



The Loire near Goudet.

IN THE TRACK OF "R. L. S." THROUGH THE CEVENNES.

BY J. A. HAMMERTON.

THE mountainous region of France to which, somewhat loosely, Stevenson applies the name Cevennes, in that delightful book *Travels with a Donkey*, lies along the western confines of Provence, and overlaps on several departments, chief of which are Ardèche, Lozère, Gard, and Hérault. In many parts the villages and the people have far less in common with France and the French than Normandy and the Normans have with provincial England. Here, in these mountain fastnesses and sheltered valleys, the course of life has flowed along almost changeless for centuries, and here, too, we may find much that is best in the romantic history and natural grandeur of the country. Remote from Paris, and happily without the area of the cheap trip organisers, this corner of France is likely to remain for ever "off the beaten track."

In order to visit the Cevennes proper, the beautiful town of Mende would be the best starting-place; but since my purpose was to strike the trail of "R. L. S.," after some wanderings awheel northward of Clermont Ferrand, I approached the

district from Le Puy, a town which has been voted the most picturesque in Europe. Besides, Stevenson himself had often wandered its quaint, unusual streets while preparing for his memorable journey with immortal Modestine. "I decided on a sleeping-sack," he says, "and after repeated visits to Le Puy and a deal of high living for myself and my advisers, a sleeping-sack was designed, constructed, and triumphantly brought home." At that time the wanderer's "home" was in the mountain town of Le Monastier, some fifteen miles south-east of Le Puy; and there in the autumn of 1877 he spent "about a month of fine days," variously occupied in completing his *New Arabian Nights* and *Picturesque Notes on Edinburgh*, and conducting with no little personal and general entertainment the preliminaries of his projected journey through the Cevennes.

Together with a friend I had spent some rainy but memorable days at Le Puy last summer, waiting for fair weather to advance on this little highland town, which lies secure away from railways.

Le Monastier, seen at a distance, is a mere huddle of grey houses stuck on the side of a bleak, treeless upland, and at close quarters it presents few allurements to the traveller. But it is typical of the mountain villages of France, and rich in the rugged, unspoilt character of its inhabitants. Stevenson tells us that it is "notable for the making of lace, for drunkenness, for freedom of language, and for unparalleled political dissension."

Mine host of the Hôtel de Chabrier was a worthy who will always have a corner in my memory. Like his establishment, his person was much the worse of

and the chances are considerable that in that month of fine days, seven-and-twenty years ago, Stevenson may have gossiped with my friend of the greasy cap; for M. Chabrier was then, as now, making his guests welcome and baking his inimitable patties.

Did he remember Stevenson? *Oui, oui, oui, M'sieu!* Stevenson was a writer of books, who had spent some time here years ago—*Oui, oui, parfaitement, M'sieu Stevenson.* What a memory the man had, and how blithely he recalled the distant past!

Mine host, who read the duty of an



Scene in Le Monastier.

wear. Lame of a leg, his feet shod with the tattered fragments of slippers, a pair of unclean heels peeping out through his stockings, he was the living advertisement of his frowsy inn, the ground floor of which, still bearing the legend *Café*, had been turned into a stable for oxen, and lay open to the highway. But withal, turning a shut eye to the kitchen as we passed, the cooking was excellent, and M. Chabrier assured us that he was renowned for game patties, which he sent to "all parts of Europe." The frank satisfaction with himself and his hotel, which he betrayed at every turn, would have rejoiced the heart of so shrewd a student of character as "R. L. S.,"

innkeeper to be the humouring of his patrons, could clearly supply me with the most surprising details of him whose footsteps I was tracing; but wishful not to lead him into temptation, I tested his evidence early in our talk by asking how many years had passed since he of whom I spoke had rested at Le Monastier, and whether he had patronised the Hôtel de Chabrier. He sagely scratched his head, and racked his memory for a moment, with the result that this Scotsman—oh, he was sure he was a Scotsman—had stayed in that very hotel and occupied bedroom No. 3 just four years ago!

Obviously he was mistaken—not to put too fine a point upon it—and his cheerful

avowal, in discussing another subject, that he was "a partisan of no religion," did not increase my faith in him. There were few Protestants in Le Monastier, he told me; but as I happened to know from the *pasteur* at Le Puy that the postmaster here at least stood by the Reformed faith, and by that token might be supposed a man of some reading, I hoped there to find some knowledge of Stevenson, whose works and travels were familiar to the *pasteur*. Alas! *J' n' sais pas* was the burden of the postmaster's song.

