

The Kipling Motoring Diaries

May 1923

The Kiplings did not take their winter break in the sun until quite late, this year. They left England at the end of March by sea, arriving in Toulon in the south of France a week later, where they stayed until their car arrived from England. They then moved to Monte Carlo for another ten days. They then left for home, going via Grenoble, Aix, Evian (they spent eleven days in the Aix-Evian area, meeting Perceval Landon (he was at Lausanne, reporting on a conference which was taking place there); then on to Bourg-en-Bresse, Dijon, Troyes, Villers-Cotterêts, Compiègne and Dieppe. This is Kipling's diary of that trip home.

May 4th 1923

Left Monte Carlo, still, hot blue weather, at 9.30. Mist from sea hid most of Mid Corniche views but as we went up valley of Var to PUGET-THENIES it got steadily warmer. The country was in late spring plumage with abundance of blossom – may and wisteria time. Reached P.T. at 1130. It is a little furnace. Vile dirty hotel (Augier) and not a good lunch. An official here took cognisance of our laissez-passer and wrote all the details down. Curious to see how each drop of water along the valley had been used for power. Left P.T. at 1. (It was here that E. in fits of mirth, first saw that I was wearing a knuttish green soft hat – made in Spain and bought in an Italian shop, with a faint perfume of high-class hair-oil. As the only place where I had been alone was the barber's at M.C. the evening before (and I recall a young knut being frizzed and massaged in an adjacent chair) I presume I must have swopped my old vile soft hat for his'n. But it was a curious affair.)



Col des Toutes Aures

Our climb through the gorges began after Entrevaux. Usual type cut or tunnel overhanging river, blinding heat reflected from rocks, and all the plants that rejoice in heat with their heads bare to the sun till it made yours ache. We climb to the Col of Toutes Aures – thence a long descent over rolling hills towards Vergon and Digne. Above Vergon and utterly alone, we came upon a rough stoned, windowless, apsidal chapel to N.D (*Notre Dame*), chilly as the grave, and, apparently as old as time, where men must have prayed before crossing the pass we had just whirled up in half an hour. Someone had presented it with a shapeless Virgin and Child and pillars above the altar in 1675 or '57. The rest might have come from the IX Cent. It was brown and wrinkled in the sun like a tortoise. The dead lay outside in the neglected grass and the whole was surrounded by a tight wall. Later on, we were held by a couple of mechanics in a light car who would neither pass, nor let us pass. We overtook him, and passed but, a few km out of Digne we had to slow for a cassis (wherein the road abounds) and he passed us roaring. Reached Digne in great afternoon heat at 3.30. Hotel clean with a good bathroom between our rooms. I lay down till 5. Then evening stroll of us three up and down the street all dirty and stale after day's work. A big church with open cagework belfry and one insistent clock – a neglected Musée (*museum*) – gutters of mountain water and electric light hardly worth turning off – three rivers seemed to join by memorial to the dead, with great sheets of pale silver shoals and muddy water from the hills. A line of barracks on a hillside and men playing bowls on a clear space by the river at the head of town, with marvellous skill and judgment: shops ostensibly open but really shut: the day's work being done and the people perspiring gently at their own doors. By river a sort of Prom(*enade*)- des Anglais, where young couples bicycled together and motors tore in. So to Hotel – very hot and to bed early. But the town was full of summer night footsteps and voices: as these ceased one heard the water swishing through the streets. At 4-5 Digne was lively awake and cleaning itself with the care of a cat. Breakfast at 8.15 in the hot little court, already carefully sprinkled. The whole of the town, so dirty the night before, had been redd up, swilled down and swept. No paint, little whitewash, but all clean. (Hotel Boyer-Mistre. Moderate dinner, but much good will).



Digne-les-Bains

This editor had thought his French was pretty good, but ‘cassis’ in this context was new to him – he only knowing the meaning as ‘blackcurrant’ or the liqueur of that flavour which forms the base of the kir royale, enjoyed as an aperitif. But it also means an irregularity in the road surface, either a ‘dip’ or a ‘bump’.

The ‘Promenade des Anglais is a well-known sea-front thoroughfare in Nice, originally so-named because it was the place where English visitors liked to foregather and take the air (rather like Hyde Park after Church Parade on Sunday).

We are slightly surprised that Kipling commented on the playing of ‘boules’ by the locals, we would have thought he must have seen it before on one of their earlier trips to France. Today, every small village in southern France has its ‘boules’ ground.

And to ‘redd’ something (meaning to clean up, or clear away) is not a word much used, other than in dialect.

May 5th

Left Digne at 9 a.m. Through broad cultivated lands to Sisteron. Good going. General impression of heat and verdure below and horned hills above becoming speckled with snow, then streaked, then patched. Hills with cockscombs of limestone rock and madly contorted strata alternating with pebbles and mud dumps.

A train of 41 trucks began to interfere with us at level crossings, one after another.

On the way from Sisteron to Larraigne (after we had passed a field of narcissi) at one such halt we overtook a heavily-loaded closed car with lady chauffeur who at that moment happened to be clutching a bottle of Black and White.



Reached Asprey-sur-Bouche at the unseemly hour of eleven a.m. still ignorant of when we should déjeuner. Held on, with some idea of getting out and munching biscuits by road side, when suddenly in a delicious upland valley came up the Hotel Reymond, by ry. stn. at Lus-le-Haut. Reymond himself, huddled into coat and collar, impressed us he had been 15 years “butlaire” in London and gave us a good lunch, all except coffee: served by pretty girl in blue with ridiculous likeness to Claire F(rewen),

Hotel very clean, built by Reymond himself 9 years back: now sought by charabancs. The whole valley could be developed for summer and winter resort. 9 feet of snow in winter (alt. 3200-odd feet).



