



The Cevennes Journal
**ROBERT LOUIS
STEVENSON**

NOTES ON A JOURNEY THROUGH
THE FRENCH HIGHLANDS



About the Book

In September 1878, Robert Louis Stevenson travelled by donkey through the Cevennes region of France. For personal memory – and, as it happens, for literary posterity – the young Stevenson recorded copious notes on his journey as he travelled. Some of these witty and incisive impressions were subsequently published in *Travels With A Donkey*. The remainder, however, didn't find its way into print until the first publication of *The Cevennes Journal* in 1978, one hundred years later. This travelogue, which also includes several of Stevenson's previously unpublished sketches of the region, provides both a unique socio-historical document and an important piece of literature.

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THE CEVENNES JOURNAL

Notes on a Journey Through
the French Highlands

by

Robert Louis Stevenson

LIST OF DRAWINGS

done by Robert Louis Stevenson during his stay in Le Monastier

The drawings, now to be found in the picture section of this edition, were all sketched in August and September 1878. They are taken from Stevenson's own sketchbook, conserved in the Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library of Yale University. We wish to thank the curator of that collection for having kindly authorised their publication in the *Cevennes Journal*.

1. 'Le Monastier: Grand Suc de Breysse - Petit Suc de Breysse.'
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In the following edition of Stevenson's *Cevennes Journal*, everything printed in serif type was written in his notebook diary at the time of the journey. Text printed in san serif type was added later in view of the publication of *Travels With a Donkey in the Cevennes*. Furthermore, the chapter and section titles of the unpublished version were added to the *Cevennes Journal*.

PREFACE

One hundred years ago, in September 1878, Robert Louis Stevenson set out on the twelve-day walking tour through the southern French Highlands that he would later describe in his well-known *Travels With a Donkey in the Cevennes*. During his journey, Stevenson kept a diary in anticipation of a possible book or article. In a small careful hand, he inscribed his daily impressions on sixty-six blue-lined pages of a simple schoolboy's notebook. It is this notebook, the daily account of Stevenson's journey and the original manuscript of *Travels With a Donkey*, that is presented today as the *Cevennes Journal*.

Stevenson had bought the notebook in London prior to his arrival in France, and had already used the first two pages to begin an essay on the Pentland Hills, a region near Edinburgh where he had often taken long hikes. This essay, not included in the present edition, was later published as chapter ten of *Picturesque Notes on Edinburgh*. Soon after coming to the tiny Auvergnat town of Le Monastier-sur-Gazeille in mid August 1878, Stevenson began filling the body of the notebook with observations on the region and its inhabitants. These observations were pictorial as well as literary; Stevenson visited the surrounding countryside with sketchbook in hand, covering it with numerous landscapes and portraits. The oblong sketchbook, with twenty-six pencil drawings tinted in a pink wash, has been conserved in the Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript

Library of Yale University, and several of the drawings have been chosen for publication in the *Cevennes Journal*.

Busy with the completion of *New Arabian Nights* and *Picturesque Notes on Edinburgh*, Stevenson's first notes on Le Monastier were only a series of short choppy fragments that he hoped to use as the basis of an opening chapter of *Travels With a Donkey*. These notes may be found in this volume in the section 'Diverse Fragments'. An elaborate and carefully written rough draft of the planned chapter, under the tentative title of 'Travels With a Donkey in the French Highlands', is in the Silverado Museum, in Monterey, California, while the third and fourth pages of a similar draft are located in the Beinecke Library. Stevenson abandoned this initial idea, however, probably for reasons of structure and balance. A first chapter on his month-long, essentially sedentary stay in Le Monastier would have placed too much emphasis on the northern portion of his travels, and most certainly would have clashed with the sensation of movement wished for in the description of the journey itself. Thus, Stevenson's notes taken in September 1878 became much later the basis of the short essay 'A Mountain Town in France', reproduced in this volume as it appeared in *The Studio*, special Winter Number, 1896-97.

Once Stevenson's actual journey began on September 22, his previously random jottings became more structured as he sought to provide a clear account of his trip. The text, which forms the core of the *Cevennes Journal*, is distinctly organised by date and the author's concern for literary style is evident. Even as he laboured through the wilds of southern France with his donkey, Stevenson was composing a finished manuscript, almost ready for publication upon his return to Edinburgh in December 1878. His natural talent as a writer is amply demonstrated by the fact that entire portions of his hastily written journal were reproduced virtually without change in *Travels With a Donkey*.

