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LETTERS

FROM

THE PYRENEES

DURING

THREE MONTHS' PEDESTRIAN WANDERINGS

AMIDST THE WILDEST SCENES OF

THE FRENCH AND SPANISH MOUNTAINS,

IN THE SUMMER OF 1842.

BY T. CLIFTON PARIS, B.A.,

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WITH SKETCHES BY THE AUTHOR, TAKEN ON THE SPOT.

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P R E F A C E.

WHEN about to leave England I experienced so much difficulty in obtaining any practical information respecting the Pyrenees, that I scarcely feel it necessary to offer an apology for the present volume—except on the grounds of its imperfect execution, and for that I full well know I must draw largely upon the indulgent consideration of the reader.

Far removed from the ordinary route of tourists, and situated to the south of the extended plain of France, the Pyrenees are only accessible by her tediously straight and dusty roads, or by the waters of the Atlantic, and they have consequently been rarely visited by the English, and few even of those who may have beheld the snows

of the Maladetta, have penetrated beyond the Baths of the *Hautes Pyrénées*, or deviated from the beaten track of the French visitors.

Of the extent and stupendous character of these mountains, but little, as I believe, is known in England : I have heard it stated by a person who had resided for six weeks in the Pyrenees, that he had been enabled to obtain a complete knowledge of them ; I can only say, that after journeying among them for three months, I am but able to claim a tolerable acquaintance with one of their divisions, and that the *Hautes Pyrénées*, which is the most elevated, and the only portion usually visited, scarcely constitutes a twelfth part of the entire range.

In my wanderings I have invariably found the Spanish mountains incomparably the finer ; and I repeat what I have elsewhere said, that no one should boast of an acquaintance with the Pyrenees who has not explored them on both sides of the frontier : I may also add, that the grandest scenery of these vast solitudes is alone accessible

to the pedestrian, and it was no small source of mortification that we were obliged to undertake many of our most interesting excursions without the lady of our party, although she probably traversed regions on horseback which few of her sex would have had the courage to encounter.

Should I be charged with imprudence for having exposed myself to danger from traversing the mountains without a guide, my answer is, that in many places, as at Panticosa, such a person was not to be procured; that we also explored regions of which the French guides were utterly ignorant; and above all, that I consider the tourist who visits the mountains with a guide at his elbow, confines the beauties of nature within appointed limits, and closes his eyes, as it were conventionally, to every prospect that has not been repeatedly seen and admired; whereas the great delight of the true worshipper of nature is to discover new beauties, or at least to place familiar scenes in novel points of view; he may be said to resemble the

keen sportsman, whose pleasure consists in starting his game and pursuing it through the wilds of the forest, while he views with indifference or disdain the birds that are purposely driven within the range of his shot.

In the following narrative I can assure the reader that nothing has been exaggerated or distorted for effect; it is a faithful description of scenes as they actually presented themselves, written at the time, or so shortly after they were visited, as to preclude the usual imperfections incident to memory. The sketches from which the woodcuts have been executed were taken on the spot, and although they may not show much, the little they do exhibit is a faithful transcript. The reader will observe that some few of these engravings are inferior to the rest in execution; it is perhaps right to state they were cut in wood by myself.

I cannot but entertain a hope that the publication of this tour, notwithstanding all its imperfections, may be the means of inducing many

of my countrymen to visit the scenes I have described, and to enrich our portfolios from a source so wonderfully prolific in beauty and sublimity; should such be the result, the work will have met with all the success its author could have any right to anticipate.

Dover Street, May 1843.

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LETTERS

FROM

THE PYRENEES.

LETTER I.

Journey from Paris to Orleans.—Savoury *compagnons de voyage* and a melting anecdote.—Statue of the Maid of Orleans.—The river Loire.—Singularly picturesque beauties of the Limosin.—Plan of the French waggoners for passing over hills.—Grotesque appearance of Limoges.

Limoges, July 7th, 1842.

AFTER an irksome journey of more than forty-eight hours, I arrived at this place from Paris at eleven o'clock yesterday morning. With respect to that portion of France over which I have passed, I can have nothing to communicate which has not already been said and written at least a thousand and one times; and were it even otherwise, I will freely confess, that amidst the scenery of this singularly grotesque place, it must be a most ambitious pen that could contest for pre-
cedency with the pencil; so for the present you must be satisfied with a hasty account of my progress.

The heat and dust from Paris to Orleans were more distressing than can be readily imagined: the latter was actually a foot in depth, and the sides of the road were

frequently invisible from the clouds that were raised, and which, from the attenuated state of the particles, floated for a mile or two over the country. As it was impossible to close the windows without the risk of suffocation, we were content to submit to the lesser evil of a thorough powdering: but for the information of those tourists who may choose to travel on the continent by public conveyances, I have more *agrémens* in store. I was seated in the *rotonde*,—the division of the vehicle most exposed to dust and jolting,—it being unfortunately the only part in which I could procure a place; we of the *rotonde*, however,—that is, myself and a man and woman,—left Paris in tolerable comfort, and were by no means in ill-humour with our berths; but our satisfaction had outrun the occasion. After having proceeded about two long, straight miles, our lumbering machine overtook three bullock-drivers with an accompaniment of dogs; the *bipeds* as well as the *quad-rupeds*, alike hot and dusty, were bound, as some demon willed it, to Orleans. The diligence paused: I surveyed the gigantic proportions of the men, their blue smock-frocks, and deliquescing faces with feelings akin to horror; it was too evident that we were doomed: the door opened, and three huge persons, with two hounds upon an equally large scale, wedged themselves into our society, and became the savoury companions of our journey to Orleans. Talk of the cramped limits of a Chinese cage, or the foul atmosphere of the Black Hole of Calcutta! what were they to such an infliction? they absolutely lose all their ter-

rors by the comparison. I intuitively felt the sufferings we were to undergo, and soliloquised in the words of Prospero, "for this be sure, tonight thou shalt have cramps, side-stitches that shall pen thy breath up;" and all these did I surely suffer to the full accomplishment of my prophecy, and was moreover all but stewed and squeezed into a jelly. The approach to Orleans in the early light of the next morning had a strange beauty, which it will probably much puzzle me to discover on any future visit; and when I look back upon the suffering of that night, I am only astonished that the sun ever dawned upon us as living travellers, and instead of stepping out substantial masses of flesh and blood, that we were not, like the lady of an Indian story, in a state to be *wiped up* by the *garçon* of the hotel. This is a problem beyond my comprehension, and its solution might even puzzle the wits of a disciple of the Marquis Beccaria*.

On our arrival at Orleans we were relieved from this nocturnal incubus, and while stopping to change horses, we took advantage of the short interval to hurry across the square, in order to stretch our cramped limbs and pay our *devoirs* to the Maid of Orleans, who there stands as boldly as in the olden time, in the form of a spirited statue in bronze. We allowed ourselves but a

* The Marquis Beccaria, with exquisite raillery, proposes the following problem, in order to show that the same degree of violence may be productive of very different degrees of suffering: "The force of the muscles and the sensibility of the nerves of an innocent person being given, it is required to find the degree of pain necessary to make him confess himself guilty of a given crime."

few minutes to examine and admire this work of art, and then hastened back with anxious speed, concluding that the diligence must be on the point of proceeding; but we found to our great annoyance that we had to sit, with what patience you may readily imagine, for at least half-an-hour for the arrival of a fresh cargo of passengers; and although we remonstrated with the *conducteur*, he was as immoveable as the statue we had just visited. At Blois we breakfasted; having, of course, but little time allowed for the satisfactory completion of our meal, and none for the inspection of the old place. Seated next to me at table was a character that afforded much amusement,—a little squat Frenchman, who, after an interval of some minutes industriously employed in a vigorous attack upon the viands, having suddenly come to a breathing pause, abruptly broke forth into the vilest imaginable jargon, which, in the innocence of his heart, he no doubt regarded as very good English. He was actually red in the face from his colloquial efforts, and after numerous ludicrous and disjointed gesticulations, delivered himself of the ascendant idea of his countrymen, that “one Frenchman was one very fine *feller*.” If the French are so perfectly satisfied of their national superiority, how is it that they are for ever forcing it upon your attention, as though all the world questioned it? Having thus sacrificed at the shrine of his vanity, he resumed his dietetic operations, and despatched his meal with evident satisfaction.

Leaving the old town, and with it my *single-speech*

friend, we passed the Loire, which from this point of view considerably disappointed my expectations: I had heard so much of its many beauties, and of the fine forest-scenery that clothed its banks, that I was ill prepared to see a river, properly enough so designated, if breadth alone could give it that claim, a mere shallow channel choked and disfigured by patches of sand, and its banks, as far as the sight extends, edged with poplars, a tree that can never find favour in any eye devoted to the picturesque. From Blois we proceeded to Chateauroux, where we supped, and thence to Limoges. The entire journey, with the exception of that portion of it which occupied the last eight hours, was as ugly as any that can be well imagined: dead, dreary flats, unredeemed by a single beauty, and for miles unvaried except by those eternal lines of poplars, that disfigure the whole country and deprive even a plain of its barren interest. Far otherwise is the aspect of the Limosin: fine ranges of hills covered with fern and forest, wild and romantic, broken into picturesque sandstone cliffs, and studded with the Spanish chestnut, which diffuses its delicious perfume far and wide; it brought to my mind the lower ranges of the Jura, not that the scenery was exactly similar, but as presenting a character equally wild and mountainous. Amongst the hills of the Limosin may be witnessed an ingenious device practised by the carters for surmounting the difficulties incident to an undulating country, and for affording relief to the horses. The heavy waggons carrying merchandise travel in company, and when seen

over the flats remind one of the caravans of the desert: on arriving at the foot of a hill the leaders of the respective waggons are taken off, and attached in a line to the first of them; the other waggons, having only one horse in each, are then successively fastened together by iron chains: on going down-hill this manœuvre is reversed, for in that case the horses are placed behind the last waggon, so that by pulling back they may check the impetus of the descending train, as you will see in the sketch I have sent you.



Limoges, as I have before hinted, is as picturesque a place as can be fancied; the old houses being in such a staggering condition, and so irregularly and whimsically placed, that you might well imagine they had been scared by an earthquake and were taking to their heels to find a more stable position. Seriously speaking, every street,

nay, every house, would afford a study for the artist: I have not yet seen a town in France that in the least resembles it. In a general view of it the cathedral presents a very prominent object, and well merits a closer inspection; over its gothic features Time has thrown his mellow shadows, and its giant tower, which soars to a great height, is in strict keeping with the whole edifice, being green from the moss that mantles its venerable walls. I wandered yesterday about this extraordinary old town, and strolled along the banks of its river Vienne, a stream, which although shallow, is, from the nature of the ground over which it flows, as clear as crystal; woods and bold rocks hang upon its sides, and at every bend in its course novel views of beauty successively present themselves. The heat was excessive, but I tempered its violence by adjourning every now and then from the banks to the bed of the stream, a little caution having been necessary to guard against the fierce rays of the sun; for on ascending to *terra firma*, experience taught me to place my feet upon ground that was shaded, since the earth exposed to the sun blistered them like a mass of burning metal.

From the foot of the bridge I had a charming view of Limoges: the river before me pure and clear, the bridge itself no mean feature in the picture, the town climbing the opposite hill in a series of terraces, with its extraordinary superannuated houses covered with vines, formed altogether a scene of surpassing novelty and interest, while the girls washing linen along both banks of the river infused life and rich colouring into the picture;

many of these damsels were beautiful in features and symmetrical in form, and all being in the most picturesque costumes and busily engaged in beating their linen, were not the least attractive of the objects before me. Over most of the streets hang gardens, and vines being trained along the terraces form alcoves of rare luxury, through whose clustering foliage we may occasionally catch a glimpse of some blooming goddess.

This evening at six I start for Bordeaux, but as yet there being no railroad, you may throw aside your fears of a collision.

LETTER II.

Journey from Limoges to Bordeaux.—Water-nymphs of the Vienne.—Arrival at Perigueux on the morning of the eclipse of the sun.—Maceron and Libourne.—Noble approach to Bordeaux.—Its magnificent bridge across the Garonne.—Excursion to the Pont de Cubzac, a gigantic suspension-bridge across the Dordogne.—Splendid quays and mercantile bustle of Bordeaux.—Catacombs of St. Michel.—Cemetery of the city.—A *café* in a coffin-manufactory.—Visit to the theatre, and clamorous dissatisfaction of the audience.

Bordeaux, July 11th.

“HAVE you water-nymphs in your country?” said a Frenchman to me, as we were passing the Vienne to Aixe. “*Comment?*” I exclaimed, rather puzzled by the question, when, glancing my eyes over the river, I immediately perceived the drift of it: its limpid surface was in one spot studded with bright crimson, in another with blue, and so on to every colour in the rainbow; all of which I recognised as the head-dresses of girls seated in little coteries up to their necks in the water. This sight, so novel to me, was, as I learnt, one of every-day occurrence; the damsels that wash the linen adjourning after the completion of their labours from the banks to the bed of the stream, where they sit in merry and social converse until the shades of evening warn them to their homes. We have all read of nymphs of stream and fountain, and, in our simplicity, may have

regarded them as the wild creations of fancy, but you have only to repair to this southern clime of poetry and romance to find them actually living, and cognizable by the senses in all their loveliness.

I am now, as you will observe by the date of my letter, at Bordeaux; I must therefore give you some account of my journey hither. I left Limoges on the evening of the 7th at six o'clock, and reached this town the following evening at seven, having travelled the fifty-six leagues in twenty-five hours. The greater part of the country through which I passed was wild and beautiful, hill and dale clothed with fern and chestnut,—the “wilderness of the Limosin,” as Arthur Young justly terms it. When the dew of the evening descended, the blossoms of the chestnut filled the whole air with their delicious fragrance; but as night crept on, in spite of every effort, my weary eyes closed, and many a mile was passed without further observation, except once or twice, when I opened them sufficiently wide to see that the aspect of the country was slightly changed, the ground being more level, and heath and shrub having supplied the place of fern and wood. At three, however, I awoke for the day. A view of a sunrise in this southern clime is far too interesting to receive from sleep any fair compensation for the loss of it, precious as this boon must ever be to a weary traveller; besides, this was the morning of the much-talked-of eclipse, for the observation of which I had heard before quitting England that several of our astronomers had proceeded to the South: the sky was cloudless, so I kept a sharp

look-out for consequences. Between five and six we were in Perigueux, famous for its partridge-pies and Roman antiquities: the philosophical inhabitants were all busy with their smoked glasses, and we of the diligence quickly supplied ourselves with the same necessary apparatus, and had the satisfaction of viewing the phenomenon as perfectly as was possible with unastronomical eyes, the gods having kindly postponed the event until we had fairly emerged from our conveyance. Any one, although ignorant of the cause, must have noticed the general diminution of light, but it was far less than I had anticipated.

Perigueux is situated in a hollow of the limestone hills of which this region is composed: they are remarkable for the caverns that pervade them in all directions, and are generally well-wooded and picturesque. From this town we passed the Isle, in which stands the remnant of a bridge, moss-grown and of most antique appearance, and then ascending a long hill, attained a level upon which we had to travel for many miles. This road was extremely striking, as it passed along the flank of the hills which fell abruptly to the plain; to the right they rose immediately steep and precipitous,—green, from a continuous forest of chestnuts, some of which were of great size and age; to the left, some way below, flowed the river Isle, which, winding its course through vineyards and fields of maize, continued our companion as far as Libourne, where it mingles its waters with those of the Dordogne.

On this road was enacted a French ceremony which

the English can never witness with patience. A bulky man, upon quitting the diligence, was met by another, his antithesis in size, who, although sickly in appearance, had evidently never been a patient of Presnitz, for a more unwashed fellow I never beheld: the friends no sooner met than they dashed into each other's arms, and forthwith commenced a furious contest, as if to try their respective powers in hugging and kissing. A French girl sat opposite to me, to whom I had half a mind to remark upon the irregularity of the obnoxious custom, and to explain to her my national views; unfortunately she spoke a *patois* that passed all understanding, and dumb signs might have been awkward and liable to a misinterpretation. At Maceron we breakfasted, and for your edification at home I will enumerate the different articles of which we partook: perch (which were excellent), *potage*, cutlets, chicken, fried potatoes, omelet, cheese, and cherries; and in addition to all these good things (thanks to the persuasive eloquence of my *compagnons de voyage*), our hostess produced a bottle of her best Bordeaux, and for this ample supply we paid only two francs each (one and eightpence of our English money). After leaving Maceron we had another long hill to ascend, from the summit of which we commanded a very extensive view, and we then rolled down into the plain, and along a road which ran in a perfectly straight line through several miles of vineyards to Libourne.

This old town is situated upon the Dordogne, a broad and rapid river, but of an aspect as dark and foul as mud can make it: a sail upon its waters has been com-

pared in M. Reichard's book to a sail upon the lakes of Switzerland! What would a Libourne fisherman say to this, were he to be transferred from the banks of the Dordogne to Thun or Geneva? the comparison would certainly not heighten his local predilections. From Libourne an uninteresting road of a few miles leads to Bordeaux: there cannot be the least objection to the traveller dreaming over this part of his journey, provided that he awake on his descent to the city of his destination; for here will be presented a view, the most striking perhaps of its kind on the continent. The Garonne, magnificent in breadth and volume, sweeps proudly round in the plain below, covered with shipping and spanned by one of the finest bridges in the world, while its banks are bordered by splendid quays and noble buildings. The great mass of the city lies before you, from which spring the two sister-pinnacles of the cathedral, remarkable for their antique architecture and symmetrical forms; above all is the translucent atmosphere of a southern climate, giving a sharpness to every outline and a harmonious richness to every colour.

Having descended the hill, we had about a mile of capital French road, broad, and as straight as an arrow, to conduct us to the bridge; the road was bordered on either side by a row of stately poplars,—trees, which, when they become the features of an artificial scene, are far from being open to the imputation I formerly cast upon them. The bridge is one of the *lions* of Bordeaux, into whose inmost recesses it is customary for visitors to enter, that they may view and justly ap-

preciate the ingenuity of its construction, the simplicity of its arrangements, and the facility with which it may at any time be repaired. I was strikingly impressed with the commanding grandeur of its appearance: its breadth is considerable, and on either side are commodious footways rising from the road by steps of stone, and, like our own Waterloo Bridge, there is no perceptible change in its level as it passes over the river, which is considerably broader than the Thames at London Bridge. On our arrival at the diligence bureau we were assailed by hotel commissioners, who patronize the stranger pretty much after the fashion of those obliging gentlemen who offer their services to the sea-sick citizen after his perilous voyage from London to Margate; but not being burdened by luggage, I readily escaped from their buzzing attacks, and, with my knapsack under my arm, sallied forth and selected my hotel, which, although not the first in distinction, had the advantage of a central position, the Place de la Comédie.

Here I tarried four days (from the 8th to the 12th), and inspected the chief wonders of this beautiful city. I had been particularly advised by an old Harrow schoolfellow whom I met in Paris, not on any account to neglect visiting the Pont de Cubzac, should I pass within a reasonable distance of Bordeaux; accordingly on one fine morning I started off *à pied*, by way of getting my *steed* into proper training for the Pyrenees, the bridge being about twelve miles distant on the road to Nantes. I soon, however, discovered that I had undertaken an expedition of no small labour for the purpose

of making my joints supple and my sinews pliant after the cramps incident to diligence travelling: of the heat of the sun, you, as a resident of England, can form no idea,—it actually so burnt my skin as to occasion pain; the glare was intense, and the dust, when anything passed along the road, threatened suffocation. As a precaution to prevent blindness I covered my head with my neckerchief, and methinks I see you laugh, as your fancy pictures my strange appearance with beet-root face and powdered hair.

A sight, however, of this wonderful bridge was well worthy of its price. The first view of it presented one of the most startling and amazing scenes of the kind I had ever witnessed: it is said by the French to be second only to the bridge of Le Roche Bernard over the Vilaine, but I fancy it must be the finer of the two, the other being higher from the water, but not so long, while the Pont de Cubzac derives its character of vastness in a great measure from its prodigious length, amounting to 1800 French feet, and from being raised 120 feet from the surface of the water, it proudly towers over the surrounding flat country*; at the same time

* Perhaps it would be interesting to compare this amazing structure with our famous Menai Bridge.

<i>Menai Bridge.</i>	English feet.
Length of roadway	1000
Height from the water	100
Time of building, seven years.	
<i>Pont de Cubzac.</i>	French feet.
Length of roadway	1800
Height from the water	120
Time of building, four years.	

the elevation is gained by a gradual ascent, a viaduct on either bank of twenty-seven fine arches lowering you into the plain. Only figure to yourself a suspension-bridge 1800 feet long, 120 feet high, and with a viaduct on either side on twenty-seven fine arches! is it not stupendous? By-the-bye, I had forgotten to tell you that the noble river over which it extends is the Dordogne, a stream as wide as the Garonne at Bordeaux, into which it falls a few miles lower down, and, like the Garonne, its waters are deeply stained with mud, while its banks are covered with slime and willows: this is the river M. Reichard compares to the mountain-lakes of Switzerland! Some little time is required to see the bridge properly: of course it must be walked over and its vast iron piers inspected; then it is necessary to go below and view it from different points, before you can be fully impressed with a just idea of its colossal proportions: the arches of the viaduct moreover are so divided, that when standing within them a most extraordinary view is obtained through a long vista of masonry. On either side of the bridge, entering it from the village of Cubzac, is an inscription; one announcing its commencement in 1835 and its completion in 1839, and another that the Duke of Orleans and his duchess were the first to pass over it, on the 17th of August, 1839.

Finding myself very nearly roasted by the intense heat of an unclouded sun I thought it was time to depart, and I accordingly returned to Bordeaux, but not on foot. The flies are terrible annoyances in this country, assailing you in troops, while the heat of the

weather renders you less in humour to bear with becoming patience their pungent assaults; they are great advocates for early rising, and are sure to wake up the sluggard by sundry hints that are generally taken and quickly acted upon: I defy a Rip Van Winkle to disregard the summons. The horses are protected from them by an armour of foliage, and you may see the old women, as they jog along the road, flourishing a stout branch with its complement of leaves, in order to brush away the venomous miscreants.

The quays of Bordeaux stand high in the list of sights; they are very striking from their great breadth, from the noble river before them sweeping round in a Herculean bow, and from the line of white houses, all well-built and regular, that form the background. There is an air of mercantile bustle also which one does not expect to find anywhere but in England: ships are unloading, cranes are working, and fine tawny specimens of the ox tribe stand about in pairs, yoked by the horns, and ready to convey barrels and goods to the different warehouses.

I must tell you that I visited the church of St. Michel, a gothic edifice of very considerable antiquity; its tower stands isolated from the body of the building, and advantage has been taken of its great elevation for the erection of a telegraph, which appeared in full activity whenever I chanced to view it. But a still more curious exhibition was to be seen under the tower, and one which forms a singular contrast with that upon its summit: the telegraph all life and activity, receiving and

transmitting thoughts from one to the other extreme of the kingdom, directing fleets and controlling armies; while the scene below to which I am about to introduce you is so silent, so dreary, so repulsive of all change, that the very elements pause in their work of decomposition, and the loathsome banquet of the spell-bound worm is suspended. It is the juxtaposition of such objects of contrast as the telegraph and the catacombs that invests the tower of St. Michel with a sort of poetical interest; but I will conduct you to this curious chamber.

There is not the least delay or difficulty in obtaining admission,—

“*Noctes atque dies patet atri janua Ditis :*”

a single rap at the door summoned from within an usher in waiting, who was quite prepared to do all the honours of a sepulchral presentation, and he went so mechanically to work without exchanging a word, that I have no doubt it had been his daily occupation for years. Having lighted a flaring lamp, he preceded me down a flight of about twenty stone steps to the vault below; here I found myself in a circular chamber, warm and dry, and surrounded by the mummies I had been so desirous of seeing; every variety of ghastly expression marked their shrivelled features, while their dry and crumpled skin, investing the bones of their limbs as they reposed against the wall, might have furnished a demoniacal study for Fuseli.

The cicerone, like the grave-digger in Hamlet, seemed proud of his vocation, and with equal archness betrayed

a secret triumph at the durability of the grave-house. He knew to admiration the history of all its inmates, even to the diseases of which they had died,—

“.....et magnâ testatur voce per umbras,”

“Here you see a family consisting of father, mother, and three children, all of whom died from eating mushrooms: only mark their distorted features, their gaping jaws, and agonized attitudes? There you see the bodies of three women who fell victims to cancer in the breast;” and he pointed to some dusky forms, as shrivelled and brown as leather, each containing a frightful cavity in the seat of the imputed disease. Who shall say that these loathsome objects might not once have been as lovely and blooming as those I saw around me every hour in this land of beauty! Methinks, were the spirit of Harrow once more to descend upon me, I might upon this occasion compose no bad parody of the speech of Anchises to Æneas in the Shades, with the understanding, however, that my Virgilian muse should abandon her prophetic prerogative, and restraining her wild imaginings of the future, confine them to the elucidation of the past. “Observe the linen,” continued the guide, “it is as strong as the bodies themselves;” upon which he gave the shroud one of those energetic tugs, which, according to a fair calculation, it must receive at least a thousand times per annum. “Here, again,” exclaimed he, “you have a man in the most wonderful preservation, with a white beard on his chin and a tooth in his jaw;” when he thrust forward his smoky light to show them off to the best advantage, by the glare of which

it was manifest that his lamp had done some service, for the white beard, as he was pleased to designate it, was nearly black, and the spectre before us grinned horribly with party-coloured features of leather and soot. Next in order came a form of gigantic height, towering greatly above his ancient brethren, and looking down upon them with a kind of patronizing air. "This," observed my cicerone, with all the confidence of an accredited historian, "was the tallest man in his country, measuring exactly seven feet in height."

I have enumerated these few specimens as being the *gems* of the collection; the others he passed over without any remark worthy of record, striking several of these "shales and husks of men" with a stick to demonstrate their leathery consistence; and having exhibited a few more teeth, and informed me that the vault was paved with bones to the depth of sixty-five feet, he received the usual *honorarium* of five sous, and dismissed me to the realms above.

Before I quit this agreeable and exhilarating vein of discourse, I may as well tell you that I afterwards visited the cemetery of the city, which is situated at a little distance, and was formerly the vineyard of the Chartreuse, which stands close at hand. Here I found ample occupation for about two hours, inspecting monuments and more humble graves, inscriptions of elaborate length, and epitaphs remarkable for their simplicity and brevity, the long history of some connubial connection, and the short, pithy memorial of "*Regrets Eternels*," or "*Souvenir d'une Sœur pour son Frère*;" in fact, there was a variety

to please all tastes, and the whole afforded a good specimen of a French cemetery, well laid out in shady walks and most plentifully supplied with tenants, 80,000 persons having, it is said, been buried within its precincts during the last thirty years. The street adjoining is filled with coffin-makers and the sculptors of monuments, and amongst the former I observed one who associated with his grave-calling an occupation by no means of a congenial character,—his house was not only a coffin-manufactory, but a *café*, within which sat a carousing party amidst crosses, slabs of marble, and half-finished coffins, in a state of great apparent exhilaration. Thus did “mine host” provide for the living as well as for the dead; and, judging from the alacrity with which he plied the former with his *eau de vie*, we may conclude that he had an eye to each branch of his business, and was duly influenced by the truth of the popular adage, that “every glass of spirit is a nail in the coffin.”

The exterior of the cathedral is very beautiful, and its two sister spires are objects of interest from whatever point of view they may chance to be seen, so delicate is their dark gothic-work, and so boldly and in such close companionship do their needle-like forms rise into the sky. Within there is nothing very remarkable, with the exception perhaps of a painted window of most brilliant colours, which are wonderfully heightened by the gloom of the interior; but there are historical events connected with this edifice which an Englishman can never call to his recollection with indifference, for to

the English is this, like many other gothic buildings in France, indebted for its erection; while in surveying the city, of which it is so distinguished an ornament, it cannot be forgotten that it once held an English court, in which our Black Prince, surrounded by a parliament of nobles summoned from the different provinces, discussed the expediency of restoring a Spanish monarch to his throne.

I can well imagine that you are wearied by my long stay at Bordeaux, and are heartily tired of my stories about coffins, and of my tales of the charnel-house and grave-yards; but bear with me a little longer; in a few more lines you shall be whisked off with a flourish of my pen to Bayonne. Before, however, I put my feathered talisman in requisition, I must dispel the blue devils my previous gloomy narrative may have raised, by begging you to accompany me to the theatre, which is one of the finest in France, and is a building which must immediately attract the notice of the stranger, standing, as it does, completely isolated in one of the most imposing situations in the city, while its well-proportioned Corinthian columns and pilasters give it a considerable claim to architectural distinction.

As a matter of course I paid it a visit. The performance was an opera of Meyerbeer's called "Les Huguenots": there were one or two fearfully discordant voices, and when the false notes came out there arose at first a very general, but decent and subdued buzz of dissatisfaction; but in a few seconds, oh ye gods! it became a roar, such as we might expect to

hear from the clashing of the elements at the end of the world. This was principally effected by a species of high-pressure catcall of at least *fifty-voice power*, numbers of which were simultaneously called into play. The tumult at length arose to such a pitch that the performance ceased, the actors were bewildered and motionless, and amidst the hurly-burly loud calls for the *préfet* of police could be alone distinguished: the manager came forward, and by opening his mouth and throwing his arms into expressive attitudes, signified his desire to address the audience; but the efforts of the catcallers were redoubled, and he was compelled to seek refuge behind the scenes. This discomfiture having in some degree pacified the indignation of the audience, it might be perceived that at each retrograde movement he made the vociferations became successively less boisterous, and as he vanished behind the side-scene comparative tranquillity was restored. After an interval the offending songsters reappeared, and all went on smoothly enough for some time; but it is hard for a bass voice to bring out the notes of the treble, and so, having committed another *faux pas*, they were again assailed by the catcalls; and in this way, with alternate storms and calms, did the opera proceed to its termination. The prices of admission to this theatre will appear moderate to the English play-goer, being only three and a half francs (less than three shillings) to the dress-circle, for four and a half hours' amusement,—from half-past six to eleven. But the curtain has dropt, and so—good night!

LETTER III.

Departure from Bordeaux.—Region of the Landes.—Its mists and cold.—Changed appearance of the peasantry.—First view of the Pyrenees.—Journey from Dax to Bayonne.—Lovely situation of Bayonne.—Biaritz, and the Bay of Biscay.—Rocks of Biaritz.—A French bathing-place.—Excursion to the mouth of the Adour.—Mysterious sounds amongst the sand-hills of the Landes.

Biaritz, July 15th.

ON the afternoon of the 12th I left Bordeaux, not having had time to examine, as I had intended, the tertiary deposits in the environs, from which, it is said, about six hundred species of shells have been obtained. The weather had changed from intolerable heat to showers and fresh breezes; grand, towering clouds sailed along the heavens, and the wind blew as I hoped it might continue until I reached the Bay of Biscay. At four o'clock I started per diligence for Bayonne, one of the most beautifully situated towns that I fancy France can show, and I arrived at my destination by the same hour on the following afternoon; four-and-twenty hours being a pretty liberal allowance for fifty-three leagues (reckoning a French league as being rather less than two and a half miles English). I cannot express with how much pleasure I had anticipated this part of my tour: the Landes had been to me a subject of high, but undefined interest ever since

I first read of their dreary sand-hills, and the manner in which villages were gradually overwhelmed by them; I associated something grand and mysterious with their interminable forests of pine, their vast sandy wastes, and wild inhabitants; so you may readily imagine that my anticipations were all of the most agreeable kind when I was about to start for this journey. It was for the most part through a perfect wilderness, enveloped in one mighty forest, broken here and there by dark, sandy gullies, the beds of torrents that ever and anon vent their harmless rage upon the firs around. As far as Langon the road was comparatively uninteresting, but after leaving that village, which is prettily situated upon the Garonne, we entered the region of the Landes properly so called, and slowly rolled up a long, gradual ascent of some leagues, with the dark, wild forest on either side; during which time the sun sank to rest below an horizon of pines in a most glorious fashion, tinting both sky and earth with the hue of the rose. These words, however, will give you but a very inadequate idea of a sunset in this climate; for so exquisitely clear and bright is the atmosphere, that I have seen the whole canopy of the heavens from west to east one blaze of glory, with every variety of hue and colour which the poet could describe or the artist represent, while the sun himself went down with a magnificence that would have much astonished your northern eyes.

My seat being anything but a pillow of down, although I had the best place in the *banquette*, did not allow me more than an occasional doze, so that I saw some of the

country through which I passed; it was forest,—all forest, broken here by a fern-covered savannah, and there by a wild tract of heath; occasionally we passed a cottage built somewhat in the Swiss fashion, and surrounded by a few acres of cleared land. Upon leaving Bordeaux I had most improvidently packed up my macintosh, little anticipating the degree of cold which I experienced during this journey. This part of the Landes is by nature swampy, and the trees necessarily condense the moisture, so that at the dawn I found myself in no very agreeable state,—cold to the very vitals, without any means of raising my temperature; and I looked at the *conducteur* and *postillon* with eyes of envy, for they were well clad in heavy winter-cloaks; I had therefore to endure as patiently as I could the chilling effect of the mist, which enveloped the whole face of the country, until the sun dismissed the dews and moisture, which he very peremptorily accomplished as soon as he had obtained a sufficient elevation: it must be a rebellious mist truly that could contend for mastery with so fierce an opponent, as he darts his fiery rays over the land.

Bordeaux appears to lie in the line of demarcation by which the French of the plain are separated from their mountain brethren. The people we met on the road were in good keeping with the savage character of their country: women barefooted and with naked legs, in rude and wild attire, riding upon mules or standing about with classically-shaped water-vessels on their heads; men with the highland cap of the mountains we were

approaching, which in its shape resembles that of Scotland, and with scarlet sashes tied around their waists; the oxen presented also a novel appearance as they stood yoked to the odd, fantastic-looking waggons, and covered from the head to the tail with cloths to protect them from the flies.



After having breakfasted at Mont de Marsan, the capital of the department of the Landes, we entered a country more broken, but still in its garments of forest and fern; clear torrents dashed through the trees, and the wide margins of sand which bordered their channels bore evidence of the occasional increase of their volume and impetuosity. But you must not think that this is a description of the desert of the Landes. The department is divided into two distinct parts; the Landes, *par excellence*, and the Chalosse; and it is through the pine-forests of the latter that the traveller passes for the greater part of his journey from Bordeaux to Bayonne. The Landes is by far the larger district: according to tradition it once formed the bed of the sea, which is said to have flowed as far as Dax; but it now consti-

tutes one of the most noted deserts of Europe, extending from the banks of the Gironde to those of the Adour, and presenting a level waste of arid sand, which near the coast is heaped into hills, ever varying in form and position*. Historians assert that the Moors, when expelled from Spain, asked permission to settle here, that they might bring the desert into cultivation, and the court of France has been much blamed for having rejected the proposal. The shepherds of the Landes are in keeping with the anomalous character of their country: mounted on stilts, that they may obtain a more extended sphere of vision over the flats, and preserve their feet from the wet or the heat of the sands, they have a stork-like appearance, which is very singular; but it is yet more surprising to see the agility with which they will run, stoop, or even dance upon their supplementary extremities, their only difficulty being to remain quiet; this, however, they obviate by carrying a long pole in their hands, by which they manage to steady themselves.

I had for some time kept a sharp look-out for the Pyrenees, expecting in my thoughtlessness to see their summits gradually elevating themselves from the distant horizon; but after changing horses at a small village between Tartas and Dax, on descending a hill the whole range of these magnificent mountains became

* M. Bremon tier estimated the progress of these sand-hills at sixty feet yearly. They have overwhelmed many villages, and Mîmigan has been menaced for the last fifteen years by a sand-hill sixty feet in perpendicular height, which obviously advances.—*Cuvier*.

suddenly apparent, looming grandly through the haze, and far above the misty horizon, although they could not have been less than fifty miles distant. My heart beat quick, and a joyous tide ran through my veins, as I hailed for the first time the wild and solitary regions so famous in song and story,—from the deeds of Roland the Brave to the tales of the “mighty magician*” of the “Mysteries of Udolpho;” and where even yet, it is said, Saracens and Christian knights may be heard battling when the wild mountain-thunder is abroad.

You may readily imagine that the views which were successively presented during the rest of the journey were as grand as any one could desire, with such a background constantly varying its aërial perspective in the soft and rosy tints of this clear atmosphere. After a time the ravines and dark mountain dells, and the dazzling snows of the higher ranges to the east might be distinguished; but of the reality of the latter I was for some time doubtful; I could not be persuaded by the *conducteur* and a Frenchman who sat next to me that they were not a continuation of the fleecy clouds that hung over the mountains in front of us. Such was certainly their appearance to an unpractised eye, but, as a traveller in Switzerland, I ought not to have been so deceived: it was, however, not until I had reached Bayonne, and climbed the citadel-hill by sunset, that my incredulity was entirely removed.

At Dax, a curious old town upon the Adour, we halted for about twenty minutes to allow our passports

* Pursuits of Literature.

to be examined, and to enable those who desired it to obtain some refreshment. The entire road from that town to Bayonne teemed with beauties, and there was one view over the Bay of Biscay to the mountain-coast of Spain so incomparably fine, that I will attempt no description of it; for so greatly do such scenes depend upon the happy arrangement and harmonious combination of the several parts, when seen under all the delicate varieties of light and shade, that it is as impossible for a tourist to give an idea of their many beauties, as it is for a novelist to describe to his satisfaction the witcheries of his heroine.

Bayonne must have been designed by a painter, and its site selected by his mistress, Nature, as a place upon which to lavish her choicest gifts. It is not possible to conceive anything more perfect in its way than the appearance of this town, as it is viewed from the high hill that leads to it; or better still, perhaps, from beneath the walls of the citadel that overhangs the Adour. It is situated at the confluence of two rivers of azure-blue and pellucid beauty, each bearing the impress of its mountain parentage. The Nive bustles through the heart of the place and amicably joins its twin brother, the Adour, which skirts the town to receive it, when in tranquil companionship they flow past the citadel, and finally mingle their united waters with those of the Bay of Biscay. These rivers are hung with bridges, and from that over the Nive, the interior of the town assumes a Venice-like beauty that is extremely striking; the eye is conducted down a vista of old, picturesque

houses along the banks of the water to a view of the distant Pyrenees.

Here I began to ruminate on my future plans, having as yet only marked out a route as far as Biaritz, a watering-place about five miles from Bayonne on the shores of the Bay of Biscay. In some way or other the thought of visiting St. Sebastian came across me, and I felt strongly inclined for a tramontane excursion into Spain, when it so happened that I met an Englishman at breakfast, whose representations at once determined me to gratify the wish. I accordingly set about having my passport *visé'd*; but I found that being French it was not calculated to carry an Englishman out of the country, and, from the negligence of the Calais authorities, my own English passport had been left behind, so that I had to obtain another from the British consul, and to have it backed by the signatures of the *préfet* of police and the Spanish consul; which having been duly accomplished, I buckled on my knapsack and started in the comparative coolness of the afternoon for Biaritz. I soon found, however, that cool as I had supposed it to be, it was far too hot for this mode of travelling; for notwithstanding the precaution I had taken of keeping in the shade, and of sauntering rather than walking, I began to think, that like another Acis, I was about to be metamorphosed into a stream.

Approaching Biaritz the country became extremely wild and arid, and broken water-courses plainly indicated the mountainous district that lay to the left.

When within a mile of this place, the evening being perfectly calm, I heard the roar of the breakers thundering upon the coast, and on gaining the summit of a sandy hill I was gratified by a view of the Bay of Biscay, stretching far and wide in one unbroken sheet of the darkest blue, and rolling in vast undulations upon a tremendous line of rocks, caverned and worn into every fantastic shape by the action of the sea. Having traversed a succession of loose sand-hills I reached the shore, where I threw myself down to enjoy the beautiful prospect. The sun was, as usual, setting most magnificently, and directly over the waters, the hues of the sky were momentarily changing, and the dark blue waves came rolling in, with their crests tipped with flashes of golden light. As I lay on my back, with my knapsack for a pillow, the scene brought to my recollection that grand picture in the Louvre of the wreck of the *Alceste*, where the wretched sufferers are making signals from their raft to a vessel on the horizon; the effect of which the artist has so wonderfully heightened by the magical lights of sunset: his colouring was that which I now had before me. The waves rolling in from the west scattered a cloud of spray over Biaritz and the adjacent country. This was very refreshing for a short time after a hot and dusty walk from Bayonne; but I was soon bedewed to my heart's content, and as the shades of night were falling, I thought it prudent to proceed without further delay to the village, where I sought a night's lodging in the Auberge de Grand Balcon, it being the first house of accommodation that presented itself.

Although this coast frowns a stern defiance upon the ocean, yet have its dark rolling waves by restless perseverance worn deep fissures, and formed subterranean chambers, which would seem even to penetrate the bowels of the earth; for when the wild winds howl, the very ground under your feet may be felt to tremble from the rushing waters which bellow in its recesses. The rocks rise to a considerable height from deep water, and besides the peculiar interest they afford to the geologist*, their grotesque and savage appearance will claim attention from every stranger. The rich purple and transparency of the sea, moreover, are particularly calculated to call forth admiration; I really could not have imagined such colouring existed in nature, although I had seen it represented in the beautiful drawings of Holland. The heat of the sun while I remained at Biaritz was tremendous; no one but a rash and inconsiderate traveller would have quitted the house, but to me time was too precious for the indulgence of a morning siesta; during the whole day did I defy its shafts, although I should think it was very much like walking in an oven, with a ball of red hot metal overhead. I was compelled in self-defence to be drinking and bathing incessantly; so you see I had enough to do in tempering the effect of the climate without any other employment.

Here there is a charming bay, shut in by towering

* His attention should be particularly directed to the calcareous formation, with reference to the tertiary deposits abounding in this district. I regret that I am unable to offer any observations that may contribute to the solution of this great problem of geological classification.

rocks, and sheltered from the heavy waves that roll upon the more exposed part of the coast,

“.....quibus omnis ab alto
Frangitur, inque sinus scindit sese unda reductos.”

The water is as clear as the brightest crystal, and through its azure depths the eye can discern the white sand that sparkles at the bottom. This constitutes the famous bathing-place; and here the *beau monde* of Biarritz are to be seen during the heat of the morning executing their watery purposes; *beaux* and *belles* alike, sporting and flirting as though the sea were their native element. The ladies are dressed in the thinnest linen garments, with gigantic hats of straw as a protection from the sun's rays. They are kept in a buoyant position by bladders passed under their arms, while expert bathing-men push them over the bay by holding their feet with one hand and swimming with the other.



I fancy your astonishment at this description, but I assure you it cannot be greater than was mine, on my first introduction to this singular scene. It is upon such occasions that we feel we are amongst another people, differing essentially from us both in habits and sentiment.

The day upon which I witnessed this scene was brilliant in the extreme, and as sultry as usual; of course, therefore, as you will readily believe, I made a point of joining this amphibious party. Having entered a booth for the purpose of equipping myself, my patience was sorely tried by a fat Frenchman, who occupied the whole attention of the assistant by fitting on different dresses, many of which were split by his exaggerated proportions; in the course of half an hour, however, having shed my outer garments, I was arrayed in the regular aquatic dress, "if *dress* it might be call'd, that *dress* had none." The nether robe scarcely reached the knees, while the jacket, composed of the thinnest materials, was wholly guiltless of sleeves. To confess the truth, I certainly did feel somewhat awkward at the idea of thus walking down to the sands through a bevy of ladies sitting at work; but custom is a great reconciler of scruples, so on I went, and as no one appeared to take particular notice of my meagre vestments, my courage mounted, and I entered the water and its band of Nereids with the most perfect nonchalance. I was much amused at perceiving these fair tenants of the sea, as they floated and gamboled, acknowledging their several acquaintances with as much

ease and courtesy as they might have shown in the gardens of the Tuileries.

I made a very interesting excursion from Biarritz to the mouth of the Adour, although I do not think I should have undertaken it had I foreseen its fatigues. The ground immediately surrounding the village is extremely barren, and shortly after passing the lighthouse I entered the region of the Landes, which is here to be seen in all its frightful desolation—

“ a bare strand
Of hillocks, heap'd from ever-shifting sand.”

Nothing can be imagined more strange and dreary, and I fancy I could nowhere have seen the coast of this desert in greater perfection. A huge bare sand-hill of a slaty colour, smooth as a snow-field and beautifully rounded, rose immediately before me, a sight as novel as it was striking; while further in advance, and to the right, lay a hideous tract of barren sand, stretching far away in vast undulations; the horizon in one direction being topped by firs, and in the other by the snow-crowned range of the Pyrenees. The day was intensely hot, the loose sand more than ankle-deep, and the labour of ploughing through it sufficiently fatiguing, but I was amply repaid by the singularity of the scene. Near Biarritz a curb is placed upon the progress of these drifting sands, or they would otherwise sweep over the whole face of the country; with this object vines are planted, and numerous stockades erected. Here therefore I had considerable difficulty in making my way,

having to climb a fence at every twenty yards, which added not a little to the fatigue of the excursion; but when once I had passed these last lines of civilization, there was nothing but the desert between me and the Adour.

If you wish to conjure up a picture of it in your mind's eye, imagine an expanse of sea before you, vast and stormy, with huge billows rolling on in endless succession; then summon to your aid the busy spirit of Michael Scott, or any other potent wizard of your acquaintance, that he may turn the whole to sand, and you will have a resemblance as perfect as any description can afford.

Toiling away, almost in despair of reaching the river, I came suddenly upon a sight as refreshing as it was unexpected in so arid a wilderness; a large sheet of fresh water, clear as crystal and bottomed with moss. As I approached it a strange sound assailed my ears resembling the cries of water-fowl or ducks, but no birds took flight, and no living thing could be seen; I was of course not a little puzzled, but the water being so clear and cool, and the sun so burning, I suspended my conjectures and eagerly plunged into the inviting bath. Guess my surprise, when I was immediately saluted by a full chorus of these same mysterious sounds; it was a perfect crash, as if the whole water teemed with aquatic spirits. On perceiving a few frogs leaping from the bank a sudden light broke in upon me, and my doubts were resolved; I had read most wondrous accounts of the Pyrenean frog, that his voice was on a scale as

grand as that of his locality, and that a pair of them in earnest converse would drown the clatter of the most energetic human tongue. Scarcely had this passed through my mind, when another and another high-pitched note resounded from the bank, and on looking round to the spot from which it proceeded, I there espied a gigantic member of this fraternity, puffing out his bloated sides, as if preparing a louder expostulation at my intrusion upon his solitary domain, and which I can assure you he fully accomplished; no doubt with as much satisfaction to himself as edification to me. As you observe these creatures leering at you from the water, and giving utterance to sounds which can only be compared to the quack of a duck, modified by the jug-jug of a superannuated nightingale, you might, in the exuberance of your fancy, imagine them the victims of some foul enchantment.

After this revivifying bath I ploughed through the unstable soil with renewed vigour, pausing occasionally at the top of a sand-wave to enjoy a view of the mountains, as they rose proudly over the desert-horizon. I could not but imagine what a strange aspect these wilds must present during a gale, the loose sharp sand scouring over the hills, and flying above on the wings of the wind: at present the air was motionless, but the summit of the tawny wave impended like the crest of the sea, or the top of a snow-drift. The only signs of any living existence were the foot-prints of wild birds, or perchance they might have been the claw-marks of sand-demons, for verily, if there be a place upon earth set

apart for the revels of the wild spirits of evil, this desert must be the very spot. I occasionally found, however, to my surprise, an elegant species of *Dianthus*, a mountain pink, springing up on its slender stalk from the arid sand, and wasting its delightful fragrance upon the air of this solitude. At length I reached the Adour, and lay myself down to observe a vessel that was passing the bar. This in stormy weather must be an undertaking of some hazard, for even now, calm as it was, a heavy swell thundered upon it. Two boats were stationed with flags to guide the vessel, one on the outside and the other within, by the assistance of which she entered in perfect safety, being heaved up by the swelling waves as she passed through the narrow entrance. I returned to Biaritz by the beach, as affording the least difficult road, although the sands were so villainously soft, that I was compelled every now and then to dash into the sea, without which the walk would scarcely have been practicable.

LETTER IV.

First excursion into Spain.—Walk to St. Jean de Luz.—A bath by moonlight, and escape from an awkward predicament.—A Brobdingnagian hostess and chamber.—Road from St. Jean de Luz to St. Sebastian.—Crossing the frontier.—The Bidassoa.—Visible change in the country.—Yrun.—Dramatic scene in the Plaza.—Spanish beauty.—Pedestrian miseries.—The visible ravages of war.—Execrable mule-paths.—A female Charon.—Passages.—Approach to St. Sebastian.—Difficulty of finding the hotel.—Odd customs.—A visit to the church.

St. Sebastian, July 18th.

ALTHOUGH tired, hot, and foot-sore, I must send you a few lines from St. Sebastian, where I have at length arrived, amidst mantillas, and Spanish faces with “cherry lips and bonny eyes,” dreaming of course of Gil Blas, Saracens’ heads, and I know not what besides, although in a state of perpetual torture from a lively and most unconscionable race of fleas, which by their numbers make up for the otherwise scanty population. “By the mass, there is ne’er a king in Christendom better bit than I have been since the first cock!”

My last letter was dated Biaritz; I must therefore carry you back to that place to resume the thread of my history. On the afternoon of Saturday, the 16th, I started for St. Jean de Luz, on my road into Spain, having left my frock-coat, and almost all my effects, with mine hostess of the Grand Balcon. But I must

confess it was rather a rash expedition; for I was ignorant of the Spanish language, I had no money of the country about me, nor any knowledge of its value, neither had I inquired into the safety of the road. These were slight disqualifications for a long day's journey on foot from the frontier to St. Sebastian, and accordingly, in addition to losing my way, I had to encounter sundry casualties. St. Jean de Luz is about twelve miles distant from Biaritz; Béobie, the frontier-village, seven from St. Jean de Luz; and St. Sebastian about fifteen from Béobie. My plan was to sleep that night at St. Jean de Luz, and on the following day to walk over the border to St. Sebastian.

