

## The Kipling Motoring Diaries

February to May 1926



*Monte Carlo in the 1920s*

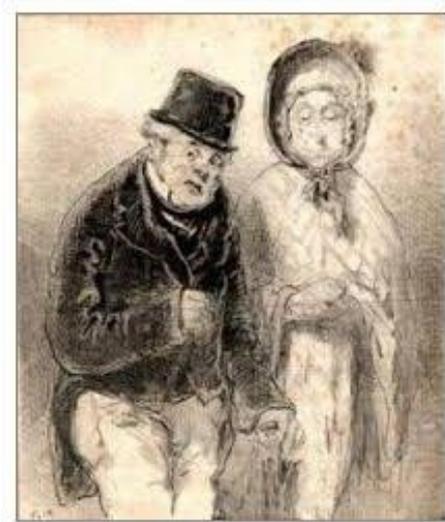
*(The Kiplings spent virtually all of February and March in a rented villa in the hills behind Monte Carlo, so that Kipling could recuperate after the bout of pneumonia which had laid him low for all December 1925. They left in mid-April, and took a wide swing westward as far as Vernet-les Bains, where they spent four days, before turning north and making their way by easy stages to Paris, where they visited their friends the Stanleys, before crossing the Channel to get home. Kipling recorded this period in a series of letters to Elsie, (PINNEY, **LETTERS**, Vol 5, pp 274-293, the last one being written the day they arrived at Tours.*

### TOULON

Feb. 12

*They had left England from Tilbury in the Orient Liner Ormonde on February 5 and after a week had arrived at Toulon, where they disembarked, and where they were met by their car and chauffeur (the Duchess/Esmeralda and Taylor).*

Left S.S. *Ormonde* after a long delay in charge of a shipping agent introduced to us by the Orient Line agent who put us into a launch at 11.30 with intent to try to get through customs on our Dip. Laisser-passer. A fine calm day and warm sun. Saw Taylor and Esmeralda looking very smart on edge of quay. Had to drive with the shipping agent (René Gross: 28 Rue Grignan, Marseilles) to a Customs bureau in the town, where an aged ‘Brigadier’ who came straight out of Gavarni examined Laisser-passer and waddled on his feet to the quay of the Customs (Clarke was left behind with the heavy baggage). He most importantly (50 fr.) put us through and we got off at 12.45 – much better than waiting till the Customs formally opened at 2 p.m.



*An old couple, by Gavarni*

*Paul Gavarni (1804-1866) was a celebrated French illustrator, who would have done full justice to the waddling ‘Brigadier’.*

*This customs official must have been wearing an impressive uniform, hence the exalted rank Kipling bestowed on him.*

There had been heavy rain for days: so that the unrepaired stretches of the road were pretty bad – wet and squalchy (*sic* – *we would have written squelchy*). Took the Le Luc road, known to us since the Hyères trip (*March 1921*), and on through long narrow muddy hamlets, each with its fountain, and women washing. (*A village ‘Lavoir’ – washplace - can still be found in many French villages, though rarely used for its original purpose.*) Decided not to stop anywhere for food but eat rusks and bread and butter and bananas in the car. Weather got cloudy and then lifted.

An hour to Le Luc: another hour to Fréjus: then the Esterelles and Cannes at 4.30, where stopped for tea at 4.30 at the Carlton and beheld Cannes in all its seasonal whoredom – very brilliant and crowded. Then on again at 5: when the day suddenly clicked out and before Nice – oh, long before – it was one beastly getting in and out of traffic – heavy and light, on ruined muddy roads.

Traffic got worse and worse at Nice (owing to carnival arrangements) and in the dark we decided to take the Lower road to Monte Carlo - which was all solid traffic.

Made Monte Carlo about 6.40. By Divine inspiration it was ME who asked a girl in a shop beyond M.C. where Roquebrunne might be and on her word took the La Turbie turn and after some skirmishing in the dark found the Hotel de Terrasse which had been given us as a landmark and then, after enquiries of people in the dark, fell down into the beautifully appointed La Souco and [blank] light, bed and beautiful grub about 7.15. A long day which did no hurt at all. 128 miles approx. run and at least 40 of that full traffic. The motor car has made the Riviera an Hell – and a noisy smelly one.

