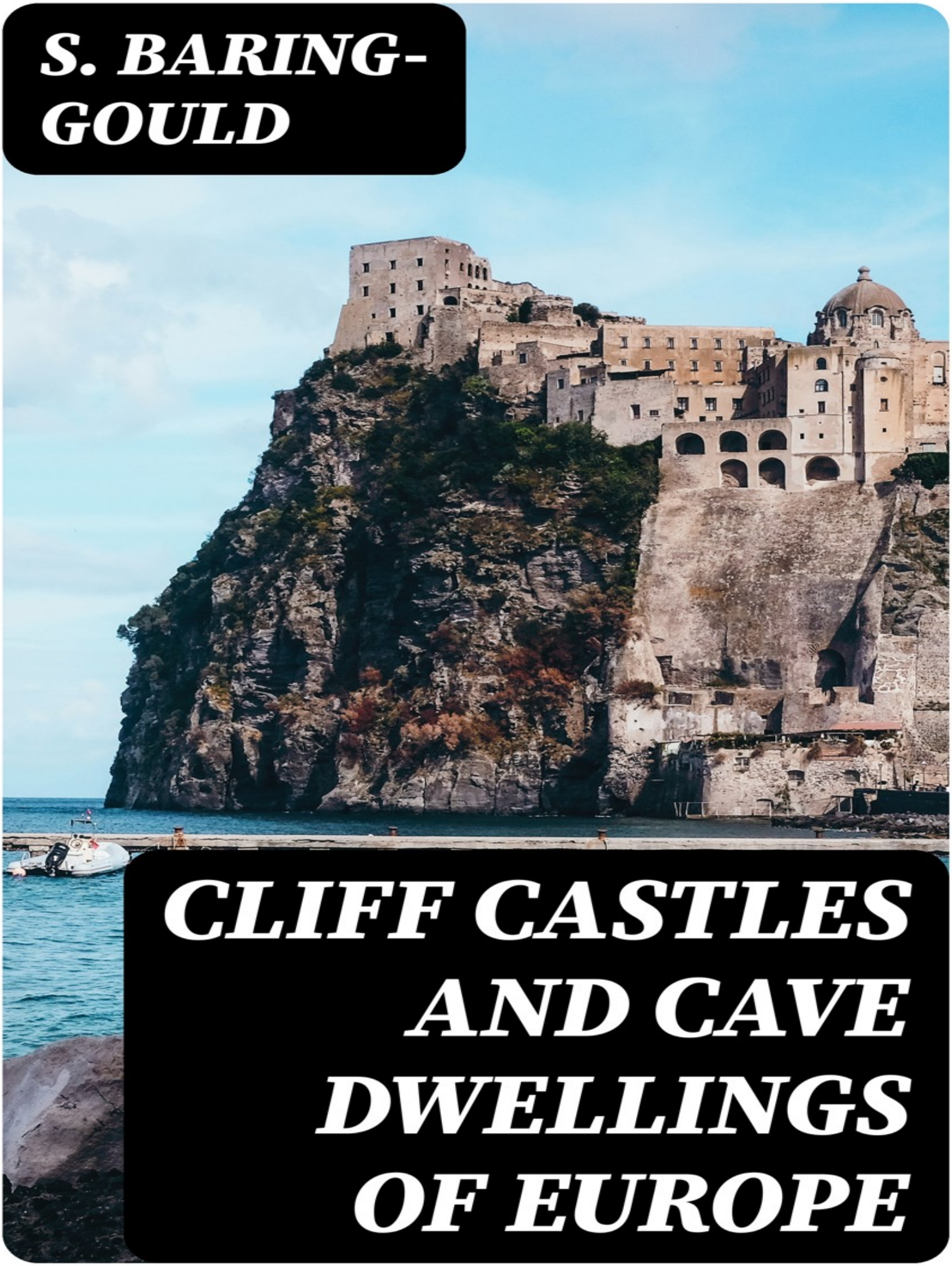
S. BARING-GOULD



CLIFF CASTLES AND CAVE DWELLINGS OF EUROPE

S. Baring-Gould

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PREFACE

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When in 1850 appeared the Report of the Secretary of War for the United States, containing Mr. J. H. Simpson's account of the Cliff Dwellings in Colorado, great surprise was awakened in America, and since then these remains have been investigated by many explorers, of whom I need only name Holmes' "Report of the Ancient Ruins in South-West Colorado during the Summers of 1875 and 1876," and Jackson's "Ruins of South- West Colorado in 1875 and 1877." Powell, Newberry, &c., have also described them. A summary is in "Prehistoric America," by the Marquis de Nadaillac, 1885, and the latest contribution to the subject are articles in *Scribner's Magazine* by E. S. Curtis, 1906 and 1909.