The day was gloomy, and the ranges of the Pyrenees were enveloped in clouds, so that I lost the pleasure of seeing their dark forms gradually revealing themselves at my approach; but the road was nevertheless interesting, as it passed over the spurs of the mountains,—large, rugged, fern-clothed hills, occasionally dipping down to the shore; whilst the *carro*, with its solid wheels, which I frequently met, reminded me of my vicinity to Spain.



The houses in this part of the country presented an

unusual aspect, their cross-beams, doors and window-shutters being coloured bright red : as to the inhabitants, they might, from the squalid misery of their appearance, have been classed with the tenants of St. Giles's; and the red crosses, which were rudely painted over their doors, afforded evidence of their superstition. I walked into St. Jean de Luz about eight o'clock, having taken these ten or twelve miles, as it may be, at my leisure, and without loss of time proceeded to inspect the town before it became dark, but in which there was not much to interest the stranger. It is situated on a marsh at the mouth of the river Nivelle: I passed through a long, narrow street into a *Place* which was picturesque enough, and thence to the sea-wall which protects the harbour and the town. I afterwards heard that the waves of the Bay of Biscay had committed great depredation in this quarter, and that at low water the remains of submerged houses might still be observed; but the present scene was one of serenity and tranquil beauty. The rocky land swept round as a dark crescent, and the green waters came running to the beach in gentle undulations, sparkling beneath the rays of the moon, and whispering in my ear an invitation which I always receive with pleasure,—even by moonlight. You will anticipate what followed; but after a hot and dusty walk, notwithstanding the time of day, the luxury of such a bath was irresistible. While revelling, however, in the clear element, I had a very narrow escape from an accident that might have proved extremely awkward. The various articles of my attire lay upon the highly-

inclined beach, and on a hint given to them by a sudden breeze, they unceremoniously betook themselves to the brink of the water; another wave, and they must have been lost for ever! but I desperately rushed forward, and at the critical moment arrested their progress. In what a forlorn condition should I have been left, had this treacherous attempt of the elements succeeded! I must have roamed the shores of this wild bay, or dwelt like a *mer-man* in its caves of rock, shunning the face of man. However humorous the account of it may appear to you, to me the incident would have turned out a tragedy.

I quickly returned into the town and lost no time in seeking a lodging, and having entered a shop, I was opportunely asked by a woman in attendance whether I had procured any accommodation for the night; upon my answering her in the negative, she volunteered to accompany me to the house of an old lady "*très aimable,*" who would be delighted to afford me all that I might require: we accordingly sallied forth in order to realise so favourable a prospect. The house was situated in a street near the sea with a most unpromising exterior; its entrance was as dark as Erebus, with walls of kindred blackness. My conductor, however, walked boldly in, and I of course followed; and having stumbled in utter darkness up a flight of wooden stairs, constructed at every possible angle with each other, I found myself in a small chamber reeking with smoky odours, in the presence of the lady of the mansion and her liege lord. I shall not stop to inquire what ideas my guide

and patroness might have associated with the inviting epithet of "*aimable*," but I will describe in a few words the appearance of the beldam. She was above six feet in height, with shoulders and limbs of equal proportion; her physiognomy was coarse and angular as a witch, and her voice had an air of ferocious grandeur; when she moved, the house shook,—when she spoke, her husband trembled. These pleasing peculiarities, however, could not affect me nor the comfort of my lodging, so, in my mildest accents, I inquired of her whether I could be accommodated for the night: "*Certainement*," was the flattering answer, and taking up a fragment of flaming pine-wood, she opened the door of a miserable little den, with an aperture in the wall, as an apology for a window, and with a bed upon the floor, its atmosphere being duly impregnated with all the fragrance of the adjoining common-room, with those pungent advantages which staleness commonly imparts. "Here," cried she, "is a chamber for ten sous the night." Yes, I mentally added, as I regarded the loathsome apartment, and as hot and as close as an oven, and, I will be bound for it, as busy as an ant-hill. "It will not answer my purpose, my good woman;" upon which declaration I moved away, with the instinctive feeling that I had raised a storm which would immediately burst upon me from the depths of her dark vocabulary. But the thought was unjust; she merely shouted after me in a stentorian voice to the effect that I was rather difficult to please, and that she had another room a size larger, that might perchance meet my fancy.

I accordingly returned, and following in the shadow of her vast form, as it was cast by the flaming pine-torch, up I went a flight of steps, which, if possible, were in a more ruinous and crazy condition than that of their nether brethren, and found myself in a chamber of such vast proportions, when contrasted with the room below, that I was perfectly amazed. It would have accommodated with ease a company of soldiers, and a bed of no mean capacity appeared to be utterly lost in one of its corners. Here then, thought I, sleeps the Brobdingnag, and below is the resting-place of her tame drudge of a husband; but I had formed a false conjecture as I afterwards found, upon hearing the mystical story of this chamber from my shopwoman on the following morning. If you are awaiting in breathless expectation the disclosure of what I saw or heard upon this occasion, you will be sadly disappointed, for I never slept more soundly nor pleasantly in the whole course of my life.

The next morning I arose from my bed by four o'clock, but finding that it rained I turned in again until seven, when I started for St. Sebastian, to which place there were three mountain-ridges to cross, one in France and two in Spain, each of which exceeds the former in interest. In about two hours I was ascending the first of them, which consists of hills of grass, commanding views over the Bay of Biscay and the Spanish mountains; they were bleak and cheerless, being naked downs, over which the winter's wind must sweep along unresisted by either brake or bush. From this ridge I

descended with increasing interest to the little village of Béobie, standing on the Bidassoa, and giving its name to the pass into Spain. Here at the foot of the bridge I was stopped, as a matter of course, by the French *douaniers*, in order to have my passport duly inspected and signed, upon the accomplishment of which I was allowed to proceed, when I shortly found myself upon the neutral ground over the river. The Bidassoa, signifying in the Basque language *the way to the west*, a river as you well know of much historical interest, is here but a poor stream, shallow as well as sluggish, overhung on the French side by a dark precipitous mountain of slaty structure, which lies deeply imaged in its tranquil waters. It is crossed by a wooden bridge, its respective ends being covered by the soldiers of France and Spain. Below Béobie the two shores are equally flat, and any one, I should suppose, might easily wade from one country to the other, although I am not positive that a few strokes of the swimmer would not be required. Having crossed the bridge I was seized upon by the Spanish soldiers, whom I had seen laying in wait for me; my passport was again demanded, and my person most minutely searched; now it was that I felt myself a helpless wanderer in a strange land. The questions of the Spaniards were to me as Arabic, and "St. Sebastian" was all that I could reply to their inquiries: our interview was therefore far from being satisfactory, and I was heartily glad when it terminated.

It is impossible, after having passed over the Bi-

dassoa, not to feel that you have entered into a new country, distinct in manners, language and customs, from that which you have just left; not only do you recognize novelty in the physiognomy and costume of the inhabitants, but the very roads present a different character, and you see Spain as indelibly stamped upon their rough and contracted course, as you did France upon those magnificent highways you had so lately quitted. There is also another feature in this scene that will strike you as most decidedly Spanish: a yellow-washed church with a red roof dedicated to St. Miguel, perched upon the very summit of a conical mountain that rises opposite to the bridge. The soldiers too, in their gay uniforms of blue coats with green epaulets and white trowsers, are brought into strong contrast with the red-breeched fellows on the other side. Having got clear of the custom-house and its watchful dragons, I felt strongly inclined, as you will readily believe after so fatiguing a walk, to seek a little quiet repose, and in the indulgence of it my imagination lost no time in bestowing its wild offerings upon the genii of this land of romance. Upon climbing up some fifty or sixty feet above the road, with the intention of obtaining a panoramic view of the country, I found a spot well-adapted for rest and contemplation. I reached the ruins of an old fort of wonderful solidity, that still frowned in impotence upon the French frontier,—a crumbling record of the devastating tide that had swept over this blood-stained land; its walls, constructed of boulders rather than of hewn masses of rock, were at least ten feet thick,

with great chasms in their sides, affording at once a monument of strength and subjection. Here then, beneath the shade of some sweet-scented bushes, I stretched my limbs, disencumbering my heated person of hat, coat and shoes, and—fell into a reverie, you will say; not a bit of it, but most unpoetically made fierce inroads into some bread and cheese, which I had prudently brought in my knapsack, to obviate any immediate difficulties I might encounter on the road. I was shortly joined by a Frenchman, who came and lay down by my side; he pointed out the various objects of interest in the fine view before me, such as Fuenterrabia, which records in its dilapidation the attack of the British, and the “Isle of Pheasants,” memorable as the scene of a treaty between the two countries; but I did not suspect the drift of his friendly visit, until he told me he had married a Spanish girl, and lived in a small house below, where he kept a posada, and would be happy to see me upon my return, should I be in want of refreshment. All the world over, self-interest is the mainspring of our volitions.

The prospect from this old fort was very pleasing: beneath me flowed the Bidassoa, if its sluggish stream could be said to flow, clear as the sky, and reflecting the black wooden bridge that crossed to France; far beyond appeared the blue waters of the main, and on either side rose the many-tinted mountains of France and Spain; but behind me was the most curious feature of the scene, the aforesaid little church of St. Miguel, perched aloft like an eagle’s nest and thrown boldly

into relief by a background of dark sky. Having rested for about three-quarters of an hour, I started like a giant refreshed; filled with various vague, and yet not unpleasing anticipations: the very idea of a day's walk into Spain was sufficient to excite the coldest temperament. Yrun, the frontier-town, was the first object in my route, and towards it I bent my steps over a level marsh bounded by mountains, my attention being kept alive by the many novelties that successively presented themselves. Here, a fierce fellow passed me with scarred features and gay attire, mounted on a wild steed covered with trappings, and bearing the portmanteau and pistols of its rider: there, I caught a glimpse of a Spanish girl, with classical features and hair hanging down her back in a long braid, with a tight velvet boddice, bright skirt, and naked feet: and anon, I passed one of those strangely picturesque houses, bearing about it an air of oriental magnificence in its curiously carved wood-work, its deep, overhanging roof, and its fretted balcony; but, anxious to reach Yrun, I bestowed only a rapid and passing glance upon these objects, rightly conjecturing that my curiosity would be yet more gratified by the novelties which that town would afford. Situated on a hill, it is characteristically Spanish in its appearance; for it consists of a group of low-roofed houses of gaunt and cheerless aspect, built of rough and undressed stone, and with windowless apertures of diminutive size, admitting some air and less light; they are overshadowed by the tower of the church, singular from the great bell that hangs aloft and the quaint style of its architecture.

Such was the view of this town as seen upon its approach; the entrance was more cheering: young Spanish highlanders with the *berét Bearnais* upon their heads, and dressed *à la mode Française*, were busily engaged at a game of ball resembling tennis, and which I afterwards witnessed in other villages; soldiers were exercising in the Plaza, amidst the braying of trumpets and the clash of martial music, and behind them was the town-hall, or whatever it might be called in Spanish,—a very extraordinary-looking building, emblazoned with arms and elaborately ornamented, and backed by the dark mountains and still darker ground of thunder-clouds. The general effect was perfectly theatrical, and had more the air of a melodramatic scene than one of reality; it being further heightened by the figures of Spanish women gliding about in black dresses and mantillas. In physiognomy they very strikingly differed from the French,—I should say they rather resembled the English style of beauty; some having light hair and fair faces, which I have never seen in the peasantry of France. I have met with many very beautiful countenances that have actually realized all my extravagant conceptions of Spanish excellence; one in particular, at a town called Oyerzun, which beamed through an open lattice and was perfectly bewitching; but my pen is running truant, and unless I check its excursive wildness, it will never conduct you steadily to St. Sebastian.

Yrun being the frontier-town, I was exposed to fresh annoyance from the examination of my passport; but

after various significant gestures and unintelligible gabbling on the part of the authorities, and much patient endurance on mine,—my responses being limited to the words “*San Sebastian*” and “*Inglés*,”—the contest was brought to an amicable conclusion by my producing a five-franc piece, and pocketing the change in Spanish coin. After leaving this town I was joined by one of those magnificent highlanders who abound in these regions; he walked barefooted, and was girded by a bright red sash, which seems to be an indispensable article of their dress. As soon as he learnt that I was an Englishman he appeared highly delighted; and, judging from the change in the manners and countenances of Spaniards whom I afterwards encountered, as soon as they had been informed of this important circumstance, I should conclude that our countrymen are in high favour in these parts; while, from other demonstrations, I have little hesitation in declaring that the French are detested. Indeed, this hatred appears mutual between the lower orders of the two nations: in France, even as far north as St. Malo, you may hear a diligence-driver abusing his horse with a “*sacré Señor, sacré Espagnol*;” and in Spain, when mistaken for a Frenchman, I have been tauntingly called after as “*Monsieur, Monsieur*,” or “*sacré Monsieur*.” They are still writhing under the hate and jealousy that a long course of warfare has engendered.

About three or four miles beyond Yrun I began the ascent of the second mountain-pass. Nature has cast its scenery in one of her choicest moulds. The road

winds upwards through a forest of Spanish chestnuts, and the summit of the ridge presents a bare pile of granite rocks, that are very striking as they boldly emerge from the fern and wood. It commands a grand view over the Bay of Biscay, France, and that portion of Spain I had traversed; the rocks of Biaritz presenting very conspicuous objects on the coast. Having crossed the summit, a prospect of a different character offered itself; a mountain scene, in which the eye was directed through a long vista of wood-covered or rock-capped ranges: from this point St. Sebastian is visible, as I discovered on my return; but on the present occasion, not knowing exactly its situation, it escaped my observation.

Here I began to suffer so severely from my feet, that I was obliged to lay up in the fern for a short time to relieve them: I had foolishly put on cotton socks, which had become so crumpled and creased about the heels and under the soles as to have covered them with blisters, and so desperately sore were they, that I felt scarcely able to proceed any further. I was, however, soon compelled to make the effort; for after a nap of half an hour, I was roused by the descent of a gentle but determined rain: my prospects at this time were certainly not of the most exhilarating kind; my only covering was a brown-holland coat, the best part of the day was gone, I was yet a long distance from St. Sebastian, in the midst of the mountains, and, from my crippled condition, scarcely able to crawl at the pace of a tortoise. Nothing, however, was left for it but patient perse-

verance, so on I trudged, and shortly afterwards found shelter under some trees, where I remained until the rain had ceased. In another hour I was at Oyerzun. The buildings of this town are decorated with elaborate carving and hung with balconies, and at its entrance a massive iron chain is carried across the road, each end of which may be observed to issue from the opposite house; a scheme, I suppose, for impeding the hostile incursions of cavalry. As the road here branched off, I was in some doubt which way to pursue; I therefore, on meeting a Spanish soldier, pronounced "San Sebastian?" with an enquiring tone and gesture, as I pointed to the two routes. My question, however, fell dead upon his ear: I might as well have addressed a milestone. At this critical moment a Spanish woman in a black mantilla hailed me in a voice which sounded like that of a guardian angel, and gave me the necessary directions in French.

The most striking features in this part of Spain are the ruins of churches, cottages and houses, which lay scattered about in every direction, blackened by smoke and overgrown by a rank vegetation. I could neither look to the right nor to the left without encountering such objects,—highly picturesque as the elements of a landscape, but lamentable tokens of the dreadful condition to which this fine country has of late years been reduced: about St. Sebastian they are particularly numerous, dotting the hills on all sides, and bordering the high road to its very gates.

Soon after leaving Oyerzun I began to entertain the

uncomfortable suspicion that I was going wrong, as the road appeared to be threading eastwards; and on proposing my usual single-worded enquiry, "San Sebastian?" to two men who were passing, they directed me in French to a cross-road that left the highway a few hundred yards further on: here I entered upon a path, to which, I am afraid, no description can do justice. If Spain is famous for the beauty of her scenery and her inhabitants, she is certainly as infamous for the deformity of her mountain-roads. You may travel on the French side over the most desolate and unfrequented regions without the chance of being crippled, but here it is physically impossible to escape such a calamity; the most refined cruelty, in the pursuit of an expiatory scheme, could never have more ingeniously contrived the position of its angular stones,—the ascetic devotee, or the barefooted pilgrim might, in vain seek for a rougher road whereon to trudge for the welfare of his soul. Only imagine me with blistered feet crawling along these rocky *chevaux de frise*! the pain I endured quite disabled me for the enjoyment of the beautiful scenery, to which hill, dale, wood, rock and stream jointly contributed their fair share of embellishment. After waddling like a Chinese woman for three or four miles, I reached a town which is the very *beau ideal* of the picturesque,—such as may be seen in the pictures of some of the old masters: it stands isolated in the midst of fields, with a simple mule-path leading in and out of it at either end. A game of ball was going on in the Plaza, and the fretted balconies around were

filled with fair spectators. I stood for some time at this spot, marvelling at the novelty of the scene, and inspecting the old black houses with their Moorish devices; and having so far satisfied my curiosity, I turned my steps once more towards St. Sebastian, following the same vile mule-track, which now skirted the banks of a river.

I had not proceeded very far before I was overtaken by a woman, who in breathless haste addressed me with a question, which for the life of me I could not understand, and at such a high pitch of voice as almost to approach a scream. I made out, however, that a boat was in some way or other the essential object of her earnestness, and I accordingly came to the conclusion that she was soliciting me to be rowed along the river rather than to continue my way by the mule-path. This, however, did not meet my humour, and I therefore attempted to shake her off with all becoming courtesy: as well might I have expected to elude my own shadow, for with equal pertinacity did she pursue me: I rebuffed her in English, I rebuffed her in French; I exhausted all my expressions of pantomime, but to no purpose,—the volubility of her tongue vied with the rapidity of her steps; so I became resigned to the persecution, and waited in unobtrusive silence the issue of the adventure.

Beggars swarmed in this district,—an old, crippled mendicant, of either gender, supplicating charity at equal distances along the whole line of road; a clear indication, as I thought, of an approach to some popu-

lous town. On I sullenly trudged with my pertinacious and loquacious companion, until we gained the summit of a hill crowned with the ruins of a large church or convent: here an unexpected view expanded itself; an inlet of the sea lay at our feet, begirt with mountains of varied hues, within which vessels of considerable size were anchored; a narrow passage to the right evidently led to the main. I was suddenly enlightened: the inlet was to be crossed in a boat, and my adhesive companion had doubtless fixed upon me as a victim of her anticipated extortions. There was no way of evading this Charon in petticoats, so, obeying her commands, I descended to the beach and embarked. At St. Sebastian at last, thought I, as I surveyed a town that lined the shore near the entrance of the inlet: but still it did not resemble the prints I had seen of it; I ascribed this, however, to the inaccuracy of the print-makers, never imagining for a moment that instead of St. Sebastian I was looking upon Passages. We rowed straight to this town, at which some Spanish soldiers, my fellow-passengers, disembarked, and I was upon the point of following their example, when my sibyl, with a look and tone of command, motioned me to sit still, and pointed to the other side of the bay; thinking, however, that I might have been misunderstood, I persisted in my intention, but she at once cut short all opposition by pushing from the shore and resuming her oars. All this was very unintelligible, but what could I do but resign myself to her guidance? I give the woman full credit for her anxiety to make me understand her, and,

after much difficulty, I did at length so far comprehend my situation as to learn that St. Sebastian was at least a good league distant, and pointing with the eternal "*mira, mira,*" she indicated the place where I should find the road. Having paid what she chose to take from me, I once again resumed my march, the mule-track running most romantically round wooded mountain-sides, or overhanging at some height the dry and muddy bed of a river; now climbing a zigzag ascent in a series of rudely-paved steps, and now running down a descent almost precipitous. At last, about six o'clock, I came in view of the conical and tower-capped hill of St. Sebastian, and a most welcome sight it was, I can assure you.

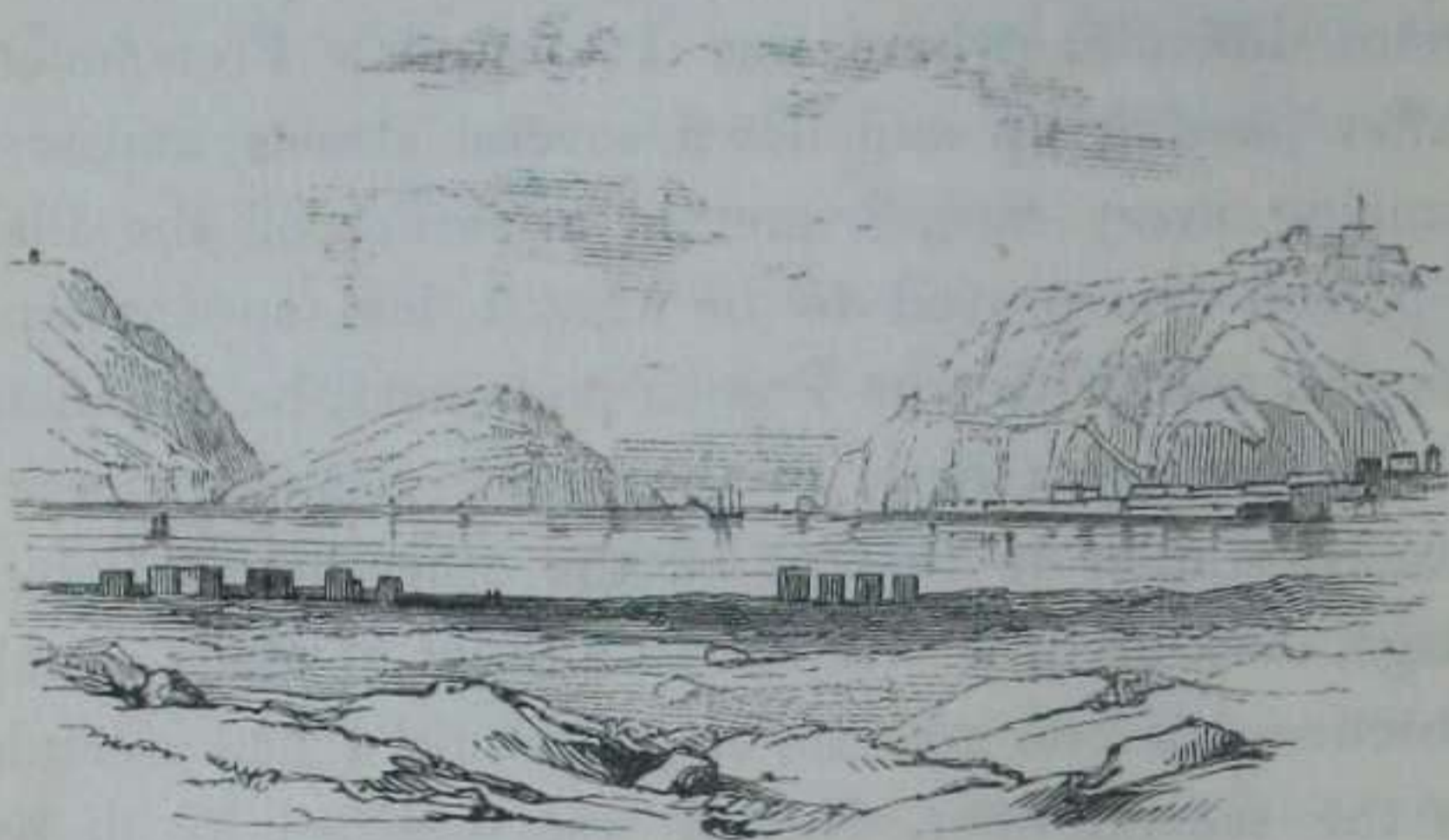
It was Sunday evening, and the whole road was alive with the gay inhabitants enjoying their accustomed promenade; and since the place, as I afterwards learnt, was filled with the fashionables of Madrid who had escaped from the heat of the capital, I had the opportunity of seeing *señors, señoras,* and *señorítas* of the most genuine quality. Many of the women were certainly very handsome, generally dressed in black, with black lace veils or mantillas thrown over their heads, than which, in my humble opinion, nothing can be more becoming. Some, however, were in more gay attire; and what with their dark, mischief-looking eyes and fine forms, they were as bewitching a race of fair ones as I should think it possible to find in any country. The black-clothed priests also were novel objects, with their roof-like hats, long and narrow and turned up at the sides; and stealing

about with a gloom and darkness exceeding that of their attire, they looked like birds of ill omen. I remained some time on the bridge watching this novel assemblage, admiring the fine faces of the women and the magnificent proportions of the men; and every now and then having 'Gil Blas' recalled to me by the sight of a young girl wrapped in her mantilla, and escorted by an old time-beaten duenna.

They were drawing a net through the river, which gathered together a swarm of both sexes and all grades upon the bridge, so that I was most fortunate in my opportunity for inspection and admiration. As it grew dark I turned my steps towards the town, mingling with the human tide that was ebbing homewards, and soon approached the heavy fortifications that surrounded it. On my arrival at the gate I again encountered a difficulty with my passport, but luckily the official was blessed with more than an ordinary share of patience, so that I was made to understand I was to call for it the next morning at the office of police. So far, so well, but there was still some trouble in store for me. I found the streets narrow and straight, bordered by tall, regular houses, each being in every respect similar to its neighbour; one and all were dark and formal, with a balcony to every window, and there was no external sign by which an hotel could be recognised: I might as well have attempted to draw a particular card from the pack, as to have selected with any chance of success the particular house of which I was in quest; and not being a conjuror, nor capable of

making any enquiry in Spanish, my only resource was to find some Frenchman, by whose assistance I might be able to solve the problem. But this was pretty much after the fashion of the schoolmen who sought to meet a difficult question by raising another equally, if not more difficult: where was I to find a Frenchman? After passing up and down several streets, and scrutinizing every face, I met in a corner of the Plaza a person who proved to be what I had so anxiously sought, and, with true French politeness, he conducted me to the great hotel of the town. Its entrance was exactly similar to that of all the other houses,—by a large, dark arch, which led to a flight of stairs equally obscure; no one was to be seen until I had ascended to the second floor, when I was gratified by finding lights, and its landlord, M. Lafitte (a fine, mustachio'd person), in attendance. He was extremely civil, and expressed his regrets at not being able to afford me any accommodation, as his house was overflowing with the aristocracy of Madrid. Upon making known, however, my ignorance of the Spanish language, he kindly volunteered to find me a room, and sent out a messenger for that purpose while I remained in the hotel. I need hardly add that he succeeded; and here I am safely lodged, surrounded by Spanish women, with whom I hold most mystical converse; but I would have you know, that when anything important is required (such, for instance, as dinner or supper) I apply next door to a French shopkeeper, who very kindly acts as interpreter.

St. Sebastian is a well-built town, surrounded, as all the world knows, by a strong line of fortifications, and situated at the foot of a conical mountain covered with forts and capped by a citadel.



It is for the most part of modern construction, having been rebuilt after it was knocked about the ears of the French by the British army under Wellington in August 1813. Its capture was most sanguinary, and its demolition almost complete, but, like a phœnix, it has arisen with renewed strength from its ashes; and situated, as it is, upon the shores of a bay, or rather inlet of the sea, land-locked and sufficiently large, it holds one of the most prominent commercial positions in Spain. Forts of various magnitudes and capabilities command the entrance to this basin, while the waves of Biscay rolling upon its rocks allow no enviable ground for a blockading squadron. The streets are regular and at right angles to each other; the houses high, and of

an appearance strikingly uniform, their windows, balconies and entrances being exactly similar to each other in construction. The situation of the city is beautiful, surrounded as it is by mountains, woods and rocks; and the view from the citadel is extremely fine, embracing a vast extent of sea and land, the Bay of Biscay, and the purple ranges of the Pyrenees.

I stopped here one day, giving a pedestrian's rest to my weary feet by merely strolling about the town, climbing the fort-covered hill of the citadel, and making short excursions along the banks of the Urumea. As for quiet in my lodgings, that was quite impossible; for the little Spanish natives, to which I have before alluded, were so numerous and busy, that to sit or lie for two minutes at a time was not practicable. They would seem to have honoured my presence by a very general muster. From the summit of the conical mountain that overhangs the town I attempted to make a sketch, but was interrupted by a Spaniard who addressed me in French, which he immediately exchanged for English as soon as he discovered the country to which I belonged: this was indeed an unexpected pleasure, and I felt much satisfaction in cultivating his acquaintance. Among other interesting matters, upon my telling him that I had walked from Bayonne, he informed me that the road was now perfectly safe, and that I might go unarmed without any apprehension. He was a fine-looking man, and had learnt English from his intercourse with the British legion,—some of whom, by-the-by, lie buried on this same citadel-hill. During

my rambles through the town, I was very much struck by objects to which my eye had never been accustomed. In the Plaza, for instance, a square of houses upon arcades, the windows were numbered in large letters instead of the doors. The balcony would seem to be an indispensable feature in Spanish architecture, for I saw no house without it. I went, as a matter of course, into the church, or cathedral, as it may be : the entrance is certainly very handsome, but the interior possesses nothing to claim the attention, though the massive pillars which support the roof, in conjunction with the vastness of the edifice, give it a certain air of solemnity. All the shrines are elaborately gilt and ornamented, and over one of them I observed a figure, the size of life, in the costume of a Spanish lady, with a black gown and mantilla, which I conclude was intended as a representation of the Virgin, and might very well pass as a production of Madame Tussaud.

In the evening I paid this sanctuary another visit : it was nearly in darkness, and a priest was performing service, the same response being chanted over and over again "*usque ad nauseam*," during which a member of the holy fraternity entered, and immediately throwing his shovel-hat upon the ground close to where I was standing, bounced upon his knees, and clearing his windpipe by no very seemly effort, fell to his gabbling devotions in right-good-earnest. The monotony of the chanting was, however, so tedious, that I shortly made my escape into the open air, when I found a scene for a painter to admire. The sun had just set, and the

sky was glowing with the rich colours he had left, while the rest of the heavens was darkened by a coming storm, already rolling its long thunders in the distance: the combined effect of the light and shade gave a glare to the sea and sky that was quite unearthly; the descent of rain, however, soon drove me from its contemplation. As a conclusion to my letter, I must tell you that, as befitting this land of romance, I was at night lulled to sleep by the soft notes of a lute from the other side of the street, and by the yet softer accompaniment of a female voice.



I think you will be amused with the above sketch, which represents a Spanish couple riding *en cacolet*, as the French term it.

LETTER V.

Departure from St. Sebastian.—Filthy condition of the highway.—Mistake the road.—Village in ruins.—The utility of a compass.—Dragons of the frontier.—A pedestrian's quarters for the night.—Maize.—Exercise in a cart.—Return to Biaritz—and to Bayonne.—A sunset in Southern France.—A nocturnal ramble.—Adventures on the road.—Fruitless assault on a cottage.—A night in a hay-loft.—A desperate walk, and arrival at Peyréhorade.—Journey to Orthés.

Orthés, July 22nd.

ON Tuesday morning the 19th, at half-past nine, I left St. Sebastian on my return to Biaritz. It had been raining all night, and the morning looked sufficiently ominous, with its heavy banks of cloud hanging sulkily over the mountain-tops. I had hesitated whether to go by Passages or by the high-road; the former, although a shorter way, I had already traversed, so I determined in favour of the latter; and I was afterwards well-pleased with the decision, as I found the pass over the third mountain ridge extending about five miles in one ascent and descent, rich in the most picturesque beauties, and sorry I should have been had I missed it. The first few miles of the highway were in a deplorable condition from black and offensive mud, which, from being constantly traversed by oxen, the beasts of draught of the country, may be aptly compared to the filthier parts of

a farm-yard, and in which I noticed footmarks that bore palpable evidence of the savage character of the country,—prints of huge feet with the toes well spread out one from the other, showing that their wild owners had never been shackled by shoe or stocking. The carts, moreover, are of a most primeval construction; a few rough timbers supported on wheels of solid wood, the “set-out” being always preceded by a wild-looking Spaniard carrying a long goad, and governing the movements of the oxen by the continual “*ída-ída.*” Cavalcades, or single machines of this kind, were the only travellers I met, with the exception of an occasional soldier, whose savage and scarred face and ragged attire gave him rather the appearance of a brigand than a member of any legalized body of troops.

The country was very beautiful,—mountain and valley, covered with wood and fern, successively presented themselves; but after I had walked about five hours from St. Sebastian, I began to have misgivings as to the right track. I had passed through several wonderfully-picturesque villages, and I thought that sufficient time must have already elapsed to have enabled me to reach the road where I had formerly turned off to Passages. I could not, however, recognise any of the distant mountains, nor those in my immediate vicinity, which were becoming wilder and more abrupt the further I advanced: the ruins of cottages also grew more frequent, and at last I reached a village that presented a scene of more frightful desolation than I had hitherto looked upon. Nothing but the bare walls were

standing; the great iron chain, which is passed from house to house, lay broken by the side of the road; and the church, which had been built on a neighbouring eminence, offered a mournful spectacle of ruin. Here I resolved upon ascertaining whether I was proceeding in a right or wrong direction; and espying a peasant in the distance, I hurried towards him and inquired to the best of my ability, by pronouncing the word "Francia?" and pointing onwards. The question was, however, too obscure for his comprehension, and I was cudgelling my brains for a method of ascertaining how matters stood, when it struck me that a certain compass-needle lay in my knapsack. But it was no easy matter to search for a *needle in a bottle of hay*; it was of course snugly ensconced at the very lowest part of my baggage, and I had therefore to turn out my whole wardrobe before I could attain my object. Imagine then my dismay, on finding that for the last hour I had been walking due south towards Tolosa! though I was so far lucky in having made the discovery sufficiently early to correct the mistake, and enable me to reach the French frontier before nightfall. But before I determined to retrace my steps, I thought it would be prudent to verify the accuracy of my compass; so I once more accosted the old Spaniard, and on this occasion with better success; pointing in one direction, he exclaimed "Tolosa," and upon reversing my action he said "Francia": this was sufficiently satisfactory, so I forthwith started to recover the time I had lost by my mistake. The fact was, I had been misled by the

turn which the highway had taken to pass round the inlet at Passages.

In about two hours after this mistake I was ascending a tortuous path over the mountains, among hills which become successively bolder and are densely clothed with the Spanish chestnut, the mountain-ash, with its scarlet berries, and a multitude of other trees, and with an undergrowth of fern and box. At a greater elevation rocks of granite diversify the scenery, topping the woods with their purple-shadowed masses; and yet higher, the eye wanders over the dark blue regions of the pine-forest. No cultivation is to be seen, and the prospect, with its rich woods and romantic dells, would furnish descriptive materials for a Radcliffe: had I been travelling in company with a heroine, I should have fully expected an attack of brigands, and an unwelcome visit to the depths of the forest. No such appropriate adventure, however, befell me; and I arrived by six at Yrun, and then proceeded towards the Bidassoa and Béobie, to pass once again through the hands of the Philistines, in the shapes of French *douaniers* and Spanish officers of the *Aduana*: by the former I was searched both for cigars and money, by the latter for money only. I had not, as you may imagine, the wealth of Cræsus about me, but I turned out some odd halfpence from my pocket, a proceeding that drew a laugh from my hungry persecutors. The Frenchmen thought they had discovered a rare prize, when, in the course of disrobing me, a hare-skin was discovered about my neck; they clutched at it with eager hands,

and I thought it would have been torn to shreds by the talons of these harpies.

Being once again set at liberty, I proceeded in the dusk and dark over the last mountain-ridge, and arrived about half-past nine at a little village called Urrugne, about two leagues from St. Jean de Luz. A soldier was keeping guard in the *place*; he directed me to an *auberge* close at hand, where he said I should experience civility and good accommodation, and scrambling up a flight of old broken stairs, I soon found myself confronted with "*mine Host,*" in whose company I passed one of those pleasant hours which alone fall to the share of the pedestrian. It was an old, crazy, tumble-down house, with massive beams and antique carvings; its highland owner apparently one of the best-tempered and most honest fellows in the world. We chatted together for a full hour in the delightful obscurity of an enormous chimney-corner: he was very curious about England, and I rather astonished him by an account of railroad-travelling, of which he had heard but rumours; he acknowledged it was a little better than the French mode of journeying by diligences. The fire was replenished every now and then by curious-looking cones, which I took for some species of fir-apple; he told me they were the shells of the Maize, and he gave me some account of that fine plant: of the ear, he said, they made their bread, with the broad leaves they filled their mattresses, and with the cones they fed their fires when a sudden increase of heat was required. He brought me some maize-bread from his cupboard, which of

course I tasted with curiosity. The first mouthful was agreeable,—it tasted rather like cake than bread; the second was not so relishing; but it ended by my not liking it at all, the after-taste being extremely unpleasant. Having talked to our satisfaction, I adjourned to my bedchamber, the rude aspect of which would have surprised you had you seen it. No article of furniture, save the bed, encumbered the broken floor; grain was piled up in one corner, and a winnowing-machine occupied another; but the linen, though coarse as sackcloth, was beautifully white, and you may take it for granted, that after my fatigues I found the bed all that a weary traveller could desire.

The next morning I rose with the freshness, but certainly not with the earliness of the lark, as it was the mature hour of nine, shortly after which I started for Biarritz, having first paid my honest host the ruinous sum of sixteenpence English, which was his charge for a supper, with an ocean of *café au lait*, an excellent bed, and a breakfast of equal prodigality with the supper. Had I arrived in my carriage with my courier, I fancy matters would have taken a very different turn. I found the day upon sallying forth deliciously cool, for the sky was yet hung with the clouds that had been pouring down rain through the entire night; so I walked on agreeably enough, and with no particular adventure until I had passed St. Jean de Luz about three miles, when I was overtaken by an old man in a crazy cart. The old man, according to the universal custom, raised his cap as he passed me, and then he and his creaking vehicle came to a halt, and I was soon again by their

side. The Frenchman opened a conversation, offering to carry me to Bayonne if I pleased; I readily acceded to the proposition and forthwith mounted. His equipage was a rare piece of antiquity, as infirm as its owner, and with body and members equally crazy. It had a head so low, that I was forced to sit resting my chin upon my knees; a frame so stiff and inelastic, that at every step of the horse I was thrown up an inch or two from my seat; and a body so worn and weary, that it



creaked and groaned at every obstruction on the road, like a loose gibbet in a stormy night. Notwithstanding these *desagrémens*, however, I enjoyed the ride, and descended from my seat of iron about a mile from Biarritz. I then made the best of my way back to the old lady of the Grand Balcon, in the light of whose eyes I arrived as the clock struck one.

The waters of the Bay looked more beautiful than ever, the rocks wore a more fantastic shape, and the sky glowed with a richer colour, but anxious to hasten towards the mountains, I bade adieu to my old nymph of the Balcon, tore myself away from this loveliest of watering-places, consoling myself with the thought that I was flying towards those clear white snows that topped the distant outline of the *Hautes Pyrénées*. I accordingly threw myself and my knapsack into a voiture, and was off on my return to Bayonne.

I had no sooner rolled over the hill that shut Biscay's blue expanse from view, than, in the enthusiasm which is always excited in my mind by exploring a country, I mentally eulogized the wing-footed god of travel as a deity who bountifully ministers to the happiness of his votaries. Under your auspices, thought I, my spirits are as buoyant as the air, and anticipation has already drawn the dim mountains from the haze of distance, while imagination has hung around them her brightest garlands. Do you not think such a votive offering should have propitiated the Mercurial god? Hear, however, how completely it failed in its purpose. Upon my arrival at Bayonne I found every thing that was adverse and provoking: there were two companies running diligences thence to Pau; but, as the aforesaid deity ordained it, they were at this very time waging a war of extermination against each other, by carrying passengers the sixty miles for four francs ahead, and filling their carriages so as to render it impossible that I could obtain a seat unless I had waited for several days at

Bayonne; so I at once determined to return to the shop where I had left my knapsack, and to walk out of the town in the direction of Pau. This was certainly a bold proceeding, and could I have foreseen the labours of the journey, I should certainly have made some other arrangement; or had I possessed the experience I have since acquired, I should have sent my knapsack by the diligence, and started on foot without any encumbrance.

At half-past seven, on the 20th of July, I might have been seen crossing the long pontoon-bridge over the Adour, bending low on one side to counterbalance the huge weight of my baggage, that was carried under the arm on the other, until I cleared the town and the many natives who were abroad to enjoy the beauty of the evening. The light of the sunset on that day was indeed wonderful, and the flashing of the water, as I passed along the bridge, was almost supernatural. Philosophers have indulged their fancy in imagining the glorious arch of light which the ring of Saturn must cast upon the inhabitants of that singular planet; but vivid indeed must be the imagination that can picture to itself anything more splendid than the illuminated heavens of this enchanting climate in a July sunset.

Having climbed the hill leading out of Bayonne, alternately shifting the weight of my burden from right to left, for it was extremely distressing, I entered a churchyard, and finally arranged myself for walking by changing my boots and coat, and strapping the overpowering load of my accumulated traps on my shoulders; all of which was effected by the last gleams

of twilight at the foot of a gigantic cross,—a resting-place by no means inappropriate for a pilgrim like myself, and as night came on I issued forth on my nocturnal rambles.

The first village on the road towards Pau was Peyréhorade, about twenty-one miles distant from Bayonne, but I did not undertake the journey without the full expectation of finding some intermediate cottage, or at least some convenient spot where I might repose for a few hours. The night was beautiful and moonlight, and the air was filled with fragrance. For many a mile the country was wild and solitary,—not a human being, nor a cottage, nor dwelling of any description was to be seen, and the stillness was unbroken by the slightest sound. The road ran in a straight direction over a sandy soil, skirted on each side by dark pines; and had it not been for the oppressive weight on my shoulders, the walk would have been extremely agreeable. I soon found, however, that I was compelled to rest every now and then upon the stones that were piled by the road-side, and at length I felt so utterly exhausted, that I sought some nook or snug berth among the trees where I might repose for the night; but this plan I was compelled to abandon from the impossibility of finding water, without which I could not have availed myself of any resting-place, however inviting it might otherwise have been: for I was as thirsty as Tantalus; and like him I imagined at every step, from the ideal murmurings of water which the wanton breeze brought to my ear, that the much-desired elixir was at my lip. In

such a state, what was my delight when I suddenly came upon a cottage shining in the moonlight, and evolving wreaths of smoke from its good old chimney! it was an oasis in the desert, and my lips acknowledged it with gratitude after having been refreshed by repeated draughts of clear cold water. Some little time elapsed before I could obtain entrance, shouting and thundering at the door until the black pines around me re-echoed the sound; but such efforts were at last rewarded, and I was admitted into a room, dimly illuminated by glowing logs of wood that displayed the comfortable recesses of a huge chimney-corner. A row of Bayonne hams was hanging from one of the massive cross-beams of the ceiling, and on the earthy floor lay various household implements in picturesque disorder. But the inmates whom I encountered brought to my mind the shrivelled tenants of St. Michel's vault,—two wretched crones, miserably clothed, with withered arms and naked feet, and a man of but little better mien and dress. Considering the hour of the night and the loneliness of the road, it was not surprising they should have expressed astonishment at my abrupt intrusion: for aught I know, they might have mistaken me for some phantom, had not the pack on my shoulders spoke so plainly of this earth and its vanities. Upon asking permission to pass the night there, I was told that I should meet with a little *auberge* about half a mile further on; so after draining their water-vessel to my heart's content, I resumed my route, and having wearily passed the promised half-mile I again stood before a dark stone cottage.

It was involved in the deepest obscurity; no smoke ascended from its chimney, and windows and doors were all closed. I was, however, unwilling to abandon my chance of a lodging without an effort, and I accordingly opened a heavy battery of fists upon the shutters. It had an immediate effect: it summoned forth a dog, which, taking up a station about six yards in my rear, proved a valuable auxiliary; for the shutters soon creaked and turned upon their hinges, and a figure, evidently aroused from its bed, emerged from the casement into the cool night-air, whilst a gruff voice demanded the cause of so much disturbance. "A weary traveller," said I: "open your door and give me shelter for the night; I am so exhausted I can proceed no further." "I have no bed for you," was the chilling answer, "but you will find an *auberge* at a very short distance;" and he then graphically described the house, standing on the side of the road, with an earnestness which excited my gratitude, and which I mention as being highly characteristic of the kind feeling that I have ever found among the peasantry of France. Few Englishmen, I fancy, when thus summoned from their beds at midnight, would have treated the disturber of their rest with so much courtesy.

Having apologised for my abrupt interruption of his slumbers, I once more started in pursuit of this phantom *auberge*, for such did I begin to regard it: another quarter of a mile, however, did actually bring me to a white-washed cottage standing endways on the road. All right, thought I; but no evidence of life appeared from window

or chimney, neither did its aspect accord with that of a house devoted to public accommodation: appearances, however, are proverbially deceptive; so without any hesitation I entered a little farm-yard, and passing through a colony of snoring swine, began as before an attack upon the window-shutters. But no cries for quarter came responsive to the assault; I might as well have stormed a tomb and called upon the dead to answer: it was the hall of enchantment, and the sleepers were evidently spell-bound. In this dilemma I accidentally espied an old ruinous ladder that leant its crazy form against the opening to a chamber, which I accordingly ascended, and soon found myself in a hay-loft, which obviously communicated with the house: need I say that I instantly cast my load from my back, kicked off my shoes, and threw my wearied limbs upon the soft hay? And never surely did bed of down afford more delightful repose, although I must confess that before I fell into a profound sleep the idea of hungry rats crossed my imagination, and I felt some instinctive dread that I might not awake in the morning with a proper complement of toes; but under my circumstances fancy could not long sustain a contention with sleep.

At about four the next morning I was sufficiently aroused by the Bayonne porkers to observe that the sky was red with the coming sun, and that a heavy thunder-cloud was sailing along the heavens; but so incessant and in such various and startling tones was the grunting, that after a few interrupted naps I determined to rise, and having well shaken myself, I pre-

pared to astonish the natives by my appearance. So far from this, however, I was received by them as if I had been the familiar guest of weeks; which I can only explain by supposing that the lazy inmates had heard my noisy application for entrance on the previous night, but were indisposed to acknowledge the summons, although they one and all protested to the contrary. The aspect of the interior bore no greater resemblance to an *auberge* than did the exterior walls: the host was a blacksmith, and was labouring at his vocation in an opposite shed; but his daughter, who was really a very pretty girl,—a perfect rose in the wilderness,—most kindly ministered to my various wants; and I so far ingratiated myself into her favour as to obtain a bowl of hot milk,—a rare luxury in these parts, as it is generally made into cheese. This, with an unlimited supply of bread, afforded me an excellent breakfast, and at seven o'clock I found myself ready to start on my pilgrimage to Peyréhorade.

This day's journey was one of continual pain and anguish: my knapsack required the shoulders of an Atlas; for not only was it filled, but it contained articles of great weight. Various guide- and sketch-books were stowed away at the bottom; then came articles of dress,—boots, shirts, and so forth, besides innumerable miscellanies; in its folds was included a mackintosh, and to its upper surface was strapped a frock-coat: so you may well imagine the combined weight amounted to something more than an agreeable burden for a walk of some fifteen miles under a broiling sun. During the day I allowed myself frequent intervals of rest, sitting

under the shadow of a hedge, or laying my length along the ground: without this precaution I should have found it impossible to reach Peyréhorade; and when I now reflect upon what I suffered, I am surprised how I could have accomplished it. The road was tedious "as a twice-told tale,"—without variety, straight, solitary and monotonous: although the highway between Bayonne and Pau, it was enlivened by no carriage of any description, and the only wayfarers that I encountered were two or three horsemen, imbedded in their deep and high-peaked saddles. I staggered on under the impulse of necessity, knowing full well that I had no other means of progression, and I applied myself to the task with the resolution of despair. Once or twice during the day I was very near giving in, when on turning some long-desired corner, I beheld another interminable stretch of straight road, vanishing to a point in the extreme distance, and of the self-same character as the weary track I had just accomplished.

At about eleven o'clock I put up at an *auberge* in a state of great exhaustion; it was one of the first houses that I had encountered on the road, and I replenished my failing strength with the best fare I could procure. In the midst of my meal the silence was abruptly disturbed by the trampling of horses, when two of that magnificent *corps* the *Gendarmerie* strided into the room. They were returning from Pau to Bayonne, and were excessively curious to know who or what I was, where I was going, and what I had to *sell* in my knapsack. They then demanded my passport for inspection;

and had not every signature been in its proper place, I should unquestionably have been marched back to Bayonne in spite of any remonstrance. My passport, however, was fortunately correct; so, after a little more cross-questioning, these self-important officials bid me adieu, mounted their horses and departed. When I had finished my repast, I was informed by the landlady that I might possibly get a place in the *malle-du-post*, which would pass her door in about twenty minutes on its road to Toulouse; with this information I determined to hasten forward for about half a mile to the house where it changed horses, and there to await its arrival. It shortly came; but it was, as I had expected, quite full; so I met the disappointment as well as I could, and continued my weary way on foot. After this I drank *eau de vie* in self-preservation; for an hour I slept upon a wild and desolate heath; I rode some distance in a cart drawn by oxen; and at length, about four o'clock, I found myself within view of Peyréhorade, but so exhausted that I could scarcely drag myself along. How I accomplished the last mile it is difficult to say: you will understand my feeling when I tell you that I counted the trees as I moved tardily onwards, and then closed my eyes for some minutes, that I might enjoy a nearer view of the town upon re-opening them. Suffice it to say I succeeded in reaching this dirty village, and found an inn with the necessary accommodation.

Here I abjured walking until I should reach the mountains, and started the next morning by a small

diligence, at seven o'clock, for Orthés, a distance of sixteen miles. When I tell you that the country through which I passed was pleasing, I speak sufficiently in its favour. We travelled at the unexciting rate of four miles the hour,—“a slow coach,” as we should say in England; and as the clock struck eleven, I arrived at my place of destination.

LETTER VI.

Orthés, the former residence of the princes of Bearn.—Its river and romantic bridge.—A bedroom of bad repute.—Journey to Pau.—Magnificent view from the town.—Its abundant and cheap market.—Enter the mountains.—A Pyrenean hail-storm.—Road to Eaux Bonnes.—Fine approach to the Vallée d'Ossau.—Narrow escape from a torrent.—Infamous extortion.—Vallée d'Ossau.—Approach to Eaux Bonnes.—Habits of living.—Cascades.

