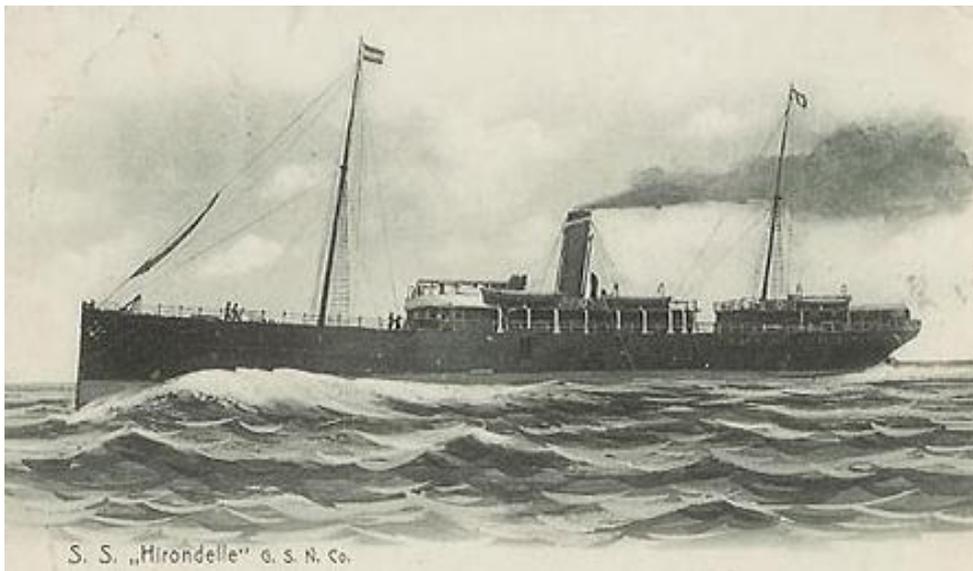


# George's Journey



From a journal by George Foster of a bicycle trip through the Pyrenees in 1899



#### **Saturday 29<sup>th</sup> April 1899**

Our party of three having met at Dulwich proceeded on its way to the St Katherine's Wharf to embark on the S.S. Hirondelle en route for Bordeaux. Found two Telegraph Service friends at the Tower Bridge, and so leaving the machines at the wharf we made for a certain "Bulls Head" nearby to drink farewell.

Before reaching the wharf once more, rain began to fall and continued to do so at a very fast rate for half an hour. The ship lay in the river so that we had to embark by tender - a proceeding much disliked by an aristocratic elderly man who affected a monocle, as he had "been informed", he said, "that she berthed alongside" and wanted to know "why the ---- they couldn't speak the truth?"

We were timed to depart at 2 pm, but did not make a start until nearly 4 o'clock, the delay being chiefly on account of a number of horses which were being taken on board. The sky cleared about 9 pm and a good many stars came out.

#### **Sunday 30<sup>th</sup> April**

Arose about 7.30 am after a light nights sleep. The weather was dull and overcast, but we had no rain during the day and the sun broke through frequently. Had breakfast at 8 o'clock and made ourselves comfortable on deck in chairs. It was none too warm however as there was a head wind. Some excitement was caused just before dinner by an open boat being sighted drifting about, and the ship's course was altered to allow a closer inspection. She was ship's boat painted white, and almost in halves, bearing no name or visible mark wherewith to be identified. The Captain said she would probably drift about for sometime longer as she had watertight compartments!

We were now in sight of Alderney and passed the "caskets" about 3 o'clock. The weather brightened in the afternoon but deteriorated later so that night was dark and threatening.

### **Monday 1<sup>st</sup> May**

A very fine day. Sea smooth and sun hot. Awoke rather early, owing to the rolling of the vessel which made us slide up and down in our berths, and was soon up on deck looking upon the "Bay of Biscay O!" Amused ourselves on deck in the morning, with a rope for tug of war, jumping, etc. The Captain told us about his adventures in France and Spain - which were not many but which included his having been shaved by the King of Spain's barber!

The only baby on board - a French one - was brought on deck by its mother today, for the first time for a long airing as the ship was so steady and the sun warm.

Bertie unearthed a grindstone on the lower deck and we succeeded generally in spoiling the edges of our knives on it. We take up regular positions at meals now in the fore cabin. Bertie at the head with Bill and myself on his left and two Frenchmen on his right. Each meal usually finishes up with a trial of linguistic ability all round. One of the Frenchmen speaks Spanish so that we ask how so and so is pronounced and what is the equivalent of this and that.

There was a lovely sunset this evening the finest, I think, I have ever seen. There was not a cloud anywhere and it was something to be thankful for to be able to watch the sun nearing the horizon and note the almost imperceptible changes in the colour of sea and sky. The sun seems to drop very quickly towards the last but there was an exquisite afterglow and a long twilight so that darkness did not come suddenly. We did not move from our chairs for two hours after the last bit of sun had vanished.

A pilot cutter had been sighted about 6.30 and in due course lowered a boat to bring the pilot to us. He scrambled up the ladder which had been lowered over the side for him whilst the man in charge of the small boat manoeuvred it dexterously in order to get away as quickly as possible and escape the swell. The pilot was a short, stout, active little man with light curly hair and whiskers, and seemed much more of an English seafaring man than a Frenchman.

### **Tuesday 2nd May**

Awoke to find that we were steaming up the Gironde. It is not so wide as I thought it would be and is rather shallow, the water being a yellow muddy colour. The banks look very pleasant and from what one sees of Bordeaux by this approach it seems nicely situated.

We landed at the Quai de Chartrons about 10.00 am and were soon negotiating the customs regarding the bicycles, as not being members of the Cycling Touring Club several formalities had to be gone through, not the least important one being the payment of a deposit. The customs officers weighed our machines, measured the wheels, constructed marvellous works from the particulars on the transfers and finally wound up charging us about 30 francs apiece to be refunded on our return. Bordeaux, although the fourth town of France, has not yet been brought up to date in the matter of weighing appliances, several weight lifters having to be employed in putting on and taking off the 50 kilos and lesser weights which are used in connection with an unwieldy antiquated pair of beam scales upon which everything is weighed.

After leaving Bill's overcoat at the Railway Station we proceeded to the Post Office - a new building which surpasses anything of the sort I have ever seen in England. Over the outer doorway is an emblematic coloured bas-relief, whilst the ironwork on the roof necessary for the telephones is quite an ornament. The space inside for the public is about three times that which existed in the old London G.P.O. Down the centre runs a double row of desks supplied with pens, ink, and blotting pad. There are two pillar boxes inside near the entrance. The floor is of mosaic and the counters are of glass laid on a black surface.

Bordeaux has spacious public gardens and boulevards and is a fine town. The weather on our arrival there seemed oppressively hot and it was rather tiring work to bump along over the pave that forms the surface of so many of the roads in this part of France.