*They seem to have acquired a Diplomatic passport - presumably through George Bambridge, their daughter Elsie's husband - and used this to get priority treatment from the French Customs..*

*When Kipling speaks of "unrepaired stretches of the road", we believe he meant stretches of the road which still had not been tarmacadam-ised, and were still in the same state as they had been pre-war – hence their being 'squalchy' after rain.*

*During their two months at La Souco, there are only two recorded outings in the car (per Carrie's diaries), and these were unrecorded by Kipling. He resumed the diary when they left in mid-April. For some reason, not apparent, this and the next two days have double entries, roughly the same, but not identical.*

### April 17

Left villa La Souco after 2 months and some days for Beauvallon Golf Club at 9.40. Arr. Cannes 11.15 – walked and lunched at Carlton. Mostly good tarred road – greyish weather with streaks of sun and high wind getting higher at Beauvallon. 3.15 went for another walk. H. Perry Robinson came in after dinner.

*Harry Perry Robinson was the journalist brother of Kay Robinson, Kipling's friend and second editor on the Civil and Military Gazette in Lahore. He had, in fact, been knighted in 1920, and so was Sir Harry P. Robinson.*

18<sup>th</sup>

Left B(eauvallon) @ 9.40 via Cogilo, arr. Aix-en-P. @ 12.15: good road, good lunch Hotel Sextius. Left 1.45 for Montpellier: arr. M. 5.20, a long day.

*They were now starting to make their way westward, towards Vernet les Bains in the Pyrenees.*

19<sup>th</sup>

Left M. at 9.40 (Metropole not a good hotel): arr. Narbonne with rising winds and clouds at 12.15. Left N. @ 1.20: arr. Vernet-les-Bains via Perpignan 3.36. Cold and raw and beastly.

*(The above three entries were then repeated, with slight amplifications.)*

Ap 17

Left La S. @ 9.40, arr. Cannes 11.15; walked 1 hr. 5 mins & lunch Carlton. Left Cannes 1.30. Crossed Esterelles 55 mins. Arr. Beauvallon 3.15.

Actual time 1.35

1.45

3.20

*What Kipling refers to as 'Esterelles' is the 'Massif de l'Esterel', a small mountain range near the coast, between Cannes and St. Raphael. Its highest point is about 2000 feet.*



*Le Massif de l'Esterel*

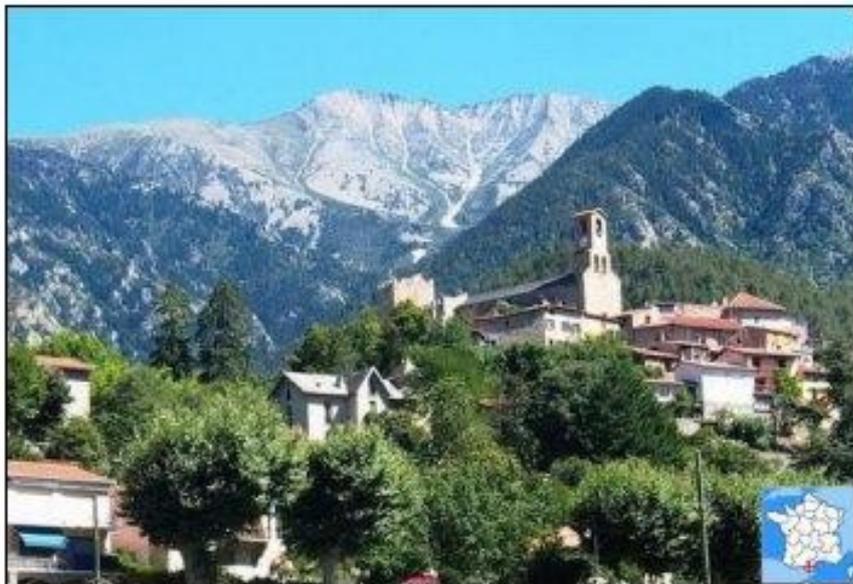
18th

Left Beauvallon – via Cogilo – Aix-en-P(rovence). @ 12.15, mostly good tarred road – greyish with streaks of sun and high wind. Dèj. Hotel Sextius. Left Aix 1.45 for Montp(ellier). (met two couples who had to talk). Arr. Montp. (de la Metropole) 5.20, a long day but not too tiring.

