Warner Anne

Seeing France with Uncle John

Anne Warner

Seeing France with Uncle John

http://www.litres.ru/pages/biblio_book/?art=23167891
Seeing France with Uncle John:

Содержание

Anne Warner
Seeing France with Uncle John

I
YVONNE TO HER MOTHER

Second day out at sea.

Dear Mama: We did get off at last, about four in the afternoon, but you never imagined anything like the day we had with Uncle John. It was awful, and, as luck would have it, he just happened to go aft or sou'west, or whatever it is on shipboard, in time to see them drop his trunk into the hold, and they let it fall from such a height that he swore for an hour. I don't see why Uncle is so unreasonable; a Russian gentleman had the locks broken to both his trunks and just smiled, and a very lovely Italian lady had her trunk caved in by the hoisting-rope and only shrugged her shoulders; but Uncle turned the whole deck fairly black and blue on account of a little fall into the hold. If Lee had only been along to soothe him down! But Lee is in London by this time. I do think he might have waited and gone with us, but Uncle says he's glad he didn't, because he says he has more than half an idea that Lee's in love with me, and that no girl alive could be happy with him. I wish Uncle liked Lee better. I wish Lee wouldn't slap

him on the back and call him "old boy" the way he does.

Mrs. Clary doesn't like it because she has to sit next to the doctor and talk English to him, and he can't talk English. She says whenever she goes on board a liner the doctor always spots her as intelligent-looking, and has her put next to him for English purposes. She says she's made seven trips as nursery-governess to a doctor with linguistic aspirations. The consequence is, she has most of her meals on deck with a man named Mr. Chopstone. Uncle doesn't like Mr. Chopstone, because he says he has a sneaking suspicion that Mr. Chopstone admires Edna. He says Edna could never be happy with a man like Mr. Chopstone.

More later.

Fourth day out.

I've been writing Lee; I can mail it at Plymouth. It does seem to me as if Lee might have waited and gone with us.

We are nicely adjusted now, and Uncle has had his trunk brought to his room, and has examined the corners and found them intact; so now the trunk is off his mind. But he has almost had fits over a man named Monsieur Sibilet, so the situation has been about as brimstony as ever. M. Sibilet is a Frenchman going back to France, but his chair is next to Mrs. Clary's, and Uncle says steamer-chairs are never accidents, but are always premeditated and with intent to kill. He asked Mrs. Clary if she couldn't see that no woman could ever be happy with a dancing fan-tan like Sibilet. We didn't know what a "fan-tan" was, but we all agreed with Uncle's premises as to poor monsieur; and then it

developed that there is a Mme. Sibilet deathly sick down below, and Uncle said that he had known it all the time and was only joking.

Edna and Harry are very happy, but they have to be awfully careful, because Uncle says he has a half-fledged notion that Harry is paying attention to Edna, and that he won't allow anything of the kind – not for one York second. We don't know what a "York second" is, and we haven't asked. Uncle plays poker nights, and we make the most of it. There is a nice Yale man on board, and I walk around with him. His name is Edgar. Uncle says he looks as if he had his bait out for a fortune, but Mrs. Clary says to never mind it – to go right on walking. She lies still while we walk, ande talks to M. Sibilet in French.

Uncle says he is the head of this expedition, and there's to be no foolishness. He says it's all rot about a man not being able to see through women, and that Edna and I needn't expect to keep any secrets from him. I do wish Lee was here to soothe him down. He was so furious to-day because he shut up his wash-stand and let the tooth-powder slide to perdition. M. Sibilet offered him an extra box of his own, but Uncle wasn't a bit grateful. He says he is sure M. Sibilet is in love with Mrs. Clary now, or why under the sun should he offer him his tooth-powder? He says he thinks it's disgraceful, considering poor Mme. Sibilet, and he took mine instead.

More later.

Sixth day out.

I do wish we were in Havre, or anywhere where Uncle had more room. The third officer invited him up on the bridge yesterday, and Uncle says you needn't tell him that any third officer in this world ever would invite him up to the bridge unless he had his eye on Edna or me. Uncle says for Edna and me to remember that old uncles have eyes as well as young third officers, and to bear in mind that it would be a dog's life to be married to a third officer. I'm beginning to be very glad, indeed, that Lee took another steamer; I reckon Lee saw how it would be. Uncle says he'd like to know what we took a slow steamer for, anyhow. He says it would have been more comfortable to have all been in death agonies and to have been in Havre by this time. He was terribly upset to-day by Mme. Sibilet's coming on deck and proving to be an old lady with white hair and the mother of monsieur instead of the wife. He says you needn't talk to him about French honor after this. We don't know what the connection is between poor old Mme. Sibilet and French honor, but we think it best not to ask. The truth is, Uncle lost all patience with M. Sibilet the day it rained and pitched – I think it was the third day out. He never did like him very much, anyhow. Mrs. Clary wanted to sit in the wind that day, and she and monsieur sat in the wind until the rain grew so bad that they were absolutely driven to come around and sit by Uncle, under the lee of the port, or whatever it is on board ship. Monsieur lugged Mrs. Clary's chair because he couldn't find a steward, and he brought it around by the smoking-room and the whole length of the deck, with the

steamer pitching so that half the time he was on top of the chair, and the other half of the time the chair was on top of him. There was no one on deck but us, on account of the storm, and I thought we should die laughing, because there were forty empty chairs under shelter already. Uncle waited until, with a final slip and a slide, the poor man landed the chair, and then he screamed: "I say, Sibbilly, just take the cards out and change *them* another time. That's the way we Americans do."

