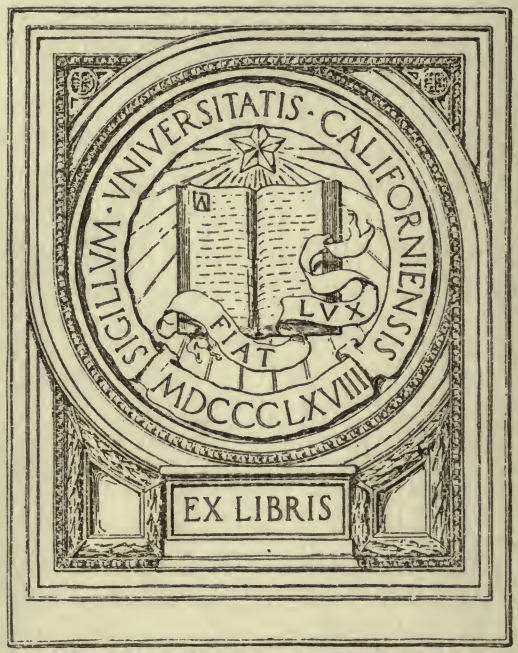
THE CHRONICLE OF A PILGRIMAGE

PARIS TO MILAN ON FOOT

HAROLD MONRO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THE CHRONICLE OF A PILGRIMAGE

BY THE SAME AUTHOR

POEMS 1906

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THE CHRONICLE OF A PILGRIMAGE

PARIS TO MILAN ON FOOT

BY

HAROLD MONRO

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INVOCATION

Thou living Oversoul, on thee I call ;
Thine is all beauty : thou that dost inspire
The vision of eternity in all,
Quicken me with the glory of thy fire !

Because I know thou only dost endure,
Therefore I will endeavour always to
Preserve the temple of my body pure,
That thy divinity may flow therethrough.

Thee I have seen by mountain, wood, and stream,
As One, through myriad passing forms, abide :
Thee I have worshipped when thy perfect dream
Sends peace into the world at eventide.

O give me beauty in the inward soul ;
Give light within and outward power to do ;
Give me desire, and give me self-control :
Thou Oversoul of beauty flood me through !

The Chronicle of a Pilgrimage

I

THE ROAD TO FONTAINEBLEAU

THE open road at last, with its joy and mystery! True, it is but an ugly rough stretch through a factory neighbourhood, black and squalid; but with such pain over miles and miles of cobbled way have I reached even this, that my heart goes out to it and I am thankful. A pleasant wind is blowing across the Seine on my right; it is a warm wind, and the sun is shining: perhaps at last it augurs spring.

I draw a long sigh of satisfaction, and laugh to myself. Is it all an earnest reality, this beautiful France? It reminds one of some

great playground. The houses are like toy houses; the grown people are different from their children only in size: it is the high seriousness of the French not to take life too seriously. I remark particularly that nearly all the windows are wide open. We English are fond of talking a great deal about fresh air, but how can we, with our clumsy windows that only half open, really let it into our houses? Here is a small villa, just a little square box with five casements and a large double door. Everything stands open: the sun penetrates to the farthest walls of the rooms, and the cleansing breeze enters at the front door, scours the house, and passes out at the wide windows.

I love these little white doll's villas with their green shutters, red or black roofs, and quaint ornamentation. How different to our suburban dwellings—built every one as though for some stout churchwarden. Gay are these, yet trim, neat and homely. The green shutters promise sun even though it long delay, and the large chestnut-tree in the garden promises shade. Ah, the chestnut! Now I feel it is truly spring, for its sticky buds are being forced open, and, the first time this year, I see bright green leaves.

The Road to Fontainebleau

At Villeneuve-St.-Georges my knapsack begins to feel very heavy, and so I lengthen my stride. Were there an inviting hotel, I fear I might shorten again and yield to its attractions ; for I started late to-day, and it is already half-past five. Villeneuve, however, is a squalid place, and I am only about eight kilometres out of Paris. So I lengthen my stride still more ; but the lump climbing up my back has the better of me for to-day. Oh, treacherous knapsack ! three times I withdrew from you treasures that my heart desired, and repacked you, till at last you seemed light as a feather—but now you seem to weigh fully two stone. For nothing did I spend the whole morning pondering whether I could leave out Emerson, and More's Utopia, and Keats? Finally I reduced myself to Shakespeare, one volume of Emerson and my diary ; yet still you weigh me down and drag at my heart like this ! Will you compel me to part with my clean pyjamas?

Truly these Frenchmen enjoy living. Just before Villeneuve I passed under an iron railway bridge. Two painters purported to be at work on the girders—but what were they really doing? With the wooden ends of their paint-brushes for drumsticks they used the

girders for drums, while they shouted in perfect harmony some military duet.

After Villeneuve I branch away from the main road beside a pleasant tributary of the Seine, passing Crosnes and Yerres, colonies of bright little villas, and at Brunoy yielding to my knapsack. It is nearly seven, and, as I have not eaten since half-past twelve, obviously time for supper.

My first hotel is charming. It does not quite correspond to anything I know in England. I sit down to dinner near a select company of railway porters, who gnaw chop bones, holding them with both hands, and wash down their pickings with copious draughts of red wine. Presently there enter a very perfect gentleman, his wife, and two maid-servants. I learn that they have taken a villa in the neighbourhood, which they will not be able to occupy till to-morrow. The gentleman is dragged on the leash by an enormous black and white spotted dog ; the lady has a small white terrier. They eat, among other things, several plates of oysters. This gentleman is very taciturn ; his wife would like to be skittish. I think he must be led through life by his huge dog—he seems so entirely at its service. Perhaps he is its

voluntary slave to preserve himself from a worse tyranny of his wife, towards whom he maintains a uniform attitude of moroseness. I notice that under the influence of red wine she makes gradual advances on him ; but he knows her wiles, and, as soon as she is within range, lets off his whole broadside of guns at her. Yet probably they are as happy as most people.

I sleep well at Brunoy, and am up at 6.30. But, alas, April is true to its reputation. Rain is falling. Why be robust? I intend to work myself into condition quite gradually —no sore feet, no overstraining. So I give the rain a chance, and by ten am glad I did so, for it has stopped.

Now I draw in the fresh morning air. The smell of the rain is exquisite. Already my knapsack feels light. Soon I am in the woods. There is a special nobility, an especial scent, about French woods : I always thought so—now I know it. I break into the level sing-song swing of three and a half miles an hour along the broad high-road. Oh, joy ! joy ! joy !

Presently the woods are left behind, and on each side of the great avenue are open spaces under cultivation. On my left, about

half a mile away, is the railroad, along which rushes an express from the south; at the same time a motor flashes past me, and on my right (strange contrast!) a team of six lazy white oxen drag a plough—dreamers, kept up to even their slow walk only by the long stick of the ploughman. A passing tramp smiles at me weirdly with parted lips. I give him good-morning, and he answers amiably. He and I have a secret in common, however much an amateur he may think me. Another motor passes slowly with five people in it. They all stare at me and smile to each other—poor fools! So slaves have smiled at free men. Contrast our estates this morning: I, owning the earth, and they—owned by a petrol-motor!

I lunch at Lieusaint chiefly on lentils and cheese, with some good red wine. Of course I am vegetarian. How is any one otherwise who loves nature in all its forms—and in the human form particularly? *Human* I emphasise, because the degradation of conscious man under butcherdom is far greater than that of unsuspecting animals. And nowhere is vegetarianism easier than in France, with really well-cooked vegetables, omelette, and plenty of cheese and fruit. Occasionally

also I eat fish, but with reluctance. While on the subject of food, I have learnt from experience on other walks that three meals a day are the very most one should ever take. Comfort and endurance depend very greatly on a rule of this sort ; and one may be sure that those who want to stop frequently for refreshment are no real walkers. The first meal, of course, is a light one—coffee and a little bread and butter. It is well to have good food and a long rest at midday, and, if there be a feeling of lassitude after, to shake it off by walking sharply for the first hour of the afternoon. The worst possible mistake is a halt for tea or coffee in the middle of the afternoon. Personally I love walking on into the moonlight and not troubling about food, but the best habit, if one must, is to take an early light supper about half-past six—and the next day to feel the fresher and happier for not having fallen into the common insidious error of over-refreshment.

Yet, after all, who shall lay down rules for the true vagabond, to whom the very breath and spirit of the road is freedom? Certain rules, if I understand him aright, he will mechanically adopt ; but they will come

to him naturally, almost without forethought: they are matters of common utility. The avoidance of sore feet, for instance, is a point of honour, so he will find out his own way to avoid them. Economy, again, is of course a matter of necessity, so he will be economical. All such things are inherent in the instinct of self-preservation which is at the root of his vagabondage.

They turn up their eyes in wonder who learn that I specially desire to go companionless on this great walk. But what need of human companionship when my comrade, the blackbird, alone has almost more to say to me than I can listen to? And as for the winds, they whisper and whisper till I am overwhelmed with their secrets, and must almost shout them aloud to the skies.

II

FONTAINEBLEAU

My second night I sleep at Melun, rather further from Paris than Guildford is from London, and my third day I walk to Fontainebleau in the morning through the forest. The road is perfectly straight nearly the whole way —most of it a magnificent avenue, with double, sometimes treble, rows of trees on each side. The French so love trees they can scarcely ever do without them, and even in the middle of a forest must needs mark out and line the road with noble giants. There is a soft fresh rain this morning, and I am enveloped in mackintosh. Presently it stops, and the woods assume their glory. The bare boughs are all soaked with it, and the spring sun glistens faintly, turning them white.

I am cursed with a small black notebook which will not stay in my pocket. At the slightest impression out it comes auto-

matically : so little I trust my memory. But now goodbye, notebook !—'tis the forest of Fontainebleau. Dark giant firs and silver birches, tufts of bright green moss seen through the red undergrowth, with occasionally a witches' pool, black and treacherous —notes about these were surely superfluous.

The entrance to the town of Fontainebleau is disappointing. 'Tis so very bare and commonplace ; one expects something more rustic. The road, however, to the hotel near the station is planted with gigantic plane-trees. O unwary traveller, be cautious where you stay in this town. For, though royalty may be dead and buried, most of the hotels still entertain only on regal terms.

There are few relics of fallen majesty more utterly sad than the palace of Fontainebleau. From court to court, from garden to garden, from boundary to boundary, out to its farthest limits it is sad, sad, ever sad. First there is the great Court of the White Horse, where Napoleon bade farewell to the Imperial Guard in 1814. One can follow the whole drama. In the palace they have replaced where it then stood the table on which he wrote his abdication in a feverish hand, even more illegible than usual, and dropped one large

blot of ink in the middle. There was no personal sacrifice, he wrote, even that of his life, that he was not ready to make in the interests of France. Oh, indeed, when at last we set that mischievous rat to worry him in St. Helena, we more than took him at his word !

Then, later, when he was going : there is the square hall with the great oak doors in which he paused a moment, and the glorious two-winged stairs which he descended into the court. On the last step he paused again, and leaned upon the balustrade, very pale. One cannot help picturing and repicturing the sturdy little figure at the foot of that great stone staircase. Then suddenly he advanced, bade his farewell, and stepped into the carriage they had brought for him.

It is best to visit the palace about the hour when most people are having luncheon, for thus one may see it almost by oneself. I must admit that, after the rooms of Napoleon, I was most strongly affected by those of Madame de Maintenon. La Vallière, Montespan, Maintenon — names of what strange magic, women of what mysterious charm !—successively gazed upon, loved, and

enthroned sovereign queen of the king's heart. There are also the apartments where Napoleon kept the pope imprisoned for eighteen months amid Gobelin tapestries representing the triumph of the gods (they perhaps served temporarily for apostles, martyrs, and saints), until at last the poor weak old fellow signed the Concordat—and revoked it the next day secretly.

After a fashion all the clocks are kept working, but even they have grown sad and weary. In the bedchamber of many queens down to the Empress Eugénie (which they call *la chambre des cinq Marie*) the clock faintly chimed twelve, while the hands pointed to twenty minutes past.

I sat many hours in the Jardin Anglais, at this time of year a place of sad lawns and melancholy waters, which Adolphe Retté has well called "the prelude to the vast symphony of the forest." At the far end is a woodland lawn with scattered fir-trees, gradually denser in the background, so that the garden almost imperceptibly, restfully becomes forest. One cannot but imagine a dance of mænads and fawns. They peep into the open, strangely shy at first and dim-discovered, but soon emerge with more free-

dom and less fear of this new world from behind the scattered trees of the forest edge, till finally, yielding to impulse, they lose all identity in the divine heat of the dance.

In former days fountains sprang from the level waters of the Grand Canal, but now, as I saw it, without a ripple, save where a few large drops of rain splashed heavily, it was most mournful of all. There is nothing at Versailles that conveys quite this feeling. Near it on a grey stone bench I sat imagining the times of festival past, and such a sense of fallen magnificence hung over everything, that the air seemed full of hopeless tears. All about me were the many statues on which kings and courtesans had gazed. The classical effects they attempted were of course utterly false : sheer waste of effort, grandiose and empty. They are futile mimicry of an Italian Renaissance, with much fuss and little result—yet they make part of the formal artificial charm of the whole. Did they plan these places thus in squares and long dreary rows subconsciously foreknowing their fall, to gain at least the dreamy commiseration of future ages? I think not. If those proud vain creatures could but have foreseen the tourist, the populace, strolling

through their aristocratic precincts, would they not have died of fastidious horror? Fontainebleau a museum! What would François I. have thought, what Louis XIV.?

> "For God's sake, let us sit upon the ground,
> And tell sad stories of the death of kings."

And I? A vulgar little figure with a guide-book under my arm!

Yet I have a presumptuous feeling I am not completely a tourist. For is there not the Garden of Diana, where I had a delicious adventure with a nymph, who peeped at me suddenly round a lilac-bush, and filled my heart with surprise?

Outside the gates I was suddenly reminded of Madame de Pompadour. As I strolled through the town, behold, a great doorway labelled *Hotel de Pompadour*, quaintly carved, very formal, and so narrow that one could imagine only a chariot of olden times passing in. It had a polished brass bell, and was labelled No. 3 with a neat little republican plate. On the opposite side of the road was the door in the wall of the palace garden through which Louis XV. would glide by night to visit La Pompadour.

Several times I walked into the forest,

clambered among great boulders, and lost myself in a solitude of fir-trees. I was caught by many showers, and afterwards long shafts of sunlight would glint on the wet trunks. There was complete loneliness, perfect silence; for even the drops from the trees fell dumbly on the moss. Never have I walked on such moss, so soft and brilliantly green. I stood and listened for the hunting horn of a French king—but in vain.

There are no ghosts at Fontainebleau. Royalty, too often rebuffed, has utterly fled. May it never—oh never, return! But meanwhile, who, feeling the heavy melancholy of these vast places and hearing in the low winds the hopeless dirge of fallen pomp, can otherwise than lament?

