

Paine Albert Bigelow

# The Car That Went Abroad: Motoring Through the Golden Age



Albert Paine

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**Paine A.**

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# **Paine Albert Bigelow**

## **The Car That Went Abroad: Motoring Through the Golden Age**

### **PREFACE**

Fellow-wanderer:

The curtain that so long darkened many of the world's happy places is lifted at last. Quaint villages, old cities, rolling hills, and velvet valleys once more beckon to the traveler.

The chapters that follow tell the story of a small family who went gypsying through that golden age before the war when the tree-lined highways of France, the cherry-blossom roads of the Black Forest, and the high trails of Switzerland offered welcome to the motor nomad.

The impressions set down, while the colors were fresh and warm with life, are offered now to those who will give a thought to that time and perhaps go happily wandering through the new age whose dawn is here.

*A. B. P.*

June, 1921.

## **Part I**

# **THE CAR THAT WENT ABROAD**

### **Chapter I**

## **DON'T HURRY THROUGH MARSEILLES**

Originally I began this story with a number of instructive chapters on shipping an automobile, and I followed with certain others full of pertinent comment on ocean travel in a day when all the seas were as a great pleasure pond. They were very good chapters, and I hated to part with them, but my publisher had quite positive views on the matter. He said those chapters were about as valuable now as June leaves are in November, so I swept them aside in the same sad way that one disposes of the autumn drift and said I would start with Marseilles, where, after fourteen days of quiet sailing, we landed with our car one late August afternoon.

Most travelers pass through Marseilles hastily – too hastily, it may be, for their profit. It has taken some thousands of years to build the "Pearl of the Mediterranean," and to walk up and down the rue Cannebière and drink coffee and fancy-colored liquids at little tables on the sidewalk, interesting and delightful as that may be, is not to become acquainted with the "pearl" – not in any large sense.

We had a very good and practical reason for not hurrying through Marseilles. It would require a week or more to get our car through the customs and obtain the necessary licenses and memberships for inland travel. Meantime we would do some sight-seeing. We would begin immediately.

Besides facing the Old Port (the ancient harbor) our hotel looked on the end of the Cannebière, which starts at the Quai and extends, as the phrase goes, "as far as India," meaning that the nations of the East as well as those of the West mingle there. We understood the saying as soon as we got into the kaleidoscope. We were rather sober-hued bits ourselves, but there were plenty of the other sort. It was the end of August, and Marseilles is a semi-tropic port. There were plenty of white costumes, of both men and women, and sprinkled among them the red fezzes and embroidered coats and sashes of Algiers, Morocco, and the Farther East. And there were ladies in filmy things, with bright hats and parasols; and soldiers in uniforms of red and blue, while the wide pavements of that dazzling street were literally covered with little tables, almost to the edges. And all those gay people who were not walking up and down, chatting and laughing, were seated at the little tables with red and green and yellow drinks before them and pitchers of ice or tiny cups of coffee, and all the seated people were laughing and chattering, too, or reading papers and smoking, and nobody seemed to have a sorrow or a care in the world. It was really an inspiring sight, after the long, quiet days on the ship, and we loitered to enjoy it. It was very busy around us. Tramcars jangled, motors honked, truckmen and cabmen cracked their whips incessantly. Newswomen, their aprons full of long pockets stuffed with papers, offered us journals in phrases that I did not recognize as being in my French phonograph; cabmen hailed us in more or less English and wanted to drive us somewhere; flower sellers' booths lined both sides of a short street, and pretty girls held up nosegays for us to see. Now and then a beggar put out a hand.

The pretty drinks and certain ices we saw made us covetous for them, but we had not yet the courage to mingle with those gay people and try our new machine-made French right there before everybody. So we slipped into a dainty place – a *pâtisserie boulangerie*– and ordered coffee and chocolate ice cream, and after long explanations on both sides got iced coffee and hot chocolate, which was doing rather well, we thought, for the first time, and, anyhow, it was quite delicious and served by a pretty girl whose French was so limpid that one could make himself believe he understood it, because it was pure music, which is not a matter of arbitrary syllables at all.

We came out and blended with the panorama once more. It was all so entirely French, I said; no suggestion of America anywhere. But Narcissa, aged fifteen, just then pointed to a flaming handbill over the entrance of a cinematograph show. The poster was foreign, too, in its phrasing, but the title, "*L'aventures d'Arizona Bill*" certainly had a flavor of home. The Joy, who was ten, was for going in and putting other things by, but we overruled her. Other signs attracted us – the window cards and announcements were easy lessons in French and always interesting.

By and by bouquets of lights breaking out along the streets reminded us that it was evening and that we were hungry. There were plenty of hotels, including our own, but the dining rooms looked big and warm and expensive and we were dusty and economical and already warm enough. We would stop at some open-air place, we said, and have something dainty and modest and not heating to the blood. We thought it would be easy to find such a place, for there were perfect seas of sidewalk tables, thronged with people, who at first glance seemed to be dining. But we discovered that they were only drinking, as before, and perhaps nibbling at little cakes or rolls. When we made timid and rudimentary inquiries of the busy waiters, they pointed toward the hotels or explained things in words so glued together we could not sort them out. How different it all was from New York, we said. Narcissa openly sighed to be back on "old rue de Broadway," where there were restaurants big and little every twenty steps.

We wandered into side streets and by and by found an open place with a tiny green inclosure, where a few people certainly seemed to be eating. We were not entirely satisfied with the look of the patrons, but they were orderly, and some of them of good appearance. The little tables had neat white cloths on them, and the glassware shone brightly in the electric glow. So we took a corner position and studied the rather elaborate and obscure bill of fare. It was written, and the few things we could decipher did not seem cheap. We had heard about food being reasonable in France, but single portions of fish or cutlets at ".45" and broiled chicken at "1.20" could hardly be called cheap in this retired and unpretentious corner. One might as well be in a better place – in New York. We wondered how these unfashionable people about us could look so contented and afford to order such liberal supplies. Then suddenly a great light came. The price amounts were not in dollars and cents, but in francs and centimes. The decimals were the same, only you divided by five to get American values. There is ever so much difference.<sup>1</sup>

The bill of fare suddenly took on a halo. It became almost unbelievable. We were tempted to go – it was too cheap to be decent. But we were weary and hungry, and we stayed. Later we were glad. We had those things which the French make so well, no matter how humble the place – "*pot au feu, bouillabaisse*" (the fish soup which is the pride of Marseilles – our first introduction to it), lamb chops, a crisp salad, Gruyère cheese, with a pint of red wine; and we paid – I try to blush when I tell it – a total for our four of less than five francs – that is to say, something under a dollar, including the tip, which was certainly large enough, if one could judge from the lavish acknowledgment of the busy person who served us.

We lingered while I smoked, observing some curious things. The place filled up with a democratic crowd, including, as it did, what were evidently well-to-do tradesmen and their families, clerks with their young wives or sweethearts, single derelicts of both sexes, soldiers, even workmen in blouses. Many of them seemed to be regular customers, for they greeted the waiters and chatted with them during the serving. Then we discovered a peculiar proof that these were in fact steady patrons. In the inner restaurant were rows of hooks along the walls, and at the corners some racks with other hooks. Upon these were hanging, not hats or garments, but dozens of knotted white cloths which we discovered presently to be table napkins, large white serviettes like our own. While we were trying to make out why they should be variously knotted and hung about in that way a man and woman went in and, after a brief survey of the hooks, took down two of the napkins and carried them to a table.

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<sup>1</sup> The old rates of exchange are used in this book.

We understood then. The bill of fare stated that napkins were charged for at the rate of five centimes (one cent) each. These were individual leaseholdings, as it were, of those who came regularly – a fine example of French economy. We did not hang up our napkins when we went away. We might not come back, and, besides, there were no empty hooks.



## Chapter II

### MOTORING BY TRAM

A little book says: "Thanks to a unique system of tramways, Marseilles may be visited rapidly and without fatigue." They do not know the word "trolley" in Europe, and "tramway" is not a French word, but the French have adopted it, even with its "w," a letter not in their alphabet. The Marseilles trams did seem to run everywhere, and they were cheap. Ten centimes (two cents) was the fare for each "zone" or division, and a division long enough for the average passenger. Being sight-seers, we generally paid more than once, but even so the aggregate was modest enough. The circular trip around the Corniche, or shore, road has four of these divisions, with a special rate for the trip, which is very long and very beautiful.

We took the Corniche trip toward evening for the sake of the sunset. The tram starts at the rue de Rome and winds through the city first, across shaded courts, along streets of varying widths (some of them so old and ever so foreign, but always clean), past beautiful public buildings always with deep open spaces or broad streets in front of them, for the French do not hide their fine public architectures and monuments, but plant them as a landscape gardener plants his trellises and trees. Then all at once we were at the shore – the Mediterranean no longer blue, but crimson and gold with evening, the sun still drifting, as it seemed, among the harbor islands – the towers of Château d'If outlined on the sky. On one side the sea, breaking against the rocks and beaches, washing into little sheltered bays – on the other the abrupt or terraced cliff, with fair villas set in gardens of palm and mimosa and the rose trees of the south. Here and there among the villas were palace-like hotels, with wide balconies that overlooked the sea, and down along the shore were tea houses and restaurants where one could sit at little tables on pretty terraces just above the water's edge.

So we left the tram at the end of a zone and made our way down to one of those places, and sat in a little garden and had fish, freshly caught, and a cutlet, and some ripe grapes, and such things; and we watched the sun set, and stayed until the dark came and the Corniche shore turned into a necklace of twinkling lights. Then the tram carried us still farther, and back into the city at last, by way of the Prado, a broad residential avenue, with trees rising dark on either side.

At the end of a week in Marseilles we had learned a number of things – made some observations – drawn some conclusions. It is a very old city – old when the Greeks settled there twenty-five hundred years ago – but it has been ravaged and rebuilt too often through the ages for any of its original antiquity to remain. Some of the buildings have stood five or six hundred years, perhaps, and are quaint and interesting, with their queer roofs and moldering walls which have known siege and battle and have seen men in gaudy trappings and armor go clanking by, stopping to let their horses drink at the scarred fountains where to-day women wash their vegetables and their clothing. We were glad to have looked on those ancient relics, for they, too, would soon be gone. The spirit of great building and progress is abroad in Marseilles – the old clusters of houses will come down – the hoary fountains worn smooth by the hands of women and the noses of thirsty beasts will be replaced by new ones – fine and beautiful, for the French build always for art, let the race for commercial supremacy be ever so swift. Fifty or one hundred years from now it will be as hard to find one of these landmarks as it is to-day relics of the Greek and Roman times, and of the latter we found none at all. Tradition has it that Lazarus and his family came to Marseilles after his resuscitation, but the house he occupied is not shown. Indeed, there is probably not a thing above ground that Lucian the Greek saw when he lived here in the second century.

The harbor he sailed into remains. Its borders have changed, but it is the same inclosed port that sheltered those early galleys and triremes of commerce and of war. We looked down upon it from our balcony, and sometimes in the dim morning, or in the first dusk of evening when its sails were idle and its docks deserted, it seemed still to have something of the past about it, something

that was not quite reality. Certain of its craft were old in fashion and quaint in form, and if even one trireme had lain at anchor there, or had come drifting in, we might easily have fancied this to be the port that somewhere is said to harbor the missing ships.

