

A Holiday in France.

In 1911 Helen left her Gymnasium in Cambridge in the charge of Signe Laven and another gymnast, Mary Willis, and went to do special work in Norwich. Signe and Mary lived with us and went into Cambridge every day with me. Florence had also consented to take into our house a girl of seventeen, named Margit Schustedt. Her Swedish parents wished her to live with us for six months and attend the Studio.

It was towards the end of the Easter term, our work was nearly over and holiday trips were being thought of. An idea was started by Mary and Signe that our holiday should be spent in Paris. I had been there over and over again but only as a student working all day in studios but I was quite ready to go there for a pleasure trip. Of course Margit said she must go with us. As soon as we had settled on the plan other friends, hearing of it, wanted to go too. John Alford the poet wanted to go, John Bell, the nephew of Gertrude Bell, the traveller, wanted to go, Mrs Thornely with her daughters, Molly and Greta, wanted to go, my friend and helper, May Hamblin-Smith wanted to go and others as well. I was afraid it might prove a cumbrous party and I was glad that we were not all to go to France at the same time. We should reach it in driblets but very soon we should all be gathered together in the old student's hotel,

the Grand Hotel de la Haute Loire. It had no lift, was very high, had no restaurant, no bathrooms, no fixed basins, but was inexpensive. No doubt we should go some way towards filling it.

I was one of the first to arrive in France and I had only May Hamblin-Smith as my companion. She was at that time my helper in the Studio. She was a close friend and she still is. Her forte in art is colour printing and one of her prints called "Pan" was chosen by the collectors for the British Museum as a good specimen of modern colour printing. In appearance she is dark with sea-green eyes shaded by lids that give them a hawklike expression. She is tall, handsome and dresses well. She was a most noticeable person in the Paris streets and in the evening when excited she could be startling. She was adventurous and often led me into strange, sometimes dangerous situations (I think she enjoys it !) Yet when she said to me one evening about ten o'clock "We cant go to bed. Let us wander". I consented.

Where we went I do not know. In a street, certainly somewhere in the Latin Quarter, we happened to walk behind the dimly seen figure of a young man with papers in his hand who entered a doorway and slipped down a staircase which was close to the entrance. We were walking slowly and another young man passed us and disappeared down the staircase. He had a case in his hand. May clutched my arm - "Something is going on down there," she said. "Let us go and see what it is". I ought to have objected - but I dont remember doing so. We went down the

stairs and found a door a little open showing a lighted room. We pushed it open and found ourselves in a rather large underground room. There were about 12 or 14 men in it, most of them young. All were roughly dressed and none looked well to do but all had a certain artistic and literary look which gave me confidence. I am sure we must have prepared to retire with apologies but if we did I have forgotten that also. I know that they offered us chairs and we sat down. I heard them speak of us as "Les Innocentes" but the work of the evening apparently went on as if "Les Innocentes" were not there. I discovered with rapt interest that this was a literary club and these men, having written an article or poem, before sending it off to some paper, were reading it aloud to far more severe critics than they would be likely to have elsewhere. I was sorry when May got up to go but I knew that we had trespassed too long and I was grateful to them for not turning us out long before.

We often tried to find that street again but we never could.

When I first went over to Paris with Helen I made the acquaintance of a girl student at Colarossi's Studios. I noticed her work which was original. She left the Studios for Brittany in order to paint fishing boats ~~at~~ⁱⁿ on the coast and was so attracted by the coast scenery that she decided to live in Brittany. However she came back to Paris years afterwards.

calling herself Madame Hunt and declaring herself an Anarchist. I think May had some connection with her, at all events when I met her again a sort of friendship between them soon developed. May asked her to take us to those strange night cafes at Montmartre, L'Enfer and Le Ciel. Madame Hunt said that she would take us to L'Enfer but refused to take us to Le Ciel. We accepted what she would give us and we started out very late for Montmartre. When we got to the cafe we entered a gloomy room. Four closed coffins stood upright in the four corners. We sat down on oak coffin stools and had our coffee on black raised coffins. The room was lit by lamps made from human skulls. On the walls were pictures representing scenes pleasant enough but at variance with the dismal atmosphere of the place. However that was soon put right. The light from the skulls turned blue, our lips and cheeks turned blue and all the pictures changed their character and turned horrible. After we had recovered from the effect of the blue light and ghastly scenes we went, with other people through a passage that seemed as if it were built of huge, rough, oozing stones and found ourselves in a long room. There we remained. At the further end of the room on what might be called the stage an empty coffin stood upright.

