ГЕНРИ ДЖЕЙМС

A LITTLE TOUR OF FRANCE

Генри Джеймс
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A Little Tour of France:

Содержание

Henry James
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Preface

The notes presented in this volume were gathered, as will easily be perceived, a number of years ago and on an expectation not at that time answered by the event, and were then published in the United States. The expectation had been that they should accompany a series of drawings, and they themselves were altogether governed by the pictorial spirit. They made, and they make in appearing now, after a considerable interval and for the first time, in England, no pretension to any other; they are impressions, immediate, easy, and consciously limited; if the written word may ever play the part of brush or pencil, they are sketches on "drawing-paper" and nothing more. From the moment the principle of selection and expression, with a tourist, is not the delight of the eyes and the play of fancy, it should be an energy in every way much larger; there is no happy mean, in other words, I hold, between the sense and the quest of the picture, and the surrender to it, and the sense and the quest of the constitution, the inner springs of the subject—springs and connections social, economic, historic.

One must really choose, in other words, between the benefits of

the perception of surface—a perception, when fine, perhaps none of the most frequent—and those of the perception of very complex underlying matters. If these latter had had, for me, to be taken into account, my pages would not have been collected. At the time of their original appearance the series of illustrations to which it had been their policy to cling for countenance and company failed them, after all, at the last moment, through a circumstance not now on record; and they had suddenly to begin to live their little life without assistance. That they have seemed able in any degree still to prolong even so modest a career might perhaps have served as a reason for leaving them undisturbed. In fact, however, I have too much appreciated—for any renewal of inconsistency —the opportunity of granting them at last, in an association with Mr. Pennell's admirable drawings, the benefit they have always lacked. The little book thus goes forth finally as the picture-book it was designed to be. Text and illustrations are, altogether and alike, things of the play of eye and hand and fancy—views, head-pieces, tail-pieces; through the artist's work, doubtless, in a much higher degree than the author's.

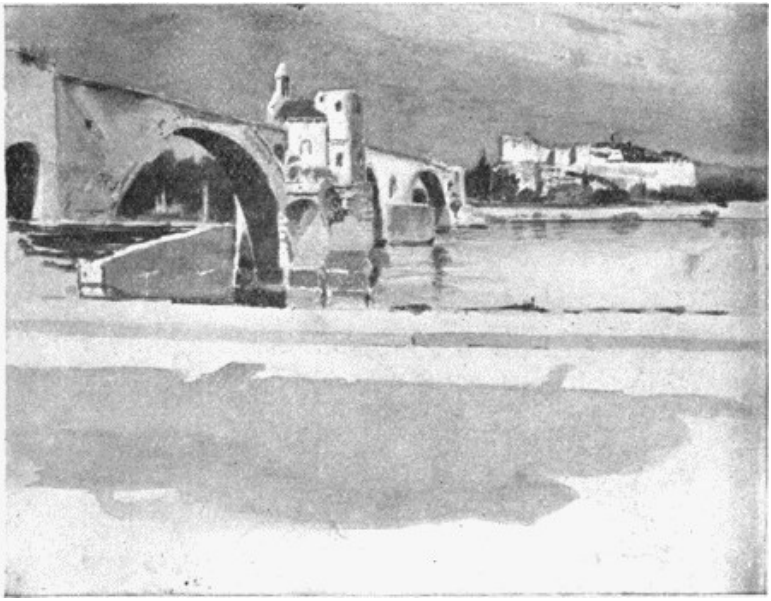
But these are words enough on a minor point. Many things come back to me on reading my pages over—such a world of reflection and emotion as I can neither leave unmentioned nor yet, in this place, weigh them down with the full expression of. Difficult indeed would be any full expression for one who, deeply devoted always to the revelations of France, finds himself, late in life, making of the sentiment no more substantial, no more direct

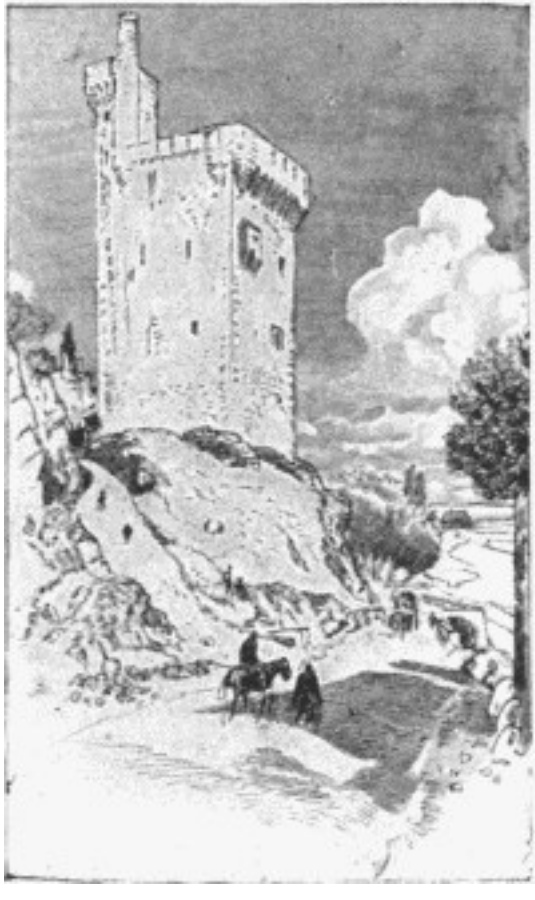
record than this mere revival of an accident. Not one of these small chapters but suggests to me a regret that I might not, first or last, have gone farther, penetrated deeper, spoken oftener—closed, in short, more intimately with the great general subject; and I mean, of course, not in such a form as the present, but in many another, possible and impossible. It all comes back, doubtless, this vision of missed occasions and delays overdone, to the general truth that the observer, the enjoyer, may, before he knows it, be practically too far in *for all that free testimony and pleasant, easy talk that are incidental to the earlier or more detached stages of a relation. There are relations that soon get beyond all merely showy appearances of value for us. Their value becomes thus private and practical, and is represented by the process—the quieter, mostly, the better—of absorption and assimilation of what the relation has done for us. For persons thus indebted to the genius of France —however, in its innumerable ways, manifested—the profit to be gained, the lesson to be learnt, is almost of itself occupation enough. They feel that they bear witness by the intelligent use and application of their advantage, and the consciousness of the artist is therefore readily a consciousness of pious service. He may repeatedly have dreamt of some such happy combination of mood and moment as shall launch him in a profession of faith, a* demonstration *of the interesting business; he may have had inner glimpses of an explicit statement, and vaguely have sketched it to himself as one of the most candid and charming ever drawn up; but time, meanwhile, has passed, interruptions have done*