You should have seen poor monsieur's face! Uncle said the whole affair gave him a queer feeling as to what might be in store for us in France. He said if M. Sibilet was a sample Frenchman, he thought he wouldn't get off at Havre, after all.

Mrs. Clary is in lots of trouble over the doctor. He comes up on deck and bothers her half to death, talking English. She can't understand his English, and M. Sibilet gets tired translating. M. Sibilet speaks seven languages. Uncle says that's nothing to his credit, however.

More later.

Ninth day out.

Uncle is in high spirits to-day, for he won the pool. He has been so disgusted because Mr. Edgar has won it three times. Uncle says that's no sign he'd be a good husband, though. I do think Uncle's logic is so very peculiar. He came into my state-room to-day and asked me if I didn't think the doctor was absolutely impertinent in the way he was pursuing Mrs. Clary. You'd have thought the doctor tore after her around the deck,

to hear him. He said he expected to have trouble with Edna and me, but he never looked for Mrs. Clary to be a care. He said he didn't suppose she was over forty, but she ought to consider appearances more. He was quite put out, and I am gladder than ever that Lee isn't with us.

We laughed ourselves half sick to-day over Mr. Chopstone. Uncle's port-hole doesn't work very easily, and Mr. Chopstone heard him talking about it to himself as he passed in the corridor, and he went in to help him. Uncle asked Mr. Chopstone if he had a crow-bar or a monkey-wrench with him, and Mr. Chopstone didn't have a crow-bar or a monkey-wrench with him, but said why not ring for the steward. Uncle wouldn't hear to the steward, and so they climbed on the divan together and tried to pry it with Uncle's hair-brush.

The hair-brush broke, and Uncle went spinning, but Mr. Chopstone caught his cuff in the crack, and it tore, and half of his shirt-sleeve with a diamond cuff-link went to sea. At first we all felt awful about it, but he was so composed that Edna said he must be a millionaire, and Uncle said it must be a paste diamond. That is all only preliminary to the funny part. This afternoon we were lying in our chairs and Uncle was standing by the rail looking at a ship. All of a sudden he exclaimed, "Great Scott! Chopstone, if there isn't your cuff!" Mr. Chopstone made just one bound from his chair to the rail, and looked over so hard that his cap fell into the sea. Of course the mere idea of the cuff having sailed as fast as we did all day used us up completely,

and Uncle in particular had to hang to the rail for support while he sort of wove back and forth in an ecstasy of speechless joy. Even M. Sibilet was overcome by mirth, although it turned out afterward that he thought the fun was on account of the lost cap. And then, when we got ourselves selves under control once more, Mr. Chopstone explained that what he had thought was that the cuff had caught somewhere on the outside of the steamer and that Uncle saw it hanging there. Edna says that it all shows that poor Mr. Chopstone is *not* a millionaire, and Mrs. Clary says it proves, too, that it *was* a real diamond.

It is beginning to seem like a pretty long trip, and Mrs. Clary has started packing her trunk. The little flag that marks our progress across the chart is making Europe in great jumps, and we are all glad. Uncle gets more restless every day, and he says if the doctor don't quit coming up on deck to talk to Mrs. Clary, something will soon drop. The doctor is really very amusing; he says the first officer has a pet "marmadillo," but we cannot see it because it is too anxious. He means "frightened," it seems. Mr. Edgar is very nice; both he and Mr. Chopstone are going to Paris. Lee will be in Paris by Wednesday, I hope, and I most sincerely trust he will keep on the right side of Uncle.

They say we will land early day after to-morrow. I can mail my letters in Plymouth to-morrow evening. Uncle says he's going express hereafter; he says no more dilly-dally voyages for him.

Tenth day out.

What do you think! Uncle took me into the parlor after dinner

to-night and told me that he wasn't going to Paris with the rest. He says he didn't come abroad to scurry around like a wild rabbit, and that he's going to stop in Havre for a day or two. He says Edna and I had better stay with him, as he can't think of our traveling with Mr. Edgar and Mr. Chopstone alone. I said, "But there's Mrs. Clary." And he said, "Yes; but you forget Sibbilly." I do think Uncle's logic is so remarkable.