The Pueblos Indians dwell for the most part at a short distance from the Rio Grande; the Zuñi, however, one of their best known tribes, are settled far from that river, near the sources of the Gila. In the Pueblos country are tremendous cañons of red sandstone, and in their sides are the habitations of human beings perched on every ledge in inaccessible positions. Major Powell, United States Geologist, expressed his amazement at seeing nothing for whole days but perpendicular cliffs everywhere riddled with human dwellings resembling the cells of a honeycomb. The apparently inaccessible heights were scaled by means of

long poles with lateral teeth disposed like the rungs of a ladder, and inserted at intervals in notches let into the face of the perpendicular rock. The most curious of these dwellings, compared to which the most Alpine chalet is of easy access, have ceased to be occupied, but the Maqui, in North-West Arizona, still inhabit villages of stone built on sandstone tables, standing isolated in the midst of a sandy ocean almost destitute of vegetation.

The cause of the abandonment of the cliff dwellings has been the diminished rainfall, that rendering the land barren has sent its population elsewhere. The rivers, the very streams, are dried up, and only parched water-courses show where they once flowed.

"The early inhabitants of the region under notice were wonderfully skilful in turning the result of the natural weathering of the rocks to account. To construct a cave-dwelling, the entrance to the cave or the front of the open gallery was walled up with adobes, leaving only a small opening serving for both door and window. The cliff houses take the form and dimensions of the platform or ledge from which they rise. The masonry is well laid, and it is wonderful with what skill the walls are joined to the cliff, and with what care the aspect of the neighbouring rocks has been imitated in the external architecture." [Footnote: Nadaillac, "Prehistoric America," Lond. 1885, p. 205.]

In Asia also these rock-dwellings abound. The limestone cliffs of Palestine are riddled with them. They are found also in Armenia and in Afghanistan. At Bamian, in the latter, "the rocks are perforated in every direction. A whole people could put up in the 'Twelve Thousand Galleries' which

occupy the slopes of the valley for a distance of eight miles. Isolated bluffs are pierced with so many chambers that they look like honeycombs." [Footnote: Reclus, "Asia," iii. p. 245.]

That Troglodytes have inhabited rocks in Africa has been known since the time of Pliny.

But it has hardly been realised to what an extent similar cliff dwellings have existed and do still exist in Europe.

In 1894, in my book, "The Deserts of Southern France," I drew attention to rock habitations in Dordogne and Lot, but I had to crush all my information on this subject into a single chapter. The subject, however, is too interesting and too greatly ramified to be thus compressed. It is one, moreover, that throws sidelights on manners and modes of life in the past that cannot fail to be of interest. The description given above of cliff dwellings in Oregon might be employed, without changing a word, for those in Europe.

To the best of my knowledge, the theme of European Troglodytes has remained hitherto undealt with, though occasional mention has been made of those on the Loire. It has been taken for granted that cave-dwellers belonged to a remote past in civilised Europe; but they are only now being expelled in Nottinghamshire and Shropshire, by the interference of sanitary officers.

Elsewhere, the race is by no means extinct. In France more people live underground than most suppose. And they show no inclination to leave their dwellings. Just one month ago from the date of writing this page, I sketched the new front that a man had erected to his paternal cave at Villiers in Loir et Cher. The habitation was wholly subterranean, but then it consisted of one room alone. The freshly completed

face was cut in freestone, with door and window, and above were sculptured the aces of hearts, spades, and diamonds, an anchor, a cogwheel and a fish. Separated from this mansion was a second, divided from it by a buttress of untrimmed rock, and this other also was newly fronted, occupied by a neat and pleasant-spoken woman who was vastly proud of her cavern residence. "Mais c'est tout ce qu'on peut désirer. Enfin on s'y trouve très bien."

