

THE PLEASURES OF TRAVEL

GENERALLY speaking, the greatest pleasure taken in travel isn't taken in travel at all, but in retrospection; or, more than that, even, in reminiscing. Next to a newly-laid parent, or a doting father whose callow offspring is beginning to have its wisdom and philosophy recorded for the edification of future generations and the desolation of this, there exists nowhere such another retailer of sayings and doings and seeings as the traveller. Even a sewing circle sits in silent admiration when a returned missionary takes the stand.

To gratify curiosity, to anticipate the desire of readers to look ahead and ascertain in advance the outcome of a story, and also to relieve any anxiety which otherwise might be felt concerning my fate, I shall combine my first and last chapters in a concise prelude, as follows:

PRELUDE

I WENT — I SAW — I RETURNED

I went, which I hardly need reaffirm. I saw!

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Heaven forbid that I should tell all I saw! I returned and am here — which should convince the most skeptical, and reassure the most anxious as to my fate; and what is more, I am here to indulge myself in one of the greatest pleasures of travel.

I wish I could have made the ocean voyage as short as this prelude just finished! The first days of my voyage I spent doing nothing, and the last days I spent in trying to undo from bottom, up, all the nothing I had done before.

I was a miserable seaman, and there was no health in me. For a moment only, and that toward the close of the last day, was I allowed even a twinge of happiness and that was when we sighted the green hills of old England, off Plymouth, and then the jealous night set in chill and rainy and shut out from sight the patched quilt of landscape, with its wooded spaces, tilled fields, grassy openings, sweeps of wavy grain and green capped chalk cliffs. But real happiness did come and that was when I found myself in a clean French bed, with candle snuffed and curtain drawn, and gentle sleep about to settle on my lids at 2:30 o'clock of a Sunday morning in Cherbourg.

Because I skip that part, it does not signify that the encounter with the French Customs officials on the cold stone quay, in the drenching rain of a dark

early morning, was without interest or humorous situation as well. But other encounters of mine with customs officials have been most replete with dramatic incident and have more deeply touched my pocket book.

The quaint tavern which contained the bed which contained me during the first few hours of my continental wandering is well worth a word to those who never have enjoyed the welcome of similar provincial hostelryes. I remember that I hardly could keep my eyes open from weariness as we rode in the little "bus" from the quay through narrow dark streets, between high gabled houses, rattling over rough cobblestones, till at length we dipped under a low archway and brought up in the courtyard of the inn. Our hostess, with a bevy of neat white-capped maids, awaited us with lighted candles in the little office upon the stone pavement on which the rain was dripping. The courtyard was lower than the street, the office pave was lower than the courtyard, very evidently, for the water was flowing in streams into the house and it was too dark for us to see where it did manage to escape at last. I wondered why so great a part of so small an office was kept out of doors on rainy nights, and I thought to solve the problem to my entire satisfaction in the morning. But in the morning the aspect of things was changed for the sun was shining brightly on the tile roofs

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about the court and upon the potted plants on the window ledges and the swinging casements reflected in every direction the cheery welcome of the bright sunshine of my first European day! The office seemed all right, perhaps a little damp as if from recent contact with scrubbing brush and broom, for the little rivers had, in some subterranean way "to the ocean run." In the courtyard I saw a soldier and from then till I took ship homeward bound I couldn't have slapped at a flea without hitting a soldier; not that all the fleas are on the soldiers, but that there is a soldier for every breath a fellow draws over there. The breakfast in the sunlit café was sweet and wholesome and blotted out the bitter memory of many an ocean steamship meal partaken of or passed by regretfully — anyway, lost to me. (I want to say parenthetically that my first ocean voyage was undertaken in extremely boisterous weather, and I had concentrated into one week of my existence all the misery which generally is allotted to one individual during the threescore and ten years it is given to man to suffer for the sins of his fathers. I wanted to die! and I said as much. That sounds strong, but it is the truth. If I should say "I simply died" — and we have heard the phrase used by good people not infrequently — that would be manifestly an untruth and, in this recital,

I shall studiously, if not conscientiously, avoid entering the region of manifest falsehood.)

