

EUROPE ON NOTHING-CERTAIN A YEAR.

I ALWAYS thought I was born to see Europe. Nevertheless my prospects of ever doing so were for years less than infinitesimal. I was that most useless and unhappy of all created beings, an uneducated and penniless girl, with ambitions and yearnings — living amid the most mean and sordid intellectual circumstances, and as entirely without sympathy in my ambitions as if those about me were stones. Nothing but derision ever met my most earnest yearning. That yearning was to see what seemed to me the sole world of romance, poetry, art, and song — Europe! — born with my first geography lessons, I believe, and nourished by my juvenile readings in "Merry's Museum," the "Saint Nicholas" of my childhood.

But, if my memory serves me well, it was the reading of Bayard Taylor's "Views Afoot" that first gave a method to my European madness. I remember that it was in those days, and after that acquaintance with Bayard Taylor's fascinating experiences, that I began emphatically to assure myself that what *that* man had done *this* woman certainly would do. For fifteen years I repeated this assurance to an always hopeful and sympathetic listener. At the end of those fifteen years I was older, more tired, perhaps less wildly enthusiastic, than at their beginning; but my heart was still fixed, and I had saved three hundred dollars and twenty-nine cents!

I knew that I could always earn at least \$300 every year, possibly more, as by that time I had reached such a dizzy height of literary success as to be able to dispose of at least three manuscripts every year to first-class magazines in addition to my usual story market. On \$300 a year I knew I need not absolutely starve in any part of the world.

For years I had studied with zeal the scientific as well as the ideal side of my scheme. I had come to know the exact amount of nutriment bound up in the skin of a potato, and to calculate the difference in life-sustaining power between a handful of wheat and one of beans. I watched the crops of Europe with intense interest, and I, alas, confess without shame that in this matter of yearly harvests I would almost have sacrificed the financial prosperity of my own country to my desire that bread might be cheap in that famous land beyond the sea. For years I read delightedly all such vagabond adventures as those of young Ralph Keeler, of all the strug-

gling authors and artists who, like myself, had counted privation and discomfort light in the balance against their desire to reach their Mecca. I knew that poverty equal to mine had taken "Views Afoot" which all my fibers tingled to think of. I knew that a beggar's lot in Europe would be in some respects happier than mine at home, and I would almost have chosen to be a leper in the streets of some palaced and cathedraled city, rather than the fussy little old maid I was, daily reeling off my measure of cheap fiction in a dismal prairie village.

Of course I was crack-brained, for so everybody said, when — with only the assurance of three hundred dollars a year, and that assurance subject to every hazard of sickness and accident, the hospital if I should sicken, the *fosse commune* if I should die — I finally crossed the sea.

My voyage over was marked by no unusual incident, and my experience was not different from the seaskiff average, save in the one particular that nobody could ever have mourned as I did the food paid for with my fifty-dollar ticket, which I could neither eat nor take away in preparation for the poorly rationed days with which my prophetic soul already concerned itself.

Looking back upon my earlier European experience, my economical heart is often wrung by memory of the mistakes I then made. It was a colossal, almost a fatal error to make my London debut in one of the innumerable boarding-houses of the Bloomsbury district, almost exclusively patronized by Americans. It was a mistake soon corrected, however, and bearing compensation in the speedier acquaintance I made, not only with London topography, but London ways, than I could otherwise have hoped to do. I well needed that knowledge, fresh as I was from a prairie town.

"What are those things?" I asked one day of a fish-vendor, pointing to a heap of dingy, wet objects upon his stall.

"Periwinkle, mum," answered the man.

"What extraordinary things are eaten in England," I remarked, upon my return to Bloomsbury. "I don't believe famine itself could make *me* swallow a periwinklemum."

Unsound as I was on periwinkles, my ideas of London were nevertheless preëminently Dickensy, and my anxiety constant lest my American phraseology fail to convey

its intention. When I wanted a bun or a cake, I invariably inquired my way to the nearest cook-shop, because cook-shops are more numerous on the pages of the famous novelist than confectioners are, and the Dickensesque world is more addicted to sausages and boiled beef than to pound-cakes and Bath buns. One hot day I decided to refresh myself in American fashion. I could not remember the Dickens for "ice-cream," and so was driven to ask for it in my native American. "Ice-cream?" repeated the confectioner's young woman; "you'll find it at a chemist's." I ought to have said "an ice"; Mademoiselle thought I meant *cold cream*!

