

## DIEPPE: 1895

### I

I WENT to Dieppe this summer, with the intention of staying from Saturday to Monday. Two months afterwards, I began to wonder, with a very mild kind of surprise, why I had not yet returned to London. And I was not the only one to fall under this inexplicable fascination. There is a fantastical quality in Dieppe air which somehow turns us all, at our moments, into amiable and enthusiastic lunatics. Relays of friends kept arriving, I as little as they knew why; and some of them, like myself, never went back. Others, forced to live mostly in London, and for the most part content to live there, went backwards and forwards every week. What is it, in this little French watering-place, that appeals so to the not quite conventional Englishman, brings him to it, holds him in it, brings him back to it so inevitably? Nothing, and everything; an impalpable charm, the old-fashioned distinction of a little town which has still, in its faded lawns by the sea, in the line of white hotels beyond the lawns, something of that 1830 air which exhales for us from a picture of Bonington. And then Dieppe is so discreetly, and with such self-respect, hospitable to us English; so different from the vulgar friendliness of Boulogne, with its "English chop-houses" insulting one's taste at every step. Dieppe receives us with perfectly French manners, offers us politeness, and exacts it on our part, and pleases a sensitive and appreciative Englishman because it is so charming in such a French way. And then life, if you will but abandon yourself to the natural current of things, passes in a dream. I do not quite know why, but one cannot take things seriously at Dieppe. Only just on the other side of that blue streak is England: England means London. At the other end of a short railway-line is Paris. But all that is merely so many words; the mind refuses to grasp it as a fact. One's duties, probably,

call one to London or Paris, one's realisable pleasures; everything but the moment's vague, immense, I say again, inexplicable, satisfaction, which broods and dawdles about Dieppe.

At Dieppe the sea is liberal, and affords you a long sweep from the cliffs on the left to the pier on the right. A few villas nestle under the cliffs; then comes the Casino, which takes its slice of the *plage* with excellent judgment. Built of peppermint-coloured brick, it sprawls its length insolently above the sea. It is quite nice, as casinos go; it is roomy, and has some amusing chandeliers hung up by ribbons; and the terrace is absolutely charming. If you are insular enough to wish it, you can sit and drink brandies and sodas all day; if you would do in France as the French do, you can sit nearer the parapet, with an awning stretched above your head, and look out drowsily over the sea, which is worth looking at here, opalescent, full of soft changes; and you can chat with as many of the *beautés de plage*, Polish princes, and distinguished artistic people as you happen to know. There is the Prince de Sagan, with his irreproachable button-hole; the Comtesse de Greffulhe is standing on the *estacade*; Massenet and Saint-Saëns are sitting on the chairs yonder; Cléo de Mérode, the 1830 beauty of the Opera, whose photograph you have seen in every shop window in Paris, is taking her bath, wearing the prettiest little black socks, yellow gloves, and a thin, many-twisted gold chain about her neck. All around you, bright in the bright sun, there is a flow of soft dresses, mostly in sharp, clear colours, vivid yellows and blues and whites, the most wonderful blues, more dazzling than the sea. And there are delicious hats, floating over the hair like clouds; great floating sleeves, adding wings to the butterfly. I adore beautiful summer dresses, and here at Dieppe you have all the fashions and felicities of a whole summer.

Ah! but the *plage*, on a sunny morning in mid-season, what a feast of colour, of movement, of the most various curiosities! The *plage* has its social laws, its social divisions, an etiquette almost as scrupulous as a drawing-room. All the space in front of the Casino is tacitly reserved for the people