To those that love the sea, a land journey seems tame; but to me the smooth, swift ride by express from Cherbourg to Paris through the garden of Normandy was like the fragrance of a delicious dream, after my rude rocking in the arms of Neptune. Apple trees were laden almost to breaking — even the props bent beneath the ripening fruit. Roses climbed over the hedges along the track and covered the walls and roofs of the way-station houses. Peach, pear and apricot branches brushed the roofs and sides of the coaches as we swept through the orchards, and the guard must have received many a quick rap from the boughs as he passed along the foot-board at the side to collect the tickets. It was one stretch of beautiful sunlit garden as far as the eye could reach until we touched the skirts of Paris soon to be lost in the ample folds. It was a quick transition from the half-timbered cottages with thatched roofs to the domes and mansards of the gay city. But we did not mourn the transition, in spite of the beauty of the country for our cry was “On to Paris!”

I will not try to describe Paris — better men have tried it and left but vague impression, like much impressionism, with distorted perspective and false

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colors. To describe Paris! I imagine it would be like trying to describe a rainbow to a man blind from birth! Paris is the storm center of French life. Along her boulevards eddy and swirl tides and counter tides of humanity. On the surface of the current bubbles dance lightly and gaily; below, dragged down and along by the irresistible force and unyielding clutch of the undertow are all the passions and vices that desire and pleasure and selfishness can beget in human breasts. If there is any worst to it all, the worst of it is that the vileness is in fascinating form. Even the sewers, they say, are clean and invitingly attractive! It is just to Paris, however, to say that all her cleanliness is not confined to her sewers, nor is it altogether wanting in the morals of her humanity.

It did not take many hours' strolling along these same boulevards, where one comes in contact with the entire scale of Parisian life, to fix one thing pretty firmly in my mind, and that was the absolute perfection of finish to everything to which the Frenchman applied his art, be that thing man, woman, child, painting, sculpture, building, or pavement, even. We may not like the style, but we must acknowledge here is style. Here is technical finish in the highest degree and it is controlled by a feeling for beauty and a knowledge of correct relation-

ships. Take a French woman, for instance; catch her with a dark skirt and light stockings. You can't. Catch her with straw bonnet and fur shoulder cape. You can't. Not only you can't catch her, she doesn't exist! From the toe of her boot to the tip of her glove finger, the French woman is perfectly harmonious in dress, and in the appreciation of this law of fitness she stands for her race in other matters.

You cannot stick a spade into the ground in Italy without unearthing a fragment of ancient art, a relic of a dead past. You can't lift your eye in France without beholding a finished piece of modern art, a vital factor of a living present. Even where ancient forms are touched it is with a spirit which brings them into harmony with the life of today.

I never could reconcile the classical architecture of Munich to the surrounding art and life; but take the Madeleine! Somehow that great, simple Roman façade never seemed an incongruous thing in Paris. Perhaps I am prejudiced! Well, perhaps I am. I came into Munich out of sunny Italy, in a snow storm with nose nearly frozen and fingers so stiff that I broke the mainspring when I went to wind my watch. All that did not seem to me to be quite consistent with bare heads and legs and floating togas! A German watchmaker mended the spring, but either the spring had contracted a cold or the

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cold had contracted the spring, for the watch began immediately to get irregular in its habits and refused thereafter to run twenty-four hours without two windings.

One cannot be much upon the streets of Paris without calling to mind the streets at home, and if he is a Chicagoan it will not be because of any similarity; but part of the difference is this: In our streets you are apt to be crowded to the gutter by the piles of goods laid out on the sidewalk for sale and display, and these piles always are surrounded by an eager crowd of bargain seekers each strong to save that one cent as though it were one hundred dollars. In Paris the chairs and tables of the open air cafés blockade the walks and at certain hours are filled with gay and festive lunchers, who talk over affairs of business or of pleasure, of politics or of society; and the man who happens to be passing just then without appetite for foods or affairs is forced to balance along the curb or walk in the gutter. Here it would mean mud. There the pavement is as smooth and clean as a floor.