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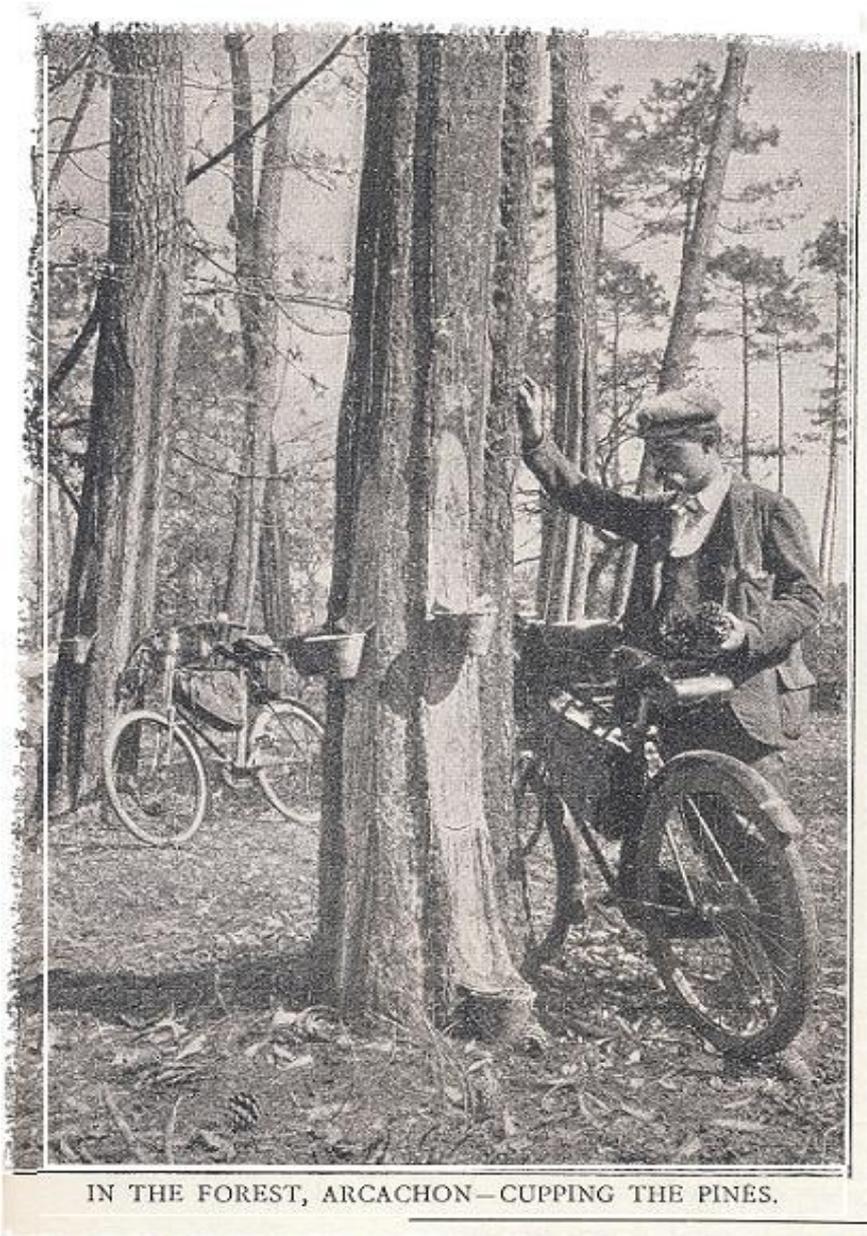
We left the town just before noon and were soon doing our best along the "Route de Bayonne" - the surface being like a tramway track greatly in need of repair. We could not recognise any of the places given on the guide posts, from the map, but found by enquiring at the café where we stopped for lunch that we were alright. The road was however execrable. The pave only being relieved at distant intervals by short spells of macadam. This was the case practically all the way to Bayonne - about 120 miles - so that we had days of it. Our riding was mostly done upon the footpath at the side, but this was often very rutty or loose, with sometimes the tree roots sticking up. There were too frequent chances also for knocking one's head against a bough or leaning trunk. The row of trees that grew on either side of the road was chiefly composed of planes varied by cork oaks denuded halfway up of their bark. The resultant contrast between the brown lower half of the trunk and the green upper part being noticeable for a long distance in front -the more so as the road went for miles without a turn. The forest of the Landes extends from outside Bordeaux to beyond Bayonne. It is one gigantic pine plantation with undergrowth of various plants and bushes amongst which flocks of sheep and goats wander and browse. The goatherd usually carries a set of panpipes with him to the music of which the goats will follow. The pines were being tapped for their resin etc., and now and again we met a man with a barrel upon a bullock-cart, collecting and emptying the little tin cups that are attached to the trees.

We put up for the night at Muret - a place which proved to be much smaller than we had expected. The villages in this district are however few and far between, so there was nothing for it but to stay here. Madame at the "Auberge" (called an hotel) was very nice and did her best for us so that we got on pretty well. We were joined at dinner by a Frenchman who seemed a nice sort of fellow, and who was reading Jules Verne's novels - the one he was on at that time being "The English at the North Pole." We went over the books of Jules Verne we knew and told our friend what a favourite that gentleman was with British schoolboys. We all became so interested - giving poor Bertie a lot of work in the way of translation at times - that it was 10 o'clock before we arose from the table and made for the seat outside the hotel. It was very pleasant sitting out there in the dark as we soon heard "la rossignol" (so the Frenchman said) singing in a tree across the road. He was not so good however as the one I heard last year on Wickham Hill, Kent.

### **Wednesday 3rd May**

Found ourselves in difficulties when it came to paying the bill in the morning. Had the lady charged more reasonably we could have paid her in French, but as it was we could not. She wanted to take an English sovereign as equal to a 20 franc piece which meant a dead loss to us of 5 francs. She would not take our word for it that the piece was worth 25 francs, and as there was no bank or moneychanger in the village we were at our wits end. It was suggested that we should go to the local Post Office to find out the value. An old peasant who seemed to have nothing to do in particular essayed the task of guiding us thither. He was a funny old man, quite a study, and was "on the grin" nearly all the time as he scuffed along in his sabots. The "Postes and Telegraphes" was a small villa prettily situated, visitors having to walk through the orchard and garden. In the hall were chairs and several palms so that those of us who did not take part in the negotiations did not get very impatient! We got no satisfaction however as there was no document or notice giving the rules of exchange in the place. Bertie said the young lady said she "thought we were right" - but of course that did not go very far! The old man spoke about taking us to the village dominic to see what his word on the subject would be, but for some reason not clear to us, the apparent postmistress warned him off it so we returned to the hotel. It was then suggested that the local "grand seigneur" or squire would be interviewed. The "guide" took Bertie there but nothing came of it. The landlady finally offered to give us 22 francs for the sovereign alleging she would have to pay three francs for changing it! We had to be content with this and so the affair ended after losing us an hour besides. As we were leaving the village a local commercial gent ran up and offered us 15 francs for "it", but we smiled!!

The heat seemed to trouble us somewhat so we took a rest amongst the pines that seemed everywhere. When we went to start again we found Bill's back tyre punctured and proved an exasperating job - or we thought so. It was well on in the afternoon when we started again, with a long ride in front of us to the next place suitable for staying the night viz, Caskets. We found the distance considerably exceeded our expectations and what with the afternoon sun and the bad road we were pretty well "fagged" when we reached our destination. We passed several caravans of gypsies and one or two circuses on the road, many of the people being evidently Spaniards. We fell upon a comfortable hotel kept by very nice people and so were soon in the best of spirits. Very few of the may-poles had as yet been disturbed from their places in the villages, and there was one in the garden of the hotel - being as usual, a pine sapling with the branches lopped and bark peeled to within two feet or so of the top and decorated with flowers and flags. This one however so the landlord told us had been erected by him on account of his daughter having been married on 1st of May, and not "pour les travailleurs".



