

GOSSIP

By Pamela Frankau

"I have never had an adventure in my life," said Rupert Edgar; "I have only had adventures in other people's."

His audience round the table said Rupert had made an epigram.

"Well, thank my profession, perhaps that what I say is true. A gossip writer has no identity. He hasn't the time. His job is to turn a searchlight on the few for the amusement of the many."

"The lowest form of animal life," suggested the poet Delroy, rudely.

"What is on the square inch of space you refer to as your mind?"

"Hamish Venne," said Rupert.

"The flying peer? Why?"

"Only let me tell you," said Rupert, "there's an interview with Venne in my rag to-morrow—two columns."

"But Venne's never given an interview in his life. Who got it?"

"I got it," said Rupert, gloomily.

"Like this—"

You all know the reputation of the Viscount Venne. You know that he broke the Cape record last month—that he's a crack pilot and nearly a millionaire, good-looking, drives a racing car and skippers a yacht and darts about Parliament in his spare time. And you seem to know his publicity-bug—that even after the record was broken he never lifted a long-distance telephone-receiver to tell the world he did it on Boko—and as a result he's better news-value than all your divorced duchesses and domestic film stars.

Anyway, I've never run up against Hamish Venne in any of the usual places. And when I went down to the Trout Hotel near Windsor this week-end he was the last person I expected to find.

I didn't find him to begin with; I found his house.

The Trout stands on a village green and the village stands on its dignity. I was there for one night to walk and drink beer and forget I was a gossip writer. But I saw a good-looking Elizabethan roof among some trees when I was coming back from the river on Saturday, and I asked the local doctor—whose was the nice house.

"That's Ashlar, Lord Venne's house, of course," he said.

I didn't wait for more. I just said "Is he there now?" and the doctor said yes, he thought so. I gulped my lunch and set out to see what I could do.

It was very hot. I walked along the white road past the pond and turned up to the right under the trees.

I was feeling a little precarious by the time I got to the gate. There wasn't a lodge—just a pair of old gates and a curly drive through the ash trees.

I walked quite comfortably—it didn't seem private at all. When I came to a clearing and saw the low Elizabethan farmhouse facing me, with grass lawn running up to the foot of its walls, and tangled rosebushes in the grass, I felt rather scared—as though I'd forgotten my errand.

While I was debating the next move—and exploring with my eyes the thick trees behind the house—I fell in love. So would you have if you had seen the woman.

She came round the house and stopped when she saw me. She looked guilty—and very beautiful. My tongue has caught poisonous catch-phrases from my pen. "A willow brunette with a vivacious mouth" is the kind of line from my stock-in-trade. But you can imagine somebody dark and dignified, yet moving casually—with hair that waved off her forehead after the lovely manner of Kay Francis—that's the woman I fell in love with.

"Were you looking for somebody?" she asked. Her voice was abrupt and deep.

"Is this Ashlar?" I hedged.

"All this is Ashlar."

"Lord Venne's house?"

"Yes," she said, and looked as though she were going to laugh. She added: "And my house—"

Of course I knew that Hamish Venne was married—and I felt chilled about it. She was waiting for me to say something.

I said: "As a matter of fact, I'm no earthly good at telling lies—I'm a Journalist."

"What a very unsuitable profession to have chosen in those circumstances," she said, solemnly, not laughing until I did.

"What a man is that I've come here to try and get an interview out of your husband. And I know what he's like about interviews. It was only ten minutes ago that I heard he lived here—so I haven't thought of a disguise yet. I'm not a reporter; I'm a gossip-writer—and this kind of job is rather beyond me. How do you think I can get at him?"

She thought for so long over the answer that I said, desperately: "He can write every word of it himself—I won't alter a comma."

"I'm sure you won't. But Lord Venne is up in London. I don't quite know when he will be back; I could find out for you."

"Bless you!" I said.

"Not at all. What do you want to know about him?"