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CHAPTER I

PREHISTORIC CAVE-DWELLERS

In a vastly remote past, and for a vastly extended period, the mighty deep rolled over the surface of a world inform and void, depositing a sediment of its used up living tenants, the microscopic cases of foraminiferæ, sponges,

sea-urchins, husks, and the cast limbs of crustaceans. The descending shells of the diatoms like a subaqueous snow gradually buried the larger dejections. This went on till the sediment had attained a thickness of over one thousand feet. Then the earth beneath, heaved and tossed in sleep, cast off its white featherbed, projected it on high to become the chalk formation that occupies so distinct and extended a position in the geological structure of the globe. The chalk may be traced from the North of Ireland to the Crimea, a distance of about 11,140 geographical miles, and, in an opposite direction, from the South of Sweden to Bordeaux, a distance of 840 geographical miles.

It extends as a broad belt across France, like the sash of a Republican mayor. You may travel from Calais to Vendôme, to Tours, Poitiers, Angoulême, to the Gironde, and you are on chalk the whole way. It stretches through Central Europe, and is seen in North Africa. From the Crimea it reaches into Syria, and may be traced as far as the shores of the sea of Aral in Central Asia.

The chalk is not throughout alike in texture; hard beds alternate with others that are soft—beds with flints like plum-cake, and beds without, like white Spanish bread.

We are accustomed in England to chalk in rolling downs, except where bitten into by the sea, but elsewhere it is riven, and presents cliffs, and these cliffs are not at all like that of Shakespeare at Dover, but overhang, where hard beds alternate with others that are friable. These latter are corroded by the weather, and leave the more compact projecting like the roofs of penthouses. They are furrowed horizontally, licked smooth by the wind and rain. Not only

so, but the chalk cliffs are riddled with caves, that are ancient water-courses. The rain falling on the surface is drunk by the thirsty soil, and it sinks till, finding where the chalk is tender, it forms a channel and flows as a subterranean rill, spouts forth on the face of the crags, till sinking still lower, it finds an exit at the bottom of the cliff, when it leaves its ancient conduit high and dry.

But before the chalk was tossed aloft there had been an earlier upheaval from the depths of the ocean, that of the Jurassic limestone. This was built up by coral insects working indefatigably through long ages, piling up their structures, as the sea-bottom slowly sank, straining ever higher, till at length their building was crushed together and projected on high, to form elevated plateaux, as the Causses of Quercy, and Alpine ranges, as the Dolomites of Brixen. But in the uplifting of this deposit, as it was inelastic, the strain split it in every direction, and down the rifts thus formed danced the torrents from higher granitic and schistous ranges, forming the gorges of the Tarn, the Ardêche, the Herault, the Gaves, and the Timée, in France.

It has been a puzzle to decide which appeared first, the egg out of which the fowl was hatched, or the hen which laid the egg; and it is an equal puzzle to the anthropologist to say whether man was first brought into existence as a babe or in maturity. In both cases he would be helpless. The babe would need its mother, and the man be paralysed into incapacity through lack of experience. But without stopping to debate this question, we may conclude that naked, shivering and homeless humanity would have to be pupil to the beasts to learn where to shelter his head. Where did

man first appear? Where was the Garden of Eden? Indisputably on the chalk. There he found all his first demands supplied. The walls of cretaceous rock furnished him with shelter under its ledges of overhanging beds, flints out of which to fashion his tools, and nodules of pyrites wherewith to kindle a fire. Providence through aeons had built up the chalk to be man's first home.

Incontestably, the great centres of population in the primeval ages were the chalklands, and next to them those of limestone. The chalk first, for it furnished man with flints, and the limestone next when he had learned to barter.

He could have lived nowhere else, till, after the lapse of ages, he had developed invention and adaptability. Besant and Rice, in "Ready-money Mortiboy," speak of Divine Discontent as the motive power impelling man to progress. Not till the chalk and the limestone shelters were stocked, and could hold no more, would men be driven to invent for themselves other dwellings. The first men being sent into the world without a natural coat of fur or feathers, would settle into caves or under overhanging roofs of rock, and with flint picked out of it, chipped and pointed, secure the flesh of the beast for food and its hide for clothing. Having accomplished this, man would sit down complacently for long ages. Indeed, there are certain branches of the human family that have progressed no further and display no ambition to advance.

