

## TRAVELLERS' TALES.

"Wenten forth in hure way with many unwyse tales,  
And haven leve to lyen all hure lyf-tyme."

I DON'T know about travellers' "haven leve" to lie, but that they "taken leve" no one can doubt who has ever followed their wandering footsteps. They say the most charming and audacious things, in blessed indifference to the fact that somebody may possibly believe them. They start strange hopes and longings in the human heart, and they pave the way for disappointments and disasters. They record the impression of a careless moment, as though it were the experience of a lifetime.

There is a delightful little book on French rivers written by an imaginative gentleman named Molloy. It is a rose-tinted volume from beginning to end; but the page or two devoted to Amboise would lure any right-minded reader to forsake his home and kindred, and to seek that favored spot. Touraine is full of beauty, and steeped to the lips in historic crimes. She delights the eye, and she stirs the heart, turn where we will, or take her as we may. But Mr. Molloy has claimed for Amboise something rarer in France than loveliness or romance, something which no French town has ever yet possessed, — a slumberous and soul-satisfying silence. "There was no sound," he writes, "but the noise of the water rushing through the arches of the bridge. We dropped under the very walls of the castle without seeing a soul. It might have been the palace of the Sleeping Beauty, but was only one of the retrospective cities that had no concern with the present."

"Absolute stillness" he found brooding over the ivied towers and ancient water front. Exquisite tranquillity, gentle indifference met him at every step. When, on the following morning, the crew pushed off in their frail boat,

less than a dozen people assembled to see the start. Even the peril of the exploit failed to awaken curiosity; and Mr. Molloy was of the opinion that "Amboise did not often witness such a gathering" as the nine men who stood silent on the shore when the outrigger shot into the swirling stream.

The book, it is true, was written some years ago; but Touraine is not Colorado nor Oregon. Nothing ever changes in those old towns, the page of whose history has been turned for centuries. Therefore we listened to a traveller's tale, though much experience has taught us, or should have taught us, that there is not a quiet corner in all France. It is to England we must go if we seek for silence, that gentle, all-pervading silence which wraps us in a mantle of content. It was in Porlock that Coleridge wrote *Kubla Khan*, transported, Heaven knows whither, by virtue of the hushed repose that consecrates the sleepiest hamlet in Great Britain. It was at Stoke Pogis that Gray composed his *Elegy*. He could never have written

"And all the air a solemn stillness holds,"

in the vicinity of a French village.

But Amboise! Who would go to rural England, and live on ham and eggs, if it were possible that a silent Amboise awaited them? The fair fresh vegetables of France, her ripe red strawberries and glowing cherries lured us no less than the vision of a blood-stained castle, and the wide sweep of the Loire flowing through the joyous landscape of Touraine. In the matter of beauty, Amboise outstrips all praise. In the matter of romance, she leaves nothing to be desired. Her splendid old Châteaueau — half palace and half fortress — towers over the river which mirrors its glory and perpetuates its shame. She is a storehouse of historic memories, she is the loveliest of little towns, she is in

the heart of a district which bears the finest fruit and has the best cooks in France; but she is not and never has been silent since the days when Louis XI. was crowned, and she gave wine freely to all who chose to be drunk and merry at her charge.

If she does not give her wine to-day, she sells it so cheaply — lying girt by vine-clad hills — that many of her sons are drunk and merry still. The sociable custom of setting a table in the street prevails at Amboise. Around it the peasants take their evening meal, to the accompaniment of song and sunburnt mirth. It sounds poetic, and it looks picturesque, — like a picture by Teniers or Jan Steen, — but it is not a habit conducive to repose. As far as I can judge — after a month's experience — the one thing no inhabitant of Amboise ever does is to go to bed. At midnight the river front is alive with cheerful and strident voices. The French countryman habitually speaks to his neighbor as if they were half a mile apart, and when a number are conversing in this key, the air rings with their clamor. They sing in the same stentorian notes. When our admirable waiter — who is also our best friend — frees his soul in song as he is setting the table, the walls of the dining-room quiver and vibrate. By five o'clock in the morning every one, except ourselves, is on foot, and out of doors. We might as well be, for it is custom, not sleep, that keeps us in our beds. The hay wagons are rolling over the bridge, the farm hands are going to work, the waiter — in an easy undress — is exchanging voluble greetings with his many acquaintances, the life of the town has begun.

