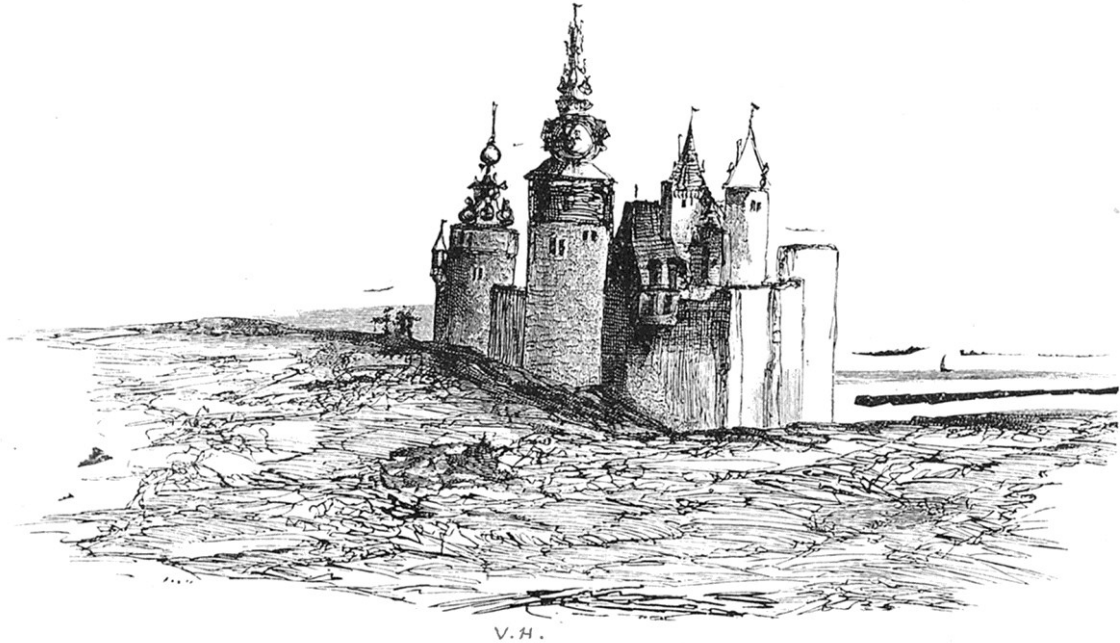


Victor Hugo

The Pyrenees (*En Voyage: Pyrénées, 1843*)



Victor Hugo (1894)

[*Paris Musées*](#)

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Part I: The Loire to San-Sebastián

Translator's Introduction

Victor-Marie Hugo (1802 –1885) novelist, poet, essayist, playwright, artist, and politician, became a leading light of the French Romantic literary movement, witnessed by the turbulent opening night of his play *Hernani* in 1830, which portrayed the Romantic hero as a figure in conflict with society, dedicated to love and driven by fate; and supported by the lengthy preface to his play *Cromwell*, which championed freer forms closer to Shakespearean drama, interweaving tragic, comic, and grotesque elements, rather than the rigid rules of previous French theatre. He later achieved wider fame with his poetry, and the novels *Notre-Dame de Paris* and *Les Misérables*.

With the Revolution of 1848, Hugo was elected a deputy for Paris in the Constituent Assembly and later in the Legislative Assembly, where he adopted a position increasingly critical of the ruling powers. When in December 1851 a coup d'état inaugurated the Second Empire under Napoleon III, Hugo, opposed to political absolutism and authoritarianism, left France for Brussels. A twenty-year exile, mostly spent in the Channel Islands, ensued; initially enforced then voluntary. The French defeat in the Franco-German War, and the proclamation of the Third Republic in 1871, brought Hugo back to Paris, where he was received as a living symbol of republicanism and a national hero.

On July 18, 1843, Hugo, then aged 41, began a summer trip. The high-on two-month journey took him from the Loire to the Île d'Oléron, off the west coast of France, passing through Spain and the Pyrenees. He penned this travel journal which he intended to publish, however, he received news of the tragic death of his daughter Leopoldine and her husband, on September 4th, who died when their boat capsized on the Seine. He ended his travels, and immediately returned to Paris. His account of his travels appeared, belatedly, in 1880, published by Pierre-Jules Hetzel (*pen-name P. J. Stahl*) and as a separate, posthumous, edition in 1890, as part of *En Voyages: Alpes et Pyrénées*.

This enhanced translation has been designed to offer maximum compatibility with current search engines. Among other modifications, the proper names of people and places, and the titles given to works of art, have been fully researched, modernised, and expanded; comments in parentheses have been added here and there to provide a reference, or clarify meaning; and minor typographic or factual errors, for example incorrect attributions and dates, in the original text, have been eliminated from this new translation.

The Pyrenees

Chapter I: The Loire – Bordeaux

Bordeaux, July 20th

You who never travel except in the mind, journeying from book to book, from thought to thought, but never from country to country; you who spend your summers in the shade of the same trees, and your winters by the same hearth, wish me, once I have left Paris, to inform you, I a vagabond, you a recluse, of everything I have done and everything I have seen. So be it. I obey.

What have I done since the day before yesterday, July 18th? Travelled three hundred and seventy miles as the crow flies, in thirty-six hours. What have I seen? I have seen Étampes, Orléans, Blois, Tours, Poitiers and Angoulême.

Do you seek more? A description? Do you wish to know more of these cities, in what aspect they appeared to me, what treasures of history, art, and poetry I gathered along the way, everything in short that I saw? So be it. Still, I obey.

Étampes was a large tower glimpsed on the right, in the twilight, above the roofs of a long street, where I heard the postilions saying: *‘Another rail disaster! Two coaches crushed, the passengers killed. An engine rammed the train from Étampes to Étréchy. At least it wasn’t us.’*

Orléans was a candle, on a round table, in a low room, where a pallid girl served one thin broth.

Blois was a bridge on the left with a Pompadour-style obelisk. The traveller suspected there might be houses on the right, perhaps a town.

Tours was another bridge, a large, wide street, and a clock reading nine in the morning.

Poitiers was a fatty soup, duck with turnips, eel-stew, roast-chicken, fried sole, green beans, salad, and strawberries.

Angoulême was a gas-light with a wall bearing this inscription: ‘Café de la Marine’, and to the left another wall adorned with a blue poster on which I read: ‘La Rue de la Lune, *vaudeville*’.

That is what France is like when you see it by mail-coach. What will it be like when one can see it by train?

I think I have already said this elsewhere: the Loire and Touraine have been over-praised. It is high time I set the record straight. The Seine is far more beautiful than the Loire; Normandy is a much more charming 'garden' than Touraine.

Wide, yellow water, flat river-banks, poplars everywhere, such is the Loire. Poplars are the only trees, which is stupid. They hide one's view of the Loire. Along the river, on the islands, at the edge of the levee, in the distance, one sees only poplars. To my mind, there is an intimate connection, an ineffable resemblance, between a landscape composed of poplars and a tragedy written in Alexandrines. The poplar is, like the Alexandrine, one of the classic forms of ennui.

It was raining, I had spent a sleepless night, I know not if that put me in a bad mood, but everything on the Loire seemed cold, sad, methodical, monotonous, staid, and solemn.

From time to time, one encounters convoys of five or six boats ascending or descending. Each boat has only the one mast with a square sail. The boat with the largest sail precedes the others, and guides them, and the convoy is arranged in such a way that the sails diminish in size from boat to boat, from first to last, in a kind of symmetrical decrescendo that nothing disturbs, and no whim deranges. One involuntarily recalls a caricature of the English family; it is like seeing the chromatic scale under full sail. I have only ever seen it on the Loire; and I much prefer, I confess, those Norman sloops and tide-chasers, fishing boats of all shapes and sizes, that fly like birds of prey, and whose yellow and red sails mingle in squalls, rain, and sun, between Quilleboeuf-sur-Seine and Tancarville.

The Spanish call the Manzanares the *Viscount of Rivers*; I propose calling the Loire the *Dowager of Rivers*. The Loire lacks, unlike the Seine or the Rhine, a host of pretty towns and beautiful villages built on the very edge of the river, their gables, bell-towers, and shop-fronts reflected in the water. The Loire crosses that great alluvial flood-plain we call the Sologne; it carries sand in its flow, which often obstructs and encumbers its bed, causing, on this low-lying land, frequent floods and inundations, which leave the villages high and dry. On the right bank, they shelter behind the levee; and there they are almost lost to the eye; the passer-by fails to see them.

Yet the Loire has its beauties. Madame de Staël, exiled by Napoleon to 'fifty leagues from Paris', found on the banks of the Loire, at a distance of exactly those hundred and twenty-five miles from Paris, a castle called, I believe, Chaumont.

It was there that she stayed (*from April to August 1810*), not wishing to reduce her exile by a quarter of a league. I pity her not. Chaumont-sur-Loire is a noble and stately residence. The castle, which is surely from the early sixteenth century, is of a beautiful style; the towers possess mass. The village, at the bottom of a tree-clad hill, presents the appearance, perhaps unique as regards the Loire, of a village on the Rhine; a long facade extending along the water's edge.

Amboise is a cheerful and pretty town, crowned by a magnificent building.

A mile or so from Tours, opposite those three precious arches of the old bridge which will one of these days disappear beneath some municipal embellishment, the ruin of the abbey of Marmoutier is a grand and beautiful sight. A few steps from the road, stands a fifteenth-century construction, which is the most original I have seen; a house by its size, a fortress by its machicolations, a town-hall by its belfry, a church by its ribbed portal. This construction summarises, and makes visible to the eye, so to speak, that kind of hybrid and complex power and authority which, in feudal times, was attached to abbeys in general, and to the abbey of Marmoutier in particular.

But what the Loire does possess, something extremely picturesque and grandiose, is its immense limestone wall, intermixed with sandstone, millstone, and potter's clay, which borders and encloses its right bank, and which extends from Blois to Tours, with inexpressible variety and gaiety, sometimes solid rock, sometimes English garden, clothed with trees and flowers, crowned with ripening vines and smoking chimneys, perforated like a sponge, and inhabited, like an anthill.

There are deep caves in which counterfeiters once hid, imitating the emblem of the Tours coinage, and flooding the province with fake *tournois* coins. Today the rough embrasures of these dens are closed by pretty facades fitted, coquettishly, to the rock and, from time to time, one glimpses through a window the graceful profile of a young girl with a strangely-coiffed hairstyle, busily packaging anise, angelica, or coriander. Confectioners have replaced the counterfeiters.

And, since I am on the subject of what is charming about the Loire, I give thanks to the workings of chance which naturally led me to tell you about the lovely girls who work and sing amidst this beautiful landscape.

‘La terra molle e lieta e diletta
Simili a se gli abitator produce’

‘The earth soft, fertile, and delightful
Yields a population much like itself’

(*Tasso, Gerusalemme Liberata, I, 62*)

Unlike the Loire, Bordeaux has not been praised enough, or at least it has been inadequately praised. They praise Bordeaux as they praise the Rue de Rivoli: for its regularity, symmetry, large white facades all alike, etc.; which to a sensible person means insipid architecture, a city that is tedious to view. However, as regards Bordeaux, nothing could be less true.

Bordeaux is a curious, original, perhaps unique city. Take Versailles, mix it with Antwerp, and you have Bordeaux. I exclude from the mix, however – so as to be fair – the greatest and

most beautiful adornments of Versailles and Antwerp, the castle of the former, the cathedral of the latter.

There are two cities of Bordeaux, the new and the old. Everything in the modern Bordeaux exudes grandeur, like Versailles; everything in the old Bordeaux tells a story, like Antwerp.

The fountains and rostral columns, the vast, well-planted avenues, the Place Royale (*Place de Bourse*) which is simply half of the Place Vendôme set at the water's edge, the bridge (*Pont de Pierre*) almost a third of a mile long, the superb quay, the wide streets, the enormous and monumental theatre (*Grand Théâtre*), these are things which none of the splendours of Versailles can match, and which would worthily surround in Versailles itself that great château which housed the 'great' century.

The inextricable crossroads, the labyrinths of passages and buildings; the Rue du Loup which recalls the time when wolves devoured children at the heart of the city; the fortress-houses once haunted by demons in so inconvenient a manner that a decree of Parliament of 1596 declared it sufficient for a dwelling to be frequented by the Devil for the lease to be automatically terminated; the tinder-coloured facades sculpted by the fine chisels of the Renaissance; the portals and staircases, adorned with balustrades and twisted pillars painted blue in the Flemish style; the charming and delicate Porte Cailhau, a gate built in memory of the Battle of Fornovo (1495); the other beautiful portal, that of the town hall, its belfry suspended so proudly beneath an openwork arch; the shapeless sections of the gloomy Fort du Hâ; the old churches, Saint-André with its two spires, Saint-Seurin, whose greedy canons sold the town of Langon for twelve lampreys a year, Sainte-Croix, which was burned by the Normans, Saint-Michel, which was set ablaze by lightning; all the mass of old porches, gables and roofs, memories which are monuments, buildings which represent ages, would certainly be worthy of being reflected in the Scheldt, as they are reflected in the Gironde, and of being grouped amidst those most Flemish and picturesque of houses surrounding Antwerp cathedral.

Add to all that, my friend, the magnificent Gironde estuary cluttered with ships; a gentle horizon of green hills; a beautiful sky; a warm sun; and you would love Bordeaux, even you who drink only water and never glance at pretty girls.

They are charming here, with their orange and red madras dresses like those in Marseille, and their yellow stockings.

It is an instinct of women in all countries to add coquetry to Nature. Nature gives them hair, but that is not enough for them, they must style it; Nature gives them a white and supple neck; that's a commonplace, they attach a necklace to it; Nature gives them small, neat feet; that is not enough, they enhance them with shoes. God made them beautiful, that is not enough for them, they make themselves pretty.

And behind all this coquetry, there is a thought, an instinct, if you will, which dates back to our mother Eve. Allow me a paradox, a blasphemy which, I am afraid, contains a truth: it is God who makes a woman beautiful, it is the Devil who makes her pretty. Ah, it seems to me I am preaching, which scarcely suits me, since I love women, even with what the Devil grants them in addition. Let us return, if you please, to Bordeaux.

Bordeaux's dual physiognomy is curious; time and chance have created it; people should not spoil it. One cannot hide from the fact that the mania for 'well-made' streets, as they say, and 'tasteful' buildings is gaining ground every day, and gradually razing the old historic city to the ground. In other words, Bordeaux-Versailles is intent on devouring Bordeaux-Antwerp.

Let the people of Bordeaux take heed! Antwerp, all things considered, is more interesting as regards art, history, and intellectual thought than Versailles. Versailles represents a single man and a single reign; Antwerp represents an entire people, and several centuries. So, maintain the balance between the two cities; put an end to the battle of Antwerp versus Versailles; beautify the new city, preserve the old city. You have a history, you are a nation, remember and be proud!

Nothing is more disastrous or more reductive than this taste for demolition. Whoever demolishes his house demolishes his family; whoever demolishes his city demolishes his homeland; whoever destroys his home destroys his name. It is the old idea of honour that is alive in these old stones.

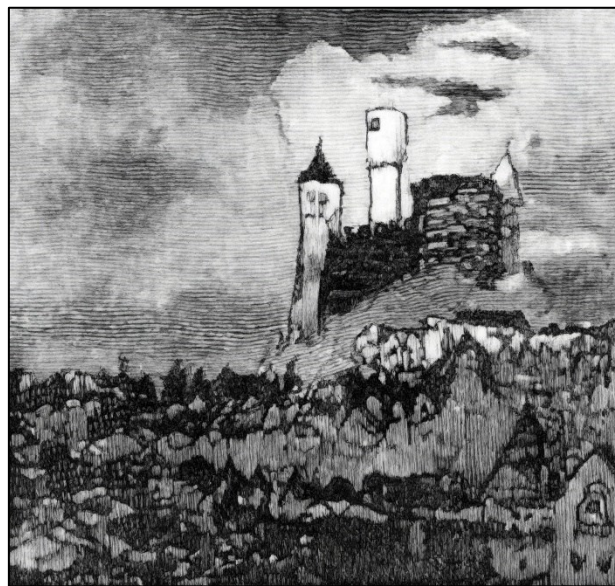
All these disdained buildings are illustrious; they speak, they have a voice; they attest to what the city's former inhabitants achieved.

The amphitheatre of Emperor Gallienus declares: 'I saw Gaius Tetricus proclaimed emperor and governor of Gaul (*in 271AD*); I saw Ausonius born (*310*), who was both poet and Roman consul; I saw Saint Martin, Pope Martin I, preside over the first Lateran council (*649*); I saw Abd al-Rahman (*Emir of the Emirate of Córdoba, from 756*), pass by, I saw the Black Prince pass by (*1355*)'. The church of Sainte-Croix declares: 'I saw Louis the Younger (*Louis VII*) marry Eleanor of Aquitaine (*1137*), Gaston de Foix, Prince of Viana, marry Madeleine of France (*1461*), and Louis XIII marry Anne of Austria (*1615*).' The Pey Berland Tower declares: 'I saw Charles VII and Catherine de Medici (*in 1453*).' The city belfry declares: 'It was beneath my vault that Michel de Montaigne, who was mayor (*1581-1585*), and Montesquieu (*Charles Louis de Secondat, baron de La Brède et de Montesquieu*), who was president (*1714-1726*), sat.' The old wall declares: 'It was through a breach in my stones, that Anne de Montmorency, Constable of France, entered (*in 1548*).' Is all this not worth more than some street drawn with a ruler? This is the past; the past which is a great, a venerable, a fruitful thing.

I have said it elsewhere: let us respect the buildings and the books; only in them is the past alive; everywhere else it is dead. Now, the past is a part of ourselves, perhaps the most essential. All the current that carries us, all the sap that gives us life, comes from the past. What is a tree without its roots? What is a river without its source? What is a people without its past?

Was Louis-Urbain-Aubert de Tourny, the intendant in 1743, who began the destruction of the old Bordeaux and the construction of the new, useful or harmful to the city? That is a question I cannot answer. A statue was erected to him, there is a Rue de Tourny, Quai de Tourny, Cours de Tourny, all that is fine. But, while admitting that he served the city worthily, is that a reason for Bordeaux to present itself to the world as having only ever known Monsieur de Tourny?

What! An emperor of the Severan dynasty erected the Pillars of Guardianship (*Piliers de Tutelles*) for you; you tore them down (*in 1677*). Gallienus built the amphitheatre for you; you dismantled it. Clovis gave you the Ombrière Palace; you ruined it. The Dukes of Aquitaine built you a wall and towers; you tore them down. The Kings of England built you a great wall from the Tanners' Ditch (*Cours Pasteur*) to the Salinières Ditch; you razed it to the ground. Charles VII built the Château Trompette for you (*in 1453*); you demolished it. You tear all the pages from your ancient book, one after the other, keeping only the last. You drove Charles VII, the Kings of England, the Dukes of Aquitaine, Clovis, Gallienus, and the Severan dynasty from your city and erased them from your history, and yet you erect a statue to Monsieur de Tourny! That is but to overthrow something major, to raise something minor.



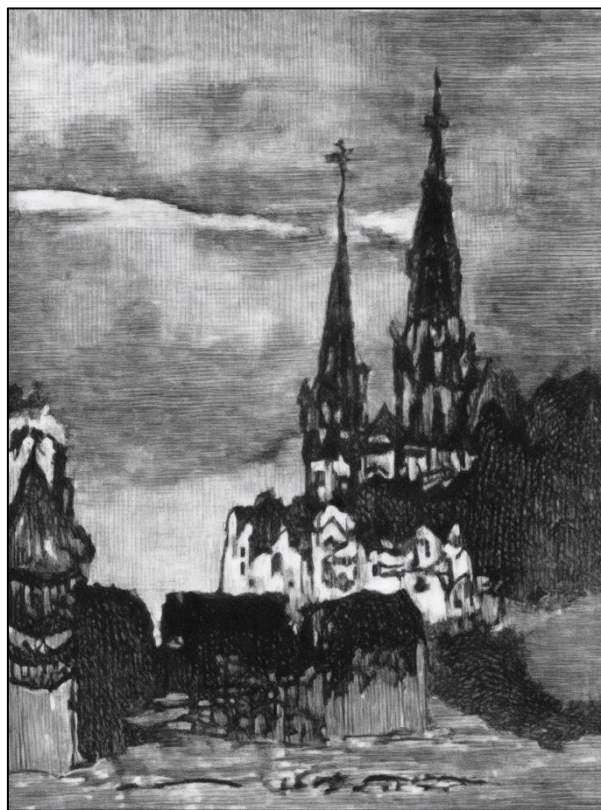
'Castle' - Victor Hugo (1894)
[*Paris Musées*](#)

Bordeaux, July 25th

The Bordeaux Bridge is the city's jewel. There are always four men working on the bridge. busy repointing the paving, and cleaning the pavement. On the other hand, the churches are in a sad state of disrepair. Yet is it not true that everything in a church deserves the attention of religion, even the stones? This is something that the priests, who are ever the first to demolish things, readily forget.

The two main churches of Bordeaux, Saint-André and Saint-Michel, have campaniles instead of bell towers, isolated from the main building, as in Venice and Pisa.

The bell tower of the Cathedral, Saint-André, is a rather beautiful one; its shape recalling the Tour de Beurre at Rouen; it is called the Pey Berland, after Pierre Berland, who was archbishop from 1430 to 1457. The cathedral has two bold spires, also, pierced through, in openwork manner, which I have already spoken of. The church, begun in the eleventh century, as the Romanesque pillars of the nave attest, was left untouched for three centuries, to be resumed under Charles VII, and finished under Charles VIII. The delightful era of Louis XII put the finishing touches to it, and an exquisite porch which supports the organ was built, at the end opposite the apse. The two large bas-reliefs applied to the wall beneath this porch are two paintings on stone in the most beautiful style and ‘carved’, one could almost say, so powerful is the modelling, by means of a magnificent use of colour. In the painting on the left the eagle and the lion worship Christ, while exhibiting deep, intelligent gazes, since it is fitting for them as the spirits of the place to worship God.



‘Saint-André cathedral, Bordeaux’ - Victor Hugo (1894)

[*Paris Musées*](#)

The portal, though merely lateral, is of great beauty; but I am eager to tell you about an old ruined cloister which borders the cathedral on the south, and which I entered by chance.

Nothing could be sadder or more charming, more imposing or more abject. Imagine this. Dark galleries pierced by ogives with flamboyant fenestrations; a wooden trellis over those ogives; the cloister transformed into a shed, all the flagstones unpaved, dust and cobwebs

everywhere; latrines in a neighbouring courtyard; rusty copper lamp-posts, black crosses, silver hour-glasses, the cast-offs from hearses and undertakers in every dark corner; and yet, beneath these false cenotaphs of wood and painted canvas, one glimpses real tombstones, their severe-looking statues reclining at too sharp an angle ever to rise again, and too deeply asleep to ever wake. Is that not scandalous? Should not the priest be accused of presiding over the degradation of his church, and the desecration of its tombs? For myself, if I had to spell out their duty to the priests, I would do it in two sentences: *Pity for the living, piety for the dead.*

In the middle, between the four arcades of the cloister, debris and rubble clutters a small corner, once a cemetery, where tall grasses, wild jasmine, brambles, and undergrowth mingle and prosper, with inexpressible joy one might almost say. Vegetation has seized the building; the work of God prevails over the work of mankind.

Yet there is nothing mean or bitter about this incursion. Their joy is the innocent and regal gaiety of Nature. Nothing more. Amidst the ruins and the grass, a thousand flowers bloom. Sweet, charming flowers! I felt the scents assail me, I saw their pretty white, yellow, and blue heads fluttering, and it seemed to me that they were all trying their best to console those poor abandoned stones. However, it is destiny. The monks vanish before the priests, and the cloisters vanish before the churches.

From Saint-André, I went to Saint-Michel... — But I'm being called, the carriage for Bayonne is leaving, I'll tell you what happened to me during my visit to Saint-Michel next time.



‘The Tower of the Basilica of St Michael, Bordeaux’ - Victor Hugo (1894)
[*Paris Musées*](#)

Chapter II: From Bordeaux to Bayonne.

Bayonne, July 23rd

You have to be a tough and hardened traveller to feel comfortable on top of the *Dotezac Brothers* coach, which runs from Bordeaux to Bayonne. I have never in my life encountered a

padded bench of such ferocity. That seat may, however, be of service to literature, by providing a new metaphor for those in need of one. Let us abandon the ancient Classical comparisons that have expressed the hardness of objects for three thousand years; let steel, bronze, and the tyrant's heart, rest. Instead of quoting:

‘Le Caucase affreux, t’engendrant en fureur,
De ses plus durs rochers fit ton barbare cœur’

‘The dreadful Caucasus, engendering you in fury,
Carved your barbaric heart from its hardest stones’

(*Jacques Delille, from his translation of Virgil's 'Aeneid', 1804*)

the poets will say of some given thing that it is: ‘*Harder than the Dotezac stagecoach seat*’.

Yet one does not climb to that high, and rugged position, without some difficulty. First, one must pay fourteen francs, that goes without saying; and then one must give one's name to the conductor. So, I gave my name. When I am asked about my name in the offices of the mail-coach companies, I readily remove the first syllable, and answer *Monsieur Go*, leaving the spelling to the fancy of the questioner. When I am asked how the thing is written, I answer: *I know not*. This generally satisfies the author of the register; he grasps the syllable that I gave him, and embroiders that simple theme with greater or lesser imagination, according to whether he is, or is not, a man of taste. My manner of doing things has earned me, in my various travels, the satisfaction of seeing my name written in the following varied ways: Monsieur Go. — Monsieur Got. — Monsieur Gaut. — Monsieur Gault. — Monsieur Gaud. — Monsieur Gauld. — Monsieur Gaulx. — Monsieur Gaux. — Monsieur Gau.

None of these writers has yet had the idea of writing Monsieur *Goth*. I have, until now, only noticed that nuance in the satires of Jean-Pons-Guillaume Viennet, and the feuilletons of *Le Constitutionnel*.

The registrar at the Dotezac office first wrote Monsieur Gau, then hesitated for a moment, looked at the name he had just written, and, no doubt finding it a little bare, added an x. So it was under this name, Monsieur Gaux, that I climbed onto the formidable saddle on which the Dotezac Brothers parade their victims for a hundred and fifteen miles or more.

I have already observed that hunchbacks may like the imperials on carriages. I do not. I don't seek to delve into coincidences, but the fact is that on top of the Meaux stagecoach I met one, and on top of the Bayonne coach two. They were travelling together, and what made the couple curious was that one was hunched behind and the other in front. The first seemed to exercise I know not what influence over the second, whose waistcoat was half-open and

dishevelled, but as I arrived, he said to him authoritatively: ‘*My dear fellow, button up your deformity*’.

The driver of the coach looked at the two hunchbacks with an air of humiliation. The good man appeared exactly like Monsieur de Rambuteau (*Claude-Philibert Barthelot, Comte de Rambuteau, Prefect of the Seine*). As I looked at him, I said to myself that perhaps shaving him would suffice to make him Prefect of the Seine, and that it would also suffice for Monsieur de Rambuteau to cease shaving to make of him an excellent coach driver.

Assimilation, as we say today in political language, is, however, neither unfortunate nor hurtful. A diligence is far more than a mere prefecture; it is the perfect image of a nation with its own constitution and government. The coach has three sections like the state. The aristocracy is in the coupé; the bourgeoisie in the interior; and the people are in the rotunda. On the imperial, above them all, are the dreamers, the artists, the classless. The king is the driver, who is readily considered a tyrant; the government is the postilion, changed at every relay. When the carriage is too loaded with baggage, that is to say, when society sets its material interests above all else, it runs the risk of tipping over.

Since I am rejuvenating ancient metaphors, I advise worthy scholars whose style is so often lumbered with the *chariot of state* to henceforth speak of the *diligence of state*. It will be less noble, but more accurate.

For the rest, the road was fine and we travelled at a brisk pace. This is due to a battle that is currently being waged between the Dotezac diligence and another carriage that the Dotezac postilions disdainfully call *the competition*, without otherwise designating it. This second carriage seemed excellent to me; it was new, smart and attractive. From time to time, it would overtake us, and then it would trot for an hour or two, twenty paces in front of us, until we returned the favour. It was very unpleasant. In the classic combats of ancient times, one made one’s enemy ‘bite the dust’; in these, one is content to make him merely swallow it.

Les Landes, from Bazas to Mont-de-Marsan, are nothing but endless pine forest, dotted here and there with tall oak-trees, and penetrated by immense clearings covered as far as the eye can see by green moorland, yellow broom, and purple heather. The presence of man is revealed in the most deserted parts of this forest by long strips of bark removed from the trunks of the pines to encourage the flow of resin.

There are no villages; but, at intervals, two or three houses with large roofs, covered with hollow tiles in the Spanish manner, sheltering beneath clumps of oak and chestnut trees. Sometimes the countryside grows harsher, the pines vanish into the horizon, and everything is heather or sand; a few low cottages, buried under a sort of coating of dried ferns applied to the wall, appear here and there, then one sees them no more, and encounters nothing more at the roadside than the mud hut of a road-mender, or, at times, a large circle of burnt turf and blackened ash, indicating the site of a nocturnal fire.

All sorts of flocks graze these heaths: flocks of geese and pigs led by children, flocks of black and red sheep led by women, herds of large-horned oxen led by men on horseback. Like flock, like shepherd. Without realising it, believing I was merely describing a wilderness, I have penned a maxim of government.

And on that note, would you believe that while I was crossing Les Landes, everyone there was talking politics? That hardly fits such a landscape, does it? A breath of revolution seems to be stirring the old pine-trees.

It was at that very moment that Baldomero Espartero's government in Spain collapsed. Nothing, as yet, was known, while everything was surmised. The postilions, climbing to their seats, said to the driver: '*He's in Cadiz.*' '*No, he's embarked.*' '*Yes, for England.*' '*No, for France.*' '*He seeks neither France nor England. He's off to a Spanish colony.*' '*Bah!*'

The two hunchbacks propounded their politics while the postilions' propounded theirs, and the one hunched in front said, neatly: '*Espartero has taken ship, and taken flight.*'

As we approached Mont-de-Marsan, the roads were filled with Spaniards, on foot, on horseback, in carriages, traveling in bands or individually. On a cart loaded with men in rags, I saw a young peasant girl, dressed in a graceful manner, whose pretty, grave, and sweet face was shaded by the most exquisite hat that could be seen; something black bordered with something red, it was charming. What kind of political system is it that blows such a storm that it is capable of driving a poor but pretty girl, with such stylish headgear, from her country?

As new refugees arrived, the recent refugees left. In two mail-coaches, galloping in opposite directions, which must have crossed on the way, I saw the Duchess of Gor (*Maria de la O Jacoba Guiráldez y Cañas Mendoza y Portocarrero*) on her way to Madrid, and the Duchess of San Fernando (*María Luisa de Borbón y Vallabriga*) on her way to Paris. Two coaches full of Spaniards crossed halfway between Captieux and Traversères, and, following the custom of postilions in such cases, exchanged their teams. The same horses that were returning yesterday's exiles to their homeland were bearing those of today to exile.

However, regardless of whatever new revolution was taking place close to us, it only disturbed grave and tranquil Nature on the surface. The storm which displaces the powers that be, and topples thrones, failed to make the pine cone trembling at the end of its branch fall from the tree any sooner. Carts, drawn by oxen, passed, with an air of ancient gravity, the fleeing post-chaises and the mail-coaches full of anxious faces.

Nothing could be stranger, by the way, than these teams of oxen. The cart is of wood, with four equal-sized wheels, which ensures that it never deviates from its course, but always forges ahead. Each of the oxen is entirely covered by a large white cloth that drags on the ground; between their horns they have a sort of wig made of sheepskin, and on their muzzles a white, fringed net that is a perfect parody of a beard. A few oak-branches wrapped around their heads complete their outfit. The oxen, thus garbed, possess the illusory air of high priests of tragedy; and resemble, to the point of duplication, the extras of the Théâtre-Français disguised as flamens and druids.

At Bazas, as we dismounted, one of these oxen passed by with such a majestic and pontifical gait that I was tempted to say to him: '*Priests are not as wise as foolish people think*' (*Voltaire, 'Oedipe' Act IV, Scene I*). I recall telling him so. I must add, to be exact, that he failed to bellow a reply.

Beyond Roquefort, the moors are brightened by the tile factories that one encounters from time to time; some, very old, dating back to Louis XIII, as attested by the keystones of their

archivolts, but abandoned; others in working order, and full production, steaming on all sides like a bundle of green wood on a hot fire.

Thirty years ago, as a child, I travelled through this country. I remember that the carriages progressed at walking pace, with sand up to their wheel-hubs. There was no track marked, in those days. From time to time, one came across a stretch of road formed of pine trunks juxtaposed and knotted together like the deck of a rustic bridge. Today, the sandy tracts are crossed by a wide causeway, lined with poplars, that runs from Bordeaux to Bayonne, and has almost the beauty of a Roman road.

In a given time this roadway, the product of industry and perseverance, will sink into the sand, then vanish. The ground tends to give way beneath it, and will engulf it as it engulfed the military road made by Brutus which ran from Capbreton, *Caput Bruti*, to Boïos, today La Teste-de-Buch, and that other road, the work of Caesar, which linked Gamarde, Saint-Géours-de-Maremne, and Saint-Michel de Jouarare.

I note in passing that those two words, *Jovis ara*, or *ara Jovis* (*altar of Jupiter*) are the origin of the names of many towns, which, though derived from the same source, barely resemble each other today, from Jouarre in Champagne, to Saint-Michel de Jouarare in Les Landes, to Aranjuez in Spain.

From Roquefort to Tartas, the pines give way to a host of other trees. Dense and varied vegetation clads the plains and hills, and the road runs through a delightful garden. At every moment, one crosses old bridges with pointed arches, above charming rivers. First the Douze, then the Midou, then the Midouze, formed, as the name indicates, from the Douze and the Midou, then the Adour. The syllable *dour* or *dou*, which is found in all these names, obviously derives from the Celtic word *dhu* (*dhub*) which means dark.

All these rivers are deep, clear, green, and pleasant. Young girls beat their laundry at the water's edge; goldfinches sing in the bushes; cheerful life breathes amidst gentle Nature.

However, at times, between two tree branches that the wind joyously pushes aside, one sees in the distance on the horizon the heather and the *piñadas* (*pine-woods*) clothed in sunset red, and remembers that one is in Les Landes. One recalls that beyond this happy garden, dotted with all these pretty towns, Roquefort, Mont-de-Marsan, Tartas, cut by all these fresh rivers, the Adour, the Douze, the Midou, only a few hours' walk away, is the forest, then beyond the forest the heather, the moors, the wasteland, a dark solitude where the cicadas sing, where the birds are silent, where all human habitation vanishes, a region crossed at long intervals, by silent caravans of large oxen dressed in white shrouds; one says to oneself that beyond those sandy solitudes are the lakes, the watery solitudes of Sanguinet, Biscarosse, Parentis-en-Born, Mimizan, Léon, with their populations of wild boars, wolves, polecats, and squirrels; their inextricable vegetation, composed of buckthorn, bay laurel, black locust, sage-leaved cistus, enormous hollies, gigantic hawthorns, and gorse twenty feet high; and their virgin forests where one cannot venture without axe and compass; one envisages, amidst these immense woods, the great Cassou, that mysterious oak whose dread branches scatter superstition and terror across the whole region. One is aware that beyond the lakes lie the dunes, mountains of sand which drift, chasing the lakes before them, swallowing the piñadas, villages and bell-towers, their

shape altered by tempests; and one says to oneself that beyond the dunes lies the ocean. The dunes devour the lakes; the Atlantic devours the dunes.

These, the moors, the lakes, the dunes, the sea, are the four zones one's thought traverses. One summons them up, in imagination, one after another, each fiercer than the last. One sees vultures flying above the moors, cranes over the lagoons, and gulls over the sea. One watches turtles and snakes crawling over the dunes. The spectre of melancholy Nature appears before one. Reverie fills the mind. Unknown, fantastic landscapes tremble and shimmer before one's eyes. Shepherds mounted on stilts, each leaning on a long stick, pass through the mists of the horizon, on the hill-crests, like giant spiders; one conjures up the enigmatic pyramids of Mimizan (*five eleventh century stones marking a religious sanctuary*) rising amidst the undulations of the dunes; one listens as if hearing the wild, sweet songs of the peasant women of Parentis; and one gazes into the distance as if seeing the beautiful girls of Biscarosse walking barefoot in the waves, wearing the flowers of those immortelles that grow amidst the sand. For thought too has its mirages. Imagination makes journeys that the Dotezac stagecoach does not.

Meanwhile, we have reached Tartas, the former capital of the Tarusates tribe, which is a pretty town on the Midouze. In the Middle Ages, it was one of the four seneschalsies of the Duchy of Albret. The other three were Nérac, Castelmoron-sur-Lot, and Casteljalous. As we passed, I greeted, on the left side of the road, a remaining section of the venerable wall that resisted the formidable English siege in 1440, and gave Charles II d'Albret, cousin to Charles VII, time to arrive. The people of Tartas have built inns and open-air cafés with the stones of this wall that defended their homes.

As we were leaving Tartas, a huge hare came out of a nearby thicket and crossed the road, then stopped within range of the coach, in a meadow, looking boldly at us. This bravery of the hares in this country is undoubtedly due to the fact that they know that it is they who gave their name to the House of Albret. Pride has taken hold of them, and they behave, when it suits, like gentlemen.

Meanwhile, night was falling. Evening, which provided Virgil with so many poetic lines, all alike in concept, all different in form, was pouring shadow over the landscape, and sleep over the eyelids of the travellers. As the darkness deepened, blurring the shapeless silhouettes on the horizon, it seemed to me — was it a nocturnal illusion? — that the countryside was becoming wilder and rougher, that the piñadas and clearings were reappearing, and that we were in reality, in profound darkness, performing that journey across Les Landes that I had imagined but a few hours before. The sky was starry, the earth offered to the eye only a sort of dark plain where here and there flickered reddish gleams, as if shepherds' fires were lit amidst the heather; one heard, without seeing or distinguishing anything, a delicate, shrill ringing of bells, a seemingly harmonious tinkling; then everything returned to silence while the carriage seemed to roll on blindly, through the night, in darkened solitude, while, here and there, large pools of light alone, appearing amidst the black trees, revealed the presence of lakes.

I felt happy. I had caught several times that scent of bindweed which reminds me of my childhood. I thought of all those who love me, I forgot about those who hate me, and looked into the shadow, with a lost gaze, so to speak, letting the vague nocturnal forms which passed confusedly before my eyes populate my reverie.

The two hunchbacks had descended at Mont-de-Marsan. I was alone on my bench, the chill was deepening; I wrapped myself in my coat and, gradually, fell asleep.

The sleep afforded by a carriage that bears you along at a gallop is a transparent sleep through which one still feels and hears. At a certain moment the driver descended, the coach stopped; the driver's voice said: '*Gentlemen, here we are at the Dax bridge*'; then the doors opened and closed as if travellers were dismounting, then the coach lurched, and set off again. A few moments later, the horses' hooves sounded on a wooden floor; the coach, suddenly tilted forward, and gave a violent jolt; I opened an eye; the postilion, bent over his horses, seemed to be staring ahead anxiously, and applying caution. I opened both eyes.

The heavy, and heavily laden, carriage, drawn by five horses harnessed to chains, was moving at walking pace over a wooden bridge, in a sort of narrow lane bounded on the left by the parapet, which was very low, and on the right by a mass of beams and timbers; below the bridge, a widish river (*the Adour*) flowed at quite a depth, which seemed increased by nocturnal uncertainty. At certain moments, the diligence tilted; in certain places, the parapet was absent. I sat up. I was alone on top of the carriage; the driver had not returned to his seat; the carriage was still moving; the postilion, still bent over his team, which was barely lit by the coupé's lantern was muttering I know not what vigorous imprecations. Finally, the horses climbed a small slope, another jolt shook the carriage, and then it halted. We were on the paved road again.

The travellers who had crossed the bridge on foot, walking before the carriage, returned to the three compartments, and, I heard the driver saying, while opening and closing the doors: — 'Devil of a bridge! Always under repair! — When will it be done? — The police are badly organised in Dax. The carpenters leave their tools in the way to try and tip the carriage over. — For a moment I thought the diligence would end in the river. — One cannot conceive the danger here. — You'll see, one of these days something bad will happen. — Was I not right, gentlemen, to make you descend?' Having said that, he clambered back to his seat, and on seeing me gave a cry: — '*Goodness, Monsieur! I forgot you!*'

Chapter III: Bayonne — The Charnel House

July 26th

I entered Bayonne with some emotion. For me, Bayonne is a source of childhood memories. I came to Bayonne when I was eight years old, towards the end of 1810, at the time of the Peninsular War. My father was in Spain as a soldier, serving the emperor, and was holding in check two provinces, the insurgents there being led by El Empecinado (*Juan Martín Díez, a Spanish guerrilla leader*), namely Avila, Guadalajara, and the entire course of the Tagus.

My mother, travelling to join him, had stopped in Bayonne to wait for a convoy, because to make the journey from Bayonne to Madrid at that time, it was necessary to be accompanied by three thousand men, and preceded by four pieces of cannon. I will say something of that journey which had its moments of interest, if only as an historical record.

My mother had with her my two brothers Abel and Eugène, and myself, the youngest of us three boys. I remember that the day after our arrival in Bayonne, a sort of pot-bellied *signor*, adorned with exaggerated trinkets and mumbling in Italian, appeared at my mother's door. The man struck us children, watching him enter through a glass door, as a charlatan. He was the director of the Bayonne theatre. He came to ask my mother to rent a box at his theatre. My mother rented one for a month, which was the length of time we were supposed to remain in Bayonne.

This rented box made us jump for joy. We children, able to visit the theatre every evening for a whole month, we who had only done so once a year, and who had no memory of the stage other than Molière's *La Comtesse d'Escarbagnas*.

That same evening, we tormented my mother, who yielded to us, as mothers always do, and took us to the theatre. The manager installed us in a magnificent front box decorated with red calico draperies adorned with saffron rosettes. They were performing *Les Ruines de Babylone*, a melodrama ('*The Ruins of Babylon, or Giafar and Zaida*', by René-Charles Guilbert de Pixérécourt, 1810) which at that time was enjoying immense success throughout France.

It was magnificent, at least for Bayonne. Apricot-coloured knights, and Arabs dressed from head to toe in mail-cloth appeared momentarily, then were swallowed up, amidst dreadful prose, in cardboard ruins littered with caltrops, and wolf-traps. The Caliph Haroun commanded the stage, and also the eunuch Giafar. We were in awe.

The next day, when evening came, we again tormented our mother, who again yielded to us. We attended the show in our rosette-adorned box. — What would they perform? We were anxious. The curtain rose. Giafar appeared. They were repeating *The Ruins of Babylon*. This did not displease us. We were happy to see that beautiful work once more, which again amused us greatly.

The following day, my mother was as kind, as ever, and we returned to the theatre. They were once more acting *The Ruins of Babylon*. We viewed it with pleasure, though we would have preferred a different set of ruins.