III

INTO THE PROVINCES

AFTER nearly three days at Fontainebleau the road calls me, and I cannot resist. All over again there is the joy of setting forth. To-day, to-morrow, every day there will be the same call, the same glow of starting ; the swing of the walk, the rest, refreshment ; new comrades, other voices and smiles, other eyes ; new sights and sounds, colours and scents ; the fresh expectancy, the high exhilaration : the same road—the same infinite variety.

Moret, at the outskirts of the forest, is a haunt of painters. They have covered the walls of the inn where I lunch with their daubs. An American lady tells me she smokes forty cigarettes a day—I gather she also paints in the intervals. It is a charming old town with a most interesting church. The organ is particularly quaint, the pipes having

apparently dropped out one by one, like an old man's teeth.

In the afternoon I leave the main road and enter a quiet valley beyond the limits of the forest among faint blue hills. I feel disposed to lie on some pleasant bank and dream. Who shall prevent me? The day is mine.

Many little muscles of my body are throbbing as with pleasure—the road is finding them out ; but I wish to sleep at Lorrez-le-bacage to-night because of its musical name. One has a way of setting one's heart on a particular place, and dreaming of it as of some dim paradise. Once I quite disabled myself in my determination to sleep in a certain village. I arrived there at last by moonlight, laughing that the spirit had conquered the flesh, but so tired that I could scarcely drag my limbs after me into bed.

Beyond Fontainebleau one has left all atmosphere of a big town ; Paris is well behind. Now there is the real countryside, wonderfully still. I am on a byway ; it is evening. For a full three miles I meet no one, I see no one. If it were not for the rumbling of a cart on some distant road and the shout of a man heard faintly beyond the hill, I could imagine myself alone in a

deserted world. On my right the sun is a dazzling golden ball in the sky, and a solitary rook is flying into it. Suddenly something stops me, glimmering on the road. It is a bright green lizard. I bend down and touch it very gently with my stick. It does not move—it is dead.

Near Lorrez-le-bacage it begins to rain. The inn is very dark; I feel homeless and disappointed. I am the only guest; the good people's kitchen is warm, so thither I repair. They are as pleasant as they are rough. They serve me a regal supper, and for it, my bed, and breakfast next day I pay three francs, ninety centimes.

Rain, rain, rain! I start and walk nearly the whole day in it; such are the risks of the road. Were I not so anxious to get southward, perhaps I should read to-day safely indoors. The north wind in my neck is bitter, but I am supremely happy.

In the afternoon, during a particularly hard downpour, I yield, as an exception, to the attractions of a suggestive inn, ask for coffee, and have the good fortune to meet with an adventure.

I recognise immediately clean, homely people—a mother and her two daughters. We

talk, and are soon friendly. But one of the daughters scarcely speaks ; she only watches, and is ready at any one's smallest desire to spring to her feet and serve. Seated at a white table, she is hemming a white table-cloth, and her hands are pure white. They call her *Berthe*, and treat her as though she were Elaine. Who could avoid imagining somewhere a Lancelot? Why is she so silent, so eager to help every one? How does she everything a woman can do—yet with such white hands? I cannot go : I am enchained. My soul shivers when at last *Berthe* speaks ; her words fall pure like snow on the air. She appears, I think, to every one as to me. Her father enters, tired. With just a word of greeting she rises from the white table and ministers. He watches her with gentle eyes : Berthe assuredly they all love. I wish to understand, but know there is a mystery beyond me. Inevitably I murmur, "*Berthe aux mains blanches*"—that is her name. The road calls but faintly ; the rain is falling. Must I go?

Shaking off indecision, I get her word of farewell, and it serves me for many miles in the wet. I am still dreaming when there comes an attack of brigands. Suddenly—who

knows whence?—I am surrounded by three gendarmes. They ask me excitedly for my papers of identity, which luckily (being a cautious traveller) I can produce. We eventually part agreeing there are undoubtedly as many *canaille* in England as in France—what conclusion more satisfactory?

Bathed in rain and in thought, I tramp on till nightfall, and leave a good thirty-two kilometres of road behind me; then, suddenly, the lights of Sens in a valley below, and all the bustle and whistle of the railway-sidings; the cathedral clearly outlined against a lurid storm-sky, and the road before me dimly winding among vineyards down the hillside. This is the threshold of the rich vineland of Burgundy.

It is exciting beyond measure to enter a town of any size at nightfall, but to-night I am tired and glad of my inn. Sens itself is a sweet old-fashioned place, and the inn proves the most interesting I have so far stayed at. I am introduced into a convivial company, which apparently assembles there each evening for dinner. They are a motley collection, among them a dog-fancier, a commercial traveller, and a doctor; but their president is a philosopher. This is manifest

at once by the way he clears his throat. About every ten minutes—usually so often as the conversation begins to go astray—there will be a sudden terrible trumpet-blast from the head of the table. All hear it and shiver, though they keep countenance. There is the slightest lull, and then the wind begins blowing the other way. He is a stately large man with a crisp beard, and white, regular teeth which come tight together if he smiles. His hands are brown and long, and his large eyes survey the world through a pair of bluish spectacles ; his voice is like thunder. I cannot learn his history ; no one will gossip about him, and, worst of all, I cannot engage him in conversation. The evening ends ignominiously with my being dragged into a petty intrigue between the commercial traveller and the dog-fancier, each in turn drawing me aside to pronounce in my ear his judgment on the other's manners. Among all the personalities I have encountered that of the inn philosopher will, I think, ever stand out one of the clearest in my memory. We are very like dogs in our tendency to worship those who will least notice us.

After Sens the road lies along the valley of the River Yonne, through a region world-

famous for its wine. Appropriately the sun shines ; the north wind is conquered, and hides beyond the hills. I tramp, all the hot mid-day, through this lovely valley of Burgundy, gentle inviting slopes on the right and the left, the river meandering at my side. It is sudden spring, pure and gentle ; the sky is rich blue, and soon there is a young moon floating like a tiny cloud mid-heaven. I walk into Villeneuve-sur-Yonne through a mediæval gateway, enter the church, defiant with weird gargoyles, sit in the half-gloom for ten minutes, and pass out at the other end of the village through a similar gateway along the white road.

Now soon the red sun tells me it is evening. There is a fresh glow on the hills, and the peasants are home-going. A distant chime tolls ; the moon begins to cast faint shadows. Oh, how beautiful !

It is the time of worship, and my spirit spreads her wings in prayer. The swing of the walk is mechanical, and I have grown unconscious of my tired body. This is praise when the soul's utterance floats wordless, without voluntary effort, into the pure air and touches heaven. Those only deny divinity who have not known it. At nightfall it is

present, unsought, to the wayfarer. Not till the prayer is uttered are we conscious we have prayed, nor till the waking moment that we have known God.

The late golden sun floods the whole land ; the rich soil of the hillside vineyards is golden ; the river is liquid gold, and in my heart is that vesper peace, the most perfect dream of the world.

IV

YONNE

WHEN I first entered the province of Yonne, soon after my departure from Lorrez-le-bacage, I was a little disappointed. After the boundary there were no more wayside trees, and for over five miles through a plain country the highway was perfectly straight and ungarnished. Perhaps the sole interest was that behind me, rising as from the middle of the road, and slowly diminishing in size as I progressed, stood the church tower of Cheroy, while in front of me rose the spire of St. Valerien, slowly enlarging. But after Sens comes the change. Oh, gracious and adorable valley of the River Yonne !

As if the cathedral of Sens had made a precedent, towering over the houses of every town and village, rises some great church as rich with gargoyles as though in Normandy.

Usually on entering a new town the hot wayfarer seeks the church—unlike the heated railway-traveller who scrambles for the hotel. To me refreshment above all others is the quiet cool aisle and the tall nave of God's house, at such time as when, free of the incantation of the priest and the rustle of the Sunday garment, it most perfectly belongs to Divinity.

My sixth night I sleep at St. Julien, which lies quaintly back in a hollow off the highway. In the morning I eagerly regain the road, white in the brilliant sunlight. Small vagrant clouds are floating across the blue sky ; there is a light wind, and everything breathes the south.

By Joigny, a prosperous riverside town, the Yonne is broad and stately. Like all the other small towns I have passed through, it is held by an intense quiet. One cart rumbling over the cobbles ; the call of a workman to his companion ; voices from within a restaurant as the door opens—a few such sounds only disturb the sense of rest. The French (unlike the English) know that ease is as beautiful as toil. All those who are able take their toil without any fret, though very few are idle. They seem to possess the secret

of making a pleasure of work, and endowing it somehow with elegance.

At Joigny, owing to the heat, I am threatened with a sore foot. I take immediate precautions—a new pair of socks well tallowed inside with a candle. In case this measure may sound very disagreeable I add hastily that it is not the least so in practice. Most important, it is effective.

Now soon I must part with my lovely lady Yonne, who branches away from the road, and, instead, I have to suffer a respectable Philistine canal for companion. I sniff coldly, and for many miles not a word do we exchange.

After a night in a rowdy inn at uninteresting Brienon, I start on my longest walk so far (37 kilometres)—for I wish to reach Tonnerre to-night, which is the first address since Fontainebleau that I have given for letters. Oh, these letters! I catch myself unconsciously quickening half the day to reach them—and is habit so strong?

St. Florentin is a nice hillside town with a taller church than ever. These enormously tall churches with flying buttresses, towering over their towns, are like bits of cathedrals, unneeded for the larger places, and used up,

in all their significance and grandeur, for the smaller. After St. Florentin the road descends to a plain, and I am in ordinary France once more.

One has a general impression of perfectly straight roads, or rather avenues, lined with acacias, poplars, or sycamores, unhedged and brilliantly white ; of a countryside of rich red soil striped with the bright green of early crops—entirely unhedged, of intense fertility, wisely husbanded with thrift and devotion ; and of infrequent prosperous villages, clustered each about its church and château. One misses the beautiful cottage gardens of England. Nearly all labour seems exhausted on the soil and the home. In England the cottage garden forms part of the pride and beauty of the home ; in Yonne there is nothing of the sort : cottage gardens are rare. In general the French do not seem to have the same love of the cultivation of flowers as the English—which surprises me. On the other hand, they undoubtedly have a greater natural love of the soil.

One has a sense of spaciousness unconfined, of something ancient, primitive. The villages are very seldom jerry-built ; they retain the old manorial picturesque appear-

ance: they are nearly always beautiful in the distance. Though only just over a hundred miles from Paris, yet am I seldom confronted by any local contractor's hideous cottages, never by the aggressive modernity of many English villages. Folk do not seem so busy *opening up* more spacious France. The châteaux are few, and convey the impression of an aristocratic leisure of former days rather than of any modern gilded luxury. Though their parks are usually walled and secured all about from public intrusion, yet for a surety they are not entirely hidden from the wayfarer. There is nearly always some stately water, and likely enough the ancient linden-trees have been so planted or cut as to form a vista, over its dark surface, of the house. Everywhere the French love their avenues and their waters. Most of the châteaux are still closed till the summer shall come, which increases their quiet old-world beauty.

A country of great level spaces, of lines and of squares—such is ordinary France. Nearer Tonnerre I meet again the canal, which had left me for some while, and salute it as a friend. It forms one more straight line over the land; it is sheltered and

softened by beautiful tall poplars on both sides. I rest on its bank, and we talk in whispers of things cool and gentle—of spring rains, summer dawns and moss in the woods. It has quaint little fish that look at one a moment with startled eyes, whisk their tails, and are off, leaving a mysterious rippling trail on the water. I rise fresh for the road, and now the canal is my companion the whole way to Tonnerre. The ever-present silver poplars, shorn of all their lower branches, stand up on the landscape like immense spider's legs, pulled off by some frolicsome giant and stuck into the earth in rows: They are beloved of parasitic mistletoe which nestles among their scanty boughs. There are quantities of busy officious magpies. For some time I amuse myself trying to get near them, but the cold-blooded creatures always spy me at a distance.

Through village after village I pass, and out into the country again. My knapsack receives a good deal of attention. In Germany or Switzerland, where thousands walk thus, one would pass unnoticed, but in France the delight of walking for its own sake is little known. Indeed, some busy folk express nothing but annoyance at one having the leisure

for such a ridiculous occupation. Tramping enough they had on their military service. But for me there is always the pleasant sensation of leaving the sour people in their own atmosphere, and moving out into the sweet air.

Now I have settled down into the mechanical swing of the evening walk. There is that delicious fatigue I love so well, when it would be more tiring to stop than it is to go on. But the twilight is not so fair and peaceful as on that well-remembered evening in the Yonne valley. The sun is sooner down and the moon, more powerful, sooner holds the sky. There is something of magic, of witchery to-night—something almost evil. I catch sight of a falling star: it makes me shiver. The bats fly very low and keep circling quite near my face; and the moon gets tangled in hideous bare boughs, looking for all the world like an haggard crone. Not a human being do I meet, though I often hear steps—but I know too much of witchcraft to look back. Presently there are limes each side of the road, gaunt and bare, having been lately trimmed so as to form those kind of great tree-hedges which the French love. There is something more than

uncanny about them, for against the moon they stand out like huge hands reaching up vainly into space. Each has five gaunt deformed fingers : I go on counting mechanically as I pass, until at last I cannot do otherwise. It becomes a bewitchment, and the number is always correctly 5—till, suddenly, round a corner, I cross a bridge over rushing water, and before I could have guessed it, am in the main street of Tonnerre. Oh, welcome inn ! Oh, welcome bed ! In less than half an hour I am fast asleep.

V

CÔTE D'OR

TONNERRE is among hills; it has many ancient churches with towers that soar above the houses, and from all sides it is beautiful.

But now soon I have entered Côte d'Or. It is cowslip time, and often 'tis hard to tell whether the pastures are green or yellow. I do not feel the scarcity of summer foliage, for there is everywhere as much wealth of colour as the eye can desire. And Spring suddenly takes the whole land in her maternal arms and possesses it.

The butterflies first brought me the news as I was going up a hill path through a fir-wood. I came to a clearing just as the low bell of some distant church broke the silence, and strangely at that moment half a dozen brilliant butterflies surrounded me and filled the air with their colours. I believe that first thrill, that vernal quickening of the blood, is the most beautiful sensation of the year. It holds

every sense; it possesses body and soul. Now I am ready for each sign: I await the spring, and it rushes to me. I rejoice in the leaves that are out, and long for those which are slow or backward: already I fear that time when the dust shall sully their fresh green. As each tree blooms I mark it off, and desire the next. But every sign of spring is here now. The birds have found voice. The lark, the incarnation of all song, holds the supreme place—until suddenly I hear the cuckoo.

Côte d'Or becomes for me from the beginning a dreamland of spring. I cannot relate events too particularly. My chief impressions are of a mist of sunlight pouring on the golden soil, or shadows drifting over the broad hills—of colour, and of song. Nevertheless there are the rambling villages and mediæval stone crosses on every hill-top, at every corner of the way; and there are particularly the castles of Rochefort and of Bussy, and the dream-city of Flavigny.