Col de la Croix Haute

Left at 1 and rose on good roads to the Col la Haute (1176m)(3858ft) by snow scree to road and rly, a hanging plantation of trees on our right and on our left at our own level, across a pasture sprinkled with cowslips, a patch of sodden, dirty but indubitable snow. Thence over Col and fell down into a stupendous panorama of snow-capped mountains and began a descent like crawling on the laps of giants. Once we got out on the edge of a pasture and sat under parasols while eating biscuits and looking at the circle of the hills, while the water brooks sang in our ears.. Then always down by huge loops through Clelles and under the great house-like rock – La Batie. The heat grew and grew till we struck the beautiful five miles of tarred straight arched with trees into Grenoble about 4.10.

So the Grand – where our rooms were three singles badly placed on the hot front street. Dinner bad as usual but eaten in the open verandah round the courtyard of the great plane tree. Inhabitants of the hotel mostly American and English.

To bed early and enjoyed one hell of a night punctuated by the bombs and fireworks of a local fete nearby, followed from 12-2 a.m. by the return of the revellers in flights or single convoys through the solid echoing streets, and the occasional libre échappement performances of the sportive motorist. Did not sleep till 2 a.m. C. slept earlier but woke at 6 after a torrid and uneasy time.



We always try to identify the towns, villages and hamlets which Kipling names – today's run was not easy. Except for Sisteron, none appeared to exist, according to Google, but a bit of diligent trawling showed that 'Col La Haute' was, in fact, Col de la Croix Haute, and Lus-la-Haute is Lus-de-la Croix Haute. Kipling was right in his assessment of its tourist potential; it is now a 'station de ski'. 'Libre échappement' means 'open exhaust'.

Claire F was properly Clare Sheridan, the daughter of their friends, the Frewens of Udiam. She was persona non grata at Bateman's after the events of the previous September (see Carrie's diary for September 11-12, 1922).

May 6

Left Grenoble for Aix, after C. and E. had gone out and had a look at the Moderne as a possible refuge another time. By error took the Domène road (a G.C.) to Chambéry instead of the N.R. on the other side of the river. Whereby a crowded-with-villages to begin with and a bumpy-and-worn-throughout road and some longer mileage. Elsie derided me. Aix at 12.15, however, to find the Bernascon, as the proprietor explained, opened for us. A hundred yards frontage, six stories high, all freshly cleaned and staffed, in apple-pie order – all to ourselves.



Hotel Bernascon, Aix les Bains

Walked several parasangs down endless passages to where our trunks, which Bowen had unpacked, made a brave show outside our doors. A huge sitting room of early Victorian tendencies on first floor, opening on to deep wide balcony which commanded small square forest of tame groomed plane and lime trees, in the [blank] of the hotel, all one solid sheet of interlocked leaves and beneath which one could have one's coffee. Bedrooms big and high – above all high, and all shutters and blinds arranged against heat and light.

Dining room about 150 feet long echoing like a cathedral; but we lunched at the verandah end of it and were served with all the pomp and ceremony of thousands by two waiters with echoing footsteps. Very good food throughout and the sensation of being Robinson Crusoes on such a desert island was very funny. The season had not begun. The flower beds had been dug, but the flowers weren't in 'em. The shops were all on the edge of opening but in some cases (as when we wanted gauffres (*wafers*) with our ices at the little ice and cake shop where Zahglul Pasha was dictating to an unwashed Turk secretary) the goods hadn't arrived from their winter establishment – Mentone or Cannes, as the case might be. A few English wandered about in the heat, looking more English than ever, but the overwhelming impression was of waiting for the curtain to arise – altogether the most unusual experience we had met for a long time. Heat continued, grateful and comforting and we spread ourselves in luxury through the big rooms.

A 'G.C.' and an 'N.R.' refer to the classification of French road. A 'G.C.' (Grande Communication) was an important minor road. 'N.R,' was the Route Nationale, often referred to more logically as 'R.N.' (See our longer note on May 20th) At first, we thought that Kipling was exaggerating the size of the hotel, just for effect, but as will be seen from the image, he was not. A parasang was an ancient Persian measure of distance, perhaps five km., here he clearly was exaggerating.



