

**РОБЕРТ
СТИВЕНСОН**

AN INLAND
VOYAGE

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An Inland Voyage

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An Inland Voyage:

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Robert Louis Stevenson

An Inland Voyage

PREFACE TO THE FIRST EDITION

To equip so small a book with a preface is, I am half afraid, to sin against proportion. But a preface is more than an author can resist, for it is the reward of his labours. When the foundation stone is laid, the architect appears with his plans, and struts for an hour before the public eye. So with the writer in his preface: he may have never a word to say, but he must show himself for a moment in the portico, hat in hand, and with an urbane demeanour.

It is best, in such circumstances, to represent a delicate shade of manner between humility and superiority: as if the book had been written by some one else, and you had merely run over it and inserted what was good. But for my part I have not yet learned the trick to that perfection; I am not yet able to dissemble the warmth of my sentiments towards a reader; and if I meet him on the threshold, it is to invite him in with country cordiality.

To say truth, I had no sooner finished reading this little book in proof, than I was seized upon by a distressing apprehension. It occurred to me that I might not only be the first to read these pages, but the last as well; that I might have pioneered this very

smiling tract of country all in vain, and find not a soul to follow in my steps. The more I thought, the more I disliked the notion; until the distaste grew into a sort of panic terror, and I rushed into this Preface, which is no more than an advertisement for readers.

What am I to say for my book? Caleb and Joshua brought back from Palestine a formidable bunch of grapes; alas! my book produces naught so nourishing; and for the matter of that, we live in an age when people prefer a definition to any quantity of fruit.

I wonder, would a negative be found enticing? for, from the negative point of view, I flatter myself this volume has a certain stamp. Although it runs to considerably upwards of two hundred pages, it contains not a single reference to the imbecility of God's universe, nor so much as a single hint that I could have made a better one myself. – I really do not know where my head can have been. I seem to have forgotten all that makes it glorious to be man. – 'Tis an omission that renders the book philosophically unimportant; but I am in hopes the eccentricity may please in frivolous circles.

To the friend who accompanied me I owe many thanks already, indeed I wish I owed him nothing else; but at this moment I feel towards him an almost exaggerated tenderness. He, at least, will become my reader: – if it were only to follow his own travels alongside of mine.

R.L.S.

TO SIR WALTER GRINDLAY SIMPSON, *BART*

My dear Cigarette,

It was enough that you should have shared so liberally in the rains and portages of our voyage; that you should have had so hard a paddle to recover the derelict 'Arethusa' on the flooded Oise; and that you should thenceforth have piloted a mere wreck of mankind to Origny Sainte-Benoîte and a supper so eagerly desired. It was perhaps more than enough, as you once somewhat piteously complained, that I should have set down all the strong language to you, and kept the appropriate reflexions for myself. I could not in decency expose you to share the disgrace of another and more public shipwreck. But now that this voyage of ours is going into a cheap edition, that peril, we shall hope, is at an end, and I may put your name on the burgee.

But I cannot pause till I have lamented the fate of our two ships. That, sir, was not a fortunate day when we projected the possession of a canal barge; it was not a fortunate day when we shared our day-dream with the most hopeful of day-dreamers. For a while, indeed, the world looked smilingly. The barge was procured and christened, and as the 'Eleven Thousand Virgins of Cologne,' lay for some months, the admired of all admirers, in a pleasant river and under the walls of an ancient town. M. Mattras, the

accomplished carpenter of Moret, had made her a centre of emulous labour; and you will not have forgotten the amount of sweet champagne consumed in the inn at the bridge end, to give zeal to the workmen and speed to the work. On the financial aspect, I would not willingly dwell. The 'Eleven Thousand Virgins of Cologne' rotted in the stream where she was beautified. She felt not the impulse of the breeze; she was never harnessed to the patient track-horse. And when at length she was sold, by the indignant carpenter of Moret, there were sold along with her the 'Arethusa' and the 'Cigarette,' she of cedar, she, as we knew so keenly on a portage, of solid-hearted English oak. Now these historic vessels fly the tricolor and are known by new and alien names.

R. L. S.

ANTWERP TO BOOM

We made a great stir in Antwerp Docks. A stevedore and a lot of dock porters took up the two canoes, and ran with them for the slip. A crowd of children followed cheering. The *Cigarette* went off in a splash and a bubble of small breaking water. Next moment the *Arethusa* was after her. A steamer was coming down, men on the paddle-box shouted hoarse warnings, the stevedore and his porters were bawling from the quay. But in a stroke or two the canoes were away out in the middle of the Scheldt, and all steamers, and stevedores, and other 'long-shore vanities were left behind.