It was during my second season in the capital that I attended the opening of the Great Salon. That is in May and is the social and artistic event of all Paris. Have you seen a penniless boy hanging wistfully about a show tent? That was I and the Salon,

metaphorically speaking. I had money enough, so far as that went, but I had no ticket and as the tickets that day, that great varnishing day, were complimentary and as nobody had offered to compliment me and I was too modest to seek a compliment, I stood simply looking. As I stood thus simply looking I was accosted by a dilapidated French gentleman with a hungry visage. "Would the Monsieur like to visit the Salon?" "Ye gods! was this a French angel in disguise? I believed so and hastened to bind its wings before it could get away. "You bet," I exclaimed (not strictly that for we conversed in the French gentleman's own tongue but it will serve to show my state of mind). "Indeed," I said, "it would be the greatest happiness of a life time." "I have a ticket!" "How much! wie viel? Quanto costa?" (I was excited) "combien!" (at last). "Five francs!" I fairly jumped. I would have given twenty but the French angel wasn't looking for a crown! So I paid five francs, took my ticket and passed in with all the grandees of Paris and the visiting world. I would have given another five francs to know then, what I know now, that I was in the same room with Marie Bashkirtseff and her paintings. However, I saw no paintings that day. My head ached so that I had to leave the galleries when, after four hours' counting, I had

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reached only 15,000 new, beautiful, individual spring toilets on as many vivacious women, and had not seen them all!

It is a night's ride from Paris to Switzerland. I took that ride before I had seen Paris to my entire satisfaction, because I heard that heavy snows were falling in the passes early in the season and, while I wanted to do Switzerland, as tourists say, I did not desire to come into personal contact with an avalanche. However, early as I did go I had an experience. To reach Chamounix I had intended taking a "voiture" over the "Tête Noir" but the guides declared the roads impassable to vehicles and I was advised to desist. But I didn't want to desist. That wasn't what I went to Switzerland to do. I could have desisted anywhere, in America, for instance, if I had cared to. So the good people of the tavern of Martigny were prevailed upon to furnish me with a guide and a horse. The horse was under size and in course of half a mile I had winded him completely. However, he stood me in fair stead though I went on foot the remainder of the journey which was some fifteen miles in all, six of them uphill, for I strapped my traps to the saddle, and when we came to a particularly wet place I used him for a ferry. We climbed up for hours, with eyes nearly blinded by the sunshine on the fresh snow. We would turn now and then to look back on the

little tavern below us, almost straight down, at first only a few feet and then a good many hundred, for the "Tête Noir" is one of the highest passes of the Alps. At last we reached the little hut which crowns the summit of the pass, and stopped on the wide bench to rest our tired limbs. I ordered two cents worth of wine for myself and brandy for my guide. As I took the glass, the wrinkled old hag who kept the hut said with a cracked smile, which may have been sunshine in other days, "Le Monsieur a du bon courage!" At first I thought she referred to the wine, and I eyed the glass suspiciously as I took a sip. It was all right, so I ordered two cents worth more. Of course, she referred to my courage in attempting the pass after the hard storm of the previous night which, indeed, had blotted out every sign of the path in many a ticklish place, and must have skinned over many a dangerous crevasse. And, too, there was the added danger of snow slides. I disclaimed any especial courage, told her it was one of my customary constitutionals and went on my way rejoicing. On the down side we encountered a snow storm. We did not encounter much of it for it was leaving the valley just below us; but we saw it raging there, and were not grieved to see it sweep around a mountain, at angles to our course, and out of sight. We stopped at a more pretentious hut for late dinner, and here was hatched a weak conspiracy

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to detain us for the night — bad roads, danger, etc. My guide was weakening. Two more brandies for him and we started. We lost our way, came back a rough mile and regained it, wandered uncertainly in the snow fields till suddenly we caught sight of the bald pate of Mont Blanc, and from that moment our guiding star was ever before us and all we had to do was to keep right on stumbling and slipping and ferrying and fording and sliding down into the valley where, long after dark, we saw the lights of Chamounix.

It was pleasant to see the lights of Chamounix. I was pleased to find other travelers in the inn. After a hot supper by the side of a big blazing fire, I went to bed. I was too tired to have any care for damp sheets. In fact, I never thought about sheets till morning when I found I was frozen in between those on my bed. I called for help and a hatchet and by noon I was dressed and downstairs. From where I lay in my bed of ice I could look up the whole side of Mont Blanc from bottom to top and the sight was glorious. I had the pleasurable sensation of being an integral part of one of the biggest things on earth. The sunshine which illumined that grand old crown was the same that flooded my bed chamber. The ice which glistened on that great bald pate descended in sheets and restrained gently but firmly my corporeal being, though my spirit

could soar at will, and my voice could demand freedom for my body. My voice prevailed and with a hatchet I cut Mont Blanc off from me and the great white mountain stands there sadly today, a maimed thing, while I am as whole and as happy as ever! Tourists mention the sad solitude of Mont Blanc—I have accounted for it!