Zaghoul Pasha

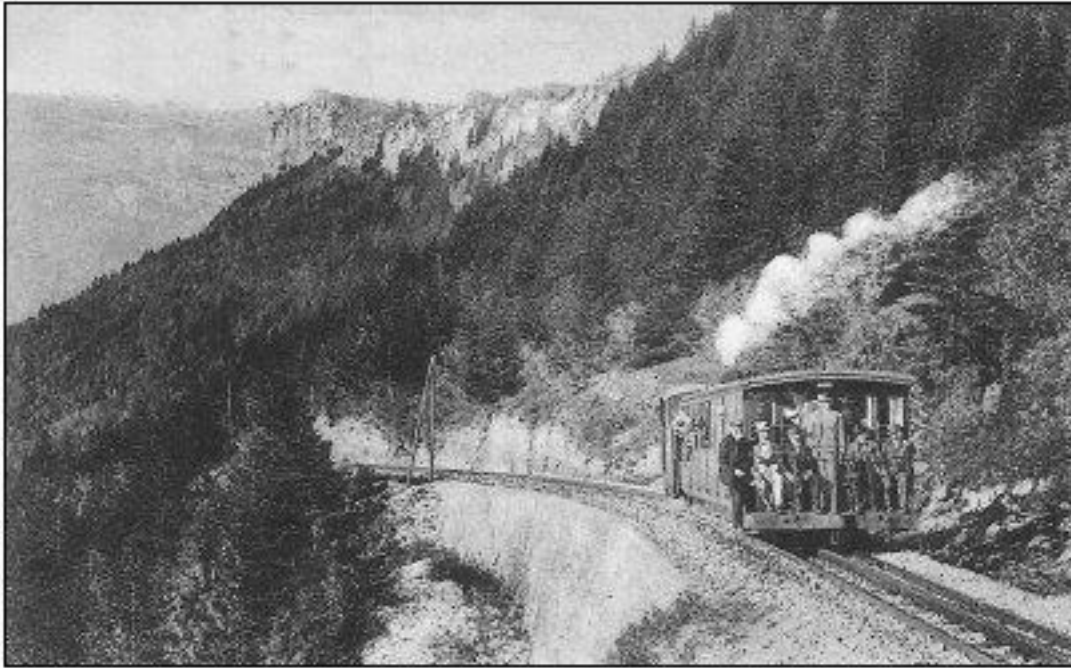
Zahglul Pasha (modern spelling Zaghoul) was an Egyptian Nationalist leader who had been exiled to the Seychelles by Britain in 1921.

He had now been released and was on his way back to Egypt, where, next year, he became Prime Minister.

Kipling's phrase 'grateful and comforting', referring to the heat, was taken from a current advertisement for Epps Cocoa, a catch-phrase at this time.

May 7th

Still, high, blue sky and heat, but the night was bland and balmy and the early part of it furnished with nightingales who sang ferociously outside. To Annecy at 10.30 to explore – a dusty and, save for the lake there, an uninteresting drive. On our return, 16 km from Aix an inner tube went (I don't blame it) and we had to sit in pure limestone-dusted grass by the road side. After lunch took the 1.45 cog-rail up the Mount Revard and were most abundantly rewarded at 4800 feet by such a view of the mountains, and especially Mont Blanc, as never before has been granted.



The 'cog-wheel' railway, Aix-les-Bains

Pastures all pressed and soggy with retreating snow which even then lay ribbed and dirty two or three feet behind the service courts of the utterly neglected hotel (they told us it would be open, so we brought no food. They told us that the train would return at 4.30, but it didn't till 5.30, which we didn't regret. But we were all hungry. Bowen came too.) The Saeter, for it was that, looked and smelt like New England on the edge of spring. Yet the air was warm and still. Ground filled with vernal crocus and many little gentians. E. who for half an hour felt sick and giddy and rested with Bowen on the grass found also Daphne and little hepaticas. C and I wandered at leisure along the ridge to the observatory, and the huge direct drop down the face of the rock which it overlooks. The colour notes were the blueish-grey of the limestone strata, the neutral tint of the snow-pressed grass and the violent blue-black of the evergreens against and between the most tender green of birch. Maple and the rest of the mountain dwellers: and the huddled, contorted snow-line behind it all. Yet truly, there are not many Himalayas but one Himalaya – and rock, snow and pine are an unchanging Trinity. But it was a most royal afternoon, made none the worse when we took out the packet of home mail and read 'em on a bench and found they included one from Valentine Williams and another from the D of C about the Irish Guards history which was approved of in both quarters.

But the neglect of the possibilities of the hotel as both summer and winter sportplace was heartbreaking. One company owns both railway, hotel and 2500 hectares of the plateau. Corporon, the manager of the Bernascon, tells me that it could all be bought for £1,200,000. Why didn't God make me a business man? I can see to the last dot how the thing could be developed – same as at Lus-le Haut – and I believe Savoy and Dauphigny (*sic*) at large are crammed with places that could be made delightful – from the play point of view. The French know about 'em but, being wise, they don't tell the outsider and prefer to keep their land to themselves.



Valentine Williams

Valentine Williams (1883-1946) was a journalist, the son of the chief editor of Reuters, who had started as an official war correspondent, but had joined the Irish Guards shortly after John's death. He had won an MC and had written two autobiographical accounts of his war service.

He later became a prolific thriller writer, with tales like 'The Man with the Clubfoot' and 'The Crouching Beast'.

The D of C was the Duke of Connaught. A 'saeter' is a pasture used for the grazing of livestock – mostly milking cows or goats: it is a Scandinavian word. Kipling was prescient about the area's possibilities, as in many things, and it has now been well developed for winter sports.

May 8th

A virtuous morning (it being too hot for motoring) when I began with letters before 10 and by the time I had done a dozen, lo: it was lunch time. Infernal waste but necessary. Clouded up in the afternoon and got to look like a change of weather so at 4 C. and I (E. funking the roads) went to the Col du Chat round and were rewarded by the most glorious drive – especially the bit along the green-jade Rhone-side to Yenne from Duloz pont and the big climb.

The Duchess came down in second gear, not having once used her brakes. We began first by going to the Pont by the lake where there was nothing doing or opened. Cannot understand this delay of opening the season. Back 6. So went forth for evening stroll through the delicate air alone. Felt the town filling up and bought a combination knife and fork (5 francs) against future wayside picnics. The sale was conducted by a young lady of 13 – half shy, half impudent – her mother, who was born near Thiers, where cutlery comes from, standing in the background ready to help but very proud help wasn't needed.

Also, an old fat chemist – God knows why – would needs show me a medical botany book, 1824, the property of his grandfather, with coloured plates. Sadly foxed and broken and in need of binding but beautiful little page plates and type. Once more praised be Allah for His men and women. It rained in the night but in no way quenched the nightingales.



