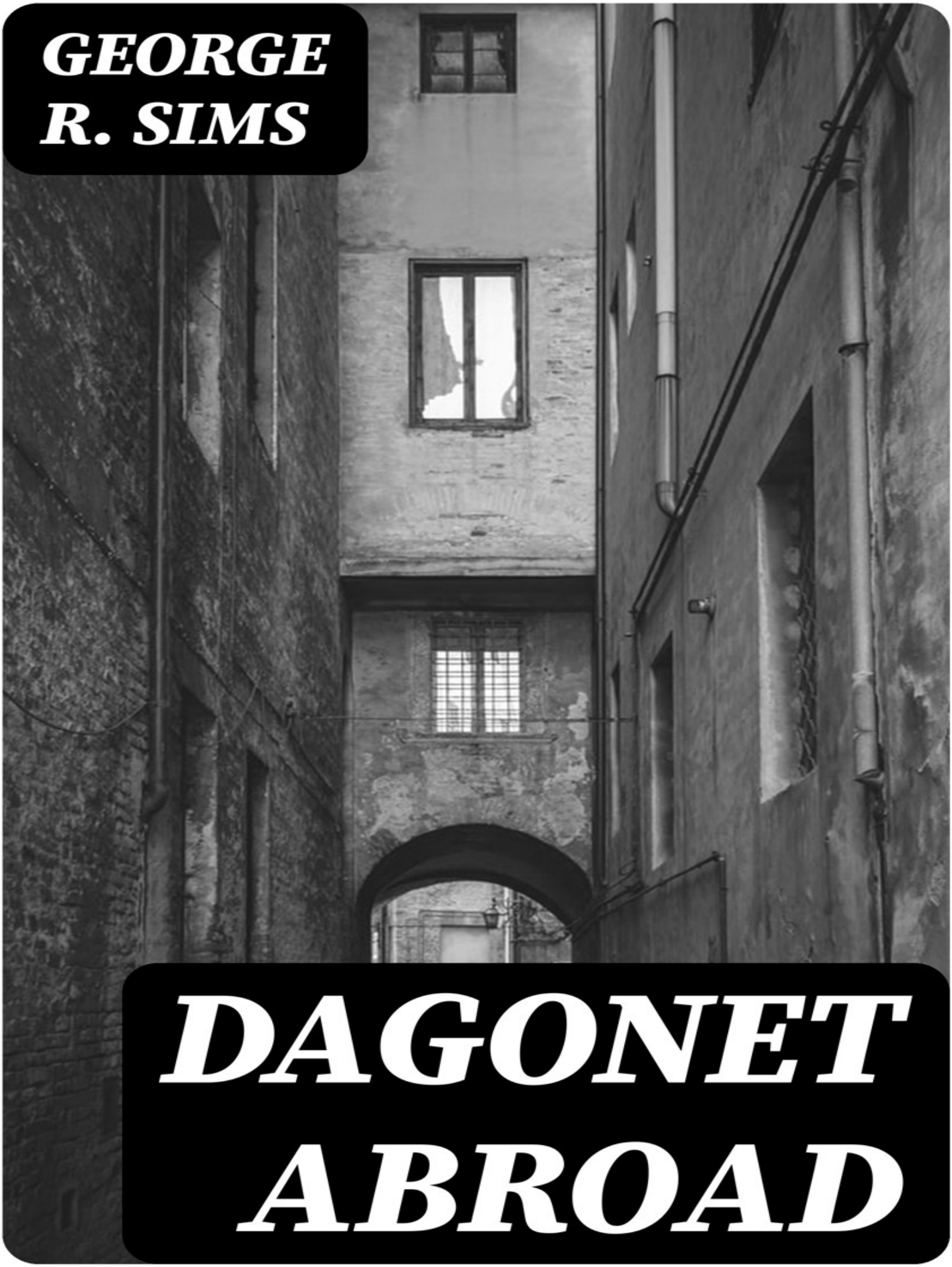
GEORGE R. SIMS



DAGONET ABROAD

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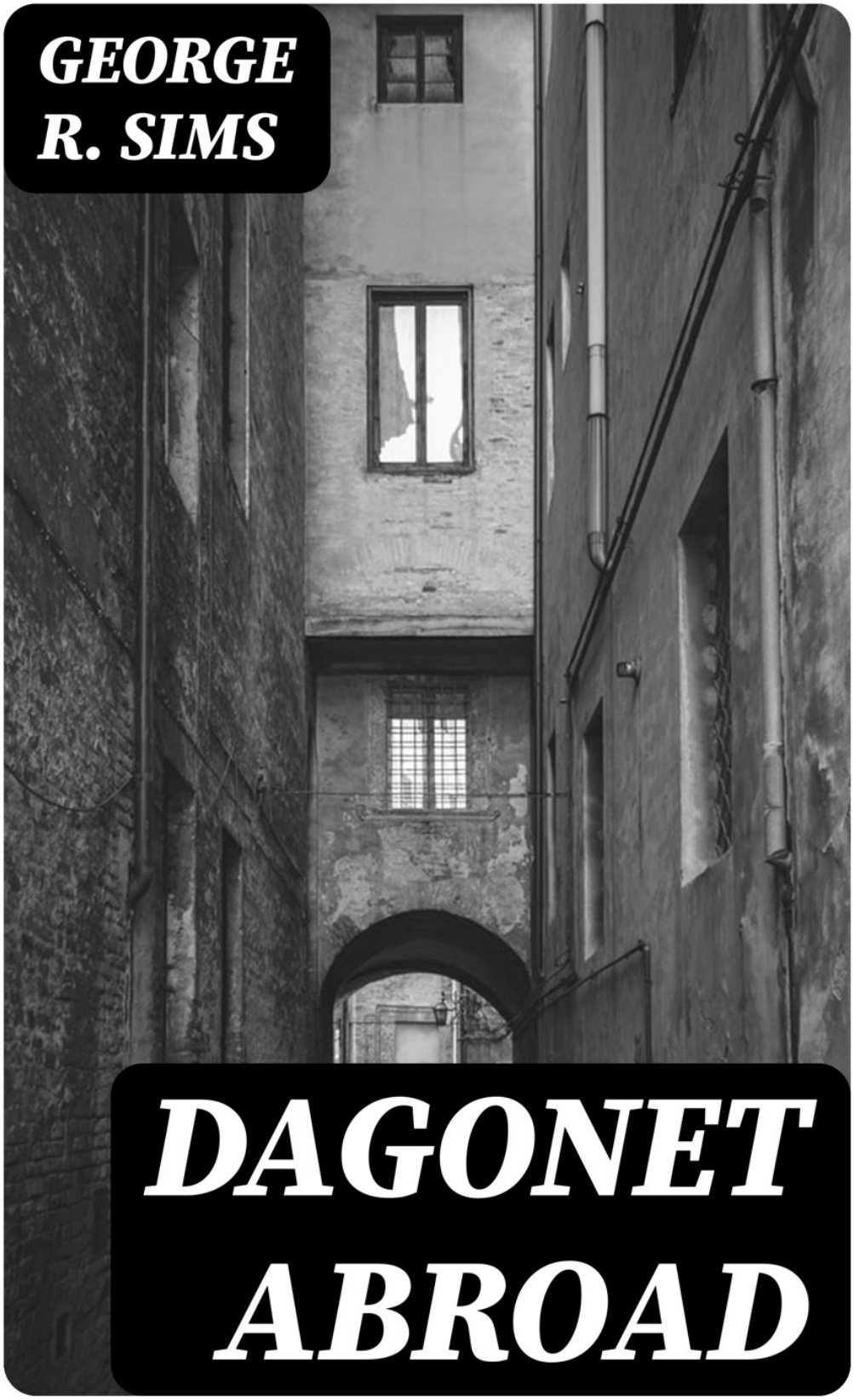

DAGONET ABROAD

George R. Sims

Dagonet Abroad

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PREFACE

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If ‘Dagonet Abroad’ is found to be mainly a record of personal adventure, my excuse must be that I have always endeavoured to attend to my own business and leave other people’s alone. I have described the cities and peoples of Europe entirely from my own personal observation. In no instance have I described a country without visiting it. I trust that this admission will not in any way injure my reputation as a traveller, or as a journalist.

GEO. R. SIMS.

London,

September 1, 1895.

DAGONET ABROAD

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CHAPTER I.

IN BORDEAUX.

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I AM in Bordeaux in February, and in a hotel; which hotel I am not quite sure. Over the top of the front door it is called ‘Hôtel de la Paix,’ on the left side of the door it is called ‘Hôtel des Princes,’ on the right side of the door it is called ‘Hôtel de Paris.’ It is three single hotels rolled into one; but its variety of nomenclature is slightly confusing. It is nice to be in so many hotels all at once, but I hope they won’t all send me in a separate bill. The key to the enigma is this: Many hotels in Bordeaux have failed, or given up business. The landlord of *my* hotel has bought the goodwill of each, and stuck its title up over his own front door.

It is early in the morning and bitterly cold when I arrive, but as the day advances it gets aired. The sun comes out in the heavens and slowly gathers strength. By noon the streets are bathed in a warm glow. Bordeaux has changed from the frozen North to the sunny South. It is no longer Siberian; it is Indian. The pavements that were frozen with the cold in the early morning are now baking with the heat. I fling off my ulster, and I light a cigarette and stroll forth, airily clad, to bask and revel in the golden sunlight.

At the corner of the street I come upon a great crowd dressed in black. They are waiting for a funeral. Presently a modest little open hearse draws up. It is drawn by two horses covered from head to tail in rusty black clothing. Two men in faded bottle-green coats jump off, and go into a

house. Presently they return with a poor, cheap, common coffin. They place it on the hearse, and throw a faded, rusty-looking pall over it. Then one of the men returns to the house, and comes back with a big wreath of yellow immortelles. On this is executed in black beads the legend, ‘To Raoul Laval; from his friends of the Bureau.’

