

GUSTAVE FLAUBERT

OVER STRAND AND
FIELD: A RECORD OF
TRAVEL THROUGH
BRITTANY

Gustave Flaubert

**Over Strand and Field: A Record
of Travel through Brittany**

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Over Strand and Field: A Record
of Travel through Brittany

OVER STRAND AND FIELD ¹

A TRIP THROUGH BRITTANY

¹ Gustave Flaubert was twenty-six years old when he started on this journey. He travelled on foot and was accompanied by M. Maxime Ducamp. When they returned, they wrote an account of their journey. It is by far the most important of the unpublished writings, for in it the author gives his personal genius full sway and it abounds in picturesque descriptions and historical reflections.

CHAPTER I. CHÂTEAU DE CHAMBORD

We walked through the empty galleries and deserted rooms where spiders spin their cobwebs over the salamanders of Francis the First. One is overcome by a feeling of distress at the sight of this poverty which has no grandeur. It is not absolute ruin, with the luxury of blackened and mouldy débris, the delicate embroidery of flowers, and the drapery of waving vines undulating in the breeze, like pieces of damask. It is a conscious poverty, for it brushes its threadbare coat and endeavours to appear respectable. The floor has been repaired in one room, while in the next it has been allowed to rot. It shows the futile effort to preserve that which is dying and to bring back that which has fled. Strange to say, it is all very melancholy, but not at all imposing.

And then it seems as if everything had contributed to injure poor Chambord, designed by Le Primatice and chiselled and sculptured by Germain Pilon and Jean Cousin. Upreared by Francis the First, on his return from Spain, after the humiliating treaty of Madrid (1526), it is the monument of a pride that sought to dazzle itself in order to forget defeat. It first harbours Gaston d'Orléans, a crushed pretender, who is exiled within its walls; then it is Louis XIV, who, out of one floor, builds three, thus ruining the beautiful double staircase which extended without interruption from the top to the bottom. Then one day, on the second floor, facing the front, under the magnificent ceiling covered with salamanders and painted ornaments which are now crumbling away, Molière produced for the first time *Le Bourgeois gentilhomme*. Then it was given to the Maréchal de Saxe; then to the Polignacs, and finally to a plain soldier, Berthier. It was afterwards bought back by subscription and presented to the Duc de Bordeaux. It has been given to everybody, as if nobody cared to have it or desired to keep it. It looks as if it had hardly ever been used, and as if it had always been too spacious. It is like a deserted hostelry where transient guests have not left even their names on the walls.

When we walked through an outside gallery to the Orléans staircase, in order to examine the caryatids which are supposed to represent Francis the First, M. de Chateaubriand, and Madame d'Étampes, and turned around the celebrated lantern that terminates the big staircase, we stuck our heads several times through the railing to look down. In the courtyard was a little donkey nursing its mother, rubbing up against her, shaking its long ears and playfully jumping around. This is what we found in the court of honour of the Château de Chambord; these are its present hosts: a dog rolling in the grass, and a nursing, braying donkey frolicking on the threshold of kings!

CHÂTEAU D'AMBOISE

The Château d'Amboise, which dominates the whole city that appears to be thrown at its feet like a mass of pebbles at the foot of a rock, looks like an imposing fortress, with its large towers pierced by long, narrow windows; its arched gallery that extends from the one to the other, and the brownish tint of its walls, darkened by the contrast of the flowers, which droop over them like a nodding plume on the bronzed forehead of an old soldier. We spent fully a quarter of an hour admiring the tower on the left; it is superb, imbrowned and yellowish in some places and coated with soot in others; it has charming charlocks hanging from its battlements, and is, in a word, one of those speaking monuments that seem to breathe and hold one spellbound and pensive under their gaze, like those paintings, the originals of which are unknown to us, but whom we love without knowing why.

The Château is reached by a slight incline which leads to a garden elevated like a terrace, from which the view extends on the whole surrounding country. It was of a delicate green; poplar trees lined the banks of the river; the meadows advanced to its edge, mingling their grey border with the bluish and vapourous horizon, vaguely enclosed by indistinct hills. The Loire flowed in the middle,

bathing its islands, wetting the edge of the meadows, turning the wheels of the mills and letting the big boats glide peacefully, two by two, over its silvery surface, lulled to sleep by the creaking of the heavy rudders; and in the distance two big white sails gleamed in the sun.

Birds flew from the tops of the towers and the edge of the machicolations to some other spot, described circles in the air, chirped, and soon passed out of sight. About a hundred feet below us were the pointed roofs of the city, the empty courtyards of the old mansions, and the black holes of the smoky chimneys. Leaning in the niche of a battlement, we gazed and listened, and breathed it all in, enjoying the beautiful sunshine and balmy air impregnated with the pungent odour of the ruins. And there, without thinking of anything in particular, without even phrasing inwardly about something, I dreamed of coats of mail as pliable as gloves, of shields of buffalo hide soaked with sweat, of closed visors through which shot bloodthirsty glances, of wild and desperate night attacks with torches that set fire to the walls, and hatchets that mutilated the bodies; and of Louis XI, of the lover's war, of D'Aubigné and of the charlocks, the birds, the polished ivy, the denuded brambles, tasting in my pensive and idle occupation – what is greatest in men, their memory; – and what is most beautiful in nature, her ironical encroachments and eternal youth.

