

March 14, 1917.—Strange day of waiting, and uncertainty. I have ransacked the town for something to read, but the bookstores are empty, nothing left, and most of my own books are packed. I have been reading Balzac—good when he does not strain after effects, and then he becomes impossible; and Anatole France, who is all acid, mordant, no sympathies, and no pity, in him; de Maupassant, who is a cynic, with a nasty mind; found an old Gaboriau, and could hardly wade through it; he doesn't compare with Conan Doyle, whose Sherlock Holmes would be a classic if he only knew how to use that and which, should and would, shall and will. I found pleasure in Maurice Barrès' *Un Homme Libre*, but can't find any more of him in town. Tried Henri Bordeaux—treacle. Last night I had pleasure in a study of the Prince de Ligne, who was a real man, from all accounts, a great gentleman who was a devil with women, and was full of a pretty wit. This sort of thing is the best thing the French do. Their fiction doesn't compare with English literature; it hasn't its mature and mellow references, its depth, its knowledge of life, nor has it any of the piety of the Russian novel. Reading French novels one would think that there was no woman in France who didn't deceive her husband, and no man who wasn't kept by a woman; one would think that the population of France consisted solely of cuckolds and pimps, of whores and cads. And that isn't France at all. Her novelists have defamed her. There isn't among them a Hardy, or a Howells, or a Galsworthy, or a Bennett, except Romain Rolland.

I should also except Pierre Loti. *An Iceland Fisherman* is superb, and I enjoyed the repose of *La Troisième Jeunesse de Madame Prune*; probably had he written of her first or even second youth, he would have written in another vein.

I've been reading Zola—also.