who subscribe to the Casino, and who are moving up and down the wooden staircase from the terrace to the beach all day long. Beyond that limit the *plage* is plebeian, and belongs to everybody. Women sit about there with shawls and babies and paper parcels. At the bathing hours it is a little more select, for some people, with full liberty of choice, prefer to bathe there. Outside the Casino there are fewer people, but one is more or less smart, and the barons and *beautés de plage* are alike here. In front of the double row of bathing machines there is a line of little private boxes. Smart women sit on exhibition in every compartment, wearing their best hats and smiles, sometimes pretending to read or sew: as if one did anything but sit on exhibition, and flirt, and chatter, and look at the bathers! There is a constant promenade along the shifting and resounding pathway of boards laid over the great pebbles; chairs are grouped closely all along the *plage* between this promenade and the sea; there is another little crowd on the *estacade*, from which the bathers are diving. The bright dresses glitter in the sunlight, like a flower garden; white *peignoirs*, bright and dark bathing costumes, the white and rose of bare and streaming flesh, passing to and fro, hurriedly, between the bathing machines and the sea. The men, if they have good figures, look well; they have at least the chance of looking well. But the women! Rare, indeed, is the woman who can look pretty, in her toilette or herself, as she comes out of the sea, wraps herself in a sort of white nightgown, and staggers up the beach, the water running down her legs. Even at the more elegant moment when she drops her *peignoir* at the sea's edge, before stepping in, it is hard for her, with the best intentions on her part and the best of wishes on ours, to look desirable. She is often wise enough to wear corsets; without them, even an excellent figure may appear a little extreme, in one direction or another. It is with a finer taste, after all, that in England the women are not allowed to bathe with the men, are kept out of sight as much as possible. A sentimental sensualist should avoid the French seaside. He will be pained at seeing how ridiculous a beautiful woman may look when she has very few clothes on. The lines of the body are lost or deformed; there is none of the suggestion of ordinary



costume, only a grotesque and shapeless image, all in pits and protuberances, for which Nature should be ashamed to accept responsibility. Complete nudity, there is no doubt, has its charm, though of a somewhat primitive kind;

but this state of being undressed and yet covered, in this makeshift, unmilliner-like way, it is too barbarous, Mesdames, for the tolerance of any gentleman of taste.

## II

THE Casino has many charms. You can dance there, listen to music, walk or sit on the terrace in the sun, write your letters in the reading-room on the very pictorial paper which is so carefully doled out to you; but it is for none of these things that the Casino exists, it is in none of these things that there lies the unique fascination of the Casino, for those to whom the Casino has a unique fascination. The Casino, properly speaking, is only a gorgeous stable for the little horses which run away with all the money of the visitors, to heap up the golden hoards of Mr. Isidore Bloch, late of Monte Carlo. All the rooms in the Casino open into the room of the green tables; all the alleys of the gardens lead there. In the intervals of the concert, if you wish to stroll for a few minutes on the terrace, you have to pass through the room; you see the avid circle about the tables, the swish of the horses; you hear the monotonous "Faites vos jeux, Messieurs . . . . Les jeux sont faits . . . . Rien ne va plus," and then, after the expectant pause, the number: "L'as, numéro un." And in time, however strong, or however idle, or however indifferent you are, you will be drawn into that fascinated circle, you will be seized by the irresistible impulse, you will begin to play. The fascination of gambling, to the real amateur of the thing, is stronger than any other passion. Men forget that a beautiful woman is sitting opposite to them; women do not so much as notice that a more beautiful toilette than their own has just come into the room. I have seen the most famous professional beauties of Paris sit at those green tables, and not a soul has looked at them except the croupiers and myself.

I said the impulse was irresistible. I have proved it on myself. Gambling in the abstract has no charms for me; I can go to the races without the slightest inclination to take the odds; it annoys me when little

newspaper boys rush up to me as if expecting me to buy their papers because they are the first to shout "All the win-ner!" I lounged about the room of the *Petits Chevaux* for weeks without putting on more than two or three two-franc pieces, which I contentedly lost. I saw my friends winning and losing every afternoon and every evening; I saw them leaving the tables with their pockets bulging with five-franc pieces; I heard them discussing lucky numbers; I saw the strength of the passion which held them by the urgency and the futility of their remorse when they had lost; I heard them saying to me, "It will be your turn next," and I laughed, certain of myself. I put on a few francs to please a charming lady whom it had pleased to tempt me, and I found myself waiting with more interest for the turn of her head as she smiled up to me, from time to time, over her shoulder, than for the turn of the little horse past the winning post. I knew by that that the demon of play had not bitten me; I felt absolutely safe.