IN THE FOREST, ARCAÇON—CUPPING THE PINES.

#### Thursday 4th May

Started out with the intention, or rather the obligation of making Bayonne before dejeuner as our stock of French money had given out, and that was the first place we could get more. We took things pretty easily however and whilst enjoying a "rest" amongst the pines an old shepherd came up and gave us "Bon jour". We entered into conversation with him but Bertie was the only one of us able to read him for some time as he spoke in "le patois du Landes". We learned that he had been a Chasseur, and he put his stick up to his shoulder to imitate the "present" and motioned to us that his eyes were failing. Every now and again he would inform us that "Les Anglais ils sont diables"! after which he would laugh hoarsely. He thought Bill and I were Spaniards and that Bertie was the only one of us fair enough to be English. When we informed how far we had come and were going, he laughed once more and made the usual remark about "Les Anglais". He then imitated a man batting and bowling at cricket. "Ho ho les Anglais!" he chuckled. "Les femme Anglais" were "tres bon" however and he winked his eye! He seemed surprised that we were not carrying umbrellas as everybody does in these parts.

We had no money now to buy a drink with and so in consequence became extra thirsty. We Resolved to try some water and seeing some people sitting outside a cottage, asked for some The "lady of the house" and her husband were both very kind, and offered us wine which we declined, but accepted instead a lemon and some sugar, and so made quite a refreshing draught. These people seemed quite pleased at being able to do us a kind act, and barriers of race and language seemed non-existent. Here's to "La Fraternelle" and plenty of it! We had now traversed most of the "bad" road and were nearing Bayonne, upon reaching which we made for the credit Lyonnaise, and then a restaurant. We performed the business at each place satisfactorily and then strolled down to the public garden by the riverside - where we sat down to listen to the band, which was a good one - as is usual.

Mounting the machines once more, a pleasant ride of five miles or so along a good road near the river, giving us fine views of both Bayonne and Biarritz, brought us to the latter place and finished our riding for the day.

Biarritz is a picturesquely sited town, the harbour being very fine and containing several large rocks near the shore connected by bridges. We walked about the rocks after dinner as it was getting dark, the quietness and the fine weather being very enjoyable, and then adjourned to the public square to listen to the band we had heard in the distance. This last was in itself a liberal education. One side of the square is open to the main street, two sides are flanked by houses and the fourth faces the sea-front. Needless to remark there are plenty of seats but the people like to stand near the bandstand or promenade. The men and women in their characteristic dress taken with the surroundings formed a literally living picture and with the music of the band in our ears too we were reminded of times when we had witnessed "Cavalleria" or "Carmen" on the stage. Although continental workpeople are supposed to be so much worse off than freeborn British workman the fact remains that they beat him in the matter of clothing both in art and taste. Instead of wearing, and being proud of, richer peoples left off stuff or "new" shoddy, they stick to their national costumes, varied locally, and look much better for it.



G. S. N. C. TOURS.—GRAND CASINO-MUNICIPAL—BIARRITZ.

The men in these parts wear a kind of blue serge cap like a Tam O' Shanter minus the tuft and ribbons, called a baretta, a loose blue canvas blouse instead of a coat, and a red scarf about four yards long wound round their waist instead of a belt. Sabots are not worn so much as in the north of France, but canvas shoes with rope matting bottoms made very strongly. The women do not wear the white nun-like looking headdress that is invariable in Normandy and Brittany but do their hair up at the back so as to leave a small knot near the top, which is kept in place by comb or a tiny black cap. Hats are rarely worn but umbrellas are used for both sun and rain - and quite as much by men as women.

#### **Friday 5th May**

We left Biarritz about noon, after another stroll about the harbour and breakwater from which latter men were fishing, en route for St Jean-de-Luz and Hendaye which stands on the French side of the river there which divides France from Spain. On the other side is Fuenterrabia, which is reached by boat, there being no bridge. The road crossed the river at Behobia near Hendaye, the railway crossing at the latter place. It was a pretty ride along the undulating road from Biarritz to St Jean, the sea being close by all the way. At one place we stayed a short time for a paddle on the sandy shore. St Jean-de-Luz is a quiet old town, which was the headquarters of the Iron Duke for a time during the war. We stretched ourselves on the sands for a couple of hours there after lunch, the harbour being a pretty one.

We should have reached Hendaye from St Jean via Behobie, but not knowing took the first turning we found that made for Hendaye and paid for our ignorance. For the last five or six miles into Hendaye, the surface was simply unrideable and very steep so that the machines were bumped about over rough, sharp stones, and walking was no pleasure. It was puzzling at times to tell the right road, and a peasant woman whom we asked did not "comprenez" being doubtless a Basque or Spaniard. We got to our destination however by wonderful and tortuous ways and put up at the Hotel Ugarte, which we remember as being one of the nicest and cheapest hotels we visited during the tour. The cuisine was richer and the wine stronger than at other places - the house being in fact a Spanish one with Spanish servants, although the proprietors were French. Nobody there spoke English but there was a large L.N.W.R. map of England on one of the walls. The daughter of the house who seemed to be very much "on her own"

with little to do, was a very nice girl and was apparently very sorry we were not better French scholars. She admonished me to learn to read and write French before I came again!

### **Saturday 6th May**

Arose rather late and were at our rolls and coffee when the aforementioned young lady came in to say we should be late for the 10.15 train to San Sebastian, and have to wait until noon unless we hurried up. We had given up the idea of catching the morning train but at this immediately made off and got to the station ten minutes before starting time and found the train standing on the line away from all platforms and everyone apparently on aboard. We had not got entirely at one so to speak with time in these parts. The train went at 10.30 and then ran no further than Irun - the first Spanish station. Whereas at Hendaye customs officers loom large, Bertie performed the job of getting some Spanish money and the railway tickets and after waiting some time amongst a crowd of Spanish soldiers, customs officers, "guarda civilia", tourists, loafers and peasants we got into the train of the "Ferro carril del norte" for San Sebastian. Each compartment of the third class having "12 asuetos", no windows except in the doors, and three stairs up to the doorways from the low platforms. There are no footbridges or subways in these parts - everyone walks across the permanent way and the platforms are built accordingly. We started off and were soon having our first view of Spain. It seemed well tilled with none of it running to waste, and bore out what we had heard from other people about Spain being a pretty and fertile land. We passed through Pasajes, where the captain of the Hirondele told us he had been, and whose harbour is being gradually being choked up by the sand and at length drew up in San Sebastian station.