We were asked if one of our number would come and stand in the coffin. A youth said that he would and walked to the coffin and stood in it. Before our eyes he gradually disappeared and a white skeleton stood in his place. Then slowly the skele-

ton was not seen and the boy was there as before. When he returned to us he declared that he had not detected any change. No skeleton had appeared to him. Then another man went on the stage and sat on an armchair. A nun seemed to come to him in great distress. She knelt down with clasped hands and seemed to pray him to help her but he was apparently hard hearted. Then a different sort of lady came in and with blandishments tried to attract him. He gave her no encouragement. Then she began to undress. To my great relief before she had discarded too many of the many garments ladies wore then she disappeared. The man said he had seen no one. I think the show was over but at all events we left. We made no attempt, although it was only next door, to go to Le Ciel. We parted from our friend, went back to our hotel and slept peacefully.

Madame Hunt was not remarkable to look at. She had an oval face with hair parted in the middle and smoothed down on each side of it. Her features were clear cut and her eyes were greenish-brown. Her expression was calm. Her dress was neat and was generally of a brown colour. I wondered what it was in her quiet personality that made it seem not at all surprising that she should be an anarchist. It seemed to emanate from her in other ways than through appearance and manner. Her conversation was interesting and her pictures strange. In those ~~ways~~ that I saw there was no evidence of any thought about line, mass or colour. It seemed as if she had been guided by some

occult spirit who didn't happen to care about composition. I wondered whether any artist could reject all laws and not inevitably develop a style with a law in it. There was a germ of style in hers in spite of its determined lawlessness. I was afraid that after our friends had gathered at the hotel I might not have the opportunity of seeing Madame Hunt again but later on I was to meet her once more.

Our friends, when they arrived, split into different groups and went their way separately, yet we all met for tea generally in Mrs. Thornely's room. Margit after her arrival, seemed to be in my charge rather than in Signe's and Graham came unexpectedly to Paris and wished me to go with him to Tours to make expeditions from there and see as many as we could of the Chateaux of the Loire. I thought that Margit would be all right with the others so, with complete confidence, I left her with them. I did not realise that some resentment might be felt that she - a girl of seventeen - should be in the party without someone specially in charge of her.

I had one of the loveliest holidays in my life at Tours with Graham. A chateau a day. Opportunities for sketching, not caught with difficulty but actually thought out and given me by my brother. Perfect weather. No expenses for me. Out of doors all day. An early-to-bed and early-to-rise sort of life and that was a rest to me after my hard term's work.

It would be difficult for me to tell of the beauties of the Chateaux. After painting scenes with my brush I cannot

describe them easily with my pen but I can give the plan of our holiday. Every evening my brother made out what we were to do on the following day and how we were to do it and, on the following day, we did it. When we arrived at Blois, Loches, Chinon, Langeais or Chenanceaux etc. we went into the castle and then wandered round it, viewing it from the distance. The moment I got what I call a "mental shock" which is when I see a scene that takes a pattern of line and mass making it suitable for a limiting border then I would call out "I want to sit here". Very often it would be in an awkward and uncomfortable place but - bless him - my brother never worried by trying to make me comfortable, that would be wasting time. Graham would pick out the best place near me he could find for himself. Out came papers from his pocket and he read and wrote. After a time he would get up and stroll off and return in about an hour. "I think I have found another view for you when you have done that". He had become ~~quite~~ quite clever in knowing the spots I might choose. If I wanted more time he would go to his papers again. After a while we would both go to find a luncheon place or rather go to the luncheon place he had already found.

I would paint for a short time in the afternoon or perhaps another Chateau would be explored. I only made pencil drawings of the remnant of the castle of Plessis les Tours but the memory of the view from its windows is as clear as if I had painted it. All round it, in fields that stretched far

away, were millions of bell glasses. Mother Earth with its crop of young vegetables was hidden under acres of gleaming, sparkling glass.

Nearly every evening we walked the streets of Tours and admired more and more its quaint old high houses with walls as well as roofs covered with slates or tiles.

Our hotel was Le Faisan, an hotel not much catering for foreigners. I could find no bathroom nor hear of one but I had a friendly talk with my maid and asked her for a bath and she graciously said that she would provide one for me. At the appointed time she fetched me and conducted me with an air of ceremony down passages and ushered me into a rather large and very white room. Away from the wall - indeed almost in the middle of the room - stood a really big bath - bigger than I had dared to expect. In it, and draped over the sides of it, was a huge white sheet or perhaps several sheets. The folds of the linen were evenly and decoratively disposed round it. The sheet gave the water in the filled bath an interesting blue-green tone. Two chairs were in the room, their forms completely hidden by snowy towels. They might have been marble seats. The effect of the room was severely classic. I felt quite inadequate to be the centre of it. I did not venture to suppose that I could suit it by being a Venus for she would require daintier surroundings. I did feel however that I ought to be formed like the ample ladies of Canova or Flaxman to be

in harmony with such a bathroom and that was far from being the case. I very much enjoyed my bath however.