I mix with the crowd. I inquire who was this Raoul Laval who is starting on his journey to the great Terminus. ‘An employé, monsieur, in the great shop yonder,’ is the answer. ‘So this is the funeral of a little clerk in a big shop,’ I say to myself. ‘Why, then, this big crowd?’ The hearse starts. Then, to my astonishment, I behold this great crowd form behind the hearse—old men and women, young men and maidens, two and two, until the line of procession reaches as far as the eye can see. The hearse is a black dot far away, and still the mourners fall in and follow the little clerk to his grave. There are four gentlemen who hold the tasselled cords of the pall. These are the proprietors of the great emporium. Then come the relatives—Raoul’s mother and his wife—then all the gentlemen in the office, then the gentlemen behind the counter and the smart shopgirls and the humble little workgirls, the porters and the packers, and the needlewomen, and the coachmen who drive out the carts, and the boys who deliver the parcels. Every living soul, great and small, rich and poor, all who earn their daily bread in that big drapery house where Raoul Laval was a humble clerk, have turned out to-day to do him honour and to see him home.

Slowly the long line of mourners (I count 760) passes on its way up the broad street until it is out of sight. I am left

alone looking after it. Not quite alone, for an old man, who leans upon a stick and is bent with age, stands beside me, and shades his time-dulled eyes from the fierce sun, and peers through the distance to get the last glimpse of the fast-vanishing cortége. ‘It is an honour to him, poor fellow!’ I say to the patriarch, as we turn away together; ‘a great honour for the whole firm to have followed him like this.’ ‘Yes, monsieur,’ he answers, ‘it is an honour; but he deserves it. He has been a faithful servant to the firm for twenty years, and everybody respected him. We shall all miss him now he is gone.’ ‘Ah! you are of the firm, too?’ ‘Yes, sir; I am the concierge. Poor Monsieur Raoul! Always a kind word for everybody, he had; and always at his post, monsieur—always at his post. The firm has lost a brave fellow—God rest his soul!’

Our ways divided; the old concierge went back to the shop, and I strolled on to the busy quay, teeming with colour and movement and life. But though I looked on the great river with its forest of masts, and listened to the babble of the thousand labourers on the quay as they loaded and unloaded the mighty ships, my thoughts were with the little clerk of the big drapery shop who was having so grand a funeral.

Yes, a grand funeral. The horses were broken-kneed, the coffin was cheap and common, the pall was threadbare and faded; but that great crowd of genuine mourners was something that a monarch might have envied. For every man and woman, every boy and girl in that long line of witnesses to his worth, loved and respected the man. Happy Raoul Laval! Lucky little clerk to have managed your life so

well! How many of us whose names are known to fame—how many of us who fret and fume, and wear our hearts out in the battle for renown—would fall back into the ranks, and toil on quietly as you did to gain such love and respect and sympathy when our work is done, and we are put to bed to rest through the long dark night that must be passed ere we awaken to that brighter day which no living eyes may see!

Bordeaux is big and clean, and strikes one as a healthy town. The streets are wide and well kept, and parks and open spaces are plentiful. The people of Bordeaux have a healthy, happy, prosperous look. They walk briskly, instead of slouching about like the people of Marseilles. In fact, Bordeaux is the exact opposite of Marseilles. If you particularly wanted to see what cholera was like, and had to pick out a town where there was a fine chance of getting it, you couldn't do better than try Marseilles. If you wanted to escape from the epidemic, and get to a town where there was the least probability of its following you, you couldn't do better than settle in Bordeaux. I can't put the difference between the two towns in a more striking way than that.

The French equivalent of 'carrying coals to Newcastle' is 'carrying wine to Bordeaux.' You haven't been in Bordeaux five minutes before the presence of an enormous wine trade makes itself felt. Wine stares at you and confronts you everywhere. The wine lists in the hotels are huge volumes. Hundreds of varieties of wines, red and white, are elaborately set out. First you have the names of the 'cru's,' then the year, the price, the proprietors, and the place where the wine was bottled. You can read down a whole page of red wines, the cheapest of which is 25 francs a

bottle, and the dearest 100 francs. These wine lists, which are handed to you in every hotel and restaurant, are magnificently bound in morocco and lettered in gold, and it is set forth that the ‘cellars’ from which you are drinking belong to a house founded so many years after the Flood, and that it has ‘a speciality for the grand wines of Bordeaux, bottled at the châteaux, with the mark of their authentic origin on the corks, capsules, and labels.’

If ever one drinks genuine ‘Bordeaux,’ it ought to be at Bordeaux. At Yarmouth one does not suspect the freshness of the bloater; in Devonshire one blindly accepts the cream; at Banbury nothing can shake one’s faith in the cake; and at Whitstable one does not say to the waiter at one’s hotel, as he hands you the oysters, ‘Waiter, are these *really* natives?’ At Bordeaux I was prepared to gulp down even the *vin ordinaire* with the sublime faith of a Christian martyr; but, lounging on the great quays of Bordeaux, my faith sustained a shock from which it will never recover, and this is how it happened:

I am of a curious and inquiring turn of mind. When I saw great ships being unloaded, and casks of wine being piled high upon the quays, I said to my companion, ‘Albert Edward, mon ami’ (Albert Edward are the Christian names of my travelling companion), ‘tell me is not this strange? Behold, here are vessels which are actually carrying wine to Bordeaux! Go and gather information.’ My companion departed, and presently returned armed—nay, actually bristling—with facts.