This is not to imply, of course, that the two works are strictly identical. Stevenson had a keen sense of what pleased the reading public and was well aware of what had to be added or removed from the original manuscript in view of its publication. Stylistic revisions were the most frequent, but Stevenson also suppressed several passages of a more personal nature, particularly pertaining to his cruel treatment of Modestine, his donkey, his ambivalent reaction to monastic life at Our Lady of the Snows, and his many spiritual and physical crises suffered en route. Additions to the manuscript were generally of historical interest, since Stevenson had largely ignored this aspect in his *Journal*. For the most part, they concerned the mysterious Beast of Gévaudan, or the eighteenth-century War of the Camisards between Protestants and Catholics in the Cévennes. References to both are numerous in the published version, but the *Journal* says nothing of the Beast and refers only once to the Camisards. Many of these post-journey additions are included in the present edition; they are printed in sans serif type. Otherwise the *Cevennes Journal* represents the integral manuscript of Stevenson's notebook, as it was written in September–October 1878.

The publication of the *Cevennes Journal* grew out of the combined Franco-Scots centenary celebration of Stevenson's *Travels With a Donkey in the Cevennes*. The Club Cévenol, a non-profit association of people native to or interested in the Cévennes Mountains, formed an editorial committee to prepare a centennial edition of Stevenson's original manuscript, as found in the Huntington Library of San Marino, California. Gordon Golding was charged with the preparation and editing of the English text, Jacques Blondel, Professor of English Literature at the University of Clermont-Ferrand, with its French translation, and Jacques Poujol with the overall co-ordination of the project. The French version, published in May 1978 by the Club Cévenol and the Editions Privat, contains a number of introductions

and articles designed to present Stevenson to the French public. These were not retained in the English edition of the *Cevennes Journal*, since it was felt that for the English-speaking public, particularly in Scotland, Stevenson's journal could speak for itself.

Editing a manuscript is an enterprise which incurs debts of gratitude too numerous to mention, and this one is no exception. But among the many people who patiently provided information several must be singled out by name. The erudition and fervour for all things Stevensonian of William McCulloch of Edinburgh and Ernest Mehew of London allowed the editors to comprehend many an elusive phrase, and to clear up a problem so arduous as to have been considered insoluble. Roger G. Swearingen of the Silverado Museum furnished a rich bibliography of Stevenson's manuscript works. From the very beginning of the project, Robin Hill of Edinburgh continuously provided valuable information on Stevenson's life and work. Other individuals who aided in tracking down difficult references and identifying people and place names in the *Journal* were Father Robert, archivist of the monastery of Nôtre-Dame des Neiges, and the descendants of Mme Pantel in La Vernède and those of Pastor Vier in Florac. Lastly, the personnel of the Huntington Library of San Marino, California, and of the Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library of Yale University were most helpful in fulfilling requests for Stevensonian documents, and in giving their permission to publish them.

Many written sources were also consulted for this edition. In the first section on 'A Mountain Town in France', several notes were borrowed from Auguste Jouret, 'Robert Louis Stevenson et son âne dans les Cévennes en 1878', *La Revue des enfants et amis de Villeneuve-de-Berg* (Ardèche), Aubenas. M. Jouret is the grandson of Mme Morel, Stevenson's landlady in Le Monastier. The standard references for notes on the War of the Camisards were

André Ducasse, *La Guerre des Camisards* (Paris: Hachette, 1970) and Philippe Joutard, *La légende des Camisards* (Paris: Gallimard, 1977). For the journey itself, the brochures of two British followers of Stevenson were quite helpful: Robert T. Skinner, *In the Cevennes Without a Donkey* (1926), and Andrew J. Evans, *Across the Cevennes in the Footsteps of RLS and his Donkey* (1965).

Lastly, the list of debts incurred would not be complete without mentioning the essential contribution of Professor Arthur Knodel, who uncovered Stevenson's manuscript in the Huntington Library and first brought it to the attention of the Stevenson Centenary Committee.

With an effort only fellow hikers can appreciate, Stevenson managed to write up each day the details of his journey. Inspiration seems to have come most often in the morning when, fully rested, he completed his journal at the inn where he had spent the night, or at the restaurant where he was to lunch. This habit explains in part his late starts from such towns as Langogne, Florac and Saint-Germain-de-Calberte. Attentive readers comparing *Travels With a Donkey* and the *Cevennes Journal* will note that Stevenson did not always find time to write all that he would have wished. The long conversations he enjoyed with people met along the way sometimes prevented him from noting them all verbatim in his journal. Then too, the quality and quantity of his notes varied according to the distance covered or the amount of fatigue felt by the author on a particular day. The sadly brief descriptions of Langogne and Florac, as well as the laconic notes on Saint-Germain-de-Calberte and Saint-Jean-du-Gard reflect only too well Stevenson's mental and physical exhaustion at various moments of his journey.