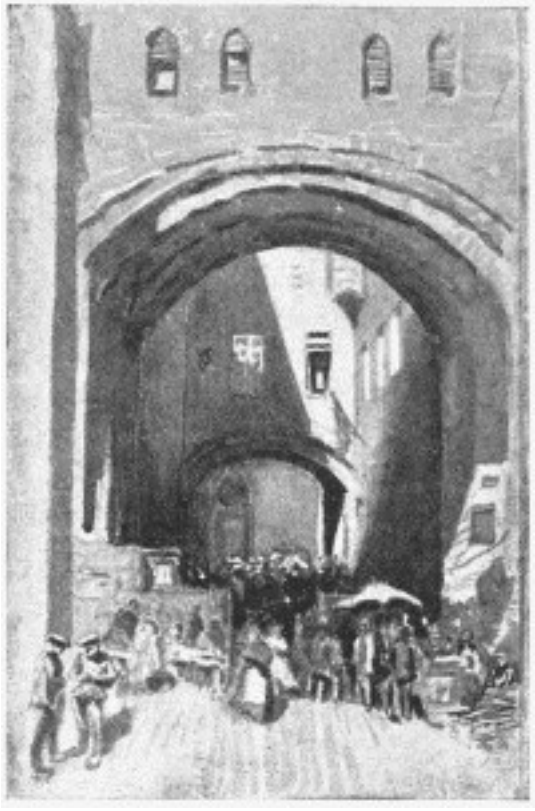
their dismal work, the indirect tribute, too, has perhaps, behind the altar, grown and grown; and the reflection has at all events established itself that honour is more rendered by seeing and doing one's work in the light than by brandishing the torch on the house-tops. Curiosity and admiration have operated continually, but with as little waste as they could. The drawback is only that in this case, to be handsomely consequent, one would perhaps rather not have appeared to celebrate any *rites. The moral of all of which is that those here embodied must pass, at the best, but for what they are worth.*

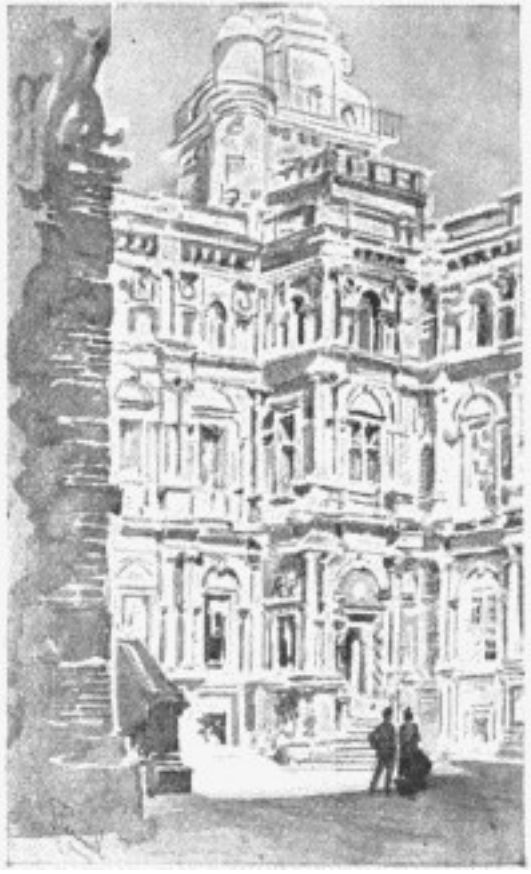
H. J.

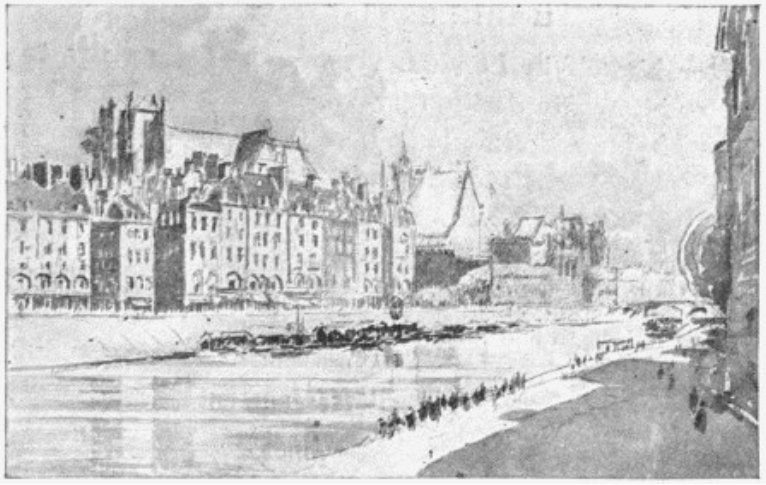
August 9, 1900.