Well, of course, I succumbed, and the sensation I experienced was worth the price I paid for it. While I played, nothing existed but the play; the money slipped through my fingers, I gathered it in, flung it forth, with an absorption so complete that my actions were almost mechanical. My brain seemed to act with instantaneous energy; no sooner had I willed than my fingers were placing the coins here, and not there, I knew not why, on the table. I followed no system, and I never hesitated. I then knew for the first time the strength of convictions for which there is not even the pretence of a foundation. While my money lasted, and I saw it flowing to me and from me so capriciously, I felt what I think must have been the intoxication of abandoning oneself to Fate, with an astonishing sense of superiority over ordinary mortals, from whom I was almost more absolutely removed than if I had been moving in a haschisch dream. And in the exaltation, the absorption, of this dream, in which I was acting with such reckless and causeless certainty, there was no really disillusioning shock, either when I lost or when I won. My excitement was so great that I accepted these accidents as merely points in a progress. After a time I did not even play for the sake of winning. I played for the sake of playing.

After all, *Petits Chevaux* is the merest amateur gambling; the serious people who play baccarat next door, in the club, would laugh at it, and rightly, from the gambler's point of view. The interest of the thing is in its revelation of the universal humanity of the gambling instinct, which comes out so certainly and so unexpectedly in the people who gamble once in the year, for a few scores or a few hundreds of francs. And those green tables are so admirable in the view they afford of the little superstitions which exist somewhere in the background of all minds. This table is lucky to such a person, that column to another. The women swear by the croupiers, and will take any amount of trouble to get a seat by the side of the one they prefer. And the croupiers, little miserable engines of Fate, sit with folded hands and intent eyes, impassive, supercilious, like little Eastern gods, raking in the money without satisfaction, and tossing you your winnings with an air of disdain. Yet they, too, in spite of their air of supremacy, are entirely at the mercy of a moment's caprice. A croupier at whose table too much is won is liable to instant dismissal; at the best, they earn their five hundred francs a month only during the few months of the season, and the most imposing of all the croupiers at the tables now has just appealed to a lady who plays there, offering himself and his wife as servants.

## III

ON certain afternoons there is a *Bal des Enfants* at the Casino. You cannot imagine anything more delicious. All around the room sit children, in their white dresses, their little, thin, black and yellow legs set forth gravely. They are preoccupied with their fans, their sashes, their gloves; their hair is beautifully done all over their heads, and falls down their backs. The little boys, in velvet and navy suits, march to and fro, very solemnly, a little awkwardly, bow, and choose partners. The bigger girls (some of them are thirteen or fourteen) jump up, cross the room hurriedly, with the nervous movement of young girls walking, tossing their hair back from their shoulders; they form little groups, laugh and nod to the grown-up people who stand about the door; and every now and then pounce on a tiny sister, and pull

about her dress until its set suits them. In the middle of the room stand two absurd persons: the blonde Jew with the immense pink nose, the golden beard and moustaches, who acts as master of the ceremonies: he tries to assume a paternal air, his swollen eyes dart about nervously; and the middle-aged lady with eyeglasses, who is more immediately concerned with the



children's conduct. She is frankly anxious, fussy and occupied. The orchestra is about to begin, and in the middle of the room a little helpless ring of very tiny children, infants, begins to walk gravely round and round; the tiny people hold one another's hands, wonderingly, and toddle along with their heads looking over their shoulders, all in opposite directions. The dance has