"Everything. Not only about the flight. Just details. You must realize the glamour of a man like your husband."

"He is baffling," said Lady Venne. She looked down and dug the toe of a very good buckskin shoe into the lawn, damaging both. Then she lifted her head and shook back the expensive hair. "I'm afraid I can't answer for Lord Venne. But suppose you have a meal with me," she said. "I could tell you things."

"Wouldn't he be there?" I asked, rudely.

"No—not if you came to-night. But, oh dear, I can't manage tonight," she remembered. "I'm dining over at Ascot."

"And I have to go back to town to-morrow"

"I'd like to help you," she was saying, more, it seemed, to herself than to me. "Why not come to supper. Mr. Gossip-writer? You're staying where?"

"At the Trout."

"Then it won't take you ten minutes to walk up. Come up about eleven-thirty."

I forgot myself and said: "But I'd love to."

"I'm so glad. I'll tell you—details about Lord Venne." She looked quite wicked at that moment.

Well, I walked back to the Trout. I couldn't quite make out her friendliness.

But the doctor soon enlightened me. His car caught me up on my way past the pond, and he shouted "Hi!" I climbed in.

"Well—where did you vanish to?" he asked.

"I went to see Lord Venne."

"And what did the Flying Peer say to you?"

"He wasn't there. But I talked to his wife."

"Oh, no, you didn't," said the red-faced doctor.

When I asked him what he meant he said: "So even gossip-writers don't know everything about this district. It's our best scandal. The lady—you've been talking to isn't married to Venne. She's a French acquaintance. He quarrelled furiously with his wife. And she left him. Went abroad. I think. But she hadn't any money, and when she came back he let her have the other house?"

"What other house?"

"Why, the house you went to, Ashlar. Itself, belongs to Hamish Venne and his present lady. The other house, Ashlar Lodge—he's permitting his wife to use. They never see each other—the grounds go for miles. Meantime I think there's a divorce pending. Funny story, isn't it? Don't you go and print it now."

"I know the laws of libel, thanks," I said.

"When I got back to the Trout I was fool enough to telephone Randall, my partner in crime at the office. When I told him what had happened he was rather brisk. I couldn't exactly explain over the telephone, and he thought I was seeing Venne himself. He had the idea that he ought to come down and do the job for me. But I'd no intention of letting him steal my thunder. Rather than shout the embarrassing story aloud for the local exchange to hear, I agreed to catch the five o'clock train to town and dine with him."

I found him in his rooms in Jermyn Street, and explained.

"Randall was envious of the supper date, but a little doubtful that it would yield any printable sort of story about Venne. He said he had known Venne's wife when she was at school, and she had a sinful temper and was expelled. He thought it was charming of Venne to let her live in Ashlar Lodge."

I was a fool not to have looked up the time-table beforehand. The last connection to my deserted village left at nine-thirty—I had to wait for a 10.25 to Windsor—I had to wait for sixty-five minutes. If I disembarked at Slough could get a car. I raced out of Paddington Station.

I went out on the wrong side for a taxi—the departure side. There wasn't one in sight. But parked against the pavement there was an immense blue and silver Rolls-Royce.

I stopped and looked—and I nearly fell dead—because leaning back in the driver's seat, sound asleep, was Hamish Venne.

At that minute I completely forgot the significance of my supper date. I was all gossip-writer. I tapped on the window. He woke up and looked at me, blinking.

"Hallo," he said, "what can I do for you?"

I hadn't got an excuse for speaking to him. I said the first thing I could think of. "Can you tell me if I've missed the fast connection to Revelstone?"

"Revelstone—my home-town," said Hamish Venne, and no more. His head nodded on his chest. Then he woke up again and smiled. "I shouldn't be at all surprised if you had," he said. "Because I have—I'm on my way there now."

That recalled my engagement. He was going down to Ashlar tonight, perhaps unexpectedly—perhaps he had telephoned her and she had failed to find me at the Trout. There was probably a message there telling me not to come. At any rate, welcome or not, his presence would throw a coroneted spanner into my supper date.