The town seemed very quiet, probably because it is chiefly a holiday resort and the season had not begun. There is a lot of building going on; many plots of land for sale and many dirty back streets that need wiping out. There are many fine buildings with of course a handsome casino, and the town itself is picturesquely placed. It stands on one bank of a river which runs into an almost landlocked bay there being a headland on each side of the entrance from the sea. We lay on the sands in the evening and watched the lovely sunset. There was a mirage in the sky of a mock sun behind a cloud not far from the real one. We found many pretty but small shells amongst the sand. As the evening wore on, it being Saturday the town became livelier, the people coming out in their tasteful costumes. As we walked back to the railway station we walked past the same cripple we had noticed in the morning selling tickets for the state lottery on the bridge over the arm of the sea that runs a good way inland and close to which the railway is laid. We got into conversation with a couple of Yankees at the railway station, who thought the place rather slow and were not sorry to be going out of it. One of them told us he had been over a good part of Spain recently and had been treated politely and properly in spite of the bad feeling against America owing to the war. Our train back was half an hour late coming in and stopped a long time in the station. It was very dark inside. The little light given by the wretched oil lamps being almost obliterated by the luggage in the racks underneath. At every station there seemed to be sort of reception by the inhabitants so that time (and the train) went slowly. We did not have to change at Irun this time but waited whilst the first class got out and had dinner. We watched them from the semi darkness of the train and wondered what time we should get our own - waiting for us at Hendaye. Whilst waiting in the station a functionary with a sword, and a semi cocked hat covered with American cloth came along looking over the compartments and under the seats. He seemed to be looking for more than mere excisable luggage and finally brought up opposite a lady in the next compartment to us and began questioning her about her "papers". From what we could catch of the conversation she had come from "Londres" and he wanted some papers which she did not possess. He eventually left without apparently getting any satisfaction and as the train moved out before he came back the lady seemed highly amused at having got past him. We arrived at Hendaye soon after 9 o'clock thoroughly tired of Spanish railway travelling, but able nevertheless to do justice to our dinner.

### **Sunday 7th May**

A splendid day. It being Sunday the market place was soon alive with people buying small goods and fruit from the stalls and the café of the hotel was crowded. Our destination for the day was St Jean Pied de Port or thereabouts. After having received directions from the young lady aforementioned, and having been shewn round the garden by her (Bertie as the chief horticulturist of the party being "au fait") we moved off, back to St Jean de Luz there being no other way. We went via Behobie this time and so avoided the bad road. Passed through St Jean de Luz and after a rest in an oak wood to dispose of some fruit, reached St Pee de Nivelles about 2 o'clock. This latter is an old village with quaint houses and is prettily situated. The road from St Jean de Luz is a grand one, running all the way between smiling vineyards with lovely views of the Pyrenees - altogether the best bit of country we had as yet seen. The next village of any size was Espelette, and from here the road was rather bad and difficult to trace.

We were soon on a "Route Nationale" again however, and passing over the railway and an artistic (as usual) suspension bridge over the river Nive. Found ourselves winding along a lovely valley. The mountains on either side being cultivated high up their sides by the industrious peasants of this fertile wine producing country.

We gave up the idea of getting to St Jean Pied de Port that day, but decided to put up at Bidarray - a small village in a most picturesque part of the valley where the rushing river is bridged by a rather unique structure known as "The Devil's Bridge". This last has three arches, one of the side ones being the largest. All are overgrown by creepers. The bridge is narrow, and in the centre is rendered more so by one side being abruptly built in closer to the other by about 18 inches. A little lower down the valley a tremendous rock juts out from the mountain side; and around this the river swirls and rushes along its clear, pebbly bed. The various colours given to the atmosphere by the setting sun - soon hidden by the surrounding peaks were charming. We put up at the only hotel the village boasts - L' Hotel du Pont d' Enfer - and although we seemed to take the people somewhat by surprise, did very well. The hotel, judging from the accommodation it possesses and it's style probably had a busier time of it before the railway was made along the valley. We found a seat outside after dinner, but the air was too fresh for us to stay there long!

### **Monday 8th May**

Awoke early to find the mountains looking very picturesque - everything very quiet - and the rain falling heavily. Now and again a peasant came by holding up a huge "family" umbrella and usually driving a cow or two, or riding an ass. After petit dejeuner (the only one we have had in France without butter) we made our way to the village post office which, however, was closed. It opened twice a day and we were not there at the all important time. A little general shop kept by a very old lady however answered our purpose just as well, as we got stamps there. And so we were able to polish off some of the correspondence whilst being delayed by the rain. This latter ceased however about 1.00pm, and as the roads seemed to be drying quickly, we decided, after having something to eat, to make a start.

We therefore cycled once more over the curious bridge and made along the road for St Jean Pied de port. The valley was still beautiful, in spite of the railway; the river rather swollen and so much noisier whilst the mountains were as close and abrupt as ever. Each village in this district possesses a strong thick wall set up on the outskirts about 10 feet square which is used by the boys to play "fives" or a similar game against. The girls play at ninepins, handling a flat "cheese".

Yesterday (Sunday) all was in full swing, but today the young people were not about. The road seemed somewhat busier as we neared St Jean and upon entering the town, by the bridge and through the old grim gateway we found it was market day. Whilst standing in the street discussing whether to go on further and "chance" what accommodation we could get, or to stay in this quaint old town, a man in cycling costume came up and addressed us in English. We were of course rather surprised. I was uncertain at first whether our new acquaintance was a Yankee or an Englishman, but soon found he was the latter. He was Mr Boulter of The Pickwick C.C. and turned out a fine fellow.

He recommended us to stay at his hotel (Epesteignay), which we did to our great satisfaction. Most of the town including the market place lies outside the

walls, the main street being the one leading from the bridge where we entered, up a steep hill to the citadel.

### **Tuesday 9<sup>th</sup> May**

We found Mr Boulter was an early riser, so I made an effort in the morning and arose about 6.30. Thought I would go up as far as the citadel for a walk and a look around. None of the others were ready so I had it all to myself. Two youngsters fastened themselves upon me near the top and one of them required a deal of shaking off. His chatter was incessant, but he cleared off after he understood there was no money to be had. I recognised him again when I was returning through one of the streets. On reaching the hotel once more I found our new friend and Bill enjoying their café au lait (7.40am) and Bertie still "en haute". I agreed with Mr B's idea of early rising but was not quite prepared for starting not later than 8.00am, which was his usual practice. Bertie and I interviewed the local photographer who had been honoured by a visit by the G.O.M. in 1894, and our party moved off for Mauleon, the next place of any importance, about 9.30.

It was a mountainous ride and walk combined. Upon turning a corner in the road up one big mountain we came upon a covered wagon stuck deep in the ditch at the roadside. All the travellers were engaged in coaxing the mixed team of oxen, mules and horses - about a dozen in all - to pull together, but it seemed a hopeless task. Although a large quantity of stuff had been taken from the wagon I order to lighten it. The animals in the van had well nigh exhausted themselves before those in the rear could be bullied into pulling. Mr B. who carried a Kodak with him "took" the group and we soon left them at it. It was whilst descending the other side of this mountain that we obtained our first sight of snow-capped mountains. It was a revelation to me, the peaks looking so much like they do in pictures.

We arrived at Mauleon after a tedious, tiring descent and found as we had suspected before entering the town that it was market day. Passed one or two women riding mules astride. The market scene, which we explored after dejeuner, was very interesting, the collection of wares for sale being a more comprehensive one than many we had seen. The river at this town is very quaintly situated, quite a waterfall tumbling into it from underneath a house near the bridge. We parted ways with Mr B. at Mauleon owing to what turned out to be a misunderstanding with regard to our routes. He was making for Pau via Tardets, whilst we were going "straight" via Oleron. After getting well on the way however we found the "short" road existed only on paper and that we could only go via Tardets. We reached Tardets and called a halt owing to the rain. We took up our positions under some arches in the main street and were soon surrounded by the small boys in the place. The "petit journal" boy with his trumpet was perhaps the sauciest of the crowd but they would all have made a good show alongside the English "genus". They enjoyed themselves immensely and made themselves heard to some purpose. Bertie possessed an old "Hugo's French Journal" and read some of it to them, but they punctuated with "clarion" which they espied in his cap. Bill then "took them on" and gave them rides on the "bicyclette". The rain having stopped we moved off again, but very soon there was nothing for it but to don the cape. Oleron was 26 kilos distant and we had to get there. The rain stopped once more but came on faster than ever as we neared the town, which we arrived at in the dark - very wet and hungry. The hotel we put up at was a nice one and we enjoyed a good dinner. A novel feature of which was an omelette served up in the midst of flaming "eau de vie".