begun: it is the Moska, with its funny rhythm, its double stamp of the heels. Some of the children dance charmingly, with a pretty exactness in the trip and turn of the toes, the fling of the leg. There are adorable frocks, marvellous faces. They turn, turn, stop short, stamp their heels and turn again. The whole thing is so gay and simple and artificial, these little, got-up people who are playing at being their elders. It is so pretty altogether and so exciting, that I could watch it for hours. Nothing is more exciting than to see children masquerading. I am always disposed to take them, as they would be taken, very seriously, to think of them almost as of men and women. As if they were not so far more attractive than any possible men and women! I hate to think of those long, thin legs getting stouter, and being covered up in skirts; of all that floating hair being twisted up into coils and bundled together obscurely at the back of the head. I can see the elder sisters of these enchanting little absurdities standing beside me at the door. How uninteresting they are, how little they invite the wandering of even the vaguest emotion!

## IV

BUT all Dieppe is not to be seen at the Casino, and, perhaps, not the most intimate part of Dieppe. I had the good fortune to live in the very heart of the town, just outside the principal doorway of the Église Saint-Jacques. I have never in my life had a more genuine, and, in its way, profound sensation than my daily and nightly view of that adorable old church, a somewhat flamboyant Gothic, certainly, which I grew to love and wonder at with an intimacy that was entirely new to me. To look out last thing at night, before getting into bed, and see the grey stone flowering there before me, rising up into the stars as if at home there, and so full of solid shadow about its base, broadly planted on the solid earth; to rise in the morning and look out on the same grey mass, white in parts, and warm in the early sunlight; there never was a *décor* which pleased me so much, which put so many dreams into my head. Every Gothic church is a nest of dreams, and the least religiously-minded of men has his moments of devotion, of spiritual exaltation, before so delicate and so enduring a work

of men's hands in praise of God. Sight and thought are lost in it; one feels its immensity as one feels the immensity of the sea. And it was as dear to me as the sea itself, this church of the patron saint of fishermen, who leans upon his staff, a sensual Jewish person with fleshy lips and a smile which is somewhat sneering, in the arch of the doorway. During the first part of my stay, the fineness, the supremacy, the air of eternity of the church, were curiously accentuated by a horrid little fair which installed itself at the church's very base, in every corner of the many-cornered ground about it. All day long, into the late evening, the wooden horses went swaying round to the noise of two or three tunes which dinned themselves into one's brain; a transformation show of Joan of Arc, just below my window, had a drum and a cornet at the door, an advertisement I could well have spared of the little, proud girl who stood outside, so seriously, in her pink tights, her tin helmet and breast-plate. A peep-show, a few steps further on, in which you saw the murder of M. Carnot and the degradation of M. Dreyfus, had a piano, which was played with diligence. Shots were fired all day long in the "Tir des Salons," which stood just this side of the "Théâtre Moderne," which had a small band. Then, all around, clinging still closer to the skirts of the church, were caravans and tents, in which all these motley people lived and slept and did their cooking. They swarmed about it like a crowd of insects, throwing up their little mounds in the earth; and the church rose calmly, undisturbed, almost unconscious of the very existence of the swarm, as the Eternal Church rises out of the agitations and feverish coming-and-going of the world and the fashions of the world.

The fair was horrid, an oppression, a nightmare; it kept me from work, from sleep, from the decent charity we owe our fellow mortals; I could not hear myself talk; but as there is no experience in the world which has not its contribution, if we choose to take it, to our sense of the agreeable, I managed to snatch a few amusing sensations out of even this discomfort. I had my own little romance in the fair, the most trifling, the most absurd of little romances that ever was. Still! One evening I chanced to go into