Eleventh day out.

Everybody is getting their trunks in from the baggage-room and running to the rail to look at ships. Uncle won the pool again to-day; he says this is one of the pleasantest trips he ever made, and he shook hands with M. Sibilet when he met him on deck this morning.

Mrs. Clary is awfully upset over our staying in Havre, and she says if Lee is in Paris he won't like it, either. We expect a mail in Plymouth.

Later.

The mail came, and I had a letter from Lee. He is going to Russia for a week, and he folded in an extra piece, saying to give Uncle the letter. It was a funny kind of letter, but of course it had to be a funny kind of letter if I was to give it to Uncle. I gave it to Uncle, and he said, "Hum!" and that was all. He says if Mr. Edgar or Mr. Chopstone stay in Havre he'll know the reason why. I do think Uncle might be more reasonable. Edna has been crying. She doesn't want to stay in Havre; she wants to go to Paris

when Harry goes.

Yours with love, as ever,
Yvonne.

II
UNCLE JOHN IN ROUEN

9 a. m.

"Well, girls, are you ready to get up and out and set about improving your minds? I've been reading the guide-book and spilling my coffee with trying to do two things at once, ever since eight o'clock. But what your Uncle John doesn't know about Rouen now isn't worth stopping to look up in the index. Why, I've even got the real French twang to the pronunciation. It's Rooank; only you stop short of the 'n' and the 'k,' so to speak. The waiter who brought my breakfast showed me how to do it – said he never saw a foreigner catch on to the trick so quick before. I gave him one of those slim little quarters they have here, and he was so pleased that he taught me how to say 'Joan of Arc' for nothing. It's Shondark —*Shondark*. I learned it in no time. Well, come on, if you're ready. I've been waiting almost an hour.

"I declare, but this fresh, free atmosphere is refreshing! As soon as you get outside of your bedroom door you begin to get the full benefit of the Continental climate. I presume, if you're poor, you get it as soon as you get outside of your bed clothes. Rather a medieval staircase, eh? And four orange-trees at the bottom to try and fool us into feeling balmy. However, I don't mind little discomforts: all I mind is being shut up on a ship with

a darned fool like that man Sibbilly. I shouldn't wonder if his mother was his wife, after all. I could believe anything of him. I didn't like him.

"We'll go to take in the cathedral first; it isn't far, and I've got it all by heart. Thirteenth century and unsymmetrical – you must remember that. There, that's it ahead there – with the scaffolding. They're bolstering it up somewhat, so as to keep on hooking tourists, I presume. The biggest tower is the Butter Tower, built out of paid-for permissions to eat butter in Lent. Rather a rough joke, its being so much the biggest, isn't it? The whole cathedral's lopsided from eating butter, so to speak. I believe it's the thing to stop in front and act as if you were overcome; so we'll just call a halt here and take in the general effect of the scaffolding.

"Now we'll walk around the whole thing. I haven't come abroad to take life with a hop, skip, and jump; I've come to be thorough, and I want you girls to form the habit of being thorough, too. What I didn't like about that fellow Edgar was his not being thorough. When he went down to look at the ship's machinery he only stayed an hour. Now, I didn't go at all; but if I had gone, I should have stayed more than an hour. Good job of scaffolding, isn't it? You see, they make the scaffolding out of young trees withed together, and use them over and over. Economical. Just about what you'd expect of Sibbilly. Those gargoyles and saints around the top stick their heads out pretty interested-like, don't they? But their view is for the most part blocked. Now this cheerful old jail at the back is the palace of

the archbishop. I wish, young ladies, that you would note those little bits of high windows and the good thick bars across them as illustrating the secure faith that the dead and gone archbishops had in their loving people. I'll bet there's been plenty of battering and rioting around under these walls, first and last; plenty of fists and sticks and stones. It's big, isn't it? Big as half a block, and things look so much bigger here than they do at home. They slide a roof up slanting and cock it full of little crooked windows, and you feel as if you must tip over backward to take in the top. I vow, I don't just see how it's done; but – oh, here's where we go in. This dark, damp little stone-paved alley is the celebrated 'Portail des Libraires,' so called because those arcades used to be full of book-stalls. We go along on the cobble-stones, ont throw ourselves hard against this little swinging door; it creaks, it yields, we enter – hush!

"Great Scott, isn't it big, and *isn't* it damp? Will you look up in that roof? I feel solemn in spite of myself; but, then, feeling solemn is no use: what we want to do is to find some one to open those big iron gates, for the most of what is to see is in back there. Edna, you ask that man how we can get hold of some other man. Well, what did he say? Said to ask the Swiss, did he? What does he mean by that? Is it a joke, or can't they trust a Frenchman with their old relics? I've been told that in Japanese banks they always have to have a Chinaman to handle the money, and maybe it's equally the thing in a French cathedral to have a Swiss look after the relics. But the guide-book never said a word about a Swiss:

it said '*fee*,' and I've got my pocket full of them.