Introductory

Though the good city of Paris appears to be less in fashion than in other days with those representatives of our race—not always, perhaps, acknowledged as the soundest and stiffest—curious of foreign opportunity and addicted to foreign sojourns, it probably none the less remains true that such frequentations of France as may be said still to flourish among us have as much as ever the wondrous capital, and the wondrous capital alone, for their object. The taste for Paris, at all events, is—or perhaps I should say was, alluding as I do, I fear, to a vanished order—a taste by itself; singularly little bound up, of necessity, with such an interest in the country at large as would be implied by an equal devotion, in other countries, to other capitals. Putting aside the economic inducement, which may always operate, and limiting the matter to the question of free choice, it is sufficiently striking that the free chooser would have to be very fond of England to quarter himself in London, very fond of Germany to quarter himself in Berlin, very fond of America to quarter himself in New York. It had, on the other hand, been a common reflection for the author of these light pages that the fondness for France (throughout the company of strangers more or less qualified) was oddly apt to feed only on such grounds for it as made shift to spread their surface between the Arc de Triomphe and the Gymnase Theatre: as if there were no good things in the

doux pays that could not be harvested in that field. It matters little how the assumption began to strike him as stupid, especially since he himself had doubtless equally shared in the guilt of it. The light pages in question are but the simple record of a small personal effort to shake it off. He took, it must be confessed, no extraordinary measures; he merely started, one rainy morning in mid-September, for the charming little city of Tours, where he felt that he might as immediately as anywhere else see it demonstrated that, though France might be Paris, Paris was by no means France. The beauty of the demonstration—quite as prompt as he could have desired—drew him considerably farther, and his modest but eminently successful adventure begot, as aids to amused remembrance, a few informal notes.

Chapter i

Tours

I AM ashamed to begin with saying that Touraine is the garden of France; that remark has long ago lost its bloom. The town of Tours, however, has something sweet and bright, which suggests that it is surrounded by a land of fruits. It is a very agreeable little city; few towns of its size are more ripe, more complete, or, I should suppose, in better humour with themselves and less disposed to envy the responsibilities of bigger places. It is truly the capital of its smiling province; a region of easy abundance, of good living, of genial, comfortable, optimistic, rather indolent opinions. Balzac says in one of his tales that the real Tourangeau will not make an effort, or displace himself even, to go in search of a pleasure; and it is not difficult to understand the sources of this amiable cynicism. He must have a vague conviction that he can only lose by almost any change. Fortune has been kind to him: he lives in a temperate, reasonable, sociable climate, on the banks of a river which, it is true, sometimes floods the country around it, but of which the ravages appear to be so easily repaired that its aggressions may perhaps be regarded (in a region where so many good things are certain) merely as an occasion

for healthy suspense. He is surrounded by fine old traditions, religious, social, architectural, culinary; and he may have the satisfaction of feeling that he is French to the core. No part of his admirable country is more characteristically national. Normandy is Normandy, Burgundy is Burgundy, Provence is Provence; but Touraine is essentially France. It is the land of Rabelais, of Descartes, of Balzac, of good books and good company, as well as good dinners and good houses. George Sand has somewhere a charming passage about the mildness, the convenient quality, of the physical conditions of central France—"son climat souple et chaud, ses pluies abondantes et courtes." In the autumn of 1882 the rains perhaps were less short than abundant; but when the days were fine it was impossible that anything in the way of weather could be more charming. The vineyards and orchards looked rich in the fresh, gay light; cultivation was everywhere, but everywhere it seemed to be easy. There was no visible poverty; thrift and success presented themselves as matters of good taste. The white caps of the women glittered in the sunshine, and their well-made sabots clicked cheerfully on the hard, clean roads. Touraine is a land of old châteaux,—a gallery of architectural specimens and of large hereditary properties. The peasantry have less of the luxury of ownership than in most other parts of France; though they have enough of it to give them quite their share of that shrewdly conservative look which, in the little chaffering *place* of the market-town, the stranger observes so often in the wrinkled brown masks that surmount the agricultural

blouse. This is, moreover, the heart of the old French monarchy; and as that monarchy was splendid and picturesque, a reflection of the splendour still glitters in the current of the Loire. Some of the most striking events of French history have occurred on the banks of that river, and the soil it waters bloomed for a while with the flowering of the Renaissance. The Loire gives a great "style" to a landscape of which the features are not, as the phrase is, prominent, and carries the eye to distances even more poetic than the green horizons of Touraine. It is a very fitful stream, and is sometimes observed to run thin and expose all the crudities of its channel—a great defect certainly in a river which is so much depended upon to give an air to the places it waters. But I speak of it as I saw it last; full, tranquil, powerful, bending in large slow curves and sending back half the light of the sky. Nothing can be finer than the view of its course which you get from the battlements and terraces of Amboise. As I looked down on it from that elevation one lovely Sunday morning, through a mild glitter of autumn sunshine, it seemed the very model of a generous, beneficent stream. The most charming part of Tours is naturally the shaded quay that overlooks it, and looks across too at the friendly faubourg of Saint Symphorien and at the terraced heights which rise above this. Indeed, throughout Touraine it is half the charm of the Loire that you can travel beside it. The great dyke which protects it, or protects the country from it, from Blois to Angers, is an admirable road; and on the other side as well the highway constantly keeps it company. A wide river, as

Tours you follow a wide road, is excellent company; it brightens and shortens the way.