From Ravières I ascend a beautiful valley towards Rochefort, a castle that, from what information I can gather, is being allowed to fall to ruins because its owner does not need it. It is a haunt of lizards and jack-

daws, and shy squirrels peep over the cornices. Was there ever such a place for uncanny noises? I feel pursued round every corner. The whole building is alive; even a stout gargoyle blinks his eyes at me. There are few things more pathetic than a castle fallen to ruin through mere disuse. Looking all the while over my shoulder, I climb the turret stair, which is in perfect condition. Through my caution in looking back I nearly run into some one coming downward towards me—but find at the last moment it is only a shadow. I can hardly stay at the top of the turret: they are closing me in below. Who was that moving in the kitchen? I hasten down to see: there is no one. 'Tis all the worse—if only some one would appear! I would like reality, but they will not face me: they move suddenly in corners that I have just left. At last, trying to persuade myself I have seen all inside, I bolt into the sunlight—an abject coward. Then the gargoyle openly grins at me, just as something heavy falls in the stables near at hand. I tell myself I am hungry and must find the nearest village for luncheon. 'Tis not true; but any excuse serves a coward.

Quite otherwise Bussy-Rabutin, which is

still inhabited, and is the most lovely French château I have seen. It is famous partly because Madame de Sévigné often stayed there. I gather little from a dear old woman who shows the principal rooms. The real story is chiefly told me by an intelligent carter.

It is thus: The castle dates from the twelfth century, but Roger de Bussy-Rabutin, cousin of Madame de Sévigné, built most of what at present exists, under Louis XIV. In 1659 he was exiled from Court for some indiscretion in holy week, but was allowed to live at his castle, where he spent his time hunting wild beasts, and writing a chronicle of Court gallantries to amuse his mistress. His fame as a hunter reached the king. A story was poured into his ears of how Roger had slain a gigantic and ferocious brute. Louis was so delighted that he had a picture painted of the event: it now hangs at Bussy. The hero returned to Court covered with glory. But, alas! his mistress circulated copies of the great work on gallantries. One was presented to Louis, his face turned a royal purple, and he clapped Roger into the Bastille to meditate on his errors for six years. When at last he was delivered, the poor gallant gentleman

was exiled to Bussy again. But he always knew how to amuse himself. He took up painting, and, assisted by a few professional artists, covered his walls and ceilings with allegorical pictures concerning Louis and his own former mistress, now turned faithless. There is an eagle slaying a partridge: the partridge was Louis, and the eagle was Roger —in his dreams. Few of the paintings are good, but there is something simple and intensely effective about them. Roger *felt* what he painted, and therefore one feels, in this twentieth century, what he felt. He loved glory, and he also decorated one great room entirely with portraits of the world's warriors. Courtly ever, he made a picture-gallery of the Kings of France—but opposite them on the other wall of the room he hung the Rabutins. In Madame de Sévigné's bedchamber are two lovely portraits of the Pompadour and of a most beautiful woman, Marie Louise d'Orleans, who died at twenty-four, having filled her short life with every atrocity a woman can devise. Apart from these, I must confess that the Sévigné relics interest me far less than those of glorious Count Roger.

After leaving Bussy, I have planned to sleep at Flavigny among the hills—indeed, so much

among them that I cannot reach it. The map utterly fails me ; at length I find myself going straight in the wrong direction, and every one I ask tells me something different. At twilight I am left standing almost hopeless. One thing alone is certain : that a great hill faces me, and beyond that hill lies Flavigny—and my bed. Courage ! I have done with the map : my only chance is to leave the road and trust to the compass. I top the hill—and there, suddenly, is the dream-city of Flavigny floating in the sunset.

Such a place fortune might lead one to in the heart of Italy, but in the centre of France one did not expect it. Flavigny covers a whole hilltop. I thought I had ascended so high that I should see it below me somewhere in the valley—but, behold, it lies among the clouds ; and I must go down and up again, higher than I am now.

It hovers before me like a vision, and I think, so soon as I climb to reach it, it will no longer be there. From the depths of the valley I last see it in a mist of moonlight, for as I climb the steep road that circuits about the hill on which it stands, it is completely hidden from sight—until suddenly I am at the gate.

Shall I enter? Is there no treachery? I can hardly believe there is quiet entrance through this double-turreted gateway. Once within, am I not entrapped? I make bold; but what fantastic shadows in the flood of moonlight! Some, I think, are men; some are not: but I cannot distinguish. The streets make every conceivable angle; they are full of Arthurian turrets: everything is twisted one way or another, and the whole place is corners. The houses are surely impossible: who would dream such buildings could stand? If you would visit a faery city, enter Flavigny in the moonlight.

The inn is at the far end. There is but one in the place, and all the rooms are occupied. Luckily they can arrange a spare bed for me on the upper landing. It turns out that the son of the house knows every stone in Flavigny, and loves it as—nay, better than, his own soul; his father loves good wine and the delights of the table, and his mother is the busiest woman I ever saw. For long I cannot get to bed, for the son will talk to me of his dear town, and so much I too love the place already that I must listen. He often tells me it was *once* taken by the English, and thinks this will please me

mightily. When at last I go, it is not, however, to sleep. The bed on the landing is, I admit, a failure, for—well, for *reasons* more than one, all of them very irritating. I am called at 6.30 during my first sleep. The old lady shouts to me *of course*, however, not to rise yet, which is really a hint, of course, that she wants to get the landing clear of me—and, at that moment, behold, an enormous *reason* jaunting up my pillow! I rise at once without effort.

There are many excitements in Flavigny. At seven a man with a drum passes through the streets announcing the weekly sale of fish of all kinds to begin immediately and last till mid-day. Downstairs I find that milord Landlord (one of the jolliest yet most dignified gentlemen I have met) has already made his purchase. As I enter he and his son are finishing their second dozen of oysters, and the talk of the morning is that the cursed fishmonger has brought asparagus with him —for which who cares a straw?—but *no lobster*. Son-and-heir is despatched to see if such an absurdity can be really true. Meanwhile milord quietly consumes the third dozen. There is little greed in his deportment; but rather a godlike indolence, as of Jove on Olympus.

Fish, I learn, is *the* affair of the week in Flavigny. A positively enormous man enters, and spots the oysters at once. "I do not care much for them—perhaps two dozen or so of a morning," says milord, drawing the dish fondly nearer himself. But the very stout gentleman has immense flabby hands, and milord is routed. "Nor do I," he says, gloating, "but these are remarkably good." When son-and-heir returns he gets the dregs of a second bottle of white wine, and that's all. Milord does not even inquire further about the lobster: he knew the whole time.

But Son is easily consoled. His only wish is to show me his Flavigny, and he is leading me forth when, unfortunately, milord chooses to begin a narration of how they defended the town against the Prussians in '70. However, my cicerone, winking at me, draws me out into the sunlight before his father can get under way. And Flavigny is as faery by day as by moonlight. A great deal of it was built between the thirteenth and fifteenth centuries, but there are delicate touches of Renaissance work set in, like tiny flowers, where one least expects them. There is scarce any new, for the hilltop has no room for more houses, and when the old are

falling they are patched, or taken down and rebuilt. I love best the quiet little court of the old seigneur's house under the church spire. There is a stone fountain in the centre, and lilies-of-the-valley are growing round the stone benches.

As I depart down the steep hill Flavigny seems to vanish in the clouds. If you wish to go to see it I doubt whether it be there now. Yet milord and his family give it a bold touch of reality. Ask for them—Hôtel de la Fontaine.

To reach St. Seine l'Abbaye, where I shall sleep to-night, I know that Gissey is the first village I must pass. But I have too much experience now to follow the main road out of Flavigny. I use my compass at once, cut across the fields, and dig my feet into the red soil, mount a steep hill, and there right below me is Gissey, and beside me, an inviting spring. I bend down and put my mouth to the cool water, then stand upon the hilltop with uplifted head, close my eyes to the sun, and let it burn into my face.

From breakfast to supper I fast. The day is too joyous and mysterious to sit down to the solemn function of a meal, and to rest on the moss of a cool wood proves the sweetest

and most complete refreshment. They were no fools who first taught that fasting brings a man nearer God. Thus the long calm day is a dream through which I wander and rest, rest and wander, over hill and valley, by stream and wood. Toward evening there is the high rock-castle of Salmaise, and then a long stretch of road beside a forest where the birds are simply mad with song. I lie full length, hide my face in the sweet grass, and listen. When I rise the moon is already high, and contends with the sun for my shadow.

Now, alas ! I am through the loveliest part of Côte d'Or, and after St. Seine l'Abbaye the remainder of the walk to Dijon is almost flat. But it is a day of intense white and blue, and there is one lovely valley into which the road dips and winds out again the other side. Then soon, behold, spires and streaks of smoke, and the low roar of a distant city, and, after the thirteenth day's walk since I started, I arrive at Dijon, and have completed the first stage of my pilgrimage.

Now, at two hundred miles from Paris, I hardly notice my knapsack. After packing it half a dozen times one discovers exactly how to dispose the particular things one has

brought. The rudiment, of course, is to put the lighter but more bulky things at the bottom, and the heavier towards the top. Then it must be hitched into exactly the right position to prevent it entirely from dragging at one's heart. Now my only difficulty is that when I take it off in the evening I feel quite unbalanced, and can scarcely walk without it.

VI

JURA

I CANNOT stand Dijon long. Though it may be pleasant to enter a large town after many days on the road, it is seldom pleasant to stay there. Besides, I become demoralized in six hours, and, among other things, begin spending far too much money ; I can't tell exactly how, but for the chief part on trifles utterly unnecessary. One mistake, for instance, is the purchase of an absurd and ponderous guide-book for Burgundy, which, as soon as I leave the shop, I know I shall scarcely open. So, having seen the churches and a very interesting museum, I take to flight and joyfully pass out from the atmosphere of town-life.

Now for many days I shall keep the main road over the plain of Dijon and the Val d'Amour into the mountains of Jura. The hot sun has quickened all the trees, and the

plentiful chestnuts hold up their heads proudly with real leaves. True, many are still turned back, shy and strange to the world, like young flappers ; yet there is everywhere a sense of verdure, as of a green veil lightly spread over the whole land. I press on, longing for the distant hills. But, alas ! now it turns very cold ; clouds obscure the sun ; there is rain, then light snow, and across the whole plain of Dijon I must walk in mackintosh.

At last I mount a range of low hills—the rampart of Jura. Looking backward, there is Dijon ; looking forward, Dôle, the great forest of Chaux, and, beyond all, forty kilometres away, the first mountains of Jura, covered with fresh snow.

I sleep at Dôle, where the chief interest is a splendid massive church tower, which shows marks of frequent bombardment. I cannot keep my eyes off it, and as I leave the place, since it is visible for a long distance, get a stiff neck from going with my head the wrong way.

After Dôle, I walk a whole day across the Val d'Amour towards the mountains. The character of the country gradually changes. The houses get deep broad roofs, often with low eaves, and are more and more châlet-

like. Oxen are almost entirely used again for agriculture, and cottage flower-gardens are much more frequent. The churches become gaunt, and sometimes obtrusively ugly ; one misses the gargoyles ; it is already the mountain type of structure. But the farmsteads are now in every way beautiful. They generally consist of one great building, with immense gable and deep low-eaved roof, under which are dwelling-house, dairy, barn, cow-byre, piggery, hayloft and all, excellently planned in the one block. It is the castle of the old race of strong, serious, thrifty peasants. I have luncheon in such a house, and am refreshed and edified.

To-day I feel so vigorous that I walk nearly seven hours without stopping—save for one rest in a cool village church. All along the way the wild flowers increase, and are most exhilarating. The colours of violet and cowslip in some outlying copses of the Forest of Chaux are wonderful. The delicate birches have gotten their leaves suddenly, as by magic. The crimson flower of the silver poplar is falling ; it drops from the roadside trees in wanton profusion upon my head and all about me.

At last I have reached the hills, for Poligny,

where I sleep, is right under them, and nestles into the entrance of a valley. It is a pleasant little town. On the morrow I eagerly begin the ascent of the road that winds up to the first plateau of Jura, whence I can look back over the plains I have crossed, and down on my left into the sweet pastoral valley. It is good from these summits to see the great tracts behind. There lies the Forest of Chaux —the third largest of France—like a patch of green moss. How puny after all ! I believe I could snatch it up in my hand and toss it to the other end of the plain. The little valley on my left has a silver stream and gentle slopes of pasture. There is an ancient convent veiled in peace, a beech-tree grove with cowslips to the waterside, and many paths wind towards the heights. Some cattle are grazing drowsily far up, and a few peasants are digging a strip of earth.

Jura is a series of plateaux culminating in the heights on the borders of Switzerland, and then dropping suddenly—before the superior Alps—to the shores of Geneva. The first plateau is sadly disappointing ; it is like a great stretch of Irish stone-wall country. Occasionally it opens up, as by Champagnole, and then there are hills covered with fir-

woods, in the distance like dark soft moss, and many villages dotted about. Here it has become very cold again, but a hard wintry sunset on the fir-trees turns them a wonderful colour, and, a little farther on, casts my shadow, a full kilometre long, gauntly up a hillside.

I am persuaded at Champagnole to leave the main road and visit Baume-les-Messieurs, which, they say, is the purple patch of Jura. The walk there, however, is dull and tiring. There is a warm, savage wind blowing which parches my lips, and I linger often and long under the shelter of crags, or in delectable corners where the violets grow.

In the afternoon comes a period of languor, when, with my whole heart, I wish myself at home in some cosy room among books and pictures, and I think that to wander is only for fools and tramps—the wind has sapped my vigour. But here, suddenly, are the rocks of Baume ; the solid earth gives way beneath me, cleft into a narrow chasm of great depth. The descent is by a perilous zigzag path, cut in the only place where the rock is not quite perpendicular. There is a roar of water from torrents still hidden ; it is a dizzy passage. Half-way down one can see the whole

valley. Though deep and very narrow, at the bottom it is green and inviting. At this upper end are but four houses, near the waterfalls and the caves, and farther down, two miles away, is the rambling village of Baume, with its graceful abbey.

At first impression one would call it *the Happy Valley*. But soon I learn there is a lawsuit. It is about the chief waterfall, of which the miller claims one half for an old mill he never uses, and has asserted his claim by dividing the course of the stream. Only man is vile. So in dry weather the lower cataract has a sad clipped appearance where the waters have been divided; but I am detained twenty-four hours by a thunder-storm and torrents of rain, and thus see both cataracts in their fullest majesty. One passes underneath the upper one to enter caves a kilometre deep. Armfulls of crystal are showered from the lap of the rocks. They shoot out above one's head, and plunge into depths below. The caves are vast and wonderful. One follows the very path of the green torrent into the bowels of the earth; then, deeper still, one stands over little still lakes, while the evil bats whirl about high and low.