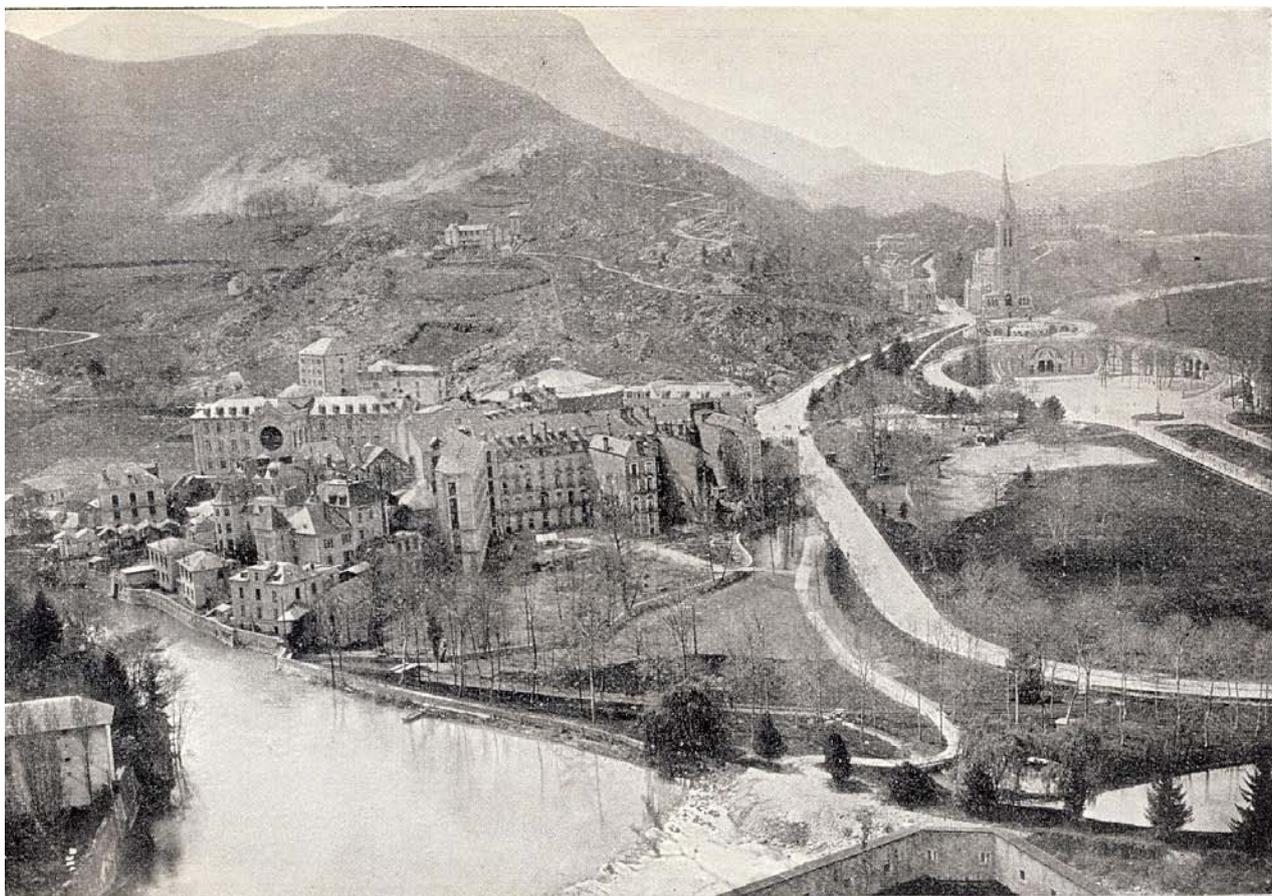
### **Wednesday 10<sup>th</sup> May**

Raining hard in the morning. Explored the town a bit when the rain ceased somewhat and found it a busy and nicely situated place. Two rivers meet in this town so that there are several fine bridges and much water, the latter serving the town with power for electric lighting. Cycling being out of the question that day we decided to rail to Pau, about 12 miles distant. We arrived there at 3.45pm and soon afterwards suddenly met Mr B. once more. He told us he too had stayed at Oleron the previous night. We put up at the Hotel de la Poste and went off to get the famous view from the promenade before dinner. The mountains were however not to be seen owing to the mist. Each time we arrived on "the

front" I felt a bit disappointed at not seeing the sea below - it seems such a shame to be up so high and then only to find the railway lines beneath when one looks over the balcony. We had a very good view next day and made out many well known peaks by the aid of the guide book. The lady of the hotel spoke English very well indeed and had been to England but liked Pau better. Our towns were so smoky and the suburbs so dreary.

#### **Thursday 11<sup>th</sup> May**

Fine, bright and warm morning. Found the town pretty well shut up - it being Ascension Day and so a holiday. Had we thought of this sooner we should have endeavoured to get to Lourdes early as that place would be more busy and interesting than on an ordinary day. We were met by a solemn procession on the outskirts of Pau which necessitated our dismounting, but saw nothing more of note until nearing St Pe where we stopped for the "Kodak fiend" to snapshot a famous bridge overhung by creepers which reach from the crown of the arch to the water's edge. Near the bridge a row of stagey looking beggars or pilgrims sat by the roadside with their backs to the wall. We mounted again, crossed the bridge and soon reached St Pe where we had dejeuner. Soon after leaving the latter town we left the road for a byway to the celebrated Lac de Lourdes. The byway led nowhere apparently and after making enquiries we were directed across many steep, grassy slopes and meadows which made hard work of pushing the machines, and so we eventually reached the lake. We were disappointed at it, it being but a large ordinary pond amidst fields. We did not stay long but made our way to Lourdes. Leaving the machines at a café we made for the celebrated church and grotto, passing a procession on our way. Mr B. photographed the grotto and the rest of the party from two or three different standpoints, after which we drank of the holy water - which was certainly much better than most of the water we had tasted (not a great quantity, perhaps!). We then mounted up to the church, which was built upon the rock above the grotto. The numerous candles always burning inside the grotto make the atmosphere rather grimy - the image of the virgin and the stacks of crutches left by invalids who have been "cured" being noticeably soiled by the soot.



G.S.N.C. TOURS IN THE PYRENEES—LOURDES.

