

## The Kipling Motoring Diaries

March/April 1913

*It looks rather as though there may be one whole tour (summer 1912) missing from the typescript of the Motoring Diaries. In the winter/spring of 1912 they had gone to Engelberg by train, as usual, and had then travelled direct to Florence for three weeks, also by train. They then went to Venice for two weeks, then to Paris, where they spent two days before going to the Depews at Chateau d'Annel for five days, and thence home by train to Calais, boat to Dover and home by car.*

*They made a tour in England at the beginning of September, just six days to the West Country and back; and it is this short tour of which there is no record. We think there may have been one, because the 1913 spring tour starts very abruptly.*

*They started the year at Engelberg. At the beginning of February they returned to Paris, where they left Elsie, who was going to spend two months there, improving her French (John had returned to Wellington some two weeks earlier). The Kiplings turned south once more, and travelled by train and boat to Egypt, where they undertook a Nile cruise to Assouan and back. (See John Radcliffe's NRG notes on Egypt of the Magicians.) At the end of the third week in March, they returned to Marseilles where they were met by their car (and their friend Landon, as in 1911) for the tour back through France. The typescript has no introduction.*



1913

Thurs. Marseilles to Avignon via Aix (*en Provence*) – left at 1.20.

Fri. Avignon.

*They hadn't been as far east as Avignon in 1911, so spent the whole day here, exploring and getting their 'land-legs' again.*

Sat, Mar 22.

Left Avignon 8.30 for Albi. Fine blue morning. Ran to Pont du Gard and Uzès. Decided to cut out Alais (today, spelled Alès) and make straight for Le Vigan for lunch. Reached Le Vigan 12.7 after severe climb through mountains and mist. Fine lunch – including trouts and larks. Left 1.10 for Albi via St. Affrique – mountain gorges and lovely scenery. Had cup chocolate at Café Moderne, St. Affrique which much set us up. Weather cleared. Dropped into St. Sernin-sur-Rance and did an awful 1200 ft. climb over to Alban: thence via Villefranche d'Albigeois to Albi (Hotel du Vigan) which reached at 7.7 p.m. Run 191½ miles. R. conned the map.



*Le Vigan, Gard*

*Their journey took them through the southern fringes of the Massif Centrale. The valleys run east to west, with the rivers in deep gorges. Their lunch at Le Vigan seems to have been very hurried – to get a “fine lunch” in a French restaurant in a scant hour suggests that they must have bolted their food – no wonder Kipling developed ulcers. We surmise (thanks to Susan Treggiari and John Walker) that R must have been Kipling himself.*

Easter Sunday, March 23.

Albi (Hotel du Vigan). No bath except a bain de pied (*foot bath*) a little bigger than a flower pot. A rainy day. Went to see Albi cathedral which is a marvel of pure brick. Saw “Life” at Café at five p.m. Meals very good.



*Albi, the Cathedral of St Cecilia*

*Albi Cathedral is, indeed, a marvel in brick: it is said to be the largest brick building in the world, being so built because of a lack of suitable locally available stone. We assume that the reference to “Life” means that the Kiplings sat in a café enjoying an afternoon cup of chocolate, while they watched the life of a French provincial town ebb and flow around them.*

Mar. 24 Easter Monday.

Dull in morn till 9.30. Thereafter sunshine and clouds. Albi to Limoges by Cordes, Villefranche-de-Rouergue (with adorable church porch across road) and lunch at Figeac: all divine views throughout. Arr. Figeac 11.20. Left at 1 for Gramat: deserted to Rocamadour which is a cleft in the ground, filled with a village – met a girl there who acted as a guide and liked London. Left Rocamadour 3 p.m. for Brive via Martel: stopped at Uzerche for chocolate (another marvellous town in a cleft by a river, where one dog committed suicide). Left Uzerche at 5.40, reached Limoges at 7.10. Motor went (?) over last 35 miles. Landon conned till Uzerche when R. took on.