In the garden, among the lilac-bushes and the shrubs that droop over the alleys, rises the chapel, a work of the sixteenth century, chiselled at every angle, a perfect jewel, even more intricately decorated inside than out, cut out like the paper covering of a *bonbonnière*, and cunningly sculptured like the handle of a Chinese parasol. On the door is a *bas-relief* which is very amusing and ingenuous. It represents the meeting of Saint Hubert with the mystic stag, which bears a cross between its antlers. The saint is on his knees; above him hovers an angel who is about to place a crown on his cap; near them stands the saint's horse, watching the scene with a surprised expression; the dogs are barking and on the mountain, the sides and facets of which are cut to represent crystals, creeps the serpent. You can see its flat head advancing toward some leafless trees that look like cauliflowers. They are the sort of trees one comes upon in old Bibles, spare of foliage, thick and clumsy, bearing blossoms and fruit but no leaves; the symbolical, theological, and devout trees that are almost fantastical on account of their impossible ugliness. A little further, Saint Christopher is carrying Jesus on his shoulders; Saint Antony is in his cell, which is built on a rock; a pig is retiring into its hole and shows only its hind-quarters and its corkscrew tail, while a rabbit is sticking its head out of its house.

Of course, it is all a little clumsy and the moulding is not faultless. But there is so much life and movement about the figure and the animals, so much charm in the details, that one would give a great deal to be able to carry it away and take it home.

Inside of the Château, the insipid Empire style is reproduced in every apartment. Almost every room is adorned with busts of Louis-Philippe and Madame Adélaïde. The present reigning family has a craze for being portrayed on canvas. It is the bad taste of a parvenu, the mania of a grocer who has accumulated money and who enjoys seeing himself in red, white, and yellow, with his watch-charms dangling over his stomach, his bewhiskered chin and his children gathered around him.

On one of the towers, and in spite of the most ordinary common sense, they have built a glass rotunda which is used for a dining-room. True, the view from it is magnificent. But the building presents so shocking an appearance from the outside, that one would, I should think, prefer to see nothing of the environs, or else to eat in the kitchen.

In order to go back to the city, we came down by a tower that was used by carriages to approach the Château. The sloping gravelled walk turns around a stone axle like the steps of a staircase. The arch is dark and lighted only by the rays that creep through the loop-holes. The columns on which the interior end of the vault rests, are decorated with grotesque or vulgar subjects. A dogmatic intention seems to have presided over their composition. It would be well for travellers to begin the inspection at the bottom, with the *Aristoteles equitatus* (a subject which has already been treated on one of the choir statues in the Cathedral of Rouen) and reach by degrees a pair embracing in the manner which both Lucretius and *l'Amour Conjugal* have recommended. The greater part of the intermediary

subjects have been removed, to the despair of seekers of comical things, like ourselves; they have been removed in cold blood, with deliberate intent, for the sake of decency, and because, as one of the servants of his Majesty informed us convincingly, "a great many were improper for the lady visitors to see."

CHÂTEAU DE CHENONCEAUX

A something of infinite suavity and aristocratic serenity pervades the Château de Chenonceaux. It is situated outside of the village, which keeps at a respectful distance. It can be seen through a large avenue of trees, and is enclosed by woods and an extensive park with beautiful lawns. Built on the water, it proudly uprears its turrets and its square chimneys. The Cher flows below, and murmurs at the foot of its arches, the pointed corners of which form eddies in the tide. It is all very peaceful and charming, graceful yet robust. Its calm is not wearying and its melancholy has no tinge of bitterness.

One enters through the end of a long, arched hallway, which used to be a fencing-room. It is decorated with some armours, which, in spite of the obvious necessity of their presence, do not shock one's taste or appear out of place. The whole scheme of interior decoration is tastefully carried out; the furniture and hangings of the period have been preserved and cared for intelligently. The great, venerable mantel-pieces of the sixteenth century do not shelter the hideous and economical German stoves, which might easily be hidden in some of them.

In the kitchen, situated in a wing of the castle, which we visited later, a maid was peeling vegetables and a scullion was washing dishes, while the cook was standing in front of the stove, superintending a reasonable number of shining saucepans. It was all very delightful, and bespoke the idle and intelligent home life of a gentleman. I like the owners of Chenonceaux.