The sun shone brightly; the tide was making – four jolly miles an hour; the wind blew steadily, with occasional squalls. For my part, I had never been in a canoe under sail in my life; and my first experiment out in the middle of this big river was not made without some trepidation. What would happen when the wind first caught my little canvas? I suppose it was almost as trying a venture into the regions of the unknown as to publish a first book, or to marry. But my doubts were not of long duration; and in five minutes you will not be surprised to learn that I had tied my sheet.

I own I was a little struck by this circumstance myself; of course, in company with the rest of my fellow-men, I had always tied the sheet in a sailing-boat; but in so little and crank a

concern as a canoe, and with these charging squalls, I was not prepared to find myself follow the same principle; and it inspired me with some contemptuous views of our regard for life. It is certainly easier to smoke with the sheet fastened; but I had never before weighed a comfortable pipe of tobacco against an obvious risk, and gravely elected for the comfortable pipe. It is a commonplace, that we cannot answer for ourselves before we have been tried. But it is not so common a reflection, and surely more consoling, that we usually find ourselves a great deal braver and better than we thought. I believe this is every one's experience: but an apprehension that they may belie themselves in the future prevents mankind from trumpeting this cheerful sentiment abroad. I wish sincerely, for it would have saved me much trouble, there had been some one to put me in a good heart about life when I was younger; to tell me how dangers are most portentous on a distant sight; and how the good in a man's spirit will not suffer itself to be overlaid, and rarely or never deserts him in the hour of need. But we are all for tootling on the sentimental flute in literature; and not a man among us will go to the head of the march to sound the heady drums.

It was agreeable upon the river. A barge or two went past laden with hay. Reeds and willows bordered the stream; and cattle and grey venerable horses came and hung their mild heads over the embankment. Here and there was a pleasant village among trees, with a noisy shipping-yard; here and there a villa in a lawn. The wind served us well up the Scheldt and thereafter up the Rupel;

and we were running pretty free when we began to sight the brickyards of Boom, lying for a long way on the right bank of the river. The left bank was still green and pastoral, with alleys of trees along the embankment, and here and there a flight of steps to serve a ferry, where perhaps there sat a woman with her elbows on her knees, or an old gentleman with a staff and silver spectacles. But Boom and its brickyards grew smokier and shabbier with every minute; until a great church with a clock, and a wooden bridge over the river, indicated the central quarters of the town.

Boom is not a nice place, and is only remarkable for one thing: that the majority of the inhabitants have a private opinion that they can speak English, which is not justified by fact. This gave a kind of haziness to our intercourse. As for the Hôtel de la Navigation, I think it is the worst feature of the place. It boasts of a sanded parlour, with a bar at one end, looking on the street; and another sanded parlour, darker and colder, with an empty bird-cage and a tricolour subscription box by way of sole adornment, where we made shift to dine in the company of three uncommunicative engineer apprentices and a silent bagman. The food, as usual in Belgium, was of a nondescript occasional character; indeed I have never been able to detect anything in the nature of a meal among this pleasing people; they seem to peck and trifle with viands all day long in an amateur spirit: tentatively French, truly German, and somehow falling between the two.

The empty bird-cage, swept and garnished, and with no trace

of the old piping favourite, save where two wires had been pushed apart to hold its lump of sugar, carried with it a sort of graveyard cheer. The engineer apprentices would have nothing to say to us, nor indeed to the bagman; but talked low and sparingly to one another, or raked us in the gaslight with a gleam of spectacles. For though handsome lads, they were all (in the Scots phrase) barnacled.

There was an English maid in the hotel, who had been long enough out of England to pick up all sorts of funny foreign idioms, and all sorts of curious foreign ways, which need not here be specified. She spoke to us very fluently in her jargon, asked us information as to the manners of the present day in England, and obligingly corrected us when we attempted to answer. But as we were dealing with a woman, perhaps our information was not so much thrown away as it appeared. The sex likes to pick up knowledge and yet preserve its superiority. It is good policy, and almost necessary in the circumstances. If a man finds a woman admire him, were it only for his acquaintance with geography, he will begin at once to build upon the admiration. It is only by unintermittent snubbing that the pretty ones can keep us in our place. Men, as Miss Howe or Miss Harlowe would have said, 'are such *encroachers*.' For my part, I am body and soul with the women; and after a well-married couple, there is nothing so beautiful in the world as the myth of the divine huntress. It is no use for a man to take to the woods; we know him; St. Anthony tried the same thing long ago, and had a pitiful time of

it by all accounts. But there is this about some women, which overtops the best gymnosophist among men, that they suffice to themselves, and can walk in a high and cold zone without the countenance of any trousered being. I declare, although the reverse of a professed ascetic, I am more obliged to women for this ideal than I should be to the majority of them, or indeed to any but one, for a spontaneous kiss. There is nothing so encouraging as the spectacle of self-sufficiency. And when I think of the slim and lovely maidens, running the woods all night to the note of Diana's horn; moving among the old oaks, as fancy-free as they; things of the forest and the starlight, not touched by the commotion of man's hot and turbid life – although there are plenty other ideals that I should prefer – I find my heart beat at the thought of this one. 'Tis to fail in life, but to fail with what a grace! That is not lost which is not regretted. And where – here slips out the male – where would be much of the glory of inspiring love, if there were no contempt to overcome?