Caesar went into Switzerland by way of the Rhone Valley. I came out of Switzerland by way of the Rhone Valley. Curiously enough (as I thought) I did not see Caesar. I mentioned this to a friend who said the discrepancy of a few centuries of time might account for it easily enough.

One can study and judge fairly of the taste of a people by the treatment given to blank walls. In France, for instance, the blank side of a building is treated with a simple architectural feeling. The Northern Spaniards who may be said to have an undeveloped taste, decorate the blank sides of their buildings with painted landscapes, with impossible perspective, flat trees and never flowing fountains. Sometimes the lines of the composition are laid down so as to carry on into the picture the lines of a real park or garden at the base of the wall, as the solid or real relief and the flat are made to merge into each other in our cycloramas. However, the Spanish artists avoid extreme realism so that no unwary one shall be injured in an unwitting attempt

to enter one of these ideal parks through a wall of solid masonry. In Northern Italy often the entire side of a building is covered with a painted architectural composition, with all the accessories of life — painted flowers on painted balconies, painted men and painted women (the artist had no lack of models) making painted love or reading painted books behind painted windows. Sometimes the imitation of architectural features is so well done as to be quite deceptive; but a painted woman can be told a mile away. I should call all this a demonstration of perverted taste. And what we see in England but more especially in America, I should charge to an entire absence of taste. The germ, even, seems wanting so there is no promise for a better future. "Coleman's Mustard, Keen's Mustard" in England; "Bull Durham, Kentucky Bourbon, Foot-form Shoes," "Zip, cures in five days" (it may have been three days, I don't remember) — these and others similar are the legends which adorn our blank walls when the builder has not left them in such ugly shape as to preclude the possibility of even the vivifying touch of the sign painter's art.

Let us dwell on more cheerful matters. I used to find the various funeral customs of interest in different parts of the continent. In Venice friends and relatives send empty gondolas, draped with black, to piece out the procession and demonstrate

regard for the dead. In the Southern countries relatives or friends do not follow the body to the grave. It is accompanied by hired mourners who do all the wailing which is to be done in public. The corpse is the only member of the family who takes enough interest in the proceeding to go along and see if he is properly disposed of; and even he does not care enough to turn on his bier and rebuke the indifference of his hired companions.

In Granada, the funeral party, instead of passing along the broad beautiful avenue which winds up past the Alhambra to the cemetery beyond, is forced to go up a steep, tortuous path in the narrow valley which lies between the Alhambra and the Generaliffe. So the funeral band must necessarily be in a disordered state when it reaches the high plateau beyond. It is not the disorder but the heartlessness which clings to my memory. I stepped aside one day to let a straggling party pass. My eyes rested accidentally on the form on the uncovered bier. I have no particular leaning toward corpses in general but this vision I shall not care to forget. The form was that of a young girl, of twelve years or thereabouts, clothed as for the first communion, with the long veil fastened by a wreath of flowers to the soft dark hair. My eyes, which had caught by accident, held with eager intention. No Greek marble ever was so pure, so delicately chiseled, so beautiful in

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the suggestion of ineffable calm. No sculptor could express the mystery, the tenderness, the sweet repose of those lids, fringed with the long, dark curving lashes. I did not wonder that He who gave it should want it back again, but I did wonder that the father and mother into whose charge such beauty had been committed should leave it, unattended by love, in the heartless surroundings in which I saw it. The boy who carried the cover of the bier set it up against a bank of earth while he rested his aching arms. The wretched little acolytes flung aside their tapers and heaved rocks and clods of earth at the target, thus inadvertently set up. The bearers of the bier stumbled and jarred and halted and jested in coarse voices. She did not care. I was the only person who minded it at all. And — and I — well, what was a little dead Spaniard “to me, that I should weep for her?”