Eaux Bonnes, July 26th, 1842.

IN my last letter I announced my arrival at Orthés, which is a town of great antiquity, situated upon an eminence, and in full view of the Pyrenees. It has been immortalized by Froissart and other chroniclers as the residence of the princes of Bearn, and many a tilt and tourney have, doubtless, been held within its precincts. The castle, which stands above the town, was built by the famous Gaston, Count de Foix, and was by all accounts of great magnitude and strength: nothing, however, now remains to attest its former magnificence, save a shattered tower, and some old walls, the resort of dark crows and lonely owls, that sit in their crevices like the ghosts of departed chivalry.

As soon as I had been safely deposited by the *voiture*, I left my "types of travel" with a polite shopkeeper, and mounted to the *château*, which now bears the title of Moncade, with the intention of returning by

one o'clock, when I should have a chance of a place to Pau by the diligence that would pass through from Bayonne. As my unlucky stars ordained it, I wandered among these old ruins about ten minutes too long, my imagination having been busied in disentombing the old knights of Bearn, and peopling the sward of Moncade with its gay tenants of yore. Although this mischance provoked me at the time, I was afterwards well-pleased that it had happened, as it afforded me an opportunity of viewing an antiquated bridge of most romantic aspect, with an ivy-hung tower springing from its centre. The whole scene is strikingly picturesque. Clear as crystal, and of azure blue, the Gave* de Pau rushes with the impetuosity of a mountain-torrent through an irregular channel of sandstone, whilst rocks of every hue and variety are mingled with the woods that impend its surface.

Returning to the shop where I had left my luggage, the good woman intimated that she could furnish me with a bed, a proposal to which I at once acceded. She accordingly ushered me into a large gloomy room, with a grim old-fashioned wardrobe in the corner, and a set of goblin-looking chairs ranged primly round the walls; upon my saying that I should go to bed immediately, as I was suffering from the effects of my walk to Peyréhorade, she announced the pleasing fact that it had been the death-bed of a young English officer after the battle of Orthés,—a consoling piece of intelligence to a

* *Gave*, which signifies *water* in the Celtic language, is the generic term for all Pyrenean torrents.

sick and solitary traveller. The next day I started by diligence, at nine o'clock in the morning, for Pau, which is twenty-three miles distant from Orthés: the road, running in a continuous straight line for miles, would be the most uninteresting in France, were it not for the mountain-chain that towers up to the right, some thirty miles distant, sprinkled with dazzling snows and continually changing its hues. During this journey I had full time to study the dark depth of its ravines, and the colossal shadows that were playing upon its sides. By two o'clock I arrived at Pau, having been five hours accomplishing twenty-three flat miles, which is the usual rate of travelling in these parts.

Pau is beautifully situated, raising itself from the plain upon which it stands, as if for the purpose of gazing at the glorious mountain view it commands. Here were born several personages who have played conspicuous parts upon the great stage of life: Gaston de Foix, Jean d'Albret, Bernadotte of Sweden, and many others; but above all, that renowned warrior and skilful monarch Henry of Navarre, who also passed his youth in its immediate vicinity. Among the dangers of the Pyrenees was fostered that intrepidity of character which distinguished him, and the energy of his mind as well as the hardihood of his body were acquired in the chase of the wild-bear of these mountains. Nothing can be more striking and princely than the position and appearance of the Chateau; and its high-peaked roofs and quaint devices recall those blyther times when it was the residence of a monarch. Accord-

ing to all accounts it was built prior to the foundation of the town of Pau, and in that unsettled period when the princes of southern France had to protect their territories from Moorish invasion. It is recorded that a prince of Bearn marked the spot for its erection by driving three stakes into the ground; and that from the word *paou*, which signifies a stake in the language of the country, the town has derived its name.



Within its walls may be seen various specimens of tapestry of the most exquisite workmanship, illustrating many interesting passages in the life of Henri Quatre: the cicerone also shows you the chamber in which the monarch was born, and a tortoise-shell slung within a pyramid of spears, that is said to have been the cradle of his infancy. Of this I have sent you a rough sketch.



But the most magnificent sight at Pau is the view from the walks to the west of the town. You are there placed upon an eminence, surrounded by the finest timber and in full view of the *château*. In front the ground falls abruptly, and below, the *gave* hurries with noise and tumult through a channel of considerable breadth; beyond, the eye rests upon a low range of hills, covered by luxuriant woods, and dotted here and there by a white mansion. These are the spurs of the mountains,—a line of sentinels that has been pushed forward to guard this land of Titans. Upon raising the eye yet higher, it reposes upon a region in a more sombre livery; a dark blue mountain-range of mighty frame, split into a thousand soaring peaks, studded with diamond beds of snow, and hung with wreaths of mist. This is the grand central chain of the High Pyrenees, and its colossal brethren stretch east and west as far as the eye can follow: I think the view is one of the most beautiful I have ever seen, and it possesses the addi-

tional charm of an ever-varying aspect. There is one member of this gigantic family that must immediately rivet the attention of the stranger; it is the Pic du Midi de Pau: it stands proudly up in the midst of the range, quite distinct from any of the surrounding mountains, and resembles a cone that has had its apex blown from the perpendicular.

Pau is greatly esteemed by the English as a place of residence; the beauty of its situation and climate are only equalled by the cheapness of its market, so that it is particularly attractive to those whose object is economy. It was really a curious sight to witness the extraordinary supply of eatables that flowed in from all parts of the country on the Monday morning: the whole town presented the aspect of one enormous market; eggs were sold at about fourpence the dozen, chickens at various prices below a shilling, and other articles on the same scale. On that day, the 25th of July, at eleven o'clock, I started *à pied* towards Eaux Bonnes, distant from Pau about twenty-four miles. The road was crowded with the neighbouring peasantry, some on foot, others on horseback, but all laden with an inexhaustible stock of vegetables, fruit and poultry. The female equestrians presented a curious appearance, jogging on astride with baskets under their arms, and bundles of live fowls tied by the legs, swinging to and fro within an inch of the ground, the red capulets of the country protecting their faces, and the wild nags they bestrode being bedecked by an endless variety of trapping and harness. The day was extremely gloomy and the

mountains invisible, whilst the air felt both sultry and oppressive; all nature seemed in expectation of a tempest; and I had scarcely cleared the last house upon the road, when it broke suddenly from the clouds with terrific violence: thunder, lightning, hail and rain raged with fearful fury, and I had but just found shelter, before a thunderbolt fell with a startling crash on the opposite side of the road, and the roar of the elements shook the very ground upon which I stood. It was very annoying to have been thus detained, as I had started late, and could scarcely expect to reach Eaux Bonnes before night. When the sky had partially cleared, I again proceeded, travelling onwards some two or three miles in alternate rain and sunshine. I had fairly entered the mountain regions, and the road began a long continuous ascent which lasted during the entire day's journey.

Soon after I had issued from my place of shelter, I was very much astonished upon climbing a hill to observe the ditches filled with ice; upon examination it proved to be a mass of hailstones of considerable depth: they were most gigantic in their proportions, not one amongst them being of less diameter than that of a common marble, and many were of a much larger size. This will give you some notion of the havoc these storms commit upon the plains. They are more especially confined to the outskirts of the mountains, from which they rush down upon the luckless vineyards and cornfields with terrible fury, scouring over the country and destroying everything in their course: so great in-

deed has been the devastation of late years, particularly about Tarbes, that a new insurance company has been formed in Paris to indemnify the loss. After about two hours walking I was amongst the Pyrenees, and the road became extremely beautiful, constantly ascending, and winding through an uninterrupted forest of beech-trees, oaks, and Spanish chestnuts, beneath whose branches was a wilderness of fern and mossy rocks, whilst on my left a torrent tumbled over a bed of stones, and continued my faithful and noisy companion. I cannot tell you how much I enjoyed this walk, nor can I do justice to the exquisite scenery through which I passed: it was pleasant to be thus rambling through a mountain region, fresh from the plain, without the encumbrance of baggage, and watching the land rising and becoming bolder and higher at every step, with the knowledge that you were approaching slowly those dim giants that loomed every now and then from the distant mists, and appeared to belong rather to heaven than to earth. As I proceeded the ridges and eminences in my immediate neighbourhood became more abrupt and rugged; they were occasionally capped by masses of granite, and were of sufficient elevation to oppose the clouds in their course. At length, after ascending constantly for some hours through a country of this character, I reached a small village from which the road fell abruptly, and I suddenly beheld before me the colossal portal of the Vallée d'Ossau.

The stranger who enters this region for the first time cannot but be struck with astonishment: I certainly had

the good luck of viewing the scene under the most favourable circumstances, but at all times and seasons it cannot be otherwise than grand and impressive. In front lay a sombre mountain ridge stretching towards the west; dark fir-forests clothed its sides, and threatening clouds were rolling sulkily along it: before me appeared a gap, on each side of which stood two grim shapes, as if to guard the entrance: to the imaginative eye the ridge would appear as if broken for the purpose of admitting the stranger into the mountains' most hidden recesses. By the time I had arrived at this spot, the clouds had collected in enormous troops, and appeared to be concentrating their forces for another storm. I was much struck with the efforts of the sun to dispute the ascendancy of the mist; the effect was to throw a thousand charms over a scene that must be at all times magnificent. At the entrance of this valley I found a village called Iseste that sheltered me from rain for the space of an hour, which I occupied in making a substantial luncheon of bread and cheese, after which I proceeded; but I had not gone far, before it appeared to me that the wiser plan would be to stop at this place for the night, and accomplish my route to Eaux Bonnes the following day, when the weather might be more propitious. Having settled this point, I turned from the road and sauntered over grassy knolls to the banks of the Gave d'Ossau, a considerable stream of exquisite purity and deep azure colour. The aspect of this portion of the valley recalled to my mind certain parts of the Undercliff in the Isle of Wight; hillocks of the very brightest

verdure, smooth and mossy, with clumps of trees and romantic rocks, constituted the principal objects: it was a scene that might be well imagined as the abode of elves and fairies, and who shall say that my approach did not send many a gay band into the flower-bells around?

I had not wandered far through this land of enchantment, before my attention was drawn to what might be appropriately termed the fairies' castle; it was a most extraordinary little structure, standing up so very prim and stately upon a bright green mound upon the opposite bank of the river: adjoining it was a chapel, on the same scale, and perched upon another equally verdant hillock; so I at once determined upon crossing the stream, that I might take a more accurate survey of them. But this was more easy in thought than performance: I searched for some time, up and down the bank, for a place which it might be practicable to ford; and having fixed upon a spot where the waters leaped and chafed over some shallower ground, I made the necessary preparations and commenced the attempt. I had not, however, waded far into this icy hubbub, before I became fully aware of the difficulty of my situation, and that, should I lose the command of my centre of gravity, I must be inevitably swept away. It was a critical moment: so great was the force of the waters, as they roared and foamed around my knees, as if angry at the unexpected obstacle, that it was only by the greatest exertion I could maintain my footing; and so cold was the furious element that my limbs were beco-

ming numbed and painful, and they had barely sufficient power left in them to bear me back to the shore.

Having failed in this attempt, I sought a more circuitous but safer path; and meeting a highlander, I much amused him by recounting my adventure. He assured me it was utterly impossible to cross the stream where I had attempted it, but with great civility he led me over stone-fences and green swards to a spot where the river was fordable. Here a line of shingles stretched diagonally across, by means of which I achieved the passage with some little difficulty, and found myself in a miserable village of rough stone cottages, with wretched half-clad inhabitants; I had, however, attained my object, for in five minutes I was climbing the green mound of the prim-looking castle, wondering more than ever at its Lilliputian dimensions and regular structure: the *château* was not above five-and-thirty or forty feet in length, whilst its roofless and weathered walls bespoke its extreme age. I much puzzled myself conjecturing to what purpose it could possibly have been applied, as it was too diminutive to have been used as a dwelling by men of ordinary stature: I was fain at last to rest satisfied that it must have been a castle of observation, since it commanded extensive views north and south, as well as the entrance of the Vallée d'Ossau. After having satisfied my curiosity, I returned to Iseste: I was warned to be speedy by heavy clouds scouring down the opposite mountains, and shortly after a blaze of lightning made me still more eagerly hasten my steps; so entering Iseste at the top of my speed and under a

furious rain, I put up at the first *auberge* that presented itself.

The next morning I became the victim of a Pyrenean fraud, which I record with much regret; for I must say, in justice to the inhabitants of these mountains, it was the only instance in which I was so shamefully cheated. Upon my arrival I had bargained as usual for bed and board, and the woman agreed to supply me for a certain sum; upon my departure, however, on tendering a five-franc piece and requesting change, she with perfect *nonchalance* retained more than her due, and protested I was lucky to get off so well for such good entertainment. This barefaced manner of robbing rather than of cheating was something quite novel; but feeling that I could have no redress, I was obliged, after a strong remonstrance, to submit to it.

This valley was formerly the scene of the sylvan sports of Henry IV., and the *Vallée d'Ossau* literally signifies, in the language of the country, "the vale where the bears come down." In point of picturesque beauty there is not much to be said in its favour: the entrance is certainly grand, but as you advance there is great monotony in the scenery, and the walk appeared to me tedious; the ground is flat and well-cultivated, the villages numerous, and the natives abundant; but after the beauty in the plains of southern France, their physiognomy was viewed with great disadvantage. The valley contracts at its upper end, and becomes much more interesting and diversified; and after passing through the village of Laruns, and crossing a bare tract

of desolate rocks, the bed of some whilome torrent, you reach the head of the vale and the foot of an enormous pine-covered ridge, stretching east and west, where the road divides to Eaux Bonnes and Eaux Chaudes. This part of the country enjoys some celebrity for the costume of its inhabitants,—though you should have been told this before I alluded to the inferiority of their physiognomies, which will probably prevent your taking interest in their dress: the women wear black velvet bodices, with skirts of some lively colour, the red peaked capulet is thrown over the head, or, being folded square, is placed upon the top of it, whilst their naked feet are set off by a kind of frill which terminates a pair of worsted leggings; the men have their heads protected by the *Berét Béarnais* (a round woollen cap of different colours, according to the taste of the wearer), and a jacket and breeches, with a red shawl which envelops the waist, complete the costume. They are certainly picturesque objects, but are more interesting in this respect when viewed at a distance.

Turning to the left, I now began the ascent to Eaux Bonnes, having crossed the *gave* by a stone bridge commanding a scene of striking beauty. A stream of the most vivid blue appears issuing from the bowels of a huge and precipitous mountain, which together with the green plants that hang around it, form a striking contrast to the gloomy gorge from which it flows. I advanced into this cleft as far as I was able, and was greatly tempted by its presiding spirits to take one of their deadly baths: no water-kelpy could have desired

anything more delicious in aspect and transparency than the rock-imbedded pools that lay immediately below; but a cold of fearful intensity lurked within their depths, and the stranger who rashly plunged into them would run a fair chance of losing his life. From this bridge the road wound up a steep acclivity in a zigzag direction, which in about half an hour I found to terminate in the little mountain-city of Eaux Bonnes.



How strangely is this placed! it really looks as if it had scampered away from the civilized world and could proceed no further, from having, in its vagrant haste, blindly entered a *cul de sac* of mountains from which there was no escape.

It principally consists of hotels and lodging-houses; and during the season, which lasts for the summer months, it is crowded by the influx of fashionable visitors: you would have thought that the whole Parisian world had congregated in the different hotels, and I found, as I had expected, that a shelter for so wandering and unsettled a being as myself could scarcely be procured. At one house the sum of five francs the night was asked for a wretched bedroom with an aperture which its owner poetically entitled a window. I believe this is not an unusual demand, but after a further search I succeeded in obtaining one for two francs: it was, however, but a sorry apartment, situated in the roof of the house.

Everybody breakfasts and dines at the *table d'hôte*, the charge for which is not unreasonable,—four francs ahead for an elegant *déjeûné* and dinner, inclusive of wine. You can have no idea what a lively scene the place presented at ten and five, the *hours for feeding*: all the inhabitants were then lounging about; and as the clock struck, innumerable *garçons* sallied from their respective hotels, and sent into the air a hundred iron-tongued calls, which were duly bandied about by the surrounding mountains. The French are essentially a sociable people, and there is one custom at these watering-places that is very agreeable to the solitary traveller. As soon as the *table d'hôte* is over, the greater part of the company adjourn to another room, called the *salle de la musique*, where they find a pianoforte and cards; some lady then usually places herself at the in-

strument, and the rest of the party sit down to whist, or amuse themselves by dancing or conversation. These meetings are rendered particularly pleasant by the free and easy manners and perfect good-breeding of the French.

I arrived at Eaux Bonnes about mid-day, and had no sooner provided myself with a lodging, than I went in search of its well-known cascades. For this purpose I entered upon the mountain-side that slopes downwards from the little town, which is covered with beech-trees of great age, wrinkled and distorted into a variety of grotesque forms, and is accommodated with walks variously interlacing each other. Below speeds the torrent Valencia, leaping through a wild vegetation and “shepherding her bright fountains” down a hundred falls towards the Vallée d’Ossau. Two of these are very remarkable,—the Gros Hêtre and the Eaux Bonnes; the former about a mile up the stream, and the latter immediately below the entrance of the town. It was to the latter that I now bent my steps, and I found it well worthy of a visit: the torrent bounds rather than falls down a slope of rock, in two magnificent curves, with incredible rapidity and stunning noise, the broken water being received in a circular pool, begirt with cliffs and literally canopied by rainbows! It is—

“the sheeted silver’s waving column;”

and in its undulations unlike any other cascade I have ever seen. I remained so long at the foot of this wild fall, that I had not time to pay my *devoirs* to the spirit of the Gros Hêtre, but I wandered up the course of the

stream, and encountered numerous cascades of minor importance.

At night, with gipsy restlessness, I formed my plans for a move on the morrow, determining to seek Eaux Chaudes by a short cut over the mountains; to visit the road to Gabas, which is said to be one of the finest passes in the Pyrenees, and if possible to return to Eaux Bonnes the same night; but as such a proceeding might not be practicable, I resolved to discharge my bill so as to start without the tie of any obligation: but I must defer an account of my further progress to a future letter.

LETTER VII.

Attempt to reach Eaux Chaudes by a mountain-path.—Awkward passage over a torrent-bed.—Wild beauty of the mountain.—At fault in the wilderness.—Extraordinary descent to inhabited regions.—Gorge and town of Eaux Chaudes.—Colossal scenery of the Pass of Gabas.—The Pyrenean dog.—An excursion with an old man of the Mountain.—The Pic du Midi de Pau.—Young highlanders.—A mountain dwelling amidst the clouds.—The fare of a herdsman.—Disturbed sleep and appropriate dreams.—The Lac de l'Ours, or Lake of the Bear.—Highland honesty.—Return to Eaux Bonnes.

Eaux Bonnes, July 29th, 1842.

THE morning after I had settled my bill at Eaux Bonnes, having entrusted my various traps to the custody of my landlady, I started with the sole encumbrance of a sketch-book, and immediately climbed up the precipitous side of the mountain behind Eaux Bonnes under the shade of beech-trees. I had, however, not proceeded very far before I unluckily took a wrong direction, and I soon found myself in a wilderness of tangled forest: the acclivity of the mountain's side was nearly perpendicular and densely clothed with wood, but I imagined that by ascending it I might soon recover the right path, so I laboured for more than an hour, hauling myself up by the tough branches of the box until I was nearly exhausted. I had by that time attained a con-

siderable elevation, and was standing amongst pines of the largest growth, many of which lay around prostrate and rotting in a state of confusion: the ground still rose like a wall before me, and my footing was so insecure from the slippery rocks that were concealed by moss and weeds, that without the aid of the trees it would have been impossible to have retained it. I now bore away to the left, as I found it impracticable to ascend higher, and reached the polished bed of a torrent that shot down through the precipitous forest like a silver arrow: to cross it was an act of considerable difficulty, the surface being as smooth as ice, while there was no friendly branch to steady either the foot or the head; its inclination, moreover, was nearly perpendicular, and the view down its fearful course most appalling. I achieved its passage, however, after a moment's hesitation, by walking cautiously on the sides of my feet until my hand could clutch a branch on the opposite side.

At length I recovered, much to my satisfaction, the path I had lost, and commenced a fresh series of zigzags with renewed vigour, passing amongst pines of such gigantic growth that I will not venture to guess at their dimensions; then the acclivity became less abrupt, and I occasionally traversed an open space bounded on all sides by the forest,—an undulating tract of bright verdure, studded with rocks, and broken, like a natural park, with clumps or single trees: the air was deliciously cool, and the view down the Vallée d'Ossau and over the plains of France, which resembled the hazy

expanse of the ocean, was inexpressibly fine. I once more plunged into the gloom of branches, and so I went on, now in sunshine now in shade, until I reached the hut of a charcoal-burner, which was scarcely distinguishable among the fallen trees; after which, to my chagrin, the path became obscure, and in the course of another half-hour I again stood completely at fault in an impenetrable waste of luxuriant but humid vegetation. What was now to be done? to persevere in this wild-goose chase was out of the question, so I at once determined upon descending in order to find the road, that I knew must be some three or four thousand feet below me. Accordingly I commenced the hazardous attempt, passing through a precipitous wilderness up to my knees in wet moss and decayed vegetation; at one time dashing down by the help of branches at the rate of some ten or twenty feet in a second, and at another, sliding for a dozen yards or more over smooth and hidden rocks: on one occasion I experienced a tremendous fall, having been shot headlong upon a pine-branch, which nearly transfixed me; in short, I descended more like a falling angel, or some wild goblin-hunter careering in full cry through his phantom domain: but I had no alternative; having once started, the steepness of the declivity did not allow of more sober progression. After about an hour I reached the signs of humanity, coming down upon cattle-paths and *châlets*, and finally attained the road that I had ascended the previous day. I think if you could have viewed me at certain periods of my extraordinary career, cutting a thousand elvish

capers in a humid forest, far above the dwellings of men, you would have been fearfully astonished.

I must now conduct you to the point where the two roads diverge at the head of the Vallée d'Ossau: you there begin a steep ascent, and find, upon gaining the summit, that the mountain has been cleft asunder, so as to allow a passage into the gorge of Eaux Chaudes, which, upon turning an angle, opens abruptly to view. It is closely hemmed in by mountain-walls, which rise to a great elevation and are hung with brushwood; its width being barely sufficient to receive the road and the torrent that accompanies it, although these thread the sinuosities at very different elevations; the former may be seen winding its snake-like course immediately in front, whilst the latter can be heard rather than seen some hundred feet below. No just parallel can be instituted between the approach to Eaux Chaudes and that to Eaux Bonnes, for they are entirely distinct in feature and character; the one adapted for the genius of a Salvator Rosa, the other for the pencil of a Wilson.

The village of Eaux Chaudes is situated near the extremity of the gorge, where it begins to open out towards Gabas, but is so shut in by towering mountains, that it wears but a gloomy aspect, and is almost excluded from the benefit of the sun. Here I found affairs very different from those at Eaux Bonnes: the place was evidently not the fashion, and it had an air of desertion and discomfort; while the invalids, who appeared to be the sole occupants, were by no means exhilarating objects for contemplation. It was late when I arrived,

and I therefore could not on that day explore the famous road to Gabas: my first object was to seek a lodging, which, by dint of a little successful negotiation, I obtained for the moderate sum of one franc,—a pretty certain indication that Eaux Chaudes was anything but a fashionable watering-place. It was a capital room; and as to the landlady and her household, I question whether the merry court of Momus could furnish greater good-humour or a blither physiognomy. In addition to the night's lodging, I was provided with a dinner and a breakfast the next morning on terms equally moderate; ham and eggs, potatoes, strawberries, sugar and wine constituted the former repast, and hot milk, bread and butter the latter: this will give you some idea of my manner of living in this part of the country. Wild strawberries form an essential part of every dessert, whether you feed in the humble *auberge*, or at the more costly *table d'hôte* of the hotel; they possess much flavour, and when mixed with sugar and wine, according to the French fashion of eating them, present a dish which is very far from being despicable.

Next morning, by nine o'clock, I started for Gabas, some eight or nine miles distant, favoured by a glorious day, a roasting sun, and a clear cloudless sky. I wish I could give you but a faint idea of the matchless scenery through which I passed: not only did I traverse a region studded with gigantic mountains, undisturbed by cultivation or any other sign of man, but they were impressed with a character perfectly distinctive and

unique. Did the thought ever occur to you, as you may have gazed upon mountains of extraordinary magnitude, how stupendous would be the effect were other masses of equal size piled upon their summits?

“..... imponere Pelio Ossam
.....atque Ossæ.....Olympum?”

Now this has actually taken place in the scene I would describe; but whether the big brethren have leapt upon each other during the throes of an earthquake, or whether the wild spirits of chaos have originally so fashioned them, I will leave others to decide. Such, however, is the case: they are heaped one upon another in masses of such breadth and solidity, that it is impossible to look upon them without wonder*. The forest reigns all-triumphant, stretching up the dark ridges in a thick and compact body; innumerable torrents leap down from on high in a series of cascades, or tumble bodily below, whilst the road winds among fallen masses of granite; add to this that the region is a perfect wilderness, without a hut or patch of cultivation, and that the valley here contracts, and there opens out to show the magnificent ranges running east and west, and I think you will conclude with me that it must be one of the finest districts in the Pyrenees. By one o'clock I reached the little village of Gabas, which forms the

* These observations more particularly apply to a colossal form that rises on the left of the valley, and is the most striking feature in the scene. Its base is clothed with the fir-forest, above which it towers up in naked precipices, and has the appearance of supporting another huge mountain on its summit.

outpost of the French *douaniers*: it consists alone of about five wretched hovels and an *auberge*, which is mainly supported by the gay visitors from Eaux Bonnes. The surrounding scenery can only be described as Swiss-like and Alpine. Here ends the valley and with it the carriage-road, a mere bridle-path leading onwards up the mountain towards the frontier of Spain.

The Pyrenees are famous for a race of dogs of great size and most noble bearing, which protect the flocks and herds from bears or wolves: I saw them here for the first time, and the two specimens that lay at the door of the *auberge* struck me as very similar in their appearance to the Newfoundland breed as known in England, being black and white and of about the same size, with bushy tails, long silky coats and magnificent heads. I entered to refresh myself with my usual travelling fare of bread and cheese, and had no sooner sat down than I was startled by the sudden irruption of two Frenchmen, who dashed into the room with the most hurried impatience. I soon discovered that one of them was an artist residing in this wild spot for the purpose of sketching the scenery, and it appeared they had both passed me in a carriage at the moment I was drawing the outline of the Pic du Midi de Pau from a point in the road about three-quarters of a mile from Gabas, whence the figure of the mountain is to be seen to peculiar advantage. No sooner, then, had I arrived, than they hastened with all the enthusiasm of artists to inspect my sketch, and highly delighted did they seem with the point of view I had selected; so I trust I may

have been the means of inducing a worthier pencil to represent one of the finest scenes in this mountain district.

When at Eaux Chaudes I had inspected my map of the Pyrenees, and thereon seen marked a certain Lac de l'Ours in the neighbourhood of Gabas: the name looked well; the *Lake of the Bear* promised a wild and solitary scene, and I had half resolved, in the vagrant freedom of pedestrianism, to undertake a pilgrimage to it. The only difficulty in the execution of this project was my ignorance of its situation and distance; but while I was hesitating as to the wisdom of proceeding under the sole guidance of my map the colossal landlady entered the room, and I questioned her as to the facility of its access, and whether I could visit it by the daylight that yet remained. She answered,—it was a long way distant, that the road to it was a ladder of broken rocks, an ascent that was most difficult and laborious, and that it would be impossible to go there and return before sunset; “but,” she added, “there is an old man below who is on the point of starting for the lake, and he will no doubt be happy to act as guide, should you wish it.” This was most desirable, and I instantly expressed a wish to be introduced to him, and accordingly in about two minutes he entered and cheerfully volunteered his services. He was one of a party who were tending a herd of three hundred cattle on the higher mountain-pastures, and he was about to return, with his donkey and a supply of bread, from a foraging excursion to these lower regions. His appearance was

agreeable: he wore a highland garb,—the round cap of Bearn, a jacket, which he now carried over his shoulders, knee-breeches and leggings, all of the same rough woollen materials and of a russet-brown colour; long black hair flowed down his back, he was exceedingly deaf, and appeared of extreme age. He said I must make up my mind to sleep in his *cabane*, and be content with black bread and milk,—his only fare; and he warned me of the probability of a mist on the morrow that might obstruct my plan of ascending to the lake: I nevertheless joyfully accepted these conditions, being quite ready for any adventure, and equally indifferent as to food and lodging. Accordingly we sallied forth, at about half-past one, for the wild residence of my “Old Man of the Mountain.”

Our labour commenced by climbing a path which greatly reminded me of the Faulhorn, so Alpine was the character of the surrounding scenery: it led through gloomy pine-woods, over roaring torrents, and up rocky and precipitous ascents; but our pace was not fatiguing, as my companion had attained his sixty-ninth year and he drove before him a donkey of about the same age, possessed with a strange spirit of contradiction and with an appetite perfectly marvellous. Ascending by the side of the stream, we suddenly came upon a surprising scene of havoc and desolation: an avalanche of snow, set in motion by the warmth of the previous spring, had fallen headlong down a steep gully in the mountain, torn a path through the forest, and finally settled at the bottom of the gorge, damming up the

waters with its icy mass and the wreck of trees. Its destructive bulk had diminished during the heats of summer; but the open gap, the shattered rocks and firs, and a remnant of snow that yet impended the torrent, bore evidence of the catastrophe. Some little way from this scene of devastation we mounted a crumbling ridge without a blade of grass to enliven it; but having gained the summit, we stood upon a *plateau* of velvet green, surrounded by wooded heights and studded with moss-grown rocks. No enthusiast could have desired a more suitable spot for the worship of dame Nature, and I felt almost inclined to turn hermit, that I might sit me down there as her votary: upon reconsidering the matter, however, it appeared more prudent to leave the wolves and *isards** in the uninterrupted enjoyment of their possession.

We here halted for a time, as the old man's bones began to ache, and the donkey was seized with an appetite too ravenous to be resisted. A conversation accordingly commenced between the highlander and myself, but it was carried on with some difficulty: his deafness would have been proof against the thunder of the avalanche, and his French was sadly confounded by *patois*. I succeeded, however, in satisfying his inquiries whether there were mountains and wolves in England,—whether my country was very far distant, and—whether I was the eldest son; and then I sent forth a protest, at the top of my voice, against an assertion he made,—that I must be very, very rich; although I

* The *isard* is the *chamois* of the Pyrenees.

doubt not that the sum I then had in my possession would have been a fortune in the eyes of the poor highlander.

Hitherto we had been climbing the roots of the Pic du Midi de Pau, as if we had meditated the ascent of that mountain, but at this point we turned to the right and bore down towards the bank of the torrent, where the ass had to be unpacked previous to its being driven through the stream, since the slight pine-bridge that was thrown across was not of sufficient breadth or strength to sustain it. After this passage we began the labour of the excursion; my highland guide having here thought proper to protect his naked feet by immersing them in a huge pair of *sabots* or wooden shoes. We ascended by a crooked path of rock, through wild firs and immediately opposite to the Pic du Midi; so you may well imagine the grandeur of the scenery. This famous mountain is bare and precipitous, soaring aloft in a huge cone, and having a notch in its impending crest like a pair of gaping jaws, with which it would seem eager to grasp the heavens. I should think it impossible to find a better point for viewing it than that afforded by this ascent; and to those who, being struck by its singular form and wild aspect as seen from the *Parc* at Pau, may wish to view the giant nearer, I could give no better advice than that they should undertake a pilgrimage to the *Lac de l'Ours*.

Among the rocks of this wilderness we met three young mountaineers conducting a white steed to the country below. As a matter of course they took off

their caps to me,—for such even is the universal custom among these sons of nature,—and they then laughed and joked with the old man, with whom they seemed on terms of familiarity, probably belonging to the same settlement. I was very much struck with the magnificent appearance of one of them: he was upwards of six feet in height, with dark curling hair, full expressive eyes, and with a mouth that disclosed a row of teeth as white as they were regular. He inquired where I was going, and then wished me every delight and happiness: such is the innate politeness of a Frenchman, even in his most uncivilized condition.

The air became now sharp and chilly; we had left the shelter of the pine-woods and had entered the open regions of pasture, where nothing met the eye but huge rocks, gorges deep and dangerous, wherein the snow yet lay unmelted, and a wild expanse of grass bedecked with the purple flower of the *Iris*. About five o'clock in the day my aged guide and his donkey came to a sudden pause in the midst of an assemblage of granite boulders, but my eye, unacquainted as yet with mountain dwellings, did not comprehend the object of our delay: the old man, however, began to unpack, and upon observing a pile of stones that appeared to have been artificially arranged, I was told that it was the hut where I was to pass the night. This wild habitation, composed of pieces of rock roughly piled together to the height of four or five feet, was covered in by rude planks of pine-wood, which in turn were kept in their places by an outer layer of stones. Stooping low I

entered, and found two highlanders asleep, covered with bear-skins and heavy cloaks, upon a raised platform composed of the leaves of the fir, which occupied the whole *cabane*, with the exception of a narrow strip at the end, where a wood-fire was burning, before which I eagerly seated myself, and was soon joined by my venerable guide, who invited me out to eat some black bread and drink a bowl of milk with him after our fatigues. Upon issuing forth the air felt both cold and wintry, and was strongly contrasted with the temperature to which I had been lately accustomed, whence I inferred the great elevation of my present position. I perceived that we were among barren summits and dreary hills of grass, and at length I discerned the tawny cattle* hitherto lost to my careless eye from the immensity of the slopes upon which they were feeding. The dews now began to fall and the mists to boil up from the deep gulf below, and ere I had finished my rude repast they came careering along the mountainsides, and shortly involved us in a premature night.

There is nothing certainly in elevated regions more calculated to startle and rivet the stranger, than the aspect and conduct of the clouds when viewed for the first time; but to appreciate fully the novelty of their appearance he should be placed in some elevated valley, in which there is nothing to remind him that he stands at any considerable elevation: he must then surely be amazed when he views the mist, instead of falling im-

* There is a breed of cattle peculiar to the Pyrenees: they are diminutive in stature and universally of a tawny colour.

perceptibly from the sky as seen from below, sweeping bodily towards him in wild and tumultuous columns. How well have its mystic freaks and unearthly appearance been described by the magic pen of Byron,—

“The mists boil up around the glaciers; the clouds
Rise curling fast beneath me white and sulphury!”

Yet it is requisite to view them with the eye rather than the imagination, to become fully impressed with the strangeness of their appearance: there is something so colossal in the vast size of their convolutions, when compared with the specks of cattle on the mountain-side over which they are sweeping; something so wild in the manner in which they whirl around, and such stateliness in their more sober movements,—now weaving their flimsy texture into an impenetrable veil, and now separating to give the overshadowed ground another gleam of sunlight.

Upon re-entering the hut I found that the different members of the family had assembled, and that it consisted of four men and a boy, who had the care of three hundred head of cattle and a number of horses. I sat amongst them over the fire, conversing to the best of my power; but their language was too barbarous to be readily understood, for although they addressed me in tolerable French, they conversed among themselves in the *patois* of the country. My old man had gone out to tend the cows, but he soon returned and set busily to work to prepare our supper, which, however, did not appear to require much culinary skill: boiling the milk

was the grand operation, and that having been effected, and a sufficient quantity of black bread broken into it, I was summoned to the rock-table outside. It is the custom of these rude people to take all their meals in the open air: our seat was a great boulder of granite; bread and milk was placed between us in a vessel made from the body of a young pine, and with wooden spoons, the handles of which were bent at right angles, we dipped at equal intervals into the mess, so that each should enjoy an equally fair share of the feast. Having satiated



our appetites we retired to rest, but it was stifling work, the *cabane* being far too small for five men and a stout boy; for we lay close to each other like *niggers* in a slave-ship, the heels of the alternate bodies being placed in juxtaposition with the heads of their neighbours, and the

entire mass being then covered with cloaks and the skins of sheep and bears. You may well imagine that sleep came with some reluctance: I was desperately cramped, the cattle-bells rang incessantly, and the fleas came in troops and marked me as their own. At length the Lethean dew fell upon me, and I tossed about in disturbed slumbers, pursued with agony through my dreams by wild goblin clouds, or by mountains quickened into life and preparing to smother me.

I awoke at sunrise with most unpleasing sensations of cold; the *cabane* was empty, and the doorless aperture gave access to the heavy mist of the morning. At about half-past five my old friend returned from the cattle, and we then sat down to bread and milk, after which, having received from him all proper instructions, I started for the lake, which was about an hour's scramble distant. The day overhead promised fairly, but bodies of mist were whisking and flying round the shoulders of the Pic du Midi, like the giant's dress fluttering in the wind: I, however, commenced by climbing a steep hill of stones and slippery grass, and then traversing the sloping side of a most dismal and barren ridge. There was one very awkward place to pass, where the rock was smooth and slaty, and ran down with an inclination that was almost perpendicular towards the torrent: it was luckily only about six yards across, but yet of sufficient width to render its passage unpleasant. I crept over that distance on the sides of my feet, but not without the expectation of being shot like an arrow to the regions below. I found the lake

as I had supposed, a small sheet of water, with the attributes of the mountain element,—transparency and beauty of colouring: it was surrounded also by savage summits of austere aspect, sprinkled with snows and strewn with *débris*. I looked around in vain for the bears which have given it their name; they no longer range the mountains unmolested, and it is but seldom that one visits even this remote spot. I gazed, however, with infinite satisfaction upon the desolate scene, where not a sound disturbed the air save the rushing of water, neither did a living object present itself except an eagle, whose majestic movements I watched with much interest; but soon the rising mists shrouded the prospect, and heavy clouds came battling up the hollows, reminding me that I had to recross the slaty pass which I had before encountered. It was lucky that I took the hint; for suddenly so dense a fog enveloped me, that I could see only a few yards in advance: however, I reached the herdsman's hut in safety.

I found one of the men surrounded by an eager troop of cattle, to which he was distributing salt*, while my old man was anxiously busied in the preparation of a hospitable meal in anticipation of my return: this was a *hasty-pudding*, which is flour and water boiled toge-

* The practice of giving salt to sheep and cattle is almost universal throughout the world, as well as of great antiquity. Columella tells us, that if the pasture were ever so sweet, yet it would grow stale to the sheep if they have not salt given in wooden troughs. The Hungarian peasants lay pieces of rock-salt at the doors of their stables for horses and cattle to lick; and I might mention a hundred other instances of this practice.

ther until it attains the consistence of dough. Upon my arrival he mixed it with a large bowl of milk, and we then adjourned to the stone outside, as was the custom, to discuss its merits: it bore a strong resemblance to that dish so well known and appreciated as the *stick-jaw* of the schools, and was about as diabolical a mixture as can be imagined; but I played my part with as good a grace as I could command, being unwilling to discredit a repast upon which my old friend appeared so greatly to pride himself. About half-past ten I started to retrace my steps towards Gabas, having sufficiently noted the road on my ascent to be under on apprehension of going astray. On the point of departure I experienced the honesty of these poor highlanders, which I feel much pleasure in recording. I had lost my knife, but whether on the mountain or in the *cabane* was more than I could say; a search among the fir-branches of their roosting-place had been unsuccessful, and I felt satisfied that I must have dropped it on my way to the lake: while bidding adieu, however, to the old man, the boy came out from the *cabane*, having discovered it with more diligence than I had used, and honestly restored it when there had been every temptation for him to play the rogue,—a knife being an object of high value, and an indispensable article to the mountaineer.

The day had now become overcast, but I was soon below, and I encountered upon the velvet *plateau*, where, you will remember, we had rested upon our ascent, a party of *Isard*-hunters returning from an un-

successful chase among the wilds of the Pic du Midi, where they had passed the night. They represented the ascent of that mountain to be no very difficult feat, and one of them volunteered to guide me to its summit on the morrow, should I desire it; but I was too anxious to get on to the department of the Hautes Pyrénées to spare the time that this would require. I accompanied the party as far as Gabas, where I left them to refresh myself in the *auberge*, and then continued my route through Eaux Chaudes to Eaux Bonnes, at which place I arrived about half-past three. The magnificence of the road elicited from me successive expressions of wonder; and I gazed upon its mighty scenery with even more astonishment than upon my former visit. I cannot say that the Lac de l'Ours is an object which in itself rewards the trouble and fatigue of reaching it; but the grand scenes through which a pilgrimage to its shores must lead you, and the view of the Pic du Midi as seen from the lake itself, will amply repay any amount of toil.

I must here conclude my letter, but you shall hear of me anon—probably from Cauterets, to which place I march over the mountains tomorrow, although I am told it is a tremendous day's work, and scarcely practicable without the aid of a horse.

LETTER VIII.

A walk from Eaux Bonnes to Cauterets.—The Col de Tortes.—Lovely Vale of Azun.—Mountain-villages.—The probable history of a Pyrenean stronghold.—Pierrefitte.—A French travelling-carriage.—Extraordinary road.—Cauterets.—The loungers of its *Place*.—A disagreeable surprise.—French mountain-riders and their ladies.—The Marcadau.—The Fall of Cerizet.—Tradition of the Pas-de-l'Ours.—Adventure with a bear.—A happy error.—Audible silence.—The Lac de Gaube and its melancholy associations.—Amusements of the French *ennuyé*.—The Lac d'Estom.

Cauterets, August 6th, 1842.

YOU will at once see by the date of this letter that I am in the heart of the mountains, and in the neighbourhood of some of the highest ranges in the Pyrenees; but let me tell you how I reached this place from Eaux Bonnes.

At six o'clock on the morning of the 30th I started with a guide; not being burdened with any luggage, since Cauterets was considered a good day's walk from Eaux Bonnes, and I had learnt to send my traps from place to place by the diligence,—a plan as safe as it is convenient; indeed it is said that your luggage is even in that case more particularly looked after than when you travel with it yourself. The carriage-road, as you may suppose, makes a considerable *détour* by the plains, whereas the traveller who rides or walks can reach Cau-

terets by a much shorter route, passing over the Col de Tortes and through a savage mountain-region to the Vallée d'Azun (the Paradise of the Pyrenees, as it is termed), and thence by the Vallée d'Argelez to Pierrefitte, and so on by the carriage-road to his destination. As a pedestrian I selected this course, as, I suppose, most would whose object is to indulge in fine mountain views.

The morning was unfortunately gloomy, but it was cool and agreeable. I was shortly joined by two highlanders bound for Cauterets, and off we went at a pace ill-adapted for enjoyment; but the guide declared that we could not otherwise accomplish the journey, so I submitted. The ascent to the Col de Tortes has an air of Alpine vastness in its scenery: the mountains clothed in the fir-forest impress you by their loneliness and grandeur; but as you rise higher, verdure gives place to barrenness, and huge summits of rock besprinkled with snow rise around in savage majesty. It costs some little trouble to gain the crest of the *Col*, which you will readily believe when I tell you that its elevation is rather more than 3000 French feet above the level of Eaux Bonnes. Having attained it, I stood in a drift-way of jagged rocks and looked forward over mountains of the most desolate aspect; but the day was too cloudy to enable me to ascertain the full extent of the view, which must be considerable. The head of this ridge is broken, as if it had been particularly exposed to a weathering by the elements, and the guide pointed out one vast fragment in a most critical position, appa-

rently waiting for the breath of the next storm to send it headlong to its former companions. We now descended at a considerable rate over rocks and slopes until we reached the vale below, where we found a herdsman's *cabane*, in which we refreshed ourselves. From this spot we had another summit to gain,—a task of almost equal labour with that of the ascent to the Col de Tortes; but my highland comrades gave every now and then a wild cry of encouragement, which the impending rocks converted into a reviving cheer, so that at length we succeeded in topping the ridge from which we descended over huge green mountains, and arrived at Arrens, the first village in the valley, by eleven o'clock. Here I became a victim to misplaced confidence by heedlessly gulping down a draught of the most diabolical wine I ever tasted, having given and received the pledge of good-fellowship by knocking my glass against those of my companions,—a fashion very common among the Pyrenees, and which, as I believe, is not wholly discontinued in some parts of my own country.

The Vallée d'Azun is one of those lovely vales peculiar to the Pyrenees, which derive their principal beauty from the extraordinary disposition of the ground; rugged rocks being intermixed with vivid verdure, undulating slopes of grass with *châlets*, woods and torrents: but in this Paradise guess my horror, when I encountered two female faces of indescribable ugliness, and deformed by hideous *goîtres*. From this valley we entered that of Argelez, which has also been described as an Eden; but its characteristics are entirely distinct from those of

Azun. The surface of the ground is flat and regular, and the mountains, which are here running towards the plains of France, have a gradual slope and are cultivated to their summits; but although tame, their garb of green and fair aspect are highly grateful to the eye that has long dwelt upon the bare rocks of the higher ranges.

There is one feature in all these cultivated valleys that may be considered essentially Pyrenean: compact little villages, each with its church and moderate proportion of houses, which would seem to be huddling together for companionship, dot the mountain's side in every direction, and in your mind's eye man appears as a gigantic bird, and these, his places of dwelling, as so many nests hung upon the huge frame of the hills. In the wild hollows of this broken land, amidst abrupt rocks and desolate chasms, the same nestling-spots of humanity are occasionally seen perched aloft like eagles' nests upon some isolated pinnacle or jutting crag, or seated far below in the shade of an impending mountain.

The Vallée d'Argelez, moreover, abounds in old crumbling castles,—venerable objects that cannot fail to awaken interest; for as we stand within the shade of their moss-grown walls, the mind naturally reverts to those wild unsettled times when warfare was the sole object and business of life, and with a look of anxious inquiry we search some speckled stone for an evidence of long-past triumphs, or seek upon the mouldering surface for the name of some fierce spirit whose memory it was intended to record. In the magic circle of such

ivy-hung ruins how readily does the imagination recall those mailed warriors to battle! I have almost fancied when sitting in the silent gloom that I heard the savage cry of the Saracens as they scoured down the mountain in search of plunder; or that the walls had been restored to their ancient strength, and that I stood upon the ramparts of a robber's hold with the Free Companions around me: then again I could imagine that the warriors of France were marshalled below in hostile array; and then, that the castle was occupied by an English knight for the glorious Black Prince Edward, that a trumpet-blast sounded, and a gay party with pennon and banner issued forth on a foray: once again the scene would change; cries of battle and a glare of fire would break upon my imagination; I was among a party of desperate Armagnacs watching from a loophole the operations of the victorious Foixiens, who, incensed by the obstinacy of resistance, were piling faggots and trees against that last tower to burn its gallant defenders. Such sights has fancy pictured in these old ivied owl-haunts; and I doubt not there are spirits dwelling among their damp, grass-grown stones that could recall stranger histories, had I taken the trouble to commune with them.

We traversed the thickly-populated slope of this long valley by a bridle-path, and reached Pierrefitte rather footsore and weary from the rapidity of our march. The situation of this village is at the extreme end of one of the finest valleys in the Pyrenees, before a barrier that seems to exclude all further progress, and fronting

mountains that are remarkable for their soft-flowing lines and brilliant colouring. The broad Vale of Argelez is, as it were, a vestibule to the wild dwelling of the clouds, and Pierrefitte is placed before the narrow stair-flights which lead up to the interior. Immediately in front lies the *embouchure* of a remarkable gorge which conducts to Luz, and to the right, that of another which runs towards Cauterets. We stopped at the principal inn of the place to obtain some refreshment. At the door stood a French travelling-carriage, whose owner, like ourselves, was preparing for further exertions. The manner in which these locomotives are crowded and overwhelmed by luggage is highly curious, and it shows in a very striking manner the regard that a Frenchman entertains for his personal comforts: as we look at the huge black boxes on the top, and the cumbrous packages swinging below, at the innumerable articles suspended behind, and the various contrivances to make further room in the interior, we cannot but feel that the Frenchman in his travels resembles the snail, not only in his pace, but in carrying his house upon his back;—but we are now entering the gorge of Cauterets, and I must give you some account of its scenery.

Its huge portal stands immediately over Pierrefitte, and is tinted with all the colours of the rainbow; while the road—a perfect specimen of French ingenuity—winds its way along the face of a bare precipice. It has been constructed within the last year or two, and is executed with the genius of a Telford. I verily believe

there is no region ever so convulsed and chaotic through which a Frenchman could not lead one of his broad and substantial paths. The gorge of Cauterets is about seven miles in length ; the mountains on either side of it soar to a great height, and would furnish studies for a legion of painters. Upon nearing Cauterets the carriage-way would seem as though it had grown phrenzied from the mountainous opposition, for it curls and writhes and overcomes the difficulties only by the most desperate exertions ; and at one spot, in its effort to compass a barrier of rock, it actually recoils within half-a-dozen yards of its former path.

I arrived at my destination by six o'clock in the midst of a heavy and driving rain, which had scoured up the gorge after us. I experienced some difficulty in procuring a lodging, as the little town, which is one of the most fashionable in the Pyrenees, was considerably crowded ; all the hotels were full, and lodging-house-keepers had the conscience to ask three and five francs a night for apartments, in which I could scarcely have stretched my full length. I succeeded, however, in establishing myself within a few doors of the Hotel de France, and truly pleased was I to find myself seated at one of the excellent dinners of M. Uzac, after having walked and clambered at a great rate up and down precipitous paths for eleven hours. The next day I remained quiet at Cauterets, wishing to become acquainted with my present locality before I sought the magnificent scenes in its neighbourhood.