The inns at Tours are in another quarter, and one of them, which is midway between the town and the station, is very good. It is worth mentioning for the fact that every one belonging to it is extraordinarily polite—so unnaturally polite as at first to excite your suspicion that the hotel has some hidden vice, so that the waiters and chambermaids are trying to pacify you in advance. There was one waiter in especial who was the most accomplished social being I have ever encountered; from morning till night he kept up an inarticulate murmur of urbanity, like the hum of a spinning-top. I may add that I discovered no dark secrets at the Hôtel de l'Univers; for it is not a secret to any traveller to-day that the obligation to partake of a lukewarm dinner in an overheated room is as imperative as it is detestable. For the rest, at Tours there is a certain Rue Royale which has pretensions to the monumental; it was constructed a hundred years ago, and the houses, all alike, have on a moderate scale a pompous eighteenth-century look. It connects the Palais de Justice, the most important secular building in the town, with the long bridge which spans the Loire—the spacious, solid bridge pronounced by Balzac, in "Le Curé de Tours," "one of the finest monuments of French architecture." The Palais de Justice was the seat of the Government of Léon Gambetta in the autumn of 1870, after the dictator had been obliged to retire in his balloon from Paris and before the Assembly was constituted at Bordeaux. The Germans

occupied Tours during that terrible winter: it is astonishing, the number of places the Germans occupied. It is hardly too much to say that, wherever one goes in certain parts of France, one encounters two great historic facts: one is the Revolution; the other is the German invasion. The traces of the Revolution remain in a hundred scars and bruises and mutilations, but the visible marks of the war of 1870 have passed away. The country is so rich, so living, that she has been able to dress her wounds, to hold up her head, to smile again, so that the shadow of that darkness has ceased to rest upon her. But what you do not see you still may hear; and one remembers with a certain shudder that only a few short years ago this province, so intimately French, was under the heel of a foreign foe. To be intimately French was apparently not a safeguard; for so successful an invader it could only be a challenge. Peace and plenty, however, have succeeded that episode; and among the gardens and vineyards of Touraine it seems only a legend the more in a country of legends.

It was not, all the same, for the sake of this chequered story that I mentioned the Palais de Justice and the Rue Royale. The most interesting fact, to my mind, about the high-street of Tours was that as you walk toward the bridge on the right hand *trottoir* you can look up at the house, on the other side of the way, in which Honoré de Balzac first saw the light. That violent and complicated genius was a child of the good-humoured and succulent Touraine. There is something anomalous in this fact, though, if one thinks about it a little, one may discover certain

correspondences between his character and that of his native province. Strenuous, laborious, constantly infelicitous in spite of his great successes, he suggests at times a very different set of influences. But he had his jovial, full-feeding side—the side that comes out in the "Contes Drolatiques," which are the romantic and epicurean chronicle of the old manors and abbeys of this region. And he was, moreover, the product of a soil into which a great deal of history had been trodden. Balzac was genuinely as well as affectedly monarchical, and he was saturated with a sense of the past. Number 39 Rue Royale—of which the basement, like all the basements in the Rue Royale, is occupied by a shop—is not shown to the public; and I know not whether tradition designates the chamber in which the author of "Le Lys dans la Vallée" opened his eyes into a world in which he was to see and to imagine such extraordinary things. If this were the case I would willingly have crossed its threshold; not for the sake of any relic of the great novelist which it may possibly contain, nor even for that of any mystic virtue which may be supposed to reside within its walls, but simply because to look at those four modest walls can hardly fail to give one a strong impression of the force of human endeavour. Balzac, in the maturity of his vision, took in more of human life than any one, since Shakspeare, who has attempted to tell us stories about it; and the very small scene on which his consciousness dawned is one end of the immense scale that he traversed. I confess it shocked me a little to find that he was born in a house "in a row"—a house, moreover, which at

the date of his birth must have been only about twenty years old. All that is contradictory. If the tenement selected for this honour could not be ancient and embrowned, it should at least have been detached.


ATE MONICK
DENTISTS

There is a charming description in his little tale of "La Grenadière" of the view of the opposite side of the Loire as you have it from the square at the end of the Rue Royale—a square that has some pretensions to grandeur, overlooked as it is by the Hôtel de Ville and the Musée, a pair of edifices which directly contemplate the river, and ornamented with marble images of François Rabelais and René Descartes. The former, erected a few years since, is a very honourable production; the pedestal of the latter could, as a matter of course, only be inscribed with the *Cogito ergo Sum*. The two statues mark the two opposite poles to which the wondrous French mind has travelled; and if there were an effigy of Balzac at Tours it ought to stand midway between them. Not that he by any means always struck the happy mean between the sensible and the metaphysical; but one may say of him that half of his genius looks in one direction and half in the other. The side that turns toward François Rabelais would be, on the whole, the side that takes the sun. But there is no statue of Balzac at Tours; there is only in one of the chambers of the melancholy museum a rather clever, coarse bust. The description in "La Grenadière" of which I just spoke is too long to quote; neither have I space for anyone of the brilliant attempts at landscape-painting which are woven into the shimmering texture of "Le Lys dans la Vallée." The little manor of Clochegourde, the residence of Madame de Mortsauf,