To wander about the evil-smelling byways of Le Monastier and observe the ancient crones busy at almost every door with their lace-making pillows, the bent and grizzled wood-choppers at work in open spaces, is to understand that, despite the lapse of a quarter of a century, there must be still alive hundreds of the village folk among whom Stevenson moved. But to find any who could recall him were the most hopeless of tasks; to identify the *auberge* in the billiard-room of which "at the witching hour of dawn" he concluded the purchase of the donkey and administered brandy to its disconsolate seller, were equally impossible; and it was only left to the pilgrims to visit the market-place where Father Adam and his ass were first encountered. So, with the odour of the church, whose interior seemed to enclose the common sewer of the town, still lingering in our nostrils, we resumed our journey southward across the little river Gazeille, and headed uphill in the direction of St. Martin de Frugères, noting as we mounted on the other side of the valley the straggling lane down

which Modestine, loaded with that wonderful sleeping-sack and the paraphernalia of the most original of travellers, "tripped along upon her four small hoofs with a sober daintiness of gait" to the ford across the river, giving as yet no hint of the troubles she had in store for "the green donkey driver."

Along our road were several picturesque patches formed of rock and pine, and notably the romantic ruins of Châteauneuf, with the little village clustered at their roots, which furnished subjects for Stevenson's block and pencil. The road grew

wilder as we advanced towards St. Martin de Frugères, to which village the sentimental traveller came upon a Sabbath and wrote of the "home feeling" the scene at the church brought over him: a sentiment difficult to appreciate as we wandered the filth-sodden streets and inspected the ugly little church, whitewashed within and stuffed with cheap symbols of a religion that is anathema to descendants of the Covenanters.

The silvery Loire far below in the valley to our right, we sat at our ease astride our bicycles and sped cheerfully down the winding road to Goudet, feeling that, if our mode of progress was less romantic than Stevenson's, it had compensations, for there was nothing that tempted us to tarry by the way.

"Goudet stands in a green end of a valley, with Chateau Beaufort opposite upon a rocky steep, and the stream, as clear as crystal, lying in a deep pool between them." The scene is indeed one of singular beauty, the fertile fields and shaggy woods being in pleasant contrast to the barren country through which we had been moving.



Where Stevenson bought Modestine: Monastier Market-place.

To the inn of M. Rivet we repaired, this being the only *auberge* which Goudet possessed at the time of Stevenson's visit. We found it one of the usual small plastered buildings, destitute of any quaintness, but cleaner than most, and sporting a large wooden tobacco pipe, crudely fashioned, by way of a sign. The old people who kept it were good Cevennol types—the woman wearing the curious headgear of the peasant folk, which resembles the tiny burlesque hats affected by musical clowns, and the man in every trait of dress and feature capable of passing for a country Scot. The couple were engagingly ignorant, and had never heard of Scotland, so it was no surprise to learn that they knew nothing of the famous son of that country who had once "hurried over his midday meal" in the dining-room where we were endeavouring to instruct Madame Rivet in the gentle art of brewing tea. The Rivets had been four years in possession of the inn at the time of Stevenson's visit, and I should judge that the place had changed in no essential feature, though I missed the portrait of the host's nephew, Régis Senac, "Professor of Fencing and Champion of the Two Americas," mentioned by Stevenson.

It was late in the afternoon when we continued our journey from Goudet, intent on reaching that evening the lake of Bouchet, which Stevenson had selected as the camping-place for the first night of his travels. The highway to Ussel is one of the most beautiful on the whole route, lying through a wide and deep glen similar to many that exist in the Scottish Highlands, but again unlike the latter in its numerous terraces, which bear eloquent witness to the industry of the country-folk.

Along this road, where on our right the terraces climbed upwards to the naked basalt, and on the other side of the valley, now flooded with a pale yellow sunset which picked out the children at play tending a scanty herd of cattle on the hillside, Stevenson had some of his bitterest experiences with that thrawn jade Modestine. We, fortunate in our more docile mounts, made excellent progress to Ussel, after walking a good two miles on foot.