one of the shooting-galleries, the "Tir des Salons" it was ceremoniously called, in company with one or two idle friends, and as I fired, fruitlessly enough, at the dancing bubbles on the fountain, I noticed that the girl who loaded my musket for me was a little, blonde person with dancing blue eyes, frizzly golden hair, a cheeky little nose, which was cheeky and yet exquisite, and a perfectly golden complexion. She was about fifteen years of age: I like youth. We chatted and laughed together a good deal, and I stayed longer in the "Tir" than I had intended. From that time I could never pass the door (which I was obliged to do several times a day) without my little friend rushing forward, all smiles, clapping her hands to me, or dancing up and down on both feet: I spent no more money there, so her liking for me was scarcely interested. Occasionally I would stop and chat, if she were alone in the place; but a mother would generally appear somewhere in the dark at the back, call to her in a harsh voice, and she would have to leave me, with a little piteous grimace. She liked to look at my books and papers, and would not shake hands if her hands seemed to her too dirty. One day, as I was looking out of my window, I saw her little face at the tiny window of one of the caravans down below; it was the living-waggon of the family; and sometimes she used to sit on the doorstep mending her stockings, and she would wave the stockings gaily to me in the air as I sat at my window writing. I liked to look out and see her there; it was a sort of company.

One morning I woke up to find that the peep-show was taking down its boards: the fair, at last, was really going away. I can never see the preparations for even the most welcome moving without a certain sadness; but never had any moving been so welcome to me. I was no longer to hear those three tunes, the waltz, the "Gardes Municipaux," and "Daisy Bell." I should be able to sleep, to write, to hear myself talk. And I heaved a sigh of relief.

And then, with a smile, I almost sighed as I saw the little hand of the girl at the "Tir" waving to me from the door of her caravan. I was really sincerely sorry that my little friend was going away. I thought of going

downstairs to say good-bye to her, to tell her I was sorry she was going ; but I was sure she would know that, and, besides, was it worth the trouble? So I nodded, and went on with my dressing.

When I came back to my room that afternoon her little show was still standing ; it was the last one left. All the afternoon I sat at my window writing, and whenever I glanced down below the little yellow person was smiling up at me, with some pretty little gesture, in the midst of her work. She worked very hard, carrying about heavy beams and mattresses and all kinds of domestic and professional objects. When all the packing was finished, the old grandfather came and sat down in his chair in the middle of the road, put on his spectacles, and began to read his newspaper. The whole family grouped itself elegantly about the caravan, and my little person perched herself on the doorstep in the old way, and once more began to mend her stockings. She was very tired, very glad to have finished her heavy work ; and when I looked down she would wave her stockings to me (if no one was looking) with that gay little air which pleased me so much. I held up the sheet on which I had been writing verses. She danced up and down, and beckoned to me to give it to her. I shook my head and went on writing.

That was the last I saw of her. The next morning I awoke suddenly with a start and, without quite knowing why, sprang out of bed and rushed to the window. The noise of heavy wheels had awakened me, and I was just in time to see the hindward half of my little friend's caravan heave slowly round the corner. I fancied her looking up at my empty window, waving her hand for the last time, wishing I would wake up and look out and say good-bye to her. I would have given so much to have been there at the window just five minutes earlier. It would have pleased her, the gay little person whose name I never knew, my little friend, whom I liked because she liked me.

## VI

Very characteristic of Dieppe, I thought, and certainly quite unlike anything you can see in England, is the aspect of the Place Nationale on a market-day, with its statue of Duquesne, so brilliant and vivid in his great, flapping hat, standing there in the middle; it reminded me somewhat of the Good-Friday fair at Venice, which is held round the Goldoni statue near the Rialto. But the colours, despite the strong sunlight, are far from Venetian. At the cathedral end of the square are the butchers; then come the vegetables, splashes of somewhat tawdry green, all over the ground, and up and down the stalls. The vegetables reach nearly as far as the statue; just this side of it begin the clothes and commodities, which give its fair-like air to the market. Stalls alternate with ground-plots, all alike covered with cheap trousers, flannel shirts, heavy boots and carpet shoes, braces, foulards, handkerchiefs, stays, bright ribbons, veils, balls of worsted, shoe-laces, and, above all, dress-pieces of every sort of common and trumpery pattern. The women stop, handle them, draw them out, and the saleswoman waits with a long pair of scissors in her hand to cut off a slice here, a slice there. One dainty little covered stall has nothing but white Norman caps, laid in rows and hung in rows, one after another. White-capped old peasant-women stop in front of it, compare the frilling with their own, and try to make a bargain out of a sou. Not far off is an open and upturned umbrella full of white babies' caps and stomachers. A dazzling collection of tin spoons and gilt studs lies on the ground beside it, and the proprietors squat on their heels close by. After the clothes comes a little assemblage of baskets, brushes, and tin-pails and saucepans, dazzlingly white in the sun. Then come the poultry, crates and baskets of dead and living fowls and ducks and geese, with a few outside specimens; and then, as we reach the street, where the market flows all the way up and down, from the quay to the *Café des Tribunaux*, we have the fruit and flowers; the fruit all in pale yellows, with the vivid red of tomatoes; the flowers mainly white and red, with a row of small palms along the pavement. And as one follows the crowded alleys between the stalls one elbows against slow, staring country-people,