In fact, have you not often seen charming old paintings that make you gaze at them indefinitely, because they portray the period in which their owners lived, the ballets in which the farthingales of all those beautiful pink ladies whirled around, and the sword-thrusts which those noblemen gave each other with their rapiers? Here are some temptations of history. One would like to know whether those people loved as we do, and what difference existed between their passions and our own. One would like them to open their lips and tell their history, tell us everything they used to do, no matter how futile, and what their cares and pleasures used to be. It is an irritating and seductive curiosity, a dreamy desire for knowledge, such as one feels regarding the past life of a mistress... But they are deaf to the questions our eyes put to them, they remain dumb and motionless in their wooden frames, and we pass on. The moths attack their canvases, but the latter are revarnished; and the pictures will smile on when we are buried and forgotten. And others will come and gaze upon them, till the day they crumble to dust; then people will dream in the same old way before our own likenesses, and ask themselves what used to happen in our day, and whether life was not more alluring then.

I should not have spoken again of those handsome dames, if the large, full-length portrait of Madame Deshoulières, in an elaborate white *dêshabille*, (it was really a fine picture, and, like the much decried and seldom read efforts of the poetess, better at the second look than at the first), had not reminded me, by the expression of the mouth, which is large, full, and sensual, of the peculiar coarseness of Madame de Staël's portrait by Gérard. When I saw it two years ago, at Coppet, in bright sunshine, I could not help being impressed by those red, vinous lips and the wide, aspiring nostrils. George Sand's face offers a similar peculiarity. In all those women who were half masculine, spirituality revealed itself only in the eyes. All the rest remained material.

In point of amusing incidents, there is still at Chenonceaux, in Diane de Poitiers's room, the wide canopy bedstead of the royal favourite, done in white and red. If it belonged to me, it would be very hard for me not to use it once in a while. To sleep in the bed of Diane de Poitiers, even though it be empty, is worth as much as sleeping in that of many more palpable realities. Moreover, has it not been said that all the pleasure in these things was only imagination? Then, can you conceive

of the peculiar and historical voluptuousness, for one who possesses some imagination, to lay his head on the pillow that belonged to the mistress of Francis the First, and to stretch his limbs on her mattress? (Oh! how willingly I would give all the women in the world for the mummy of Cleopatra!) But I would not dare to touch, for fear of breaking them, the porcelains belonging to Catherine de Médicis, in the dining-room, nor place my foot in the stirrup of Francis the First, for fear it might remain there, nor put my lips to the mouth-piece of the huge trumpet in the fencing-room, for fear of rupturing my lungs.

CHAPTER II. CHÂTEAU DE CLISSON

On a hill at the foot of which two rivers mingle their waters, in a fresh landscape, brightened by the light colours of the inclined roofs, that are grouped like many sketches of Hubert, near a waterfall that turns the wheel of a mill hidden among the leaves, the Château de Clisson raises its battered roof above the tree-tops. Everything around it is calm and peaceful. The little dwellings seem to smile as if they had been built under softer skies; the waters sing their song, and patches of moss cover a stream over which hang graceful clusters of foliage. The horizon extends on one side into a tapering perspective of meadows, while on the other it rises abruptly and is enclosed by a wooded valley, the trees of which crowd together and form a green ocean.

After one crosses the bridge and arrives at the steep path which leads to the Château, one sees, standing upreared and bold on the moat on which it is built, a formidable wall, crowned with battered machicolations and bedecked with trees and ivy, the luxuriant growth of which covers the grey stones and sways in the wind, like an immense green veil which the recumbent giant moves dreamily across his shoulders. The grass is tall and dark, the plants are strong and hardy; the trunks of the ivy are twisted, knotted, and rough, and lift up the walls as with levers or hold them in the network of their branches. In one spot, a tree has grown through the wall horizontally, and, suspended in the air, has let its branches radiate around it. The moats, the steep slope of which is broken by the earth which has detached itself from the embankments and the stones which have fallen from the battlements, have a wide, deep curve, like hatred and pride; and the portal, with its strong, slightly arched ogive, and its two bays that raise the drawbridge, looks like a great helmet with holes in its visor.

When one enters, he is surprised and astonished at the wonderful mixture of ruins and trees, the ruins accentuating the freshness of the trees, while the latter in turn, render more poignant the melancholy of the ruins. Here, indeed, is the beautiful, eternal, and brilliant laughter of nature over the skeleton of things; here is the insolence of her wealth and the deep grace of her encroachments, and the melodious invasions of her silence. A grave and pensive enthusiasm fills one's soul; one feels that the sap flows in the trees and that the grass grows with the same strength and the same rhythm, as the stones crumble and the walls cave in. A sublime art, in the supreme accord of secondary discordances, has contrasted the unruly ivy with the sinuous sweep of the ruins, the brambles with the heaps of crumbling stones, the clearness of the atmosphere with the strong projections of the masses, the colour of the sky with the colour of the earth, reflecting each one in the other: that which was, and that which is. Thus history and nature always reveal, though they may accomplish it in a circumscribed spot of the world, the unceasing relation, the eternal hymen of dying humanity and the growing daisy; of the stars that glow, and the men who expire, of the heart that beats and the wave that rises. And this is so clearly indicated here, is so overwhelming, that one shudders inwardly, as if this dual life centred in one's own body; so brutal and immediate is the perception of these harmonies and developments. For the eye also has its orgies and the mind its delights.