Only when the districts of chalk and limestone were overstocked would the overflow be constrained to look elsewhere for shelter. Then some daring innovators, driven from the favoured land, would construct habitations by

grubbing into the soil, and covering them with a roof of turf. The ancient Germans, according to Tacitus, lived in underground cabins, heaped over with dung to keep them warm during the long winter. With the invention of the earthenware stove, the German Bauer has been enabled to rise above the surface; but he cherishes the manure round his house, so to speak, about his feet, as affectionately as when it warmed his head.

For a long time it was supposed that our British ancestors lived in pit dwellings, and whole clusters of them were recorded and mapped on the Yorkshire Wolds, and a British metropolis of them, Caer Penselcoit, was reported in Somersetshire. Habitations sunk deep in the rock, with only a roof above ground. But the spade has cracked these archæological theories like filberts, and has proved that the pits in the wolds were sunk after iron ore, or those in Somerset were burrowings for the extraction of chert. [Footnote: Atkinson, "Forty Years in a Moorland Parish." Lond. 1891, p. 161, *et seq.* Some pits are, however, not so dubious. At Hurstbourne, in Hants, pit habitations have been explored; others, in Kent and Oxfordshire, undoubtedly once dwelt in. In one of the Kentish pits 900 flakes and cores of flint were found. The Chysoyster huts in Cornwall and the "Picts houses" in Scotland were built up of stones, underground.] But the original paleolithic man did not get beyond the cavern or the rock-shelter. This latter was a retreat beneath an overhanging stratum of hard rock, screened against the weather by a curtain of skins. And why should he wish to change so long as these were available? We, from our advanced position, sitting in padded arm-

chairs, before a coal fire, can see that there was room for improvement; but he could not. The rock-dwelling was commodious, dry, warm in winter and cool in summer, and it cost him no trouble to fashion it, or keep it in repair. He had not the prophetic eye to look forward to the arm-chair and the coal fire. Indeed, at all periods, down to the present day, those who desire to lead the simple life, and those who have been reared in these nature-formed dwelling-places, feel no ambition to occupy stone-built houses. In North Devon the cottages are reared of cob, kneaded clay, and thatched. A squire on his estate pulled down those he possessed and built in their place brick houses with slated roofs. The cottagers bitterly resented the change, their old mud-hovels were so much warmer. And in like manner the primeval man would not exchange his *abris* for a structural dwelling unless constrained so to do.

The ancients knew that the first homes of mankind were grottoes. They wrote of Troglodytes in Africa and of cave-dwellers in Liguria. In Arabia Petræa, a highly civilized people converted their simple rock- dwellings into sumptuous palaces.

I might fill pages with quotations to the purpose from the classic authors, but the reader would skip them all. It is not my intention to give a detailed account of the prehistoric cave-dwellers. They have been written about repeatedly. In 1882, Dr. Buckland published the results of his exploration of the Kirkdale Cave in Yorkshire in *Reliquiæ Diluvianæ*, and sought to establish that the remains there found pertained to the men who were swept away by Noah's flood. The publication of Sir Charles Lyall's "The Geological Evidences

of the Antiquity of Man," in 1863, was a shock to all such as clung to the traditional view that these deposits were due to a cosmic deluge, and that man was created 4004 B.C.

At first the announcements proving the antiquity of man were received with orthodox incredulity, because, although the strata, in which the remains were found, are the most modern of all earth's formations, still the testimony so completely contravened traditional beliefs, that the most conclusive evidence was required for its proof. Such evidence has been found, and is so strong, and so cumulative in character as to be now generally accepted as conclusive.

Evidence substantiating the thesis of Lyall had been accumulating, and the researches of Lartet and Christy in the Vézère valley, published in 1865-75, as *Reliquiæ Aquitanicæ*, conclusively proved that man in Perigord had been a naked savage, contemporary with the mammoth, the reindeer and the cave-bear, that he had not learned to domesticate animals, to sow fields, to make pots, and that he was entirely ignorant of the use of the metals.