In general, Stevenson wrote only on the recto of his notebook's pages, reserving the verso for various notations such as expenses, poems, revisions of his text, and

calculations of elevation in feet. All these elements, for the most part omitted from the published version, have been regrouped in the *Cevennes Journal* under the heading of 'Diverse Fragments'. Certain revisions found on the versos have been incorporated into the *Cevennes Journal*, either where Stevenson himself indicated in the manuscript, or where they were finally placed in the published version. Except for the correction of spelling and punctuation, and the division of the text into chapters, this was the only liberty taken with the manuscript; it is published here in its entirety, just as Stevenson wrote it in that Cévenol autumn of 1878. In case of divergence between the manuscript and its published version the former was always preferred.

In order to distinguish easily between the two texts, two different sets of characters were chosen to designate them. Everything that Stevenson wrote in his notebook journal is printed in serif type; all that was added during the book's final preparation is printed in sans serif type. The essay 'A Mountain Town in France' is also printed in sans serif, as are four chapters of *Travels With a Donkey* not found in the notebook: 'The Donkey, the Pack, and the Pack-Saddle', 'Florac', 'The Last Day' and 'Farewell Modestine!'. Thus, by reading only those passages printed in serif type, the reader may follow Stevenson on his route, exactly as he described it at the time.

Gordon Golding

NOTES ON UNPUBLISHED PASSAGES

The publication of Stevenson's manuscript journal in an integral form, just as he wrote it, has led to a certain effacement of the difference between those portions of the manuscript that were preserved by the author in *Travels With a Donkey* and those that were omitted, thus remaining unpublished to this day. Most differences were stylistic in nature, or concerned with the switch from the personal voice of the diary to the more impersonal tone of the travel book. The manuscript does contain, however, several long passages, omitted by Stevenson for various reasons from the published version, which are presented here for the first time. The most important of these may be found in the following places:

fn1 'A whole country . . . lonely voice.'

fn2 'As I passed through . . . against time.'

fn3 'The youngest daughter . . . Made all right.'

fn4 'O better in the great wide world . . .' (Poem)

fn5 'At five in the morning . . . I was in the right.'

fn6 'I do not find time . . . Lady of the Snows.'

fn7 'these things have a flavour . . . with quiet minds.'

fn8 '*O sancta Solitudo!* . . . compromise of life.'

fn9 'Their patois . . . sheep cheeses.'

fn10 'I wish I could catch . . . like a natural object.'

fn11 'At any rate, the whole business . . . courts of law.'

fn12 'But black care . . . world and myself.'

fn13 'Perhaps the bad idea . . . clear a voice.'

A MOUNTAIN TOWN IN FRANCE

Le Monastier is the chief place of a hilly canton in Haute Loire, the ancient Velay.¹ As the name betokens, the town is of monastic origin, and it still contains a towered bulk of monastery and a church of some architectural pretensions,² the seat of an archpriest and several vicars. It stands on the side of a hill above the river Gazeille, about fifteen miles from Le Puy, up a steep hill where the wolves sometimes pursue the diligence in winter. The road, which is bound for Vivarais, passes through the town from end to end in a single narrow street; there you may see the fountain where women fill their pitchers, there also some old houses with carved doors and pediments and ornamental work in iron.

For Monastier, like Maybole in Ayrshire, was a sort of country capital, where the local aristocracy had their town mansions for the winter, and there is a certain baron still alive and, I am told, extremely penitent, who found means to ruin himself by high living in this village on the hills. He certainly has claims to be considered the most remarkable spendthrift on record. How he set about it, in a place where there were no luxuries for sale, and where the board at the best inn comes to little more than a shilling a day, is a problem for the wise. His son, ruined as the family was, went as far as Paris to sow his wild oats, and so the cases of father and son mark an epoch in the history of centralisation in France. Not until the latter had got into the train was the work of Richelieu complete.