All night, too, there is the roar of the water, so terrible, yet so soothing. And in the blackness through the open window it is like the voice of some appalling presence unseen, till, gradually discerned as one's eyes become accustomed, there is the white foamy shape of the fall, quivering from the earth upwards like a ghost, with waving arms and head and every kind of uncanny gesture.

The valley of Baume might be the end of the world. It is a weird spot on a rainy day, but the little hotel is charming, and I have to give an English lesson to mine hostess, who is mad to talk our most unlovely tongue. She makes rapid progress, picks up several sentences, and speaks them divinely.

Last, but not least, there dwells a hermit in the valley. I am told that modern hermits usually keep themselves alive by selling post-cards. This one—I did not ask him his religion—has built himself the quaintest little house, in which, winter and summer through, he dwells alone. It has two rooms; one his bedroom, the other, a museum containing about three hundred stuffed birds. He killed and stuffed them all himself, and charges twenty centimes admission.

They make a quaint community in their

four houses beside the waterfalls—the factious miller, the hermit-naturalist, the guide to the caves, and Monsieur Poulet and family of the hotel.

VII

THE PERILOUS VALLEY

In spite of black cold weather, I set out to join the main road again at St. Laurent; and it feels like starting to meet an old friend. I determine to go by way of the valley of the River Hérisson, where they say I shall see some of the most beautiful waterfalls in France. The first part of the walk is through that hateful stone-wall country; but, after lunch at Doucier, I enter the valley. Unfortunately a sharp squall enters at the same moment. After the wind has had its say, a soft rain sets in, rather cool and pleasant than otherwise. Near the entrance to the valley are two or three delicate waters, close along the shore of which the lane winds. They are faery lakes in the thin falling mist, and the hills, of uncertain height, rise up from them, hazy and mysterious. All is so gentle and soft; there is, indeed, a beauty of the rain as of sunshine; it seems absurd

we should fear it so. It is because of our clothes of course. The water trickles inside the collar, or we are wetted through ; and there are colds and rheumatism hovering over us like carrion-crows. No man with a well-hardened skin would mind walking naked in the rain ; it is the clothes keep him indoors. And after all these centuries are we still to say we have found no way of adapting ourselves to the incessant and well-known caprices of the weather? Why does no one hurry to invent satisfactory rain-proof clothing? As it is, we stand at the window and growl, or we talk incessantly about *recent* uncertainty of weather, which always has been, and always will be, uncertain. I long for the perfect mackintosh clothing, if only to put a check on such dull conversation. Strange that man the adaptable should be so stupid, so obstinate on this one point of adapting himself to established climatic conditions !

Higher up the valley, towards the second plateau of Jura, the rain becomes sleet, and, a little higher yet, it becomes snow. Then the valley narrows to a gorge, and the river, enclosed between rocky heights, becomes a torrent. The snow falls more and more

heavily. The torrent, which was such a quiet pastoral stream in the open valley, under constraint, becomes fierce, almost ferocious. The lane is now a narrow winding path; little tough bushes close in all about it, with branches interlaced across; everything in the world is white. I have been ascending all day, and am half-way toward the second plateau, in a far colder atmosphere, where every flake of snow lies. Freezing fast on to the boughs, it forms a white outer covering; it is six inches deep on the ground, and it makes the softest hissing sound as it falls, which mingles harmoniously with the roar of the water.

But now there steals over all a distant louder voice; louder, louder, more intense, but still from no visible source. I feel strongly what I felt but dimly at Baume—that the voice of the waters is conscious and articulate. At last the ground is trembling, and there is a mysterious sensation of being in the presence of some great unseen force. I stop by a gap in the bushes, and behold, through a veil of falling snow, towering right over me, is a great fan-shaped waterfall about three hundred feet high, narrow at the top, bounding and broadening down, ledge upon ledge, to four times the breadth at the bottom. It

is almost too graceful to be terrible ; the next fall above it, which drops nearly the same depth in but one single leap, seems far more terrible. I scarce know how the path winds out of this gorge into the one above, narrower and steeper. Twice little bridges cross the torrent, and, suddenly as before, the second fall is revealed through snow. I feel it much more ; it has a mesmeric force which is terrible, and which I cannot withstand. A kind of drowsiness steals upon me, and I am held gazing I know not how long. At last I lift up my arms in silent wonder ; it has ceased to appear terrible—it has the gentleness of intense power.

And the snow has nearly covered me over. I am roused by the appearance of a long streak of crimson on the path ; 'tis the sunset. Hastily I gather myself together for the ascent, but it is not so easy a matter. There are two or three paths, all vague by now with snow ; there is no appearance of a signpost. The most likely track seems to the left ; it leads me past a mysterious cave, up over a ledge, round a corner to—nowhere. I retrace my footprints and try another, which leads me up and up, and then straight back in the wrong direction—apparently also no-

where. And all the while there is the drowsy roar of the water and the whispering rustle of the snow, which, in the gathering dusk, has become cruel and more than white. Turning back, suddenly I strike the real path quite by chance. It is all so entrancingly beautiful that I have grown callous of peril, and to sleep in the snow appears harmless. At the head of the fall I can look right down the valley—or could, were it not that the low sun has now shot out a dazzling tongue of flame from under black clouds, and turned the white lands almost too fiery to gaze upon.

When at last I move on things have grown serious; there is utter loneliness, and the path becomes less and less distinct with the increasing snow. I can but follow upwards the course of the torrent, which leaps past me in I know not how many mighty or fantastic cataracts. As the gorge becomes broader again I lose the path hopelessly, and wander, stumbling and falling several times, across fields of snow. At last, the dim outline of a great watermill! I hasten towards it; there's a light in the window; I knock at every hollow door—'tis deserted. The light in the window was the reflection of the crimson sun. And so, with all speed, I follow

a path broader and, luckily, less dim, and, in gathering darkness, come to a mountain village almost entirely deserted. In one gaunt hovel, by a low fire, at last there is an old man smoking his pipe. He says that out of the twenty-five houses of the village only six are now inhabited ; everybody has rushed to the towns. I have heard this sad tale more than once before along the way. He directs me to the main road, pointing towards some vast crags, terrible in the dim light, and advising me not to go on, as (though it has just stopped snowing) there will be more and more under foot towards Switzerland. But the spirit of adventure is on me.

There is no moon, but the sky becomes cloudless, and the stars are soon so brilliant that they light up the snow. One or two sledges pass with soft gliding sound, muffled voices of men, and tinkling bells. Soon the road winds high up round a broad valley (how deep I cannot tell), twists into the rocky peaks, round a corner, where the chill wind blows, through a narrow opening, and out into another valley beyond. I am utterly alone with Nature. All her power is at work. She has taken me in her dear maternal arms : she could put me so gently to sleep. . . .

VIII

SOME IMPRESSIONS OF FRANCE

I REACHED St. Laurent at half-past nine. I am a little hazy about the last part of the walk: the road curved and wound until it seemed to be taking me in a circle. I remember the queer creaking noise of the snow under my feet, and its perpetual caking on my boots; also a mysterious village with a few lights which all seemed to disappear before I came to them. And when I arrived the snow was frozen on to my hat, knapsack, and mackintosh, so that I was like a man in armour.

St. Laurent and Morez are both detestable, but from the latter begins the long steep ascent to the third plateau of Jura, all very very lovely. Near the Swiss frontier the snow becomes formidable: it is of the whole winter. The road has only been cleared to the breadth of the plough, and one walks be-

tween frozen banks of it eight feet high on each side. My last impression of France is delightful. Suddenly round a sharp corner comes a wedding party, and I have to press myself against the snow-wall to let them pass —three brakes full. In the first is a dainty little white girl-bride, but the remainder of the party consists almost entirely of men in frock coats and top hats—top hats! Most of them are crooning some old love ballad.

This pleasant sight almost on the frontier recalls some of my other impressions of France and her beloved people. The French have seemed to me warm-hearted and cordial everywhere: this is my foremost sensation of them. None the less there is always a certain calm reserve and reticence to begin an acquaintance cheaply. The Englishman's much-vaunted reserve too often takes the form of an insolent stony stare; the Frenchman's is rather a matter of politeness. However slowly he begins, his heart afterwards runs away with him: he soon makes up for lost time—but nearly always with a deference and courtesy truly admirable.

Of course, however, I have met plenty of surly people: they abound everywhere. The over-eaten type, stupefied, self-sufficient, almost

impossible to rouse, is perhaps the most irritating: its occupation is to crawl from meal to meal. There was one such woman who kept a certain hotel that I entered very late and very tired. She sat all day, if not eating, doing nothing, at a table, on some part of which (moving only to make room for dishes) a fat long-haired dog reposed. This creature welcomed me to the house with a prolonged squeaky paroxysm of barking, and every one in the room had to help coax it to silence before I could be heard. At last I was able to bid her good-evening and ask for lodging. Without a word she waved to one of the many females about her, who conducted me upstairs. Every time I approached that woman the dog went through the same performance, and had to be silenced before I could make myself understood. Only one single word did I drag from her floppy mouth during the whole stay. She was not deaf or dumb: she was simply lazy and treated everybody alike. Another time, when her visage was flushed after a heavy meal, I heard her snap at her females like an angry shark. She had ready enough words then, spoken quickly and ferociously.

Once clear of Paris, as I travelled south-

ward, at every stage people seemed more and more amiable: in Côte d'Or they were at their best. One must not forget, however, that a Frenchman is excitable proportionately as he is amiable. Yet what often appears to us violent irritability in conversation is nothing but so much play: it is overflow of good spirits and eloquence. In one hotel I heard a ludicrous discussion. Here the landlord (is it not a very nice custom?) ate at the same long table with the visitors, and attended personally to any little requirements. Besides myself there was only one guest, who happened to be an old friend of the landlord. They took the opportunity of cooking a long-hoarded woodcock, and I did them a real service in being vegetarian, enabling them to cut the bird in half instead of three parts. Unfortunately in the middle of this operation the landlord made a statement that woodcock was the greatest delicacy in existence. His dogmatism roused something in his friend, who replied quickly that such a thing was surely a matter of taste. This the landlord would not have: it was a matter, he said, of the acknowledged consensus of opinion—admittedly on his side. Thereupon they set to; the one became purple, the other red, and

I thought at the time that if they had not been so engaged upon the bird they would have ended by attacking each other with their forks. But now I realise my error. The whole thing ended as suddenly as it began in a simultaneous shout of laughter. They had enjoyed the argument as much as the woodcock. Without the heat there would have been no sting of excitement : it would have been flat, scarcely a discussion—nothing.

It is these high spirits that many of us English abominate in them, because we do not understand. The French are not intemperately irresponsibly excitable, as we so often imagine, but are nearly always tempered by good sense and chiefly by courtesy. I fully expected plenty of jeering on the road : an Englishman puffing along under his knapsack was surely an object for jest ; yet not once was I openly jeered at, save near Poligny, where a group of little boys, among other jokes, shouted after me, all together, the line of some comic song, which ran, " J'ai marché trente kilomètres sans boire," and certainly made me laugh as much as they laughed themselves.

I was severely lectured two or three times for not carrying a revolver, and at Dijon was at last persuaded to buy one ; but the vile

thing only added to my many needless extravagances in that town, and considerably to the weight of my pocket.

We are often prejudiced against the French because of their ugly table manners. It certainly is difficult to understand why a man should use his cheese-knife to extract the meat fibres from his teeth, or to accustom oneself to a very respectable old gentleman holding a fried sole in his immaculately clean fingers to tear it up with his teeth, and spitting the bones out on his plate. I do not say that such things are done in the best society ; but who would judge a nation by its so-called best society, which is a minimum of its population? The whole thing is a matter of custom and of training : many an evil mind lurks behind the cleanest manners. To be severely cautious in outward appearances is often merely a trait of the Philistine or the hypocrite. Good manners are indeed some criterion, but let us rather look first to the heart !

And they are eminently good-hearted. They show it so often in the details of life. In one small town I stopped at a cobbler because the nails were coming through the sole of one of my boots. He hammered them

out very carefully, but absolutely refused to accept any payment for his services. I went on to the chemist as the rubbing had set up a little inflammation. He gave me a box of powder, and was almost offended when I wanted to insist on paying for it. I felt that atmosphere of good-comradeship in France which in other places I have only felt in the society of socialists. The dreadful sharply-defined distinction between rich and poor seems almost non-existent. This is not difficult to understand when one realises that in the whole country there are only fifteen thousand people who have more than 50,000 francs income a year. Yet, in spite of the comparatively equal distribution of wealth, and although socialism is becoming so readily adopted in practice, I was sorry to find much hostility everywhere towards it in theory. I inquired regularly, but most people shook their heads and answered me that they knew too much about the socialists, and could see farther than they. "Chacun pour soi," they would often add; but none the less I always saw that at heart it was the French political party of socialists to which they objected, not the principles of socialism. Few nations are more socialist at heart.

I perceived in the majority of country people a deep fund of kindly simplicity. By the road one hears the peasant yelling perpetual execrations in God's name at his horses, but 'tis all figure of speech. He swears by the devil as easily, and would by a potato if his father had taught him—or not at all if his father had not. I love the impression I have of him—great heavy simple fellow—loitering about some fair or market, hauling out his watch, the size of a turnip, every five minutes, still a little incredulous about it, and raising it to his ear each time, suspicious of its having stopped.

Yet he is a grand lord in his way. He is often versed in many subjects of real interest, and his dinner is never less than four courses, with coffee after. At a busy season he seems to work as much on Sunday as another day, and once, when I lost count, though it turned out afterwards to be Sunday, for miles I could not make up my mind: all the peasants were at work. Indeed, it seems to be the particular day for clearing off old scores. In one of the quaint hotels of Yonne the whole family (father, mother, and two daughters) began early in the morning with brushes and pails, and by evening had

scrubbed the place from roof to cellar. They told me this operation took place every Sunday. The personal washing accommodation in the rooms is certainly bad, with its basin often the size of a soap-dish and soap-dish the size of a salt-cellar. Yet it is wonderful what a delicious cold bath one can have in a basin, if one determines not to be scornful and to try.

I am very glad I joined the *Touring Club de France* so that I could carry its annual in my pocket. At a town in Yonne, one of the few times I did not follow it, I got into a vile place of the type where half a dozen people pursue you down every passage for tips — I suppose really one of the few "*decent*" hotels I stayed in. I fear that people who are the least fastidious do not find the provincial hotels good in France—though at all events they must find many of them beautiful. I am filled with a sense of keen delight as I think of the old country inns of the larger kind, as at St. Julien or Tonnerre, with cobbled courtyard, open to the sky or sometimes roofed by a gigantic vine, crooked rambling outside stairway, and galleries or balconies all around with the bedrooms opening on to them. Then there is

the amiable reception and the homely warm cheer—coloured of course by all the delights of fatigue and anticipations of the next day.