At the foot of two large trees, the trunks of which are intersected, a stream of light floods the grass and seems like a luminous river, brightening the solitude. Overhead, a dome of leaves, through which one can see the sky presenting a vivid contrast of blue, reverberates a bright, greenish light, which illuminates the ruins, accentuating the deep furrows, intensifying the shadows, and disclosing all the hidden beauties. You advance and walk between those walls and under the trees, wander along the barbicans, pass under the falling arcades from which spring large, waving plants. The vaults, which contain corpses, echo under your footfalls; lizards run in the grass, beetles creep along the walls, the sky is blue, and the sleepy ruins pursue their dream.

With its triple enclosure, its dungeons, its interior court-yards, its machicolations, its underground passages, its ramparts piled one upon the other, like a bark on a bark and a shield on a

shield, the ancient Château of the Clissons rises before your mind and is reconstructed. The memory of past existences exudes from its walls with the emanations of the nettles and the coolness of the ivy. In that castle, men altogether different from us were swayed by passions stronger than ours; their hands were brawnier and their chests broader.

Long black streaks still mark the walls, as in the time when logs blazed in the eighteen-foot fireplaces. Symmetrical holes in the masonry indicate the floors to which one ascended by winding staircases now crumbling in ruins, while their empty doors open into space. Sometimes a bird, taking flight from its nest hanging in the branches, would pass with spread wings through the arch of a window, and fly far away into the country.

At the top of a high, bleak wall, several square bay-windows, of unequal length and position, let the pure sky shine through their crossed bars; and the bright blue, framed by the stone, attracted my eye with surprising persistency. The sparrows in the trees were chirping, and in the midst of it all a cow, thinking, no doubt, that it was a meadow, grazed peacefully, her horns sweeping over the grass.

There is a window, a large window that looks out into a meadow called *la prairie des chevaliers*. It was there, from a stone bench carved in the wall, that the high-born dames of the period watched the knights urge their iron-barbed steeds against one another, and the lances come down on the helmets and snap, and the men fall to the ground. On a fine summer day, like to-day, perhaps, when the mill that enlivens the whole landscape did not exist, when there were roofs on the walls, and Flemish hangings, and oil-cloths on the window-sills, when there was less grass, and when human voices and rumours filled the air, more than one heart beat with love and anguish under its red velvet bodice. Beautiful white hands twitched with fear on the stone, which is now covered with moss, and the embroidered veils of high caps fluttered in the wind that plays with my cravat and that swayed the plumes of the knights.

We went down into the vaults where Jean V was imprisoned. In the men's dungeon we saw the large double hook that was used for executions; and we touched curiously with our fingers the door of the women's prison. It is about four inches thick and is plated with heavy iron bars. In the middle is a little grating that was used to throw in whatever was necessary to prevent the captive from starving. It was this grating which opened instead of the door, which, being the mouth of the most terrible confessions, was one of those that always closed but never opened. In those days there was real hatred. If you hated a person, and he had been kidnapped by surprise or traitorously trapped in an interview, and was in your power, you could torture him at your own sweet will. Every minute, every hour, you could delight in his anguish and drink his tears. You could go down into his cell and speak to him and bargain with him, laugh at his tortures, and discuss his ransom; you could live on and off him, through his slowly ebbing life and his plundered treasures. Your whole castle, from the top of the towers to the bottom of the trenches, weighed on him, crushing, and burying him; and thus family revenges were accomplished by the family itself, a fact which constituted their potency and symbolised the idea.

Sometimes, however, when the wretched prisoner was an aristocrat and a wealthy man, and he near death, and one was tired of him, and his tears had acted upon the hatred of his master like refreshing bleedings, there was talk of releasing him. The captive promised everything; he would return the fortified towns, hand over the keys to his best cities, give his daughter in marriage, endow churches and journey on foot to the Holy Sepulchre. And money! Money! Why, he would have more of it coined by the Jews! Then the treaty would be signed and dated and counter-signed; the relics would be brought forth to be sworn on, and the prisoner would be a free man once more. He would jump on his horse, gallop away, and when he reached home he would order the drawbridge hoisted, call his vassals together, and take down his sword from the wall. His hatred would find an outlet in terrific explosions of wrath. It was the time of frightful passions and victorious rages. The oath? The Pope would free him from it, and the ransom he simply ignored.