On the fourth day, the playbill was sure to be different; we went; my mother indulged and accompanied us, smiling. They were showing *The Ruins of Babylon*. We fell asleep.

On the fifth day, we sent Bertrand, my mother's valet, early in the morning to view the playbill. They were showing *The Ruins of Babylon*. We begged my mother not to take us. On the sixth day, they were showing *The Ruins of Babylon* again. Such was the case all month. One fine day the playbill changed; that day, we were leaving.

It was this memory that made me speak somewhere about '*teasing Chance that toys with children*'.

Apart from *The Ruins of Babylon*, I remember that month spent in Bayonne with happiness. There was a beautiful promenade by the water, under some trees, where we used to walk every evening. We would pout as we passed by the theatre, which we no longer set foot in, and which now inspired in us a kind of ennui mixed with horror. We would sit on a bench, watch the ships, and listen while my mother spoke. She was a noble and religious woman who is now but a figure in my memory (*Hugo's mother, Sophie Françoise Trébuchet, died in 1821*), yet one which will shine in my soul, and over my life, until my last day.

The house we lived in was cheerful. I remember my window over which beautiful bunches of ripe corn hung. During all that long month, we experienced not a moment of boredom, always excepting *The Ruins of Babylon*.

One day we went to see a ship of the line anchored at the mouth of the Adour. An English squadron had given chase to it; after a few hours battle it had taken refuge there, and the English had blockaded it. I still can see, as if it were before my eyes, that admirable vessel which could be seen half a mile from the coast, lit by a beautiful shaft of sunlight, all sails furled, leaning proudly into the waves, and which seemed to me to possess I know not what threatening air, having retreated from the shrapnel yet about to face it once more perhaps.

Our lodgings backed onto the ramparts. It was there, on the green grassy slopes, among the upturned cannons, the sunlight on the grass, and the mortars lying face down, that we would go and play in the morning.

In the evening, Abel, my poor Eugène (*died 1837*) and I, grouped around our mother, smearing the contents of a box of paints, illuminated as best we could, and in the most ferocious manner, the engravings in an old copy of the *Thousand and One Nights*. This copy had been given to me by General Lahorie (*Victor Fanneau de La Horie, who joined the Moreau conspiracy against Napoleon*), my godfather, who was executed, two years after the time of which I speak (*in October, 1812*), on the plain of Grenelle in Paris.

Eugène and I bought all the goldfinches and greenfinches brought to us by the little lads in town. We imprisoned these poor birds in wicker cages. When one cage was full, we bought another. We soon had five cages full. When it was time to leave, we granted all those pretty birds their freedom. It was both a joy and a heartbreak to us.

It was a widow from the town, I believe, who rented the house to my mother. The widow herself lived in a house nearby. She had a daughter of fourteen or fifteen. My memory, after thirty years, has lost none of the features of that angelic figure. I can see her still. She was blonde and slender, and seemed tall to me. Her gaze was soft and veiled, her face a Virgilian profile, as one dreamt that of Amaryllis or Galatea to be, fleeing among the willows. She had an admirably well-set neck of adorable purity, a small hand, a white arm, and a slightly red elbow, which reflected her age; a detail I was unaware of given mine. She usually wore a tea-coloured madras headdress, with a green border, tightly tied about her head and down to the nape of her neck, so as to leave her forehead uncovered, and hiding only half her hair. I don't remember the dress she wore.

This lovely child came to play with us. Sometimes Abel and Eugène, my elders, taller and more serious than me, 'acting like men,' as my mother said, went to watch the shooting practice

on the ramparts, or ascended to their room to study Sobrino, and leaf through Cormon (*the dictionary, 'Sobrino Aumentado, o Nuevo Diccionario de Las Lenguas Española, Francesa y Latina Compuesto de Los Mejores Diccionarios,' by Francisco Sobrino, augmented by François Cormon, 1776*). Then I was alone, I felt ennui descending; what to do? The daughter would call me and say: '*Come, let me read you something.*'

In the courtyard there was a doorway, raised by a few steps, the door closed by a large rusty bolt that I can still see, a round bolt, with a pig's tail handle, like the ones you sometimes find in old cellars. It was on those steps that she would sit. I stood behind her, my back against the door.

She would read to me from the book that was open on her knees. Above our heads was a bright sky, and a beautiful sun that filled the linden trees with light, and changed their green leaves to gold. A warm breeze blew through the cracks in the old door and caressed our faces. Bent over her book, she would read aloud.

While she was reading, I listened, not to grasp the meaning of the words but to hear the sound of her voice. At times my eyes would lower, my gaze would meet her half-open kerchief below me, and I would see, with a confusion mingled with a strange fascination, her round, white throat rising and falling gently in the shadow, vaguely gilded with a warm reflection of the sun.

Sometimes at such times she would suddenly raise her large blue eyes and say to me: '*Well, Victor! Are you listening?*' I would be rendered completely speechless; blushing, trembling, and pretending to play with the big bolt. I never kissed her myself; it was she who called me and said: '*Kiss me then.*' The day we left Bayonne, I felt two great sorrows: that of leaving her, and that of freeing my birds.

What was that, my friend? What did I feel, so small a fellow, next to that tall, beautiful, innocent girl? I had no idea then, but I've often thought about it since.

Bayonne has remained in my memory as a vermillion-coloured and smiling place. It is there that the oldest memories of my heart lie. O naive days, and yet already gently stirred! It was there that, in the obscurest corner of my soul, I saw that first inexpressible glimmer dawn, the divine dawn of love.

Do you not find, my friend, that such a memory is a bond, and a bond that nothing can destroy! Is it not a strange thing, that two human beings can be bound by an indissoluble chain like this all their lives, and yet not miss each other, not seek each other, rather become strangers to each other, and no longer know each other! The chain that binds me to that sweet child has never broken, yet the thread has snapped.

As soon as I arrived in Bayonne this week, I walked round the city, along the ramparts, looking for that house, looking for the door, looking for the lock; I found nothing, or at least recognised nothing.

Where is she? What is she doing? Is she dead? Is she still alive? If she is alive, she is probably married, and has children. She is perhaps a widow, and growing old in her turn. How can it be that beauty departs and the woman remains? Is the woman of today really the same

being as the young girl of the past? Perhaps I have just passed her? Perhaps she is the commonplace person I asked for directions earlier, and who watched me walk away like a stranger?

What bitter sadness there is in all this! We are, then, mere shadows. We pass by one another, and we fade away, like smoke in the deep, blue sky of eternity. Men are to space what the hours are to time. When an hour strikes, it vanishes. Where is our youth? Where is our childhood, alas! Where is that beautiful young girl of 1810? Where is the child I was then? We touched in those days, and now we perhaps still touch, yet there's an abyss between us. Memory, that bridge to the past, is broken, somewhere between her and myself. She would not know my face, and I would not recognise the sound of her voice. She no longer knows my name, nor I hers.

I have little to tell you as regards Bayonne. The city is gracefully situated, amidst green hills, at the confluence of the Nive and the Adour, which forms an area of ground like a little Gironde. But of this pretty city and this beautiful place it was felt necessary to create a citadel.

Woe to the landscapes we think it appropriate to fortify! I have said before, and I cannot refrain from saying again: a zigzag ditch makes the saddest of ravines, a scarp with its counterscarp the ugliest of hills! Bayonne is a Vauban masterpiece (*Sébastien Le Prestre, Marquis of Vauban, was military engineer to Louis XIV*). Fine. But assuredly, Vauban's masterpieces spoil those God created.

Bayonne Cathedral (*Saint-Marie*) is a rather beautiful fourteenth-century church (*begun in the thirteenth, completed in the seventeenth century*), the colour of tinder, and all eaten away by the wind from the sea. Nowhere have I seen mullions provide richer, more capricious, fenestrations inside the ribbed vaults. It possesses all the strength of the fourteenth century mingled, without tempering it, with all the fantasy of the fifteenth. Here and there some beautiful stained-glass windows remain, almost all of them from the sixteenth century. To the right of what was the great portal, I admired a small bay whose design is composed of flowers and leaves, marvellously shaped into a rosette. The doors are of great character; they are great black slabs studded with large nails, and once both enhanced with gilded iron door-hammers. Only one of these remains, which is of beautiful Romanesque workmanship.

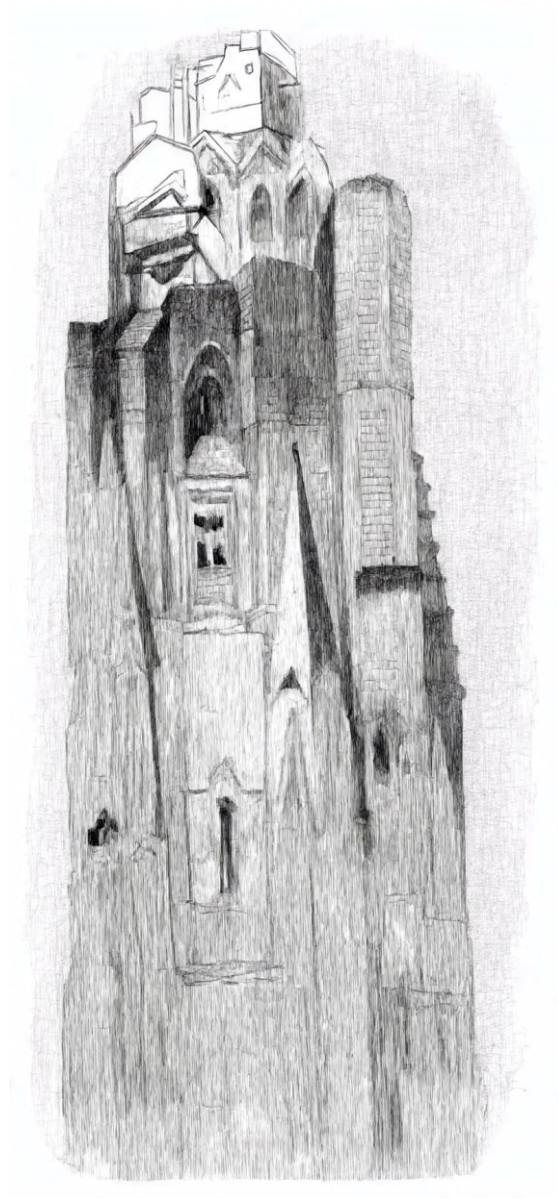
The church is flanked to the south by a vast cloister from the same period, which is currently being restored with skill and intelligence, and which formerly communicated with the choir by a magnificent portal, today walled up and whitewashed, the ornamentation and statues of which recall, by their grand style, Amiens, Reims and Chartres.

There were many tombs in the church and the cloister, which have been ripped away. A few mutilated sarcophagi still cling to the wall. They are empty. A hideous dust of some kind has replaced the human dust. The spider spins its web in these dark dwellings of death.

I stopped at a chapel where all that remains of one of these tombs is the place, still recognisable by the marks of destruction on the wall; and yet the deceased had taken precautions to guard his tomb. 'This sepulchre is his,' as an inscription on black marble sealed in the stone, still reads, 'April 22, 1664.' If we are to believe this same inscription, which I quote verbatim, 'E. Reboul, royal notary and gentlemen of the chapter' has granted 'Pierre de

Baraduc, bourgeois, and man-at-arms in the old castle of this town, title and possession of this tomb, *for the enjoyment of himself and his family.*'

As regards this, my visit to Saint-Michel in Bordeaux returns to me. I had just left that church, which is from the thirteenth century and very remarkable, especially for the portals, and an exquisite chapel of the Virgin, sculpted, I should say 'worked', by the admirable figurists of the days of Louis XII. I glanced at the bell-tower which is next to the church, and surmounted by a telegraph. It was once a superb spire, three hundred feet high; it is now a tower of the strangest and most original appearance.



'The Bell Tower of the Basilica of St Michael, Bordeaux' - Victor Hugo (1894)

[Paris Musées](#)

For those who are unaware, lightning struck this spire in 1768 causing it to collapse. Due to the ensuing fire which simultaneously devoured the church's framework, this enormous tower, which seems both military and ecclesiastical, as rugged as a keep and as ornate as a bell-tower, is most problematic. There are no longer any louvres in the upper bays. The bells, chimes, gongs, hammers, and clock, are no more. The tower, though still crowned with a solid block possessing eight sides and eight gables, is raw and truncated at its summit. One feels it has been decapitated, and is thus dead. The air and daylight pass through its long, windowless, mullion-less ribs as if through large segments of bone. It is no longer a bell-tower; it is the skeleton of a bell tower.

Well, I was alone in the courtyard, planted with a few trees, in which this isolated bell-tower stands. The courtyard is the old cemetery. I contemplated, although a little bothered by the sun, this gloomy yet magnificent building, and attempted to read its history in its architecture, and its misfortunes in its wounds. You know that a building interests me almost as much as a human being. For me, it is in some way a person whose adventures I try to discover.

I was standing there, dreamily, when suddenly, a few steps from me, I heard someone say: 'Monsieur! Monsieur!' I looked; I listened. No one. The courtyard was deserted. A few sparrows chattered in the old trees of the cemetery. Yet a voice had called me, a weak, soft, broken voice, which still echoed in my ear.

I took a few steps, and heard the voice again: 'Monsieur!' This time I turned quickly, and saw, at the corner of the courtyard, near the door, the figure of an old woman emerging from a skylight. This skylight, horribly dilapidated, revealed the interior of a miserable room. Beside the old woman was an old man.

I have never in my life seen anything more decrepit than that hovel, except for the couple. The interior was whitewashed with that whitewash that recalls a shroud, and I saw no other furniture than the two stools on which sat, looking at me with their little grey eyes, those two tanned, wrinkled, scuffed faces, which were as if coated with bistre and bitumen, and seemed wrapped, rather than dressed, in old patched grave-cloths.

I am not like Salvator Rosa who said: '*Me figuro il sepolcro in ogui loco: I see images of the tomb everywhere.*' Yet, even in broad daylight, at midday, under a warm, living sun, the apparition surprised me for a moment, and it seemed to me that I heard myself summoned, by two four thousand years old spectres from the depths of an antediluvian crypt.

After a few seconds reflection, I gave them fifteen sous. They were simply the gatekeepers of the cemetery. Philemon and Baucis (*for the myth see Ovid's 'Metamorphoses', Book VIII*).

Philemon, dazzled by the fifteen-sou piece, made a dreadful grimace of joy and astonishment, and placed the coin in a sort of old leather pouch nailed to the wall, '*another relic of the years*', as La Fontaine would have said (*see his 'Fables': Book XII, 25, Philémon et Baucis*), while Baucis said to me, with a kindly smile: — 'Would you like to see the charnel house?'

This phrase, *the charnel house*, awakened a vague memory in my mind of something I thought I understood, and I replied: 'With pleasure, madam.' 'I thought so,' the old woman

continued. And she added: 'Here is the bell-ringer who will show it to you; it is very beautiful to see.' As she spoke thus, she placed her red, diaphanous, palpitating hand, hairy and cold like a bat's wing, over my hand, in a most friendly manner.

The new character who had just appeared, and who had no doubt smelled the odour of the fifteen-sou piece, namely the bell-ringer, was standing a few steps away on the outer staircase of the tower, the door to which he had half-opened. He was a fellow of about thirty-six, stocky, robust, fat, pink, and fresh, with all the air of a bon vivant, as befits one who lives at the expense of the dead. My company of two ghosts was completed by a vampire.

The old woman introduced me to the bell-ringer with a certain air of pomp: 'Here is an English gentleman who wishes to see the mass grave.' The vampire, without saying a word, retraced the few steps he had descended, pushed open the tower door, and beckoned me to follow him. I entered.

Still silent, he closed the door behind me. We found ourselves in profound darkness. However, there was a nightlight in the corner of a step, behind a large paving stone. By the light of this nightlight, I saw the bell-ringer bend down and light a lamp. The lamp lit, he began to descend the steps of a narrow spiral staircase; I did likewise.

After about ten steps, I think, I bent down to negotiate a low door, and climbed, still led by the bell-ringer, two or three steps; I no longer have the exact details in memory; I was plunged in a sort of reverie which made me walk as if in sleep. At a certain moment the bell-ringer held out his big bony hand to me, I heard our footsteps echo from the floor; we were in a very dark place, a sort of secret vault.

I shall never forget what I next experienced. The bell ringer, mute and motionless, stood in the middle of the vault, leaning against a post driven into the floor and, with his left hand, raised his lamp above his head. I looked around us. A hazy, diffuse glow vaguely illuminated the vault; I could make out its pointed arch.

Suddenly, fixing my eyes on the wall, I saw that we were not alone. Strange figures, standing and leaning against the walls, surrounded us everywhere. By the light of the lamp, I could glimpse them dimly through the damp fog that fills the low, dark places.

Imagine a circle of terrifying faces, in the centre of which I stood. Their blackish, naked bodies sank into, and were lost in, the night; but I saw pressed against each other, protruding from the shadows, and leaning as it were towards me, a crowd of sinister, terrible heads which seemed to call to me from wide-open mouths, but voicelessly, and to gaze at me from eyeless sockets. What were these figures? Statues, no doubt. I took the lamp from the bell-ringer's hands and approached. They were corpses.

In 1793, while the royal necropolis in Saint-Denis was being violated, the people's cemetery in Bordeaux was being treated in a like manner. Royalty and the People are twin sovereignties; the populace insulted them at the same time. Which proves, by the way, to those who do not comprehend my grammar, that the words *people* and *populace* are not synonymous.

The Saint-Michel cemetery in Bordeaux was devastated like the others. The coffins were torn from the ground, and the dust within thrown to the wind. When the pickaxes reached the foundations of the tower, they were surprised to find not more rotten coffins and ruptured vertebrae, but whole bodies, desiccated and preserved by the clay that had covered them for so many years. This inspired them to create a museum around this mass grave. The idea was suited to the time.

They found the little children of Rue Montfaucon and Chemin de Règles playing knucklebones with the scattered relics from the cemetery. They took them from their hands; all that could be found were collected, and the bones were piled up in the lower vault of the Saint-Michel bell-tower. They made a pile seventeen feet deep over which a platform with a balustrade was erected.

They crowned it all with the strangely intact corpses that had just been unearthed. There were seventy of them. They were placed upright against the wall in the circular space reserved between the balustrade and the wall. It was that floor which resonated beneath my feet; it was on those bones I had walked; it was those corpses that gazed at me.

When the bell-ringer had orchestrated his effect, for the artist staged the whole thing like some melodrama, he approached, and deigned to speak to me. He explained his corpses to me. The vampire became a cicerone (*guide*). It was like listening to a museum booklet chattering away. At times he attained the eloquence of a bear trainer.

— ‘Look at this one, sir, it’s number one. He’s got all his teeth. — See how well-preserved number two is; yet it’s nearly four hundred years old. — As for number three, he looks as if he’s breathing still, and can hear us. That’s hardly surprising. He’s only been dead sixty years. He’s one of the youngest here. I know people in town who knew him.’

He continued the tour in this way, passing gracefully from one spectre to another, and delivering his lesson with imperturbable exactitude. When I interrupted him with a question in mid-sentence, he answered me in his natural voice, then resumed his sentence at the very point where I had stopped him. At times, he struck a corpse with the stick he held in his hand, and it sounded like an empty suitcase. What, in fact, is the body of a human being when thought is no longer there, if not an empty suitcase?

I know of no more terrifying revue. Neither Dante nor the sculptor Orcagna (*Andrea di Cione di Arcangelo*) dreamed of anything more lugubrious. The macabre dances of the Lucerne Bridge (*the series of 17th-century paintings lining the interior of Lucerne’s Spreuer Bridge, depicting the Danse Macabre, ‘Dance of Death’, and created by Caspar Meglinger*) and the Campo Santo in Pisa (*the ‘Triumph of Death’ fresco, also known as the ‘Dance of Death,’ in the Camposanto Monumentale, attributed to Buonamico Buffalmacco*) are only a shadow of this reality.

There was a Black African woman, hanging from a nail by a rope under her armpits, who laughed at me with a hideous laugh. In a corner a whole family who died, it is said, poisoned by mushrooms, were gathered; there were four of them. The mother, her head bowed, seemed still trying to calm her youngest child who lay dying between her knees; the eldest son, whose profile had retained something youthful, rested his forehead on his father’s shoulder. The arm

of a woman who had died of breast-cancer was strangely bent as if to show her wound, enlarged by the dreadful work of death. Beside her stood a gigantic porter, who had one day placed a bet that he would carry a load weighing two thousand pounds from the Caillau Gate to the Chartrons district. He carried it, won his bet, and died. The man slain by a bet stood elbow to elbow with a man killed in a duel. The sword-hole by which death had entered was still visible in the right side of that gaunt chest.

A few steps away writhed a poor fifteen-year-old child who, it is said, had been buried alive. This was the height of terror. This spectre was suffering. He still struggles, after six hundred years, against the vanished coffin. He lifts the lid with his skull and knee; he presses the oak boards with his heel and elbow; he breaks his nails, in desperation, against the walls; his chest expands; the muscles of his neck swell in a dreadful manner; he screams. We can no longer hear this scream, but we see it. It is all horrible.

The last of the seventy was the oldest. It dates back eight hundred years. The bell-ringer pointed out the teeth and hair to me in a coquettish manner. Next to it was a small child.

As I was retracing my steps, I noticed one of these spectral forms seated on the ground near the door. His neck was outstretched, his head raised, his mouth piteous in shape, and his right palm open; a loincloth clothed the middle of his body, one leg and one foot were bare, and from his other thigh protruded a bare shin set on a stone like a wooden leg. He seemed to be asking for alms. Nothing could be stranger or more mysterious than such a beggar at such a door.

What should I give him? What alms to disburse? How much coinage do the dead need? I remained motionless for a long time before this apparition, and my reverie gradually became a prayer.

When one thinks that all these misshapen forms, today chained in frozen silence and distressing attitudes, once lived, palpitated, suffered, loved; when one thinks that they viewed the spectacles of Nature, the trees, the countryside, the flowers, the sun, the blue vault of the sky, instead of this livid vault; when one thinks that they once possessed youth, life, beauty, knew joy and pleasure, and that amidst the feast they too have indulged in long bursts of laughter, imprudently and forgetfully; when one thinks that they have been as we are and that we will be as they are; when one finds oneself thus, alas, face to face with one's future state, a gloomy thought comes to oppress the heart, one seeks in vain to hold on to the human things one possesses, which will all successively slip through one's fingers like sand, and one feels oneself falling into the abyss.

For anyone who looks on these human remains with an eye for the flesh, nothing is more hideous. Their ragged shrouds barely hide them. Their ribs appear bare through their torn diaphragms; their teeth are yellow, the nails black, the hair sparse and frizzy; the skin is a tawny sheepskin that secretes a greyish dust; the muscles have lost their outlines, the viscera and the intestines have resolved into a sort of reddish tow from which hang dreadful threads that silently unwind in the darkness an invisible distaff of death. At the bottom of an open-belly one sees a spinal column. — 'Monsieur,' my guide said to me, 'see how well preserved they are!' For anyone who looks at all this with the eye of the mind, nothing is more formidable.

The bell-ringer, seeing me lost in reverie, crept away, and left me alone. The lamp remained on the ground. When the fellow was no longer there, it seemed to me that something troubling me had vanished with him. I felt in direct and intimate communication, so to speak, with the gloomy inhabitants of the vault.

I looked with a kind of dizziness at this circle surrounding me, motionless and yet convulsed at the same time. The arms of some hung down, others were twisted; some seemed to clasp their hands together. A certain expression of terror and anguish remains on all those faces that have seen the interior of the sepulchre. However the tomb treats it, a dead body is still terrible.

To me, as you have already gathered, they were not mummies; they were ghosts. I saw all these heads turned towards each other, all these ears which seemed to listen leaning towards all these mouths which seemed to whisper, and it seemed to me that these dead people, torn from the earth and condemned to endure, lived, in this night of dreadful and eternal life, that they spoke to each other in the dense mist of their dungeon, that they recounted the dark adventures of the soul in the tomb, and that they said inexpressible things to each other.

What frightening dialogues! What can they converse about? O chasms where thought is lost! They know what lies beyond life. They know the secret of the journey. They have rounded the promontory. The vast clouds have been torn for them. We remain in the land of conjectures, hopes, ambitions, passions, of all the follies we call wisdom, of all the chimeras we call truths. They have entered the region of the infinite, the immutable, the realm of reality. They know the things that are, and the only things that are. All the questions that occupy us night and day, we dreamers, we philosophers, all the subjects of our endless meditations, the goal of life, the object of creation, the persistence of the self, the ultimate state of the soul; they know the depths of them; to all our enigmas, they hold the answers. They know the end of all our beginnings. Why do they appear so vile? Who gave them this desperate and fearsome appearance?

If our hearing was not too coarse to comprehend their words, if God had not placed between themselves and ourselves the insurmountable wall of flesh and life, what would they say to us? What revelations would they utter to us? What advice would they give? Would we emerge from it wise or foolish? What do they bring to us from the tomb?

It would be terrifying to us if we were to believe these spectral apparitions to be all. But they are only appearance, and it would be foolish to believe in that alone. Whatever we imagine, we dreamers, we only touch the surface of things, we only reach to a limited depth. The sphere of infinity no more allows itself to be penetrated by thought than the core of the terrestrial globe by a probe.

The various philosophies are simply artesian wells; they all cause the same water to spring from the same soil, the same truth mixed with human mud, and heated with the warmth of God. But no well, no philosophy reaches to the centre of things. The mind of genius itself, the most powerful of all probes, cannot touch the fiery core, Being, the geometric and mystical point, the ineffable heart of truth. We will never make anything emerge from the rock except a drop of water sometimes, sometimes a spark of fire.

Let us think, however. Let us strike the rock, let us dig the earth. That is to fulfil the law of Nature. Some must think as others must plough.

And then let us resign ourselves. The secret that philosophy seeks to wrest from her Nature keeps. Who will ever be able to defeat you, O Nature? We see only one side of things; God sees both.

Human remains terrify us when we contemplate them; but they are only remains, empty, vain and uninhabited. It seems to us that these relics reveal dreadful things to us. No. They arouse fear, nothing more. Do we see the intellect there? Do we see the soul? Do we see the spirit? Do we know what the spirits of the dead would tell us, if we were given a glimpse of them in their glorious radiance? Let us not believe, then, in the body, which degenerates horribly, and which is repelled by its own destruction; let us not believe in the corpse, nor the skeleton, nor the mummy, rather let us remember that, if there is night in the sepulchre, there is also light. The soul entered the light while the body remained behind in the night; the soul contemplates this light. What does it matter if the body grimaces, if the soul smiles?

I was plunged into this chaos of thought. Those dead people, who were conversing with each other no longer inspired me with fear; I felt almost at ease among them. Suddenly, I know not why, it struck me that at that very moment, at the top of that tower of Saint-Michel, two hundred feet above my head, and above these spectres who were exchanging in the night who knows what mysterious communications, the telegraph, a poor wooden machine pulled by ropes, was stirring beneath the clouds, and sending across space, in the mysterious language that it likewise employs, one after another, all those events imperceptible from here which will appear tomorrow in the newspaper.

Never have I felt more deeply than at that moment the vanity of everything that fascinates us. What a poem that tower of Saint-Michel is! What a contrast is there, and what a lesson! On its summit, in the light and in the sun, in the middle of the azure of the sky, above the faces of the busy crowd swarming in the streets, a telegraph machine, gesticulating and struggling like Pasquin on his plinth (*The Hellenistic-style statue on Piazza Pasquino in Rome, on which lampoons have been pasted since the fifteenth century*), communicates, and details minutely, all the poverty of the history of the day, and the politics of the last quarter of an hour: Baldomero Espartero falls, Ramon Narváez rises, Joaquín López succeeds Álvaro Becerra (*as Prime Minister of Spain, July 23rd, 1843, after earlier presiding over the 'ten-day' government*); all the great microscopic events, the infusoria who become dictators, the algae who become tribunes, the bacteria who become tyrants; all the pettiness of which transient humanity and the fleeting moment are composed. Yet, all the while, at its base, in the middle of the mass on which the tower rests, in a crypt to which neither a sound nor a ray of sunlight reach, a council of spectres, seated in a circle in the darkness, talk quietly of the tomb and eternity.

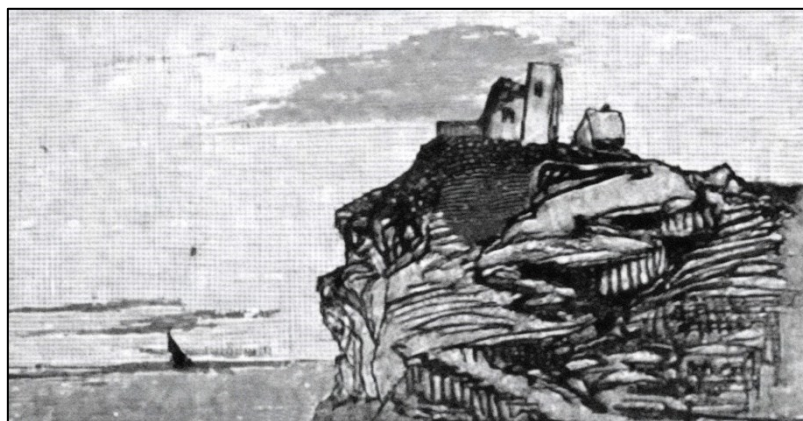
Chapter IV: Biarritz

July 25th (written before the preceding note)

You know, my friend, of those three points on the Normandy coast that I like best: Bourg-d'Ault (*Ault*), Le Tréport and Étretat; Étretat with its immense arches carved through the cliff by the waves; Le Tréport with its old church, its old stone cross, and its old port teeming with fishing boats; Bourg-d'Ault with its wide Gothic street that abruptly ends at the open sea. Well, now you may add Biarritz to Le Tréport, Étretat, and Bourg-d'Ault as one of the places I would choose *for the pleasure of my eyes*, as Fénelon says (in '*Les Aventures de Télémaque*', Book I).

I know of no place more charming and magnificent than Biarritz. There are no trees, say people who criticise everything, even the good Lord in his most beautiful works. But one must choose: either the ocean or the forest. The wind from the sea stunts the trees.

Biarritz is a white village with red roofs and green shutters, set on hillocks of grass and heather, whose undulations it follows. You leave the village, you descend the dunes, the sand crumbles under your heels, and suddenly you find yourself on a soft, even shore in the midst of an inextricable labyrinth of rocks, chambers, arches, grottoes, and caverns, a strange architecture thrown pell-mell into the midst of the waves, which the sky fills with azure, the sun with light and shadow, the sea with foam, and the wind with noise.



'Biarritz'- Victor Hugo (1894)

[*Paris Musées*](#)

Nowhere have I seen old Neptune ravage old Cybele with more power, gaiety, and grandeur. This whole coast is full of reverberations. The waters of the Bay of Biscay gnaw and tear at it, and extend their vast murmuring to the reefs. Yet I have never wandered this deserted shore, at whatever hour, without a great feeling of peace rising in my heart. The tumult of Nature never disturbs solitude.

You could not conceive of all that lives, palpitates, and vegetates amidst the seeming chaos of a disintegrating shoreline. A crust of living shells covers the rocks; zoophytes and molluscs swim and float, themselves translucent, in the translucent waves. Water filters drop by drop, and rains down in large pearls, from the vaults of the caves; crabs and sea-slugs crawl, among the kelp and the seaweed which trace on the wet sand the contours of the waves that brought them. Above the caves, a whole range of curious and botanical specimens grow well-nigh unseen: the Bayonne milk-vetch (*Astragalus baionensis*), the Gallic pink (*Dianthus gallicus*), the sea-flax (*Linum maritimum*), the burnet-leaved rose (*Rosa Pimpinellifolia*), and the daisy-leaved snapdragon (*Antirrhinum thymifolium*).

There are narrow coves where humble fishermen, squatting around an old rowboat, skin and gut the fish they caught during the night, to the deafening sound of the tide rising and falling among the reefs. Young girls, barefoot, wash the skins of dogfish in the waves, and, each time the sea white with foam rises up at them, like an angry lion turning about; they lift up their skirts and recoil with great bursts of laughter.

One bathes at Biarritz as at Dieppe, Le Havre, and Le Tréport; but with a freedom that its beautiful skies inspire, and its mild climate tolerates. Women, wrapped in large shawls from head to toe, but wearing the latest hats from Paris, lace veils over their faces, enter with lowered gaze one of those canvas huts with which the beach is strewn; a moment later, they emerge, bare-legged, dressed in a simple brown woollen shirt which often barely reaches below the knee, and run, with peals of laughter, to throw themselves into the sea. This exercise of liberty, together with human joy, and the grandeur of the sky, has a grace all its own.

The village girls, and the pretty grisettes of Bayonne, bathe in serge shirts, often with large holes, without worrying too much about what the holes show and what the shirts hide.

On the second day I visited Biarritz, as I was walking at low tide among the caves, looking for shells and scaring away the crabs that fled obliquely and burrowed into the sand, I heard a voice behind a rock, singing the following verse in a local patois, but not enough to prevent me from distinguishing the words:

‘Gastibelza, l’homme à la carabine.

Chantait ainsi:

Quelqu’un a-t-il connu doña Sabine,

Quelqu’un d’ici?

Dansez, chantez, villageois, la nuit gagne

Le mont Falù.

Le vent qui vient à travers la montagne
Me rendra fou.'

'Gastibelza, the man with the carabine.
Sang loud and clear:
Does anyone know of Doña Sabine,
Anyone here?
Dance, villagers, sing; its night for certain
On Mount Falù.
The wind that blows from the mountain
Will drive me cuckoo.'

It was a woman's voice. I turned the corner of the rock. The singer was a bathing. A beautiful young girl swimming, in a white chemise and a short petticoat, in a small cove closed off by two reefs at the entrance to a cave. Her clothes lay on the sand at the end of the cave. When she saw me, she came halfway out of the water and began to sing the second stanza, and, seeing that, motionless while standing on the rock, I was listening to her, she said to me with a smile in a jargon combining our language and Spanish:

— '*Senor estrangero, conoce usted this song?*'

— 'I think so', I told her. 'A little.'

Then I walked away, though it was not that she sent me away. Do you not find in this a memory of Ulysses listening to the Siren? Nature repeats, and return to us, again and again, while rejuvenating them, the innumerable themes and motifs with which the imagination of humankind created all the old poems and mythologies.

All in all, with its friendly population; its white and pretty houses; its wide dunes; its fine sand; its enormous caves; its superb sea; Biarritz is an admirable place. My only fear is that it will become fashionable. People are already visiting from Madrid, and soon they will be doing so from Paris.

Then Biarritz, this rural, rustic, and still honest village, will be taken up with a sordid yearning for profit; *sacra fames* ('*Auri sacra fames: the accursed hunger for gold.*' Virgil's '*Aeneid*' Book III, 57). Biarritz will plant poplars on its hills, build ramps on its dunes, stairs on its precipices, kiosks on its rocks, and put benches in its caves, and trousers on its bathers. Biarritz will become modest, and rapacious. Prudishness, *which as regards the body possesses nothing chaste but the ears*, as Molière might have put it (*compare* '*Women are more chaste as regards their ears than the rest of their bodies*' from '*La Critique de l'École des femmes*', 1663) will do away with the free and innocent familiarity of these young women who play with the waves. And then there will be a reading room and a theatre. The newspaper will be read in

Biarritz; melodramas and tragedies will be performed in Biarritz. ‘O Zaire, what do you wish of me?’ (*A mock reference to Voltaire’s tragedy ‘Zaïre’ of 1732, on which Bellini’s opera ‘Zaira’ of 1829 was based*). In the evening, one will go to the concert, because there will certainly be a concert every evening, and a tenor, a pot-bellied nightingale of about fifty, will sing soprano arias, in Italian, a few steps from this old ocean which sings the eternal music of tides, hurricanes and storms. Thus, Biarritz will no longer be Biarritz. It will be something faded and bastardised like Dieppe and Ostend.

Nothing is grander than a fishing hamlet, with its naive and ancient traditions, sited at the edge of the ocean; while nothing is grander than a city that seemingly possesses the august function of thinking on behalf of all humanity and proposing to the world those novelties, often difficult and formidable, that civilisation demands. But nothing is smaller, more petty, more ridiculous than an imitation Paris.

Cities bathed by the sea should carefully preserve the physiognomy that their location grants them. The ocean possesses every grace, every beauty, all the grandeur one could desire. When one has the ocean, what is the point of trying to reproduce Paris?

Already various symptoms announce the imminent transformation of Biarritz. Ten years ago, people came here from Bayonne in a *cacolet* (*a Basque-style mule-mounted pannier, carrying two, one in each side-basket*); two years ago, they came in a *coucou* (*a two wheeled cabriolet*) now they come by omnibus. A hundred years ago, twenty years ago even, people bathed in the old port, a small bay overlooked by two ancient dilapidated towers. Today, people bathe in the new port. Ten years ago, there was barely a single inn in Biarritz; today, there are three or four ‘hôtels’.

It is not that I blame the omnibuses, nor the new port where the waves break more broadly than in the old port and where bathing is consequently more efficient, nor the ‘hôtels’ whose only fault is a lack of windows overlooking the sea; but I fear other potential improvements, and would like Biarritz to remain Biarritz. So far all is well, but let it be left there. Meanwhile, the omnibus service from Bayonne to Biarritz has not been established without resistance. The *coucou* struggles against the omnibus, as no doubt, ten years ago, the *cacolet* struggled against the *coucou*. All the carters of the city are in revolt against two saddlers, Castex and Anatol, who introduced these omnibuses. A league against them has been formed, competition has ensued, a coalition has been formed. It is an Iliad of cab drivers, which exposes the traveller’s purse to strange assaults.

The day after my arrival in Bayonne, I wished to go to Biarritz. Not knowing the way, I asked a passer-by, a Navarrese peasant in a splendid suit, with wide olive-velvet trousers, a red belt, a shirt with a large turned-down collar attached with a silver ring, a jacket of heavy chocolate-coloured cloth embroidered with brown silk, and a small Henri II hat edged with velvet, and adorned with a black, curly ostrich-feather. I asked this magnificent passer-by the way to Biarritz.

— ‘Take the Rue du Pont Mayou,’ he told me, ‘and follow it to the Porte d’Espagne.’

— ‘Is it easy,’ I added, ‘to find a carriage to go to Biarritz?’

The Navarrese looked at me, smiled a grave smile, and spoke, with the accent of his country, these memorable words, the full depth of which I only understood later:

— ‘Monsieur, it is easy to go, but difficult to return.’

I took the Rue du Pont Mayou. While ascending it, I came across several posters in various colours, which advertised carriages to Biarritz at various honest prices; I noticed, but perfunctorily, that all these posters ended with the following invariable protocol: ‘*Prices fixed until eight in the evening.*’

I arrived at the Porte d’Espagne. There a host of vehicles of all kinds were gathered, and piled up, pell-mell: chariots, cabriolets, coucous, gondolas, calèches, coupés, omnibuses. I had barely glanced at the crowd of carriages before another crowd had gathered round me. They were the coachmen. In a moment I was deafened. All their voices, accents, dialects, curses, and offers sounded forth together.

One took my right arm:

— ‘Monsieur, I am Monsieur Castex’s coachman; take the coupé; a seat for fifteen sous.’

Another took my left arm:

— ‘Monsieur, I am Ruspil; I also have a coupé; a seat for twelve sous.’

A third blocked my path:

— ‘Monsieur, I am Anatol. Here is my carriage; I’ll take you for ten sous.’

A fourth spoke in my ear:

— ‘Monsieur, come with Momus; I am Momus; full speed to Biarritz for six sous!’

— ‘Five sous!’ Other faces around me shouted.

— ‘Look, Monsieur, what a pretty car: *The Sultana of Biarritz!* A seat for five sous!’

The first one who had spoken, who was holding my right arm, finally dominated all this uproar:

— ‘Monsieur, I was the one who spoke to you first. I ask you for the preference.’

— ‘He’s asking you for fifteen sous!’ shouted the other coachmen.

— ‘Monsieur,’ the man replied coldly, ‘I ask you for only three sous.’

There was a long silence.

— ‘I spoke to the gentleman first,’ added the man.

Then, taking advantage of the stupor of the other contestants, he opened the door of his coupé swiftly, pushed me in before I had time to think, closed the coupé’s door, climbed onto his seat, and galloped on. His carriage was full. It seemed he had merely been waiting for me.

The carriage was brand new and very good; the horses were excellent. In less than half an hour we were in Biarritz.

When I got there, not wanting to abuse my position, I took fifteen sous from my purse, and gave them to the coachman. I was about to leave. He held me back by the arm:

— ‘Monsieur,’ he said to me, ‘it is only three sous.’

— ‘Nonsense!’ I replied, ‘You said fifteen sous at first. Fifteen sous it shall be.’

— ‘No, Monsieur, I said I’d take you for three sous. Three sous it is.’

He returned me the rest, and almost forced me to receive them.

— ‘Goodness me,’ I said as I left him, ‘there’s an honest man.’

The other travellers, like myself, had only paid three sous.

After walking all day on the beach, when evening came, I was ready to return to Bayonne. I was tired, and I thought, not without a degree of pleasure, of the excellent carriage and the virtuous coachman who had brought me. Eight o’clock struck on the distant clocks of the plain around, as I climbed the escarpment of the old port. I took no notice of a crowd of strollers appearing from all directions, who seemed to be hastening towards the entrance of the village where the carriages halt.

The evening was superb; a few stars were pricked out on the clear twilight sky; the sea, barely stirring, displayed the heavy, opaque shimmer of an immense oil slick.

A lighthouse, with a rotating lens, had just become apparent on my right, sited on a nearby headland; it shone, then vanished, then returned, and cast a sudden and brilliant beam, as if it were trying to contend with eternal Sirius shining resplendently in the mist at the opposite end of the horizon. I stopped, and contemplated this melancholy spectacle for a while, which seemed to me a metaphor for human effort in the presence of divine power.

Meanwhile, the night was thickening, and the thought of Bayonne, and the inn, suddenly came to mind. I set off again, and reached the square. There was only one carriage left; a lantern lying on the ground illuminated it. It was a four-seater; three places were already occupied. As I approached, a voice called to me:

— ‘Hasten, Monsieur, here’s the last seat, and we’re the last carriage.’

I recognised the voice of my earlier coachman. I had met with that man of ancient honesty, once more. Chance seemed to have been kind. I praised God. A moment later, and I would have been obliged to walk a good five miles of road.

— ‘Goodness me,’ I said, ‘you’re a fine fellow, and I’m pleased to see you again.’

— ‘Climb up quickly, Monsieur,’ the man continued.

I did so. When I was seated, the coachman, his hand on the door-catch, said to me:

— ‘Does the gentleman know that the hour has struck?’

— ‘What hour?’ I asked him.

— ‘Eight o’clock.’

— ‘Indeed, I heard some such hour strike.’

— ‘Monsieur knows,’ replied the man, ‘that after eight in the evening the price alters. We come and collect travellers to oblige them. The custom is to pay before leaving.’

— ‘Fine,’ I replied, taking out my purse. ‘How much is the fare?’

