the demoiselle, his daughter--it is she

who sees to everything. She is always coming. Never was any grave so cared for, as you will see.'

He was right. The sarcophagus of pure white marble stands in the midst of a tiny garden, exquisitely kept and railed in, with gate well-locked. The well-known inscription inscribed by Stuart Mill to the memory of his wife cannot be deciphered from outside the enclosure, and no one, under any circumstances whatever, is permitted to enter it; but the name of the noble apostle of liberty stands out bold and clear, and may be seen from a distance. The flower-borders around the tomb were bright with late summer and autumn flowers; not a seared leaf, not an unsightly weed anywhere. The reverential care bestowed on this grave is delightful to witness. Two English girls lie buried near the great champion of women and of liberty of thought. Rare flowers--roses and lilies--were not to be had, so I purchased a homely garland of zinnias and China asters, and laid it just outside the little railing. In paying this modest tribute to the memory of John Stuart Mill I fulfilled a wish very dear to my heart. One other pilgrimage of the like kind I would fain make did not wide seas intervene. I should like to place a wreath on the tomb of another apostle of liberty--the dauntless, the self-immolating Colenso!

Schiller, great in poetry as in prose, says: 'The larger portion of humanity are too much concerned with the struggle for bare existence to occupy themselves with the search after truth.' Let us, then, rejoice in the memory of those who have consecrated their existences to this lofty task!

Beautiful as is Avignon for a burial-place, we wonder how anyone could from choice live here. The perpetual mistral-like wind, the dazzling glare, the white dust, the malodorous streets of the old town, do not at any rate invite a long stay during the dog-days, and much of its picturesqueness would be lost in winter. With the prospect of the breezy Roof of France ever before us, we certainly felt little disposed to linger, in spite of our comfortable quarters and another attraction not mentioned in guide-books. I allude to the great beauty of the people, especially of the young girls and children. We seemed here to have touched the first note of a gradually ascending scale of beauty, the climax awaiting us in the mountain fastnesses of the Lozere. In and around Avignon we saw many a girl beautiful as one of Raphael's Madonnas, many a child lovely as an angel. We could not paint these charming heads, we could not make the acquaintance of their possessors; but it was delightful to obtain such glimpses of beauty by the way--to feel one's self in a living portrait-gallery of beauty. The great neatness and tidiness of the country people, and the absence of vagrancy, are very striking. Wherever we go, we see evidence of an existence laborious perhaps in the extreme, yet one of wholesomeness and content.

Strange to say, chemical science has proved as disastrous to the rural population round about Avignon as the phylloxera has done in other parts of the department. The supersession of madder by aniline dyes has, indeed, for a time almost ruined the small farmers of Vaucluse.

'Ah!' said an elderly man to me, 'in former days the madder made up for everything. It was the harvest of the year. If a peasant's corn was blighted, or potatoes and fruit crops failed, the madder was there to take to market. The madder paid his way in bad seasons and in good--gave him a little "argent mignon" to lay by. The peasant just manages

to live nowadays, but when madder was cultivated 'twas his own fault if he didn't grow rich.'

The culture of this plant, which extended over 13,500 hectares in Vaucluse in 1860, had diminished to eight, representing a loss of millions of francs. The vineyards have also been reduced, owing to the inroads of the phylloxera, although not in equal proportion. Even the silkworm, the third chief source of wealth here, has suffered from a parasite.

But the peasant-owner of the soil never loses heart. He drives his plough across the ruined vineyard, digs up the madder-field, plants other crops, and cheerfully accepts a fourth part of former profits.

My companion, of course, would no more have dreamed of quitting Avignon without a visit to Vaucluse than I should have thought it possible to go away leaving unvisited the tomb of John Stuart Mill. But next morning brought a lowering sky, heavy rain-drops, and an ominous rumbling of thunder. To set out for a twenty miles' drive across country under such auspices were madness.

We decided to visit Orange instead, a short distance by railway. We should be sure to obtain a covered carriage at the station. Under such circumstances, need a deluging shower or two and a thunderstorm keep us at home?

The prospect brightened towards mid-day, so we started in high spirits, assuring ourselves of a delightful excursion. We found pleasant company in the railway-carriage, our fellow-travellers being all bound for Paris. One, a young Jesuit who had been in England, was delighted to practise his English.

'You are not favoured with fine weather in your travels,' he said; 'but you are probably going to remain at Orange some time?'

'Oh dear no,' was the reply. 'We are spending the afternoon there, that is all--just going to see the Roman theatre!'

'I wish you enjoyment of your expedition,' he replied drily, no little amused, but evidently somewhat accustomed to insular eccentricity.

The rest of the company could hardly keep a grave countenance. 'These English! these English!' their faces said, and the general verdict evidently was parodying the immortal words of Madame Roland: 'O Pleasure, what pains are endured under thy name!'

By the time we reached our destination the storm had become truly awful. Rain fell in torrents; the crashing thunder was like the roar of artillery. The heavens were black as night, but for the blue flashes that seemed to set the place on fire. Outside the station was no vehicle of any kind; within, groups of storm-driven travellers and pedestrians waited for the tempest to abate.

And long, indeed, we had to wait. The most rational alternative seemed to be to take the next train back to Avignon. But we might never again find ourselves at Orange. We recalled Addison's words, 'The remains of this Roman amphitheatre are worth the whole principality of Orange,' so we abided the storm. We were, after all, as well off in the comfortably-appointed little station as in a first class railway-

carriage, and the tempest, if awful, afforded a sublime spectacle. Lightning so vivid I think I never before witnessed.

At last the deluging rain slackened somewhat; the heavens grew clearer; and the omnibus of the Hotel de la Poste made its appearance. We took our seats and rattled into the town, the poor drenched horses paying no heed to the swiftly-recurring peals and flashes.

At the Poste, most French and old-fashioned of French inns--very spacious, very handsome, and scrupulously clean--we found a charming landlady, to whom we carried friendly greetings from former visitors; and after tea and a little chat, the thunder and lightning having abated, we ventured forth.

The streets, which on our arrival an hour before were like rivers, now began to dry up; the raindrops fell at intervals only; the thunder pealed from a distance. A few townspeople, like ourselves, were abroad.

A noble avenue of plane-trees leads from the station to the ancient town. Hardly a bit of modernization to be seen anywhere, its quaint, narrow streets having deep, over-hanging roofs and round arched galleries, as seen in some of the old Spanish towns of Franche-Comte. After zigzagging for awhile in rain, we come suddenly upon the Roman theatre, a sight to take one's breath away. Rome itself shows nothing finer than this colossal mass of masonry--facade of the Augustan amphitheatre, and at the same time an acoustic wall, built of such thickness and solidity in order to retain the sound of the actors' voices. The entire facade is very nearly perfect, and forms a splendid specimen of Augustan architecture in its prime. It is constructed of huge blocks put together symmetrically, without the adjunct of cement. The colour is of deep, rich brown, the entire structure majestically dominating the town, whilst around, dwarfed by its gigantic proportions, rise the pleasant green hills.

Close under the shadow of the facade, enhancing its grandeur by force of contrast, are mean little houses, and in front an open space, where poor people are washing their clothes and carrying on the homeliest avocations. Some notion of the interior may be gathered from without, but, on payment of a small fee, strangers are permitted to enter and wander at will about the stone benches raised on tiers, the corridors, and dressing-closets of the actors. Vandalism has all but done its worst; still, enough are left of proscenium and auditorium, originally constructed to hold 7,000 spectators, to admit of the performance of plays here. The stone corbels, pierced with holes to hold the enormous awning or velarium used in wet weather or extreme heat, remain intact. The gray stone is covered with moss and greenery, and the whole scene for magnificence and impressiveness may be compared with the great Dionysiac theatre at Athens.

As we lingered outside, it was pleasant to witness the pride of the inhabitants in this great monument.

'Ah, you should have been here a few days ago!' one bystander said to us; 'you might then have seen the "OEdipe Roi" of Corneille given in this amphitheatre, by the troupe of the Comedie Francaise. Never before was a fete so brilliant seen at Orange! People flocked hither from fifty miles and farther round!'

We found, and lost, and lost, and found our way in the perplexing

labyrinth of ancient streets, till we reached the fine but somewhat cold and uninspiring triumphal arch at the other end of the town. Then we returned to Avignon, the thunderstorm bursting forth with renewed fury. Our compartment was illuminated by the lightning from the beginning of our journey to the end, and when we alighted the blue flashes were positively appalling; the whole place seemed ablaze with the steely-blue, blinding coruscations. So we rattled through the lightning-lit streets and turned into bed, the storm taking its departure as soon as we were safely housed. It was worth while making a great effort to see Orange, but nothing--no, nothing--will ever tempt me to excursionize in such a storm again!

It is odd that English folk so rarely visit Orange; but the attractions of Switzerland are too obvious, and the great Schweitzer Hof at Lucerne has more charms for the multitude than the thoroughly French Hotel de la Poste.

One illustrious English traveller, however, just two hundred years ago, thought otherwise.

In a recently-unearthed letter of Addison to Bishop Hough, dated 27th October, 1700, he wrote: 'I was about three days ago at Orange, which is a very fruitful and pleasant spot of ground. The governor, who is a native of the place, told me there were about 5,000 people in it, and one-third were Protestants. There is a Popish bishop and some convents, but all live very amicably together, and are, I believe, not a little pleased with their prince, who does not burden them with taxes and impositions. There are two pieces of antiquity--Marius' triumphal arch, and the remains of a Roman amphitheatre--that are worth the whole of the principality.'

It may be as well to add here that the prevailing opinion of archaeologists now refers the arch to the reign of Marcus Aurelius, and that the name Marius has no reference to the conqueror of the Cimbri, as has been generally supposed. The supposition was brought about by the name Mario inscribed on a shield, among the many facsimiles adorning the trophy. But it is clearly the name of the vanquished, not the victor, found here, and Mario, part of Marion, may well have been the name of a Gaulish prisoner.

As all spoliations throughout France indiscriminately are imputed to the Revolution, it may be as well to remind the reader that it was Maurice, Prince of Nassau, who did his very utmost to demolish the noble Roman theatre of Orange.

By the Treaty of Ryswick, signed 1697, the family of Nassau were confirmed in the possession of Orange, and the prince referred to in Addison's letter was our William the Third. The spoliator of the Roman theatre was his ancestor, the tyrannical and justly-hated Maurice. This fact is to be noted.

The thunderstorm cooled the air, and the next day we had unclouded skies and burning sunshine, tempered with a brisk wind, for our expedition to Vaucluse. The wind blows ever at Avignon, no matter what the weather may be, and renders the tropic heat of summer tolerable. All the way we caught sight of beautiful faces, these peasant-girls and children having faultless features, a rich complexion, dark hair and eyes, and a dignified carriage. They go bare-headed in the broiling sun, and seem to revel in the heat. Passing suburban villas, close-

shuttered, vine-trellised, handsome chateaux, each approached by stately avenues of plane or mulberry, cypress groves and vineyards, we are soon in the heart of the country.

Little farmhouses are seen on either side, their ochre-coloured walls gleaming against the deep-blue sky--fig-trees in every garden, with peach-orchards beyond, showing the brilliant fruit. It is a bit of the East, only the blue-bloused peasant and the bare-headed, dignified country girls, wishing us 'Bonjour' as they pass, remind us that we are on French soil. There is no evidence here either of wealth or poverty; but the fruits of the earth, so laboriously cultivated, are equally shared by all. Everywhere we find cheerfulness, independence, and thrift.

Pilgrims to Vaucluse must be prepared to pay dear for the privilege. Once--and once only during this journey--were we thoroughly overcharged, and it was at the little inn here.

I have not kept the bill, but was it not worth any money to taste trout fished from Petrarch's stream, eggs whose ancestors had crowed in Petrarch's hearing, salad grown within perhaps a stone's-throw of Petrarch's garden? Thus doubtless our hostess reasoned, and in all probability she was right. What devotee would be deterred from visiting such a shrine by the prospect of a long bill?

Many, however, will be deterred by another reason. I allude to the burning noonday sun, that makes this close-shut valley, as it is complimentarily called, a veritable furnace. It is in reality a deep winding cleft between lofty, yellow rocks, by virtue of position and formation a naturally formed sun-trap, not a ray being lost. Words can give no idea of the scorching, blinding heat this August afternoon. Yet a little girl who acts as our guide confronts the sun bareheaded, and as we go we find dozens of relic-vendors equally unprotected. No one seems to require a hat or umbrella. This child had the face of a miniature Madonna, and others we met on the way equally beautiful and well-formed. Strange thus to escape for a time altogether from the region of human ugliness, to be as completely isolated from ill-favoured looks and uncomely gait as if we were in a sculpture-gallery of Florence! These country-bred girls and children have not only statuesque features, but the stateliest carriage, holding themselves with the air of Nature's princesses.

I stopped when half-way through the burning, blinding cul-de-sac, and took refuge under the shadow cast by a bit of wall and a fig-tree. If the deluging showers of yesterday had failed to damp my enthusiasm, the meridian heat of Vaucluse shrivelled it up. My companion, with her angelic-faced little cicerone, perseveringly went on.

This rock-shut valley, watered by the Sorgues, a tiny thread of water and verdure amid towering walls of bare, sun-baked rock, has lost much of its poetry and romance. The stream flows clear as in the poet's time, but the solitude he loved so well is invaded. Of his garden not a trace remains. The perpetually whirring wheels of a water-mill, the clatter of washerwomen beating clothes on the bank, now drown the murmur of the waves, whilst at every turn the traveller is beset by vendors of immortelles and photographs. Truth to tell, an element of vulgarity has found its way to this once ideal spot! But it requires no very vivid imagination to transport ourselves to the Eden described so musically in Petrarch's letters; and close at the doors of the

hermitage he has rendered immortal lies scenery that might well recall his native Italy. All this is vividly portrayed in the pages of Arthur Young, who was more fascinated by the scenery of Vacluse than either myself or my companion.

'And what was the fountain like?' I asked, when, after a quarter of an hour, she returned.

This was her account:

'Following the hot and dusty path, beset all the way with children selling wild-flowers and dried grasses-it seems providential that they don't all have sunstroke under this merciless sun-we at last reach a semicircle of rocks, a miniature stone bay, slanting slippery rocks leading down to the midst, covered, as my little guide said, in winter by water. From under these rocks burst the Sorgues-not a very tiny river at its first start-and flows into a dark pool of by no means clear water. Indeed, I should say it looked slightly scummy. On the only ledge of rock above, with soil enough for vegetation, is a bright spot of green, covered with the sweet-scented flower-a plant of the good King Henry tribe, which we had been pestered to buy all the way from the inn. This little patch looked so inaccessible that I think the children must find the plant elsewhere.

'It is well,' sighed my friend, 'that Petrarch cannot see his beloved village and river; for although the Sorgues is still limpid and beautiful when flowing over the mossy rocks, what with guides, tourists, and paper-mills, the place is vulgarized by people who probably never read a line of the great poet of ideal love in their lives, and never will.' [Footnote:

'The love from Petrarch's urn,
A quenchless lamp by which the heart
Sees things unearthly.'
SHELLEY.]

If the outward drive amid orchards of peach and fig trees, vineyard and cypress, conjures up a vision of the East, the return journey will give some idea of the great olive-strewn plain of the Spanish Vega.

Far as the eye can reach, nothing is seen but one continuous sweep of country covered with the silvery-green olive. Beyond in a northerly direction the vast grandiose outline of Mont Ventoux shows an opaline hue, its deep violet tints being subdued in the paling afternoon light. All the tones in the picture are uniform and subdued, but none can be fairer, more harmonious, no spectacle more impressive, than the delicate sea-green foliage of myriads of olive-trees--plumage were the apter word--one unbroken sheeny wave from end to end of the immense horizon.

That the half may be better than the whole in travel is an axiom verified every day. Was it worth while to incur a sunstroke for the sake of seeing Petrarch's fountain--nearly dry, moreover, at such seasons of the year? Far better to drive home without headache, and be able thoroughly to enjoy such compensation for what we could not see.

After the tomb of John Stuart Mill, Petrarch's Vacluse; after Petrarch's Vacluse, the palace of the popes.

But the sight of torture-chambers and horrid underground prisons is not inviting; the souvenirs here awakened are anything but attractive. The palace of the anti-popes, moreover, is turned into a caserne. I was content to pass it by. Does not Mr. Symonds relate, in his history of the Italian Renaissance, how a certain pope vivisected little children in the hope of prolonging his own infamous existence? In other words, the pope believed in the doctrine of transfusion of blood, and hapless little lads were bribed into undergoing the operation of blood-letting in order that the veins of the pontiff should be thereby revived.

The victims received the promised money and died, but I refer readers to Mr. Symonds' work for the story--as horrible as any in the horrible history of the sovereigns of the Vatican. Doubtless the walls of this outwardly imposing papal palace here could tell others as ghastly. I had not the slightest inclination to cross the threshold.

At Avignon we made inquiries right and left as to the best means of reaching the Causses. Nobody had so much as heard of the name. One individual thus interrogated repeated after me:

'L'Ecosse, l'Ecosse? Mon Dieu! je n'en sais absolument rien.'

He thought we were asking the directest road to Scotland--a strangely random question for two Englishwomen to make, surely, in the South of France!

CHAPTER V. LE VIGAN.

Nîmes in August is about as hot as Cairo in May, which certainly is saying a good deal. In front of the pleasant Hotel de Luxembourg are fountains and gardens, bright with oleanders and pomegranates; and the town is open and airy, but the heat is very oppressive. The unremitting precautions taken to keep out the sun show what is expected in summer-time. The rooms are not only protected by shutters, but by Venetian blinds as well, and are kept in semi-darkness during the greater portion of the day. How the business of daily life can be carried on in this perpetually enforced twilight I am unable to say. Whether or no the majority of the townsfolk have acquired by sheer force of habit the faculty of seeing in the dark, or contrive to transact all obligatory affairs in the cool of the evening, when for a brief moment shutters are thrown open and blinds drawn, is a mystery.

I have no intention of describing Nîmes--a city, perhaps, as familiar to my country-people as any in France; and, indeed, time only permitted of a glance at the beautiful Roman baths, a quite fairy-like scene, the exquisite little Greek temple, [Footnote: Colbert wished to move this lovely little temple to Versailles, bit by bit, and the Cardinal Alberoni demanded that it should be encased in gold.] known under the name of the Maison Carree, and the amphitheatre. All these have been well and amply described for tourists elsewhere; also the lovely group of Pradier adorning the principal fountain of the town--a modern chef-d'oeuvre that may well figure amid so many gems of classic art. The most hurried traveller will, of course, visit one and all.

The modern aspect of Nimes is worthy of note.

Distinguished Frenchmen--or, for the matter of that, Frenchwomen--may count with mathematical certainty upon the compensation of earthly ills: they are sure of their statue after death.

Nimes, not behindhand in this appreciative spirit, has recently conferred such honours upon two illustrious sons--Reboul, the artisan poet; and Paul Soleillet, the gallant African explorer. Both monuments are well worth seeing, and both men deserved to be so remembered.

One-fourth of the inhabitants of Nimes are Protestant; but a true spirit of toleration was very slow to make itself felt there. In 1876, for the first time, 'Les Huguenots' was given at the opera-house. Hitherto the experiment had been considered risky.

It is strange that the inroads of the phylloxera should have any influence upon the movements of religious bodies, but so it is. Narbonne, in the neighbouring department, has lately lost its Protestant population, most of whom were wine-growers or wine-merchants, ruined by the terrible vine-pest. So complete was the exodus that the ministrations of a pastor were no longer needed. These facts I had from the then _desoeuvre_ pastor himself, who was appointed to the cure of souls in the little village of St. Georges de Didonne, at the mouth of the Gironde, during my stay there two years ago.