When Clisson was imprisoned in the Château de l'Hermine, he promised for his freedom a hundred thousand francs' worth of gold, the restitution of the towns belonging to the duke of Penthièvre, and the cancelling of his daughter Marguerite's betrothal to the Duke of Penthièvre. But as soon as he was set free, he began by attacking Chateladren, Guingamp, Lamballe and St. Malo, which cities either were taken or they capitulated. But the people of Brittany paid for the fun.

When Jean V. was captured by the Count of Penthièvre at the bridge of Loroux, he promised a ransom of one million; he promised his eldest daughter, who was already betrothed to the King of Sicily. He promised Montcontour, Sesson and Jugan, etc., but he gave neither his daughter nor the money, nor the cities. He had promised to go to the Holy Sepulchre. He acquitted himself of this by proxy. He had taken an oath that he would no longer levy taxes and subsidies. The Pope freed him from this pledge. He had promised to give Nôtre-Dame de Nantes his weight in gold; but as he weighed nearly two hundred pounds, he remained greatly indebted. With all that he was able to pick up or snatch away, he quickly formed a league and compelled the house of Penthièvre to buy the peace which they had sold to him.

On the other side of the Sèvre, a forest covers the hill with its fresh, green maze of trees; it is *La Garenne*, a park that is beautiful in itself, in spite of the artificial embellishments that have been introduced. M. Semot, (the father of the present owner), was a painter of the Empire and a laureate, and he tried to reproduce to the best of his ability that cold Italian, republican, Roman style, which was so popular in the time of Canova and of Madame de Staël. In those days people were inclined to be pompous and noble. They used to place chiselled urns on graves and paint everybody in a flowing cloak, and with long hair; then Corinne sang to the accompaniment of her lyre beside Oswald, who wore Russian boots; and it was thought proper to have everybody's head adorned with a profusion of dishevelled locks and to have a multitude of ruins in every landscape.

This style of embellishment abounds throughout La Garenne. There is a temple erected to Vesta, and directly opposite it another erected to Friendship...

Inscriptions, artificial rocks, factitious ruins, are scattered lavishly, with artlessness and conviction... But the poetical riches centre in the grotto of Héloïse, a sort of natural dolmen on the bank of the Sèvre.

Why have people made Héloïse, who was such a great and noble figure, appear commonplace and silly, the prototype of all crossed loves and the narrow ideal of sentimental schoolgirls? The unfortunate mistress of the great Abélard deserved a better fate, for she loved him with devoted admiration, although he was hard and taciturn at times and spared her neither bitterness nor blows. She dreaded offending him more than she dreaded offending God, and strove harder to please him. She did not wish him to marry her, because she thought that "it was wrong and deplorable that the one whom nature had created for all ... should be appropriated by one woman." She found, she said, "more happiness in the appellation of mistress or concubine, than in that of wife or empress," and by humiliating herself in him, she hoped to gain a stronger hold over his heart.

The park is really delightful. Alleys wind through the woods and clusters of trees bend over the meandering stream. You can hear the bubbling water and feel the coolness of the foliage. If we were irritated by the bad taste displayed here, it was because we had just left Clisson, which has a real, simple, and solid beauty, and after all, this bad taste is not that of our contemporaries. But what is, in fact, bad taste? Invariably it is the taste of the period which has preceded ours. Bad taste at the time of Ronsard was represented by Marot; at the time of Boileau, by Ronsard; at the time of Voltaire, by Corneille, and by Voltaire in the day of Chateaubriand, whom many people nowadays begin to think a trifle weak. O men of taste in future centuries, let me recommend you the men of taste of to-day! You will laugh at their cramps, their superb disdain, their preference for veal and milk, and the faces they make when underdone meat and too ardent poetry is served to them. Everything that is beautiful will then appear ugly; everything that is graceful, stupid; everything that is rich, poor; and oh! how our delightful boudoirs, our charming salons, our exquisite costumes, our palpitating plays,

our interesting novels, our serious books will all be consigned to the garret or be used for old paper and manure! O posterity, above all things do not forget our gothic salons, our Renaissance furniture, M. Pasquier's discourses, the shape of our hats, and the aesthetics of *La Revue des Deux Mondes*!

While we were pondering upon these lofty philosophical considerations, our wagon had hauled us over to Tiffanges. Seated side by side in a sort of tin tub, our weight crushed the tiny horse, which swayed to and fro between the shafts. It was like the twitching of an eel in the body of a musk-rat. Going down hill pushed him forward, going up hill pulled him backward, while uneven places in the road threw him from side to side, and the wind and the whip lashed him alternately. The poor brute! I cannot think of him now without a certain feeling of remorse.

The road down hill is curved and its edges are covered with clumps of sea-rushes or large patches of a certain reddish moss. To the right, on an eminence that starts from the bottom of the dale and swells in the middle like the carapace of a tortoise, one perceives high, unequal walls, the crumbling tops of which appear one above another.