It is a busy place by day. Its quays are full of trucks and trams and teams, and a great traffic going on. Lucian would hardly recognize any of it at all. The noise would appall him, the smoking steamers would terrify him, the *transbordeur*— an aerial bridge suspended between two Eiffel towers, with a hanging car that travels back and forth like a cash railway — would set him praying to the gods. Possibly the fishwives, sorting out sea food and bait under little awnings, might strike him as more or less familiar. At least he would recognize their occupation. They were strung along the east quay, and I had never dreamed that the sea contained so many strange things to eat as they carried in stock. They had oysters and clams, and several varieties of mussels, and some things that looked like tide-worn lumps of terra cotta, and other things that resembled nothing else under heaven, so that words have not been invented to describe them.

Then they had *oursins*. I don't know whether an *oursin* is a bivalve or not. It does not look like one. The word "*oursin*" means hedgehog, but this *oursin* looked a great deal more like an old, black, sea-soaked chestnut bur — that is, before they opened it. When the *oursin* is split open —

But I cannot describe an opened *oursin* and preserve the proprieties. It is too — physiological. And the Marseillais eat those things — eat them raw! Narcissa and I, who had rather more limb and wind than the others, wandered along the quay a good deal, and often stood spellbound watching this performance. Once we saw two women having some of them for early breakfast with a bottle of wine — fancy!

By the way, we finally discovered the restaurants in Marseilles. At first we thought that the Marseillais never ate in public, but only drank. This was premature. There are restaurant districts. The rue Colbert is one of them. The quay is another, and of the restaurants in that precinct there is one that no traveler should miss. It is Pascal's, established a hundred years ago, and descended from father to son to the present moment. Pascal's is famous for its fish, and especially for its *bouillabaisse*. If I were to be in Marseilles only a brief time, I might be willing to miss the Palais Longchamps or a cathedral or two, but not Pascal's and *bouillabaisse*. It is a glorified fish chowder. I will say no more than that, for I should only dull its bloom. I started to write a poem on it. It began:

*Oh, bouillabaisse, I sing thy praise.*

But Narcissa said that the rhyme was bad, and I gave it up. Besides, I remembered that Thackeray had written a poem on the same subject.

One must go early to get a seat at Pascal's. There are rooms and rooms, and waiters hurrying about, and you must give your order, or point at the bill of fare, without much delay. Sea food is the thing, and it comes hot and delicious, and at the end you can have melon — from paradise, I suppose, for it is pure nectar — a kind of liquid cantaloupe such as I have seen nowhere else in this world.<sup>2</sup> You have wine if you want it, at a franc a bottle, and when you are through you have spent about half a dollar for everything and feel that life is a song and the future made of peace. There came moments after we found Pascal's when, like the lotus eaters, we felt moved to say: "We will roam no more. This at last is the port where dreams come true."

Our motor clearance required a full ten days, but we did not regret the time. We made some further trips by tram, and one by water — to Château d'If, on the little ferry that runs every hour or so to that historic island fortress. To many persons Château d'If is a semi-mythical island prison from which, in Dumas' novel, Edmond Dantes escapes to become the Count of Monte Cristo, with fabulous wealth and an avenging sword. But it is real enough; a prison fortress which crowns a barren rock, twenty minutes from the harbor entrance, in plain view from the Corniche road. François I laid

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<sup>2</sup> Our honey-dew melon is a mild approach to it.

its corner stone in 1524 and construction continued during the next seventy years. It is a place of grim, stubby towers, with an inner court opening to the cells – two ranges of them, one above the other. The furniture of the court is a stone stairway and a well.

Château d'If is about as solid and enduring as the rock it stands on, and it is not the kind of place one would expect to go away from alive, if he were invited there for permanent residence. There appears to be no record of any escapes except that of Edmond Dantes, which is in a novel. When prisoners left that island it was by consent of the authorities. I am not saying that Dumas invented his story. In fact, I insist on believing it. I am only saying that it was a remarkable exception to the general habit of the guests in Château d'If. Of course it happened, for we saw cell B where Dantes was confined, a rayless place; also cell A adjoining, where the Abbé Faria was, and even the hole between, through which the Abbé counseled Dantes and confided the secret of the treasure that would make Dantes the master of the world. All of the cells have tablets at their entrances bearing the names of their most notable occupants, and that of Edmond Dantes is prominently displayed. It was good enough evidence for us.

Those cells are on the lower level, and are merely black, damp holes, without windows, and with no floors except the unlevelled surface of the rock. Prisoners were expected to die there and they generally did it with little delay. One Bernadot, a rich Marseilles merchant, starved himself, and so found release at the end of the twelfth day; but another, a sailor named Jean Paul, survived in that horrible darkness for thirty-one years. His crime was striking his commander. Many of the offenses were even more trifling; the mere utterance of a word offensive to some one in power was enough to secure lodging in Château d'If. It was even dangerous to have a pretty daughter or wife that a person of influence coveted. Château d'If had an open door for husbands and fathers not inclined to be reasonable in such matters.

The second-story prisons are larger and lighter, but hardly less interesting. In No. 5 Count Mirabeau lodged for nearly a year, by suggestion of his father, who did not approve of his son's wild ways and thought Château d'If would tame him. But Mirabeau put in his time writing an essay on despotism and planning revolution. Later, one of the neighboring apartments, No. 7, a large one, became the seat of the *tribunal révolutionnaire* which condemned there sixty-six to the guillotine.

Many notables were sent to Château d'If on the charge of disloyalty to the sovereign. In one of the larger cells two brothers were imprisoned for having shared the exile of one Chevalier Glendèves who was obliged to flee from France because he refused to go down on his knees to Louis XIV. Royalty itself has enjoyed the hospitality of Château d'If. Louis Philippe of Orléans occupied the same large apartment later, which is really quite a grand one for a prison, with a fireplace and space to move about. Another commodious room on this floor was for a time the home of the mysterious Man of the Iron Mask.

These are but a few – one can only touch on the more interesting names. "Dead after ten years of captivity"; "Dead after sixteen years of captivity"; such memoranda close many of the records. Some of the prisoners were released at last, racked with disease and enfeebled in mind. Some went forth to the block, perhaps willingly enough. It is not a place in which one wishes to linger. You walk a little way into the blackest of the dungeons, stumbling over the rocks of the damp, unlevelled floor, and hurry out. You hesitate a moment in the larger, lighter cells and try to picture a king there, and the Iron Mask; you try to imagine the weird figure of Mirabeau raging and writing, and then, a step away, the grim tribunal sorting from the nobility of France material for the guillotine. It is the kind of thing you cannot make seem real. You can see a picture, but it is always away somewhere – never quite there, in the very place.

Outside it was sunny, the sea blue, the cliffs high and sharp, with water always breaking and foaming at their feet. The Joy insisted on being shown the exact place where Dantes was flung over, but I was afraid to try to find it. I was afraid that there would be no place where he could be flung into the water without hitting the sharp rocks below, and that would end the story before he got the

treasure. I said it was probably on the other side of the island, and besides it was getting late. We sailed home in the evening light, this time into the ancient harbor, and landed about where Lucian used to land, I should think, such a long time ago.

It was our last night in Marseilles. We had been there a full ten days, altogether, and time had not hung upon our hands. We would still have lingered, but there was no longer an excuse. Even the car could not furnish one. Released from its prison, refreshed with a few liters of gasoline —*essence*, they call it – and awakened with a gentle hitch or two of the crank, it began its sweet old murmur, just as if it had not been across some thousands of miles of tossing water. Then, the clutch released, it slipped noiselessly out of the docks, through the narrow streets, to a garage, where it acquired its new numbers and a bath, and maybe a French lesson or two, so that to-morrow it might carry us farther into France.

## Chapter III

### ACROSS THE CRAU

There are at least two ways to leave Marseilles for the open plain of the Provence, and we had hardly started before I wished I had chosen the other one. We were climbing the rue de la République, or one of its connections, when we met, coming down on the wrong side of the tram line, one of the heaviest vehicles in France, loaded with iron castings. It was a fairly crowded street, too, and I hesitated a moment too long in deciding to switch to the wrong side, myself, and so sneak around the obstruction. In that moment the monstrous thing decided to cross to its own side of the road, which seemed to solve the problem. I brought the car to a standstill to wait.

But that was another mistake; I should have backed. The obstruction refused to cross the tram track. Evidently the rails were slippery and when the enormous wheels met the iron they slipped – slipped toward us – ponderously, slowly, as inevitable as doomsday. I was willing to back then, but when I shifted the lever I forgot something else and our engine stopped. There was not enough gravity to carry us back without it; neither was there room, or time, to crank.<sup>3</sup> So there we were, with that mountain closing in upon us like a wall of Poe's collapsing room.

It was fascinating. I don't think one of us thought of jumping out and leaving the car to its fate. The truck driver was frantically urging his team forward, hoping the wheels would catch, but only making them slide a little quicker in our direction. They were six inches away, now – five inches – three inches – one inch – the end of the hub was touching our mud guard. What we *might* have done then – what *might* have happened remains guesswork. What did happen was that the huge steel tire reached a joint in the tram rail and unhurriedly lifted itself over, just as if that was what it had been intending to do all the time. I had strength enough left to get out and crank up, then, but none to spare. A little more paint off the front end of the mud guard, but that was nothing. I had whetted those guards on a variety of things, including a cow, in my time. At home I had a real passion for scraping them against the door casing of the garage, backing out.

Still, we were pretty thoughtful for several miles and missed a road that turns off to Arles, and were on the way to Aix, which we had already visited by tram. Never mind; Aix was on the way to Arles, too, and when all the roads are good roads a few miles of motor travel more or less do not count. Only it is such a dusty way to Aix, and we were anxious to get into the cleaner and more inviting byways.

We were at the outskirts, presently, and when we saw a military-looking gentleman standing before a little house marked "*L'Octroi*" we stopped. I had learned enough French to know that *l'octroi* means a local custom house, and it is not considered good form to pass one of them unnoticed. It hurts the *l'octroi* man's feelings and he is backed by the *gendarmerie* of France. He will let you pass, and then in his sorrow he will telephone to the police station, just ahead. There you will be stopped with a bayonet, or a club, or something, and brought back to the *l'octroi*, where you will pay an *amend* of six francs; also costs; also for the revenue stamp attached to your bill of particulars; also for any little thing which you may happen to have upon which duty may be levied; also for other things; and you will stand facing a half-open cell at the end of the corridor while your account is being made up – all of which things happened to a friend of mine who thought that because an *octroi* man looked sleepy he was partly dead. Being warned in this way, we said we would stop for an *octroi* man even if he were entirely dead; so we pulled up and nodded politely, and smiled, and said, "Bon joor, messoor," and waited his pleasure.

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<sup>3</sup> The reader is reminded that this was in a day when few cars cranked otherwise than by hand.

You never saw a politer man. He made a sweeping salute and said – well, it doesn't matter just what he said – I took it to be complimentary and Narcissa thought it was something about vegetables. Whatever it was, we all smiled again, while he merely glanced in the car fore and aft, gave another fine salute and said, "*Allay*" whereupon we understood, and *allayed*, with counter-salutes and further smiles – all of which seemed pleasanter than to be brought back by a *gendarme* and stood up in front of a cell during the reckoning process.