Since then, in the valley of the Vézère, Les Eyzies in the Department of Dordogne, has become a classic spot. I have already described it in another work, [Footnote: "The Deserts of Southern France." Lond., Methuen, 1894.] but I must here say a few more words concerning it. On reaching the valley of the Vézère by the train from Perigueux, one is swung down from the plateau into a trough between steep scarps of chalk-rock that rise from 150 to 300 feet above the placid river. These scarps have been ploughed by the weather in long horizontal furrows, so that they lean over as

though desirous of contemplating their dirty faces in the limpid water. Out of their clefts spring evergreen oaks, juniper, box and sloe-bushes. Moss and lichen stain the white walls that are streaked by black tricklings from above, and are accordingly not beautiful—their faces are like that of a pale, dirty, and weeping child with a cold in its head, who does not use a pocket-handkerchief. Jackdaws haunt the upper ledges and smaller caves that gape on all sides chattering like boys escaped from school, and anon a raven starts forth and hoarsely calls for silence. At the foot of the stooping crags, bowing to each other across the stream, lie masses that have broken from above, and atop and behind these is to be seen a string of cottages built into the rock, taking advantage of the overarching stratum of hard chalk; and cutting into it are russet, tiled roofs, where the cottagers have sought to expand beyond the natural shelter: they are in an intermediate position. Just as I have seen a caddis-worm emancipating itself from its cage, half in as a worm, half out as a fly.

Nature would seem to have specially favoured this little nook of France, which must have been the Eden of primeval man on Gallic soil. There he found ready-made habitations, a river abounding in fish, a forest teeming with game; constrained periodically to descend from the waterless plateaux, at such points as favoured a descent, to slake their thirst at the stream, and there was the nude hunter lurking in the scrub or behind a stone, with bow or spear awaiting his prey—his dinner and his jacket.

What beasts did he slay? The wild horse, with huge head, was driven by him over the edge of the precipice, and when

it fell with broken limbs or spine, was cut up with flint knives and greedily devoured. The reindeer was also hunted, and the cumbersome mammoth enabled a whole tribe to gorge itself.

The grottoes perforating the cliff, like bubbles in Gruyère cheese, have been occupied consecutively to the present day. Opposite to Les Eyzies, hanging like a net or skein of black thread to the face of the precipice, is a hotel, part gallery, part cave—l'Auberge du Paradis; and a notice in large capitals invites the visitor to a "Course aux Canards."

When I was last there, reaching the tavern by a ladder erected in a grotto, I learned that an American couple on their honeymoon had recently slept in the guest-chamber scooped out of the living rock. The kitchen itself is a cavern, and in it are shelves, staged against the rock, offering Chartreuse, green and yellow, Benedictine, and Crème de Menthe. The proprietor also possesses a gramophone, and its strident notes we may well suppose imitate the tones of the first inhabitants of this den. Of the Roc de Tayac, in and against which this paradisaical hotel is plastered, I shall have more to say in another chapter.

The first men who settled in this favoured valley under shelters open to the blaze of the sun, in a soft and pleasant climate, where the air when not in proximity to men, is scented with mint, marjoram and juniper, where with little trouble a salmon might be harpooned, must have multiplied enormously—for every overhanging rock, every cavern, even every fallen block of stone, has been utilised as a habitation. Where a block has fallen, the prehistoric men scratched the earth away from beneath it, and couched in

the trench. The ground by the river when turned up is black with the charcoal from their fires. A very little research will reward the visitor with a pocketful of flint knives and scrapers. And this is what is found not only on the main artery, but on all the lateral veins of water—wherever the cretaceous rocks project and invite to take shelter under them. Since the researches of Lartet and Christy, it has been known as an established fact that these savages were indued with rare artistic skill. Their delineations with a flint point on ivory and bone, of the mammoth, reindeer, and horse, are so masterly that these men stand forth as the spiritual ancestors of Landseer and Rosa Bonheur. And what is also remarkable is that the race which succeeded, that which discovered the use of metal, was devoid of the artistic sense, and their attempts at delineation are like the scribbling of an infant.

Of late years fresh discoveries have been made, revealing the fact that the Paleolithic men were able to paint as well as to engrave. In Les Combarelles and at Font-de-Gaume, far in the depths, where no light reaches, the walls have been found turned into a veritable picture- gallery. In the latter are twenty-four paintings; in the former forty- two.

