

**AMONG FRENCH
FOLK: A BOOK FOR
VAGABONDS**

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Among French folk: a book for vagabonds by W. Branch Johnson

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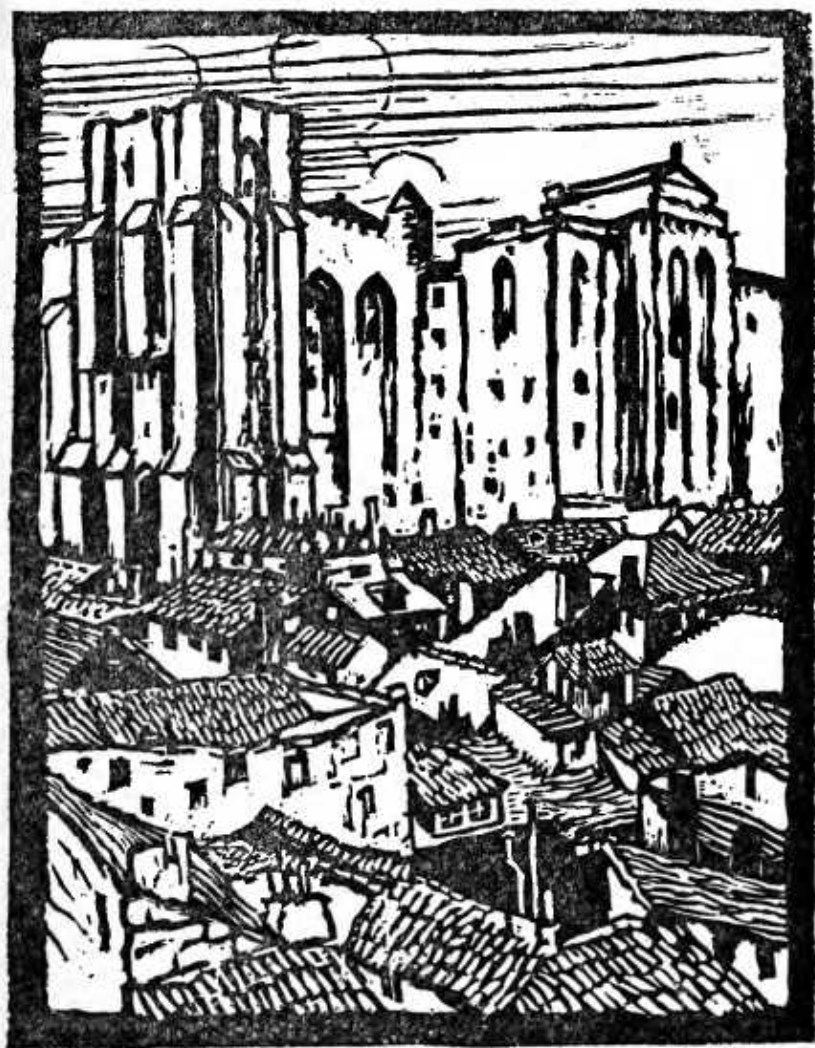
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W. BRANCH JOHNSON

**AMONG FRENCH
FOLK: A BOOK FOR
VAGABONDS**



Harold Haven Brown

CHATEAU DES PAPES, AVIGNON

From a wood-block by Harold Haven Brown

AMONG FRENCH FOLK

A BOOK FOR VAGABONDS

By
W. BRANCH JOHNSON

*“ O why do you walk through the fields in gloves
Missing so much and so much ? ”*