the heroine of that extraordinary work, was within a moderate walk of Tours, and the picture in the novel is presumably a copy from an original which it would be possible to-day to discover. I did not, however, even make the attempt. There are so many châteaux in Touraine commemorated in history that it would take one too far to look up those which have been commemorated in fiction. The most I did was to endeavour to identify the former residence of Mademoiselle Gamard, the sinister old maid of "Le Curé de Tours." This terrible woman occupied a small house in the rear of the cathedral, where I spent a whole morning in wondering rather stupidly which house it could be. To reach the cathedral from the little *place* where we stopped just now to look across at the Grenadière, without, it must be confessed, very vividly seeing it, you follow the quay to the right and pass out of sight of the charming *côteau* which, from beyond the river, faces the town—a soft agglomeration of gardens, vineyards, scattered villas, gables and turrets of slate-roofed châteaux, terraces with grey balustrades, moss-grown walls draped in scarlet Virginia-creeper. You turn into the town again beside a great military barrack which is ornamented with a rugged mediæval tower, a relic of the ancient fortifications, known to the Tourangeaux of to-day as the Tour de Guise. The young Prince of Joinville, son of that Duke of Guise who was murdered by the order of Henry II. at Blois, was, after the death of his father, confined here for more than two years, but made his escape one summer evening in 1591, under the nose of his keepers, with a gallant

audacity which has attached the memory of the exploit to his sullen-looking prison. Tours has a garrison of five regiments, and the little red-legged soldiers light up the town. You see them stroll upon the clean, uncommercial quay, where there are no signs of navigation, not even by oar, no barrels nor bales, no loading nor unloading, no masts against the sky nor booming of steam in the air. The most active business that goes on there is that patient and fruitless angling in which the French, as the votaries of art for art, excel all other people. The little soldiers, weighed down by the contents of their enormous pockets, pass with respect from one of these masters of the rod to the other, as he sits soaking an indefinite bait in the large, indifferent stream. After you turn your back to the quay you have only to go a little way before you reach the cathedral.

Chapter ii

Tours: the Cathedral

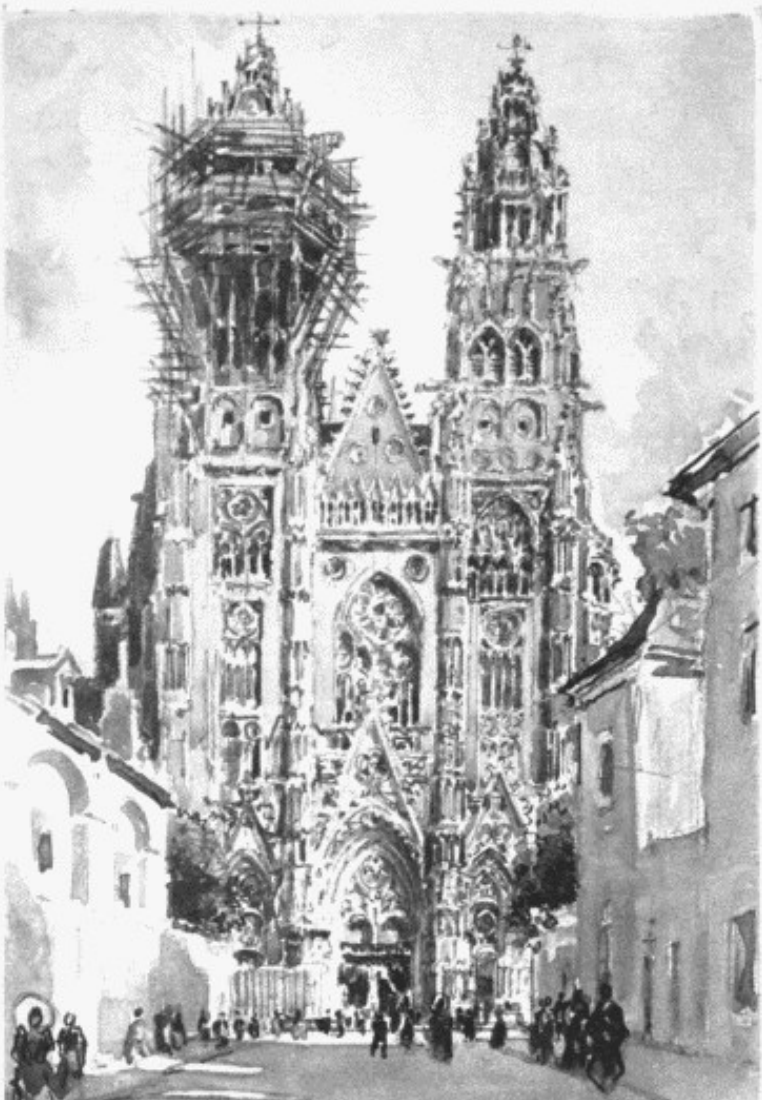
IT IS a very beautiful church of the second order of importance, with a charming mouse-coloured complexion and a pair of fantastic towers. There is a commodious little square in front of it, from which you may look up at its very ornamental face; but for purposes of frank admiration the sides and the rear are perhaps not sufficiently detached. The cathedral of Tours, which is dedicated to Saint Gatianus, took a long time to build. Begun in 1170, it was finished only in the first half of the sixteenth century; but the ages and the weather have interfused so well the tone of the different parts that it presents, at first at least, no striking incongruities, and looks even exceptionally harmonious and complete. There are many grander cathedrals, but there are probably few more pleasing; and this effect of delicacy and grace is at its best towards the close of a quiet afternoon, when the densely decorated towers, rising above the little Place de l'Archevêché, lift their curious lanterns into the slanting light and offer a multitudinous perch to troops of circling pigeons. The whole front, at such a time, has an appearance of great richness, although the niches which surround the three high