When we arrived at Costaros, a dismal little town on the highway between Le Puy and Pradelles, the evening was wearing out under a leaden sky, promising the stragglers from the market good use

for their bulky umbrellas; and we had still eight kilomètres of rough country roads between us and the lake. Stevenson, in his heart-breaking struggles with the wayward ass, must have crossed the highway in the dark some little distance south of Costaros to have arrived at the village of Bouchet St. Nicolas, two miles beyond the lake; and as we urged forward in the rain which now fell pitilessly and turned the darkling mountains into phantom masses smoking with mist, we could appreciate to the full the satisfaction with which he abandoned his quest of the lake and spent his first night snug at the inn of Bouchet.

"I had been told," says "R. L. S.," "that the neighbourhood of the lake was uninhabited except by trout." He travelled in the days before the *Syndicat d'Initiative du Velay*, which I shall ever bless for its châlet by the Lac du Bouchet, whose lighted window two weary pilgrims described that night with joy unspeakable. Our arrival was the cause of no small commotion to the good folk who kept this two-storied wooden hostel. When we told the landlady in a fireside gossip that we had come from Le Monastier by way of St. Martin and Goudet, she was highly amused, and her daughter, a rosy-faced wench, laughed heartily at the thought of anybody visiting such places. The lake of Bouchet—ah, that was another matter! Lakes were few in France, and this one well worth seeing. There were many lakes in Scotland? *Beaucoup de lacs? Ma foi!* This was news indeed, and they wondered why we had come so far to see this of Bouchet—as we did ourselves, when next morning we surveyed a tiny sheet of water almost circular, no more than two miles in circumference and quite featureless. It is simply the crater of an ancient volcano, and receives its water from some underground springs, there being no obvious source of supply. The lake, at an altitude of 4,000 feet, is higher than the surrounding country.

When we awoke in the morning and made ready for our departure the outlook was grey and the air bit shrewdly as the tooth of winter. Had the day promised better, we should have struck south from the lake to Bouchet St. Nicolas, at whose inn Stevenson uncorked a bottle of Beaujolais, inviting his host to join him in drinking it, and the innkeeper would take little, saying, "I am an

amateur of such wine, do you see?—and I am capable of leaving you not enough." But the way thither is no better than a bullock-track, and several miles of similar road lie between Bouchet and the highway; so, with a lowering sky ominous of more rain and the assurance of the landlady at the ch[^]alet that for three weeks the country had been soaking, we determined not to risk the bullock-track, and retraced our path to Costaros, passing on the way numerous ox-waggons laden with timber.

Southward of Costaros even on a bright summer day the road must appear bleak and cheerless, and that morning our chief desire was to move along it as quickly as

sorry that Stevenson did not yield to the urging of the landlady of the inn to visit Our Lady of Pradelles, "who performed many miracles, although she was of wood," for his impressions of the place could not have failed to be peculiarly piquant.

From Pradelles to Langogne is a long and deep descent, and while walking with our machines down an unrideable path, a young woman on a terrace near the road came forward to greet us, tripping unexpectedly over the tether of a goat, but landing naturally and softly on the ground, where after her moment's surprise she smilingly asked, "*Où allez-vous pro-*



"I came down the hill to where Goudet stands in a green end of a valley."

we could. By the time we had reached the hamlet of La Sauvetat we had again joined the track of "R. L. S.," where, now armed with a goad, he drove his donkey: "The perverse little devil, since she would not be taken with kindness, must even go with pricking." We had but to sit in our saddles and wheel rapidly down the long and exhilarating descent to Pradelles, a very tumbledown village with a great shabby square lying at an angle of almost forty-five degrees. The town occupies a little corrie on the hillside, perched here at an altitude of 3,800 feet above sea level.

The interior of the church of Notre Dame is quaint and unusual, and one is

mener?"—more usually our bucolic greeting than "*D'où 'st que vous venez?*"—the latter "sacramental phrase," which Stevenson mentions, being possibly suggested in his case by the odd appearance of the traveller and his beast of burden. The bridge across the Allier at Langogne, where he met the "lassie of some seven or eight" who demanded whence he came, is now a crazy ruin, and a serviceable modern structure spans the river some little distance to the west of it. He furnishes no information about his stay at Langogne, where I suspect him of having slept at one of the inns.