Doctor Capitan and the Abbé Breuil were the first to discover the paintings in Les Combarelles. In an account read before the Academy of Sciences, they say: "Most frequently, the animals whose contours are indicated by a black outline, have all the surface thus circumscribed, entirely covered with red ochre. In some cases certain parts, such as the head of the urochs, seems to have been painted over with black and red together, so as to produce a brown

tint. In other cases the head of the beast is black, and the rest of the body brown. This is veritable fresco painting, and the colour was usually applied after the outline had been graven in the stone. At other times some shading is added by hatching supplied after the outline had been drawn. Finally, the contours are occasionally thrown into prominence by scraping away the surface of the rock around, so as to give to the figures the appearance of being in low relief."

These wall paintings are by no means unique. They have been found as well at Pair-sur-Pair in Gironde, and in the grotto of Altamira at Santillana del Mar, in the north of Spain.

Still more recently an additional revelation as to the artistic skill of primeval man has been made; in a cave hitherto unexplored has been discovered actual sculpture with rounded forms, of extinct beasts.

These discoveries appeared incredible, first, because it was not considered possible that paintings of such a vastly remote antiquity could remain fresh and distinguishable, and secondly, because it was not thought that paintings and sculpture could be executed in the depths of a rayless cavern, and artificial light have left no traces in a deposit of soot on the roof.

But it must be remembered that these subterranean passages have been sealed up from time immemorial, and subjected to no invasion by man or beast, or to any change of air or temperature. And secondly, that the artists obtained light from melted fat in stone bowls on the floor, in which was a wick of pith; and such lamps would hardly

discolour ceiling or walls. Of the genuineness of these paintings and sculptures there can be no question, from the fact that some are partly glazed over and some half obliterated by stalagmitic deposits.

Another discovery made in the Mas d'Azil in Arriege, is of painted pebbles and fan-shells that had served as paint-pots. [Footnote: Piette (E.), *Les Galets colorrés du Mas d'Azil.* Paris, 1896.] The pebbles had been decorated with spots, stripes, zig-zags, crosses, and various rude figures; and these were associated with paleolithic tools. In the chalk of Champagne, where there are no cliffs, whole villages of underground habitations have been discovered, but none of these go back to the earliest age of all; they belong to various epochs; but the first to excavate them was the Neolithic man, he who raised the rude stone monuments elsewhere. He had learned to domesticate the ox and the sheep, had made of the dog the friend of man. His wife span and he delved; he dug the clay, and she formed it with her fingers into vessels, on which to this day her finger-prints may be found.

These caves are hollowed out in a thick bed of cretaceous rock. The habitations are divided into two unequal parts by a wall cut in the living chalk. To penetrate into the innermost portion of the cave, one has to descend by steps cut in the stone, and these steps bear indications of long usage. The entrance is hewn out of a massive screen of rock, left for the purpose, and on each side of the doorway the edges show the rebate which served to receive a wooden door-frame. Two small holes on the right and left were used for fixing bars across to hold the door fast. A

good many of these caves are provided with a ventilating shaft, and some skilful contrivances were had recourse to for keeping out water. Inside are shelves, recesses cut in the chalk, for lamps, and to serve as cupboards. But probably these are due to later occupants. The Baron de Baye, who explored these caves, picked up worked flints, showing that their primitive occupants had been men of the prehistoric age, and other caves associated with them that were sepulchral were indisputably of the Neolithic age. [Footnote: De Baye (J.), *L'Archéologie préhistorique.* Paris, 1888.]

Mankind progresses not smoothly, as by a sliding carpet ascent, but by rugged steps broken by gaps. He halts long on one stage before taking the next. Often he remains stationary, unable to form resolution to step forward; sometimes even has turned round and retrograded.

The stream of civilisation flows on like a river, it is rapid in mid- current, slow at the sides, and has its backwaters. At best, civilisation advances by spirals. The native of New Guinea still employs stone tools; whilst an Englishman can get a nest of matches for twopence, an Indian laboriously kindles a fire with a couple of sticks. The prehistoric hunter of Solutré devoured the horse. In the time of Horace so did the Concanni of Spain. In the reign of Hakon, Athelstan's foster son, horseflesh formed the sacrificial meal of the Norseman. At the present day, as Mr. Lloyd George assures us, the haggard, ill-paid German mechanic breaks his long fast on black bread with rare meals of horseflesh.

At La Laugerie Basse, on the right bank of the Vézère, is a vast accumulation of fallen rocks, encumbering the ground for at least thirty-five feet in height under the overhanging