doors (with recesses deep enough for several circles of sculpture) and indent the four great buttresses that ascend beside the huge rose-window, carry no figures beneath their little chiselled canopies. The blast of the great Revolution blew down most of the statues in France, and the wind has never set very strongly towards putting them up again. The embossed and crocketed cupolas which crown the towers of Saint Gatien are not very pure in taste; but, like a good many impurities, they have a certain character. The interior has a stately slimness with which no fault is to be found and which in the choir, rich in early glass and surrounded by a broad passage, becomes very bold and noble. Its principal treasure perhaps is the charming little tomb of the two children (who died young) of Charles VIII. and Anne of Brittany, in white marble embossed with symbolic dolphins and exquisite arabesques. The little boy and girl lie side by side on a slab of black marble, and a pair of small kneeling angels, both at their head and at their feet, watch over them. Nothing could be more elegant than this monument, which is the work of Michel Colomb, one of the earlier glories of the French Renaissance; it is really a lesson in good taste. Originally placed in the great abbey-church of Saint Martin, which was for so many ages the holy place of Tours, it happily survived the devastation to which that edifice, already sadly shattered by the wars of religion and successive profanations, finally succumbed in 1797. In 1815 the tomb found an asylum in a quiet corner of the cathedral.

I ought perhaps to be ashamed to acknowledge that I found the

profane name of Balzac capable of adding an interest even to this venerable sanctuary. Those who have read the terrible little story of "Le Curé de Tours" will perhaps remember that, as I have already mentioned, the simple and childlike old Abbé Birotteau, victim of the infernal machinations of the Abbé Troubert and Mademoiselle Gamard, had his quarters in the house of that lady (she had a specialty of letting lodgings to priests), which stood on the north side of the cathedral, so close under its walls that the supporting pillar of one of the great flying buttresses was planted in the spinster's garden. If you wander round behind the church in search of this more than historic habitation you will have occasion to see that the side and rear of Saint Gatien make a delectable and curious figure. A narrow lane passes beside the high wall which conceals from sight the palace of the archbishop and beneath the flying buttresses, the far-projecting gargoyles, and the fine south porch of the church. It terminates in a little dead grass-grown square entitled the Place Grégoire de Tours. All this part of the exterior of the cathedral is very brown, ancient, Gothic, grotesque; Balzac calls the whole place "a desert of stone." A battered and gabled wing or out-house (as it appears to be) of the hidden palace, with a queer old stone pulpit jutting out from it, looks down on this melancholy spot, on the other side of which is a seminary for young priests, one of whom issues from a door in a quiet corner, and, holding it open a moment behind him, shows a glimpse of a sunny garden, where you may fancy other black young figures strolling up

and down. Mademoiselle Gamard's house, where she took her two abbés to board, and basely conspired with one against the other, is still farther round the cathedral. You cannot quite put your hand upon it to-day, for the dwelling of which you say to yourself that it must have been Mademoiselle Gamard's does not fulfil all the conditions mentioned in Balzac's description. The edifice in question, however, fulfils conditions enough; in particular, its little court offers hospitality to the big buttress of the church. Another buttress, corresponding with this (the two, between them, sustain the gable of the north transept), is planted in the small cloister, of which the door on the farther side of the little soundless Rue de la Psalette, where nothing seems ever to pass, opens opposite to that of Mademoiselle Gamard. There is a very genial old sacristan, who introduced me to this cloister from the church. It is very small and solitary, and much mutilated; but it nestles with a kind of wasted friendliness beneath the big walls of the cathedral. Its lower arcades have been closed, and it has a small plot of garden in the middle, with fruit-trees which I should imagine to be too much overshadowed. In one corner is a remarkably picturesque turret, the cage of a winding staircase which ascends (no great distance) to an upper gallery, where an old priest, the *chanoine-gardien* of the church, was walking to and fro with his breviary. The turret, the gallery, and even the chanoine-gardien, belonged, that sweet September morning, to the class of objects that are dear to painters in water-colours.



TOURS—THE CATHEDRAL

Chapter iii

Tours: Saint Martin

I HAVE mentioned the church of Saint Martin, which was for many years the sacred spot, the shrine of pilgrimage, of Tours. Originally the simple burial-place of the great apostle who in the fourth century Christianised Gaul and who, in his day a brilliant missionary and worker of miracles, is chiefly known to modern fame as the worthy that cut his cloak in two at the gate of Amiens to share it with a beggar (tradition fails to say, I believe, what he did with the other half), the abbey of Saint Martin, through the Middle Ages, waxed rich and powerful, till it was known at last as one of the most luxurious religious houses in Christendom, with kings for its titular abbots (who, like Francis I., sometimes turned and despoiled it) and a great treasure of precious things. It passed, however, through many vicissitudes. Pillaged by the Normans in the ninth century and by the Huguenots in the sixteenth, it received its death-blow from the Revolution, which must have brought to bear upon it an energy of destruction proportionate to its mighty bulk. At the end of the last century a huge group of ruins alone remained, and what we see to-day may be called the ruin of a ruin. It is difficult to understand how so