The man continued, quietly:

— ‘Monsieur, it’s twelve francs.’

I comprehended the game at once. In the morning it was announced that interested parties would be taken to Biarritz for three sous per person: there was a crowd; in the evening, that crowd was returned to Bayonne at twelve francs a head.

That very morning, I had experienced stoic self-denial in my coachman; I answered not a word, and paid.

As we were galloping back to Bayonne, I recalled that beautiful maxim of the Navarrese peasantry, of which I made this translation into the vernacular for the benefit of travellers: ‘Carriages to Biarritz. Price, per person, one way: *Three sous*; to return: *Twelve francs*. — ‘Is that not a splendid balancing act?

Some distance from Bayonne, one of my travelling companions pointed out the Chateau de Marracq, or at least what remains of it today, in the shade, on a hill.

The Chateau de Marracq is famous for having been, in 1808, the residence of the Emperor Napoleon, at the time of the ‘interview at Bayonne’ (*a series of meetings at which Napoleon pressured Ferdinand VII and his father, former King Charles IV, to renounce their claims to the Spanish throne*). Napoleon’s concept was splendid; but Providence works otherwise; and, though Joseph I (*Joseph Bonaparte, Napoleon’s elder brother*) governed the Old and New Castile like a good and wise prince, the concept, potentially so useful moreover to Europe, France, Spain and civilisation, of establishing a new dynasty in Spain, was as disastrous for Napoleon as it had been for Louis XIV.

Joséphine (*Napoleon’s first wife, Joséphine de Beauharnais*) who was a Creole, and superstitious, accompanied the Emperor to Bayonne. She was subject to premonitions, like Nuño Salido in the Spanish romance, and often repeated: ‘*Something ill will come of this.*’ (*See the fragmentary medieval Spanish romance ‘Los Siente Infantes de Lara’, in which the seven Infantes come to a sad end, the ill omens of which Nuño Salido their tutor, recognises. See also the etching of the relevant scene by Antonio Tempesta, 1612, Los Angeles County Museum of Art*)

Today, when we see the reverse side of these events, already buried in history, and from a distance of thirty years, we can distinguish, in their smallest details, all that was sinister about them, and of which it seems fate held all the threads.

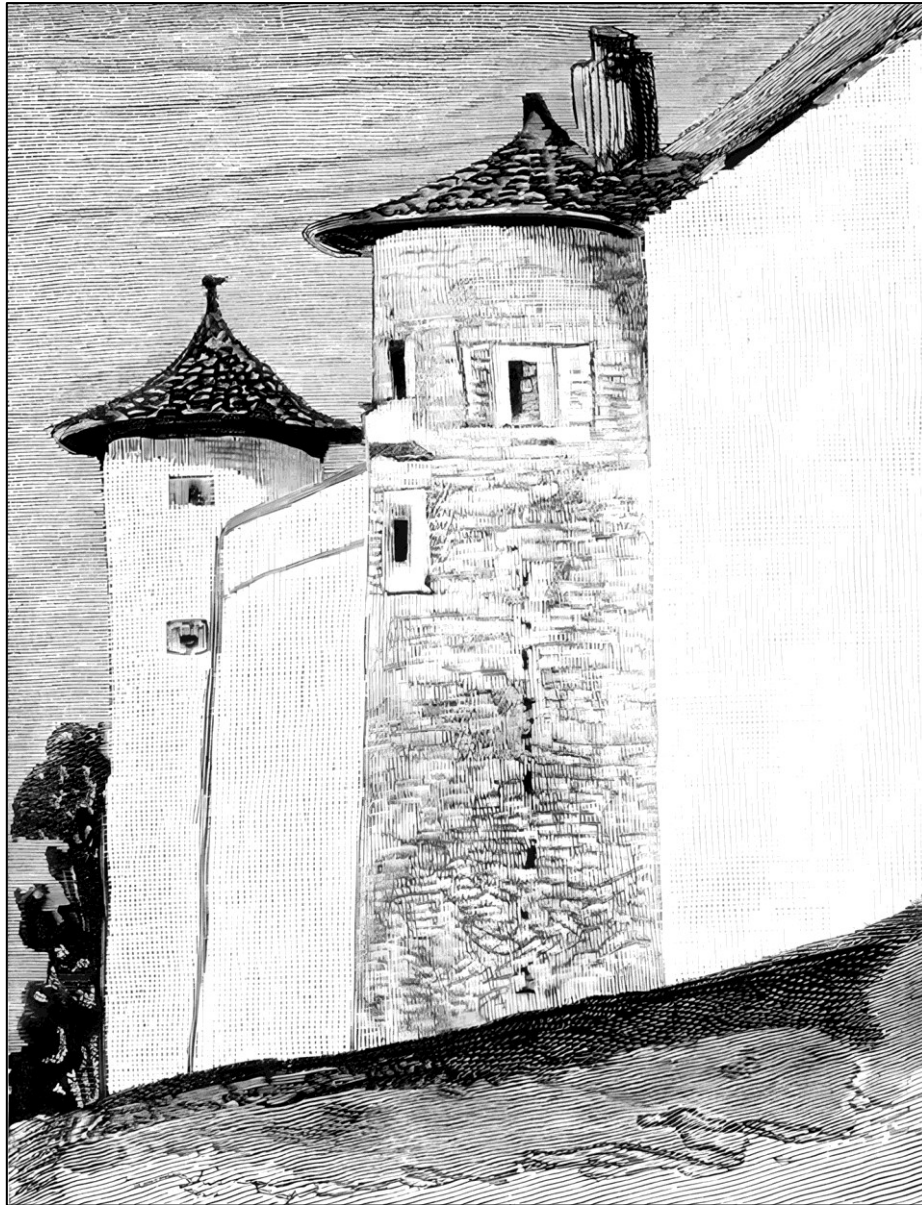
Here is a completely unknown oddity which deserves to be recorded. During his stay in Bayonne, the emperor wanted to visit the project he was having carried out at Boucaut. The Bayonne residents, who were adults at that time, remember the emperor, one morning, crossing the shore on foot to reach the brigantine anchored in the port which was to transport him to the mouth of the Adour.

He gave Josephine his arm. As everywhere, he had a retinue of kings; on this occasion the princes of the south and the Bourbons of Spain formed his entourage: the old King Charles IV and his wife; the Prince of Asturias, who has succeeded him, and called himself Ferdinand VII; and Don Carlos, today a pretender under the name of Charles V.

The entire population of Bayonne crowded the alleys leading to the sea, and surrounded the emperor, who walked without guards. Soon the crowd became so numerous, and so importunate, driven by southern curiosity, that Napoleon doubled his pace. The poor, breathless Bourbons followed him with great difficulty.

The emperor arrived at the brigantine's boat at such a pace that, as she entered, Joséphine, trying, hastily, to grasp the hand offered to her by the ship's captain, sank into the water up to her knees. In any other circumstance, she would have only laughed. *'It would have been an opportunity for her,'* Madame the Duchess of C*** told me as she related the story, *'to show off her legs, which were charmingly formed.'* But on this occasion, it was noted, she shook her head sadly. The omen boded ill.

All who witnessed this adventure came to a sad end. Napoleon died in exile; Joséphine died repudiated; Charles IV and his wife died dethroned. As for those who were then young princes, one of them, Ferdinand VII., died at forty-eight; the other, Don Carlos, is in exile. The brigantine, that the emperor sailed in, was lost a year later, crew and all, off Cap Ferret in the Bay of Arcachon (*at the Battle of l'Île d'Aix, 1809*); the captain who had given his hand to the Empress, and whose name was Jean-Baptiste Lafon, was condemned to death for abandoning his vessel (*La Calcutta*), and shot. Finally, the Château de Marracq, where Napoleon had lodged, which was transformed successively into a barracks and a seminary, burned down. In 1825, during a stormy night, some unknown hand, set fires at all four corners.



‘Bayonne. Château-Vieux, July 26, 2 p m. Grey sky’- Victor Hugo (1894)

[*Paris Musées*](#)

Chapter V: The Ox-Cart

San Sebastián, July 28th

It was on July 27th, 1843, at ten thirty in the morning, at the instant of my entering Spain, between Bidart and Saint-Jean-de-Luz, that at the door of a humble inn I saw an old Spanish

ox cart, again. By this I mean one of the small carts of Biscay, with a pair of oxen and two solid wheels which turn with the axle, and make a terrible noise which can be heard two miles away in the mountains.

Do not smile, my friend, at the loving care with which I minutely record the memory. If you only knew how charming that noise, dreadful to every other ear, is to mine! It reminds me of a blessed time.

I was very small when I crossed these mountains and heard it for the first time. The other day, as soon as it struck my ear, I felt suddenly rejuvenated at the very sound, and it seemed to me that the whole of my childhood was alive again in me, I cannot tell you what strange and supernatural effect of memory rendered it all fresh as an April dawn. I recalled everything at once; the smallest details of that happy time appeared again, clear, luminous, as if lit by the rising sun. As the oxcart approached with its rough music, I distinctly saw again that delightful past of mine, and it seemed to me that between that past and today no time at all had gone by. It was as if it were yesterday.

Oh, the beautiful days! The sweet and radiant years! I was a child, I was little, I was loved. I was untainted by experience, and my mother was there!

The travellers around me covered their ears; I was filled with rapture. Never has a Weber chorus, a Beethoven symphony, or a Mozart melody so awakened in the soul everything that is angelic and ineffable, as the furious and bizarre grinding of those two poorly greased wheels on a poorly paved road did in mine.

The ox-cart moved away, the noise gradually grew fainter, and as it faded among the mountains, the dazzling apparition of my childhood faded from my mind; then everything seemed to fade, and when the last note of that song, harmonious to me alone, had vanished in the distance, I felt myself slowly returning to reality, the present, life, and the night.

Blessed be the poor unknown cowherd who possessed the mysterious power to make my thoughts glow, and who, without knowing it, had aroused that magical evocation in my soul! May Heaven bless the passer-by, who with an unexpected burst of clarity makes the dark spirit of the dreamer rejoice!

My friend, this has filled my heart. I will write nothing more to you today.

Chapter VI: From Bayonne to San Sebastián

July 29th

I left Bayonne at sunrise. The road was delightful; it runs over a high plateau, with Biarritz on the right and the sea on the horizon. Closer, a mountain; closer still, a large green salty pool. A

naked child was giving a cow water. The landscape was magnificent; blue sky, blue sea, bright sun. From the top of a hill a donkey watched all this,

Dans le mol abandon
D'un mandarin lettré qui mange du chardon.

With the casual abandonment
Of a learned mandarin, munching a thistle.

My notes: we passed a pretty Louis XIII castle, the last one on the French side of the southern border. In Bidart, they change the horses. A sort of strange idol at the church door, venerated now as in the past. The destiny of that piece of stone was to be worshipped: a god to the pagans, a saint to the Christians. He who neglects to think needs such fetishes.

Next, Saint-Jean-de-Luz, a village thrust into the crevices of a mountain. Arms of the sea, about sand. Puddles of murky water smelling of fish; washerwomen. An air of joy. A small hotel, with turrets like the Hôtel d'Angoulême in the Marais in Paris, and probably built for Cardinal Mazarin at the time of Louis XIV's marriage (*After the Treaty of the Pyrenees of 1659, Maria Theresa of Spain was married by proxy to Louis XIV at Fuenterrabia in 1660. She met Louis for the first time on the Isle of Pheasants. in the Bidasoa river*).

The Bidasoa, a pretty river with a Basque name, acts as the border between two languages and two countries, and maintains its neutrality as regards being French or Spanish.

I crossed the bridge. At the southern end the carriage stopped. Passports were requested. A soldier in torn canvas trousers, and a green jacket patched with blue at the elbow and collar, appeared at the door. It was the sentry. I am in Spain. Here I am in the country where they pronounce *v* as *b*; which is what that drunkard Julius Caesar Scaliger was ecstatic about: 'Felices populi,' he cried, 'quibus vivere est *bibere*: a happy people where *to live* is *to drink*.'

There are no pheasants on the Isle of Pheasants, which is merely a kind of green plateau. A cow and three ducks represented the pheasants; extras no doubt hired to play this role for the satisfaction of passers-by.

It seems to be a general rule. In Paris, in the Marais, there is no marsh; in the Rue des Trois-Pavillons (*now Rue Elzévir*), there are no pavilions; in Rue de la Perle, there are only sluts; on the Île aux Cygnes (*Isle of Swans*), there are only cast-up slippers, and dead dogs. If a place is called Pheasant Island, there will only be ducks. O travellers, impertinent beings driven by curiosity, forget not this maxim!

I nonetheless gazed at Pheasant Island, where the House of France married the House of Austria (*Maria Theresa, Infanta of Spain, was also an Archduchess of Austria as a member of the Spanish branch of the House of Habsburg*); where Cardinal Mazarin, that doyen of cunning,

fought in close combat with Luis Méndez de Haro (*the 'bridegroom' in the proxy marriage, who had negotiated with Mazarin over the Treaty of the Pyrenees, which was signed on the island*), the doyen of pride; and where a cow was now grazing the grass. Was the spectacle any the less grand? Is the meadow diminished as a result? Machiavelli would say yes; Hesiod would say no.

I am in Irun. My eyes had sought Irun eagerly. It was here that Spain appeared to me for the first time, and so astonished me, with its dark houses, its narrow streets, its wooden balconies, and fortress-like doors, I being a French child raised amidst the mahogany of the empire-style. My eyes, accustomed to starred bed-curtains, swan-necked armchairs, sphinx-shaped firedogs, gilded bronzes, and turquoise-blue marble, gazed with a sort of terror at the large sculpted sideboards, the tables with twisted legs, the four-poster beds, the crooked and squat silverware, the leaded windows; a whole world, at the same time old and new, revealed itself to me here.

Alas! Irun is no longer Irun. Irun now displays more mahogany in the empire style than Paris. It is nothing but white houses and green shutters. One senses that Spain, always behind the times, is reading Jean-Jacques Rousseau at this very moment. Irun has lost all its physiognomy. O, villages that are being embellished, how ugly you become! Where is history? Where is the past? Where the poetry? Where the memories? Irun resembles Batignolles.

There are barely two or three black houses with overhanging balconies left. I thought I recognised, however, and saluted from the depths of my soul, the house opposite the one my mother had occupied, the old house that I contemplated for long hours with such astonishment, and already, though a child, and French, and raised amidst mahogany, with a measure of sympathy. The house where my mother lived has disappeared beneath an embellishment.

There is still an old column in the square bearing the Spanish coat of arms from the time of Philip II of Spain. Napoleon, passing through Irun, leaned against that column.

Leaving Irun, I recognised the junction, the road rises in one direction and descends in the other. I recalled it as I saw it as a child. It was morning. The soldiers of our escort, cheerful as soldiers always are in wartime when they set out with food for three days, marched up the road that rises, and we followed the road that descends.

Hondarribia had left a luminous impression on me. It had remained in my mind as the golden silhouette of a village, with a pointed bell-tower, in the depths of a blue gulf, at an immense distance. I found it not to be as I recalled it. Hondarribia is a rather pretty village situated on a plateau with a tree-lined promenade at the foot, and the sea beside it, and is quite close to Irun; a mile or so away.

The road plunges into mountains of superb shape, and charming vegetation. The hills are covered in green velvet, worn here and there. A house appears, a large stone house with a balcony, with a vast coat of arms that one at first takes for the coat of arms of Spain, so pompous and imperially variegated is it. An inscription warns: *Estas armas de la casa Solar, año 1759: these are the arms of the House of Solar, 1759.*

A torrent runs alongside the highway. Every now and then, an ivy-covered arched bridge swayed beneath some oxcart crossing its deck. The wheels screeched horribly in the ravines.

For a few moments a man armed with a rifle runs alongside the stagecoach, dressed like a Parisian; round jacket and wide trousers in leather-coloured cotton velvet; a cartridge belt across his stomach; a round waxed hat like our cab-drivers, with this inscription: 'Cazadores de Gipuzkoa' (*Riflemen of Gipuzkoa*). He is a gendarme. He is escorting the stagecoach.

Are there thieves? Is it possible. We are leaving France. We shrug our shoulders. However, we arrive at a village. What is this place called? Astigarraga. What is that long, green-painted carriage at the door of the inn? It's the mail-coach. Why is it here, unhitched, and unloaded? It's unloaded because it no longer has any cargo; unhitched because it no longer has any horses; here because it was stopped. Stopped? By whom? By thieves, who killed the postilion, took the horses, robbed the mail, and robbed the travellers. And the poor devils standing there on the threshold of the inn with that pitiful expression? They are the travellers. Oh! Really? We become more alert. So, it is possible. We can see we are certainly no longer in France.

The cazador leaves. Another one arrives. The one who is leaving approaches the coach door and asks for alms. That's his pay. One thinks of the gold coins one has in one's pocket, then gives him a silver one. The poor give a penny, the misers a farthing. The cazador receives the peseta, takes the penny, accepts the farthing. The cazador knows little more than to run along the road, carrying a rifle, and beg for alms. That constitutes all his labour. I ask myself this question: what would become of the cazador if there were no thieves? Good question! He would become a thief, himself. At least so I fear. The rifleman must live.

Two-thirds of the villages are ruined. Carlists (*supporters of the claim of the Bourbon Don Carlos, Count of Molina, brother of Ferdinand VII, to the Spanish throne*) oppose Cristinos (*supporters of Queen Maria Cristina and her Liberal government*). The Chouan civil war was taking place in Gipuzkoa, and Navarre six years ago. In Spain, the highway is given over to civil war, from time to time, and to thieves always. Thieves are the norm.

As one enters Hernani, the road bends sharply to the right. A pedestrian pavement runs alongside the road. A crowd of countrymen in berets were heading to the market to sell their livestock.

As the coach came galloping downhill, a poor, frightened ox plunged into a thicket. A little boy of four or five who was driving it took its head, and clasped it to his chest, stroking it gently with his hand. He was doing to the ox what his mother no doubt did to him. The ox, trembling all over, confidently buried its large head, armed with enormous horns, between the child's little arms, and cast a sideways, frightened glance at the coach passing by drawn by six mules to a dreadful din of bells and chains. The child smiled, and spoke to it in a low voice. There is nothing so touching and admirable as seeing brute, blind strength graciously reassured by intelligent weakness.

The coach reached the summit of a hill; a magnificent spectacle lay below. A promontory on the right, a promontory on the left, two gulfs with an isthmus in the middle, a mountain at its end planted in the sea; at the foot of the mountain, a city. Such is San Sebastián.

The first glance is magical; the second full of interest. An old lighthouse on the headland to the left. An island in the bay below this lighthouse. A ruined convent. A sandy beach. Ox-

carts unloading ships loaded with iron ore onto the beach, and the port of San Sebastián, a curious tangle of complicated pierheads.



‘St Sébastien, the old lighthouse’ - Victor Hugo (1894)

[Paris Musées](#)

To the right, the Loyola Valley, full of robins, where the Urumea, a beautiful steel-coloured river, forms a gigantic horseshoe. On the northern promontory, a few sections of razed wall remain, relics of the fort from which the Duke of Wellington bombarded the city in 1813. The waves break there admirably.

At the entrance to the city, a drawbridge, a fortress. On the city gate, a beautiful, crude cartouche from the time of Philip II of Spain, which probably contained the city’s coat of arms, part-erased by some French revolutionary. Inside this same gate, above the guardhouse and the sentry, was a large painted wooden Christ bleeding large drops from under his crown of thorns. A font of holy water stood beside it. The soldiers on guard were playing on a guitar and castanets. The dreadful paving consists of small pebbles. San Sebastián’s appearance is that of a newly rebuilt city, in regular squares like a chessboard.

While dining, I heard laughter in the street, and the sound of castanets. I went to see, and a swarm of strange men surrounded me; ragged, draped in rags, but proud and elegant like the figures in Jaques Callot etchings; their hats those of the Incroyables (*dandies*) of the Directory period; small moustaches; a noble, witty, and impudent air. People around me were

shouting: '*Los estudiantes! Los estudiantes!*' They were students from Salamanca on vacation. One of them approached me, bowed to me, and held out his hat. I threw a peseta into it. He rose. They all shouted: 'Viva!' The students race around the country begging for alms. Some are rich. It amuses them. In Spain, begging for alms is nothing shocking. It's the 'done' thing.

I entered a barber's shop. This artiste lived in a sort of cave. Three large walls and a ceiling; no windows; a door at the back. The house is furnished with an exquisite Louis XV mirror, two coloured engravings of the battles of Austerlitz and Marengo, a small child, and four or five large wheels such as might once have been found in an executioner's lodgings. The man speaks four languages, smells very bad, and shaves one admirably.

This is his story. He was born in Aix-la-Chapelle, and speaks German. The emperor made him a Frenchman and the empire a soldier, he speaks French. The Spanish took him prisoner in 1811, he speaks Spanish. He married, here, a *Basquaise*, his word, he speaks Basque. That's what it's like to pursue one's life in four different languages.

I passed a ruined convent near San Sebastián. Quite a beautiful ruin, especially from a distance. The church dates from the sixteenth century. The tower is crumbling. The stones of the vault were coming loose and falling at my feet as I sketched. A poor family has settled there in a corner of what was once the garden. They have half walled-up the door of a chapel and turned it into a stable. There are angels painted on the wall. As in the nativity scene, we see the manger, the ox, and the donkey.

Auster Oyarbide, a witty Basque, takes charge of carrying my belongings. He lifts them. — 'They're heavy!' — 'How much?' — 'One peseta.' — It's settled. — He loads everything onto his head, and affects to groan at the weight. At the city gate, on the way out, he meets a woman, a poor old woman, barefoot, already laden. He goes to her, says something in Basque; the woman stops. He loads his entire bundle into the vast basket which she is already carrying half-full on her head, then he returns to my side. The woman walks in front. Auster, his hands behind his back, walks beside me, and talks to me. He has a horse; he offers it to me for an excursion to Renteria and Hondarribia; one day, eight pesetas. We arrive. The old woman places the package at Oyarbide's feet and bows to him. I give Oyarbide his peseta. 'Won't you give the poor woman something?' he says.

Chapter VII: San Sebastián

San Sebastian — August 2nd

I am in Spain. At least, I have one foot planted here. This is a country of poets and smugglers. Nature is magnificent; as wild as dreamers require, as harsh as thieves could wish. A mountain

in the middle of the sea. Traces of bombardment on all the houses, traces of storm on all the rocks, traces of fleas on all the shirts; such is San Sebastián.

But am I truly in Spain? San Sebastián is attached to Spain as Spain is attached to Europe, by a strip of land. It is a peninsula within a peninsula; and here again, as in a host of other things, the physical aspect is an emblem of the society. One is scarcely Spanish in San Sebastián; one is Basque.

This is Gipuzkoa, it is the ancient land of the *fueros* (*outsiders*), one of the free provinces, the *vascongadas* (*the others are Álava and Biscay*). They speak a little Castilian, but they mostly speak *Basque*. The women wear the mantilla, but not the *basquine* (*a tight-fitting Basque bodice*); and even the mantilla, which the women of Madrid wear with such coquetry and grace, and even over their eyes, the Gipuzkoans relegate to the back of the head, which does not prevent them from appearing coquettish and very graceful. They dance in the evening on the lawns, snapping the fingers of both hands, like pale shadows of the castanets. The dancers sway with harmonious suppleness, but without verve, without passion, without ardour, without voluptuousness; a mere shadow of the *cachucha* (*a solo dance similar to the bolero*).

And then the French are everywhere; in the city, out of every twelve shops three are run by the French. I am not complaining; I simply note the fact. Besides, considering them only with regard to the populace, all these cities, here and beyond, Bayonne as well as San Sebastián, Oloron as well as Tolosa, contain mixed populations. One feels an eddy of peoples mingling. They are like river mouths. This is neither France nor Spain, neither sea nor river.

A singular aspect, moreover, and one worthy of study I might add, is that here a deep and hidden bond, that nothing has been able to break, unites, despite treaties and diplomatic borders, despite even the Pyrenees, the natural border, all the members of the mysterious Basque family. The old name *Navarre* is nothing. One is born Basque, one speaks Basque, one lives a Basque, and one dies a Basque. The Basque language is a homeland, in itself; I almost said a religion. Speak a Basque word to a mountaineer among the mountains; before you speak it, you are barely a man to him; once spoken, you are his brother. The Spanish language is a foreign language here, as is the French language.

No doubt this Basque unity is weakening, and will eventually disappear. Large states absorb small ones; such is the law of history and Nature. But it is remarkable that this unity, seemingly so negligible, has resisted so long. France received one setback amidst the Pyrenees, Spain another; neither France nor Spain have been able to dissolve Basque solidarity. Despite the more recent history superimposed on it for four centuries, it is still perfectly visible like a crater beneath a lake.

Never has the force of molecular adhesion, through which nations are formed, worked more energetically against the thousand causes of every kind that dissolve and recompose these vast natural conglomerations. I would wish, by the way, history-makers and treaty-makers to study, a little more closely than they are accustomed to, the laws of this mysterious chemistry through which humanity is made and unmade.

This Basque unity leads to strange results. Thus, Gipuzkoa is a land of ancient communes. The old republican spirit of Andorra and Bagnères-de-Bigorre has spread for centuries in the

Jaizkibel mountains, which are in some ways the Jura of the Pyrenees. Here the people possessed a charter, while France was ruled by a Christian absolutist monarchy, and Spain a Catholic absolutist one. Here, since time immemorial, the people elect the *alcalde* and the *alcalde* governs the people. The *alcalde* is mayor and judge, and belongs to the people. The priest belongs to the Pope. Who is left to belong to the king? The soldier. But if he is a Castilian soldier, the people reject him; if he is a Basque, the priest and the *alcalde* take him to their hearts; the king merely provides his uniform.

At first glance, it would seem such a nation is admirably prepared to adopt French innovations. An error. Old freedoms fear new freedom. The Basque people have proven this well.

At the beginning of the nineteenth century, the Cortes (*parliament*), adopted the decrees of the Constituent Assembly at every opportunity and, often appropriately, proclaimed Spanish unity. Basque unity rebelled. Basque unity, protected by its mountains, undertook a war of the north against the south. The day the Crown broke with the Cortes, it was in Gipuzkoa that a terrified and hunted royalty took refuge. The country of rights, the nation of *fueros* cried: '*Viva el rey neto! Long live the true king!*' Ancient Basque liberty made common cause against the Revolutionary spirit as well as the ancient monarchy of Spain and the Indies.

And behind this apparent contradiction there was deep logic and a true instinct. Revolutions — let me insist — treat old liberties no less harshly than the ancient powers that be. They put everything on the table, and remake everything on a grand scale; for they work on behalf the future, and have already measured the Europe to come.

Hence those immense generalisations which are, so to speak, the frameworks within which the nations of the future will be built, and which are so difficult for people to appropriate, through their taking so little account of older societies, laws, customs, franchises, frontiers, idioms, habits, constraints, and the old tangles that all things end in, the old principles, systems, facts.

In the language of the Revolution, old principles are termed *prejudices*, old facts are termed *abuses*. The words are both true and false. Whether they are republican or monarchical, traditional societies are full of abuses, much as the faces of the old are full of wrinkles, and old buildings of brambles; but one ought to make distinctions, tear out the brambles but respect the building, eliminate the abuses but respect the state. This is what revolutions know not how to do, nor wish to do, nor furthermore are capable of doing. Select, choose, prune, do they really have time for that! They come not to weed the fields, but to make the earth tremble. A revolution is not a gardener; it is the breath of God. It passes by a first time, and everything collapses; it passes a second time, and all is reborn.

Revolutions, therefore, mistreat the past. Everything with a past fears them. In the eyes of revolution, the ancient monarchy of Spain was an abuse, the ancient Basque mayoralty was another. Both abuses sensed danger, and joined forces against the common enemy. The king relied on the mayor; and this is how it happened that, to the great astonishment of those who only view the surface of things, the old Gipuzkoan republic fought for the old Castilian despotism against the Constitution of 1812.

This, however, is not without analogy with the uprising in the Vendée (*a counter-revolutionary insurrection in the Vendée region of Brittany from 1793 to 1796*). Brittany was a country of states and franchises. The day when the one, indivisible Republic was decreed, the inhabitants of Brittany felt, though confusedly, that Breton unity would be lost in this greater French unity; Brittany rose to a man to defend the past, and fought for the King of France against the National Convention. The ancient nations who fight in this way are too weak to descend to the plains and deliver pitched battles against new races, ideas, and armies; they call Nature to their aid; they wage war on the moors, in the mountains, in the desert. The Vendée fought a war of the moorlands; Gipuzkoa fought a war of the mountains; North Africa fought a war of the desert.

War has left its mark everywhere here. In the midst of the most beautiful Nature and the most beautiful results of cultivation, among fields of tomatoes that reach up to your hips, among fields of corn over which the plough passes twice a season, you suddenly see a house without windows, door, roof, or inhabitants. Who did this? You look closely. There are traces of flames on the stones of the walls. Who burned this house? It was the Carlists. The road bends. Here is another one. Who burned this? The Cristinos. Between Hernani and San Sebastián, I started counting the ruins I saw from the road. In five minutes, I counted seventeen. I gave up.

On the other hand, the little anti-Espartero revolution, which is called *el pronunciamiento de Riego* (1820), 'took place in San Sebastián as peacefully as possible'. San Sebastián refused to stir, leaving the other towns of the province to 'pronounce' as they wished. Then, a threat arrived from the people of Pamplona, that a *pronunciamiento* was necessary in San Sebastián, or else they would descend upon it. San Sebastián was unafraid, but the people were weary. To wage Baldomero Espartero's civil war after Don Carlos' civil war was too much. The principals of the town met at the *ayuntamiento* (*city hall*); the two officers in command of each company of the urban militia were summoned; a table with a green cloth was set up in one of the rooms; at this table something was penned, the result was read from a window to the passers-by in the square; some children who were playing hopscotch stopped for a moment and shouted: 'Vivat!' That same evening, the event was notified to the garrison in the Castillo (*fortress*). The garrison agreed to what had been penned at the table in the town hall, and then read aloud at the window on the square. The next day the general took a post-carriage, the day after that the political leader took the mail-coach; two days later the colonel left. The revolution was over. At least that's the tale as it was told to me.

I was travelling this beautiful devastated countryside, with a former Carlist captain, perched like me on the imperial platform of the *peninsular diligencias* of Bayonne. He was a well-mannered man, distinguished, silent, thoughtful. I asked him point-blank in Spanish: '*Que pensa usted de don Carlos? What think you of Don Carlos.*' He answered me blow for blow: '*He's an imbecile.*' Take imbecile in the sense of *imbecillus*, weakling. You have there a true judgment, not of the man, but of the moment in which the man lived.

That war from 1835 to 1839 was savage and violent. For those five years the populace lived, scattered throughout the woods and the mountains, without setting foot in their homes. It is sad for a nation when the concept of 'home' vanishes. Some were enlisted, others fled. One was obliged to be a Carlist or a Cristino. Political parties always wish you to be of their

party. The Cristinos burned the Carlists, and the Carlists burned the Cristinos. The ancient law, and ancient history, of the age-old human spirit.

Those who abstained were hunted down today by the Carlists, and shot next day by the Cristinos. There was always some fire smouldering on the horizon. Nations at war respect the laws of nations, political parties do not. Here Nature does all it can to reassure mankind, and mankind does all it can to darken Nature.

Don Carlos (*Carlos María Isidro de Borbón*), took no personal part in the war. He resided sometimes at Tolosa, sometimes at Hernani. Sometimes, he went from one town to another, holding a small court, raising levies, and living according to the most rigorous Spanish etiquette. When he arrived in some village where he had not yet lodged, they chose the best house for him; yet he knew how to be content with little. He usually dressed in a dark-coloured frock-coat, without epaulettes or adornments, bearing the Golden Fleece (*an Order of Knighthood founded in Burgundy in 1430, and associated later especially with Habsburg Austria, and with Spain*), and the emblem of Charles III. His son, the Conde de Montemolín, wore the Basque beret, and looked very handsome in it. Don Carlos his wife the Princess of Beira (*Infanta Maria Teresa of Braganza*), and the Conde de Montemolín travelled on horseback; the Princess of Beira setting an example of courage amidst peril, and cheerfulness despite fatigue. Several times the royal group were nearly surprised by Espartero; The princess then mounted her horse happily, and said laughingly: '*Vamos: Let's go.*'

Ferdinand VII disliked Don Carlos and feared him. He accused him of conspiring against him; which was not the case. Yet, the last person King Ferdinand saw every night before going to sleep was this very brother. At midnight, Don Carlos would come in, kiss the king's hand, and leave, often without the two brothers having exchanged a word.

The bodyguards had orders to allow only Don Carlos, and the famous Père Cirilo (*Cirilo de Alamèda y Brea, initially a Member of the Council of State under Ferdinand VII, and Minister General of the Franciscans, later Archbishop of Toledo, a Cardinal, and a Carlist*) into the royal chamber at this hour. Père Cirilo had wit and learning. His profile would have been worth sketching, set between two such princes, two such brothers. The political parties both denigrated him at will, and with a strange fury.

There were many English among Ferdinand VII's bodyguards. It was to them that the king spoke most willingly when he went, after mass, to play a game of billiards, that being his greatest interest, a session which lasted almost all day. When he was in a good mood, he handed out cigars. In truth, Don Carlos was lost as a pretender to the throne the day Zumalacárregui died (24th June 1835). Tomás de Zumalacárregui e Imaz (*the Spanish Basque officer who led the Carlist faction as Captain General of the Army during the First Carlist War*) was a true Basque. He was the heart of the Carlist faction. After his death, the army of 'Charles V' was nothing more than a *loose bundle of men*, as the Marquis de Mirabeau (*Victor de Riqueti*) said. There were two parties around Don Carlos, the party of the court, of *el rey neto* (*the true king*), and the party of rights, of *los fueros*, the outsiders. Zumalacárregui was the man of 'rights.' He neutralised the clerical influence exerted on the prince; he often said: '*El demonio los frayles! Devil take these friars!*' He stood up to Père Larranaga, Don Carlos' confessor. Navarre adored Zumalacárregui. Thanks to him, Don Carlos' army at one point numbered thirty

thousand regular combatants and two hundred and fifty thousand auxiliary insurgents, spread throughout the plains, forest, and mountains. The Basque general, moreover, treated 'his king' rather cavalierly. It was he who directed and moved, at will, that capital piece in the chess game then being played in Spain. Zumalacárregui wrote on a scrap of paper: '*Hoy su magestad ira a tal parte! Today his majesty will go to such and such a place!*' Don Carlos did so.

In the First Carlist War, the conflict in the Basque Country ended abruptly in 1839. General Rafael Maroto Yserns' betrayal, reportedly bought for a million piastres, broke the Carlist army. Don Carlos, forced to take refuge in France, was chased over the border, to the sound of gunfire.

That day, some families from Bayonne were amusing themselves at precisely that point on the border to which chance brought Don Carlos. They witnessed the prince's crossing, and the last struggle of the small, faithful band that surrounded him. As soon as he set foot on French territory, the rifle volleys stopped.

There was a poor goatherd's hut nearby. Don Carlos entered. As he did so, he said to the Princess of Beira, who was accompanying him: 'Were you afraid?' 'No, Señor,' she replied.

Then the prince asked for a chair. and had his chaplain say Mass. After hearing the Mass, he was served a drink of chocolate, and smoked a cigar.

The handful of men who had fought for him until the last moment consisted wholly of Navarrese. They were surrounded and seized by a French detachment. Those poor soldiers went one way, and Don Carlos the other. He said not a word to them; he did not even deign to look at them. The prince and the army parted without a farewell.

General Elio (*General Joaquín Elio y Ezpeleta Elio, made Duke of Elio by Don Carlos*), who had spent seventeen months in prison by order of Don Carlos, was a member of this troop. When he arrived in Bayonne, General Harispe (*Jean Isidore Harispe, 1st Comte Harispe*) said to him: 'General Elio, I have orders to make exception for you. Ask whatever you wish. What do you need for yourself and your family?' 'Bread and shoes for my soldiers,' said Elio. 'And for your family?' 'As I have said.' 'Your request only addresses your soldiers.' General Harispe continued. — 'My soldiers,' Elio replied, 'are my family'. — Elio was indeed a hero.

San Sebastián saw all these events, and more. It was bombarded by the French in 1719, and burned in 1813 by the English.

But I am told the mail is about to leave. I am hastily thrusting the result of all my scribbling into an envelope without rereading it. I am obliged to finish my letter, it seems, with a bombardment and a fire.

The End of Part I of Hugo's '*Pyrénées*'

Part II: San-Sebastián to Pamplona

Chapter VIII: The Passage (*Pasajes*) – Pasai (*Pasai Donibane, Pasajes San Juan*)

The other day, I left San Sebastián as the tide was on the turn. I made my way to the left (*east*) at the end of the promenade, crossing the wooden bridge over the Urumea, the toll being one *cuarto* (or '*quarto*', a fourth of a '*real*'). A road presented itself, I accepted it at random, and off I went. I walked in the mountains without really knowing where I was; little by little the exterior landscape, which I looked at vaguely, was transformed to that other interior landscape which we call reverie; my sight was turned inward, and opened clearly within me, and I no longer saw Nature, I saw into my own mind. I could not say what I was doing in that state, to which you know me to be subject; I only remember in a confused way that I remained motionless, for a few minutes in front of a bindweed over which an ant came and went, and that in my reverie this spectacle was translated into this thought: — 'An ant on a bindweed. Labour and scent.' Two great mysteries, two great ideas.

I know not how long I had been walking like this when, suddenly, a high-pitched noise composed of a thousand strange cries roused me. I looked; I was between two hills, with high mountains on the horizon, and I was heading straight towards an arm of the sea, at a place where the road I was following ended abruptly, forty feet or so in front of me. There, at the point where the path plunged into the water, I could see something singular.

About fifty women, in a single line like a company of infantry, seemed to be waiting for someone, calling for them, demanding their attention, with tremendous yelps. The thing amazed me greatly; but what redoubled my surprise was to recognise, after a moment, that this someone, so awaited, so called upon, whose attention was so demanded, was myself. The road was deserted, I was alone, and all this storm of shouts seemed truly addressed to me.

I approached, and my astonishment increased still further. These women all threw at me the most lively and engaging words at once: '*Señor frances, benga usted con migo!* — *Con migo, caballero!* — *Ven, homhre, muy bonita soy!* *Frenchman, come with me!* — *With me, sir!* — *Come, sir, I am very pretty!*'

They called to me with the most expressive and varied pantomimes, yet not one of them advanced towards me. They seemed like living statues rooted to the ground to whom a magician had said: 'Utter your cries, perform your gestures; but take not a step.' Moreover, they were of all ages and of every shape and size, young, old, ugly, pretty, the pretty ones dressed and

adorned like coquettes, the older ones in rags. In these rural areas, women are less fortunate than butterflies in a field. The latter begin as caterpillars; here the women end that way.

As they were all talking at once, I could grasp nothing, and it took me some time to understand. Finally, some boats moored by the shore explained the matter to me. I was in the middle of a group of boatwomen offering to help me cross the water.

But why boatwomen and not boatmen? What was the meaning of their burning obsession that condemned them to remain behind a hidden boundary never to cross it? Finally, where were they leading me? So many enigmas, so many reasons to advance. I asked the prettiest one her name; it was Pepa. I jumped into her boat.



'Boat passage' - Victor Hugo (1894)

[Paris Musées](#)

At that moment I noticed a passenger who was already seated in another boat; we were running the risk of having to wait a long time each on our own; by joining together we could depart at once. As the last to arrive, it was my duty to join the other. So, I left Pepa's boat. Pepa pouted; I gave her a peseta; she took the money, and continued to pout, which flattered me immensely; for a peseta was, as my travelling companion explained to me, double the maximum price of the passage. So, she had gained the fare, without the usual effort.

Meanwhile, we had left the shore behind, and were sailing over a gulf where all was green, the waves and the hills, the land and the water. Our boat was steered by two women, one old and one young, mother and daughter. The daughter, very pretty and very cheerful, was named Manuela, and nicknamed Catalana. The two boatwomen rowed standing up, at bow and stern,

each with a single oar, with a slow, supple, and graceful movement. Both spoke passable French. Manuela, with her little oilcloth hat adorned with a large rose, her long braided plait floating down her back in the local fashion, her bright yellow kerchief, her short petticoat, and her well-shaped legs, showed the most beautiful teeth in the world, laughed a lot, and was charming. As for the mother, alas, she too had once been a butterfly.

My companion was a silent Spaniard, who, finding me quieter than himself, decided, as always happens, to speak. He began, of course, by finishing his cigar. Then he turned to me. In Spain, when a cigar ends, a conversation begins. As for me, as I don't smoke, I don't talk. I never possess that great pretext which marks the beginning of a conversation, namely, the end of a cigar.

— 'Señor,' my man said to me in Spanish, 'have you seen it before?' I answered him in Spanish:

— 'No, Señor.'

Notice this '*No*', and admire it. If I had said: '*What?*', which would have been more natural, I would have received an explanation, and I would probably have understood the key to the enigma at once; but I wished to keep it a mystery as long as possible, having no desire to know where I was going.

— 'In that case, Señor,' continued my companion, 'you are going to see something very beautiful.'

— 'Truly?' I asked.

— 'It is very long.'

— 'Very long!' I thought: 'What can it be?'

The Spaniard replied: '*She*'s the longest one in the province.'

— 'Well,' I said to myself, 'according to the pronoun this thing is feminine.'

— 'Señor,' continued my companion, 'have you seen any others?'

— 'Sometimes,' I replied. Another answer in much the same vein as the first.

— 'I bet you haven't seen a longer one.'

— 'Aha! You might lose.'

— 'Well, which ones has the noble Señor already seen?'

This question was somewhat more demanding. I answered: 'The one in Bayonne,' still without knowing what we were talking of.

— 'In Bayonne!' cried my companion, 'In Bayonne! Well, sir, that of Bayonne is three hundred feet shorter than this. Did you measure it?'

— 'I answered, with the same composure: — 'Yes, Señor.'

— 'Well, measure this one.'

— 'I'm counting on doing so.'

— ‘You will be enlightened. A squadron of cavalry could fit in it, single file.’

— ‘Impossible.’

— ‘It is as I say, Señor. I see that the noble Señor is an amateur.’

— ‘Amazing.’

— ‘You are French,’ replied my man, and, brightening up, he added:

— ‘Perhaps you have come from France, especially to see it.’

— ‘Precisely. On purpose.’

My Spaniard was radiant. He held out his hand and said:

— ‘Well, Monsieur’ (he uttered the French ‘monsieur’, in a most courteous manner) ‘you’ll be pleased. It’s as straight as a letter I, it’s as if drawn with a ruler, it’s magnificent.’

— ‘The Devil!’ I thought, ‘Would this pretty gulf possess, in extension, a Rue de Rivoli? What a bitter mockery! To flee the Rue de Rivoli, reach Gipuzkoa, and find the Rue de Rivoli there, stuck to an arm of the sea, that would be sad, indeed!’

Meanwhile our boat continued to advance. It rounded a small cape dominated by a large ruined house, its four walls pierced by doorframes without doors, and windows without windowpanes.