Thankful as the visitor may feel to get away from Nimes in the dog-days, it should certainly be visited then, otherwise we lose that impression of the South--that warm glow of colour and Oriental languor so new and striking in Northern eyes. For ourselves, we would willingly have lingered days--nay, weeks--in the noble Roman city, but for the heat and our feverish desire to reach that cool, breezy Roof of France, so near, yet so apparently difficult to reach; in fact, the nearer we approached our destination, the more unattainable it appeared. No more at Nimes than at Avignon could we get an inkling of information as to the best means of reaching the Causses.

We are but fairly off on our way to Le Vigan when we find a welcome change in the atmosphere. The air is cooler, the heavens show alternating cloud and sky; we feel able to breathe. Past olive grounds and mulberry plantations, ancient towns cresting the hill-tops, cheerful farmsteads dotted here and there--these are the pictures descried from the railway. It was hard to pass Tarascon without stopping, but the experience of last year was fresh in my memory. If we lingered at every interesting place on the way, we should find the Roof of France embedded in snow. There was nothing to be done but, in policeman's language, 'move on.' Some of the little towns passed on the way are very old and curious, but night closed in long ere we reached our destination.

I had heard nothing in favour of Le Vigan. The hotel was described to us as a fair auberge. The very place was marked down in my itinerary simply because it seemed impossible to reach the region we were bound for from any other starting-point. At least, the two other alternatives had drawbacks: we must either make a circuitous railway journey round to Mende, or a still longer detour by way of Millau.

Having therefore expected literally nothing either in the way of accommodation or surroundings, what was our satisfaction next day to

wake up and find ourselves in quite delightful quarters, amid charming scenery! Our hotel, Des Voyageurs, is as unlike the luxurious barracks of Swiss resorts as can be. An ancient, picturesque, straggling house, brick-floored throughout, with spacious rooms, large alcoves, outer galleries and balconies facing the green hills, it is just the place to settle in for a summer holiday. On the low walls of the open corridor outside our rooms are pots of brilliant geraniums and roses; beyond the immediate premises of the hotel is a well-kept fruit and flower garden; everywhere we see bright blossoms and verdure, whilst the low spurs of the Cevennes, here soft green undulations, frame in the picture.

The weather is now that of an English summer, with alternating clouds and sunshine and a fresh breeze.

The people are no less winning than their entourage. Our host, a septuagenarian of the old-fashioned school, in his youth was cook to Louis Philippe, and has carried with him to this remote spot all the polish and urbanity of the court. Aristocratic as he was in manner, and evidently a man of substance, as behoved a royal cook to be, he yet exercised supervision in the kitchen, not only giving instructions, but inspecting saucepans, to see that the acme of cleanliness was arrived at.

For what we may therefore call a royal cuisine, besides excellent accommodation, we were charged the modest sum of seven francs per diem each. Madame la patronne was no less dignified in manner than her husband, and from the first took me into her confidence.

She told me that the prosperity of their old age had just been saddened by the death of their only child--the hope of hopes, the joy of joys. No one remained to inherit their good name and little fortune.

'And a young girl so carefully brought up, so well educated and amiable, so useful in the house! Voyez-vous, madame, ces choses sont trop tristes,' she said with tears; and what could we say to comfort her?

To attend upon us we had a delightful peasant woman, neat, clean, sturdy, unlettered; yet very intelligent, and full of interest in English inventions and English ways. What a treasure such a woman would be at home! but for the hindrance of husband and children, we should have felt sorely tempted to bring her away with us. Then there was a tall, handsome fellow, a man of all work, in the establishment, who would rap at my door at all hours of the day with two enormous jugs of boiling water. I required a considerable supply of hot water early in the morning wherewith to fill my portable indiarubber bath--a perpetual source of amusement in the Lozere--and he seemed to think that a warm bath, like a cigarette or a petit verre, was a luxury to be indulged in at all hours of the day.

I would be absorbed in the study of maps and geographies when a thundering rat-tat-tat would make me start from my seat, and, lo! on opening the door, there stood the tall, soldierly, well-favoured Francois, holding in each hand a huge steaming jug filled to the brim, his handsome face beaming with satisfaction at having thus anticipated my wishes.

He evidently thought, too, that anyone with an appetite so unreasonable in the matter of hot water must have innumerable wants equally

unreasonable. So quite unexpectedly, I believe whenever he had a spare moment, he would knock at our door and stand there, stock-still, awaiting commands.

Seductive as is Le Vigan by virtue of site and surroundings, I am sorry to have to say that the town is badly kept. Its aediles are terribly wanting in a sense of what is due to public health and enjoyment. The streets look as if they were never cleaned from January to December, although there is an abundant supply of water. Sanitation is for the most part woefully disregarded, and the little that is needed to make the place wholesome and attractive is left unattempted. What distressed my companion more than the neglected aspect of the streets was the sight of so many apparently uncared-for, ill-fed cats and dogs. As a rule, French people are kind to their domestic pets, but the bare-ribbed cats and their kittens here told a different story. Fortunately, when sketching just outside the town one day, the cure came up and entered into conversation with the sketchers. Here was an opportunity not to be neglected, and it was eagerly seized upon.

'Do, M. le Cure,' pleaded the English lady, after drawing his attention to the destitute condition of many four-footed parishioners, 'speak to your people, and make them see how wrong it is thus to rear cats and dogs, and leave them to starve.'

The benevolent old man promised to do his best, reminding me of the different response made to a similar appeal by a Breton priest.

I was once so shocked at the cruel treatment of calves at a country fair that I boldly stopped the cure in the middle of the road, and entreated him to preach against such wickedness.

'Madame' was his reply, 'ce n'est pas un teche' (it is no sin); meaning, I suppose, that diabolical cruelty to animals did not come under the head of offences against the Church.

It may be a consolation to many readers to know that the Loi Grammont now prohibits the misdeeds ignored by so-called ministers of religion in France; and it is a law, if not often, occasionally enforced with little ceremony. At Clermont-Ferrand, a few weeks later, a cab-driver was carried off to prison before our eyes for having brutally beaten his fallen horse.

Throughout the remainder of this journey I am bound to say that we were struck with the kindness and gentleness of our drivers to their horses. Any sign of ill-temper or skittishness was always coaxed away, an angry word or blow never being resorted to.

As I have said, Le Vigan might easily be made a charming halting-place for tourists in these regions. The pulling down of a few ancient, ill-favoured streets, a wholesale cleaning and white-washing, a general reparation of the town from end to end, open spaces utilized as public gardens--all this might be done at half the expense of the supernumerary statues now being raised all over France. Sanitation first, statues afterwards, should be the maxim of its prefets and maires in these remote and behindhand regions. Our hotel, it must be added, is clean and well kept, and even furnished with the luxury of baths. A few more royal cooks at the head of French country inns, and we should soon find cosmopolitan luxuries in out-of-the-way corners.

But such an epithet will not long apply to our favourite town. A railway now in course of construction will soon link it to Millau, on the Toulouse line, thus rendering it accessible from all south-westerly points. Who knows? This quaint, old-fashioned, thoroughly French hotel may be replaced a few years hence by some huge fashionable barracks, in which there will be a perpetual come and go of tourists furnished with return tickets, including the Causses, the gorges of the Tarn and Montpellier le Vieux.

An English pedestrian or cyclist or two have, I believe, found their way hither, but no lady tourists.

Poorly off in matters of sanitation, Le Vigan could not, nevertheless, afford to lose its one statue to its one hero. We all know the story of the gallant young Chevalier d'Assas, captain of an Auvergnat regiment, and of his no less heroic companion, the Sergeant Dubois: how when reconnoitring at night in the forest near Closter-camp, their men in ambush behind them, they came suddenly upon the foe. A dozen bayonets were pointed at their breasts with the whisper, 'Silence or death!'

The pair in a breath gave the warning: 'The enemy! Fire!' and fell side by side, pierced with the bullets alike of friend and foe.

This bronze statue is the only monument the town can boast of, but it possesses a compensation for many monuments--I allude to its noble grove of venerable chestnuts. Well-planted boulevards of plane-trees lead to what appears a bit of primeval forest--an assemblage of ancient trees, their knotted, hoary trunks each in girth huge as a windmill, in striking contrast to the bright foliage and abundant fruit. Nothing can be more weird and fantastic than these broken, corrugated stems, battered by storm, worn out by time, apparently dropping to pieces, yet at the root full of vitality, sending forth the most luxuriant harvest, the freshest, youthfulest leafage: the whole--the gray old world below, the fairy-like greenery above--making a glorious scene under the bright blue sky. May not this chestnut grove symbolize the phenomenal richness and activity of highly-endowed natures in old age--the Goethes, the Titians, the Voltaires? From these pleasant suburbs, little paths wind invitingly upward among the hills, planted on all sides with the vine, and although the summer is already so far advanced, wild-flowers abound. What a paradise this would be for the botanist in spring, or for the portrait painter! The good looks of the people, their rich colouring, fine stature, and dignified bearing, strike us ever with a sense of novelty.

How many makable places, if I may coin such a word, still remain in France--sweet spots, Cinderellas of the natural world, only awaiting the fairy godmother to turn them into princesses, courted by wealth and fashion. Many a nook in the environs of Le Vigan doubtless answers to this description. I will only describe one, Cauvalet, an inland watering-place sadly in need of enterprise and patronage.

The 'Etablissement des Bains' stands in a nest of greenery within ten minutes' drive of the town; its mineral waters, strongly impregnated with sulphur, are said to be very efficacious in rheumatic affections. We found a few visitors lounging in the gardens; with proper accommodation, and under good management, the place might doubtless become a miniature Vals. The same remark might be applied to many other equally favoured spots I have met with in my French travels. It is a consolation to remember that, sooner or later, their time must come. So

enormously has the habit of travelling increased of late years among French people, that France itself will ere long prove too narrow for its own tourists, to say nothing of foreigners.

Our good hosts were very anxious that we should see everything. Accordingly we were escorted to one of the numerous silk factories in the town. Here, as at Vic-sur-Cere the year before, and in places to be described later on, we were rather treated as guests in a country house than Nos. 1 and 2 of an ordinary hotel. Everybody--master, mistress, and servants--wanted to do the honours of their native place for us, and this without any thought of interest or advantage. It was the good, invaluable, middle-aged chambermaid who, out of her own head and on her own account, carried us off to see the silk factory. The fact of two English ladies having come so far to see the country evidently impressed her wonderfully.

'Ah!' she sighed cheerfully, 'were it not for my good man and my demoiselles' (her daughters), 'how pleased I should be to return with you and see l'Angleterre!' and as she went along, having dressed herself in her Sunday's best for the occasion, she stopped in high glee to tell chance-met friends and neighbours that we were two Englishwomen come across the sea 'pour s'instruire'--for self-instruction. The fact of having crossed that tiny strip of sea ever impresses French country folk. Had we reached France by land, no matter the distance--say, from St. Petersburg--the exploit would not appear half so striking to them.

The work-room of a silk factory affords a curious spectacle.

At long narrow tables, stretched from end to end of the workshop, sit rows of girls manipulating in bowls of hot water the cocoons--in Gibbon's phrase, 'the golden tombs whence a worm emerges in the form of a butterfly'--carefully disengaging the almost imperceptible film of silk therein concealed, transferring it to the spinning-wheel, where it is spun into what looks like a thread of solid gold. Throughout the vast atelier hundreds of shuttles are swiftly plied, and on first entering the eye is dazzled with the brilliance of these broad bands of silk, bright, lustrous, metallic, as if of solid gold. This flash of gold is the only brightness in the place, otherwise dull and monotonous.

Gibbon gives a splendid page on the 'education of silkworms,' once considered as the labour of queens, and shows impatience with the learned Salmasius, who also wrote on the subject, because, unlike himself, he did not know everything. He tells us how two Persian monks, long resident in China, amid their pious occupations viewed with a curious eye the manufacture of silk; how they made the long journey to Constantinople, imparting their knowledge of the silkworm and its strictly guarded culture to the great Justinian; finally, how a second time they entered China, 'deceived a jealous people by concealing the eggs of the silkworm in a hollow cane, and returned in triumph with the spoils of the East.' 'I am not insensible of the benefits of an elegant luxury,' adds the historian, 'yet I reflect with some pain that if the importers of silk had introduced the art of printing, already practised by the Chinese, the comedies of Menander and the entire decade of Livy would have been perpetuated in the sixth century.'

Alas! a pound of silk is no longer worth twelve ounces of gold, as the Emperor Aurelian complained; and the education of the silkworm, instead of being the labour of queens, is far from a remunerative occupation.

The hours in these factories are terribly long--fifteen--two of which are, however, allowed for meals. The wages, on the other hand, contrast favourably with those of many of our own factories in which women are chiefly employed. About fifteenpence a day is the average pay, the ateliers being always closed on Sundays. Several causes have brought about a temporary depression of the French silk trade. Just as cheap Chinese and Japanese straw-plaits have paralyzed our home industry of hand-plaited straw in Bedfordshire, so cheap Oriental silks have, for a time at least, done much to supplant the more solid, richer, and more brilliant Lyons manufacture.

Again, the silkworm industry, not only in France, but in other countries, was some years back threatened with an enemy as ruthless as the phylloxera. It is interesting to learn that here science has come to aid with a simple but effectual remedy, which it is said has benefited French industry to the extent of the Prussian war indemnity, viz., four hundred million sterling (five milliards of francs). The silkworm-rearers are now taught to breed from healthy moths only. Girls and women are employed in examining the bodies of the moths with microscopes. If the diseased corpuscles are found, the eggs are discarded.

Thus, by a simple method of artificial selection, the silkworm industry has been rescued from what threatened to be a collapse.

Of course, one consequence of these fluctuations in rural industries is a universal migration into the towns, and consequent diminution of population in country places. The towns gain, but the villages lose. We find Le Vigan a little centre of increasing commercial activity, and the same may be averred of the secondary towns of this department, this prosperity having originally a different source.

The Protestant communities of France, formerly deprived, like the Jews, of civil and political rights, threw heart and soul into industrial pursuits. Wherever they settled they founded manufactures--cotton-mills, silk-factories, manufactures of woollen stuffs--many of which have flourished in these small towns on the outskirts of the Cevennes till this day.

The Gard is foremost of all other departments in the matter of silk-worm rearing, the Ardeche alone surpassing it in the number of silk-factories. In all the villages around Le Vigan are small silk-worm farms, the peasants rearing them on their own account, and selling them to the manufacturers. The curious on this subject will everywhere be cordially received, and gain any information they may require. At least, such was our own experience.

CHAPTER VI. NANT (AVEYRON).

All this time Le Vigan was to us as Capua to Hannibal's soldiers--Circe's charmed cup held to the lips of Odysseus.

We ought not to have stayed there an unnecessary hour. We should have

continued our journey at once. On and on we lingered, nevertheless, and when at last we braced ourselves up for an effort, the terrible truth was broken to us. Instead of being nearer to the goal of our wishes, we had come out of the way, and were indeed getting farther and farther from that mysterious, so eagerly longed-for region, the terribly unattainable Causses. Our project at last began to wear the look of a nightmare, a harassing, feverish dream. We seemed to be fascinated hither and thither by an ignis fatuus, enticed into quagmires and quicksands by an altogether illusive, mocking, malicious Will-o'-the-wisp.

I was painfully reminded of what had been a pleasing puzzle in childish days: the maze at Needham Market, famous throughout Suffolk, and familiar to all Suffolk-bred folk. This is a wonderfully constructed shrubbery or thicket, cut into numerous little circular and semicircular paths, so contrived that the most ingenious are caught like flies in a spider's trap. Round and round, backwards and forwards, in and out, scuttle the uninitiated, only to find themselves at the precise point whence they had started hours before. The conviction of being thus foiled in my purpose, and for the second time, weighed upon my spirits. My companion also became somewhat dejected. The superb weather might forsake us. September was at hand. It really seemed as if we were doomed to return to our dogs and cats at Hastings without having reached the Roof of France after all.

True, a matter of eighty miles only divided us from our destination, but surely the most impracticable eighty miles out of Arabia Petraea! We were bound for a certain little town called St. Enimie, but between us and St. Enimie stretched a barrier, insurmountable as Dante's fog isolating Purgatory from Paradise, or as the black river separating Pluto's domain from the region of light. We seemed as far off the Causses as Christian from the heavenly Jerusalem when imprisoned in Castle Doubting, or as the Israelites from Canaan when in the wilderness of Zin.

To reach St. Enimie, then, meant two long days' drive, _i.e._, from six a.m. to perhaps eight p.m., in the lightest, which stands for the most uncomfortable, vehicle, across a country the greater part of which is as savage as Dartmoor. Our first halting-place would be Meyrueis, and between Le Vigan and Meyrueis relays could be had, but at that point civilization ended. The second day's journey must lie through a treeless, waterless, uninhabited desert; in other words, as a glance at the map will show, we must traverse the Causse Mejean itself.

Romantic as this expedition sounded, our host, the royal cook, shook his head at the proposal. Suppose we were overtaken by a storm in that wilderness? Suppose any accident happened to horses or harness? Suppose----

'In fact,' he said, 'there is nothing for these ladies to do but make the round to Mende by railway.'

'To Mende!' I cried aghast. 'Back to Nimes, back to heaven knows where! Never! Get to St. Enimie we can, we will, we must, without making the round by railway to Mende.'

After a good deal of somewhat painful excitement, a rueful inspection of the only kind of vehicle that was practicable on the stony, uphill Causse, the Helvellyn we wanted to climb, I gave in. Yes, it was out of

the question to drive for fourteen hours at a stretch, seated on such a knifeboard. I had made a blunder in thinking eighty miles only eighty miles under any circumstances. Crestfallen, and having in mind the dictum of the great Lessing: 'Kein mensch muss muessen,' I again took in hand maps and guidebooks. At this stage of affairs came to aid the voiturier who had gallantly proposed to drive us to the top of the Lozerien Helvellyn, provided we could sit on a knifeboard. He was one of the handsomest men we saw in these parts, which is saying a good deal. Tall, well-made, dignified, with superb features and rich colouring, it seemed a thousand pities he should be only a carriage proprietor in this out-of-the-way spot. He appeared, however, as every other good-looking person does here, altogether unconscious of his magnificent physique and striking features. What occupied him much more was evidently his business, and the duty incumbent upon him to make things pleasant to strangers.

'If these ladies,' he said in country fashion, thus addressing ourselves--if these ladies will let me drive them to Millau, they can have my most comfortable carriage, as the roads are excellent. They can sleep at a good auberge on the way. From Millau it is only five hours by railway to Mende, and from Mende only a four hours' drive to St. Enimie.'

We joyfully hailed the proposal. It seemed a roundabout way to St. Enimie, but it did seem a way; and, at any rate, if we were going back, we were not going back to the precise point from which we had started.

My companion still persisted in the melancholy conviction that we should never get to the Causses, but I comforted her with the observation that if we did not get to the Causses, we should at all events get somewhere. Before starting, our host presented us with a letter of introduction to the master of the auberge at our halting-place for the night--the little village of Nant, half-way between Le Vigan and Millau.

'It is only an auberge,' he said apologetically; 'you must not expect much. But the patron is a friend of mine; he will do his very best for you after what I have written.'