the blither natives of the town, the well-dressed visitors, and now and again a little lounging line of sailors or fishermen in their sea-stained drab or brown.

The second-hand section of the market is strewn all around the cathedral, mainly about its front, and along the Rue de l'Oranger. Looking down from my window facing the portal, the whole ground seems carpeted with old clothes, so old, so dirty, so discoloured, that one wonders equally how they could have got there, and how those who have brought them can possibly imagine that they will ever find purchasers. There are coats and trousers, petticoats and bodices, stockings, bed-covers, and even mattresses (once a whole four-poster was placed on the pavement, which it completely filled, just outside my door); everything that can be folded is folded neatly, with a great economy of space; and at intervals are collections of boots laid along side by side, eccentricities of rusty iron, which always look so amusing and so useless; old books, prints, frames, vases, tall hats, lamps, clocks under glass cases, crockery and concertinas. There is a collection of earthenware, which is new; some tea-pots, ribbons and tin pans are also new. Beyond, where the Rue Ste. Catherine narrows back to the arcade at the side of the church, the market-carts are laid in rows, resting on their shafts. Few people pass. I have never actually seen anything bought, though I would not take upon myself to say that it never happens.

## VII

The most absolutely romantic spot in Dieppe, a spot more absolutely romantic to its square inch than anything I ever saw, is the little curiosity-shop in the Rue de la Barre. You look in through a long sort of covered alley, lined on both sides with old tables, and mirrors, and bookshelves, and huge wooden effigies of saints, and plaster casts, and scraps of modern carpentry, and you see at the farther end what looks like a garden of antiquities, in which all the oddities of the earth seem to be growing up out of trees and clinging on to vines, tier above tier. You go in a little way, and you see, first, an upper floor facing you, all the front covered with glass, in which are

laid out the most precious items, the inlaid tables, the Empire clocks, the Louis XV. chairs. You go in a little further still, and you find yourself in the garden of antiquities, which is even more fantastic and impossible than its first aspect had intimated. It fills the square of a little court, round which curls a very old house trailed over with vines and creepers; a house all windows and doors, one of the doors opening on a spiral stone staircase like the staircase of a tower. At the further end there is a glass covering, like an unfinished conservatory; creepers stretch across underneath the glass, and, in a huge mound, piled quite up to the creepers so that they are covered with its dust, I know not what astonishing *bric-à-brac*, a mound which fills the whole centre of the court. There are chairs and tables, beds, bundles, chests, pictures in frames, all sorts of iron things, and, very conspicuously, two battered wooden representations of the flames of hell (as I imagine), the red paint much worn from their artichoke-like shoots. All around the walls, wherever there is room for a nail between a window and a vine-branch, something is hung, plaster bas-reliefs and masks, Louis XVI. mirrors, lanterns, Japanese prints, arm-chairs without seats; frankly, an incredible rigmarole. I saw few desirable objects, but the charm of the whole place, its unaccountability, its absurd and delightful romanticism, made up in themselves a picture which hardly needed to be painted, it was so obviously a picture already.