Suddenly, as if by magic, and without my having heard the customary stagehand’s whistle, the scenery changed, and a delightful spectacle appeared before me:

A curtain of high green mountains, their peaks outlined against a dazzling sky; at the foot of these mountains, a row of closely juxtaposed houses; all these houses painted white, saffron, green, with two or three stories of large balconies sheltered by the projection of their wide red roofs covered with hollow tiles; on all these balconies a thousand floating things: clothes to dry; fishing nets; red, yellow, and blue rags; at the foot of these houses, the sea; to my right, halfway up the hill, a white church; to my left, in the foreground, at the foot of another mountain, another group of houses with balconies leading to an old dilapidated tower; ships of all shapes and boats of all sizes were lined up in front of the houses, moored beneath the tower, or sailing the bay; on these ships, on this tower, on these houses, on these rags, on this church, on these mountains and in this sky, life, movement, the sun, an azure expanse, an air of inexpressible gaiety; that is what I had before my eyes. This place, magnificent and charming like everything that has the double character of joy and grandeur, this unique place which is one of the most beautiful that I have seen and which no ‘tourist’ ever visits, this humble corner of earth and water which would be admired if it were in Switzerland, and famous if it were in Italy, and which is unknown because it is in Gipuzkoa, this little radiant Eden at which I had arrived by chance, and without knowing where I was going, or knowing where I was, is called in Spanish *Pasajes*, and in French *Le Passage* (*the Pasaia Bay area with two coastal sections: Los Pasajes de San Juan, and Los Pasajes de San Pedroko*).

Low tide leaves half of the bay dry, and prevents navigation to and from San Sebastian, which itself is almost cut off from the world. High tide re-establishes the ‘Passage’. Hence the name.

The population of this town has only one industry, toil on the water. The two sexes share the work according to their respective strength. The men sail the ships, the women row the boats; the men take to the open sea, the women occupy the bay; the men go fishing and leave the gulf, the women stay within the gulf and render *passage*, when the tide is in, to all those whose business or interests bring them there from San Sebastian overland. Hence the *bateleras* (*boatwomen*)

These poor women so rarely have a passenger that they have reached an agreement among themselves. In competing for each passerby, they would have devoured each other, and perhaps devoured the passerby. They have a set line they do not cross, and a charter they never violate. It is an extraordinary country.

As soon as the tide rises, they bring their boats to the place where the road floods, and stand there on the rocks, spinning their distaffs, waiting.

If a stranger appears, they rush to the line they have set for themselves, and each tries to render herself the newcomer's choice. The stranger chooses. Having made his choice, all are silent. The stranger who has chosen is sacred. He is left to the one who has secured him. The passage costs little. The poor give a *cuarto* (*a quarter of a real*), the bourgeois a *real* (*a quarter of a peseta*), the nobility a *media-peseta* (*half a peseta*), the emperors, princes and poets a *peseta*.

Meanwhile the boat had touched at the landing stage. I was so dazzled by the place that I hastily threw my peseta to Manuela, and leapt ashore, forgetting everything the Spaniard had told me, and the Spaniard himself, who, now I come to think of it, must have watched me leave with a very astonished air.

Once on land, I took the first street I found; an excellent method that always delivers you where you want to be, especially in towns like Pasai (*Pasai Donibane*) that only have one street.

I walked along the entire length of this unique street. It consists of the mountain on the right; and, on the left, the rear facade of all the houses whose fronts overlook the gulf. Here was a new surprise. Nothing is more cheerful and fresh than the Passage seen from the water; nothing is more severe and sombre than the Passage seen from the mountainside.

These houses, so pretty, so cheerful, so white, so luminous beside the sea, offer, seen from its narrow, winding street paved like a Roman road, nothing more than high walls of blackish granite, pierced by the occasional square window, impregnated with the humid emanations of the rock, a gloomy row of strange buildings affixed to which, and sculpted in the round, are enormous coats of arms borne by lions, and figures of Hercules, and topped with gigantic morions (*helmets*). In front they are houses; behind they are fortresses.

I asked myself a thousand questions. What is this extraordinary place? What does it mean that the street displays coats of arms from one end to the other? You only see streets like these in knightly cities like Rhodes and Malta. Coats of arms seldom sit side by side. They require isolation; they need space, like everything grand. A coat of arms needs an entire keep, as an eagle demands an entire mountain. What is the meaning of a village bearing coats of arms possess? Huts in front, palaces behind, what do they signify? When you arrive by sea, your

chest expands, you think a bucolic scene lies before you; you cry aloud: 'Oh, the sweet, candid, naive fisher folk!' You enter the place, and you are in the home of *hidalgos* (*noblemen*), you breathe the air of the Inquisition; you see the livid spectre of Philip II arising at the far end of the street.

In whose house is one, when one is in Pasai? Is one dwelling amidst peasants, or great lords? Is this Switzerland or Castile? Is not this little corner of Spain, unique in the world, a place where history and Nature meet, and each create an aspect of the same town, Nature employing its most graceful aspect, history its most sinister?

There are three churches in Pasai, two black and one white. The main one (*San Juan Bautista*), which is black, is of a surprising character. On the outside, it is a block of stone; on the inside, it reveals the bareness of a sarcophagus. Except that, amidst those gloomy walls, unrevealed by any sculpture, unenlightened by any fresco, unpierced by any stained-glass window, you suddenly see an altar shining and gleaming, which is in itself a whole cathedral.

It is an immense piece of woodwork applied to the wall, carved, painted, carpentered, worked, gilded, with statues, statuettes, twisted columns, foliage, arabesques, volutes, relics, roses, wax figures, saints, tinsel and other ornamentation. It rises from the pavement, and reaches as far as the vault. There is no transition between the nakedness of the walls and the adornment of the altar. It is a magnificent exercise in gleaming, flowery architecture which is vegetating, one scarcely knows how, in the shadows, in this granite cave, and which reveals thickets of gold and precious stones in the darkest of corners when one least expects them.

There are four or five of these altars in the church at Pasai. This style is, moreover, typical of all the churches of the province; but it is at Pasai that it produces its most singular contrast.

The first thing that struck me as I left the church was a head carved into a wall facing the portal. This head is painted black, with white eyes, white teeth, and red lips, and stares at the church with an air of amazement. As I was contemplating this mysterious sculpture, the *Señor Cura* (*parish priest*) passed by; he approached me; I asked him if he knew what this African mask in front of the threshold of his church meant. He had no idea, and, told me that no one in the area did either.

After two hours, having seen everything, or at least visited everything, I embarked again. Manuela was waiting for me. As my excursion was over, she had taken possession of me, I belonged to her, I was her thing.

As I stepped over the edge of the boat, someone grabbed my arm; I turned around. It was the worthy passenger with whom I had traversed the arm of the sea, that morning, and whose portrait I have neglected to give you; let me make up for the oversight: a threadbare hat of tall shape and narrow brim, a blue frock coat worn at the seams, one side buttoned with two buttons, a thick watch chain with a cornelian key hanging from it, and the face of a penniless fellow who will lend his name to dubious operations. Here follows our dialogue on board the boat. Imagine it delivered in the swiftest stream of Castilian you can imagine:

— 'Well, French Senõr?'

— 'Well, what?'

— ‘What do you say?’

— ‘Say to what?’

— ‘Have you seen it?’

— ‘What?’

— ‘Have you measured it?’

— ‘What?’

— ‘Is it not the longest in the province?’

— ‘Which province, and what is longest?’

— ‘Goodness! The rope factory!’

— ‘What rope factory?’

— ‘The rope factory you just visited! The rope factory here!’

— ‘Is there a rope factory here?’

— ‘Ah! The French lord is in a good mood and wishes to have fun; but he knows very well that there is a rope factory, since he travelled five hundred miles expressly to see it.’

— ‘I? Not at all.’

— ‘Is it not beautiful? Long? Straight? Magnificent? Straight as a letter I?’

— ‘I’ve no idea.’

— ‘Ah, indeed!’ replied the man, looking me straight in the eye. ‘Seriously, Monsieur, you have not seen it then?’

— ‘What?’

— ‘The rope factory?’

— ‘Understand, Senõr,’ I replied majestically, ‘that I particularly hate long, magnificent things drawn with a ruler, and that I would travel five hundred miles *not* to see a rope-factory.’

I said these memorable words in such a solemn manner and with such a deep accent that the man recoiled. He looked at me with a frightened air; and, as the boat departed the shore, I heard him say to the boatmen who had remained on the stairs, while indicating myself with a shrug of his shoulders: ‘*Un loco!*’ A madman.

Back in San Sebastian, I announced at the inn that I would be moving to Pasai next day. This caused general consternation.

— ‘What are you going to do there, sir? It’s a hole. A desert. A land of savages. You’ll find not a single inn there!’

— ‘I’ll stay in the first house I come across. One can always find a house, a room, a bed.’

— ‘But there are no roofs to the houses, no doors to the rooms, no mattresses on the beds.’

— ‘That must be interesting.’

- ‘And what will you eat?’
- ‘Whatever they have.’
- ‘There’ll be nothing but mouldy bread, spoiled cider, rancid oil, and wine in a goatskin.’
- ‘I’ll try their usual fare.’
- ‘What, Monsieur, you are decided?’
- ‘Yes, decided.’
- ‘You will be doing what no one here would dare to do.’
- ‘Really? I’m tempted by that thought.’
- ‘Going to sleep in Pasai, it’s never been seen before!’

And they almost made the sign of the cross. I refused to hear any more and, the next day, left for Pasai in time to catch the tide.

‘Now, do you wish to know the result? This is where my recklessness led me. I will begin by telling you what I have before my eyes as I write to you. I am on a long balcony overlooking the sea. I am leaning on a square table covered with a green rug. To my right is a French window that opens into my room, for I have a room, and the room has a door. To my left is the bay. Beneath my balcony two ships are moored, one of which is old, and in which a sailor from Bayonne works who sings from morning to night. In front of me, two cables’ length away, another brand new and very fine ship sways, which is about to leave for the Indies. Beyond this ship, the old dilapidated tower, the group of houses called *el otro Pasaje* (*the other Pasai*), and the triple ridge of a mountain. All around the bay, the wide semicircle of hills, whose undulations vanish into the horizon, is dominated by the bare ridge above Irun.

The bay is brightened by the boatwomen’s craft, to-ing and fro-ing without cease, as they hail each other from one end of the gulf to the other with cries that resemble the crowing of a rooster. The weather is magnificent, and the sunlight is the brightest in all the world. I hear my sailor humming, children laughing, the boatwomen calling to each other, the washerwomen beating the linen on stones in the local manner, the oxcarts creaking in the ravines, the goats bleating in the mountains, the hammers clanging in the shipyard, the cables unwinding on the capstans, the wind blowing, the sea rising. All this noise is music, for joy fills it.

If I lean over the balcony, I see at my feet a narrow stone terrace on which grass grows, a black staircase that descends to the sea, and whose steps the tide climbs, an old anchor sunk in the mud, and a group of fisherfolk, men and women, knee-deep in the water, pulling their nets from the water while singing.

Finally, if you wish me to tell you of everything, there before my eyes, on the terrace and the staircase, constellations of crabs perform, with solemn slowness, all the mysterious dances that Plato ever dreamed of.

The sky contains every shade of blue from turquoise to sapphire, and the bay every shade of green from emerald to chrysoprase. The bay is not lacking in gracefulness; when I look at the horizon that encloses it, it is a lake; when I look at the rising tide, it is the sea.

What say you to that? In regard to one matter — I've been thinking about it, and you reminded me of it in your letter — for the three weeks that I've been travelling, I've been unfaithful to my custom of describing the landscape from my window. I'll make up for this oversight at once. In Bordeaux, my window looked out onto a large wall; in Bayonne, onto a street planted with trees; in Saint-Sébastien, onto an old woman killing her fleas. Your need is now satisfied. I return in haste to Pasai.

The house I inhabit (*Casa Gaviria*) is at once one of the most solemn that overlooks the street, and one of the most cheerful that overlooks the gulf. Above the roof, I see stairs, amidst the rocks, that climb through tufts of greenery to the old white church (*Dona Ane Basaeliza*) which looks like another heifer waving its bell around its neck on the hillside. For, in the churches of Gipuzkoa, one sees the bell hanging naked from the edge of the church roof under a kind of arcade that looks like a necklace.

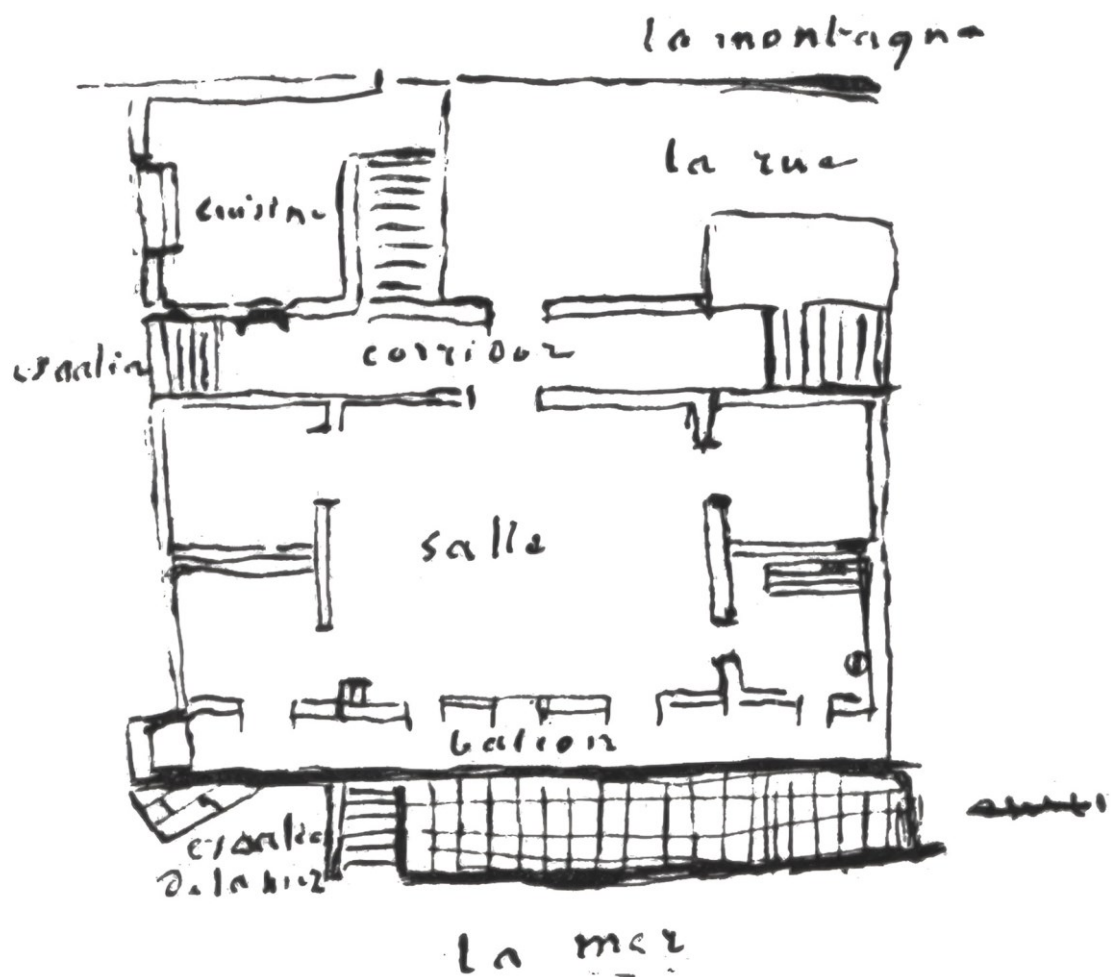
The house I lodge in has two floors and two entrances. It is curious and rare above all others, and bears to the highest degree the dual character so original to the houses of Pasai. It is the monumental patched together with the rustic. It is a house joined to, and welded to, a palace.

The first of these entrances is a portal with pillars from the time of Philip II, sculpted by the delightful artists of the Renaissance, mutilated by time and children at play, eaten away by the rain, the moonlight, the sea wind. You know rough sandstone erodes in an admirable fashion. The portal is a beautiful buff colour. The coat of arms remains, but the years have erased the blazon.

One pushes on, and opens, the small door to the right of the gate, and finds a staircase of beams and planks; beams and planks as black as coal, roughly hewn, and barely squared. At the top of the staircase, whose centuries-old steps display wide gaps, a heavy fortress door, in the centre of which is a narrow skylight with a grille, creaks on its massive iron hinges, and ushers you into the dwelling.

The antechamber is a whitewashed corridor which, since I don't wish to conceal anything from you, is covered with vast spider webs, and lit by a window overlooking the street. Opposite this window, the escarpment of the mountain rises in a gigantic wall as far as the eye can see.

The corridor, which leads to the staircase on the second floor, is pierced by two doors; the one on the right leads to the kitchen, which one reaches via two mouldy wooden steps; the other on the left opens into a large room, flanked at the four corners by four small bedrooms, which along with these four closets and the kitchen, composes the first floor of the house. Two of these closets are dark, and have no other opening than their door onto the room. Yet someone sleeps there. The other two bedrooms are, like the room, on the same level as the balcony, with which they communicate by French windows painted green, and decorated with small shuttered panes. Each bedroom has one of these French windows. The large room has two, between which is a pretty, almost square window.



‘A house joined to, and welded to, a palace’- Victor Hugo (1894)

[*Paris Musées*](#)

The interiors of the rooms are whitewashed, like the facade onto the lake; the parquet floors, black and rotten like the staircase, resemble the wooden deck of a rustic bridge; the doors resemble the parquet floors. A round table, a few sideboards, a few straw-bottomed chairs, are the furnishings of the great hall. A coat of arms, barely heraldic, is crudely painted above the middle door. No fireplaces. The climate renders them redundant. The walls are made of stone, and as thick as those of a dungeon.

I occupy the room on the balcony at the corner of the hall on the left. The other rooms are those of the various inhabitants of the house, of whom I will speak to you presently.

The second floor is identical to the first. A bedroom replaces the kitchen. The second-floor balcony shelters the first-floor balcony and is itself protected by the wide edge of the roof, which is brightened by charming curved and carved joists. The balconies are tiled with red brick and painted green.

But all this seems about to collapse. The walls have cracks that reveal the view; the bricks of the balcony above reveal the one below; the floors of the rooms bend beneath one's feet. The staircase leading from the first to the second floor is most strange:

‘Tout branlait dessous nous, jusqu’au dernier étage’

‘All shook beneath us, up to the highest floor’

(*Mathurin Régnier, ‘Satire XI’*)

said Mathurin Régnier, speaking of such a house somewhere. This staircase is both rickety and massive. It was formed three hundred years ago, of large timbers, planks, and nails, adjusted and assembled in a crude way, which tremble with age, and yet still have something robust and formidable about them. The whole stair threatens, in the dual sense of the word. No skylight; no light except for a slanted ray from above. The steps, put together with a billhook, the planks laid crooked and as if at random, look like wolf-traps. It is both massive and crumbling away. Huge spiders weave to and fro amidst this dark tangle. An oak door, four inches thick, fitted to a solid, though rust-eaten, frame, closes this staircase off from the second floor, and from the first if necessary. A fortress of a building.

What do I think of the structure? Is it sad? Repulsive? Terrible? Well, no, it is charming.

First of all, nothing could be more unexpected. This is a house like no other. Just when you think you are in a mere house, a sculpture, a fresco, some useless but exquisite ornament warns you that you are in a palace; you are waxing ecstatic over this detail which is luxurious and full of grace, when the hoarse shriek of a bolt leads you to believe you are living in a prison; you go to the window, there is the balcony, there is the lake, you are in a chalet in Zug or Lucerne.

Moreover, bright daylight enters and fills this singular dwelling; its plan is cheerful, comfortable and original; the salt sea air cleanses it; the pure midday sun dries it, warms it and vivifies it. Everything becomes joyous in this joyous light.

Everywhere else, dust is filth. Here, dust is merely decay. Yesterday's dust is odious; the ash of three centuries is venerable. Finally, what more can I tell you? In this land of fishing and hunting, the spider that also hunts and spreads its nets has a right to citizenship. It is at home. In short, I accept the house as it is. Except that I have my room swept, and have given notice to the spiders who occupied it before me.

What completes the strange appearance of this house is that I never see a man here. Four women and a child occupy it; the mistress of the house, her two daughters, her servant Iñacia, a beautiful barefoot Basque girl, and her grandson, a pretty eighteen-month-old toddler.

The hostess, Madame Basquetz, is an excellent woman with intelligent eyes, pleasant, cordial, and cheerful, who is somewhat French by origin, quite French at heart, and who speaks French very well. Her two daughters speak only Spanish and Basque.

The eldest is a sickly young woman, sweet and pensive. The youngest is called Pepa like almost all Spanish women! She is twenty years old, with a slender figure, a supple bodice, well-formed hands, small feet, a rare thing in Gipuzkoa, large black eyes, and superb hair; she leans on the balcony in the evening in a sad attitude, yet she turns around, if her mother calls to her, with an expression of joyful vivacity. She is at that age where the carefree attitude of the young girl begins to disappear, imperceptibly veiled by the melancholy of the woman.

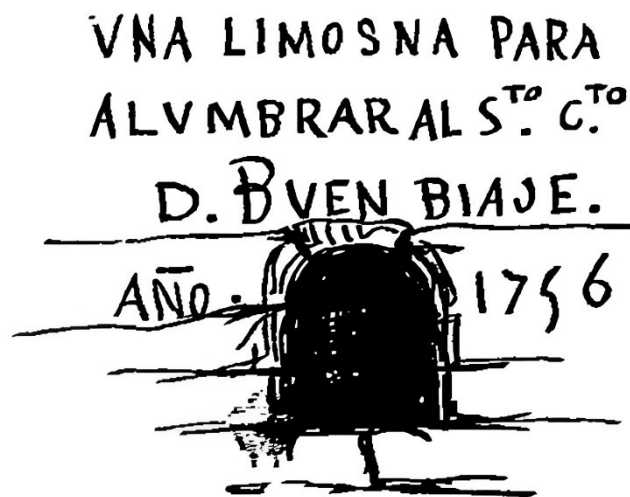
The child, who crawls up and down the stairs from one floor to another, comes and goes all day, laughs, fills the house with life, and warms it with his innocence, grace and naivety. A child in a house is a furnace of gaiety. As he sleeps near my room, in the evening I hear him whispering softly while the four women lull him to sleep with a song.

I told you that the house has a second entrance. It is a staircase without a banister, made of large cut stones, which rises from the street to the kitchen, and there joins a flight of stone staircases which ascend the mountain amidst the foliage.

The house bridges the street, as the Château de Chenonceaux does the River Cher, the street passing beneath via a kind of long, narrow, dark and vaulted arch, lit by a lantern at night, where in a niche, next to a basement window behind a fifteenth-century grille, a blessed wax candle commends itself to the poor sailors passing by, with the following inscription:

‘Una limosna para
alvmbrrar al s^{to} c^{to}
d. bven biaje’
año 1756’

‘Given, to light the Holy Christ, after a safe journey —1756.’



‘A basement window behind a fifteenth-century grille’- Victor Hugo (1894)

Now you know the house, and its inhabitants. I have told you where my room is; but I have not told you what it looks like. Picture to yourself four white walls; two straw-bottomed chairs; a basin on a tripod; a child's hat, decorated with feathers and glass beads, hanging from a nail; a shelf bearing some pots of ointment and three mismatched volumes of Jean-Jacques Rousseau; an antique four-poster bed with curtains of very fine Persian fabric, with two mattresses as hard as marble and a headboard of the most beautiful painted wood in the world; a slanted mirror with an exquisite frame hanging on the wall; and a cellar door that refuses to close. That is my room. Add to that the French window I have already told you about, and my table which is on the balcony. From my bed I can see the sea and the mountains.

You see that, despite the dire predictions of the civilised people of San Sebastian, I managed to find lodging with the ‘Hurons’ of Pasai. Now how do I survive here? Judge for yourself.

At about ten o'clock, the gracious Pepa, who wakes with the dawn, places a white napkin on my green-cloth covered table, which never leaves the balcony; then she brings me oysters gathered that very morning from the rocks in the bay, two lamb chops, a fried sea-bass, which is a delicious fish, sweet fried eggs, chocolate cream, pears and peaches, a cup of very good coffee, and a glass of Malaga wine. I also drink cider, unable to accustom myself to wine from a goatskin. Such is my lunch.

Now for my dinner, which takes place in the evening around seven, when I have returned from my errands in the bay or on the coast. An excellent soup; *puchero* (*Spanish stew*) with bacon and chickpeas but without saffron and chilies; slices of hake fried in oil; a roast chicken; a salad of watercress picked from the washhouse stream; peas with hard-boiled eggs; a corn cake with milk and orange blossom; nectarines; strawberries; and a glass of Malaga wine.

While Pepita serves me, going back and forth all around me, with all these items that appeal to my mountain appetite, the sun sets, the moon rises, a fishing boat leaves the bay, all the

spectacles of the ocean and the mountains unfold before me, married to all the spectacles of the sky. I speak Basque and Spanish to P  pita. I tell her incredible stories of sorcerers that I invent, and in which I appear to believe; she laughs and tries to dissuade me from continuing, I hear the boatwomen singing in the distance, and I refrain from noticing that the porcelain is earthenware and the silverware is pewter. All this costs me five francs a day. In San Sebastian, they probably think I have died of hunger and been devoured by savages.

In truth, nothing was easier for me than to settle here. I had asked Manuela if she knew of a house in Pasai where I could stay for a few days. The whim surprised Manuela a little at first; but I persisted, and she led me to where I am. The worthy Madame Basquetz welcomed me with a smile; I paid her the price she asked. It is all very simple, as you see.

The bay, sheltered on all sides from every wind, would make a magnificent port. Napoleon thought so and, as he was a fine engineer, he himself drew up a plan of what was required. The basin is several miles around, while the inlet leading to the sea is so narrow that only one vessel can pass through at a time. This narrow inlet, between two tall ridges of rock, is itself divided into three small basins separated by narrow passages that are easy to fortify and defend.

In the eighteenth century, the Caracas Company (*The Royal Gipuzkoan Company of Caracas existed from 1728 to 1785, then merged with the Barcelona Trading Company to form the Royal Company of the Philippines*) since united with that of the Philippines, had its warehouse and stores in Pasai. The company enhanced the fine roughly-circular tower (*early seventeenth century, demolished 1867*) which protects the bay, and today adorns it. This tower was damaged a few years ago by the Carlists (*in 1835*). The Carlists, by the way, left sad traces in Pasai. They demolished and burned several houses. The one where I live was only looted. ‘A great happiness!’ my hostess said to me, clasping her hands.

The English also occupied Pasajes San Juan at various times, and even more recently. They built a few forts on the high points of the coast, now destroyed, burned by the inhabitants. And, it must be said, the fires were festive ones. The English are not liked in Gipuzkoa. Lord Wellington’s landing here, with the Portuguese, in 1813, is a sinister memory for the Basques. The hearts of these mountaineers contain, like the mountains themselves, prolonged and deep echoes, and the bombardment of San Sebastian still resounds there.

The English left no other vestiges in the town of Pasai than the two syllables: ...OLD ...COLD, which were part of some merchant’s sign and which are still legible, next to the gate of Philip II, on the wall of the house where I lodge.

Now, the port of Pasajes San Juan (*the Spanish name for Pasai Donibane*) is almost deserted. Only fishing boats are moored there. Shipowners from Bayonne build ships there, with Spanish names, attributed to them in Bilbao or Santander; ships intended for the Spanish trade and which would not enjoy the relevant franchises if they were not built in Spain. Pasai is used for this purpose. And that is why, in 1842 I think, they established the large rope factory in the shipyard, which I so disdained. This rope factory is a long tunnel, and indeed a ‘beautiful’ rope factory. I finally visited it. You will note that I am becoming civilised.

The port is no longer protected, militarily, except by a small castle installed on the rock halfway up the slope, at the entrance to the second articulation of the gorge. This fortress is defended by countless fleas, and also a few soldiers.



‘The Bay of Pasai’ - Victor Hugo (1894)

[Paris Musées](#)

Pasai, however, well-nigh guards itself. Nature has fortified it, admirably. The entrance to the port is formidable. Every year some vessel is lost there. Last year, a ship loaded with planks worth about fifty thousand francs, seeking refuge in heavy weather, was caught side on as it entered the second basin of the strait, and thrown by a huge wave onto the rocks more than sixty feet above the sea. It remained there. The points of rock pierced and gripped it on all sides. An iron cross, that trembles in the wind, today marks the spot where this great ship was nailed.

Would you like to hear now of the life I lead? Since I never close my window or door, the dawn sunlight and the child’s chatter wake me. I lack the crowing of a rooster, but I have the cries of the *bateleras*, which amount to the same thing. If the tide is rising, even as I rise myself, I see, from my balcony, the boatwomen, hastening towards the end of the gulf,

There are always two women in a boat, partly because of the boat’s weight, and partly because of the jealousy exhibited by their husbands or lovers. They thus go about in pairs, and each couple has a name: ‘la Catalana y su madre’; ‘Maria Juana and Maria Andres’, ‘Pepa and

Pepita', *las compañeras* and *las evaristas* (*the companions and the charmers*). The *evaristas* are very pretty; the officers of the garrison of San Sebastian are happy to walk out with them, but the former are wise; they do in fact simply walk. They always have a bouquet fastened to their oilskin hats, and when they bend over the oar, their short, heavily pleated black-cloth petticoats reveal well-shaped, well-shod legs. They are among the few who have stockings; they are the aristocracy of boatwomen. Pepa and Pepita, the two sisters, are perhaps the prettiest.

Nothing is as vivid and pure as this bay in the morning. I hear the bells of the three churches ringing behind me; the sun marks the wrinkles on the old tower. The boats leave long wakes in the gulf, each seemingly dragging behind it a long silver fir-tree complete with all its branches.

Before lunch I take a walk around the village, or the town, as you will, since I am unsure what name to give to this special place. I always discover something I failed to see the day before. There are sheds, dug into the rocks that pierce the street, and yawning open between the houses; in these sheds are supplies of wood, tree-stumps bristling like chestnuts, torn pieces from boats, the carcasses of ships. There is a woman spinning in front of the door; the thread leaves her hand, and rises to the roof of the house, from whence it falls, bearing at its end the spindle that hangs in front of the spinner. There are oriental shutters at Gothic windows, and fresh faces behind those tight meshes of black wood. There are beautiful little girls, bare-legged, and already tanned by the climate, who dance and sing:

'Gentil muchacha,
Toma la derecha.
Hombre de moda,
Toma la izquierda.'

Which I would translate as follows, more in spirit than in the letter:

'*Clever* little girl,
You take the right side.
Handsome fellow,
You take the left.'

In Pasai, they work, dance, and sing. Some work, many dance, all sing. As in all unsophisticated, rustic places, there are only young girls and old women in Pasai, that is to say flowers and... well, seek the other word in Ronsard's works. Beautiful women, strictly speaking, are those magnificent roses that bloom between twenty-five and forty years of age, those exquisite and rare products of extreme civilisation, of elegant civilisation, which exist only in cities. To make a beautiful woman, one needs culture; one needs, pardon the expression,

that cultivation we call the spirit of society. Where there is no spirit of society, such women are lacking. Rather, there is Agnes, and Gertrude; but no Elmire (*see Molière's play 'Tartuffe'*).

In Pasai there are always girls washing clothes, and clothes drying; the girls wash clothes in the streams, the clothes dry on the balconies. It's a delight to the ear and the eye. These balconies are the most curious things in the world to look at and study. You cannot imagine all that there is to see, besides the laundry drying in the open air, as regards a balcony in Pasai.

The balustrade itself, which is almost always old, that is to say worked or carved, is already worth examining. Then, from the ceiling of the balcony — for every balcony has a ceiling which is the upper balcony or the edge of the roof — from this ceiling, are suspended lines, traps, nets, coils of rope, sponges, a parrot in a wooden cage, and boxes full of red carnations beneath which knots of rope are entangled, like little aerial gardens which make you think of Semiramis and the hanging gardens of Babylon. On the wall, between the windows, are suspended bouquets of immortelles tied in a cross, rags, old embroidered jackets, flags, and tea towels; then wondrous things whose use one cannot guess and which are there as ornamentation, four slats tied in a square, a wire hoop, or a punctured tambourine. A few charcoal drawings on the whitewashed wall, buckets with shiny iron bands for drawing water, and a laughing young girl leaning on the balustrade complete the furnishings of such a balcony.

In old San Pedro, on the other side of the bay, I saw a fifteenth-century house whose balcony, fuller of objects and more cluttered than a Normandy farmyard, was framed between two severe knightly profiles carved on wide oak planks.

The day I arrived, as if to celebrate my welcome, an old petticoat, made of several rags of every colour sewn together, fluttered like a banner from one of these balconies. This dazzling work of motley swelled in the wind with inexpressible pride and pomp. I have never seen a more magnificent harlequin's cloak.

In the midday sun, wide bands of horizontal shadow occupy the spaces beneath all the roofs and balconies, highlighting the whiteness of the facades and making this little town, if seen from afar, bright against the dark green background of the mountains, a thing of luminous and extraordinary life.

The square, above all, is dazzling. For there is a square in Pasai, which, like all Spanish squares, is called *Plaza de la Constitucion*. Despite this dour parliamentary name, the Plaza de Pasai sparkles and shines with admirable verve. This square is nothing other than an extension of the street, widened, and open to the sea. Some of the tall houses that surround it are perched on colossal arches. The central house bears the city's colourful coat of arms on its front. All the ground floors are shops.

On certain Sundays, the city treats itself to a bullfight, and this square serves as its amphitheatre, as indicated by the assemblages of posts planted in the pavement along the parapet. Next to the *Plaza de la Constitucion*, which is the *Plaza de Toros*, nothing, I repeat, is more cheerful, more curious, or more entertaining to the eye.

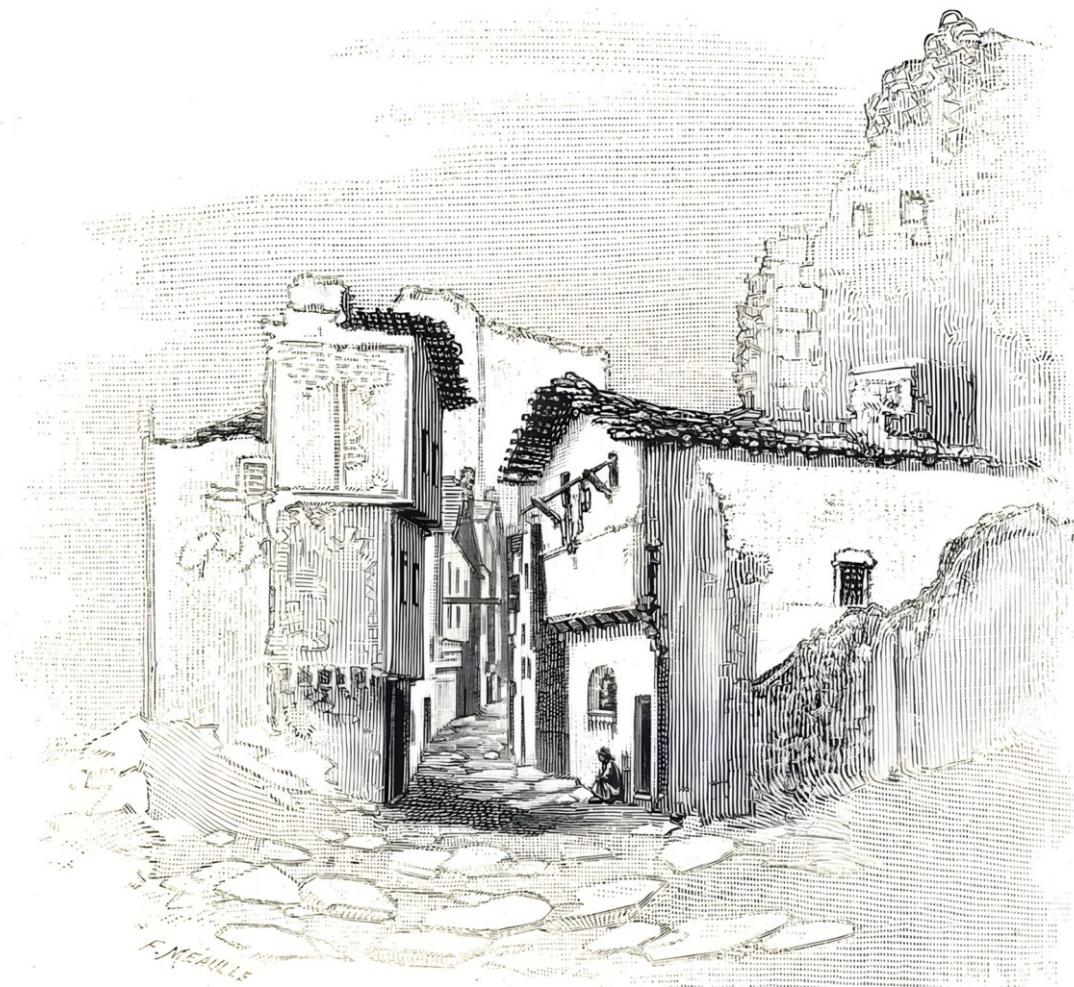
The overabundant life that animates Pasai is gathered in this square, and reaches its climax there. The *bateleras* stand at one end, the *majos* (*well-dressed workers*) and sailors at the other; children crawl, climb, walk, toddle, shout and play on the cobblestones; the painted facades

display all the colours of a parrot's fathers, the brightest yellows, the freshest greens, the reddest vermilions. The rooms and shops are caverns full of magical chiaroscuro, where one glimpses among the glimmers and reflections all sorts of fanciful furniture, sideboards such as one sees only in Spain, mirrors such as one sees only in Pasai. Good, honest, and cordial figures occupy all these thresholds.

I was telling you earlier about *Pasai San Pedro, the Old Pasai*, which is also called *el otro Pasai*. There are in fact two Pasais, a young one and an old one. The young one is three hundred years old. It is the one I am lodging in. The other morning, I decided to cross the water and visit the old village. It's a sort of southern Bacharach am Rhein. Here, as in the Rhine version, the stranger is truly strange. Haggard children and pale old women watch you pass by in amazement.

One called out to me, as I halted in front of her house: '*Hijo, dibuja eso. Viejas cosas, hermosas cosas: Son, draw this. Old things, beautiful things*'. The house was indeed a magnificent thirteenth-century hovel, the most dilapidated and crumbling one could find.

The street of the Old Pasai is a real Arab street; whitewashed houses, massive, with bumpy walls, barely pierced by a few holes. If it weren't for the roofs, one would think one was in Tetouan (*in northern Morocco*). This street, where ivy runs from one side to the other, is paved with flagstones, large slabs of stone that undulate like the scaly back of a snake.



‘The Street of the Old Pasai’ - Victor Hugo (1894)

[Paris Musées](#)

The church (*the parish church of San Pedro*) spoils the ensemble. It is modern and rebuilt in the last century. I had it opened up for me for half a peseta. An inscription on the organ gives the date, which is all too clearly written in the architecture:

manvel martin
carrera me hizo
año 1774

Manuel Martin Carrero built me, 1774

The church is gloomy; this Old Pasai is sad. Nothing could be less alike: gloominess is the sadness of what is small. Whereas Pasai San Pedro has grandeur.

You will see, my friend, that my morning walks are not without interest. My walk completed, I return, I have breakfast, and I wander along the rocky paths. I give the mornings to the city and the days to the mountain.

I climb the mountain by perpendicular staircases, with tall and narrow steps, solidly built into the escarpment and amidst the rough vegetation of the rock. When one reaches the top of one staircase, one finds another. They are thus joined end to end, rising towards the sky like those fearful ladders one sees trembling in the impossible and mysterious architectural engravings of Giovanni Piranesi. However, Piranesi's ladders vanish into infinite regions, while the staircases of Pasai reach an end.

Once I am at the top of the stairs, I usually seek a ledge, a goat's path, a sort of gutter made by the rain and the torrents forming a ledge on the mountain. I go in that direction, at the risk of tumbling down onto one of the village roofs, falling down a chimney into a cooking pot, and adding myself as one more ingredient to some *olla podrida* (Spanish stew).

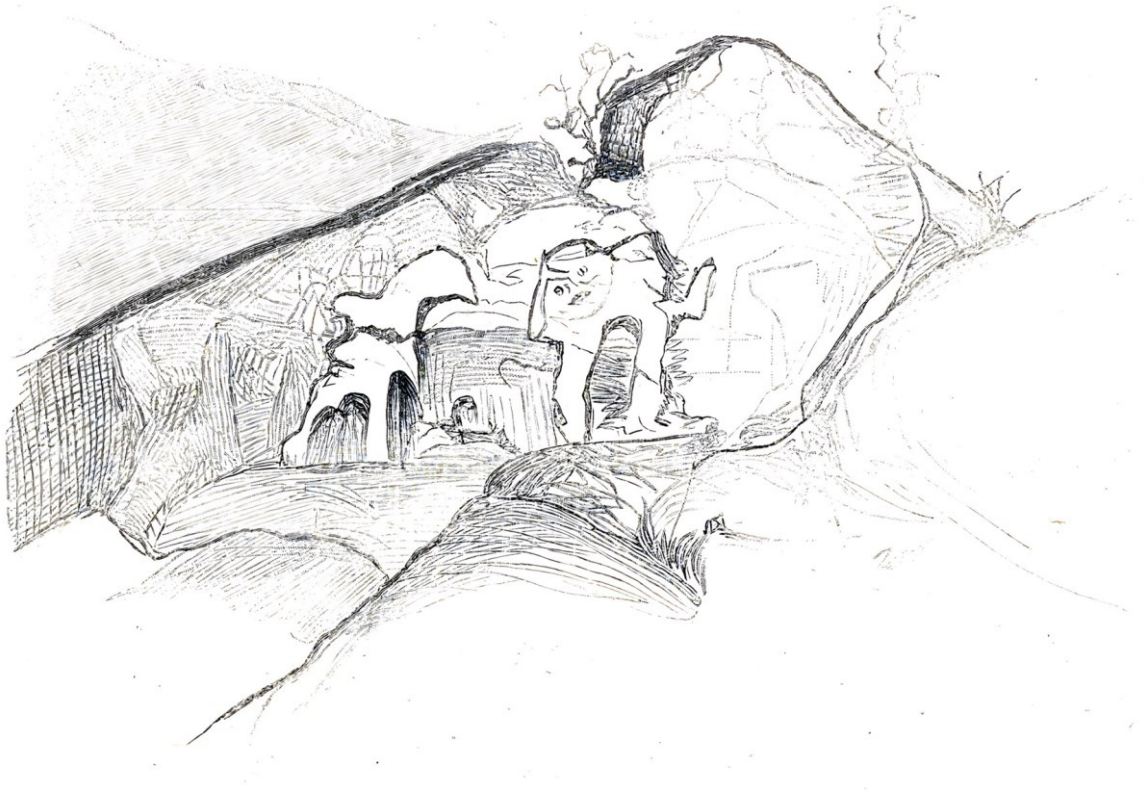
The mountain peaks are a world unknown to us. Therein, vegetates, flowers, and throbs a Nature finding refuge, that lives apart. There, the fierce and the gentle, the wild and the peaceful, combine in a mysterious form of union. Mankind is far away, Nature is tranquil. A sort of confidence, unknown in the plains where the creatures may suddenly hear human footsteps, calms them and modifies their instincts. This is no longer the fearful anxious world of the countryside. The butterfly does not flee; the grasshopper allows itself to be caught; the lizard, which is to the stones what the bird is to the leaves, emerges from its hole and watches one pass. No other sound but the wind, no other movement than the grass below, and the cloud above. On the mountain slopes the soul is elevated, the heart is purified; thought takes its share in this profound peace. One seems to feel the eye of Jehovah upon one.