Inquiring in Aix for the road to Arles we made a discovery, to wit: they do not always pronounce it "Arl" in the French way, but "Arlah," which is Provençal, I suppose, the remains of the old name "Arlate." One young man did not seem even to recognize the name Arles, though curiously it happened that he spoke English – enough, at least, to direct us when he found that it was his Provençal "Arlah" that we wanted.

So we left Aix behind us, and with it the dust, the trams, and about the last traces of those modern innovations which make life so comfortable when you need them and so unpeaceful when you prefer something else. The one great modern innovation which bore us silently along those level roads fell into the cosmic rhythm without a jar – becoming, as it seemed, a sort of superhuman activity, such as we shall know, perhaps, when we get our lost wings again.

I don't know whether Provence roads are modern or not. I suspect they were begun by the Roman armies a good while ago; but in any case they are not neglected now. They are boulevards – no, not exactly that, for the word "boulevard" suggests great width. They are avenues, then, ample as to width, and smooth and hard, and planted on both sides with exactly spaced and carefully kept trees. Leaving Aix, we entered one of these highways running straight into the open country. Naturally we did not expect it to continue far, not in that perfectly ordered fashion, but when with mile after mile it varied only to become more beautiful, we were filled with wonder. The country was not thickly settled; the road was sparsely traveled. Now and then we passed a heavy team drawing a load of hay or grain or wine barrels, and occasionally, very occasionally, we saw an automobile.

It was a fair, fertile land at first. There were rich, sloping fields, vineyards, olive gardens, and plummy poplars; also, an occasional stone farmhouse that looked ancient and mossy and picturesque, and made us wish we could know something of the life inside its heavy walls. We said that sometime we would stop at such a place and ask them to take us in for the night.

Now and then we passed through a village, where the streets became narrow and winding, and were not specially clean. They were interesting places enough, for they were old and queer, but they did not invite us to linger. They were neither older nor more queer than corners of Marseilles we had seen. Once we saw a kind of fair going on and the people in holiday dress.

At Salon, a still larger and cleaner place, we stopped to buy something for our wayside luncheon. Near the corner of a little shaded square a man was selling those delectable melons such as we had eaten in Marseilles; at a shop across the way was a window full of attractions – little cheeses, preserved meats, and the like. I gathered up an assortment, then went into a *boulangerie* for bread. There was another customer ahead of me, and I learned something, watching his transaction. Bread, it seemed, was not sold by the loaf there, but by exact weight. The man said some words and the woman who waited on him laid two loaves, each about a yard long, on the scales. Evidently they exceeded his order, for she cut off a foot or so from one loaf. Still the weight was too much, and she cut off a slice. He took what was left, laid down his money, and walked out. I had a feeling that the end and slice would lie around and get shopworn if I did not take them. I pointed at them, and she put them on the scales. Then I laid down a franc, and she gave me half a gill of copper change. It made the family envious when they saw how exactly I had transacted my purchase. There is nothing like knowing the language. We pushed on into the country again, stopped in a shady, green place, and picnicked on those good things for which we had spent nearly four francs. There were some things left over, too; we could have done without the extra slice of bread.

There were always mountains in view, but where we were the land had become a level plain, once, ages ago, washed by the sea. We realized this when the fertile expanse became, little by little, a barren – a mere waste, at length, of flat smooth stones like cobble, a floor left by the departing tides. "La Crau" it is called, and here there were no homes. No harvest could grow in that land – nothing but a little tough grass, and the artificially set trees on either side of the perfectly smooth, perfectly straight road that kept on and on, mile after mile, until it seemed that it must be a band around the world. How can they afford to maintain such a road through that sterile land?

The sun was dropping to the western horizon, but we did not hurry. I set the throttle to a point where the speedometer registered fifteen miles an hour. So level was the road that the figures on the dial seemed fixed there. There was nothing to see but the unbroken barren, the perfectly regular rows of sycamore or cypress, and the evening sky; yet I have seldom known a drive more inspiring. Steadily, unvaryingly, and silently heading straight into the sunset, we seemed somehow a part of the planetary system, little brother to the stars.

It was dusk when we reached the outskirts of Arles and stopped to light the lamps. The wide street led us into the business region, and we hoped it might carry us to the hotels. But this was too much to expect in an old French, Provençal, Roman city. Pausing, we pronounced the word "hotel," and were directed toward narrower and darker ways. We had entered one of these when a man stepped out of the shadow and took charge of us. I concluded that we were arrested then, and probably would not need a hotel. But he also said "hotel," and, stepping on the running-board, pointed, while I steered, under his direction. I have no idea as to the way we went, but we came out into a semi-lighted square directly in front of a most friendly-looking hostelry. Then I went in and aired some of my phonograph French, inquiring about rooms on the different *étages* and the cost of *dîners* and *déjeuners*, and the landlady spoke so slowly and distinctly that it made one vain of his understanding.

So we unloaded, and our guide, who seemed to be an *attaché* of the place, directed me to the garage. I gathered from some of the sounds he made that the main garage was *complet* – that is to say, full – and we were going to an annex. It was an interesting excursion, but I should have preferred to make it on foot and by daylight. We crossed the square and entered a cobbled street – no, a passage – between ancient walls, lost in the blackness above, and so close together below that I hesitated. It was a place for armored men on horseback, not for automobiles. We crept slowly through and then we came to an uphill corner that I was sure no car without a hinge in the middle could turn. But my guard – guide, I mean, signified that it could be done, and inch by inch we crawled through. The annex – it was really a stable of the Middle Ages – was at the end of the tunnel, and when we came away and left the car there I was persuaded that I should never see it again.

Back at the hotel, however, it was cheerful enough. It seemed an ancient place of stone stairways and thick walls. Here and there in niches were Roman vases and fragments found during the excavations. Somewhere underneath us were said to be catacombs. Attractive things, all of them, but the dinner we had – hot, fine and French, with *vin compris* two colors – was even more attractive to travelers who had been drinking in oxygen under the wide sky all those steady miles across the Crau.

## Chapter IV

### MISTRAL

(From my notes, September 10, 1913)

Adjoining our hotel – almost a part of it, in fact, is a remnant of the ancient Roman forum of Arles. Some columns, a piece of the heavy wall, sections of lintel, pediment, and cornice still stand. It is a portion of the Corinthian entrance to what was the superb assembly place of Roman Arles. The square is called Place du Forum, and sometimes now Place Mistral – the latter name because a bronze statue of the "Homer of the Provence" has been erected there, just across from the forum entrance.

Frédéric Mistral, still alive at eighty-three, is the light of the modern Provence.<sup>4</sup> We had begun to realize something of this when we saw his photographs and various editions of his poems in the windows of Marseilles and Aix, and handbills announcing the celebration at St. Remy of the fiftieth anniversary of Gounod's score of Mistral's great poem, "Mireille." But we did not at all realize the fullness of the Provençal reverence for "the Master," as they call him, until we reached Arles. To the Provence Mistral is a god – an Apollo – the "central sun from which other Provençal singers are as diverging rays." Whatever Mistral touches is glorified. Provençal women talk with a new grace because Mistral has sung of them. Green slopes and mossy ruins are viewed through the light of Mistral's song. A Mistral anniversary is celebrated like a Declaration of Independence or a Louisiana Purchase. They have even named a wind after him. Or perhaps he was named after the wind. Whichever way it was, the wind has taken second place and the people smile tenderly now, remembering the Master, when its name is mentioned.

I believe Mistral does not sing in these later days. He does not need to. The songs he sang in youth go on singing for him, and are always young. Outside of France they are not widely known; their bloom and fragrance shrink under translation. George Meredith, writing to Janet Ross in 1861, said: "Mistral I have read. He is really a fine poet." But to Meredith the euphonies of France were not strange.

And Mistral has loved the Provence. Not only has he sung of it, but he has given his labor and substance to preserve its memories. When the Academy voted him an award of three thousand francs he devoted it to the needs of his fellow poets;<sup>5</sup> when he was awarded the Nobel prize he forgot that he might spend it on himself, and bought and restored an old palace, and converted it into a museum for Arles. Then he devoted his time and energies to collecting Provençal relics, and to-day, with its treasures and associations, the place has become a shrine. Everything relating to the life and traditions of the Provence is there – Roman sculpture, sarcophagi, ceramics, frescoes, furnishings, implements – the place is crowded with precious things. Lately a room of honor has been devoted to the poet himself. In it are cases filled with his personal treasures; the walls are hung with illustrations used in his books. On the mantel is a fine bust of the poet, and in a handsome reliquary one finds a lock of hair, a little dress, and the cradle of the infant Mistral. In the cradle lies the manuscript of Mistral's first and greatest work, the "Mireille." The Provence has produced other noted men – among them Alphonse Daudet, who was born just over at Nîmes, and celebrated the town of Tarascon with his *Tartarin*. But Daudet went to Paris, which is, perhaps, a sin. The Provence is proud of Daudet, and he, too, has a statue, at Nîmes; but the Provence worships Mistral.

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<sup>4</sup> Written in 1913. Mistral died March 24th of the following year.

<sup>5</sup> Daudet in his *Lettres de Mon Moulin* says:



## Chapter V

### THE ROME OF FRANCE

There is no record of a time when there was not a city at Arles. The Rhone divides to form its delta there – loses its swiftness and becomes a smooth highway to the sea.

"As at Arles, where the Rhone stagnates," wrote Dante, who probably visited the place on a journey he made to Paris. There the flat barrenness of the Crau becomes fertile slopes and watered fields. It is a place for men to congregate and it was already important when Julius Caesar established a Roman colony and built a fleet there, after which it became still more important – finally, with its one hundred thousand inhabitants, rivaling even Marseilles. It was during those earlier years – along through the first and second centuries – that most of the great building was done, remnants of which survive to this day. Prosperity continued even into the fourth century, when the Christian Emperor Constantine established a noble palace there and contemplated making it the capital of his kingdom.

But then the decline set in. In the next century or two clouds of so-called barbarians swept down from the north and east, conquering, plundering, and establishing new kingdoms. Gauls, Goths, Saracens, and Franks each had their turn at it.

Following came the parlous years of the middle period. For a brief time it was an independent republic; then a monarchy. By the end of the fifteenth century it was ready to be annexed to France. Always a battle ground, raided and sacked so often that the count is lost, the wonder is that any of its ancient glories survive at all. But the Romans built well; their massive construction has withstood the wild ravage of succeeding wars, the sun and storm of millennial years.

We knew little of Arles except that it was the place where there was the ruin of a Roman arena, and we expected not much from that. The Romans had occupied France and had doubtless built amusement places, but if we gave the matter any further thought it was to conclude that such provincial circus rings would be small affairs of which only a few vestiges, like those of the ruined Forum, would remain. We would visit the fragments, of course, and meantime we drifted along one side of the Place du Forum in the morning sunlight, looking in show windows to find something in picture postals to send home.

What we saw at first puzzled, then astonished us. Besides the pictures of Mistral the cards were mostly of ruins – which we expected, perhaps, but not of such ruins. Why, these were not mere vestiges. Ephesus, Baalbec, Rome itself, could hardly show more impressive remains. The arena on these cards seemed hardly a ruin at all, and here were other cards which showed it occupied, filled with a vast modern audience who were watching something – clearly a bull fight, a legitimate descendant of Nero's Rome. I could not at first believe that these structures could be of Arles, but the inscriptions were not to be disputed. Then I could not wait to get to them.