I was not long in learning that my humble means could not support Bloomsbury prices. So I found a bedroom in a plebeian but cleanly neighborhood, where our nearest omnibus focus was the Angel at Islington, and my weekly rent but six shillings.

How astonished my Bloomsbury acquaintances would have been had clairvoyant vision betrayed me translated from a "third-story back" and full-dress dinners to cooking a threepenny bit of beefsteak upon a toasting fork over the coals in my bedroom grate! I brought my provisions home in a fancy basket which might contain floss silk and ecclesiastical embroidery for all the tales it told; there were often hot potatoes in my pocket bought scorching at some street furnace; Liebig extract, with a dash of Worcestershire sauce added to a basin of boiling water from my landlady's teakettle, was my constant friend; my petroleum lamp burned brightly; my little round table, white-draped, was cosy. I had a subscription to Mudie's, and my weekly expenses for food and lodging were fourteen shillings. Then fourteen shillings a week represented comfort and plenty. Of the many, many weeks when the outgoing shillings were less I will not speak.

Two establishments received my constant patronage. At one, uncooked fish adorned the sidewalk-shelf, the odor of frying pervaded the air. Here, for five cents ($2\frac{1}{2}d.$), I could buy a very fair dinner—a three-ha'penny "middle," or headless and tailless bit of hot fish in crisp batter, with a pennyworth of fried potatoes. The other establishment was the Widow Hardwick's, "a cook-shop," where a penny would buy a huge "faggot," another as much pease-pudding as one could eat. The latter is simply a *purée* of dried pease. What the former is we can only leave to the imagination! It was in appearance a large round ball of hashed meat, wholesome enough in flavor; but, with beef at a shilling a pound, how *could* so much "faggot" be given for a penny?

Experience and dinners of crusts taught me providence. Therefore every time I found myself comfortably in funds, I laid in a provision of Liebig and biscuits, and when the stress came my landlady's teakettle steamed me safely over the troubled tide.

Those were busy and happy days. This old Europe was glorious to my prairie-bred senses, and not only the treasures of art and knowledge which I studied, but the commonest sights of the street, the most insignificant trifles of daily experience, were fraught with a romantic essence which intoxicated me like subtle ether. It was worth being born to live those dreamy, deliciously melancholy days in Westminster Abbey, the dim atmosphere, haunted by white forms, scarcely more real than the images of themselves which had haunted my imagination in far-away Illinois. It was worth living to hold communion with, or more consciously to reverence, the beautiful, the gifted, the good, and the famous dead. It was worth living to steal away from that divine company and refresh my mortal part with sausages and mashed potatoes for "thrippence" in a near cook-shop; or to dine upon a penny bun or two, and memories of Coleridge, as I climbed toward Highgate upon the top of a twopenny tram. It was well worth living to go home and chat with my landlady, thus getting, as I flattered myself, at the heart of the common people. Many were the astonishing revelations concerning our common humanity that came to me from that brown-hued dame in rusty black and bonnet with center of gravity invariably over her left eye. My landlady had a daughter, black eyes, round-cheeked, noisy, and sixteen.

"Would you mind ringing for your coals before six?" said my landlady one day. "My Sairy's taken to keepin' the sidewalks 'ot, an' there ain't no livin' with her if she can't get out with the rest o' her mates at six."

"Oh, Mrs. Dodshow! how dare you trust that child?"

"Oh, she'll be all right! She ain't no use to me nowadays, since she set her heart on gettin' a young man."

WHEN, three years later in Paris, I found my French, learned without a master, strangely incomprehensible to the gibbering natives, that I had but seven hundred francs in hand, and that I knew not a single soul in that whole brilliant capital, my situation was not exactly what it had promised to be when seen from across the sea. I must even confess that a slight dew of homesickness fell upon my pillow that night, in a modest little hotel named in Baedeker. "Room, 2 frs.; candle,

50 centimes; attendance, 50 centimes." My first business in Paris was to find an economical room; and therein was the beginning of disillusionments, founded upon the baseless scheme of Ralph Keeler. That happy-go-lucky adventurer, whose end was so tragic, I remember, claimed to have lived in Paris for \$8, or 40 francs, a month. His experience was before the war, but, even allowing for the increase of prices since that time, it is difficult to believe that a healthy and active man could live at that rate for many months, and survive to tell the tale. Years after that homesick night of my *début* in Paris, when ways and means of economy were more familiar to me, and, alas, for a sorrowful season, my "nothing-certain" became certainly-nothing, I descended to the lowest point of pecuniary expenditure, beyond which I must have ceased to live. That point was forty francs a month; but I was a delicate, abstemious woman of sedentary habits,—a most important factor in such a calculation.