"Well, where can we get a Swiss? I should think he'd be more handy than he appears to be. There's another man looking for him, too. He – Great Scott! if it isn't – no, that is impossible. Yes, it is!

"I beg your pardon, sir, but is your name Porter? Yes? Robert Porter – Bobby Porter that went to the Washington School? Bob, do you remember me? Well, of all the larks!

"Girls, this man and I went to school side by side for eight years, and he's the finest – my nieces, Bob. That's Edna and this is Yvonne, and – you don't say he's your son? Didn't know you ever married. Oh, I'll take your word for it, of course; but, I say, Bob, you've got to come and dine with us to-night. You must; I won't have it any other way. You and I'll have to just sit down and overhaul all our old memories together. Do you remember – but how do you come to be in Europe, anyhow; and what liner did you line up on? We had a beastly trip, – only came from Havre last night, – and, by the way, how in thunder can we get hold of the man who opens these iron gates? Everything in the place is back there.

"Is that a Swiss – that splendid circus-chariot driver? Give you my word, I thought he was a cardinal! How much of a tip is that much gold lace going to look forward to getting? I wish he was plainer, somehow. I'll tell you, Bob; you pay, and I'll settle up later. I certainly am glad to see the gates open; I felt more like a serpent shut out of paradise than I ever expected to feel in all

my life.

"Well, now we begin. Who's buried here? Henry II of England, eh? I can't read Latin, so Henry's virtues and dates are all one to me. Which Henry was he, anyhow – the one with six wives or the one who never shed a smile? Either way, let's move on.

"What comes next? Richard-Cœur-de-Lion – petrified, eh? Oh, only a statue of him; that's less interesting. I thought at last I was looking at Richard when he was himself again. What is our Swiss friend hissing about? Heart buried underneath? Whose heart? – Richard's? Ask if it's his bona fide heart or only a death-mask of it? Strikes me as a pretty big statue to put up to a heart, don't you think, Bob? But come on; I want to be looking at something else.

"So this is the tomb of the husband of Diana of Poitiers? I didn't know she ever had a husband – thought she only had a king. I've never been brought up to think of Diana of Poitiers mourning a husband. But maybe she did, maybe she did. They say you must check your common sense at the hotel when you set out to inspect Europe, and I believe it – I believe it. It's a nice tomb, and if they kneel and mourn in a gown with a train, she certainly is doing it up brown. However, let's go on.

"Two cardinals of Amboise kind of going in procession on their knees over their own dead bodies – or maybe it's only hearts again. Well, Bob, the Reformation was a great thing, after all, wasn't it? Must have felt fine to straighten up for a while. Stop a

bit; the guide-book said there was something to examine about these two – wait till I find the place. Oh, well, never mind; I dare say a guide-book's very handy, but I move we quit this damp old hole, anyway. I wouldn't bother to come again. That's a sad thing about life, Bob; as soon as you get in front of anything and get a square look at it, you're ready to move on – at least I am.

"What's he saying? Well, ask him again. Whose grave? Well, ask him again. Rollo's! What, Rollo that was 'At Work' and 'At Play' and at everything else when we were kids? Another? What other? Well, ask him. Rollo the Norman? I don't see anything very remarkable in a Norman being buried in Normandy, do you, Bob? When did he die? Well, *ask* him. What are we paying him for, anyway? Died about 900, eh! And this church wasn't built till four hundred years later. Where did he spend the time while he was waiting to be buried? Well, ask him. I declare, if I could talk French, I bet I'd know something about things. You are the *dumbest* lot! Here's Rollo lying around loose for as long as we've had America with us, and no one takes any interest in where. Is that the tomb he finally got into? Clever idea to have it so dark no one can see it, after all. I suppose he thinks we'll be impressed, but I ain't. I don't believe Rollo's in there, anyhow.

"Come on; I'm tired of this old church. I move that we go out and look at the place where they burned Joan of Arc, or something else that is bright and cheerful. What's he saying? No, I don't want to see any treasury; I've done enough church-going for one week-day. Give him his money, Bob, and let's get out.

You tell us where to go next; you must know everything, if you were here all day yesterday. I want to see that double-faced clock and those carvings of the Field of the Cloth of Gold. They're all over in the same direction.

"Good to be out in the air, eh? I vow, I never was great on churches. What boat did you come over on? Did it roll? Ours rolled and pitched, too. I never saw such a rolling. I tell you, Bob, the man will make a fortune who invents a level liner. I used to try and figure on how to hang the passenger department in an open square, so it could swing free, – do you get the idea? – but I don't know as it could be managed. I was trying to work it out one morning, and I came up against the wash-stand so sudden that I thought I was cut in two; the next second I went backward so quick that the edge of the berth nearly amputated my legs; and then the whole craft arose on such a swell that I swallowed half my tooth-brush. You may laugh, Bob, but I'm not telling this to be funny; I'm telling it for a fact. I had to have the steward in to put the washing-apparatus to rights, and I asked him what in thunder was up outside. He was standing at an angle of forty-five degrees, looking up at me where I sat in the lower berth, and he said, 'If the wind shifts, we're very likely to have it rough.' Just then he took on an angle of ninety-five degrees, and my trunk slid out on his feet so quick he had to hop. I said: 'Have it *rough*, eh? Well, I'm glad to know, so that I can take advantage of this calm spell.'