He lapsed again into sleep. I tapped the window a second time. "Hallo!" said Hamish Venne, "you there again?"

"Sorry," I said, "but could you possibly give me a lift to Revelstone?"

"Revelstone," he said, as though he hadn't heard the name before. "Certainly—but you'll have to drive."

"I'll drive with pleasure," I said.

I was looking at the petrol-gauge and switching on the engine. Hamish had moved drowsily from the driver's seat.

It was a super car. I let one window down—I didn't want Venne to sleep all the way to Revelstone—I had a lot of questions to ask him. The air woke him again, but he didn't seem to remember much. He lay in the corner seat and blinked at me.

"Who are you?" he asked, sleepily.

"My name's Edgar."

"I'm delighted to meet you. Good lord—what a hora!"

Certainly, the Klaxon shrieking behind us would have started somebody less tired than he was. I accelerated. The Klaxon shrieked louder.

I turned out of Bayswater Road into the Park.

The other car turned likewise. It seemed to be chasing us. I trod again on the accelerator. That car was a dream to drive.

"I say you can drive," said the Flying Peer. "We shall get to Ashlar in about ten minutes. Come in and have a drink."

"Love to," I replied, as I had replied to his French acquaintance. "In this car we might get there under the hour."

Good car—Rolls, isn't it?"

"That's right," I said, laughing. I liked him.

"Ashlar's my house," he explained. "My wife will give us cold beef and beer. At least, no she won't—I forgot. My wife had excellent ideas about beef. But—"

He was cut short by the yell of that infernal Klaxon—I looked over my shoulder and saw the lights of the other car glancing after us.

"I say," said Hamish Venne, waking from a further trance, "aren't you being chased by something?"

"Yes—some feels trying to race us."

"Drunk, I expect," said the Flying Peer. "Deplorable thing, drink—I should let him pass."

"I'll let him see if he can when we get to the Great West," I said.

The speedometer was past sixty. The Great West Road opened in front of us and the Klaxon screamed reproachfully.

"That's put him back six weeks," said Venne.

But that car wasn't giving up so easily. And the horn was an outrage. I put out my hand and signalled it to pass. It shot by and pulled up with a screech—if I hadn't skidded round it there would have been an end of one Rolls-Royce, one Flying Peer, and one gossip-writer.

"Good God!" said Venne, sleepily. "Bandits."