We did not drive. It was only a little way to the arena, they told us, and the narrow streets looked crooked and congested. It was a hot September morning, but I think we hurried. I suppose I was afraid the arena would not wait. Then all at once we were right upon it, had entered a lofty arch, climbed some stairs, and were gazing down on one of the surviving glories of a dead empire.

What a structure it is! An oval 448 by 352 feet – more than half as big again as a city block; the inner oval, the arena itself,<sup>6</sup> 226 by 129 feet, the tiers of stone seats rising terrace above terrace to a high circle of arches which once formed the support for an enormous canvas dome.

All along the terraces arches and stairways lead down to spacious recesses and the great entrance corridor. The twenty thousand spectators which this arena once held were not obliged to crowd through any one or two entrances, but could enter almost anywhere and ascend to their seats from any

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<sup>6</sup> The word arena derives its name from the sand, strewn to absorb the blood.

point of the compass. They held tickets – pieces of parchment, I suppose – and these were numbered like the seats, just as tickets are numbered to-day.

Down near the ringside was the pit, or *podium*, and that was the choice place. Some of the seats there were owned, and bore the owners' names. The upper seats are wide stone steps, but comfortable enough, and solid enough to stand till judgment day. They have ranged wooden benches along some of them now, I do not see why, for they are very ugly and certainly not luxurious. They are for the entertainments – mainly bull fights – of the present; for strange, almost unbelievable as it seems, the old arena has become no mere landmark, a tradition, a monument of barbaric tastes and morals, but continues in active service to-day, its purpose the same, its morals not largely improved.

It was built about the end of the first century, and in the beginning stags and wild boars were chased and put to death there. But then Roman taste improved. These were tame affairs, after all. So the arena became a prize ring in which the combatants handled one another without gloves – that is to say, with short swords – and were hacked into a mince instead of mauled into a pulp in our more refined modern way. To vary the games lions and tigers were imported and matched against the gladiators, with pleasing effect. Public taste went on improving and demanding fresh novelties. Rome was engaged just then in exterminating Christians, and the happy thought occurred to make spectacles of them by having them fight the gladiators and the wild beasts, thus combining business and pleasure in a manner which would seem to have been highly satisfactory to the public who thronged the seats and applauded and laughed, and had refreshments served, and said what a great thing Christianity was and how they hoped its converts would increase. Sometimes, when the captures were numerous and the managers could afford it, Christians on crosses were planted around the entire arena, covered with straw and pitch and converted into torches. These were night exhibitions, when the torches would be more showy; and the canvas dome was taken away so that the smoke and shrieks could go climbing to the stars. Attractions like that would always jam an amphitheater. This one at Arles has held twenty-five thousand on one of those special occasions. Centuries later, when the Christians themselves came into power, they showed a spirit of liberality which shines by contrast. They burned their heretics in the public squares, free.

Only bulls and worn-out, cheap horses are tortured here to-day. It seems a pretty tame sport after those great circuses of the past. But art is long and taste is fleeting. Art will keep up with taste, and all that we know of the latter is that it will change. Because to-day we are satisfied with prize fights and bull fights is no sign that those who follow us will not demand sword fights and wild beasts and living torches. These old benches will last through the ages. They have always been familiar with the sport of torture of one sort or another. They await quite serenely for what the centuries may bring.

It was hard to leave the arena. One would like to remain and review its long story. What did the barbarians do there – those hordes that swarmed in and trampled Rome? The Saracens in the eighth century used it for a fortress and added four watch towers, but their masonry is not of the everlasting Roman kind, and one of their towers has tumbled down. It would be no harm if the others would tumble, too. They lend to the place that romance which always goes with the name "Saracen," but they add no beauty.

We paid a franc admission when we came into the amphitheater, our tickets being coupon affairs, admitting us to a variety of other historic places. The proceeds from the ruins are devoted to their care and preservation, but they cannot go far. Very likely the bull-fight money is also used. That would be consistent.

We were directed to the Roman Theater, near at hand, where the ruin is ruin indeed. A flight of rising stone seats, two graceful Corinthian columns still standing, the rest fragments. More graceful in its architecture than the arena, the theater yielded more readily to the vandalisms of the conquerors and the corrosions of time. As early as the third century it was partially pulled down. Later it was restored, but not for long. The building bishops came and wanted its materials and ornaments for their churches. Not much was left after that, but to-day the fragments remaining have been unearthed

and set up and give at least a hint of its former glory. One wonders if those audiences who watched Christian slaughter at the arena came also to this chaste spot. Plays are sometimes given here to-day, I am told, classic reproductions, but it is hard to believe that they would blend with this desolated setting. The bull fight in the arena is even better.

We went over to the church of St. Trophime, which is not a ruin, though very old. St. Trophime, a companion of St. Paul, was the founder of the church of Arles. He is said to have set up a memorial to St. Étienne, the first martyr, and on this consecrated spot three churches have been built, one in the fourth century, another in the seventh, and this one, dedicated to St. Trophime, in the twelfth, or earlier. It is of supreme historical importance. By the faithful it is believed to contain the remains of St. Trophime himself. Barbarossa and other great kings were crowned here; every important ceremony of mediæval Arles has been held here.

It is one of the oldest-looking places I ever saw – so moldy, so crumbly, and so dim. Though a thousand years older, the arena looks fresh as compared with it, because even sun and storm do not gnaw and corrode like gloom and dampness. But perhaps this is a softer stone. The cloister gallery, which was not built until the twelfth century, is so permeated with decay that one almost fears to touch its delicately carved ornamentations lest they crumble in his hands. Mistral has celebrated the cloister portal in a poem, and that alone would make it sacred to the Provence. The beautiful gallery is built around a court and it is lined with sculpture and bas-relief, rich beyond words. Saints and bible scenes are the subjects, and how old, how time-eaten and sorrowful they look. One gets the idea that the saints and martyrs and prophets have all contracted some wasting malady which they cannot long survive now. But one must not be flippant. It is a place where the feet of faith went softly down the centuries; and, taken as a whole, St. Trophime, with its graceful architecture – Gothic and Byzantine, combined with the Roman fragments brought long ago from the despoiled theater – is beautiful and delicate and tender, and there hangs about it the atmosphere that comes of long centuries of quiet and sacred things.

Mistral's museum is just across from the church, but I have already spoken of that – briefly, when it is worth a volume. One should be in a patient mood for museums – either to see or to write of them – a mood that somehow does not go with automobile wandering, however deliberate. But I must give a word at least to two other such institutions of Arles, the Musée Lapidaire, a magnificent collection of pagan and early Christian sarcophagi and marble, mostly from the ancient burial field, the Aliscamp – and the Musée Réattu.

Réattu was an Arlesian painter of note who produced many pictures and collected many beautiful things. His collections have been acquired by the city of Arles, and installed in one of its most picturesque old buildings – the ancient Grand Priory of the Knights of Malta. The stairway is hung with tapestries and priceless arras; the rooms are filled with paintings, bas-reliefs, medallions, marbles, armor, – a wealth of art objects. One finds it hard to believe that such museums can be owned and supported by this little city – ancient, half forgotten, stranded here on the banks of the Rhone. Its population is given as thirty thousand, and it makes sausages – very good ones – and there are some railway shops that employ as many as fifteen hundred men. Some boat building may still be done here, too. But this is about all Arles can claim in the way of industries. It has not the look of what we call to-day a thriving city. It seems, rather, a mediæval setting for the more ancient memories. Yet it has these three splendid museums, and it has preserved and restored its ruins, just as if it had a J. Pierpont Morgan behind it, instead of an old poet with a Nobel prize, and a determined little community, too proud of its traditions and its taste to let them die. Danbury, Connecticut, has as many inhabitants as Arles, and it makes about all the hats that are worn in America. It is a busy, rich place, where nearly everybody owns an automobile, if one may judge by the street exhibit any pleasant afternoon. It is an old place, too, for America, with plenty of landmarks and traditions. But I somehow can't imagine Danbury spending the money and the time to establish such superb institutions as these, or

to preserve its prerevolutionary houses. But, after all, Danbury is young. It will preserve something two thousand years hence – probably those latest Greco-Roman façades which it is building now.

Near to the Réattu Museum is the palace of the Christian Emperor Constantine. Constantine came here after his father died, and fell in love with the beauty and retirement of the place. Here, on the banks of the Rhone, he built a palace, and dreamed of passing his days in it – of making Arles the capital of his empire. His mother, St. Helene, whose dreams at Jerusalem located the Holy Sepulcher, the True Cross, and other needed relics, came to visit her son, and while here witnessed the treason and suicide of one Maximus Hercules, persecutor of the Christians. That was early in the fourth century. The daughter of Maximus seems to have been converted, for she came to stay at the palace and in due time bore Constantine a son. Descendants of Constantine occupied the palace for a period, then it passed to the Gauls, to the Goths, and so down the invading and conquering line. Once a king, Euric III, was assassinated here. Other kings followed and several varieties of counts. Their reigns were usually short and likely to end with a good deal of suddenness. It was always a good place for royalty to live and die. Until the beginning of the nineteenth century it was known as the "House of the King," but it was a ruin by that time. Only portions of it remain now, chiefly a sort of rotunda of the grand hall of state. Very little is left to show the ancient richness of its walls, but one may invite himself to imagine something – its marbles and its hangings – also that it was just here that M. Hercules and King Euric and their kind went the violent way; it would be the dramatic place for those occasions.

One may not know to-day just what space the palace originally covered, but it was very large. Portions of its walls appear in adjoining buildings. Excavations have brought to light marbles, baths, rich ornamentations, all attesting its former grandeur. Arles preserves it for its memories, and in pride of the time when she came so near to being the capital of the world.

## Chapter VI

### THE WAY THROUGH EDEN

There is so much to see at Arles. One would like to linger a week, then a month, then very likely he would not care to go at all. The past would get hold of him by that time – the glamour that hangs about the dead centuries.

There had been rain in the night when we left Arles, much needed, for it was the season of drought. It was mid-morning and the roads were hard and perfect, and led us along sparkling waysides and between refreshed vineyards, and gardens, and olive groves. It seemed a good deal like traveling through Eden, and I don't suppose heaven – the automobilist's heaven (assuming that there is one) – is much better.

I wish I could do justice to the Midi, but even Mistral could not do that. It is the most fruitful, luscious land one can imagine. Everything there seems good to eat, to smell of – to devour in some way. The vines were loaded with purple and topaz grapes, and I was dying to steal some, though for a few francs we had bought a basket of clusters, with other luncheon supplies, in Arles. It finally became necessary to stop and eat these things – those grape fields were too tempting.