"So that's the clock! Well, it's a big one, surely – almost as

wide as the street, although candor compels us to own that the street is about the narrowest ever. All right, I'm done; a clock is a clock, and one look in its face always tells me all I want to know. Come on; we can't stand dilly-dallying if we're to get through Rouen to-day, and I must say I consider a day to a town as quite enough in Europe. I know, when I was young and traveled for wholesale shoes, I used often and often to do three towns a day and never turn a hair. I tell you, Bob, when I was —

"Is that the fountain? Hold on; we want to see that! The guide-book has it in italics. I don't see anything to underline, though; looks foreign to me. Come on; we've got to be getting somewhere, or I shall feel I was a fool to stop off at Rouen. Not that I'm not glad to have met you again, Bob; but that could have happened anywhere else just as well, you know. When did you come over? Last year! Great Scott, what are you staying so long for? I bet I get enough in six weeks; I feel as if I'd got pretty close to enough now. Not that time ever hangs heavy on my hands, you know. No, not by a long shot. I'm the kind of man that can always amuse himself. Give me a fair show, – off a ship, of course, – and I'll defy any one to get on better. Take the day we landed, for instance, there in Havre, – rainy, not a thing to do, and every one else off for Paris. You might have looked for me to be a little disgusted, naturally; but not a bit of it. The day went like the wind. We landed at noon, I slept all the afternoon, and in the evening I took a bath. I tell you, Bob, a fellow with brains can get on anywhere. I never know what it is to feel bored.

"What's our Goddess of Liberty doing up there? What's that Indian beadwork around her feet for? Who? You don't mean to tell me that's Joan of Arc? Well, all I can say is, I never imagined her like that. But what are the beads? French funeral wreaths! Great Scott! do they keep Charlemagne wreathed, too, or is five hundred years the bead-wreath limit? Pretty idea, to put up a fountain where they burnt her – keep her memory damp at all events, eh? What's the moral of her train turning into a dolphin? Just to bring the mind gradually down to the level of the fact that it is a fountain, after all, I suppose.

"She wasn't burnt here, anyhow, the book said. The book said she was burnt farther over. Smart people here – have two places where she was burnt, so people must trot through the whole market if they try to be conscientious. Look at that woman, with her bouquet of live chickens – novel effect in chickens, eh, Bob? Strikes me it was an enterprising idea to burn Joan in the market, anyhow – good business for the market. Folks come to see the statue, and incidentally buy some peanuts.

"Well, where can we go now? I say to set out and have a look at the tower where she was imprisoned. Pulled down! It isn't, either; it's starred in the book. What's that? This tower named for her, and hers pulled down! Well, there's French honor for you again. What do you think of Sibbilly now, Edna? I don't want to see the tower if it ain't the real one. I want to see the bas-reliefs of the Field of the Cloth of Gold, and then I want to go back to the hotel to lunch. I tell you, this sight-seeing is a great appetizer.

The more old ruins and burnings I look over, the hungrier I get.

"Is this the place? Makes me think of a sort of glorified gate to a woodyard. What is it, now? Well, ask somebody! A bank, eh? Are those the famous bas-reliefs? Those! Them! Well, well, I must say the touring public is easy game. They're all worn off. What's the tin overhead for? To keep the rain from damaging them, eh? Pretty bit of sarcasm, eh, Bob? Great pity they didn't think to put it four or five hundred years sooner. I don't see a man with a head or a horse with a leg from here. It lacks character, to my idea. Let's go home. Come on. I've racked around Rouen all I care to for one day."

III
YVONNE TO HER MOTHER

Rouen.

Dearest Mama: It is midnight, and I must tell you the most astonishing piece of news. We came here with Uncle last night, and all this morning we were out with him. When we came home and unlocked our room we found *Lee* sitting by the window. But he doesn't want Uncle to know. It was fortunate that Uncle's room is across the hall, for I screamed. We couldn't see how he got in, but he says that he has bent a buttonhook so that he can travel all over Europe. It seems he never meant to go to Russia at all; but he doesn't want Uncle to know. He says he thinks Russia is a good place for Uncle to imagine him in. We had such fun! We told him all about the voyage and all about Uncle. He says M. Sibilet's mother *is* his wife – he married her for money. He says he's a painter. Lee is really going yachting, but he doesn't want Uncle to know. He isn't going for a while, though; and he doesn't want Uncle to know that, either. While we were talking, Uncle rapped, and Lee had to get into the wardrobe while Uncle came in and read us a lecture. When we were in the cathedral to-day he found a man he used to know in school, and he was utterly overjoyed until he saw that the man had a son; and then, of course, he was worried over the son. So he came in to-night to tell us that it he