## VIII

ONE of the most characteristic corners of Dieppe lies in the unfashionable end of the town, the fisher quarter by the harbour, where the boats come in from Newhaven. Where the basin narrows to a close passage, just before you are past the pier, and in the open sea, there are two crucifixes, one on either side, guarding Dieppe. The boats lie all along the quay, their masts motionless above the water, and it is along the quay that the train from Paris comes crawling in its odd passage through the town; a curious spectacle, as one sits at the *café* under the arcade. Arcades, reminding one of Padua, run along the townward side of the quay; they are stocked with cheap restaurants, most with tiny balconies on the first floor, just under the

roof of the arcades, and all with spread tables in the passage-way itself: waiters and women stroll up and down continually, touting for customers. From one of the little balconies you can look across the fish-market, beyond the masts, across the water, to the green hill opposite, with its votive church on the summit. The picture is framed in the oval of one of the arches, and it looks curiously theatrical, and charmingly so, over the heads of the fisher-people and townfolk who throng below. The crier passes, beating his drum; sometimes, about dinner-time, a company of strolling musicians, a harpist, his wife and daughter who play violins—the little one with an air of professional distinction—linger outside one of the *cafés*. Along the quay, which stretches out towards the pier, is a broken line of old, many-coloured houses; there are endless little restaurants, hotels, and *cafés*, meant mainly for the sailors, and two *cafés concerts* of the seaside sort, with a piano (the pianist in one of them has been an organist in Paris; drinks, of course, and reproaches destiny), the usual platform, and the usual enormous women, hoarse, strident, and *décolletées*, who collect your pennies in a shell after every song. There is a night *café*, too, on the quay, which you can enter at any hour; you tap on the glass door, a curtain is drawn back, and, if you are not an *agent*, you will have no difficulty in entering. An *agent*, when he makes his tour of inspection, has sometimes to wait a little, while a pack of drinkers is hurriedly bundled out at the back door. M. Jean's licence appears to be somewhat vague; the report that an *agent* is at the door causes a charming little thrill of excitement among his customers. Some of his customers, who are fishermen, I do not altogether like; their friendliness was a little boisterous; and, sometimes, when they lost their temper, M. Jean would knock them down, and roll them, quite roughly, out of the door. On the other side of the water, on the Pollet, as it is called, you find the real home of the fishermen, in those little battered houses, twisting around all sorts of odd corners, climbing up all sorts of odd heights, some of them with wooden beams along the front, all dirty with age, all open to the street, all with swarms of draggled, blue-eyed, gold-haired children playing around their doors. In a few corners one sees women making nets, once quite an industry, now

fallen into some disuse. The whole place is thick with dust, faded with years, shrivelled with poverty; it is a part of Dieppe which is among the most curious, among the most picturesque, but scarcely among the most charming.

## IX

THE charm of Dieppe! No, I can never give the real sense of that charm to anyone who has never experienced it; for myself, it is not even easy to realise all the elements which have gone to make up the happiness of these two summer months here. It always rests me, in body and mind, to be near the sea; and then Dieppe is so placid and indulgent, lets you have your way with it, is full of relief for you, in old corners and cool streets, warm and cool at once, if you take but five steps from the Rue Aguado, modern and fashionable along the sea front, dazzling with sunlight, into any one of the little streets that branch off from it townwards. And if the sun beats on you again as you come out into the square about the Église Saint-Jacques you have but to go inside—better still, if you seek the finer interior of Saint-Remy—and, suddenly, you have the liquid coldness of stone arches that have never felt the sun. And then the sea, at night, from the jetty; the vast space of water, fading mistily into the unseen limits of the horizon, a boat, a sail, just distinguishable in its midst, the lights along the shore, the glow of the Casino, with all its windows golden, an infinite softness in the air. I have spent all night wandering about the beach, I have traced every change in sea and sky from twilight to sunrise, inconceivable delicacies of colour, rarities of tone. And what dreams have floated up in the smoke of my cigarette, mere smoke that will never reach the stars! What memories I have evoked, what inspiring conversations I have had, in the cool of the evening, on that jetty! And the country round Dieppe, rarely as I went into it, that, too, means something for me: Puys, where I went to see Alexandre Dumas, in the house in which his father died, the house where so many of his own plays have been written; Pourville, the road along the cliffs, Varengeville, with its deep, enchanting