The letter of introduction being, of course, an open one, we read it. 'Permit me to commend to your attentive care,' wrote the royal cook, 'two respectable ladies----' Here amusement got the better of curiosity; we laid down the missive and had a hearty laugh over what seemed at best a strange, almost ludicrous, compliment. Surely he might have substituted an adjective of a more flattering nature, accorded us some more winning attribute--charming, amiable, learned. Could we lay claim to none of these?

I summed up the matter in our favour, after all. Such a testimony coming from a courtier, as the chef of a king's cuisine must be called, was, perhaps, the very highest he felt able to give; and to be respectable means more than meets the ear.

Does not La Bruyere say: 'Un homme de bien est respectable par lui-meme et independamment de tous les dehors'? He had, perhaps, that axiom in his mind.

Having sent on our four big boxes to Millau by diligence, we set off for the first stage of our journey. The weather was perfect, and I

cannot at any time reconcile my experiences of French weather with those of another ardent explorer of France a hundred years ago. 'Amusements,' wrote Arthur Young from the North of France in September, 1787, 'in truth, ought to be taken within doors, for in such a climate none are to be depended on without; the rain that has fallen here is hardly credible. I have, for five-and-twenty years past, remarked in England that I never was prevented by rain from taking a walk every day, with going out while it actually rains; it may fall heavily for many hours, but a person who watches an opportunity gets a walk or a ride. Since I have been at Liancourt we have had three days in succession of such incessantly heavy rain that I could not go a hundred yards from the house without danger of being quite wet. For ten days more rain fell here, I am confident, had there been a gauge to measure it, than ever fell in England in thirty.'

We are accustomed to reverse this comparison, and I should say that the years 1787-88-89, during which the Suffolk squire journeyed through the country on horseback, must have been revolutionary in a meteorological as well as a political sense. I have now made travels and sojourns in various parts of France during fifteen years, and I should say to all who want sunshine for their holiday trip, go to France for it.

Upon this, as upon the occasion of former expeditions, a rainy day never came except when a spell of bad weather was an unmitigated boon, enforcing rest, and giving leisure for the utilization of daily experiences.

On the whole, the route now decided upon has much to recommend it, especially to travellers unfit for excessive fatigue. The drive from Le Vigan to Millau is thus divided into two easy stages, and the scenery for the greater part of the way is diversified and interesting.

Gradually winding upwards from the green hills surrounding our favourite little town, its bright river, the Arre, playing hide-and-seek as we go, we take a lonely road cut around barren, rocky slopes covered with stunted foliage, here and there tiny enclosures of corn crop or garden perched aloft.

The charm of this drive consists in the sharp contrasts presented at unexpected turns. Now we are in a sweet, sunbright, sheltered valley, where all is verdure and luxuriance. At every door are pink and white oleanders in full bloom, in every garden peach-trees showing their rich, ruby-coloured fruit--the handsome-leaved mulberry, the shining olive, with lovely little chestnut-woods on the heights around. Now we seem in a wholly different latitude. The vegetation and aspect of the country are transformed. Instead of the vine, the peach, and the olive, we are in a region of scant fruitage, and only the hardiest crops, apple orchards sparsely mingled with fields of oats and rye. And yet again we seem to be traversing a Scotch or Yorkshire moor--so vast and lonely the heather-clad wastes, so bleak and wild the heavens.

But every zone has its wild-flowers. As we go on, our eyes rest upon white salvias, the pretty Deptford pink, wild lavender, several species of broom and ferns in abundance. The wild fig-tree grows here, and the huge boulders are tapestried with box and bilberry. One rare lovely flower I must especially mention--the exquisite, large-leaved blue flax (the *Linum perenne*), that shone like a star amid the rest.

It is Sunday, and as we pass the village of Arre in its charming

valley, we meet streams of country folks dressed in their best, enjoying a walk. No one was afield. Here, as in most other parts of rural France, Sunday is regarded strictly as a day of rest.

After a long climb upwards, our road cut through the rock being a grand piece of engineering, we come upon the works of a handsome railway viaduct now in construction. This line, which, when finished, will connect Le Vigan with Millau and Albi, will be an immense boon to the inhabitants—one of the numerous iron roads laid by the Republican Government in what had hitherto been forgotten parts of France. Close to these works a magnificent cascade is seen, a sheet of glistening white spray pouring down the dark, precipitous escarpment.

Hereabouts the barren, stony, wilderness-like country betokens the region of the Causses. We are all this time winding round the rampart like walls of the great Causse de Larzac, which stretches from Le Vigan to Millau, rising to a height of 2,624 feet above the sea-level, and covering an area of nearly a hundred square miles. This Causse affords some interesting facts for evolutionists. The aridity, the absolutely waterless condition of the Larzac, has evolved a race of non-drinking animals. The sheep browsing the fragrant herbs of these plateaux have altogether unlearned the habit of drinking, whilst the cows drink very little. The much-esteemed Roquefort cheese is made from ewes' milk, the non-drinking ewes of the Larzac. Is the peculiar flavour of the cheese due to this non-drinking habit?

The desert-like tracts below this 'Table de pierre,' as M. Reclus calls it, are alternated with very fairly cultivated farms. We see rye, oats, clover, and hay in abundance, with corn ready for garnering.

Passing St. Jean de Bruel, where all the inhabitants have turned out to attend a neighbour's funeral, we wind down amid chestnut woods and pastures into a lovely little valley, with the river Dourbie, bluest of the blue, gliding through the midst. Beyond stream and meadows rise hills crested with Scotch fir, their slopes luxuriant with buck-wheat, maize, and other crops—here and there the rich brown loam already ploughed up for autumn sowing. Well-dressed people, well-kept roads, neat houses, suggested peace and frugal plenty.

What a contrast did the little village of Nant present to Le Vigan! It was like the apparition of an exquisitely-dressed, pretty girl, after that of a slatternly beauty. Nant, 'proprette,' airy, well cared for, wholesome; Le Vigan, dirty, draggled-tailed, neglected, yet in itself possessed of quite as many natural attractions. We had been led to expect a mere country auberge, decent shelter, no more—perhaps even two-curtained, alcoved beds in a common sleeping-room! What was our astonishment to find quite ideal rustic accommodation—quarters, indeed, inviting on their own account a lengthy stay!

A winding stone staircase led from the street to the travellers' quarters. Kitchen, salle-a-manger and bedrooms were all spick and span, cool and quiet; our rooms newly furnished with beds as luxurious as those of the Grand Hotel in Paris. Marble-topped washstands and newly-tiled floors opened on to an outer corridor, the low walls of which were set with roses and geraniums as in Italy. Below was a poultry-yard. No other noise could disturb us but the cackling of hens and the quacking of ducks. On the same floor was a dining-room and the kitchen, but so far removed from us that we were as private as in a suite of rooms at the celebrated Hotel Bristol.

Nant is a quite delightful townling; we only wished we could stay there for weeks. It is a very ancient place, but so far modernized as to be clean and pleasant. The quaint, stone-covered arcades and bits of mediaeval architecture invite the artist; none, however, comes!

The sky-blue Dourbie runs amid green banks below the gray peak, rising sheer above the town; around the congeries of old-world houses are farms, gardens and meadows, little fields being at right angles with the streets. In the large, open market-place, where fairs are held, just outside the town, is a curious sight. The corn is gathered in, and hither all the farmers round about have brought their wheat to be threshed out by water-power.

Next morning, by half-past eight, our landlady fetched me to see some farms. She was a delicate, even sickly-looking little woman, although the mother of fine, healthful children, and very intelligent and well-mannered. Without showing any inquisitiveness as to my object, she at once readily acceded to my request that she should accompany me on a round of inspection. First of all, however, and as, it seemed, a matter of course, she carried me off to see the Bonnes Soeurs--in other words, the nuns, often such important personages in rural places.

I had already seen so much of nuns, nunneries and the like, that I sorely begrudged the time thus spent. Good manners forbade a demur. There was nothing to do but to feign some slight interest in the schoolrooms, dormitories, playground, chapel--facsimiles, as were the nuns themselves, of what I had seen dozens of times before.

But one thing these nuns had to show I had never seen before. I allude to their herbarium. The mother superior, so it seems, was a capital herbalist and doctor, consulted in case of sickness by all the country-folks for miles round, and, in order to supply her pharmacopoeia, had yearly collections made of all the medicinal plants in which the neighbourhood abounds. Here in a drying chamber, exposed to air and sun, were stores of wild lavender for sweetening the linen presses; mallows, elder flowers, gentian, leaves of the red vine, poppies, and many others used in medicine. What I was most interested in was the vast stores of the so-called the des Alpes, a little plant of the sage tribe, of which I had heard at Gap, in the Hautes Alpes. The country-people in that part of France, as in the Aveyron, use this little plant largely as a febrifugal infusion; they also drink it as tea. My landlady showed me great bundles of it that she had dried for household use. The thought struck me, as I surveyed the mother superior's herbarium--here is an excellent hint for the projectors of home colonies. Surely, if poor people are to be made self-supporting in one sense, they should be made so in all.

Why should not every home colony--for the matter of that, every isolated village--have its medicine-chest of simple field remedies? The originators of home colonies have only to translate that excellent little sixpenny work, 'Les Remedes de Campagne,' written by Dr. Saffray, and published by Hachette, and put it into the hands of these backwoodsmen of the old country. The least intelligent would soon learn to cure common ailments by the use of remedies ever at their doors, and not costing a penny. Having taken leave of the nuns, madame la patronne next conducted me to the country on the other side of the town, stopping to chat with this acquaintance and that. I suppose lady tourists are wholly unknown in these parts, for these good people,

having glanced at me, said to madame:

'A relation, I suppose, and you are showing her about?'

All seemed pleased to learn that I was an Englishwoman come to see their corner of the world.

We then paid a visit to some elderly farming-folks, friends of hers, just outside the town. We found the farmer and his wife at home, and both received us very cordially. The old man had a shrewd, pleasant face, and, without any ado or ceremony, bade me sit down beside him whilst he finished his morning soup. I chatted to him of my numerous travels in various parts of France, and after listening attentively for some time, he said:

'You must be finely rich' (joliment riche) 'to travel as you do.'

'Not at all,' said I; 'my fortune is my pen. I see all that I can, and, on my return to England, write a book for the amusement and instruction of others, which more than covers the expense of my journey.'

The old man's eyes twinkled; he touched his forehead, and then said something to his wife in patois. I laughingly begged him to translate the remark, which he did with a smile.

'I said to my wife that you must have a good head' (une bien forte tete) 'to do that.'

'Le bon Dieu has given me eyes to see and a memory to retain,' said I. 'I have only to look well about me and take note.'

He paused, and added after a little reflection:

'Above all, you must talk with learned people.'

'That is not always necessary,' I replied. 'On the contrary, what serves my purpose best is to talk with country-folk like yourself, who can tell me about the details of farming in these parts--prices, crops, and so on--not with fine ladies and gentlemen, who do not know a turnip when they see it growing.'

This observation seemed to gratify him exceedingly. We then talked of land tenure in France and in England. When I made him understand that the law of entail still existed in my country, he shook his head gravely. When I added that the English peasant did not possess an acre of land, a garden, not even a house or a cow, he looked graver still.

'Il faut que tout cela change' (All that will have to be changed), he remarked; and I told him that I fully concurred in the sentiment, and that a great change of opinion on this subject was taking place in England.

His wife, who had meantime listened attentively to our conversation, now joined in. The fact that we had no conscription seemed to strike her more than any other piece of information I had as yet given.

'You English people are very fortunate,' she said. 'Think of what it is to be a mother, and rear your son to the age of twenty, then to see him torn from your arms and shot down by a mitrailleuse. War, indeed! Grand

Dieu! the world has seen enough of it.'

We then had a long talk on farming matters, the old man quite ready to devote half an hour even at this time of the day to a stranger. Like many another French peasant of the poorer class, he was the owner of a house and garden only, his occupation being that of bailiff on the estate of a large owner. Here, as everywhere else throughout France, a great diversity may be seen in the matter of land tenure--peasant properties from five acres upwards, large holdings either let on lease, as in England, cultivated by their owners, or lastly, as in the present instance, managed by farm stewards. The system of metayage, or half-profits, is not in force.

On five acres, my informant told me, a man with thrift and intelligence may rear and maintain a family. The crops are very varied, corn, maize, oats, rye, buckwheat, hay, being the principal. Butter is not made on any considerable scale, but sheep, pigs, goats, and poultry are reared in abundance.

I have mentioned that this old man possessed a house and garden. Rare, indeed, is it to find a deserving peasant without them in France! But he let these, meantime occupying the large, rambling old farmhouse, formerly an abbey, belonging to his employer. When too old to work, he would, with his little savings, retire to the cottage, from which none could eject him.

As will be seen, the agriculture in this part of the Aveyron presents no special features. What strikes the stranger, as he rambles about the well-cultivated belt of country immediately around Nant, is the sobriety, contentment, and independence of the people. All are suitably and tidily dressed. Of beggary there is not a trace, and if life is laborious, the sense of independence lightens every burden.

At present the entire education of girls and that of little boys is in the hands of the nuns. In spite of every attempt to render popular education unsectarian throughout France, how long it will be ere the same mental training is accorded both sexes--ere, to use Gambetta's noble words, 'our girls and boys are made one by the understanding before they are made one by the heart'! Is it any wonder that Boulangism, miracle-seeking, or any other mental aberration, gets the upper hand in France, so long as young girls are reared by convent-bred women, and their brothers and lovers-to-be in the school of Littré, Herbert Spencer, and Darwin?

CHAPTER VII. MILLAU (AVEYRON).

It is a charming drive from Nant to Millau. Our road winds round the delicious little valley of the Dourbie, the river ever cerulean blue, bordered with hay-fields, in which lies the fragrant crop of autumn hay ready for carting. By the wayside are tall acacias, their green branches tasselled with dark purple pods, or apple trees, the ripening fruit within reach of our hands. Little Italian-like towns, surrounded by ochre-coloured walls, are terraced here and there on the rich burnt-amber walls, the limestone ridges above and around taking the form of a

long line of rampart or lofty fortress, built and fashioned by human hands. In contrast to this savagery, we have ever and anon before our eyes the sweet little river, no sooner lost to sight amid willow-bordered banks than found again.

Nervous people should avoid these drives, on account of the steep precipices, often within a few inches of the horses' heels. Wherever on the shelves of rock a few square yards of soil are found or can be laid, are tiny crops of buckwheat, potatoes, and beetroot. The weather has a southern warmth and brilliance, and in and out the burning-hot mountain wall on our left large beautiful brown lizards disport themselves. The road is very solitary. Till within the precincts of Millau, we meet only a few peasants and two Franciscan brothers.

The approach to Millau is very pretty. Almond and peach orchards, vineyards and gardens, form a bright suburban belt. Two rivers, the Tarn and the Dourbie, water its pleasant valley, whilst over the town tower lofty rocks in the form of an amphitheatre. Nant may be described as a little idyll. After it Millau comes disenchantingly by comparison.

Never was I in such a noisy, roystering, singing, lounging place. There was no special cause for hilarity; nothing was going on; the business of daily life seemed to be the making a noise.

In spite of its pretty entourage, too, the town is not engaging. Its hot, ill-kept, malodorous streets do not call forth an exploring frame of mind. The public garden is, however, a delightful promenade, and the well-known photographer of these regions has his atelier in one of the most curious old houses to be seen anywhere.

Climbing a narrow, winding stone stair, we come upon an open court, with balconies running round each story, carved stone pillars supporting these; oleanders and pomegranates in pots make the ledges bright, whilst above the gleaming white walls shines a sky of Oriental brilliance. The whole interior is animated. Here women sit at their glove-making, the principal industry of the place, children play, pet dogs and cats sun themselves; all is sunny, careless, southern life--a page out of 'Graziella.'

There are several mediaeval facades, and some curious old carved arcades also; much, indeed, that is sketch worthy, if our artists could be brought to deem anything worth sketching in France, out of Brittany and Normandy.

Millau, once one of the stanchest Protestant communities of the Cevennes, was quite ruined by the revocation of the Edict of Nantes.

May not French history up to the date of the Revolution be summed up in a single sentence--one woman created France; another ruined it? The glorious work of Jeanne d'Arc was for a time wholly undone by the machinations of that arch enemy of mankind, Madame de Maintenon. We must travel in the Cevennes, and learn by heart the vicissitudes of these once-flourishing little Protestant centres to realize the bloodstained page in French history played by the bigoted adventuress whose sole ambition was to become Queen of France.

And how worthy of such a career the last little episode of her court life! When the old king, a shadow of his former self, lay on his dying bed, and whispered that his chief consolation in dying was the thought

that she would rejoin him in heaven, Madame de Maintenon made no reply. She was, indeed, wearied of the task that had been, in her eyes, so inadequately rewarded--amusing for thirty and odd years a dull, resourceless, ennuye and ennuyant husband; and had no desire to see any more of him, either in this world or the next.

At present there is but a sprinkling of Protestants in Millau.

We took train to Mende. It is one of those delightfully slow trains which enable you to see the scenery in detail, after the leisurely fashion of Arthur Young, trotting through France on his Suffolk mare.

Part of the way lies through a romantic bit of country: chateau-crowned hills follow each other in succession, every dark crag having its feudal shell, whilst patchwork crops cover the lower slopes.

Everywhere vineyards predominate, so persistent the faith of the French cultivator in the vine, so touching the efforts made to entice it to grow on French soil. Few and far between are little wall-encompassed villages perched on the hilltops.

At Severac-le-Chateau romance culminates in the stern, yellowish-gray ruin cresting the green heights. A most picturesque little place is this, seen from the railway. We now leave behind us cornlands and the vine, and reach the region of pine and fir woods.

On the railway embankment we see the yellow-horned poppy and the golden thistle growing in abundance; many another flower, too, as brilliant brightens the way--a large, handsome broom, several kinds of mullein, with fern and heather.

Bright and strongly contrasted are the hues of the landscape--purply-black the far-off mountains, emerald-green the fields of rye and clover at their feet. A large portion of the land hereabouts is mere wilderness; yet the indomitable peasant wrenches up the boulders, cleans the ground of stones, and turns, inch by inch, the waste into productive soil. At every turn we are reminded of the dictum of 'that wise and honest traveller,' Arthur Young: 'The magic of property turns sands to gold.'

We are now in the region of the Causses; around us rise the spurs of Sauveterre and Severac. The scenery between Marvejols and Mende is grand; sombre, deep-green valleys, shut in by wide stretches of stupendous rocky wall, dark pinewoods, and brown wastes.

Then evening closes in, and the rest is lost to us. As on my first visit to Mende, a year ago, I lose the romantic approach to this wonderfully placed little city.

The Hotel Manse, whither we now betake ourselves, is a great improvement on the other mentioned in my first chapter in matters of situation, sanitation, and comfort; the people are very civil and obliging in both.

Here, however, we are not in the very heart of the stuffy, dirty, ill-kept town, but on the outskirts, looking on to suburban gardens and pleasant hills, with plenty of air to breathe.

Our rooms are so spacious, well-furnished, and clean that once more we

regret we cannot stay for weeks. Such quarters might indeed tempt many a tourist to idle away a month here. The people are well-mannered, affable, and strikingly handsome; and if the town requires an advanced aedileship, no one need see much of it. Abundance of excursions are to be made from Mende, and the prices of hotels are very moderate.

At Millau we saw a drunken man, and in the streets of Mende one old woman came up to us begging an alms. I note these facts as we have so rarely encountered either drunkards or mendicants on our way.