*We cannot find a 'Cogilo' anywhere in the gazetteer. We think he may have meant Cogolin, which lies on the coast road, just inland of St. Tropez (then an unknown fishing harbour).*

19th

Left Montpellier 9: a warmish, soft day (not a good hotel); arrived Narbonne (Gd. Hotel) with a rising mistral chill & overcast @ 12.15 after one mistake on the road & one stand-easy. Left Narbonne 1.20, arr. Vernet-les-Bains via Perpignan 3.35. Wet & cold & grey. Snow on Canigou. Our old rooms.



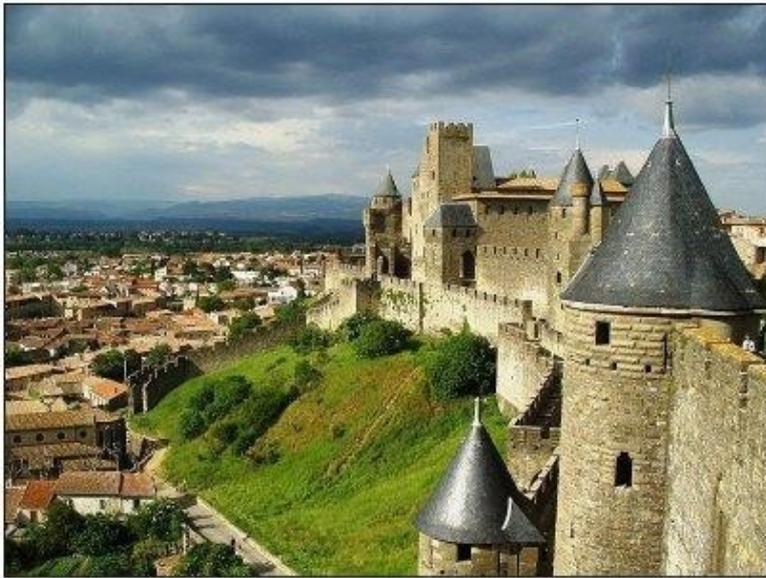
*Vernet les Bains*

*Mont Canigou above Vernet is one of the highest peaks of the Pyrenees. They stayed there for four days, leaving again on 23<sup>d</sup> April.*

23<sup>rd</sup>

Left Vernet at 10.25 for Perpignan – fine day after wet of previous night & roads clean and resilient. P. at 11.20 & then to Lion d'Or Rest(aurant) – an awful little slum where one had eaten in `thirteen.

Very good lunch, coffee, and cognac. Warmer as day went on. Left P. at 1.5 for Carcassonne via Quillan – good run - & through splendid blue gorge from Axat to Quillan. Stand-easy at 3.5 a few km beyond Limoux – all this was fine country & most interesting run with good cloud effects. Arr. Carcassonne, La Cité, 4.30 full of good (?) Americans. Went for a walk with a guided round Ramparts & saw 14-Cen. stained glass in St. Nazaire.



*Carcassonne*

*Carcassonne is a city completely surrounded by its mediaeval walls, and a walk on the ramparts is a splendid experience. It cannot have been “in `thirteen” that they had eaten at the Lion d’Or in Perpignan. That year they had been to Egypt, and returned to Marseilles, where they picked up the car, and drove back, Marseilles – Avignon – Albi – Bourges – Limoges – Rheims – Paris. They could not have visited Perpignan on that trip. But they had been there when they stayed at Vernet in 1911.*

#### Carcassonne, 24<sup>th</sup>

Left C. cold & wet & blowy at 1.30 – forgot brollies and coat & went back. Made fresh departure at 1.55 – arr. Toulouse (Grand) at 4 o’clock. 20 min. spent in finding the hotel. Not nice – roads very good. Hotel Tivolier very bad. Rest. Table d’hôte unspeakable & there was no heating in room 133. Everyone lied about it all the afternoon. Finally, after dinner, man was sent to light a fire which, owing to neglect of fireplace was impossible – altogether as bad as could be.