It is my opinion that nothing in the world is more enjoyable than an automobile roadside luncheon. One does not need to lug a heavy basket mile after mile until a suitable place is found, and compromise at last because the flesh rebels. With a car, a mile, two miles, five miles, are matters of a few minutes. You run along leisurely until you reach the brook, the shade, the seclusion that invites you. Then you are fresh and cool and deliberate. No need to hurry because of the long tug home again. You enjoy the things you have brought, unfretted by fatigue, undismayed by the prospect ahead. You are in no hurry to go. You linger and smoke and laze a little and discuss the environment – the fields, the growing things, the people through whose lands and lives you are cutting a cross-section, as it seems. You wonder about their customs, their diversions, what they do in winter, how it is in their homes. You speculate on their history, on what the land was like in its primeval period before there were any fields and homes – civilized homes – there at all. Perhaps – though this is unlikely – you *know* a little about these things. It is no advantage; your speculations are just as valuable and more picturesque. There are many pleasant things about motor gypsying, but our party, at least, agreed that the wayside luncheon is the pleasantest of all.

Furthermore, it is economical. Unless one wants hot dishes, you can get more things, and more delicious things, in the village shops or along the way than you can find at the wayside hotel or restaurant, and for half the amount. Our luncheon that day – we ate it between Arles and Tarascon – consisted of tinned chicken, fresh bread with sweet butter, Roquefort cheese, ripe grapes, and some French cakes – plenty, and all of the best, at a cost of about sixty cents for our party of four. And when we were finally ready to go, and had cleaned up and secreted every particle of paper or other refuse (for the true motorist never leaves a place unsightly) we felt quite as pleased with ourselves and the world, and the things of the infinite, as if we had paid two or three times as much for a meal within four walls.

## Chapter VII

### TO TARASCON AND BEAUCAIRE

It is no great distance from Arles to Tarascon, and, leisurely as we travel, we had reached the home of Tartarin in a little while. We were tempted to stop over at Tarascon, for the name had that inviting sound which always belongs to the localities of pure romance – that is to say, fiction – and it has come about that Tarascon belongs more to Daudet than to history, while right across the river is Beaucaire, whose name, at least, Booth Tarkington has pre-empted for one of his earliest heroes. After all, it takes an author to make a town really celebrated. Thousands of Americans who have scarcely heard the name of Arles are intimately familiar with that of Tarascon. Of course the town has to contribute something. It must either be a place where something has happened, or *could* happen, or it must have a name with a fine sound, and it should be located in about the right quarter of the globe. When such a place catches the fancy of an author who has the gift of making the ideal seem reality, he has but to say the magic words and the fame of that place is sure.

Not that Tarascon has not had real history and romance; it has had plenty of both. Five hundred years ago the "Good King René" of Anjou, who was a painter and a writer, as well as a king, came to Tarascon to spend his last days in the stern, perpendicular castle which had been built for him on the banks of the Rhone. It is used as a jail now, but King René held a joyous court there and a web of romance clings to his memory. King René's castle does not look like a place for romance. It looks like an artificial precipice. We were told we could visit it by making a sufficiently polite application to the *Mairie*, but it did not seem worth while. In the first place, I did not know how to make a polite application to visit a jail – not in French – and then it was better to imagine King René's festivities than to look upon a reality of misfortune.

The very name of Tarascon has to do with story. Far back, in the dim traditional days, one St. Martha delivered the place from a very evil dragon, the Tarasque, for whom they showed their respect by giving his name to their town.

Beaucaire, across the river, is lighted by old tradition, too. It was the home of Aucassin and Nicolette, for one thing, and anyone who has read that poem, either in the original or in Andrew Lang's exquisite translation, will have lived, for a moment at least, in the tender light of legendary tale.

We drove over to Beaucaire, and Narcissa and I scaled a garden terrace to some ruined towers and battlements, all that is left of the ancient seat of the Montmorencys. It is a romantic ruin from a romantic day. It was built back in the twelve hundreds – when there were still knights and troubadours, and the former jousted at a great fair which was held there, and the latter reclined on the palace steps, surrounded by ladies and gallants in silken array, and sang songs of Palestine and the Crusades. As time went on a light tissue of legend was woven around the castle itself – half-mythical tales of its earlier centuries. Figures like Aucassin and Nicolette emerged and were made so real by those who chanted or recited the marvel of their adventures, that they still live and breathe with youth when their gallant castle itself is no more than vacant towers and fragmentary walls. The castle of Beaucaire looks across to the defiant walls of King René's castle in Tarascon and I believe there used to be some sturdy wars between them. If not, I shall construct one some day, when I am less busy, and feeling in the romantic form. It will be as good history as most castle history, and I think I shall make Beaucaire win. King René was a good soul, but I am doubtful about those who followed him, and his castle, so suitable to-day for a jail, does not invite sympathy. The Montmorency castle was dismantled in 1632, according to the guidebook, by Richelieu, who beheaded its last tenant – some say with a cleaver, a serviceable utensil for such work.

Beaucaire itself is not a pretty town – not a clean town. I believe Nicolette was shut up for a time in one of its houses – we did not inquire which one – any of them would be bad enough to-day.

It is altogether easy to keep to the road in France. You do not wind in and out with unmarked routes crossing and branching at every turn. You travel a hard, level way, often as straight as a ruling stick and pointed in the right direction. Where roads branch, or cross, there are signboards. All the national roads are numbered, and your red-book map shows these numbers – the chances of mistake being thus further lessened. We had practiced a good deal at asking in the politest possible French the way to any elusive destination. The book said that in France one generally takes off his hat in making such an inquiry, so I practiced that until I got it to seem almost inoffensive, not to say jaunty, and the formula "*Je vous demande pardon, but – quel est le chemin pour —*" whatever the place was. Sometimes I could even do it without putting in the "but," and was proud, and anxious to show it off at any opportunity. But it got dusty with disuse. You can't ask a man "*quel est le chemin*" for anywhere when you are on the straight road going there, or in front of a signboard which is shouting the information. I only got to unload that sentence twice between Arles and Avignon, and once I forgot to take off my hat; when I did, the man didn't understand me.

With the blue mountains traveling always at our right, with level garden and vineland about us, we drifted up the valley of the Rhone and found ourselves, in mid-afternoon, at the gates of Avignon. That is not merely a poetic figure. Avignon has veritable gates – and towering crenelated walls with ramparts, all about as perfect as when they were built, nearly six hundred years ago.

We had heard Avignon called the finest existing specimen of a mediæval walled city, but somehow one does not realize such things from hearing the mere words. We stopped the car to stare up at this overtopping masonry, trying to believe that it had been standing there already three hundred years, looking just about as it looks to-day, when Shakespeare was writing plays in London. Those are the things we never really believe. We only acknowledge them and pass on.

Very little of Avignon has overflowed its massive boundaries; the fields were at our backs as we halted in the great portals. We halted because we noticed the word "*L'Octroi*" on one of the towers. But, as before, the *l'octroi* man merely glanced into our vehicle and waved us away.

We were looking down a wide shaded avenue of rather modern, even if foreign, aspect, and full of life. We drove slowly, hunting, as we passed along, for one of the hotels set down in the red-book as "comfortable, with modern improvements," including "*gar. grat.*" – that is to say, garage gratis, such being the custom of this land. Narcissa, who has an eye for hotels, spied one presently, a rather imposing-looking place with a long, imposing name. But the management was quite modest as to terms when I displayed our T C. de France membership card, and the "*gar. grat.*" – this time in the inner court of the hotel itself – was a neat place with running water and a concrete floor. Not very ancient for mediæval Avignon, but one can worry along without antiquities in a hotel.

## Chapter VIII

### GLIMPSES OF THE PAST

Avignon, like Arles, was colonized by the Romans, but the only remains of that time are now in its museum. At Arles the Romans did great things; its heyday was the period of their occupation. Conditions were different at Avignon. Avenio, as they called it, seems to have been a kind of outpost, walled and fortified, but not especially glorified. Very little was going on at Avenio. Christians were seldom burned there. In time a Roman emperor came to Arles, and its people boasted that it was to become the Roman capital. Nothing like that came to Avenio; it would require another thousand years and another Roman occupation to mature its grand destiny.

I do not know just how it worried along during those stormy centuries of waiting, but with plenty of variety, no doubt. I suppose barbarians came like summer leafage, conquered and colonized, mixing the blood of a new race. It became a republic about twelve hundred and something – small, but tough and warlike – commanding the respect of seigneurs and counts, even of kings. Christianity, meantime, had prospered. Avignon had contributed to the Crusades and built churches. Also, a cathedral, though little dreaming that in its sacristy would one day lie the body of a pope.

Avignon's day, however, was even then at hand. Sedition was rife in Italy and the popes, driven from Rome, sought refuge in France. Near Avignon was a small papal dominion of which Carpentras was the capital, and the pope, then Clement V, came often to Avignon. This was honor, but when one day the Bishop of Avignon was made Pope John XXII, and established his seat in his own home, the little city became suddenly what Arles had only hoped to be – the capital of the world.

If one were permitted American parlance at this point, he would say that a boom now set in in Avignon.<sup>7</sup> Everybody was gay, everybody busy, everybody prosperous. The new pope straightway began to enlarge and embellish his palace, and the community generally followed suit. During the next sixty or seventy years about everything that is to-day of importance was built or rebuilt. New churches were erected, old ones restored. The ancient Roman wall was replaced by the splendid new one. The papal palace was enlarged and strengthened until it became a mighty fortress – one of the grandest structures in Europe. The popes went back to Rome, then, but their legates remained and from their strong citadel administered the affairs of that district for four turbulent centuries. In 1791, Avignon united her fortunes to those of France, and through revolution and bloodshed has come again to freedom and prosperity and peace. I do not know what the population of Avignon was in the day of her greater glory. To-day it is about fifty thousand, and, as it is full to the edges, it was probably not more populous then.

We did not hurry in Avignon. We only loitered about the streets a little the first afternoon, practicing our French on the sellers of postal cards. It was a good place for such practice. If there was a soul in Avignon besides ourselves with a knowledge of English he failed to make himself known. Not even in our hotel was there a manager, porter, or waiter who could muster an English word.

Narcissa and I explored more than the others and discovered the City Hall and a theater and a little open square with a big monument. We also got a distant glimpse of some great towering walls which we knew to be the Palace of the Popes.

Now and again we were assailed by beggars – soiled and persistent small boys who annoyed us a good deal until we concocted an impromptu cure. It was a poem, in French – and effective:

Allez! Allez!  
Je n'ai pas de monnaie!  
Allez! Allez!

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<sup>7</sup> Alphonse Daudet's "La Mule de Pape," in his *Lettres de Mon Moulin*, gives a delightful picture of Avignon at this period.



Je n'ai pas de l'argent!

A Frenchman might not have had the courage to mortify his language like that, but we had, and when we marched to that defiant refrain the attacking party fell back.

We left the thoroughfare and wandered down into narrow side streets, cobble-paved and winding, between high, age-stained walls – streets and walls that have surely not been renewed since the great period when the coming of the popes rebuilt Avignon. So many of the houses are apparently of one age and antiquity they might all have sprung up on the same day. What a bustle and building there must have been in those first years after the popes came! Nothing could be too new and fine for the chosen city. Now they are old again, but not always shabby. Many of them, indeed, are of impressive grandeur, with carved casings and ponderous doors. No sign of life about these – no glimpse of luxury, faded or fresh – within. Whatever the life they hold – whatever its past glories or present decline, it is shut away. Only the shabbier homes were open – women at their evening duties, children playing about the stoop. *They* had nothing to conceal. Tradition, lineage, pride, poverty – they had inherited their share of these things, but they did not seem to be worrying about it. Their affairs were open to inspection; and their habits of dress and occupation caused us to linger, until the narrow streets grew dim and more full of evening echoes, while light began to twinkle in the little basement shops where the ancestors of these people had bought and sold for such a long, long time.