It is a people of lacemakers.³ The women sit in the streets by groups of five or six, and the noise of the bobbins is audible from one group to another. Now and then you will hear one woman chattering off prayers for the edification of the others at their work. They wear gaudy shawls, white caps with a gay ribbon about the head, and sometimes a black felt brigand hat above the cap;⁴ and so they give the street colour and brightness and a foreign air. A while ago, when England largely supplied herself from this district with the lace called *torchon*, it was not unusual to earn five francs a day, and five francs in Monastier is worth a pound in London. Now, from a change in the market, it takes a clever and industrious workwoman to earn from three to four in the week, or less than an eighth of what she made easily a few years ago. The tide of prosperity came and went, as with our northern pitmen, and left nobody the richer. The women bravely squandered their gains, kept the men in idleness, and gave themselves up, as I was told, to sweethearting and a merry life. From week's end to week's end it was one continuous gala in Monastier; people spent the day in the wine-shops, and the drum or the bagpipes led on the *bourrées* up to ten at night. Now

these dancing days are over. '*Il n'y a plus de jeunesse,*' said Victor the garcon. I hear of no great advance in what are thought the essentials of morality, but the *bourrée*, with its rambling, sweet, interminable music, and alert and rustic figures, has fallen into disuse, and is mostly remembered as a custom of the past. Only on the occasion of the fair shall you hear a drum discreetly rattling in a wine-shop or perhaps one of the company singing the measure while the others dance. I am sorry at the change, and marvel once more at the complicated scheme of things upon this earth, and how a turn of fashion in England can silence so much mountain merriment in France.⁵ The lacemakers themselves have not entirely forgiven our countrywomen, and I think they take a special pleasure in the legend of the northern quarter of the town, called L'Anglade, because there the English freelances were arrested and driven back by the potency of a little Virgin Mary on the wall.

From time to time a market is held, and the town has a season of revival; cattle and pigs are stabled in the streets, and pickpockets have been known to come all the way from Lyons for the occasion. Every Sunday the countryfolk throng in with daylight to buy apples, to attend mass, and to visit one of the wine-shops, of which there are no fewer than fifty in this little town. Sunday wear for the men is a green tailcoat of some coarse sort of druggot, and usually a complete suit to match. I have never set eyes on such degrading raiment. Here it clings, there it bulges, and the human body, with its agreeable and lively lines, is turned into a mockery and laughing stock. Another piece of Sunday business with the peasants is to take their ailments to the chemist for advice. It is as much a matter for Sunday as church-going. I have seen a woman who had been unable to speak since the Monday before, wheezing, catching her breath, endlessly and painfully coughing; and yet she had waited upwards of a hundred hours before coming to seek help, and had the week been twice as long, she would have waited still. There was a canonical day for consultation; such was the ancestral habit, to which a respectable lady must study to conform.⁶

Two conveyances go daily to Le Puy, but they rival each other in polite concessions rather than in speed. Each will wait an hour or two hours cheerfully while an old lady does her marketing or a gentleman finishes the papers in a cafe. The *Courrier* (such is the name of one) should leave Le Puy by two in the afternoon on the return voyage, and arrive at Monastier in good time for a six o'clock dinner. But the driver dares not disoblige his customers. He will postpone his departure again and again, hour after hour; and I have known the sun to go down on his delay. These purely personal favours, this consideration of men's fancies, rather than the hands of a mechanical clock, as marking the advance of the abstraction, time, makes a more humorous business of stage-coaching than we are used to see it.

As far as the eye can reach, one swelling line of hilltop rises and falls behind another; and if you climb an eminence, it is only to see new and farther ranges behind these. Many little rivers run from all sides in cliffy valleys; and one of them, a few miles from Monastier, bears the great name of Loire. The mean level of the country is a little more than three thousand feet above the sea, which makes the atmosphere proportionally brisk and wholesome. There is little timber except pines, and the greater part of the country lies in moorland

pasture.⁷ The country is wild and tumbled rather than commanding; an upland rather than a mountain district; and the most striking as well as the most agreeable scenery lies low beside the rivers. There, indeed, you will find many corners that take the fancy; such as made the English noble choose his grave by a Swiss streamlet, where nature is at her freshest, and looks as young as on the seventh morning. Such a place is the course of the Gazeille, where it waters the common of Monastier and thence downwards till it joins the Loire; a place to hear birds singing; a place for lovers to frequent. The name of the river was perhaps suggested by the sound of its passage over the stones; for it is a great warbler, and at night, after I was in bed at Monastier, I could hear it go singing down the valley till I fell asleep.

On the whole, this is a Scottish landscape, although not so noble as the best in Scotland; and by an odd coincidence, the population is, in its way, as Scottish as the country. They have abrupt, uncouth, Fifeshire manners, and accost you as if you were trespassing, with an *'Ou'st-ce que vous allez?'* only translatable into the Lowland *'Whau'r ye gaun?'* They keep the Scottish Sabbath. There is no labour done on that day but to drive in and out the various pigs and sheep and cattle that make so pleasant a tinkling in the meadows. The lacemakers have disappeared from the street. Not to attend mass would involve social

degradation,⁸ and you may find people reading Sunday books, in particular a sort of Catholic Monthly Visitor on the doings of Our Lady of Lourdes. I remember one Sunday, when I was walking in the country, that I fell on a hamlet and found all the inhabitants, from the patriarch to the baby, gathered in the shadow of a gable at prayer. One strapping lass stood with her back to the wall and did the solo part,⁹ the rest chiming in devoutly. Not far off, a lad lay flat on his face asleep among some straw, to represent the world element.