Mileage:

Albi to Figeac	103
Figeac to Martel	51
Martel to Limoges	123
To Rocamadour	<u>10</u>
	8)287 Km
	36
	<u>5</u>
	190 miles ( <i>should be 180 miles</i> )

*We assume that “deserted” is a mis-reading of “diverted”. This editor spent a number of holidays in this area in the 1980s and `90s, and would endorse Kipling’s comments on the scenery. Today, Rocamadour, a pilgrim destination for a thousand years, is a ‘must see’ for every tourist who goes to south west France.*

*Kipling took a tremendous interest in the cathedrals and churches of France. Interestingly though, he does not refer to the bastides, fortified towns built largely in the 14<sup>th</sup> and 15<sup>th</sup> centuries, when the English were overlords of Aquitaine. This was the country through which the “White Company” of English archers marched, in the tale by his friend Conan Doyle, which Kipling must have read.*

March 25<sup>th</sup>.

Limoges which Mr. L much admired and took us to see some enamels in a shop window. Also saw one rich and one poor wedding in Limoges Cathedral. The hotel is like the enamels. So is all the rest. Left Limoges at 12.30 after bad lunch for Bourges, via Chateauroux. (115 miles)

At Ambazac saw the celebrated Chasse of St. Etienne which was once stolen (copper gilt and set with precious stones). Sacristan told us the story. Ambazac was a diversion. Retd. to main road near Raze. Thence to Bessines: not interesting. Chocolate at Chateauroux where one Jules (son of Jules who kept Jules’ restaurant) asserted that he knew Landon well (from L’s demeanour thereafter fear this only too true). Thence to Bourges direct. Where Boule d’Or was still in candle stage – we noticed it but bath was good. Mistook wayside chapel for Bourges Cathedral. *Mem.* Must not tell La Demoiselle de Beauvais.



*La Chasse de St Etienne*

*The Chasse de St Etienne is a 12th century reliquary, a fine example of Limousin enamel-work. Limoges has long been a centre for the production of decorative enamels.*

*We assume that Jules' restaurant was a London restaurant, probably in the West End, or in the vicinity of Fleet Street, Landon being a journalist*

*It was clearly unusual to find a good quality hotel in France, still without electricity. How they came to mistake a wayside chapel for the cathedral passes understanding – the Cathedral is a very large and imposing building. Possibly “La Demoiselle de Beauvais” was a daughter of the house in the hotel at Beauvais (Hotel de France et d’Angleterre) where they had stayed twice before.*

March 26<sup>th</sup>. A grey damp wet overcast or continuously raining day which we spent alternately in Bourges Cathedral and at the telephone making love to Cook. L was taken with spasms about going to the King of G's funeral.

None the less, saw Cathedral in morn, where met highly intelligent French priest who knew all about the Jungle Book. Gratifying to notice the spread of civilisation in Gaul.



*Stained glass in the Cathedral of St Etienne, Bourges*

After lunch to house of Jacques Coeur which Landon couldn't stomach. We liked it. Then to Cathedral again to rejoice more in the windows. Rain and Rain and Rain all day but we behaved beautifully. A woman with a bad face came into our salon to find an alleged Baedeker which she had not left there. Hotel Boule d'Or good but without electricity.

*The "making love to Cook" was to Thomas Cook, the travel agent. Kipling wrote to Frank Cook, a grandson of Thomas, and then one of the firm's managers to congratulate him on the efficiency of the Paris office, which had provided a solution (Pinney, **Letters**, Vol. 4, ppm 178/9. At this time, Kipling had not had anything to do with Greece, in any official capacity, and it is not clear why he should have felt it was incumbent upon him to attend. In the event, neither he nor Landon went.*



*Jacques Coeur*

*Jacques Coeur was a French merchant prince of the 15<sup>th</sup> century, and a native of Bourges: he served King Charles VII in three embassies, including one to the Vatican, in which he ended the schism between the rival Popes in Rome and Avignon. His commercial empire formed the basis for French cultural influence in the Levant, which still remains to some degree. He may be compared to Cardinal Wolsey in England, and like Wolsey, lost the Royal favour and fell massively from grace.*

Mar. 27<sup>th</sup>.