country lanes, its little sunken ways through the woods, its strange, stiff little pine woods on the heights; the Manoir d'Ango, now degraded into a farm, but still with its memories of Francis I. and Diane de Poitiers, whose faces one sees, cheek by cheek, on a double medallion; the Manoir d'Ango, with its delicate approach through soft alleys of trees, and past a little shadowed pool; Arques, with its Italian landscape, so cunningly composed about the ruined castle on the hill. There is nothing in or near Dieppe which does not, in one way or another, appeal to me; nowhere that I do not feel at home. And the friends I have made, or found, or fancied, at Dieppe, men and women of such varying charm and interest! The most amiable soul in all the world resides, I think, in the Anglo-maniac French painter in whose ch<sup>â</sup>let I spent, so agreeably, so much of my time, in the studio where he paints the passing beauties as they fly. Was there not, too, the hospitable Norwegian painter, with the heart of a child in the body of a giant, who lives with his frank and friendly wife in the villa on the hill, where I spent so many good-tempered evenings? And the young English painter, who was my chief companion, a temperament of 1830, *né romantique*, in whose conversation I found the subtle superficialities of a profoundly sensitive individuality, it was an education in the fine shades to be with him. The other younger Englishman, an artist of so different a kind, came into our little society with a refreshing and troubling *bizarverie*; all that feverish brilliance, the boyish defiance of things, the frail and intense vitality, how amusing and uncommon it was! And there were the two French poets, again so different from one another; elegant and enthusiastic youth, and the insistent reflectiveness of a mind which was above all reasoning. And then the charming women one met as they flitted to and fro between Dieppe and Paris and London and Monte Carlo; in especial, that flashing vision, to whom I here once more render my homage: the little French lady whose mother had been one of the Court beauties of the Second Empire; the adorable *profi*le de mouton, with the hysterical piquancy of a mouth, perfect in repose, which would never rest, and which could be so exquisitely fluent with naughty words

and the malice of a truly feminine soul. Heartless, exquisite, posing little person, I found you more sympathetic than you thought; and if you see these lines, they are to tell you that I was really sorry when you went away so suddenly with your Russian *grande dame*, for whose talents I had so great an admiration. And there was Jane Hading, whom I went to see in the little, stifling dressing-room, scarcely more than a cupboard, of the tiny theatre, where she was playing Dumas' somewhat sentimental argument in drama, "La Princesse de Bagdad." Never had I seen the grave and yet Parisian beauty of the woman at so amusing an advantage, as there, in that absurd little dressing-room, where I had to squeeze myself into a corner, while the actress stood, hot and impatient, in front of the long glass, in which from time to time I caught the charm of a somewhat pre-occupied smile, as the dresser stitched and pinned the separate fragments of a bodice which was to be so magnificently torn off, with so considerable a view of such superb shoulders, in the fine, exciting scene of the second act. And there was the divine De Mérode, with her slim, natural, and yet artificial elegance, her little, straight face, so virginal and yet so aware, under the Madonna-like placidity of those smooth coils of hair, drawn over the ears and curved along the forehead; De Mérode, who, more than anyone else, sums up Dieppe for me. How many other beautiful faces there were, people one never knew, and yet, meeting them at every hour, at dinner, on the terrace of the Casino, at the tables, in the sea, one seemed to know them almost better than one's friends, and to be known by them just as well. Much of the charm of life exists for me in the unspoken interest which forms a sort of electric current between oneself and strangers. It is a real emotion to me, satisfying, in a sense, for the very reason that it leaves one unsatisfied. And of this kind of emotion, Dieppe, in the season, is bewilderingly abundant. Is it, after all, surprising that I should have come to Dieppe with the intention of staying from Saturday to Monday, and that I should have stayed for two months?

ARTHUR SYMONS.