vast an edifice can have been so completely obliterated. Its site is given up to several ugly streets, and a pair of tall towers, separated by a space which speaks volumes as to the size of the church and looking across the close-pressed roofs to the happier spires of the cathedral, preserve for the modern world the memory of a great fortune, a great abuse, perhaps, and at all events a great penalty. One may believe that to this day a considerable part of the foundations of the great abbey is buried in the soil of Tours. The two surviving towers, which are dissimilar in shape, are enormous; with those of the cathedral they form the great landmarks of the town. One of them bears the name of the Tour de l'Horloge; the other, the so-called Tour Charlemagne, was erected (two centuries after her death) over the tomb of Luitgarde, wife of the great Emperor, who died at Tours in 800. I do not pretend to understand in what relation these very mighty and effectually detached masses of masonry stood to each other, but in their grey elevation and loneliness they are striking and suggestive to-day; holding their hoary heads far above the modern life of the town and looking sad and conscious, as they had outlived all uses. I know not what is supposed to have become of the bones of the blessed saint during the various scenes of confusion in which they may have got mislaid; but a mystic connection with his wonder-working relics may be perceived in a strange little sanctuary on the left of the street, which opens in front of the Tour Charlemagne—whose immemorial base, by the way, inhabited like a cavern, with a diminutive doorway where,

as I passed, an old woman stood cleaning a pot, and a little dark window decorated with homely flowers, would be appreciated by a painter in search of "bits." The present shrine of Saint Martin is enclosed (provisionally, I suppose) in a very modern structure of timber, where in a dusky cellar, to which you descend by a wooden staircase adorned with votive tablets and paper roses, is placed a tabernacle surrounded by twinkling tapers and prostrate worshippers. Even this crepuscular vault, however, fails, I think, to attain solemnity; for the whole place is strangely vulgar and garish. The Catholic Church, as churches go to-day, is certainly the most spectacular; but it must feel that it has a great fund of impressiveness to draw upon when it opens such sordid little shops of sanctity as this. It is impossible not to be struck with the grotesqueness of such an establishment as the last link in the chain of a great ecclesiastical tradition.

In the same street, on the other side, a little below, is something better worth your visit than the shrine of Saint Martin. Knock at a high door in a white wall (there is a cross above it), and a fresh-faced sister of the convent of the Petit Saint Martin will let you into the charming little cloister, or rather fragment of cloister. Only one side of this surpassing structure remains, but the whole place is effective. In front of the beautiful arcade, which is terribly bruised and obliterated, is one of those walks of interlaced *tilleuls* which are so frequent in Touraine, and into which the green light filters so softly through a lattice of clipped twigs. Beyond this is a garden, and beyond the garden are the other buildings of the convent, where the placid sisters keep a school—a test, doubtless, of placidity. The imperfect arcade, which dates from the beginning of the sixteenth century (I know nothing of it but what is related in Mrs. Pattison's "Renaissance in France"), is a truly enchanting piece of work; the cornice and the angles of the arches being covered with the daintiest sculpture of arabesques, flowers, fruit, medallions, cherubs, griffins, all in the finest and most attenuated relief. It is like the chasing of a bracelet in stone. The taste, the fancy, the elegance, the refinement, are of the order that straightens up again our drooping standard of distinction. Such a piece of work is the purest flower of the French Renaissance; there is nothing more delicate in all Touraine.

There is another fine thing at Tours which is not particularly delicate, but which makes a great impression—the very interesting old church of Saint Julian, lurking in a crooked corner at the right of the Rue Royale, near the point at which this indifferent thoroughfare emerges, with its little cry of admiration, on the bank of the Loire. Saint Julian stands to-day in a kind of neglected hollow, where it is much shut in by houses; but in the year 1225, when the edifice was begun, the site was doubtless, as the architects say, more eligible. At present indeed, when once you have caught a glimpse of the stout, serious Romanesque tower—which is not high, but strong—you feel that the building has something to say and that you must stop to listen to it. Within, it has a vast and splendid nave, of immense height, the nave of a cathedral, with a shallow choir and transepts and some admirable old glass. I spent half an hour there one morning, listening to what the church had to say, in perfect solitude. Not a worshipper entered, not even an old man with a broom. I have always thought there be a sex in fine buildings; and Saint Julian, with its noble nave, is of the gender of the name of its patron.

It was that same morning, I think, that I went in search of the old houses of Tours; for the town contains several goodly specimens of the domestic architecture of the past. The dwelling to which the average Anglo-Saxon will most promptly direct his steps, and the only one I have space to mention, is the so-called Maison de Tristan l'Hermite—a gentleman whom the readers of "Quentin Durward" will not have forgotten—the

hangman-in-ordinary to that great and prompt chastener Louis XI. Unfortunately the house of Tristan is not the house of Tristan at all; this illusion has been cruelly dispelled. There are no illusions left at all, in the good city of Tours, with regard to Louis XI. His terrible castle of Plessis, the picture of which sends a shiver through the youthful reader of Scott, has been reduced to suburban insignificance; and the residence of his *triste compère*, on the front of which a festooned rope figures as a motive for decoration, is observed to have been erected in the succeeding century. The Maison de Tristan may be visited for itself, however, if not for Sir Walter; it is an exceedingly picturesque old façade, to which you pick your way through a narrow and tortuous street—a street terminating, a little beyond it, in the walk beside the river. An elegant Gothic doorway is let into the rusty-red brickwork, and strange little beasts crouch at the angles of the windows, which are surmounted by a tall graduated gable, pierced with a small orifice, where the large surface of brick, lifted out of the shadow of the street, looks yellow and faded. The whole thing is disfigured and decayed; but it is a capital subject for a sketch in colours. Only I must wish the sketcher better luck—or a better temper—than my own. If he ring the bell to be admitted to see the court, which I believe is more sketchable still, let him have patience to wait till the bell is answered. He can do the outside while they are coming.