ON THE WILLEBROEK CANAL

Next morning, when we set forth on the Willebroek Canal, the rain began heavy and chill. The water of the canal stood at about the drinking temperature of tea; and under this cold aspersion, the surface was covered with steam. The exhilaration of departure, and the easy motion of the boats under each stroke of the paddles, supported us through this misfortune while it lasted; and when the cloud passed and the sun came out again, our spirits went up above the range of stay-at-home humours. A good breeze rustled and shivered in the rows of trees that bordered the canal. The leaves flickered in and out of the light in tumultuous masses. It seemed sailing weather to eye and ear; but down between the banks, the wind reached us only in faint and desultory puffs. There was hardly enough to steer by. Progress was intermittent and unsatisfactory. A jocular person, of marine antecedents, hailed us from the tow-path with a '*C'est vite, mais c'est long.*'

The canal was busy enough. Every now and then we met or overtook a long string of boats, with great green tillers; high sterns with a window on either side of the rudder, and perhaps a jug or a flower-pot in one of the windows; a dinghy following behind; a woman busied about the day's dinner, and a handful of children. These barges were all tied one behind the other with tow ropes, to the number of twenty-five or thirty; and the

line was headed and kept in motion by a steamer of strange construction. It had neither paddle-wheel nor screw; but by some gear not rightly comprehensible to the unmechanical mind, it fetched up over its bow a small bright chain which lay along the bottom of the canal, and paying it out again over the stern, dragged itself forward, link by link, with its whole retinue of loaded skows. Until one had found out the key to the enigma, there was something solemn and uncomfortable in the progress of one of these trains, as it moved gently along the water with nothing to mark its advance but an eddy alongside dying away into the wake.

Of all the creatures of commercial enterprise, a canal barge is by far the most delightful to consider. It may spread its sails, and then you see it sailing high above the tree-tops and the windmill, sailing on the aqueduct, sailing through the green corn-lands: the most picturesque of things amphibious. Or the horse plods along at a foot-pace as if there were no such thing as business in the world; and the man dreaming at the tiller sees the same spire on the horizon all day long. It is a mystery how things ever get to their destination at this rate; and to see the barges waiting their turn at a lock, affords a fine lesson of how easily the world may be taken. There should be many contented spirits on board, for such a life is both to travel and to stay at home.

The chimney smokes for dinner as you go along; the banks of the canal slowly unroll their scenery to contemplative eyes; the barge floats by great forests and through great cities with their

public buildings and their lamps at night; and for the bargee, in his floating home, 'travelling abed,' it is merely as if he were listening to another man's story or turning the leaves of a picture-book in which he had no concern. He may take his afternoon walk in some foreign country on the banks of the canal, and then come home to dinner at his own fireside.

There is not enough exercise in such a life for any high measure of health; but a high measure of health is only necessary for unhealthy people. The slug of a fellow, who is never ill nor well, has a quiet time of it in life, and dies all the easier.

I am sure I would rather be a bargee than occupy any position under heaven that required attendance at an office. There are few callings, I should say, where a man gives up less of his liberty in return for regular meals. The bargee is on shipboard – he is master in his own ship – he can land whenever he will – he can never be kept beating off a lee-shore a whole frosty night when the sheets are as hard as iron; and so far as I can make out, time stands as nearly still with him as is compatible with the return of bed-time or the dinner-hour. It is not easy to see why a bargee should ever die.

Half-way between Willebroek and Villevorde, in a beautiful reach of canal like a squire's avenue, we went ashore to lunch. There were two eggs, a junk of bread, and a bottle of wine on board the *Arethusa*; and two eggs and an Etna cooking apparatus on board the *Cigarette*. The master of the latter boat smashed one of the eggs in the course of disembarkation; but observing

pleasantly that it might still be cooked *à la papier*, he dropped it into the Etna, in its covering of Flemish newspaper. We landed in a blink of fine weather; but we had not been two minutes ashore before the wind freshened into half a gale, and the rain began to patter on our shoulders. We sat as close about the Etna as we could. The spirits burned with great ostentation; the grass caught flame every minute or two, and had to be trodden out; and before long, there were several burnt fingers of the party. But the solid quantity of cookery accomplished was out of proportion with so much display; and when we desisted, after two applications of the fire, the sound egg was little more than loo-warm; and as for *à la papier*, it was a cold and sordid *fricassée* of printer's ink and broken egg-shell. We made shift to roast the other two, by putting them close to the burning spirits; and that with better success. And then we uncorked the bottle of wine, and sat down in a ditch with our canoe aprons over our knees. It rained smartly. Discomfort, when it is honestly uncomfortable and makes no nauseous pretensions to the contrary, is a vastly humorous business; and people well steeped and stupefied in the open air are in a good vein for laughter. From this point of view, even egg *à la papier* offered by way of food may pass muster as a sort of accessory to the fun. But this manner of jest, although it may be taken in good part, does not invite repetition; and from that time forward, the Etna voyaged like a gentleman in the locker of the *Cigarette*.