The wine which we saw was wine imported from Spain. Enormous quantities of common Spanish wines are brought

periodically from Spain to Bordeaux, and are there mixed with the ‘wines of the country.’ This discovery was a great blow to me; but I had a still greater blow when I found tremendous cargoes of all sorts of chemicals being unloaded, and I learnt that these also were imported for the purpose of manufacturing Bordeaux wines. Of course, the high-priced old wines are above suspicion; but I don’t think I shall ever recover my faith in the *vin ordinaire*, after seeing that tremendous importation of Spanish wines and chemicals.

The fact is that Bordeaux has for a long time past been unable to meet the tremendous demands for its wines. The phylloxera has further increased the difficulty by ravaging the vineyards. So Nature having failed, Art steps in to supply the deficiency.

For the terrible spread of the phylloxera the growers were probably themselves originally to blame. They had been interfering with nature. The farmers in some countries have come to grief again and again from the same cause. Their crops have been destroyed by insects because they (the farmers) slaughtered all the small birds who would have kept the insects down. Everything in nature has its uses, and is meant to keep things in proportion. The world only prospers so long as we eat one another. Directly we upset the equilibrium of nature, we must pay the penalty. Half the diseases and epidemics which ravage the world are caused by the selfishness of man in endeavouring to work that willing horse, Nature, to death.

My hotel is exactly opposite the Grand Theatre of Bordeaux. The theatre is a magnificent building, and worthy

of any capital. It stands alone in the centre of an immense square. This theatre was in 1871 the seat of the French Government, and here the Chamber of Deputies sat. It is very nice to live opposite a grand theatre, because you can pop across the road after dinner, and there you are, don’t you know.

While I was in Bordeaux a grand opera company had possession of the theatre, and it was for this reason that I presently found out that there are also *dis*advantages in living in a hotel opposite a grand theatre. I had just settled down to my work, when I was startled by female shrieks in the next room to me. I imagined that a murder was being committed, and I rushed to the keyhole. But the shrieks suddenly became melodious, and then merged into shakes and cadenzas and trills, and general vocal gymnastics of the high Italian style. It was the prima donna of the opera company practising for the evening. She practised all the morning and all the afternoon, and it was past seven in the evening before she left off.

It was very interesting at first to hear all those lovely top notes gratis, but when a lady in the room on the other side of me commenced the same diversion in a rich contralto, and the gentleman in a room on the other side of my corridor began to sing in a basso profundo, and a gentleman up above me, who was the leading violinist, began tuning his fiddle, and a gentleman somewhere else in the hotel practised a solo on the trombone, being engaged for a private party after the opera, I began to gather together my writing materials, and rang the bell for the waiter, and inquired if he could direct me to a hotel, a little way out of

town, at which the members of an opera company were not likely to put up.

The soprano lady in the next room to me was Mdlle. Isaak, and she travelled with a nice old mama and a dear old papa. Mama and papa accompanied her everywhere, and when they were in their own room they sat and applauded her shakes and runs vigorously with their feet and their hands. They all three came down and dined opposite me in the restaurant, and even between the courses Mdlle. Isaak hummed a little aria from the opera, and papa kept time with his fork on his wine-glass.

I had grand opera all day, and long after midnight I was suddenly aroused from my slumber by a terrific operatic duet in the next room. The tenor had returned to supper with the soprano family, and he and the lady were obliging mamma and papa with the duet they were going to sing together on the morrow. When they had finished I rose stealthily, and crept to the keyhole and hissed through it like a hundred discontented first-nighters. I would have paid my hotel bill twice over to have seen the faces of mamma and papa when that unwelcome sound burst upon their startled ears.

I have told you what beautiful sunshine we had at Bordeaux, and how nice and warm it was in the daytime. As long as the sun kept out it was lovely; but oh, when the sun went down! They gave me a beautiful, large, lofty room at the hotel, with doors and windows all over it. After dinner I went up to it to try and write, and then I found that Siberia had come again. I put great logs of wood upon the fire, and blew them with the bellows till the flames roared up the

chimney; but still I shivered in the icy blasts that blew through every crevice. I put on my ulster, I dragged the blankets from the bed, I ran races round the room, and practised the Indian clubs with a heavy portmanteau in each hand; but still I felt my blood congealing, and the horrors of the early morning came back again. In this dilemma my companion's Soudan experiences stood us in good stead. (He was with Gordon in the expedition of '76-'77.) He took our walking-sticks and umbrellas, and with these and the blankets and the rugs he rigged up a nice, comfortable tent in front of the fire. Sitting in this tent in our big room we at last got warm, and my fingers were able to hold a pen.

People who have not travelled find it difficult to believe how cold it can be at night in places which are hot during the day. Houses in these places are arranged to keep out the warmth, and in consequence they let in the cold. A Russian gentleman who was shivering in Rome said to me one evening: 'Ah, in my country we *see* the cold; in Italy we *feel* it.' It is a fact that in a really cold country you can always keep yourself warm, while in a warm country you find it extremely difficult to prevent yourself feeling cold.