At that not Sardanapalian period, I found a room, or *cabinet*, in an *hôtel meublé*, in the Rue des Saints Pères. It was seven flights up from the street, and was lighted by a skylight in the roof. This skylight was manoeuvred by a rope knotted to my bed-post. When that *tabatière* was closed, I was in a box with the lid down. When the rain fell, I had the choice to stifle or to soak; in dry times the flakes from my surrounding forest of chimneys gave me, every morning, the aspect of a blackamoor.

This cabinet was nine feet by six, and I paid for its luxury of bare brick floor, one broken chair, and toilet conveniences set up on an unpainted pine shelf, 20 francs a month. When I entered the little inclosure it had been freshly papered, but I discovered that the brick floor had probably not been washed from time immemorial. I shrank from putting my bare feet upon it. How to better the matter I could not determine for some time, for I had no extra franc with which to bribe gray and grasping Eugène, and there seemed no possible way to evolve cleanliness without him. However, the situation was intolerable. So down I went upon my knees every morning during several days, and scoured two or three bricks a day till all were clean.

While I occupied that eyrie my food alone cost me 20 francs a month. Every morning my breakfast was taken *en plein air* in the narrow and dingy Rue Dragon. Madame Boulanger always knew and welcomed me, gave me a chair, an iron spoon, a bowl, and a large bit of bread. The bowl she filled with hot milk into which she trickled a few drops of coffee and chicory,—principally the latter,—

and I breakfasted for five sous, in company sometimes of a *repasseuse* from a neighboring laundry, a post-office clerk, a not too flourishing journalist, and a woman artist descended from an adjacent mansard. I was wise enough to make friends with the most promising of my co-breakfasters, and thus, in that long, draughty corridor, flagged with huge stones, beside Madame's charcoal furnace, I have received French lessons that my income of nothing-certain a year could never have paid for. I invariably found my companions as perfectly polite and self-respecting as those I was accustomed to in my native land, and breakfasting thus *à la bohémienne* in an open doorway of a foreign city, my own self-respect suffered no loss, which is more than one can always say of luxuriously-served American breakfast-tables.

At noon I bought two crisp "crescents," which I ate sometimes at a shop counter, sometimes in the cool corridors of the Louvre or in its sunny gardens, or sometimes sitting under the trees upon the iron benches of the boulevards. I was never remarked in this; for Paris is a city of oddities, and much of the eating and drinking is done in the open air. Whoever gave a glance at me as I munched my crescents and rested by the wayside naturally took me for one of the quiet party of country people or humble *commerçants* munching bread or fruit near by, and thus gave me no second thought. Oftentimes I have been offered a draught from the bottle of some white-bonneted *ouvrière* beside me, and what discourtesies I have received in my wandering life have not been from my companions of the boulevard benches. It must be borne in mind that I was not young, and have never been pretty, otherwise I know that my experience would have been unhappily different.

At night during this short-commons period I bought a pint of strong and steaming *bouillon* from a dusky cuisine for four sous, and carried it to my room. *La cuisinière* always addressed me with affectionate politeness as "*ma petite dame*," nor changed her greeting even those gloomy nights when my forlorn exchequer forced me to buy two centimes' worth of broken crusts with which to thicken my *bouillon*, instead of serving myself with *pain frais* from the more aristocratic baker's. Those two centimes' worth of broken bread by the way (two-fifths of a cent) gave me all the farinaceous addition my soup and appetite needed for two dinners!

But these were late experiences in my foreign life, and took place after years of Continental wanderings, long after I had lived ten days in Naples on thirty sous' worth of boiled

macaroni, and subsisted many and many a day in grim Edinburgh on tea, bread, and three cents' worth of tripe fried over a spirit-lamp. I lived in Paris three months on forty francs a month, three months of unremitting literary labor. I came out from the experience perfectly well. That there was no superfluous fat on my bones it is needless to say; but, as the pursuit of fat was not one of my objects in coming abroad, I counted that no deprivation.