One follows a hedge, climbs a path, and enters an open portal which has sunken into the ground to the depth of one third of its ogive. The men who used to pass through it on horseback would be obliged to bend over their saddles in order to enter it to-day. When the earth is tired of supporting a monument, it swells up underneath it, creeps up to it like a wave, and while the sky causes the top to crumble away, the ground obliterates the foundations. The courtyard was deserted and the calm water that filled the moats remained motionless and flat under the pond-lilies.

The sky was white and cloudless, but without sunshine. Its bleak curve extended far away, covering the country with a cold and cheerless monotony. Not a sound could be heard, the birds did not sing, even the horizon was mute, and from the empty furrows came neither the scream of the crows as they soar heavenward, nor the soft creaking of plough-wheels. We climbed down through brambles and underbrush into a deep and dark trench, hidden at the foot of a large tower, which stands in the water surrounded by reeds. A lone window opens on one side: a dark square relieved by the grey line of its stone cross-bar. A capricious cluster of wild honeysuckle covers the sill, and its maze of perfumed blossoms creeps along the walls. When one looks up, the openings of the big machicolations reveal only a part of the sky, or some little, unknown flower which has nestled in the battlement, its seed having been wafted there on a stormy day and left to sprout in the cracks of the stones.

Presently, a long, balmy breeze swept over us like a sigh, and the trees in the moats, the moss on the stones, the reeds in the water, the plants among the ruins, and the ivy, which covered the tower from top to bottom with a layer of shining leaves, all trembled and shook their foliage; the corn in the fields rippled in endless waves that again and again bent the swaying tops of the ears; the pond wrinkled and welled up against the foot of the tower; the leaves of the ivy all quivered at once, and an apple-tree in bloom covered the ground with pink blossoms.

Nothing, nothing! The open sky, the growing grass, the passing wind. No ragged child tending a browsing cow; not even, as elsewhere, some solitary goat sticking its shaggy head through an aperture in the walls to turn at our approach and flee in terror through the bushes; not a song-bird, not a nest, not a sound! This castle is like a ghost: mute and cold, it stands abandoned in this deserted place, and looks accursed and replete with terrifying recollections. Still, this melancholy dwelling, which the owls now seem to avoid, was once inhabited. In the dungeon, between four walls as livid as the bottom of an old drinking-trough, we were able to discover the traces of five floors. A chimney, with its two round pillars and black top, has remained suspended in the air at a height of thirty feet. Earth has accumulated on it, and plants are growing there as if it were a jardinière.

Beyond the second enclosure, in a ploughed field, one can recognise the ruins of a chapel by the broken shafts of an ogive portal. Grass has grown around it, and trees have replaced the columns. Four hundred years ago, this chapel was filled with ornaments of gold cloth and silk, censers, chandeliers, chalices, crosses, precious stones, gold vessels and vases, a choir of thirty singers,

chaplains, musicians, and children sang hymns to the accompaniment of an organ which they took along with them when they travelled. They were clad in scarlet garments lined with pearl grey and vair. There was one whom they called archdeacon, and another whom they called bishop, and the Pope was asked to allow them to wear mitres like canons, for this chapel was the chapel, and this castle one of the castles of Gilles de Laval, lord of Rouci, of Montmorency, of Retz and of Craon, lieutenant-general of the Duke of Brittany and field-marshal of France, who was burned at Nantes on the 25th of October, 1440, in the *Prée de la Madéleine* for being a counterfeiter, a murderer, a magician, an atheist and a Sodomite.

He possessed more than one hundred thousand crowns' worth of furniture; an income of thirty thousand pounds a year, the profits of his fiefs and his salary as field-marshal; fifty magnificently appointed horsemen escorted him. He kept open house, served the rarest viands and the oldest wines at his board, and gave representations of mysteries, as cities used to do when a king was within their gates. When his money gave out, he sold his estates; when those were gone, he looked around for more gold, and when he had destroyed his furnaces, he called on the devil. He wrote him that he would give him all that he possessed, excepting his life and his soul. He made sacrifices, gave alms and instituted ceremonies in his honour. At night, the bleak walls of the castle lighted up by the glare of the torches that flared amid bumpers of rare wines and gipsy jugglers, and blushed hotly under the unceasing breath of magical bellows. The inhabitants invoked the devil, joked with death, murdered children, enjoyed frightful and atrocious pleasures; blood flowed, instruments played, everything echoed with voluptuousness, horror, and madness.

When he expired, four or five damsels had his body removed from the stake, laid out, and taken to the Carmelites, who, after performing the customary services, buried him in state.

On one of the bridges of the Loire, relates Guépin, opposite the *Hôtel de la Boule-d'Or*, an expiatory monument was erected to his memory. It was a niche containing the statue of the *Bonne Vierge de crée lait*, who had the power of creating milk in nurses; the good people offered her butter and similar rustic products. The niche still exists, but the statue is gone; the same as at the town-house, where the casket which contained the heart of Queen Anne is also empty. But we did not care to see the casket; we did not even give it a thought. I should have preferred gazing upon the trousers of the marshal of Retz to looking at the heart of Madame Anne de Bretagne.