## **Chapter IX**

### **IN THE CITADEL OF FAITH**

We were not very thorough sight-seers. We did not take a guidebook in one hand and a pencil in the other and check the items, thus cleaning up in the fashion of the neat, businesslike tourist. We seldom even had a program. We just wandered out in some general direction, and made a discovery or two, looked it over, surmised about it and passed judgment on its artistic and historical importance, just as if we knew something of those things; then when we got to a quiet place we took out the book and looked up what we had seen, and quite often, with the book's assistance, reversed our judgments and went back and got an altogether new set of impressions, and kept whichever we liked best. It was a loose system, to be recommended only for its variety. At the church of St. Agricole, for instance, which we happened upon when we started out one morning, we had a most interesting half hour discussing the age and beauty of its crumbling exterior and wandering about in its dimness, speculating concerning its frescoes and stained marbles and ancient tombs. When, later, we sat on the steps outside and looked it up and found it had been established away back in 680, and twice since restored; that the fifteenth-century holy-water basin was an especially fine one; that the tombs and altar piece, the sculpture and frescoes were regarded as "remarkable examples," we were deeply impressed and went back to verify these things. Then we could see that it was all just as the book said.

But the procedure was somewhat different at the Palace of the Popes. We knew where we were going then, for we saw its towers looming against the sky, and no one could mistake that pile in Avignon. Furthermore, we paid a small fee at its massive arched entrance, and there was a guardian, or guide, to show us through. It is true he spoke only French – Provençal French – but two gracious Italian ladies happened to be going through at the same time and, like all cultured continentals, they spoke a variety of tongues, including American. The touch of travel makes the whole world kin, and they threw out a line when they saw us floundering, and towed us through. It was a gentle courtesy which we accepted with thankful hearts.

We were in the central court first, the dull, sinister walls towering on every side. The guide said that executions had taken place there, and once, in later times – the period of the Revolution – a massacre in which seventy perished. He also mentioned a bishop of the earlier period who, having fallen into disfavor, was skinned alive and burned just outside the palace entrance. Think of doing that to a bishop!

Our conductor showed us something which we were among the first to see. Excavation was going on, and near the entrance some workmen were uncovering a large square basin – a swimming pool, he said – probably of Roman times. Whatever had stood there had doubtless fallen into obliterated ruin by the time the papal palace was begun.

A survey of the court interior showed that a vast scheme of restoration was going on. The old fortress had suffered from siege more than once, and time had not spared it; but with that fine pride which the French have in their monuments, and with a munificence which would seem to be limitless, they were reconstructing perfectly every ruined part, and would spend at least two million dollars, we were told, to make the labor complete. Battered corners of towers had been carefully rebuilt, tumbled parapets replaced. We stood facing an exquisite mullioned window whose carved stone outlines were entirely new, yet delicately and finely cut, certainly at a cost of many thousand francs. The French do not seem to consider expense in a work of that sort. Concrete imitations will not do. Whatever is replaced must be as it was in the beginning.

Inside we found ourselves in the stately audience room, measuring some fifty by one hundred and eighty feet, its lofty ceiling supported by massive Gothic arches, all as complete as when constructed. Each missing piece or portion has been replaced. It was scarcely more perfect when the first papal audience was held there and when Queen Jeanne of Naples came to plead for absolution,

nearly six centuries ago. It was of overpowering size and interest, and in one of the upper corners was a picture I shall not soon forget. It was not a painting or tapestry, but it might have been either of these things and less beautiful. It was a living human being, a stone carver on a swinging high seat, dressed in his faded blue cap and blouse and chopping away at a lintel. But he had the face and beard and, somehow, the figure of a saint. He turned to regard us with a mild, meditative interest, the dust on his beard and dress completing the harmony with the gray wall behind him, the embodied spirit of restoration.

We ascended to the pontifical chapel, similar in size and appearance to the room below. We passed to other gigantic apartments, some of them rudely and elaborately decorated by the military that in later years made this a garrison. We were taken to the vast refectory, where once there was a great central table, the proportions of which were plainly marked by an outline on the stone floor, worn by the feet of feasting churchmen. Then we went to the kitchen, still more impressive in its suggestion of the stouter needs of piety. Its chimney is simply a gigantic central funnel that, rising directly from the four walls, goes towering and tapering toward the stars. I judge the cooks built their fires in the center of this room, hanging their pots on cranes, swinging their meats barbecue fashion, opening the windows for air and draught. Those old popes and legates were no weaklings, to have a kitchen like that. Their appetites and digestions, like their faith, were of a robust and militant sort.

I dare say it would require a week to go through all this palace, so the visitor is shown only samples of it. We ascended to one of the towers and looked down, far down, on the roofs of Avignon – an expanse of brown tiling, toned by the ages, but otherwise not greatly different from what the popes saw when this tower and these housetops were new. Beyond are the blue hills which have not changed. Somewhere out there Petrarch's Laura was buried, but the grave has vanished utterly, the church is a mere remnant.

As we stood in the window a cold breath of wind suddenly blew in – almost piercing for the season. "The mistral," our conductor said, and, though he did not cross himself, we knew by his exalted smile that he felt in it the presence of the poet of the south.

Then he told us that Mistral had appointed him as one of those who were commissioned to preserve in its purity the Provençal tongue. That he was very proud of it was certain, and willing to let that wind blow on him as a sort of benediction. It is said, however, that the mistral wind is not always agreeable in Avignon. It blows away disease, but it is likely to overdo its work. "Windy Avignon, liable to the plague when it has not the wind, and plagued by the wind when it has it," is a saying at least as old as this palace.

We got a generous example of it when we at last descended to the street. There it swirled and raced and grabbed at us until we had to button everything tightly and hold fast to our hats. We took refuge in the old cathedral of Notre Dame des Dômes, where John XXII, who brought this glory to Avignon, lies in his Gothic tomb. All the popes of Avignon were crowned here; it was the foremost church of Christendom for the better part of a century. We could see but little of the interior, for, with the now clouded sky, the place was too dark. In the small chapel where the tomb stands it was dim and still. It is the holy place of Avignon.

A park adjoins the church and we went into it, but the mistral wind was tearing through the trees and we crossed and descended by a long flight to the narrow streets. Everywhere about us the lower foundations of the papal palace joined the living rock, its towers seeming to climb upward to the sky. It was as if it had grown out of the rock, indestructible, eternal, itself a rock of ages.

We are always saying how small the world is, and we had it suddenly brought home to us as we stood there under the shadow of those overtopping heights. We had turned to thank our newly made friends and to say good-by. One of them said, "You are from America; perhaps you might happen to know a friend of ours there," and she named one whom we did know very well indeed – one, in fact, whose house we had visited only a few months before. How strange it seemed to hear that name from two women of Florence there in the ancient city, under those everlasting walls.

## Chapter X

### AN OLD TRADITION AND A NEW EXPERIENCE

Among the things I did on the ship was to read the *Automobile Instruction Book*. I had never done it before. I had left all technical matters to a man hired and trained for the business. Now I was going to a strange land with a resolve to do all the things myself. So I read the book.

It was as fascinating as a novel, and more impressive. There never was a novel like it for action and psychology. When I came to the chapter "Thirty-seven reasons why the motor may not start," and feverishly read what one had better try in the circumstances, I could see that as a subject for strong emotional treatment a human being is nothing to an automobile.

Then there was the oiling diagram. A physiological chart would be nowhere beside it. It was a perfect maze of hair lines and arrow points, and looked as if it needed to be combed. There were places to be oiled daily, others to be oiled weekly, some to be oiled monthly, some every thousand miles. There were also places to be greased at all these periods, and some when you happened to think of it. You had to put on your glasses and follow one of the fine lines to the lubricating point, then try to keep the point in your head until you could get under the car, or over the car, or into the car, and trace it home. I could see that this was going to be interesting when the time came.

I did not consider that it had come when we landed at Marseilles. I said to the garage man there, in my terse French idiom, "Make it the oil and grease," and walked away. Now, at Avignon, the new regime must begin. In the bright little, light little hotel garage we would set our car in order. I say "we" because Narcissa, aged fifteen, being of a practical turn, said she would help me. I would "make it the oil and grease," and Narcissa would wash and polish. So we began. The Joy, aged ten, was audience.

Narcissa enjoyed her job. There was a hose in it, and a sponge and nice rubbing rags and polish, and she went at it in her strenuous way, and hosed me up one side and down the other at times when I was tracing some blind lead and she wasn't noticing carefully.

I said I would make a thorough job of it. I would oil and grease all the daily, weekly, and monthly, and even the once-in-a-while places. We would start fair from Avignon.

I am a resolute person. I followed those tangled lines and labyrinthian ways into the vital places of our faithful vehicle. Some led to caps, big and little, which I filled with grease. Most of them were full already, but I gave them another dab for luck. Some of the lines led to tiny caps and holes into which I squirted oil. Some led to a dim uncertainty, into which I squirted or dabbed something in a general way. Some led to mere blanks, and I greased those. It sounds rather easy, but that is due to my fluent style. It was not easy; it was a hot, messy, scratchy, grunting job. Those lines were mostly blind leads, and full of smudgy, even painful surprises. Some people would have been profane, but I am not like that – not with Narcissa observing me. One hour, two, went by, and I was still consulting the chart and dabbing with the oil can and grease stick. The chart began to show wear; *it* would not need greasing again for years.

Meantime Narcissa had finished her washing and polishing, and was putting dainty touches on the glass and metal features to kill time. I said at last that possibly I had missed some places, but I didn't think they could be important ones. Narcissa looked at me, then, and said that maybe I had missed places on the car but that I hadn't missed any on myself. She said I was a sight and probably never could be washed clean again. It is true that my hands were quite solidly black, and, while I did not recall wiping them on my face, I must have done so. When Narcissa asked how soon I was going to grease the car again, I said possibly in about a thousand years. But that was petulance; I knew it would be sooner. Underneath all I really had a triumphant feeling, and Narcissa was justly proud of her work, too. We agreed that our car had never looked handsomer and shinier since our first day of ownership. I said I was certain it had never been so thoroughly greased. We would leave Avignon in style.

We decided to cross the Rhone at Avignon. We wanted at least a passing glance at Villeneuve, and a general view of Avignon itself, which was said to be finest from across the river. We would then continue up the west bank – there being a special reason for this – a reason with a village in it – one Beauchastel – not set down on any of our maps, but intimately concerned with our travel program, as will appear later.

We did not leave Avignon by the St. Bénézet bridge. We should have liked that, for it is one of those bridges built by a miracle, away back in the twelfth century when they used miracles a good deal for such work. Sometimes Satan was induced to build them overnight, but I believe that was still earlier. Satan seems to have retired from active bridge-building by the twelfth century. It was a busy period for him at home.

So the Bénézet bridge was built by a boy of that name – a little shepherd of twelve, who received a command in a dream to go to Avignon and build a bridge across the Rhone. He said:

"I cannot leave my sheep, and I have but three farthings in the world."

"Your flocks will not stray," said the voice, "and an angel will lead thee."