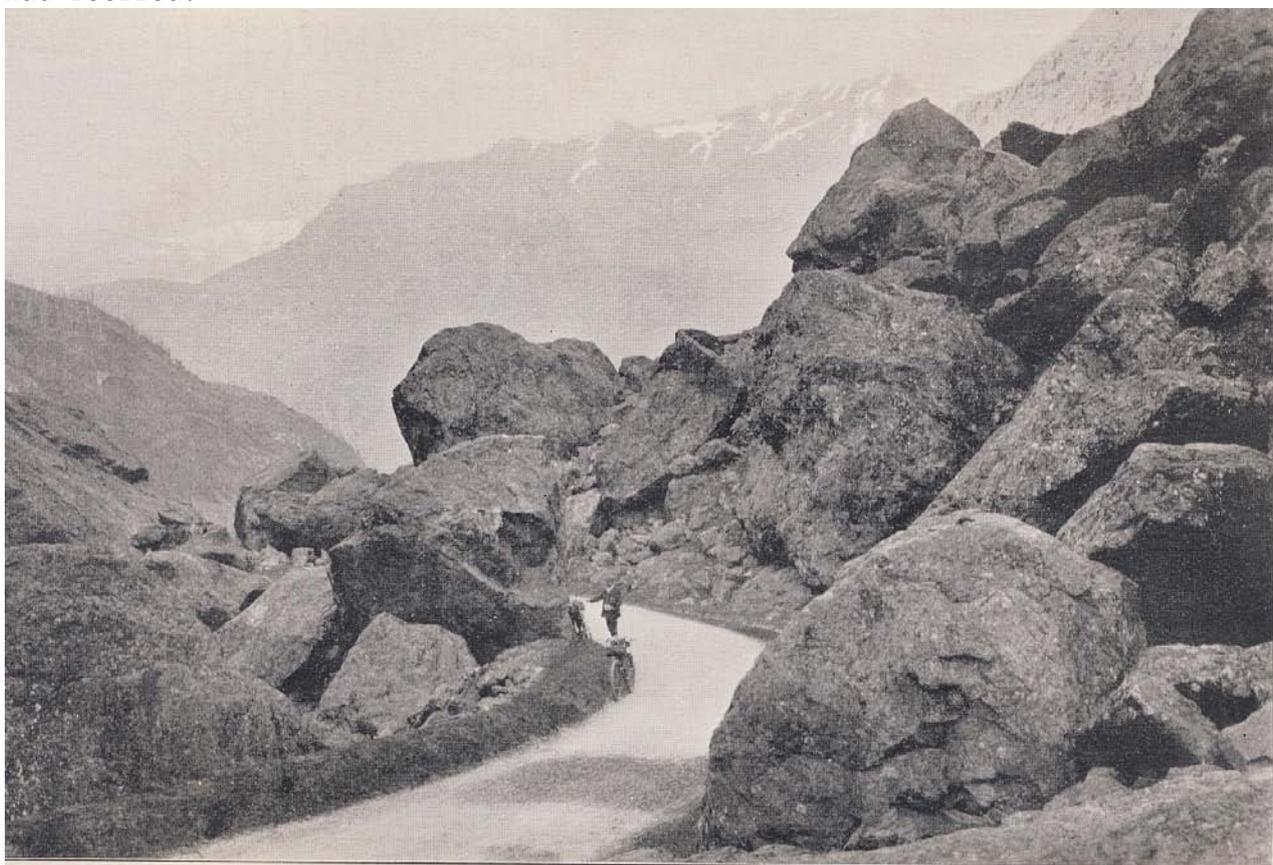
The stone wall - blackened altogether - is nevertheless kissed unctuously by the faithful. The right toe of the bronze image of St Peter too in the church is polished bright by the same process. The church is a very richly ornamented one, the walls being literally covered with tablets testifying to marvellous interventions of the deity and expressing thanks and praises. Gold and other rich colours abound, whilst the carving and tracery are wonderful. Having no wish to sleep in Lourdes owing to the unenviable condition of most of the people who fill the spare beds there, we we left for Argeles which we reached after an uneventful but pleasant ride. We put up at the Hotel de France but could gain no attention for some time, owing to the fact, as we found later, that we had entered through the garden to the annexe, which lies across the street from the hotel proper. The place was literally reeking with English and Americans, some of the specimens of the "Englishwoman abroad" being truly odious - a fact which the maids seemed quite aware of. It is said that Englishmen are liked much better abroad than Englishwomen - probably with reason. The hotel was so full that dinner was served in the restaurant as well as the salle a manger. We had an excellent dinner - everything at this place was good and everyone seemed to go about with the greatest freedom. We adjourned to the smoking room and played whist or nap until we retired. Although we slept in the annexe I think we were better off than in the main building. My room opened on to the verandah, below which was the splendid garden of the hotel. Beyond, across the valley were the mountains. It was very peaceful, romantic even, to sit out there far into the night, the only sound heard being that of the nightjar or two or three belated peasants singing as they went home. The district about Argeles is very picturesque and has, judging from the photos one sees displayed, been pretty well traversed by a Dublin photographer named McKennan, or his agents.

#### **Friday 12<sup>th</sup> May**

Awoke early and lay in bed looking at the mountains, of which I had a good view from my room. From Argeles the road lay along the valley to Pierrefitte, a lovely neighbourhood, after which began the ascent to Cauterets. The stiff pull up soon made riding wearisome and walking became a necessity. Cauterets is about 300 feet above the sea level, 1400 feet higher than Pierrefitte. The road up although winding a good deal is quite steep enough. An electric railway has been recently constructed between the two places, the power being obtained of course from the rushing torrent or "gave". Mr B. "shot" several of the cascades that rush into the gave from the precipitous heights on either side of the gorge. We reached Cauterets to find it almost deserted, as the "season" had not opened.

We explored the place, not very thoroughly I am afraid, and sampled the sulphur water in one of the large "hydros", after dejeuner, and then left to return to Pierrefitte. During dejeuner a Frenchman sitting at another table became so vociferative in his conversation that the place rang. Mr B, who was looking up "Baedeker" felt inclined to return the compliment and the result was rather amusing. From Pierrefitte we started up the other gorge, almost parallel with the previous one, and down which and rising above Gavarnie, rushes the "gave de Pau". The gorge we were now travelling up was much wilder, deeper and stiffer to climb than the Cauterets one. At Luz it is joined by another, up which lies Bareges, and the road by which to ascend the Pic du midi de Bigorre, and also to cross the watershed at the Col du Tourmalet and follow the Adour which rushes down the other side. We intended doing this latter gorge after going to Gavarnie and returning to Luz. We therefore "kept to the right" through San Sauveur, over a fine stone bridge. The crown of whose single arch is 216 feet above the rushing stream, and up a road practically cut along the side of the gorge that soon became too steep to ride without a terrific expenditure of energy. The scene became wilder than ever until at a part we reached called "chaos" it seemed as though we had found the limit. Huge masses of "gneiss" rock seemed to have fallen about into the most impossible and grotesque positions, the result of a landslide which for many generations held up the waters of the "gave", forming a huge lake until the weight of the latter caused another cleavage. Above "chaos" we passed a "military hut" and a couple of soldiers and soon afterwards found our way obstructed by a torrent dashing down from the mountain side, across the road and down again to the "gave". We found four big stones meant for stepping stones, placed on the "gave" side of the road, and there was nothing for it but to lift the machine up above one's head

and get across. The wind was blowing too and the first stone rocked in a degree anything but reassuring. Everyone, however, managed the work safely, and another stream we soon came to but to cross which it was sufficient to put the machine under one's arm, was of course quite a minor affair. The next development however was a snow storm and after that rain which lasted for about the last two miles. Gavarnie lies at an elevation of 4380 feet so that there was an appreciable difference in temperature, when compared with that of Pierrefitte and Argeles. About 3 kilos from Gavarnie we were overtaken by a girl and boy, mounted on a horse, and had a little conversation with them. There is a mountain path from Gavarnie to Cauterets, but a guide is necessary. We put up at the Hotel des Voyageurs and were soon none the worse for the snow and rain we had encountered. We were looked after very well here and made ourselves very comfortable around the fire, after the other guests, including an apparently honeymooning couple who played and giggled incessantly, had retired.