It is almost unnecessary to mention that when lunch was over

and we got aboard again and made sail, the wind promptly died away. The rest of the journey to Villevorde, we still spread our canvas to the unfavouring air; and with now and then a puff, and now and then a spell of paddling, drifted along from lock to lock, between the orderly trees.

It was a fine, green, fat landscape; or rather a mere green water-lane, going on from village to village. Things had a settled look, as in places long lived in. Crop-headed children spat upon us from the bridges as we went below, with a true conservative feeling. But even more conservative were the fishermen, intent upon their floats, who let us go by without one glance. They perched upon sterlings and buttresses and along the slope of the embankment, gently occupied. They were indifferent, like pieces of dead nature. They did not move any more than if they had been fishing in an old Dutch print. The leaves fluttered, the water lapped, but they continued in one stay like so many churches established by law. You might have trepanned every one of their innocent heads, and found no more than so much coiled fishing-line below their skulls. I do not care for your stalwart fellows in india-rubber stockings breasting up mountain torrents with a salmon rod; but I do dearly love the class of man who plies his unfruitful art, for ever and a day, by still and depopulated waters.

At the last lock, just beyond Villevorde, there was a lock-mistress who spoke French comprehensibly, and told us we were still a couple of leagues from Brussels. At the same place, the rain began again. It fell in straight, parallel lines; and the surface of

the canal was thrown up into an infinity of little crystal fountains. There were no beds to be had in the neighbourhood. Nothing for it but to lay the sails aside and address ourselves to steady paddling in the rain.

Beautiful country houses, with clocks and long lines of shuttered windows, and fine old trees standing in groves and avenues, gave a rich and sombre aspect in the rain and the deepening dusk to the shores of the canal. I seem to have seen something of the same effect in engravings: opulent landscapes, deserted and overhung with the passage of storm. And throughout we had the escort of a hooded cart, which trotted shabbily along the tow-path, and kept at an almost uniform distance in our wake.

THE ROYAL SPORT NAUTIQUE

The rain took off near Laeken. But the sun was already down; the air was chill; and we had scarcely a dry stitch between the pair of us. Nay, now we found ourselves near the end of the Allée Verte, and on the very threshold of Brussels, we were confronted by a serious difficulty. The shores were closely lined by canal boats waiting their turn at the lock. Nowhere was there any convenient landing-place; nowhere so much as a stable-yard to leave the canoes in for the night. We scrambled ashore and entered an *estaminet* where some sorry fellows were drinking with the landlord. The landlord was pretty round with us; he knew of no coach-house or stable-yard, nothing of the sort; and seeing we had come with no mind to drink, he did not conceal his impatience to be rid of us. One of the sorry fellows came to the rescue. Somewhere in the corner of the basin there was a slip, he informed us, and something else besides, not very clearly defined by him, but hopefully construed by his hearers.

Sure enough there was the slip in the corner of the basin; and at the top of it two nice-looking lads in boating clothes. The *Arethusa* addressed himself to these. One of them said there would be no difficulty about a night's lodging for our boats; and the other, taking a cigarette from his lips, inquired if they were made by Searle and Son. The name was quite an introduction. Half-a-dozen other young men came out of a boat-house bearing

the superscription *Royal Sport Nautique*, and joined in the talk. They were all very polite, voluble, and enthusiastic; and their discourse was interlarded with English boating terms, and the names of English boat-builders and English clubs. I do not know, to my shame, any spot in my native land where I should have been so warmly received by the same number of people. We were English boating-men, and the Belgian boating-men fell upon our necks. I wonder if French Huguenots were as cordially greeted by English Protestants when they came across the Channel out of great tribulation. But after all, what religion knits people so closely as a common sport?

The canoes were carried into the boat-house; they were washed down for us by the Club servants, the sails were hung out to dry, and everything made as snug and tidy as a picture. And in the meanwhile we were led upstairs by our new-found brethren, for so more than one of them stated the relationship, and made free of their lavatory. This one lent us soap, that one a towel, a third and fourth helped us to undo our bags. And all the time such questions, such assurances of respect and sympathy! I declare I never knew what glory was before.

‘Yes, yes, the *Royal Sport Nautique* is the oldest club in Belgium.’

‘We number two hundred.’

‘We’ – this is not a substantive speech, but an abstract of many speeches, the impression left upon my mind after a great deal of talk; and very youthful, pleasant, natural, and patriotic it seems

to me to be – ‘We have gained all races, except those where we were cheated by the French.’