discovered any skylarking, he should at once give up a friendship which had always meant more to him than we young things could possibly imagine. He said we must understand that he'd have no sort of foolishness going on, and at that the wardrobe creaked so awfully that Edna had a fit of coughing, and I didn't know what I should have if he kept on. He didn't go until it was high lunch-time, and I was afraid Lee would have to stay in the wardrobe until he smothered. When Uncle was gone, Edna asked Lee how under the sun he kept still, and he said he nearly died, because so many hooks hooked into his coat and he had nothing to perch on except shoe-trees. I do think Lee is so clever. I wish Uncle thought so, too. He went to his room, and we lunched with Uncle, Mr. Porter, and Mr. Porter, Jr.; and afterward we visited the church of the Bon-Secours and the monument to Jeanne d'Arc. She stands on top, her hands manacled, with her big, frightened eyes staring sadly and steadily out over the town where she met death. Uncle admired her so much that he tripped on one of the sheep that are carved on the steps, and after that he didn't admire anything or anybody. We got back about five, and Lee came in for a visit of an hour. Lee says he had a fine voyage. It stormed, and he says he never was battened down with such a lively lot of people. Uncle came in twice while he was there, but Lee has the wardrobe by heart now, and doesn't take a second. He says the men he's going yachting with are great sport, and he expects to have the time of his life. I do wish Uncle liked Lee, so that he could go around with us these days; he would be so much fun.

We are going to Jumièges to-morrow, Uncle says. Lee says he must take the early train for Havre. He's just been in to say good-by. He brought a cherry-tart and his shoe-horn, and we had ours, and so we had no trouble at all in eating it.

It has raised my spirits lots, seeing Lee. It seemed so terrible for him to go off to Russia like that. Uncle spoke of it yesterday. He said he was glad to have one worry off his mind and safe in Russia. The wardrobe squeaked merrily.

Now good-by.

Love from
Yvonne.

IV
YVONNE TO HER MOTHER

Rouen.

Dear Mama: Lee is gone. I do wish he could have stayed longer, but he thought it was risky. Uncle John was sure he smelt cigarette smoke in my room, and although it wasn't true at all, Edna cried and said the wardrobe was getting on her nerves, and Lee said he reckoned he'd take his button-hook and move on. We had an awful time bidding him good-by, for Uncle came in three times, and the second time he had lost his umbrella and thought it must be in our wardrobe. I never was so frightened in all my life; for, you know, if Uncle had been hunting for his umbrella and had found Lee, he wouldn't have liked it at all. Edna volunteered to look in the wardrobe, and I know I must have looked queer, for Uncle asked if I'd taken cold. You know how much I think of Lee, but I couldn't help being relieved when he was gone. It is such a responsibility to have a man in your wardrobe so much of the time. He said that I must try to steer Uncle toward Brittany, because he'll be yachting all around there. He says I must mark places in the Baedeker with strips of paper. He says that's a fine way to make any one go anywhere, and that if Edna and I will talk Italy and mark Brittany, Uncle is almost sure to wind up in the Isle of Jersey. Lee says he wishes he'd been kinder to Uncle

in America, and then he'd like him better in Europe. He's afraid Uncle will never forgive him for taking him bobbing that time and dumping him off in the snow. It was too bad.

We went to Jumièges to-day. Uncle found it in the guide-book, and we took an eleven-o'clock train. Mr. Porter and his son were late, and just had time to get into the rear third-class coach. Uncle was much distressed until we came to Yainville, where the train stopped, and they got out. Uncle wanted them to get in with us, and he talked so forcibly on the subject that the train nearly started again before Mr. Porter could make him understand that Yainville is where you get off for Jumièges.

I do wish it wasn't so hard to turn Uncle's ideas another way when he's got them all wrong.

Yainville has a red-brick depot on the edge of a pleasant, rolling prairie, but there is a little green omnibus to hyphenate it with Jumièges. We were a very tight fit inside, for of course we could only sit in Uncle's lap, and he didn't suggest it, so I had to hold Edna; and Mr. Porter and his son knew Uncle well enough not to suggest taking her. I thought that we should never get there; and it was so tantalizing, for the country became beautiful, and we could only see it in little triangular bits between shoulders and hats. Young Mr. Porter wanted to get out and walk, but Uncle said, "Young man, when you are as old as I am, you will know as much as I do," so he gave up the idea. I do believe we were cooped up for a solid hour before we finally rolled down a little bit of a hill into a little bit of a village, and climbed stiffly out

into the open air.