I think we saw everything in Bordeaux except the Zoological Gardens, and we didn't see these for a reason. At the hotel they gave me a local guide-book, which duly set forth the wonders of the town. A whole page was devoted to the Zoological Gardens. Here, the book informed the traveller, were to be seen lions and tigers and elephants, all sorts of dogs and monkeys and serpents and rare birds. Moreover, on Sunday afternoons, it stated, there was always a grand concert and a children's ball. 'Ah!' said I to myself,

‘this is the thing for Sunday afternoon. Let us away to the lions and tigers and the children’s ball.’ We hailed a chariot which was on the rank—a regular Lord Mayor’s coach, with room for twenty inside, and magnificently decorated. True, it was about one hundred years old, and it dropped little bits of itself as it rattled over the stones. The coachman was eighty if he was a day, and he sat on the huge box-seat with his feet in great sabots stuffed full of hay. We were able in this immense vehicle to take driving and walking exercise together, for we walked round and round it inside arm-in-arm, while two bony and broken-kneed horses staggered along the streets with it. We told our coachman to take us to the Zoological Gardens. He said nothing, but drove on with us.

In about a quarter of an hour he put us down at the Jardins Publiques, and we entered. Beautiful hothouses, a fine museum, nice lawns and ponds, but no animals. We re-entered the dilapidated Lord Mayor’s coach, and said that was not what we wanted. We desired the gardens with the animals and the children’s ball. Good! Off we drove again.

Presently the old coachman, by a series of feeble gymnastic exertions, dropped himself off the box and came to the carriage-door. ‘Pardon, but would the gentlemen like to see the Museum of Paintings?’ We said we would do anything to oblige so venerable a man; and he took us to the picture gallery. Then we started once more, impressing upon our aged Jehu that the real object of our promenade *en voiture* was the local Zoo. This time he drove us for nearly three-quarters of an hour, and at last pulled up in a lonely suburb opposite a stone wall, and, landing himself by

easy stages to the earth, came hat in hand to the door and begged us to descend.

We descended. He then personally conducted us to a gap in the wall which was boarded up. In one board there was a little hole. ‘Behold, gentlemen,’ he said; ‘if you will give yourselves the trouble to look through that little hole you will see the ground which is being converted into a new public park. It will be finished in two years.’ We looked through and beheld a waste of brick and mortar and plank-strewn ground—and nothing more. ‘But this is not the garden with the animals and the children’s ball!’ I exclaimed, after catching a violent cold in my eye from the wind which blew through the little hole in the hoarding; ‘a truce to practical joking, mon vieux! To the Zoological Gardens at once, or I will swear at you.’ The old man bowed and smiled and grinned, and begged a thousand pardons. He would gladly conduct us to such a place, but he did not know where to find it.

Then I abused him. I told him his conduct was disgraceful—that he had no right to be a coachman in Bordeaux if he did not know the way to its most famous place of public resort. He replied that he had never heard of such a place. Then I called a police-officer, and interrogated him. He, too, knew of no wild animals in Bordeaux, and of no gardens such as I described. We interrogated every passer-by, including a postman. The latter told us that perhaps we meant Paris—there was a garden like that there. In despair we gave up the expedition, and returned in the Lord Mayor’s coach to our hotel.

There we triumphantly produced the local guide-book and read it aloud to the coachman, the concierge, the waiters, and the landlord. It made no impression. One and all declared on their honour, as citizens of Bordeaux, that no such place existed in the town. *And they were right.* I ascertained the fact by finding an old man who had lived seventy years in Bordeaux, and he told me that when he was a boy there was such a place, but it had disappeared this fifty years. And my guide-book is dated 1885! The editor is a good citizen. He refuses to allow the attractions of his native town to disappear from his pages. He wishes to paint his city to the greatest advantage. He is right from his point of view; but a guide-book which includes exhibitions which have been closed for fifty years—whose very sites have been built over—is not the best companion for a traveller who hires a carriage by the hour in order to drive about and see ‘everything.’

I didn’t trust to that guide-book any more. I quitted Bordeaux on Monday for Bayonne, *en route* for Biarritz. If you go to Biarritz direct, you must leave by a train at seven in the morning. I don’t love early rising, so I determined to take a later train to Bayonne, from which place you can get on to Biarritz at any time. The distance is 124 miles, and the train does it in seven hours. It was slow, but I did not regret the journey.

CHAPTER II.

IN THE BASQUE COUNTRY.

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BAYONNE, as all good little girls and boys who take prizes at school for geography and history are aware, is a fortified town commanding the passes of the West Pyrenees, and is a high road to Spain. It was here that the citadel which formed the key to an entrenched camp of Marshal Soult was invested by a portion of the army of the Duke of Wellington in 1814. The whole neighbourhood teems with memories of the halcyon days of the British arms. One comes to many a spot immortalized by a story which makes the Briton's heart beat faster with patriotic pride. The arms of England may still be seen upon the vault of the cathedral, and in the cemetery lies many a gallant officer and brave soldier of the Coldstream Guards who fell in the sortie of April 14, 1814. It was here—— But for further particulars look up your history. The dead past can bury its dead; my business is with the present.