Left Bourges at 9.30 after letters from John and his acting housemaster. Dull and cheerless day at first but improving steadily to almost perfect evening. Stopped at La Charité (which C and I had glimpsed on our way from Nevers with Fleck) – a beautiful church (all whitewashed). circa 1130. Thence to Vézelay, Hotel de la Poste and Lion d'Or where a most excellent déjeuner. Climbed to Cathedral and terrace where saw gipsies camping. Went into crypt: had big doors opened, wh. old lady couldn't shut again. Do not forget the fish and omelette. Left Vézelay at nearly 2 p.m. C saw church at Pontigny wh. stopped to look at – all bathed in sea-green light – with tomb of St. Edmund of Pontigny behind high altar – evening sunlight on front: thence to Auxerre which we did not like.

Thence to Troyes over perfect roads: rchd. Troyes at 5.45 p.m. Hotel Saint Laurent. Went out with Landon to look at Church of St. Urbain and Troyes Cathedral. Got 30" impression of latter – darkness and one jewelled eye in the east – ere we were turned out. Very tired and full of impressions. Run 149 miles.

*La Charité is a small town standing on the east bank of the Loire where it makes its big sweeping turn from flowing northwards from its source, to west, to run past Orléans and so to the sea. Fleck was the Rolls-Royce chauffeur who had been loaned to them, along with a car, to drive them home from Vernet in 1911.*



*Vézelay Abbey*

*The great abbey church of Vézelay is built at the top of a spur of rock, and the 'terrace' to which they climbed (and it is quite a climb, too, this editor has done it – twice) overlooks a precipitate drop to the valley below.*

*Pontigny is also a large abbey church of some repute: and St. Edmund of Pontigny is better known as Edmund of Abingdon (c. 1174-1240). He was an English cleric, and strong Archbishop of Canterbury, who kept his church, and King Henry III, in order. He died at Pontigny on his way to Rome.*

March 28<sup>th</sup>.

Reims. Arose at 7.30 a.m (a mad garçon in attendance) and at 9.30 walked for two hours round Troyes. First the Cathedral and its treasures: not. (*probably RK's shorthand for 'nota bene' – the full stop is distinct*) one Irish style missal.

Next St. Urbain (potted Gothic, too good and too restored), next to St. Jean where Henry V m'd Catherine of France: a rowdy old ch. wh. had evidently seen life. Next, the Madeleine with hanging Gunter screen between two pillars (next thro' Ruelle des Chats where streets nearly touched). Then Landon tried to buy books while we watched coffee roasting and made a purchase at a cutlery shop. Left Troyes at 12.50 for Reims, via Châlons-sur-Marne. A few kms outside C-s-M the bracket of our exhaust broke and M. had to tie it up with rope. Went on at 3.12. Reached Rheims (*RK spells the town both English fashion with an 'h', and French fashion, without.*) at 5.45. To Crédit Lyonnais in haste to get money. Found bank shut at five. To Cathedral after chocolate. Saw A WINDOW. Dist. 75 miles.

*The church of St. Urbain, although building started in the 13<sup>th</sup> century, was not fully completed until the first half of the 17<sup>th</sup>. During the Revolution, the church was used as a grain store, and then a warehouse. Thereafter, it was allowed to decay, until a restoration project was started in mid-19<sup>th</sup> century, but only completed in 1905. We do not know what Kipling meant by Gunter screen, but the church of the Madeleine is famous for its rood screen, a rarity in French churches.*



*The cathedral in Rheims is also noted for its stained glass, and we think that the WINDOW refers to one of the rose windows – Rheims cathedral has two, one in the west front, the other in the north transept.*

March 29<sup>th</sup>.

All day at Reims: grey and overcast and dark.

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*This is where this diary ends. They went on to Paris, the next day, staying there for six days and collecting Elsie, who had spent two months in Paris, improving her French. They crossed to England via Boulogne on 6 April, after spending one night in Abbeville.*

[R.K./A.J.W.W.]