A few days after reaching Paris my manner of life became methodical enough for any American old maid or Parisian *religieuse*, although amid an atmosphere of undeniable bohemianism. I dined at a *restaurant bourgeois*, where my fellow-diners were all things but *bourgeois*! There were uncloistered *seurs* from the provinces, burly *marchandes* from the markets, students from the Bonnat *atelier*.

The salads in the windows of this humble restaurant might have been a week old, their flanking custards of even greater antiquity; the oil was of suspicious nativity, the chickens patriarchal; but what difference need that make to me when I could dine upon three *plats*, with a carafon of astringent ordinaire, for thirty sous! To uncounted millions in this struggling world of ours it would be almost the luxury of the "Arabian Nights," and why should I repine that it was less than that to me? I had only to repeat again "High thinking and low living," trot off to my selected lectures at the Collège de France and the Sorbonne, just as I had gravitated towards all the workingmen's libraries and lectures in London, thanking fate that I could hear thoughts so high with living no lower.

All this time I was making manuscript with facility, if without much art. I added to my means by translations. I studied French and made everybody my teacher. Sundays I spent in the Louvre, Luxembourg, or other picture galleries, at the Cluny or Versailles, while whole long days I browsed among books at the Bibliothèque Nationale. Whenever I dared I paid three francs for a seat at the Français, in a gallery level with the chandelier, although not the highest in the theater, or paid fifty centimes less for a place at the Grand Opéra, or more rarely thirty sous for a Padeloup concert. In all my foreign experiences I have found that eating and drinking are really but minor expenses, while traveling, clothing, studies, books, the forever unforeseen and uncalculated-upon, are the foxes that eat up the vines.

I had lived thus for about six months when serious doubts as to my being able to do Europe on nothing-certain a year began to assail me. My bare living was now at the rate of two hundred and fifty dollars a year,

but the remaining fifty was more than swallowed up by that terrible "unforeseen," which, like an implacable cormorant, ever followed my steps. There were the perpetual *pourboires*, the pests of Europe; soon would come the new-year's presents, when I must give to postman, restaurant waiters, concierge, *femme-de-chambre*, Jeanne who brought home my linen, and Marthe who took it away,—even to the beggar who begged at our *portecochère*.

I was ruminating sadly over my macaroni.

"In union is strength," said Miss Day, an art-student at the same table. "Let us try housekeeping."

We tried it.

There were two furnished rooms and a doll's kitchen, sixty francs a month. We did our own cooking; or, when business pressed, brought food ready to eat from a "cook-shop" on *cuisine bourgeoise*. How often have we dined, and dined well, on cabbage soup! Madame Clère showed us the simple process of adding a lump of butter and a cup of milk to the water in which a two-sou cabbage had been boiled. They who cannot laugh and grow fat on cabbage soup, thick with broken bread, do not deserve ever to "do" Europe on nothing-certain a year.

Those impromptu suppers that we gave sometimes,—how gay they were, even though our apple-sauce was served in an earthen flower-pot, our napkins remnants of last year's *peignoirs*; though our table was covered with newspapers, and all our cups loving enough for two friends to drink from each.

A small establishment near by, dubbed by us "The Dinnery," furnished us every night a slice from a hot joint and a dash of hot vegetables at a cost of twelve sous each person. One of us ran bareheaded, plate in hand, into the little place, and took her turn to be served with work-people in *bonnets blancs* and blouses, *petites couturières* with thimbles on, and shop-people with baskets. It was a quaintly curious and foreign scene on winter nights, and worthy the brush of a Flemish master—that dusky little den where Madame Richard stood by an immense *fourneau* slicing joints or spooning vegetables, as the orders came, the red light thrown up from the cracks of the smoldering *fourneau* and illuminating her broad face while the rest of her robust person was in Rembrandt shadow.

Sometimes we cooked our own dinner and invited George B—— to dine with us.

"I can scarcely believe it," he said, when we talked of our economies—"I can scarcely believe it, for you always have so much better meat than they give at my restaurant!"