*Toulouse was emphatically not ‘the flavour of the month’.*

25<sup>th</sup>

Left infamous Toulouse in steady wet and wind at 9.20, low clouds & drenched but very good roads. Montauban inside the hour & got through quickly to Cahors, arr. 12.35. Delightful inn (Les Ambassadeurs) & nice people who wanted us to stay. 101 km = 2hrs. 14 mins & it still rains.

Left Cahors 1.55 heavy rain still & wind. Reached Brive at 3.15, made one mistake which lost 5 or 10 mins. Roads perfect except for light floods once or twice. Was recommended the Etoile et Paix at Brive which is a small auberge where we stopped for café au lait – still further wet: not quite so good a road and unmitigated beastliness till Limoges (de la Paix). Actual time 6.10.

*They were coming up the N.20 , which 'leads to Bourg Madame': see his poem of 1923, "A Song of French Roads".*

26<sup>th</sup> April

Good night, went for shopping walk 10.30 – 12, got shoes & slippers at intelligent shop. Not raining but very cold and windy with gleams of pale sun. Left at 1.30 (good déj.), weather improving, for Chateauroux (roads good). Had to stop for adjustment 2.16 in a wood by Fromental - found Argenton (3 p.m.) half flooded by river, market day & two boats in the street, also two drunk men who got on our footboard to be ferried over. A heavy water splash. Stand-easy beyond Argenton 3.20. Much warmer, cowslips & a lark singing. Arr. Chateauroux 4.10 – not much of a hotel to look at.

8.15. So much for rash judgments. The heating apparatus warmed up at 6 & functioned splendidly and the best dinner of the whole run at 7.10. Agneau Bérichonne (with garlic), Asparagus, ham omelette, all perfect of their kind. To bed early. C. with bad throat (relaxed).

*Agneau Berrichonne is a breed of French sheep, and it was (inevitably) cooked with garlic. (It rather looks as though Kipling had an Englishman's suspicion of anything to do with garlic.)*

27<sup>th</sup>

Left Chateauroux at 9.45. Weather clearing with bits of blue sky and warmer. Good petit déjeuner. C. not at all well. Decided to go to Tours & lie up there. Arr. Tours 11.35 – a bit of roughish road holding us back. Don't know how throat will go. Hotel 'under reparation'. Got small room (265), no lift, but comfy. C. took hot bath and went to bed.

I to chemist for Dr. Bengué & inhaler (a small porcelain one). Dined in room. C. had two bad turns in night. Weather suddenly & delightfully changed in evening.



*We believe that what Kipling was looking for was known in England as Friar's Balsam, which was used to relieve sore throats.*

*It was added to boiling water and the resulting vapour administered through an inhaler. This editor remembers having it when very young.*

28<sup>th</sup>

C. better, but we stay here another day.

*In the event, they stayed for ten days. According to Carrie's diaries, not only did she have a bad sore throat, but Kipling's stomach problem re-appeared.*

May 8<sup>th</sup>, '1926.

Left Tours 11.15, arr. Blois 12.25. Very good lunch at Gd. Hotel de France (alone). Walked on bridge in a gleam of sunshine: went on at 1.25 to Orleans, found bit of bad road and streets blocked by Fête in O. causing delay of 20 min. The N. by the road taken last year but much improved since. Waited under some trees to let a storm go by at Artenay. Thence into Chartres (bitter cold) at 4.30. Got fire in room at once and C. to bed with hot water bottle.

9<sup>th</sup>

Left Chartres @ 11.15. Arr. 51 Rue des Belles Feuilles @1 p.m.

*Carrie's diaries give no indication of the nature of her illness, nor, other than Carrington's interpretation that "They appear to stay until 8 May, both ill", is there any indication of Rudyard's health. That is the end of this tour as recorded in Kipling's Motoring Diaries.*

*They were staying in Paris, with the Stanleys: the day they arrived, Carrie records that “Rud dresses for dinner, the first time since November”. Britain was in the middle of the General Strike which lasted from 4 to 13 May. They went home to Bateman’s on 17 May.*



---