‘You must leave all your wet things to be dried.’

‘O! *entre frères!* In any boat-house in England we should find the same.’ (I cordially hope they might.)

‘*En Angleterre, vous employez des sliding-seats, n’est-ce pas?*’

‘We are all employed in commerce during the day; but in the evening, *voyez-vous, nous sommes sérieux.*’

These were the words. They were all employed over the frivolous mercantile concerns of Belgium during the day; but in the evening they found some hours for the serious concerns of life. I may have a wrong idea of wisdom, but I think that was a very wise remark. People connected with literature and philosophy are busy all their days in getting rid of second-hand notions and false standards. It is their profession, in the sweat of their brows, by dogged thinking, to recover their old fresh view of life, and distinguish what they really and originally like, from what they have only learned to tolerate perforce. And these Royal Nautical Sportsmen had the distinction still quite legible in their hearts. They had still those clean perceptions of what is nice and nasty, what is interesting and what is dull, which envious old gentlemen refer to as illusions. The nightmare illusion of middle age, the bear’s hug of custom gradually squeezing the life out of a man’s soul, had not yet begun for these happy-starred young Belgians. They still knew that the interest they took in their business was a trifling affair compared to their spontaneous,

long-suffering affection for nautical sports. To know what you prefer, instead of humbly saying Amen to what the world tells you you ought to prefer, is to have kept your soul alive. Such a man may be generous; he may be honest in something more than the commercial sense; he may love his friends with an elective, personal sympathy, and not accept them as an adjunct of the station to which he has been called. He may be a man, in short, acting on his own instincts, keeping in his own shape that God made him in; and not a mere crank in the social engine-house, welded on principles that he does not understand, and for purposes that he does not care for.

For will any one dare to tell me that business is more entertaining than fooling among boats? He must have never seen a boat, or never seen an office, who says so. And for certain the one is a great deal better for the health. There should be nothing so much a man's business as his amusements. Nothing but money-grubbing can be put forward to the contrary; no one but

Mammon, the least erected spirit that fell
From Heaven,

durst risk a word in answer. It is but a lying cant that would represent the merchant and the banker as people disinterestedly toiling for mankind, and then most useful when they are most absorbed in their transactions; for the man is more important than his services. And when my Royal Nautical Sportsman shall have so far fallen from his hopeful youth that he cannot pluck up

an enthusiasm over anything but his ledger, I venture to doubt whether he will be near so nice a fellow, and whether he would welcome, with so good a grace, a couple of drenched Englishmen paddling into Brussels in the dusk.

When we had changed our wet clothes and drunk a glass of pale ale to the Club's prosperity, one of their number escorted us to an hotel. He would not join us at our dinner, but he had no objection to a glass of wine. Enthusiasm is very wearing; and I begin to understand why prophets were unpopular in Judæa, where they were best known. For three stricken hours did this excellent young man sit beside us to dilate on boats and boat-races; and before he left, he was kind enough to order our bedroom candles.

We endeavoured now and again to change the subject; but the diversion did not last a moment: the Royal Nautical Sportsman bridled, shied, answered the question, and then breasted once more into the swelling tide of his subject. I call it his subject; but I think it was he who was subjected. The *Arethusa*, who holds all racing as a creature of the devil, found himself in a pitiful dilemma. He durst not own his ignorance for the honour of Old England, and spoke away about English clubs and English oarsmen whose fame had never before come to his ears. Several times, and, once above all, on the question of sliding-seats, he was within an ace of exposure. As for the *Cigarette*, who has rowed races in the heat of his blood, but now disowns these slips of his wanton youth, his case was still more desperate; for the

Royal Nautical proposed that he should take an oar in one of their eights on the morrow, to compare the English with the Belgian stroke. I could see my friend perspiring in his chair whenever that particular topic came up. And there was yet another proposal which had the same effect on both of us. It appeared that the champion canoeist of Europe (as well as most other champions) was a Royal Nautical Sportsman. And if we would only wait until the Sunday, this infernal paddler would be so condescending as to accompany us on our next stage. Neither of us had the least desire to drive the coursers of the sun against Apollo.

When the young man was gone, we countermanded our candles, and ordered some brandy and water. The great billows had gone over our head. The Royal Nautical Sportsmen were as nice young fellows as a man would wish to see, but they were a trifle too young and a thought too nautical for us. We began to see that we were old and cynical; we liked ease and the agreeable rambling of the human mind about this and the other subject; we did not want to disgrace our native land by messing an eight, or toiling pitifully in the wake of the champion canoeist. In short, we had recourse to flight. It seemed ungrateful, but we tried to make that good on a card loaded with sincere compliments. And indeed it was no time for scruples; we seemed to feel the hot breath of the champion on our necks.