Strangers might naturally expect a somewhat low standard of morality in a department so isolated from the great French highways and social centres as that of the Lozere. The railway to Mende, as I have before mentioned, dates from a few years only; up till that time the little bishopric in the mountains would often be completely shut off from the outer world by the snow, the only link being the telegraphic wire. Nevertheless, an exceptional freedom from crime distinguishes the country, as may be gathered from the following statement in a French newspaper, dated August 29th, 1888.

'The opening of the assizes of the Lozere, which should have taken place on the 3rd of September, will now be unnecessary, the list of cases being _nil_.' What are called 'white sessions' (assises blanches), for the matter of that, are of no infrequent occurrence in the department of the Lozere, eminently an honest one. This is the second time that 'white sessions' have distinguished it during the present year.

As the Lozere is essentially a region of peasant owners, far from the richest of their class, I commend the fact to the opponents of peasant property--albeit, I know too well, to small purpose. The people have no right to the soil in the eyes of these political economists. Whether the possession of the soil makes them better or happier is wholly beside the question. Just as the great autocrat Louis XIV, after very serious reflection on the matter, came to the solemn conclusion that his subjects had no right to any property whatever, and that the sovereign was the divinely-ordained owner of everything supposed to belong to them, so certain writers believe that, according to some direct Providential arrangement--a second choosing of a special people--not a Canaan alone, but every inch of Mother Earth, is the heaven-sent heritage of the superior few.

CHAPTER VIII. FROM MENDE TO ST. ENIMIE.

So, just upon twelve months later, I once more found myself climbing to the summit of the lofty plateau between Mende and St. Enimie.

It was a fortnight earlier in the year, and the weather was perfect; light clouds that had threatened rain cleared off, mild sunshine brightened the scene, and the air, although brisk and invigorating, was by no means cold. Still more enticing now looked the billowy swell of gold and purple mountains, and the dark cliffs frowning over green valleys. To-day, too, the exhilarating conviction of fulfilment was added to that of looking forward. A second time I had reached the

threshold of the long-dreamed-of region of marvels, at last really to cross it and enter in.

I was on my way to the Causses at last! More striking and beautiful than when first seen now seemed the upward drive from Mende--the beautiful gray cathedral cushioned against the soft green hills, the cheerful little town in its fertile valley, its wild entourage of far-stretching waste and barren peak. More musical still sounded in my ears the purling of the Lot, as unseen it ran between sunny pastures over its stony bed far below.

Little I thought, indeed, although of firm intention, when making the journey so far twelve months all but two weeks ago, that on this 5th of September, 1888, I should be gazing on the same scene--a scene reminding me now, as then, of the vast reedy plateau gazed on at Saida, dividing the Algerian traveller from the Sahara.

This time I did not stop to make tea gipsy-wise on the turf in front of the farmhouse; nor, to my disappointment, did the children run out to share the contents of my bonbon-box. Not a soul was abroad; an eldritch solitude reigned everywhere.

The Causse of Sauveterre is not reached till we have left the farmhouse and ruined chateau far behind. From that point the roads diverge, and we see our own leading to St. Enemie wind like a ribbon till lost to view in the gray, stony wilderness.

A considerable portion of the land hereabouts is cultivated. We see little patches of rye, oats, Indian corn, clover, potatoes, and here and there a peasant ploughing up the soil with oxen.

As we proceed, the enormous horizon ever widens; long shadows fleck the purply-brown and orange-coloured undulations; scattered sparsely are little flocks of sheep, of a rich burnt-umber-brown, but herbage is scant and little cattle can be nourished here. The swelling hills now show new and more grandiose outlines; at last we come in sight of the dark mass of the Causse de Sauveterre, and soon we enter upon the true 'Caussien' landscape in all its weird and sombre grandeur. Just as when fairly out on the open sea we realize to the full its beauty and sense of infinity, so it is here. The farther we go the wider, more bewilderingly vast becomes the horizon: wave upon wave, billow upon billow, now violet-hued, with a tinge of gold; now deep brown, partly veiled with green, or roseate with sunlit clouds--the gray monotony of stone and waste is thus varied by the way.

By the roadside slender trees of the hornbeam tribe are planted at intervals, and where these are wanting, tall flagstaffs take their place, to guide the wayfarer when six feet of snow cover the ground. Wild-flowers in plenty brighten the edges of the road--stonecrops, cornflowers, purple 'lady's fingers,' and many others; but wedged as we are in our not too comfortable caleche, to get out and pluck them is impossible.

The road from Mende to the summit of the plateau can only be described as a vertical ascent; before beginning to descend, we have a few kilometres of level, that is all. As we approach the village of Sauveterre, we see one or two wild figures--shepherds, uncouth in appearance as Greek herdsmen; poorly dressed, but robust-looking, well-made girls and women, short-skirted, bare-headed, footing it bravely

under the now hot sun.

Portions of the land on either side consist of waste, quite recently laid under cultivation; the huge blocks of stone have been wrenched up, heaven knows how, and conspicuously piled up in the midst of the newly-created field, a veritable trophy. How much more commendable than that commemorative of blood-stained victory! The rich red earth amply repays these Herculean labours. With regard to the tenure of land, I should suppose the state of things here must be very much what it was in the age of primitive man. I fancy that any native of these parts, any true Caussenard, has only to clear a bit of waste and plant a crop to make it his own; a stranger would doubtless have his right to do so contested, or, maybe, some patriarchal system is still in force, and the village community is not yet extinct in France.

'Voila la capitale de Sauveterre!' soon cries our driver, pointing to a cluster of bare brown, apparently windowless, houses, and a tiny church, all grouped picturesquely together.

A poor-looking place it was enough when we obtained a nearer view, reminding me of a Kabyle village more than anything else; not, however, brightened with olive or fig tree! Nothing in the shape of a garden is to be seen, only dull walls of close-set dwellings, with narrow paths between. Windows, however, our driver assured us, were there; but the village is built with its back to the road.

The great privation of these poor people is that of a regular water-supply--one large, by no means pellucid, pond, with cisterns, are all the sources they can rely upon from one end of the year to the other; not a fountain issues from the limestone for miles round, not a stream waters the entire Causse, a region extensive as Dartmoor or Salisbury Plain. When we consider that this plateau has a height above the sea-level equal to that of Skiddaw, we can easily imagine what the long eight months' winter here is like. For the greater part of the time the country is under several feet of snow, and the Caussenard warms his poor tenement as best he can with peat.

It was curious to hear our conductor, himself evidently accustomed to a hard, laborious life, speak of the inhabitants of Sauveterre. He described their condition much as a well-to-do English artisan might speak of the half-starved foreign victims of the sweater--so wide is the gulf dividing the Caussenard from the French peasant proper.

'Just think of it,' he said; 'they don't even dress the rye for their bread, but eat it made of husks and all. Rye-bread, bacon, potatoes, that is their fare, and water: if it were only good water one would have nothing to say--bad water they drink. But they are contented, pardie.'

'What do they do for a doctor?' I asked.

He made a curious grimace.

'They doctor themselves till they are at the point of death, and then send for a doctor. But it is not often. They are healthy enough, pardie!'

With regard to the ministrations of religion, they are in the position of dalesfolk in some parts of Dauphine. A cure from St. Enimie, he told

us, performed Mass once a fortnight in summer, and came over as occasion required for baptisms, marriages, and burials. In winter alike ordinary Mass and these celebrations were stopped by the snow. The services of the priest had then to be dispensed with for weeks, even months, at a time.

I next tried to gain some information as to schools, but here my informant was not very clear. Yes, he said, there was schooling in summer; whether lay or clerical, whether the children were taught the Catechism in their mother-tongue--in other words, the patois of the Causse--or in French, I could not learn.

Do these wild-looking mountaineers exercise the electoral privilege? Do they go to the poll, and what are their political views? Are their sons drafted off, as the rest of French youth, into military service? Does a newspaper, even the ubiquitous *Petit Journal*, penetrate into these solitudes? It was difficult to get a satisfactory answer to all my questions, and quite useless to make a tour of inquiry in the village. One must speak the patois of the Causse to obtain his confidence, and though the population is inoffensive, even French tourists are advised on no account to adventure themselves in these parts without being accompanied by a native of the country.

One thing is quite certain: The four thousand and odd wild, sheepskin-wearing inhabitants of the entire region of the Causses must ere long be nationalized--like the Breton and the Morvandian, undergo a gradual and complete transformation. Travellers of another generation on this road will not be stared at by the fierce-looking, picturesque figures we now pass in the precincts of Sauveterre. Brigands they might be, judging from their shaggy beards, unkempt locks, and Robinson Crusoe-like dress; also their fixed, almost dazed, look inspires anything but confidence. Still, we must remember that Sauveterre is in the Lozere, and that the Lozere enjoys the enviable pre-eminence of 'white assizes'--a clean bill of moral health.

After quitting the village, which has a deserted look as of a plague-stricken place, the road descends. We now follow the rim of a far-stretching, tremendous ravine, its wooded sides running perpendicularly down. For miles we drive along this giddy road, the only protection being a stone wall not two feet high. The road, however, is excellent, our little horses steady and sure-footed, and our driver very careful. We are, indeed, too much interested in the scenery to heed the frightful precipices within a few inches of our carriage-wheels. But the retrospection makes one giddy. The least accident or mishap, contingencies not dwelt upon whilst jogging on delightfully under a bright sky, might, or rather must, here end in a tragedy. Tourists should be quite sure of both driver and horses before undertaking this drive.

By-and-by the prospect becomes inexpressibly grand, till the impression of magnificence culminates as our road begins literally to drop down upon St. Enimie, as yet invisible. Our journey must now be compared to the descent from cloud-land in a balloon. Meantime, the stupendous panorama of dark, superbly-outlined mountain-wall closes in. We seem to have reached the limit of the world. Before us, a Titanic rampart, rises the grand Causse Mejean, now seen for the first time; around, fold upon fold, are the curved heights of Sauveterre, the nearer slopes bright green with sunny patches, the remoter purple black.

It is a wondrous spectacle--wall upon wall of lofty limestone, making what seems an impenetrable barrier, closing around us, threatening to shut out the very heavens; at our feet an ever-narrowing mountain pass or valley, the shelves of the rock running vertically down.

When at last from our dizzy height our driver bids us look down, we discern the gray roofs of St. Enimie wedged between the congregated escarpments far below, the little town lying immediately under our feet, as the streets around St. Paul's when viewed from the dome. We say to ourselves we can never get there. The feat of descending those perpendicular cliffs seems impossible. It does not do to contemplate the road we have to take, winding like a ribbon round the upright shafts of the Causse. Follow it we must. We are high above the inhabited world, up in cloudland; there is nothing to do but descend as best we can; so we trust to our good driver and steady horses, obliged to follow the sharply-winding road at walking pace. And bit by bit--how we don't know--the horizontal zigzag is accomplished. We are down at last!

CHAPTER IX. ST. ENIMIE.

How can I describe the unimaginable picturesqueness of this little town wedged in between the crowding hills, dropped like a pebble to the bottom of a mountain-girt gulf?

St. Enimie has grown terrace-wise, zigzagging the steep sides of the Causse, its quaint spire rising in the midst of rows of whitewashed houses, with steel-gray overhanging roofs, vine-trellised balconies, and little hanging gardens perched aloft. On all sides just outside the town are vineyards, now golden in hue, peach-trees and almond groves, whilst above and far around the gray walls of the Causse shut out all but the meridian rays of the sun.

As I write this, at six o'clock on the evening of the 5th of September, the last crimson flush of the setting sun lingers on the sombre, grandiose Causse Mejean. All the rest of the scene, the lower ranges around, are in a cool gray shadow: silvery the spire and roofs just opposite my window, silvery the atmosphere of the entire picture. Nothing can be more poetic in colour, form, and combination.

Close under my room are vegetable gardens and orchards, whilst in harmony with the little town, and adding a still greater look of old-worldness, are the arched walls of the old chateau-fort. As evening closes in, the fascination of the scene deepens; spire and roofs, shadowy hill and stern mountain fastness, are all outlined in pale, silvery tones against a pure pink and opaline sky, the greenery of near vine and peach-tree all standing out in bold relief, blotches of greenish gold upon a dark ground. I must describe our inn, the most rustic we had as yet met with, nevertheless to be warmly recommended on account of the integrity and bonhomie of the people.

Somewhat magniloquently called the Hotel St. Jean, our hostelry is an auberge placing two tiny bedchambers and one large and presumably general sleeping-room at the disposal of visitors. We had, as usual,

telegraphed for two of the best rooms to be had. So the two tiny chambers were reserved for us, the only approach to them being through the large room outside furnished with numerous beds. The tourist, therefore, has a choice of evils--a small inner room to himself, looking on to the town and gardens, or a bed in the large outer one beyond, the latter arrangement offering more liberty, freedom of ingress and egress, but less privacy. However, the rooms did well enough. A decent bed, a table, a chair, quiet--what does the weary traveller want beside?

Here, as at Le Vigan, we were received with a courteous friendliness that made up for all shortcomings. The master, a charming old man, a member of the town council (*conseiller municipale*), at once accompanied me to the post-office, where the young lady post-mistress produced letters and papers, probably the first English newspapers ever stamped with the mark of St. Enimie. The townsfolk stared at me in the twilight, but without offensive curiosity, I may here give a hint to future explorers of my own sex, that it is just as well to buy one's travelling-dress and head-gear in France. An outlandish appearance, sure to excite observation, is thus avoided. In the meantime the common inquiry was put to us, 'What will you have for dinner?' It really seemed as if we only needed to ask for any imaginable dish to get it, so rich in resources was this little larder at the world's end. The exquisite trout of the Tarn, here called the Tar; game in abundance and of excellent quality; a variety of fruit and vegetables--such was the dainty fare displayed in the tiny back parlour leading out of the kitchen. Soup in these parts, it must be confessed, is not very good. In other respects we fared as well for our five francs per diem, including lights and attendance, as if at some big Paris hotel paying our twenty-five!

The fastidious are warned that certain luxuries we have learned to regard as necessary to existence are unheard of in the Lozere. A bell, for instance--as well expect to find a bell here as in Noah's Ark! A very good preparation for this journey would be the perusal of Tieck's humorous novelette called 'Life's Superfluities' (*Des Lebens Uberfluss*), wherein he shows that with health, a cheerful disposition, and sympathetic companionship, we may do without anything in the way of an extra at all. Shelter, covering, bed--beyond these all is mere superfluity.

Having dined, we made inquiries as to the morrow's journey on the Tarn, and that somewhat portentous shooting of the rapids we longed for, yet could hardly help shrinking from.

Our host soon set our minds at rest, and smiled when I suggested discomfort and peril.

'Make your minds easy,' he said; 'I will myself answer for your safety.'

He then gave me the following printed programme of the day's excursion, which I translate below, as it shows into what excellent hands the stranger falls at St. Enimie. The most timid lady travellers may safely trust themselves to these town councillors and maires of the little villages bordering the Tarn. Not only will they be taken the very greatest care of; not only are they perfectly secure from any form of extortion: they make acquaintance throughout every stage of the way with the very best type of French peasant, a class of men, as will be

shown in these pages, of whom any country might justly be proud. I have now a fairly representative experience of the French peasant. The dignity, sobriety, and intelligence of the Lozerien I have nowhere found surpassed. It was a happy thought of the leading men in these parts to organize a kind of tourist agency among themselves, thus keeping out strangers and speculators sure to spoil the business by overcharges. A village mayor here, a municipal councillor there, in all about a score of the inhabitants, have formed what they call 'La Compagnie de Batellerie St. Jean,' which ensures the traveller a fixed tariff, good boats, and, above all, experienced boatmen, for what is during the last stage of the way a somewhat hazardous journey. The

prospectus runs thus:

'NOTICE TO TOURISTS.

'The Hotel St. Jean at St. Enimie places at the disposal of tourists a service of boats between that town and Le Rozier.

'The service is divided into four stages, the entire journey without halt occupying six hours.

'The corresponding members of the company at the four stations are as follows:

'At St. Enimie, St. Jean, hotel proprietor and town councillor.

'At St. Chely, Bernard, town councillor.

'At La Malene, Casimir Montginoux, hotel proprietor.

'At St. Prejet, Alphonse Solanet, mayor.

'The charge for the complete transit, whether the boat numbers one passenger or several, is forty-two francs, which may be paid to any of the boatmen or at any stage of the journey.'

St. Enimie is what Gibbon calls 'an aged town,' its sponsor and foundress being a Merovingian princess. For the pretty legend concerning this musically-named maiden, I refer readers to the guide-books, liking better to fill my pages with my own experiences than with matter to be had for the asking elsewhere.

Had it been somewhat earlier in the year, we might perhaps have decided to make a little stay here. But in the height of summer the heat is torrid on the Roof of France. In winter the cold is Arctic, and there is no autumn in the accepted sense of the word; winter might be at hand. We were advised by those in whose interest it was that we should remain, to lose no time and hurry on. Having bespoken the four relays of boatmen for next day, we betook ourselves to our little rooms, somewhat relieved by the fact that we were the only travellers, and that the large, general bedroom adjoining our own would be therefore untenanted. We had reckoned without our host, the comfortable beds therein being evidently occupied by various members of the family when the tourist season was slack. We were composing ourselves to sleep, each in our own chamber, when we heard the old master and mistress of the house, with some little grandchildren, steal upstairs and, quiet as mice, betake themselves to bed. Then all was hushed for the night.

Only one sound broke the stillness. Between one and two in the morning our driver descended from his attic. A quarter of an hour later there was a noise of wheels, pattering hoofs, and harness bells. He had started, as he told us was his intention, on his homeward journey, traversing the dark, solitary Causse alone, with only his lantern to show the way. Soon after five o'clock our old host, evidently forgetting that he had such near neighbours, or perhaps imagining that nothing could disturb weary travellers, began to chat with his wife, and before six, one and all of the family party had gone downstairs. I threw open my casement to find the witchery of last night vanished, cold gray mist enshrouding the delicious little picture, with its grandiose, sombre background. That clinging mist seemed of evil bodement for our expedition. Ought we to start on a long day's river journey in such weather? Yet could we stay?

I confess that there was something eerie in the isolation and remoteness of St. Enimie. Compared to the savagery and desolation of the Causses, it was a little modern Babylon--a corner of Paris, a bit of boulevard and bustle, but with such narrow accommodation, and with such limited means of locomotion at disposal, the prospect of a stay here in bad weather was, to say the least of it, disconcerting. I prepared in any case for a start, made my tea, performed my toilet, and packed my bag as briskly as if a bright sun were shining, which true enough it was, although we could not see!

When, soon after seven o'clock, I descended to the kitchen, I found our first party of boatmen busily engaged over their breakfast, and all things in readiness for departure.

'The sun is already shining on the Causse,' said our old host. 'This mist means fine weather. Trust me, ladies, you could not have a better day.'

We did our best to put faith in such felicitous augury. Punctually at eight o'clock, accompanied by the entire household of the little Hotel St. Jean, we descended to the landing-place, two minutes' walk only from its doors.

CHAPTER X. THE CANON OF THE TARN.

Amid many cordial adieux we took our seats, the good old town councillor having placed a well-packed basket at the bottom of the boat. Excellent little restaurants await the traveller at the various stations on the way, but all anxious to arrive at their journey's end in good time will carry provisions with them.