Again, this people is eager to proselytise; and the postmaster's daughter¹⁰ used to argue with me by the half-hour about my heresy, until she grew quite flushed. I have heard the reverse process going on between a Scots woman and a French girl; and the arguments in the two cases were identical. Each apostle based her claim on the superior virtue and attainments of her clergy, and clenched the business with a threat of hell-fire. *'Pas bong prêtres ici,'* said the Presbyterian, *'bong prêtres en Écosse.'* And the postmaster's daughter taking up the same weapon, plied me, so to speak, with the butt of it instead of the bayonet. We are a hopeful race, it seems, and easily persuaded for our good. One cheerful circumstance I note in these guerilla missions, that each side relies on hell, and Protestant and Catholic alike address themselves to a supposed misgiving in their adversary's heart. And I call it cheerful, for faith is a more supporting quality than imagination.

Here, as in Scotland, many peasant families boast a son in holy orders. And here also, the young men have a tendency to emigrate. It is certainly not poverty that drives them to the great cities or across the seas, for many peasant families, I was told, have a fortune of at least 40,000 francs.¹¹ The lads go forth pricked with the spirit of adventure and the desire to rise in life, and leave their homespun elders grumbling and wondering over the event. Once, at a village called Laussonne, I met one of these disappointed parents; a drake who had

fathered a wild swan and seen it take wing and disappear. The wild swan in question was now an apothecary in Brazil. He had flown by way of Bordeaux, and first landed in America, bareheaded and barefoot, and with a single halfpenny in his pocket. And now he was an apothecary! Such a wonderful thing is an adventurous life! I thought he might as well have stayed at home; but you never can tell wherein a man's life consists, nor in what he sets his pleasure: one to drink, another to marry, a third to write scurrilous articles and be repeatedly caned in public, and now this fourth, perhaps, to be an apothecary in Brazil. As for his old father, he could conceive no reason for the lad's behaviour. 'I had always bread for him,' he said; 'he ran away to annoy me. He loved to annoy me. He had no gratitude.' But at heart he was swelling with pride over his travelled offspring; and he produced a letter out of his pocket, where, as he said, it was rotting, a mere lump of paper rags, and waved it gloriously in the air. 'This comes from America,' he cried, 'six thousand leagues away!' And the wine-shop audience looked upon it with a certain thrill.

I soon became a popular figure, and was known for miles in the country. *Ou'st-ce que vous allez?* was changed for me into *Quoi, vous rentrez au Monastier ce soir?* and in the town itself every urchin seemed to know my name, although no living creature could pronounce it.¹² There was one particular group of lacemakers who brought out a chair for me whenever I went by, and detained me from my walk to gossip. They were filled with curiosity about England, its language, its religion, the dress of the women, and were never weary of seeing the Queen's head on English postage stamps or seeking for French words in English journals. The language, in particular, filled them with surprise.

'Do they speak patois in England?' I was once asked; and when I told them not,

'Ah, then, French?' said they.

'Then,' they concluded, 'they speak patois.'

You must obviously either speak French or patois. Talk of the force of logic - here it was in all its weakness. I gave up the point, but proceeding to give illustrations of my native jargon, I was met with a new mortification. Of all patois they declared that mine was the most preposterous and the most jocose in sound. At each new word there was a new explosion of laughter, and some of the younger ones were glad to rise from their chairs and stamp about the street in ecstasy; and I looked on upon their mirth in a faint and slightly disagreeable bewilderment. 'Bread', which sounds a commonplace, plain-sailing monosyllable in England, was the word that most delighted these good ladies of Monastier; it seemed to them frolicsome and racy, like a page of Pickwick; and they all got it carefully by heart, as a stand-by, I presume, for winter evenings. I have tried it since then with every sort of accent and inflection, but I seem to lack the sense of humour.¹³

There were of all ages; children at their first web of lace, a stripling girl with a bashful but encouraging play of eyes, solid married women, and grandmothers, some on the top of their age and some falling towards decrepitude. One and all were pleasant and natural, ready to laugh and ready with a certain quiet solemnity when that was called for by the subject of our talk. Life, since the fall in wages, had begun to appear to them with a more serious air. The stripling girl