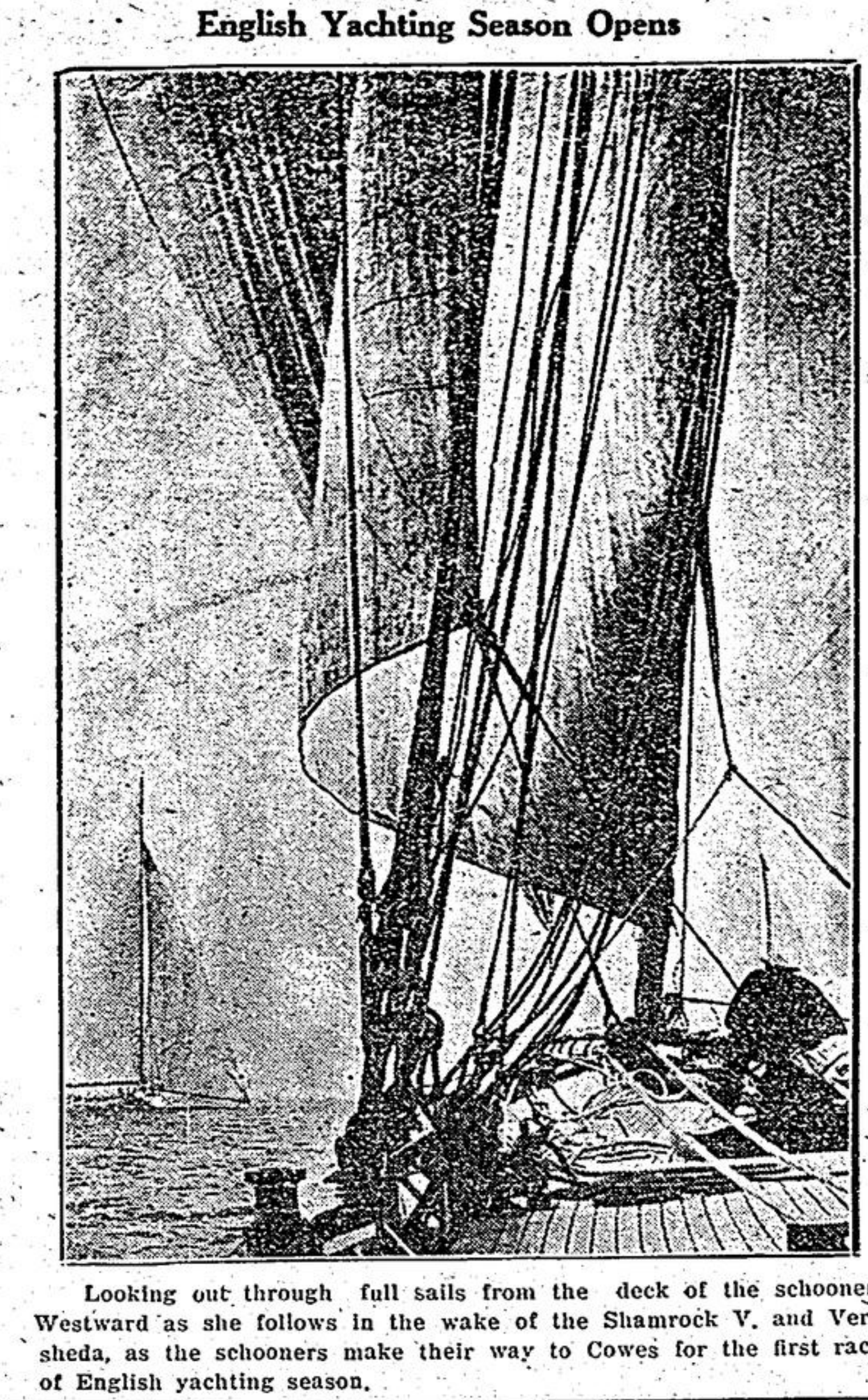
I turned the car towards the pavement, put on my brakes and got out.

Two men were running up the road towards me. One shouted "Stop!" but I didn't wait for more. I jumped back. I'd no idea what sort of racket was going on, but I realized I'd too valuable a passenger to risk. One man was up to the Rolls as I started her. He got his foot on the step—I stuck an arm through the window and pushed his face. He fell backwards. The Flying Peer woke up again and said "Damned impertinence."

"It's worse than that," I told him, as I trod on everything.

"It was all very sudden," murmured Venne. "Very sudden indeed—woke me up."

Now I could hear that Klaxon again and for the life of me I couldn't imagine who or what was after Lord Venne. The noise was ridiculous. Crooks wouldn't have risked it.



Looking out through full sails from the deck of the schooner Westward as she follows in the wake of the Shamrock V. and Verasheda, as the schooners make their way to Cowes for the first race of English yachting season.

I got every ounce out of that Rolls, and as we poured over Staines bridge I began to laugh at the business. It was so utterly a journalist's adventure and it didn't look as though I'd get a story out of it unless we crashed.

For the noble lord was sleeping. And whoever it was damning his eyes to the tune of a Klaxon, I hardly thought they'd chase him through Ashlar gates. He had taken it so calmly that I was regretfully obliged to guess that these were his dinner companions rather than the quoted Prime Minister. "Yes," I thought, "that's it. They're tight, and they're racing him." But my opinion of the Flying Peer was a little damaged. More so when, as we shot by the river, he asked brightly: "Did I invite you in for a drink?"