Ville de Yenne, Savoie

*Two of the letters he wrote that morning will be found in PINNEY, **Letters**, Vol.5, pp 140-1. Thiers is in the centre of France, the other side of Lyon from where they were at Aix. It lies between Lyon and Clermont-Ferrand.*

May 9th

A dull day and rain – letters and typing all the morning.

May 10th

Poured all morning: cleared in the afternoon when we went for a walk and met the Lows (*sic*) with whom we dined.

‘The Lows’ is evidently a mis-reading of ‘The Laws’ (Andrew Bonar Law, the Prime Minister, and his daughter, Isabel). The Kiplings were acquainted with various ‘Lows’, but we know that this meeting was with the Laws, following correspondence with an Arts Society in Aix in 2015, which produced a photograph of Bonar Law, Kipling and Carrie sitting together in the sun. (See article in KJ No. 372.)



Rudyard, Carrie, and Bonar Law

May 11th

Fine in morning. Grey in afternoon. Left for Evian at 3.30 via Annecy and Annemasse (by a shortcut of E's own devising which gave us a view *intime* of many farms on the snaky upland road, but was not a time-saving device. Reached Evian at 6.30. Hotel not yet under way, but boasts 60 inhabitants. Landon arrived for dinner from Lausanne and slept night.

A conference to replace the Treaty of Sèvres, the peace settlement with Turkey after WW 1, had been taking place in Lausanne since November 1922; Landon had been the correspondent for the Daily Telegraph at the conference. It resulted in the Treaty of Lausanne, the basis of Turkey's place in the world until WW 2.

May 12th

Over the lake in grey dull weather by the 10.10 boat (very maritime) to Lausanne with Landon. Then it rained and we went to lunch amid all the piled plateresque (?*picturesque*) confections of the Beau Rivage where the debris and fringes of the Lausanne conference eats, intrigues and circulates.

Met Mr. Walters, *Times* correspondent. Mr. and Mrs. Adam (he is second to Rumbold) and a young Cavendish-Bentinck of the F(*oreign*) O(*ffice*) with unlimited possibilities of impudence. He was at school with John. The great central hall under its Curzonesque ceiling was crowded with little tables with National Flags – all of 'em with agitated and secretive backs.



Hotel Beau-Rivage Palace, Lausanne, 2019

The whole setting as mad and fantastic as the heart of man could desire. And, naturally, the Turks, who like champagne and disapprove of the draughts of Angora, are in no sweat to go. Story of the old lady who had lived at the Beau Rivage since 1905 (!) and had never gone away. She is supposed to be mad. “We’ll all go mad if we stay long enough”. Likewise the Pole, quite dotty, who when the hall is full wanders about with a questing face looking for a friend who never comes! The day before, a Swiss had shot a Bolshevik at a Lausanne Hotel on the grounds that the B. had killed his father and uncle. Hence great excitement and parading the corpse, corteges and riots.

W. gave me his opinion about the unrelatedness of U.S. journalists who haven’t the least idea of what the settlement of things is about – and go no further than concessions and wild cables to their own villages. Can be extraordinarily dangerous! After lunch lay down for my rest in L’s room (No. 33) while he taught C. and E. Mah Jongg and found it most interesting. Want a set of my own as soon as can be. Had a lovely tea in L’s room and all went back to Evian with the falsity of the Conference hanging all round one like a dream. Dinner at the Hotel (none too good) and to bed early.

The palatial Beau Rivage in Lausanne accommodated the minor players and support staff and ‘hangers-on’ of the conference. Kipling’s “Curzoesque” ceiling may have referred to its domed central hall, like that at Lord Curzon’s home at Kedleston Hall. We have been unable to identify Mr. Walters and the Adams more precisely, but Rumbold was Sir Horace Rumbold, a distinguished British diplomat, at this time our High Commissioner at Constantinople and the British Empire’s representative at the Conference.



Sir Horace Rumbold



Victor Cavendish-Bentinck

“Young Cavendish-Bentinck” was Victor Cavendish-Bentinck (1897-1990) He was a diplomat, and was in charge of the administration for the conference. At 26, he was the same age as John would have been, though he had gone to Wellington two terms before him.

The Turkish delegation were evidently not above setting aside their Muslim principle of abstaining from alcohol. The “draughts of Angora” is, we assume, a euphemistic way of referring to water (cf. ‘Adam’s Ale’), Angora being the older name of Ankara, which was about to become the de jure capital of Turkey. ‘W’ is Mr. Walters, while ‘L’ is Landon. There is no set of Mah Jongg at Bateman’s, nor at Wimpole Hall, so maybe Kipling never pursued this interest.

Sunday 13th

Nothing doing in the morn and thereafter only small runs as necessary, including one of 20 km to St. Gingolph on the lake, with P.L. up to the Swiss border. A load of drunkenish folk, very happy at overtaking and passing a Rolls Royce. We gave ‘em that pleasure as they surged about a bit.

Monday 14th.

Filthy, pouring wet. Not a wheel stirred. We did letters.

Tuesday 15th

To Lausanne and lunched with P.L. and Walters in the B(eau) R(ivage) manager’s private room. A FINE DAY.

Wednesday 16th

Nothing till E. went to station with Bowen (also rain in morn on and off). Saw her go at 7.10 p.m. Back to hotel for last packings.