CHAPTER III. CARNAC

The field of Carnac is a large, open space where eleven rows of black stones are aligned at symmetrical intervals. They diminish in size as they recede from the ocean. Cambry asserts that there were four thousand of these rocks and Fréminville has counted twelve hundred of them. They are certainly very numerous.

What was their use? Was it a temple?

One day Saint Cornille, pursued along the shore by soldiers, was about to jump into the ocean, when he thought of changing them all into stone, and forthwith the men were petrified. But this explanation was good only for fools, little children, and poets. Other people looked for better reasons.

In the sixteenth century, Olaüs Magnus, archbishop of Upsal (who, banished to Rome, wrote a book on the antiquities of his country that met with widespread success except in his native land, Sweden, where it was not translated), discovered that, when these stones form one long, straight row, they cover the bodies of warriors who died while fighting duels; that those arranged in squares are consecrated to heroes that perished in battle; that those disposed in a circle are family graves, while those that form corners or angular figures are the tombs of horsemen or foot-soldiers, and more especially of those fighters whose party had triumphed. All this is quite clear, but Olaüs Magnus has forgotten to tell us how two cousins who killed each other in a duel on horseback could have been buried. The fact of the duel required that the stones be straight; the relationship required that they be circular; but as the men were horsemen, it seems as if the stones ought to have been arranged squarely, though this rule, it is true, was not formal, as it was applied only to those whose party had triumphed. O good Olaüs Magnus! You must have liked Monte-Pulciano exceeding well! And how many draughts of it did it take for you to acquire all this wonderful knowledge?

According to a certain English doctor named Borlase, who had observed similar stones in Cornouailles, "they buried soldiers there, in the very place where they died." As if, usually, they were carted to the cemetery! And he builds his hypothesis on the following comparison: their graves are on a straight line, like the front of an army on plains that were the scene of some great action.

Then they tried to bring in the Greeks, the Egyptians, and the Cochin Chinese! There is a Karnac in Egypt, they said, and one on the coast of Brittany. Now, it is probable that this Karnac descends from the Egyptian one; it is quite certain! In Egypt they are sphinxes; here they are rocks; but in both instances they are of stone. So it would seem that the Egyptians (who never travelled), came to this coast (of the existence of which they were ignorant), founded a colony (they never founded any), and left these crude statues (they produced such beautiful ones), as a positive proof of their sojourn in this country (which nobody mentions).

People fond of mythology thought them the columns of Hercules; people fond of natural history thought them a representation of the python, because, according to Pausanias, a similar heap of stones, on the road from Thebes to Elissonte, was called "the serpent's head," and especially because the rows of stones at Carnac present the sinuosities of a serpent. People fond of cosmography discovered a zodiac, like M. de Cambry, who recognised in those eleven rows of stones the twelve signs of the zodiac, "for it must be stated," he adds, "that the ancient Gauls had only eleven signs to the zodiac."

Subsequently, a member of the Institute conjectured that it might perhaps be the cemetery of the Venetians, who inhabited Vannes, situated six miles from Carnac, and who founded Venice, as everybody knows. Another man wrote that these Venetians, conquered by Cæsar, erected all those rocks solely in a spirit of humility and in order to honour their victor. But people were getting tired of the cemetery theory, the serpent and the zodiac; they set out again and this time found a Druidic temple.

The few documents that we possess, scattered through Pliny and Dionysius Cassius, agree in stating that the Druids chose dark places for their ceremonies, like the depths of the woods with "their vast silence." And as Carnac is situated on the coast, and surrounded by a barren country, where nothing but these gentlemen's fancies has ever grown, the first grenadier of France, but not, in my estimation, the cleverest man, followed by Pelloutier and by M. Mahé, (canon of the cathedral of Vannes), concluded that it was "a Druidic temple in which political meetings must also have been held."

But all had not been said, and it still remained to be discovered of what use the empty spaces in the rows could have been. "Let us look for the reason, a thing nobody has ever thought of before," cried M. Mahé, and, quoting a sentence from Pomponius Mela: "The Druids teach the nobility many things and instruct them secretly in caves and forests;" and this one from Tucain: "You dwell in tall forests," he reached the conclusion that the Druids not only officiated at the sanctuaries, but that they also lived and taught in them. "So the monument of Carnac being a sanctuary, like the Gallic forests," (O power of induction! where are you leading Father Mahé, canon of Vannes and correspondent of the Academy of Agriculture at Poitiers?), there is reason to believe that the intervals, which break up the rows of stones, held rows of houses where the Druids lived with their families and numerous pupils, and where the heads of the nation, who, on state days, betook themselves to the sanctuary, found comfortable lodgings. Good old Druids! Excellent ecclesiastics! How they have been calumniated! They lived there so righteously with their families and numerous pupils, and even were amiable enough to prepare lodgings for the principals of the nation!