Innocent George! Three pieces of steak were on the platter, the one on George's side the juiciest of tenderloin, those nearest us the rumpiest of rump!

Of course, during those European years we had many a fierce tussle with "*la bête*." One of those frightful struggles remains deeply impressed upon my memory. It was a bitter night; our fire was low, and both heaven and America too far away to help our dreariness. We had dined upon a salted mackerel for four sous, and were cowering around the dull grate like sepulchral caryatides.

"How long do people hold out?" murmured Miss Day.

"Hold out *what*?" I answered, half suspecting she meant to extend her pretty hand for alms on the boulevard.

"Before they draw lots," responded Miss Day.

Next morning, after our breakfast of reheated coffee and stale bread, we carried our watches, which we had never valued as Latin Quarter students are said to value theirs, to Mont Piété.

Some months later we found ourselves in Havre, returning from a trip through Normandy. As we wandered through the streets of that miniature Paris we were fascinated by a wondrous placard advertising the steamer *Sea King* to sail that night for Amsterdam, fare only twenty-five francs.

We looked at each other.

"Impossible!" sighed Miss Day.

We counted our money, sitting on a bench in the Public Gardens.

"Impossible!" sighed I.

We stopped at a *pâtisserie* to buy *brioche*s. Miss Day there looked at her watch.

"One watch is enough for *any* traveling party!" somebody murmured.

That very night my watch traveled express to Paris, with a note to a friend to carry it to Mont Piété and send the money to Amsterdam.

And thus we saw Amsterdam, living in a little room by night, wandering by day among pictures and antiquity-steeped architecture, making artistic and literary memoranda of all we saw. Then we slipped by sea to Rotterdam, thence to Bruges, Ghent, Antwerp. At Antwerp we concluded that even one watch was a superfluity in a traveling party, and Miss Day's made the same voyage as mine.

Then we went dreaming long halcyon days, like rose-petals on a summer sea, till we got back to Paris, to hard work, anxiety, and, alas, *la bête* again.

Eighteen months later it came to pass that we had a clear \$150 between us. We invested

forty of them in third-class railway tickets, and went vagabondizing into beautiful Italy.

One moonlight night we walked under mighty shadows amid eloquent silence through the streets of old Rome. We could scarcely speak for emotion as we came out upon the Spanish Stairs, even though one of the companions, who had met us at the station, wore a philistine "claw-hammer" and white choker, and the other had come in the costume of a Boulognese fish-girl from the fancy-dress ball of the *Cercolo Artistico*.

Through the silvery mystery brooding over the wonderful city we saw the dome of Saint Peter's and the solemnly waving stone piles of Monte Mario. It was Rome, wonderful, dreamed-of, hoped-for, struggled-for Rome. Rome at last! Miss Day spoke like one in a dream, as she said:

"Here we are finally in the Eternal City, with just two hundred francs in our pockets."

Our rooms were already engaged for us. The next day we gave seven *lire* for a battered, second-hand charcoal furnace, which we established upon our giddy balcony, eight flights from the narrow *ricolo* below. In these rooms we lived for two years, musing among ruins, studying in galleries, soothed in tired hours by the rhythmic sway of the Pincian pines; spreading our dinner-table to-day with a New York journal, to-morrow with a Roman Zanfulla; our sugar-bowl an antique *tazza*, our salt-cellar a Pompeiian tripod, our soup-tureen a much-dented tin basin; struggling with *la bête* at times with heart throbbing almost to bursting.

When, after months in southern Italy, we were in Paris again, preparing to drift northward, Mrs. Salmon called to bid us good-bye. We had our hats on, umbrellas and satchels in hand, a cab at the door.

"Where are you going first?" asked Mrs. Salmon.

"I don't know," I answered innocently. "Miss Day is counting over the money. If we have enough, we shall go round by Perugia and Assisi to Florence; if not, we shall stop in Siena till more comes."

"Oh, you *vagabonds*!" cried Mrs. Salmon.

And so we were indubitably. We were thorough vagabonds, even although hard-working ones. Yet if these pages incline any reader to do as we did, struggle to see Europe on nothing-certain a year, our advice would be short. Do not attempt it! For not two women in ten thousand could do as we have done, bear as we have borne, and be glad as we are glad. Even we, had we known what was before us, would have hung back and refused to take another step in so thorny and rough a path.