His track now lay somewhat to the west of the Allier, as he made for the

little village of Cheylard l'Evêque, on the borders of the Forest of Mercoire; and in this stage of his journey he was more than usually faithful to his ideal of travel: "For my part, I travel not to go anywhere, but to go. I travel for travel's sake. The great affair is to move; to feel the needs and hitches of our life more nearly; to come down off this feather-bed of civilisation, and find the globe granite underfoot and strewn with cutting flints." There was no need for his quitting the highway, since his further objective lay due south through the

pleasant valley of the Allier.

But his diversion among the by-ways was rich in adventure, and furnished him with material for perhaps his best chapter, "A Camp in the Dark." He had the good fortune to lose his way after nightfall, and to be forced to camp in a wood of pines in happy ignorance of his whereabouts. When next morning he did reach Cheylard he was fain to confess that "it seemed little worthy of all this searching."

With a less keen appetite for losing ourselves in a maze of muddy bullock-tracks, we pressed forward through the fresh green valley to Luc, and here rejoined the path of our adventurer once more.

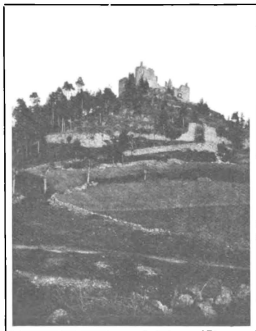
"Why any one should desire to visit either Luc or Cheylard is more than my much inventing spirit can suppose." Thus our vagabond; but journeying at a more genial season of the year we found the neighbourhood of Luc not devoid of beauty. The valley of the Allier is here broken into wide and picturesque gorges, and in many ways the scenery is reminiscent of Glencoe, where Alec Breck and David Balfour dodged the redcoats.

In late September it would bear a very different aspect, and Stevenson tells us that "a more unsightly prospect at this season of the year it would be hard to fancy. Shelving hills rose round it on all sides, here dabbled with wood and fields, there rising to peaks alternately naked and hairy with pines. The colour throughout was black or ashen, and came to a point in the ruins of the castle of Luc, which pricked up impudently from below my feet, carrying on a pinnacle a tall white statue of Our Lady." There is now a railway station at Luc, the line running near the

road all the way to La Bastide; and as we continued southward that sunny June day it was only the shrill noise of the crickets and the unusual quilt-work of the diligently husbanded hillsides that told us we were not looking on a Perthshire landscape. In a sweet corner of the valley lies La Bastide, a drowsy little town despite its long connection with the railway, which existed even at the time of Stevenson's visit.

Here, he tells

us, "I was directed to leave the river, and follow a road that mounted on the left among the hills of Vivrais, the modern Ardèche; for I was now come within a little way of my strange destination, the Trappist monastery of Our Lady of the Snows." Thither we shall follow his steps more nearly than usual, as the road is too steep to admit of our cycling. For some distance the route lies through a great forest of pines, but when the crest of the hill is gained a far-reaching prospect greets the eye. "The sun came out as I left the shelter of a pine wood," writes "R. L. S.," "and I beheld suddenly a fine wild landscape



Château Beaufort, near Goudet.

to the south. High rocky hills, as blue as sapphire, closed the view, and between these lay ridge upon ridge, heathery, craggy, the sun glittering on veins of rock, the underwood clambering in the hollows as rude as God made them at the first." Only when the snow comes down and mantles these abundant hills would this description not apply. It is a perfect picture of what we saw. Presently we noted with no small satisfaction the white statue of the Virgin, which, standing by the highway at a point where a side road strikes northward through the pines, "directed the traveller to Our Lady of the Snows."

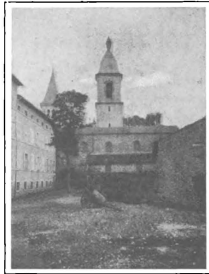
"I have rarely approached anything with more unaffected terror than the monastery of Our Lady of the Snows. This is to have had a Protestant education," says Stevenson, as he recalls the feeling produced within him by the clanging of a bell at the monastery while he was not yet in sight of it. No bells clanged as we descended the road which Father Apollinaris was still in the act of making when Stevenson encountered him. We emerged at length from the shelter of the trees into a wide hollow of land

from which on every side the hills rose up, and where on our right were the outer walls of the monastery, plain plastered buildings with little barred windows on the ground floor, and a row without bars in the second story. On our left was a large saw-mill, where steam saws were giving shrill advertisement of their use. Several monks were among the workers at the mill, and a brown-coated figure was walking along the road that opened on our left beyond the timber sheds to some large white buildings which, as we learned afterwards, composed the farm belonging to the monastery. The first impression was not exactly to touch one's feeling for

romance—Trappists in the Timber Trade suggests a heading for a "snippet" periodical; and if the monks were silent, here, at least, were noises that smote unpleasantly on the ear.