The ordinary week-day life, I mean, for on Sundays the market people have assembled by four, and there are nights when the noises never cease. It is no unusual thing to be awakened an hour or two after midnight by a tumult so loud and deep that my first impression

is one of conspiracy or revolution. The sound is not unlike the hoarse roar of Sir Henry Irving's admirably trained mobs, — the only mobs I have ever heard, — and I jump out of bed, wondering if the President has been shot, or the Chamber of Deputies blown up by dynamite. Can these country people have heard the news, as the shepherds of Peloponnesus heard of the fall of Syracuse, through the gossiping of wood devils, and, like the shepherds, have hastened to carry the intelligence? When I look out of my window, the crowd seems small for the uproar it is making. The waiter, who, I am convinced, merely dozes on a dining-room chair, so as to be in readiness for any diversion, stands in the middle of the road, gesticulating with fine dramatic gestures. I cannot hear what is being said, because everybody is speaking at once; but after a while the excitement dies away, and the group slowly disperses, shouting final vociferations from out of the surrounding darkness. The next day when I ask the cause of the disturbance, Armand, the waiter, looks puzzled at my question. He does not seem aware that anything out of the way has happened, but finally explains that "quelques amis" were passing the hotel, and that Madame must have heard them stop and talk. The incident is apparently of too common an order to linger in his mind.

As for the Amboise dogs, I am still in doubt as to whether they really possess a supernatural strength which enables them to bark twenty-four hours without intermission, or whether they have divided themselves into day and night pickets, so that when one band retires to rest, the other takes up the interrupted duty. The French villager, who values all domestic pets in proportion to the noise they can make, delights especially in his dogs, giant black and tan terriers for the most part, of indefatigable perseverance in their one line of activity. Their bark is high-pitched and querulous rather than deep and de-

fiant, but for continuity it has no rival upon earth. Our hotel — in all other respects unexceptionable — possesses two large bulldogs who have long ago lost their British phlegm, and acquired the agitated yelp of their Gallic neighbors. They could not be quiet if they wanted to, for heavy sleigh-bells (unique decorations for a bulldog) hang about their necks, and jangle merrily at every step. In the courtyard live a colony of birds. One virulent parrot who shrieks its inarticulate wrath from morning until night, but who does — be it remembered to its credit — go to sleep at sundown; three paroquets; two cockatoos of ineffable shrillness; and a cageful of canaries and captive finches. When taken in connection with the dogs, the hotel cat, the operatic Armand, and the cook who plays “See, O Norma!” on his flute in the intervals of labor, it will be seen that Amboise does not so closely resemble the palace of the Sleeping Beauty as Mr. Molloy has given us to understand.

All other sounds, however, melt into a harmonious murmur when compared to the one great specialty of the village, — stone-cutting in the open streets. Whenever one of the picturesque old houses is crumbling into utter decay, a pile of stone is dumped before it, and the easy-going masons of Amboise prepare to patch up its walls. No particular method is observed, the work progresses after the fashion of a child’s

block house, and the principal labor lies in dividing the lumps of stone. This is done with a rusty old iron saw pulled slowly backward and forward by two men, the sound produced resembling a succession of agonized shrieks. It goes on for hours and hours, with no apparent result except the noise; while a handsome boy, in a striped blouse and broad blue sash, completes the discord by currying the stone with an iron currycomb, — a process I have never witnessed before, and ardently hope never to witness again. If one could imagine fifty school-children all squeaking their slate pencils down their slates together — who does not remember that blood-curdling music of our youth? — one might gain some feeble notion of the acute agony induced by such an instrument of torture. Agony to the nervous visitor alone, for the inhabitants of Amboise love their shrieking saws and currycombs, just as they love their shrieking parrots and cockatoos. They gather in happy crowds to watch the blue-sashed boy and drink in the noise he makes. We drink it in too, as he is immediately beneath our windows. Then we look at the castle walls glowing in the splendor of the sunset, and at the Loire bending in broad curves between the gray-green poplar trees; at the noble width of the horizon, and at the deepening tints of the sky; and we realize that a silent Amboise would be an earthly Paradise, too fair for this sinful world.

*Agnes Repplier.*

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## NOX DORMIENDA.

LET three persons read the story of *Œdipus*. The first, notwithstanding the almost superhuman suffering of the hero of the Greek drama, would still deem it inconceivable that *Œdipus* should have come to desire only death, to crave that as the one boon. The second, moved ir-

resistibly by the infinite pathos of the tragedy, would nevertheless understand it, and would admit, reluctantly or otherwise, the necessity of the consequence. The third reader would simply acquiesce with nodding head, untouched, apparently, by the pity of it.