The heavy gray mist hung about the scene for the first hour or two, otherwise it must have been enchanting. Even the cold, monotonous atmosphere could not destroy the grace and smilingness of the opening stage of our journey--sweet Allegro Gracioso to be followed by stately Andante, unimaginably captivating Capriccioso to come next--climax of the piece--the symphony closing with gentle, tender harmonies. Thus in musical phraseology may be described the marvellous canon or gorge of

the Tarn--like the pen of true genius, enchanting, whatever the theme. Quiet as the scenery is at the beginning of the way, without any of the sublimer features to awe us farther on, it is yet abounding in various kinds of beauty. Above the pellucid, malachite-coloured river, at first a mere narrow ribbon ever winding and winding, rise verdant banks, tiny vineyards planted on almost vertical slopes, apple orchards, the bright red fruit hanging over the water's edge, whilst willows and poplars fringe the low-lying reaches, and here and there, a pastoral group, some little Fadette keeps watch over her goats.

The mists rise at last by slow degrees. Soon high above we see the sun gilding the limestone peaks on either side. Very gradually the heavens clear, till at last a blue sky and warm sunshine bring out all the enchantment of the scene.

The river winds perpetually between the bright green banks and shining white cliffs. Occasionally we almost touch the mossy rocks of the shore; the maiden-hair fern, the wild evening primrose, wild Michaelmas daisy, blue pimpernel, fringed gentian, are so near we can almost gather them, and so crystal-clear the untroubled waters, every object--cliff, tree, and mossy stone--shows its double. We might at times fancy ourselves but a few feet from the pebbly bottom, each stone showing its bright clear outline. The iridescence of the rippling water over the rainbow-coloured pebbles is very lovely.

All is intensely still, only the strident cry of the cicada, or the tinkle of a cattle-bell, and now and then the hoarse note of some wild bird break the stillness.

Before reaching the first stage of our journey the weather had become glorious, and exactly suited to such an expedition. The heavens were now of deep, warm, southern blue; brilliant sunshine lighted up gold-green vineyard, rye-field bright as emerald, apple-orchard and silvery parapet on either side.

But these glistening crags, rearing their heads towards the intense blue sky, these idyllic scenes below, are only a part of what we see. Midway between the verdant reaches of this enchanting river and its sheeny cliffs, between which we glide so smoothly, rise stage upon stage of beauty: now we see a dazzlingly white cascade tumbling over stair after stair of rocky ledge; now we pass islets of greenery perched half-way between river and limestone crest, with many acombe or close-shut cleft bright with foliage running down to the water's edge.

Little paths, laboriously cut about the sides of the Causses on either side, lead to the hanging vineyards, fields and orchards, so marvellously created on these airy heights, inaccessible fastnesses of Nature. And again and again the spectator is reminded of the axiom: 'The magic of property turns sands to gold.' No other agency could have effected such miracles. Below these almost vertical slopes of the Causse, raised a few feet only above the water's edge, cabbage and potato beds have been cultivated with equal laboriousness, the soil, what little of soil there is, being very fertile.

On both sides we see many-tinted foliage in abundance: the shimmering white satin-leaved aspen, the dark rich alder, the glossy walnut, yellowing chestnut, and many others.

Few and far between are herdsmen's cottages, now perched on the rock, now built close to the water's edge. We can see their vine-trellised balconies and little gardens, and sometimes the pet cats run down to the water's edge to look at us.

And all this time, from the beginning of our journey to the end, the river winds amid the great walls of the Causses--to our left the spurs of the Causse Mejean; to our right those of Sauveterre. We are gradually realizing the strangeness and sublimity of these bare limestone promontories--here columns white as alabaster--a group having all the grandeur of mountains, yet no mountains at all, their summits vast plateaux of steppe and wilderness, their shelving sides dipping from cloudland and desolation into fairy-like loveliness and fertility.

St. Chely, our first stage, comes to an end in about an hour and a half from the time of leaving St. Enimie. We now change boatmen--punters, I should rather call them. The navigation of the Tarn consists in skilful punting, every inch of the passage being rendered difficult by rocks and shoals, to say nothing of the rapids.

Here our leading punter was a cheery, friendly miller--like the host of the hotel at St. Enimie, a municipal councillor. No better specimen of the French peasant gradually developing into the gentleman could be found. The freedom from coarseness or vulgarity in these amateur punters of the Tarn is indeed quite remarkable. Isolated from great social centres and influences of the outer world as they have hitherto been, there is yet no trace either of subservience, craftiness, or familiarity. Their frank, manly bearing is of a piece with the integrity and openness of their dealings with strangers.

Shrewd, chatty, kindly, the municipal councillor--Bernard by name--showed the greatest interest in us, his easy manners never verging on impertinence. He was much pleased to learn that I had come all the way from England in order to describe these regions for my country-folks, and told us of the rapidly increasing number of French tourists.

'It is astonishing!' he said--'quite astonishing! Two or three years ago we had a score or two of gentlemen only; then we had fifty in one summer; now we have hundreds--ladies as well; hardly a day passes without tourists. I have to leave the management of my mill to my son, as I am perpetually wanted on the river at this season of the year.'

'Such an influx of strangers must surely do good in the country?' I asked.

'Ca ne fait pas de mal' (It does no harm), was his laconic reply; but one could see from his look of satisfaction that he highly appreciated the pacific invasion. The plain truth of the matter is, that the Canon du Tarn is proving a mine of wealth to these frugal, ingenuous peasants.

How pleasant to reflect that the gold thus showered into their laps by Nature will not be squandered on vice or folly, but carefully husbanded, and put to the best possible uses! What the effect of a constantly-increasing prosperity may be on future generations, no one can predict. Certain we may be that the hard-earned savings of these village mayors and municipal councillors will go to the purchase of land. The process of turning sands to gold will proceed actively; more and yet more waste will be redeemed, and made fertile.

A charming chateau, most beautifully placed, adorns the banks of the river between St. Chely and La Malene; alas! untenanted, its owner being insane. Nowhere could be imagined a lovelier holiday resort; no savagery in the scenes around, although all is silent and solitary; park-like bosquets and shadows around; below, long narrow glades leading to the water's edge.

At La Malene, reached about noon, we stop for half an hour, and breakfast under the shade. Never before did cold pigeon, hard-boiled eggs, and water from the stream have a better flavour. Our municipal councillor was much concerned that we had no wine, and offered us his own bottle, which we were regretfully obliged to refuse, not being claret-drinkers. Then, seeing that our supply of bread was somewhat small, he cut off two huge pieces, and brought them to us in his bare hands. This offer we gratefully accepted.

'Ah! what weather, what weather!' he said. 'You said your prayers to good purpose this morning. This is the day for the Tarn.'

Magnificent was the day, indeed, and sorely did La Malene tempt us to a halt. It is a little oasis of verdure and luxuriance between two arid chasms--flake of emerald wedged in a cleft of barren rock. The hamlet itself, like most villages of the Lozere, has a neglected appearance. Very fair accommodation, however, is to be had at the house of the brothers Montginoux, our boatmen for the next stage, and all travellers, especially good walkers, should make a halt here if they can.

For ourselves, two motives hastened departure. In the first place, we had heard of formidable rivals in the field; in other words, competitors for whatever rooms were to be had at our destination, Le Rozier. Three distinguished personages, deputies of the Lozere, were making the same journey; whether before us or behind us, we could not exactly make out. One thing was certain: like ourselves, they were bound for Le Rozier. This alarming piece of information, coming as it did on the heels of our last night's experience, made us doubly anxious to get to our journey's end and insure rooms. What if we arrived to find the auberge full--not an available corner anywhere, except, perhaps, in the general bedchamber left for belated waifs and strays, such as Mr. Robert Louis Stevenson describes in his voyage with a donkey?

Again the weather, although most favourable for to-day's excursion, betokened change. The light fleecy clouds playing about the summits of the Causses, on either side grew heavier in appearance. We must hasten on. We heard, too, a pitiful story of two American ladies who had lately made this journey in a perpetual downpour, arriving at Le Rozier drenched to the skin, and having seen nothing. We had not crossed the Atlantic certainly to shoot the rapids of the Tarn, but it would be deplorable even to have come from Hastings and meet with such a fiasco.

We now took leave of our worthy miller and his companion, giving a liberal pourboire, as I am sure all travellers will do. It must be borne in mind that the return journey occupies the punters three or four times the duration of the journey downstream. Each stage is an entire day's work, therefore, for which the tariff alone is insufficient remuneration. Our new boatmen are the brothers Montginoux--young men, very pleasant, very intelligent, and exceedingly skilful in

their business. The elder, who stands with his face towards us, is full of enthusiasm for the scenery, and knows the river so well that during the greater part of the way he is able to chat to us, pointing out every remarkable feature in the shifting scene, and giving us a good deal of information.

Both brothers, as is the universal rule in these parts, are exceedingly good-looking, and have that frank, dignified manner characteristic of the French peasant at his best. Peasant, did I say? These young men might have passed for gentlemen anywhere; they are instances of the great social transformation taking place throughout France. 'Le paysan, c'est l'aristocrate de l'avenir,' French people say; and true enough we see every day sons of peasants like the late Paul Bert, enrolled in the professional ranks, attaining not only a respectable position, but eminence in science, literature, and art. Turn over a dictionary of French contemporary biography--how often do these words come after a well-known, even distinguished, name: 'Fils d'un paysan'!

The first care of our young punters was to cut willow-branches, and spread at the bottom of the boat in order to keep our feet dry. Do what they will, the boat is flooded from time to time, and but for this precaution renewed at intervals, we should be in sore discomfort.

On quitting La Malène, with its fairy-like dells, hanging woods, and lawny spaces, the third and most magnificent stage of our journey is entered upon, the first glimpse preparing us for marvels to come. Smiling above the narrow dark openings in the rock are vineyards of local renown. Here and there a silvery cascade flashes in the distance; then a narrow bend of the river brings us in sight of the frowning crag of Planiol crowned with massive ruins, the stronghold of the sire of Montesquieu, which under Louis XIII. arrested the progress of the rebellious Duke de Rohan.

For let it not be supposed that these solitudes have no history. We must go much farther back than the seigneurial crusades of the great Richelieu, or the wholesale exterminations of Merle, the Protestant Alva or Attila, in the religious wars of the Cévennes--farther back even than the Roman occupation of Gaul, when we would describe the townlings of the Causses and the banks of the Tarn. Their story is of more ancient date than any of recorded time. The very Causses, stony, arid wildernesses, so unpropitious to human needs, so scantily populated in our own day, were evidently inhabited from remote antiquity. Not only have dolmens, tumuli, and bronze implements been found hereabouts in abundance, but also cave-dwellings and traces of the Age of Stone. Prehistoric man was indeed more familiar with the geography of these regions than even learned Frenchmen of to-day. When, as I have before mentioned, in 1879 a member of the French Alpine Club asked the well-known geographer Joanne if he could give him any information as to the Causses and the Canon du Tarn, his reply was the laconic:

'None whatever. Go and see.'

It would take weeks, not days, to explore these scenes from the archaeological or geological point of view. I will content myself with describing what is in store for the tourist.

We now enter the defile or défilé, at which point grace and bewitchingness are exchanged for sublimity and grandeur, and the scenery of the Causses and the Tarn reach their acme. The river,

narrowed to a thread, winds in and out, forcing laborious way between the lofty escarpments, here all but meeting, yet one might almost fancy only yesterday rent asunder.

It is as if two worlds had been violently wrenched apart, the cloven masses rising perpendicularly from the water's edge, in some places confronting each other, elsewhere receding, always of stupendous proportions. What convulsive forces of Nature brought about this severance of vast promontories that had evidently been one? By what marvellous agency did the river force its way between? Some cataclysmal upheaval would seem to account for such disruption rather than the infinitely slow processes suggested by geological history.

Meantime, the little boat glides amid the vertical rocks--walls of crystal spar--shutting in the river, touching as it seems the blue heavens, peak, parapet, ramparts taking multiform hues under the shifting clouds, now of rich amber, now dazzlingly white, now deep purple or roseate. And every one of these lofty shafts, so majestic of form, so varied of hue, is reflected in the transparent green water, the reflections softening the awful grandeur of the reality. Nothing, certes, in nature can surpass this scene; no imagination can prefigure, no pen or pencil adequately portray it. Nor can the future fortunes of the district vulgarize it! The Tarn, by reason of its remoteness, its inaccessibility--and, to descend to material considerations, its expensiveness as an excursion--can never, fortunately, become one of the cheap peep-shows of the world.

The intense silence heightens the impressiveness of the wonderful hour, only the gentle ripple of the water, only the shrill note of the cicada at intervals, breaks the stillness. We seem to have quitted the precincts of the inhabited familiar world, our way lying through the portals of another, such as primeval myth or fairy-tale speak of, stupendous walls of limestone, not to be scaled by the foot or measured by the eye, hemming in our way.

This defile, so fancy pictures, was surely the work of Titans in the age of the ancient gods; their play, their warfare, were over hundreds of thousands of years ago: only these witnesses left to tell of their greatness! The famous Cirque des Baumes may be described as a double wall lined with gigantic caves and grottoes. Here it is the fantastic and the bizarre that hold the imagination captive. Fairies, but fairies of eld, of giant race, have surely been making merry here! One and all have vanished; their vast sunlit caverns, opening sheer on to the glassy water, remain intact; high above may their dwellings be seen, airy open chambers under the edge of the cliffs, deep corridors winding right through the wall of rock, vaulted arcades midway between base and peak, whence a spring might be made into the cool waves below. All is still on a colossal scale, but playful, capricious, phantasmagoric.

Nor when we alight at the Pas de Soucis are these features wanting. Here the river, a narrow green ribbon, disappears altogether, its way blocked with huge masses of rock, as of some mountain split into fragments and hurled by gigantic hands from above.

The spectacle recalls the opening lines of the great Promethean drama of the Greek poet. Truly we seem to have reached the limit of the world, the rocky Scythia, the uninhabited desert! The bright sunshine and balmy air hardly soften the unspeakable savagery and desolation of the scene, fitting background for the tragedy of the fallen Fire-giver.

Dominating the whole, as if threatening to fall, adding chaos to chaos, and filling up the vast chasm altogether, are two frowning masses of rock, the one a monolith, the other a huge block. Confronting each other, tottering as it seems on their thrones, we can fancy the profound silence broken at any moment by the crashing thunder of their fall, only that last catastrophe needed to crown the prevailing gloom and grandeur.

CHAPTER XI. SHOOTING THE RAPIDS.

At this point we alight, our water-way being blocked for nearly a mile. It is a charming walk to Les Vignes: to the left we have a continuation of the rocky chaos just described, to the right a path under the shadow of the cliffs, every rift showing maidenhair fern and wild-flowers in abundance, the fragrant evening primrose and lavender, the fringed gentian. The weather is warm as in July, and of deepest blue the sky above the glittering white peaks. Half-way we meet the rural postman, whose presence reminds us that we are still on the verge of civilization, eerie as is all the solitude and desolation around.

At Les Vignes we lose our pleasant, chatty, well-informed young boatmen, the brothers Montginoux, and embark for the fourth and last time. We have now to shoot the rapids.

A boat lay in readiness; two chairs placed for us, and willow branches in plenty below; our baskets and bundles carefully raised so as to be above water. In the least little detail the greatest possible attention is thus paid to our comfort. I would suggest that if lady tourists had the courage to imitate a certain distinguished Frenchwoman--an explorer--and don male attire here, the shooting of the rapids would be a more comfortable business. The boatmen cannot prevent their little craft from being flooded from time to time, and though they scoop up the water, skirts are apt to prove a sore incumbrance. Foot-gear and dress should be as near water-proof as possible upon this occasion.

We were somewhat disconcerted at the sight of our first boatman, an aged, bent, white-haired man, hardly, one could fancy, vigorous enough, to say nothing of his skill, for the hazardous task of shooting the rapids. He at once informed us that his name was Gall, to which the first place is given in French guide-books. Even such a piece of information, however, hardly reassured us.

Our misgivings were set at rest by the first glance at his companion.

'My colleague, brother of Monsieur le Maire,' said the veteran, presenting him.

A handsome, well-made man in his early prime, with a look of indomitable resolution, and a keen, eagle-like glance, our second boatman would have inspired confidence under any circumstances, or in any crisis. I could but regret that such a man should have no wider, loftier career before him than that of steering idle tourists through the rocks and eddies of the Tarn. Enough of character was surely here

to make up a dozen ordinary individualities. You saw at a look that this dignified reserve hid rare qualities and capacities only awaiting occasion to shine conspicuously forth.

How Carlyle would have delighted in the manly figure before us, from which his simple peasant's dress could take not an iota of nobility!

This French rustic, brother of a village mayor, was endowed by Nature beyond most, the spirit within--there could be no doubt of that--matching an admirable physique. Of middle stature, with regular features and limbs perfectly proportioned, every pose might have served for a sculptor's model, whilst his behaviour to-day sufficiently indicated his fitness for weightier responsibilities and more complex problems. Never shall I forget the study before us during that short journey from Les Vignes to Le Rozier. The old man Gall we could not see, being behind; his companion stood at the other end of the boat facing the rapids, and having his back turned towards us.

With form erect, feet firmly planted, sinews knit, every faculty under command, he awaited the currents.

It was a soldier awaiting the enemy, the hunter his prey.

The white crests are no sooner in sight than he seizes his pole and stands ready for the encounter.

A moment more and we are in the midst of the eddying, rushing, foaming rapids. We seem to have been plunged from a lake of halcyon smoothness into a storm-lashed sea. Around us the waves rise with menacing force; now our little boat is flooded and tossed like a leaf on the turbulent waters; every moment it seems that in spite of our brave boatman we must be dashed against the rocks or carried away by the whirlpool!

But swift and sure he strikes out to the right and to the left, never missing his aim, never miscalculating distances by an inch, till, like an arrow shot by dexterous archer, the little craft reaches the calm. Whilst, indeed, it seems tossed like a shuttlecock on the engulfing waves, it is in reality being most skilfully piloted. The veteran at the stern we could not see, but doubtless his skill was equally remarkable. The two, of course, act in concert, both knowing the river as other folks their alphabet.

To each series of currents follows a stretch of glassy water for awhile, and we glide on deliciously. It was instructive to watch the figure at the helm then; he laid down his pole, his limbs relaxed, and he indulged in cigarette after cigarette, pausing to point out any object of interest on the way.

The swirling, rushing, eddying currents once more in sight, again he prepared himself for action, and for a few minutes the task would be Herculean--the mental strain equally phenomenal. His keen, swift, unerring glance never once at fault, his rapid movements almost mechanically sure, he plied his pole, whilst lightly as a feather our little boat danced from cascade to cascade, all but touching the huge mossy slabs and projecting islets of rock on either side.

There was wonderful exhilaration in this little journey. We felt that every element of danger was eliminated by the coolness and dexterity of our conductors, yet the sense of hazard and adventuresomeness was

there! My more stout-hearted companion was a little disappointed, would fain have had an experience nearer akin to Niagara. It is as well to remind the traveller that these apparently playful rapids are by no means without risk. Several are literally cascades between rocks, hardly allowing space for the boat to pass. Here the least imprudence or want of skill on the part of the boatman might entail the gravest consequences. At one of the points, indeed, a party of tourists very nearly lost their lives some years since, their boatman being unfamiliar with the river.

The scenery changes at every turn. Just as one moment we are in lake-like waters, smooth as a mirror, the next apparently in mid-ocean, so we pass from sweet idyllic scenes into regions of weird sternness and grandeur. Now we glide quietly by shady reaches and sloping hills, alive to the very top with the tinkle of sheep-bells; now we pass under promontories of frowning aspect, that tower two or three thousand feet above the water's edge. The colours of the rock, under the shifting clouds, are very beautiful, and golden, bright and velvety the little belts and platforms of cultivated land to be counted between base and peak. We have to crane our necks in order to catch sight of these truly aerial fields and gardens, all artificially created, all yet again illustrations of the axiom: 'The magic of property turns sands to gold.'