Bénézet awoke and found beside him a pilgrim whom he somehow knew to be an angel. So they journeyed together and after many adventures reached Avignon. Here the pilgrim disappeared and Bénézet went alone to where a bishop was preaching to the people. There, in the presence of the assembly, Bénézet stated clearly that Heaven had sent him to build a bridge across the Rhone. Angry at the interruption, the bishop ordered the ragged boy to be taken in charge by the guard and punished for insolence and untruth. That was an ominous order. Men had been skinned alive on those instructions. But Bénézet repeated his words to the officer, a rough man, who said:

"Can a beggar boy like you do what neither the saints nor Emperor Charlemagne has been able to accomplish? Pick up this stone as a beginning, and carry it to the river. If you can do that I may believe in you."

It was a sizable stone, being thirteen feet long by seven broad – thickness not given, though probably three feet, for it was a fragment of a Roman wall. It did not trouble Bénézet, however. He said his prayers, and lightly lifted it to his shoulder and carried it across the town! Some say he whistled softly as he passed along.

I wish I had lived then. I would almost be willing to trade centuries to see Bénézet surprise those people, carrying in that easy way a stone that reached up to the second-story windows. Bénézet carried the stone to the bank of the river and set it down where the first arch of the bridge would stand.

There was no trouble after that. Everybody wanted to stand well with Bénézet. Labor and contributions came unasked. In eleven years the great work was finished, but Bénézet did not live to see it. He died four years before the final stones were laid, was buried in a chapel on the bridge itself and canonized as a saint. There is another story about him, but I like this one best.

Bénézet's bridge was a gay place during the days of the popes at Avignon. Music and dancing were continuously going on there. It is ready for another miracle now. Only four arches of its original eighteen are standing. Storm and flood did not destroy it, but war. Besiegers and besieged broke down the arches, and at last, more than two hundred years ago, repairs were given up. It is a fine, firm-looking fragment that remains. One wishes, for the sake of the little shepherd boy, that it might be restored once more and kept solid through time.

Passing along under the ramparts of Avignon, we crossed the newer, cheaper bridge, and took the first turn to the right. It was a leafy way, and here and there between the trees we had splendid glimpses of the bastioned walls and castle-crowned heights of Avignon. Certainly there is no more impressive mediæval picture in all Europe.

But on one account we were not entirely satisfied. It was not the view that disturbed us; it was ourselves – our car. We were smoking – smoking badly, disgracefully; one could not deny it. In New York City we would have been taken in charge at once. At first I said it was only a little of the fresh oil burning off the engine, and that it would stop presently. But that excuse wore out. It would have

taken quarts to make a smudge like that. When the wind was with us we traveled in a cloud, like prophets and deities of old, and the passengers grumbled. The Joy suggested that we would probably blow up soon.

Then we began to make another discovery; when now and then the smoke cleared away a little, we found we were not in Villeneuve at all. We had not entirely crossed the river, but only halfway; we were on an island. I began to feel that our handsome start had not turned out well.

We backed around and drove slowly to the bridge again, our distinction getting more massive and solid every minute. Disaster seemed imminent. The passengers were inclined to get out and walk. I said, at last, that we would go back to a garage I had noticed outside the walls. I put it on the grounds that we needed gasoline.

It was not far, and the doors stood open. The men inside saw us coming with our gorgeous white tail filling the landscape behind us, and got out of the way. Then they gathered cautiously to examine us.

"Too much oil," they said.

In my enthusiasm I had overdone the thing. I had poured quarts into the crank case when there was probably enough there already. I had not been altogether to blame. Two little telltale cocks that were designed to drip when there was sufficient oil had failed to drip because they were stopped with dust. Being new and green, I had not thought of that possibility. A workman poked a wire into those little cocks and drew off the fuel we had been burning in that lavish way. So I had learned something, but it seemed a lot of smoke for such a small spark of experience. Still, it was a relief to know that it was nothing worse, and while the oil was dripping to its proper level we went back into the gates of Avignon, where, lunching in a pretty garden under some trees, we made light of our troubles, as is our way.

## Chapter XI

### WAYSIDE ADVENTURES

So we took a new start and made certain that we entirely crossed the river this time. We were in Villeneuve-les-Avignon – that is, the "new town" – but it did not get that name recently, if one may judge from its looks. Villeneuve, in fact, is fourteen hundred years old, and shows its age. It was in its glory six centuries ago, when King Philippe le Bel built his tower at the end of Bénézet's bridge, and Jean le Bon built one of the sternest-looking fortresses in France – Fort St. André. Time has made the improvements since then. It has stained the walls and dulled the sharp masonry of these monuments; it has crushed and crumbled the feebler structures and filled the streets with emptiness and silence. Villeneuve was a thronging, fighting, praying place once, but the throng has been reduced and the fighting and praying have become matters of individual enterprise.

I wish now we had lingered at Villeneuve-les-Avignon. I have rarely seen a place that seemed so to invite one to forget the activities of life and go groping about among the fragments of history. But we were under the influence of our bad start, and impelled to move on. Also, Villeneuve was overshadowed by the magnificence of the Palace of the Popes, which, from its eternal seat on le Rocher des Doms, still claimed us. We briefly visited St. André, the tower of Philippe le Bel, and loitered a little in a Chartreuse monastery – a perfect wilderness of ruin; then slipped away, following the hard, smooth road through a garden and wonderland, the valley of the Rhone.

I believe there are no better vineyards in France than those between Avignon and Bagnols. The quality of the grapes is another matter; they are probably sour. All the way along those luscious topaz and amethyst clusters had been disturbing, but my conscience had held firm and I had passed them by. Sometimes I said: "There are tons of those grapes; a few bunches would never be missed." But Narcissa and the others said it would be stealing; besides, there were houses in plain view.

But there is a limit to all things. In a level, sheltered place below Bagnols we passed a vineyard shut in by trees, with no house in sight. And what a vineyard! Ripening in the afternoon sun, clustered such gold and purple bunches as were once warmed by the light of Eden. I looked casually in different directions and slowed down. Not a sign of life anywhere. I brought the car to a stop. I said, "This thing has gone far enough."

Conscience dozed. The protests of the others fell on heedless ears. I firmly crossed the irrigating ditch which runs along all those French roads, stepped among the laden vines, picked one of those lucent, yellow bunches and was about to pick another when I noticed something with a human look stir to life a little way down the row.

Conscience awoke with something like a spasm. I saw at once that taking those grapes was wrong; I almost dropped the bunch I had. Narcissa says I ran, but that is a mistake. There was not room. I made about two steps and plunged into the irrigating canal, which I disremembered for the moment, my eyes being fixed on the car. Narcissa says she made a grab at my grapes as they sailed by. I seemed to be a good while getting out of the irrigating ditch, but Narcissa thinks I was reasonably prompt. I had left the engine running, and some seconds later, when we were putting temptation behind us on third speed, I noticed that the passengers seemed to be laughing. When I inquired as to what amused them they finally gasped out that the thing which had moved among the grapevines was a goat, as if that made any difference to a person with a sensitive conscience.

It is not likely that any reader of these chapters will stop overnight at Bagnols. We should hardly have rested there, but evening was coming on and the sky had a stormy look. Later we were glad, for we found ourselves in an inn where d'Artagnan, or his kind, lodged, in the days when knights went riding. Travelers did not arrive in automobiles when that hostelry was built, and not frequently in carriages. They came on horseback and clattered up to the open door and ordered tankards of good red wine, and drank while their horses stretched their necks to survey the interior scenery. The old

worn cobbles are still at the door, and not much has changed within. A niche holds a row of candles, and the traveler takes one of them and lights himself to bed. His room is an expanse and his bed stands in a curtained alcove – the bedstead an antique, the bed billowy, clean, and comfortable, as all beds are in France. Nothing has been changed there for a long time. The latest conveniences are of a date not more recent than the reign of Marie Antoinette, for they are exactly the kind she used, still to be seen at Versailles. And the dinner was good, with red and white flagons strewn all down the table – such a dinner as d'Artagnan and his wild comrades had, no doubt, and if prices have not changed they paid five francs fifty, or one dollar and ten cents each, for dinner, lodging, and *petit déjeuner* (coffee, rolls, and jam) – garage free.

Bagnols is unimportant to the tourist, but it is old and quaint, and it has what may be found in many unimportant places in France, at least one beautiful work of art – a soldier's monument, in this instance; *not* a stiff effigy of an infantryman with a musket, cut by some gifted tombstone sculptor, but a female figure of Victory, full of vibrant life and inspiration – a true work of art. France is full of such things as that – one finds them in most unexpected places.

The valley of the Rhone grew more picturesque as we ascended. Now and again, at our left, rocky bluffs rose abruptly, some of them crowned with ruined towers and equally ruined villages, remnants of feudalism, of the lord and his vassals who had fought and flourished there in that time when France was making the romantic material which writers ever since have been so busily remaking and adorning that those old originals would stare and gasp if they could examine some of it now. How fine and grand it seems to picture the lord and his men, all bright and shining, riding out under the portcullis on glossy prancing and armored horses to meet some aggressive and equally shining detachment of feudalism from the next hilltop. In the valley they meet, with ringing cries and the clash of steel. Foeman matches foeman – it is a series of splendid duels, combats to be recounted by the fireside for generations. Then, at the end, the knightly surrender of the conquered, the bended knee and acknowledgment of fealty, gracious speeches from the victor as to the bravery and prowess of the defeated, after which, the welcome of fair ladies and high wassail for all concerned. Everybody happy, everybody satisfied: wounds apparently do not count or interfere with festivities. The dead disappear in some magic way. I do not recall that they are ever buried.

Just above Rochemaure was one of the most imposing of these ruins. The castle that crowned the hilltop had been a fine structure in its day. The surrounding outer wall which inclosed its village extended downward to the foot of the hill to the road – and still inclosed a village, though the more ancient houses seemed tenantless. It was built for offense and defense, that was certain, and doubtless had been used for both. We did not stop to dig up that romance. Not far away, by the roadside, stood what was apparently a Roman column. It had been already old and battered – a mere fragment of a ruin – when the hilltop castle and its village were brave and new.

It was above Rochemaure – I did not identify the exact point – that an opportunity came which very likely I shall never have again. On a bluff high above an ancient village, so old and curious that it did not belong to reality at all, there was a great château, not a ruin – at least, not a tumbled ruin, though time-beaten and gray – but a good complete château, and across its mossy lintel a stained and battered wooden sign with the legend, "*A Louer*" – that is, "To Let."

I stopped the car. This, I said, was our opportunity. Nothing could be better than that ancient and lofty perch overlooking the valley of the Rhone. The "To Let" sign had been there certainly a hundred years, so the price would be reasonable. We could get it for a song; we would inherit its traditions, its secret passages, its donjons, its ghosts, its – I paused a moment, expecting enthusiasm, even eagerness, on the part of the family. Strange as it may seem, there wasn't a particle of either. I went over those things again, and added new and fascinating attractions. I said we would adopt the coat of arms of that old family, hyphenate its name with ours, and so in that cheap and easy fashion achieve a nobility which the original owner had probably shed blood to attain.