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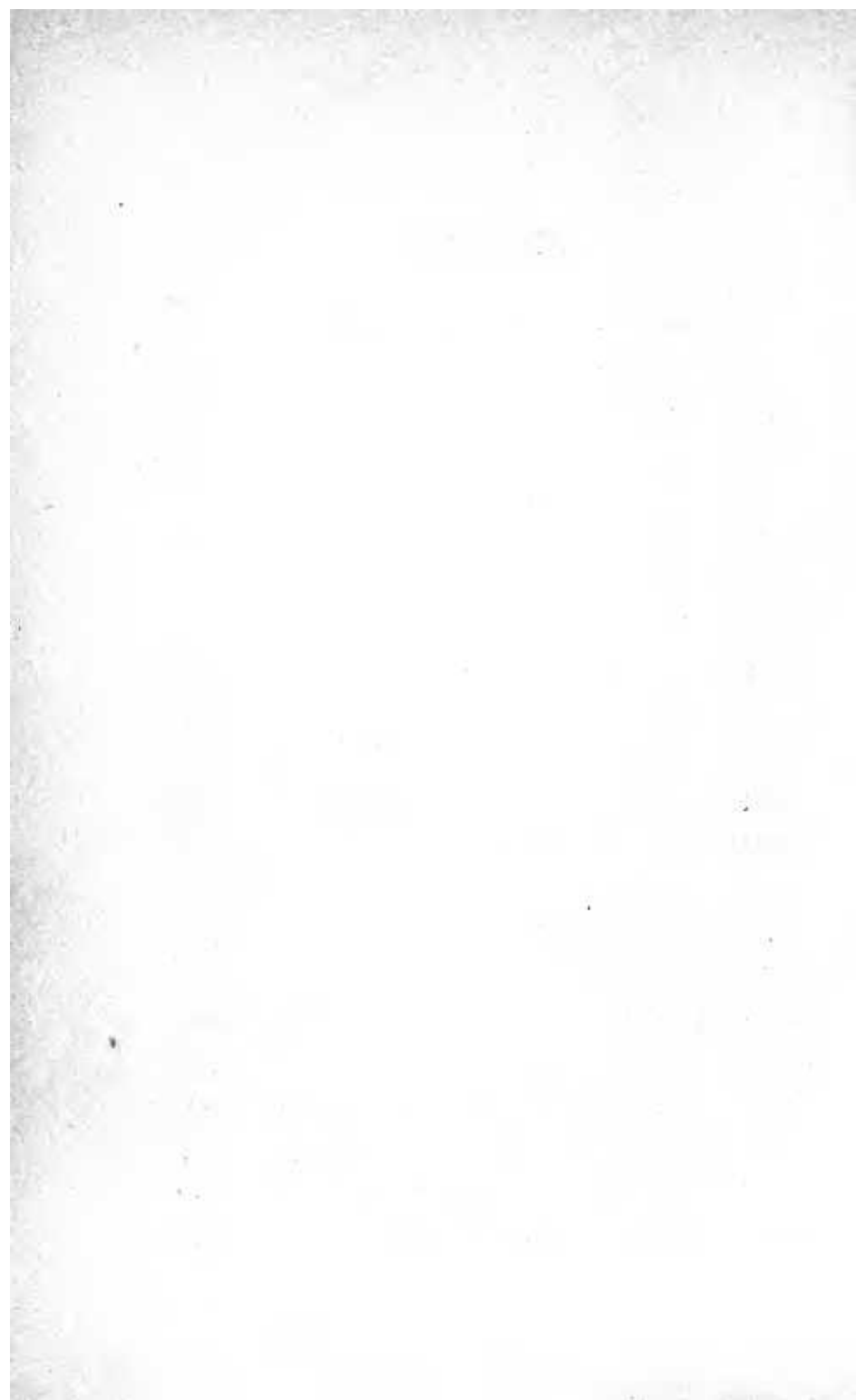
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AMONG FRENCH FOLK

I

THE BEGGAR OF THE PALACE

I

SPRING is surely the most abused of seasons, for to it are attributed, directly or indirectly, countless lapses from commonsense. I am instructed by Helen—a wife whose advice is often worth following—to blame the season for the notes which follow. Personally I would blame the employers who, just at that time, took it into their heads to dispense with my services. Had it not been for them I should have spent the summer respectably employed in filling the columns of a daily newspaper.

But no. Helen remains adamant on the Spring theory. She is romantic. Her only sorrow, I believe, is that she is not her namesake of Troy, whose beauty inspired poets and embroiled nations. That would have been *so* exciting. She found it exciting even to be out of a job. She looked up with dancing eyes.

“We’ll wander through France,” she enthused. “Just a pack on our backs and a Springtime smile for everyone we see.”

I have yet to meet the person who will stand out against Helen. She listens to no reasoning: did not on this occasion. It was the Spring, she repeated, the season of the Bohemian, the Wanderlust. The Fates favoured her plan.

So, on a Spring night we found ourselves in Paris

and, strolling beside the Seine, watched in the darkness a Parisian declaration.

"*Mais c'est vrai que tu m'aimes ?*" There was anxiety in his voice—a tremolo which could be felt passionately in spite of the low tone in which the question was put.

A moment's silence followed, but it seemed like an age. All Paris stood still in expectation. Helen's hand sought mine in the darkness and trembled. So much happiness rested on the answer.

"*Bien sûr.*" The reply was as demure as you please; and there was an answering flash to the dark flowing river in the girl's eyes.

"*Alors . . .*" He was about to demonstrate his affection, when a great cat, as black as a piece of coal, emerged from the other half of Paris on to the parapet over the river, and looking directly at the couple, sat down in front of them and licked its chops. Helen was sure it winked, but I cannot vouch for that.

At any rate, the thread was broken. The girl laughed and enticed pussy on her lap, where she fondled it to the utter exclusion of her wooer, while he, poor fellow, sat meekly trying to ingratiate himself with both parties.

Did ever a black cat make so inauspicious an appearance? Or was it following the prescribed right of its species to bring luck? Or was it simply the Spring?

Only after long months did we chance upon the sequel.

II

THERE are people who have the knack of fitting into their surroundings—the grande dame in her drawing-room, the colonel at the head of his troops, the old beggar outside the Palace of the Popes at