Truly marvellous is the evidence of this love of the soil in a region so wild and intractable! High above we obtain a glimpse of some ancient village, its scrambling roofs shining amid orchard-trees and firwoods, or an isolated chalet of goatherd or shepherd breaks some solitude. One ruined chateau crests the jagged cliffs, a real ruin among the semblances of so many.

Again and again we fancy we can descry crumbling watch-towers, bastions, and donjons on the banks of the Tarn, so fantastic the forms of the Causses on either side. What a scene for a Dore!

Soon straight before us, high above the wooded heights that hem us in, rises the Causse Noir--dark, formidable, portentous as the rock of Istakhar keeping sentinel over the dread Hall of Eblis, or the Loadstone Mountain of the third Calender's story, which to behold was the mariner's doom. The Causse Noir from the Tarn is a sight not soon forgotten. With black ribs set close about its summit, it wears rather the appearance of a colossal castellation, an enormous fort of solid masonry, than of any natural mass of rock.

What with this spectacle, the excitement of the rapids, the varied landscape, the study of that statuesque figure before us, the brother of M. le Maire, this stage of the way seemed all too short. We regretted--but for the sake of our boatman--that there were not twenty-five more rapids still to be passed before we reached our destination. We regretted, too--who could help it?--that we were not hardy pedestrians, able to clamber amid the rocks overhead, and make that wonderful expedition on foot described by the discoverers of this region, as the writers I have before alluded to may indeed be called. But if the half may not always prove better than the whole in travel, at least it is better than nothing, and the day's excursion here described had of itself amply repaid the long journey from England.

Sorry, then, were we to come in sight of the bridge spanning the Tarn, behind the village of Le Rozier. Just eight hours after quitting St.

Enimie we alighted for the last time, and, following our boatmen, took a winding path that led to the village.

It was a scene of quiet, pastoral beauty that now met our eyes. The Tarn, its sportive mood over, the portals of its magnificent gorge closed, now flows amid sunny hills, quitting the wild Lozere for the more placid Aveyron; immediately around us are little farmsteads, water-mills, and gardens, whilst opposite, like a black thundercloud threatening a summer day, the Causse Noir looms in the distance!

CHAPTER XII. LE ROZIER.

Next morning we woke up to a delightfully wet day, the very best piece of good fortune that can occasionally overtake the traveller. We could write, sketch, chat with the people of the house--above all, enjoy a brief period of entire repose. For my own part, I hail nothing so enthusiastically in my travels as a day of unmitigated downpour. Not the most astounding landscape, not the most novel experience, can evoke a warmer outburst of gratitude and welcome. I suppose there are tourists who never feel the need of rest, who, like the Flying Dutchman, are impelled to move on perpetually, who do not want to nurse their impressions, if I may legitimize the expression. I, for one, cannot understand the condition of body and mind implied in such a temperament. Were life long enough and did circumstances and seasons permit, I should make a six weeks' halt at least between every stage of a journey, sipping experiences as we sip exquisitely flavoured liqueurs, and making the whole last as long as possible.

To our intense satisfaction, we had not been anticipated by those much-dreaded deputies of the Lozere. We had a choice of rooms, although later in the day a large contingent of tourists arrived--two or three French families travelling in company. The hotel at Le Rozier is a primitive, but quite lodgeable, place--open, airy, cheerful. Bells, bolts and bars are apparently unheard of. When we remonstrated with the patronne on the insecurity of our doors, there being no means whatever of fastening them, she gazed at us with the greatest possible astonishment. 'Grand Dieu!' her face said, 'is there a country under heaven in which folks are such ruffians that no one can sleep safely in his bed?'

'N'ayez pas peur' (Have no fear), was the reply; such a question in her eyes was evidently the naivest in the world.

The primitive--I am almost tempted to say ideal--condition of things here was more strikingly illustrated a little later.

I had begged madame to give me change for a hundred-franc note; she immediately accompanied me back to my room, unlocked a drawer, and displayed a heap of money--notes, gold and silver.

'Good heavens, madame!' I cried, 'do you keep your money in a room given up to strangers?'

'Il n'y a pas de danger' (There is no danger), she replied, with almost

a contemptuous toss of the head, as she took out what she wanted and turned the key in its loosely fastened lock. Anyone with a pocket-knife could have wrenched it off.

We begin to understand why there should be 'white assizes' in the Lozere!

I exchanged my bedroom containing the drawer full of money, and which was the best in the house, for a quieter one, higher up. Nothing could be homelier than my present quarters, an attic bare as a barn, and almost as spacious. There was a bed in it of excellent quality, a chair and one very rickety table furnished with jug and washbasin--no more. I believe at night the bats, to say nothing of rats and mice, were tolerably familiar with this part of the house. The floor sadly showed its unacquaintance with soap and scrubbing-brush, but there were compensating advantages. I was far away from the noise and savoury smells of the kitchen; my window opened on to a wonderful view, and turning the bed into a sofa, I could write or read as cosily as at home.

Nor did my companion spend less happy hours below. Her room had a more cosmopolitan appearance. The table serving as washstand stood securely on its four legs. She had even the luxury of a table and an arm-chair.

The rain was a veritable windfall of good luck to her as well as myself, affording leisure to paint the floral treasures culled by the way. How those sweet sketches brightened the bare room!

There was the golden thistle, the horned poppy, the fringed gentian, the blue pimpernel, the rare orobanche ramosa, the yellow salvia, and pinks in profusion.

Blessed, thrice blessed, the traveller with companions whose mind to them a kingdom is! What disenchantment to have had the glorious experiences of the last few days followed by a spell of boredom! Diderot says: 'Ceux qui souffrent, font souffrir les autres' (Those who suffer make others suffer); and certainly to be in company of the bored is to become bored one's self.

That long wet day passed like an hour. Towards sunset the rain ceased, and at last the three deputies of the Lozere made their appearance. They looked drier and more cheery than could be expected, although to have shot the rapids of the Tarn in such weather was about as mortifying a circumstance as could befall any travellers.

They displayed the true verve Gauloise in dealing with a trying situation, smoked cigarettes, chatted with the people of the house, and made friends with everybody.

Le Rozier is an attractive little place, and its one inn stands airily in the village street; on the other side of the way, a little lower down, is its rival, the Hotel Dieudonne, which, although within a stone's throw, is in another village and another department. Behind us lies the Lozere, in front the Aveyron, and perched most picturesquely on a pyramidal green hill, crowned with a fine old church tower, rises the little Aveyronnais village of Peyreleau. Travellers have therefore a choice of inns and of prospects, the twin townlings being both most advantageously placed between the three Causses, and accommodation very fair in both.

As we sauntered about in the bright sunshine following the storm, watching the red light on the dark flanks of the Causse Noir, on which we can now discern the feudal tower of Capluc, gathering the fringed gentian just outside the town, interchanging friendly talk with the cheery peasant-folk, the thought arose: What a paradise for weary brain workers! What a perfect summer retreat! Removed from the routine of daily life, escaped for a time from the artificiality of ordinary travel, how happy were the lover of nature, of pastoral existence, of quietude in such a spot! No whistle of railway, no bustle of streets, only the placid rippling of the Tarn and the wind gently swaying the pine-trees.

Alas! I was soon to undergo the cruellest disillusion.

'There are now three religions in these parts,' said our host to us: 'the Catholic religion, the Protestant religion, and the religion of the Salvation Army.'

He then added, much as if such a piece of news could but give us the liveliest satisfaction:

'Not so very long ago Booth was here himself!'

The Salvation Army on the very Roof of France! That solitude of solitude invaded by fife and drum; the wastes of Sauveterre echoing the hackneyed air, 'Hold the Fort,' Hallelujah lasses in hideous poke-bonnets parading the picturesque streets of St. Enimie; the very rapids silenced by the stentorian exordiums of these Salvationist orators! Could any disenchantment be more complete?

Now, whilst accrediting every member of the Salvation Army with the best possible intentions, I quite approve of the severe measures taken in so many English towns, and also in some places abroad, against one of the most tremendous social nuisances that ever afflicted humanity. Doubtless these good people, whether Protestants or Catholics of Le Rozier and Peyreleau, follow their religion in all sincerity; for Heaven's sake, then, let us leave our neighbours' creeds and spiritual concerns alone. In a community in which assizes, not once only, but often, are found to be unnecessary, there being no criminals to try, General Booth and his noisy followers are surely out of place. In the face of such results as these, the religion of the people must be pronounced adequate to their needs.

Let the Salvationist chiefs occupy themselves instead with mastering the principles of Spinoza's 'Tractatus Theologico-Politicus,' Colenso's 'Pentateuch,' and, thrown into the bargain, Sir G. B. Airey's essay on 'The Earlier Hebrew Scriptures.'

One piece of information, however, in no small degree consoled me for that terrible nightmare of the Salvation Army on the banks of the Tarn.

'There are three religions in these parts, but one political belief only,' added our host. 'Everybody in the department of Lozere is a stanch Republican,' and a conclusion, novel to many minds, may be drawn from this fact also. The Republic is not the demoralizing force some would have it believed. An entire department may show a clean bill of moral health when the assizes come round, and yet be ardently devoted to a democratic form of government!

Whilst Le Rozier is a prosperous, well-to-do little place, its twin village Peyreleau has a woefully forlorn and neglected appearance. If a French Chadwick or Richardson would preach the gospel of sanitation there, and, by force of precept and example, teach the people how to sweeten their streets and make wholesome their dwellings, I for one would wish God-speed to the undertaking. Perhaps over-much of devotion has made these village-folks neglectful of health and comfort. Let us by all means give them instead a dose of positive philosophy. Certain amateur political economists would straightway set down the unsightliness of this remote spot to peasant property, whereas I shall show that the causes are to be sought elsewhere.

The detesters of peasant property, single-minded persons who love the land so well that they cannot support the notion of a neighbour possessing so much as an inch, remind me of certain French folks, determined antagonists, they hardly know why, of the Republic. These worthy people--the only thing that can be said against them is that they have come into the world a hundred years too late--impute every conceivable mishap or calamity, public or private, to the fact of having a Republican form of government. They entertain but lukewarm feelings for any other; they are adherents of neither the Bonapartist nor Orleanist pretenders, nor do they care a straw for the charlatan hero of the crutch and blue spectacles: their only political dogma is a dislike to the Republic.

So, if a landslip occurs and an express train runs off the line with disastrous results, they immediately cry, 'Is M. Carnot out of his senses?' If there is an inundation of the Loire and the riverside villages are under water, they lift up their hands, exclaiming: 'What can be expected under such a Government as ours?' When cholera breaks out at Toulon, or the phylloxera makes further inroads in the Cote d'Or, or murrain appears among sheep, they protest that nothing in the shape of bad news astonishes them. The only wonder is that, under a Republic, honest folks keep their heads on their shoulders!

On a par with this is the reasoning of the would-be political economists alluded to. If a French peasant is lazy, it is because he has no rent to pay; if a French peasant works too hard, it is because he owns a bit of land. If a cottage is untidy, it is because its occupants are not farm labourers in receipt of ten shillings a week; in fact, the possession of land--except in the hands of English squires--is the most impoverishing, demoralizing, satanic force imaginable, and the only way of turning modern France into a Utopia would be to clap every peasant proprietor alive into nice comfortable, well-conducted workhouses, after the English model.

Now, in the first place, peasant proprietors in many parts of France, as I have shown elsewhere, enjoy not only the comforts, but also the luxuries, of their neighbours of the towns; and in the second, the untidiness, excessive thrift, and even squalor, occasionally found in out-of-the-way places, are to be attributed to quite other causes than that of having no rent to pay. Tidiness, seemliness, order, are taught, like everything else, by example, and from one cause and another this example has not been widely set the French peasant.

The matter is one requiring much more space than can be devoted to it here. I would only observe that the life of French country gentlemen is often simple to homeliness, and that their poorer neighbours have few

practical illustrations of the value of comfort and hygiene. I have been astonished to find in the houses of rich landed proprietors in Anjou and Berri, brick-floored bedrooms, carpetless salons, dejeuner served on the bare table, and servants in waiting with their unstockinged feet thrust in sabots.

This condition of things is slowly changing, but there is another and yet more formidable obstacle to the progress of ideas in isolated rural districts. I now allude to the celibate clergy. There are doubtless many estimable parish priests in France, but how can these worthy men revolutionize the homes of the peasant? Their own is often hardly more comfortable or hygienic. If feminine influence presides over a priestly household in the country, it is generally of the homeliest kind. The mother, sister, housekeeper of a village abbe belongs in all probability, like himself, to the peasant class, and, unlike himself, gets no glimpse from time to time of a more polished society and cosmopolitan ways. Let the clergy marry in France, laicize all schools, alike for rich and poor, and what may be called the aesthetic side of domestic economy, to say nothing of hygiene, would soon spread to the remotest corners of the country. Will it be believed, at Nant, in that conventual establishment I have before described, there was absolutely no lavatory for the children at all? They were just taken to a fountain in the courtyard, there to be washed after the manner of little Bedouins.

There is also another cause which in part accounts for the oftentimes squalid and unsanitary condition of the peasant's home. Educated Frenchwomen as a rule have little love of the country, and convent-bred Frenchwomen have still less sympathy with their humbler neighbours in rural districts, whose Republican convictions are well known. Thus it comes about that, generally speaking, the housekeeping sex of different ranks remains apart. And as the well-to-do peasant regards domestic service in the light of degradation, his daughters in turn may become heads of houses without ever having once been inside a home conducted on modern principles. One word more: ill-kept, oftentimes squalid as is the house of the French peasant owner, he can say with Touchstone, 'Tis a poor thing, but 'tis my own.' The son of the soil in France may want carpets, wardrobes, clean swept hearths: he at least owns a home from which only imprudence or thriftlessness can eject him.

CHAPTER XIII. MONTPELLIER-LE-VIEUX.

After a day of gloom and downpour the weather became again perfect--no burning sun, no cold wind; instead, we had a pearly heaven with shifting sunlight and cloud, and the softest air.

The carriage-roads of the Lozere are a good preparation for ascending Mont Blanc or the Eiffel Tower.

Here we seem to be perpetually going up or coming down in a balloon; and to persons afflicted with giddiness, each day's excursion, however delightful, takes the form of a nightmare when one's head rests on the pillow. For days, nay, weeks after these drives on the Roof of France, my sleep was haunted with giddy climbs and still giddier descents. It was the price I had to pay for some of the most glowing experiences of

my much-travelled life. The journey to Montpellier-le-Vieux formed no exception to the rule. Happy, thrice happy, those who can foot it merrily all the way!

The pedestrian has by far the easier task. Throughout the two hours' drive thither, and the somewhat shorter journey back, the horses have to crawl at a snail's pace, their hoofs being within an inch or two of the steep incline as the sharp curves of the corkscrew road are turned. The way in many places is very rough and encumbered with stones; and there is a good deal of clambering to be done at the last. Let none but robust travellers therefore undertake this expedition, whether by carriage or on foot.

Our landlord drove us, much to our satisfaction; his horses, steadiest of the steady, his little dog--a distant cousin to my own pet at home--trotting beside us, sniffing the air joyously, as if he too were a tourist in search of exhilaration and adventure.

Over against Le Rozier, towering high above Peyreleau, its twin village, rises a sharp pyramidal spur of the Causse Noir, its shelving sides running vertically down. That mountain wall, impracticable as it seems, we have to scale.

The road cut so marvellously round it is excellent, wild lavender scenting the way. As we wind slowly upwards we see an old, bent woman filling a sack with the flowery spikes for sale. Thus the Causse, not in one sense but many, is the bread-winner of the people. We follow this zig-zag path westward, leaving behind us sunny slopes covered with peach-trees, vineyards, gardens and orchards, till flourishing little Le Rozier and its neglected step-sister, Peyreleau, are hidden deep below, dropped, as it seems, into the depths of a gulf.

An hour's climb and we are on the plateau, where the good road is quitted, and we take a mere cart-track between pastures, rye-fields, and woods of Scotch fir. So uneven and blocked with stones is the way here, that the poorest walker will soon be glad to get down. The deliciousness of the air, and the freshness of the scenery, however, soon make us insensible to bodily fatigue. Every minute we obtain wider and grander horizons, the three Causses being now in view, their distant sides shining like gigantic walls of crystal; deep blue shadows here and there indicating the verdant clefts and valleys we know of. All lightness and glitter are the remoter surfaces; all warm colour and depth of tone the nearer undulations. What a wealth of colour! what incomparable effects for an artist!

The prospect now increases in wildness, and we seem gradually to leave behind the familiar world. We are again in the midst of a stony wilderness, but a wilderness transformed into a fairy region of beauty and charm.

Nothing can be softer, more harmonious, more delicate than the soft gray tints of the limestone against the pure heaven; every bit of rock tapestried with the yellowing box-leaf, or made more silvery still with the flowers of the wild lavender.

East, west, north, south, the lines of billowy curves in the far distance grow vaster, till we come in sight of what seems indeed a colossal city towering westward over the horizon; a city well built, girt round with battlements, bristling with watch-towers, outlined in

gold and amethyst upon a faint azure sky.

It is our first glimpse of Montpellier-le-Vieux.

The jolting now becomes excessive; we leave our carriage, conductor and little dog to follow a traverse leading to Maubert, the farmhouse and auberge where are to be had guides, food, and bedchambers for those who want them.

We could not miss the way, our driver said, and woe betide us if we did! We seem already to have found the city of rocks, the famous Cite du Diable; so labyrinthine these streets, alleys, and _impasses_ of natural stone, so bewildering the chaos around us. For my own part, I could not discern the vestige of a path, but my more keen-eyed companion assured me that we were on the right track, and her assertion proved to be correct. After a laborious picking of our way amid the pele-mele of jumbled stones, we did at last, and to our great joy, catch sight of a bit of wall. This was Maubert; a square, straggling congeries of buildings approached from behind, and of no inviting aspect. A dunghill stood in front of the house, and hens, pigs, and the friendliest dogs in the world disported themselves where the flower-garden ought to have been. At first the place seemed altogether deserted. We knocked, shouted, ran hither and thither in vain. By-and-by crawled forth, one after the other, three ancient, hag-like women, staring at us and mumbling words we could not understand. On nearer inspection they seemed worthy old souls enough, evidently members of the household; but as their amount of French was scant, they hurried indoors again. A few minutes later a young, handsome, untidy woman popped her head from an upper window, and seeing that we were tourists, immediately came downstairs to welcome us.

She would send for her husband to act as guide at once, she said; in the meantime, would we breakfast?

I am sorry to confess that this young mistress of the house--a bride, moreover, of three months--did poor credit to the gifts Nature had lavished upon her. Very bright, good-looking, amiable and intelligent she was, but sadly neglectful of her personal appearance, with locks unkempt and dress slatternly--a strange contrast to the neat, clean, tidy peasant-women we had seen elsewhere on our journey.

The farmhouse, turned into a hostelry, only required a little outlay and cosmopolitan experience to be transformed into quite a captivating health resort. If, indeed, health is not to be recruited on these vast, flower-scented heights, nearly three thousand feet above the sea-level, swept clean by the pure air of half a dozen mountain chains, where may we hope to find invigoration?

Even now non-fastidious tourists may be fairly comfortable. A large, perfectly wholesome upper dining-room; bedrooms containing excellent beds; a farmhouse ordinary with game in abundance; courteous, honest hosts, and one of the marvels of the natural world within a stroll--surely scores of worn-out brain-workers would regard Maubert as a paradise, in spite of trifling drawbacks.