The town of Cauterets is situated like an outpost of

civilization upon the granite frontier of an uninhabited region ; the silence of which is alone disturbed by falling rocks and rushing torrents. It is a watering-place that offers to the stranger the enjoyment of good society, as well as a ready access to some of the finest scenery in the Pyrenees : it is placed near the termination of the valley and upon a steep slope, the inclination being so considerable that a torrent rushes past the town with unusual speed and tumult. I soon learnt, moreover, that it stands upon the border-land of Spain, a position that cannot fail to give it an additional interest, for in its little triangular *Place*, which in my eyes always wore a most pantomimic aspect, from the variously-coloured placards in large letters posted upon the different houses, Spaniards with dark swarthy faces and handsome figures were constantly to be seen. Many of these men are simple shepherds, but others—*contrabandistas*,—a race of hardy adventurers who swarm along the frontier. Their costumes are picturesque, most of them wearing a kerchief round the head,—a short vest, which is more generally thrown aside or carried over the shoulder,—a blue waistcoat, a purple shawl which envelops the waist, blue breeches, leggins and *alpargátas* (sandals made of hemp). Others again wear the *chapeau d'Aragon*, which closely resembles that in which Italian brigands are represented ; and some have their heads protected by the huge *sombrero*, a black felt hat with a low circular crown and enormous brim. But the *manto* is the part of their costume that is most calculated to strike the attention ; this is a species of blanket in which they muffle them-

selves; it is said to be impervious to rain or snow, and the shepherd ensconced within it sleeps upon the mountain's side with the most perfect indifference: some are of alternate crimson and yellow, and are bordered with a rich fringe; but the greater number are more subdued in their appearance. There are also to be seen in this singular *Place* French mountaineers in their garb of russet-brown, with long black hair and huge wooden shoes—Pyrenean dogs exposed for sale—a row of *chaises à porteur*, the hackney-cab-stand of Caunterets—and ugly *goitred* women in the pure highland costume, with the red peaked capulet edged with black upon their heads, and with no other covering to their feet than shoes of wood.

The day after my arrival a very ludicrous circumstance occurred to me. As I was seated upon a sloping lawn—a position I had chosen for sketching—and was steadily directing my attention up the Valley of Lutour to the snows beyond, to my utter amazement the ground beneath me became suddenly converted into a pool of icy water! I started up with an alacrity you may readily imagine, and found that the slope had been transformed into a morass that surrounded me on all sides; the cause of which I presently discovered. By a powerful sun and constant supply of water the mountain-farmers of the Pyrenees are enabled to carry many successive crops of hay during the summer, and in order to excite the grass to grow as speedily as possible, they drown the meadows as soon as one crop is removed by turning the rills above into the trenches with which their fields

are scored. The emerald knoll upon which I had unluckily established myself was undergoing this irrigation; the cold streams of the upper regions had trickled down upon me unawares, and as they stole hissing through the grass I mentally condemned them in my wrath to some foul office in the neighbouring town as I splashed towards *terra firma*.

The next day, the 1st of August, will be commemorated in my calendar in letters of gold, for I passed it amid scenes of such solemn magnificence that they can never be effaced from my memory. By a most fortunate mistake, when searching for the Lac de Gaube, I took the wrong turning and walked to the foot of the Marcadau; by this blunder I became acquainted with one of the finest mountains in the Pyrenees.

Upon sallying forth I found at the door of the hotel a large equestrian party preparing for an excursion. There is a common character by which these parties are distinguished which savours not a little of the ludicrous. The Pyrenean horses are generally very diminutive, while their riders are frequently of large stature, and as extremes are known to meet, it of course happens that these antitheses commonly come together: in the party before me appeared a strange contrast of this kind,—an enormous man most liberally supplied with whisker and moustache, arrayed like a trooper in jack-boots and six-inch spurs, with the additional paraphernalia of a heavy cloak strapped upon the saddle, a colossal brandy-flask suspended about his shoulders, and a whip of terrific strength which he wielded in his hand, mounted upon a

little mouse-coloured horse with a docked tail and a hog mane, and with limbs which were not much larger than those of a fine mountain-dog,—this ill-matched pair afforded no little amusement as they pranced to and fro like a caricature in a pantomime. The ladies are sometimes extravagantly dressed in every variety of the most brilliant colours, with boots and spurs and red highland sashes, and as they gallop over the mountains might be



well mistaken for a procession of tulips just escaping from a nursery-ground. There is also a custom with these gay cavaliers not quite so agreeable to the inhabitants. When starting on their excursions (which is generally by daybreak), they leave the town on the full gallop, and thundering down the streets and cracking all their whips invariably arouse every one from his slumbers; and since the French whip, from the leathern

thong of the diligence-driver to the lash of the equestrian, is constructed for the sole purpose of making the greatest possible noise, and as the Pyrenean riders are well-skilled in producing such an effect, the hubbub of these departures, as you may believe, is somewhat apt to upset one's equanimity when disturbed by it at the untimely hour of sunrise. It is curious to observe whilst this infernal and universal cracking is going on, the steeds appear perfectly unconscious that any appeal is made to their feelings, and seem to regard the tumult overhead as solely produced for the amusement of the rider and the annoyance of his auditors;—but I must proceed on my excursion.

From the moment of leaving Cauterets the route to the Marcadau mountain is exceedingly fine; it constitutes one of the passes into Spain, and the bridle-road to the foot of the ridge is kept in order by the *cantonniers* of government, so that the traveller can if he please view its grand scenery on horseback; but for a mile or two, on his approach to the great frontier wall, the rider must be prepared for a trial of his nerves. The Marcadau is not one of the usual sights to which the traveller is directed, but the lover of nature will there enjoy a feast that can never be surpassed, however deeply he may elsewhere explore.

Soon after passing the baths of *La Raillière*, which are situated upon a granitic mountain covered by debris, I entered the gorge which leads to Spain, and ascended the path which threads the sinuosities of the defile. A furious torrent raged below, sometimes concealed by the

firs which cover the whole of this region, whilst vast boulders of granite, twenty and thirty feet in height, hung over the road: above, soared the inaccessible crags of the mountain to an elevation that was perfectly startling, throwing the fringed shadow of their needle-like forms into the depth of the defile. I frequently stopped to gaze at these precipices, and by straining my vision, like one trying to descry the gulfs and mountain-ranges of the moon, I could just distinguish Lilliputian pines hanging here and there from their crevices.

Between the entrance of this gorge and the Pont d'Espagne there are four considerable cascades; the Mahourat, Cerizet, Pas-de-l'Ours, and Coussin; but the second, and I think very justly, is considered one of the most beautiful in the Pyrenees. It is situated in the gloom of the pine-forest, about midway between Caunterets and the Pont d'Espagne: it is impossible to contemplate the deep abyss into which its waters are hurled, or to view the enchanting rainbows which irradiate the mists that are carried in circling eddies round the spot, or to listen to the incessant and deep intonation of the torrent, without feelings of extreme delight and wonder. Never did I pass along this road without paying my homage to the wild spirit of the Cerizet. Further on is the Pas-de-l'Ours, which derives its name from a whimsical tradition. Once upon a time, says the legend, there lived a methodical old bear in the forest above, who was wont when pinched by hunger to descend from his fastness, to step leisurely across the cascade, and having selected a luckless sheep from the

flock that might be grazing there, to walk as deliberately back to his den. The *Step of the Bear* is some twenty feet across, so Bruin must have been a wonderful beast,—a fit inhabitant of this colossal region, which might well be fancied the abode of giants of “mighty bone and bold emprise.”

Throughout the wild mountains of the Pyrenees this animal reigns supreme, although of late years it has become scarce from the exterminating war that is waged against it. Whenever it is known that a bear is in the neighbourhood, the inhabitants assemble and hunt it to the death; and even among the most remote and almost inaccessible crags he is often doomed to die by *chasseurs* who undertake regular campaigns against the race: he is, however, a strong and savage beast,—“he can run like a dog,”—as the guides assert, and is not to be encountered with impunity; for many are the hair-breadth escapes and woful tragedies that the huntsman can narrate, and too often has the bold adventurer who has entered its solitary domain been caught at a disadvantage where there was no possibility of retreat. My guide from Eaux Bonnes narrated to me the other day an adventure that had lately befallen a Spanish muleteer in crossing the frontier by the Port de Venasque. Having loitered behind his companions, who were passing with a string of mules into Spain, he was suddenly startled by a ferocious growl, and looking quickly round he beheld a bear within a few yards, gnashing its teeth and preparing for an attack: not a moment was to be lost,—he had barely time to snatch a knife from his

pocket and to give a desperate cry to his distant companions, before the savage beast was upon him, and he was folded in its embrace. The pain from this fearful hug was so overpowering that he immediately fainted, but upon regaining his consciousness he found the bear lying by his side in the last agonies of death: he had possessed sufficient presence of mind to stab the monster as it rushed to close quarters, and the knife had done its duty.

Besides the bear, the wolf and isard inhabit these mountains. The former is the *Lupus lycaon*, the black wolf or *lobo* of Spain: it is stronger in the limbs and shoulders than the common species, and is generally found in rocky and elevated ranges. They are exceedingly shy and ferocious, and formerly frequented in vast numbers the passes of the Pyrenees, where they have been seen bounding from bush to bush by the side of a string of mules, watching an opportunity to select a victim.

In the neighbourhood of the Pas-de-l'Ours I was joined by a young Frenchman from Angoulême, who was in search of the Lac de Gaube; he unfortunately placed himself under my guidance,—for I led him astray to the precipices of the Marcadau. Having passed the Pont d'Espagne, the scenery became successively wilder: we crossed the torrent continually by rude Alpine bridges, and shortly entered the region of granite, where the surface of the mountain was terribly rough and broken, and thinly sprinkled with aged pines, which hung at every angle from masses of rock remarkable for

the round forms into which they had been weathered. It was really surprising to see how some of these trees clung to the naked granite with their roots, and looked perfectly healthy, although there did not appear a particle of mould to yield them nourishment.

“Now,” said I to my companion, as we entered the grassy basin that formed the head of this long valley, and around which stood the snow-sprinkled heights that divided us from Spain, “now, we cannot be far from the lake, it must be in the hollow above:” but having mounted to this spot, we found ourselves upon a *plateau* immediately under the precipices of the mountain which I afterwards found to be the Marcadau: it was evident therefore that we had lost our road. Suddenly I espied a party of equestrians winding their way among the rocks that strewed the neighbourhood; but so diminutive did they appear, that having turned my eyes from them for an instant it was with difficulty I could recover a sight of them; in a few minutes, however, they came within the range of common vision, and growing larger and larger at length approached. “You are surely not going to pass into Spain at this time of day,” exclaimed the guide as he reached us. “No,” said I, rather puzzled; for I had no idea that the range before us was the frontier; but a short explanation convinced me that we were at the foot of the Marcadau, over which there is a pass to the Spanish Baths of Panticosa. The guide and his party now pursued their way towards Caunterets, taking with them the lad of Angoulême whom I had thus innocently led

astray, as he was anxious to return homewards, while I was desirous to attempt a sketch.



Here I sat for about two hours, wrapped in the sublimity of these magnificent mountains, gazing at their dim heights and giddy precipices as though they had concealed secrets I was endeavouring to penetrate. There is a strange spirit that takes possession of us when we sit alone in these still solemn wilds, and I cannot express to you how unearthly seemed the breathless silence that reigned around. Dr. Johnson has said that the traveller amid such scenes “has not the tranquillity but the horrors of solitude.” Stillness, in the ordinary conception of the word, carries with it no other notion than the absence of sound; but that which reigns in a high mountainous region is something substantially affecting the senses,—it is a silence that is

audible ! It would be very difficult to assign any reason for my listening in the expectation of hearing sounds from the surrounding heights, but such was the fact ; the universal stillness seemed to be unnatural and ominous, as though these grim giants were holding their breath in anticipation of some great catastrophe.

Having waited until the tints of a glorious sunset were fading, I turned reluctantly towards Cauterets, and then dashed homewards at the top of my speed down the valley towards the Pont d'Espagne, upon nearing which my pace began somewhat to tell upon my sinews : but there is unquestionably an elasticity excited by the rarefied air of these lofty regions that renders muscular exertion less fatiguing ; and he who travels in company, or is hurried on by a guide through such scenery, can scarcely appreciate the delight with which the enthusiastic admirer of nature in her most sublime forms pursues his solitary rambles among such wild woods and terrific precipices*.

The next day I was more successful in my search after the Lac de Gaube, which is considered the queen of the Pyrenean waters. As the morning was brilliant and the sun intensely hot, I sauntered very leisurely through the mountains and hailed with delight the cool fragrance of the Cerizet after so hot a walk from Cauterets. From the Pont d'Espagne I climbed a steep mountain among

* It is a walk of about three hours and a half from Cauterets to the foot of the Marcadau ; and it would be possible for a person to whom time might be an object to visit it on horseback, together with the Cerizet, the Lac de Gaube, and Pont d'Espagne.

withered pines, when the lake with its crystal surface broke upon my eye as some vision ;

“ A purple firmament of light,
Which in the dark earth lay,
More boundless than the depth of night,
And clearer than the day.”

It is situated upon a *plateau* which is the lowest of a series of steps that lead upwards to the distant Vignemale, and it lies amongst the granite range which stretches south-westerly in a stern phalanx from the Valley of the Bastan to the Baths of Panticosa. It is the largest sheet of water in the Pyrenees, and the traveller's book at the little hut upon its banks will amply testify the universal admiration it has excited : but though of so serene an aspect, its fatal waters were the scene of a most dismal tragedy in the year 1832. On the 20th of September Mr. and Mrs. Pattisson, a young Englishman and his bride, tempted by the beauty of the day and the tranquillity of the water, procured the frail canoe of a fisherman for the purpose of rowing to the upper end of the lake : scarcely had they attained half the distance when Mr. Pattisson was seen to rise from his seat for the purpose of recovering one of the paddles, and after a moment of fearful struggling to maintain his position to fall headlong into the water, whilst his agonized wife in her attempt to save him upset the frail machine and became also engulfed. The fisherman stood horror-struck on the bank, unable to afford the slightest assistance, a miserable witness to their dying efforts : their strength was soon exhausted, and the

bubbling waters drew a veil over their last agonies. On a round mass of granite that juts into the lake stands a monument to record the tragic event, "Ils furent engloutis dans ce lac," says the inscription, "le 20me Septembre 1832." The sad fate of this young couple, so suddenly bereft of life in the enjoyment of its most sunny period, throws a mournful interest over this solitary spot.

The scenery around the lake is extremely grand and desolate: vast slides of *débris* shoot down into its depths, and the white granite mountains over which the eye wanders would seem to promise a secure asylum for the bear and the wolf. The principal object in the view is the noble Vignemale,—the loftiest summit on the French side of the Pyrenees,—raising its triple crest above glaciers and snows, and closing the vista which the lake commands. As evening approached a tempest gathered on its brow, and I was barely in time to reach Cauterets before a violent storm commenced.

During the whole of that night and the greater part of the next day it rained incessantly, with a constant accompaniment of thunder and lightning; but towards evening it cleared up, and I found all the world of Cauterets assembled on the little bridge to observe the raging torrent and the mountains that were covered with newly-fallen snow. It requires an acquaintance with these mountain-floods to become fully impressed with the mighty power of water: we can scarcely imagine anything more resistless than the fury of the ocean under the lash of the tempest; but we well know

that, with the exception of the tide, its angry billows have no progressive motion: whereas these offspring of the clouds and glaciers, when hurried over fall and precipice, roll bodily forward in their impetuous career, overwhelming the valleys as though determined to seek a full recompense for all former restraints. The rapid metamorphosis which the mountains had undergone was quite startling: the thunder was heard, and the black clouds rolled down upon the yet darker summits, when, behold, they suddenly cleared away, and the big brethren stood forth far and near with whitened heads. Their aspect was sufficiently cold and cheerless; but I was somewhat comforted by the intimation that it betokened the return of fine weather,—since a fall of snow in the Pyrenees during the summer is regarded as an indication that the wind is gone to the north, and is the herald of clear skies.

I was a perfect idler this day, and amused myself by noting the various diversions with which the French visitors endeavoured to dissipate their *ennui*; amongst which I remarked one that is indeed common to all the Pyrenean watering-places, and which would appear to be admirably adapted for the education and encouragement of duellists, and must be passing pleasant and soothing to the nervous patients who flock to these baths to drink their healing waters. An enclosed piece of ground is furnished with all the necessary appliances for pistol-shooting, and from sunrise to sunset is the ear assailed by the incessant twang: a greater nuisance to

those who are compelled to pass their time within ear-shot can scarcely be imagined. The fair weather having returned as was predicted, I have been wandering wherever the spirit has led me, tracking the torrents to their sources and drinking the waters in the neighbourhood of the glaciers. Upon entering on the day's excursion I search upon my map for the mountains or lakes I wish to visit, and then trust to the streams for guidance; for there is no fear of being lost if you keep within hearing of their noisy prattle,—they are the threads which will conduct you safely through these wilds, even should the dark clouds envelop you.

The Lac d'Estom is, I think, one of the most solitary and savage scenes in the neighbourhood of Cauterets: I paid it a visit yesterday, and found it a bright mirror of the darkest blue, and so transparent that every rock and gelid cavern at the bottom could be distinctly discerned. It is situated at the head of the forest-covered valley of Lutour, and its scenery is well worthy the neighbourhood of the Vignemale, which mountain can be reached from its shores, but only on foot, by the laborious pass of the Col d'Arailé.

I find the living here excessively reasonable and convenient: I pay four francs a day at the Hotel de France for an excellent breakfast and dinner, and I have the option of eating by myself at any hour, or of joining the *table d'hôte*. Lodgings are expensive, but if the traveller is determined to be economical, he can with a little trouble procure a small bedroom for a franc the night.

At any period of the year, except during the season, which continues from June to the beginning of August, the cost of living in these watering-places is almost nominal. I have now remained more than a week at Caunterets and shall quit it with reluctance: tomorrow I start for Luz, from which place you will probably receive a further account of my progress.

LETTER IX.

Unsuccessful attempt to pass the mountains to Luz.—A nocturnal attack by dogs.—The ridge between Cauterets and Luz.—Views from high summits in the Hautes Pyrénées.—Luz and its basin.—St. Sauveur.—Madame Cazaux.—A church of the Templars.—Excursion to the Cirque du Marboré.—Narrow escape of an Englishman.—An accident that might have proved awkward.

Luz, August 9th, 1842.

I MUST now give you some account of my attempt to reach Luz. I had read in Conway's travels of his passing round from Cauterets to that town by the foot of the Vignemale, and remembering that he had given the scenery a peculiarly savage character, I had a strong desire to pursue the same course. With such an idea, I had upon my last visit to the Lac d'Estom attentively studied the precipices and the expanse of rocks and snows above me, and therefore thought that I could easily discover the proper direction for an escalade of the mountain.

The morning of the seventh was as beautiful as any traveller could desire, the dark sides of the Vallée de Lutour were alive with woodcutters, and the solitary saw-mills most industriously slicing the big pines of the forest; but as I climbed towards the lake, clouds began to rise above the heights and threatened to render a pathless course over the most elevated ridge of the Pyrenees,

where landmarks alone could guide me, a task of no slight peril. The scenery around this wild lake looked if possible more savage on that day than I had hitherto seen it, and the clear indigo depths of the water contrasted more strongly with the colour of the granite; but without further consideration I began the ascent.

I selected the stream for my guide, as its neighbourhood offered the most practicable route, and I followed it upwards through a region of colossal rocks, by stepping from one huge fragment to another, and ascending acclivities but little inclined from the perpendicular. The labour, however, increased in difficulty; for I had occasionally to pass round the angle of a precipice in the spray of the torrent, where the footing was extremely slippery, and finally I had to raise myself by my hands and knees. But the higher I went the more abrupt became the mountain, and after an hour of very hard work I was obliged to confess the heights inaccessible and to prepare for the descent. Upon turning round, however, the retreat appeared even more hazardous than the ascent; but by grasping firmly with my hands, and proceeding with extreme caution over the broken masses, between which were chasms frequently twenty feet in depth, I effected it, and shortly stood where I had rested some two hours previously.

Above the lake the torrent divides into two branches, and I now turned up that which flowed in a direction from the Vignemale; but I had not ascended far, before I arrived at a spot where it issued from the earth like some dark Acheron, seeming to break through the

clefts and cracks of rocks. I sat down upon one of the granitic masses that strew the whole limb of this mountain, even to the Col d'Araillé, for the purpose of regarding the strange birth of the stream, and of speculating upon the probable direction that I should have followed to] Luz; for the appearance of clouds at the head of the lake now convinced me that any further attempt to discover it would be useless. I had for some time observed them creeping lazily up the Valley of Lutour, threatening to waylay me on the heights, should I succeed in reaching them; and now there was no time to be lost, so I commenced the retreat, but was soon enveloped in a driving mist. Having arrived near the lake, I discovered a rude hut of stones that contained a tempting store of bread and cheese; and I waited there in expectation of the herdsman's return, being anxious, if possible, to obtain a night's lodging, that I might make another attempt to scale the neighbouring ridge on the morrow: but time crept on and the mountaineer came not, and since the shades of evening were falling I started on my return to Cauterets.

From the lake there is a steep and dangerous descent, and as it was no highway to travel in the dark, I hurried at the best of my speed to reach the more level surface of the valley. Luckily I gained a saw-mill as the twilight faded, and from this spot there was little chance of going astray, as the constant transport of timber to Cauterets had impressed furrows upon the land that were sufficiently obvious: but a slight adventure befell me nearer home.

I had walked for about an hour through the darkness of this solitary region, when I found myself marching abruptly into the midst of a recumbent flock of sheep. To be attacked by the dogs was the work of a moment; and as they were five in number, their assault soon wore a most menacing aspect: at the critical moment, however, when the angry animals seemed inclined to make a dash upon me, the shepherd came roaring from his *cabane*, and order was immediately restored. Although in no tranquil mood, I could not help admiring the obedience and sagacity of my noble assailants: they walked quietly away without any suppressed growl or skulking demeanour, seeming to say that they attacked me with no particular malice, but for the purpose of summoning their master, who would now inquire my business. The Pyrenean dog ranks among the noblest of his kind, and is as remarkable for docility as for strength and courage: he is not the drover of the flock, —to drive it here and there, or to keep it together; on the contrary, he walks in advance and leads it to the mountain side, or towards evening to the *cabane* of the shepherd. His principal duty, however, is to defend his fleecy charge from the wolf or bear; and should either venture an attack, he unhesitatingly gives battle and generally comes off the victor. These fine animals will always salute the passing stranger as he journeys over the mountains, but will seldom, I believe, do more than menace: lifting a stone will keep them at a distance; or should they come to closer quarters, a blow over their legs with your stick, as the guides affirm, will imme-

diately command respect: at night of course their attack may be dangerous.

As my return to Caunterets was unexpected, I found it no easy matter to effect an entrance into my old quarters: half-past nine, the hour that I arrived, is late for these primitive people, and I had to batter the shutters with considerable violence before I could disturb their slumbers. My old highland landlord, however, at length appeared, and declared that my noise must have awakened the dead in the neighbouring churchyard, and that they would certainly visit me at midnight. "Let them come in troops," said I, "and rattle their bones in my ears; I don't think I shall mind them:" and verily I believe I spoke the truth; for never did mortal lay in a heavier trance than I did on that night.

After this failure among the roots of the Vignemale, I determined to march to Luz by a less difficult route, as I had expended sufficient time in the neighbourhood of Caunterets. For this purpose there were two roads open to me,—the carriage-highway to Pierrefitte, and a mountain-path, that can be traversed only on foot or horseback, passing over the ridge that separates the gorge of Caunterets from the basin of Luz: the latter, which is commonly pursued by exploring travellers, was that which I selected. It is a laborious journey of about five or six hours, but the view from the summit most amply repays the trouble: the path leaves Caunterets at the back of the town, and descends into the basin of Luz at the bridge over the *gave*. I started at ten o'clock, intending to walk very leisurely and dedi-

cate the day to the excursion. In the early part of the ascent the path led through sloping lawns, hanging woods and cultivated meadows: *châlets* were perched here and there, and masses of rock lay among the flowers of this smiling Eden, reminding the traveller that there were sterner regions above. Delicious milk was to be obtained at the different cottages, and I found most of the highlanders busy in manufacturing butter for the neighbouring town of Caunterets. The way of churning is not a little primitive: a sheep-skin forms a rude bladder containing the milk, and this is moved to and fro until the transformation is effected; when they untie the mouth of the bag and roll out the butter.

Having climbed the grassy pastures near the summit, I at length stood upon the crest of the ridge, whence I looked upon a mountain region of great extent. Of all these bird-eye views over the High Pyrenees desolation is the prevailing characteristic; for although from many gorges and valleys the heights appear to be covered by luxuriant woods, it must be remembered that the slope of the mountain conceals its giant shoulders, as well as the greater part of its body; a fact which is immediately perceived upon ascending a neighbouring elevation, when the vast forests that seem to clothe it even to the very summit, may be seen to sink lower and lower the higher we rise, and gradually to disappear in the deep gulfs that separate the ridges, whilst the upper zone of pasture or naked rock becomes developed. Cone-shaped mountains, moreover, of which you may perhaps

actually see the summits from the Valley, have their upper regions so foreshortened, that we are quite unable to judge of their magnitude or fertility until we view them from an opposite height. When perched upon these aërial summits in the midst of the Hautes Pyrénées, we can see nothing around us but long desolate ridges, scored and broken by torrents; vegetation lies crouching in the hollows, and the bare bones of this wonderful earth alone meet the eye. The tint of these prospects I have always observed to be either ultramarine or pink, depending of course upon my position in regard to the sun: as I stood upon this huge ridge, looking down into the depths, in which lie Luz on the one side and Cauterets on the other, and imagining how an Atlas might sit astride upon its back and uphold the heavens, these different colours were most broadly set forth in the picture. The sun was shining above, a little way to the west, and the realms of the Vignemale which lay on that side were of the deepest blue, whilst Mont Perdu and the mountainous regions to the east were steeped in the hue of the rose, which is certainly far less beautiful as the colour of a mountain prospect.

The descent to Luz proved much longer than I had expected, but the views were grand, and the slopes, as indeed throughout the Pyrenees, were enamelled with interesting flowers. Besides the *Crocus*, *Gentiana*, *Dianthus* and a hundred other genera, I noticed the *Parnassia palustris*, which, in accordance with its name, is to be found only in the moist atmosphere of a marsh or

in that of an elevated summit*. At seven o'clock I was entering the *Hôtel des Pyrénées*, and was shortly engaged at one of the famous dinners of the celebrated Madame Cazaux.

The town of Luz is situated at the distance of about twelve miles from the central chain of the Pyrenees, and at the southern extremity of a fertile basin that has evidently at some former period been a lake; this is level and begirt by lofty mountains, and since the traveller usually enters it by deep and dismal gorges, its beauties are enhanced by all the charms of contrast. However, I thought its scenery tame as I descended from the wild neighbourhood of the summits; the green mountains around being destitute of the pine-forest, and unbroken by rocks, while the dead level of the basin is traversed by lines of poplars and a straight carriage-road. The lower slopes, however, that hem it in are exceedingly picturesque; they are subdivided into a thousand hanging fields, broken by copses and studded with villages; old towers peep out here and there from the woods, and innumerable sunny rills hasten downwards to the basin.

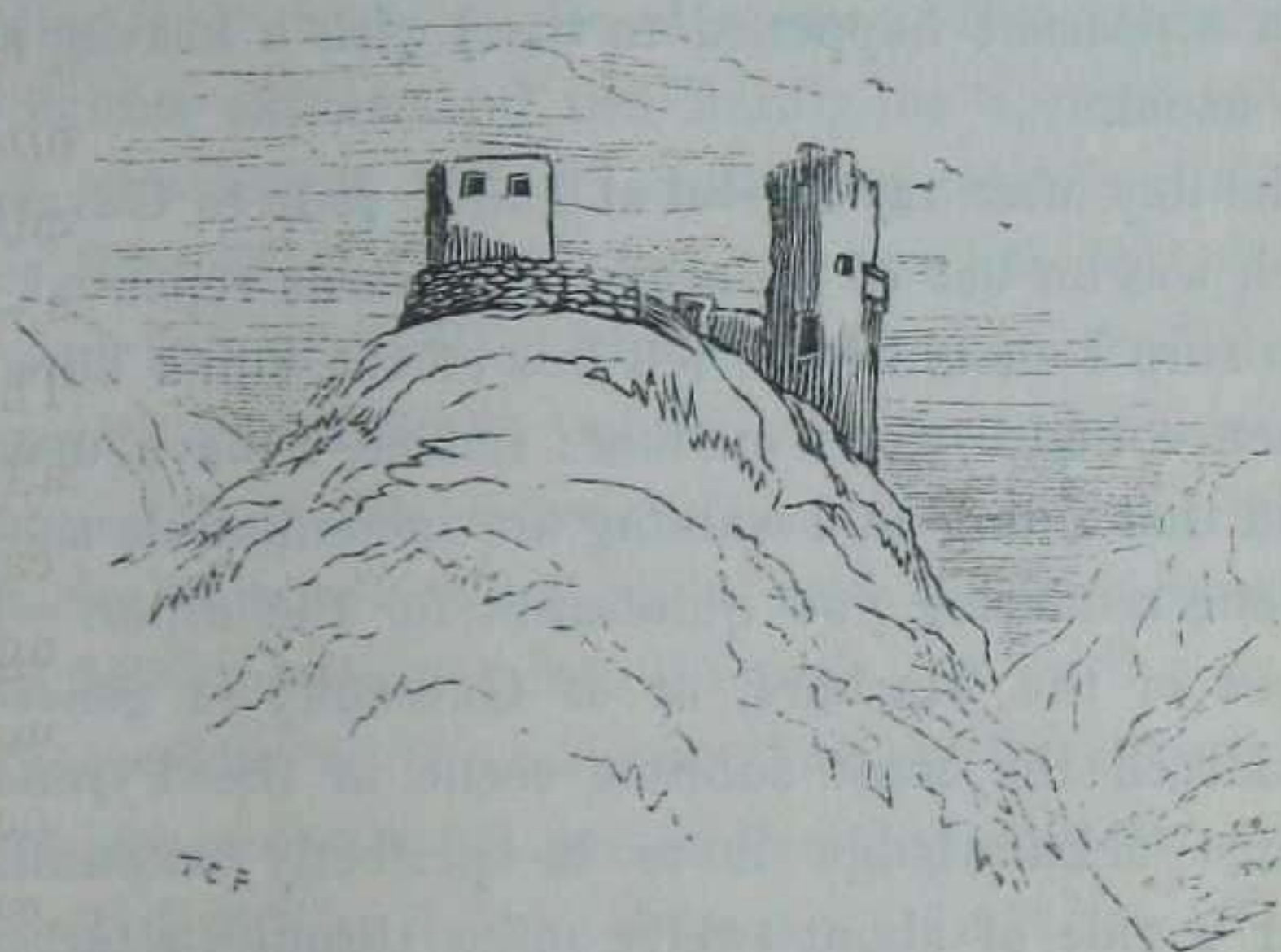
Luz itself possesses no mineral springs or bathing establishment, but a walk of ten minutes will bring you

* Linnæus observes, that the plants which chiefly grow upon the summits of mountains are rarely found in any other situation, except in marshes; because the clouds, arrested in their progress by such elevations, keep the air in a state of perpetual moisture, somewhat resembling that of fogs in meadows and marshes: in exemplification of this fact, the locality of *Parnassia palustris* immediately suggests itself to our notice.

to the romantic village of St. Sauveur, where sudatories and other watery inventions are in active operation. The situation of this little town is something quite extraordinary: it hangs like an eagle's nest upon the very edge of the precipice at the entrance of the gorge that leads to Gavarnie; and so narrow is the shelf upon which it is perched, that there is barely room for its single street of houses, which the mountains behind appear elbowing over the precipice: the view of it from the bridge is truly delicious, embosomed as it is in woods, and overhung by the lofty peaks and great masses of one of the highest Pyrenean ridges. Luz as a place of residence is infinitely cheaper than St. Sauveur: it is larger and less fashionable, lodgings therefore, as might be expected, are much more reasonable: both, however, are equally convenient as central points for the various excursions in the neighbourhood; but for the pedestrian, who has occasionally to live upon black bread and milk, Luz offers a bait that is irresistible; Madame Cazaux, who has been graphically and faithfully described as having a waist of a circumference greater than that of her shoulders, and which would have stretched the belt of Falstaff, is universally acknowledged the greatest culinary adept in the Pyrenees, and the dinners of the famed Hôtel des Pyrénées, which can be obtained after ten minutes' notice at any time in the afternoon, have delayed many a wanderer on his journey.

Upon entering the town I was struck by the romantic appearance of a little castle hanging over an abrupt pre-

cipice: this is the chateau of St. Marie, which, according to tradition, was built by the English some centuries since, when the county of Bigorre, being annexed to the Duchy of Aquitaine, came into the possession of



our Black Edward as part of the ransom of the French king, John. Besides this old chateau, there is in the centre of Luz another record of chivalry's bright days: it is a church of most venerable aspect, built, according to tradition, by the Templars; and it appears, by the solid rampart that encircles it, to have stood in the double capacity of citadel and cloister, and to have been equally a refuge to those who were persecuted by terrestrial or spiritual enemies. Everything about this hoary structure wears an unquestionable air of antiquity; its paving-stones are sunk and corroded by age, and scarecrow images, that could only have been exe-

cuted in most remote times, are to be seen upon its walls. The gloom of the interior, moreover, well accords with the train of thought that its exterior is calculated to produce : I really started with the impression that the warrior-priest was marching over the pavement when a peasant happened to tread with a heavier step than usual.

The day after my arrival at Luz I rode to Gavarnie, which was an act of laziness I afterwards repented, for I am sure I should have felt less of the sun's burning influence had I gone on foot : indeed I have usually found that riding and walking are incompatible acts,—the one rendering you quite unfit for the other. The *Cirque* of the Marboré, or of Gavarnie, is generally considered the most sublime scene in the Pyrenees : I must acknowledge it to be perfectly astounding. After a ride of about twelve miles through a tortuous valley remarkable for its convulsed scenery, I stood upon the bridge of Gavarnie, when the receding ridges displayed this wonder of the Pyrenees,—an icy amphitheatre, grand to sublimity, in which the laws of nature seem at variance with each other ; where summer and winter are contending for the mastery, and where the fall of the avalanche, or the rush of the snow-storm, announces their alternate triumphs ; the fiery sun darting its rays and conflicting with the icy assault showered down from the mountains.

An hour's walk from Gavarnie conducts you to the threshold of the Circus : it has the figure of a horse-shoe, the area of which is surrounded by impending

precipices and hoary glaciers, alternately disposed one above the other in a series of gigantic steps; whilst from the highest rim a circle of torrents falls in cascades. When the storm is abroad the imagination of a Fuseli might conceive colossal shapes to be here seated regarding the shock of the elements. The arena is of prodigious extent, and can hardly be appreciated by those who do not cross it: consisting entirely of *débris*, it is fissured and worn by the torrents that hurry through it, and is called in the language of the country an *Oule*, or caldron*; whilst it is impossible not to recognise in it the existence of an ancient lake, which at some remote period must have broken down its boundary and escaped into the plain.

In speaking of the cascades, I ought to tell you that there is one great fall pre-eminent, and which is considered the finest in the Pyrenees; for it leaps boldly down a precipice of more than 1200 feet. To approach it, however, is no easy matter, as you have to scramble through the broken rocks of the *Oule*, while the fearful speed and force with which it is hurled from so amazing a height dissipate it into mist and rain, which the whirlwinds disperse around in showers. The waters of this cascade flow from the lake of Mont Perdu, where being weaned from the cold bosom of their glacier parent, and issuing forth as the *Gave de Pau*, they take at once this fearful leap, and then glide down the

* A word probably derived from the Latin word *Olla*. M. Reichard computes the circumference of the arena at 1800 toises, and a toise is about 6 feet 4 inches English measure.

length of the Lavidan* to the plains of France. At Lourde they turn to the west, still lingering about their mountain origin, and after passing Peyréhorade, mingling with the Adour are lost in the Bay of Biscay.

Having worshipped at the feet of this fair nymph until I was sufficiently bedewed with her refreshing presence, and inspected the snow-beds through which she glides at the head of the *Oule*, I retraced my steps towards Gavarnie,—but I must not pass on without first telling you a story recorded by M. Reichard respecting these same snow-beds, which he terms “snow-bridges,” since the torrent has so worked a broad, dark channel through the mass, that the icy surface hangs over it in the manner of a bridge or platform. After cautioning the traveller from entering the portal of these chambers, where, as he says, the crystal fragments are suspended overhead like the sword of Empedocles, he tells us of an Englishman who, having braved the danger, was drawn into the torrent and hurried forward notwithstanding his utmost efforts at resistance. His horrified companions heard his exclamations for help without the power of according it: all they could do was to repair to the other end of the snow-bed to rescue the body when it should appear. It came with great rapidity, and when raised from the water they found to their wonder and delight that life was not yet extinct,

* The Lavidan comprises not only the great valley that runs from the foot of the Marboré to the plains of Bearn, but the lateral valleys that diverge from it, such as those of Cauterets, Baréges and Héas.

and they succeeded after considerable exertion to restore him.

As I returned towards the village, on directing my eyes along the heights of the central range, almost immediately over the Port de Gavarnie, my attention was suddenly attracted by a pinnacled glacier sparkling like a bed of diamonds, not unlike that which I have witnessed in the *Mer de glace* and other frozen oceans of Switzerland. I reached Luz by nine o'clock, having ridden in the dark most part of the way from the little village of Pragnères and over a road not of the safest description, considering that it hangs like a thread at a great elevation above the torrent. I however arrived at the hospitable roof of Madame Cazaux scatheless, although my steed took advantage of a loose rein and came down on his nose in a place where you would have much stared to see him get up again. At night I ruminated on my future plans: my wish was to pay another visit to Gavarnie for the purpose of ascending the Brèche de Roland,—the Piméné was to be mounted, the Circus of Troumousse and Chapel of Héas were to be visited, and divers *et-cetera* to be performed; but my shoes were in ruins and my purse in a deep consumption, so I have determined without delay to proceed to Bagnères de Bigorre to recruit my resources.

LETTER X.

Singular gathering of the clouds.—Departure for Grip and Bagnères de Bigorre.—The Bastan and Baréges.—Precarious tenure of houses.—The Pass of the Tourmalet.—Arrival at Grip drenched to the skin.—The Basque language.—A highlander's questions to an Englishman.—Bagnères de Bigorre.—Its Marbrerie.—The Pic du Midi de Bigorre.—Its ascent from Grip.—The view from the summit.

Luz, August 13th, 1842.

WEDNESDAY the 10th opened upon the Pyrenees with the usual clear sky and intense sun, but the clouds about twelve o'clock gathered in a manner I have never before observed among these mountains. They made their simultaneous appearance in all the four quarters of the compass and then swept rapidly together; as if some mountain giant had blown his horn, and the dark spirits of the storm were hastening from north, south, east and west to obey the signal. Everybody foretold a tempest of no ordinary violence, and it was a curious sight to look up and see the vapours flying in all directions, crossing and recrossing each other, and gambolling about like wild things as they are. It was not very prudent to start under such circumstances, but I had no alternative; besides, to confess the truth, the voice of the storm is to me as the song of the siren.

From this town there are two modes of access to

Bagnères de Bigorre; the carriage-road by the plain, and the horse-path passing over the mountains by Baréges and the Tourmalet. The latter, as being the shortest, was that which I selected; and as it was marked on the map* as a carriage-road, I started without the least suspicion that I had to cross one of the most dreary mountain-passes in the Pyrenees to reach Grip, where I intended to pass the night.

In an hour's time, following the valley of the Bastan, I reached Baréges, a noted bathing-place situated in as inhospitable a mountain-district as I ever witnessed. The Bastan is a torrent remarkable for the devastation it causes: a hundred streams flow into it from the unknown solitudes of the gigantic Neouvielle, and the wild valleys that open on either side of the great drift-way in which Baréges is situated; and in spite of the numerous devices contrived for checking its violence, it periodically carries destruction through the whole length of its course, from its fountain-head to Luz. I soon witnessed the doings of this dark water-spirit and its accessories; for the sides of the mountains were laid bare and their black earth ploughed up, and I passed over several places where the road had been recently carried away, and the *cantonniers* were employed in heaving the masses of granite from the broken carriage-way. Baréges is one of the most elevated towns in the Pyrenees, being situated more than 4000

* The roads or paths that are kept up by the government are all broadly marked on the French map as if they were highways for diligences.

feet above the level of the sea, and so deep does the snow lie there in the winter that it is then entirely deserted by the inhabitants, two or three men being alone left in it to take care of the baths: indeed, on so precarious a tenure do the people hold their dwellings, that most of the shopmen migrating at the approach of winter carry with them the wooden walls of their *baraques*, as they are termed; so that houses as well as men run away from the inclement atmosphere of this exposed settlement. After passing Baréges the carriage-road ended, and my course was to be pursued along a bridle-path. The whole distance from Luz to Bagnères de Bigorre, about four-and-twenty miles, was one great ascent and descent, the crest of the Tourmalet constituting its highest point. At the entrance of the Valley of Escoubous I was overtaken by clouds and rain, and involved in a labyrinth of granite fragments; the road crossed the torrent, but the bridge had been carried away and the track was not to be discerned. Luckily at that moment a mountain dog came bounding to the assault, the shepherd followed, and I was once more placed in the right road to Grip. The Tourmalet is one of the dreaded passes where during the snowstorms of winter the Pyrenean proverb says, "the father never expects his son nor the son his father": the neighbouring mountains and the Valley of the Bastan are perfectly bare, without a tree or shrub to obstruct the drifting snow; consequently in the winter it accumulates to a vast extent in the hollows and upon the flank of the mountain. I shall well remember

the pass for reasons with which I will now acquaint you.

The mists had cleared, but apparently for no other purpose than that of revealing the difficulties I had to encounter; for on looking back to see whether the bright gleam of sunshine was likely to be lasting, I perceived enormous troops of clouds, as black as night, sweeping up the valley in pursuit. It was a fine sight, but by no means agreeable to anticipate the chance of losing the road over the heights, or of taking a step too many at one of its numerous angles, and walking over the precipice. In a minute the clouds overshadowed me, the mountains were hid, the wind roared, the rain descended, and it was my fortune to toil for two long hours up the zigzags of the Tourmalet, now exposing my face and now my back to the drenching of the storm; but I thought myself lucky to be traversing a path that was legibly traced.

At length I stood within the *port** at the summit, through which the rain and wind were driving with tremendous fury, being thoroughly wet and shivering with cold. It was a curious circumstance that the currents of the storm were still flowing in opposite directions: when below, I had seen the clouds rolling towards me from the west, but here, through the cleft of the ridge, they were speeding in equal haste from the east: I was blown up the mountain, but arriving at the summit I met an opposite current, and was nearly

* The summit of a pass in the Pyrenees is termed a *port*. It generally consists of a narrow cleft or gateway in the ridge.

blown back again. The descent appeared interminable: long green slopes, steep and slippery, down which I hastened to the vale of Grip, which I reached as evening fell, without any other accident than that of a tumble, which carried me some thirty yards down the grass, and thrust my physiognomy into the mountain. The second cottage in the straggling village of Grip was distinguished by a painting exhibiting a large black and white fish, accompanied with the necessary comment of its being intended to represent a trout; so without inquiry as to any better *auberge*, I forthwith entered through the doorless aperture, drenched to the skin and dripping like a *mer-man*. Nothing could exceed the attention and hospitality of its inmates: the highlander hastened to procure me one of his clean coarse shirts and other necessary vestments; the women flew to the fire to provide me supper and to dry my dripping garments, and in a quarter of an hour I was seated, like some great mountain-bear, in outward appearance, at a most welcome meal, and within the shadow of their chimney-corner.

You cannot imagine how agreeable it is to sit after a day's hard walking among these primitive people, witnessing the simplicity of their habits and household economy, and answering their many and earnest questions. Among themselves they speak an unintelligible *patois*,—a hideous and discordant dialect, which the Parisians cannot better understand than the English, but I have generally found them able to converse with me in French, which though not of Attic purity is in-

telligible. There is much that is curious in the history of the Pyrenean dialects, both as to their origin and distribution. Of these the Basque language is perhaps one of the most singular and difficult in Europe: I have been told that it is confined within certain small districts, distinct from each other like islands in the ocean, and that its difficulty is so extreme, that the neighbouring peasants are unable to understand or to learn it. Every now and then in wandering among the mountains I have found myself in one of these singular communities, linked together as it were by the tie of an exclusive and barbarous tongue, and as rapidly have I passed through them and again entered regions in which the common French *patois* prevailed.

These honest highlanders of the Trout questioned me as usual whether I was a German,—so universal a reputation have the students of the North for vagrancy,—whether I had come from London, and how far distant it might be—whether it was as large as Bagnères de Bigorre—and had we wolves and sheep-dogs in England; and, above all, in what manner did the English dispose of their money, with a hundred subjects of similar inquiry. The good matron of the house was employed boiling her linen preparatory to washing it in the neighbouring stream: a caldron of water had been suspended over the fire, and in the chimney-corner stood a gigantic tub (the excavated stem of a pine) some four feet in height and three in diameter, which contained the articles to be soaked.

Having satisfied my hunger and luxuriated to my

heart's content before the fire, and witnessed the disappearance of a mountaineer into bed in one of the recesses of the room, I, together with my host and his brother, betook myself to an apartment in which we were to pass the night; this was a small chamber partitioned from the travellers' room above: its unpainted timbers were massive, carved, and full of the fragrance of the fir, and the walls were hung with crumbling tapestry, which appeared not a little extraordinary in a mountain-cottage, since it represented the triumphs of Cæsar or some other worthy Roman. On either side of the room stood a bed, each having a solid mattress and pillow of straw; upon the one I threw myself, and upon the other the two highlanders, who were to be up again by daybreak to drive their sheep to pasture. The next morning, after performing ablutions in the Adour, which rises not very far from Grip, I sat down to some ham and bread and butter at the *table d'hôte* of the mountaineers, whose meal was a thin *potage* of bread and vegetables, then a small piece of fat bacon and a few scraps of mutton; wine was of course plentifully swallowed to wash down this cheer, and, as usual among this primitive people, having filled their goblets, they brought them in contact over the middle of the table, and drank severally to the company's good health and happiness.

By ten I started for Bagnères and arrived there in about four hours: my route lay down the Valley of Campan*, which has been extolled by all French

* Famous for its delicious butter.

writers on the Pyrenees as the *beau ideal* of mountain beauty, rivalling even that of the classic Tempe. For my own part I entirely dissent from this panegyric.

Bagnères de Bigorre is the Paris of the Pyrenees; and the gay troop of fashionables who flock to these mountains, are enabled to support the *ennui* of such wild scenery as that of Cauterets and the other bathing-places by the anticipated season at *La charmante Bagnères*. It is situated among the soft beauties of wood and dale which characterize the outskirts of the mountains, and at the foot of the far-famed Pic du Midi, the Rigi of the Pyrenees, the amazing frame of which abuts at once upon the plain. Towards the middle of August, when the season at the higher baths is drawing to a close, the stream of fashion, that has been divided among the hills, flows into this town to enjoy a milder temperature and a gaiety which is carried on with Parisian spirit. The town is pretty, and the stranger will here, as at Cauterets and the other watering-places, be struck with the prodigal use of the most beautiful marbles; most of the houses having their windows and doors framed with that chaste material. In the season as many as 8000 visitors have been known to assemble at the same time; but there is no lack of accommodation, for almost every house in the place has lodgings or are *pensions* or hotels. However, the wild wastes and scenery of the central range were to me so fascinating that I left the promenades of Bagnères as speedily as possible, and slept at Grip again on the morrow on my return to Gavarnie.

The marble works are one of the most interesting sights at Bagnères de Bigorre, and M. Geruzet, the proprietor, with great politeness showed me all that was worthy of notice. The stone is derived from several places in the Pyrenees, among which the Valley of Campan is especially famous, and it was from the quarries of the Vallée d'Aure that the palaces of Trianon and Versailles were decorated in the reign of Louis XIV. This *marbrerie* is on a very extensive scale, being divided into several departments: in one, the stone is cut into slabs by saws set in motion by the strong arm of the Adour; in another, it is chiselled and smoothed; in another, again, divided yet more finely and polished; whilst in a fourth it is cut into circular tables and into some of the most delicate objects of workmanship. M. Geruzet ships off his manufacture to all parts of the world.

Ever since I left Luz I had been unfortunate in the weather: the Tourmalet had been hidden from me; the Pic du Midi concealed in the clouds while I rested at Bagnères, and I was now doomed to enter Grip for the second time in a flood of rain. Here I put up, not as before at the Trout, where I had met with no small entomological inconvenience, but at the Hôtel des Voyageurs, a very comfortable little inn.

The following morning I looked abroad after three days of gloom with no little interest to scan the features of the mountains I had traversed but not yet seen, and I started about twelve o'clock to retrace my steps over the Tourmalet.

Grip is in the immediate neighbourhood of the Pic du

Midi de Bigorre, which everybody ascends and everybody descants upon; there is scarcely a ridge that has not its Pic du Midi; but I beg you to understand that this is the Pic du Midi *par excellence*, surpassed by some in height, but by none in notoriety. It is a vast barren cone, which according to Vidal Reboul rises 1506 toises* above the level of the sea, and what is singular in a mountain of that magnitude, it stands at the furthest distance from the central and most lofty range of the Pyrenees, and abuts at once upon the plain. With such a position the view from its crest is necessarily most extensive, commanding on one side the vast expanse of southern France, and on the other the whole mountainous family of the *Hautes Pyrénées*. It was of course my intention to ascend this pinnacle; but I had determined to defer the labour until after my return from Gavarnie. However, as I was wending my way up the tortuous path of the Tourmalet I felt an irresistible desire at once to accomplish my purpose; for on a sudden turn of the road at the Cabanes de Tramesaigues, the mountain presented so magnificent a *coup d'œil*, that I was perfectly fascinated and irresistibly drawn towards it. I apprehend that the extraordinary effect which the mountain here produces may be ascribed to the influence of contrast; for the surrounding ridges are covered with the brightest green grass, whilst the Pic du Midi, some three miles distant, closes the emerald vista with a mighty pyramid of bare

* 9538 feet, English measure; reckoning 6 feet 4 inches to the toise. Water boils upon its summit at 194 Fahr.

rock, which appears of a rosy-brown and glistens in the sun with metallic lustre: to the imaginative eye it would represent a spectre of desolation in the midst of fertility.

