

## AN INLAND VOYAGE by R. L. Stevenson - 1904



I never saw the Cigarette in such an idyllic frame of mind. He waxed positively lyrical in praise of country scenes. I was little less exhilarated myself; the mild air of the evening, the shadows, the rich lights and the silence, made a symphonious accompaniment about our walk; and we both determined to avoid towns for the future and sleep in hamlets.

At last the path went between two houses, and turned the party out into a wide muddy high-road, bordered, as far as the eye could reach on either hand, by an unsightly village. The houses stood well back, leaving a ribbon of waste land on either side of the road, where there were stacks of firewood, carts, barrows, rubbish-heaps, and a little doubtful grass. Away on the left, a gaunt tower stood in the middle of the street. What it had been in past ages, I know not: probably a hold in time of war; but now-a-days it bore an illegible dial-plate in its upper parts, and near the bottom an iron letter-box.

The inn to which we had been recommended at Quartes was full, or else the landlady did not like our looks. I ought to say, that with our long, damp india-rubber bags, we presented rather a doubtful type of civilisation: like rag-and-bone men, the Cigarette imagined. 'These gentlemen are pedlars?—Ces messieurs sont des marchands?'—asked the landlady. And then, without waiting for an answer, which I suppose she thought superfluous in so plain a case, recommended us to a butcher who lived hard by the tower, and took in travellers to lodge.

Thither went we. But the butcher was flitting, and all his beds were taken down. Or else he didn't like our look. As a parting shot, we had 'These gentlemen are pedlars?'

It began to grow dark in earnest. We could no longer distinguish the faces of the people who passed us by with an inarticulate good-evening. And the householders of Pont seemed very economical with their oil; for we saw not a single window lighted in all that long village. I believe it is the longest village in the world; but I daresay in our predicament every pace counted three times over. We were much cast down when we came to the last auberge; and looking in at the dark door, asked timidly if we could sleep there for the night. A female voice assented in no very friendly tones. We clapped the bags down and found our way to chairs.

The place was in total darkness, save a red glow in the chinks and ventilators of the stove. But now the landlady lit a lamp to see her new guests; I suppose the darkness was what saved us another expulsion; for I cannot say she looked gratified at our appearance. We were in a large bare apartment, adorned with two allegorical prints of Music and Painting, and a copy of the law against public drunkenness. On one side, there was a bit of a bar, with some half-a-dozen bottles. Two labourers sat waiting supper, in attitudes of extreme weariness; a plain-looking lass bustled about with a sleepy child of two; and the landlady began to derange the pots upon the stove, and set some beefsteak to grill.