AT MAUBEUGE

Partly from the terror we had of our good friends the Royal Nauticals, partly from the fact that there were no fewer than fifty-five locks between Brussels and Charleroi, we concluded that we should travel by train across the frontier, boats and all. Fifty-five locks in a day's journey was pretty well tantamount to trudging the whole distance on foot, with the canoes upon our shoulders, an object of astonishment to the trees on the canal side, and of honest derision to all right-thinking children.

To pass the frontier, even in a train, is a difficult matter for the *Arethusa*. He is somehow or other a marked man for the official eye. Wherever he journeys, there are the officers gathered together. Treaties are solemnly signed, foreign ministers, ambassadors, and consuls sit throned in state from China to Peru, and the Union Jack flutters on all the winds of heaven. Under these safeguards, portly clergymen, school-mistresses, gentlemen in grey tweed suits, and all the ruck and rabble of British touristry pour unhindered, *Murray* in hand, over the railways of the Continent, and yet the slim person of the *Arethusa* is taken in the meshes, while these great fish go on their way rejoicing. If he travels without a passport, he is cast, without any figure about the matter, into noisome dungeons: if his papers are in order, he is suffered to go his way indeed, but not until he has been humiliated by a general incredulity. He is a born British

subject, yet he has never succeeded in persuading a single official of his nationality. He flatters himself he is indifferent honest; yet he is rarely taken for anything better than a spy, and there is no absurd and disreputable means of livelihood but has been attributed to him in some heat of official or popular distrust..

For the life of me I cannot understand it. I too have been knolled to church, and sat at good men's feasts; but I bear no mark of it. I am as strange as a Jack Indian to their official spectacles. I might come from any part of the globe, it seems, except from where I do. My ancestors have laboured in vain, and the glorious Constitution cannot protect me in my walks abroad. It is a great thing, believe me, to present a good normal type of the nation you belong to.

Nobody else was asked for his papers on the way to Maubeuge; but I was; and although I clung to my rights, I had to choose at last between accepting the humiliation and being left behind by the train. I was sorry to give way; but I wanted to get to Maubeuge.

Maubeuge is a fortified town, with a very good inn, the *Grand Cerf*. It seemed to be inhabited principally by soldiers and bagmen; at least, these were all that we saw, except the hotel servants. We had to stay there some time, for the canoes were in no hurry to follow us, and at last stuck hopelessly in the custom-house until we went back to liberate them. There was nothing to do, nothing to see. We had good meals, which was a great matter; but that was all.

The *Cigarette* was nearly taken up upon a charge of drawing

the fortifications: a feat of which he was hopelessly incapable. And besides, as I suppose each belligerent nation has a plan of the other's fortified places already, these precautions are of the nature of shutting the stable door after the steed is away. But I have no doubt they help to keep up a good spirit at home. It is a great thing if you can persuade people that they are somehow or other partakers in a mystery. It makes them feel bigger. Even the Freemasons, who have been shown up to satiety, preserve a kind of pride; and not a grocer among them, however honest, harmless, and empty-headed he may feel himself to be at bottom, but comes home from one of their *coenacula* with a portentous significance for himself.

It is an odd thing, how happily two people, if there are two, can live in a place where they have no acquaintance. I think the spectacle of a whole life in which you have no part paralyses personal desire. You are content to become a mere spectator. The baker stands in his door; the colonel with his three medals goes by to the *café* at night; the troops drum and trumpet and man the ramparts, as bold as so many lions. It would task language to say how placidly you behold all this. In a place where you have taken some root, you are provoked out of your indifference; you have a hand in the game; your friends are fighting with the army. But in a strange town, not small enough to grow too soon familiar, nor so large as to have laid itself out for travellers, you stand so far apart from the business, that you positively forget it would be possible to go nearer; you have so little human interest around

you, that you do not remember yourself to be a man. Perhaps, in a very short time, you would be one no longer. Gymnosophists go into a wood, with all nature seething around them, with romance on every side; it would be much more to the purpose if they took up their abode in a dull country town, where they should see just so much of humanity as to keep them from desiring more, and only the stale externals of man's life. These externals are as dead to us as so many formalities, and speak a dead language in our eyes and ears. They have no more meaning than an oath or a salutation. We are so much accustomed to see married couples going to church of a Sunday that we have clean forgotten what they represent; and novelists are driven to rehabilitate adultery, no less, when they wish to show us what a beautiful thing it is for a man and a woman to live for each other.