We were told by an old man to go round to the chief gateway, and there summon the Brother Porter by ringing the bell, if we wished to visit the monastery. This we did with something of that "quaking heart" to which Stevenson confesses in the same act, for the clamour of a bell which one rings in a great silent building seems fraught with news of an offence for which one stands to receive the penalty. Nor do one's spirits rise

when a little shutter in the door is opened, and a grizzly whiskered face in a brown hood peers through, demanding your business. All was well, however, and the Brother Porter admitted us to the courtyard, and summoned the Guest-Father, who proved himself a vivacious and interesting companion, showing us reverently the various noteworthy features of the chapel and the chapterhouse, the library, the refectory, and the dormitory. As our guide was most anxious to impress upon us, the



Spire of Our Lady of Pradelles.

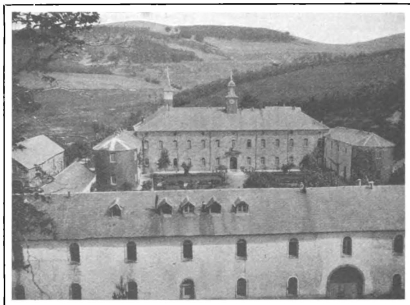
chapel was remarkable for the simplicity of its furnishing. "*C'est très simple, très simple,*" he said earnestly, pointing out that even the abbot's crozier was a piece of simple wood carving, the gift of some American admirer. We learned with regret that Father Apollinaris, "so good and so simple," had been dead five years.

Our room—for we were readily granted a lodging for the night—contained two single beds and the barest necessities. It was on the first floor to the left of the gateway, and after bestowing our luggage we returned to the church to be present at vespers, our friend of the cowl promising to come for us when supper was ready.

The monks, seated in their chairs, sang

"those majestic old Gregorian chants that, wherever you may hear them, seem to build up cathedral walls about you." This fine phrase of Meredith's exactly describes the sensation of the service we

neighbourhood of Bleynard, and coming there at sunset we found that town so mean and featureless that we had no wish to pass the evening there. But a perverse fate had decreed that we should



Our Lady of the Snows.

listened to that evening; and it was almost with regret we allowed ourselves to be carried off to the gross celebration in the strangers' room on the right of the gateway, where a meal of soup, omelets, potatoes, walnuts, figs, cheese, bread and wine had been prepared for us, and required none of the apologies wherewith it was submitted. In this same room "R. L. S." had his warm discussions on politics and religion with some boarders and an Irish *retraitant*; but the Irishman seems to have departed long ago, and we were the only strangers within the gates.

In the morning we made a swift descent to La Bastide, and by way of Chasseradès, where Stevenson slept in the common bedroom of the inn, reached Le Bleynard late in the afternoon, passing through a country of bare hills and poor villages clustered in gusty hollows or hanging like swallows' nests on craggy slopes. The valley of the Lot, though rich and beautiful westward to Mende, possesses no elements of charm in the

make close and undesired acquaintance with the place. The hotel where we thought to dine had been burned down three months before, and the only hostel was a frowsy roadside inn opposite the gaunt and grimy ruins of the "Hôtel du Lot." Blue-smocked yokels were lounging on rude benches and spitting freely in the dirty common-room, while unwashed women were busy in the gloomy kitchen. But two decently dressed men sat sipping absinthe at the door, and they assured us that the place was "well managed"; so we took our courage in hand, and decided to patronise the establishment, for we learned that it would be impossible to cross the Lozère, a mountain some thousand feet higher than Ben Nevis, that night. All next day it rained steadily, and the Lozère was wrapped in dense mists. But we contrived to pass the time somehow in our bedroom—the only clean place in the *auberge*—and indeed we had become so friendly with the absinthe-drinkers that another day would have found us quite

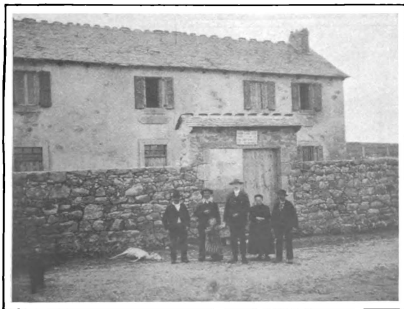
at home, so soon does the wayfarer adapt himself to circumstances. But, I confess, it was with high spirits that we hailed a clearing sky on the morning of the second day, and bade a joyous adieu to Bley-mard.