IX

THE BLUE LAKE

La Cure, the frontier village between France and Switzerland, is surrounded by plains of snow, relieved by dark fir-woods and gaunt sudden peaks. Châlets are dotted about, and there is the sound of the sweet cow-bells. From La Cure to St. Cergues is one of the most solitary stretches of country along the whole way from Paris. The road ascends to nearly 4,000 feet; the last fall of snow still lies on it, deep, but unfortunately not hard, and to walk becomes a desperate tussle. There seem only two sounds in the whole world—the occasional rustle of snow dropping from a fir-tree, and the ringing song of a thrush.

The first view of the lake and the Alps beyond on this cool spring morning bursts upon me like the unexpected fulfilment of some glorious dream, and for many seconds Mont Blanc brings such a strange sensation

of fear that I tremble and can scarce breathe. The road winds downwards, reaching the shore at Nyon, and I determine to strike back from there to Geneva, and thence saunter at my ease along the marge of the water from end to end.

There is no nation more promising than the Swiss. I always suspected it: now I know it. One receives the impression directly one arrives in the country. It is written on the faces of the men and women; it is evident in their habits and manners, and above all it is revealed in the children. How enthralling are these merry little smocked urchins with mischievous smile and ever-ready greeting. I so love it when they speak me good-day simultaneously with lips and eyes. They scarcely ever fail unless they are too absorbed in some wild game. Among the French-Swiss will be born perhaps some day the real prophet who shall open the adamantine gate of the next age. They have all the romance and careless ardour of the south admirably tempered by the thrift, method, and cool reasonableness of the north. At present, alas, the black heavy stone of commercialism is about their necks; but one day they will produce some transcendent hero.

The Chronicle of a Pilgrimage

Every one knows the town of Geneva : like Lausanne and Lucerne, it is a meeting-ground for all nationalities. For a brief sojourn it is not so unpleasant as some other towns, but it reminds one too much of Mr. Wells's "pleasure cities." A great part of the 22 kilometres from Geneva to Nyon is sacrificed to trams and motors, and flanked by the villas of the rich. My mouth is filled with dust, and the sounds of the horn and noisy bell echo through my brain. I become a very contrite creature : along the road I have been imagining myself quite a serious excursionist —here I am merely the first little tourist of spring.

Nyon is at the mouth of the greater lake. Opposite, on the Savoy side, near the marvellous fairy village of Yvoire, a large rock marks the division. From Nyon to Lausanne the walk is along the broad rich lands between the Jura Mountains and the shore. It is the season of full blossom, and I linger more than a week in this enchanted world. On cloudless days the heat of the sun is intense, yet there is always a fresh breeze, cool as nectar, but scarcely strong enough to ruffle the blue holy calm of the water. Sometimes it is hard to believe that I am

awake and that everything is real in the paradise about me. Human life is listless ; sound, motion are slow and languid ; the sap alone is quick, and the myriad winged scents dart through the air in their first freshness like butterflies, and awaken the oldest and sweetest associations the brain has stored. The blossom creates a white haze tinged with clusters of pink, relieved occasionally by lilac and often by masses of wisteria ; and beyond are the cool mountains, whitest of all, whose divine presence one may never forget.

Though sacred is the wonderful sun, yet on the fresher days, soft and slightly overcast, this region is certainly of the most fairy loveliness. Then the lake is pure silver, the mountain-snow shining fantastic silver, the scent-laden air is exquisite, and everything magical. Sometimes it is most wonderful of all after rain, when the mountains are draped with long low clouds, which cling and cling. and cannot soar, and the atmosphere is so clear that one thinks one can distinguish each tree of a forest twenty miles away.

Nearly all the places between Nyon and Lausanne — Rolle, St. Prex, Morges — are beautiful : most of them have a dreamy ancient atmosphere, and are devoid of noisy

tourists. I wander about St. Prex towards twilight. There is a misty blue tinge upon the lake ; the sky is purple-blue with streaky white clouds, and a young moon is sailing high. To my left is a headland with a long old wall crumbling down to the lake edge and square tower with pointed roof, a few pink-blossomed chestnut-trees and a mad profusion of lilac : behind all rise the ever-beautiful tall poplars. The many swallows whirl swift and low along the water, which plashes weirdly upon its stones ; and in the distance the shadowy mountains are the same faint colour as the moon and the clouds.

The road, particularly on hot days, is haunted by all the more venturesome individuals of the insect world. Often I have to pick my way among terrified spiders rushing zigzag across, or to walk round huge lazy beetles, rather like German professors, lumbering thoughtfully home after a big dinner. Yet the silly things will get crushed ; over and over again one is troubled by the bodies of those that have failed to look after themselves, flat as a bearskin rug in the dust. It is most enjoyable to play the supernatural God to helpless snails or officious ants. The former love choosing ridiculous places—the

bottom of a rut, for instance—to lie and dream. One day I helped an almost microscopic ant to carry the corpse of an immense bumble-bee up a steep hill. He halted occasionally, and looked about him in blank astonishment: I am certain the occurrence is now a miracle in ant mythology.

Some of the older parts of Lausanne are still pleasant and rambling, but it is being entirely disfigured by quantities of new appalling erections for human habitation run up in a few months, which one can only hope the first strong wind may fortunately blow down. The town gives the general impression of having been poured suddenly out of a bucket down the hillside, and of having trickled chiefly into cracks and fissures. Some parts of it are haunted by an unpleasant cackling mixed population, with the Jewish nose predominant.

Soon after Lausanne the mountains close in upon the waters, and above the road vineyards climb terrace upon terrace into the heights. On the far side the villages appear just to escape slipping into the lake, and must hold on tooth and nail to the mountain edge. Before Vevey one views the whole glorious expanse of water — length and

breadth. One is often reminded of the Mediterranean: there is some beautiful wild scenery. But now very soon one enters *Touristland*. At Vevey it begins, and continues uninterruptedly as far as Chillon—twelve good kilometres. All the places along here are suburbs of each other—Vevey, Tour de Peilz, Clarens, Montreux, Territet, Chillon: one continuous row of immense jerry-built hotels with the well-known detestable names—Palace, Majestic, Splendid, Grand, Royal, Imperial, calculated to attract the gilded Englishman and frighten money out of the timid or poor man's pocket. At Vevey the most prominent headland is adorned by a factory chimney belching black smoke. Thence electric trams run the whole road to Chillon castle, filling the air with their nervous grinding sound. The English element predominates. Everywhere the perfect *gentleman* is flaunting his high superiority over the foreigner; the schoolboy, with new panama and immaculately pressed trousers, is advertising that perfect institution, the English public school; and there is the English church (one knows it a mile away), the truly *English* church. Along the whole twelve kilometres an atmosphere prevails of "giving

the young people a good time," which consists chiefly in parents looking excessively smug and children of all ages sucking unhealthy cakes or sugar-plums. There are very many English schools in the district, and when at last I reach Chillon (which for twelve years, since I first read Byron, it has been one of the ambitions of my life to see) right under the great walls is an English "four", and as I enter the gateway the shrill-voiced cox screams: "Forward! Are you ready? Paddle!" I could have heard that on the Cam.

Chillon, like many such monuments, has been handed over to the merciless restorer for final destruction. Villeneuve at last, outside the clatter of *Touristland* at the entrance of the Rhone Valley, is quiet and old-world, and I saunter out upon a poplared headland to look back over the lake. Luckily these last impressions are ephemeral, and my chief recollections are of sweet homely cottages wrapped in wonderful wisteria, of broad green meadows fragrant with flowers sloping to the lake, planted in fruit-trees dazzling with blossom, and of azure water freshened by a crisp breeze and dotted with many a white sail; or of still fragrant nights, melodious with song and magical beneath the moon.

X

AMONG THE TITANS

I AM glad beyond measure to leave the clamorous tourists behind me and begin the ascent of the Rhone Valley. I shake myself free and settle into a long swinging stride. At once one feels in a valley : within a hundred yards the new atmosphere asserts itself. There are meadows each side of the road, where the hemlock is full waist-high; many cow-bells ring out clearly ; there is the perpetual chant of the cricket—and once again I hear the cuckoo.

The valley at its opening is quite five miles broad and perfectly flat, with plenty of Italian poplars. I feel overcome with self-consciousness through a sense that those colossal Titans, who sit round in everlasting conclave, are watching me. " Pooh, pooh ! " I laugh out, " What a fuss for a midge ! " At first I think they have no sense of humour : then I look again. The brows of some are

wreathed in white cloudy garlands. All are dreaming, dreaming—and the least dream of any is greater than a universe. Did I dare think they noticed *me?*

The sunset over the lake is wonderful. At first it was quite pale under a heavy bank of black clouds, but now it has turned deep orange, with great shafts of light shooting out mid-heaven. Happily this is my last impression of the lake.

At dusk I am suddenly attacked and utterly routed by a host of cockchafers. Ugh ! Why can't the foul heavy brutes look where they are flying? To be struck—*Zzung!*—simultaneously on the cheek and the back of the neck by a pair of them is almost beyond patience. It is a blow that sets every nerve in your body tingling. I snatch off my hat, one having fallen into the brim : then another drops on my head. Several are sprawling on their backs in the middle of the road. How are they so clumsy? They should not be trusted with wings. Wherever they hit, there they stick until swept off. Who would not enjoy to have butterflies perch all over him with the utmost intimacy? But cockchafers . . .

The next day it is real Switzerland. The

valley begins to narrow, and villages have had to climb the mountain-side to escape the heat of summer. Church bells ring so often through the clear air that it cannot be every time for religious reasons. I half suspect 'tis sometimes because a village slips an inch or two : it would take so little up there to set the bells aringing. And high, high up, sweet little châlets have been left by some titan's child on impossible ledges, to which certainly no path can lead. The road is still quite level and easy, and round every cleft or corner new titans are revealed. The beautiful valley with its broad flowery meadows dreams on in the sunlight, with every melodious sound the world possesses to make its dream more perfect. Yet it is prosperous with sleek cattle, and full of healthy signs of activity. In such a place one might found Utopia.

The Dent du Midi and the Dent de Morcles face each other, one on each side of the valley. Some day or other far back one of them stretched himself, and by St. Maurice their feet almost touch. Through this narrow opening there is only just room for the river with a road on each side of it. The railway, happily, can find no place, and disappears into a tunnel. Here the beautiful bridge of St.

Maurice spans the Rhone, and there is a splendid sixteenth-century castle, tall and strong. Every rock and ridge bristles with old fortifications. What a place for a fight! Many a time, I am told, has that bridge been held or won; and many a corpse, I am certain, has the Rhone received. It is a cruel heavy river, muddy and of immense volume, which rolls along like the Styx. Just above the bridge there is a sharp turn. The waters lumberously surge against the far rock, and, beaten back, return sulkily mid-stream, where at every point they boil up unexpectedly in vicious eddies.

After St. Maurice there are waterfalls that leap half-way down a mountain-side in three bounds. Sometimes one can trace them far up to the white peaks. They are the very snow itself which the sun is driving down; and, liquid, it is still white. Near any one of them you can feel a slight breeze, which is the cool breath of the mountain-tops. The valley from end to end is filled with their music. It is still serene and pastoral, but shows signs of becoming wilder. 'Tis an even more wonderful country for wisteria than the shores of Geneva. One plant by the road-side has climbed far up an Italian poplar, and

hangs in great mauve clusters from the top branches.

There is great diversity of entertainment. A colossal toad has fallen off a wall on his back. He is kicking and struggling, and keeps getting tangled in a bit of newspaper lying near. I have the immense pleasure of helping the dear old gentleman with my stick, but cannot wait to receive his stammered thanks, for two little boys are coming, and I am anxious not to betray him to them.

Now I am right under the Dent du Midi, which is always infested with fluffy little clouds that need dusting away. There is a view of snowy chasms, iron-cold, that no sun-ray can ever reach, the bare sight of which makes you draw your breath and shiver.

About here the crickets seem crowded off the grass. There are some, I imagine, that cannot stand so much singing, and come to sleep on the road for quiet : it makes walking very difficult. At the sound of a footstep they entirely lose their heads, run, hop, slide, tumble on their backs, and scramble at last somehow, white with dust, into the grass : quite an unnecessary fuss—they must be impossible to live with.

Towards evening there is a pine-wood,

which is cool relief, and, right in the middle, a clearing with a beautiful meadow, where I stay long to listen. For here, by a magical quartette, a pastoral sonata is being played more beautiful than man ever composed. 'Tis, in the bass, the waterfalls and the cattle bells, the former in low continuous monotone, the latter interweaving melody; and in the treble the unwearying ever-musical chant of the crickets, to which is added the high rapturous song of the birds—supreme melody of all. For once the four blend in complete, one would think, conscious, harmony: it is magical music one might never hear again in the whole world.

Later, quite unexpectedly, round a corner I come upon the waterfall of Vernayaz. It takes one's breath away. 'Tis over six hundred feet high, but is violent, and not nearly so graceful as the other falls I have just seen. Also telegraph posts run up each side of it, and a hideous erection of platforms has been made to enable tourists to pass on a ledge under it. Coming nearer, I find it is fenced in, and a restaurant has been built, over the door of which is inscribed in three languages, "Entrance to the waterfall." I pass it by without hesitation.

Yet there is always this difficulty of "sights". One knows, on the one hand, there is little chance of enjoying something deliberately dished up and forced down one's throat by an officious guide; but, on the other hand, one could not possibly make a rule of always passing them by. This poor waterfall is further damaged by the accursed *Buzz-z* of some carbide works, which stand right in the middle of the valley, and belch out great clouds of smoke visible for miles in every direction. The titans are really very lazy. One of them has but to move a foot, and the whole thing goes to destruction.

There is another "sight" near at hand, the Gorges du Trient, which should not be missed. Martigny-ville is at the great bend of the valley, right in a corner. It remains entirely hidden in a delightful way, until suddenly one is in the middle of it. The valley bears sharp to the left, and the bend is dominated by an utterly impossible castle, said to be the oldest in the Canton of Valais, but which I can't help suspecting of having been brought here from the Rhine. One side of it has gone so terribly crooked that it makes the eyes ache, and I would not mind being shot at fifty times through any of the

loopholes, unless by a knight with a squint, for no man with a straight eye could possibly aim through them. Also there is an old covered wooden bridge across the Rhone, which makes one feel born in a wrong century.

I have a bitter disappointment. For years I have longed to pass into Italy over the Great St. Bernard; but I am told that at this season it is far too dangerous without a guide, so I must be satisfied to go up the valley to Brigue and over the Simplon.

As I leave Martigny, looking back on the strange little town embosomed among titans, it seems as if one dark night a playful whirlwind, sweeping into that corner, might snatch it up and bear it away to the clouds.

XI

INTO THE HEIGHTS

AND now the valley becomes like ordinary France. For miles and miles the road is a perfectly straight avenue with poplars; and waterfalls are so scarce, the titans so silent and sleepy, that one might almost forget their existence. The soil is very sandy, so there are but few wild flowers: it is a great country for the cultivation of asparagus, and milk is scarce. There is a driving wind. At the tiny inn, where I can only get bread with lemons and water for luncheon, they tell me there is fortunately nearly always a wind here, and that otherwise this sandy part of the valley would be almost too hot to live in. There is now, of course, quite a new range of mountains disclosed far, far in the distance. They are very black at the base and dead white and cold above, with snow far down their sides: they are the higher peaks of

the Bernese Alps. At one time the valley was full of castles, and many ridges still bristle with beautiful ruined towers, walls, and ramparts.