Having determined upon an immediate ascent I turned up the valley that ran towards it, examining the sides of the mountain as I proceeded with some little curiosity, for from this point of view they appeared inaccessible. There were many flocks and shepherds in its neighbourhood; and having arrived at the foot of the *Pic* I was directed to turn up the mountain to the left, where I discovered a track of sheep, and accordingly climbed aloft without difficulty or danger. The freshness of the air increased with my ascent, and the panoramic view as gradually extended itself: the mountain-ladder appeared perfectly safe, and the assurance that I could distinguish the right direction gave me the greatest confidence; although I looked every now and then with an eye of suspicion at a troop of light clouds that were rising from the valleys, and a thin veil of mist that hung without motion upon the crest of the mountain. At length I gained the track from Luz and looked down upon the Lac d'Oncet—a little gem of darkest blue set in the silver snow: it was a crystal pool where, adopting the superstition of the country, we may readily imagine the *Black Man** of the mountain comes to load his wings with hailstones.

* It is a superstition in the Pyrenees, that when the ripe crops are destroyed by a hail-storm, an evil spirit termed the *Homme Noir* is to be seen hovering over some neighbouring peak, shaking the hailstones from his wings.

From this point the rest of the mountain rises in a cone and is covered with *débris*: the summit is upwards of 2000 feet above the level of the lake, but easy of access, as a good path for horses winds up its glossy side. Nothing can be more melancholy than its ruined aspect—it appears as the wreck of a mountain, disintegrated into loose fragments ready to slide down with you to the lake should you leave the path; yet in the crevices of the rock, where no blade of grass is to be found, flourish the mountain-pink, diffusing its rich fragrance, the elegant *Myosotis*, Gentians of the most brilliant colours, and various other plants. The frame of this giant has been cast in a brown micaceous schist, which cropping out from the surface in masses sparkles with metallic brilliancy.

At twenty minutes to three I was standing upon the summit, having leisurely ascended from Grip in less than five hours. It was a dizzy pinnacle—the apex of a vast cone—from whence I looked abroad and surveyed the world. There was nothing to limit the view; for on every side the mountain sloped abruptly, and the point upon which I stood was not above twenty feet in circumference. I felt as if a gust of wind would have blown me into the plain, which was dimly visible at a depth of nearly 10,000 feet. Under the shelter of a pile of stones that crowns this pinnacle I wrote a letter to ——, and I verily believe had I sent it adrift from this perch in the high heavens, as the wind served right well, it would have found its way to England without the aid of French postmasters. Having finished

this effusion, I rose and looked around; and so ethereal became my spirit in the contemplation of the big earth, that I was fain to climb the heap of stones to satisfy an irresistible craving that possessed me to rise higher, although I already looked as it were from a star upon the world.

An intelligent traveller who has ascended both the mountains of Switzerland and the Pyrenees, has pronounced the view from the Pic du Midi de Bigorre the finest that he has ever witnessed; and indeed from its isolated position, from its jutting into the plain and soaring to so great a height, it must command one of the most extensive prospects in Europe. The view over France is very extraordinary: it presents the appearance of a boundless sea—blue and unbroken, like the sky with which it is inextricably mingled. On the other side the prospect is very different: the hazy expanse is exchanged for rude cliffs, embellished by numerous tints and relieved by broad shadows. I remained about two hours on this singular spot gloating on the glories of the prospect; the sun was very powerful and the air by no means cold, although I was standing within the zone of perpetual snow*. The mountain view embraces all the countless summits of the *Hautes Pyrénées*, amongst which the three giants—the Maladetta, the Mont Perdu, and the Vignemale are readily distinguished by their enormous bulk and extensive glaciers.

* The zone of perpetual snow in the Pyrenees commences at a height of about 7200 feet above the level of the sea. It is considerably more elevated than the frozen region of the Alps.

As I gazed once more upon the great expanse of France, the silver clouds of summer that I had observed on my ascent having slowly collected, so as to form *cirrocumuli*, were now moving like a vast inundation of wool over the plain; from which shot forth here and there rocky peaks lying

“islanded in the immeasurable air;”

and as the sun above was brilliant and the sky spotless, the waves of the vapoury flood and the islets that penetrated it were gorgeously lighted up.

At a quarter to five I started with the hope of reaching Luz in reasonable time, although a guide, whom I had met descending with a party more than two hours before, assured me that I should have no chance of doing so before it was very late, even should I leave the mountain immediately after having made its ascent. By availing myself, however, of my full speed I presently reached the Valley of the Bastan, when I felt comparatively at home, and passing through Baréges I entered my comfortable quarters at Madame Cazaux's by eight o'clock.

LETTER XI.

A stroke of good fortune.—The Chaos of Peyrada and its holy stone.—The Chapel of Héas.—Grotesque paintings.—Pyrenean proverb.—The Cirque du Troumousse.—Mountain spectres.—A pilgrim to the Chapel.—The Chaos of Gèdre.—Ascent to the Brèche de Roland.—The passage of its glacier.—The puzzling strata of the Marboré.—Unpleasant descent in the dark.

Gavarnie, August 17th, 1842.

IF ever my lucky genius interposed, she surely did so in inducing me to revisit Luz. As I was listlessly sitting astride upon the parapet of the bridge, swinging my legs like pendulums in the moonlight, listening to the murmur of the bounding torrent, and attempting to pierce with my vision the Cimmerian darkness of the Gavarnie gorge, two persons passed me on horseback: how little did I think at that moment that they were entering Luz under the guidance of my tutelary deity, and were destined to influence the future plans of my Pyrenean wanderings! Such, however, was the case; and to cut a long matter short, I will at once tell you that they were an Englishman and his wife, with whom I very soon became most intimately acquainted; so intimately and so pleasantly indeed, as fully to exemplify the observation, that “while we may remain strangers with the companions of years, we may become friends with the strangers of yesterday.”

A curious circumstance attended our first interview ; for extraordinary as it may appear, it is actually true that I experienced difficulty in expressing myself in English ; and it was some time before I could recover my native fluency. My first excursion with my friend O * * (for be it known such is the initial of his name), was to the Chapel of Héas, a solitary little structure standing in one of the wildest of Pyrenean valleys, and to which it has been customary for the neighbouring peasants to undertake a pilgrimage at a certain period of the year. The road from Luz to Gavarnie, which the pilgrim to this holy spot must traverse as far as Gèdre, has been justly admired by tourists. Immediately upon leaving the basin of Luz the traveller enters the Passage de l'Echelle, a narrow and beautifully-coloured defile, where in many places the road is cut out of the face of the rock, and is suspended over the torrent at an alarming height. At one spot a protecting wall has been raised for the safety of those who ride past to visit the wonderful Circus, in consequence of a young Frenchman having fallen into the gulf. He had stopped for the purpose of adjusting his stirrups, when, losing his balance, he was hurled over the precipice and dashed to pieces.

The Valley of Héas opens at Gèdre : it is a bare solitude, without a tree to enliven it. Indeed, generally speaking, nothing can be more utterly barren than the heights and valleys of the more elevated ranges : their sterility is as remarkable as the luxuriance of the woods and the romantic beauty of the Lower Pyrenees. The

Valley of Héas seems to have been the subject of terrible convulsions: its mountains have in many places been overthrown, and enormous blocks of granite appear here and there hanging upon the slopes as if they had been arrested in their downward course. The Chaos of Peyrada has been evidently the result of a recent *éboulement*, and opposes no slight obstacle to the progress of the traveller: it presents a vast assemblage of broken rocks that have descended from the neighbouring mountain into the valley. Beyond is the site of a former lake, which by some geological convulsion has been dispersed, and from this spot first appears the lonely Chapel of Héas and the Circus of Troumousse, which closes the end of the valley with its mountainous semicircle.

In the Chaos of Peyrada there stands an enormous block, upon which, according to tradition, the Holy Virgin miraculously appeared to the inhabitants of this district. It is called by the natives the *Caillou de l'Arailé*, and to its rugged summit do they yet ascend, that they may there supplicate the Virgin and chip from the holy stone a fragment to be borne away with them as a relic. The Chapel of Héas was erected in commemoration of this event, and the legend asserts that three masons who were employed in building the little chapel were supported during their labour by as many goats, who came every day attended by their kids to give them milk. Such was the belief of the mountaineers, who from time immemorial have consecrated the 15th of August by a pilgrimage to our Lady's shrine.

at Héas: but, unfortunately, as we curious travellers considered it, the intelligence of the nineteenth century has extended even to the minds of the remote Pyreneans, and this holy fane, like the divine Mecca, will very shortly lose its odour of sanctity, and the highlanders will cease to solicit spiritual aid against the dreaded *Homme Noir*, or the diabolical *Loup-garou**.

On our arrival at the chapel not a pilgrim was to be seen, and the far-famed shrine had but one solitary attendant,—the *custos* of the temple. It was a strange diminutive structure, standing alone and built in the shape of a cross: within, the gay trumpery and tinsel of its altars were little calculated to excite our devotional fervour, particularly as we entered it from so glorious a temple as this mountain-framed valley, and it was certainly with anything but the feelings of an anchorite that I inspected the two altar paintings. They were most preposterous representations of a future state: in the one might be seen a naked assemblage dancing and capering in Paradise, whilst a number equally unclothed were sinking in a morass in their attempt to escape a gaping mouth, which appeared in the foreground furnished with a most formidable set of tusks: in the

* From the earliest ages a mysterious influence has been associated in the minds of the superstitious with the wolf; which has probably arisen from its fearful howl, its malevolent sagacity, and its habits of prowling by night, and glaring with its sinister eyes in the dark; accordingly we hear of the *Loup-garou* in the Pyrenees, answering to the *Were-wolf* of the Saxons. It is believed to assume various forms, and to create strange noises to be heard at great distances.

other, divers rows of persons, equally in a state of nudity, were standing with most placid and affable countenances in the midst of brickdust-coloured flames; while the Saviour was represented nailed upon the cross in the centre, and at the right-hand corner an angel was rescuing by the legs one of the naked bodies from the fire. The whole interior of the little fane was covered by grotesque paintings in fresco, which appeared of great antiquity; but as I surveyed the lace and painted cheeks of the Virgin, and the pavement worn by the feet and knees of pilgrims, I could not but feel it extraordinary that these wild sons of nature, who hear the thunders and view the glories of the mountains, and who have themselves so feelingly recorded their sense of divine power in their remarkable proverb, that *he who has not been in the port or on the sea knows not how to worship God*, should bow the knee in veneration and awe to these gilded dolls and trumpery gewgaws.

I left the chapel I can assure you in perfect disgust, rejoiced to regain the wild mountains, and to continue my way to the Circus of Troumousse. This we had been told at Luz was even finer than that of Gavarnie, but in truth they are perfectly different in character; the latter being chiselled out by the torrents from the mountain of the Marboré, while the former is constituted by the mountains themselves, which form a crescent of many miles. Between the chapel and the head of the valley we began to find the difficulty of the path so extreme, that we determined upon climbing the mountain to the left, which appeared to offer an easier

mode of obtaining a view of the *Cirque*. It proved, however, no slight undertaking; but we at length reached a *plateau* some two thousand feet above the valley, whence we enjoyed a magnificent *coup d'œil* of the Circus, which from its enormous extent is seen to greater advantage at some distance, for the opening between the two horns of the crescent cannot be less than four or five miles. It presented a huge semicircle of the blackest and most barren rock of a slaty and calcareous character, alone relieved by snow and glaciers.

The *plateau* upon which we stood was carpeted with grass relieved by the pink *Crocus* and dark blue *Iris*; but returning at the same elevation along the ridge to the neighbourhood of the chapel, we passed through one of the most convulsed regions I have anywhere seen in the Pyrenees. At one spot, where there was no slight difficulty in proceeding, the mountain had been torn asunder and presented an enormous *brèche* or gateway: the approach to it was singularly covered with an extensive bed of nettles, an unusual sight in a mountainous wilderness, and its passage was choked with rocky fragments to a considerable depth. Upon looking up at the surface of the fracture, I was much surprised by seeing, as I thought, some figures rudely sketched upon it: we were both ready to declare that some idle fellow must have climbed up and painted these grotesque forms; but the nature of the precipice rendered such a feat impossible, besides which the locality was one that in all probability no person more civilized than a shepherd had ever before visited. Im-

mediately too on the other side of the *brèche* lay some rocks in which human forms might as readily be detected: was then this mountain-chasm a spot of enchantment? had the head of Medusa been victimising some luckless shepherds? or had Dame Nature in a freak turned sculptor, and liberated the embryo shapes that lay imbedded in the marble?*

Pursuing our course we reached another circus on a smaller scale, where we encountered a shepherd who directed us to a track that descended to the valley. He was calling his sheep from the heights by a peculiar whistle which is universally practised by the Pyrenean shepherds, and to which I have generally observed the flocks most obedient, leaping down at the signal like a troop of soldiers obeying the word of command. We regained the chapel at a very fortunate moment, as we found an old woman on her knees in the roughest road imaginable, performing a pilgrimage to the shrine of our Lady. In her right hand she carried a long taper, an expiation I suppose for her sins, whilst with the assistance of a stick, with her gown tucked up, she slowly crawled along, now advancing one knee and then the other upon the path, which, like one of our fresh-macadamized roads, was bristling with the sharpest fragments. Poor old soul! she went on her way tardily enough, taking

* Such fanciful creations or chance resemblances are not unusual in mountain districts. I met with more of them, as you will hear, in my passage over the Pyrenees into Spain, and many are the travellers who have been startled in different countries by viewing gigantic shapes amidst inaccessible rocks.

no notice of us heathens, absorbed in a fit of devotional enthusiasm. We should have been pleased to have witnessed the whole ceremony, but so snail-like was her progression, that we were compelled to leave her some twenty yards from the chapel, as night was falling fast upon the mountains.

Our walk back to Gèdre was dreadfully rough, and in one spot rather dangerous, where it crossed in a narrow ledge a slide of loose black earth at a considerable height above the torrent, and where, from the nature of the soil, it was not easily distinguished in the moonlight. At half-past nine Gèdre was gained, and you may believe that the mundane enjoyments of food and sleep were not beneath our regard.

Tuesday the 16th was as usual brilliant, but we undertook no Titan labour on that day: our humour was for sauntering, and we proceeded towards Gavarnie at the lazy rate of about one mile in two hours, climbing here for a view of the Marboré, and descending there to quench our thirst in the blue torrent; planning all the while gigantic projects in the true spirit of Fuseli, who, as his biographers tell us, would sketch colossal groups in his mind's eye as he went dreamily along, uttering ever and anon the exclamation of "Michael Angelo," whereas our cry was "Mont Perdu," or "Pic d'Ane-thou*."

We loitered through a wonderful region on that day,—the famous Chaos of Gèdre, the scene of a compara-

* The highest pinnacle of the Maladetta and summit of the Pyrenees.

tively recent but tremendous convulsion. The left-hand side of the valley from Gèdre to Gavarnie is composed of the mighty masses of the Coumèlie and Piméné, and soon after passing the former village *en route* to the Circus, we reached a spot where the side of the Coumèlie has been torn away from the mountain and precipitated bodily into the valley; and the huge fragments into which it has been dissevered constitute the far-famed Chaos. Above is seen the polished surface of the enormous fracture, while around lie the ruins that have fallen from it. To call it a tract covered with broken rocks would give a very slight notion of the Chaos: the great red fragments from the overhanging Coumèlie are masses of thirty and forty feet in diameter, lodged one above the other in awful disorder, covering the whole slope of the mountain, and damming up the torrent below, or forming bridges or cascades. The horse-path winds round and about them, and it was a curious sight to see a mounted party threading the rocky labyrinth, the huge blocks of which, from the peculiarity of their shape, resembled pebbles that had grown into mountains and yet retained the plump and rounded features of their infancy.

Towards mid-day we idlers parted company,—my friend to return to Luz and I to continue on to Gavarnie, having decided upon a magnificent plan of operations, by which we two kindred spirits, each lovers of “waste and solitary places,” anticipated the sight of some of the finest scenery in the Pyrenees, and designed to have a peep at the wild sons and daughters of roman-

tic Spain. The following was our *programme* of the proposed excursion. On the morrow I was to ascend to the Brèche de Roland, and O * * was to join me in the evening: we were then to start the next morning for the Spanish Baths of Panticosa, crossing the frontier by the Port de Gavarnie and making a considerable detour through Alto-Aragon. From Panticosa we proposed to re-enter France by the Marcadau and return to Caunterets; after which we were to take a guide, pass by the Lac d'Estom and the Col d'Arailé to the Lac de Gaube, and on the following day to return to Gavarnie by the Col de Vignemale and Vallée d'Ossonne. Such was our plan in prospect, and I shall now proceed to tell you how we accomplished it.

I left the little inn at Gavarnie by nine o'clock the following morning for the purpose of ascending the Marboré to the Brèche de Roland. This is generally considered the most difficult adventure in the Pyrenees: not that there is any danger during fine weather and with skilful guides, although the labour under the most favourable circumstances is very considerable, but alone the traveller has a very good chance of losing his way through the puzzling strata of the mountain, or very possibly of being hurled into eternity by his foot slipping as he passes over the slope of the glacier. However, as I well knew that it was the custom of the guides to exaggerate if not to make difficulties for the purpose of enhancing their own services, I was somewhat incredulous as to its imputed dangers, and had therefore determined upon attempting the ascent by myself, prefer-

ring in such excursions to be unshackled by any tie that might oblige me to adapt my pace or direct my steps at the will of another.

I started full of confidence for the exploit. In an hour the arena of the Marboré was gained; and I stood in the middle of the *Oule* looking up at the black precipices that rise so grimly around, and which to the careless observer appear as perfectly inaccessible; but there is a spot on the left hand where the traveller can climb aloft with the assistance of his hands and feet and a steady head. Of this I had been informed, and on my former visit to Gavarnie I felt almost certain I had discovered its locality. I accordingly made straight for this place by crossing the torrent, which was no easy matter, and then working my way up an inclined plane of *débris* to the foot of the precipice. My conjecture proved correct—this was evidently the place I had sought, by the worn aspect of the rocks, so I applied myself to the task and ascended.

This *rock-ladder* is one of the most curious features in the ascent to the Brèche de Roland: in the gigantic sweep of the Circus it is the only spot where it is possible to scale the precipice, and the traveller is enabled to invade the higher regions by grasping projections and ledges which are afforded by the crumbling strata, and following exactly in the footsteps that have been imprinted on the rock by former explorers, or by the *contrabandistas* who frequently pass by this difficult route into Spain. Although sufficiently abrupt, it presents no danger and little difficulty to a person accustomed to

the mountains; but as I went aloft I rested every now and then to look down into the huge amphitheatre, or to gaze in wonder at the cascade and glaciers, and I should recommend every traveller to brave these heights, should he wish to view this bold-leaping torrent to its greatest advantage. Its columns of water are precipitated like rushing rockets or broad-headed arrows, dispersing in spray before they gain half the descent, when they again assemble on a jutting ledge and fall once more in a cloud of watery spears towards the *Oule* of the Circus. The tresses of this fair nymph thus floating apart from each other recalled to my mind the imagery of Shelley—

“ She leapt down the rocks
 With her rainbow locks
 Streaming amongst the streams.”

I will not enter into all the particulars of my early labours, which became sufficiently fatiguing from my having ascended higher than was necessary before I turned to the left: I will merely say that I used my hands and feet incessantly for two hours and a half, when I reached a kind of platform immediately below the glacier and summit.

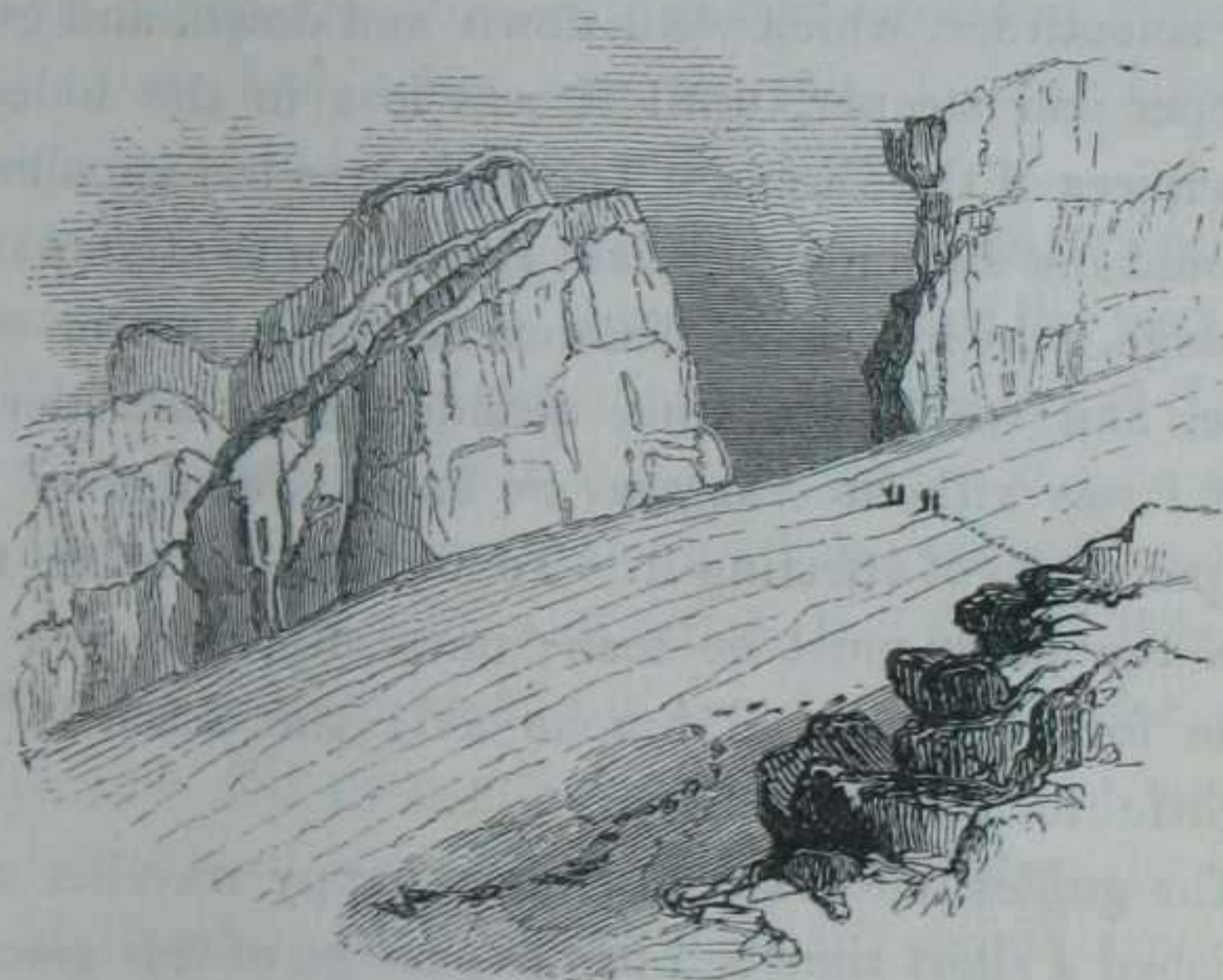
What a stern wilderness here opened upon me,—a region of ice, torn and rent into chasms, and a series of black precipices and ranges of decomposing rocks that crumbled beneath the touch! In one place a series of slates rose in bristling ranks like so many razors, to fall upon which would have been certain mutilation, and on the right stood a jagged ridge, wonderfully fissured in

the direction of its highly inclined strata, from the hollows of which I summoned innumerable echoes, and so repeatedly were my yellings bandied about, that I verily believe they would have scared a pack of wolves from the mountain; demoniacal laughter rang around me on all sides, and groans appeared to issue from the deep *crevasses* of the glacier: nor was the breathless silence that succeeded scarcely less appalling, and I was fain for mere companionship again and again to disturb it.

Having reached the foot of the glacier I now turned up its side, the rock often giving way under my weight and lacerating my hands by the roughness of its surface; but however distressing this might be, it was with reluctance that I left it for a yielding mass of loose rubbish, where it was a much more difficult task to keep my legs, and where nothing lay below me but a smooth snowfield that sloped towards precipices. However, having passed this unpleasant spot, and after a climb of three hours and a half from the Circus, I reached a place where I must repose a few minutes, in order to give you a notion of the wonderful sight that there met my view,—the far-famed Brèche de Roland.

Along the summit of the Marboré mountain, which forms a prominent feature in the great ridge of the Pyrenees, runs a wall of rock from 300 to 600 feet in height, dividing France from Spain, in the centre of which appears an enormous gap or *brèche* about 300 feet wide, of such regularity as to resemble a portal between the two kingdoms, though it gives ingress and egress to little else than the drifting snow and howling wind. This

ice-bound gateway is the Brèche de Roland*, and it would have been passing strange had not some mysterious legend been attached to so extraordinary a phe-



nomenon; it is accordingly related that Roland the Brave, mounted on his war-horse, in his eagerness to attack the Moors, cut this passage into Spain with a blow of his sabre. As a pass it is but seldom used, except by the smugglers who care not for its difficulties, or by the few travellers who ascend Mont Perdu. The danger lies on the French side, and I had now arrived at the point where it begins; a smooth glacier that slopes to the distant circus is to be crossed.

This dizzy labour is generally effected by the traveller with a guide on each side, who have their feet armed

* 9880 feet above the level of the sea according to Ramond.

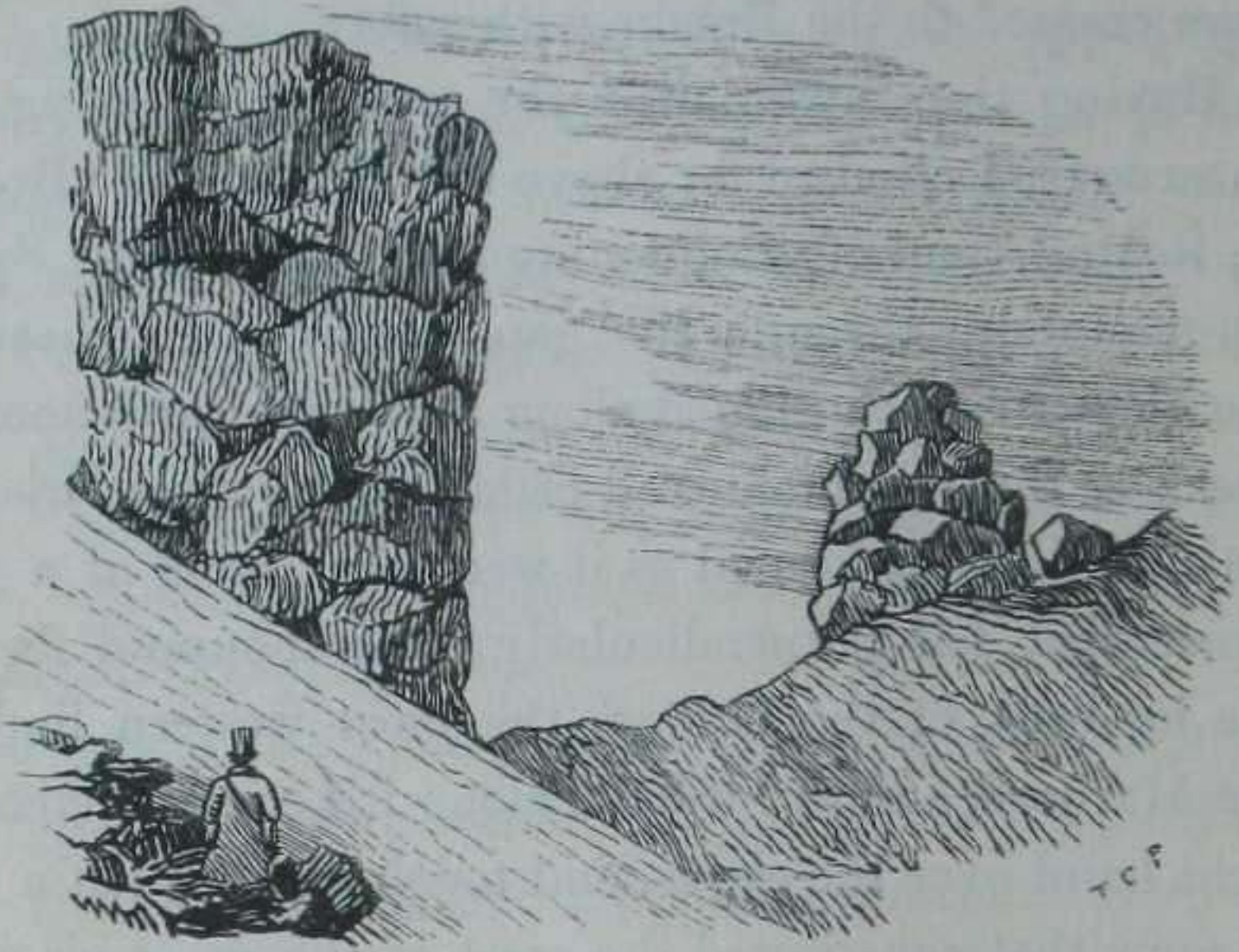
with *crampons*, and are furnished with hatchets in order to notch the slippery surface. I essayed the snow with my feet, looked at the stupendous gateway so provokingly near, and then down the huge slope of the smooth ice, which went down and down, and grew steeper and steeper, until it was lost in the hideous precipices of the Circus. The sight was too appalling: I could not summon sufficient resolution to attempt the passage, which was in distance about a quarter of a mile, and wisely, I think, abandoned it, considering that I was without *crampons* or any knowledge of the proper mode of effecting it. To understand all its terrors the place must be seen; once slip, and you are gone for ever past all human aid: the death is too frightful for contemplation.

The guides tell a story of an unhappy traveller who perished a short time ago in the passage of this glacier. He was crossing it with every possible precaution, when his trousers by some unaccountable accident became entangled with his *crampons*—he lost his balance, and in vain attempted to recover it, since there was nothing at which he could grasp to save himself—in an instant he shot down the sloping ice with the rapidity of a thunderbolt; while his horrified companions watched his awful career to those fearful precipices where he must have been dashed to pieces, and where of course all search for his remains would have been fruitless. When my friend O * * ascended, the whole region was covered with fresh-fallen snow, in which he had traced the course of a gigantic set of paws, which the

guide declared were those of a bear: the passage of the glacier under such circumstances was of course comparatively easy. I also found the frozen mass coated with a layer of snow, with the exception of a portion in the middle, where the blue ice was laid bare and glittered in the sun: had it not been for this, I think I might have crossed to the Brèche with safety.

Having thus abandoned the passage as being too hazardous, I climbed far above the level of the 'Brèche de Roland,' and after obtaining a full view of the Spanish mountains through the gap, I turned the head of the glacier and continued along a ledge towards another break in the mountain-wall called the 'Fausse Brèche.' This giddy path formed as it were the coping of a precipice that fell perpendicularly some thousand feet to the ice-beds of the *Taillon*, the most western limb of the Marboré, and as I walked along it I could stretch my right hand over the abyss, and touch with my left a wall of snow that constituted the crest of the great glacier I had been skirting. I was indulging in a hope of reaching the Fausse Brèche by this dizzy route, when my steps were arrested by the abrupt termination of the ledge, and I saw to my disappointment that from this quarter it was inaccessible. I therefore sat down for some time to enjoy the pleasures of so exalted a position, and to look down into the gulf at the dark blue rents and chasms in the ice, and to search the wilderness for *isards*; whilst I listened to the strange noises in the restless glacier, or to the dull sound of falling rocks or snow which alone disturbed the air. I also made a

sketch of the Fausse Brèche, while an eagle soaring above me appeared to be taking considerable interest in my operations; but the cold was so intense and my hands became so benumbed that it was with great difficulty I could accomplish it. At this altitude it was



Siberian winter, whilst the regions below were reeking from the heats of summer, as the hot haze that enveloped the view sufficiently testified.

On retracing my steps I found a difficulty in my path that I had not anticipated: on my way hither I had crossed a chasm where the ledge had been broken down, by keeping a tight hold on the inequalities of the rock: on returning to this awkward place, I found that the surface down which I must now lower myself, with a precipice upwards of a thousand feet immediately beneath me, had very few projections that could render me as-

sistance, and even those upon trial yielded to my weight. I think I must have been a quarter of an hour in planning different positions for my hands and attitudes for my body, before I slid down to the narrow glacis that sloped to the precipice; but the rocks held firm, and I soon regained the ledge on the opposite side in safety. This was one of the most disagreeable places I passed on that day; the gulf being so deep, and the slope to it so inexpressibly terrific.

I had left my high perch near the Fausse Brèche at five o'clock, and I reached the foot of the glacier with tolerable ease, but there I was rather startled by the view that presented itself, and I felt the imprudence of having started so late. It was really fearful to look upon the long ridges of inclined strata, running down steeper and steeper towards the gulf of the Circus, with the sudden conviction of the extreme difficulty of finding the right direction to that exact spot at which I ascended, and by which alone an exit from the mountain could be accomplished; for from the puzzling formation of the strata, it is almost impossible for the stranger to retrace his steps with certainty.

I accordingly found that I repeatedly went wrong, and was obliged to scramble back again over slopes ending in precipices, and as the daylight was rapidly fading, these successive failures at length began seriously to alarm me. Luckily, however, I espied at some distance a Spanish shepherd gathering together his flock, and hurrying towards him I made a signal that he should point out the right direction, which he immediately did,

and I then proceeded with fresh assurance of finding my way. But I was doomed to further disappointments—the fearful labyrinth was far from being unravelled—again and again did I find myself on the brink of the gulf: but the sun was down, and I had already left the shepherd far above me; so, growing desperate at the rapid approach of night whilst I was in so dangerous a position, I clambered down perpendicular rocks at the most imminent hazard, for a yielding ledge or an incautious step would have shot me down to the regions below like an avalanche. But this rash descent was fruitless—I could not hit the track—darkness was falling rapidly upon the mountains, and I was surrounded by the most hideous precipices without knowing whether to go to the right or to the left. My situation at that moment was certainly not enviable. I looked around at the distant ridges growing momentarily more indistinct, and searched about for some projecting crag that might afford me shelter and protection for the night; but in so doing my eye suddenly recognised a riven rock as an acquaintance I had passed in the morning: no chance of escaping from these dismal heights was to be neglected—I made another attempt, and happily descended into the Circus; but down rocks with my hands and feet and in perfect darkness.

Never, I can assure you, did sharp angular stones feel so smooth to the foot as did those of the rugged *Oule* on that night, and never was the awkward passage of its torrent achieved with greater *sang-froid* than it was by me, as I made my way towards Gavarnie, limping from

a sprained knee, in the light of the moon which had just arisen above the Circus.

There I arrived a little after nine o'clock, still labouring under the excitement of the descent. My friend O * * was awaiting very anxiously my arrival, endeavouring to keep the house open in spite of the landlady's determination to close it: he declared I should shortly return, whilst she vehemently protested that it was out of the question; at this juncture I entered and put a stop to the contention. Nothing could make the good people believe that I had been alone up the Marboré: they declared that it was impossible any stranger could find the ascent from the Circus, and much less the direction of the descent from the heights; and in vain did I show my torn hands, sprained knee, and outline of the *Brèche* itself from the pocket of my drawing-book—I could not convince them that I was not imposing on their credulity; so there was an end of the matter, and I satisfied myself in revenging their disbelief by a ferocious attack on a three-foot wide loaf, and by cutting ravines and precipices in their butter.

LETTER XII.

A second excursion into Spain.—A lazy Frenchman or an animated woolsack.—Skulls of Templars and mountain-graveyards.—The Port de Gavarnie.—Spanish shepherds.—Magnificent scenery on the Spanish side of the *port*.—Arrested by the Spaniards as English spies.—Marched under an escort through a mountain region of extraordinary grandeur.—Arrival at Torla in a thunderstorm.—Search after the authorities.—A private secretary.—A night in a *posada*.

Torla, Alto-Aragon, August 18th, 1842.

HAVING breakfasted on the following morning with our incredulous hostess at Gavarnie, we buckled on our armour for an excursion into Spain. There was yet, however, one important thing to be done—my passport had to be *visé'd*; and for this purpose it was requisite to walk a mile towards Gèdre. Accordingly, leaving my companion to amuse himself as he best might, I hurried off to transact this business.

The functionary was absent, but his wife and daughter were at home, and so agreeable withal, that I felt no hesitation in granting their request and waiting for the official's return. The girl was strikingly handsome, with black eyes, ivory teeth, and regularly formed features, and with her wild showy dress and naked feet she presented a study for a painter. Both were busily employed churning butter by shaking the black skin-bags to and fro, but they found breath enough for conversa-

tion, and promised to provide me with a bed and provisions when I returned to Gavarnie for the purpose of ascending the Piméné, as was my intention. In a short time the functionary entered, stripped to his shirt and fresh from his fields: there was no difficulty about the passport, and then the hospitable trio pressed me to take some breakfast, or at all events to stop a few minutes longer that I might taste the fresh butter; but I made apologies as my comrade was waiting for me, and having drunk to their health in a large bowl of fresh milk, I bade these hospitable people farewell and hurried away. On the road I passed a grotesque travelling-party: an enormous French Falstaff, who I should think would have larded the lean earth had he walked, seated in a *chaise à porteur*, a sort of open sedan-chair, and carried along by no less than six men, three abreast,—one in the shafts before and behind, and two on either side of them. With indolent Frenchmen this is a very common mode of traversing the rough paths of these regions; but heaven preserve me from adopting such a fashion! it will be time enough when I have lost the use of my legs to journey through the wild mountains like a bale of goods.

At half-past ten we started for Spain, stopping for a few minutes at the little church of the Templars, where twelve of their illustrious skulls, as it is said, are still preserved; these we duly inspected, and can confidently assert, from phrenological data, that one of the holy warriors at least must have been a bad fellow. With this and sundry other moral reflections we left the

venerable fane and journeyed on. By-the-bye, the grave-stones in these parts are somewhat curious: at Luz, Gèdre and Gavarnie they are seldom more than rough pieces of slate, shapeless and ragged, without any inscription; in fact, the churchyards have the appearance of abandoned slate-quarries. I will leave you to draw any conclusion you may think proper from this fact, reminding you that Addison observes, "A foreigner may well conceive the idea of national character by the turn of their public monuments and inscriptions."

The scenery on the French side of the Port de Gavarnie must necessarily be magnificent, since the zigzag path runs upwards under the grand central chain, strewn with glaciers and presenting a frightful pile of rocks and dreary wastes; but nevertheless it cannot for a moment be compared with the stupendous scenery on the Spanish side, which is not to be surpassed in the Pyrenees. Should the traveller have but a few days to spare, let him only pass over by the Port de Gavarnie to the Aragonese village of Torla: I think that excursion will astonish him. We found the ascent to the *port* far from being difficult, and the cool ice-beds very agreeable neighbours under a fierce sun with a cloudless sky: as we went along we amused ourselves by capturing brilliant butterflies, or inspecting the flowers that strewn the wayside. Amongst the former the *Apollo* (*Papilio, Doritis Apollo*) is one of the most striking species that frequent this country, floating in the air like an autumnal leaf, and resembling a piece of fine

gauze, with its white stationary wings dotted with scarlet *ocelli*.

In an hour and a half from our leaving Gavarnie we gained the *port*, where the wind blew with tremendous fury. Here an extensive panorama opened upon us; but being anxious to obtain a view of the summit of Mont Perdu, which is, with the exception of the Maladetta, the highest mountain in the Pyrenees, and of which the Marboré is a part, we climbed a disintegrated cone of a brownish, micaceous, schistose sandstone of most melancholy aspect, which rises immediately to the north of the *port*, and is called Santo Arguelo by the Spaniards. We gained, however, nothing by our labour, which was considerable to my sprained knee, except, indeed, the sight of a magnificent eagle, which swept in a rapid swoop within twenty yards of our heads, exhibiting to us his brown wings and majestic shape. We added a stone, according to usage, to the pile that topped the summit, and then descended to a lake lying low on the opposite side, and which is marked in my map as the Lac Loubass. Our progress down this huge cone was most rapid, since we were occasionally carried down by the mass moving beneath us, and we shortly approached the grazing-ground of a herd of mules, and made towards the shepherd who tended it in order to learn the name of the mountain from whose crest we had thus nimbly descended. After this we regained the mule-path, but not without difficulty.

The appearance of these Spanish mountaineers, as

they stand in haughty attitudes upon the mountain ridges, is exceedingly wild and picturesque. If the weather be bad or the air cold the *manto* wraps them round, otherwise it is carried loosely over the shoulder; their heads are bound with a coloured kerchief or covered with the huge *sombrero*; a shawl many yards in length envelops the waist, and rude sandals of ox-hide or hempen *alpargatas* protect their feet. There is, moreover, a fashion of cutting the hair among the younger part of the community that gives a peculiar wildness to the countenance: it is shaven close over the crown and allowed to grow and hang in elfin locks from a circle round the base of the scalp.

The pass of the Port de Gavarnie is much dreaded in the winter, since, from the nakedness of the surrounding ridges, the drifted snow accumulates to a great extent. A Frenchman at Luz, a border trader, had enlightened us as to its dangers. He informed us that he had frequently during the winter crossed these mountains with his mules, and that on arriving in the *port*, he, according to custom, took his station by the side of the path, and as each muleteer passed him he brushed the ice from his eyelashes and held a flask of brandy to his lips, and occasionally he had to exhort them to be men and to persevere courageously.

In pursuing our path there soon opened upon us a view so grand that we were in perfect raptures: instead, however, of finding ourselves near the valley, as we had concluded from the easiness of the ascent, the turning of a rock revealed only a small portion of the vast

descent that had yet to be accomplished. An amazing spectacle presented itself upon our left—a rosy mountain of shattered rocks, the ruinous condition of which was quite extraordinary, fronted by six enormous columns sloping to the path, each probably a thousand feet in height, placed at equal distances from each other, and topped by capitals that presented uncouth shapes and chance resemblances: one of which we likened to the head of a bull—another, to that of a king with a crown; and so on with the others: it seemed as if some giant had been rearing a colossal edifice which the wrath of Jove had overthrown. But the most surprising feature of the scene was the almost boundless slope of the *débris*; down which we could see the faint track winding until it became lost to our vision. To add moreover to the desolation of this savage foreground, the white withered trunks of pines, barkless and branchless, were hanging at every angle from the broken precipices to the left, and their carcasses strewn our path, having been wrecked by the avalanche or the disintegration of the rock.

Before us lay a most extensive view: a torrent was to be seen at a great distance and depth winding like a thread from the Vignemale into Spain; whilst above it, rose a series of parti-coloured mountains, separate and distinct from each other, and patched with fir forests. This was the sublime—but in another hour we had reached the beautiful. Rocks, vieing even with the hues of the rainbow, soared up from green woods and hanging shrubberies: while the stony path descended

between trees of box, fifteen or sixteen feet in height, which richly perfumed the air, and were interspersed with the hoary pine and the mountain ash with its brilliant berries and bright green leaves.

Through such a scene of enchantment did we wend our way, gradually opening before us the little hamlet of Bujarelo, which offered a picture of such beauty that we seated ourselves to make a sketch of it, little imagining the consequences that were to arise from so harmless an act. But before I recite the adventure, I must tell you, in extenuation of the ignorance displayed by the Spaniards on this occasion, that this mountain pass is seldom if ever traversed by beings more civilized than the muleteers: the scenery that offers so wonderful a combination of the sublime and the beautiful is almost unknown: travellers rarely stray beyond the beaten track that leads to and from the French Baths, and even the guides know very little of the Port de Gavarnie, and nothing whatever of the circuitous road we afterwards traversed to Panticosa, for we were entirely misled by their directions—but to continue my story.

While we were seated and proceeding with our sketches, I observed that we had become objects of more than ordinary interest to a number of villagers who were dressing corn in an enclosure below, by throwing it into the air for the separation of the chaff; and O * * afterwards told me that he had observed them making some signals, which escaped me. The peasants, however, had desisted from their work and were intently gazing at us, and presently I observed a

couple of ill-looking fellows with guns on their shoulders, and whose appearance was in perfect keeping with the wildness of the scenery, coming up the pathway; when I jocosely said to my companion,—“here are two brigands, so be ready for them”—and in truth they looked most suspicious characters. On approaching us they intimated by gestures that their business was with us, whatever that might be, and immediately began to address us fiercely in Spanish, and evidently in a tone of command; but whether we were to turn out our pockets or move away we could not understand; so on we worked with our sketches without paying the slightest regard to the interruption. This coolness on our part highly incensed them; they became more vociferous, and raising their weapons threatened to strike us; when O * * observed to me—“they want us to go below;” and at the same instant one of them seized him insolently by the shoulder, while the other snatched up my drawing materials, and by his gesticulations plainly indicated that he would throw them over the precipice unless we instantly obeyed him. Matters had now arrived at a crisis—we felt at the moment an uncontrollable desire to decide the dispute by force; but a moment’s reflection convinced us of the absurdity of resistance, so we sullenly put up our traps and prepared to move, although not a little provoked at leaving our sketches unfinished.

Down they marched us like a couple of culprits—one soldier before and the other behind—whilst an eager crowd of natives appeared awaiting us below, by whom we were soon surrounded and our passports loudly de-

manded. It was evident they regarded us as very suspicious persons, and that our papers did not serve to enlighten them. In the first place every signature was successively examined by a number of the bystanders ; when at length another official came up who appeared to have authority over the rest, and having in his turn examined our passports, with an ominous shake of the head he demanded our effects for inspection. These were not very numerous, as you may suppose ; a sketch-book, paint-box, map, and a small book of plants were all that I carried : the latter they treated with very little ceremony, turning over every leaf and fingering each flower at the risk of destroying it. On my offering to take my sketches from the pocket of my book, as I did not much relish the contact of the dirty fingers of the Spaniard who was endeavouring to discover the method of extracting them, he very significantly shook his head and moved further from me, as if it had been a *ruse* on my part to conceal some unlawful article. My companion's things were examined with the same jealous scrutiny, and we were then told to our very great surprise the conclusion at which they had arrived—that we were spies employed by the British government to take plans of their forts, and drawings of their country !

Only fancy our astonishment at this accusation—an indignant denial of which only made them more vehemently insist upon the belief ; and they pointed with significant gestures to my unlucky sketch of the old castle at Luz. This was very provoking, but with our imperfect knowledge of the language we did not exactly

know how we could undeceive them. "Here are more castles for you," O * * managed to say, as in looking over his drawings they had stopped at a sketch of a party journeying on mules. They laughed—but nevertheless did not seem more inclined to give credence to our protestations of innocence: indeed they insisted that we were counterfeiting an ignorance of the language. My companion, unfortunately on this occasion, could speak a sentence or two correctly and with a good accent, so that when he asserted he knew but a few words, "*Algunas palabras!*" exclaimed the Spaniard, "you speak it as well as any of us,"—and an angry denial only served to confirm his suspicions. Remonstrance therefore was in vain, and we had nothing left but to await patiently the issue of the adventure; neither did it seem very probable that we should be able to get away in time to reach Broto, where we had intended to pass the night, for the Spaniards withheld our passports, and sat chatting and laughing together as if we were wholly out of the question. Angry as we were at the detention, it was impossible not to look with interest at the picturesque costumes, handsome faces, and magnificent proportions of the men around us.

After some time my companion interrupted their conversation by requesting them to show us a house where we could obtain some wine; in a few moments we were conducted as we imagined to the posada of the place, — into a black rickety room, where we seated ourselves with the soldiers and others who had persecuted us. A meal was now prepared, and strange

to say, their manner was at once changed from rudeness to politeness and hospitality. Bread, the best I had tasted since I had left England, meat bones, onions, dried fish, and wine were pressed upon us with a profuse generosity that appeared quite unaccountable—unless, as we began to suspect, it were a conspiracy to detain us for the night; and under this impression we thought it advisable to lay in a very substantial supper. Nothing could exceed the attention with which they anticipated our wants; we were solicited to taste this, and to try that, and they expressed themselves well pleased to hear that their bread reminded us of England. More assiduous than the rest was one of the soldiers who had captured us; the moment our glasses were empty he was ready with the wine-skin to replenish them, and when we had eaten to our hearts' content, he and others even pressed cigars upon us.

“It is quite clear that we are here for the night,” said my companion to me, “but I think we might have fared worse at Broto,”—with which I perfectly agreed. But in this we were mistaken; for at that moment two soldiers rose up, shouldered their muskets and desired us to follow them. “To what place?” we asked with some surprise. “To Torla,” they answered: “it is three hours distant and the sun is low, so we must walk well to reach it before nightfall.” We therefore pulled out our money to pay for our good cheer, when to our surprise again, we were informed that we had been feasting in the quarters of the custom-house officers, and not in a posada, and that they would not accept a

sous in return. We of course thanked them to the best of our ability, and then walked off with our guard.

I picture to myself your amazement could you have beheld us marching at a tremendous pace under an armed escort through the romantic defiles that led to Torla. The scenery struck me as having a character very different from anything I had viewed on the French side of the Pyrenees; the execrable mule-path was edged with box trees, twice or thrice our height, and the mountains were clothed with aged pine-forests, which in various places had been torn asunder by the avalanche. The defile was perfectly Alpine, with the additional foliage, flowers, and shrubs of a warmer climate. Considering the rugged character of the road we sped along at a most trying pace, although I and my companion could find breath enough for an occasional exclamation of rapture at the scenery. About two miles from Bujarelo we reached one of the crosses that abound along these mountain roads, and then turning to the left, we entered the stupendous gorge which I consider as the finest in the Pyrenees. We ascended along the face of a precipice hanging over us in black and threatening masses, which seemed as if a breath might bring it down; the torrent roared among broken rocks several hundred feet below us, whilst on the opposite side, above the line of vegetation, an enormous front of perpendicular rock raised itself, and extended several miles, exhibiting a series of finely-coloured precipices piled one above the other with such regularity

as to resemble walls and buttresses of masonry; the massive grandeur of which, their immense altitude, and the rich variety of their tints defy description. How we lamented a fate that hurried us through such scenes! I need hardly tell you we were passing along the Spanish side of the great backbone of the Pyrenees,—behind the Marboré and the great range towards the Port de Gavarnie.