G. S. N. C. TOURS IN THE PYRENEES—"CHAOS"—ON THE ROAD TO GAVARNIE.

### **Saturday 13<sup>th</sup> May**

Arose before 6 am and after "café" made for the celebrated "cirque" after following the "gave" up the valley, climbing over rocks, rivulets and snow for about two hours we came within a fair distance of the precipitous mountain sides that form the semicircle of marble. It is a grand scene, and the rumbling of the snow that is constantly falling in the neighbourhood from ledge to ledge finally ending in a loud roar and a cloud of spray, helps to impress it upon the mind. We saw the famous waterfall, said to be the second highest in Europe, but there was not much water, and what little came down was turned into spray after it had covered about a third of the distance down. Mr B. took several shots and we returned to the hotel passing several tourists of both sexes on horseback, going to the cirque. One gentleman wanted to stop and ask Mr B. about his photos, but his wife - another "Englishwoman abroad" cut the idea short so he reluctantly pushed on again! There was a large gathering of natives outside the hotel when we reached it, watching the new arrivals, and amongst the crowd we saw our little horsewoman of the previous evening. She seemed shy, however, and merely gave us "bon jour". It was warm this morning, quite a contrast to the weather we had enjoyed coming up the day before. We went back

down the same road to Luz and then began ascending once more, to Bareges. We soon gave up all hopes of being able to ride it as the road was "up". Gangs of male and female labourers were at work fetching huge stones up from the bed of the "gave", metalling the road with them and building up the parapet. They looked at us and smiled and wondered as we toiled up the rough road with our machines. The broiling soon making us envy them their scant clothing. The little torrents and "shoots" that rush out from the bank on their way to the river gave us opportunities to cool our wrists and hands, of which we were not slow to avail ourselves. After five miles of this we reached Bareges about 5pm, and were not sorry. What with getting up early, doing the cirque before dejeuner, and backpedalling and walking down to Luz, and thence ploughing up to Bareges, we felt fairly tired. We were now over 4000 feet above sea level, just slightly lower than Gavarnie. Bareges is chiefly a summer resort, and as it was very early in the season, was consequently almost deserted. One seemed to hear nothing but the rushing "gave". We had hoped to be able to get to the hotel near the summit of the Pic du midi de Bigorre that night, and so enjoy the sunrise from the peak in the morning. Fate had other things in store however, for we learned upon enquiry that the hotel was closed. We therefore had to stay at Bareges that night, a council of war was held and we decided to get up at 4am and start for the Pic taking with us as a guide the "maitre de l'hotel", and two mules to carry the machines. The latter would go to the summit of the Col du Tourmalet whence, after seeing the Pic, we would ride on to Bagneres di Bigorre and say goodbye to the Pyrenees. I did not enjoy a good night's sleep, probably owing to the fact of the gave flowing at the back of the hotel, and was the first downstairs.

#### **Sunday 14<sup>th</sup> May**

After café au lait we started off up the street, a somewhat queer looking crowd. Bertie's cycling shoes were approaching collapse, so far as walking was concerned, so he was attired in a borrowed pair of boots "a la navvy Anglais". We others of course congratulated him loudly as he strode along to the manner born, so to speak, Alpenstock in hand. After following the road for an hour or so we left the mules with their novel and awkward burdens and followed the guide along a path. About 7am just as we came in sight of the Pic - still of course a good distance away, rain began to fall. WE were soon obliged to make for some shepherd huts - now deserted, being used only as summer "residences" when the sheep stay up in the mountains all night, in the hope that the rain would stop and allow us to proceed. In about an hours time we descried the mules away along the road and after a deal of energy had been expended in shouting they were brought over, unloaded and put in one of the cabins. We were now in a curious plight. The rain increased, we could hear the snow falling down the sides of the peaks with a noise like thunder, and here we were tied up in a rough stone hut miles from anywhere. We had brought some wine, bread and sausage with us so we soon lit a fire and made things as comfortable as we could. We burnt up the shepherd's "bed" - which consisted mostly of heather - and all the wood that was handy, sang songs and talked. As the day wore on it became obvious that the ascent of the pic was out of the question. The alternatives were saying up there until the rain stopped, or making a dash through, despite the cold and the wet, for the nearest village over the col. We decided on the latter. The mules were brought out and loaded in the pouring rain. Bertie changed his boots, and once more we started off. WE soon gained the road that led to the Col, or pass, and sooner still found it blocked up with snow. WE could see the road further on and the guide essayed to take the mules through the drift. He laid hold of one which then began to plunge and stumble and threatened to "demoralise" the machines, whilst the other made down the mountainside - worse still! We got the latter gentleman in the right however and got through the snowbank, which came up to about our knees, safely. We were all pretty well wet through by now, and after negotiating another snow drift soon reached the top of the col, 7,100 feet high. We unloaded the machines and bade farewell to the guide who returned to Bareges. Mr B. shot his last film - all in the pouring rain, and essayed to travel the downward track. Riding was practically "off" owing to the snowdrifts. Moreover when one tried to back-pedal against the descent, one's foot simply slipped and squashed in one's shoe. Grippe, the nearest village, lay 12 kilos down the valley. The gradients on the road were at times very heavy and the turns sharp; whilst there several flocks of sheep, apparently without shepherds scattered about

blocking the roadway. Bertie, as of yore, soon got on ahead. Mr B. following closely, whilst William and yours truly brought up the rear. Bertie bethought himself, so it turned out, of tying a young tree to his saddle and with such an efficient brake to "moderate his transports" rode probably more of the distance than anyone and so reached the hotel first. In the fullness of time Bill and I reached the place and were welcomed by Bertie and Mr B. who had prepared a good fire, dry clothes and a hot cognac for us. We had a large room all to ourselves and were soon at peace with the world, quite cheerful in fact. We were soon surveying each other, dressed in French shirts, French trousers, French socks and slippers. Bill, however, for some reason or other, which was not quite apparent, had lavender trousers served out to him! The "little girl" who looked after us worked like a Trojan. Nor did she stand on ceremony, but took no more notice of our state or doings than if she had been a hospital nurse! This hotel is celebrated for its trout, and needles to remark we were in a likely position to enjoy them. We found a pack of cards after dinner and so whiled away the Sunday night.

#### **Monday 15<sup>th</sup> May**

Still raining and continued to do so all day. Made an effort to explore the village in the rain but did not spend much time that way as there was no post office and no shops. We cleared out all the cigars they could find in the hotel, and used up all our postcards and stamps in correspondence. The rain cleared about 6 pm but we decided to remain at Grippe until the morning.

#### **Tuesday 16<sup>th</sup> May**

Awoke to find that fine sunshine had returned at last. The machines seemed none the worse for the snow and rain, and about 9.30am we bade goodbye to Grippe and its hospitable hotel. We parted here from Mr B. who had yet another col to mount, as he intended to reach Adorre if possible before he returned. He had shown himself to be a sound fellow and a real acquisition our party. We promised to look him up at the Pickwick Cycle Club after our return home.