One evening we went to the cinema. It was the first time that I had seen a long film. It was the story of Anthony and Cleopatra. Cleopatra was an enormously fat woman. In one picture she causes a girl slave to be thrown into her pool of crocodiles. When I think of it, it still gives me the creeps far more than any memory of "L'Enfer". There I was too intent on observation to have time to detect any reek of the pit but a scene of triumphant cruelty, even in a film, smelt of it.

I found a jaded, dissipated ~~look~~ looking crew in the hotel when we returned to Paris. Late nights had done their work. Graham and I took them off next day willy nilly to spend a day at Fontainebleau. It was very hot. They all lay about the forest unable to move except Mrs. Thornely who had wisely gone to bed while the youngsters were seeing the night sights of Paris. The memory left me of Fontainebleau Forest is that in every glade among its rocks and oaks lie groups of people. They are either panting with combined heat and weariness or sleeping profoundly. We went next day to Chartres and then the party separated.

But I was to remain behind for a few days with Margit. I had looked forward to being with her but I found her cross and sulky. Before Signe and Mary left I had found out the

reason for Margit's sulkiness. It appeared that they and the others had promised her that when I came back I should take her to the Moulin Rouge. When I did come back something about me must have made her doubtful. While I had been away the whole party had left her late one night well tucked up in bed, and had gone to enjoy themselves at the Moulin. They had not told her what they were going to do. She found it out and was so angry that just to pacify her, and also perhaps with the impish desire of punishing me for having left them, they had promised that I should take her there. I told them and Margit that I had never been to the Moulin Rouge and did not intend to go and that they had no right to make promises for other people. Having made my position clear I saw them off gaily and returned to the hotel to find myself left with a spoilt, bad tempered child. She cried a good deal and would not eat, sleep or talk sensibly. She told me that her one idea, when she came to Paris, was to go to the Moulin Rouge. She mourned over the fact that she must so soon, go back to Sweden but to go back without seeing that sight of sights would spoil her life. I had come back from Touraine with my mind full of beautiful scenery and interesting history and I was "off" music halls. I gave her a bad time in return for her bad temper and told her that I didn't intend to go where I didn't want to go. Fate however said otherwise. We happened to meet Madame Hunt. I told her why my companion seemed so woeful and silent. She said at once - "I'll

take you both to the Moulin Rouge and look after you". The clearing of the heavy storm that had settled over Margit was sudden, extraordinary and very unsettling to my resolutions. In the end I gave way. I somehow felt quite confident in the guidance of my anarchist friend, so, that very night quite late, she called for us.

We went in a fiacre and arrived at the office under the big red sails made redder still by flaring lights. We were asked questions which were explained to me. If we were respectable we paid five francs, if not only one. I paid fifteen francs and we went in. We sat down for our coffee at a table close to the famous dancing floor. Many people were round us and many also filled the galleries. I wondered how they knew who had paid five francs. I enjoyed seeing the dancers on the shining boards. One dancer, a girl, I shall never forget. I could have watched ~~the~~ wild thing all night long. She and all the other dancers wore just their ordinary clothes. Our coffee was served to us by a fat old waiter with enormous splay feet. He seemed to take a fatherly interest in our party especially in the fair haired Margit who certainly looked a child in that company. When some professional dancers came in from the Music Hall and gave a dance that might be considered not quite decent he happened to stand exactly in front of her. She called out several times - "I cant see ! I cant see !" but he did not move. After a time a number of performers from the Music Hall came

in and processed round the room and made remarks to us coffee drinkers. They were dressed in very strange costumes. Some people threw down from the galleries dozens and dozens of rings of coloured paper ribands, the dancing grew quicker to the sound of quicker and louder music, the expressions on some of the faces became unpleasant and I decided to go. Although it was perhaps early to leave Madame Hunt agreed and Margit got up mechanically and said no word against it.

When we were outside we said good-bye to Madame Hunt. I have never seen her again. She went in a cab and we got into ours. Then, when the horse had started and we were well on our way, to my intense surprise, Margit flung her arms round me and burst into floods of tears. I naturally thought at first that I had come away too soon, but no. That was not the reason. She sobbed out at last some confused words I could hardly make out but she repeated again and again - "Oh it was so ugly ! It was all so ugly !" Soon she was able to tell me that she had read "La Dame aux Camelias" and had woven a fantastic dream of beauty and splendour about the Moulin Rouge. The disillusionement was bitter. She found the place sordid - and sordid it will remain in her imagination. For me all the bother and the irritation of my mind beforehand were more than paid for by the sight of one girl dancing - a girl in a working girl's dress, with no ornament on her and no paint, but who might have been apachante of the woods. Margit, I think, did not notice her.

Margit has girls of her own now. How I should have liked to have heard her tell the story of her visit to the Moulin Rouge from her point of view; but perhaps she never told it.