I had a terrible fright coming from Bordeaux to Bayonne. The railway runs for a portion of the way through the Landes, a vast tract of heaths and ash-coloured sands and brackish streams. The inhabitants of this strange district lead hard and terrible lives. Food is scarce, and, what is worse, they can get very little water that is fit to drink, most of Sir Wilfrid Lawson's favourite beverage that finds its way to the Landes being salt and nauseous. I reached the Landes after the moon had risen. Owing to a little accident

on the line, we were detained at a wayside station for half an hour. I lit a pipe, and strolled outside and made my way down a kind of road that skirted a wild, uncultivated heath. The road was very lonely, and everything looked weird in the moonlight. I was alone, for my companion had sacrificed comfort to a tight boot, and declined to walk. All of a sudden I saw a gigantic shadow thrown on the ground in front of me. I looked up and beheld a man twelve or fourteen feet high stalking towards me with strides that covered ten feet of ground at a time. On, on the giant came at a terrific pace, and the great beads of perspiration broke out upon my brow. He was a wild-looking giant, with long black hair, and a huge sheepskin covered his body. His legs were the longest and the thinnest I had ever seen in my life. I didn't believe he was human. I made up my mind he was a creature from the fable world, and that I was about to be carried away to his haunt, wherever it may be, and devoured. I thought of Jack and the Beanstalk, and I expected the creature every moment to say, 'Fee, fo, fum!' and refer to the fact that the blood of an Englishman had saluted his olfactory organs. Just as I was going to drop on my knees and shriek for mercy, the giant suddenly halted, put a big pole which he carried in his hand behind his back, and stood stock-still in the moonlight, a living, breathing tripod.

I held my breath, and waited for the dénouement. The giant raised his cap, and asked me, in excellent French, if I could tell him what the time was. Then I took a calmer view of him, and suddenly it dawned upon me that my giant was

no giant at all, but merely a shepherd of the Landes mounted upon enormous stilts.

I am not the first traveller who has been startled by such an apparition. The inhabitants of this district walk upon stilts from childhood to old age. They would not be able to get over the sandy ground studded with prickly heather in ordinary boots and shoes. They stride over hedges and ditches in this way at a pace which no horse can keep up with, and while they are watching their flocks they stick a long pole in the ground, and, resting their backs against it, stop in this position for hours knitting stockings. The spectacle to the unaccustomed eye is one of the most startling that can be conceived. I told my stilted friend the time, and, wishing him good-night, walked back to the station; but it was a long time before I got over the ‘turn’ which his sudden apparition in the moonlight had given me.

In Bayonne I spent the Mardi Gras and had my ‘carnival.’ The people of the South know how to be merry and enjoy themselves, and they can disguise themselves humorously and in good taste. All night long the quaint streets were crowded with hundreds of masquerading revellers, and the fun was fast and furious. Many of the costumes were Spanish, and really fine pieces of colouring. The ladies were particularly charming, though I fancy some of them must have suffered the next day with rheumatism in the lower limbs, for the roads were damp and muddy, and the wind blew keenly. Wet roads and keen winds are hardly suited to extra short skirts and pink fleshings and dainty little shoes and head-dresses of gauzy lace.

They certainly were not rheumatic on the night of the Mardi Gras, for I procured a box at the theatre and watched the grand carnival ball at its height during the small hours. The masked ball at the Paris Opera House is a grander sight for variety and richness of costume, and the crowd of revellers is greater, but no ball that I have ever witnessed came near to this little Bayonne celebration in mirth and unforced gaiety and rollicking good humour. Heavens, how the natives danced! How they whirled round and round, and capered and kicked their legs up, and laughed and shouted, and threw themselves heart and soul into the maddest of mad quadrilles! I left the theatre at four in the morning, and the Bayonne lads and lasses, masked, disguised, and brilliantly costumed, were hard at it still; and when I got outside into the cool air of the early morning there were still dozens of masqueraders, male and female, promenading the public square arm-in-arm, with never a cloak or a wrap about them, yet not a single cough or sneeze broke in upon the merry laughter that floated on the cool and humid air. I hurried towards my hotel with my overcoat buttoned to my chin, and on my way I passed a little sylph in an airy pink ballet costume, seated on a stone bench, and listening to the old, old story from the lips of a youthful Spanish matador; and the little sylph in pink gauze had taken great care not to sit upon the delicate texture of her skirts. I could understand that the tender passion had warmed her heart, but it must have also spread a glow all over to enable her to listen to the vows of her swain in that costume and on that seat without a single chatter of the teeth.