The road was in a fair condition and improved as we got farther on. It was market day at the nearest large village to Grippe so that with the vehicles and cattle the road was at times rather lively. We eventually reached Bagnères di Bigorre (the baths of Bigorre) and stayed for a while to buy some photos and look about generally. We had reckoned on getting here on the wet Sunday we spent near the Col du Tourmalet, so that we had practically lost two days owing to the weather. We were now 5,000 feet below the summit of the col and thought the host of the Hotel des Voyageurs at Gavarnie when he put it to us thus picturesquely: "Col du Tourmalet phsst! (circular forward motion with clenched fists) - Bagnères di Bigorre!" As has been noticed things did not quite work out that way! We had left Bagnères about 6 kilos behind when, whilst going along I felt the machine shiver a bit and heard spokes twanging. I thought the chain had broken but saw that it had not, and hearing the air hissing from the back tyre, got down. Just then Bill, who was close behind, and who had also dismounted called out "here it is, it came from that field!" He had in his hand a large flint about the size of half a brick, and it was obvious to me that it had gone through my back wheel - after narrowly escaping Bill's ribs It had demolished the valve and broken four spokes. We went back a little distance and to investigate and saw a man in the field. There was a ditch and hedge between us so we could not "fall on him" at once. When, however, he heard our shouts and understood what he had done he seemed greatly upset and we could not make out what he was saying. All I could understand was "parfaitement, parfaitement" he soon became so frightened however that he gathered up his tools and hurried off down the field, and so we lost him. We looked about for the valve but could not find it. Bagnères was the nearest place where we could get the repairs done so that all we could do was retrace our steps thither. Bertie kindly undertook to run my machine whilst riding his own, and he and Bill dashed on so as to save a little time if possible, leaving me to walk back. Needless to remark, the circumstances under which I was suffering did not make that four mile walk feel particularly pleasant or exhilarating. I had reached the heart of the town and was wondering which way the others had taken when I saw them coming. The machine was being attended to and was to be ready in about an hour and a half. I interviewed the "mechanicien" who seemed an intelligent fellow (like all his fellows in that

line) and then we did the best thing possible - went and enjoyed a good dejeuner. WE left Bagneres once more but after doing a few kilos found the back tyre deflated. This was rather a "damper" and amidst plenty of "remarks" and growling I searched for punctures which did not exist. The only conclusion to which we could come was that the valve, being made in a different style to the English ones, and having been put in in a too short space of time, was leaky. We plugged it around with canvas and started off again. It was not of much use however and we had stop at the first place we could find where water was available. This was at some roadside cow sheds where there was a well. We had to manoeuvre slightly as the well bucket was not detachable. It was still the valve that was defective and after partially resetting it we started off once more, being about six hours behind on the days ride. There was nothing for it but to ride hard. It was a lovely evening and the road was fairly good. About 7.30 we reached Lannemezan and put up for the night

### **Wednesday 17<sup>th</sup> May**

We were soon on the main road for Auch, which town we reached in time for dejeuner although my tyre wanted re-pumping about every three hours and the road was very hard and bumpy. The weather was perfect; the sky being a lovely colour and just enough breeze to counteract the warm sun. The views we obtained of the Pyrenees which lay on our right and left and behind us seemed to me to be an improvement on the one from Pau. Auch, although the capital of the department of Gers seemed almost dead. It lies on the slopes of an eminence, crowned by the cathedral and has a celebrated large flight of steps leading from the lower to the upper town, from which a good view of the Pyrenees can be obtained. From Auch we made for Montestruc but upon arriving there found no accommodation for stopping the night, and so perforce had to go on to Fleurance, a much larger place where we put up at the Hotel Barriac.

### **Thursday 18<sup>th</sup> May**

Arose and left Fleurance in a slight rain which we soon rode out of into fine weather. An uneventful ride brought us to Agen, where we had dejeuner. Haymaking, reaping etc. were being carried out in all the districts we were passing through so that the air seemed very sweet and refreshing. Rain fell fast whilst we were at Agen but we started as soon as it stopped and we were not again troubled by it. After a long days ride we reached Aiguillon, a very neglected sort of village where public spirit and initiative seem at a discount, and put up for the night. The hotel faced on the public square and had a spacious verandah shaded by trees, on to which my bedroom opened. The square seemed to suffer from lack of proper cleaning and sweeping, a handsome fountain which stood in the centre having been allowed to become dirty, and its basin to get coated with slime and choked with leaves.

### **Friday 19<sup>th</sup> May**

It being a question now of riding every day for all we were worth in order to reach Bordeaux with a few hours to spare, we were up early. I found both my tyres deflated and speedily came to the conclusion that the use of a fountain basin six or eight feet in diameter in such a case was not to be despised. Here was a means of finding leakages and punctures which I quickly availed myself of, although possibly enough it is not used so often as it might be! Both tubes were soon in a sound and reliable condition and we started off in good time and spirits. We had now one more stoppage before reaching Bordeaux, viz Langon. The road lay along the banks of the Garonne, which is also closely followed by the railway. Almost every inch of the soil in these parts is cultivated, there being very little waste or woodland - much different from what obtains in the district of the Landes. We made a stop at Mahmand, and in due course reached Langon where the river is crossed by an artistic suspension bridge. Langon is a thriving business like little town and possesses a good hostelry - The Cheval Blanc - recommended by The English C.T.C. The church here is very fine and together with the bridge helps to form an artistic picture from the river bank.

### **Saturday 20<sup>th</sup> May**

Started early hoping to reach Bordeaux by noon, and so have a few hours to spend in the town. When about half way on the road however, Bill found that one of his cranks was cracked where the pedal pin screwed in, and was in a fair way to break. After wasting some time with it, Bertie and I decided to tow Bill and

so get him along. This made slow work of it, but worse still a strong headwind had sprung up. After another mile or two the pedal dropped off altogether, and Bill's front tyre which had had to be bound almost every day through the tour with canvas bursted outright, and so put an end to the towing business. After dejeuner, we arrived at the Bordeaux custom house well on in the afternoon, to find business almost at a standstill and a large crowd waiting to be attended to. After waiting our turn and going the necessary formalities found the paying out office shut, which necessitated a visit (with more waiting) to the shipping office, in order to give them the authority to deal with the matter. This brought dinner time upon us and after that there was a journey to the other end of the town to procure William's overcoat which had been left at the Medoc Railway Station. As ill luck would have it the station was closed, but after digging up some clerks who were doing overtime (?) in an office there we obtained the overcoat. The shops were now closed and after a visit to one of the large cafes that boasted an orchestra of Viennese ladies we made for the Hironnelle, which we reached about 11pm.

#### **Sunday 21<sup>st</sup> May**

The ship was just leaving the Gironde when I arrived on deck. The weather was rather gloomy and later turned to rain. Felt the mal de mer slightly in the morning and the climax was reached upon finishing dinner. Was alright again by teatime and was scarcely troubled during the rest of the voyage. The second cabin was much fuller this journey although the female contingent took a day or so to get used to the situation.

#### **Monday 22<sup>nd</sup> May**

A lovely day. The cabin was more lively today owing the mal de mer having largely gone with the bad weather. Cards and corkscrews received more handling. A bright moon came up in the evening making it very pleasant to remain late on deck. We had the real captain on board this time, (the one with us going out having come from another vessel) and he was a typical old sea dog. Had been on the passage 32 years and insisted on being father to everyone. Anchored in Spithead at not being possible to reach Southampton that night in time for it to be of use to anyone.

#### **Tuesday 23<sup>rd</sup> May**

Found the ship in dock upon waking, and was very soon on shore. Had some breakfast and caught the 7.45 train to Waterloo.