I stop but a second to blow my nose, and the wind snatches my hat. It is a very steady wind. My soft felt hat has, with much use, gradually become as round as a wheel, and it is hard to run fast with a knapsack, which thumps the whole time on one's back. I wonder how far I pursue that hat—anyway so far that at last the perfectly straight road takes a bend, and I am horrified by the approaching repeated bray of an angry motor-horn. Oh, my hat!—but it runs into the wall of a house, and stops. I look up for the motor, and find 'tis nothing but an enormous and furious mule tied to a post. The brute repeats his shouts as I disappear round the next corner, and since I am feeling rather exhausted and distraught, for a moment actually deceives me again. A little farther on there is the first news from Italy. It consists of four dark dusty Italians with a camel, a cart-load of monkeys, two ponies, and in the rear, shuffling his flat feet through the dust, a most amiable and gentlemanly old bear.

Nearer Sion the valley opens up again into a lovely stretch of fertile country, where wild flowers are resplendent. The road crosses to the shadier side, and, as evening approaches, the shadow of the mountains on my left slowly covers the valley, and creeps up the farther mountains, gently putting every village and little house to sleep. Behind, the lower snow-peaks of the Mont Blanc range which reach down to Martigny, and in front, the heights of the Bernese Alps, have all turned crimson in the sun.

Soon, in a dark passage between two huge rocks, there is an inky-black pool by the road, from which rise grunts and hisses, screeches, groans and snorts, gasps, croaks, shrill squeaks, and every other sound the invisible can possibly produce. Round the next corner Sion comes in view—almost another Flavigny.

If, in moments of extreme absent-mindedness, I have sometimes glanced into a guide-book, it has always been my misfortune to cull some choice phrases which have stuck in my brain. Thus, the "threatening" waterfall of Vernayaz, the "formidable Dent du Midi" —and now as I turn the corner what do I murmur but "Ah, Sion picturesque!" and immediately gnash my teeth. Over the little

town, on two masses of rock that rise precipitous out of the centre of the valley, soar the ancient strongholds of Tourbillon and Valère; and I so long to stand among the windy ruins of Tourbillon that I can scarce keep patience with my cumbersome tired feet. In former days from these rocks the Prince-Bishop lorded it over the countryside; but, more than once, when he waxed too proud, the citizens of Sion had to come and knock at his door—with rams and crowbars. Now, *now* they are "sights", with guides duly installed; but the guide of Tourbillon is a very courteous old fellow of seventy-five. He names the surrounding peaks, and recites the history of the place with complete reverence. It is not easy to stop him, once started, but if you ask a question of sufficient interest to divert his attention, he will stop, answer you, and then go methodically right back over several sentences of what he was saying, so as to get properly under way again. At first it is irritating, but later I gather 'tis because he has very nearly lost his memory (which makes one love him), and by this mechanical trick of repetition alone is able to keep his livelihood. I come across quantities of dear little Swiss toy soldiers, who talk the marvel-

lous Bernese dialect, and seem quite contented to make their habitation in bits of old castles, and clamber about among half-restored ruins, which it was certainly a delightful idea to make into barracks.

The next day there is real heat. Oh, the glory of it ! I walk in the hottest part of the day on purpose. For some distance the road is cut out of rock which the sun so scorches that one cannot touch it. Lizards positively swarm, and always seem to dart up from nowhere. They are most inquisitive, and, before they scramble out of sight, cannot resist stopping to have a look. You can easily make friends with them, standing perfectly still for a minute, and then advancing very gradually till you almost touch them. Meanwhile they fix you with their eyes, and their little hearts thump till they shake their whole bodies.

It is Sunday, and many pairs of sweethearts are out under the trees, he in black trousers and white shirt-sleeves with his coat over his arm, and she in romantic peasant dress with a skirt that ends midway 'twixt her knee and good stout ankle. I am much diverted by the attempts of a sweet old woman to drive three goats and a cow, all of which

have discovered an infinite pleasure in scratching their necks against roadside trees. If by chance she succeeds so well as to get the three goats in front of her, the cow is always left serenely grinning at the third tree behind; and directly she goes for it, the goats disperse to the scratching.

Sierre, obviously built up for tourists, is so nearly a new town that three or four old towers scarce manage to keep it respectable. Meanwhile the language has gradually quite changed, and heaven knows what it has become! There are very many Italians, who (alas! I must admit) do not compare favourably with the Swiss. Out on the road after Sierre every other man I meet is an obvious brigand, and presently, in a thick pine-wood, the strains of an Italian song, accompanied by a mandoline, float down the air. They come from a log-shanty labelled by distinction "Caffè e Pensione", all about which sprawls and chatters the filthiest crowd of children, women, and men I have ever seen. Farther on there are several more such hovels—if one may call them so much—and presently I discover why they are there. The Rhone, which is gradually becoming quite a turbulent mountain river, is to be tamed. They are divert-

ing it for two new factories : a great canal is in construction, and the two thousand Italian workmen employed are thus housed—no better than pigs.

On my left the mountains have become terrible. There are flying galleries of snow terminating in jagged peaks which tear the clouds. There is something now of movement about them—of flight : they are more massive, not so dreamy. Somewhere, far up, the rock is being blasted for a new railway, and you can almost see the winged echoes rushing and whirling along the topmost white galleries. At Loëche, where I sleep, a terrible new monster (the Wildstrubel) becomes visible, and one feels like a crushed insect. I pine for the moon, which will rise late. Presently her silvery light touches the top peaks. For long she is yet invisible : then the light slowly spreads downward, until, rising at length, she floods and softens the whole valley.

Next morning in the sunlight the snow-mountains are so dazzling that one cannot look at them, and the blue of the sky is almost too dark and unrelieved. I can't help imagining Loëche was originally built in the valley, but, at some epoch or other, crawled every night a little way up the mountain. It

is rendered beautiful by many cracked and crumbly bits of an old turreted castle piled up at odds and ends of dates, of which portions, in a vague kind of way, are still inhabited. Every description of language is talked—or rather jabbered. The authorities seem to have come to no final decision in this matter. For instance, the large notice in the porch requesting the congregation not to spit in church is in German, though Italian is being talked in all the streets round; while in the post-office the best French is spoken, and Italian is not understood. Also every barometer is in two languages.

Their method of mending the highway in the Rhone Valley is often amusing. They cover one half of it thick in stones. Then everybody drives on the other half until deep ruts are made, so that the whole road becomes quite impassable. After Loëche, about midday, there is scarcely a sound in the great heat. Most of the villages are far up the mountains; the peasant toilers are all sleeping in the shade, and, strangely, here there are no crickets. There is a sense of hushed majesty—suddenly relieved by that dear ugly sound which reminds me of every hot summer I have ever known or dreamed: the *creek-creek* of a landrail.

Soon after Viège a mountain village has slipped into the valley—I knew it must happen. It is easy to recognise this through its being composed entirely of those particular toy châlets which are only seen up mountain-sides, where a whole village stands facing the same way, producing rather the effect of a little crowd of extremely good children with their Sunday hats on very straight, listening to something they don't quite understand. But these houses in their downfall have been twisted that way and this at random. There is none of the Swiss orderliness about them, and they have also become hopelessly, but beautifully, entangled in some giant vines, which have spread like fever, caught them in their meshes, and bound them all up into a rich confused mass of green.

I am clearly reminded that this is now again a Roman Catholic country by seeing a tall crucifix with a terrible figure on it, which rises out of the middle of a manure-heap; and four little children sit all about it on the manure.

More than once through France and Switzerland my heart has throbbed with admiration of the poplars, but the approach to Brigue is an avenue with by far the most

magnificent I have ever seen, and, as though for special effect, behold, a long funeral procession slowly moving between them. It is led by three men bearing black banners with representations of the dying Christ and the Virgin, and a long shuffling procession of male mourners telling their rosaries. Then come three priests chanting, and the coffin, borne by four men. The chief mourners follow, many of the women wailing with hidden faces, and the rest telling their beads mechanically with wandering eyes. In the rear are more than a hundred followers, chiefly women in bright dresses, with coloured sunshades, unaffectedly smiling and chatting. The whole picture is very lovely. *Requiescat in pace!*

Brigue is quaint, clean, and charming, and what it has of modern does not spoil it. There are narrow old streets, and it is dominated, in quite Italian fashion, by a church, white and cool inside, with a broad terrace, and all its doors standing to-day wide open in the sunlight and the Alps. But I think the real charm of the place is the Stockalper Castle, with its three cracked towers crowned with bulbs, its many crumbling galleries, and a calm inner court full of silence and dreams.

The Chronicle of a Pilgrimage

This fifth and last day in the Rhone Valley has in one way been most lovely of all, for the whole of it has been sacred to a certain mountain above Brigue at the valley's end. It is one of the peaks of Monte Leone: I do not wish to know the particular name. 'Tis as pure white as Mont Blanc, and far more gracious. In form it is like a strong god with arms outspread in benediction, and it is altogether restful, in contrast to the peaks and galleries of the Bernese Alps. It has called and called to me: and I am coming.

XII

COMRADES OF ROAD AND INN

I FEEL a miser over the Simplon : it is safely there, all mine. Any day I like I can begin the ascent, greedily counting the hoarded miles, and reckoning every golden treasured moment of the way. And Brigue is so pleasant that I want to sit a brief while, look back over the road I have left, and think just a little about some of its comradeships.

Many beautiful friendships have I made—as beautiful as they were brief. In the Yonne Valley, not far from St. Julien, just as the moon was beginning to whiten, hearing a noise behind me, I glanced over my shoulder in time to see a boy spring from the saddle of his bicycle, and at once he walked beside me. He asked me the distance to Joigny, and then we began to talk. He told me he was a farrier's assistant, had grown tired of Paris, and was bicycling to Lyon to get work

there. It was five hundred kilometres, and would take him about five days; but he had saved some money and wanted to see the country. Already on the second day, however, he found the solitude of the road rather depressing. He asked few questions, but I saw he was anxious to know my business, and I told it him. We walked five miles together; he related me nearly the whole of his life, and we talked about people and things and countries. We spoke of the joy of being able to look beyond the drudgery of a continual routine, and having some sense of life outside it. He kept glancing over his shoulder at the faint afterglow of the sunset, but I could not see his face clearly. In the moonlight neither of us saw the other's features, and, if we met to-morrow, should not recognise each other, unless by voice. He looked a sturdy robust little fellow, and I judged him about nineteen. At last we came to a sign-post, to read which I had to climb a wall. It told me that our roads parted. He gave me his hand; I took it and held it a minute. Unlike his voice, it was rough and hard. Regretfully we said farewell, wished one another good fortune, and passed each along his own way.

Again, near Tonnerre, this time in hot sunlight, for some distance up a steep hill I heard scuttling feet behind me, but paid no particular attention. Presently, however, a quaint little person with an enormous basket, ambling up beside me, tried to settle down to my pace, which meant a scuttle every five steps. He watched my face, then looked down at my feet and tried to step as long as I, then watched my face again—and then suddenly asked if I had heard the cuckoo yet. I walked his pace at once. We compared notes about all the birds and flowers we knew; he particularly loved the lilies-of-the-valley in the wood by his home. Then I had to guess his age, and he attempted my nationality. I was right first shot—I guessed eleven, but he could make nothing of me. He would not have me English, but finally tried to make the best of it, and wanted to know all about my country. I could not impress him much: in the end he thought France was probably better, and he was certain there were more flowers. *Tu sais, la France est un beau pays* —not once was I *vous*. I had to guess the number of his sisters and brothers, his own name, and the ages of his father and mother, which were fifty and thirty-two. Per-

fect confidence was established between us long before we must part. A little fairy could not have allured one more ; he had the most elfish, quizzical laugh I have ever known. It turned out that every Saturday he walked five kilometres to the market at Tonnerre to fetch a basketful of provisions for the whole week. His home lay just off the main road. "Je dirai à mon père que tu es anglais," he cried as we waved farewell. How I wished to keep him ! But you must learn on the road to part as cheerfully as you meet.

Sometimes road-companions are not so pleasant. There were two gipsy children I could not shake off. They wished either to be friendly or to get some coppers, and scampered all about me, showing off in every way they knew. They would not listen to any protests, and I quickened and slackened with no success. I felt singularly helpless. At last, not till I had sat for half an hour at the wayside, reading, did they give me up and pass on out of sight. Later I met the caravan to which they belonged. Six gipsies —the two men between the shafts—were dragging it, and the nag was tied on behind. It was putting the cart before the horse with a vengeance. The poor beast was almost too

thin and weak to move, and so to-day his turn had come to be dragged instead of dragging.

And at the inns one is always certain of a good reception. I much prefer the inn proper to the small hotel. The former, though it may be rough, is generally clean ; the latter is by no means always clean, and is usually full of commercial travellers—the least agreeable society in all countries. They seem to represent the knight errant in modern life, possessing, however, all his bad qualities and none of his reputed good. They are usually greedy and disgusting, and they are interested in nothing, dream of nothing, but their meals and their own sordid business. Where the knight errant might have boasted (with a measure of truth) five hundred doughty victories, one must hear this modern knight gluttonously boast how he has palmed off five hundred tawdry shirts on some over-credulous tradesman.

But in the smallest inns one may meet with the very best entertainment, and among the peasants find the most perfect gentlemen. On the day I fled from Rochefort, coming to the village of Asnière, at first I could find no inn, but, determined to obtain luncheon,

I at last opened the door of a likely house, and found myself (as one often may on such occasions) in the kitchen. A man at the table rose and at once asked me to be seated with him, while his wife bustled about preparing food. The house turned out to be the chief village inn. There were several people lunching in the restaurant, which led out of the kitchen, and the wife divided her time between cooking luncheon for all, waiting on the others and on us, and eating her own meal—a marvellous performance, carried out with perfect composure. My banquet was divided into five courses : (1) radishes, with bread and butter, (2) omelette, (3) spinach, (4) salad, (5) dessert. I stayed more than two hours, and we settled the affairs of the world over our coffee. Several times I have enjoyed like entertainment, and gone happy on my way, full of hope and of belief in the goodwill of humanity.

At Dôle there was a wedding dance in the hotel, and every one was brimming with jollity. I picked up an acquaintance with two little French soldiers. Reserved at first, later they bubbled over with merriness and amiability, yet always with polished courtesy and deference to my foreign blood. They

told me about barrack life, had little to say in praise of the French military system, but quipped occasionally—with perfect good taste and decorum—at the British Army.