From Bayonne, before going to Biarritz, I determined to push further into the interior of the Basque country, and see for myself this strange race of people as they are in their mountain homes. Many of the inhabitants of Bayonne are Basque, and all the servants in the hotels. From coachmen, waitresses (there are very few waiters in Basque hotels), peasants, and fishermen, I gleaned a good deal of useful information before starting; but years of study might be devoted to this extraordinary people, the aborigines of Western Europe, who have seen Celts, Carthaginians, Romans, Goths, Vandals, and Saracens pass away like shadows, and still linger on themselves, retaining their old traditions and superstitions and their old language, which is like no other European tongue. Of their habits and customs, and of their homes, I shall have something to say presently; but I cannot resist giving here a specimen of this extraordinary Basque language, which one hears to-day freely talked, not only in the mountains and the valleys, but in the busy streets of the big towns.

The following paragraph I take from a dialogue between two Basque peasants, which is printed in a Basque paper. An election in the department was fixed for February 27, and it is concerning the merits of the Conservative and the Republican candidate that Batichta and Piarres are engaged in animated converse:

> ‘Batichta eta Piarres.—Canden igande arratsaldean, bezperetaric lekhora, ikhus, en gintuen Batichta eta Piarres, bi etcheco jaun adiskide handiac, bici bicia mintzo pilota plaza hegal batean. Huna, gero entzun dugunaz, car cerasaten.’

The linguist will see how utterly unlike any European tongue these words are. There is a suggestion of Arabic now and then, and a slight resemblance to a few Finnish and Spanish words; but, as a whole, it is absolutely original. Here is the translation: ‘Last Sunday, in the afternoon, on coming from vespers, we noticed two landowners—Batichta and Piarres—two good friends. They spoke very excitedly at the corner of the Jeu de Paume ground, and here is what they said——’ Then follows a long political conversation.

The Basques are strongly anti-Republican. Hundreds of young men are leaving their villages and going to South America to avoid serving in the army of the Republic. Their fathers would rather let their children go from them to the great land beyond the seas than see them fighting for a Government which they detest. The Basque population swarms in such places as Ecuador, Uruguay, the Brazils, Chili, and the Spanish-speaking portions of South America. Many of them return in after-years, rich and prosperous, to their native mountain homes, and build magnificent châteaux on the site of the old paternal cottages. When they return they are called ‘Americans'; and this rather bothered me, as one day, near Cambo, I had grand villa after villa pointed out to me as the residence of an ‘American.’ By cross-questioning my guides I arrived at the truth. The ‘Americans’ were wealthy Basques who had made fortunes ‘across the seas,’ and come home to be great men among their poorer compatriots. There is a good deal of South America dotted about the Basque country. You come upon the ‘Auberge de Monte Video,’ and the ‘Hôtel de Buenos Ayres,’ and the ‘Auberge de Rio Janeiro.’ My

coachman’s sister has married and gone to Peru. My chambermaid’s brother is making money in Chili. An old fisherman who told me all the legends of St. Jean de Luz has two sons at Monte Video. Half the cottagers one talks to have friends and relatives in South America. South America is the El Dorado of the young Basque’s dreams. But when he has made his pile, he likes to come back to the old home, and spend it among his people.

With all these travellers among them, you would think the Basque peasantry would cease to be strongly conservative, that their ideas would broaden, and their exclusiveness would be broken down. But it is not so. They hate railways, and they hate the foreigners to come and disturb their peaceful ways. At Cambo the other day I fell in with a group of small landowners who were discussing the new railway schemes, and they were purple with passion that such an idea should have been mooted.

This conservative spirit among the Basque population is tremendously worked upon at election time. It will be interesting to all who study French politics (and who does not nowadays?) to see the sort of language which a local Conservative candidate indulges in at the expense of the Republic. Listen to this:

For God and for France.

Electors of the Basses Pyrénées,—The struggle begins; the banners are unfolded. On which side should good Catholics and simple and honest folks range themselves? Under the banner of the Republic?

No; for it is this Republic whose dead weight lies upon our unhappy country, and crushes out its life.

Who suppressed the catechism and prayers in our public schools?

Who has driven God from the army?

Who has driven the priest from the bedside of the sick and of the dying?

Who established the anti-Christian and immoral law of divorce?

Who, not content with paganizing France, has robbed her of her fortune and her glory?

Who for the last ten years has augmented by milliards the debt of France?

Who dishonours the armies of France by making them the Armies of the Republic?

Who has left us in all Europe without a single alliance?

Who has led us to the very brink of war, from which God preserve us?

The Republic!

Will you vote for the Republic?

No; you will vote for God and for France—

And for the Conservative candidate.

This inflammatory address is placarded throughout the Basque villages of the department concerned in the election. Crowds of the peasants stand round the walls and read it sympathetically.

Everything is bright and pretty and quaint and picturesque in the Basque country. The men, clean shaven and with fine Saracen faces, in their dark blue berets and red waistbands; the women, with their red, or blue, or black, or yellow toques; the half-Spanish, half-Swiss houses; the carts drawn by yoked oxen; the waggons and diligences

with their long string of Spanish mules; the crosses and signs upon the doorways; the Eastern custom of carrying gracefully water-jars upon the head; the tall wooden crosses on every hill and highway—all these things, thrown into relief by a background of glorious scenery, make an impression upon the traveller which does not soon pass away.