May 17th

Left Evian at 8.40-42 in a dappled day of sunshine and clouds which exactly suited the nature of the country. Twisted market-full road up to Annemassy (*Annemasse*) and St. Julien where we accidentally made (so close is the road to the Suisses' frontier) as tho' to cross into Switzerland and were stopped by Suisses. (As if we would.) A simply adorable run, but slowed by reason of curves. St. Julien by Viry, Valleiry and under Collonges – magnificent descent which gave us Fort Lacluse (*Fort l'Écluse*) first above, then we went through it where it clings to the rocks and with perforated rock windows behind it, Thibetan in effect.

Hit two lakes (Silan with an out-of-work ice factory – all dark with sheets of naked rock tilting into it - just like a Canadian lake) and Nantua, much the same (*Lac de Sylans today – and there is still an ice-factory there.*) Both lakes buried from the sun in high furred hills. Round head of lake at Nantua direct for Poncin and Pont d'Ain. We were dismissed the mountains in one tremendous swoop above Leigmiel (after La Balme) (*Labalme today – not to be confused with another La Balme, which is not far from Aix, whence they had recently come*) that sent us reeling into France and before we quite realised it, the Duchess was out on the usual dead straight plane-arched road, legging it over the flat into Bourg wh. we reached at 12.30 (in spite of 15 min. delay at Bellegarde, for examining a triptych, and a mistake of mine in overshooting Neuville bridge).

Hotel de la France gave us a ripping lunch, fish, chicken (de Bresse) etc., all the best of its kind: but our bathroom water did not run hot: tho' valet overnight swore it should and when rebuked as we left next morn, unwashen, at 8.30, calle his false god to witness that it had run hot everywhere else. To this the Painted Proprietress (a fool in grain) added the lie with circumstance – as that the heat everywhere else of the water was 44° Cent. (L liked that).



Lake Geneva

The Lake of Geneva (or Lac Lemman), through which the Rhone flows) lies largely in Switzerland, with the great city of Geneva in a little 'bubble' of Switzerland at its western end. Lausanne is on the north shore. About half the south shore, in the middle, is French, and Evian is on that French shore. To go westwards into France, one has to skirt the Geneva 'bubble', and the road does indeed run very close to the Swiss border.



*Fort l'Écluse, on the Franco-Swiss frontier
(Creative Commons)*

Fort l'Écluse guards the entrance to France from Switzerland, overlooking the river Rhone as it makes its way from Lake Geneva. It is built in several tiers against a vertical rock face, and a public road, no longer the main road, runs through it, exactly as Kipling described nearly a century ago.

The 'poulet de Bresse' is, one might say, the French equivalent of Aylesbury Duckling in British cuisine. And when Kipling says that the proprietress of their hotel in Bourg was a fool 'in grain', he is making a literal translation of a French phrase 'en grain', which we believe, may be translated as 'dyed-in-the wool', obstinately set in one's ways, ingrained.

May 18th

Left Bourg after these happenings and a little mild shopping (bought a green Italian tray) in the town in the afternoon of the 17th. This included the Church of Brou – a white-lined marvel, with a characteristic crooked pillar and amazing tomb to an Anne of Austria. Sent Landon the album) at 8.45.



The Royal Monastery of Brou, Bourg-en-Bresse

Day fresh: alternating sun and cloud but cloud most. The Duchess romped at a steady 35 and 40 where the road had been “recharged”. Whereby we found ourselves in Beaune at 10.45 and had time, calling at the Hotel de la Poste, which is being vehemently enlarged, to order 6 doz. Chambertin ½ bottles @ 9f. the bottle to be sent to us at Batemans. The three kittens of our friend the Siamese Cat of two years ago assisted at the conference, in the back room (*see entry for April 24, 1921.*). They could not play in comfort on the polished floor but were uncannily silent throughout. Their markings were, however, good: but we decided we loved them not. Then we urged at 40 (there was nothing to stop us) and reached Dijon (rather a nice town and all be-flagged for aviation fêtes which begin tomorrow) at 11.45. The Cloche, a four humper, pretentious and inadequate. A bad lunch: but with comfy room (hope the water will be hot tomorrow). We lunched and I rested (same as I did at Bourg) from 2-3, and then out on a campaign wh. included gloves for Taylor, a travelling clock, if possible for Bowen, and shoes (by chance) for C. After numerous defeats I at last got the gloves (Dents! 22f!) in the French tongue. Shoes didn’t prosper and travelling clocks were not. Curious in so big a town. One look at the Ch. of St. Benigne was enough for us. Then back to the Hotel with spoil: then out to a choc shop for chocolate and cakes. Saw a woman like Mrs. Asquith talking hard in a low earnest tone to the proprietress all the time we were here. Seemed like intimate scandal embracing whole town. Home at 5.30, rather fagged, wrote letters to Elsie (whose note from the Gare du Nord we had received when we arrived at Dijon and at 7 went to a bad dinner – made out with bread and cheese, soup and fish. The working of this shack (wh. has the impudence to have bad verses written about it on the back of the menu) is simply beastly. Got a G.B.D. briar of almost perfect graining which I think I shall give to Taylor. Oddly enough found time to play a little over my Botanic nonsense – the Culpepper Pastiche. Also turned over “20 leads to B. Madame” in my mind.

The tomb in the “Church of Brou” is that of Archduchess Margaret of Austria, Duchess of Savoy, (1480-1530), daughter of Maximilian I, Holy Roman Emperor, and herself the Governor of the Austrian Netherlands. (The tomb is, indeed, “amazing” – and is similar to that found in the Rosslyn Chapel, near Edinburgh.)