We found a pleasant young French tourist with his blue-bloused guide eating omelettes in the salle-a-manger. Soon the master of the house came up--a young man of perhaps twenty-five--as well favoured as his wife, and much neater in appearance. This youthful head of the family

possesses a large tract of Causse land, besides owning in great part what may prove in the future--is, indeed, already proving--a mine of wealth, an El Dorado, namely, the city of rocks, Montpellier-le-Vieux.

We now set out, our host, whilst quite ready to chat, possessing all the dignity and reserve of the Lozerien mountaineer. As we sauntered through patches of oats, rye, potatoes, and hay, I obtained a good deal of information about rural affairs.

'As near as you can guess, how large is the size of your property?' I asked.

I had learned by experience that the precise acreage of these highland farms is seldom to be arrived at, the size of a holding in the Lozere and the Cantal often being computed by the heads of stock kept.

He informed me that he owned four hundred hectares, that is to say, nearly a thousand acres, a considerable portion of which consisted of rocky waste or scant pasturage. He employed several labourers, possessed a flock of several hundred sheep, six oxen for ploughing, besides pigs and poultry.

Here, as elsewhere throughout France, all kinds of land tenure are found. Thus we find land let or owned in holdings from two and a half to a thousand hectares, some of the tenant farmers hereabouts paying a rental of several hundred pounds a year. Roquefort cheese is the most important production, and sheep are always housed like other cattle in winter. Here is a hint for Welsh farmers!

'Have you any neighbours?' I asked.

'Oh, yes!' he replied, 'farmers here and there. And we have a postal delivery every day in summer; when winter comes we get letters as we can. I take a newspaper, too. It is not so out of the way a place as it seems. But a church! Ah, church-going is impossible; the nearest is too far off.' He added: 'This influx of tourists is changing everything. I never saw anything like it. My uncle, who acts as guide here, is always occupied now, and I am so much in request as guide too during the summer season, that I think of letting my farm and giving myself wholly up to the business of hotel-keeper. I should keep mules for tourists, horses and carriages, improve the roads, and furnish my house better. There is to be a model of Montpellier-le-Vieux at the grand exhibition in Paris next year; that will make people come here more than ever. I have almost decided to do as I say.'

I thought to myself that the model of a house constructed on strictly scientific principles should be exhibited also. Nothing were easier than the proposed transformation; but it is less money and enterprise that are needed than knowledge of the world and its ways. I wished that I could invite this intelligent, well-mannered young peasant and his handsome, sprightly wife to England, in order to show them how much more besides good food and good beds are summed up in our oft-quoted 'le confort.'

CHAPTER XIV.
MONTPELLIER-LE-VIEUX (_continued_).

Chatting thus pleasantly, we come nearer and nearer the city, painted in violet tints against an azure sky, to find it, as we approach, a splendid phantasmagoria. What we deemed citadels, domes and parapets, prove to be the silvery dolomite only: limestone rock thrown into every conceivable form, the imposing masses blocking the horizon; the shadow of a mighty Babylon darkening the heaven; but a Babylon untenanted from its earliest beginning--a phantom capital, an eldritch city, whose streets now for the first time echo with the sound of human voice and tread.

I can think of but one pen that could aptly describe the scene: the pen of a Shelley dipped in iridescence and gold; of a poet whose inner eye could conjure up visions of loveliness and enchantment invisible to the rest of mortal born. I do not know how Montpellier-le-Vieux would look on a dull, gray day; doubtless imagination would people it then with gnomes, horrid afrits, and shapes of fear. To-day, under an exquisite sky, pearly clouds floating across the blue, a soft southern air wafting the fragrance of wild pink, thyme and lavender, it was a region surely peopled by good genii, sportive elves and beneficent fairies only. We were in a spirit, a phantasmal world; but a world of witchery and gracious poetic thrall only.

But as yet we are on the threshold, and, like other magic regions, the Cite du Diable unfolds its marvels all at once, as soon as the novice has entered within its precincts. Before us rose the colossal citadel so-called, pyramid upon pyramid of rock, which our guide said we must positively climb, the grandest panorama being here obtained; a bit of a scramble, he added, but a mere bagatelle--the affair of a few minutes only.

I hesitated. We were at the foot of a chaotic wall of enormous blocks, piled one upon the other, with deep, ugly fissures between--the height, from base to summit, that of St. Paul's Cathedral. In order to reach even the lower platform of these superimposed masses it was necessary to be hoisted up after the manner of travellers ascending the Pyramids, only with this disadvantage--that holding on to the rocks where any hold was possible, and planting the feet as firmly as was practicable on the almost vertical sides, we had here to bestride chasm after chasm.

'Don't be afraid,' cried our guide. 'It is nothing.'

'I would venture if I were you,' urged my friend mildly. So up I went.

The climbing, beyond a somewhat breathless scrambling and painful straining of the limbs, was nothing to speak of. For a few moments I could revel in the marvellous spectacle before me.

Lying on a little platform, perhaps two yards square, high above the bright heavens, I had, far around and beneath, the wide panorama of the dolomite city, vista upon vista of tower and monolith, avenues, arches, bridges, arcades, all of cool, tender gray, amid fairy-like verdure and greenery. Not Lyons itself, seen from the heights of La Fourviere, shows a more grandiose aspect than this capital of the waste, unpeopled by either the living or the dead!

Hardly had I realized the magic of the prospect when I became conscious

of frightful giddiness. The flowery shelf of rock on which I lay was only a foot or two removed from the edge of the piled mass just climbed so laboriously, and, sloping downwards, seemed to invite a fall. From this side the incline was almost vertical, and the turf below at a distance of over a hundred feet. No descent was practicable except by bestriding the same fissures, two feet wide, and clinging to the sides of the rocks, as before. I now felt that terrible vertigo which I am convinced accounts for so many so-called suicides from lofty heights. To throw myself down seemed the only possible relief from the terrible nightmare. Had I been longer alone I must, at least, have allowed myself to slip off my resting-place, with certain risk to life and limb. As it was, I called to my companion, who had scaled another story--had, indeed, reached the topmost shelf of the citadel; and she tripped down looking so airy and alert that I felt ashamed of my own weakness.

Pale and trembling, I pointed to the horrible staircase by which we had come.

'Get me down some other way,' I said to the guide, who now followed, not slightly embarrassed. Had he possessed the physique of our punter of the rapids, or of our conductor, now attending to his horses at the farm, he could have shouldered me like a baby. But he was slight of build and by no means robust. Not a creature was within call, and those dreaded fissures had to be bestridden. There was no other means of descent.

'It is of no use to try, I cannot get down,' I repeated, and for a moment a sombre vision of broken limbs and a long incarceration at the farm passed before my mind's eye.

Reassuring me as best he could, our poor guide now grasped one of my hands, with the other got a strong grip of the rock, and the first dreaded step was achieved. The second presented greater difficulties still. Once more he tried to carry me, but found the task beyond his strength. I remembered that he was a bridegroom of a few months only; what would be the young wife's feelings if he now came by mishap? So I closed my eyes, shutting out the prospect beneath, and allowed myself to be dragged down somehow, never more to venture on such giddy heights. The incomparable view had been too dearly purchased.

The moral of this incident is, let tourists subject to vertigo carry a smelling-bottle with them, or, better still, stay below.

All had ended well, however, and I could once more enjoy the scene. When the first bewilderment of wonder and admiration is over; when the fantastic city no longer appears a vision, but a reality, pile upon pile of natural rock so magically cast in the form of architecture, we realize countless beauties unperceived at first. The intense limpidity and crystalline clearness of the atmosphere, the brilliance of the limestone, the no less dazzling hue of the foliage everywhere adorning it, the beautiful lights and shadows of the more distant masses, line upon line of far off mountain-chain, mere gold and violet clouds rising above the rugged outline of the Causses, the deep, rich tones of the nearer--these general effects are not more striking than the details close under our feet. About every fragment of rock is a wealth of leaves, flowers and berries, the dogwood and bilberry with their crimson and purple clusters and tufts, wild lavender and thrift, whilst the ground is carpeted with the leaf of the hepatica.

We found also the pretty purple and white toad-flax, [Footnote: *Linaria versicolor*] the handsome gold-flowered spurges, [Footnote: *Euphorbia sylvatica* and *E. cyprissea*] the elegant orange and crimson-streaked salvia, [Footnote: *Salvia glutinosa*] with others more familiar to us. If the adorer of wild flowers is a happy person here in September, what enchantment would await him in the spring!

Like the Russian Steppes and the African Metidja, these wastes are a mosaic of blossoms. The foot-sure, hardy and leisurely traveller must not content himself with the bird's-eye view of this dolomite city just described. He should spend hours, nay, days here, if he would conscientiously explore the stone avenues, worthy to be compared to Stonehenge or Carnac; the amphitheatre, vast as that of Nimes or Orange; the fortifications, with bulwarks, towers, and ramparts; the necropolis, veritable Cerameicus, or Pere-la-Chaise; the citadel, the forum, the suburbs; for the enthusiastic discoverers of Montpellier-le-Vieux, or the Cite du Diable, have made out all these.

The most striking rocks have been fancifully named after the celebrated structures they resemble. We find the Chateau Gaillard, the Sphinx, the Gate of Mycenae, or of the Lions, the Street of Tombs supposed to resemble Pompeii, some of colossal dimensions. Thus the citadel measures a hundred and fifty feet from the ground, at this point Montpellier-le-Vieux attaining an altitude of two thousand five hundred feet above the sea-level. When I add that the Cite du Diable measures nearly two miles in length and a mile in breadth, and that its city and suburbs, so-called, cover a thousand hectares, an area a third less than that of Windsor Forest, the enterprising tourist will have some feeble notion of the waste before him. The place is indeed altogether indescribable--surely one of the most striking testimonies to the force of erosion existing on the earth's surface. The explanation of the phenomenon is found here. At a remote period of geological history the action of mighty torrents let loose sculptured these fantastic and grandiose monoliths, bored these arcades and galleries, hollowed these fairy-like caves. Erosion has been the architect of the Cite du Diable, partly by impetuous floods, partly by slow filtration. Water has gradually, and in the slow process of ages, built up the whole, then vanished altogether. Nothing strikes the imagination more than the absolute aridity of the region now. Not a drop left in the bed of ancient lake or river, not a crystal thread trickling down the rock channelled by ancient cascades, and nevertheless abundance of greenery and luxuriant foliage everywhere! The waterless world of stone is not only a garden, but a green forest! Immediately around us flowers, ferns, and shrubs adorn every bit of silvery gray rock, whilst wherever space admits we see noble trees, pines, oaks, beeches, some of marvellous growth, yet perched on heights so remote and lofty as to appear mere tufts of grass.

And then the wonderful deliciousness and invigorating quality of the air! It is like tasting the waters of the Nile, an experience never to be forgotten.

Those, indeed, who have once breathed the air of the Lozere will have only one desire: to breathe it again.

True, Montpellier-le-Vieux, departmentally speaking, is in the Aveyron, if so phantom-like a city can be said to have a local habitation and a name. But the Lozere chain is still in sight; its breezes are wafted to

us; we seem still in my favourite department of the eighty-seven, that now being the proper number, including the newly-created one of the Territoire de Belfort. I note the fact, as so many errors find their way into print on the subject of French geography. As we reflect on the mine of wealth this newly-discovered marvel may, we should say must, inevitably become to its owners and their near neighbours, a terrible vision rises before the mind. The gradually-diminishing area of the picturesque world, in proportion to the enormously-increasing percentage of tourists, can have but one ultimate result. In process of time the dolomite city must undergo the fate of other marvels of the natural world. Waggonettes drawn by four horses will convey the curious from the Grand Hotel and Hotel Splendide at Le Rozier to the Cite du Diable. Who can tell? A steam tramway may be placed at the disposal of globe-trotters sleeping at Maubert, and a patent lift or captive balloon for the ascension of the citadel. But no! We may at least console ourselves with the reflexion that such a contingency is far off. It will take more than a generation or two to vulgarize the Cite du Diable, which in our days may be considered as remote from London as Bagdad. The ideas of tourists in general must undergo entire transformation ere they will cease to endorse Shelley's opinion: 'There is nothing to see in France.'

Perhaps these pages may tempt a stray sketcher or lover of wild flowers to follow my route, but the peasant-owner of Montpellier-le-Vieux, although reaping a fair harvest from his unique possession, will not certainly become a millionaire through the patronage of Messrs. Cook, Gaze and Caygill. And, truth to tell, it is not even every ardent lover of natural beauty who would be held captive here. It requires a peculiar temperament to appreciate this gray, silent, fantastic world of stone. When once within its precincts, our mood is not precisely that of delight or exhilaration; it is more akin to the eerie and the awesome. We are spellbound, not so much by the sublimity or loveliness of the place, but by its absolute uniqueness, its total unlikeness to any other on the face of the globe, its kinship with the few incomparable marvels Nature has given us; creations of her mysterious, freakish, daemonic humour. Strange that a neighbourhood so weird should have exercised only a wholesome influence on the character of the people! As far as we can judge, no franker, cheerier, more straightforward folks are to be found in France, to say nothing of that little fact of white assizes, so creditable to the department.

Perhaps the fine prospect framing in Montpellier-le-Vieux is best appreciated as we walk back to the farm, the mind not then being full of expectancy. What a superb coup d'oeil! Distance upon distance, one mountain range rising above another, almost in endless succession, the various stages showing infinite gradation of colour--subtle, distracting, absolutely unpaintable! No wonder the air is unspeakably fresh and exhilarating, seeing that it blows north, south, east and west from lofty Alps. We have in view the sombre walls of the three Causses, the wide outline of the Larzac, in a vast semicircle the western spurs of the Cevennes, whilst from east to west stretch the Cantal chain, the Lozere, and the Cevennes des Gardons. [Footnote: So called from this portion of the Cevennes rising above the valleys of the streams and rivers Gardon.]

We are on the Roof of France indeed! Having escaped a broken leg or dislocated shoulder, my only regret was that we could not spend at least a month within reach of the Cite du Diable. What explorations in search of rare flowers! what sunset effects! what impressions to be

obtained here! How delightful, too, to make friends with the young owners of this strange property--the strangest surely out of the 'Arabian Nights,' 'Vathek,' or 'The Epicurean!'--and get the farmhouse turned into quite an ideal hostelry! I saw in my mind's eye the dunghill replaced by a pretty flower-garden, a tablecloth spread for breakfast, the floors swept and scoured, carpets and armchairs in the best bedrooms, and even--my ambition went so far--trays, bells, and door-fastenings introduced into these wilds. As the Utopia could not be realized this year, I chatted with our hosts upon 'le confort,' whilst they brought out one liqueur after another--rum, quince-water, heaven knows what!--with which to restore us after our fatigues. Whilst I conversed on this instructive topic: 'Yes,' said the handsome, slatternly little mistress of the Cite du Diable, turning to her husband, 'we must buy some hand-basins, my dear.'

We had not noticed the fact that the six bedchambers at Maubert were altogether unprovided with these luxuries, for luxuries they must be called in a region where there is absolutely nothing whatever to render them necessary. Without smoke, fog, artificial or atmospheric impurities of any kind, one might surely remain here in a condition of ideal cleanliness from January to December.

Invigorated by the various petits verres of home-made cordials this hospitable young couple had pressed upon us, we now set off jauntily for Le Rozier. My companion, with a courage and endurance I could but envy, mounted the caleche; I followed close behind on foot with the little dog.

It was amusing to watch the imperturbability of our conductor as the somewhat antiquated vehicle swayed this side and that, at every moment, as it seemed, in jeopardy of overthrow. For a mile and a half from the farm the road, or, rather, cart-track, may be described as a kind of steeplechase on wheels, every step of the way showing either a stone-heap or a ditch, the word 'rut' being quite an inadequate definition. Now I saw the hood of the carriage nod to the right, now to the left, as some stone-heap impeded the way; now it curtseyed forward, almost disappearing altogether as some gully was plunged into, horses, driver, and vehicle, wonderful to relate, emerging as if nothing unusual had happened, my companion sitting bolt upright and coolly enjoying the view.

All this time it was instructive to watch the behaviour of the little dog. Whenever I lingered behind to gather a flower or gaze around, the intelligent little creature stopped too and waited for me, with a look that plainly said, 'You must not be left behind, you know.' Nothing would induce him to rejoin his master till I had caught him up.

The drive back to Le Rozier is another balloon descent from the clouds. Like St. Enimie, the little town lies, figuratively speaking, at the bottom of a well, and as we approach we could almost drop a plummet-line on to the house-tops. It is a dizzy drive, and many will shut their eyes as their horses' hoofs turn the sharp curves of the precipitous mountain-sides, only an inch or two between wheel and precipice.

And here is a caution to the adventuresome. During our stay a family-party set off on mule-back from Maubert to Peyreleau somewhat late in the day. Darkness and rain overtaking them, they were obliged to take shelter for the night in a peasant's cottage, thankful enough to obtain

even such rough hospitality.

Let no one undertake an expedition in these regions without proper information and the support of accredited guides--men well known and well-recommended by residents on the spot.

CHAPTER XV. LE ROZIER TO MILLAU AND RODEZ.

The road between Le Rozier and Millau is delightful; the verdure and brilliance of the valley in striking contrast with the sombre, dark-ribbed Causse Noir frowning above. For two-thirds of the way we follow the Tarn as it winds--here a placid stream--amid poplars, willows, and smooth green reaches. Gracious and lovely the shifting scenes of the landscape around, stern and magnificent of aspect the Causse, its ramparts as of iron girding it round, its gloomy escarpments showing deep clefts and combes, lines of purple gold and green breaking the gray surface.

Close under this mighty shadow--a bit of fairyland by the dwelling of evil genii--are sunny little lawns, peach-groves, orchards, and terraced gardens overlooking the river; beyond, fertile fields, and here and there, perched on the crags, some quaint village or ruined chateau. The road is bordered for the most part with walnut-trees, affording rich foliage and delicious shadow. The colours of every feature in the scene--luxuriant belt of field and garden, blue hills and sky--have a southern warmth and brilliance.

Growing close to road and river are apple-trees laden with ruddy fruit. In England such crops would be pillaged in a day. Among peasant proprietors, each respects the possession of his neighbour. This fact and one or two others impressed my companion much. It was her first acquaintance with rural France, and she had undertaken the journey purely as a lover of nature and art, not at all as a student of political economy, agriculture, or statistics. Peasant property was no more in her way than the Impressionist school of modern art in mine. But being keenly observant, and feeling, as any other member of the propertied class must do, aghast at the condition of rural affairs in England--vast tracts of cultivated land deteriorating into waste, agricultural wages lowered to nine shillings a week, vagrancy on the increase in consequence of the general migration to the towns, the sons of country squires enlisting in the ranks, or betaking themselves to manual labour in the Colonies--aghast, I say, at these signs of the times among ourselves, she could but feel some surprise at her French experiences. The entire absence of mendicants in the departments we had lately traversed--these reputed among the poorest in France--was altogether a revelation to her, as indeed it must be to any stranger on French soil. Even in a neglected-looking place like Peyreleau, where the people are wholly unused to the sight of tourists, and life is evidently one of extreme laboriousness, no hand is held out for an alms. In our long drives across country, where strangers in a carriage and pair are assuredly taken for millionaires, we were never asked by man, woman or child for a sou.