In little more than a mile beyond the town the road becomes unrideable, and for some miles we had to plod upwards on foot in a wild and rocky gorge with the merest trickle of water below. The tiny hamlet of Malavieille, about half-way up the mountain-side, is the highest point permanently inhabited. It is a mere handful of dark-grey houses, covered on slates and walls with a vivid yellow fungus.

When we had come within sight of the Baraque de Secours we had reached a kind of tableland reaching east and west for many miles. Eastward lay the pine-woods in which Stevenson spent one of his most tranquil nights, as described in his chapter "A Night among the Pines." It was there that, awakening in the morning, he beheld the daybreak along the mountain tops of Vivarais—"a solemn glee possessed my mind at this

on the turf as he went along pieces of money, "until I had left enough for my night's lodging." Some of the coins may be there to this day, for there is small human commerce at this altitude, a shepherd or two being the only folk we saw until we arrived at the shelter which we had seen for more than half an hour, while we cycled arduously toward it.

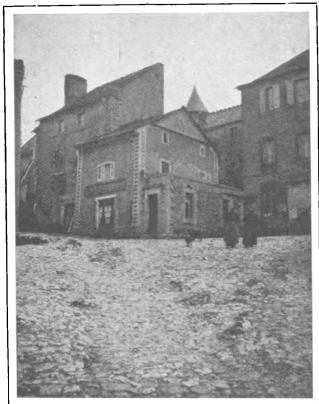
The Baraque is a plain two-storied building, with a rough stone wall and porch enclosing a muddy yard. It stands at a height of over five thousand feet, and is thus higher than the summit of Ben Nevis. Westward the Lozère swells upward, a great treeless waste, to its highest point, the Pic de Finiels, 5600 feet above the sea-level; while a splendid mass of volcanic origin uprears its craggy head some little distance to the southeast. "The view, back upon the northern Gèvaudan," says Stevenson, writing of what he saw as he passed near this point, "extended with every step: scarce a tree, scarce a house, appeared upon the fields of wild hill that ran north, east, and west, all blue and gold in the haze and sunlight of the morning." And then in a little,



On the Lozère: The Baraque de Secours.

gradual and lovely coming in of day." And it was there, too, that, out of thankfulness for his night's rest, he laid

when he commenced the descent towards the valley of the Tarn, he says: "A step that seemed no way more decisive than



The main street of Le Bleyard.

many other steps that had preceded it—and, 'like stout Cortez when, with eagle eyes, he stared on the Pacific,' I took possession, in my own name, of a new quarter of the world. For behold, instead of the gross turf rampart I had been mounting for so long, a view into the hazy air of heaven, and a land of intricate blue hills below my feet." As he makes no mention of the Baraque, I venture to suppose it had not then been built, for one so eager of new experience would not have missed the opportunity of resting on his way at this high-set hostel.

There is one respect in which the Cevennois have progressed since Stevenson went among them. He writes: "In these hedge-inns the traveller is expected to eat with his own knife—unless he ask, no other will be supplied; with a glass, a whang of bread, and an iron fork, the table is completely laid." Not so had we found it in any of the inns we visited—all had risen to the dignity of knives

and forks; but here at this house in the wilds our table was precisely as Stevenson describes, and the bread being hard it was a temptation to break it across the knee like a piece of wood.