The path having ascended to a dizzy height above the torrent, we reached the head of the pass and the ruins of a watch-tower, where a parapet had been raised to render the road more secure. The Spaniards there stopped for us to gaze down into the abyss, and by gestures, imitating the act of hurling a body over the precipice, intimated to us how easily the pass might be defended; and we agreed that a more favourable place for a summary murder could scarcely be conceived by the fancy of a Radcliffe. After passing this fearful spot, that will long live in my memory, we reached the head of a valley running due south into Spain, and arrived in the wretched village of Torla by the last glimmer of twilight, just as the clouds, which had for the last half hour been gathering together with occasional thunder and lightning, as if to enhance our adventure, poured down their contents in good earnest.

It is impossible to consider anything more wretched and inhospitable than an Aragonese village; every house is a counterpart of its neighbour,—dark and dreary, built of rough stones, with the least possible apertures to admit air and light. There is no distin-

guishing the posada ; all bear the same aspect of cheerlessness and desertion,—without lights, names, shops or signs, to raise a belief that the place is inhabited. After stumbling along over the uneven stones of the filthy lanes, splashing the mud and water in all directions, we at length stood within the yard of the mansion of some dignitary. Gracious powers, what a sty ! A woman came out to inform us that her husband was not at home ; so on we went through the driving storm to the residence of the Alcalde. But if the last had merited the epithet swinish, how can I designate this official hovel ? We entered an inclosure piled with heaps, from which “there was the rankest compound of villanous smells that ever offended nostril,” and passing through an opening, intended probably as a door, we found ourselves in the interior.

The place was dark, but the soldiers shouted, and a wild half-clothed imp appeared with a flaming pine-torch to inquire our business ; and then down a flight of stairs came a woman equally uncouth in aspect and attire. The Alcalde was from home ; so once more were we obliged to paddle through the rain to seek his secretary, whom we found standing at his own door in his shirt-sleeves tucked up to his elbows, and dressed in the meanest attire of the country, his wild face unshaven and his head bound with the usual dirty kerchief. It was impossible to repress a laugh when we understood this personage to be an official ; one of our common labourers would have looked a gentleman by his side. Yet he proved of some service ; for by speaking

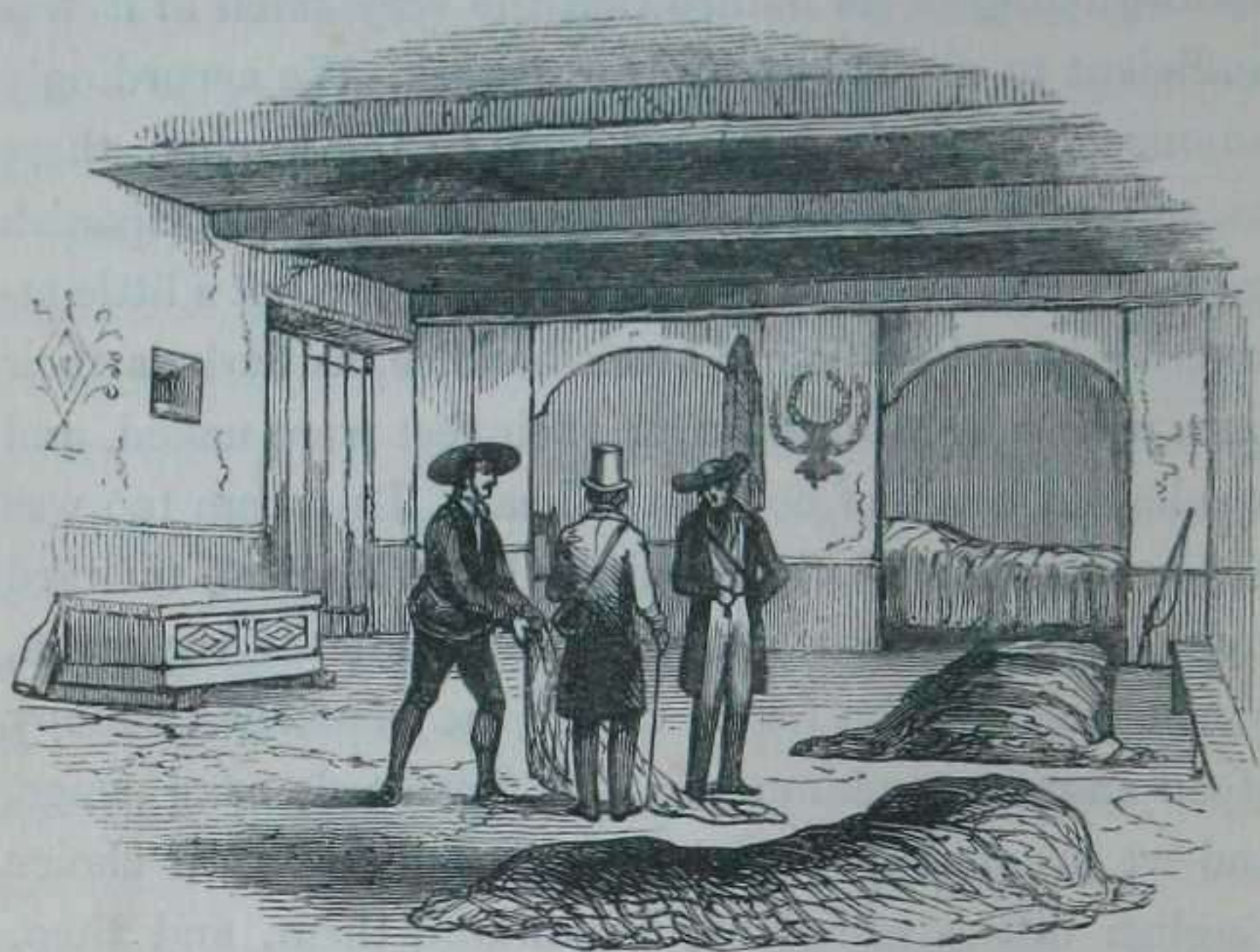
a little French he was enabled to understand our explanation, and so to disabuse the authorities of their suspicions. We accordingly found ourselves at perfect liberty to proceed in whatever direction we pleased on the following morning, with our passports properly *viséd* by the Alcalde of Torla.

Under the especial guidance of this dignitary we were conducted to the posada, which, if possible, was more wretched than any of the other houses: a very lofty stone wall protected the yard, which having entered, we stumbled through mud and filth to stairs that led to the common room. Here we seated ourselves upon a bench, lighted our cigars, and gleaned all the information we could from the learned secretary and one of the soldiers who had accompanied us, while the chamber was illuminated by burning slips of pine placed in a hole in the wall constructed for that purpose. It appeared that we had come entirely out of our way by following the directions of the French guidee, who had told us we must pass through Broto to reach Panticosa. The aforesaid official informed us there were three roads to that place from Bujarelo; two leading immediately over the mountains,—one only being practicable on horseback, but both on foot,—and a third over the lower ranges, making a considerable *détour* through Alto-Aragon: Broto lay completely out of the way. We had now therefore the choice of retracing our steps to Bujarelo, or of going the long circuit by Frajin, Biescas, and Pueyo: we chose the latter, but did not in the least regret the error we had committed.

They cooked us a vile supper,—a dish of stringy beans and another of scraggy pieces of meat; but they were both rendered uneatable by garlic and a filthy oil so disgusting in its nature that the very smell of it was sufficient to dispel appetite for a week. We accordingly adjourned from the untasted meal to the kitchen, there to smoke and admire the black eyes of two Spanish girls, whose costumes as well as faces were not a little attractive,—a close-fitting black boddice, as dark as their hair, with a light blue skirt: their feet were naked, and a coloured kerchief bound the head. The room too was not uninteresting: the wood fire burnt upon an inclined ledge of stone that reached the middle of the room, whilst we sat upon forms under the blackened canopy of an enormous chimney. The Spaniards sang songs, and we in our turn indulged them with several choice English ditties which highly amused them, and then, having exhausted our store, we retired to the sleeping-place. This was a low-roofed room paved with round stones disposed in circles; the walls were marked with rude red figures, and two beds stood in recesses; but as they did not appear very inviting, we had each a mattress placed upon the floor, whilst the soldier and another Spaniard turned into one of the recesses, the other being tenanted by certain entomological genii, of which the señora humanely gave an intimation.

The Spaniard had arrived from Saragossa, and entertained us much before we retired to bed by dramatically representing the several uses of the *manto*. At one end it was sewed up so as to fit over the

head, and he laid himself down as he would have done upon a mountain, and wrapping it round him, declared he was then proof against rain or snow, and



could sleep soundly and warm however fiercely the storm might bluster; after which he rose and folded it in the manner it is carried over the shoulder when not in use; he then enveloped his fine form in it after various fashions, and stalked about the room with the step of a mountaineer; and finally, having rolled it up and tied it in a wrapper, he showed us into what a small compass it might be compressed. It was an interesting performance, and came to a conclusion at the very moment that the classically-shaped lamp, which had hitherto diffused an artificial twilight, gave a few flickers to warn us to bed, and then expired.

LETTER XIII.

The torrents of the Spanish mountains.—Overtaken by a flood.—Oil and garlic.—A pictorial language.—A moonlight night at Biescas.—Travelling in Spain.—A Frenchman's account of the plain of Aragon.—Savage approach to and situation of the Baths of Panticosa.

Panticosa, Alto-Aragon, August 20th, 1842.

WE could not leave Torla the next morning from the state of the weather until twelve o'clock, after having a contest with our landlady on account of her charges, which were most exorbitant, when we had been unable to procure a better breakfast than dry bread and a couple of eggs: she, however, proved inexorable, so we quitted the house with resignation. Our day's journey* was one of unbounded interest, leading us through the wild mountains and villages of Aragon, a country that I should think cannot have altered since the days of Gil Blas and Don Quixote; and in which, according to the French borderers, the traveller may expect a bandit

* Walk from Bujarelo to the Baths of Panticosa:—

Villages.	Secretary's time. hours.	Real time. hours.	Villages.	Secretary's time. hours.	Real time. hours.
Torla.....	3	2½	Biescas.....	2	2
Frajin	½	1	Pueyo	3	3
Linas	½	¾	Panticosa.....	1	½
Jesero	3	2½	Baths of Panticosa.	2	2¼

behind every bush, and the stab of a knife if he but casts his eyes upon a village maiden.

Our road lay over the lower mountain ranges, which presented the most deserted appearance, and were principally clothed with box-trees; no cottage or hut was to be seen, with the exception of a few miserable villages, and we met not a human being on the road save two muleteers. It was not long before we went astray, taking a wrong path that led to Broto, and were compelled to scramble across a country that was divided by stone walls or thick hedges at every thirty or forty yards; and as the land was disposed in terraces, each little field differing some six feet in elevation from its neighbours, you may well imagine that our progress was laborious: in fact we were two hours and a half reaching the village which the secretary had pronounced as only half-an-hour distant.

Since we had entered Spain there had been one feature in the mountain view which struck us as peculiar to the Spanish Pyrenees,—the enormous breadth of the torrent-beds, which in some places occupied the entire valley. We were not a little curious to learn whether the floods that had swept through them were attributable to the rapid melting of the snows from their southern aspect, and the steeper declivity of the mountains towards the Spanish plain, or to the occurrence of storms of more than ordinary violence. It is most probable that these causes have jointly cooperated in producing the effect; and indeed in the latter part of the day we were eye witnesses to the destructive

agency of one of them. We had just passed over a torrent-track of the usual character,—a bed of rocks some fifty yards across, of desolate aspect and rent into deep chasms,—when I observed a storm gathering in front, and in a few minutes I could see the rain descending like a waterspout, and travelling over the mountains towards us with the rapidity of a tornado, although everything around was still and not a leaf moved. We had barely time to gain the shelter of some trees before down it pelted upon us with terrific violence, accompanied by thunder and lightning, and a blast of wind that I should have been sorry to have met among the precipices of the higher ranges. The roar of the elements was amazingly grand, but in a few minutes the storm had swept over us, and we emerged from our shelter comparatively untouched by it. The effect of the rain was however yet to be seen.

Proceeding onwards I suddenly heard a dull booming sound coming down upon the wind, and on looking up the valley behind me, I perceived a head of discoloured water rushing rapidly down the water-course over which we had just passed, bearing before it great rocks, as though they were mere pebbles, and roaring like an enraged sea. We watched it with intense interest, so novel was the sight; the noise becoming louder and the inundation more fierce and rapid as it approached us.

Upon arriving at the next village we were told we should not be able to pass it to Biescas: this was by no means agreeable information, but hurrying on we reached the ford by the last light of day, and found the

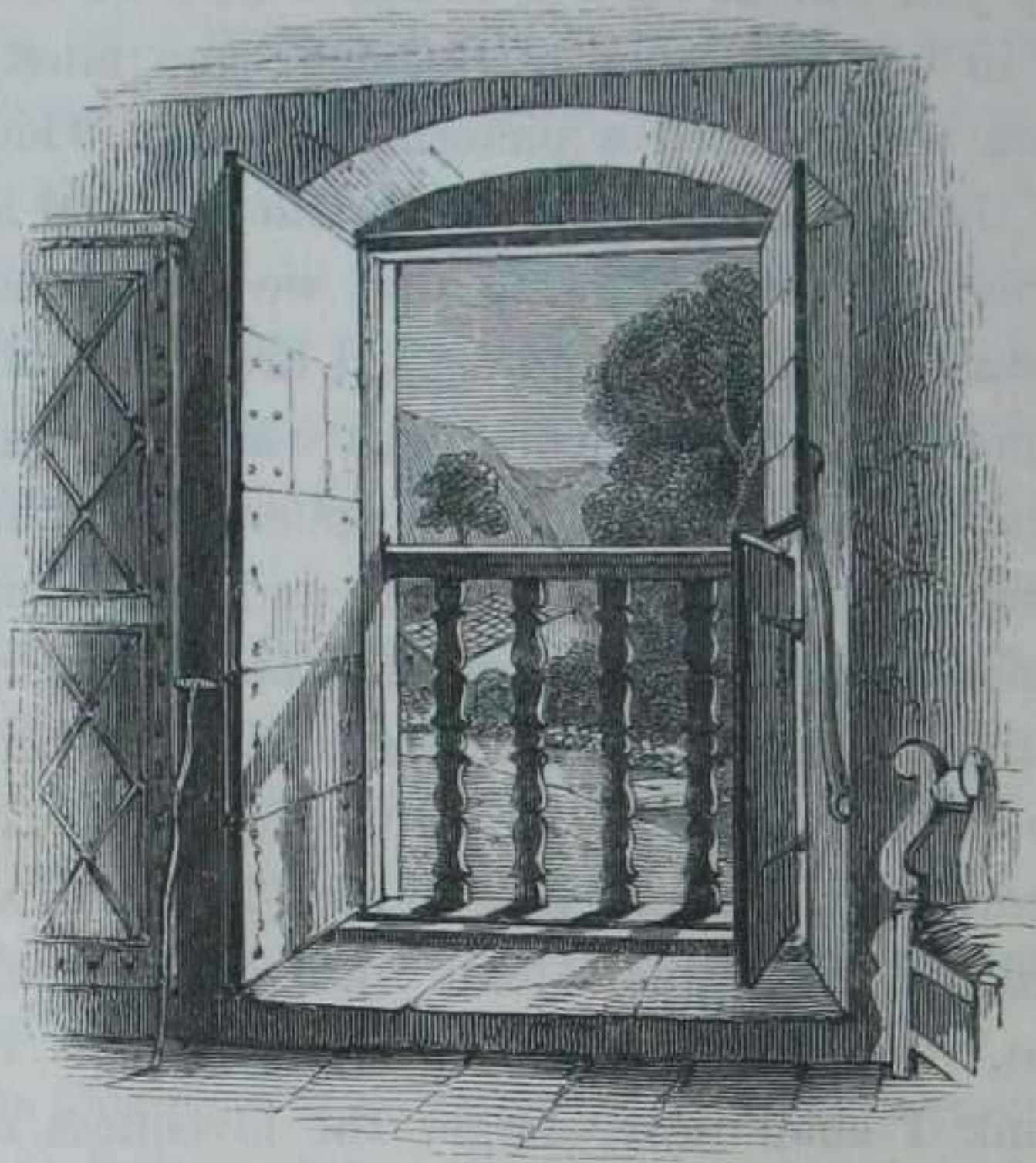
flood raging along in three separate streams with imposing speed and uproar: luckily a bridge spanned one of them, and following in the wake of three Spaniards whom we found on the bank stripping off their lower garments, after making a similar preparation we crossed to the opposite village in safety. We thought this had been Biescas, but found it was yet a mile or two further on, so we passed to it along the mountain side of a broad valley running north and south, by the light of a full-moon,—more gloriously bright than I had ever seen it, and were much astonished as we went along at the shrill and incessant chiruping of the grasshoppers. These insects abound in the Pyrenees, but I never heard their stunning music out of Spain, nor indeed as I did on this night. Many of them are furnished with crimson or light blue wings, with which they sustain a flight of several yards, and whilst on the wing have the appearance of moths and butterflies.

Biescas looked well in the distance, its houses shining in the moonlight as if they had been constructed of white marble; but while we were congratulating ourselves upon finding so civilized a place in this rude country, a nearer approach dissolved the charm, and revealed to us the unpleasant truth that Biescas was no more a city of palaces than the villages we had already passed. We had subsequently, however, no reason to complain; for we found excellent quarters in a posada at the foot of the bridge, and obtained a tolerable supper by superintending the cooking ourselves, and keeping a sharp look-out against the oil-can and garlic; our disgust at

the former of these universal Spanish appliances being not a little heightened by the discovery that the same can supplied the lamps as well as the *cuisine*. But I dare say you will be curious to know how we managed so well in our ignorance of Spanish; you must know then that we invented a pictorial language which answered the double purpose of instruction and amusement; for instance, knowing that we should not fare badly could we get ham and eggs, I drew the outline of a hog, marking the particular part which we required, and then designed a hen, and a spheroid for the egg; the hieroglyphics were immediately understood, and my companion went away with our hostess to superintend the cutting of the indicated slices, whilst I remained to prepare our next demand, which was for milk; the cow was accordingly drawn,—but we soon learnt, as we had expected, that milk was a luxury unknown in this part of Spain.

I think I shall never forget the loveliness of that night. We had an excellent room and capital beds, resplendent with red and yellow coverlids; but above all, there was a large window opening to the ground and furnished with a carved balustrade upon which we leant to a late hour, admiring the exquisite scene before us, and singing several songs which are held at Cambridge to be pre-eminently classical, and are particularly esteemed for their choruses. The locality of the window was most appropriate. Immediately opposite rolled the torrent, sparkling like silver in the beams of the moon, and backed by a dark belt of shrubs, from which rose

one of Claude's fairy-like trees, with every leaf thrown out in strong relief against the sky, whilst beyond stretched a broad valley with soft undulating moun-



tains bathed in the purest light; the whole forming a scene of such exquisite beauty, that we both allowed, although continuing our boisterous merriment, that the spot was alone adapted for the tender converse of a Romeo and Juliet. Never in my life did I less feel a soporific tendency, and at twelve o'clock I had the courage to proceed with one of these prosy letters; but the lamp soon went out and my labour was abruptly interrupted. Long did we lay broad awake, gazing on the glorious view and ever and anon breaking forth into

some hearty chorus ; but the "gentle tyrant" will claim his due, and our eyelids closed in spite of the balmy air and spirit-stirring beauty of the night.

We did not leave Biescas the next day until twelve o'clock, concluding that we should reach the Baths of Panticosa in six hours. Our route pointed northwards towards the great chain of the Pyrenees, and for several reasons we were rather pleased to direct our steps toward France ; for walking as we generally did for the greater part of the day, the wretched food we obtained was really not sufficient ; the wine, moreover, I could never bring myself to drink, the flavour of the goat-skin being almost as sickening as the smell of the oil.

Leaving Biescas we entered a valley entirely occupied by the bed of the torrent, and passed along lonely mountains covered with dense shrubberies of box, without inhabitants or cultivation, the road being wildly romantic, and exactly corresponding with our notions of a brigand scene. After walking about two hours we reached the ruins of a fort called the Castillo de St. Helena, which had been knocked to pieces in the Carlist wars, and while sketching it a travelling party of Spaniards passed us on mules. This is the only mode of transport through the greater part of Spain, there being, with very few exceptions, no roads, and consequently no carriages ; the whole business of carrying the corn from the fields, of transporting merchandise, or of conveying travellers being performed by these animals. To give you an idea of the uncivilized state of Spain, I will relate to you what a friend whom I had

lately met told me. Being at Madrid he wished to pay Toledo a visit, for the sake of witnessing the Roman Catholic worship in all its magnificence, it being, like Canterbury in England, the city of the great episcopal see. He was, however, told it was impossible to reach it in a carriage; but being determined to effect his object, he was actually driven over the fields of the country for forty miles, unimpeded by tree or hedge, the postilion carrying him directly towards the mark as a pilot would steer a ship across the Atlantic!

On the mountain above this ruined fort is situated one of those curious springs which have been denominated *intermitting*: we were informed that it alternately flows and disappears at intervals of two hours. On the way side we noticed a rude shrine, which had been probably erected to its presiding spirit. Such springs are to be found in various countries, but I am not aware that they have hitherto received any satisfactory explanation. I shall therefore not stop to inquire whether the one just mentioned derives its source from "Old Ocean—suck'd through the porous globe," or from the melting snows, or "ever-dripping fogs."

Having completed about half our day's journey, we unfortunately reached a place where the pathway branched right and left. As a matter of course we went wrong, passing to the right bank of the torrent instead of continuing along the same side we had been traversing. Bridges are rare luxuries in this country, and having found out our error when too late to retrace our steps, we experienced for two hours the difficulties of steep rocks

and tangled woods while searching for a bridge, which a Spaniard had informed us was not far distant. It turned out to be a rough mode of transit—a single pine that had been thrown across a narrow but deep channel of the torrent—and having thus gained the left bank we made for a miserable village that appeared hard by, and to our joy discovered it to be Pueyo, distant only half an hour from Panticosa and about three from its Baths. To the south of us rose a range of stupendous precipices having about its centre an enormous gap, somewhat resembling in its regularity the Brèche de Roland, which would seem to mark the course which that wild hero had pursued from the Marboré.



Hitherto we had been ascending, although gradually,

but from Pueyo the acclivity became steep, and we rapidly rose towards the lofty granite regions of the Marcadau. In this path we overtook a Spaniard, as we imagined, from his Aragonese costume, but he turned out to be a Frenchman, although so disguised with a bronzed face and moustache that no Gallic brother could have recognized him as a countryman. He was coughing at every step, and from his haggard looks he appeared in the last stage of consumption: he was wending his painful way towards the Baths with the vain hope of a cure. Having lived for eight years in Spain he had acquired a *patois* which rendered it difficult for us to understand him: he gave us rather an alarming account of the plains. "Here," said he, "among the mountains, the people are tolerably honest, and the stranger may wander about in comparative security; but further south in the vast plains of Lower Aragon, where you may journey for miles without seeing a habitation, it is not unusual for the traveller to be stopped by a summons to lay down on his face or be instantly shot, proceeding from a Spaniard stationed behind a tree with his carabine pointed after the fashion of the beggar in Gil Blas, and having complied with the mandate, to be robbed and then bound hand and foot, and left in that helpless state until accident might bring some one to his rescue; unless indeed the miscreant thought proper to deprive him of that remote chance by giving him a *coup de grâce* on parting." Such was the story of the Frenchman; as to its credibility I will say nothing; although our own experience has taught us that these

wild Spaniards are as hospitable as they are harmless towards travellers. From the slow rate at which this unhappy person walked we were soon obliged to leave him, as the evening was closing in and the Baths were as yet two good hours distant.

Having passed through the village of Panticosa we entered a gorge between two huge buttresses of rock which stood on each side of the entrance. Along this we trudged at a great rate over a better pathway than we had yet seen in Aragon, and shortly reached a spot where all further progress seemed to be barred, but the road unexpectedly mounted the rocks, and we opened another vista, and thus on we went until we wondered where on earth the Spanish Baths of Panticosa could be found. The mountains now changed from limestone to granite, and another turn of the path revealed a road so fearfully wild and savage, that we began to entertain misgivings as to the correctness of our route, and were almost inclined to believe that we were passing the mountains to France. There was little chance that we should find a house in this wilderness, and the further we went the stronger grew our suspicions that we were all in the wrong. However, the twilight was on the wane and there was nothing for it but to persevere; we had been the two hours allowed us from Panticosa to the Baths, and if we were right in our direction they could not now be far distant: although almost dark we could distinguish a great mass of granite ahead, where the gorge became again contracted and the road made another turn; our last hopes rested upon

what should be seen round that corner. It was rather in despair that we hurried to determine our fate, for should it prove as we had feared, our prospect was gloomy indeed. I went first, and approaching the critical spot discovered a lake; "that's well," said my companion, "there's a lake at Panticosa"—and in another moment we both expressed our delight by a simultaneous exclamation—for having rounded the corner we beheld a light reflected in the water. The indication was more than welcome, and we already anticipated the comforts of a good supper.

Having arrived at a house which we learnt was the *posada*, we forthwith entered, and were perfectly astonished by the sight that met our view—a kitchen of which Ude himself might well have been proud, displaying a line of stoves, a shining array of bright saucepans, and above all, the great Michel himself busy at his savoury vocation: in a few words, we found ourselves in a capital French inn with a scientific French *artiste*—the cook of the Hotel de France at Pau during the winter months, and the quondam *cuisinier* of my Lord * *, a rational person who could fully understand our prejudices against Spanish cookery, and who was ready to serve us with a supper without oil or garlic. Such was the prosperous conclusion of our day's journey *.

* The best way of reaching the Baths of Panticosa from France is by the mountain-path from Eaux Bonnes, which is practicable for horses.

LETTER XIV.

Staring propensity of the Spanish visitors.—The Baths of Panticosa.—Detained by a succession of storms.—Their effect upon the mountains and torrents.—A day's fasting at the Spaniards' *table d'hôte*.—Leave Panticosa on an excursion that terminates in no mean adventure.—The wilds above Panticosa.—Beset by mists.—Consultation and determination to proceed.—The descent of the mountain.—Construct a hut for the night.—Extreme suffering from cold.—A wild shepherd.—A visionary castle.—Return to Panticosa.

Baths of Panticosa, August 20th, 1842.

HAVING by a satisfactory consultation with our excellent friend Michel arranged a good supper, we adjourned to the common room to partake of it. Here we found a number of invalid Spaniards who were pacing to and fro, pallid in face, arrayed in black beaver hats, and heavy cloaks which were wrapped sturdily about them. Never have I seen anything at all approaching the determination with which they stared at us; I would have wagered them against the American who looked the bark off the tree, and we naturally began to inquire whether there might not be something very extraordinary in our appearance: nor was their intent gaze all that we had to encounter,—they stood around us in a circle earnestly talking with each other, and commenting upon every mouthful we eat, and how we eat it. We were not, however, the least abashed, for hunger

quashes diffidence,—and indeed we felt some pride in exhibiting ourselves at feeding-time. Having finished our substantial meal upstairs, we descended into the kitchen to smoke a cigar. Here we found Michel, our culinary genius, and the Master of the Baths, who moreover spoke French, with whom we passed a pleasant hour before bedtime. Amongst various interesting matters they told us, when we spoke of the fearfully wild and savage character of the road leading to the Baths, that two wolves had been seen there at nine o'clock the previous evening, and been chased up the granite wilds by their dog *Milor*; the sheep had been lately brought down from the mountains, and they were supposed to have been the attraction: this incident attached a novel interest to our evening's walk. After we had luxuriated to our satisfaction on coffee and cigars, we adjourned to our bedroom situated over the baths, and which was warmed by the hot-spring below.

The Baths of Panticosa, I believe, are situated upon the highest inhabited spot in the Pyrenees, being 8500 feet above the level of the sea, as recorded in large letters upon the side of the posada. The village consists of six separate buildings, standing in a little basin and surrounded by the most savage mountains of granite, which rise immediately to the regions of perpetual snow. During the season, which lasts from July to September, it gives accommodation to about 800 visitors, who flock hither from various parts of Spain for the benefit of the waters; but at the beginning of October its inhabitants migrate for

the winter, and two men are alone left to keep guard over the place, and to prevent the bears and wolves



from gaining a settlement in it. The whole of the little basin, in which by-the-by is a crop of the deadly *Aconitum Napellus* or Wolf's-bane, extends not many hundred yards in any direction, and was formerly a lake, but the waters at present cover only the lower end of it, and having found a vent through a narrow gorge, direct their

course towards the village of Panticosa. It was a stupendous sight to look up at the granite wilderness, the rocks of which were in places stained of an inky blackness, and were weathered into rounded masses; and frequently did we scan the hollows and precipices of its vast expanse for wolves or isards. It never could have entered into the mind of man to fix a house on such a spot, except for its mineral springs; there is not even soil enough for the growth of a few common vegetables, and all provisions have to be brought from the neighbourhood of Panticosa, or over the Marcadau from France.

Our intention was to have rested here a day and then to have proceeded to Caunterets, but the elements frustrated our plan. On going to bed the sky was clouded over, and the morning light found the valley flooded with rain, which continued to pour down upon us with tropical violence. For four days, from the evening of the 20th to the morning of the 25th, were we detained here by a series of tremendous storms: the most vivid lightning of an exquisite rose-colour, thunder, hail, and rain were incessant, while the cold wind held outrageous revels. Day after day did we behold in amazement the perseverance of the storm, and night after night did we look upon the mountains as they were illuminated by a rosy blaze, while they re-echoed the thunder like a perpetual discharge of artillery. It was a most magnificent sight, but we rejoiced that it had not arrested us at Biescas or Torla, where a week's residence would have been insufferable: here, however provoking the detention, the living was excellent, and the attentive Michel spared no

pains to make us comfortable; and I must in justice add, that his charges proved as moderate as his treatment had been liberal.

You are not to imagine from this account that the Spanish guests fare so sumptuously: on the first day of our arrival we joined their *table d'hôte*; but before I tell you of what it consisted, you must know that these visitors were, according to Michel, mere peasants who frequent the Baths after the season has ended. We had for breakfast, as was their custom, a small cup of thick chocolate, peculiar to Spain, served upon a waiter with a glass of cold water and two or three little lines of toast. By twelve o'clock, which is the dinner hour, we were well disposed for the onset; but unfortunately everything was cooked in the filthy oil—the sickening taste or even smell of which it is impossible to describe. We were in no very gentle mood I assure you, as we pronounced the Spaniards barbarians, but we consoled ourselves with the hope that the supper would prove a more acceptable repast. At four, another little cup of spiced chocolate was served, and at nine o'clock we sat down famishing like wolves to the crowning meal. First came oil soup—*faugh*—then a dish of cutlets embalmed in oil and bread crumbs, a dish of potatoes, an omelette, and a few cakes by way of dessert. Upon learning the fatal truth, that this was the sum total of the supper, our faces lengthened considerably, and our despairing looks afforded Michel no little amusement when we entered the kitchen and protested against Spanish fare, and requested that on the morrow we might be treated in a

French or English fashion. At these Spanish meals, together with the dessert, a small chafing-dish is placed upon the table, and the company forthwith set to work in good earnest upon their tobacco. In France smoking is practised to a great extent; but in Spain—it is incessant, from sunrise to sunset; in fact, we might as well expect to see a tavern chimney, as the mouth of a Spaniard, without smoke. The way in which they smoke the tobacco is to roll it up in a small piece of paper into the shape of a cigar: little books of this paper are sold for the purpose, but a peculiar knack is required to make up the *cigarito*.

I must not quit this posada without taking some notice of the dog *Milor*, whom I have before mentioned as having driven the two wolves into their fastnesses: he is of a tawny-colour and a perfect canine colossus; I certainly never before witnessed so magnificent a fellow: to see him standing upright with his fore-paws on his master's shoulders is something quite astonishing; whilst his companion, a dog of the ordinary size of a Newfoundland, appears a puppy by his side. We had observed that most of these wolf-dogs, when abroad with the sheep, were furnished with collars studded with iron-spikes, but we were at a loss to discover their use, until lately informed that they are intended as a protection against the attack of wolves, which in the onset generally seize the neck.

After having idled away four days at this place, taking "mine ease in mine inn," I and my friend broke cover on the 25th and started on an excursion that proved as

you will presently hear no mean adventure: but before we set out on this wild journey, I must tell you that we had been informed by the Master of the Baths there were two ways of reaching Bujarelo besides that which we had pursued; one that could be traversed by horses, although according to Michel most execrable—a journey of eight hours by the village of Panticosa; the other, a scramble of five hours, without any track, passing across the wilderness of the highest Pyrenean range. We were very anxious to see, as well as to ascertain the existence of these two passes, as they must necessarily traverse sublime scenery, and one of them was the road we ought to have taken from Bujarelo. I must moreover tell you that the weather during our stay at Panticosa had not only changed from sunshine to hail and rain, but from extreme heat to that of cold; insomuch that the great wood fire of the kitchen was the only place where we could abide in our very light coats with any comfort; the torrents had swollen to twice their usual bulk—had carried away the little bridge of pines, and overflowed the lake so as to render the mule-path impassable; besides which, the floods of rain had inundated the valleys, and fresh-fallen snow had covered the mountains in every direction.

Under such inauspicious circumstances we started on the morning of the twenty-fifth for Bujarelo, having been instructed to follow a torrent that came down to the Baths from an amazing height and great distance in one continuous fall, until we reached a lake, and then to search for another stream flowing in the opposite di-

rection, which, as was said, would in due time conduct us to the Valley of Bujarelo. The morning was tolerable, although clouds were sweeping in various directions and the cold was severe; yet it appeared brilliant after the turbulent sky we had seen for several days: accordingly we bade a temporary adieu to Michel, who cheerfully hinted at the impossibility of our finding the way, it being our intention to sleep that night at Bujarelo, and to return by the Panticosa road on the morrow.

Our difficulties began at once; by climbing bodily upwards to a vast height by the course of the torrent, my companion taking one side of the stream and I the other, since we had differed as to the easiest path, and we soon became invisible to each other from the colour of our garments being similar to that of the granite, whilst the Spaniards below gazed up with wonder at the beings who could so sturdily clamber up to the wilds in such unsettled weather. After a time the ascent became less steep, and the Baths consequently invisible, and we managed to join company, although the torrent we had to pass was no "Duck-puddle." Here the wild cliffs and dark granite solitudes appeared so fearful, that in all sober truth we expected to meet with wolves, and indeed searched the heights and precipices on each side for them, as well as for *isards*: nothing living, however, was to be seen—there was nothing but granite piled on granite, snows in front, and ragged mouldering pines standing here and there about us.

It was not long before a real difficulty occurred—the

stream divided ; but we fortunately determined on following the one on the left, which after another laborious ascent conducted us to the lake. The next point was to discover the stream we were to follow to Bujarelo : beyond rose a bare ridge, apparently inaccessible—the stream of course must be on the other side of it. We clambered up the mountain and reached another lake, which was of considerable size, and from this point we espied a gap in the ridge, which we determined to gain, and accordingly waded our way, slowly enough, ankle-deep, and sometimes up to our knees in snow. On nearing the summit some dangerous places had to be crossed—sloping rocks that lay concealed under the snow, smooth and highly inclined, and many narrow escapes had we from being precipitated. But clouds came now sweeping up from below and down from above, and before we could top the ridge everything beyond a limited circle was concealed from us.

At length, however, we stood in the gap, shivering with the cold, that was intense, and scarcely able to withstand the force of the wind : the mist driving through the opening seemed to penetrate my very bones ; whilst all in front, except a chaotic mass of rocks and a bed of snow that lay immediately beneath, was quite invisible. Such a state of things appeared sufficiently cheerless ; the chance of finding our way to Bujarelo very unlikely, and we deliberated as to the prudence of a further progress. Upon consulting our watches we found there was just time enough to get back to our comfortable quarters before night-fall ; we had a very

faint idea of the direction to be taken to Bujarelo ; the mountain wilderness was wrapped in darkness, and we were both cold and hungry. That was one side of the equation ; on the other, there was the spirit of enterprise urging us on, the dislike of being thwarted in our plans, and the triumph of Michel should we return. Being in a prudent mood I was for going back ; my companion, with a rashness that ought to have been mine, was evidently inclined to persevere : he did not exactly express such a wish, but seemed strongly disinclined to beat a retreat, so I threw the *onus* upon his shoulders by declaring that I was indifferent, and would do exactly as he pleased. At that moment a bright gleam of sunshine chased away the mists, and showed us far distant on the right a green mountain, and a portion of sky more brilliantly blue than the fairest sapphire. “ Allons—en avant,” we both exclaimed, and on we went with renewed spirits.

The mountain we had seen was at a very considerable distance, but we calculated upon finding some shepherd's hut under which we might pass the night should we fail in reaching Bujarelo. There was a kind of gap in the mass of rocks below in the same direction, to which my companion thought we had better descend : I differed upon this point, and gave it as my opinion that the proper route lay in front over the ridges of snow : I yielded, however, and we forthwith began a descent more difficult than anything we had yet encountered ; for although the gap was not more than two hundred feet distant from us, the passage to it occupied no less

than half an hour; after which we again descended, and reached a hollow scored by the tracks of sheep, and running down towards the desired green mountain, which to our snow-blinded eyes appeared an Eden. We therefore went on in the full confidence that all our perils were over: judge then of our disappointment when we observed the slope becoming steeper and steeper, and finding it, after an hour's walking from the dangerous descent above, to end in a system of hideous precipices. What was now to be done? We gazed silently at each other, and then cast our eyes below at the torrent which dashed more wildly along as its bed grew steeper, until it fell through a rocky cleft, breaking into a series of cascades, and was finally lost in the abyss. It was evident that we were fairly in for a night among the crags and precipices, unless we could make our way below; wolves too were in the mountains, the cold was intense, and our clothes were of the very lightest material. These were potent reasons for deciding that the descent, however perilous, must be attempted, and we accordingly looked about for the way by which it might possibly be accomplished.

There was a cleft in the ridge to the left, towards which we observed a sheep-track, and we made straightway for it: nothing, however, was gained by this,—the same hideous slopes ran down towards the valley, which now became visible far below, and we heard the busy murmur of its torrent, which looked a silver thread in the distance. We passed along the side of this infernal ridge, regarding with longing eyes the soft green moun-

tain opposite, from which arose the tinkling of cattle bells, although the animals themselves were not distinguishable ; but the night was coming on rapidly, so it behoved us to be prompt and decisive ; we therefore determined at once to lower ourselves down the slope until it might terminate in a precipice, when we trusted some way would present itself of attaining the valley. Down this we went with our hands and feet, my companion first, and I close upon his head, steadying ourselves by tufts of wiry grass, and perching upon small projections in the rock ; dizzy work, I can assure you, requiring no little nerve and caution ; the different points of rest had to be felt, and their firmness ascertained before we ventured to trust our weight upon them—a slip would have been inevitable destruction. The thought occurred to me, and I afterwards learnt that I had shared it in common with my companion, that if one had gone, how dreadful would have been the situation of the other ; for no human aid could have been obtained for many mountain miles. Lower and lower we went, and more difficult at every step became the descent ; the ledges grew smaller, the mountain side more smooth and perpendicular, the tufts of grass more rare ; at length we reached so frightful a pitch of the precipice that I shouted out to my companion to return, for it was madness to attempt any further progress. He, however, went two or three steps lower, and then called out to me for assistance,—exclaiming that he could neither go downwards nor get back, nor could he hold on many minutes ! Here was an awful moment ! it was

utterly impossible for me to render him the slightest aid, and his destruction appeared inevitable; a precipice of several hundred feet was below, and then a mass of sloping granite rocks, highly inclined, ran down to the torrent, upon which, unless he could recover his step, he must be hurled in a few short moments. Providence, however, ordained it otherwise; he regained the presence of mind he had for the moment lost, and by a desperate effort got back to a place of comparative safety.

We now determined to ascend, although that was no easy matter, and to find, if possible, some rocks that might afford us shelter for the night. It was, however, most provoking to give up our enterprise after having achieved so much, and we had not scrambled upwards more than a few yards, when I espied a place that seemed to promise a more practicable descent, so we determined once more to attempt it. O * * as before went first and I followed close behind. There was only one part that seemed utterly impassable; but this my companion achieved by turning round in a very adroit manner, changing hands, and giving himself an indescribable twist,—most perilous it must be confessed. Upon my reaching it I felt I could not succeed, whilst it was equally impossible for my companion to return; I therefore determined at all events to attempt it, and after resting a few moments to collect all my energies, I succeeded in the manœuvre, and we were in a few moments some way below. We had now passed the worst, and were soon by the side of a stream which had been in our neighbourhood all the way,

tumbling down the rock in a continuous fall; into its black and slippery bed we slid, regardless of the water that fell upon us, and were shortly on the *débris* congratulating each other upon our escape.

As day faded into night we reached the valley, and the long-coveted green mountain was opposite, but still unattainable, for a raging torrent rolled at the foot of it, which it was impossible to pass. We found ourselves in a *cul-de-sac* from which we could not escape without the light of day,—one of those bare Spanish water-courses without a tree or shrub that could afford shelter. A little lower down the mountains closed in upon it, merely leaving a narrow channel for the stream, and in the other direction the valley rose steeply to distant heights covered with snow. We stood still for a few moments to contemplate our position, when observing two shepherds high up on the opposite side, we shouted valiantly at the top of our voices; but the noise of the rushing waters drowned our efforts and they vanished in the gloom. Nothing now was to be done but to make the best arrangements we could for passing the night: we had no food with us and were literally famishing; the air was severely cold, and nothing could be more threatening than the aspect of the clouds. To build up some sort of protection was of course our first determination; and after searching about we found a rock that we thought would serve well enough for a back to our proposed dwelling: we accordingly set to work about half-past eight collecting the great stones of the torrent, and by half-past ten I had built up a

wall about five feet high on my side, but that of my companion's had not yet attained so great an elevation. We were very weary and our hands were cut and bruised by the granite, but the labour served well to pass the time and to keep us warm. The clouds, however, that had been long threatening, now broke into rain and drove us to our wretched walls; but they yielded not the slightest shelter, there being no roof or front to the dwelling, and the rain came from a quarter the very opposite to that which we had expected. We sat gloomily down on our two stone seats with a prospect more wretched than can be well imagined. Happily the rain passed off before we were completely wet, and the moon shone forth brilliantly, though the sky becoming more clear increased the intensity of the cold.

O * * now resumed his work at the wall, which he built nearly as high as mine, and we then crouched down close to each other, buttoning up our coats of brown holland as tightly as possible, and I hung a letter before my face as some protection from the cold wind, whilst my companion threw his handkerchief over his head and face, pulled his slouched hat over his brows, thrust his hands into his pockets, and drawing up his legs brought his chin close to his knees: I did so likewise, and we then huddled closely together like love-birds. We were considerably wet from having waded for so many hours through deep snow, and the degree of our suffering from cold it is impossible to describe: I will only say I would not pass such another night for any temptation that could be offered. We shivered like aspen leaves,

and our teeth chattered incessantly—mine to such an extent that I could scarcely speak from the rapid though involuntary motion of my jaws: to sleep was hardly possible—although I think I dozed once or twice.

At midnight we lighted two cigars which I fortunately had with me—their ends having been bitten off at half-past ten, when we had wisely postponed smoking them to a later hour: these were indeed a treasure—they were food and drink to us; we smoked, walked about furiously, and then again crouched down and commenced



singing most energetically, the chattering of the teeth mingling hysterically with the chorus, and never before I will be bound to say did that wild valley reverberate such fiendish glee: but our ghastly mirth died away and we sat shivering and suffering in silence the rest of the night.

Never was Aurora more tardy in her appearance than on the morning of the twenty-sixth : we looked at the sky and the bright stars and wondered it was not day. At length, however, at five o'clock they grew dim and faded, the green mountain loomed gradually through the darkness, and we arose with delight although in a dreadful state from cold and fasting. We looked at the precipices we had descended in astonishment and awe, as we became fully impressed with the extent of the danger we had undergone, and leaving our dwelling, the scene of so much suffering, we started up the valley in order to seek a passage over the torrent : it was not, however, to be found, and we continued our way until we came in sight of a flock of sheep and a shepherd's hut sheltered by an impending precipice. I think I never beheld a more savage-looking fellow than the Spaniard who came out to meet us, or a face rendered more hideous by matted locks and unshaven beard : but his scowling physiognomy proved the fallacious outside of a civil interior ; for he answered our questions and directed us with all proper *complaisance*, telling us we had yesterday gone wrong from the summit of the ridge, by turning down to the right instead of keeping along the snows as I had proposed, and it seemed we had descended into the road by which we had intended returning, which indeed passed along the green mountain we had been so anxious to reach.

Tired as we were, we yet resolved to follow up this road towards Bujarelo as far as the crest of the ridge in order to ascertain its direction, when we intended re-

turning by the same path to the village of Panticosa. The scenery around us was amazingly fine*, we had left the granite and were now among mountains of a different character, the brilliant colours and grotesque figures of which called forth admiration, even from such weary wanderers as ourselves. On our way back there was an extraordinary sight that met our view: high above, on the ridge from which we had made our frightful descent, there appeared the walls and towers of a castle of considerable size, a true *Château en Espagne*, for had we not been assured of the impossibility of any human structure standing there, we should have supposed it to have been the stronghold of some Spanish chieftain:

“ A vision strange such towers to see
Sculptured and wrought so gorgeously
Where human art could never be.”

It proved a long weary way to Panticosa and the descent seemed interminable. We halted in passing over the well-known green mountain to look down once more into the wild valley far below our feet, and upon our little hut that was plainly visible: we sat down for a short time, but such was my fatigue that I was in a few minutes asleep, and it was with difficulty my companion awoke me at the approach of a Spaniard. He was a herdsman: we pointed out to him the spot where we

* The view of a range of black mountains stretching north and south, of most regular structure and gloomy aspect, and having their fissures filled with snow, so that they seemed covered by network, which we beheld from the summit of the ridge, ranks in my opinion with that of the Circus of the Marboré.

had descended—he shook his head and said it was impossible, for no hunter could pass down that precipice: we assured him of the fact and showed him our wall of stones where we had passed the night, and then our bruised hands—he seemed astonished and looked after us in perfect wonder as we continued our way to Panticosa, which we reached in due time, and then bent our steps northwards to the Baths; and at two o'clock, after fasting seven and twenty hours, and walking that day for nine hours, we happily rounded the last corner of the road, and beheld the long-desired posada and its staring peasants pacing to and fro upon its terrace as we had left them.

Never did the copper saucepans of Michel look so bright as they did upon this occasion. A small leg of mountain mutton was at the fire, potatoes were in preparation, and in five minutes we were seated at a feast, forgetting all our cares and fatigues in the deep inroads we made upon his good cheer, and in the ample potations we quaffed; and the Spaniards, I think I hear you say, did they stare with their usual eagerness? Ay, did they not? If we were lions before, we had now become mammoths at least—the whole place was in an uproar—the greatest interest was excited by our adventure—not only did they stand around to see us eat, but ventured even to enter into conversation with us, although I verily believe they thought we must have engaged in some unholy compact with the Evil Spirit.

LETTER XV.

The peasants' dance.—Passage of the Marcadau.—Changed appearance of Cauterets.—The Col d'Araillé.—The Vignemale.—The Plateaux d'Oulettes.—Frustrated plans and departure for Cauterets.—“Darkness which may be felt.”—Storm and perilous walk.—Arrival at Cauterets.—Return to Luz.

Luz, August 29th, 1842.

ON the evening of the day on which I despatched my last letter from Panticosa there was a dance in the posada, at which all the fair ones of the little place were present. It was, as the Master of the Baths himself inscribed it in our journal, the *Iota afandangáda*, the peasant dance of the country; but I confess it did not appear to me very remarkable either for liveliness or grace.

Two musicians performed upon their guitars a monotonous and unvarying tune, to which every now and then they added a vocal accompaniment of extraordinary wildness; there was no master of the ceremonies to introduce partners, but whenever a Spaniard wished to dance he made a bold dart at the object of his choice, while the girl in question, apparently as a matter of etiquette, made every effort to elude him, and if caught to resist his addresses: the strength of the swain, however, generally prevailed, and the fair captive was dragged

struggling through her companions into the centre of the room; her hands were then released, as it was equally her duty under such circumstances to submit, and the partners commenced the dance with considerable solemnity. In this way were several pairs engaged, each couple affording, as it were, a distinct exhibition: they began with a slow movement, setting solemnly to each other with faces almost as grave as quadrille dancers in England, which I think you will admit does not convey an idea of much salient exhilaration; but the step gradually increased in velocity, the parties leaping up to a considerable height from the ground, and stamping most furiously, until their movements reached a paroxysm of rapidity, when the dance concluded, and the heated pair retired; the youth, however, merely to draw breath before he again sprang forward to seize another partner. We were considerably amused by this exhibition, as there was something so inconsistent in the extravagance of their antics with the solemnity of their faces.

The next day at twelve o'clock we prepared to depart, to quit this wild and yet amusing place with something like regret for Caunterets. Michel told us that to the summit of the Marcadau was a walk, or rather scramble of three hours; but he added, not the very consoling remark, that our course would lay over granite mountains on which there was not the slightest track for our guidance: "indeed," said he, "when I passed into France last October, after this road had been repeatedly traversed during the summer, I could not detect by a broken

stone that any human being had ever been there before.” The butcher of the place also had a few days previously, whilst speaking upon the subject, vehemently exclaimed, “that it must have been made by the very devil himself;” so you see we had no very pleasant prospect before us, and we thought it quite right to secure a guide, as we had no desire to pass another night upon the mountains*. At the instant we had so determined, a Spanish *contrabandista*, who belonged to the place, and had plied his illegal trade for many a year, entered the room with a bundle of bright scarfs and kerchiefs, which he forthwith unpacked and displayed as carelessly as if he had been a licensed hawker. This was the very man for our purpose—a man of *confidence*, as Michel expressed it, who knew every possible pass in the great wilderness between the two countries: we accordingly engaged him to bear us company, and having bid adieu to Michel and our numerous companions we bent our steps with our Spanish smuggler towards France.