One person in Maubeuge, however, showed me something more than his outside. That was the driver of the hotel omnibus: a mean enough looking little man, as well as I can remember; but with a spark of something human in his soul. He had heard of our little journey, and came to me at once in envious sympathy. How he longed to travel! he told me. How he longed to be somewhere else, and see the round world before he went into the grave! 'Here I am,' said he. 'I drive to the station. Well. And then I drive back again to the hotel. And so on every day and all the week round. My God, is that life?' I could not say I thought it was – for him. He pressed me to tell him where I had been, and where I hoped to go; and as he listened, I declare the fellow sighed. Might not

this have been a brave African traveller, or gone to the Indies after Drake? But it is an evil age for the gypsily inclined among men. He who can sit squarest on a three-legged stool, he it is who has the wealth and glory.

I wonder if my friend is still driving the omnibus for the Grand Cerf? Not very likely, I believe; for I think he was on the eve of mutiny when we passed through, and perhaps our passage determined him for good. Better a thousand times that he should be a tramp, and mend pots and pans by the wayside, and sleep under trees, and see the dawn and the sunset every day above a new horizon. I think I hear you say that it is a respectable position to drive an omnibus? Very well. What right has he who likes it not, to keep those who would like it dearly out of this respectable position? Suppose a dish were not to my taste, and you told me that it was a favourite amongst the rest of the company, what should I conclude from that? Not to finish the dish against my stomach, I suppose.

Respectability is a very good thing in its way, but it does not rise superior to all considerations. I would not for a moment venture to hint that it was a matter of taste; but I think I will go as far as this: that if a position is admittedly unkind, uncomfortable, unnecessary, and superfluously useless, although it were as respectable as the Church of England, the sooner a man is out of it, the better for himself, and all concerned.

ON THE SAMBRE CANALISED: TO QUARTES

About three in the afternoon the whole establishment of the *Grand Cerf* accompanied us to the water's edge. The man of the omnibus was there with haggard eyes. Poor cage-bird! Do I not remember the time when I myself haunted the station, to watch train after train carry its complement of freemen into the night, and read the names of distant places on the time-bills with indescribable longings?

We were not clear of the fortifications before the rain began. The wind was contrary, and blew in furious gusts; nor were the aspects of nature any more clement than the doings of the sky. For we passed through a stretch of blighted country, sparsely covered with brush, but handsomely enough diversified with factory chimneys. We landed in a soiled meadow among some pollards, and there smoked a pipe in a flaw of fair weather. But the wind blew so hard, we could get little else to smoke. There were no natural objects in the neighbourhood, but some sordid workshops. A group of children headed by a tall girl stood and watched us from a little distance all the time we stayed. I heartily wonder what they thought of us.

At Hautmont, the lock was almost impassable; the landing-place being steep and high, and the launch at a long distance.

Near a dozen grimy workmen lent us a hand. They refused any reward; and, what is much better, refused it handsomely, without conveying any sense of insult. 'It is a way we have in our countryside,' said they. And a very becoming way it is. In Scotland, where also you will get services for nothing, the good people reject your money as if you had been trying to corrupt a voter. When people take the trouble to do dignified acts, it is worth while to take a little more, and allow the dignity to be common to all concerned. But in our brave Saxon countries, where we plod threescore years and ten in the mud, and the wind keeps singing in our ears from birth to burial, we do our good and bad with a high hand and almost offensively; and make even our alms a witness-bearing and an act of war against the wrong.

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

the rain, was of enchanting purity. The river doubled among the hillocks, a shining strip of mirror glass; and the dip of the paddles set the flowers shaking along the brink.

In the meadows wandered black and white cattle fantastically marked. One beast, with a white head and the rest of the body glossy black, came to the edge to drink, and stood gravely twitching his ears at me as I went by, like some sort of preposterous clergyman in a play. A moment after I heard a loud plunge, and, turning my head, saw the clergyman struggling to shore. The bank had given way under his feet.

Besides the cattle, we saw no living things except a few birds and a great many fishermen. These sat along the edges of the meadows, sometimes with one rod, sometimes with as many as half a score. They seemed stupefied with contentment; and when we induced them to exchange a few words with us about the weather, their voices sounded quiet and far away. There was a strange diversity of opinion among them as to the kind of fish for which they set their lures; although they were all agreed in this, that the river was abundantly supplied. Where it was plain that no two of them had ever caught the same kind of fish, we could not help suspecting that perhaps not any one of them had ever caught a fish at all. I hope, since the afternoon was so lovely, that they were one and all rewarded; and that a silver booty went home in every basket for the pot. Some of my friends would cry shame on me for this; but I prefer a man, were he only an angler, to the bravest pair of gills in all God's waters. I do not affect fishes

unless when cooked in sauce; whereas an angler is an important piece of river scenery, and hence deserves some recognition among canoeists. He can always tell you where you are after a mild fashion; and his quiet presence serves to accentuate the solitude and stillness, and remind you of the glittering citizens below your boat.