We are not sure about the reference to ‘sending the album to Landon’. There is a hanging parenthesis which doesn’t have a beginning, and we wonder if the original transcription from the M/S had slipped a line. We are fairly sure that the ‘four humper’ is a reference to a hotel rating system, such as the ‘star’ rating given by the AA, or on Tripadvisor. (Thomas Cook uses a ‘heart’ rating today, and we think it possible, since Kipling used Cook for his travel arrangements, that the humps may have been smudged hearts, and the usage a family joke.)

Dents are a long-established (1777) firm of English glovers, still making and selling high-quality leather gloves, and Kipling was clearly slightly surprised that he should not have found French-made gloves in a French provincial town. And G.B.D. briar pipes are still being made and sold (again, an old-established British firm).

*The reference to ‘the Culpepper Pastiche’ required some interesting research from a number of Kipling Society members before we could establish with any confidence what Kipling was referring to. We believe that it ultimately resulted in a poem ‘The Buttercup’ which was written on, or in, a copy of *Les Noms des Fleurs* (The Names of Flowers). The first mention is in an article written by Dr. Gillian Sheehan, which appeared in *KJ* 264 (Dec. 1992). She wrote “Kipling had found a little booklet on the names of flowers, written in French by Gaston Bonnier (1853-1922) who had been Professor of Botany at the Sorbonne. Kipling must have enjoyed it, for he wrote on the back cover forty lines of verse —never published — beginning, “The Buttercup and the Berberis . . .”, and running pleasantly on through nearly a hundred plant names”. (We have reproduced it, with notes, in this Guide.)*

*The poem can also be found in Vol. III of Professor Pinney’s *Poems of Rudyard Kipling* on p. 2118. He notes that the booklet used to be at Bateman’s, but can no longer be found, and that he transcribed it from a photocopy among the Kipling Papers at Sussex University.*

*However, there is a small discrepancy: it is clear that Kipling was working on the poem in 1923, whereas Pinney says that the copy of *Les Noms des Fleurs* reproduces a date on the flyleaf “Monte Carlo / Ap. 26.*

He therefore gives a tentative date of 1926 for the poem's writing. Although they were in Toulon when Carrie's 1923 entry was made, they stayed at Monte Carlo in both 1923 and 1926. We just wonder whether the photocopy date was not clear-cut (Pinney says it was faint in places), and we believe the poem at least had its inception in 1923.

May 19th

Fled from evil Dijon at 8.45 in dull weather, promising better but never performing. Roads good leading over wide downs and then looping down into big river-rifts with the village at the bottom. The high grounds mostly covered with the forests of State. All this was a new run to us, and we enjoyed it and the Duchess went sweetly enough.

At our eleven o'clock stand-easy by a road full of orchids and one cuckoo *a per se* (Napoleonic epoch) loud-speaking peasant came along with a mule and a cartload of dung. We talked: a cigarette passed. He had bought the mule (fr 1000) from the Americans when they left. It was a strong beast. In such a motor as ours one could promenade well. Whence and whither were we? He detested motors. They frightened the cattle grazing by the road sides and the children in attendance. Yes, and they could knock down a woman and bolt up to Paris and say nothing about it. There was, however, a woman in an auto from Paris. She stormed along till the auto hit a tree nearby here and she was thrown out and spat out most of her teeth. Good! The local cattle were "Swiss", and the big plough bullocks spotted red and white came from the Vosges. The local pig was a large white breed. There was a pig-farm nearby (here interpolated himself an ancient with a blank eye and a quivering underlip, "The war finished him", said the loud-speaker. So he got a cigarette and went on up the road to talk to Taylor.) We shook hands when we parted and got into Troyes about 12 as the people were coming out of the shops.



Troyes, the ancient capital of Champagne-Ardennes

Different from `15. The old St. Laurent quite as dirty and quite as unchanged but the cooking as good as ever. The quiet streets just the same – even to a certain stand of rakes and hay-forks and a ladder which had been there nine years ago, by the gardens at the back. Took C. to the Church of St. Jean and the Cathedral – both as in the old days and both full of memories that cut like hot poker. I hated it.

No pretence at a garage except a half-glazed inner court into which (the full-rigged ship into a bottle wasn't equal to it as a trick) some dozen large motors somehow managed to pack themselves, and what was more wonderful, to extract 'emselves next morn after Taylor had sworn at them a bit. Four young gents of the Royal Liège Motor Club were the chief obstructionists. A nouveau riche out with his car in France for the first time complained of the roads!! We had found 'em much more good than bad throughout. In the afternoon C. purchased two rather nice patterned garden parasols for 56 or 58f.

Note: I'm afraid they're "restoring" both the St. Jean and Troyes Cathedral. Don't like the suspicious cleanliness of the side-chapels in either.

To bed early, but many Saturday drunks came home by twos and threes; their voices and uncertain feet echoing long before and after passage. A really good dinner but really outrageous charges for the chauffeur accommodation.

It is interesting that Dijon had gone from being "rather a nice town" on arrival, to "evil" on departure. Clearly the "bad" dinner and the beastly shack had rankled. The conversation with the "Napoleonic epoch" peasant (more or less verbatim) shows us how the reporter in Kipling functioned, and reveals the source of the style of French speech that he put into the mouths of the Curé of St. Jubans ('The Miracle of St. Jubanus'; Limits and Renewals) and M. Voiron ('The Bull that Thought'; Debits and Credits).

The reference to '15' and 'nine years ago' are slightly confusing. He had visited Troyes on August 20 1915 while in France, visiting the French army, but that was under eight years ago.

On the other hand, nine years ago, all four of the family had been touring from Paris on their way home, and had visited a number of churches and cathedrals (though not Troyes) and it may be that it was these memories that "cut like hot pokers". Kipling was clearly dubious about the merits of 'restoration' of mediaeval church buildings.