Upon leaving the Baths we climbed the mountain which ascends to the Marcadau, passing a string of lakes, each of which sent its bright spirit to babble through the rocks. Our guide halted by the side of

* The Pass of the Marcadau is one of the most desolate and least frequented in the Pyrenees, leading the traveller through an inhospitable region of granite, noted for its wild animals. In our climb to the summit, whenever we crossed the mule-path we found it execrable, but sufficiently marked upon the rocks to be followed by a person accustomed to tracking the paths over the mountains.

the first to show us a rocking-stone*, a great block of granite which he was able to set in motion with his shoulder, and at the same time to taste of an icy spring which he particularly recommended to our notice. In two hours and a half after leaving the Baths we stood upon the crest of the Marcadau and looked below upon France: we had ascended almost in a direct line, mounting several acclivities with the aid of our hands, and therefore taking a shorter course than that of the mule-track; for there is such a path, but I would not recommend any traveller to adventure his neck or the legs of his beast upon it. In another hour we were at the foot of the mountain, where we dismissed our guide with a small gratuity, and leisurely continued our way to Caunterets.

How changed was this gay watering-place since my last visit! its season had closed, and the few straggling visitors who had lingered beyond the allotted time had been peremptorily driven away by the late bad weather. The storms that had waylaid us at Panticosa had been equally violent in this place,—in short the summer was broken up; the cold damp mists filled the valleys both in the morning and evening, the general temperature had become chilly, and the snows of winter were already

* These rocking-stones are to be found in every granitic country, and are the natural results of decomposition. How any antiquary could have referred them to the agency of the Druids, unless he had supposed them as universal and as active as the elements, I cannot understand. Depend upon it no other instruments have ever been employed in their formation than the breath of Heaven and the tooth of Time.

assembling on the mountains. Under these circumstances we obtained superb rooms at the Hôtel de France for a mere trifle. You will remember the plan we devised for reaching Gavarnie, to accomplish which we here procured Joseph Sarniguet as guide, and proceeded towards the Lac d'Estom* the following morning at half-past ten, our intention being to pass over the Col d'Arailé to the Lac de Gaube, where we determined passing the night.

We found the ascent of the Col d'Arailé dreadfully fatiguing—it being an incessant climb of two hours from one mass of granite to another, but having gained the summit, the sight of the beautiful Vignemale was a recompense for our toil. From this spot its noble appearance is particularly striking, and I should think from no point of view could its symmetrical figure be better appreciated. Imagine a vast conical figure cleft in twain from its summit to its base, so as to present a precipitous face of bare rock of great height and breadth, topped by snows and based by glaciers. Such is the appearance of the Vignemale from the Col d'Arailé: it is the queen of the French Pyrenees, being 1722 toises in height, and only inferior to the Maladetta and Mont Perdu which rise on the Spanish side. In spite of the boisterous wind and cold we managed to stand here for some minutes to draw the outline of this giantess, after which we passed the height, and descended to the Plateaux d'Oulettes and to the level of the glaciers of the Vignemale over boulders of

* It is possible to pass from the Vallée de Lutour to Pragnères by the Gorge de Louét.

granite which strewed the whole surface of the mountain. Soon after leaving the *port* we came upon one of the guiding-stones placed by the *chasseurs*, and which a stranger might naturally pass without notice; but when these savage regions are wrapped in the wild dark mists, and the mountaineers by a deviation of a few yards might be precipitated into a fatal abyss, they afford clues of safety.

The Plateaux d'Oulettes upon which we descended, form an extraordinary valley, and offer strong evidence of having at some remote period been a string of lakes; for they consist of a series of gigantic steps leading up through a distance of some five or six miles from the Lac de Gaube, which is at present the receptacle of the rocky *detritus* with which the winter torrents are laden, to the foot of the Vignemale, and would represent, as O * * expressed it, a vast stair-way by which the gods might mount to Olympus. During our progress a storm came on, and we entered the hut on the banks of the Lac de Gaube at a triumphant pace, running the gauntlet through its hailstones, whilst the thunder rolled around so magnificently, that we half expected to see the storm-spirit striding after us down the huge steps we had just descended. Here we had proposed to rest the night; but circumstances occurred, as you will presently learn, that drove us forth again among the mountains.

Upon our arrival the hostess of the mountain *auberge* was absent, and we had dried our clothes and discussed a bottle of Bordeaux before she returned: we then made

our inquiries as to bed and board; her answer was laconic,—“I don't mind sleeping on the floor, and therefore you travellers can divide the bed between you; and as to supper, you can have anything you please.” That was pretty well for so solitary a place; but we had before heard the reputation of the old dame for extortion, and we thought it wise to inquire the terms on which she would thus liberally accommodate us. Ten francs was the moderate payment she expected for the single bed into which we were to be bundled, and the charges for eating were to be on the same scale of expense. This was not to be tamely borne: we reasoned, but all in vain; the storm raged in the mountains, and she was not less inexorable. We threatened to return to Caute-rets,—we might as well have remonstrated with the winds: rather than submit to such extortion we resolved to brave them; and ordering off our unwilling guide, who had little sympathy with our scruples, we threw our traps over our shoulders and quitted the hut, half expecting that such a demonstration would bring the enemy to terms, or that we should be recalled by a messenger before we had proceeded many hundred yards: but no such event followed, and we walked forward into dangers that we little anticipated.

But before we proceed further it is necessary that you should be acquainted with the fact, that the path to Caute-rets winds through pine-forests, and among precipices with torrents rolling beneath them. We had left the hut but a short time before darkness fell upon the land; not darkness in the ordinary sense of the word, but darkness

as if we were passing through black marble—actually tangible—“even darkness which may be felt,” except when the lightning blazed. By using the greatest precaution we reached the Pont d’Espagne, when it became evident that we must adopt some extraordinary means of security. We therefore halted close upon the roaring torrent, and deliberated what we should do, although perfectly invisible to each other.

The only plan, unless we stopped on that wild spot all night, was to link ourselves together and to trust to the instinctive sagacity of our guide. I accordingly grasped Joseph by the shoulder, whilst O * * and myself were united by each holding the end of a handkerchief; and in this way we cautiously crept along, feeling before and around us with our sticks before we ventured a step. The darkness was so intense that (will you believe it?) I was actually unable to detect the guide whose shoulder I grasped; and although I was arrayed in a white coat and white hat, I was equally invisible to my companion. But as yet we had not experienced our roughest work; for the storm grew more violent, the crash of the thunder was immediately over our heads, the lightning shot down its jagged bolts with a glare so intense that we did not venture to open our eyes, the wind roared, and the clouds descended in torrents. Here was a pretty situation—and yet I confess I felt something like pleasure in the sublimity of the scene, and I may add in the excitement of our danger. Every sense was called into requisition: we knew not that the next movement would not hurl us over the precipice: with one hand on the

shoulder of the guide I felt each step that he stumbled, and with the other, connected to my companion by a handkerchief, I ascertained his faltering movements behind. We had constantly to pause until the lightning pointed out the way, and so deafening became the din of the elements, that unless we bawled at the top of our voices it was impossible to hear one another; for the rolling thunder was incessant, the torrent roared below us, the rain and hail dashed around, and the big pines through which we journeyed swung to and fro, as though about to be swept away. At this moment imagine my horror when I felt the handkerchief which linked O * * and myself together, suddenly give way—he had fallen from the path! I shouted out to him, and strained my eyes in a vain attempt to pierce the darkness: fortunately he had tumbled into a hollow on the safe side, and a few bruises were the only consequence. In another minute the guide and most probably myself had a more narrow escape: we had waited for the guiding assistance of a flash of lightning, being doubtful of the right direction, when its momentary blaze showed us that we had turned towards the edge of the precipice, and that in another step we should have been dashed into the torrent that must instantly have swept us away.

We now listened for the fall of the Cerizet, which we knew must be near: it was the most dreaded spot we had to pass, and full well did we know its dangers, and as we crept onwards we anticipated its raging waters and dark abyss, and feared the slippery slope that fell

from the path to it. Scarcely had we passed it in safety before I shot down the steep descent as if discharged from a catapult, and nearly precipitated the whole party by my fall. "Où êtes vous?" shouted the guide; "all safe," I replied, struggling up again, although somewhat bruised and shaken; for so complete had been my overthrow, as I afterwards found, that the breast pocket of my linen coat had been torn asunder, and the wonder was we were not all capsized down this descent, for it consisted of large masses of rock, now slanting down, and now falling abruptly: had we not shuffled along instead of raising our feet from the ground, it would have been impossible for us to have preserved our equilibrium for an instant. There was but one other spot that we feared, and that was the cascade called Mahourat: at the top of the descent that led to it we lost the way for several minutes; for the path there made a sharp turn, whilst we continued straight on, and immediately found ourselves involved in box bushes and granite rocks. We waited for the assistance of the lightning; but flash succeeded flash without discovering to us the way: at length I espied it during a blaze of the most intense and rosy light; I seized the guide by the shoulder, and having felt before us with our sticks, we were in a few minutes once more *en route* for Cauterets, and in less than a quarter of an hour, at about half-past nine, we walked into the Hotel de France, drenched to the skin, cut bruised and muddy, though withal as merry and hungry as mountain hunters. And bright I can assure you blazed the ruddy fire upon the hearth, comfortable

was the hurrying to and fro of Rose and her assistant train, and refreshing, above all, the sounds that announced a good supper in preparation. A fire was soon kindled in one of the best bed-chambers, two suits from the wardrobe of M. Uzac were brought us, and in half an hour we were seated at capital cheer, heartily laughing at our ridiculous appearance, and listening with satisfaction to the storm that still blustered without.

Whether I have imbued you with a proper sense of our terrible walk, I know not ; but I can assure you it will long live in my memory as one of the most dangerous adventures that have befallen me in the wild Pyrenees ; and had it not been for the extraordinary sagacity of our guide, we should assuredly have passed a second dreadful night upon the mountains. This was the last thrilling incident of our Spanish excursion, and the next day we proceeded by the high road to Luz, where we found Mrs. O * * in a state of great anxiety awaiting our return, which had been so long delayed from the succession of storms we had encountered.

LETTER XVI.

Excursion to the Lac Escoubous with an elfish guide.—Walk to Grip.—Cold and mists of the Pic du Midi.—A Pyrenean soup.—The Cascade Garrét.—To Arreau by the Hourquette d'Aspin.—The situation of that town, and the beauty of the Vallée d'Aure.—Numerous old churches of the Templars.—A funeral at Arreau.—Vielle.—Abominable quarters.—Ascent of the Pic d'Azet.

Vielle, Vallée d'Aure, September 6th, 1842.

WE remained two days at Luz, the first being thoroughly wet, and the second of that versatile character which leads you out about mid-day to return in a few hours drenched to the skin; on the latter of which we procured three horses and started about one o'clock for the Lac Escoubous. Passing through Baréges we reached the mouth of the wild valley where I had formerly been assailed by a storm on my road to Grip, and the path shortly became so rough that we were obliged to dismount, and it was then only with difficulty that we could force our horses to proceed. The mountains being wrapped in clouds, we had procured a boy whom we had encountered at the entrance of the valley to act as our guide, but this "elfish page" annoyed far more than he served us. In stature he was a dwarf, with an enormous head, large bony hands, and feet of corresponding disproportion; and keeping ahead of us was continually exclaiming, "*Il faut courir au moi, il faut*

courir au moi”—you must make haste, you must make haste; and as pertinaciously did he repeat this exclamation, as did Lord Cranstoun’s goblin page cry, “lost, lost, lost,” and most assuredly should we have thrown him into the torrent could we have overtaken him; but

“...like tennis-ball by racket toss’d,
A leap of thirty feet and three,
Made from the gorse this elfin shape,
Distorted like some dwarfish ape.”

This imp directed us to leave the horses near the end of the valley and mount to the lake on foot, whereas we afterwards found we could have ridden with ease up the ascent—a circumstance which was not very likely to improve our temper towards our guide: he very soon, however, disappeared, and as he was in possession of Mrs. O * * ’s cloak we thought it very likely we should not see him any more; but having gained the summit, the everlasting “*il faut courir au moi*” saluted us, and we espied him cutting capers in the mist and pointing in exultation towards the lake which was invisible. Little gratification did we derive from this excursion, with the exception of having seen the wild character of the Valley of Escoubous, although the roguery and strange antics of our fiend-like guide afforded us some amusement, and had any accident befallen us we should assuredly have referred it to his diabolical influence. His different devices for extorting money were extremely ingenious, and on our return his wits served him right well with a plan for deceiving us. We had despatched him for the horses, conceiving that we might

cross the torrent more agreeably on their backs: after a considerable delay he returned with only one of the steeds, declaring that the shepherd who had been guarding them refused to let them go until he was paid; that he had ransomed one, but had not sufficient money about him to liberate the others. Doubting this tale, however, we crossed the torrent and found as we had expected that the horses were quietly standing by themselves, and that the shepherd was not to be seen; but our sharp-witted guide declared that he must have run away.

This was our last day at Luz; on the morrow we departed for Grip, being anxious to see the beautiful Vallée d'Aure, and the magnificent scenery about Bagnères de Luchon before the season became too far advanced for journeying among the higher mountains. We left Luz at half-past ten, Mrs. O * * and her maid having preceded us on horseback accompanied by a guide, it being our intention to ascend the Pic du Midi by the way, should the weather prove sufficiently auspicious.

On the outskirts of the town we procured a specimen of the famous *fabrique de lain* as a memorial of Luz, and proceeded to Baréges under a brilliant sky, where we found the Frenchmen dispelling the *ennui* of so wild a spot by cards and sugar and water, and then crossing the Bastan pursued the new road towards the Tourmalet. This is by far the best path I have seen anywhere in the Pyrenees, and was constructed for the late Duke of Orleans, of whose tragical fate we had been apprized at Luz. In passing the mouth of the Valley of Escoubous

we again espied the hobgoblin who had acted as our guide the day before: he soon recognised us, and capering triumphantly gave us a view-halloo of the most unearthly description, "waving his long lean arm on high," while he pointed out to some companions the victims of his knavery. Fearing that he might be inclined to renew his offers of service, we quickened our pace "to rid us of his company," and in about another hour we reached the foot of the Tourmalet, where we turned up towards the Lac d'Oncet. Half-way to the lake we encountered a French party with their guide. "Go back," said the latter, "the Pic is in the clouds, and the cold is insufferable; we have been obliged to desist from the ascent, and you had better follow our example." "No, no," answered my companion, "we are bound for Grip, and unless we can reach the summit shall turn off at the Lac d'Oncet." "Ma foi!" continued the guide, "you'll be lost to a certainty if you wont hear reason." We nevertheless determined to judge for ourselves, and resumed our march, the guide receiving our adieu by shaking our hands as though we had been doomed to destruction, assuring us that we should certainly lose our way and perish in the cold.

With such words of comfort did we part, and were soon far away; but rising higher the prophetic words of the guide made some impression upon us. The dark little lake lay below us in its bed of snow, but the pyramid of the Pic was enveloped in clouds, which came whirling around and about us like threatening demons, mingling and parting, sinking and rising, as if for the

purpose of bewildering us: the cold, moreover, was intense, and we shivered with the change. It was evident that we could not ascend the Pic, so we determined to turn off for the Vallée d'Arissas, and were in a few minutes among the wild precipices of the descent, quite unable to pierce the mist which encompassed us beyond a few yards. I went in advance, as having some acquaintance with the path; and though unable to descry the landmarks, we reached the green valley without any casualty, and attained in due time the road of the Tourmalet, which had been sadly broken up by the late storms, and arrived as the evening closed at Grip.

I think I have never given you any description of Grip: it can scarcely be called a village, as no two houses stand in connexion with each other; but it consists of a number of scattered cottages strewing a long valley, that stretches east and west some three or four miles, from the Tourmalet to the head of the Vale of Campan. The little hotel, which stands entirely alone, appropriates to itself the title of 'Grip,' which is legibly inscribed upon it. One might almost think there had formerly stood hereabouts a compact village, which having been electrified, and endued with the power of repulsion by a passing thunder-cloud, had been thus disjointed and scattered.

We tarried here during a wet day, in which our consultation with Madame Noguét regarding our dinner was the most important event. She had on a former occasion given us a very palatable soup which we were anxious to *encore*: we entitled it onion soup, and had

fully determined upon the propriety of sending its receipt to the publisher of Mrs. Rundall's savoury work, that it might find a place in the next edition. But the difficulty that puzzled us as gastronomers was the management of a fowl which was to die for our dinner: we could not at the moment recall to our memory the sovereign preventive of toughness which, if administered a few minutes before the bird is killed, is said to answer the intended purpose; so that our chicken came to table in a state that would have defied the adamantine teeth of an Australian native.

On the following morning we paid a visit to the Cascade de Garrét, which is formed by the Adour falling through a rocky cleft as it rolls from its fountains in the distant Pic d'Adour*, and it is well worth a walk of three-quarters of an hour from the inn. The spray that was seen circling above as we approached it, promised well: on arriving at it we found a guide with a party of Frenchmen from Bagnères, who told us that he had never before seen it so magnificent; such volume had the torrent acquired from the late heavy rains. Unlike the Cerizet, which writhes and coils in its descent, the waters of the Garrét roll downwards in a direct line, and after making a series of falls through pine-covered crags, heedlessly tumble from a precipice of perhaps sixty feet in height. We lingered for some time on this interesting spot, and then having returned to Madame Noguet's,

* There is another cascade of some notoriety above Grip: it is called the Cascade de Tramesaigues or — de Grip, and is situated in the torrent that flows from the Pic du Midi.

started for our different destinations; O * * and his wife for Bagnères de Bigorre, and I for the Vallée d'Aure*.

From St. Marie the road to Arreau by the Hourquette d'Aspin offered features that were entirely novel to me as a Pyrenean traveller. The entire road consisted of one ascent and descent, the Hourquette forming the apex of the pyramid, and it led through moors bounded by pine-clad mountains, as well as through the forests themselves that abound throughout this district†. At a quarter-past six I arrived at my destination.

The beauties of the matchless Vallée d'Aure are little known, and still less is the exquisite scenery of the Valley of Tramesaigues : this is a district which is seldom, I believe, visited by the traveller. The aspect of the town of Arreau, which stands at the entrance of the Vale, affords conclusive evidence of this fact; it is situated on the confluence of two mountain-streams that flow from the valleys of Aure and Louron, and with its old fretted

* From Grip to Arreau there are two roads; one practicable for carriages, and another alone adapted for horses and pedestrians. The former, which is considerably the longer, conducts the traveller to the head of the Vale of Campan, where, at the village of St. Marie, it turns southward. The latter passes immediately across the mountains, and approaches the former on a wild moor midway between Grip and Arreau. They shortly, however, diverge again and pass the ridges to the Vallée d'Aure; the one by the Hourquette d'Aspin, the other by the Hourquette d'Arreau.

† For the information of future pedestrians I will state the time that this walk occupied. I left St. Marie at half-past two, reached the Hourquette at a quarter to five, walking very fast, and arrived at Arreau by a quarter-past six.

houses, narrow streets and antiquated hotel, evidently belongs to that venerable race of towns that are so abundant on the plains of France, and have nothing in common with such novel creations of fashion as Caute-rets, Bagnères, or Luchon. Being situated further from the central chain, the neighbouring mountains are of less elevation; but they are covered with pine-forests, and abound with curiously shaped rocks, as may be seen by my annexed sketch, which represents the 'Sarrat de la Croix,' a whimsical rock at the entrance of Arreau, that has been consecrated by the superstition of the peasantry.



The Vallée d'Aure was in former times the residence of the Counts of Armagnac, so famous for their rebellion against the sovereign power of France, and for their

inveterate feud with the Counts of Foix. Before, however, the territory was acquired by this haughty family, it had been assigned by the Count of Bigorre to the Templars, who erected Bordères, a town in the neighbouring Valley of Louron, into a *commanderie*, and the Vallée d'Aure is yet filled with their old churches, which may be readily recognised by the round chancel, and the arms of the warrior knights sculptured over the entrance: towards Vielle many of them are to be seen in ruins among woods and rocks, forming objects that are well adapted for the skilful exercise of the pencil. I rested a day at Arreau for the sake of exploring the town and searching out the castle of the Armagnacs: the only part that remains is an old tower that totters above the village of Cadéac, half an hour's walk distant; in its interior you are led by a flight of broken steps to an opening in the wall, whence may be obtained a superb view of this most lovely valley. These grass-grown stones are all that remain to mark the dwelling-place of the once haughty house of Armagnac.

One of the most interesting scenes that I witnessed at Arreau was a funeral: I was standing in the *Place* when a procession passed me, which I understood was going towards the house of the deceased, for the purpose of receiving the dead body; it consisted, first, of a boy dressed in white and bearing aloft a red cross mounted on a long silver staff; then came two priests, and after them several boys swinging incense-burners. On their return towards the church of Notre Dame, where the service was to be performed, I happened to be in a shop,

from which I beheld the procession; the priests chanted as they went along, occasionally pausing and bending the knee; the coffin was borne on the shoulders of several men, and was followed by a crowd of at least a hundred women, dressed in mourning and having upon their heads white capulets edged with black. As they passed along, the people by the way-side fell upon their knees, and every person in the shop with me did the same or uncovered their heads. I followed the funeral to the church, where the coffin was placed upon a form between two rows of candles, the boy with the red cross stood at the head of it, while the priests at the altar chanted the service: I observed none but women among the congregation. After a short time one of the ministers with a hammer in his hand descended from the altar, and having first turned round and bent the knee to the image that was there placed, he walked slowly round the coffin, striking the air as he went as though he were hammering the nails, while as he passed the red cross he bowed his head and turned up his eyes. He next took a vessel of burning incense, and swinging it to and fro, again walked round the coffin with the same solemn demeanour: then followed more chanting, and the procession ultimately moved away to the cemetery. Upon this occasion I experienced a very disagreeable crush, for I had unwittingly stationed myself before the font, and it was only with considerable exertion I could extricate myself from the crowd that so eagerly pressed forward for the holy water.

I must tell you that another novelty at Arreau pre-

sented itself in the altered dress of the men. Every Pyrenean district, like each canton in Switzerland, has its own peculiar and distinguishing costume: about Luz, instead of the *Berét Bearnais* which had hitherto been the head-dress, I found the highlanders arrayed in long pointed caps, and which, like the jackets and breeches, were woollen, and of a russet-brown colour; but here at Arreau there was a complete change in the coats, for they were now furnished with short tails, like our charity boys, a costume that was excessively displeasing. Having rested a day idling and sketching (which by the by reminds me of the little chapel of *Notre Dame des Voyageurs* at the entrance of the town, which, as a traveller, I made a point of transferring to my drawing-book) I



started the next morning down the Vallée d'Aure, with

no other plan than that of passing the mountains after a few days to Luchon *, and of regulating my time according to the variety of scenery I might be induced to examine.

The day was magnificent, and I was fortunate in viewing the soft mountains of this exquisite valley under the most favourable circumstances: it appeared very populous, for numerous villages of the usual compact appearance, many with manufactories of thread, and each with its picturesque church tower, successively presented themselves; whilst the fields were animated with busy men and women, some thrashing the corn in the field, and others mowing the grass and making hay, although so late as the fifth of September. A short way from Arreau I stopped at the cemetery, which recalled to my memory the funeral I had so lately witnessed: the graves were undistinguished by any mark or stone, a huge wooden cross stood in the centre of the enclosure, but the fresh-turned earth alone intimated where the dead of yesterday had been deposited. My wanderings through the Vallée d'Aure were fraught with interest; for independent of the delays enjoined by the pencil amid such matchless scenes, old ivy-hung ruins of Templar shrines so lured me from the direct road in order to scramble through bush and briar, that I found it getting late

* From Arreau to Bagnères de Luchon there are two mountain roads: one by the Port de Pierrefitte, another by the Port de Peyre Sourde. The former pass is infinitely the finer, as well as the more elevated. From Vielle, at the upper end of the Vallée d'Aure, there is another path which ultimately joins that by the Port de Peyre Sourde.

when I approached the town of Vielle*. So striking was the beauty of the surrounding mountains from this spot, especially that of the cone-shaped Pic d'Azet, which rises some distance on the left, that I determined to rest here for the night, but I fared most miserably.

The execrable *auberge*, yclept the *Hôtel d'Espagne*, was full worthy of its name, on account of its filth and rotten condition: the town was completely Spanish in construction as well as in name, and the *hôtel* was nothing more than an ordinary *posada* for furnishing entertainment to the Spanish muleteers who carry on the border traffic. After scrambling up a flight of superannuated wooden steps, I was shown by my hostess the room I was doomed to occupy. Tallow candles of the vilest composition were suspended in greasy ranks from the ceiling, diffusing an odour by no means savoury; whilst the floor was disposed in mountains and valleys, and broken into chasms, which gave the vision free access to the common room beneath. This, however, was the only *auberge* in the town, so I was fain to sigh contentment to my landlady, and to order supper—a comfort much more easily demanded than obtained: and here let me caution the future sojourner in the high regions of the Vallée d'Aure to provide himself with potted meat or some such dainty contrivance, or he will assuredly be abraded by a discontented stomach. Nothing is more delightful than the fine scenery of nature, but it is surprizing how its enjoyment may be influenced

* According to the gendarmes of Vielle, there is a way of passing to Baréges from that town by the Lac d'Oumar.

by our physical condition. I was obliged to be satisfied with a repast of execrable bread, a small portion of the vilest *potage*, served up in a vessel whose shape was by no means calculated to excite agreeable associations, and a *farrago* of the odds and ends of chickens—such as feet, spurs, and combs—a Spanish dish, by the by of which the muleteers appear excessively fond. Such was the heat of the night and the diffusive odour emanating from the tallows, that I lay with my windows open; but awakening on the next morning, I found the air so deliciously scented with the new-made hay that it vividly recalled a spring-time morning in England.

On the previous night I had chatted with the gendarmes of the place, and from their information had determined to ascend the Pic d'Arbizon* or the Pic d'Azet—the one being on the west, the other on the east of the Valley. The striking appearance of the latter, however, inclined me in its favour, and I started about nine with the intention of mounting it. The way led up a broad undulating hollow, covered with luxuriant crops and trees, and studded with villages, in many of which I found the mouldering ruin of the *château*, where, as the peasants told me, “the Seigneur had dwelt;” and often adjoining it an old Templar shrine, equally embowered in the fair profusion of the *Clematis*. The path rose ra-

* Its elevation is 1460 toises, or about 9246 English feet above the level of the sea. It is situated in that vast mountainous district so little known, laying between the Vallée d'Aure and the Lavidan, and may, according to the gend'armes of Vielle, be easily ascended from that town in three hours and a half.

pidly, and on turning round I soon beheld the giant frame of the Pic d'Arbizon, one of the most barren mountains of the Pyrenees, which is invisible from the surface of the Vallée d'Aure. Having arrived at Azet, I inquired my way of an old woman, and the discordant tongue with which she answered my interrogatory, convinced me that I was passing through one of the Basque districts I have before mentioned: at this village there is a kind of terrace opposite to the Pic d'Azet, whence the view of that summit is indescribably beautiful: it rises in a cone of rosy rock, whilst a pine-covered mountainous spur shoots downwards from it to the green and wooded hollow that lies below the village.

Having passed this spot I soon left the horse-path and made towards the object of my excursion; but not to enter into all the details of my ascent, let me tell you that I passed a most laborious day from having missed the right direction; and should any traveller be inclined to ascend the Pic d'Azet, I would advise him to follow the torrent that is marked in the French map of the Hautes Pyrénées, as flowing from the Lac de Sarnouis, where he may turn up the cone and reach the summit without encountering precipices, whereas it is inaccessible from the side of the Vielle. The view from its crest, which is elevated 9525 feet above the level of the sea, commands the usual sterile summits, the parallel valleys of Aure and Louron, and the dim plains of France visible in the distance; and you may look upon a wild lake or two, interesting as humble tributaries to the stately Garonne, and still more as being, according to Pyrenean

superstition, the baths of mountain demons, to whose gambols have been attributed the occasional inundation of the river.

It was dark before I returned to my miserable quarters, thoroughly fatigued by my excursion, and my hostess really appeared to feel much regret as she announced the unwelcome truth that nothing but bread and wine could be given me for supper; however, in pity she sallied forth into the village and obtained a few scraps of meat, but for which nothing less than the keen winds of the Pic d'Azet could have procured me an appetite.

LETTER XVII.

The Valley of Tramesaigues pre-eminent for its lovely scenery.—Assaulted by a mountain wind.—The Master of the Baths.—Rough quarters.—The Lac Doredan.—Unexpected good cheer.—Proceed to Bagnères de Luchon.—St. John's day celebrated.—Beauty of the Vallée de Lys, or 'Vale of the Lily.'—Meditate another Spanish excursion.—John Algaro and his quaint sayings and doings.

Bagnères de Luchon, Sept. 15th, 1842.

AN hour's walk from Vielle, in a direction towards Spain, lies the village of Tramesaigues, begirt by towering mountains, and embosomed in woods and cliffs, which claims a particular notice from the exquisite character of its surrounding scenery; for as far as my own experience will warrant me, I award to this village view and its mountainous vista the palm of Pyrenean beauty: other scenes may be more magnificent, but this I consider to merit a pre-eminent rank for the richness of its colouring, and the exquisite disposition of its features.

As I lingered through so fair a region, how vainly did I wish that my pencil could represent its beauties! and as I sat aloft upon a rock, attempting to execute my purpose, I was very justly rebuked by the irruption of a mountain wind, that so suddenly rushed upon me, that before I could offer any resistance I was nearly

rolled over, while the tin paint-box was carried bodily away from my hand, my hat torn from my head, and the contents of my portfolio scattered like the leaves of the Sibyl.

As the path descends towards Tramesaigues it divides, one branch climbing towards the Port de Plan, whilst the other will ultimately conduct the traveller to the Port de Biels: by following the latter I soon reached the village, which I found to be very small, and distinguished by the usual Spanish characteristics, but in a situation indescribably beautiful.

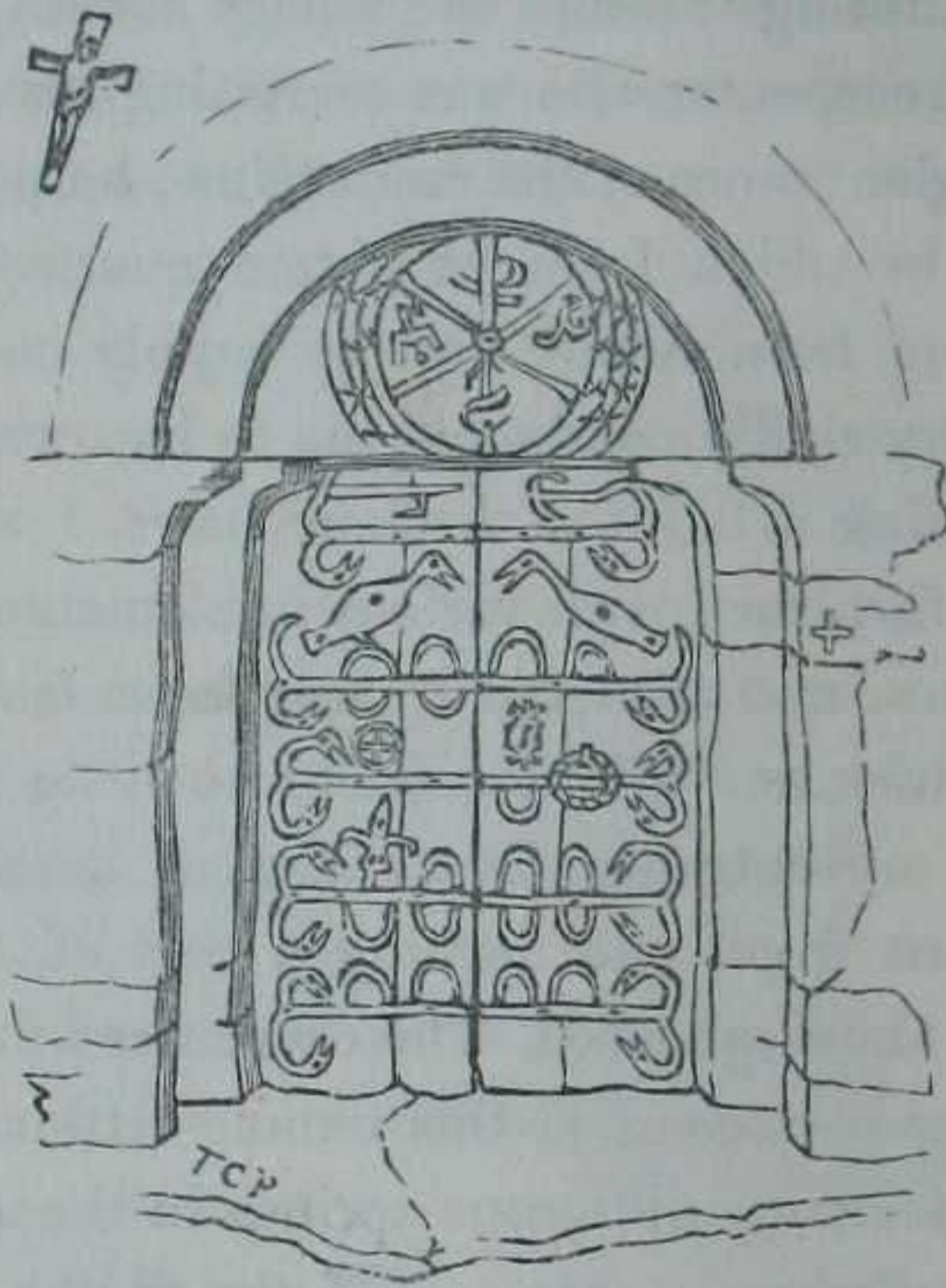


There are two objects here of considerable interest; a very extraordinary old Templar church, of which the above is a representation, and the ruins of a castle, which best claims that title among the many old *châteaux* I

have seen in the Pyrenees; for it consists of a square tower with a competent expanse of ivy-covered walls standing high above the village on the brink of a precipice, and in the midst of green knolls and romantic cliffs that are hung with wood, whilst an old gateway spans the narrow mule-way, evidently showing that this border castle had once been the key of one of the passes into Spain.

Whilst hunting through the village for an *auberge* I came upon a carpenter who was exercising his calling on one of the giant pines of the mountains; he pointed out the cottage in which I might obtain quarters; but its inmates were from home, and to supply my present wants he very civilly conducted me to his own dwelling. After mounting a flight of broken stairs, I stood in a large room furnished with various implements of household economy, and occupied by a hideous female dwarf of a most filthy and idiotic aspect: so little notice did she take of my entrance, that I almost fancied her a figure cut out from, and forming a part of, the bench upon which she was seated. The carpenter I found to be an important personage in this remote settlement, since there were several sulphurous springs in the neighbourhood, and he was the Master of the Baths. Trame-saigues is, however, seldom visited except by a few Spanish peasants; but I think it very likely, from its lovely situation, from the magnificent scenery in its neighbourhood, and the short distance over which it will be necessary to construct a carriage-road, that it may at no remote period become one of the most frequented of the Pyrenean watering-places.

The treatment of my host was as hospitable as had been his reception : he gave me bread and butter, milk, wine, eggs, and a kind of sausage peculiar to this district. Having thus feasted to my heart's content, I strolled for an hour or two among the knolls and rocks around the castle, and having performed my *devoirs* at the old Templar shrine, and sketched its antiquated door, I sought out the *auberge* to procure a night's lodging.



This was truly the rude roosting-place of the pedestrian. The cottage consisted but of one room, a loft, and a nocturnal receptacle for goats in the regions below : in one corner of the apartment I reposed upon a mattress and pillow of maize-straw, while my host and hostess lay in the other corner, my olfactory senses being steeped in the odours of a sink, which stood in

close companionship with the head of my bed, my body furnishing ample amusement to the usual lively tenants of French sleeping-places, whilst my dreams were suggested by the continual tinkling of the goat-bells beneath me.

The next day being thoroughly wet, I amused myself in puffing forth the vile tobacco of the country, in making an excursion to taste the sulphurous springs, and in viewing with admiration the picturesque costumes of the Spaniards who fill this place, and whom I here first saw arrayed in the long red cap of Catalonia. My fare was sorry enough, but the charge of my hostess was not as I had so often experienced in an inverse ratio with the comforts afforded: two francs fed and lodged me for two days. In the morning I rose about five in the presence of men or women customers who sought the *auberge* at that early hour, and on the second night I was kept long awake by the earnest contest of two French highlanders upon the character of the Chinese! one affirming that they were "*bels hommes, très grands*;" the other, that they were "*très petits*" and "*miserables*." I was also rather amused in the course of the day by another mountaineer, who became excessively angry, when to a question addressed to me, I answered that London was three or four times larger than Paris: "No, no," said the unsophisticated Frenchman, with a shake of the head that plainly implied he was not so easily deceived; "I know well enough that Paris is the largest city in the world, and *that Madrid is the next to it in size*."

The following day I walked to the Lac Doredan, a

sheet of water lying entirely out of the route of travellers, but marked of such size on my map that I had determined to visit it. The road was good, and I easily discovered the lake by tracking one of the torrents to its source. The path led me through winding valleys and narrow gorges, where in places it was upheld by the neighbouring beech-trees: the scenery, which was of Alpine grandeur, much reminded me of that between Cauterets and the Marcadau. I left the road which ascends to the Port de Biels at the village of Arragnouet, between which and the lake there are three fine cascades, one of which I cannot but consider far superior to the Cerizet and other waterfalls that I have seen in the Pyrenees; but so remote and unfrequented is its neighbourhood, that I was unable to learn the name by which it was distinguished.

The immediate vicinity of the lake, which is of considerable size, offers a scene at once solemn and savage, and recalled to my mind the wilderness of Panticosa: it is a granitic region, and its round masses sprinkled with ragged pines abruptly abut upon the clear depths of the lake. I found here a solitary woodcutter, in whose *cabane* I wished to pass the night, for the purpose of exploring the neighbourhood on the morrow, but unfortunately his supply of bread was exhausted, and he was himself forced to return to Arragnouet, whither I descended in his company, and approached Tramesaigues by nightfall, after a day of unbounded satisfaction*.

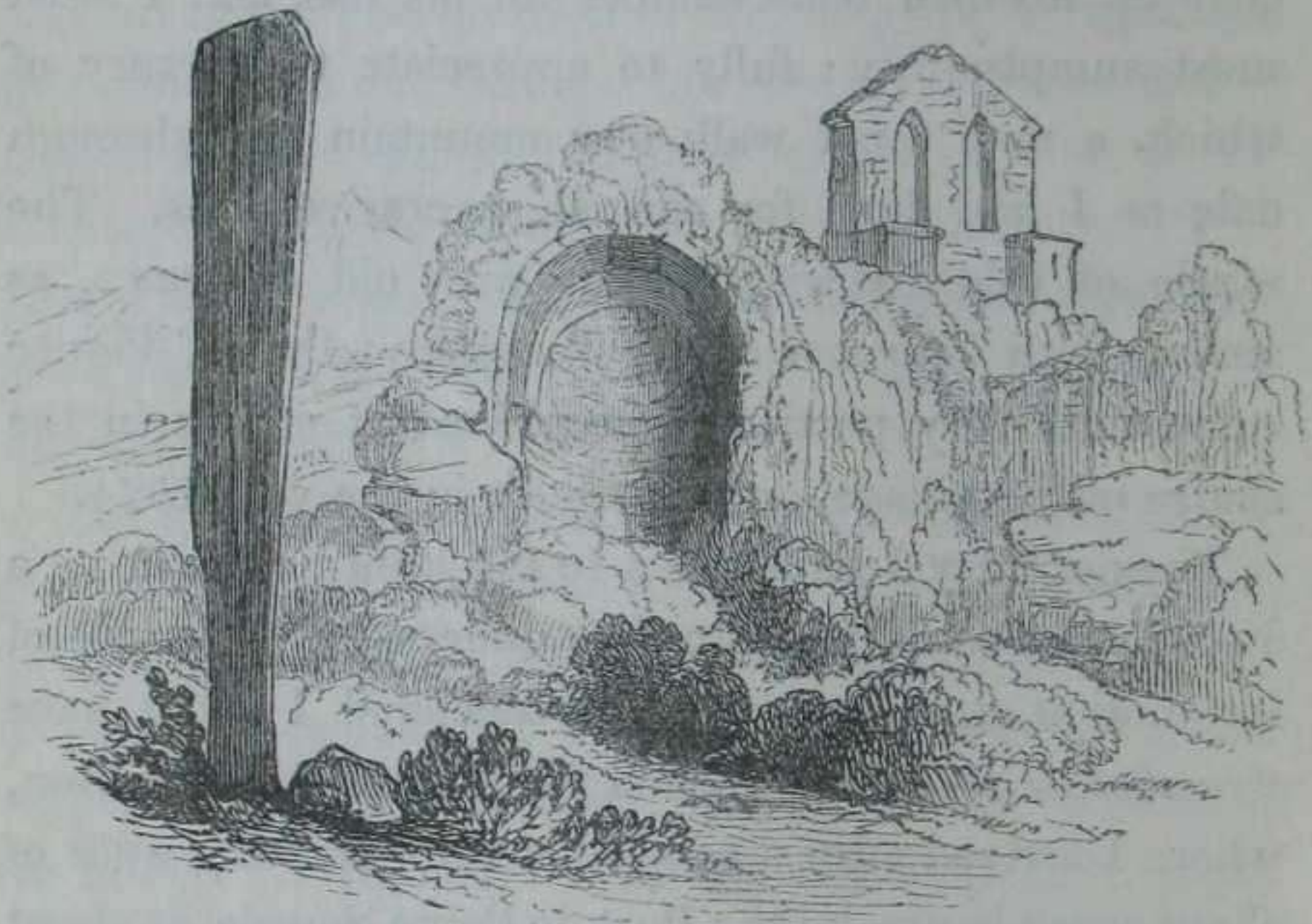
* From Tramesaigues to the Lac Doredan or — Camou is a walk of four hours, and the road is sufficiently plain, as it is tra-

My quarters in this village had been so truly wretched, that I had determined to return to my tallow-scented chamber at Vielle, but on my way thither having stopped at the *Débit de Tabac* of the little village of Vignec, I was surprised upon finding a dandy Frenchman and an excessively pretty woman as its proprietors; whilst I discovered most tempting slices of ham broiling on the fire. Here was good fortune, after inanition of nearly a week! M. Fontan proved a very jewel to me; he gave up his own bed-chamber for my use, and I fared most sumptuously; fully to appreciate the luxury of which, a man must walk o'er mountain and through dale as I had done for several successive days. The whole of this district abounds with old *châteaux*, as well as with churches of the Templars: that of Vignec commands very particular attention; it stands in the centre of the village, and was built in the year 1524.

The next day I bade adieu to my kind host, who as a Frenchman could by no means understand my mode of locomotion, inasmuch that he declared I must have "*jambes de fer*," and started for Bagnères de Luchon, where I arrived after a somewhat uninteresting walk of about seven hours, by the Port de Peyre Sourde, at about six o'clock. I met with few objects of novelty on the road; the green mountain's side at the Port de Peyre Sourde was whimsically scored by water-courses, and

versed by wood-carts. From the lake the woodcutter told me it was possible to pass the mountains to Baréges in four hours: of course, however, there is no track, and the traveller, if without a guide, must trust to his own sagacity and the torrents.

presented the appearance of a succession of parallel dykes, cut so regularly and so equidistant from each other, that they might be supposed the furrows of some colossal ploughshare : whence descending through the fertile Vallée de l'Arboust my curiosity was much excited by the erection of a great pole of wood, which I had observed in or near most of the villages through which I had passed. It consisted of the trunk of a pine fixed into the ground in the neighbourhood of the church,



and cut into slices from the top to within a yard or two of the bottom : upon inquiry I learnt that the inhabitants of the country assemble on the twenty-fourth of June and make a bonfire of them in honour of St. John—a ceremony which is by no means uncommon in many parts of England and Wales.

At the Port de Peyre Sourde I left the department of

the Hautes Pyrénées and entered that of the Haute Garonne, of which Bagnères de Luchon is one of the principal towns. I was much struck with its position as I descended from the long Valley of Arboust: it stands in an extensive basin, encompassed by fir-covered mountains, at a distance of about two leagues from the frontier of Spain. It is impossible that the visitor to Luchon should not be forcibly struck with the gigantic barrier that here separates the two countries: the view of this enormous structure, covered with its wild snows, and rising above the distant clouds with the abruptness of a wall, is really astounding. This town is one of the most fashionable of the Pyrenean Baths, and ranks next to Bagnères de Bigorre for its excellent accommodation: you enter it on all sides through avenues, and its appearance is rendered gay and lively by placards of coloured linen which, according to the French fashion, are hung before the various shops and hotels. I took up my quarters in the Allée d'Epigny, the most fashionable part of Luchon, which consists of a broad road of about half a mile in length, ornamented by avenues of trees and bordered by innumerable lodging-houses. This town has many claims upon the traveller for delay: in addition to the several beauties in its immediate neighbourhood, it is a central point from which diverge various excursions of the highest interest, such as those to the Lac Séculéjo, and to the far-famed Port de Venasque to view the giant Maladetta, the Mont Blanc of the Pyrenees. I have now been staying here five days, but as the weather has been generally wet, I have

merely had the opportunity of visiting some cascades in the neighbourhood, and of making today an excursion to the lovely Vallée de Lys, which I have performed in the company of O * * and his wife, whom I have again happily met, and I trust we shall not part until Time with his unwelcome tongue shall summon me away from these romantic mountains.

The very name of the Vallée de Lys—the 'Valley of the Lily'—pictured it to my mind as one of those verdant gardens which Nature in a softer mood has implanted amidst the sterner summits of the Pyrenees, and I found it as smiling as my imagination had portrayed, the woodland solitudes, enamelled slopes and picturesque cascades of which might well represent one of the fabled scenes of Boccaccio. The head of this valley, which can be easily reached from Luchon in two hours, presents a rare union of sublimity and beauty : far above is the glacier of the mighty Carbious*—*the mountain of the isards*, in whose neighbourhood lies a dangerous pass into Spain, over which the *contrabandistas* have the hardihood to bring laden mules, passing down precipices of the most awful character ; whilst beneath, from a deep and dismal hollow, falls a torrent of water, appropriately termed the *Cascade d'Enfer*, and which afterwards flows onwards through the rich and varied woods of the valley.

I must finish my letter by giving you a sketch of my future plans. The grand expedition that every body

* 10,323 feet above the level of the sea.

makes from Luchon is to the Port de Venasque, which is always considered by Pyrenean tourists as the most awful of mountain solitudes; but having tasted the strange pleasure of journeying through the wilds of desolate Spain, we shall not be contented with merely climbing to the summit of the ridge and of there viewing the Maladetta, but have determined to make another incursion upon her Catholic Majesty's territory, and to enjoy a run of some few days through parts of Aragon and Catalonia.

After divers consultations held with John Algaro the guide, who, by-the-by, is a perfect character in his way, we have fixed upon a route which at all events possesses the charm of novelty; for John tells us he has not traversed it for thirty years. During this excursion we expect to see some stupendous scenery, since it is our intention to pursue a course round the Maladetta by the Spanish towns of Venasque, Vitalles, and Viella; and after visiting the source of the Garonne, to return to Luchon by the Port de Portillon.

John Algaro is a very eccentric fellow; by his own account the descendant of an Arab chief, half Spaniard and half Frenchman by birth, and allied in blood with a noble Spanish family. I have no doubt he will be of great service to us, as he speaks Spanish, and is, I believe, the only person at Luchon who is at all acquainted with the country which we propose to explore: to quote his own whimsical expression, he knows it "*comme sa poche*,"—as well as he does his pocket. An Irish tourist has just joined our party, and we are in high hopes of

a delightful trip; there are no custom-house difficulties to be surmounted, passports even are not required; since John says, "*Je suis connu comme un loup blanc,*"—that he is as well known as a white wolf; and since his respectability will be a guarantee of our own, he assures us that under his guidance we shall pass the government dragons without a question.

LETTER XVIII.

Leave Luchon for Venasque.—A silver mine.—The Port de Venasque.—A formidable contrabandista.—Immensity of the Maladetta, the Mont Blanc of the Pyrenees.—Tragic death of the guide Barrau.—Grandeur of the road to Venasque.—The *fonda*.—A wild chant.—John Algaro a prisoner.—His caution as we start for Vitalles.—The murder at the Port de Castanéze.—Romantic road.—The horse knocked up.—Catalonian head-dress.—Our quarters at Vitalles.—A Spanish fire-place.—Moonlight scene and serenade.

Vitalles, Catalonia, September 17th, 1842.

IN my last letter I told you we were about to climb the barrier between France and Spain, and I must now give you some account of the manner in which we accomplished the task, and of the wild regions which it opened to us.

On the morning of the 16th of September, which, radiant as it was with sunshine, seemed especially ordained for our purpose, we started about nine o'clock for the port and town of Venasque; the only difficulty opposed to the line of our future route being that suggested by John Algaro, that we should be exposed to the chance of meeting with a band of robbers who infested the mountains of Catalonia, and might perhaps pillage if not murder us. We left Bagnères de Luchon at different intervals in a very straggling manner,—Mrs. O * * being on horseback, and the rest of the party on foot;

but we all joined company among the beech-woods that clothe the mountains towards the Port de Venasque and reached the French hospice at the foot of the pass in about two hours, at which spot there opens to the right the precipitous ascent towards the *port*; and having proceeded a little further, we reached a silver mine that is worked among the rocks: the inspection of it, however, did not answer my expectations; for as the vein of the precious ore crops out at the surface, there are no shafts or subterranean operations to be explored. Some slight opposition was offered to our viewing it, but after a short delay the superintendent very civilly conducted us up the mountain to the workings, with the express understanding, however, that we were not to carry off any specimens. We learnt that the mine had only been worked about two years, that it belonged to a *société* and not to government, and that the ore, after having been properly sifted and washed on the spot, was smelted at Luchon.