The waitress in my hotel, who is at once waitress, *femme de chambre*, and everything that is useful, is a wonder in her way. Of Spanish Basque origin, she has travelled with families during her early life, and she speaks Spanish, French, German, and Italian, as well as her native Basque. She likes the English, she tells me, and is very proud of the fact that she one day waited on the Prince of Wales when he came incognito to breakfast at the Hôtel St. Martin, at Cambo (a beautiful Basque village about twelve miles from Bayonne). No one knew the Prince, and he and his companions made a good breakfast, and then went about and talked with the villagers, and inspected the farms, and smoked their cigars out on the terrace of the hotel, which overlooks a landscape not to be matched in Switzerland. The Prince talked to my waitress, and asked her what this was in Basque and what that was, and questioned her as to the habits and customs of the country.

To all intents and purposes the royal party were simply English tourists, when suddenly a grand carriage drove up to the hotel. A French duke and another gentleman alighted, and, bowing themselves into the presence of the Prince, invited him to a grand breakfast at Biarritz; and a third gentleman arrived almost immediately with an invitation

from the English consul. ‘Thanks,’ said the Prince, laughing; ‘I have breakfasted excellently, and I’m going to spend the day here. Let me enjoy myself in this delightful spot, like good fellows, and go back and say you couldn’t find me.’

My *femme de chambre* ran on for a quarter of an hour eulogizing the Prince. She has the five-franc piece which he gave her when he paid his bill, and it is to go to her family when she dies as a precious legacy. She believes in royalty tremendously, for the royal family of Portugal, she tells me, always stop at this hotel, and they laugh and talk with her always like old friends. ‘Ah,’ she says, ‘your royal folks when they travel are simple and easily pleased, and they make no fuss. It is your people of small rank who are proud and cold and want so much attention. There is a little German countess who comes here in the season *en route* for Biarritz, and she travels with a dog and two servants, and she must have the whole of the first-floor reserved for her, and she will take nothing from the servants of the hotel. Her dog even will not notice us, but walks past us with his tail in the air.’

I let my *femme de chambre* chatter on. She tells me stories of the Empress Eugénie in the old Biarritz days, and tears come into her eyes as she speaks of the dead Prince Imperial. They worship the memory of the imperial family of France all round this district, and have many a pleasant tale to tell of the young lady who lived so much among them in the days before the love of an emperor raised her to the throne. When she has quite finished her royal and imperial anecdotes, I cross-question her as to Basque habits and customs and superstitions. My head is full of the beautiful

Basque legends and ghost stories which I have lately picked up, and I ask her if it is true that the people still believe in them. Then she informs me that her venerable father and mother are Basque peasants, and that they themselves believe in witchcraft and sorcery, and all the spells of the Evil One, and all the bad spirits that haunt the mountains and the woods. Her papa has, in fact, just moved out of his house on account of sorcery. He lost last year six cows, and he was so convinced that they had been bewitched, and that a spell had been worked upon his house, that he quitted it, and built another close by. He then sent for the priest to come and bless it, and after that he painted up a big white cross on the front door to keep the evil spirits from entering therein. 'Superstitious!' she says. 'Ah, mon cher monsieur, I have travelled and seen the world, and I know better; but when I go to my native village and say I do not believe in witches and charms and the evil spirits of the night, the peasants cross themselves, and my old father and mother weep and curse themselves for allowing me to leave home and become "une fille perdue."'

Wandering about the Basque villages, I have gleaned a few of their superstitions. No man, woman, or child among them will be out of doors after midnight, for they all believe that wicked spirits are abroad, and that terrible misfortune will befall anyone who meets them. On certain feast days they light a great fire, and the whole family kneels and prays round the burning wood until it is all reduced to ashes. These ashes are then carefully collected and scattered on the fields to make them fruitful. If any man neglects to

propitiate the spirits by strewing these ashes, his crops will fail.

One afternoon I come to a little auberge on the slope of a lonely mountain on the Spanish side. A great white cross is roughly chalked on the door, and outside sits an old woman talking with the landlord and his wife. They are listening with rapt attention, and cross themselves again and again. Presently the old crone goes away, and I sit on the bench and call for something ‘for the good of the house,’ and gradually get the landlord to tell us what the old lady was talking to him about. Then he tells us that last night the old crone saw the ‘arguiduna’ in the village graveyard—the ‘arguiduna’ of her son whom she buried a month since. The ‘arguiduna’ is the soul of a dead person when it takes the shape of a will-o'-the-wisp. This strange light came from her son’s grave, and stopped close to her. As she moved away it followed her, and accompanied her to the old home. On the threshold she stood still, and her son’s soul in its fiery form circled three times round her, and then slowly went up, up, up into the skies till it was lost among the stars. ‘And now,’ says the innkeeper, ‘the old mother is happy, for she has been in great trouble about her boy, for he had been wild and had done many evil things, and she feared it might not be well with his soul. Now that she has seen the “arguiduna” go up like that to the skies, she knows that his sins have been forgiven him, and that he is with the blessed. She will weep for him no more.’

People who live in great cities, where ideas rush at railway speed, and where the bustle and noise of modern life destroy romance and drive fancy from the field, find it