We went forward into the country of the Camisards along a well-made road, which gangs of labourers were leisurely repairing. So good are these mountain roads, and so diligently tended, that one is inclined to think they are used chiefly for the transit of stones to keep them in repair. That on which we travelled has been made since Modestine and her driver footed it through this same valley. In less than a mile from the Baraque it begins to sweep swiftly downward. Stevenson thus describes his descent: "A sort of track appeared, and began to go down a breakneck slope, turning like a corkscrew as it went. It led

into a valley between falling hills, stubbly with rocks like a reaped field of corn, and floor'd further down with green meadows. I followed the track with precipitation; the steepness of the slope, the continual agile turning of the line of descent, and the old unwearied hope of finding something new in a new country, all comprised to lend me wings. Yet a little lower and a stream began, collecting itself together out of many fountains, and soon making a glad noise among the hills. Sometimes it would cross the track in a bit of waterfall, with a pool, in which Modestine refreshed her feet. The whole descent is like a dream to me, so rapidly was it accomplished. I had scarcely left the summit ere the valley closed round my path, and the sun beat upon me, walking in a stagnant lowland atmosphere."

Our road brought us at length to Pont de Montvert, "of bloody memory," which lies in a green and rocky hollow among the hills. To Stevenson "the place, with

its houses, its lanes, its glaring river bed, wore an indescribable air of the south." Why so, he was unable to say, as he justly observes that it would be difficult to tell in what particular it differed from Monastier, or Langogne, or even from Bleynard. One of the first buildings the traveller encounters is the little Protestant temple perched on the rocky bank of the river, and perhaps it was again the Protestant education of "R. L. S." that led him to note a higher degree of intelligence among the inhabitants than he had found in the purely Catholic villages. For my part, with the best will to mark the difference, I found little to choose between the Catholic and Camisard townships, unless it were a more obvious effort after cleanliness in some of the latter.

Pont de Montvert is memorable as the place where the Covenanters of France struck the first blow against their Romish persecutors; here they "slew their Archbishop Sharpe." The Protestant pastor, a fresh-faced man of sixty, with a short white beard, and wearing no outward symbol of office, but dressed in an ordinary jacket suit and cloth cap, we

at the "roaring table d'hôte" and was pleased to find three of the women passably good-looking, that being more than an average for any town in the Highlands of France. Our pastor—his wife and golden-haired daughter also—was more interested in discussing Stevenson's travels than the religious conditions of his district, a subject on which my companion, a pastor from "the Celtic fringe," was athirst for information.

To my vicarious questions regarding the position of the Reformed Church I received the barest answers; there was no glowing enthusiasm *chez le pasteur* for the Camisards, who, a stone's throw from where we sat, stabbed, with many superfluous thrusts, the Archpriest Du Chayla, their most brutal persecutor. But Stevenson and his donkey—ah, that was another matter! He knew all about them, to the year, the day, the hour, of the quaint and curious visit; he was himself only two years established in his charge at the time. And Clarisse! We knew, of course, what Stevenson had said of her? Would we care to see her photograph?—she was now married and settled in



"It was but a humble place called La Vernède."

found at his house in a building on the river-side, near the bridge. Directly across the rock-strewn river-course was the Hôtel des Cévennes, where Stevenson sat

another town, with a considerable family growing around her.

"What shall I say of Clarisse?" he writes. "She waited the table with a

heavy placable nonchalance, like a performing cow; her great grey eyes were steeped in amorous langour; her mouth had a curl; her nostrils spoke of dainty pride; her cheek fell into strange and interesting lines. It was a face capable of strong emotion, and, with training, it offered the promise of delicate sentiment. . . . Before I left I assured Clarisse of hearty admiration. She took it like milk, without embarrassment or wonder, merely looking at me steadily with her great eyes; and I own the result upon myself was some confusion."

Out of Pont de Montvert the road rises steadily uphill past the Catholic church—the town being about equally divided in the matter of religion—for close on two miles, and then it is a long and gentle descent to Florac. In no respect has the road changed since Stevenson wrote of it; nor is there any likelihood that it will be altered ere the crack of doom. "A smooth sandy ledge, it runs about halfway between the summit of the cliffs and the river in the bottom of the valley; and I went in and out, as I followed it, from

bays of deep shadow into promontories of afternoon sun. This was a pass like that of Killiecrankie; a deep turning gully in the hills, with the Tarn making a wonderful hoarse uproar far below, and craggy summits standing in the sunshine high above."