"You did," I said. "And I think those friends of yours behind will expect one, too."

"Friends? I haven't got any friends. I was just wondering if—whether—how—Look here, my name's Venne," he said, sounding more sober. "Does that convey anything to you?"

"Yes."

"Well, my domestic life is a little complicated at the minute. I've made rather a fool of myself, as a matter of fact. Ever been married?"

"Practically never."

"Well, I was—but the lady of my house—"

"It's all right," I said, "I know the story—I've met her—and I knew who you were as soon as I saw you. That's why—"

"You recognized me, did you? But where did you meet Jeanne? And who—?"

Now we were half a mile from Revelstone. I hadn't been listening for our pursuers. I heard them then, the absurd howl of the horn not fifty yards behind us.

"Look here, Lord Venne," I said. "You're awake now—think who is heaven's name can be chasing you?"

"Chasing me? Here was the Trout and the pond and the model village, suitably sleeping under the moon. "Nobody chases me," said the Flying Peer. "I wish to heaven she would—"

"Who?"

"Never mind," said the amazing man. "But if you think those bandits are after me, put it out of your head. How should they know I'm here. Gosh, they're putting on a spurt."

They were. Their lights rushed up the lane behind us, and unless they pulled out I saw I was going to sponsor a crash as I turned into Ashlar gates.

I flung out my arm. The gates were open. The others were just behind us. I pulled the wheel over and they must have grazed our back mudguard as we whirled into the drive. The calmness of the Flying Peer infected me.

"Well, probably they know your car," I suggested.

It was then that I got my second surprise of the evening. For the Flying Peer sat up with a jerk and said "My car? What the devil are you talking about? This isn't my car."

We were within ten yards of the house. I put on the brakes before I said: "Whose is it, then?"

"Don't ask me," said the Flying Peer. "I thought it was yours."

"But you—were—sitting in it," I stammered.

"I know. I was aiming for the train—there's a fast connection to Revelstone; you know—and I felt so ill that when I found I'd missed it,

English Yachting Season Opens

Where People Aren't Crowded

Historic Hostels of Old France

A little pamphlet issued by the Department of the Interior summarizes in an interesting fifteen pages conditions in the Northwest Territories—Canada's northern empire—which group a vast area of islands and mainland beyond the provincial boundaries notes the Ottawa Journal in this editorial.

The three districts—Mackenzie, Keewatin and Franklin—which together make up the Territories, have a total area of 1,309,682 square miles, only 51,465 square miles of this expanse being water. The total population is 9,723, from which it follows that every resident has an expanse of some 135 square miles, and if a man doesn't like his neighbors he need not travel very far before he is into the great open spaces. There are only one thousand whites in the Territories, and the remainder are divided fairly evenly between Indians and Eskimos.

The pamphlet gives useful information on climate and natural resources. At the end of last year, it is stated, mineral claims in good standing numbered 3,739, of which 2,200 were staked at Great Bear Lake. Deposits of copper have been found in the Dismal Lakes-Coppermine River district, lead-zinc near Great Slave Lake, nickel at Rankin Inlet, pitchblende and silver ores on the eastern shores of Great Bear Lake. There are indications also of gold, coal, cobalt, manganese and other minerals, while at Norman there are oil wells and a small refinery has been installed.

The airplane has permitted a degree of exploration in the Territories impossible in the old days, but transportation is, of course, the great problem in exploitation of the natural riches now known to exist there.

Josephine Hambleton, Canadian Press Writer, Tells of Colorful Inns

To the usual animation of the highways of France along which, it is said, travel 1,700,000 a day, is now added the colorful exodus from cities to the sea. Two millions, it is expected, will go down this year to the shores of the Channel, the Atlantic and the Mediterranean. Half a million children will camp in the vacation colonies on the coast.

On the way, what is so delightful as the old inns which, with their quaint bright signs, tempt the wayfarer to tarry?