The Pasajes mountains have a dual attraction for me. The first is that they reach the sea, which at every moment transforms their valleys into gulfs, and their ridges into promontories. The second is that they are formed of sandstone, which is rather disdained by geologists who classify it, I believe, among the parasites of the mineral kingdom. As for me, I think highly of sandstone.

You know, my friend, that, to thoughtful minds, all parts of Nature, even those, at first glance, the most disparate, are connected by a host of secret harmonies, invisible threads of creation that the contemplative eye perceives, which make of the great whole an inextricable network alive with a single breath of life, nourished by a single sap, a unity in variety; those threads which are, so to speak, the very roots of being. Thus, for me, there is a harmony between the oak and the granite, which awaken in the mind, the one amidst the vegetable order, the other within the mineral region, the same idea as the lion and the eagle awaken among animals: power, grandeur, strength, excellence.

There is another harmony, even more hidden, but to me just as obvious, between the elms and the sandstone.

Sandstone is the most amusing and strangely kneaded stone there is. It is among rocks what the elm is among trees. There is no appearance that it fails to assume; no whim that it fails to exercise; no dream that it fails to realise; it adopts all the faces, it displays all the grimaces. It seems animated by a multiple soul. Forgive me the use of the word with regard to mere things.



‘It adopts all the faces, it displays all the grimaces’ - Victor Hugo (1894)

[Paris Musées](#)

In the great drama of the landscape, it plays the role of a creature of fantasy; sometimes tall and severe, sometimes buffoonish; bending like a wrestler, curling up like a clown; it is a sponge, a piece of pudding, a tent, a hut, a tree-stump; it appears in a field among the grass at ground level in small tawny, flaky bumps, imitating a somnolent flock of sheep; it has faces which laugh, eyes that gaze, jaws that seem to bite and graze the ferns; it grasps the undergrowth like a giant fist suddenly emerging from the earth. Antiquity, which loved finished allegories, should have carved statues of Proteus from sandstone.

A plain strewn with elms is never dull; a sandstone mountainside is always full of surprise and interest. Whenever the still life seems to come alive, it moves me with a strange emotion.

It is especially in the evening, at the troubling hour of twilight, that these elements of creation begin to take shape, and become ghostly. A dark and mysterious transfiguration!

Have you noticed, at nightfall, on the main roads around Paris, the monstrous, supernatural profiles of all the elm-trees that one's carriage, travelling at full gallop, causes to appear and disappear before one, in succession? Some yawn, others twist towards the sky, and open wide a mouth that howls dreadfully; there are some that laugh with a fierce and hideous laughter, peculiar to darkness; the wind agitates them; they lean back displaying the contortions of the damned, or lean towards each other and whisper in each other's vast leafy ears words of which you hear in passing who knows what strange syllables. There are some that possess disproportionate eyebrows, ridiculous noses, dishevelled hair, formidable wigs; which in no way detracts from the fearsome, lugubrious nature of their wondrous reality; they are caricatures, but they are also spectres; some are grotesque, all are terrible. The dreamer believes he is seeing the unknown, and possibly monstrous denizens of the night, lined up at the edge of the road, in threatening, deformed rows, leaning above him as he passes.

One is tempted to ask whether these are not the mysterious beings whose very medium is the darkness, beings composed of shadow as the crocodile is composed of stoniness, as the hummingbird is composed of air and sunlight. All thinkers are dreamers; reverie is simply thought in its fluid, floating state. Every great mind has been obsessed, charmed, frightened, or at the very least astonished, by the visions that emanate from Nature. Some have spoken of them, and have, in a manner, deposited in their works, to forever live there, with the immortal life granted by their style and thought, those extraordinary and fleeting forms, the nameless things that they had 'glimpsed in the darkness of night: *visa sub obscurum noctis*' (Virgil: 'Georgics' I, 478). Cicero calls them *imagines*, Cassius Dio *spectra*, Quintilian *figurae*, Lucretius *effigies*, Virgil *simulacra*, and the Lombard Laws, the Edictum Rothari of 643AD, *masca*. In Shakespeare, Hamlet talks of such to Horatio. Pierre Gassendi was concerned about them and Joseph-Louis Lagrange dreamed about them, after translating Lucretius, and meditating on Gassendi.

I am thinking aloud along with you, my friend. One idea leads me to another. I let my thoughts roam. You are kind and sympathetic and indulgent. You are accustomed to my pace, and permit me to think with a free rein. Yet here I am far from sandstone, in appearance at least. Let me return to it.

The aspects presented by sandstone, the singular copies it makes of a thousand things, have this peculiarity that the clarity of day does not dissipate them, nor does it make them vanish. Here, at Pasajes, the mountain, sculpted and worked by the rains, the sea and the wind, is populated by the sandstone with a crowd of stony inhabitants, mute, motionless, eternal, almost terrifying. There, sits a hooded hermit, at the entrance to the bay, on the summit of an inaccessible rock, arms outstretched, who, depending on whether the sky is blue or stormy, seems to bless the sea or warn the sailors. There, are dwarfs with birds' beaks, monsters in human form and with two heads, one of which laughs and the other weeps, close to the sky, on a deserted plateau, amidst the clouds, where nothing makes one laugh and nothing makes one weep. Here, are the dismembered limbs of a giant, *disjecti membra gigantis* (see Horace 'Satires', 1.4.62; a variant on his 'disjecti membra poetae'); here a knee, there a torso and shoulder-blade, further on, the head. Here, is a pot-bellied idol, with an ox's muzzle, necklaces around its neck, and two pairs of thick, short arms, behind which large branches of brushwood

wave like fly swatters. And here, crouching at the top of a high hill, is a gigantic toad, marbled by lichens with yellow and livid spots, which opens a horrible mouth, and seems to blow the storm over the ocean.

My notes: Pasai. In the evening, dancing, laughter, guitars. Suddenly a doorbell rings, and a voice says: *paralme almas del purgaterio: pray for the souls in purgatory*. Everyone falls to their knees.

On Sundays, a concert is paid for by the town. Two ragged, sad-looking fiddlers play the violin and bang the tambourine. Always the same cadence; the dancing of bears. To this music, the most beautiful girls in the world dance with a deep, solemn joy. Pepa and Pepita, the two boatwomen, the two beautiful sisters, both have something pure and noble about them. The elder looks chaste, the younger looks virginal. One might think one was seeing the Madonna dancing opposite the goddess Diana.

Handsome shepherds; handsome fishermen; dark-skinned, swarthy, robust. Respectful and tender as regards their gestures with these modest girls. This dance, however, resembles our proscribed dances. The children dance as well; two-year-olds who sway in such a manner as would doubtless frighten Parisian police officers. These fisher-folk dancing like this in their picturesque costumes, in white shirts, red belts, blue berets, jackets on their shoulders; are beautiful, noble, graceful, almost antique in profile.

Pot-bellied gnomes with broad, flat faces, in frock coats and blunderbuss hats, look at them with disdain. They are the bourgeoisie.

Chapter IX: Around Pasai

Excursions in the mountains. Written while walking.

I

August 3rd, 5 p.m.

While walking along the harbour, I noticed a kind of ruin at the top of a mountain (*Fuerte de Lord John Hay, a British fort, completed 1838, rebuilt 1875*). It in no way has the look of an ancient ruin. It is a modern, and probably recent, result of demolition. The English during their stay in Pasajes, and the Carlists and the Cristinos during the last war, built forts on the heights; the ruin is undoubtedly one of those forts since razed. I intend to visit it.

I climb the mountain. There is a path apparently, but not one I know. I venture on through the broom. The climb is long, almost sheer, and quite arduous. Halfway up, I sit down on a shelf of sandstone.

The horizon is higher; the sea has reappeared over there. The sound of the bells round the necks of the goats that graze on the precipice reaches me. Near my foot I see a beautiful green *buprestid* (*jewel beetle*) dotted with golden spots.

I resume my climb; the mountain summit curves, and rounds; walking becomes easier. I arrive at the ruin. A stone chimney, black with smoke, stands above a wall. A huge pile of demolished ashlars. A ditch full of rubble. I clamber over the stones. They are mixed with broken tiles and bricks. I am on the plateau.

A road for cannon-carriages, paved, brand new, and looking like it was laid yesterday. Yet grass grows in the spaces between the slabs.

I enter the first pile of ruins. — A square stone room. — A large, thick wall. — Three loopholes looking down on the houses of Pasai. — In the centre of the room, an enormous brick and stone chimney, the one whose flue I could see, mostly demolished, and of a strange appearance. — Several brick compartments, cubic and circular, are probably a furnace for red-hot cannonballs. The interior is nothing but a heap of rubble. No human noise reaches here. All you can hear is the wind and the sea. It is starting to rain. Stones roll beneath my feet. I extricate myself with difficulty.

A second room, about ten feet square; identical to the first. Three loopholes overlooking the village. A window overlooking the sea. The remains of a beam in an embrasure; it is rotten; I break a piece from it. Two other small rooms without windows; one completely blackened with smoke. I make a plan of the first set of ruins, leaning on the top of the wall. Burnt wood is mixed with the rubble. The three rooms no longer have roofs; not even vestiges of them remain.

I enter the second area of ruins. A large room, less cluttered with rubble, with a small fireplace at the back. Next to it, a smaller room; both square. Everything is torn away, destroyed, collapsed. Hideous insects flee from under the stones I lift with the tip of my cane. The rain intensifies. Fog covers the sea and the mountain. I exit and descend.

I decide to climb the rest of the ruins. A pile of stones that must have been a third building. Behind this pile, a small cultivated field twelve feet square covered with sections of burnt wood. The ditch borders the field and surrounds the three sets of ruins. — It is now pouring with rain. A kind of darkness is forming. The mist is thickening more and more. Everything disappears around me. I can see nothing but the ruins, the paved road, and the plateau. — I shall be unable to find my way and find myself lost among the escarpments. God protect me!

A magnificent butterfly, driven by the rain, comes to take refuge behind me, on a stone. It is less afraid of me than of the storm. It is right to be so; I leave it alone. I retreat downhill randomly.

The weather is clearing. The rain is easing, daylight is returning. — I can see the small harbour. — It is populated by fishing boats with four oars, racing over the water. From where I am, the harbour, full of these boats, looks like a pond covered with water-spiders.

II

August 4th, 2:30 p.m., on the mountain

Desolate nature. — Violent wind. — The small bay narrowly confined between the two capes of Pasajes. — The sea breaks furiously on a shelf of rocks that half closes the bay. The high sea is dark and agitated. Leaden sky. The sunlight and shadow wander over the waves.

In the distance, a *trincadour* (*a flat-bottomed, undecked coastal vessel with a raised bow, and two or three lug or lateen sails*) from Hondarribia, its twin sails in the wind, struggles, to enter the bay. It sets course for the passage. The tide rocks it back and forth. Just now, a shepherd was saying to me in the mountains: '*Iguraldia gaiztoa: bad weather*'. — Here it is, the boat is almost touching the rocks that the waves cover with foam. It passes by. It has passed. — A cicada sings in the grass beside me.

3 p.m. on the edge of the precipice

Bare rocks like skulls. Heather. I stick my cane in the moor, and it stands upright. Flowers everywhere, and grasshoppers of a thousand colours, and the most beautiful butterflies in the world. I hear laughter, in the abyss, of young girls whom I cannot see.

One of the rocks in front of me has an interesting profile. I draw it. The cheek seems to have been eaten away, as well as the eye and the ear, and one would think one could see the inside of the exposed trunk.

In front of this rock, another represents a dog. It looks as if it is barking at the open sea.

5 p.m.

I am on a rocky point at the end of a cape. I circle the rock, climbing the escarpment. In climbing I place my hands and feet into the strange holes with which the rock of this shore is riddled, and which resemble the imprints of enormous feet. I thus reach a kind of console with a backrest that projects over the abyss. I sit there; my feet dangle in the void.

The sea, nothing but the sea. — Magnificent and eternal spectacle! It whitens there, below, on black rocks. The horizon is misty, although the sun burns me. Always a strong wind. — A

gull passes majestically in the abyss a hundred fathoms below my gaze. — The noise is continuous and deep. From time to time, one hears sudden bursts of sound, like that of sudden and distant fall, as if something collapsed; then there are murmurs that resemble a multitude of human voices; one might think one heard the noise of a crowd.

A thin, shining silvery fringe winds along the coast as far as the eye can see. Behind me, a large, standing rock represents an immense eagle lowering itself toward its nest, its two claws resting on the mountain. A dark and superb sculpture of the ocean.

6 p.m.

Here I am at the very tip of a high mountain, on the highest peak I have been able to reach in a day. Here again I have had to climb on my hands and knees.

I discover an immense horizon. All the mountains as far as Roncesvalles. The whole sea of Bilbao to the left, the whole sea of Bayonne to the right. I write this leaning on a rooster's crest shaped block that forms the extreme ridge of the mountain. On this rock, three letters have been deeply engraved with a pickaxe on the left: LRH, and two letters on the right: VH.

Around this rock, there is a small triangular plateau covered with dried-up heather, and surrounded by a kind of very rough ditch. However, I notice in a crevice a pretty little pink heather-flower in bloom. I pick it.

7 p.m.

Another fort (*The Admiral's Fort, on Mount Ulia, built by the British in 1836*), much larger than that of yesterday. A thousand insects are bothering me. I am within the enclosure, after climbing the moat. A large square of stone walls topped by an earthen wall; still intact here and there, and covered with grass. Four Basque shepherds, wearing berets and red jackets, are sleeping in the shade in the moat. A large white dog is sleeping on top of the wall.

The remains of rooms. In one of them, the damaged pieces of a chimney are still visible. In the middle of the large enclosure, a smaller one, one corner of which is burnt and blackened with smoke. Behind this small enclosure, a terrace leading to a staircase of four steps.

One of the shepherds woke up, and came over to me. I said to him gravely: '*Jaincoa berorrecrequin: God be with you.*' He walked away in astonishment. — He went to wake the others — I see them through the embrasures looking at me with a strange air. — Is it a worried air? Is it a threatening air? I know not; perhaps both. I have no other weapon than my cane. The dog has woken up too, and is growling.

A marvellous carpet of green grass, as thick as fur, dotted with a million daisies and chamomiles in bloom, fills the entire ruin, right to the last corners. I am ascending to the terrace.

Here I am. I am sitting on top of the dry brick wall. Behind me is the sea, in front of me is a cirque of mountains. To my left, in the distance, on a ridge that touches the clouds, I can see the demolished fort I visited yesterday; to my right, even further away, Fort Wellington and the old lighthouse tower beyond San Sebastian (*on Santa Clara Island*). In one hollow, the Loyola Valley (*the valley of the River Urola, containing the Loiola Sanctuary*); in another hollow, the Hernani Valley.

One of the shepherds approached me again; I looked at him fixedly; he ran away shouting: — ‘Ahuatlacouata! Ahuatlacouata!’ I am descending.

On the way back down, the strangest sight in the world. A small triangle of water in a huge circle of mountains; in this water a few aphids. This water is the bay; these aphids are the ships.



‘A small triangle of water in a huge circle of mountains’ - Victor Hugo (1894)

[Internet Archive Book Images](#)

III

August 5th, noon

Still following the road halfway up the hill, after passing the castle, its sentry box, and its sentry, I come across a wash-house.

This wash-house is the most charming cavern ever. An enormous rock, which is one of the sharp edges of the mountain, and which extends quite far above my head, forms here a sort of natural grotto. Through the vault of this cavern a spring filters, its water falling abundantly, drop by drop, from every crack in the ceiling. It looks like a shower of pearls. The entrance to the cave is carpeted with vegetation so rich and so dense it forms an enormous porch of greenery. All this greenery is full of flowers. In the middle of the branches and leaves, a long blade of grass forms a sort of microscopic aqueduct, and serves as a conduit for a small stream of water which runs along its entire length then falls from its end, pouring itself into the dark depths of the cave, as a silver thread. A sheet of clear water which is restricted by a parapet fills the entire floor. The uncemented stones provide an outlet for the water which runs away into the pebbles.

The path passes some distance from the parapet, from which it is separated by a wide, fresh lawn of watercress. You can see the water through the leaves, and hear the spring murmuring beneath the greenery. If you turn around, you can see Pasajes Bay and, on the horizon, the open sea.

Three women, their legs up to their knees in water, are washing their clothes in the washhouse. One cannot say they are beating them, but rather thrashing them. Their method consists of violently whipping the stone parapet with the clothes they hold in their hands. One is an old woman. The other two are young girls. They stop for a few moments, look at me, then return to their work.

After a few moments of silence: ‘Monsieur,’ the old woman says to me in bad French, ‘have you come from the mountain?’ I reply in poor Basque: ‘*Buy, bicho nequesa (more correctly, ‘bai, bide neketsua: yes, a wearisome path’)*. The young girls look at each other with lowered eyes, and start to laugh.

One is blonde, the other is brunette. The blonde is the younger and prettier. Her hair, braided in a single pigtail at the back, according to the fashion of the country, takes on a tawny tint on the top of her head, like silk braids that have been left exposed to the air, whose colour has faded. Moreover, the young washerwoman is full of grace, in her red petticoat and blue corset, the two favourite colours of the Basque people.

I approach her and start the conversation in Spanish:

- ‘What is your name?’
- ‘Maria Juana, at your service, Senõr.’
- ‘How old are you?’
- ‘Seventeen.’
- ‘Are you from this country?’
- ‘Yes, Senõr.’
- ‘Daughter of a bourgeois?’
- ‘No, sir, I am a boatwoman.’

— ‘A batelera! And you are not at sea?’

— ‘The tide is low; and then, we have to wash our clothes.’

Here the girl grows bolder and continues of her own accord:

— ‘I was on the shore the other day, Senõr, when you arrived. I saw you. You had first chosen Pepa to take you across; but, as you were with Senõr Leon, and the lord had already embarked, and Manuela the Catalan is his boatwoman, you crossed with Manuela. Poor Pepa! But you gave her a coin. — Do you remember,’ she said, turning to her companion, ‘do you remember, Maria Andrès? The Senõr chose Pepa first.’

— ‘And why did I choose her?’

The girl looks at me with her big, naive eyes and answers without hesitation:

— ‘Because she’s the prettiest.’

Then she starts beating her laundry again. The old woman, who has finished her task and is leaving, says, as she passes by me:

— ‘The *muchacha* is right, Senõr.’

And saying this, she places her basket on the ground and sits down at the edge of the path, fixing on the two young girls and on me her little grey eyes, pierced as if with a gimlet amidst the wrinkles.

— ‘Would you like me to help you replace this basket on your head?’ I ask her.

— ‘A thousand thanks, Senõr! But no one helped me yesterday, and no one will help me tomorrow; it is better if no one helps me today.’

— ‘What do you call this herb in Spanish?’ I said, pointing at the watercress with the tip of my cane.

— ‘*Berro*, Senõr.’

— ‘And in Basque?’

She gives me a lengthy answer which I don’t recall well enough to write down.

I turn to the young girls:

— ‘Maria Juana, what is the name of your querido (*boyfriend*)?’

— ‘I don’t have one.’

— ‘And Maria Andres?’

— ‘Maria Andrès has one.’

The girl said this deliberately, without hesitation, without appearing surprised by the question or embarrassed by replying.

— ‘What is the name of Maria Andrès’ *querido*?’

— ‘Oh! He’s a fisherman, a poor lad. He’s very jealous. Look, he’s over there in the bay; you can see him from here in his boat.’

Here the old woman spoke again:

— ‘And, luckily, he doesn’t see you! He would be happy indeed if he saw Maria Andrès laughing and talking with a Senñor! Talking with a Frenchman, Sweet Jesus! Better to chat with the four demons of the east, west, north and south.’

A soldier passes by; I wave to the girls; they return my wave with a smile, and I continue on my way.

IV

August 6th, 3 p.m.

I hear a young rooster crowing in the distance, and I keep walking. I arrive, via a very rough road cut into the rock for oxcarts, at a strangely wild ravine. The rocks emerging from the heather on the steep mountain slope almost all represent gigantic heads; there are death’s-heads, Egyptian profiles, bearded Sileni laughing in the grass, and gloomy knights with severe profiles. Everything, and everyone, is here, even Odry (*Jacques Charles Odry, the comic actor and poet*), who is sneering beneath a brushwood wig.



‘There are death’s-heads, Egyptian profiles’ - Victor Hugo (1894)

[Internet Archive Book Images](https://www.internetarchive.org/book-images)

Through the break between the two mountains, on the right, I see an arm of the sea, three villages, two ruins, including a monastery, a wonderful valley, and a chain of high peaks covered in clouds.

The village of Lezo, which is the nearest of the three, has its beautiful Gothic church of a simple and large design; it looks like a fortress. God himself lives in citadels in this country where war is never extinguished at one corner of the horizon without reigniting at the other.

5:30 p.m.

Here the spectacle is one of tremendous magnificence. The horizon forms two segments, sea and mountain. The shore extends before me as far as the eye can see. It has the angle and shape of the immense escarpment of an immense entrenchment that the heather clothes. A precipice at the same angle forms the counterscarp.

On the landward side, the sea furiously besieges and batters this entrenchment, on the edge of which nature has placed a parapet that looks as if it was built with a set-square. The entrenchment is collapsing, here and there, in long wave-like sections that fall as a single block into the ocean. Imagine slabs eighty feet long. Where I am, the assault has been furious, the devastation is terrible. A monstrous breach has been made.

I sit on the very tip of the overhanging rock that dominates this gap. A forest of ferns fills the top of the collapsed part. A crowd of dwarf-oaks, which the wind from the sea has stunted to the height of a lawn, grow around me. I pluck a pretty red leaf.

Well-nigh imperceptible fishing boats swim at the bottom of the abyss, at my feet; mackerel, *lubines* (*sea-bass*), and sardines gleam in the sun, in the bottom of the boats, in starry heaps. The shadows of the clouds give the sea a bronze hue.

7 p.m.

The sun is setting. I walk back down. A child is singing amidst the mountain slopes. I see him passing at the bottom of a sunken path, chasing six cows before him. The mountain's battlements cast wide shadows across a red field where sheep graze.

The sea is chrysoprase green. It becomes darker. The sky fades.

Chapter X: Lezo

August 8th

For several days I had noticed from the mountains a village of strange and severe appearance. This village is called, Lezo. It is situated at the end of the Pasajes inlet, at a place left dry by the tide when it withdraws. Yesterday, as the sun was setting, I followed an ox-track halfway up the hill which leads to it.

The road is often very rough, paved in places with sandstone and marble slabs, and interrupted here and there by a kind of steep staircase formed from the crumbling slabs. Moreover, it runs along the slopes of two mountains which are now covered with an immense blanket of flowers, purple heather, and yellow broom.

I left behind, on my right, a large stone farm with an ogival door, then, on my left, a wild gorge, from which a torrent bursts forth in the most furious and strange manner from a ruin that was once a house. I crossed this torrent on a small single-arched bridge, and climbed the slope of the opposite mountain.

Women were singing; children were bathing in puddles; French workmen from Bayonne, who are currently constructing a building in the bay, were traversing a ravine, seven of them carrying a long wooden frame; I could hear the bells of the oxen, and the rustling of the trees; the landscape was magnificently cheerful; the wind brought everything to life; the sun gilded everything.

Then I came across a ruin on the right, a ruin on the left, and another, and then a group of three or four behind a clump of apple trees, and suddenly I found myself a few steps from the village.

I used the word ruin incorrectly; I should have used the word 'hovel'. The hovels usually consist of four roofless walls pierced by a few windows, most of them blocked with a brick apron and converted into loopholes, with traces of fire everywhere, and inside a cow or a goat peacefully grazing the grass on the paving, and the ivy on the walls. These ruins are the result of the last war.

As I entered the village, a solemn beggar-woman, at least a hundred years old, rose from the corner of a wall and asked me for alms with a gesture, to formidable effect. I gave this centenarian a sou.

I entered a gloomy street, lined with large black houses, all of stone, some with balconies of heavy iron of ancient workmanship, others with enormous coats of arms, carved in the round, in the centre of their facade.

Livid faces, which seemed to have suddenly awakened, appeared on the thresholds as I passed. Almost all the windows revealed, instead of curtains, vast cobwebs. Through these long, narrow windows, I looked into the houses, and saw what looked like the interiors of sepulchres.

In an instant, a head appeared at each window, a head even older than the window. All these dull, cadaverous heads, as if dazed by too bright a shaft of sunlight, were moving, leaning over, whispering. My arrival had set this anthill of spectres in turmoil. It seemed to me that I was in a village of ghosts and *lamiae*, and all these shades were gazing in anger and with terror at a living being.

The street I entered was winding and divided, so to speak, into two levels. The right side leaned against the mountain; the left side plunged into the valley.

There were many fifteenth-century houses, with two large doors; on the keystone of the first door was carved, in the most delicate and elegant manner, the house number intertwined with some religious symbol, a cross, a dove, a cluster of lilies; on the keystone of the second were carved the attributes of the inhabitant's trade, a wheel for a wheelwright, an axe for a woodcutter. In this village, everything possessed a sombre and singular grandeur. One sign was a bas-relief.

There was deep poverty here, but not a vulgar poverty. It was a poverty housed in cut stone; a poverty with balconies of wrought iron like the Louvre, and coats of arms on marble slabs like the Escorial. A tribe of gentlefolk in rags, in granite huts.

I saw not a single young face, except for a few ragged children who followed me at a distance, and who, as soon as I turned around, retreated without fleeing, like frightened young wolves.

Between every two houses there was a ruin, mostly covered with ivy and blocked with brushwood, sometimes old, more often recent.

Climbing over the sections of wall, I came to a house that appeared uninhabited. The entire facade on what had been the street possessed the gloomy air of a home without owners, the doors carefully shut, the green shutters, of Louis XIII period woodwork, at the windows everywhere closed. I climbed a small fence to go around this house, and found it open on the far side, dreadfully open, open from top to bottom due to the entire demolition of the rear facade the remains of which lay on the ground, in one piece, in a field of crushed corn. I walked along this wall as on broad paving, and entered the house.

What desolation! I saw at a glance that the four floors had been gutted. The staircase had burned; the stairwell was nothing more than a large hole into which all the rooms led. The walls, red and hideous, showed scorch marks everywhere. I was only able to walk around the ground floor; the staircase having collapsed.

The house was very large and very tall; it is supported only by a few pillars and beams now, thinned by the fire. I felt it hanging and trembling above my head; from time to time a stone, a brick, a piece of plasterwork would shake loose and fall at my feet, making a sinister noise of life in that dead dwelling. On the third floor, a half-burnt board remained hanging from a nail;

the wind stirred it and made it creak sadly. I saw again in the bedrooms that the shutters were firmly clasped. There were a few shreds of paper on the walls. One room is painted pink. In the kitchen, in a place now inaccessible, I noticed, on the white jamb of the tall chimney, a small ship drawn in charcoal by a child's hand.

From a centuries-old ruin one emerges with an enlarged and expanded soul. From a ruin of yesterday one emerges with a heavy heart. In the ancient ruin, I imagined ghosts; in the recent ruin, I imagined its last owner. The ghosts were less sad.

The tall, enormous, gloomy, granite church of San Juan Bautista dominates this wild village. From a distance, it is not a church, it is a solid block. As one approaches, one can see a few holes in the wall, and in the apse three or four fifteenth-century ribbed vaults. As they probably found that too much light entered this stone box, the ribbed vaults were walled up, leaving only a narrow bull's-eye window in the centre of each one. The walls are red, rough, and eaten away by lichen.

The facade is a large, square-cut wall, without a rose window, without a bay, and offering the eye no other opening than the portal, which is low and sad, with two crude columns and a bare pediment. Two long slashes of black stone scar this facade from top to bottom. It is flanked on the right by a long, narrow tower, which barely exceeds the height of the building.

Seven or eight hideous and solitary old women were crouched at intervals around the exterior of the church. I know not whether this arrangement was the effect of pure chance, but each of these old women seemed to be paired with a gargoyle that stretched out its neck above her head, at the edge of the roof. At times, the old women raised their eyes to the sky and seemed to exchange tender glances with the gargoyles.

One of these wild beggars fixed on me a wilder and more intense gaze than the others. I went straight up to her, which seemed to surprise her; then I indicated the church and said to her: '*Giltza*,' which means in Basque: 'the key'. The living gargoyle, tamed by this magic word, and the fifty centimes coin that I threw into her apron, stood up and said: '*Bai*,' that is to say: yes. She disappeared behind the church.

I stood alone in front of the porch. The other old women had all risen, and gathered at one corner from which they were watching me. A few moments later, the one who had vanished reappeared holding a key. She opened the church door, and I went in.

Was it the hour, the approaching night, the disposition of my mind, or an emanation of the building itself? I have never felt a more chilling impression than when I entered this church.

It was a high nave, as bare inside as it was outside, dark, cold, miserable and large, barely lit by the pale, earthy rays of twilight.

At the back, behind the tabernacle, on a stone platform, from the pavement to the vault, stretched an immense altarpiece, laden with statues and bas-reliefs, once gilded, now rust-coloured, displaying over a surface sixty feet high the formidable saints of the Inquisition mingled with the tragic and sinister architecture of Philip II. This altar, glimpsed in the shadows, had something pitiless and terrible about it.

The old woman had lit a candle, which glittered in a large, tastefully stamped tin-lamp hanging before the altar. This candle did nothing to alleviate the darkness and added something to the horror.

The priest ascends to the altar by a wide staircase which is enclosed by a massive ramp, admirably worked in the dark and elegant taste of Charles V, which corresponds to what we call in France the François I style, and to what is known in England as Tudor architecture. I climbed this staircase, and from there inspected the church interior, which is truly majestic and funereal. The old woman was somewhere in a dark corner.

The door had remained half-open, and I saw in the distance the countryside already covered in shadow, the darkened sky, the arm of the sea, and a vast beach, at that moment dry; in the foreground, a ruin which was a hovel; in the mid-distance, a ruin which was an alcalde's house; in the background, a ruin which was a monastery. The ruined hut, the ruined house, the ruined monastery, the sky from which the day was departing, the beach from which the sea had withdrawn, was that not a complete symbol? It seemed to me that, from the depths of this mysterious church, I saw, not just any countryside, but the aspect of Spain itself.

At that moment, a strange noise reached me. I listened, unable to believe my ears, and listened again. A surprising thing, and one which announces how profound the revolution taking place in this country already is: the group of children who had followed me from afar had seen the church door open; they had settled under the porch, and were chanting away at the tops of their voices, and with derision and long bursts of laughter, the Mass and Vespers, parodying the priest at the altar, and the singers in the choir.

Shall I tell you, friend? At that moment, I felt in my soul an infinite pity for these poor children who will lack religion before they acquire civilisation.

And then, from the children, my pity went to this poor old nave of the Holy Office, obliged to endure the affront in silence. What a torment! What a reversal! Children mocking what has so long made men tremble! Oh! if stones have entrails, if the souls of institutions communicate themselves to the edifices they construct, what gloomy and inexpressible anger must at that moment be stirring these austere and formidable walls to their very foundations! And to think that this was happening near the cradle of Saint Ignatius, thirty miles from the valley of Loiola! — As the children sang, the nave became darker, and this nightfall in the church seemed to be the image of the nightfall of their faith. Sad church of San Juan, you thought you had defeated Satan, and you are defeated by Voltaire!

Thus, everything is in ruins in Spain! The houses, their human dwellings, are ruined in the countryside; religion, that dwelling of the soul, is ruined in their hearts.

It was dark when I left the church. All the windows and doors in the village were shut. Not a light, not a single inhabitant. It was as if the tombs had closed and the ghosts had returned to their slumber

However, in one square, I distinguished a glimmer. I headed towards it. A shutter was half-open on the ground floor, and I saw in a low room an old woman crouching, motionless, leaning against a freshly whitewashed wall. Above her head burned a lamp attached to a nail, the old Spanish lamp with the shape of a sepulchral lamp. I thought I saw Lady Macbeth dreaming.

The rays of this lamp allowed me to read this inscription on the door of the house opposite:

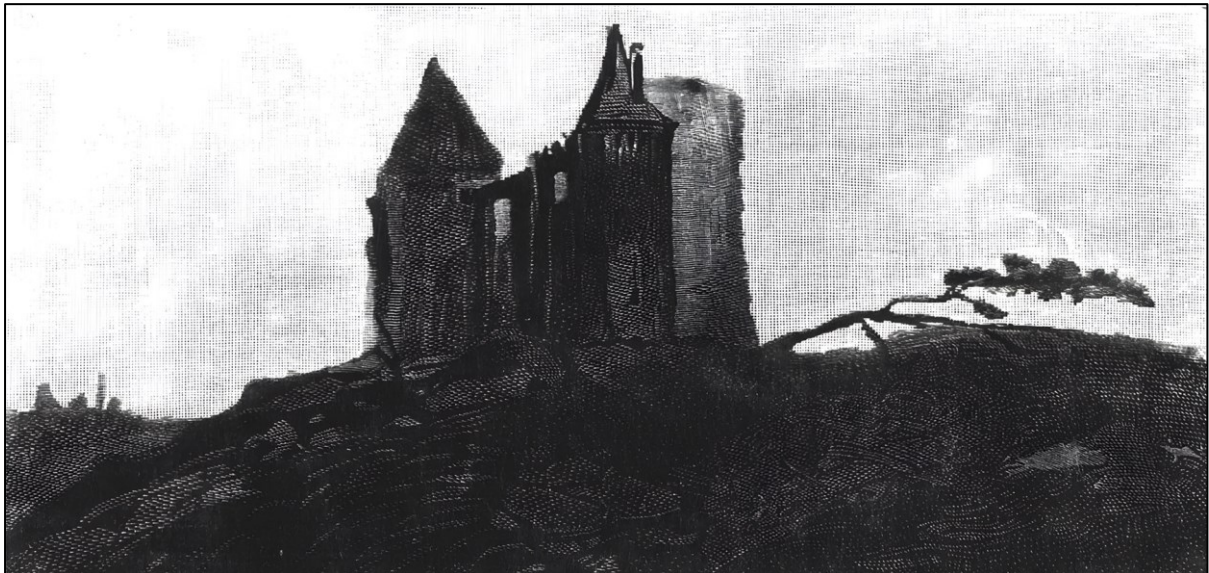
posada
i habii

inn
and lodgings

I had hardly expected to find an inn there.

The moon was rising behind the Jaizkibel Mountains as I left the village. It was easy for me to find my way back. Yet, in the frame of mind in which my visit to this strange place had left me, I had difficulty recognising the countryside that had charmed me so, but a few hours before. That landscape, so cheerful in the sun, had become gloomy in the moonlight. The solitude of night filled the horizon.

I was approaching Pasai. A few passers-by were beginning to appear on the road. I had my eye fixed on the ruin of a *castillo* (*fort*) highlighted in the distance, by the moonlight, on the crest of a fairly high mountain, at the end of a narrow, wild and deserted valley.



‘Ruined castle’ - Victor Hugo (1894)

[Paris Musées](#)

What occupied me was a light that had just appeared in this ruin, at the end of the gable. This light had something inexplicable and singular about it, first because of the place where it

shone, then because of the way in which it shone. It behaved like a lighthouse, flaring, then dying, then flaring again, shining suddenly with the brightness of a large star. What was this light, and what did it mean?

As I reached the gorge where the bridge stands, a poor woman who usually stands at the entrance to the rope- factory, and to whom I give alms almost every morning, was crossing the road to ascend to her hut halfway up the slope. On seeing me, she turned around, made the sign of the cross and pointed to the light, saying: *Los demonios; Demons*. I walked on.

A little further on, at the entrance to the steep pavement that leads down to Pasai, a man, a fisherman, was standing on a shelf of red marble, and, like the old woman, he was looking at the light. '*Que es eso; what is it?*' I said to him as I approached.

The man did not take his eyes off the light, and answered me: — '*Contrabandistas (Smugglers)*'.

As I was going upstairs, at my lodgings, my hostess, the excellent Madame Basquetz, came to me:

— 'Ah! Sir, how late you are! Have you had supper? Where have you come from, at this hour?'

— 'From Lezo.'

— 'Ah! You went to Lezo?'

— 'Yes, madam.'

She repeated a moment later, with a thoughtful air:

— 'From Lezo?'

— 'Yes,' I said. 'And you, have you never been there?'

— 'No, sir.'

— 'And why not?'

— 'Because the folk round here; we never go to Leso.'

— 'And why do you never go there?'

— 'I have no idea.'

Chapter XI: Pamplona

August 11th

I am in Pamplona, and I cannot describe what I feel. I have never visited this city before, yet it seems to me that I recognise every street, every house, every door. All of that Spain I saw as a child appears to me here. As they did on my hearing the first oxcart pass, the intervening thirty years or so have faded from my life; I have become the child again, the little Frenchman, *el niño, el chiquito frances*, as they called me. A whole world that was sleeping inside me has awakened and lives again, and my mind teems with memories. I thought that world was well-nigh erased; now it is more resplendent than ever.

This is truly the real Spain. I see arcaded squares, cobblestone mosaic pavements, balconies with awnings, houses painted with frills, which make my heart beat. It seems to me as if I was here only yesterday. Yes, it was surely yesterday I entered beneath that large carriage arch which opens onto a small staircase; the other Sunday, while going for a walk with my young comrades from the noblemen's seminary, I bought I don't know what peppered *gimblettes* ('*rosquillas*', *ring-shaped, soft pastries*) in that shop from the pediment of which hang goatskins for carrying wine; I played ball along that high wall, behind the old church. All this is certain to me, real, distinct, palpable.

There are walls coloured with extravagant marble that delight my soul. I spent two delightful hours alone, with an old green shutter with small panels that opens in two sections to make a window if you open it halfway, and a balcony if you open it completely. This shutter had been there for thirty odd years, without my realising it, in a corner of my thoughts. I said: 'Look! There's my old shutter!'

What a mystery the past is! And how true it is that we deposit a part of ourselves in each of the objects that surround us! We believe them to be inanimate, yet they live; they live with the mysterious life that we have given them. At each phase of our life, we shed our entire being, and leave it in some corner of the world. All that collection of inexpressible things, that were each a part of oneself, remains there in the shadows, becoming one with the objects on which we have imprinted ourself without our knowing. One day, finally, by chance, we see these objects again; they suddenly appear before us, and there they are, with the immediacy and omnipotence of reality, restoring our past to us. It is like a sudden light; they recognise us, they make themselves recognised by us, they bring back to us, in dazzling wholeness, our store of memories, and give back to us a charming ghost of ourselves: the child who played, the young man who loved.

I left San Sebastian yesterday. The mountains produce two kinds of roads: those that wind flat along the ground like vipers, and those that wind, in an undulating manner with sudden humps, like boa constrictors. Permit me those two comparisons that render my thoughts tangible. The road from San Sebastian to Tolosa is of the latter kind; that from Tolosa to Pamplona is of the former. That is to say, the road from San Sebastian to Tolosa climbs and descends along the ridges of the hills, while the road from Tolosa to Pamplona follows the windings of the valleys. One is charming, the other is wild.

Leaving San Sebastian, I took a last look at the peninsula, at the sea foaming superbly, whitening the sand, at Mount Urgull, and at the three monasteries at the gates of the town, that were burned, one by the Cristinos, two by the Carlists.

Hernani has no monuments — a random church whose Pompadour portal is nevertheless quite richly worked, and an insignificant *ayuntamiento* — but Hernani has an admirable landscape round about it, and a street worth a cathedral. The main street of Hernani, lined with projecting coats of arms, jewel-like balconies, and stately portals, secured by an old ruined postern gate which at this moment bears, instead of battlements, tufts of flowering nasturtiums, is a magnificent book in which one can read, page by page, house by house, the architecture of four centuries.

I regretted, while crossing the town, that nothing indicated to the passer-by the house where Juan de Urbieta was born, a Spanish captain who, at the battle of Pavia, had the honour of capturing Francis I. Urbieta behaved like a gentleman, while Francis I suffered like a king. Spain owes Urbieta at least a marble plaque in the main street of Hernani.

Moreover, these mountains are full of illustrious names. Mutriku is the homeland of Churruca who died at Trafalgar (*Cosme Damián Churruca, commander of the 'San Juan Nepomuceno'*). Juan Sebastián Elcano, who circumnavigated the world in 1519, note the date (*in the 'Victoria', on the Magellan expedition to the Spice islands*) and Alonso de Ercilla, who wrote an epic poem (*'La Araucana' concerning the Spanish conquest of Chile*), were born, one in Getaria, the other in Bermeo. The Loiola valley saw the birth, in, 1491 of Ignatius Loyola, who from being a page (*in a relative's service*) became a saint, while the port of Laredo saw the landing (*in 1556*) of Charles V, on his way from Germany to the monastery of Yuste (*in Extramadura*), he who, abdicating his imperial role, became a monk.

Tolosa, which may have been the old Iturissa, has more grace than Hernani, and greater life and wealth, but less grandeur and solemnity. Despite the light rain that had been falling since morning, I viewed the whole town. A few old houses, including one built under Alfonso X of Castile, the Wise, the astronomer king; a rather beautiful church, which has been converted into a storage place for fodder; two pretty rivers, the Oria and the Araxes, were all I gained for my trouble.

On the first-floor frontage of a building in the main street, there is an inscription on black marble which begins with *Sic visum, superis* and ends with *el emperador le armo caballero*. I had begun to copy it, but this unheard-of action produced in a few minutes such a crowd around me that I gave up the inscription. At this moment when the *ayuntamientos* (*town halls*) are trembling like a leaf, I feared to inadvertently cause a revolution in Tolosa.

Hernani, which I had passed through as a child, and whose memory remained with me, has much more of a Spanish physiognomy than Tolosa. The fourteen diligences that leave Tolosa every day bear off, each morning, something of the old manners, the old ideas, the old customs, of all that which makes old Spain in short.

And then there is manufacture in Tolosa. There is the Urbieta hat factory, a paper-factory, many leatherworks, and many factories making nails, horseshoes, wrought-iron pots, polished-iron balcony railings, sabres and rifles; the whole mountainside is full of forges. Now, if anything can transform Spain, it is work.