The pass of the Port de Venasque is one of the best known in the *Hautes Pyrénées*, and from its altitude presents at certain seasons considerable danger, although it is constantly traversed by the hardy border-men. The day previous to our ascent, as we were informed, the mountain had been visited by a tremendous storm of wind and snow, which had waylaid an unlucky Spaniard with a baggage of glass, and the manner in which the whole path was strewn with its fragments amply testified the extent of his loss. But this pass has been frequently the scene of more melancholy accidents, and as we climbed the

Culet, an acclivity that is almost perpendicular, Algaro pointed out to us a spot called the *Trou de Chaudronniers*, or 'Hole of the Tinkers;' where nine of these unfortunate sons of Vulcan were overwhelmed and destroyed by an avalanche. The early part of the ascent somewhat disappointed me, as my expectations had been exaggerated by the wide-spread fame of the pass; not having considered that the French tourists who had awarded to it such pre-eminence of savage grandeur, had probably not like myself, visited the unfrequented high fastnesses of the Pyrenees, such as those in the neighbourhood of Panticosa and the Marcadau: however, I confess that on mounting to the highest *plateau* I became satisfied; for having passed a guiding-stone called *L'homme* in the shape of a rude cross, placed near a precipice in the path in order to warn the descending traveller of its dangers, we entered one of those savage regions from which spring up the summits of these mountains; where wild lakes held in durance by stern and gigantic rocks, enormous ridges, and treacherous snows everywhere meet the eye, and where the mists often suddenly assemble around the traveller, and render his escape a miracle.

We now began to wonder where the *port* could be, as we were apparently in a *cul-de-sac*, surrounded on every side by inaccessible heights; but having passed four dark mountain lakes we turned an angle and suddenly beheld above the great cleft that constitutes the *Port de Venasque*, and to which a zigzag path, almost perpendicular and rendered slippery by ice, at length conducted us. As we approached it an object in

perfect keeping with the savageness of the spot met our view; it was the swarthy visage of a ferocious looking Spaniard who was peering down upon us from the rocks. "Don't look near him," said our guide in a low voice: "he is a desperate character well known as a brigand and smuggler, who is armed of course to the teeth, and would think no more of shooting you than he would a wolf, should he suspect you might report him to the Spanish authorities"; and with this Algaro pointed to an enormous bale of goods that was lying in the *port*, and to forward which to its destination the Spaniard was awaiting the arrival of some French confederates.

In another minute we had gained the *port*, and who shall describe by words the impression that is made by the first view of the amazing Maladetta—"the *Accursed mountain*"—or the majesty by which this monarch of the Pyrenees is distinguished? but wonderfully as its enormous bulk first impresses you, it requires to be studied before it can be fully comprehended. Standing at the Port de Venasque we were separated from this mountain by a deep sterile valley, and as it rose immediately opposite in an enormous ridge, it was difficult to fix upon its absolute summit; but as we gazed we became more and more conscious of its magnitude and of the expanse of its glaciers and wilds; its base being begirt by parallel lines of precipices, looking as though they were ramparts raised by nature to keep the foot of the adventurer from her stronghold. The highest summit has hitherto proved inaccessible, and with good reason

has the mountain acquired the title of "*The Accursed*," as from year to year hardy *chasseurs* and guides have been ingulphed within its glaciers, and the dreadful death of the guide Barrau, who perished there in the year 1829, has long deterred the adventurous from attempting its ascent. He had started the previous day from Luchon in company with two young engineers with the determination of reaching its highest point: they had slept that night on the mountain, and in two hours the next morning arrived at the *moraine* of the glacier, whence climbing the icy mass they gained without any casualty two-thirds of the total height; here, however, a vast *crevasse* opposed their further progress; Barrau sounded it, and believing that he had ascertained its direction moved forward—but the gulph there turned in a sharp angle concealed by snow—it gave way under his weight, and the unhappy man vainly struggling to extricate himself sank deeper and deeper, and as he disappeared from view his voice gurgled through the snow—"I am sinking—I am sinking!"

The cold of the region in which we were now standing was excessive, yet in the presence of such an object, what pencil could lie indolently within its case? accordingly O * * and myself contrived to draw the outline of the dreaded mountain, even though John Algaro, who had begun the descent with the rest of the party, every now and then looked behind him that he might give warning should the Spaniard steal down upon us. We found the declivity excessively steep, leading us over snows and ridges of marble of the most various and ex-

quisite tints ; and in the wild hollow below the Maladetta, which is strewn with the mutilated pines and rocks that the giant had thrown from him, Algaro pointed out the famous *Trou de Toro*, into which leap a part of the traitorous glacier-waters, to pass, as it is said, through the bowels of the opposite mountain, and heedless of their Spanish birth and allegiance to carry fertility to the plains of France.

At the base of the pass lies the Spanish hospice of Venasque, a posada of the vilest description, but of course affording in its picturesque inmates objects of high interest to a painter's eye. From this point the great mass of the Maladetta is invisible, and three extraordinary cones situated below the glaciers appear to



crown it with a triple summit ; their figures being particularly striking from their regularity and extreme resemblance to each other. We rested awhile to drink a cup of wine and to refresh Mrs. O * * 's horse, and as the day was waning we then hurried on for Venasque. The path, like all Spanish mule-paths, was villanous, but it led us through such magnificent re-

gions of granite as claimed our admiration at every step, and could not for a moment be compared with the far inferior scenery on the French side of the pass: indeed I have uniformly found the Spanish mountains incomparably the finer; and let no traveller boast that he has seen the Pyrenees, or offer any opinion upon them, until he shall have traversed them on both sides of the frontier.

About mid-way between the hospice and our destination, we were much surprised by the appearance of a large isolated and Argus-like building, staring with innumerable windows, and of an aspect so imposing, that one might naturally have mistaken it for a palace, had it not been situated on a mountain's side of bare granite, remarkable for its high slope and desolate character. This building we learnt, instead of being the residence of any haughty Don, was the *Etablissement* of the Sulphurous Baths of Venasque.

Near Venasque Algaro pointed out to us the gorge that ran upwards to the Port d'Oo, one of the highest passes, by which we had intended to have proceeded from Luchon to Venasque, until we were told that it would not be possible for Mrs. O * * to accompany us. Algaro also pointed aloft to a stream that appeared issuing from the face of a precipice at the summit of a mountain, which as he informed us was uninfluenced by any change of weather, and equally abundant both in the summer and winter. After descending in a rapid walk of three hours from the hospice through a succession of stupendous scenes, we entered the village of our

destination at the close of day and proceeded at once to the fonda; the women of the place calling to each other as we passed through the muddy lanes to look at the Parisian señora, who I need not say was the lady of our party*.

When contrasted with the posadas to which we had hitherto been accustomed, the appearance of the hotel struck us as something quite magnificent, but the demand they made upon our purse was so extravagant that we determined to try another fonda, or posada as it might have been; we however met with no better success. Its proprietors as Algaro declared were "*gens riches*," and did not care to trouble themselves without an extravagant remuneration; so we discontentedly returned to the former, where we at least had reason to expect some comforts for our money. In all these Spanish fondas, or posadas, there is a peculiarity of proceeding that is far from agreeable to the hungry traveller: invariably does the hostess, without bestowing a thought upon your supper, instantly proceed to the preparation of your bed. Upon the present occasion the whole array of the household immediately on our arrival were busied in opening the doors of the different sleeping rooms, in carrying linen to and fro, and arranging on the spacious beds the magnificent coverlids of the most brilliant satin, variously coloured and edged by richly flowered borders, which imparted to the rooms an air of Moorish magni-

* To the Hospice de Luchon $2\frac{1}{4}$ hours; to the silver mine 20 minutes; to the port 2 hours; to the Hospice de Venasque 1 hour; to Venasque 3 hours.

ficence quite in character with the romance of the country: amid all these preparations the kitchen hearth was apparently forgotten, and a delay of more than two hours ensued before there was any possibility of satisfying our excessive appetites. In the midst of our repast, accompanied as you may well suppose with the usual indications of hilarity, our voices were on a sudden hushed and our gastronomic operations suspended by a chant of such extraordinary wildness and beauty, that as it floated on the still air of night completely riveted our attention; it was evidently sung by a party of Spanish women who were passing through the street, since the cadences of the chorus became less and less distinct and shortly died away in the distance. "What a memento of Spain would that wild air be, could we carry it to England!" was our simultaneous exclamation; we unfortunately, however, never had the good luck to hear it more.

The town of Venasque, which is as gloomy and dirty as any other Spanish town of our acquaintance, is situated in a basin formed by the receding ridges, and according to our guide at the distance of a four hours' walk from Saragossa. The mountains in the neighbourhood are excessively rugged and lofty, and some way to the east of it rises a cone which will remind the visitor to the Vallée d'Aure of the striking Pic d'Azet. To the north of the town stands a fortress of some extent—a picturesque object, although I should fancy from its being commanded on all sides by the neighbouring heights, no very secure position for a besieged garrison;

indeed John Algaro confirmed this opinion, for according to his account he was one in a French force stationed there during the Peninsular War when the fortress was bombarded and captured by the Spaniards; his eye gleamed with intelligence and expression as he gazed upon it and recounted the history of the event; "but," exclaimed he, "they did not succeed in keeping me long as a prisoner, for in less than two hours I made my escape; and," he added, as he pointed to the wild rocks in the direction of the frontier, "yonder I ran—and with very light feet, I can tell you."

The following morning we started at ten o'clock on our day's journey to Vitalles, turning our faces towards the east and entering a region that had probably never been traversed by any former tourist. John Algaro laid upon us a most peremptory injunction before we quitted the town that we should not stray from each other, but keep as closely as possible together, and that when we reached Vitalles, which we were not likely to do before night-fall, we should be particularly careful to avoid communicating to any one the route we intended to follow on the morrow. Our day's journey consisted of one gigantic ascent and descent, the Port de Castanéze forming its highest point, and having passed through a miserable village called Sarli, where Algaro pointed out in our rear the Port de Sohun which crossed the mountains in the opposite direction to Plan, we entered a wild and gloomy region through which lay our route. Having advanced a little further, on our left arose the mountain of Castanéze, famous for its botanical riches,

and for a view of Castile which it commands from its crest; and on our right was the cone-shaped mountain I have before mentioned, and from which according to Algaro the *isards* were peering down upon us.

In this part of the road the injunctions of our guide were not very strictly observed; O** was about half a mile ahead of the party, having pressed forward in order to draw the view from the *port*, while I was about as far in the rear, employed in excavating a fine calcareous crystal from its bed of rock; and before we approached the *port* we were both in advance of the others, although separated by a long interval from each other, and we afterwards learnt that old John was in a perfect fever lest we should be attacked singly and mastered by some Spanish shepherds whom he had observed on the summit of the ridge; they, however, seemed harmless enough, although as wild as savages in appearance, with fleecy sheepskins flung over their shoulders; John Algaro, however, abused us in no measured terms upon joining us, declaring that these Spaniards were cut-throats whom cowardice alone had prevented from attacking us.

The view from the Port de Castanéze is peculiarly dreary; not a shrub or tree of any kind relieves the vast expanse of green or rocky mountains, whose grim chasms and falls of black earth might be imagined the abode of evil genii; and as we looked around I am sure we should not have felt surprised had we, like Aladdin in the Arabian tale, discovered some mystical entrance to conduct us to a store of mineral treasures. *Apropos* to our encountering such fierce-looking shepherds on this

dreary spot, I must tell you that there is placed within the *port* a rude cross surrounded by a few scattered stones, that marks the last resting-place of an unfortunate Frenchman who was treacherously murdered here two years ago.



By Algaro's account this victim of Spanish rapacity was a man of great muscular power, and had been receiving the sum of eight hundred francs at the town of Venasque; on ascending the mountain he was overtaken by two Spaniards who had followed him from the village, and proposed to bear him company, and having arrived at the *port*, they sat down for the alleged purpose of refreshing themselves with wine; scarcely, however, had

the Frenchman raised the skin to his lips when one of the miscreants felled him to the earth by a blow on the head, and the other falling immediately upon him with his knife soon completed the bloody work, and after robbing his person, they made off with their booty. Upon hearing this story, we could not but look round with additional horror at the rocks that had been the silent witnesses of this tragedy.

After a long descent over grassy mountains covered with the *Colchicum Autumnale*, we turned southward into a winding defile that presented a succession of the most romantic scenery, where the path was continually falling and rising and had the regularity of a garden walk, passing between lofty hedges of box, interspersed with the exquisite mountain-ash, and winding around the angles of the defile, where we occasionally observed rude shrines of stone, within which were placed images of apparently very great antiquity: but here a serious calamity that we had long anticipated seemed likely to befall us; the mare of Mrs. O * *, which had already given signs of distress, was evidently unable to proceed much further, although old Algaro had, as was his custom, supported her down all the hills by holding her back by the tail, while he had abandoned his other practice of assisting his own person up the hills by the same expedient. We were, however, luckily not far distant from the village of Castanéze, in which it was probable we might procure some provender, and as the defile opened out we turned eastward, and the sun which

was now setting displayed a most glorious prospect ; but I have so often tried your patience with description, and it is so extremely difficult to give individuality to a scene composed of the general elements of mountain wood and water, that I shall only observe, if accident should ever direct the traveller to this spot, I am sure he will agree with me that the view is well worthy the pencil of a Claude.

We were shortly at Castanéze, but unfortunately could obtain little refreshment for Algaro's exhausted mare, and in the course of half an hour we were again *en route* for Vitalles, the whole party going on foot and carrying the various articles that had before been strapped upon the horse, the animal being so thoroughly dead-beat as to be scarcely able to move forward when thus relieved from its burden ; old Algaro all this time venting his bitterest imprecations upon the poverty of Spain, which was not even able to afford corn for his horse. We had now an addition to our party in a young Spanish woman who was going to Vitalles : she was arrayed in the Catalonian head-dress, which consisted of a white kerchief fancifully thrown over the head and beautifully worked, which together with a black boddice, gaily-coloured skirt, and brilliant neckerchief, forms a costume that is highly picturesque. To this interesting Catalonian we were not a little indebted for ultimately reaching Vitalles, for John had evidently forgotten the road. In the glorious light of a full moon, after various scrambles we passed over an old picturesque bridge, and at the

same moment entered the province of Catalonia and the village of Vitalles*.

A Frenchman at Luchon had kindly furnished us on starting with a note to some persons in this place, and we at once proceeded to introduce ourselves, and after ascending as usual through the most dirty lanes we stood in a few minutes before the house: it was larger than any we had passed in the village, and on its front were several elaborately carved balconies. After a summons by Algaro a woman appeared who received our credentials, and passing through a stable and stumbling up some narrow and dark stairs we entered the kitchen, and judging from the earnest and astonished gaze of its inmates, I fancy our arrival must have produced no small sensation. One person, however, there was amongst them who was far too busily occupied to be thus interrupted; our first impression was that he was taking a draught of oil, since the household vessel for wine, formed of green glass, is furnished with a long spout with an orifice not much larger than a pin-hole, and this strange decanter did the Spaniard hold at some little distance from his mouth so as to receive a jet of the liquor without ever allowing the vessel to touch his lips: to drink from it, however, required no little address, and we suspect that the stranger who should venture to attempt it would most certainly receive the stream in his bosom.

* We walked at an easy rate from Venasque to the Port de Castanéze in three hours; from the *port* to the village of Castanéze in four hours; from Castanéze to Vitalles in two hours and a half.

Here we fared badly enough, although as far as the people of the house were concerned there was no lack of hospitality; the sleeping arrangements were of course their first care; they had but one room to give us, but as the beds stood in recesses, by drawing the curtains before them the chamber might be converted into separate dormitories. The culinary operations, however, did not admit of so satisfactory an accommodation: we were informed by Algaro that Spanish pride would not allow them either to cook for or to wait upon us: "all that you can expect from their hospitality," said he, "is to be furnished with the necessary materials." He accordingly at once set himself to work by preparing some scraps of mutton, and the rest of our party having with the permission of our hostess made an incursion upon her store-room, fortunately discovered a most promising fitch of bacon, from which, under the superintendence of Mrs. O * *, were cut several savoury slices. The fireplace from its size and appearance resembled a room; it opened into the kitchen, and was of intense but glittering blackness all around, its upper part being convex and terminating in an aperture to allow the escape of the smoke, while blazing faggots were piled on the centre of the floor, and were surrounded by a rude bench. Mrs. O * * kindly prepared the first supply of eggs and bacon, while I having studied her mode of proceeding, very creditably, as I was told, accomplished the second; but not only did the duties of cook, but those of waiter devolve upon us.

The important services of Mrs. O * * upon this

occasion were most acceptable, and were proffered with a cheerfulness that greatly enhanced their value: like the shepherd's wife in the 'Winter's Tale,'—

“ This day, she was both pantler, butler, cook ;
Both dame and servant.”

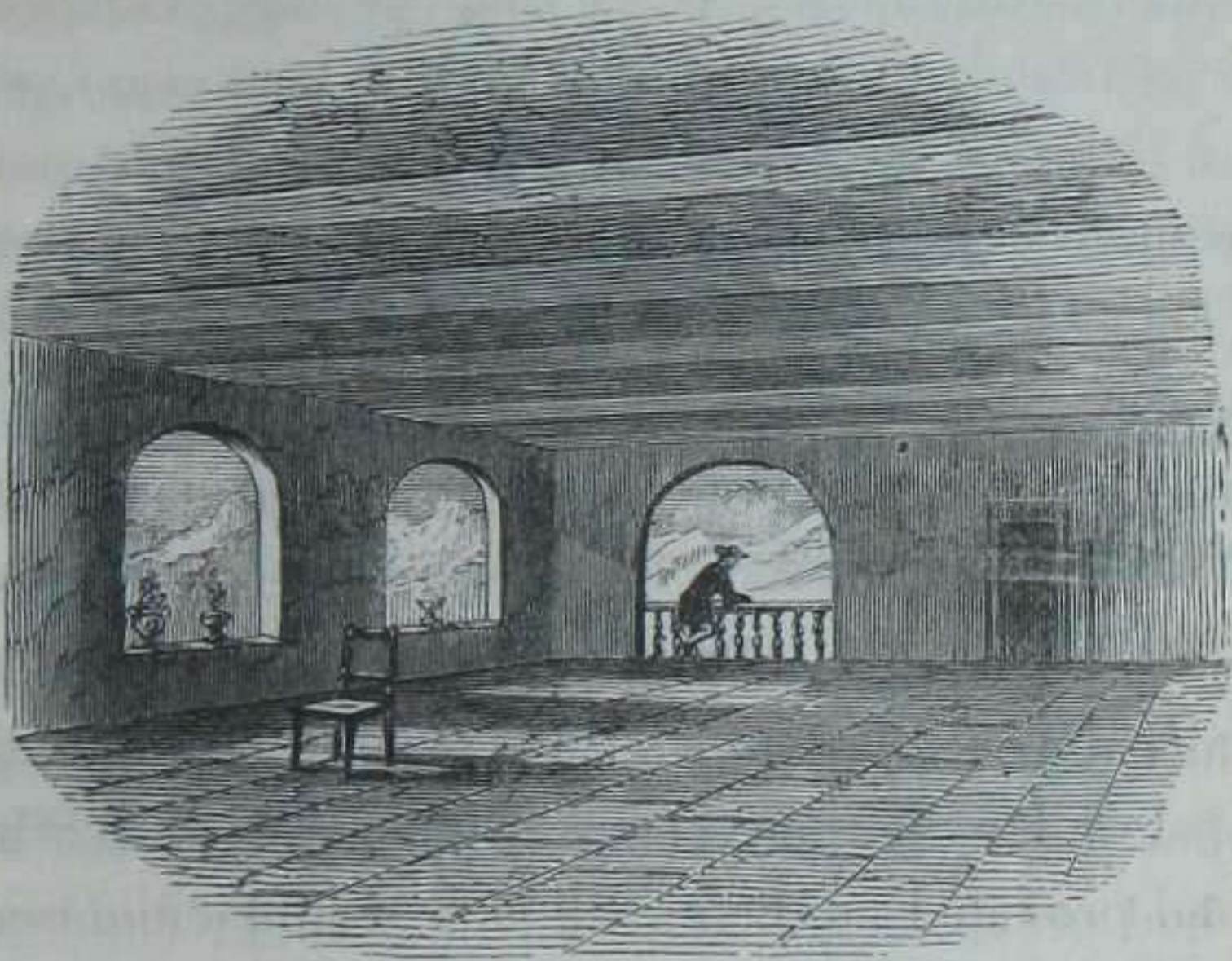
The next difficulty that our party experienced was the want of knives, which the traveller will generally experience in mountain posadas; our hostess, however, at length provided us with one that was long and clasp-handled, such as the Spaniards carry for the double purpose of cutting their food and of stabbing those who may provoke their anger, and as I also carried with me a pocket knife, we managed tolerably well, and although heartily tired, it was not without expressions of satisfaction that we completed our humble meal, and drank from the uncouthly-shaped vessels of these wild people.

As we had entered this village by the light of the moon, the different objects were almost defined with the distinctness of daylight, and it appeared to us as one of the most picturesque places we had seen in Spain, which I think all travellers will agree with me is bestowing upon it no mean commendation. In the midst of a valley, and upon a small conical hill, is situated Vitalles, and by a tumble-down bridge over a broad but rapid torrent did we make our entrance to it; and so struck were we with its appearance, that we declared after supper we would return to the bridge for the purpose of making some sketches by moonlight. I and my companion O * *, however, preferred, after the rest of the party had

retired, to adjourn to one of the fretted balconies that we might fully enjoy the rare beauty of the night. The scene much reminded us of that we had witnessed at Biescas; the moon, as on that former occasion, was at the full, and she poured down a flood of light upon the mountains and upon a sparkling stream that ran through the long valley before us, whilst on either side stood the strange old houses of a Spanish town.

As we leant forward over the balustrade enjoying the balmy air, there stole upon the stillness of the night a faint sound of music, at first scarcely more perceptible than the murmur of the breeze, but at each moment becoming more distinct: we at length beheld three men who passed below our balcony, walking abreast and keeping step to the music, which was of peculiar softness, and proceeded from a guitar, a tambourin, and a triangle: the music died away as their figures receded, and in a short time the night air was as before undisturbed by the slightest sound; scarcely, however, had we concluded our expressions of surprise and delight at the wild notes that were in such unison with the tranquil scene, before the music again became audible, and the tread of the three Spaniards was again heard, when having passed once more below they disappeared as in the former instance. On the following morning we learnt that the daughter of our hostess was shortly to be married, and that she had been serenaded by her lover on the previous night. Adjoining our bed-chamber was a room open to the air, which with its arches and balustrades had somewhat of an Italian aspect,

whence the moon-lit scene was viewed to great advantage.



It was considerably past one before we could determine to close our eyes upon a night the memory of which must ever be linked with romantic associations.

LETTER XIX.

A spot infamous for murder and robbery.—Devastated region.—The wilds of the Maladetta.—The guide knocked up.—Hospice of Viella.—Catalonian shepherds.—The Port de Viella.—Algaro's mare.—The fair at Viella.—Crowded posada.—Mules.—The Valley of Joueou.—The Œil de Garonne.—Footprints of a bear.—A dish of Spanish frogs.

Bagnères de Luchon, Sept. 21st, 1842.

AT half-past six the following day, after remunerating our hostess for the mere cost of the articles with which she had provided us, being all she would condescend to accept, we once more started on our journey, and directing our steps northwards ascended towards the Hospice and Port of Viella. We were now in the dreaded Catalonia, and Algaro strictly cautioned us to keep together; the valley through which the path wound was chiefly remarkable for the great extent of its torrent-bed and for the barren appearance of its mountains, which successively grew bolder. At one spot O * * and myself were so struck by its wild character that we were induced to rest behind for a few moments, but on re-joining Algaro, he observed in accents of terror, that the place at which we had loitered was never passed by a Spaniard without shuddering, as it was particularly infamous for robbery and murder, from the convenient lurking-place afforded by the neighbouring rocks and its remoteness from any village. Further on we came to a scene of very extraordinary ruin; about five years

before, there had occurred one of those fearful storms that occasionally visit the Spanish Pyrenees; on each side of the valley appeared a horrid and desolate expanse, and for more than half a mile in breadth might be seen the bed of the destructive inundation, which on crossing we found to be covered with enormous masses of rock that had "ridden the ridgy wave," and to be broken by chasms, clearly pointing out the direction of the eddies which this mountain ocean had produced: in the language of Algaro, "it must have been like the end of the world," and it would be difficult to imagine the roar of such a flood, ripping open the mountains and rolling their huge fragments before it with the might of an avenging spirit.

Anatou was the last village on our road, and shortly after passing an old tower on a neighbouring eminence, the valley assumed a grand and savage aspect, well according with the neighbourhood of the Maladetta. Most of our party were now so much fatigued, and especially our guide, that we determined to relinquish our attempt to reach Viella that day, and to sleep at the hospice at the foot of the pass, which was still far distant; nor did we afterwards repent our determination, for that solitary building is situated in the granite zone of the Pyrenees and amid stupendous scenes. We slowly passed beneath mountains which had been the scene of Algaro's hunting exploits, one of which, by-the-by, he declared he had seen covered with bears as numerous as a flock of sheep, and through a region that is still the most famous in the Pyrenees for bears and *isards*, as well as

for a more valued species of game, for in the wilds of the Maladetta is to be found a colossal race of *chamois*, and we looked along the fractured precipices which the opening gorges revealed with no ordinary interest, upon being assured by John Algaro that they were the *endroit* of the *bouctien*. According to his own account, he had seen four of them when he had mounted to the glaciers of the Maladetta; they were as large as mules, and trotted grandly past him, apparently unconscious that any human being was in their neighbourhood.

At three o'clock we reached the hospice; its approach afforded grand rock and forest scenery, while the valley presented the appearance of a park with its stately woods of beech and flowery meads. This sequestered building lies beneath the great ridge of the Pyrenees, which does not here divide the two countries, as Catalonia stretches northward and overleaps the barrier that Nature has reared between France and Spain: I cannot give a better idea of its scenery than by stating, that in savage magnificence it fully equals the neighbourhood of the Baths of Panticosa, and that nothing, as far as I know, can be compared with it on the French side of the mountains. It was with difficulty that Algaro, as he afterwards confessed, contrived to reach this hospice, and indeed we were all considerably tired, since we had been walking for three successive days on exceedingly short commons*; we were never-

* The walk from Vitalles to the hospice might be accomplished in four hours, from the hospice to the Port of Viella in one hour and a half, and from the *port* to the town of Viella in two hours and a half.

theless alive to the sight of some Spaniards sleeping on the ground near the entrance; their *mantos* were stretched upon the floor, on which they lay with their faces to the ground, and having just returned from the fair of Viella, their new *gorás*, or long caps, were of a brilliant scarlet, whilst the rest of their costume was of equally bright colouring. We fared at this place tolerably well, and soon recovered sufficient strength for a stroll in the neighbourhood, for the purpose of watching the gathering of a storm amid lonely pine forests and gigantic rocks; and fearfully did the thunder roar and the wild lightning blaze during that night; but being seated in a chamber as black, but of larger dimensions, than that of Vitalles, listlessly watching the fire that was consuming the end of an enormous pine-trunk that lay its whole length along the floor, we little heeded their terrors.

The next morning we left the hospice by eleven for Viella, and immediately climbed towards the *port* of the same name, a pass which I rank in point of austere scenery with those of Venasque and the Marcadau: its tremendous precipices and great elevation (it being 8322 feet above the level of the sea) must render it a terrible passage in the winter. We here saw two Catalonian shepherds, a part of whose costume was entirely new to us; like the muleteers they wore the scarlet *gorá*, a jacket, and an enormous shawl, but instead of breeches they were provided with a scanty covering of linen of extraordinary fullness, but not reaching the knee—a dress that I should imagine to be anything but com-

fortable upon these chilly heights. Clouds gathered together and snow fell upon us as we approached the *port*, so as to conceal an enormous glacier of the Maladetta that is thence visible; we were, however, gratified by beholding in the dim distance the plains of Spain; this was the first time we had looked upon them, and you may imagine their hazy expanse was not a little calculated to attract an ardent gaze, associated as they are with such strange and romantic histories.

In spite of the freezing atmosphere we stood for some considerable time in the *port*, in the expectation that the mists would clear from the Maladetta, as they occasionally were lifted up and displayed a mass of ice and snow that was perfectly startling. John Algaro amused us during this interval by relating sundry anecdotes, and affording various points of information respecting the mountains; amongst other things, he told us that on the Port de Cambiéle, which is the highest *port* in the Pyrenees (with the exception of the Port d'Oo) that can be traversed by horses, the animals are obliged to have their feet protected by leathern socks to enable them to cross the ice in safety. This led to an anecdote of his own little mare, which was peculiarly appropriate to the spot on which we stood: two years previously he had been over the present pass in company with a Spaniard, and having arrived upon the summit, upon which we were then standing, they detected some *isards* in the neighbourhood, and having left the horse, proceeded after them: on his return to the *port*, John Algaro found that his mare had disappeared, but on searching about

he descried her on the summit above, which consists of a succession of dismal crags and precipices; thither had she climbed, as he said, to look after him, but he never expected her to descend alive; she did so, however, upon recognising her master. As we looked up at the mighty mass above us, we acknowledged that it must have been a most extraordinary feat.

On our way down to Viella we saw the whitened bones of several mules that had fallen a prey to the bears, and a spring was pointed out by our guide which he called the *Fuente frio*, a draught from which, he said, would prove fatal. Our descent was long and steep, but we at length reached the Vallée d'Aran, and entered the place of our destination in time to see something of the fair,—a sight that could not fail to be highly interesting in such a country as Spain. The little Plaza was of course filled with Catalonians in their gayest attire; the *gorá* was of the most brilliant scarlet, the becoming bodice of the newest material, and the dark hair of the damsels was adorned with ribands of black velvet, while *mantos* of the brightest colours gave a rich variety to the scene. The most abundant commodities of the fair seemed to be garlic and *alpargátas*; and to such an extent was the supply, that I think the former might have served a whole generation—even of Spaniards, whilst the latter might have soled the feet of an army of mountaineers. However, upon entering the portico, beneath which the stalls had been erected, we found a great variety of merchandise, such as chocolate, burnt nuts, silk kerchiefs of the most dazzling colours,

rich *mantos*, and a hundred other articles of food or attire, whilst the usual tricks of a fair were in active operation.

You cannot conceive how novel the whole scene was to us; for in addition to the picturesque effect of the crowd diversified by its numerous tints, there were the sparkling eyes and glossy hair of the women, and the fine proportions of the men for our admiration. It was lucky that Algaro had on the previous day sent notice of our advent by a muleteer; for, with the exception of two excellent rooms that had been reserved for us, the posada was crowded to suffocation; and upon sallying out at night in order to see what was going on, we were nearly precipitated over a crowd of Spaniards, who were not only sleeping in every nook and corner, but were actually lying about on the staircase. We found the town as quiet and deserted as the glistening mountains around, which were shining beneath the moon in a garment of fresh-fallen snow, and shivering we returned over the bodies of the unconscious sleepers to the comfort of our blazing fire.

On the following morning our attention was particularly attracted by the mules which stood in the yard of the posada; for their trappings were most gorgeous, their heads being literally concealed in scarlet worsted-work, and a long horn-shaped ornament of the same material rose up from each of their foreheads. The mules as well as their drivers are always most picturesque objects in the Spanish mountains, their backs being covered with a cloth with a long scarlet fringe, which

by swinging to and fro, serves to brush the flies from their bellies, whilst the animals themselves are many of them equal in size to our finest carriage-horses in England; the trappings, moreover, of these mules at Viella, dressed as they were in their gayest attire for the fair, were far more superb than any we had before witnessed.

By half-past eight we started on our return to Bagnères de Luchon, and passing along the Vallée d'Aran, which claims no particular notice, except for its numerous villages, and through the Forêt de Barracoude, we found ourselves about midday at the mouth of the fair Valley of Joueou, looking up its long vista of beech forests at the heights, upon which the coming winter had already "shaken forth its waste of snows," and at the distant ridge of the Maladetta, which, topping the less elevated range in front, terminates the view. Near the head of this valley do those mysterious waters which we had formerly seen diving into the Trou de Toro reappear, and the place of their second birth is termed the Source of the Garonne, or the Eye of the Garonne, *L'Œil de Garonne*; and as this was one of the principal objects of our Spanish excursion, we left the path to Luchon and ascended the valley.

It runs upwards to the Port de Picade, which gives a passage to Venasque, and is in close neighbourhood with the *port* of that name. Towards the head of the valley we found the Hospice d'Artiga de Lin, as it is called, the yard of which is protected from the bears by a high wall, and upon ascertaining that we could procure ac-

commodation for the night, we determined to devote the day to the exquisite scenery in the neighbourhood.

A Frenchman at Luchon had told us he considered this valley as the most beautiful he had ever witnessed; and we now learnt that an artist had been lately residing here for the sole purpose of executing his pictorial designs: this I mention in order that you may imagine the character of the valley without exhausting your patience with any further description. Leaving the hospice, we ascended through lofty beech-woods, and presently effected a very hazardous passage over the mossy rocks of the torrent, when we entered a dense wilderness of innumerable varieties of tree and shrub, and passing for some considerable distance through this jungle, knee-deep with decayed vegetation, we at length stood before the *Œil de Garonne*.

This is altogether a most singular sight: from a steep and tangled wilderness of wood, and from a heap of rocks and fallen trees, comes an invading torrent of great size, though it is difficult to fix upon the exact spot from which the different portions proceed; for it would rather appear to distil from innumerable pores than to gush from any distinct cavity. According to general belief, they are the same waters that leap from the glaciers of the Maladetta into the Trou de Toro, and pursue thence a subterraneous course of five or six miles; and were we to judge from the size and direction of the stream, and the calcareous nature of the mountains through which they are said to flow, this account is by no means improbable. We looked with considerable

interest at this tumultuous spirit, that in its pride of birth disdains the ordinary habits of its fellow-streams, and commands the mountains to open and yield a free passage to its will.

Around this spot, amid the rank vegetation and underwood, flourish the mountain strawberry, the raspberry, and the various species of the currant, which, with the exception of the strawberry, were as large and finely-flavoured as any I have ever tasted in an English garden, and upon which we made an excellent luncheon; we then ascended through the woods towards the Artiga de Pomairo, a mountain-basin beneath the summit of that name.

In the midst of the wood, Algaro, who was ahead of us, suddenly stopped, and stooping low observed in the middle of the path we were pursuing the clear impression of a gigantic paw, and near it we soon discovered the mark of another much smaller: it was clear therefore that a she-bear and her cub had passed there within the last half-hour, and he expressed his opinion that she must be a "*grand bête*," as he had never before seen so large a foot-print; upon examining it I found I was just enabled to span it with my hand.

The Artiga de Pomairo, as I have said, is a green hollow: it is begirt with a belt of forest, and immediately to the south of it rise the snowy heights of the Pic Blanc, Pomairo, and Negro or "Black Mountain," from the latter of which flows the stream of that name. A herd of mules were feeding on the grass of the basin, and Algaro declared that the bear and her cub must be somewhere

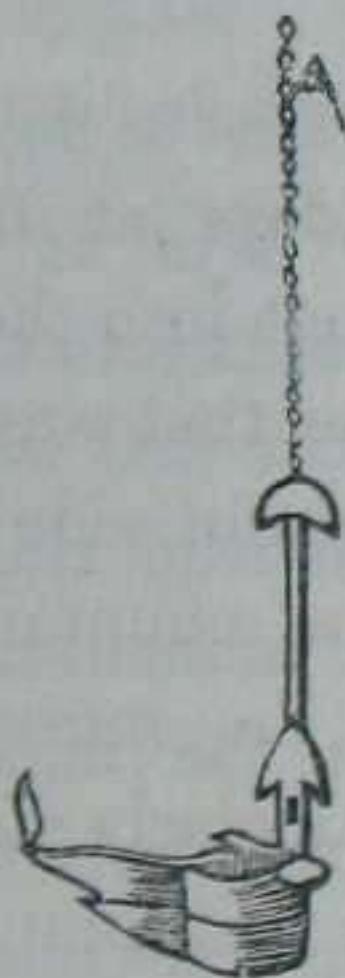
in the belt of wood preparing themselves for a meal. So grandly did the heights ascend above us that we determined to scale them, and to pass, if time permitted us to do so, round the back of the Pomairo, and descend into the other end of the basin; in which course, according to our guide, we should see two mountain lakes with most savage scenery, and most probably encounter some *isards*. Accordingly, leaving Mrs. O * * and Algaro fishing under the stones of the clear torrent for frogs of a large size, which we proposed should furnish us with a dish at supper, we started on the excursion. We were, however, disappointed in our objects, for scarcely had we climbed for half an hour before we were met by a determined rain in the midst of a nut-wood, so after filling our pockets with the fruit we were compelled to retreat.

I think I never passed through so rich and varied a wilderness as I did on returning to the hospice; for on scrambling towards the path we met with a thousand different trees, many of which were exceedingly beautiful and to me quite novel, and I only lament I am unable to furnish you with their names. At supper-time our curiosity was much raised by the important preparations that old Algaro had made for cooking his dish of frogs; it was his gastronomic opinion that every part of the reptile was eatable; we all found the legs far from disagreeable, although so rich that one pair was quite sufficient for most of the party, but as for the other *morceaux piquants*, which loomed from the brown sauce like scraps from a museum, we left them for our

scientific John Algaro ; though, as he declared the next morning, the heads had been almost too good for him, that he had eaten too many, and would trouble us for our brandy flask.

It was with great reluctance we left this valley, and passing through Las Bordès, the ancient Castel-Leon and capital of Aran, we crossed the wooded heights by the Port de Portillon and reached Bagnères de Luchon in good time for the *table d'hôte*.

I have sent you a sketch of the common lamp of the posada, which I have frequently mentioned.



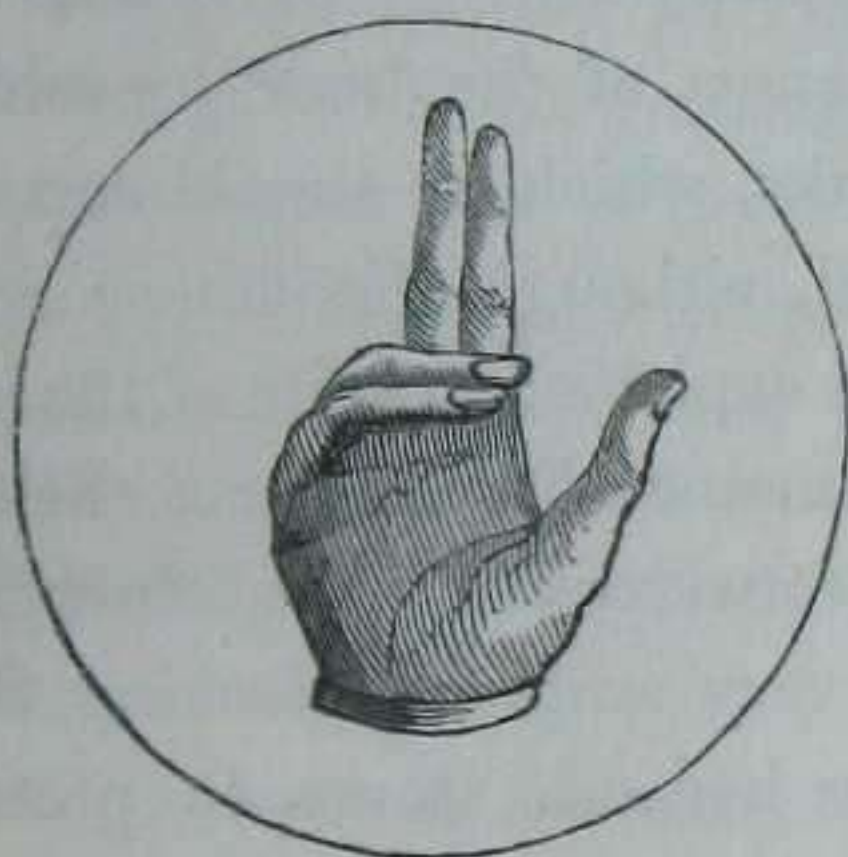
LETTER XX.

The Lac Séculéjo.—Its Cascade.—The wilds and lakes above.—The Mineral Springs and Baths of the Pyrenees.—Pass the mountains to Arreau by the Port de Pierrefitte.—Concluding adventure in the Pyrenees.—Leave Grip for Bagnères de Bigorre.—Extraordinary series of echoes.—Opposed by a wall of snow.—Arrival at Bagnères de Bigorre.—Conclusion.

Bagnères de Bigorre, September 28th, 1842.

I RESTED some few days at Bagnères de Luchon, making several excursions into the neighbourhood, and witnessing the cattle fair that was held there. On one occasion I had a delightful ride to St. Beat and the Pont du Roi through a mountain district of peculiar beauty, abounding in the mossy ruins of Templar shrines. We were particularly struck with one, standing among embowering trees and roofed by the woven *Clematis*: we made our way into its interior with some difficulty, where we found several grotesque paintings, and a few images encircled by garlands of fresh flowers, showing that this venerable fane, although a neglected ruin, had still the respect of the neighbouring peasantry. Over the old door-way, besides the usual arms, was a sculptured hand having its fingers bent in a position that we in vain attempted to imitate, the third

and fourth fingers being laid over the two first at right angles to them: whether it was a sign of free masonry by which the Templars might recognise each other, I must leave those to determine who have made a study of their history.



I also visited the far-famed Lac Séculéjo, to which we walked in about three hours. It is entirely different from the Lac de Gaube, being a fine piece of water surrounded by immense mountains that rise precipitously from it, and into which tumbles a magnificent cascade from a height of more than a thousand feet; but on so gigantic a scale is every surrounding object, that it required some little time to make us fully conscious of the dimensions of the lake and the enormous volume of the rushing torrent. The waters of the Séculéjo form the lowest of a string of lakes, of which the most elevated, called the Lac Glacé, is always frozen, and is situated near the Port d'Oo, one of the most lofty passes in the Pyrenees. We climbed the mountain to the second lake called Espingo, which occupied little more than an

hour, and the wild scene that I there witnessed will claim an interesting place in my Pyrenean reminiscences. The whole region was covered with snow, which taken up by the wind eddied to and fro and rolled like mists from above, clearly showing the intensity of the frost that thus separated its particles. We much regretted the lateness of the hour prevented our ascent to the frozen lake, which we should certainly otherwise have attempted, although the season was far too advanced for such exploits ; in spite of the icy atmosphere, however, we remained here under a sheltering mass of granite some considerable time, observing the movements of two very suspicious-looking Spaniards, who were crouching beneath stones to protect themselves from the wind, but ever and anon looking up over the vast expanse of snows : we afterwards learnt they were expecting a *contrabandista* with salt by the Port d'Oo. Descending towards the level of Séculéjo, the noise of the waterfall is very striking, and resembles a rattling discharge of musketry.

After this excursion to the lake we remained a day or two at Luchon devising plans for a tour through the Hautes Pyrénées, by which we might be enabled to fill up omissions and entitle ourselves to be considered as tolerably acquainted with this magnificent mountain region ; but unfortunately the weather was so bad and the snows assembled in such force that we were obliged to abandon all hope of accomplishing the design, and I accordingly started on my return to Bagnères de Bigorre on the 25th of September, accompanied by my friend,

since we were both desirous of deferring as long as possible the day of separation—but before quitting the Pyrenees, I ought perhaps to tell you something about the mineral springs and baths which have given celebrity to Eaux Bonnes and Eaux Chaudes, Cauterets, St. Sauveur, Baréges, Bagnères de Bigorre, and Bagnères de Luchon; but as I neither possess medical knowledge, nor have any experience as to their value, and as the mere analysis of their composition is a sad stupid affair, you must be satisfied with a few general remarks.

In the first place they are all what are termed *thermal*, varying, however, in temperature from about 68° to 122° of Fahrenheit. The hottest, I believe, are those of Cauterets and Baréges, the former being much more copious, and having the advantage of a less exposed situation and a milder climate. The characteristic ingredient in all these waters is *sulphuretted hydrogen*, although at Bagnères de Bigorre, where there are no less than seventy baths, and numerous warm springs, there are several which are simply saline, with small quantities of iron. The proportions of sulphurous matter also vary in different places, the waters of Cauterets and Baréges are strongly impregnated, and at Bagnères de Luchon, the walls of the grottoes from whence the springs arise are encrusted with sublimed sulphur. The waters of St. Sauveur are similar to those of Baréges but less concentrated. It is a spring termed the *Cæsar* at Cauterets that supplies all France with the water exported in bottles, each being sold at 25 cents. I was informed

that the Bath of La Raillière in this place was rented at 7000 francs : here also is the shower-bath of *Pré*, which is considered the most energetic in the Pyrenees.

The diseases in which these waters are considered to be particularly beneficial, from their temperature and sulphurous nature, are said to be cutaneous diseases, rheumatism and paralysis. By-the-by, I was struck by a circumstance at Panticosa which I am quite unable to explain ; the water, as I have stated, is highly sulphurous, but it contains some ingredient so fascinating to flies, that hundreds may be seen about it, or drowned in their attempts to drink it. Need I add, that in all these places of resort will be found every convenience that the most fastidious invalid can desire ? if potation be his object, he may, *pleno cratere*, enjoy his fill ; and he may, should it so please him, take his siesta under the soothing drippings of a watering-pot, or the more animating stream of a pump ; or he may be steamed, stewed, sweated, or parboiled, according to order ; and when thoroughly cleansed and washed, he may hang himself out to dry in the finest mountain air in the world.

Leaving Luchon we crossed to Arreau by the Port de Pierrefitte, a pass that is infinitely finer and higher than that of Peyre Sourde. The principal event of our day's journey, which occupied us six hours, was having been overtaken by night at a considerable distance from Arreau, when overshadowed by impending mountains ; and indeed it became so dark that we were obliged to walk for about two miles through a stream that flowed down

the middle of the path, as being the least hazardous route.

From Arreau we crossed to Grip by the Hourquette d'Arreau, and on that day the mountain mists conspired to give us one more adventure. O * * had traversed this road on a former occasion, and thinking he knew it, volunteered to act as guide. The morning was cloudy and threatening, but we reached the cleft of the Hourquette without any accident, although we considered the loss of the superb view no slight misfortune; we had not, however, passed it far, before the clouds rolled lower and lower and involved the pine-forest through which we journeyed in rain and obscurity; once or twice did we shelter ourselves, but as the day was growing late we at length determined upon braving the storm, and as a wild moorland was now to be traversed with the wind and rain equally furious in our faces, you may well imagine we were soon wet to the skin, and in the course of an hour O * * admitted he was at fault and knew not which direction to pursue. Nothing was to be seen but huge green mountains, to the last degree cold and cheerless; after a short consultation, we, however, trudged along over the wet grass, where no track appeared to guide us, and had the gratification of finding a path as night descended, the rain still continuing unabated; but it shortly became excessively dark, and the promising road ended at a few chalets, and having furiously assailed the doors without receiving any answer, it was evident they were merely rude buildings for the sheep.

Our situation was now extremely uncomfortable, and we considered ourselves doomed to wander the night over this inhospitable waste; but after a little consideration it occurred to me that the ground on which we stood must be the crest of the ridge immediately above Grip, for I had detected the long even slope that forms so peculiar a feature in the scenery from that village; O * *, however, thought otherwise, but I stoutly maintained my opinion, and creeping cautiously along for a few hundred yards we stood on the edge of the ridge, whence we observed some lights glimmering in the subjacent valley. The descent to it, however, proved most difficult; for it was perfectly dark, and as we were ignorant of the locality, our position was not without hazard; indeed we discovered on the following morning that near the summit of the ridge we had unconsciously passed within a few feet of a precipice: moreover, in spite of every precaution we occasionally wandered into underwood from which it was no easy matter to extricate ourselves.

Shuffling cautiously down a sheep-path which was invisible, the stony character of the track enabling us to know when we deviated from it, we reached the valley in another half-hour, and made at once towards one of the glimmering beacons we had observed from above. "*Mon Dieu!*" exclaimed the highlander, when we raised the latch of his door and entered; "where have you dropped from?" "From the clouds," was the reply,—and that was the fact, as our dripping persons sufficiently testified; and upon our informing

him that we were unable to discover the way over the torrent to Grip, he very kindly lighted a lantern and walked with us to the foot-bridge that crossed it. For the next two hours we were stalking to and fro in Madame Noguet's best chamber arrayed in blankets, which, as they wrapped round our figures, bore some resemblance to the Roman *toga*, whilst our bare legs were in correspondence with the costume. Our comfortable hostess, however, made us soon forget the *desagrémens* of our night's adventure, and we started the next morning for Bagnères de Bigorre as well equipped as on the previous day.

A considerable fall of snow had taken place during the night, and the Tourmalet looked much improved in its wintry garment. The route we pursued to our destination was perfectly novel, and had been suggested by myself, viz. up the Vallée d'Arizas, across the ridge into the Vallée de l'Ardelos, and that of Esponne, and so on through the Vale of Campan.

Near the summit of the pass we discovered a remarkable succession of echoes: our cry was repeated several times from the Pic du Midi; then occurred an interval, which was followed by a similar series of repetitions from an opposite quarter, and in divers directions, and thus for several minutes did the chattering of this garrulous nymph continue to amuse us, whilst our wild cries brought down several *lavanges*, or falls of stones, from the neighbouring mountain. Having approached the crest of the ridge we found an unexpected obstacle in our path,—a snow-drift crowned the summit with an

impending wall some six feet in height: this we supposed had been the work of the previous night, as its dazzling surface and deep azure clefts were without the slightest stain; but beautiful as it was to look upon, we could have dispensed with the sight, for it occupied us at least half an hour to break it down and effect a passage. The vicinity of the Pic du Midi is peculiarly wild, and we descended into a valley that with its pine-forests, abrupt cliffs, and granite rocks, might have been supposed to be situated in the central range, and passing thence down the long Valley of Espoune, we reached Bagnères de Bigorre in time for me to arrange my departure for Toulouse on the morrow.

To you and the wild Pyrenees I shall together bid farewell, for I am now about to hasten to England as speedily as a French diligence can convey me, returning through France by Toulouse, the Garonne, Bordeaux, Nantes, and St. Malo; and I only trust that when I start tomorrow the heavens may be shrouded, for sorry shall I be to see these cherished mountains, among which I have wandered so long and so pleasantly, fading in the distance.

In conclusion, I give as a parting piece of advice to any traveller who may wish to become acquainted with their most magnificent scenery, that he should go in and out of the different *ports* that top the heights of the Hautes Pyrénées.

THE END.