Again, the good, neat, suitable clothes of the country-people struck my

friend no less. The total absence of tawdriness and finery on Sundays, the equally total absence of rags and squalor on week-days, afforded a striking contrast to what we are accustomed to see at home. It is more especially in the matter of foot-gear that the working-classes in France show to advantage. My friend noticed with admiration the well-stockinged, well-shod children, all having good strong shoes--stockings evidently bought or made for them, not the ill-fitting belongings of others, gifts of charity or bargains of the pawnshop. The men and women, too, are uniformly well shod, with strong, clean, home-knit stockings. Again, the implied sense of security in these unprotected gardens and wayside orchards is a novelty to the English mind. At Hastings, which may also be called the metropolis of vagrancy, it is impossible to keep a poor little wallflower or a primrose in one's garden. An apple-tree would be pillaged on any public road in England before the fruit was half ripe. Not only here, but in Anjou and many other regions, I have walked or driven for miles, amid unprotected vineyards and fruit-trees, the ripening crops being within reach of passers-by. No one pillages his neighbour.

Yes, peasant property is a detestable, nay, an iniquitous, institution, only to be compared to the Inquisition itself. No one who does not already possess several thousand acres of land ought to be permitted by law to purchase a single rood. Nine shillings a week, Christmas doles of beef and flannel petticoats from the Hall, the workhouse as a reward for fifty years' patient following the plough--these make up the only Utopia worth mentioning. Every right-minded person, every true Christian, has come to such conclusions long ago. Yet when it is possible to spend weeks in a civilized country without encountering a beggar; when we see an entire population well-clothed, cheerful, and self-supporting in old age; when we see fruit-crops ripening in all security by the roadside, and inquire throughout the length and breadth of the land for a poor-house in vain; when we find judge and jury dismissed at assize after assize because there are no criminals to try, we are tempted to exclaim:

'Peasant property or no, they manage these things better in France!'

'There is no want here,' our driver said, and the fact is self-evident.

As we approach Millau we meet streams of country folk disporting themselves, some afoot, others in rustic vehicles--the men wearing clean blue blouses over the Sunday broadcloth, the women neat black gowns, kerchiefs, and spotless white coiffes. The fields are deserted. Man and beast are resting from the labours of the week.

The landscape now changes altogether, and we are reminded that we have quitted the Lozere for the Aveyron. The air has lost the matchless purity and exhilarating briskness of Sauveterre and Montpellier-le-Vieux. Alike sky, atmosphere, and vegetation recall the south. Pink and white oleanders bloom before every door; the quince, the mulberry, the peach, ripen in every garden. We long to get at our boxes and exchange woollen travelling-dresses for cottons and muslins.

Pleasant and welcome as is this soft air, this warm heaven, this bright, rich-coloured, flowery land, we strain our eyes to get a last glimpse of the Causse Noir. To betake ourselves to cosmopolitan hotels, cities and railways, after this sojourn in elfdom, was like closing the pages of 'Don Quixote' or Lucian to read a debate in the House or listen to a sermon.

And now that I am no longer held spellbound by wizardry and genii, good or evil, and the first glow of enthusiasm is over, let me jot down a few hard facts for the reader's edification--give in a few words the geological and general history of the Causses, if nothing more--a bare outline to serve the tourist on his way. The origin of the phenomenon is thus explained by the great French geographer, Elisee Reclus, in his chapter on 'Le Plateau Central de la France.' [Footnote: See his 'Geographie Universelle,' vol. ii.: 'La France,' 1885.] 'There is no doubt,' he writes, 'that at a remote period all these plateaux of jurassic rock formed a single Causse, deposited by the sea in the southern strait of the granitic group of France. Although the Causse Mejean, placed almost in the centre of the series of plateaux, is a hundred metres loftier than the rest, its formation accords with theirs. All show the same features. From the banks of the Herault to those of the Lot and the Aveyron, all show the same development of continuous strata. The ancient glaciers spread on the highest summits of the Cevennes as they melted, gradually cut into the rock, channelled openings--finally, forcing their way through the layers, have formed these gigantic defiles, now the marvel of geologists. If the rivers flow in an unbroken stream in these deep gorges, on the contrary, water is altogether absent from the plateaux above. The ground, riddled everywhere into holes and fissures, is hardly moistened by a shower. The rain, as if falling through a sieve, immediately disappears. In some places the chasms of rock have widened, the intermediate projections given way, and huge cavities of rightful depth--avens or tindouls, as they are locally called--are formed in the limestone. But the surface of the Causse is almost universally uniform, and these subterranean wells are only indicated by slight openings. Nowhere a foundation springs forth. Alike as to formation, aspect, and climate, the Causses are unique in France.'

This entire chapter is a necessary preparation for no matter how hasty a journey in the Lozere; equally to be recommended is the study of the Causses by M. Onesime Reclus in his work 'La France.' [Footnote: 'L'orage aux larges gouttes, la pluie fine, les ruisseaux de neige fendue, les sources joyeuses ne sont pas pour le Causse, qui est fissure, crible, casse, qui ne retient point les eaux, tout ce que lui verse la nue, entre dans la rocaille. Et c'est bien, bien bas que l'onde engloutie se decide a reparaitre, elle sort d'une grotte, au fond des gorges, au pied de ces roches droites, symetriques, monumentales, qui porte le terre-plein du Causse. Mais ce que le plateau n'a bu qu'en mille gorgees, la bouche de la caverne le rend souvent par un seul flot, les gouttes qui tombent du filtre s'unissant dans l'ombre en misseaux, puis en rivières. Aussi, les sources du pied du Causse, sont-elles admirables par l'abondance des eaux, par la hauteur et la sublimite des rocs, de leur "bouts de mondes." Trop de soleil si le Causse est bas, trop de neige s'il est eleve, toujours et partout le vent, qui tord les bois chetifs, pour lac, une mare, pour riviere un ravin, de rocheuses prairies tondues par des moutons et des brebis a laine fine, des champs caillouteux d'orge, d'avoine, de pommes de terre, rarement de ble, voila les Causses! Le Caussenard seul peut aimer le Causse, mais qui n'admirerait les vallees qui l'entourent?']

I may add that the only traces of volcanic action in the Causses have been found at Sauveterre, near the so-called capital. Here basaltic rocks exist amid the limestone.

It is not only the geologist and the botanist, in search of an emotion,

to use a French phrase, who will find a paradise here. The palaeontologist is no less happy. Sparsely peopled, isolated from civilization as is the 'great jurassic island' in our own day--lost as it seems to have been in the pages of French history--it was inhabited by our prehistoric forerunners, contemporaries of the great cave-bear. The entire department of the Lozere is a rich palaeontological field, and the Causse Mejean especially has afforded abundant treasure-trove. In the vast caverns and grottoes of its walls, great quantities of flint implements and fossils, human and animal, have been discovered. A collection of these may be seen in the museum of Mende.

The Causses, owing to their isolated position, may be said to have escaped a history. The great wave of religious warfare that devastated the Cevennes in the Middle Ages passed them by. Only here and there on the skirts of Sauveterre, near Mende, and of the Causse Noir, near Millau, as we have seen, are relics of feudal times. Close around, under the very shadow of these vast promontories, cresting the borders of the Tarn and the green heights between Millau and Mende, ruined strongholds and chateaux abound. The Causse itself enjoyed immunity alike from ferocious seigneurs and still more ferocious theologian bandits, seeking, as they put it, the salvation of their neighbours' souls. The merciless Calvinist leader, Merle, who burnt, pillaged, and depopulated Mende; the equally merciless quellers of the Camisard revolt, emissaries of Louis XII., were tempted by no more prey to penetrate these solitudes.

Were they, indeed, peopled at all? Was the so-called capital of Sauveterre even in existence? Who can answer the questions? Nor is it easy to determine when the entire region first fell under the observation of French geographers, and found at last a name and a place on the map of France.

Arthur Young, the most curious and accurate traveller of his time, brought, moreover, into contact with the best informed Frenchmen of the day, had evidently never heard of any portion of the Gevaudan, as the Lozere was then called, at all answering to the Causses. But a French traveller before alluded to--himself without doubt stimulated by the example of our countryman--M. Vaysse de Villiers, author of the 'Itineraire Descriptif de la France,' did in 1816, or thereabouts, accomplish the journey from Mende to Florac by way of Sauveterre. 'Never,' he wrote, 'have I seen a more complete aridity, so utter a desert,' He goes on to describe the beauty of the Tarnon (a small river of the Lozere) and its verdant banks. 'All this, added to the delightfulness of the autumn day and the horrible Causse of Sauveterre,' but just passed, transformed the dreary town and narrow valley of Florac into a delicious retreat. In a note he gives the accepted derivation of _Causse_ from _calx_, saying that it was of general application, and that the word certainly filled a blank in French nomenclature.

It is now instructive to turn to French guidebooks and see how completely the region here described was ignored till within the last few years. I have before me Joanne's invaluable and conscientious guides for Auvergne, including the Cevennes, published respectively in 1874 and 1883. In the former, whilst the Causses figure in the map, beyond a brief allusion to the Causse Noir, they are ignored altogether. St. Enimie is not once mentioned, and nothing is said about the gorges of the Tarn. As to Montpellier-le-Vieux, it could find no place in a guide-book of that date, seeing that it was only discovered

ten years later. We now take the edition of 1883. Here, the route from Mende to St. Enimie by way of Sauveterre is described also in the fewest possible words, two pages being found sufficient for short descriptions of the gorges of the Tarn by way of Florac, St. Enimie and the valley of the Joute. Montpellier-le-Vieux, for the very good reason mentioned above, is still absent. But just a year later we find the guide-book remodelled altogether. Joanne now devotes an entire volume to the Cevennes, and states in his preface that the new issue of the 'General Itinerary of France' contains an account of a region very little known to French tourists, yet well worth visiting, the region comprising the Causses, the Canon du Tarn and Montpellier-le-Vieux. The distinguished geographer, alas! did not live to see his little purple volume, and, I am compelled to add, Baedeker's red rival, in the hands of scores and hundreds of his fellow-countrymen and women bound for the Lozere.

If the reader now turns to a map of France, and draws a perpendicular line from Mende to Lodeve, and a vertical line from Millau to Florac, he will have a pretty good notion of the area occupied by the Causses, including that of the Larzac in Aveyron.

When it is taken into account that the superficies thus covered in the Lozere alone reaches the total of 125,000 hectares, some idea may be gathered of the magnitude of the whole. The entire population of these highlands was only 6,662 souls in 1876, and there can be little doubt that, in the slow process of time, either they will be abandoned altogether, or by means of scientific methods utterly transformed. The laborious, long-suffering, hitherto ignored Caussenard will not surely be long neglected by the patriarchal Government of France. The Republic has laid iron roads across the Lozere, thus redeeming the department from the isolation and inertia of former times. Another tardigrade act of justice will surely ere long complete the work, and the inhabitant of the French steppes be made to share in the well-being and happiness long enjoyed by his fellow-countrymen.

CHAPTER XVI.

RODEZ, VIC-SUR-CERE REVISITED.--A BREAKFAST ON THE BANKS OF THE SAONE.

In future, tourists bound northward will be able to reach Neussargues on the Clermont and Nimes railway by a direct line from Mende and St. Flour. As this new line is not yet completed, and I had set my heart upon revisiting Rodez and Vic-sur-Cere, we took the more circuitous route, going over the same ground I had traversed the year before. It was once my ambition to visit one by one every noteworthy spot in France. The appetite grows by what it feeds on, and now I never see any striking place without making up my mind to see it twice.

Great was my delight at Rodez to find a bright, cheerful, spick and span hotel, newly opened since last year. The time-honoured house of Biney has two credentials worthy of mention--very low charges and good food. Its modern rival has greater claims upon the wayfarer's gratitude--pleasant, wholesome rooms, neat chambermaids, and the kind of modernization so necessary to health and comfort. The Hotel Flouron, too, is presided over by a lady, and when we have said this we have

implied a good deal. A grand old town is the capital of the Aveyron. We must see it again and again to realize its superb position and the unique splendour of its cathedral, towering over the wide landscape as our own Ely Cathedral over the eastern plains. To-day it was not flushed with the flaming red and gold of sunset, as when first I saw it a year before, but its aspect was perhaps all the more grandiose for sombre colouring.

From both extremities of the town we obtain vast panoramas; we look down as if from a mountain-top, the plateau or isthmus on which Rodez stands being two hundred and fifty feet above the circumjacent plain, the river Aveyron almost cutting it off from the mainland. Within a few yards of the Hotel Flouron we reach the edge of this escarpment, and gaze upon the wide valley of the Aveyron, village-crested hills, and the dim blue outline of the far-off Larzac.

From the public promenade at the other end of the city we look westward upon a richly-cultivated plain set round with the Cantal mountains, gold-green vineyards, wine-red soil, and deep purple distance.

The physical characteristics of some French departments are as nicely defined as their political demarcations. Nothing can afford a sharper contrast than the Aveyron, with its ruddy soil and red rocks, and the green, pastoral Cantal, land of smiling valleys, unbroken pastures, and hills that wear a look of perpetual spring. These differences cannot fail to strike the traveller who journeys from Rodez to Vic-sur-Cere; a charming bit of railway it is, especially in autumn, when the chestnut woods begin to show autumn crimson and gold.

And Vic-sur-Cere, too, delights even more on a second visit. The spot is indeed a corner of Eden--a happy valley, to be transformed, alas! into a miniature Vals. My hostess told me that a casino, hotel, and bathing establishment are about to be built, all bringing their concomitant evils or advantages, as we may respectively regard cosmopolitan comforts, high prices, frivolous distractions, and a fashionable crowd.

How kindly the good folks of the homely Hotel du Pont welcomed their guest of last year, filling my basket at departure with gifts of flowers, fruit, and little cheeses, begging me to return the following summer! At Clermont-Ferrand, good fortune for the first time directed me to a really comfortable hotel, as on previous visits, alike in lodgings and hotels, I had been cheated, bullied, and made uncomfortable. Let me signal alike the fact and the name: at the Hotel de la Poste I was enabled really to enjoy this interesting old town, the views of the Puy de Dome from every opening, the noble, Romanesque church of Notre Dame du Port, the magnificent display of the shops--no town in all France where you can buy more beautiful jewellery, bronzes and porcelain than at Clermont.

My companion quitted me here, proceeding by night express to Paris, and I took the long, slow, wearisome parliamentary to Lyons, a ten hours' journey, which wiser travellers will not fail to break half-way. The only express train between Clermont and Lyons leaves very early in the morning, so we have a choice of evils.

I do not know why the Puy de Dome should be my favourite mountain, but so it is, and never did it look lovelier than to-day, as, with its sister volcanoes, pyramid upon pyramid of warm purple, it towered above

the green Limagne; gradually the rest receded from view, till at last nothing was left but that solitary dome of amethyst under the golden heaven. At Lyons--where I awaited a dear French friend--I always make a point of seeing the famous town-clock, work of a modern sculptor, a son of Lyons.

This clock, or rather the marble facade adorning it, is not only a work of genius, but a sermon in stone, perpetually preached to the surging, buzzing crowds below. It stands high above the central hall of the Exchange, at business hours a scene of extraordinary bustle and excitement, which the public can always watch from the gallery above, and from which they command an excellent view of the clock.

The noble piece of sculpture forming the facade represents the various stages of human life--three female figures composing the group--the Hour that is gone, the Hour that is here, the Hour that is coming. Simple as is the arrangement of the whole, nevertheless, so skilful is the portrayal that each figure seems to move before our eyes. We almost see the despairing past sink into the abyss, her passive, erect sister, the dominant hour, letting go her hand, whilst, radiant and impatient for her own reign to begin, the joyous impersonation of the future springs upward as if on wings.

This allegory, so powerfully and poetically rendered in marble, might have been more appropriately placed. Does it not savour of irony thus to idealize the three stages of human existence 'among the money-changers of the Temple'?

Next day was Sunday, as glorious a sixteenth of September as could be desired. In company with my friend I set off for an al-fresco breakfast on the banks of the Saone.

No city in all France boasts of more umbrageous walks than Lyons, and for miles we drive along the plane-bordered quays and suburban slopes, dotted with villas and chateaux, the modest chalet of the artisan and small shopkeeper peeping amid vineyards and orchards, whilst showing a splendid front from English-like park we see many a palatial mansion of silk merchant or iron-founder. Between the sunny vine-clad hills and belt of suburban dwellings flows the placid Saone, a contrast indeed to its swift, impetuous brother--no wonder the Rhone has a masculine name!

An hour of upward climb, and we might fancy ourselves in Switzerland or at Keswick, anywhere but within an easy walk of the second Paris--so cool the shadow of the over-arching trees, so rustic the ferny rock, so quiet the woodland glades. We got lovely glimpses of the clear, blue river as, freighted with many a pleasure-boat, it winds its way towards Macon.

In a sequestered nook at the foot of these wooded hills is a curious monument, none more martial to be found in the world--the tomb of a soldier, constructed by soldiers; on a plain marble slab inscribed the words: 'Here lies a soldier,' not a syllable more.

On either side, under a small open chapel, portico-shaped, in which the stone lies, are two figures, a dragoon and a foot-soldier, who keep perpetual watch over their chief.

This is the self-chosen monument of the General Castellane, one of the first Napoleon's veterans. Perpetual Masses are celebrated here on his

behalf.

We drive on to our destination, the Ile Barbe, a narrow wooded islet, dividing the Saone into two branches, and forming the favourite holiday-ground of the Lyonnais. The rich hire a special pleasure-boat or carriage; the happy tourist is, perhaps, like myself, driven thither by ever-hospitable, too hospitable, French friends, who, not content with affording their guests a day's unmitigated pleasure, invariably contrive to eliminate every element of fatigue. Holiday-making is indeed cultivated to the point of a fine art in France.

For slender purses there are cheap boats, cheap railways, and the omnibus. It does one's heart good to see scores of family parties today availing themselves of the superb weather and taking a last picnic. In every green, shady nook we see a merry group squatted on the ground, relishing their cold patties, fruit and wine, as they can only be relished out of doors. The babies, nursemaids, and pet dogs are there. Breakfast over, the holiday-makers amuse themselves, grandparents and bantlings, with fishing for minnows in the clear waters.

How merry are all! How all too swiftly fleet the bright hours!

In the spacious, terraced garden of the restaurant we find dozens of tables spread for richer folk. We prefer the cool, quiet dining-room, which we have to ourselves, after all. The food is not of the choicest, the wine compels criticism between each course, we have to wait long enough for the making of an ordinary meal; but French gaiety and good-nature overlook these drawbacks, and the charming view of the river and its wooded banks, the freshness of the air, the atmosphere of gala and relaxation, make up for everything; the bill is cheerfully paid, and all but the separate items of the day's enjoyment forgotten.

Perhaps the charm of a French picnic is enhanced by the fact that it is never made too long. Our neighbours do not make what is called 'a day of it,' but wisely prefer to take their pleasure as they do their champagne--in moderation. We drive home, feeling fresh and alert as when we set out.

Everyone is abroad. As we pass through the workman's suburb, the ultra-socialist, ultra-revolutionary quarter of the city, in which political passions have so often raged hotly, and popular feeling has taken incendiary form, we find only peacefulness and calm. The socialist and red-revolutionary, in his Sunday's best, sits before his front door, reading a newspaper, playing with his baby or chatting with a neighbour. Pet dogs and cats sun themselves with a lazy, Sunday air, girls and lovers flirt, children play, gossips tell each other the news. It is difficult to believe that we are passing the stormiest quarter of the stormiest city in France. All is as quiet as the riverside scenes we have just left.

With this delightful recollection I close my latest--not, I trust, last--French journey.

I took leave of my dear friend at Lyons, both of us hoping to breakfast together next time, not on the banks of the Saone, but on the Eiffel Tower, there to fete the glorious Revolution, in the words of our great Fox: 'How much the greatest event that ever happened in the world, and how much the best!'

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