Spain is essentially the land of gentlemanly people who, for three centuries, were fed, while doing nothing, by the Indies and the Americas. Hence the emblazoned streets. In Spain, one

awaited the treasure-galleon, as in France one votes on the nation's budget. Tolosa, with its activity, its industry, its mills, its rivers, its shade, its anvils, and its noise, resembles a pretty French town. Its buzzing must surely annoy the old Castle Gate (*Puerta de Castilla*), and the latter must have been tempted more than once to turn around, half asleep as it is, to say: 'Be quiet!'

As I descended from the coach, at Tolosa, at the door of the inn, a swarm of maidservants in short petticoats, with bare legs, eager, cordial and some pretty, surrounded me and seized my luggage. All sought to say a few words to me in French.

This morning, at three, well before daybreak, I clambered into the coupé of the *Coronilla de Aragon* coach and left Tolosa. We traversed the street and the bridge, and reached the main road in the darkness, the eight mules galloping furiously, roused, urged on, whipped, spurred, goaded, and harassed by the three crew.

One of these was a child, but he was worth the other two. He looked no more than eight or nine years old. This fierce brat, whom before leaving I had glimpsed under the stable-lantern, with his Henry II hat, his straw smock, and his leather gaiters, had an Arab profile, almond-shaped eyes, and the most graceful bearing in the world. As soon as he was on horseback, he was transfigured; he looked like a gnome acting as a postilion. He was almost insignificant astride his immense mule, seemed glued to his saddle, brandished with his little arm a monstrous whip, each blow of which made the team jump, and hurtled headlong into the darkness amidst all this enormous equipage, as it clanged, jolted, and rolled over bridge and road, with the noise of an earthquake. He was the gadfly, but what a formidable one!

Imagine a demon trailing thunder. The *mayoral* (*driver*), seated to the right at the front, grave as a bishop, waved a gigantic whip, like a sceptre, whose tip reached the eighth mule at the end of the team, and appeared to sting like fire. From time to time, he shouted: '*Anda, niño; go on, my child!*' Then the little postilion bent furiously over his mule, and everything leapt about as if the carriage were about to fly away.

To the left of the *mayoral* stood a tall, twenty-year-old fellow, almost as astounding as the postilion. He was the *zagal* (*the lad*). This odd youth, strapped around with rope, shod with rags, clothed in a rag, and wearing a beret, risked his life twenty times an hour. At any moment he would leap to the ground, race to the head of the carriage, and insult the mules, calling them by their names with terrifying cries: *La capitana! La capitana! La générale! Leona! La carabinera! La collegiana! La carcana!* whipping, pricking, pinching, biting, and striking them with his fist and foot, urging them to a triple gallop, which he seemed unable to match, the coach overtaking him with the speed of lightning, yet at the moment when one might of thought he had been left half a mile behind, as the fastest pace was achieved in this wild race, a figure that seemed to have been hurled by a bombard suddenly landed on the seat next to the *mayoral*. It was the *zagal* seating himself again, who did so as calmly as possible, without seeming troubled, or panting, and without a drop of sweat on his brow. A miser who has just given a penny to a beggar would, without a doubt, appear more out of breath. Anyone who has not seen a Navarrese *zagal* racing along, on the road from Tolosa to Pamplona, is ignorant of all that is contained in the famous proverb: *to run like a Basque*.

My head was heavy with the kind of sleep into which the fatigue due to a bad night, the fresh morning air and the swaying of a coach plunge the traveller. You will know that drowsiness, both opaque and transparent, amidst which the mind floats half-drowned, and in which the realities that one perceives tremble confusedly, expand, waver, become fearful, and turn to dream while yet remaining real. The diligence becomes a whirlwind, yet remains a diligence. The mouths of people speaking emit sounds like a horn; at the relay-station the postilion's lantern blazes like Sirius, the dog-star: the shadows it projects on the pavement seems like an immense spider that seizes the carriage, and shakes it between its antennae. It is through this reverie, magnifying all, that the eight mules and three postilions appeared to me.

But is there not a degree of reason sometimes in our hallucinations, of truth in our dreams? And are not the strangest states of the soul full of revelations?

What shall I add as regards my reverie? In that state, in which many a philosopher has tried to study their own mind, singular doubts and strange, new questions presented themselves to my own. I asked myself: 'What might take place, what does take place in the minds of these poor mules, who, in the state of somnambulism in which they live, vaguely illuminated by flickering gleams of instinct, deafened by a hundred bells in their ears, almost blinded by their blinkers, imprisoned by the harness, terrified by the noise of the chains, the wheels, and the paving stones which pursue them incessantly, feel a relentless shadow upon them, and amidst the tumult three devils whom they do not know, but whose blows they suffer, whom they cannot see, but can hear? What does this dream, this vision, this reality mean to them? Is it a punishment? Yet they have committed no crime. What do they think of Mankind?



'Aragonese mule driver. The Tolosa gorge. August 11th' - Victor Hugo (1894)

[Paris Musées](#)

My friend, dawn was beginning to break; a corner of the firmament was whitening with that sinister whiteness which the first light of morning always displays; everything that lives a distinct and individual life was still sleeping; in the nests lost under the leaves, in the huts buried in the woods; but it seemed to me that nature was not asleep; the trees, glimpsed in the

darkness like ghosts, were gradually emerging from the mist in the deep gorges of Tolosa and appeared above us, at the edge of the sky, as if they were thrusting their heads forward over the tops of the hills; the grasses were shivering on the bank beside the road; black and confused brushwood was writhing over the rocks as if in despair; I heard no noise, no voice, no complaint; but, I tell you, it seemed to me that Nature was not asleep. It seemed to me that she was gradually awakening around us, and that, in the trees, the grasses, the brushwood, it was she, the common mother, who leant down, in ineffable pain, with inexpressible pity, from the edge of the road and the summits of the mountains, to see those poor terrified mules pass by, suffering, on this road full of darkness, those creatures wretched and abandoned who are her children like us, and who live closer to her than we do.

O my friend, if Nature indeed looks upon us at certain times, if she sees the brutal actions that we commit needlessly and as if for pleasure, if she suffers from the evil things that men do, how gloomy her aspect must be, how terrible her silence!

No one has yet fathomed the depths of such questions. Human philosophy has paid little attention to the world outside of mankind, and has examined only superficially, and almost with a smile of disdain, the relationship of mankind to the things about us, and the creatures, which to it are no more than things. Yet are there not abysses there for the mind to sound?

Is one to be deemed insane, merely because one feels in one's heart universal pity? Are there not certain mysterious laws of equity, of justice, that emerge from the unity of things, and which are harmed by the unintelligent and useless acts of man towards the creatures? Without doubt, the sovereignty of Mankind over things cannot be denied; but the sovereignty of God is above that of Mankind. Do you believe, for example, that man has turned the ox, the donkey, the horse into the 'convicts' of Creation, without violating the secret and paternal intent of the Creator? Let Mankind have them serve, that is fine; but let not Mankind make them suffer! Let Mankind even kill them, if it must be so, if it is necessary and thought right, but let not Mankind see them suffer. At the least, and I insist on this, let us not make them suffer needlessly.

For myself, I think that pity is a law like justice, that kindness is a duty like probity. The weak have a right to the kindness, and pity, of the strong. The animal is weak, in that it lacks higher intelligence. Let us therefore be kind and show pity where it is concerned.

There is in the relationship between man and the creatures, the flowers, the objects of Creation, a whole great morality barely glimpsed as yet, but which will eventually see the light and which will be the corollary and complement of human morality. I admit the innumerable exceptions and restrictions, but I am certain myself that, on the day Jesus said: 'Do not unto others what you would not have them do unto you,' (*the common paraphrase of 'Matthew' 7:12, 'Therefore all things whatsoever ye would that men should do to you, do ye even so to them: for this is the law and the prophets'*) in his mind, that word 'others' was immense in scope; that word 'others' surpassed Mankind, and encompassed the universe.

The main purpose for which Mankind was created, its great aim, its great function, is to love. Understanding is secondary. God wishes Mankind to love. He or she who does not love is far below the man who does not think. In other words, the egoist is lower than the fool, those who are evil are lower on the human scale than those who are mentally impaired yet innocent.

Everything in Nature grants Mankind the fruit it bears, the benefit it delivers. All objects serve Mankind, according to their own laws; the sun gives its light, fire its warmth, the animal its instincts, the flower its perfume. This is their way of loving Mankind. They each follow their law, and do not resist it, and never shirk it; Mankind must obey its law. It must give to Humanity, and return to Nature, its own light, warmth, instincts and perfume, Love.

Without doubt, this was the first duty — and this is where we were required to begin, and the various legislators of human affairs were right to neglect all other cares for this one — it was necessary to civilise Mankind with regard to the affairs of Mankind. The task has already advanced, and progresses every day. But we must also civilise Mankind with regard to Nature. There, everything is yet to be done.

Such was my reverie. Take it for what it is; but whatever you say of it, I declare to you that it comes from a well of deep feeling within me. Now, let me reflect on it, but not speak of it any more. One must sow the seed, and let the furrow do its work.

August 12th

What shall I write? I am charmed. It is a wonderful country, and very beautiful, curious, and interesting. While you have rain in Paris, I have sun here, and blue skies, and just enough cloud to create magnificent mist in the mountains.

Everything here is singular, capricious, contradictory; a mix of primitive and degenerate moral attitudes is evident; naivety and corruption; nobility and bastardy; pastoral life and civil war; beggars with the air of heroes, heroes with the look of beggars; an ancient civilisation which is finally decaying amidst ever-youthful Nature, at the same moment that a new nation is coming into being; it is old and reborn, it is rancid and fresh; it is inexpressible. Above all, it is interesting.

A unique country where incompatibilities are to be found at every moment, at every turn of the road, at every street corner. The waitresses at the table d'hôte bow like duchesses to receive two sous. Look at this village girl passing by; she is miraculously pretty, with beautiful hair, coquettish and adorned like a Madonna; lower your eyes, and there's a horrid ragged skirt beneath which emerge dreadfully large, bare, dirty feet. The Madonna's body ends in that of a muleteer. The wine is execrable, it smells of goatskin; the oil is abominable, it smells of I know not what; the sign on every shop offers you wine and oil: *Vino y aceite*. The main streets have pavements, the beggars wear jewellery, hovels bear coats of arms, their inhabitants lack shoes. Every soldier in every sentry-box plays the guitar. Priests climb on top of the coach's imperial, smoke cigars, stare at women's legs, eat like tigers, and are as thin as nails. The roads are littered with picturesque rascals.

O decrepit Spain! O brand-new people! A great history! A great past! A great future! A hideous and wretched present! O misery! O marvels! One is repelled; one is attracted. I tell you: it is quite inexpressible!

In the evening, we see them again, these same rascals, standing on the hilltops, a rifle on their back, silhouetted against the sky. All in all, an admirable country.

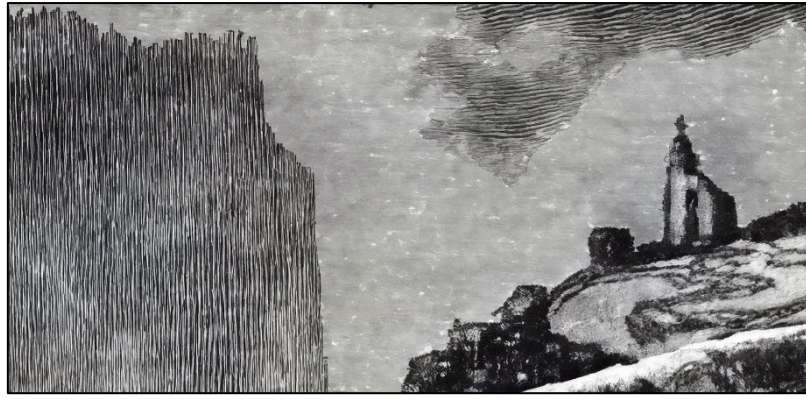
The gorge that leads from Tolosa to Pamplona would be famous if it were known. But it is one of those roads no one takes. A zigzag journey in Spain would rate as a voyage of discovery. There are seven or eight major roads; everyone follows them. No one sees the places in between.

Moreover, Europe is threatened with something similar. The abandonment of intermediate regions is one of the probable and formidable results of rail travel. Civilisation will certainly find the remedy, but it must seek it.

There is a host of people, of minds, if you will, wearied or overwhelmed by shows of enthusiasm, who employ, when faced with the beauties of art or creation, the ready-made phrase: 'It's forever the same.' For these profound despisers of all about them, what is the sea? A cliff, or a dune, and a large, monotonous blue or green arc. What is the Rhine? Water, a rock, and a ruin; then more water, another rock, another ruin; and so on, from Mainz to Cologne. What is a cathedral? A spire, a few ribbed arches, some stained-glass windows, and flying buttresses. What is a forest? Trees, and then more trees. What is a gorge? The cleft a torrent carves between two mountains. 'It's forever the same!'

Excellent fools, who fail to suspect the immense role detail and nuance plays in this world! In Nature, it is life; in art, it is style. Superb, disdainful fools, who fail to comprehend that the air, the sun, the sky whether grey or serene, a gust of wind, an accident of light, a reflection, the season, the wondrous creations of God, the wondrous creations of poets, the wonders of landscape, are worlds! The same combination of land and sea produces the Bay of Constantinople, the Bay of Naples, the Bay of Rio-Janeiro. The same skeleton yields Venus or the Virgin. All of Creation, in fact, this multiple, varied, dazzling, and melancholy spectacle, which all thinkers have studied since Plato, which all poets have contemplated since Homer, can be reduced to two colours: green and blue. Yes, but God is the painter. With this green he makes the earth; with this blue he makes the sky.

The Tolosa gorge is therefore a gorge like every other gorge, 'forever the same,' a torrent between two mountains; but this torrent utters such a horrid cry, these mountains possess such haughty attitudes that on penetrating them a human being feels small and weak. A forest combines with the rocks, and there are wide sheets of scree descending from the highest peaks, strewn with unbelievably large oaks. One considers the tree, one considers the rock, and one wonders where the roots are and what it lives on.



‘Gorges of the Spanish Pyrenees. August 12. Fog and Rain’ - Victor Hugo (1894)
[Paris Musées](#)

As amidst all the awe-inspiring things that Nature produces, there are charming corners, lawns, streams detached from the torrent which murmur alongside with that sweet chirping eaglets must make in the nest, grasses full of flowers and perfumes, a thousand graceful resting places for the eye and the mind. The human alone remains gloomy. The peasants who pass have a dreamy air; there are no villages, but, here and there tall stone houses pierced by three or four small windows which have still been thought too large, since they have been half walled-up.

In this country, I am obliged to repeat, the window is no longer a window; it is a loophole. The house is no longer a house; it is a fortress. At every step, there is a ruin. That is because all the civil wars of Navarre, for four centuries, have spilled pell-mell into this ravine, with its torrent, such that its foamy white water has many times run red with blood. Perhaps that is why the torrent howls so sadly. It is certainly why Mankind dreams.

A high mountain, a vast climb in traveller’s terms, a steep slope in postilion’s language, cuts the gorge in two. The road, quite beautiful in other respects, twists and turns around the edges of the precipice in fearful bends. Two oxen had been added to our eight mules, and the coach, towed by this immense team, ascended at walking pace. In the middle of this ascent, a large stone marker warns one that one is six leagues, or fifteen miles, from Pamplona, *seis leguas a Pamplona*. The mountains tower above the precipices. Harvesters as small as ants were reaping their wheat at the foot of the abyss.

I descended from the coach and, while walking, to the sound of the chains of the oxen and mules, I picked a bouquet of wild flowers. At the top of the mountain, I met a beggar, I gave him a *real*. Then I came across a small waterfall; I threw my bouquet into it. One must give alms to the naiads too.

Then, I climbed back on top of the diligence, while the oxen were unhitched. At that moment, the six mules in front, feeling themselves freed, set off at a gallop. The mayoral, the postilion, and the zagal ran after the mules, swearing, and leaving the carriage behind. The vehicle was still on a very steep slope. The two guide mules left to hold it back alone lacked the strength; they yielded, and the carriage began to roll back slowly toward the precipice. We

travellers, very frightened, called out to the drivers, who failed to hear us. The rear wheel was only a few inches from the edge when the beggar, a poor old man, bent over and well-nigh paralysed, approached and kicked over a stone. That proved sufficient. The stone obstructed the wheel, and the carriage halted.

There was a priest next to me on the bench. He made the sign of the cross and said to me, 'God has just saved twenty people.' I replied: 'By means of a stone and an old man.' The drivers retrieved the mules, which were already a distance away.

An hour later, we emerged between two enormous promontories, which are the last towers that the mountain displays at this end, onto the plain of Pamplona.

Pamplona is a city that delivers more than it promises. From a distance, one nods one's head; no monumental buildings raise their profiles; once you are in the city, one's impression changes. In the streets, there is interest at every step; on the ramparts, one is charmed.

Its situation is admirable. Nature has formed a plain, round like an arena, and surrounded it with mountains; in the centre of this plain, Mankind has made a city. It is Pamplona.

A city of the Vascones according to some, with the ancient name of Pompaelo; a Roman city according to others with Pompey as its founder (*c. 75BC*), Pamplona is today the Navarrese city which the House of Evreux (*a cadet branch of the Capetian dynasty*) turned into a Gothic city, the House of Austria turned into a Castilian city, and the sun almost turns into an Oriental city.

All around, the mountains are bald, the plain is parched. A pretty river, the Arga, nourishes a few poplar-trees here. The gentle undulations that run from the plain to the mountains are full of ruins and edifices à la Poussin. It is not just a vast plain, it is a vast landscape.

Close to, the city has the same character. The streets of dark houses brightened by paintings, balconies, and fluttering curtains, are at the same time cheerful and severe.

A magnificent square tower (*San Saturnino, otherwise San Cernin*) of dry brick, with the simplest and proudest lines, dominates the tree-lined promenade. It represents the thirteenth century as modified by the Arab style, as that century is, in Germany and Lombardy, by the Byzantine. A portal in the style of Philip IV richly furnishes the lower part of the tower, which without it would perhaps be a little bare. This portal, which is in no way garish or excessive, is a happy addition. It is almost Rococo, yet still of the Renaissance.



‘San Cernin Bell-Tower’ - Victor Hugo (1894) [Paris Musées](#)

However, the Spanish Rococo is a backward-looking Rococo, like everything produced in Spain; it borrowed from the sixteenth century, and retained in the seventeenth, and even the eighteenth, the smallness of the columns and the complex broken arch of the pediments, that so graced the style of Henri II. These forms of the Renaissance, mixed with acanthus leaves and rocailles, give to the Castilian Rococo an originality deriving from nobility and caprice.

This magnificent tower is a bell-tower. The old church which it adjoined has vanished. Who destroyed it? Was it burned down during one of the many sieges that Pamplona has endured?

I was asking myself this question, when the sight of a deep breach in one corner of the bell-tower, seemingly caused by some bombardment, confirmed the conjecture in my mind. However, I pushed open a door at the foot of the tower and entered a 'tasteful' but dreadful church, in the most mediocre style, that of the Madeleine or the Guardhouse on the Boulevard du Temple. This perplexed me. Was it to display this dull architecture, decorated with triglyphs and archivolts, that the old half-Romanesque, half-Moorish church of the thirteenth century had been demolished?

The 'tasteful school', alas, has penetrated as far as Spain, and this building is worthy of it. Such architecture has disfigured old cities more than all the sieges and fires. I would rather wish a hail of bombs to descend on a monument rather than an architect of the 'tasteful' school. By all means, bombard the old buildings, don't restore them! The bomb is merely brutal, while 'Classical' masons are stupid. Our venerable cathedrals proudly braved shells, grenades, cannonballs, and Congreve rockets; they tremble to their foundations before our great neo-classical architect, Pierre-François-Léonard Fontaine. At least rockets, cannonballs, grenades, and shells do not sculpt Corinthian capitals, nor cut grooves, nor cause newly carved ovoids to bloom around a Romanesque semicircular arch, accompanied by the customary rosary of paternosters. Saint-Denis has just been restored, and is no longer Saint-Denis; the Parthenon was bombed yet is still the Parthenon.

The houses, almost all built of yellow bricks, the obtuse angled roofs of hollow tiles, the dust in the air, the reddish plain, and the scorched mountains on the horizon, give Pamplona an indescribably earthy appearance that saddens the eye at first glance; but, as I was saying, everything in this city delights. The fanciful taste for ornamentation, peculiar to southern peoples, takes revenge on the bare fronts of all the houses. The variegated hangings, the gaiety of frescoes, the groups of pretty women, half-leaning over the street and signalling to each other from balcony to balcony, the varied and intriguing shop displays, the joyous noise and perpetual elbowing at the crossroads, have something ever lively and radiant about them.

At every moment, the bold taste, both wild and elegant, characteristic of semi-civilised nations, is revealed. Here is a commonplace well whose barely-hewn stone rim supports six small white marble columns surmounted by a dome, that serves as a pedestal for the statue of a saint; here is a doll-like Madonna, surrounded by paintings, laden with trinkets, tinsel, and sequins, installed beneath a canopy of red damask at the corner of a promenade with whitewashed arcades.

It is a style, impressed on the decoration and furnishings of churches, that sheds grace and light. In Pamplona, the exterior architecture of the monuments being very austere, the interior architecture avoids being dull. For myself, I am grateful; in my opinion the greatest merit of rocaille and acanthus-leaf art, which encourages one to forgive all its vices, is the continual effort it makes to please and amuse.

Apart from the cathedral, which I will tell you about later, the churches of Pamplona, although almost all have old naves, have preserved few traces of their Gothic origins. However, I noticed in one of them, in the middle of a high wall, above a door, a fourteenth-century bas-relief representing a knight leaving for the Crusade. The man and the horse disappear under their war caparison. The knight, proudly-seated, the cross marked on his shield, urges his horse,

which hastens to advance. Behind the baron, on a hill, one sees his castle with crenellated towers, whose portcullis is still raised, whose door is still open, whence he has come, and to which he may never return. Above the keep is a large cloud parted to display an arm and hand, an all-powerful and fatal hand, whose outstretched finger indicates to the knight his path and his goal. The lord of the castle turns his back on this hand, and thus is not looking at it, but one surmises that he feels it. It pushes him onwards; it holds him to his task. The work is full of mystery and grandeur. I thought I saw revived, there, roughly but superbly carved in granite, that beautiful Castilian romance which begins: — ‘By the banks of the Arlanza, Bernardo del Carpio rides, on a black horse caped with scarlet; a hefty lance in his hand, and armed to the teeth,’ (*Bernardo del Carpio was a legendary hero of medieval Spain, once considered a historical personage to rival El Cid. He appears in many ballads, and other literary works*).

All the churches have an altar to Saint Saturnin, who was the first apostle of Pamplona, and another altar to Saint Firmin, who was its first bishop. Pamplona is the oldest Christian city in Spain, and is proud of it, if such a thing is ever a matter of pride. These two names, Firmin and Saturnin, are not only in every church, they are also on every shop. On every street corner one reads: Saturnino, *ropero* (clothier) — Fermin, *sastre* (tailor).

There is in I forget which street, a hôtel portal that struck me. Imagine a large archivolt around which creep, climb, and twist, like stone vegetation, all the strange tulips and extravagant lotuses that the Rococo mixes with its shells and volutes; now, draw forth from these lotuses and tulips, in place of scaly sirens and naked nymphs, kettle-drummers wearing tricorne hats, and mustachioed halberdiers, dressed like the infantrymen of the Chevalier de Folard (*an eighteenth century military theorist who championed the use of infantry columns*); add to this rocailles and garlands amidst which cannoneers load their pieces; and arabesques bearing, delicately, at the ends of their tendrils drums, bayonets and grenades burst forth; add to this ensemble the somewhat round and heavy, but quite fluid, style of the time of Charles II, and you will have some idea of the little military and pastoral poem carved on this door. It is an eclogue decorated with cannonballs.

The first thing one look for when first catching sight of a city on the horizon is its cathedral. Arriving in Pamplona, I had viewed from a distance, towards the eastern end of the city, two abominable bell-towers from the time of Charles III, a period which corresponds to our worst Louis XV. These two bell-towers, which are intended to be spires, are identical. If you want to imagine one of these spires, imagine a tall rectangular tower, topped by four large corkscrew columns supporting a kind of pot-bellied and turgid vessel with a lid, which in turn is crowned with one of those classic pots, commonly called urns, which look as if they were born from the marriage of an amphora and a jug, turned upside down. All of this in stone. I was perfectly angry.

— ‘What!’ I cried, ‘Is this what was done to the almost Romanesque cathedral (*Santa María la Real*) of Pamplona, which Charles II of Évreux, King of Navarre, found so beautiful that he wanted his tomb built there (*he died in 1387*); is it this building that saw a French cannonball wound Ignatius of Loyola (*in 1521*), and which saw the construction of Philip II’s citadel (*begun in 1571*)?’ (*The current fourteenth and fifteenth century Gothic church replaced the Romanesque one; the Neoclassical facade was added in 1783*)

I was tempted not to visit it. However, when I arrived in Pamplona and saw the pitiful appearance of the two bell-towers at the end of a street, I felt a scruple and headed towards the gate.

Seen up close, the building is even worse. Those two outgrowths pierced like cabbage stalks, and blessed with the name of spires, that I have just sketched for you are supported by a colonnade to which I can compare nothing except the colonnade of Saint-Denys-du-Saint-Sacrement, in our Rue Turenne in Paris. And these turpitudes are passed off in schools as Greek and Roman art! Oh, my friend, how ugly is ugliness when it has pretensions of being beautiful!

I recoiled from this architecture, and was about to leave the church when, turning left, I saw behind the front façade the high black walls, pointed arches with flamboyant windows, delicate bell-towers, and robust buttresses of the venerable and ancient cathedral of Pamplona. I recognised the church I had dreamed of.



‘View of a Church, Pamplona’- Victor Hugo (1894)

[Paris Musées](#)

She stands there, as if she were suffering some kind of punishment, hidden, darkened, sad, and humiliated, behind that odious portal with which ‘good taste’ has saddled her. What a mask that facade is! What dunces’ caps those two bell towers are!

Reconciled and satisfied, I entered the building through a side portal which is fifteenth century, simple, lightly decorated, but elegant. The doors are studded with nails and fleurs-de-lis, and the iron door-hammer, composed of dragons biting at each other, is of a beautiful Byzantine form. The interior of the church delighted me. It is Gothic with magnificent stained-glass windows.

I was telling you earlier about a hôtel entrance which forms a pretty little poem. The cathedral of Pamplona is also a poem, but a great and beautiful poem, and, since I have been led to this association, which arises so naturally, between the forms of architecture and the forms of poetry, allow me to add that this poem is in four parts, which I would title: the high altar, the choir, the cloister, and the sacristy.

As I entered the cathedral, it was a little after five in the morning. The doors had just been opened; the building was still deserted, and dark. The first rays of the rising sun shone, horizontally, through the stained-glass windows of the high nave, and threw great golden beams from one ogive to another, which were highlighted sharply against the dark background and glowed resplendently in the gloomy church. An old, bowed priest was saying the first Mass before the high altar.

The high altar, barely lit by a few lighted candles, half surrounded by a floating wall of tapestries and hangings suspended from the pillars of the apse and intercepting the daylight, seemed, in the mist that enveloped it, like a pile of precious stones. Around it stood all sorts of glittering furniture that one only sees in Spanish churches, credenzas, cabinets, sideboards, sheathed buffets with little drawers. At the back, behind clusters of lilies, above the high altar, in the midst of a glorious display that was perhaps only gilded wood, but to which the hour and the place gave a strange majesty, and between the dazzling walls of a golden armoire with two open doors, stood a radiant Madonna in a silver robe, an imperial crown on her head, and the infant Jesus in her arms. I glimpsed this through a marvellous iron gate from the time of Joanna the Mad (*Joanna I, nominal queen of Castile from 1504, and queen of Aragon from 1516*), crafted with magical skill, by the metalworkers of the fifteenth century, laden with flowers, arabesque, and figurines. This gate, more than twenty feet high and to which one ascends by a staircase of a few steps, shuts off the sanctuary on the only side where an eye can penetrate.

Nothing could be more striking, at that sublime and sacred hour of the morning, than this white-haired man, alone in the middle of this vast church, dressed in splendid clothes, speaking in a low voice, leafing through a book and acting out something mysterious in this magnificent, dark, silent, veiled place. His Mass was addressed to God, the immensity, and an old woman who was listening to him, huddled behind a pillar, a few steps from me.

It all possessed grandeur. The ancient church, the old priest and this old woman seemed to form a kind of Trinity, as one. The two genders, and the building; here was a symbol which lacked nothing. The priest had been strong, and was weak, the woman had been beautiful, and was withered, the building had been complete, and was mutilated. The man, grown old in his flesh, and his task, worshipping God in the presence of the dazzling light that nothing dims, that nothing darkens, that nothing alters, that nothing extinguishes; say, do you not find grandeur in that?

I was moved to the depths of my heart. No discordant thought arose in me, from this melancholy contrast; on the contrary, I felt that an inexpressible unity emanated from it. Certainly, only a profound and unfathomable mystery can thus unite, in an intimate and religious harmony, the incurable decrepitude of the creature, and the eternal newness of Creation.

After Mass, I turned around, and viewed the choir, which in the churches of northern Spain faces the altar. The choir of Pamplona cathedral, tall, dark woodwork of the sixteenth century, is composed of two tiers of stalls that occupy the three sides of a rectangle, the fourth side of which is filled and closed off by an iron grille, in magnificent metalwork of the same period. Behind each stall one of the saints of the liturgy is carved in solid oak. All this wood was cut with the smooth and skilful chisel-work of the Renaissance. In the middle of the short side of the rectangle that faces the grille, and consequently the altar, stands the bishop's throne surmounted by a charming openwork bell-tower. The current bishop of Pamplona (*Severo Leonardo Andriani Escofet*) who is at odds with Baldomero Espartero, has been in France for the last two years, in Pau, I believe, where he has taken refuge.

I was tired from walking all morning, I sat down on this vacant throne. A throne! Do you not think it a singular resting place? I did. The bishop's choir-book was before me on his desk. I opened it. Almost every page was torn.

The choir grille, whereon angels flutter and wriggle as if in enchanted foliage, faces the grille of the high altar. The art of the fifteenth century and the art of the sixteenth are there, both with their most distinctive and contrasting characteristics; one is more delicate, the other is more copious; one knows not which is the most charming.

In the centre of the choir, is another iron grille, resembling a large cage, which covers and protects the cenotaph of Charles III of Évreux, King of Navarre, while still allowing it to be seen.

It is an admirable tomb from the fifteenth century, worthy of being sited in Bruges beside the tombs of Mary of Flanders and Charles the Bold (*in the Church of Our Lady*), or in Dijon beside the tombs of the Dukes of Burgundy, Philip the Bold and John the Fearless (*in the Musée des Beaux-Arts*), or in Bourg-en-Bresse beside the tombs of Philibert II, Duke of Savoy, his wife Margaret of Austria, and his mother Margaret of Bourbon (*in the Royal Monastery of Brou*). The motif does not vary, but it is so simple and so beautiful! The king with a lion at his feet, the queen with her greyhounds, are lying side by side, crowns on their heads, on a bed of marble; a touching marital tomb, around which revolve, beneath little arches of the most exquisite workmanship, a procession of weeping figurines. This part of the tomb is badly mutilated. Almost all the statuettes are in two pieces.

Seven or eight enormous missals, their format that of the copy of the *Infortiat* (*the 'Infortiat' or 'Pandects' is a subdivision of the 'Digest of Justinian', a key part of the 'Corpus Juris Civilis'*) which provided Nicolas Boileau with such a beautiful rhyme (*of 'Infortiat' and 'Alciat, for Andrea Alciato the jurist*) and such a charming verse (*see Boileau's 'Le Lutrin', Chant V*), all bound in parchment, and armed with copper wedges, are arranged around the cenotaph, and placed on the ground like the shields of resting soldiers. They are raised against

the gate of the sepulchre. It seems that chance has thought to lean these books of religion against the tomb.

A large organ, in the style of the last century, rich and gilded, dominates the entire choir but does not mar it. Below, one reads this verse which is also inscribed on almost all the organs in Spain: '*Laudate Deum in chordis et organo: Praise God with stringed instruments and organs*' (*Psalm 150*: line 4). Further down is the date: año 1742.

The chapels surrounding the high altar and the choir are adorned, one might almost say cluttered, with those immense carved and gilded altar-tops that this old Catholic country has always loved. The fashion is an old one. I saw one of these altar-tops in a chapel that dated from the fifteenth century, and in a side-aisle another from the thirteenth. In the middle of the altarpiece a large Byzantine Christ, all black, with a curly beard and prominent ribs, dressed in a vast, white lace petticoat hangs from three nails. What on earth is the lace hiding?

Various banners affixed to the walls, Madonnas in red damask niches, and tombs carved into the wall at sundry heights, complete the furnishings of the church.

As I left the choir, some effect of chiaroscuro drew me to the right, towards the side door opposite the one through which I had entered, and I suddenly found myself in one of the most beautiful cloisters I have ever seen in my life.

It is a vast quadrangle, surrounded by large ogives whose mullions form rich and robust fourteenth-century windows. Some of these ogives bear the traces of recent and, I hasten to say, intelligent restoration. Above the ogival gallery, a second, lower gallery, with sculpted joists, supports the hollow-tiled roof from which black stone pinnacles of exquisite form rise here and there. The cloister courtyard is a well-kept garden, in which clipped box trees trace all the charming arabesques of seventeenth-century gardens.

Everything is beautiful in this cloister: the size and proportion, the shape and colour, the whole and the detail, the shadow and the light. Sometimes an old fresco animates the walls and brings them to life, sometimes a marble sepulchre eaten away by the years, sometimes an oak door mended and patched in such a way as to curiously mix the woodwork of all eras.

As I passed by, the wind made old Navarrese lilies, half-plucked, sway on the iron fences of the garden, alongside which the eternal lilies of God were blooming in all their fragrance and splendor.

The pavement on which one walks is formed of long black slabs. Each slab bears a number, and covers a tomb. There is something icy and arid in this manner of labelling the dead. I consent to become dust, ashes, a shade; I am repelled by the thought of becoming a number. It is nothingness without the poetry; an excess of nothingness.

At one corner of the cloister, a few lancet arches, partly walled-up, extend around a sort of mysterious chamber. It is a chapel. But why separate it from the church? I saw only some rather dilapidated furniture, a crucifix, a wooden altar, a stamped-tin lamp. However, I admired the iron grille that closes the two sides of the chapel opening onto the cloister, which is a precious example of the dense and complicated ironwork of the fourteenth century. This grille is the

curiosity of the chapel, as regards both its workmanship and its material. It is only iron, perhaps, but it is illustrious iron.

At the Battle of Las Navas de Tolosa (*in 1212*), the camp of the *Amir al-Mu'minin* (*Commander of the Faithful*), Caliph al-Nasir, was surrounded by an iron chain, which Sancho VII, King of Navarre, severed with an axe blow. Like Berenice's hair, which took its place among the stars, the chain became one of the constellations on a coat of arms, that of the Kingdom of Navarre, and, in days gone by, occupied one half of the coat of arms of France (*when Henri IV ascended the throne in 1589*). Now, it is from the iron of this chain that the grille in the cathedral was made. This at least is what is revealed to the passer-by and confirmed by a sign placed above the gate, with this quatrain in a somewhat barbaric and enigmatic Latin:

cinger quæ cernis crucifixum ferrea vincla
barrariçæ gentis funere rupta manent.
santius exuvias discerpias vindice ferro
huc, illuc sparsit stemata frusia pius.

año 1212

The iron chains you see all about the crucifix
were broken when the Barbarian horde were slain.
Pious *Sancho* scattered the remnants, torn away
by the avenging blade, here and there, as spoils on his coat of arms.

I have nothing to add, as regards this quatrain, except that the workmanship of the grille indicates the fourteenth century and not the thirteenth.

What is also entirely fourteenth century is the interior portal beneath which I entered the cloister from the church. Here, tympanums, arches, capitals, small columns, medallions, statuettes, everything is in the most beautiful style of that beautiful era. Furthermore, protected by the cloister against the action of the atmosphere, and by good fortune against whitewash, this portal has preserved in well-nigh all its lustre, and freshness, the gilding and painting of that time. I was amazed. — 'Indeed,' I thought, 'it's enough to make you want to kneel before it!'

I turned around, and saw someone who was actually doing so, kneeling on the paving. Who was it? A woman of about forty, still beautiful, with a noble face, and wrapped in a rich, black lace mantilla. As I was looking at her in surprise, another woman, old and raggedly dressed, entered the cloister, and came and knelt near the first. Then a third. Note that we were outside the church. 'That,' I said, 'is how to worship architecture devoutly!' Closer attention explained

all. There was a doll-like Madonna on the mullion of the portal, and next to it on the wall this inscription:

ed eminen^{mo} s^r carde
nal pereira concedio
80 dias de yndulgen a
y el s^r orispo murillo
40 al que rezare una
salve de brodillas de
lane esta s^{ma} ymagen
de n^{ra} s^{rs} de el amparo

The most eminent Senõr
Cardinal Pereira, has granted
80 days of indulgences
and Senõr Bishop Murillo
40 to whoever recites
a prayer on their knees
before this most holy image
of Our Lady of Amparo.

It is likely that this inscription is the good fortune I was talking about earlier, which prevented any use of whitewash. The Madonna protected the portal. As I finished copying the inscription, the beautiful kneeling devotee rose, and as she passed near me, almost without turning away, said over her shoulder: '*French gentleman, who looks at everything, go and see the sacristy.*' Then she walked away quickly.

I entered the church, I searched everywhere, and finally, after pushing open all the doors, I arrived at the sacristy. Oh! Here indeed was a sacristy to stir the heart of a beautiful devout Spanish woman! Imagine an immense rocaille boudoir, gilded, tangled, flowery, coquettish, tinted in amber, and charming. Wall-paper imitated the damask it replaced; the brick and stone pavement imitated mosaic. Everywhere beautiful ivory Christs, swooning Magdalens, sloping mirrors, sofas with large cushions, dressing tables with goat's feet, corner cabinets with Aleppo breccia tops; brilliant daylight, mysterious nooks; unusual and varied items of furniture; priests coming and going; chasubles sparkling in half-open drawers; a marquis' perfume unfamiliar to me, an abbot's odour likewise; such is the sacristy of Pamplona.

It was the worthy Cardinal Antonio Zapata y Cisneros, Bishop of Pamplona (*from 1596 to 1600*) who executed this gallant addition to the cathedral. The transition is abrupt; it is almost a shock. Dante inhabits the cloister, Madame de Pompadour the sacristy. Though, here again, one complements the other, and there is a profound harmony. The sacristy invites sin; the cloister invites penance.

Mass was already being said in all the chapels, and the church was filling with the faithful, especially women. I wandered around it one last time.

On the side of the grand portal, the choir is protected by a large wall against which is a white marble tomb. The epitaph, in almost-erased gold lettering, indicates that therein are the remains of that brave Jean Bonaventure Thierry Du Mont, 1st Count of Gages, who fought against Prince Eugene of Savoy himself (*during the War of the Spanish Succession, 1701-14*) and defeated the Imperial armies in many encounters (*during the War of the Austrian Succession, 1740-48*).

One of these encounters resulted in a fierce battle, which can be seen sculpted in bas-relief above the epitaph. There are cannons being aimed, horses rearing, officers issuing commands, dense battalions wielding their pikes while resembling brushwood stirred by an angry wind. Nothing could be stranger than this petrified, mute melee, forever motionless in the darkened church, where, from time to time, I could hear the faint and intermittent voice of a choirboy.

The great tumult of that battle and the deep silence of the tomb grant the heart a grave lesson. This then is the glory of dead warriors! A silent one, while the glory of poets and thinkers sings and speaks on, eternally.

While I was dreaming, lost in a kind of reverie, before this tomb, the sound of an organ and a violent, lugubrious, wild chant, suddenly bursting forth to my left from a neighbouring chapel, made me turn my head.

A coffin, which had probably just arrived, was placed on the ground, on the paving. One could see its wooden lid, barely hidden by a black cloth torn and full of holes. Four candles burned around it; three round loaves were arranged on a board on the ground, at the head of the coffin. A few steps to the right four large resin torches blazed, whose rays revealed to me, confusedly, in a dark chapel, the priest, in a black chasuble black adorned with a white cross, saying the Mass for the dead. The chanting, and the organ notes, descended from above like a kind of supernatural music. It was impossible to distinguish where it came from. Around me, a crowd of women of all ages, forming a sort of semicircle some distance from the bier, all gracefully coiffed and wrapped in black silk mantillas, squatted on the paving of the church, according to the Spanish fashion, in the soft, charming attitudes of the women of the Turkish Seraglio, their eyes more often raised than lowered, plying their fans, listening to the Mass and gazing at the passers-by.

I, in turn, gazed at the sepulchre of the Count of Gages, and at the coffin of this poor stranger, two wells of nothingness, one honoured, the other disdained. Oh, my friend, if the things we call inanimate could, suddenly, speak, what a dialogue might ensue between the marble tomb and the fir-wood coffin!

In the evening, I walked along the ramparts, thoughtful and alone.

There are days in life that stir the whole past within us. I was full of inexpressible ideas. The grass of the counterscarps, stirred by the wind, whistled faintly at my feet. The cannons poked their necks between the battlements as if looking out onto the countryside. The mountains on the horizon, blurred by the twilight, had taken on magnificent shapes; the plain was dark; the Arga's flow, wrinkled with a thousand luminous reflections, slid beneath the trees like a silver snake.

As I passed the entrance to the town, I heard the creaking of the drawbridge chains, and the dull thud of the portcullis as it fell. The gate had just been closed. At that moment the moon was rising. Then, if you will forgive the ridiculousness of my quoting myself, these lines I wrote fifteen years ago came back to me:

Toujours prête au combat, la sombre Pampelune,
Avant de s'endormir aux rayons de la lune,
Ferme sa ceinture de tours.

Always ready for battle, sombre Pamplona,
Before falling asleep, in the gleaming moonlight,
Clasps tight its belt of towers.

(see verse 8 of Hugo's poem 'Grenade', 1828)

August 13th

In the cities of Spain there are many *ventas*, or café dance-halls; a few *posadas*, or inns, and scarcely any *fondas*, or hôtels. In San Sebastian there is only the *Fonda Ysabel*, so named to distinguish it from the French-style hôtel, run by an honest and brave man, one Laffitte. In Tolosa, and in Pamplona, the only *fonda* has neither name nor sign. It is simply called *The Fonda*; a clear indication of its uniqueness.

The room I occupy in The Fonda of Pamplona, *al segundo piso* (on the second floor), has two large windows overlooking the main square. This square is nothing remarkable. Currently under construction at one end, on the east side, is something hideous that looks like a theatre, and will be fashioned of cut stone. I commend it to the first intelligent man to bombard Pamplona.

Forgive me, my friend, for this dismal jest. I have left it here, because such happenings are in the very nature of things. Is it not the fate of all the cities of Spain to be bombed periodically?

