

on an arable hill the distant silhouettes of peasants and oxen could be seen against the sky; but those were the only signs of human life. For Stewart was deep in the rural Limousin now, where Time lags slow, and where France seems what it was in Royal days.

He did not wander aside, into any delightful bypath or natural pleasaunces; to quit the highroad would have seemed cowardice, he thought. "*Va pas?* I'll go on all the more! I'll keep on, straight on, no matter what I come to!" Still resenting the warning of the signpost, he went on as straight as he could. That was not very straight, it is true; indeed, it was hardly straight at all, for endless were the vagaries, and absurd the twists and angles, of that ancient *route du Roi*. The earliest Gauls must have trodden it first, and in spite of French macadamizers it remained inconceivably primitive and old.

But its windings shortened the apparent distance, by keeping the journey full of variety and unexpected charm; they cheered the heart of the wayfarer without too much wearying his feet; they prepared surprises for him; they seemed to connect and perpetuate the footprints of somebody older than the oldest Gauls—of some merry Titan who had traped about the quag there, when it had newly emerged from the Flood. For miles the way went in hollow places, under the shoulders of hillocks and copses; but presently it lifted the wayfarer up to a high bare place, where the path crossed a kind of common or heath, and a shallow quarry of road-mending stone lay exposed. Perceive the place: a stony place, that dazzles with pale glitter; perceive the cracked and chipped fragments white with mica glinting in the sun, the yellow agrimony spiking up, the purple loosestrife, the blue of bramble-berries showing amidst very green leaves, the red-spotted vipers sunning themselves at the edge of the glaring white way.

The quarriers and stone-breakers had quitted the place for a time, but they had left behind them some orderly rhomboidal heaps of broken stone, and a straw-thatched screen that had served as a shelter from too much sunlight or rain. And it was here that Dick Stewart came upon the Boy.