The slopes of the valley have been terraced almost to the skyline, not for baby fields of wheat, but to furnish ground for chestnut trees that clothe the hills with rich and sombre foliage, and give forth "a faint sweet perfume" which tinctures the air with balsamic breath. It was on a terrace under one of these trees that he

camped for the night, having to scramble up some sixty feet above the place he had selected for himself, which was as high as that from the road, before he could find another terrace with space enough for his donkey. He was awakened in the morning by peasants coming to prune the trees, and after going down to the river for his morning toilet—"To wash in one of God's rivers in the open air seems to me a sort of cheerful solemnity or semipagan act of worship"—he went on his way "with a light and peaceful heart,

and sang psalms to the spiritual ear as I advanced." Some little way from where he had slept he foregathered with an old man in a brown nightcap, "clear-eyed, weatherbeaten, with a faint, excited smile," who said to him after a while, "*Connaissez-vous le Seigneur?*" The old fellow was delighted when the donkey driver answered, "Yes, I know Him; He is the best of my acquaintances," and together they journeyed on, discussing the spiritual condition of the country folk. "Thus, talking like Christian and Faithful by the

way, he and I came upon a hamlet by the Tarn. It was but a humble place, called La Vernède, with less than a dozen houses, and a Protestant chapel on a knoll. Here he dwelt: and here, at the inn, I ordered my breakfast. The inn was kept by an agreeable young man, a stonebreaker on the road, and his sister, a pretty and engaging girl."

We found this little hamlet even smaller than we had expected—some half-dozen houses and a tiny place of worship, the whole lying below the level of the main road, so that one could have thrown a stone on their roofs, well-tilled fields and



Clarisse.

meadows stretching down to the river. A *cantonnier* who was busy breaking stones by the roadway helped us to identify the place, and was proud to confess himself a Protestant in common with the little handful of his fellow-villagers. The country grows richer and more fruitful as we approach Florac, passing on our way the old castle of Miral and a picturesque church, compounded of an ancient battlemented monastery, and some modern buildings with a tall tower.

Florac is a small town of white houses, cuddled between the eastern front of the Causse Mejean and the western foothills of the Cevennes, with the river Tarnon, joined by the Mimente to the south, running northward on its outskirts. There are only two thousand inhabitants, but the number and excellence of Florac's hotels are accounted for by its being an important centre for tourists visiting the gorges of the Tarn, which, totally unknown to the outer world at the time of Stevenson's journey, are now admitted to present the finest scenery in Europe. Our French guidebook frankly stated that Florac is a place "of few attractions," but "R. L. S." makes the most of these in a sentence or two, describing the town as possessing "an old castle, an alley of planes, many quaint sweet corners, and a live fountain welling from the hills."

The track of "R. L. S." now lay along the valley of the Mimente, which branches eastward a little way south of Florac, and penetrates a country very similar to that traversed between the Lozère and this point. It was only a few miles from Florac that he spent his last night *à la belle étoile* in the valley of this little river, noting in one of his finest sentences the coming of night: "A grey pearly evening shadow filled the glen; objects at a little distance grew indistinct and melted bafflingly into each other; and the darkness was rising steadily like an exhalation."

At Cassagnas he was in the very heart of the Camisard country, where there is little to engage one but the historic associations of the district. At St. Germain de Calbèrte, six miles to the south-west, reached by a rough and difficult road more suitable for the foot than the wheel, he slept at the inn, and next afternoon (Thursday, October 3rd) he accomplished the eight remaining miles through the waterless valley of the Gardon to St. Jean du Gard—"fifteen miles and a stiff hill in a little beyond six hours."

There came the parting with the companion of his travels, Modestine finding a ready purchaser at much below prime cost. "For twelve days we had been fast companions," he writes on his last page: "we had travelled upwards of a hundred and twenty miles, crossing several respectable ridges, and jogged along with our six legs by many a rocky and many a boggy by-road. After the first day, although sometimes I was hurt and distant in manner, I still kept my patience; and as for her, poor soul! she had come to regard me as a god. She loved to eat out of my hand. She was patient, elegant in form, the colour of an ideal mouse, and imitatively small. Her faults were those of her sex; her virtues were her own. Farewell, and if for ever—Father Adam wept when he sold her to me; after I had sold her in my turn I was tempted to follow his example; and being alone with the stage driver and four or five agreeable young men, I did not hesitate to yield to my emotion."

We are to imagine our "R. L. S." thus tearfully occupied in the stage-coach bearing him east to Alais, an important industrial town on the main line northward through Le Puy, whither there is no call to follow him. We have the romantic regions of the Causse and the Tarn gorges still to explore. Our way, no longer a pilgrim's path, lies west.