But at last came a man imbued with the genius of ancient things and disdainful of trodden paths. He was able to recognize the rests of a Roman camp, and, strangely enough, the rests of one of the camps of Cæsar, who had had these stones upreared only to serve as support for the tents of his soldiers and prevent them from being blown away by the wind. What gales there must have been in those days, on the coasts of Armorica!

The honest writer who, to the glory of the great Julius, discovered this sublime precaution, (thus returning to Cæsar that which never belonged to Cæsar), was a former pupil of l'École Polytechnique, an engineer, a M. de la Sauvagère. The collection of all these data constitutes what is called *Celtic Archaeology*, the mysteries of which we shall presently disclose.

A stone placed on another one is called a "dolmen," whether it be horizontal or perpendicular. A group of upright stones covered by succeeding flat stones, and forming a series of dolmens, is a "fairy grotto," a "fairy rock," a "devil's stable," or a "giant's palace"; for, like the people who serve the same wine under different labels, the Celto-maniacs, who had almost nothing to offer, decorated the same things with various names. When these stones form an ellipse, and have no head-covering, one must say: There is a "cromlech"; when one perceives a stone laid horizontally upon two upright stones, one is confronted by a "lichaven" or a "trilith." Often two enormous rocks are put one on top of the other, and touch only at one point, and we read that "they are balanced in such a way that the wind alone is sufficient to make the upper rock sway perceptibly," an assertion which I do not dispute, although I am rather suspicious of the Celtic wind, and although these swaying rocks have always remained unshaken in spite of the fierce kicks I was artless enough to give them; they are called "rolling or rolled stones," "turned or transported stones," "stones that dance or dancing stones," "stones that twist or twisting stones." You must still learn what a *pierre fichade*, a *pierre fiche*, a *pierre fixée* are, and what is meant by a *haute borne*, a *pierre latte* and a *pierre lait*; in what a *pierre fonte* differs from a *pierre fiette*, and what connection there is between a *chaire à diable* and a *pierre droite*; then you will be as wise as ever were Pelloutier, Déric, Latour d'Auvergne, Penhoet and others, not forgetting Mahé and Fréminville. Now, all this means a *pulvan*, also called a *men-hir*, and designates nothing more than a stone of greater or lesser size, placed by itself in an open field.

I was about to forget the tumuli! Those that are composed of silica and soil are called "barrows" in high-flown language, while the simple heaps of stones are "gals-gals."

People have pretended that when they were not tombs the "dolmens" and "trilithes" were altars, that the "fairy rocks" were assembling places or sepultures, and that the business meetings at the time of the Druids were held in the "cromlechs." M. de Cambry saw in the "swaying rocks" the emblems of the suspended world. The "barrows" and "gals-gals" have undoubtedly been tombs; and as for the "men-hirs," people went so far as to pretend that they had a form which led to the deduction that a certain cult reigned throughout lower Brittany. O chaste immodesty of science, you respect nothing, not even a peulven!

A reverie, no matter how undefined, may lead up to splendid creations, when it starts from a fixed point. Then the imagination, like a soaring hippogriff, stamps the earth with all its might and journeys straightway towards infinite regions. But when it applies itself to a subject devoid of plastic art and history, and tries to extract a science from it, and to reconstruct a world, it remains even poorer and more barren than the rough stone to which the vanity of some praters has lent a shape and dignified with a history.

To return to the stones of Carnac (or rather, to leave them), if anyone should, after all these opinions, ask me mine, I would emit an irresistible, irrefutable, incontestable one, which would make the tents of M. de la Sauvagère stagger, blanch the face of the Egyptian Penhoët, break up the zodiac of Cambry and smash the python into a thousand bits. This is my opinion: the stones of Carnac are simply large stones!

So we returned to the inn and dined heartily, for our five hours' tramp had sharpened our appetites. We were served by the hostess, who had large blue eyes, delicate hands, and the sweet face of a nun. It was not yet bedtime, and it was too dark to work, so we went to the church.

This is small, although it has a nave and side-aisles like a city church. Short, thick stone pillars support its wooden roof, painted in blue, from which hang miniature vessels, votive offerings that were promised during raging storms. Spiders creep along their sails and the riggings are rotting under the dust. No service was being held, and the lamp in the choir burned dimly in its cup filled with yellow oil; overhead, through the open windows of the darkened vault, came broad rays of white light and the sound of the wind rustling in the tree-tops. A man came in to put the chairs in order, and placed two candles in an iron chandelier riveted to the stone pillar; then he pulled into the middle of the aisle a sort of stretcher with a pedestal, its black wood stained with large white spots. Other people entered the church, and a priest clad in his surplice passed us. There was the intermittent tinkling of a bell and then the door of the church opened wide. The jangling sound of the little bell mingled with the tones of another and their sharp, clear tones swelled louder as they came nearer and nearer to us.

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