We all had to cry out with wonder and admiration then, it was really so wonderful. On one side were the hills, with the Seine winding off toward Paris; and on the other side was the wood, with the ragged ruins of the abbey-church walls towering up out of the loftiest foliage. Uncle thought we had better go and see all there was to be seen directly, so we walked off down the little road with a funny feeling of being partly present and partly past, but very well content.

The story goes that one of the ancient French kings took two young princes of a rival house, crippled them, put them on a boat, and set them afloat at Paris. They drifted down the current as far as this spot, and here they were rescued. They founded a monastery in gratitude, and their tomb was in the church, which is now in ruins. Later we saw the stone, with their effigies, in the little museum by the gate. They were called "Les Deux Enervés," in reference to their mutilation. Uncle thought the word meant "nervous," and we heard him say to Mr. Porter, "Well, who wouldn't have been, under the circumstances?" The whole of the abbey is now the private property of a lady who lives in a nice house up over back beyond somewhere. She built the lodge, and also a little museum for relics from the ruins, and has stopped the wholesale carrying off of stones from the beautiful remnants of what must have once been a truly superb monument. I am sure I shall never in all my life see anything more grand or impressive than the building as it is to-day. It is much the same plan as

the cathedral at Rouen, only that that has been preserved, and this has been long abandoned. It is so curious to think of the choir which we saw yesterday, with its chapels and stained glass, and then to compare it with this roofless and windowless one, out of the tops of the walls of which fir-trees – big ones – are growing. You don't know what a strange sensation it is to see trees growing out of the tops of ruined walls the foundations of which were laid by Charlemagne's relatives. Edna and I felt very solemn, and Uncle was quiet ever so long, and then only said, "I vow!" The grass is growing in the nave and transept, and the big carved pediments stick up through the turf here and there, with moss and lichen clinging to the shadowy sides. The rows of pillars are pretty even, and the set of big arches above are mostly all there still. There were a third and a fourth gallery above, and although they are fallen away in places, still you can see exactly how it used to be. When you look away up to the fourth tier of columns, the main walls of the nave are still soaring higher yet; and when you follow the sky-line of their vastness, you see the two mighty towers rising, rising, straight up toward heaven, with the rooks whirling and circling about them and screaming in the oddest, most awfully mournful manner. I'm sure I shall never feel the same way again, not even if I live to be a thousand years old myself. I felt overcome; I felt a way that I never felt before. I don't know what I felt.

Uncle was delighted; he sighed with satisfaction. "This is the real thing," he said to Mr. Porter; "I like this. You can see that

there's been no tampering with *this* ruin." Mr. Porter looked up at the sky above and said: "I should say that there had been considerable tampering with this ruin. I will take my oath that the whole of the little town yonder was built with the stone taken from these walls and those of the monastery buildings."

Uncle is getting very nervous over Mr. Porter, Jr., because he walks around with Edna so much; so we were not allowed out of his sight during the visit, and didn't explore half as much as we wanted to. The little museum was really very interesting, and had the tombstone of one of Joan of Arc's judges. I feel very sorry for Joan's poor judges. They had to do as they were bid, and have been execrated for it ever since.

We came home late in the afternoon, and Mr. Porter found a telegram calling him to Brussels on business, so he and his son said good-by hurriedly and took a half-past-six train. Uncle said at dinner that it was a strange thing to see how, after forty-five years of seeing the world, a man could still be the same as when one had to do all his sums for him at school. We absorbed this luminous proposition in silence, and then Uncle looked severely at Edna and said that at the rate that things were progressing he wouldn't have been surprised to have had a John Gilpin in the family any day. We were struck dumb at this threat or prophecy or whatever was intended, and went meekly to bed. Edna had a letter from Lee and I had one from Harry. Lee didn't dare write me and Harry didn't dare write Edna because of Uncle. But they each sent the other their love.

Uncle wants to go to Gisors to-morrow.

P. S. I must add a line to tell you that Mrs. Braytree and the four girls have arrived. They saw Uncle on the stairs coming up, and all came straight to our room. They landed yesterday, and had a real good passage, only Eunice fell out of the berth and sprained her wrist. She has it in a sling. They had a hard time arranging about the dog, as the hotel didn't want him in the rooms. He is one of those dogs that look scratchy and whiny at the first glance. Mrs. Braytree has lost her keys, so she sat with us while the hotel people got a man to open her trunks. She says she's in no hurry to unpack, for she had so many bottles she's almost positive one cork at least must have come out. They entirely forgot to bring any hairpins and suffered dreadfully on shipboard on that account. They had trouble with one of their port-holes too, and Mrs. Braytree and Uncle are both going to carry crowbars at sea hereafter.

They are going to stay here a week. It's so nice to meet some one from home!

Always yours lovingly,
Yvonne.

V
UNCLE JOHN EN ROUTE

Rouen.