Last year Baldomero Espartero bombed Barcelona. This year Van-Halen (*Juan Van Halen y Sarti, who followed Espartero into exile in 1843*) is bombing Seville. Who will direct the bombardment next year, and what will be bombed? I know not. But take it for granted such will happen. That being so, I offer up a prayer for the inhabitants, the houses and the cathedrals; and, since one must expect bombardment, I will gladly grant that person all the replicas of our ugly and foolish Paris Bourse (*the Stock Exchange*) I come across.

That said, let me return to Pamplona, and ascend again to my room. It is a kind of whitewashed hall, with two beds, one of which is wide, which the maids call *el matrimonio*. On the wall are some illuminated frames representing smiling lovers and sulking spouses. Also, there is a small table, two straw-bottomed chairs, and an enormous door, its panels buttressed by an oak frame, with bolts like those of a prison cell, or that of a fortress.

It seems that in Spain defence against assault is provided for on every floor of every house. Arming one's window and balcony with tightly meshed shutters to protect one's wife from gallants, and one's door with sturdy ironwork to protect one's house from pillage, is the dual concern of the bourgeoisie in Spain; jealousy bars the window, and fear bars the door.

Half of the main square of Pamplona is occupied, at this moment, that is to say has been invaded, by a colossal mass of scaffolding erected for the bullfight, which is to take place in about ten days' time, and the advent of which is causing commotion in the city. The bullfight will last four days, from August 18th to the 22nd. On the first day there will be a bullfight, and on the last day a famous *espada* (*matador, 'swordsman'*) in this region, 'Cúchares' (*Francisco Arjona Herrera*), will kill the bull.

The arena then is the Grand Plaza del Castillo; panels hide the ground floors of the houses on two sides of the square, while their balconies and windows will, on the day of the bullfight, serve as lower and upper tiers of boxes; and the attics will serve as the 'gods'. This theatre, for that is what it is, is quite simply built of timbering, with innumerable tiers, the crudest there could be, and from my room I can make out the numbering of the benches. Add to this theatre set two or three unhitched coaches, and a guardhouse whose military incumbent is walking up and down in front of the *fonda*, and you have the view from my window.

The town hall in Pamplona is an elegant little building from the time of Philip III. The facade offers a curious example of a type of ornamentation peculiar to seventeenth-century Spain. It consists of arabesques and flat volutes that seem to have been cut out of the stone with a punch. I had already seen a house in this style, in that strange and gloomy village of Lezo in Gipuzkoa. The pediment of this town hall is surmounted by lions, bells, and statues that produce an entertaining effect.

What entertained me no less was the fair, which is currently being held in a small square (*the Plaza Consistorial*) directly in front of the town hall. The open-air shops full of gilded items, and trinkets, vendors full of cheer, passers-by jostling, and buyers busily assessing the wares, all the whirlwind of noise, laughter, insult and song, that is called a fair, achieves more noise and gaiety beneath the Spanish sun.

In the midst of this crowd, leaning against a pillar of the town hall, stood a tall and formidable fellow. His large bare feet protruded from his red knitted leggings; a *muleta* (*cape*)

of whitish wool with madder stripes covered his head, enveloping it entirely in its sculptural folds, and leaving only his swarthy face with its prominent cheekbones, square nose, angular jaw, jutting chin, and black, bristling beard visible; a figure seemingly of Florentine bronze, with the eyes of a wild-cat. In the midst of all this noise and movement, the man remained motionless, grave, silent. He was a Spaniard no more but an Arab.

A stone's throw from this 'statue', a grimacing Italian, with large glasses on his nose, was advertising his puppet show, by beating a drum, while singing, on his platform, that ancient rhythmic tune of Pulcinello's: '*Fantoccini, burattini, puppi*' (*types of puppets: 'burattini' are moved from below by hand, 'fantoccini' and 'puppi' are manipulated with strings or wires*) to which we rhyming French set a villanelle:

'Le pantalon
De Toinon
N'a pas d'fond.'

'Antoinette's pantaloons lack a seat.'

The 'Pantalone' and the 'Savage' looked at each other without comprehending one another, like inhabitants from two different planets. (*Pantalone is a Commedia dell'arte character, old and miserly*)

One cannot traverse a fair, especially this one, without buying something. I let myself go; I opened my purse, and sent off to the *fonda* everything I bought.

On my return, I found, on the table in my room, a complete set of peddler's wares: amulets from Zaragoza, in gold, silver-gilt, and filigree; garters, bearing mottoes, from Segovia; glass holy-water fonts from Bilbao; tin nightlights from Cauterets; a box of chemical matches from Hernani; a bundle of resinous sticks that serve as candles in Elizondo; paper from Tolosa; a mountaineer's belt from the Panticosa Pass; a wooden iron-shod staff; rope shoes' and two *muletas* (*capas*) from Pamplona itself, of magnificent wool, crude workmanship, and exquisite taste.

Apart from this fair, and a few busy crossroads, Pamplona is gloomy and silent all day; but, as soon as evening comes, as soon as the sun sets, as soon as the windows and lanterns are lit, the city awakens, life quivers everywhere, joy sparkles; it is a hive of noise. A fanfare of trumpets and cymbals bursts forth from the main square; the musicians of the garrison are serenading the city. The city replies. On every floor, at every window, on every balcony, one hears songs, voices, the sound of guitars and castanets. Each house rings like an enormous bell. And add to that the Angelus, sounding from all the city's bell-towers.

You might think the whole thing is discordant, and that from all these intermingled sounds only one immense, perfectly dreadful hullabaloo must emerge. You would be wrong. When a city becomes an orchestra, a symphony always emerges. The wind softens the shrill tones, the

wide-open spaces extinguish the false notes, everything merges into one whole, and the result is harmony. On a small scale, it would be a din; on a large scale, it is music.

This music cheers the population. Children play in front of the shops; residents emerge from their houses; the main square is filled with people strolling about; priests and officers approach women in mantillas; words are exchanged behind fans; beneath the arcades, muleteers tease the wenches; a soft glow, shed from a hundred wide-open, brightly lit windows vaguely illuminates the square. The crowd come and go, and cross paths in the shadows, and nothing is more charming than this discreet mingling of pretty faces briefly glimpsed, and joyful stifled laughter.

The freedom of priests in this beautiful climate causes no scandal. There is a certain familiarity that the religion allows. However, observing everything from my window, I heard three priests, wearing prodigious sombreros and wrapped in vast black capes, talking in front of the *fonda*, and I must admit that one of them pronounced the word *muchachas* (*young women*) in a manner that would have made Voltaire smile.

Around ten in the evening, the square empties, and Pamplona falls asleep. But the noise refuses to die there and then; it continues, not choosing to end where sleep begins. It seems, during the first hours, that the city's slumber still resonates with all the evening's joy.

At midnight, however, silence falls, and one hears only the voice of the night-watchman calling out the hour which, at the very moment when you are about to fall asleep, sounds out, bursts forth, suddenly, from the neighbouring bell-tower, then is repeated, distantly and diminished, by another tower at the far end of the square, and then again, more and more faintly, from bell-tower to bell-tower, till it vanishes into the darkness.

The End of Part II of Hugo's '*Pyrenées*'

Part III: Pamplona to the Île d'Oléron

Chapter XII: The Cabin in the Mountains

The sun was setting; the mists were beginning to rise from the torrents that could be heard roaring deep among lost ravines. The pass was becoming wilder and wilder. No trace of habitation. I was exhausted with fatigue. I noticed to the right, halfway up the slope, a few steps from the path, at the foot of a high, sheer cliff, a block of white marble half-sunken into the earth. A large fir-tree, dead from old age, and fallen from the escarpment, had stopped this block as it rolled down the slope, and clothed it in dry and hideous branches. Exhausted as I was, this boulder and the dead tree, on which in my mind I had already hung our muletas and our blankets, to form a sort of tent, seemed to me to offer the possibility of a most comfortable bedroom.

I called my companions, who were about twenty paces ahead of me, and explained my idea of nocturnal architecture, declaring that my intention was to bivouac there. Azcoaga began to laugh. Irumberri's only reply was to watch the smoke from his cigar float away in the sun. Escumuturra el Puño ('the Fist') took my hand:

— 'You think so, French lord? Is that your decision?'

— 'Not *my* decision,' I said, 'but I'm simply exhausted.'

— 'You wish to sleep here!'

— 'I *resign* myself to sleeping here.'

— 'Bah! Look what your home will be made from. Only the dead sleep in rooms made of marble and fir-wood.'

Mountaineers, like sailors, are superstitious. Now, I claim that in the mountains I am a mountaineer and at sea I am a sailor, that is to say, superstitious in both scenarios, and without reason, simply being superstitious in the same way that the people around me are. Escumuturra's sepulchral reflection made me think.

'Come,' he continued, 'just a few yards more, *amigo*. I swear to you, lord, that a quarter of a mile from here there's a good place to rest.'

— 'A quarter of a mile, in Spain!' I cried. 'It's six in the evening; we'll not arrive till midnight.'

Escumuturra answered me gravely:

— ‘Midnight, it will be, if the Devil makes the journey longer, or twenty minutes if the Frenchman quickens his pace.’

— ‘Andamos,’ said I. The caravan set off again.

The sun set, twilight came; yet I must say that the Devil failed to lengthen the path. We had been climbing for about half an hour, a steep path winding between granite blocks that looked as if a giant had seeded the mountainside with them. Suddenly a lawn appeared, the softest, freshest, most unexpected lawn and the most pleasant underfoot.

Escumuturra turned to me. — ‘Here we are’, he said.

I looked ahead to discover what was there, and saw nothing but the dark, bare line of the mountain. The lawn narrowed to an avenue, between two low dry-stone walls which I had not seen at first. However, my companions had doubled their pace, and I did the same.

Soon I saw a sort of angular, dark bump rising up little by little, like something emerging from the earth, to appear against the clear twilight sky, which seemed to be a roof topped with a chimney. It was indeed a house hidden in a fold of the mountain.

As I approached, I gazed at it. The sky was not completely dark. I was attempting what is called a strategic reconnaissance.

The house was quite large, and built, like the wall around the lawn, of dry-stone mixed with marble blocks; the thatched roof was cut to provide a staircase. I have since found this the fashion in the poorer hamlets of the Pyrenees.

At the bottom of the wall, facing the slope of the mountain, there was a square hole from which a small sheet of clear, fresh water emerged, falling onto the rock, then disappearing into the ravine with a lively and joyful sound.

The low, massive door was closed. There was only one window, next to the door, very narrow and three-quarters blocked with roughly-laid bricks.

This poor dwelling, like all the isolated dwellings of Gipuzkoa and Navarre, had the air of a fortress; but it was more with an air of defiance than defence, since the thatched roof was at head-height, and one could have forced the place to surrender without any other artillery than a lighted match.

However, there was no light within, no voice, no footsteps, no noise. It was not a house; it was a mass of blackness, mute and dead as a tomb.

Escumuturra dismounted, approached the door, and began to whistle softly the first part of an odd but charming melody; then he stopped whistling and waited.

Nothing moved in the cabin. Not a breath answered. Night, which had fallen completely, added something gloomy and funereal to this silence so mysterious and so profound.

Escumuturra began his melody again; then, reaching the same note, he stopped. The cabin remained silent. Escumuturra began a third time, even more softly, whistling at low volume, as it were.

The four of us leant toward the door, listening. I admit I was holding my breath and my heart was pounding a little.

Suddenly, as Escumuturra stopped, the rest of the melody was heard from behind the door in the house, but whistled so faintly and so low that it was perhaps more singular and even more frightening than silence. It was mournful because it was so sweet. It was like the song of a spirit in a sepulchre.

El Puño clapped his hands three times.

Then a man's voice rose in the hut, and here is the laconic and rapid dialogue which was exchanged in the shadows, in Basque, between this voice which questioned and Escumuturra who answered:

— '*Zuec?* (You?)'

— '*Guc.* (All of us.)'

— '*Nun?* (Where?)'

— '*Emen.* (Here.)'

— '*Zenbat?* (How many?)'

— '*Lau.* (Four.)'

A spark flashed inside the house, a candle was lit, and the door opened. Slowly and noisily, since it was barricaded. A man appeared in the doorway. He held in his hand, raised above his head, a large iron candlestick in which a resin torch burned.

Here was one of those swarthy, burnt faces that are ageless; he might have been thirty, he could have been fifty. However, he had fine teeth, a lively eye, and a pleasant smile, when he smiled. A red handkerchief was tied around his forehead, after the fashion of Aragonese muleteers, and his thick, black hair was held back from his temples. The top of his head was shaved, a wide white muleta covered him from chin to knees, and he wore short olive velvet breeches, white wool leggings with black buttonholes, and rope shoes on bare feet.

The thick strand of burning resin, stirred by the wind, flickered over this figure, casting tremulous shadows. Nothing could be stranger than his cordial smile beneath this sinister blaze.

A moment later, he noticed me, and his smile vanished like a lamp being blown out. His brow furrowed, his gaze remained fixed on me. He said not a word.

Escumuturra touched his shoulder with his hand, and said in a low voice, pointing at me with his thumb:

— '*Adiskide.* (A friend.)'

The man stepped aside to let me in; but his smile failed to reappear. Meanwhile, Azcoaga and Irumberri had driven the mules into the hut; Escumuturra and the host talked in low voices in a corner. The door had been closed and Irumberri had carefully re-barricaded it as if he were accustomed to the task; and, while Azcoaga was unloading his mule, I sat down on a bale of straw from which I surveyed the interior of the house.

The house only contained the one room, in which we were, but that room contained a world. It was large and low, the ceiling being composed of slats and battens, supported here and there on beams acting as pillars, allowing the straw, with which the top of the house was filled to the angle of the roof, to pass through and hang in long strands. Openwork partitions, resembling trellises rather than partitions, created capricious compartments in this room.

One of these compartments, to the left of the door, took in a corner of the cabin, the window, the fireplace, which was an enormous cavern of stone blackened by the fire, and the bed, that is to say, a sort of coffin on which the thousandfold intricacies of a brown straw mattress and a red blanket lay. This was the bedroom.

Opposite the bedroom, another compartment contained a calf lying on manure, and some hens asleep in a kind of box. This was the stable.

In the opposite corner, in a third compartment, a shapeless pyramid of bristling stumps, and thorny bundles of sticks, was piled, a supply of wood for the winter. A few wineskins and mule harnesses were arranged with some care near the bundles. This was the cellar. There was a rifle in the corner of the wall next to the window; and, between the cellar and the stable, in the final compartment cluttered with all sorts of junk, old muletas, old baskets, a broken tambourine, a stringless guitar, I saw gleaming beneath a basket of rags the handle of a fine *navaja* (a long folding knife), black, and braided with copper, like the sleeve of an Andalusian. I distinguished in the shadows beside it two or three rifle-barrels buried under rags, and a sort of large, flared metal horn which, at first, I took to be the end of a mountaineer's bugle, but which was in fact a blunderbuss. This pile of rags was the arsenal.

A large lump of rock that filled the corner to the right of the door, and on which the wall was built, formed a granite shelf in the interior of the cabin, which served as a bedside table to a few bales of straw thrown on the ground. This was, without doubt, the inn.

A naked child, who had probably been fast asleep on this straw, and whom our arrival had awakened, crouched on the granite shelf, his knees pressed against his chest and his arms crossed on his knees, and was looking at us with frightened eyes. At first, I took him for a gnome; then I thought a monkey was seated there; finally, I realised that it was a child.

Two tall wrought iron fire-dogs, rusted by rain, and scorched by the flames, commanded the fireplace, standing on four massive feet, open jaws lifted at the ends of their long necks. They looked like two house dragons, ready to roar and bite.

Except for a frying pan hanging in the chimney, there was no other cooking utensil in the cabin; this, with the iron candlestick, the andirons and the bed, made up all the furniture.

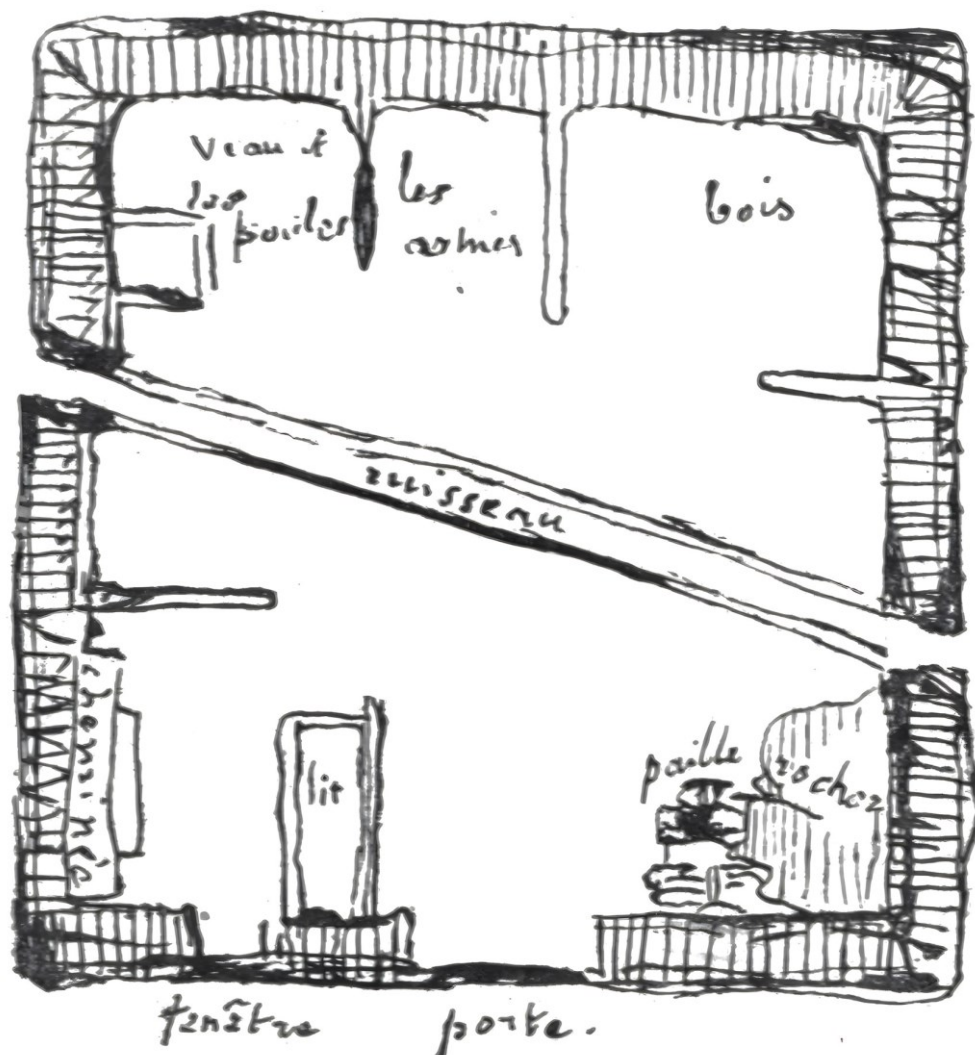
A jar of oil stood near the bed, and another jar full of milk beside the door. On the rim of the milk jar hung a wooden begging bowl of the most elegant and pure form. It was almost Etruscan in style.

Two lean, yellow cats, which, like the child, we had awakened, prowled around us with a menacing air. From the way they looked at us, it was clear that they deemed themselves tigers. I seem to recall there was a pig too, grunting in a dark corner.

The dwelling had that sweet, stale smell that all Spanish cabins have. There was neither table nor chair. Anyone who entered either stood, or sat on the floor. Anyone carrying a knapsack sat on that. In this house, the phrase '*seat yourself at the table.*' had no meaning; I remained for a few moments lost in this melancholic reflection. I was dying of hunger. In such cases, sad thoughts rise from the stomach.

A small, graceful sound, a sort of discreet, continuous chirping that I had heard since I entered the cabin, brought me out of this reverie. When one has nothing to eat, what can one do in a cabin except stare about you? So, I stared, but failed to discover where the noise was coming from.

At last, as my eyes lowered to the ground, I distinguished in the darkness a sort of metallic quivering, a luminous line in moiré, and saw that a stream traversed the cabin from one side to the other.



'A stream traversed the cabin'- Victor Hugo (1894)

[Internet Archive Book Images](https://www.internetarchive.org/bookimages/)

This stream, which flowed rapidly, at an oblique and inclined angle, along a hollow beam set in the ground, opened into the cabin through a hole made in the wall, and exited through the opposite wall. There it fed the little waterfall in the ravine I had noticed on arrival. A unique room where the mountain seemed to feel at home and entered familiarly: the rock lodged there; the stream passed through it.

While I was making these observations, in the elegiac manner of a dreamer who has not yet had supper, the mules, unloaded and unmuzzled, were peacefully tearing at the long strands of hay hanging from the ceiling. Seeing this, Escumuturra signalled to the host, who drove them to the back of the hut, and gave each of them a bundle of fodder. Meanwhile my companions settled down, one on a bale, like me, one on a saddle placed on the ground; Azcoaga lay down at full length, wrapped in his muleta.

The host propped two bundles of broom in the fireplace, on a bed of dry ferns. He set his resin torch to it; and in the twinkling of an eye a large, crackling fire rose in the hearth, emitting swirls of sparks, and a beautiful, blazing, red glow filled the cabin, and made the mules' rumps, the chicken-coop, the sleeping calf, the hidden blunderbuss, the rock, the stream, the strands of straw hanging from the ceiling like golden threads, the harsh faces of my companions, and the haggard eyes of the frightened child stand out in relief against the dark recesses of the hut. The two black andirons with monstrous mouths stood out against their background of burning embers, and looked like two hellhounds panting in the fiery furnace. But none of this, I confess, attracted my attention; it was entirely elsewhere.

A great event had just taken place in the cabin. The host had taken the frying pan from the nail!

Chapter XIII: Notes on Spain

The Passport

One is forever making two journeys in Spain at the same time: that which one intends to make, and that which one's passport is making. What a terrible wanderer one's passport is in Spain! It won't stay still for a moment. At every instant it flies from your pocket, unfolds, and vanishes. One chases after it; to the *jefetara* (*police station*) to the *politica* (*political authority*) to the *casa del alcade* (*the mayor's office*); then to the *ayuntamiento* (*the council office*), and finally to the *refrendar* (*the registrar, to have it stamped*)! And each time it costs a *media-peseta*. One has already paid one franc for a passport to Spain to the authorities in Paris, five francs in Bayonne to the consulate, and two francs in Irun to enter. Now, one must pay ten sous to the policeman every time it changes hands, and one must have one's passport stamped in

every town, to access each particular gate of the town. If one changes one's mind, and alters the gate of choice, the passport has to be returned. Ten sous. — One pays ten sous for everything in Spain. Yesterday I was arrested by a clown of a police sergeant and dragged through the town to the *alcalde*. Found innocent, the police sergeant asked me, for the trouble he had taken and the honour he had done me, *ten sous*. Poor, noble Spain! Just now a scoundrel followed me down the street, shouting: '*Caballero! Señor Caballero!*' I turned around, saw the poor devil, searched my pocket, and gave him a *sou*. He took the *sou* and asked for my passport. I had taken him for a beggar; he was a public official, the State embodied. Yet it turned out he was also a beggar. He took the penny, and asked for my passport, but happily accepted the alms.

The Spanish Priest

The priest insisted on speaking French to me. Dreadful gibberish. At one point, he was talking about grammar and linguistics, and I understood not a word. I kept hearing the obscure phrase: '*les-tigres-morts-au-logis: dead tigers in the house.*' I racked my brains. Finally, at some point I realised that the good priest meant: '*l'étymologie: etymology.*'

He wrote in the travellers' book, at the foot: — '*Think, while here, O mortal, that once dead you will be eaten by worms.*' I took up the pen and added: '*and that while alive you will be eaten by fleas.*' In Spanish: '*Pensa aqui, o hombre mortal, que muerto comido eras de las viermes. — Y que vivo comido eras de las pulgas.*'

Mules and Muleteers

Mules, shorn except for the tail, which is used as a stencil to draw a letter T on the animal's rump. Mules with copper plates on their snouts, harnessed, clothed with wool caparisons with red tassels, bearing paniers of enormous fish; tuna or sturgeon, whose tails stick out from under the lids. The fish that travels in the sun among the mountains must arrive fresh.

Muleteers with tonsured heads. A handkerchief tied around them. Further south, the heads are shaved, and the handkerchief becomes a turban. This is the best headdress because sweat would otherwise drip from the hair into the eyes.



‘Muleteers with tonsured heads’ - Victor Hugo (1894)

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First muleteer — Short breeches, blue stockings, velvet jacket, and a large round hat with wide brim. White blanket with red checquering on the shoulder. Espadrilles. Second Muleteer — Straw hat with black ribbon, short breeches, white stocking with raised designs. A pack on the end of a stick. The muleta, motley yellow, blue, green and red, across the shoulder. Their trousers, unbuttoned towards the knee, reveal their rough, hairy legs.

The Basque Muleteers Who Were My Guides

A formidable pass. A frightening bend. A narrow path strewn with small round stones, the bend emerging abruptly above the abyss and empty air. The mule stopped short, I felt her every

limb tremble beneath me. But I had to move forward. ‘*And’usted: Go on!*’ shouted Escumuturra to me. I pushed at the mule, she leant on her hind legs, rushed forward, the stones rolling from under her feet into the precipice; and leapt across.

The Kitchen

One doesn’t know what kind of meat one is eating. It’s red, thin, and tough. — Is it beef, pork, sheep, dog, horse, camel, bear? — It’s veal.

Pamplona. — ‘What’s this?’ I cried in horror. A calm reply: ‘*Langusta*’ (*Spiny lobster*). I remembered that the tide brought the mullet with it. Something with oil. One chews. Teeth get tangled in hair. A wig à la *barigoule* (*with barigoule mushrooms*)! Pharmaceutical-tasting herbs dressed in rancid oil claiming to be English-style green beans. No sugar; a sort of yellow-brown substance, instead, mixed with ants and flies.

The bare-legged maid chases away the flies with a stick adorned with a feather duster while you dine. No butter. No milk. No coffee. And that’s only in the best inns. Saffron, chili, cinnamon, and pepper everywhere. Always pork, in all its forms.

The Inhabitants

Lots of pretty girls, no pretty women. — Aragonese woman. Swarthy-faced. Dazzling white headdresses. Men’s jackets of bronze-green velvet with tight sleeves. Black cloth skirts, a thousand pleats around the waist. Blue stockings with decoration.

When you enter a cabin here and see its poor, bare interior, having viewed the countryside, admirable Nature who gives everything, lavishes everything, wheat, corn, vines, apple-trees, oak-trees, elms, pines, mountains, rivers, torrents, gulfs, mines yielding gold, silver, lead, iron, and quarries yielding sandstone, lime, plaster, granite, and marble, one wonders how human beings can have managed to extract so much misery from so much wealth!

Oh! If this great nation could only find a great man to lead it, what great things it might achieve! What misery! To need a Napoleon, and find only an Espartero!

The coquettish and vain officers love finery too much not to love glory also.

Chapter XIV: From Bayonne to Pau

August 14th

Four in the morning. — Seated on the Imperial. — Mist. — Vast plains. — The sun in one's eyes. — A trail of vapour marks the Gave de Pau (*the river flows through the city of Pau*) on the right. — By noon, the Pyrenees could only be distinguished by a few white streaks on the horizon, as if the blue robe of the sky, frayed in places, revealed its silver weave. At a large village, Biaudos, I think, a hill topped by a beautiful ruin. Further on, Peyrehorade. The name seems to indicate an ancient *gnomon*, perhaps a *peulven* (*a menhir*) whose moving shadow tells the time.

Orthez. — A beautiful, tall square tower of the old viscounts. A cheerful town open to the sun. At the entrance to the place, countrywomen going to the market put on their stockings, naively, in the street.

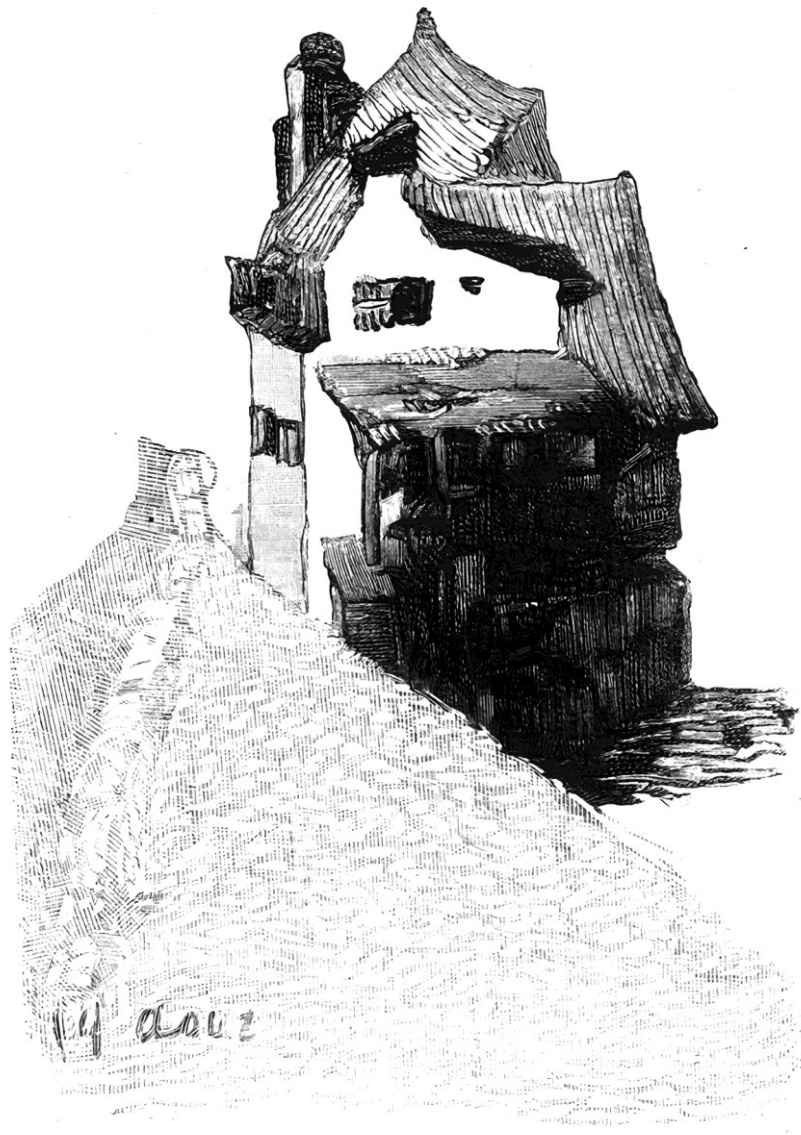
In a beautiful deserted valley, two women were herding a flock that included a goose. Each of these two women seemed very busy guarding her half of the goose. The goose seemed to be mocking them.

Pau. — The château. One is only able to view three or four rooms, poorly restored but admirably furnished, with old chests and tapestries from the storeroom. As I am waiting for the Duke of Montpensier (*Antoine d'Orléans, the youngest son of Louis Philippe*), the floors are being scrubbed. A footman charged with protecting the parquet seeks to prevent my viewing a statue of Henry IV in the great hall, on the first floor. I scold the footman, and go and find the statue. Beautiful, fine, intelligent, delicate sixteenth century sculpture. Yet it is a last flourish. Already the heaviness of the Louis XIII style is making itself felt.

The main tower is opened up for me. An admirable view from the platform. All of the Pyrenees. The whole town with its slate roofs. A young English lady whom I had assisted, along with the people who accompanied her, including a local resident, looked with great curiosity at a low, closed house, isolated in a garden. Not an open window. Vines and ivy hiding the walls. A man was working in the garden. It was the house of the executioner of Pau (*Joseph Faroux*). The gardener was the executioner. 'He is rich', said the resident.

A Renaissance chapel door; charmingly, completely, and exquisitely restored. However, it is marred by a tasteless cross replacing the impost. Admirable spiral staircases, skilfully restored.

The cradle of Henri IV (*born at the Chateau de Pau, in 1553*). Its tortoiseshell surround is gnawed at the edges. Is it authentic? See the book by Saget (*Pierre Saget, 'Description du Château de Pau et de ses Dépendances' 1831*). Ridiculously adorned with a bundle of gilded wooden pikes, and a cardboard helmet with white plumes in the Louis XVIII style. A relic of the sixteenth century, and of the royalism, with its bulging fleurs-de-lis, of 1814. A garish and unfortunate combination.



‘Pau. 14 August - old house below the château terrace, birthplace of Henri IV’ - Victor Hugo (1894)

[Paris Musées](#)

Pau — a cheerful, pretty, clean city. A little too rebuilt and re-modelled, which detracts from its historic air. Only the trench made by the old moat through the city indicates the layout of the ancient Pau, that of Antoine de Bourbon (*Antoine, King of Navarre from 1555 to 1562, the first monarch of the House of Bourbon, and father of Henri IV*). Old slate houses, though. Buffeted, marked by curious architectural accidents, and displaying on every floor the original and curious warts of fifteenth-century domestic masonry.

Chapter XV: From Pau to Cauterets

Six in the morning. It is raining. The rain above, the Gave below, mingle their sounds. A picturesque road, shaded, green, and cheerful despite the bad weather. The Pyrenees on the horizon. Mountain peaks, broken, chewed, twisted, kneaded, as if tweaked by the formidable hand of a giant. Small snow-water lakes in the hollows.

Here one no longer hear those resounding names hurled at the top of our lungs by the Spanish muleteers to their mules: *La generala! La capitana!* The Béarnese coachman instead talks to his mares in the local patois, in a low voice, and in a tone that is sometimes mocking, sometimes caressing: *Yo grisa! Yo blonda!*

In a village this inscription on a door: '*lo que ha de ser ne puede faltar: what must be will be.*' One feels the proximity of Spain.

Here, slate roofs are everywhere; sharply-pitched roofs, sloping to allow the snow and rain to drain away. Travel a few miles, cross these mountains, and you will find flat roofs, with hollow tiles. Here, are villages of the Ardennes; there, the villages of Calabria. The north occupies one slope of the Pyrenees, the south the other.

Saint Pé de Bigorre — A charming town with traces of the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries. Countrywomen emerge from Mass in long lines, dressed in black, with grey, white, and red hoods. They look like processions of nuns of every religious order. In Cauterets the effect is even stranger. They have grey hoods and bare feet. Saint Anthony from above; Goton (*a slattern*) from below.

Lourdes. — A magical arrival. A magnificent thirteenth-century keep perched on a rock. The Gave de Pau on one side, the town on the other. In the background, the mountains, high, steep, cut by deep valleys from which rise mists, wind, and noise.



‘Lourdes’- Victor Hugo (1894)

[*Paris Musées*](#)

At Lourdes begins the great gorge of the high Pyrenees which opens at Agos-Vidalos, diverges, and divides into four ravines, forming that immense crow’s foot (*patte d’oie*, literally *goose’s foot*) whose base is Argelès (*Argelès-Gazost*) and whose four claws reach Arbéost to the west, via the valley of Estrem de Salles; Aucun to the south-west, via the valley of Azun; Cauterets to the south, by the defile of Pierrefitte (*Pierrefitte-Nestalas*); and Barèges to the south-east, via the Luz pass. — The gorge from Lourdes to Argelès is, so to speak, its handle, like the wrist of this open hand.

Lourdes is the gateway to the Hautes-Pyrénées. In 1755 it felt the aftershocks of the Lisbon earthquake. The central network of the Pyrenees was well-guarded in the Middle Ages. Every arm of the valleys had its castle which overlooked the castles of the two neighbouring valleys, and conversed with them by means of fire-beacons. Today one sees their ruins, which add immense interest to the landscape; nothing is more poignant than the ruins of Mankind amidst the wildness of Nature.

The Château Fort de Lourdes viewed the three turrets of the Château de Pau, which viewed, in turn, the square Tower of Vidalos (*Agos-Vidalos*), which could communicate by signals with the ancient *castrum* built by the Romans, and raised from the ruins by Charlemagne, on the hill of Saint-Savin (*Saint-Savin en Lavedan*, site of the *Abbey Church of Saint Savin*), which was connected across the mountains to the feudal fortress of Beaucens. The signals thus passed, from tower to tower, along the valley of Luz, to the Château Sainte-Marie d’Esterre (*occupied*

by the Knights Hospitaller in the fourteenth century), as far as the valley of Gavarnie, as far as the citadel of the 'Templars'. The castellans of the Pyrenees, like the burgraves of the Rhine, passed warnings to each other. In a few hours the bailiwicks were roused, the mountain was on fire.

The countryfolk, felt no hatred for the castellans, a remarkable feature and one local to the area. They felt that these fortresses, while dominating them, even oppressing them, protected the border. It was the mountain people who gave one of these castles not far from the Ousse valley, the name of *Bon-Château*, which it still retains: *Castelloubon*. (*This ancient ruined castle of the Viscounts of Lavedan, at Cotdoussan, having been abandoned, was finally destroyed by the earthquake of 1660.*)

Chapter XVI: Cauterets

To Louis Boulanger

I am writing to you, dear Louis, with the state of my eyesight the worst in the world. Yet writing to you is a sweet and familiar habit that I do not wish to forego. I would not want to loosen a single stone of our friendship. For almost twenty years we have been brothers, brothers in heart, brothers in thought. We see Creation with the same eyes; we view Art with the same spirit. You love Dante, in the same way that I love Raphael. We have gone through many days of struggle and trial together without our sympathy weakening, without retreating a step in our devotion. Let us therefore remain until the last day what we have been from the first. Let us change nothing of what has been so good and so sweet. In Paris, let us shake hands; absent, let us write to one another.

When I am far from you, I need to write a letter to tell you something of what I see, think, and feel. This time it will be shorter, that is to say, less lengthy than usual. My eyes force me to spare yours. Complain not, you will receive less grammar, but just as much friendship.

I come from the sea, and am in the mountains. Which is not a change in my emotional life, so to speak. The mountains and the sea address the same regions of the mind.

If you were here (I cannot help dreaming of it, constantly), what a charming life we would lead! What pictures you would carry away in your thoughts, so as to render them afterwards in art, even more beautifully than Nature would offer them to you!

Imagine, Louis, that I rise every day at four in the morning, and at that hour, a twilight of both darkness and light, I visit the mountains. I walk beside a torrent, I plunge into the wildest gorge there is, and, under the pretext of soaking myself in hot water, and drinking the sulphurous liquid, I witness, every day, a new, unexpected and marvellous spectacle.

Yesterday, the night was rainy, the air was cold, the wet fir-trees were blacker than usual, mists rose from the ravines on all sides, like the smoke from the cracks at Solfatara (*Solfatara is a shallow volcanic crater at Pozzuoli, near Naples, part of the Phlegraean Fields, emitting jets of steam with sulphurous fumes*); a hideous and terrible noise came from the darkness, below, in the precipice, beneath my feet; it was the raging cry of the torrent hidden in the fog. Something vague, supernatural, inconceivable, mingled with the landscape; everything was dark, as if pensive around me; the immense spectres of the mountains appeared to me through gaps in the clouds, as through torn shrouds. The twilight illuminated nothing; but, through a stony crevasse above my head, I perceived, far away in the infinite, a corner of blue sky, pale, icy, gloomy, yet brilliant; all I could distinguish of the terrain; rocks, forests, meadows, glaciers, shifted chaotically amidst the vapour, and seemed to flee, borne by the wind, through space, amidst a gigantic network of cloud.

Before dawn, the night was serene. The sky was starry; but what a sky, and what stars! You know, that freshness, that grace, that melancholic and inexpressible transparency of dawn, bright stars against a whitening sky, a crystal vault strewn with diamonds. Enormous mountains on every side leaned against this luminous vault; mountains black, hairy, and misshapen. The summits of those in the east were highlighted by the brightest of dawns, their fir-tree forests resembling those leaves of which aphids leave only the veins, and which look like lacework. Those in the west, black at their bases, glowed on their summits, and throughout almost their entire height, with a rosy clarity. Not a cloud, not a sign of vapour. An obscure and delightful life animated the dark slopes of the mountains; one could distinguish the grass, flowers, stones, the heather, all softly and joyful teeming. The noise of the Gave du Marcadau was no longer dreadful; it was a great murmur mingling with this great silence. No sad thought, no anxiety emerged from this harmonious whole. The whole valley was like an immense urn into which the sky, during the sacred hours of dawn, poured the peace of the spheres, and the radiance of the constellations.

It seems to me, my friend, that these sights are more than mere landscapes. They are Nature glimpsed at certain mysterious moments when everything seems to dream, I almost said 'think'; when trees, rocks, clouds and bushes are more visibly alive than at other times, and seem to quiver with the soft beat of universal life.

A strange vision, and one that for me is very close to being a reality. At the moments when human eyes are closed, something unknown fills Creation. Do you not see it as I do? Does it not seem that, at the moment of falling asleep, when coherent thought ceases in the mind it commences in Nature? Is the calm not deeper, the silence more absolute, the solitude more complete, such that the dreamer who is still awake then can better grasp, in its subtle and marvellous detail, the extraordinary fact of Creation? Or is it that some revelation, some manifestation of the supreme intelligence enters into communication with the great whole, as some new state of Nature? Does Nature feel more at ease when we are absent? Does it expand more freely?

It is certain that, in appearance at least, there exists for the objects that we call inanimate a twilight life and a nocturnal life. This state is perhaps only in one's mind; sensible realities present themselves to us at certain times in an unusual aspect; they move us; a mirage is formed

from them within us, and we mistake the new ideas that they suggest for a new life that they truly have.

These are the questions. Decide. As for me, I limit myself to dreaming. I devote my mind to contemplating the world and studying mystery. I spend my life between the state of admiration and one of questioning all.

Chapter XVII: Banks of the Gave de Marcadau

Cauterets, August 18th

A huge landslide. Scattered stones have rolled right into the Gave de Marcadau. They still bear all the disordered marks of their fall. You would think that they had fallen yesterday, were it not that they are eaten away by lichen. One of them, the largest, is split down the middle. A shepherd dreams among these rocks to the sounds of tumultuous Nature. The goats bleat, and hang from the rocks. A large green grasshopper allows me to pick it up in my hands. I place it on the rock; it stays where I place it. A lizard emerges from a crack. The grasshopper and the lizard look at each other. The lizard approaches. The grasshopper skims away like a bird, and descends far off among the tall grass.

I cross the wooden bridge at the confluence of the Gaves of Marcadau and Lutour. A smell of sulphur rises from the torrent. Here, the flow is frightening. It is an avalanche of liquid snow. A furious noise. On the sides, hosts of flowers grow; small side-branches of the torrent make microscopic cascades over small boulders. There are little, tranquil pools with pebbled beds, that look as if they have been arranged by a child for their garden. A ray of sunlight pierces the clouds, and makes each drop of water sparkle. — Beautiful green puddles. All shades of green. Light greens, dark greens. The pieces of granite and marble, stained with pink, that one sees through the glaucous water veined with light, resemble gigantic agates.

I started out in blazing sunlight, and suddenly a heavy grey cloud invaded the whole sky. It was about to rain. I took refuge beneath the porch of the thermal baths. An old woman who was knitting saw me enter, grumbling. She was a broken-down, hideously wretched figure, her face all wrinkled, wrapped in a ragged cape. Seeing that I persisted in remaining there, and had taken a chair, she rose, dragged herself, while leaning on two sticks, towards a dark corridor, and departed. — From a niche on the outer wall, I picked a beautiful yellow flower, which had the shape of a tulip, and the scent of an apricot.