The most ancient of the inns which play so distinctive a part in the legends of the Great Roads is at Theze, Loir et Cher. It was built by the Romans and, if you have not forgotten your Latin, on the pavement in front of the massive stone walls, you may still read the imperial bill of fare, with prices affixed.

Later inn-keepers are not above copying this practice from those admirable tourists and practical travelers, the Romans. To-day, whether along the lonely paths of the Pyrenees, the sunny roads of Provence, or the boulevards of Paris, posted up outside the door, for the uncompromising gaze of all and sundry, is the menu of the day's fare, with prices of each dish. Where the welcome adage "Vin compris" is lacking, the unhappy traveller knows that here he must pay extra for his wine.

The Golden Eagle

In the heart of Calvados, six miles from Deauville, but six centuries in atmosphere, with its antique rafters against the sun-baked stucco is the Inn of the Golden Eagle, "L'Aigle d'Or."

Hors d'Oeuvre, haricots verts, green peas, potatoes, roast veal, cheese, apple tart, (Tarte Maison)—today's menu, hanging under the eaves with the encouraging: "Vin compris—Ouzé francs."

The whole, including tip, for 5 francs.

Inside, original prints from Dickens remind the traveller that he has found a favorite haunt of wayfarers from England. One oak bench, worn smooth by four centuries of diners, has cut deep in the brown wood the letters: "Brummel, 1830."

Beau Brummel carved his name in the bench, while supping here, on his way to Caen.

He who would pass the night at the Inn of the Golden Eagle must go out through the great courtyard (where coaches drew up in the old days), climb the outside wooden staircase to the balcony above.

"Many travellers this year?"

"Fewer in cars, more on foot, especially from London," answers the jolly host.

Sixteenth Century

The inn, a favorite resort of artists, English and French, dates from 1520. It was in the 16th century that the French first took to the roads wholesale and inns sprang up prolific as good intentions along the path of the pilgrim.

At Totes, near Dieppe, the somewhat austere front of the Swan Inn (Hotel du Cygne) belies the comfortable interior which Guy de Maupassant made famous in "Boule de Suif." The huge copper kettle left by Napoleon after a sojourn here still hangs before the broad fireplace. Established, too, in the 16th century, it became known as a rendez-vous of the king's cavaliers. It was a favorite stopping place of Messire Castelnore, known more commonly as D'Artagnan, on his secret and perilous errands across the Channel.

Even more brilliant it became under Louis XV., who designated it a hunting lodge for Madame de Pompadour. In the Great War, it was for a time the refuge of the King and Queen of the Belgians.

Dynasties pass but appointments and services are much the same as when D'Artagnan made his sudden appearances here. The host, in modest chef's cap, still welcomes the guest and vaunts good fare and modest rate.

There are inns famous for the departure of kings in exile. At Le Commanderie a few leagues from Evreux, Louis Philippe stopped in 1848, in his precipitate flight from the revolution. In the simple room, with its old rafters mellow in the Autumn light, the Empress Eugenie rested a few minutes in September, 1870, and had a cup of coffee before the fire. She too was flying from Republican Paris.

Others are known for their splendid entrances. They are to be found along the Route of One Hundred Days, known as the Route Napoleon. It runs from Cannes to Grenoble on the way to Paris. At the Inn of the Golden Arm (l'Auberge du Bras d'Or) at Alseron, the room where Napoleon had his first sleep after his escape from Elba, is much the same as it was in March, 1815. At Grenoble, the Hotel des Trois Dauphins still preserves some of the famous manifestoes which the Emperor addressed to the Army.

There is about these ancient inns an indefinable atmosphere. Every man who has passed by in quest of adventure, fortune, love or gain, has in parting, left something of himself and his dreams.

"I always suffer. Suffering seems to be what I do best,"—Richard Barthelemy.

TELEPHONE AT NIGHT

By GLUYAS WILLIAMS