Several times I have raced donkey-carts—one of the greatest diversions. When he's going his own pace you simply can't help walking faster than a donkey, but, just as you are coming up to him, the driver, usually a tiny girl with a huge stick, starts lacing in. I honestly don't believe the donkey minds a bit; he seems perfectly accustomed, and is generally thinking of something else. It has been the traditional way of arguing with him, his fathers, and forefathers ever since Balaam, and so for a hundred yards he breaks into a good-humoured jaunt. The issue of the race depends on the number of these spurts. If eventually he gets too immersed in thought to bother about the stick, then you win easily.

Perhaps my best friends were the blue anemones between St. Seine and Dijon. All the real loveliness of Côte d'Or was behind me, and I was feeling utterly forlorn, when one of them peeped over a tuft of grass. It had large round blue eyes, with just a little sympathetic anxiety in them; it was about

the size of a rose. Then I discovered it had hundreds and hundreds of brothers, all as blue and wistful as itself, and forthwith they gladdened my whole day.

XIII

SIMPLON

I GLOAT indecently beginning the ascent of the Simplon, and my blood ripples with laughter when I think of travellers entering the dark tunnel. A poor enough acquaintance they have made with the Rhone Valley. Now they are to be swallowed up in a black roaring inferno—but I shall be upon the mountain-tops with God.

My exultation is soon checked. Passing a wayside chapel, I glance casually at the door, and the next moment am held in wonder by an appalling sight. An old beggar-woman sits perpendicular on her chair, her face parchment-yellow lined with deep black, and her large eyes, sunk into her head, nearly all white save for the faint edge of an upturned pupil. One hardly knows for certain if there be still a thin covering of flesh on the bones of her hands—indeed, scarcely whether she be

alive or dead. And there is only time to shiver and hesitate a moment ere the terrible head of a man appears at the window of a tiny inn nearly opposite. His face and ears are crimson, and the veins of his forehead start out blue. His large eyes are watery and bloodshot. In his fat trembling hand he scarcely manages to hold a glass of red wine, and he is shouting an obscene song. For fifty yards I almost run—I must confess it. Are these part of that humanity for which we dream so high?

The Simplon road was, of course, built by Napoleon. "'There shall be no Alps,' he said; and he built his perfect roads, climbing by graded galleries their steepest precipices, until Italy was as open to Paris as any town in France." [1]

For the first seven kilometres it beats up and back in several zigzags along the green plateau above Brigue, and then, having found the right level, makes direct for a dark ravine, which is the passage out of the Rhone Valley into the regions of the high Alps. The sudden perpendicular view into the depths of the ravine is terrible and mesmeric. Now the white summits of the Simplon, which were

[1] Emerson.

hidden for a time, are revealed again, and far, far up there is a mark like a scar along the snow of a peak : it is the road.

Hitherto my theme has been chiefly pastoral : now I would ring high words in praise of the Alps. Oh, may I never cease to wonder at their form and marvel at their divinity ! The voice of the main torrent rises thunderous from the deep gorge, while the air above is filled with laughter of the lesser streams that race to meet it. Looking into the depths, I lose all sense of standing on a road. Sometimes in dreams one flies through great spaces ; now there is just such a sensation of freedom and of flight. Across the plateau, where the sun was nigh overpowering, my tongue was parched ; but here a snow-breeze, flowing down the air in strong waves, is a libation poured by gods which assuages all thirst.

I find it good as I walk to gaze down at the dust and imagine myself on an English road, then look up suddenly at the snow-mountains and feel rapture through my blood. Round the next bend Monte Leone—of all mountains most gracious—is in full view. I cannot, I dare not attempt to describe its form. It is of that supreme beauty which

is entirely elusive, and I only know that, gazing at it, I am moved to the deep wonder which is akin to fear. Yet Monte Leone has nothing of the cold cruelty of certain other mountains; it is gentle and compassionate in its great power: it has something of the Human. It is white, not with coldness of the far-away Divine, but because of purity without blemish.

Now the road has cleared that first ravine and reached the inner precincts of the Alps. It curves to the left, and one can see it to the head of a valley; but then it is lost to sight, and one marvels by what dextrous feats of curving and winding it can ever become the thin line on the far white mountain-side. There are primitive peasant-dwellings on every available patch of ground above and below, and giddy paths thread from hut to hut. Here at least one would think life must retain into the far centuries the rare delights of simplicity—but who can tell? It is strange to see neat patches of cultivation 5,000 feet up apparently on the sheer precipice. Every little plot of pasture is as trim as the lawn of a duke.

Not till at the head of the valley can the torrent be crossed. Over the bridge there

is a patch of ridiculous cowslips, beginning to open at least five weeks too late. Side by side with them blooms the darkest gentian, and I half suspect the cowslips of posing as Alpine flowers. Soon I come to the first snow. Doubtless from a distance it would have looked white, but near, it is dreadfully dirty. It hangs, several feet thick, suspended across a stream which it is gradually helping to form. Several bees hover about it as though in perplexity, and a blue butterfly shows clearly against it: it is surrounded by Alpine flowers. So intent am I that I stumble and fall flat on my face over a felled tree which lies almost across the road.

Now soon the snow becomes quite familiar. Oh, it is lovely to press it, pick it up, and rub it over one's hot hands, which the sun dries again in less than a minute. Just here in a wood there is complete silence, and the silence of the heights is quite different from that of the valley. The undertone of rushing waters is, however, seldom quite absent, and round the first corner it bursts in again on my ears. Now, after great toil and multitudinous zigzags, the road at last gathers courage for a straight flight to the top peak

of the pass. There is just a glimpse of Brigue, which has become the size of a pebble, before I enter the last region of galleries and tunnels, of ice and great drifts of snow.

Here everything gives a sensation of delicious cool, the sky, the sunset, the breeze, the small, hardy, glinting flowers—and the water, for there is a crystalline spring by the road to which I put my mouth. It drives me nearly mad: I have never tasted such water. 'Tis very difficult to reach; I cut my nose against the rock in indecent greed, and nearly make myself wet through.

"He built his perfect roads, climbing by graded galleries their steepest precipices." In one place, met by a savage torrent, pitting his skill against its barbaric force, he made a new bed for it right over the top of his built gallery. Through one of the arches it is seen falling, a transparent liquid column, which the sunset beyond turns into pure opal. Water continually trickles through the roofs of the tunnels, and thus all the winter they are blocked by solid ice. Just now men are working with pickaxes: they have cut away much of it, but it still lies three feet deep through every tunnel, and, in semi-obscurity, one helplessly struggles along its dark uneven surface,

sliding and tumbling in every direction. In this wild corner great forces are perpetually at work. In some places the snow still lies twenty feet deep where it lately slipped from the heights, and was dashed wantonly across the way ; and one avalanche of it, greater than the others, has worked havoc, carrying large blocks of road into the valley below.

Round another bend I come upon the immense hospice, gaunt and bare, which stands to the side of a small oval hollow, well sheltered all about by peaks. I am heartily received by one of the *prieurs*, given a cosy supper, and shown to my room. At the hospice the wayfarer is entirely in his element. These cheery black-robed fellows know, indeed, how to receive and lodge him, for such is their chief way of serving God.

How the great solitudes, with their music of waters, stimulate thought ! My brain is hard at work even as the *prieur* leads the way along the echoing passage ; and, in my room, still dressed, I drop mechanically on to the bed and think far into the night.

Here, at this summit of my pilgrimage, my heart rises to a summit of anxious doubt. I am troubled because of the stone crosses of Côte d'Or, the chapels and pilgrim-ways,

effigies, shrines, and memorials. What do they signify? And this evening the crucifix hanging on the wall sets a final seal of pain on my heart. Burning questions spring to my lips. Ardently, the whole way from Paris I have sought to discover, amid the tangle of superstition that cumbers the soul of the people, some dominating religious idea. Everywhere the shrines and symbols of religion : everywhere hypocrisy or contempt ! Who *really* cares? In Dijon on Good Friday, though the churches were thronged all day, yet in the small-talk of the street and the restaurant I heard nothing but mockery and scorn. And usually if people do not laugh, 'tis only because they are indifferent, or else moulded to usage and tradition. Who really *cares?*

Or if, as many believe, the day of Christianity is indeed past ; if, rather, the Church, weak and divided against itself, with scarcely anything left in it of the real Christ, merely keeps its hold by the power of hollow tradition, if it is tottering to ruin—what has the multitude instead? They need, they must have, religion ; but now there is relatively no trace of a dominating idea : almost *none*. The greater mass of humanity dreams on,

wrapped in mouldy tradition, and cannot awaken. Will no one waken it? Will no one lead on? The torch is twisted. Who will light it, who bear it? Oh, for a prophet!

"Be ye therefore perfect," *He* said, "even as your Father which is in heaven is perfect." They forget this, or keep their eyes still dimly fixed on an uncertain future as a subterfuge for not trying to be perfect here and now. Yet at Dijon as I watched, through a cloud of hat-plumes, the white emaciated figure on the cross, I did realise, as never before, that somehow to the human heart, despite all that swinging of censers, bowing and scraping, kissing of books and clanking of the offered penny, in spite of all vanity or scorn, it does still represent an ideal; and I realised that people will surely rise and remember, as soon as another prophet shall arise and remind them—and die the death. Now, as ever, whoso really desires the greater life must slowly, painfully, surrender his heart to the rack of his desire: yet I think we are on the threshold of a happy age. Whenever the many begin consciously, articulately to desire, then shall they begin to have, even unto the establishment of the kingdom of heaven —which is Utopia.

XIV

THE PASSIONATE WATERS

VERY early I am at my bedroom window tasting the delicious air. I cannot sleep after four: the morning is too good. There is no special beauty of sunrise, but the sun seems quite suddenly to flood a world of snow, and the many streams to quicken and strengthen. Three great St. Bernard dogs race past under the window: the *prieur* is giving them their morning run, and their bark rings crisply out. After breakfast, as I go, I carry a last impression of that tall black figure at the same time waving me farewell from the hospice steps, and calling to the three huge dogs that bound and prance over the snow.

Now the road is all downhill, and the village of Simplon is nearly 1,500 feet lower than the hospice. Round the first corner there is dead silence and utter solitude, suddenly broken by the mountain call of some peasant, which is like the laughter of a thousand rills.

The Passionate Waters

Just before the village of Simplon, about six years ago, one of the greatest titans heaved a deep sigh, and a vast mass of rock crashed into the valley. It was early one morning they tell me. Fortunately only two human beings were killed, but the Simplon road was wiped out for a long distance, and the main torrent from Monte Leone had its course split into many channels by hundreds of huge boulders. Already strong and broad, here it first becomes passionate. After this for a time the road passes away from it through meadows glorious with Alpine flowers, then, sweeping back, plunges into a deep narrow valley, and joins it again.

Here the waters truly have begun to live. At first the road is chiefly through tunnels, for the torrent possesses the whole gorge. But its increasing voice is never absent, and, outside again, meets one each time as a youthful joyous shout. I have an irresistible temptation to shout with it—and do so. From high, high above, aerial cascades, that seem to have their source in the blue sky, dropping leisurely from shelf to shelf, at last bring it down their cool message. Everywhere great boulders have fallen and lie roughly tossed mid-current. Sometimes they still con-

vey such a sensation of movement that one seems to hear the echo of that far-resounding fall; but the plastic water at once began to carve and mould them to its new ever more graceful course.

Oh, the voice of the waters! There is that about it which maddens the soul within me. The road crosses the torrent, which, almost under the bridge but just in view, takes its first plunge of any real height, with all the uncurbed violence of youth. From full twenty feet broad it narrows into three, to force its way between two high rocks, then expands again under the bridge, and boils onward to new exploits. It seems to shake its head, toss back its locks, tighten its muscles, and shout with expanded chest defiance to the whole world. And *the* achievement of its life is near—just such a thing as an artist once fulfils in the half-conscious joyousness of early manhood, but later never again. It so happened that the largest boulder that has ever fallen in the valley fell mid-stream at that felicitous corner, and all round this obstacle the torrent must first wind a devious way. Thus, starting incited by opposition, it plunges round another corner, forward against an opposing rock, and

finally downwards—out of sight, to where a cloud of spray rises from the semi-darkness, on which the sun makes perpetual rainbows.

I cannot resist scrambling on to an almost overhanging ledge, and there I remain clutching, completely fascinated, and incapable of moving. When the moment comes that I must return I wish I had not ventured, and, being easily made dizzy, nearly lose my head. But once back in safety, I realise that I have heard the authentic cry of Nature's "storm and stress", and perceived those things which are never quite seen, but whose very loveliness is to remain in the region of the dim and hazy. Just here at this supreme moment a tablet stands out dramatically carved on the face of the rock: "*Aere Italo MDCCCV. Nap: Imp:*". One passes into another series of tunnels with occasional glimpses of the water now far below the level of the road, and in through the mouth of the last a continuous breeze blows, so fresh that it seems composed of the mountain water itself—and it is: for, still inside, one is sprinkled with water, and then, just outside, bounding far out almost into one's face, but suddenly down and under the road—behold! another torrent, strong too, but with a more

pitiful strength, and with a different — a woman's voice. It is supreme, standing on the bridge, to listen to the voices blending, yet perfectly distinct. She, fresh and virginal, flows from the peaks of Monte Leone, and, standing here, I can follow her path, flight upon flight, into the blue, how high I dare not guess. But below she rushes eagerly to her mate, and her voice has all that about it which is most wonderful in woman: it is resolute, but yielding; it is passionate, yet gentle; it is intensely strong, yet pitiful as the very spirit of motherhood. And he, far away among the rocks, calls with the whole prime and beauty of manhood in his voice, and stands with head thrown back and arms stretched out to receive her—it is the marriage of the waters.

XV

INTO ITALY

It must be delightful to live near a frontier. One would find, I imagine, the characteristics of the two nations blended most excitingly. To-day one could visit friends of one nationality, to-morrow friends of the other, and the third day neighbours of mixed blood. The change is, of course, really very gradual ; one does not, for instance, step from Switzerland into Italy : the process evolves along about ten kilometres. The fluid Italian element seems, however, to have brimmed over into Switzerland : some distance before the frontier it distinctly predominates. My first real Italian impressions are of a stone house with good enough chimneys—but streaks of soot nevertheless from the windows up the walls, where the smoke has habitually found the shortest way out, and of another where the kitchen smoke, issuing from a chimney

jutting out from the wall, enters the house again at the open door, just as it might in Ireland; and my next, of excited little Customs officials at Iselle (the entrance to the tunnel) inquisitively running all about my knapsack like so many busy ants.

The first villages over the frontier are nothing less than appalling. Most of their rough shanties that serve for houses are nearly in ruins, and the dirt is almost nauseating. They swarm with filthy humanity, chiefly barefoot dark brown children, and tired cross women. Every one is overheated and dirty and lazy, yet rough and petulant. It is a disappointing entrance to the adored land of my pilgrimage.