"Come on, girls, this is quite an expedition. I vow I shook a little when Mrs. Braytree suggested coming, too. Seven women to one man would be too many for comfort as a general thing; but your Uncle John never shows the white feather, so I only drew the line at the dog. Why the devil five women want to travel with one dog and eight trunks I can't see; but if I was Mrs. Braytree, I'd probably know more about it. Curious little creature, the cross-eyed one, isn't she? And that Pauline – always wanting to be somewhere else. I told her pretty flatly at dinner that if she couldn't get any more fun out of Rouen than by wishing it was St. Augustine, she'd better have stayed in New York. Anything but these fault-finders.

"Well, ain't you ready? I've sent the luggage along, and it seems to me that we ought to be following its good example. Lord knows, two days is enough to waste in an old hole like Rouen; I was wondering last night what we ever came for. I never was so cold anywhere in my life, and sleeping on a slope with a pillow on your feet isn't my idea of comfort at night, anyhow. I don't understand the moral of the scheme, and the pillow keeps sliding, and I keep swearing, all night long. Also, I can't learn to

appreciate the joy of standing on a piece of oil-cloth to wash. I must say that one needs to wear an overcoat and ear-muffs to wash here, anyhow. I was dancing under the bell-rope and ringing for hot water a good half-hour this morning. I'm going to write and have the asterisk subtracted from this hotel.

"Well, come on, if you're ready. Whose umbrella is that getting left by the door? Mine? I vow, I didn't remember putting it down. But no one can think of everything. Edna, is this soap yours? No? Well, I just asked. I seem to have left mine somewhere, and it's live and learn. Come on! come on!

"Good morning, Mrs. Braytree – Eunice – Emma – Pauline – Augusta. I reckon we'd better be hustling along pretty promptly. The train doesn't go until five minutes after the time, if we don't hurry. It's truly a pleasure having you join us, Mrs. Braytree. A little excursion like this makes such a pleasant break in the routine of sight-seeing, I think, and these quaint old – there, all get out now, I have the money. I'll take the tickets; we're all full-fare, aren't we? Or – how old is the little cross-eyed one? I *beg* your pardon, Mrs. Braytree, but I had to know in a hurry.

"There, come on! come on! Squeeze through. Se – ven women and one man. Hurry! we want a compartment, here – no, there. Run, Edna, and get ahead of that old lady; here's two umbrellas to throw crossways, and then you can tell her there's no room, and the law will uphold you. You look surprised, Mrs. Braytree, but I learned that little trick coming from Havre. I tell you, by the time I get to Paris I'll be on to every kind of game going. I

learn fast – take to Europe as a duck takes to water, so to speak.

"Well, we're off for Gisors. Great pleasure to have you with us, Mrs. Braytree; no more work to steer seven – Good Lord! there aren't but six here! Who isn't here? Edna's gone! What is it, Yvonne? I sent her ahead, did I? Oh, so I did, so I did. And of course she is waiting for us. Poor child! I hope she's not worried. As soon as we get out of the tunnel I'll hang out of the window and holler to her. Very convenient method of talking to your friends aboard, Mrs. Braytree; only I should think a good many would lose their heads as a consequence. However, as the majority of the heads would be foreigners', I don't suppose it would matter much in the long run.

"Speaking of Gisors, Mrs. Braytree, it's really a very interesting place – according to the guide-book. As far as I'm personally concerned, I'd be willing to take the time to go there to learn how to pronounce it. The workings of the mind which laid out the way to speak French don't at all jibe with the workings of the mind which laid out the way to spell it – not according to my way of thinking. There's that place which we've just left, for instance, – 'Ruin' as plain as the nose on your – on anybody's face, – and its own inhabitants can't see it – pronounce the R in a way that I should think would make their tongues feel furry, and then end up as if, on second thought, they wouldn't end at all.

"Yvonne, I wish you'd hang out and see if you see any of Edna hanging out. I declare, this is a very trying situation to be in. You don't know what a trip I had, Mrs. Braytree, trying to keep

track of these girls; and since we landed – well, I just had to call a halt in Havre and come off alone. Curious place, Havre, don't you think? See any one you knew there? We – who did you say? Why, that can't be, he's in Russia. Yvonne, didn't that young reprobate write you he was going to Russia? Yes, I thought so. Well, Mrs. Braytree says she saw him in Havre. Good joke his not knowing we were in Rouen; he'd have been down there in a jiffy, I'll bet anything. But your Uncle John is a rather tough customer to handle, and I expect that young man knows the fact, and so thought it best to give Rouen a wide berth. Not that I have anything in particular against young Reynolds, only I don't consider that any girl could be happy with him. And it's foolish to have a man around unless you can make him happy – I mean unless he can make you happy. My wife was very happy up to the time she developed melancholia – a sad disease, Mrs. Braytree. Yvonne, I wish you'd hang out and see if you can see anything of Edna.

Конец ознакомительного фрагмента.