It was no use. The family looked up the hill with an interest that was almost clammy. Narcissa asked, "How would you get the car up there?" The Joy said, "It would be a good place for bad dreams." The head of the expedition remarked, as if dismissing the most trivial item of the journey, that we'd better be going on or we should be late getting into Valence. So, after dreaming all my life of living in a castle, I had to give it up in that brief, incidental way.

## Chapter XII

### THE LOST NAPOLEON

Now, it is just here that we reach the special reason which had kept us where we had a clear view of the eastward mountains, and particularly to the westward bank of the Rhone, where there was supposed to be a certain tiny village, one Beauchastel – a village set down on none of our maps, yet which was to serve as an important identifying mark. The reason had its beginning exactly twenty-two years before; that is to say, in September, 1891. Mark Twain was in Europe that year, seeking health and literary material, and toward the end of the summer – he was then at Ouchy, Switzerland – he decided to make a floating trip down the river Rhone. He found he could start from Lake Bourget in France, and, by paddling through a canal, reach the strong Rhone current, which would carry him seaward. Joseph Very, his favorite guide (mentioned in *A Tramp Abroad*), went over to Lake Bourget and bought a safe, flat-bottomed boat, retaining its former owner as pilot, and with these accessories Mark Twain made one of the most peaceful and delightful excursions of his life. Indeed, he enjoyed it so much and so lazily that after the first few days he gave up making extended notes and surrendered himself entirely to the languorous fascination of drifting idly through the dreamland of southern France. On the whole, it was an eventless excursion, with one exception – a startling exception, as he believed.

One afternoon, when they had been drifting several days, he sighted a little village not far ahead, on the west bank, an ancient "jumble of houses," with a castle, one of the many along that shore. It looked interesting and he suggested that they rest there for the night. Then, chancing to glance over his shoulder toward the eastward mountains, he received a sudden surprise – a "soul-stirring shock," as he termed it later. The big blue eastward mountain was no longer a mere mountain, but a gigantic portrait in stone of one of his heroes. Eagerly turning to Joseph Very and pointing to the huge effigy, he asked him to name it. The courier said, "Napoleon." The boatman also said, "Napoleon." It seemed to them, indeed, almost uncanny, this lifelike, reclining figure of the conqueror, resting after battle, or, as Mark Twain put it, "dreaming of universal empire." They discussed it in awed voices, as one of the natural wonders of the world, which perhaps they had been the first to discover. They landed at the village, Beauchastel, and next morning Mark Twain, up early, watched the sun rise from behind the great stone face of his discovery. He made a pencil sketch in his notebook, and recorded the fact that the figure was to be seen from Beauchastel. That morning, drifting farther down the Rhone, they watched it until the human outlines changed.

Mark Twain's Rhone trip was continued as far as Arles, where the current slackened. He said that some one would have to row if they went on, which would mean work, and that he was averse to work, even in another person. He gave the boat to its former owner, took Joseph, and rejoined the family in Switzerland.

Events thronged into Mark Twain's life: gay winters, summers of travel, heavy literary work, business cares and failures, a trip around the world, bereavement. Amid such a tumult the brief and quiet Rhone trip was seldom even remembered.

But ten or eleven years later, when he had returned to America and was surrounded by quieter things, he happened to remember the majestic figure of the first Napoleon discovered that September day while drifting down the Rhone. He recalled no more than that. His memory was always capricious – he had even forgotten that he made a sketch of the figure, with notes identifying the locality. He could picture clearly enough the incident, the phenomenon, the surroundings, but the name of the village had escaped him, and he located it too far down, between Arles and Avignon.

All his old enthusiasm returned now. He declared if the presence of this great natural wonder was made known to the world, tourists would flock to the spot, hotels would spring up there – all other natural curiosities would fall below it in rank. His listeners caught his enthusiasm. Theodore Stanton,

the journalist, declared he would seek and find the "Lost Napoleon," as Mark Twain now called it, because he was unable to identify the exact spot. He assured Stanton that it would be perfectly easy to find, as he could take a steamer from Arles to Avignon, and by keeping watch he could not miss it. Stanton returned to Europe and began the search. I am not sure that he undertook the trip himself, but he made diligent inquiries of Rhone travelers and steamer captains, and a lengthy correspondence passed between him and Mark Twain on the subject.

No one had seen the "Lost Napoleon." Travelers passing between Avignon and Arles kept steady watch on the east range, but the apparition did not appear. Mark Twain eventually wrote an article, intending to publish it, in the hope that some one would report the mislaid emperor. However, he did not print the sketch, which was fortunate enough, for with its misleading directions it would have made him unpopular with disappointed travelers. The locality of his great discovery was still a mystery when Mark Twain died.

So it came about that our special reason for following the west bank of the Rhone – the Beauchastel side, in plain view of the eastward mountains – was to find the "Lost Napoleon." An easy matter, it seemed in prospect, for we had what the others had lacked – that is to say, exact information as to its locality – the notes, made twenty-two years before by Mark Twain himself<sup>8</sup> – the pencil sketch, and memoranda stating that the vision was to be seen opposite the village of Beauchastel.

But now there developed what seemed to be another mystery. Not only our maps and our red-book, but patient inquiry as well, failed to reveal any village or castle by the name of Beauchastel. It was a fine, romantic title, and we began to wonder if it might not be a combination of half-caught syllables, remembered at the moment of making the notes, and converted by Mark Twain's imagination into this happy sequence of sounds.

So we must hunt and keep the inquiries going. We had begun the hunt as soon as we left Avignon, and the inquiries when there was opportunity. Then presently the plot thickened. The line of those eastward mountains began to assume many curious shapes. Something in their formation was unlike other mountains, and soon it became not difficult to imagine a face almost anywhere. Then at one point appeared a real face, no question this time as to the features, only it was not enough like the face of the sketch to make identification sure. We discussed it anxiously and with some energy, and watched it a long time, thinking possibly it would gradually melt into the right shape, and that Beauchastel or some similarly sounding village would develop along the river bank.

But the likeness did not improve, and, while there were plenty of villages, there was none with a name the sound of which even suggested Beauchastel. Altogether we discovered as many as five faces that day, and became rather hysterical at last, and called them our collection of lost Napoleons, though among them was not one of which we could say with conviction, "Behold, the Lost Napoleon!" This brought us to Bagnols, and we had a fear now that we were past the viewpoint – that somehow our search, or our imagination, had been in vain.

But then came the great day. Up and up the Rhone, interested in so many things that at times we half forgot to watch the eastward hills, passing village after village, castle after castle, but never the "jumble of houses" and the castle that commanded the vision of the great chief lying asleep along the eastern horizon.

I have not mentioned, I think, that at the beginning of most French villages there is a signboard, the advertisement of a firm of auto-stockists, with the name of the place, and the polite request to "*Ralentir*" – that is, to "go slow." At the other end of the village is another such a sign, and on the reverse you read, as you pass out, "*Merci*" – which is to say, "Thanks," for going slowly; so whichever way you come you get information, advice, and politeness from these boards, a feature truly French.

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<sup>8</sup> At Mark Twain's death his various literary effects passed into the hands of his biographer, the present writer.

Well, it was a little way above the château which I did not rent, and we were driving along slowly, thinking of nothing at all, entering an unimportant-looking place, when Narcissa, who always sees everything, suddenly uttered the magical word "Beauchastel!"

It was like an electric shock – the soul-stirring shock which Mark Twain had received at the instant of his great discovery. Beauchastel! Not a figment, then, but a reality – the veritable jumble of houses we had been seeking, and had well-nigh given up as a myth. Just there the houses interfered with our view, but a hundred yards farther along a vista opened to the horizon, and there at last, in all its mightiness and dignity and grandeur, lay the Lost Napoleon! It is not likely that any other natural figure in stone ever gave two such sudden and splendid thrills of triumph, first, to its discoverer, and, twenty-two years later, almost to the day, to those who had discovered it again. There was no question this time. The colossal sleeping figure in its supreme repose confuted every doubt, resting where it had rested for a million years, and would still rest for a million more.

At first we spoke our joy eagerly, then fell into silence, looking and looking, loath to go, for fear it would change. At every opening we halted to look again, and always with gratification, for it did not change, or so gradually that for miles it traveled with us, and still at evening, when we were nearing Valence, there remained a great stone face on the horizon.

## **Chapter XIII**

### **THE HOUSE OF HEADS**

I ought to say, I suppose, that we were no longer in Provence. Even at Avignon we were in Venaissin, according to present geography, and when we crossed the Rhone we passed into Languedoc. Now, at Valence, we were in Dauphiné, of which Valence is the "chief-lieu," meaning, I take it, the official headquarters. I do not think these are the old divisions at all, and in any case it all has been "the Midi," which to us is the Provence, the vineland, songland, and storyland of a nation where vine and song and story flourish everywhere so lavishly that strangers come, never to bring, but only to carry away.

At Valence, however, romance hesitates on the outskirts. The light of other days grows dim in its newer electric glow. Old castles surmount the hilltops, but one needs a field glass to see them. The city itself is modern and busy, prosperous in its manufacture of iron, silk, macaroni, and certain very good liquors.

I believe the chief attraction of Valence is the "House of the Heads." Our guidebook has a picture which shows Napoleon Bonaparte standing at the entrance, making his adieus to Montalivet, who, in a later day, was to become his minister. Napoleon had completed his military education in the artillery school of Valence, and at the moment was setting out to fulfill his dream of conquest. It is rather curious, when you think of it, that the great natural stone portrait already described should be such a little distance away.

To go back to the House of the Heads: Our book made only the briefest mention of its construction, and told nothing at all of its traditions. We stood in front of it, gazing in the dim evening light at the crumbling carved faces of its façade, peering through into its ancient court where there are now apartments to let, wondering as to its history. One goes raking about in the dusty places of his memory at such moments; returning suddenly from an excursion of that sort, I said I recalled the story of a house of carved heads – something I had heard, or read, long ago – and that this must be the identical house concerning which the story had been told.

It was like this: There was a wealthy old bachelor of ancient days who had spent his life in collecting rare treasures of art; pictures, tapestries, choice metal-work, arms – everything that was beautiful and rare; his home was a storehouse of priceless things. He lived among them, attended only by a single servant – the old woman who had been his nurse – a plain, masculine creature, large of frame, still strong and brawny, stout of heart and of steadfast loyalty. When the master was away gathering new treasures she slept in the room where the arms were kept, with a short, sharp, two-edged museum piece by her couch, and without fear.

One morning he told her of a journey he was about to take, and said: "I hesitate to leave you here alone. You are no longer young."

But she answered: "Only by the count of years, not by the measure of strength or vigilance. I am not afraid."

So he left her, to return on the third day. But on the evening of the second day, when the old servant went down to the lower basement for fuel – silently, in her softly slippers – she heard low voices at a small window that opened to the court. She crept over to it and found that a portion of the sash had been removed; listening, she learned that a group of men outside in the dusk were planning to enter and rob the house. They were to wait until she was asleep, then creep in through the window, make their way upstairs, kill her, and carry off the treasures.

It seemed a good plan, but as the old servant listened she formed a better one. She crept back upstairs, not to lock herself in and stand a siege, but to get her weapon, the short, heavy sword with its two razor edges. Then she came back and sat down to wait. While she was waiting she entertained

herself by listening to their plans and taking a little quiet muscle exercise. By and by she heard them say that the old hag would surely be asleep by this time. The "old hag" smiled grimly and got ready.

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