18 août. Caunter, la mendiant
 que j'ai rencontré aujourd'hui près
 de Mahourat dans les rochers -
 Me m'a dit avoir quatre vingt et un ans

'Beggar, Caunterêts' - Victor Hugo (1894)

The storm is approaching. Large, sonorous drops of rain fall on the trees and rocks. A flash of lightning. A clap of thunder. A clap of thunder in these gorges is no longer a clap of thunder; it is a pistol-shot, a monstrous pistol-shot that bursts from among the clouds, falls on the nearest peak, and bounces from crest to crest with a dry, sinister, and formidable noise. — It is raining hard. All except the cloud and the rain is invisible. It is a sort of pale night, interrupted by lightning, amidst which one hears nothing but two roaring sounds: the torrent which howls incessantly, and the thunder which rumbles from time to time. I thought in reverie about this dual noise, and said to myself: 'the torrent resembles rage, and the thunder resembles anger'.

August 23rd. 3 a.m.

After a two-hour climb, I reach an immense meadow with two or three wretched huts, whose gardens are a meagre tangle, with marble walls. To the right, is a torrent. Before me, an enormous block of white marble, and an old, dried-up stump. Around me, magnificent mountains. The sun's rays create broad swathes of light and shadow. Small snow-filled tarns near the sky, fill the crevices. As well as the snow and ice, rock-slides of slate sparkle in the sun up there. It looks like the back of an enormous dragon. Broad swathes of darkness and light. Immense, simple planes. Four mountains fill the horizon. Nothing but short, sparse grass, and some heather. Yet it makes for a gigantic blanket of greenery that covers the mountains as far as the entrance to the passes. The torrent flows smoothly and almost peacefully through the depths of the ravine. No sound. No voices. Blue sky. Deep calm. Absolute solitude. I have never seen anything more beautiful or grand in the Pyrenees.

August 24th

The two torrents form a Y. On this Y, stands a wooden bridge (*the Pont d'Espagne, reconstructed in stone in 1886*) with three arches, triply bonded, made of fir-trees stretching from rock to rock. On the Gave du Marcadau, there are four other bridges, at four different levels, along the mountain side, formed of tree trunks. Rocks collapsing.



‘Old bridge at Cauterets’- Victor Hugo (1894)

[Paris Musées](#)

A torrent of water over a torrent of stones.

At the first bridge (Cascade d’Escane Gat): dried fir trees with short, broken branches that could serve as top-gallant masts for bears to climb. In one of these hollow fir-trees, a fire has been made. It still makes for a fairly large chimney. Hairy lichens clothe these skeletons. Multi-layered vegetation. All the flowers of the mountain. Green, peaceful water in a cove below the falls with dead fir trees hanging over it.

At the second bridge (Cascade de Ceriset): two black walls. The light catches the projections, and creates small, bright terraces covered with grass and flowers. The water is luminous; the light is moist. Between the two black walls, the white Gave.

In the background: a four-tiered waterfall. Trees cut down by lumberjacks. Forest. Immense mountains below.

At the third bridge: (Cascade de Pouey Bacou): Another waterfall. A rainbow. The waterfall drops to a plateau, then plunges into the chasm. I descend, holding onto the tree roots, to a jutting rock. The bridge is above my head. The rock receiving the splash of the waterfall is perforated like a sponge. Mist and rain. I clamber back up. The rotten branches break easily. (The fourth bridge is the ‘Pont du Pas de l’Ours’)

Lac de Gaube. — It is said to be thirteen hundred feet deep. Our old Notre Dame would have to be piled upon itself six times, before the highest balustrades of the towers (226 feet) reached the surface of the water. If the Great Pyramid (454 feet) were to be submerged in it, if Strasbourg Minster (446 feet) were placed on Cheops' Pyramid, and the spire of Antwerp (404 feet) on the Minster, the tip of the spire of Antwerp would barely rise above the lake's surface, like the tip of the mast of a shipwrecked vessel.

A wild valley. Pine forest crushed by a collapsed mountain. Pollarded trees, dead trees. Here, the years, thunderclaps, and avalanches are the only lumberjacks.

At the lake; four in the afternoon. — A pool of the greenest, most graceful, prettiest, most cheerful water, surrounded by hideous, chewed, deformed, ruined and terrifying rocks. In the background the snowy ridges of Mount Vignemale, the highest French mountain, form an immense inverted Y towards the east. At the edge of the pool, transparent water beneath which one sees the granite bed, which swiftly deepens. The great shadows of the peaks fall on the western escarpment like the shadows of battlements.

Foreground: — A cabin wherein kirsch is drunk; a cage full of chickens, ducks; a rock that forms a small peninsula. Beside the lake one finds a kind of tomb (*destroyed in 1944*) in white marble, and surrounded by a grille. The tomb is of an English couple who drowned here, and whose epitaph is as follows:

In memory
of
William Henry Pattisson, Esquire,
Barrister-at-Law, of Lincoln's Inn, London,
and Sarah Frances, his wife,
aged 31 and 26, married
only a month. A terrible accident took them from their inconsolable
relatives
and friends.
They were swallowed up in this lake
on September 20, 1832. Their
remains, borne to England,
are buried at Witham in the county of Essex.

(The inscription on the memorial stone at the lake, was in French on one side, English the other. A bas-relief, by Charles Augustus Rivers, commemorating the couple, can be found in the church of Saint Nicolas, Chipping Hill, Witham, Essex. William Henry Ebenezer Pattison, was admitted to the Middle Temple in 1818, called to the Bar in 1825, and admitted to Lincoln's inn in 1828. They had married on August 22nd, 1832. See the painting of William and his younger brother Jacob Howell Pattison, entitled 'The Masters Pattison' by Sir Thomas Lawrence.)

Icy water. Whoever falls in dies. In the ninety years that the old fisherman had been there, he had not seen anyone bold enough to bathe in it. It costs *three sous* per person to enter the tomb enclosure. I picked some cineraria from the granite overhanging the lake. I slipped, and almost fell into the water. That would have made a second grave. It cost them six *sous* to do so.

Cauterets, August 26th

The valley is peaceful; the escarpment is silent. The wind dies down. Suddenly, at a bend in the mountain road, the Gave appears. It has the sound of a melee; which is its appearance. One thinks one hears the combatants howl with rage, and sees the projectiles flying. — They are drawing nearer. — Large funnels end in large vats in which the water leaps and boils, covered with foam, as in some enormous pot heated by an everlasting fire. Monstrous tree stumps, hideous roots, gaunt and deformed, roll about in the torrent like the carcasses of Hydras. — Everything about the place is terrifying.

The mountain horses are admirable, patient, gentle, obedient, full of instincts, and adaptable. They climb stairs and descend ladders. They journey over grass, granite, and ice. They skirt the very edge of precipices. They walk delicately, and spiritedly, like cats. True ‘alley-horses’.

Mine was curious and somewhat of an original. He seemed to love adventure. He always chose to walk along the narrow edge of all the abysses we encountered. He seemed to be saying to himself: ‘This gentleman is an artist, an amateur. We must allow him to see everything clearly. Ah! You want torrents, Parisian! You want Gaves, waterfalls, chasms, precipices, adventure! Well, here they are. Here, look, lean over, here, and here, and here. Is that enough for you?’

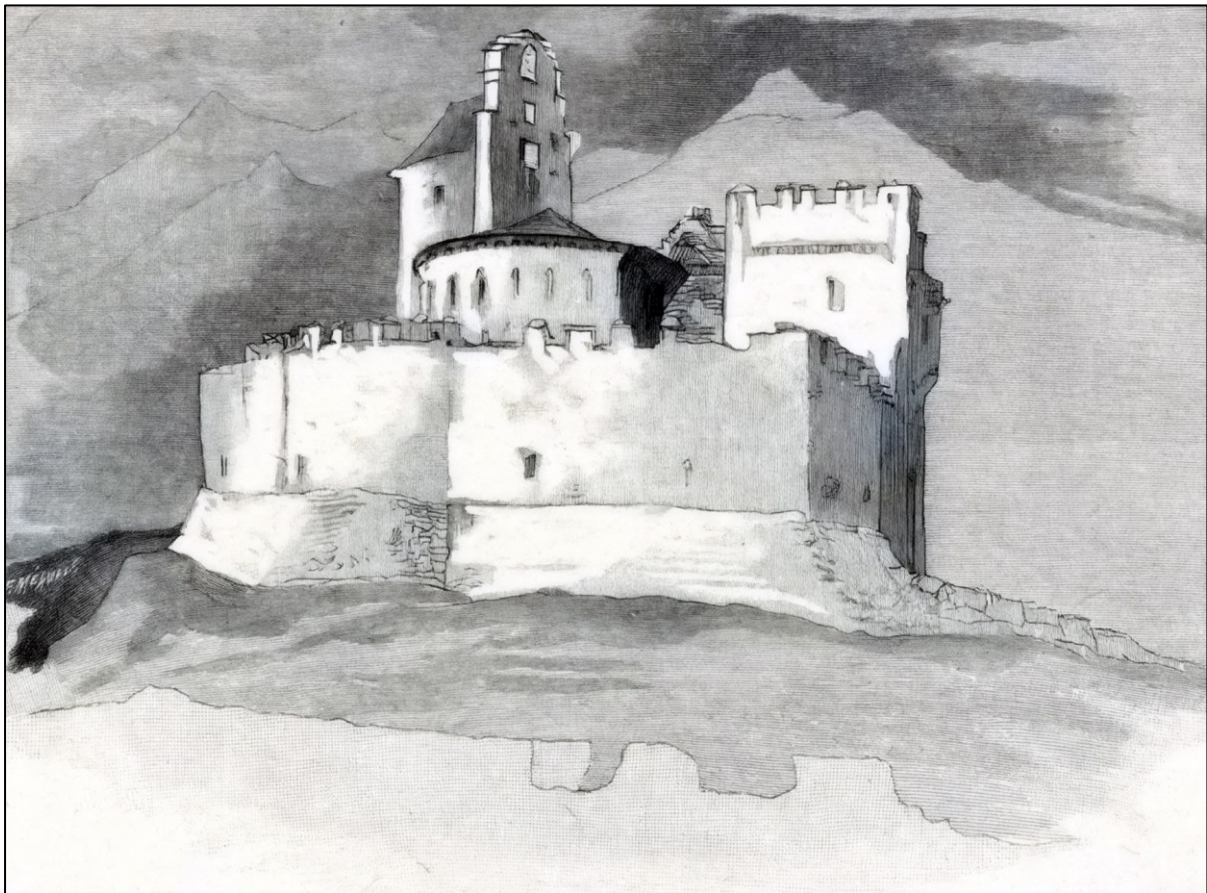
I trotted thus along overhanging escarpments eight hundred feet high, with a small, dark blue river beneath my gaze. I tried at first to make him take less a picturesque route, but he persisted and, when I saw that it was to his liking, I had too much interest in keeping well in with him to contradict, and let him alone.

Chapter XVIII: Luz

Luz, is a charming old town — a rare thing in the French Pyrenees — delightfully situated in a deep triangular valley. Three great shafts of daylight enter it through the triple embrasures of three mountains. When the *miquelets* (*Spanish guerillas*), and Spanish smugglers arrived from Aragón by La Brèche de Roland (‘*Roland’s Breach*’ is a natural gap, in the Pyrenees on the

border between Aragón, in northern Spain, and the Hautes-Pyrénées) and by the dark and hideous valley of Gavarnie (*Gavarnie Gèdre*), they suddenly perceived, at the end of the dark gorge, a sudden brightness, like the opening of a cellar door to those inside. They hastened on, and found a large village, lively, and lit by the sun. This village, they named *Lumière*, Luz (*Luz Saint-Sauveur*).

I made four drawings of the Castle of Sainte-Marie Esterre. The church (*Saint André, l'Église des Templiers*) was built by the 'Templars' (*the Saint John Hospitallers in the twelfth century*); it is rare and curious; a fortress as much as a church; a crenellated enclosure, a gatehouse-keep.



'The church of Luz' - Victor Hugo (1894)

[*Paris Musées*](#)

I walked around, between the church and the crenellated wall. The cemetery there is dotted with large slates from which the crosses, and the names of mountaineers, dug with a nail, are erased by rain, snow, and the feet of passersby.

The *Cagots'* Gate, in the cemetery is walled up. These sufferers from goitre were outcasts. They had their own gate. A low one, as far as one can judge from the vague line marked by the stones that block it.

The exterior holy-water font is a charming little Byzantine tomb to which two almost Roman capitals still adhere. The key to the cemetery is hidden there, in order to oblige foreigners to pay to view the place. For everything here has to be paid for. The tomb's inscription is illegible, erased by time, scored with a knife, covered in dust. A few Spanish words can be made out. *Aqui: Here: Abris: Find.* However, the words *filla de* (Basque: *daughter of*) ... seem to indicate the patois. I have more or less deciphered the last line, which makes no sense though: SUB DESERA LO FE (Latin: '*below the wastelands*', plus '*Spanish: the faith*')

The corbels on the exterior wall of the apse are adorned with curious and charming designs. The main portal, which depicts Jesus between the four symbolic creatures, is of the finest Romanesque style; firm, robust, powerful, severe. Remains of paintings on the wall depict mosaics and buildings. The interior of the church is a nondescript barn.

Under the vault of the portal of the entrance tower, the Byzantine paintings, restored and half colour-washed, have lost much of their character. At the top of the vault, Christ, with the imperial crown. Below, the angels of judgment blowing their trumpets, and this inscription: SVRGYTE MORIVY-BENYTE-AD-JVDYCIUM ('*Surgite morui venite ad judicium: Rise, you who have died, and come to judgment.*')

At the four corners, some remnants of the four evangelists. The ox, with the inscription SANC-LUC (*Saint Luke*). The eagle, with SANC... (*Saint John*). Mould has clouded it, and the rest is lost. The winged lion, in a beautiful style, with the inscription SANT-MARC (*Saint Mark*). In the shadow, an angel's head with this remnant of the inscription ... CTE MYCHAEL (*Saint Michael*).

Chapter XIX: Gavarnie

When you have crossed the Pont de Douroucate bridge (*at Pragnères*) and are only a quarter of an hour from Gèdre (*Gavarnie-Gèdre*), two mountains suddenly seem to part and, in whatever manner you approach Gavarnie, you discover something unexpected.

You may have visited the Alps, the Andes, the Cordilleras; for several weeks you have had the Pyrenees before your eyes; whatever you may have seen, what you now perceive resembles nothing you have encountered elsewhere. Until now you have seen mountains; you have contemplated outcrops of all shapes, of all heights; you have explored green ridges; slopes of gneiss, marble or schist; precipices; rounded or jagged summits; glaciers; forests of fir-trees among the clouds; needles of granite; needles of ice; but, I repeat, you have nowhere seen what you see, at this very moment, on the horizon.

Amidst the capricious curves of the mountains, bristling with obtuse and acute angles, straight lines suddenly appear, simple, calm, horizontal or vertical, parallel or intersecting at right angles, and combined in such a way that the dazzling, real form, penetrated by sun and azure, of an impossible and extraordinary object results from their ensemble.

Is it a mountain? But what mountain has ever presented these rectilinear surfaces, these regular planes, these rigorous parallels, these strange symmetries, this geometric aspect? Is it a wall? Here are towers indeed which buttress and support it, here are battlements, cornices, architraves, ledges, and walls of stone, which the eye distinguishes and could almost count; here are two breaches, deeply cut, which awaken in the mind ideas of sieges, trenches and assaults; but here also is snow, large bands of snow placed on these ledges, on these battlements, architraves, and towers; we are in the heart of summer and the south; these are therefore eternal snows; now, what wall, what human architecture has ever risen to the frightening heights of eternal snow? Babel, the effort of the whole human race, collapsed upon itself before attaining them.

What is this inexplicable object that cannot be a mountain, yet which is as high as a mountain, which cannot be a wall yet which has the shape of a wall?

It is a mountain, and a wall at the same time; it is the most mysterious building, by the most mysterious of architects; it is Nature's Colosseum; it is the Cirque de Gavarnie.

Imagine this magnificent silhouette as it first appears at a distance of seven or eight miles: a long, dark wall whose every projection, every wrinkle, is marked by lines of snow, whose every platform bears a glacier. Towards the middle, two large towers; one to the east, square and turning one of its angles towards France; the other to the west, fluted as if it were less a tower than a sheaf of turrets; both covered with snow. To the right, two deep notches, the breaches, which cut into the wall like two vases filled with clouds; finally, still to the right and at the western end, a sort of enormous edge pleated with a thousand steps, which offers to the eye, in monstrous proportions, what in architecture would be called the cross-section of an amphitheatre.

Picture it as I saw it: the black wall, the black towers; the dazzling snow, the blue sky; a scene complete in short, grand to the point of incredulity, serene to the point of sublimity.

It is an impression unlike any other, so singular and so powerful at the same time that it erases everything else, and one becomes for a few moments, even when this magical vision has disappeared behind a bend in the road, indifferent to everything else.

The landscape that surrounds you, however, is admirable; you enter a valley where all the magnificence and all the graces envelop you. A pair of upper and lower villages, like Tracy-le-Mont and Tracy-le-Val, namely Gèdre-Dessus and Gèdre-Dessous, with their stepped gables and their old 'Templar' church (*Not extant, replaced by the late nineteenth century church of Saint-Matthieu*), curl-up and unfold on the slopes of two mountains, along a foaming-white Gave (*Gave de Gavarnie*), below cheerful, whimsical tufts of charming vegetation. All this is lively, ravishing, happy, exquisite; it is Switzerland and the Black Forest suddenly merged with the Pyrenees. A thousand joyful sounds reach you as if they were the voices and words of this

sweet landscape: birdsong, children's laughter, the Gave's murmur, the rustling of leaves, the calming breaths of wind.

You see nothing; you hear nothing; you barely retain of this graceful ensemble even a vague and confused impression. The apparition of the Cirque de Gavarnie is always before your eyes, and shines in your thoughts like those supernatural horizons one sometimes sees in the depths of dream.

In the evening, returning from Gavarnie, I experience an admirable moment. From my window: a great mountain fills the earth; a great cloud fills the sky. Between the cloud and the mountain, a thin strip of twilight sky, clear, vivid, and limpid, and Jupiter sparkling, like a golden pebble in a silver stream. Nothing is more melancholic, more reassuring, or more beautiful than this little point of light between these two blocks of darkness.

Chapter XX: Auch Cathedral

September 4th

There is a degree of analogy with the cathedral of Pamplona. Rich internally; mediocre externally. A hideous portal attached to the old nave by some architect stupefied by 'good taste'. The fifteenth century side portals are beautiful and well preserved.

The interior has admirable stained-glass windows which are, I believe, by Arnaud de Moles. The Sibyl of Delphi next to the prophet Elisha. The Tiburtine Sibyl opposite Saint Matthew and next to the prophet Habakkuk. The Sibyl Agrippina (*Aegyptia*) between the prophets Nahum and Jeremiah. The Sibyl of Cumae next to Daniel facing the prophets Sophonias, Elijah, and Uriah. The Sibyl Europa, her throat almost bare and sword in hand, between the prophet Amos and the patriarch Joshua. The Libyan Sibyl between Enoch and Moses. She predicts the ascension of the Virgin to heaven. Superb costumes.

A huge fleur-de-lis in the stained-glass window of the apse, repeated on the upper lancet. The Revolution respected them, strangely enough.

Joseph sold into bondage. An admirable composition. Joseph innocent and gentle, in a white shirt. The merchant rummages through his bags, looking sideways at Joseph with the expression of one haggling over the price. In the background, the loaded donkeys, exactly like the *arrieros'* mules of today.

An Entombment of Christ, early sixteenth century. Larger than life. Admirably guarded by four proud statues, one with an immense sword in its hand, on which it leans at full height. As I passed, a beautiful young woman, sad and serious, was overseeing the cleaning of this magnificent work by a kneeling servant.

There is no grant for the upkeep of the church. When Napoleon saw it, he was ecstatic about the stained-glass windows and the choir, and exclaimed: ‘*There are cathedrals one would like to place in a museum*’. He granted the church six thousand francs a year, which the revolution of 1830 (*the July Revolution*) abolished. Formerly, *liberal* meant magnificently generous; now, *liberal* means stingy.

The Choir. A Renaissance door decorated with a large Louis XV cherub. Inscription:

HÆC-PORTA-DOMINI-IVSTI-INTRABVNT-IN-EAM-PSAL. – 117

THIS IS THE GATE OF THE LORD, THROUGH WHICH THE RIGHTEOUS MAY
ENTER

(*Psalm 117 in the Vulgate, Psalm 118 otherwise, verse 20*)

In the choir, above this door, the Precepts of the Church translated into Latin as follows:

FESTOS DIES CELEBRATO.
MISSAM IN FERTIS AUDITORO.
JEJUNIA INDICTA OBSERVATIO.
QUO ANNIS SACERDOTI
CONFITEOR.
IN PASCHATE
COMMUNICATO.

OBSERVANCE OF FEAST DAYS.
HEARING MASS.
FASTING AS REQUIRED.
CONFESSING ONE’S SINS AT LEAST ONCE A YEAR.
RECEIVING COMMUNION AT EASTER.

On the other side the Precepts of God:

UNUM COLE DEUM.
NON JURES VANA

PER IPSUM.
SABRATHA SANCTIAETCIS.
HABEAS IN HONORE
PATENTES.
NON SIS OCCISOR
FUR MAECHUS.
TESTIS ANIQUUS.
ALTERIUS NUPIAM
NEC REM CUPIAS
ALIENAM.

THOU SHALT HAVE NO OTHER GODS BEFORE ME.
THOU SHALT NOT MAKE UNTO THEE ANY GRAVEN IMAGE.
THOU SHALT NOT TAKE THE NAME OF THE LORD THY GOD IN VAIN.
REMEMBER THE SABBATH DAY, TO KEEP IT HOLY.
HONOUR THY FATHER AND THY MOTHER.
THOU SHALT NOT MURDER.
THOU SHALT NOT COMMIT ADULTERY.
THOU SHALT NOT STEAL.
THOU SHALT NOT BEAR FALSE WITNESS AGAINST THY NEIGHBOUR.
THOU SHALT NOT COVET.

Above them we read:

PRÆCEPTA EJUS COR TUUM CUSTODIA

KEEP HIS PRECEPTS IN YOUR HEART

Horrid, S-shaped balustrades around the nave. In the choir, a charming Renaissance high-altar on which are carved, in marble, two pulpits, one for the Gospel the other for the Epistles.

In front of the altar, the tombstones of three archbishops: the Count of Morlhon (*André-Etienne-Antoine de Morlhon*), Cardinal d'Isoard (*Joachim-Jean-Xavier d'Isoard*) and Léonard de Trapes, whose epitaph, composed by himself, reads:

LEONARDUS DESTRAPPE-ARCHIEPS-AUXITANUS.

VERMIS ET NON HOMO.

OPPROBRIUM HOMINUM

ET ABJECTIO PLEBIS

LÉONARD DE TRAPES, ARCHBISHOP OF AUCH,

A WORM AND NOT A MAN.

A REPROACH TO MANKIND

AND REJECTED BY THE PEOPLE.

He died amidst the odour of sanctity.

It took almost two hundred years to build the cathedral (1489-1680), sixty-five to carve the woodwork of the choir-stalls, which were completed in 1554, which is admirable and comparable to the woodwork of Chartres and Amiens. Statues in the proud and fleshy style of Rubens. Details I noted here and there: four demons fighting over a head and holding it by the hair; Saint Luke writing on his wax tablet, stylus in hand, thumb securing the tablet; Justice and her scales; Abundance, and the cornucopia of Amalthea the goat (*which nursed Zeus*); among the mingled saints and apostles.

This cathedral is remarkable for the cult of the Sibyls. There are Sibyls in the stained-glass windows, there are Sibyls in the choir. — The Sibyl of Samos, who predicted the birth of Jesus Christ, holds a crib in her hand. — The Tiburtine Sibyl predicted that a soldier would strike Christ, she holds the hand of this soldier. — The Delphic Sibyl predicted that he would be crowned with thorns. She holds the crown. The Sibyl Europa predicted the flight into Egypt, and the Massacre of the Innocents. She holds the sword. All these figures, life-size, sculpted in half-relief, form the backs of the canons' stalls. All the characters from the Old and New Testaments are there.

In the stained-glass windows there are only figures from the Old Testament. Pagan allegories find a place among these figures. Among others, *Death*. Beautiful, grave, dressed as a nun, half-veiled, she holds a skull in one hand, and a mirror in the other, in which she looks at herself. She seems to be contrasting death to beauty. — The prophet Habakkuk, beside a hut, a bow in his hand, wearing boots, and with a Germanic beard. A crossbow depicting the triumph of Maximilian. — Four stalls depict a minor drama, to strange effect in this grave choir: Uriah speaks of his betrayal to Saint George, and points to Bathsheba, who is tenderly gazing at King David. — Various stalls are distinguished by coats of arms and attributes. The stall of Archbishop Augustine de Maupeou, with his coat of arms. The fleurs-de-lis have been scraped off. Only a lion remains. — The stall of Cardinal Jean d'Armagnac, Archbishop of Auch, to the left of the door as you enter, matching, though lower than, the archbishop's throne,

and larger than the other canonical stalls, with Adam and Eve carved on the backrest, and the serpent in the shadows. It was later the stall of the King of France who held the title of first canon of the cathedral of Auch. Another archbishop's stall. Tall and splendid. With Saints Peter and Paul as backrests.

In the middle of the choir is an immense lectern on the four sides of which are engraved the four cardinal names: *Petrus, Paulus, Joannes, Jacobus* (*Peter, Paul, John, James*). The fleurs-de-lis have been scratched over everywhere.

Chapter XXI: From Auch to Agen.

September 4th

Night. — The carriage was moving swiftly. I was asleep. However, I could perceive, vaguely, the noise of the wheels and the galloping of the horses, the brightness of the moon, and the fresh night wind. Then my sleep became deeper. A jolt woke me. I half-opened my eyes.

There was a precipice to my right. I could see only the edge of the road. The sky was so unusual in appearance that, still half-immersed in dreams, I was for a moment unaware of what I was looking at. Patches of mist were rising on the horizon to the right; a few torn and brownish clouds mingled with them. A strange light, created by the setting moon, and the breaking dawn, floated over all. At first, I thought the sky, marbled with black clouds and white fragments of mist, of which I could see only a corner through the narrow square of the window, was an immense mountain whose escarpment was lost in infinity. The stars seemed to me like shepherds' fires lit, here and there, on that gigantic slope.

Then I awoke completely, and the strange optical illusion was dispelled, though the spectacle remained admirable. I saw constellations we usually only see when they are above our heads setting, on the horizon. The Great Bear, already half-enveloped in the mists, seemed monstrous in size. Its seven stars shone like seven small moons; its immense chariot tilted towards to the Earth, behind which its splendid team was about to vanish, granted the whole sky an extraordinary and terrible aspect.

An effect of fog. Still half-asleep as we arrived in Agen, I thought I saw the sea. It was the Garonne that was playing a Gascon trick on me.

Chapter XXII: From Périgueux to Saintes

September 5th

Périgueux

Saint-Front Cathedral. An initial square tower served as a porch. Today it is buried in a block of houses. A baker lives there and rents its four floors to poor families who dry their laundry at those windows said to have been built by the Templars. A fortress-church for soldier-monks. Once past this first tower, one is in a narrow courtyard which adjoins the bell-tower. An admirable Romanesque tower. Almost-Roman pilasters. At the top, a string of columns pressed against each other, bearing a stone tiara. A rough, original, and rare form. — Inside the church, on the left, a magnificent wooden altar from the time of Louis XIII. An ‘Assumption’. Dazed figures of the apostles. Spiral columns around which angels, birds, squirrels, eagles, a whole fantastic world, clamber and twist.

The entire church is whitewashed. Corinthian columns from the ninth century. Four enormous square pillars, pierced by cross-shaped archivolt, support the central dome, which is oval as in the Orient. The church is shaped like a Greek cross and has five domes.

In the choir, below the lectern, is the tombstone of Saint-Front. The lectern allows the first words of the epitaph to be read:

SEPVE

CHRVN

BEATI

FRON

and hides the rest. Saint-Front was the first apostle of Périgord.

On the climb to the bell-tower, one has to stop halfway, and visit the top of the church vault. Very curious. Timber frames. Dust. Caves. Crude sculptures, truncated columns that look like mummies standing in their cases and leaning against the wall. Ladders. Square holes, former cells of razed bell-towers. The five domes were uncovered. In the last century, a roof was built over them. Hence this strange interior, a mixture of chance and architecture, reminiscent of Piranesi’s nightmares. The previous bishop (*Thomas-Marie-Joseph Gousset*), now Archbishop of Reims, demolished the Romanesque choir to enlarge his garden.

From the top of the tower one can see the whole city, a venerable mass of gables and turrets, one of those labyrinths of pointed roofs in which the fantastic and rich genius of the fifteenth century appears with all its fantasies.

The landscape is composed of two sections, a reddish city, a green plain; the Isle, a pretty river, marks the separation; a circle of hills, borders and surrounds the basin. In the background one sees, at the end of a street called the Rue des Vieux-Cimetières, the Tour de Vésone (*the tower of Vesunna, a tutelary goddess of the Petrocorii, a Gallic tribe*), an ancient temple of the goddess, and on the heights the vague outlines of a Roman camp.

The roof, built in the last century, hides the domes, and spoils the church's silhouette. Grass grows on the bell-tower. One climbs ladder after ladder, to the line of small columns. Some are made of marble. Externally, time has carved holy-water fonts into the stone, which the rain keeps filled. Beneath the church pavement is a crypt full of bones.

The Tour de Vésone. — A temple of the goddess which the Middle Ages considered a sinister place. It was here that criminals were hanged. An enormous tower built of small stones. There was a marble covering which has collapsed. The tower, gutted to the east, perpendicularly like the castles that Cardinal Richelieu dismantled, is so large that it looks like a small amphitheatre. It is in a vineyard which one enters through a door, which sets a bell ringing. The owner thus earns a few sous from showing it. Sections of Roman columns. A cornfield. Vineyards. An orchard. — I found some charming Renaissance debris inside the tower, mixed with the ancient rubble. A lawn. A small grassy eminence where the gallows were planted. Four ceilings, still indicated by scars on the wall, have collapsed, successively. On the very spot where the gallows once stood, next to a stone resembling a Roman altar, lies a delightful Renaissance relic that, broken by chance, has the shape of a cross. A salamander is carved at its centre, and two angels praying on either side. A sixteenth century edifice, a chapel or altar no doubt, must have been erected next to the Tower. The lawn is covered with scabious, and flowering hemlock. Around what remains of the tower stand nine archivolted bays that have been walled up with brick.

Château Barrière. — Next to the Tour de Vésone. A beautiful ruin. A charming interior, from the fifteenth century. Roman remains. Entablatures. Hollowed-out columns used as troughs for a reservoir. Roman capitals used as seats. Ivy serves as a tapestry. The upper doorframe of a large fireplace with small columns. A Roman altar in a casement. A pretty door with an ornate transom. Traces of excavations. A brick pavement. The ruins appear to belong to an intelligent owner.

After Périgueux

Château-l'Évêque

A charming sixteenth-century chatelet, the summer residence of the bishops of Périgueux. It belongs to a lawyer and justice of the peace.

Angoulême

A glimpse. Daybreak. Five in the morning. A beautiful thirteenth and fifteenth-century castle in the centre of the town. It serves a purpose, since there's a sentry. So much the better, it is unlikely to be demolished (*it was remodelled as the Town Hall, 1858-1869*). A Romanesque cathedral (*Saint-Pierre*). An admirable portal with five levels of bas-reliefs, the wall covered with arabesques and statues, but spoiled by a blue window-shutter right in the middle. A beautiful Romanesque bell tower, five-storeyed, like the portal.

After Angoulême

Jarnac

No vestige of the historic site (*of the Battle of Jarnac in 1569, between Catholic and Huguenot forces. The Huguenot leader Louis I de Bourbon, Prince de Condé was killed*). A long white village with a yellow poster on a wall reading: *Ball at Monsieur Baraud's*. — I recall seeing at the Duke of Rohan's in Laroche-Guyon, in 1821, in the antechamber, a beautiful and rare painting on wood representing the duel (*known as the 'Coup de Jarnac'*) between Guy Chabot de Saint-Gelais, the future second Baron de Jarnac, and Francois de Vivonne, Lord of La Châtaigneraye (*in which the latter was the unexpected loser; mortified by his defeat, he tore off his bandages and died as a result of the fight in 1547*).

Cognac

An interesting and fairly well-preserved old town.

Saintes

The old bridge has lost all its character. Mutilated, and repointed. The triumphal arch (*The Arch of Germanicus*) is currently being demolished to be transported elsewhere, they say (*saved, by Prosper Mérimée, and rebuilt on the river-bank*). Necessitating a barbaric and ridiculous operation. The bridge is cluttered with the debris of the arch, reduced to dust. I saw a stone numbered C5 being carried away; a jolt almost caused the cart to overturn. At a steeper angle the stone would have fallen onto the pavement and crumbled to dust, like two-thirds of the monument. Only the two lower arches remain. The workmen on them, the framework above and around them, the crane at the top. The old stones, furrowed by age and rain, are being crushed under the weight of the ladders. At the corner, there, on the right, an engaged, fluted, cantilevered column will obviously have to be rebuilt, or will be lost. This is called ‘rescuing’ a monument. The bridge, it seems, was hindering navigation. At the time it was built, the sea, as an old sailor told me, was *felt* more in Saintes than it is now. Now the piles are three or four feet too high. They tried to reduce them beneath one arch. But it is such a skilfully knotted framework that it locks together as a whole. It could not have been reduced in one place, without the rest collapsing. Hence this very regrettable demolition.

In Saintes, there are three beautiful bell-towers; one Romanesque (*attached to Sainte Marie des Saintes*) on the right bank of the Charente; the other two, Gothic, on the left bank. Of these latter two-bell towers, the first, in a very rich and noble manner, is the oldest. It is attached to the church of Saint Peter (*Saintes Cathedral*) which has a beautiful portal. This bell-tower is topped with an unfortunate dome (*the church was rebuilt, starting in the fifteenth century; the spire was never completed*). No stained-glass windows, whitewashed walls and at the back of the apse a pretty Renaissance chapel. On the outside wall of the apse this sign: *Bossuet, court usher*. The other Gothic bell-tower, from the fifteenth century, is attached to the Basilica of Saint Eutrope, outside the city. Nearby is a Roman amphitheatre (I failed to visit it).

Nothing is as charming as the Charente from Saintes to Rochefort. A narrow, clear, lively river. Meadows and hills. Old castles like Taillebourg, old towns like Saint-Savinien. A few miles further on, this river enters the marshlands, and becomes a pool of mud that the tide stirs and renders fetid.

Chapter XXIII: The Isle of Oléron (*l’Île d’Oléron*)

September 8th

Imagine a ladder lying on a sheet of ice on the ground, or better still a window frame laid flat with its grid of glass panes; grant this window half a mile or more each way, and consider it a salt marsh. When the panes look frosted, it is because salt is forming.

Now, imagine a long, flat, narrow strip of land, which, in bird's eye view, appears covered with these immense windows, and between them narrow strips of ground with gorse and tamarinds; here and there a few meadows, a few vineyards, which are fertilised with kelp, and which yield an oily and bitter wine, a few clumps of trees, a few paths; here and there, white villages along the beach; on the side towards mainland France, a fortified border; on the ocean side, an escarpment termed the wild coast; at the southern tip, dunes strewn with pines which announce the vicinity of moorland; cover this land with grey, dirty mists which rise from the marshes on all sides, and there you have the Isle of Oléron.

If, after having contemplated the whole, you consider it in detail, sadness increases with every step you take, and you feel your heart gradually gripped by a gloomy pang.

A mud-bank, an empty horizon, two or three mills turning slowly; lean cattle in meagre pastures; on the edge of the marshes, piles of salt, in grey or white cones depending on whether they are covered with thatch to survive the winter or exposed to the sun to dry; on the thresholds of the houses, beautiful pallid girls, livid children, dejected and shivering men, few old people, fever everywhere; this is the little gloomy world into which you sink.

It is not easy to reach the Isle of Oléron. You have to want to do so. The traveller only arrives at the Isle of Oléron in stages; it seems it wishes to give one time to think and change one's mind.

From Rochefort one is conveyed to Marennes, in a sort of omnibus that leaves Rochefort twice a day. This is one's initiation.

Fourteen miles amidst the salt marshes. Vast plains, from which, the beautiful English-style stone steeples with spires of Moëze (*Saint Pierre-et-Saint Paul*) and Marennes (*Saint-Pierre-de-Sales*) rise, like two obelisks in a cemetery; all along the road, pools of green water; in all the fields, which are marshes, enormous padlocked fences; no passers-by; from time to time a Customs officer with a rifle in his hand standing in front of his hut of earth and brushwood with a pale, dismayed face; no trees; no shelter from the wind and rain if it is winter, from the sun if it is a heatwave; icy cold or a hot furnace; in the middle of the marshes, the unhealthy village of Brouage enclosed within its square of walls, with its ruins from the time of the Wars of Religion, its low houses, whitewashed like the tombs spoken of in the Bible (*Matthew 23:27*), and its ghosts shivering before the doors at midday. Such is the first stage of the journey.

At Marennes, if one insists, a cabriolet driver will seize one, deposit one, the fifteenth passenger, into a vehicle legally allowed to hold at most six; and with the fifteen victims inside, and a mountain of packages on top will depart, to the lame and faltering trot of a single horse, across the moors and heather, for the point.

There, if one still insists, one will be disembarked or embarked, as one chooses, in one of those chancy ferries that the local people term 'risk-alls'. It has a crew of three, four oars, two masts and two sails, one of which is called the 'wind-cutter'. One has a couple of sea-miles to cover on this plank. The sailors who load the boat begin by placing the oxen, horses, and carts, safely, in the sturdiest section; then the baggage is stowed; then in the remaining spaces, between the horns of an ox and the wheels of a cart, the passengers are inserted.

There one dreams, at the discretion of the wind, sun, or rain. During the journey, you hear the passengers' feverish moaning, and the roar of the Maumusson strait (*Pertuis de Maumusson*) which is at the tip of the island and which sailors can hear from thirty miles away. As a diversion, I will explain the cause of this noise to you.

The Maumusson passage is one of the sea's navels. The waters of the Seudre and the waters of the Gironde, the great currents of the Ocean and the small currents of the southern extremity of the island, mingle there from four different directions over the shifting sands that the sea has piled along the coast, and make a whirlpool of their liquid mass. It is not a chasm, the sea appears flat and smooth on the surface, one can barely distinguish a slight fluctuation; but one hears a formidable noise from beneath the calm surface.

Any large ship that touches the whirlpool is lost. It halts in its course, then sinks slowly, sinks ever deeper, and gradually vanishes from sight. Soon the gun ports are no longer visible, then the deck plunges beneath the waves, then the yards and topsails, until only the tip of the mast can be seen, then a small ripple appears in the sea; everything has disappeared. Nothing can stop the slow and terrible movement of the fearsome spiral current that has seized the ship.

However, vessels of shallow draught cross the strait boldly, without danger, as the sailors tell one. A moment later they add: 'Yet on one occasion old Monier, the castle pilot, only had time to throw himself into the sea, letting his boat sink, and swam for four hours before breaking free of the undertow.'

Amidst these conversations, the boat arrives, the wind-cutter sail is lowered, the anchor is deployed, and we are moored at the pier. On the right is a fortress (*Citadelle du Château-d'Oléron*) which is a prison, on the left a hideous beach which is also a source of marsh-fever; one disembarks between the two.



'The boat arrives' - Victor Hugo (1894)

[*Paris Musées*](#)

Pretty Charente maids, with immense white headdresses which they wear with grace, wait for one on the pierhead, take one's suitcase and overnight bag, and lead the way.

You traverse a rampart, at the foot of which a swarm of a few hundred men dressed in grey, haggard, silent, and guarded by gendarmes, in all attitudes of work, dig trenches in the foul mud. They are men condemned to hard labour, poor soldiers, most of them deserters, victims

of homesickness, whom the law does not brand, but whom the disciplinary code punishes severely, and who die here, though not condemned to death.

While reflecting on all this, you arrive at the *White Horse*, which is the local inn. A good inn, to be fair. You are shown into a vast whitewashed room, amidst which a large four-poster bed juts out to form a promontory, in the fashion of the seventeenth century. The walls are white, the sheets are white; the host is cordial, the hostess is gracious; everything is appropriate and pleasing in this house. Only one must not gaze at the water in one's water jug, though it is considered fresh water on the island.

The evening of my arrival in Oléron, I was overwhelmed with sadness. The island seemed desolate to me, yet I did not dislike it. I walked along the beach, wading through the kelp so as to avoid the mud. I walked along the castle moat. The condemned men had just returned, the roll-call was being taken, and I heard their voices responding successively to the voice of the inspecting officer as their names were called. To my right the marshes stretched as far as the eye could see, to my left the lead-coloured sea was lost in the mists that masked the coast.

I saw no other human creature on the whole island except a soldier on sentry duty, motionless at the crest of an entrenchment, and silhouetted against the fog. I could barely distinguish, in the distance on the horizon, the small fortress (*Fort Louvois, also known as Fort Chapus*), isolated in the sea between the mainland and the isle, which is called the *pâté (sand-castle)*, locally. No sound from the sea. No sails. No birds. In the depths of the sky, at sunset, an enormous, round moon appeared which seemed, amidst the livid mists, only a reddened, gilded imprint of the moon.

I felt dead at heart. Perhaps everything I saw was coloured by my despondency. Perhaps another day, at another time, I would have received a different impression. But that evening all felt funereal, full of melancholy. It seemed to me that the island was a great coffin floating on the waves, and the moon a funeral torch above.

Chapter XXIV: Editor's Epilogue (*Hetzel and Quantin Edition, 1880*)

The next day, September 9th, Hugo quit the unhealthy island, where he had experienced feelings of oppression, and travelled to Rochefort. While waiting for the coach to leave, he entered a café, where he asked for a beer. His eyes fell on a newspaper.

Suddenly, a witness saw him turn pale, place his hand to his heart as if to prevent it from bursting, rise, leave the town, and walk like a madman along the ramparts. The newspaper he had read recounted a disaster at Villequier.

Five days earlier, on September 4th, 1843, his daughter Léopoldine had died while boating on the Seine. She had been married for scarcely six months to Charles Vacquerie, who, unable to save her, had died with her. They were buried in the churchyard at Villequier, in the same coffin.

(The similarity of their deaths with those of William and Sarah Pattison, drowned in the Lac de Gaube, is striking, Hugo, as previously described, having viewed the memorial stone there, barely a fortnight before, on August 24th.)

Hugo's travels, therefore, were interrupted, and he returned in haste to Paris.

The End of Part III, and of Hugo's '*Pyrenées*'