But soon, where the torrent takes one last sheer spring of about twelve feet in its full breadth and the full volume of its power, the valley opens out and the first Italian town of any size is revealed—Varzo. The campanile of course catches one's eye, then the suspicion of a pink house or two. Of course also bells are ringing. It is the typical Italian town, beautifully grouped upon a gentle slope, straggling and folding away rhythmically from its central square campanile. Yet, so far, I only half realise I am in Italy. As

usual, a scent—in this case rather a smell—brings full realisation: it is that delicious musty smell made up of everything that is Italian, and with a strong touch of coffee-grinding by a cottage door. It makes every chord in my body tighten and vibrate; it sends a cold thrill down my back; all my blood ebbs, then flows again suddenly. I am left weak from joy. Italy! Italy! Italy!

The evening walk is through a valley of Piedmont. The mountains behind are wild, tossed, and snowy; those before me, so gentle, graceful, and shadowy, clothed in a fresh forest-green garment, rising to no great height, and whitened but occasionally with a little snow where their peaks touch the violet sky. The torrent, in contrast, has become fiercer and fiercer, and, within narrow bounds, keeps up a melodious under-roar, like very distant thunder. It is crossed by many perilous stone bridges of every fantastic-shaped arc, old and rickety. Sometimes they are so narrow that two people could scarcely walk over abreast, and they curve up with marvellous fairy grace to quite unnecessary heights. Is there a building, I wonder, less than a hundred years old—is there one with a particle of mortar left to keep its tumbled

walls together? There seem, indeed, more both bridges and buildings crumbling to ruins than in use. The romantic vineyards are embosomed in lush meadowland, and the vine, flourishing everywhere, shoots first up its stone props and along the cross-pieces, and then spreads itself abroad, casting its luxuriance in coronals, wreaths, and rich tresses upon everything it can touch. In Switzerland it had only begun to sprout ; here it is nearly in fruit. I love even the hideous Madonna or Saint pictures with which every fifth house is bedaubed. The road is three inches deep in dust, and there is the sacredness of heat—that immaculate heat which outlasts even the decline of the sun ; holy, inviolable through the sweet long noonday and the fragrant night.

I sup at a charming inn four kilometres short of Domodossola, and get on splendidly with the landlord, his wife, and baby, until the two former go into the kitchen to fetch something and leave me alone with the baby in his high chair. Looking wildly towards me, and seizing a knife in one hand and three toothpicks in the other, he puts them all at once into his mouth—'tis a terrible moment. His thanks when I rescue him are a piercing

shriek, and his mother, running to him, looks at me with fierce eyes and would like to scold me.

Now, under the stars, to Domodossola, across an open space bounded by shadowy mountains. The torrent roars distantly, the air is heavy with summer unto fainting, and there is the miracle of the fireflies—not hundreds nor thousands of them, but millions, and millions, and millions, filling the meadows, lighting up the road, circling about my face, creating a world of magic. A door opens, and there are faint sounds from a dimly-lit house ; a lamp is carried across the court, and weird shadows dart up the walls. There are sudden strains of music, but some rough voice breaks in upon them. By the open windows of a long low hut three men are stretched heavily across a table in drunken sleep ; a fourth is filling up his glass with dark wine. There is always the faint musty smell, but here it is dimmed by that of the sweet acacia flower. As I enter Domodossola and pass along its narrow streets, the only sounds are catches of music and hushed voices. There is no fear of traffic at night, and the restaurant tables stand far out into the street. It is all rather theatrical—the

coloured houses, narrow cobbled ways, sudden angles, and sharp corners. The little town is in the arms of mystery, dim and melodious.

The next day's walk is between wooded hills, towards Lake Maggiore. Their calm slopes and curves are restful, after the wild mountains. They are vivid green, tinged with the bright yellow of gorse. Occasionally there is a ruined castle high up, or a village with a prominent campanile, of which the bells pour their frequent music like water into the vale. Roses are in full bloom, the meadows have more wild flowers than grass, and the reckless vine casts itself in unstinted profusion abroad, reaching, as ever, with its long tendrils, up stone and tree, across meadow and lane, and even finds its way far in through the windows of houses.

Towards evening the sky lowers, and just after I have gone to bed at Ornavasso, such a storm breaks that the inn feels lifted from the ground, and for twenty minutes the night is almost uninterruptedly far lighter than any day. But having apparently slammed every shutter and door in the village, and broken many windows, it passes as suddenly as it came, and leaves sweet sleep. Early in the

morning I hear music in my dreams, and am roused gradually by song that seems more than angelic. Half awake, I spring to the window, and the words rush to my brain :

> "Leading the way, young damsels dance along;
> Bearing the burden of a shepherd's song."

It is a sweet song to the Virgin, lifted with the full power of their little voices by tiny peasant maidens in procession, all swarthy and adorable, with their faces hooded in silk. Men follow them, then boys, chanting responses to the evil-visaged priests, who lurk last of all like hideous demons. This is Friday in May—the month of the Virgin, and these have awakened at sunrise to perform rites in her honour.

Early on the road, I overtake, for the third day in succession, an Italian with a wooden leg. We slept the same night on the Simplon, and since then have come the same distance, though he always starts earlier, and arrives later, than I. Hitherto he has had another fellow with him, and neither of them seemed willing to talk ; but to-day he is alone, and in response to inquiries, tells me that he left his temporary road-companion sprawling and singing somewhere behind. He is a tailor,

who has found winter employment in Geneva, and is now going back to Milan, his native town. We walk far together, and with great difficulty I persuade him to take a meal with me. He admits that he has no money, and is so proud that I am tempted to offer him a little ; but he refuses it at once, and by no argument can I make him accept it. In the afternoon we finally part. Wondering at him and dreaming of Utopia, I pass onward towards Lake Maggiore.

XVI

THE END OF THE PILGRIMAGE

LAKE MAGGIORE is at first very disappointing, after Geneva. I reach it in grey weather, and the water is no colour at all. Also the barrack-like hotels of Pallanza seem to monopolise the whole shore. Its islands and villa gardens are the chief attractions ; Isola Bella is a very island of fairyland. All the villas are built a quaint shape and painted some romantic colour ; most are decayed and mouldering, and the gardens are festive with masses of Syringa in full bloom. Lake-life is surely very disagreeable—there is no escape from the cheap-ticket element. Presently the sun shines, and of a sudden the tourists seem to hatch and swarm like mayflies. The colours become wonderful—almost too brilliant, I think. Recollection comes to me of a French lady I met last time I was here. She raved and raved and raved about the

scenery: "Is it not beautiful! Is it not wonderful! Is it not splendid! Is it not adorable!" and finally: "Indeed, it is as beautiful as a picture postcard!"

On the lake road, in the afternoon, I meet a delightful German workman. We sit on a wall and talk for nearly two hours. He is a carpenter one half of the year, and spends the other travelling on foot. He usually has some money saved—not enough to last him long, but that hardly disconcerts him. He can always obtain porridge from hospitable peasants and shelter in a barn, or at worst under a hayrick. He appears to be one of those people to whom material needs are insignificant compared with the necessities of the soul. One of his worst material deprivations is if he cannot afford a picture postcard as a remembrance of something that has particularly pleased him. From a neat little bag, slung about his shoulder, he produces for my edification his journal, written in a tiny niggly handwriting. Interspersed in the text are drawings of any woodwork that has pleased him, or designs for furniture founded on his observations. He tells me that he carefully writes up all these notes each time at the end of his travels, and he relates me

a very amusing recent experience. When passing from Hungary into Italy, ten minutes over the frontier, some excited policeman, having examined his belongings and discovered his notebook, insisted he was a spy. They locked him up for three hours while they scrutinised his notes, then actually confessed they would have to let him go after all, as none of them could read German. He thanked them for having given him material for an excellent story, and parted with them on the best of terms. As we bid each other farewell he asks me a *particular* favour: I wonder what is coming. It is, when I reach Florence—the eventual object of my pilgrimage—to send him the best postcard of the cathedral that I can buy.

The peasants—particularly the old women—have a most entertaining way of leading their cows home, like very tame dogs, by a thin cord tied to one of their horns. I pass a dear old lady with a short skirt, gesticulating, and in a loud voice confiding some pathetic story to her cow. The latter has a grim wistful expression, and goes with her ears back, as if she had heard it all before.

Arona is only sixty-seven kilometres' walk from Milan. I am detained there a couple

of days by appalling thunderstorms, and on the third, set out in glorious weather across the plains of Lombardy. By Sesto-Calde, from a great bridge at the very end of the lake, one bids farewell to the mountains. In the foreground is the green river with lush meadows ending in sedge and willow at the margin, and the sun makes thousands of twinkling stars on the water ; beyond is the blue lake and the pyramidical Italian hills, then the whole range of Alps, beginning dark and rugged, and rising whiter and whiter into the pure air. Good-bye, mountains, good-bye !

This is but the last week in May, yet 'tis high summer in Lombardy. The first crops of hay are already mown, and the wheat is six foot tall. Stunted mulberry-trees peep out strangely over the yellow crop, and the vine interweaves itself wherever it can. To-day the glory of the plain is the pale white flower of the acacia. It is everywhere—everywhere. It is most lovely in hedgerows, amid a setting of plaintive little willows. If it were comparable with anything, I could think it as beautiful as the lily. In the villages one has many delicious glimpses through great doorways into courtyards, cool with fountains and fragrant with many flowers. The heart

throbs with delight. How good and gracious it is to live! Italy! Land of the soul's desire—Italy! Italy!

My walk is over. The last night I sleep at Busto-Arsizio—and am sorry. It is called the Manchester of Italy. The picture post-card of which they seem most proud is one which only really shows, rising over a group of dark hideous houses, two churches and thirty-nine smoking factory chimneys. Indeed, this conveys a just impression of Busto. I had intended to rise early any way for the last day's walk, but at 5 a.m. the great bells of the three adjacent churches—because it is the Virgin's month—are already active. All together (eighteen of them), clash upon clash upon clash, with hardly a pause, ring onwards into the morning. I have never heard such bells. They are immense; they bulge out from their campaniles, which can scarcely hold them. And at six the cruel factory whistles, forty or fifty of them, one after another, intermingle their shrill notes. Poor struggling creatures are driven from their beds to church—there is scarce any option: who could sleep in such a clatter?—then, hardly at church, they are driven on again to the factory and the long day's work. By

seven my head is aching terribly. The only refuge from the bells is inside one of the churches themselves: before starting I look in upon the pagan rites. The building is packed. An evil-visaged priest is mumbling at the altar; evil-faced crones are reclining on the altar-steps; ragged people are absently bowing and curtseying, or telling their beads. It gives a horrible impression, which lasts, indeed, the whole day.

Much of the walk is through factory districts, squalid, filthy, hideous. Bells ring on the whole morning: ten masses must be rung and said before noon in honour of the Virgin. High from many a church the pitiful eyes of a Christ-figure look down upon the miserable horror of it all, upon fierce unloving men and women, and hungry depraved children—the victims of capitalism. In one narrow street, a drunken woman screams, and almost throws a knife at a man who cowers under the opposite wall. Here the churches are of some real use; I think they are the only places of refuge and rest.

But presently I emerge once more into the lovely open plain, and, after six hours' walking, come to Rho just in time to see the Bishop, followed by a long reverential pro-

cession, pass out of the cathedral into the palace. The humour of it is the return of the procession through the cathedral to disrobe when it has dropped the Bishop. It runs quite wild; two acolytes particularly, having first amused themselves chasing each other round the font for holy water, then go a little farther, ladling the water itself in handfuls, and throwing it over each other mid uproarious laughter.

Now there is the last stretch of road into Milan, along which I calculate statistics and dream of many a past and future joy. With regard to the distance, matters are thus: The whole walk has been 925 kilometres, and there have been thirty-seven walking days; so I have averaged 25 kilometres (about 15½ miles) a day. But this stands for nothing, as some days I have gone close on 40 kilometres, and on others have done but 12 to 15—according to weather, attractions by the way, and moods. The whole distance has taken fifty-six days, so there have been nineteen on which I have not walked at all.

My knapsack, fully charged, weighs about 15 lbs. I have learned scarcely to notice it—still, it has had its days. In thunder weather sometimes the whole weight of the storm has

seemed to get into it; and other days, though one might pack the thing three or four times over, it would manage to stick out in a hump somewhere, or continually to shift its weight all to one side. One can have a delicious regular change of linen by carrying one set partly in wear and partly in the knapsack, and leaving the other to be washed and sent on to Poste Restante some distance ahead. Of course, one does not carry a razor, collars, or any such paraphernalia. Yet, if so inclined, with an occasional trimming of the beard and one celluloid collar, one can be no end of a dandy.

Here are the outskirts of Milan, and there comes to me a sweet feeling of exhilaration. In this age of hurry and of hideous mechanism it is so good to have accomplished any kind of thing slowly, thoughtfully, and by the real laborious effort of one's human limbs. Twice I have got into trouble with well-meaning, though slightly intoxicated, farmers who have offered me a lift. I thanked them, and explained carefully that I meant to walk every inch of my way; but they, each time, thinking me proud and foolish, became abusive, and whipped up their horses without further listening.

The End of the Pilgrimage

There has been all the delight in this existence of the past two months that whoso loves Nature and Life in all its forms could desire. There are many who embark upon such journeys to break records, or force the appetite by congenial exercise between meals, and one hears most of beer and well-earned enormous repasts in their descriptions. 'Tis a matter of taste, yet surely the real delight is rather in trees, flowers, and birds, mountains, valleys, plains, rivers, and lakes, and all the myriad forms, colours, and sounds of Nature; the real entertainment, in men, women, and children, animals and insects, cities, customs, and religions; and the real refreshment, either in the silence or 'mid the music of flower-carpeted woods, or within the walls of cool quiet churches, in clean simple food, taken only at the call of real hunger, and then sparingly; and in sleep, by day on the sunlit grass, or by night in the hospitable inn. To walk through the world, calm and completely self-reliant, clear-headed and clean-hearted through control and abstinence; to look out from the rock-castle of one's soul through the windows of one's eyes, impartial, immovable, yet sensitive to every impression of beauty and of love; while

still keeping one's self sacred, to receive whenever it were offered, but to give always, Love—to lavish indiscriminately, wastefully perhaps, even foolishly, on man, woman, child, animal and inanimate nature, high and low, broad and long, shallow and deep, Love ! Love ! Love !—That would be to live.

Behold the great marble cathedral of Milan soaring fantastically into the blue. The heat of the Italian summer is upon the land, and it were nigh impossible to walk farther. To-morrow I shall travel to Florence, the city of lovely dreams, the far shrine of my desire. But, verily, he who has walked upon one such pilgrimage will never fail to take the road again, again, and yet again, so often as he may. 'Tis a madness—the love of the road—that may never be purged from a man's blood till it run cold—and perhaps not then. It will passionately claim him, most often in the spring, so that he will arise from the ashes of the winter fire, wean himself from the ways of the household and the customs of his city, gird on his strength, wave his lady farewell, and with his pack upon his shoulders and his countenance set high into the new sun, stride forth, amid the scent of opening flowers, upon the pathways of the world.

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