May 20th

Dull, but breaking towards warm. Got away at 8.50 and fairly licked up the first 25 Km on the lovely, level Paris road. Thence I coned by map for Villers-Cotterêts per G.Cs of unknown quality and with surprisingly few stretches of bad road and only two overshoots due to me not thinking. Herewith log.

L. at La Belle Etoile, and over all the little Seines to Méry-sur-Seine – St. Oulph, and Angclure (today, *Anglure*). Thence along straight to Sezanne, 2½ Km W to Moeurs and another straight into Montmirail ending in beautiful loops and twists. Here take first 6 Kms of La Ferté-sous-Jouarre road, thence on a right-hand fork one long dead straight (with ups and downs) into Château-Thierry.

Here repeat process of taking first few kms of C(hateau).T(hierry). - La Ferté road up to top of rise. Thence over baddish bit of road past USA cemetery at Belleau (where nothing seems to have been done except the outlaying of grandiose roads) and on to Neuilly-la-Poterie where sign-post has been carried away. Here right up most picturesque twisty road through Chézy-en-Orxois which (clean against Taride's map of it) sweeps easily into La Ferté Milan where, having been aforetime, we naturally lost ourselves in making for Villers-Cotterêts. Had to retreat vestigia – hit road through forest with no pavé. A very good lunch at La Chasse Hotel (V(illers).C(otterêts).) but crowded with car people, mostly French en famille. The people very kind to us and pleasantly apologetic. The only bad bit of road of the whole trip was from V.C. into Compiègne thro' the forest. Potholed as ever. Picked up our letters at the Palais and came back to the Rond Royale which smells extortionate but looks nice as it sits in the forest.

All Compiègne full of Pentecostal trippers and families and cars. After we sent a wire to garage and Dufresne, Dieppe, asking for space for car and cabin in Wednesday's day boat (hope we get it). Then choc. in Palace Hotel – a very crowded and unpleasing place, in noisy passage. So back to Rond Royale breasting the returning tide of tired, happy trippers each with a bunch of lilies of the valley (Muguets de mai) in their hands and the children with long-stalked paper chrysanthemums which seem to be the fashion. But how many women and how few men. The rooms very comfy but somehow think the bill will astonish. Very proud of my map conning this morning – it didn't make me tired to speak of, either.

This had been a relatively short day's drive, about 180 Km (112 miles). On leaving Troyes they were passing through the country of the headwaters of the Seine. We believe that when Kipling talks about GCs, he is using an old-fashioned system of classifying minor roads, no longer used (they were became the responsibility of the Département in which they lay and became 'D' roads in 1938).

The reference to USA Cemetery at Belleau indicates his professional interest, as a member of the International War Graves Commission.



Belleau Wood, the American Cemetery

Belleau Wood is the place where the US army (more particularly the US Marine Corps) was first seriously 'blooded' on the western front in stopping the final German 'push', in June 1918, in a battle which continued for nearly four weeks and in which the Americans suffered substantial casualties.

A modern gazetteer has Veuilly-la-Poterie and La Ferté Milon. Nor are we quite sure of Kipling's evidently unclear phrase 'retreat vestigia'. We suggest it may be a mis-reading of Kipling's writing by the original transcriber; however the sense is fairly clear, 'they re-traced their steps slightly'.

Villers-Cotterêts lies in the Forest of Retz, and was the site of an early action by the 1st Battalion, the Irish Guards in 1914, and was where Lady Milner's son had been killed, also in 1914, in the Battle of the Marne. Kipling's comment on the scarcity of men is, of course, a reflection of the losses suffered by France during WW1, which seem to have been proportionately greater than in England.

They had evidently used the Palais Hotel in Compiègne as a Poste Restante – maybe they had originally intended to stay there; but they stayed instead at the Rond Royale, which is today a Retirement Home, or so it would appear.

May 21st

Dull with rain after what promised fair. Off to Villers-Cotterêts to see the Mayor, about possibilities of erecting Memorial Stone to 1st. I(rish) G(uards) in the Forest. Left at 11.50 – late and a vile road. Did not reach La Chasse Hotel till 12.25 and found it more roaring full than even the day before and with an even more common type of person. Having appointment with Mons. Mouflers, the Mayor, we pressed lunch and cut the hors d'oeuvres. Lunch singularly bad except cheese and butter and we were charged only 2fr. less than day before – 36 fr to wit for 3 lunches! All hopeless and rapacious. The old mother; her very plain daughter who, I think, means one day to be wed for her gold, and the good-looking handmaid who knew a few words of English.

To the Mayor's house in rain – sought it vainly at the Mairie, there being no one in the streets had to hunt about a bit till we found it behind a vast street cochère door giving into an almost oriental, or say Spanish, inner court. Room I was shown into was untouched 1870-82 in crowded decorations, wall paper, furniture. Mem. Has the ordinary Frenchman any eye for artistic matters? I've seen many interiors and they were all on these lines. Talked about the local contractor Sauranet. Rue de Paris, V.C. – artistic, saw the Mayor, honest and capable of following a simple design. Entered anon the lady M – entirely the grey mare – precise, capable and refined of force. Suggested going to see a plain memorial stone to dead Forest Guards of V.C. forest who had fallen in the war – done by Sauranet.

We all four went – first to Memorial Stone to the F(orest) G(uards) made of a local stone which does not allow frost to enter – whitish and hardish. Thence to V.C. (Brigade) cemetery once more. I seem to have seen it all my life. It was as usual – tore the heart out.