The Sambre turned so industriously to and fro among his little hills, that it was past six before we drew near the lock at Quartes. There were some children on the tow-path, with whom the *Cigarette* fell into a chaffing talk as they ran along beside us. It was in vain that I warned him. In vain I told him, in English, that boys were the most dangerous creatures; and if once you began with them, it was safe to end in a shower of stones. For my own part, whenever anything was addressed to me, I smiled gently and shook my head as though I were an inoffensive person inadequately acquainted with French. For indeed I have had such experience at home, that I would sooner meet many wild animals than a troop of healthy urchins.

But I was doing injustice to these peaceable young Hainaulters. When the *Cigarette* went off to make inquiries, I got out upon the bank to smoke a pipe and superintend the boats, and became at once the centre of much amiable curiosity. The children had been joined by this time by a young woman and a mild lad who had lost an arm; and this gave me more security. When I let slip my first word or so in French, a little girl nodded her head with a comical grown-up air. 'Ah, you see,' she said, 'he

understands well enough now; he was just making believe.' And the little group laughed together very good-naturedly.

They were much impressed when they heard we came from England; and the little girl proffered the information that England was an island 'and a far way from here —*bien loin d'ici*.'

'Ay, you may say that, a far way from here,' said the lad with one arm.

I was as nearly home-sick as ever I was in my life; they seemed to make it such an incalculable distance to the place where I first saw the day. They admired the canoes very much. And I observed one piece of delicacy in these children, which is worthy of record. They had been deafening us for the last hundred yards with petitions for a sail; ay, and they deafened us to the same tune next morning when we came to start; but then, when the canoes were lying empty, there was no word of any such petition. Delicacy? or perhaps a bit of fear for the water in so crank a vessel? I hate cynicism a great deal worse than I do the devil; unless perhaps the two were the same thing? And yet 'tis a good tonic; the cold tub and bath-towel of the sentiments; and positively necessary to life in cases of advanced sensibility.

From the boats they turned to my costume. They could not make enough of my red sash; and my knife filled them with awe.

'They make them like that in England,' said the boy with one arm. I was glad he did not know how badly we make them in England now-a-days. 'They are for people who go away to sea,' he added, 'and to defend one's life against great fish.'

I felt I was becoming a more and more romantic figure to the little group at every word. And so I suppose I was. Even my pipe, although it was an ordinary French clay pretty well 'trousered,' as they call it, would have a rarity in their eyes, as a thing coming from so far away. And if my feathers were not very fine in themselves, they were all from over seas. One thing in my outfit, however, tickled them out of all politeness; and that was the bemired condition of my canvas shoes. I suppose they were sure the mud at any rate was a home product. The little girl (who was the genius of the party) displayed her own sabots in competition; and I wish you could have seen how gracefully and merrily she did it.

The young woman's milk-can, a great amphora of hammered brass, stood some way off upon the sward. I was glad of an opportunity to divert public attention from myself, and return some of the compliments I had received. So I admired it cordially both for form and colour, telling them, and very truly, that it was as beautiful as gold. They were not surprised. The things were plainly the boast of the countryside. And the children expatiated on the costliness of these amphoræ, which sell sometimes as high as thirty francs apiece; told me how they were carried on donkeys, one on either side of the saddle, a brave caparison in themselves; and how they were to be seen all over the district, and at the larger farms in great number and of great size.

PONT-SUR-SAMBRE

WE ARE PEDLARS

The *Cigarette* returned with good news. There were beds to be had some ten minutes' walk from where we were, at a place called Pont. We stowed the canoes in a granary, and asked among the children for a guide. The circle at once widened round us, and our offers of reward were received in dispiriting silence. We were plainly a pair of Bluebeards to the children; they might speak to us in public places, and where they had the advantage of numbers; but it was another thing to venture off alone with two uncouth and legendary characters, who had dropped from the clouds upon their hamlet this quiet afternoon, sashed and be-knived, and with a flavour of great voyages. The owner of the granary came to our assistance, singled out one little fellow and threatened him with corporalities; or I suspect we should have had to find the way for ourselves. As it was, he was more frightened at the granary man than the strangers, having perhaps had some experience of the former. But I fancy his little heart must have been going at a fine rate; for he kept trotting at a respectful distance in front, and looking back at us with scared eyes. Not otherwise may the children of the young world have guided Jove or one of his Olympian compeers on an adventure.

A miry lane led us up from Quartes with its church and bickering windmill. The hinds were trudging homewards from the fields. A brisk little woman passed us by. She was seated across a donkey between a pair of glittering milk-cans; and, as she went, she kicked jauntily with her heels upon the donkey's side, and scattered shrill remarks among the wayfarers. It was notable that none of the tired men took the trouble to reply. Our conductor soon led us out of the lane and across country. The sun had gone down, but the west in front of us was one lake of level gold. The path wandered a while in the open, and then passed under a trellis like a bower indefinitely prolonged. On either hand were shadowy orchards; cottages lay low among the leaves, and sent their smoke to heaven; every here and there, in an opening, appeared the great gold face of the west.

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