Then on a few hundred yards to the Rond de la Reine where is Lady Milner's statue of the mourning peasant woman and Passant-arrête-toi!



*The memorial to George Cecil, Villers-Cotterêts
'Passant, arrête-toi' ('Stop, passer by')*

They were retracing their steps from Compiègne through the forest to Villers-Cotterêts for the specific purpose of discussing a further memorial to the 1st Battalion, Irish Guards who had fought a rear-guard action there in 1914 during the retreat from Mons to the Marne, before the western front settled down to the destructive stalemate of trench warfare.

There was no specific memorial to the Irish Guards there, although there was a burial ground of the men of the Guards Brigade ("V.C. (Brigade) cemetery" in the text above) and Lady Milner (Lady Cecil at the time) had erected a separate memorial to her son, George Cecil of the Grenadier Guards, and his comrades nearby. The Kiplings had visited Villers-Cotterêts and the memorial in July 1920 There is a web page (www.webmatters.net/txtpat/?id=1933) devoted to Lady Milner's memorial. The text means "Stop, passer-by" (implying "and read or say a prayer")

Some of Kipling's prejudices are very much to the fore, in this entry. He didn't like to share 'his' facilities with others, and he had a very poor opinion of French interior design.

Very good and impressive. Dropped the Mayor and his wife at their house with intent to be home by 3 and rest. Then trouble by the wayside a few kms out of V.C. Duchess lay down – P(ost) M(ortem) began and after more than an hour was finally traced to a broken make-and-break of the magneto. Smashed spring exhibited as evidence. Switched on to batteries after more delays and were not back at Hotel till 4.30. Sent wire to R.R. (Cricklewood) (Silvergost. Somehow that irritated one at such a crisis) for fresh make- and-break to be posted to AA representative at Newhaven to meet Wednesday afternoon boat from Dieppe (Type of Watford Magneto E.6. Chassis No. 6 U.E.) and we are now committed to run to Dieppe tomorrow on our batteries! Electric light in hotel awfully bad and “temperamental”. Night shut in with heavy rain. This is about our tenth day of dull weather. What worried C. while we waited between the tall aisles of trees while the Duchess was disgracing herself, was the sight of acres of lily of the valley not yet out and processions of cars whose occupants had bunches of lilies all out in their hands.

***Silvergost** was the Rolls-Royce telegraphic address, based on the name of their most popular model. The 'Duchess's trouble lay in the ignition system for the spark plugs. John Walker explains that this model of Rolls Royce, had, in effect, a dual system of ignition: the magneto produced the 'high tension' (HT) (high voltage) current and the timing device for the spark plugs, but could only do so when the engine was running, and could not produce enough voltage when the engine was being turned to start: nor did it charge the battery, which was used to supply HT via a second, auxiliary, set of spark plugs when the car was being turned, prior to starting. In an emergency, such as this, the battery could be used to continue to provide the HT while the engine was running, in place of the magneto; but in consequence Kipling was worried lest there should not be enough left in the battery to get them from Compiègne to Dieppe.*

May 22nd

What looked like a fine day. After packing went for an hour's walk “round the block” which made us warm. Hotel bill fairly stiff, but not so bad' and quite a place to come again some time (rather a find). Left at 10.50-55 for Beauvais over very good roads, considering, and got there at 12.5-10. Fell into the arms of all the Piats, our old friends at the Hotel de France (known these fifteen years) now making money by giving service. Was introduced to Denise Jeanne Herbertine Piat aged 31 months, whom we had last seen aged three months, and before that just as Hans in Kelder. To her I promise to send a French “Just So” book. Ripping good lunch and lots of good feeling and talk over old times and queries over Mademoiselle. They mayn't mean it, but it's comforting. Also P's chauffeur mightily helped us by warning us off the Gournay en Braye, Forge-les-Eaux road and advising Neufchatel and the river run into Dieppe. Certainly some stretches were blind (but beautiful) and twisty but the surface throughout excellent. So reached Dieppe (Grand Hotel: a new speculation) about 3.15-20.

Then a clean up and a walk around. C. purchasing a Camembert and its cousin (name forgot) but they smell richly. Likewise, after vain search for a hair tonic whose name she had forgot, one bottle of Eau-de-Cologne. In search after oranges I was intensely annoyed by serving wench clapping 5c on price of 50c oranges – just because one was English. It's mean and unworthy. Choc. in a choc. shop and then home to rest for an hour in a beautiful bed. Sea dull blue with streaks of uncertain sunshine.

General aspect and feeling of the air not unlike February. And this is towards the last week in May. Never was a more delightful six days together. Tomorrow should fetch us home. Good dinner.

The Kiplings had called in at the Hotel de France in Beauvais on the homeward leg of their tour up from the south in 1921 (See Motoring Diary for March 1921, entry and annotation for May 2nd). They had, in fact, been quite often to Beauvais, including in March 1914 with both John and Elsie, and the Piats knew the circumstances of John's death. The phrase 'Hans in Kelder' (Correctly, in German, 'Hans im keller'), means 'Jack in the cellar' and is used to mean a child still in the womb.

The last six days were the only ones on the trip when they had been on their own (Elsie and Carrie's maid, Bowen, had been with them until they left Evian.)

May 23rd.

Up at seven and everything cleared up and packed for Taylor to put into car at 9 a.m. Uncertain-looking day with wind from W. and some rain. Cleared up some correspondence in morning.

The diary ends there. But Carrie's diary records that they did, indeed, cross to Newhaven that day and that it was "rough". And so home.