The Maison de Tristan, I say, may be visited for itself; but I hardly know for what the remnants of Plessis-les-Tours may

be investigated. To reach them you wander through crooked suburban lanes, down the course of the Loire, to a rough, undesirable, incongruous spot, where a small, crude building of red brick is pointed out to you by your cabman (if you happen to drive) as the legendary frame of the grim portrait, and where a strong odour of pigsties and other unclean things so prostrates you for the moment that you have no energy to protest against this obvious fiction. You enter a yard encumbered with rubbish and a defiant dog, and an old woman emerges from a shabby lodge and assures you that you stand deep in historic dust. The red brick building, which looks like a small factory, rises on the ruins of the favourite residence of the dreadful Louis. It is now occupied by a company of night-scavengers, whose huge carts are drawn up in a row before it. I know not whether this be what is called the irony of fate; in any case, the effect of it is to accentuate strongly the fact (and through the most susceptible of our senses) that there is no honour for the authors of great wrongs. The dreadful Louis is reduced simply to an offence to the nostrils. The old woman shows you a few fragments—several dark, damp, much-encumbered vaults, denominated dungeons, and an old tower staircase in good condition. There are the outlines of the old moat; there is also the outline of the old guard-room, which is now a stable; and there are other silhouettes of the undistinguishable, which I have forgotten. You need all your imagination, and even then you cannot make out that Plessis was a castle of large extent, though the old woman, as your eye

wanders over the neighbouring *potagers*, discourses much of the gardens and the park. The place looks mean and flat; and as you drive away you scarcely know whether to be glad or sorry that all those bristling horrors have been reduced to the commonplace.

A certain flatness of impression awaits you also, I think, at Marmoutier, which is the other indispensable excursion in the near neighbourhood of Tours. The remains of this famous abbey lie on the other bank of the stream, about a mile and a half from the town. You follow the edge of the big brown river; of a fine afternoon you will be glad to go farther still. The abbey has gone the way of most abbeys; but the place is a restoration as well as a ruin, inasmuch as the Sisters of the Sacred Heart have erected a terribly modern convent here. A large Gothic doorway, in a high fragment of ancient wall, admits you to a garden-like enclosure, of great extent, from which you are further introduced into an extraordinarily tidy little parlour, where two good nuns sit at work. One of these came out with me and showed me over the place—a very definite little woman, with pointed features, an intensely distinct enunciation, and those pretty manners which (for whatever other teachings it may be responsible) the Catholic Church so often instils into its functionaries. I have never seen a woman who had got her lesson better than this little trotting, murmuring, edifying nun. The interest of Marmoutier to-day is not so much an interest of vision, so to speak, as an interest of reflection—that is, if you choose to reflect (for instance) upon the wondrous legend of the seven sleepers (you may see where

they lie in a row), who lived together—they were brothers and cousins—in primitive piety, in the sanctuary constructed by the blessed Saint Martin (emulous of his precursor, Saint Gatianus), in the face of the hillside that overhung the Loire, and who, twenty-five years after his death, yielded up their seven souls at the same moment and enjoyed the rare convenience of retaining in their faces, in spite of mortality, every aspect of health. The abbey of Marmoutier, which sprang from the grottos in the cliff to which Saint Gatianus and Saint Martin retired to pray, was therefore the creation of the latter worthy, as the other great abbey, in the town proper, was the monument of his repose. The cliff is still there; and a winding staircase, in the latest taste, enables you conveniently to explore its recesses. These sacred niches are scooped out of the rock, and will give you an impression if you cannot do without one. You will feel them to be sufficiently venerable when you learn that the particular pigeon-hole of Saint Gatianus, the first Christian missionary to Gaul, dates from the third century. They have been dealt with as the Catholic Church deals with most of such places to-day; polished and furbished up, labelled and ticketed—*edited*, with notes, in short, like an old book. The process is a mistake—the early editions had more sanctity. The modern buildings (of the Sacred Heart), on which you look down from these points of vantage, are in the vulgar taste which sets its so mechanical stamp on all new Catholic work; but there was nevertheless a great sweetness in the scene. The afternoon was lovely, and it was flushing to a

close. The large garden stretched beneath us, blooming with fruit and and wine and succulent promise, and beyond it flowed the shining river. The air was still, the shadows were long, and the place, after all, was full of memories, most of which might pass for virtuous. It certainly was better than Plessis-les-Tours.

Chapter iv

Blois

YOUR business at Tours is to make excursions; and if you make them all you will be always under arms. The land is a rich reliquary, and an hour's drive from the town in almost any direction will bring you to the knowledge of some curious fragment of domestic or ecclesiastical architecture, some turreted manor, some lonely tower, some gabled village, some scene of something. Yet even if you do everything—which was not my case—you cannot hope to tell everything, and, fortunately for you, the excursions divide themselves into the greater and the less. You may achieve most of the greater in a week or two; but a summer in Touraine (which, by the way, must be a delectable thing) would hold none too many days for the others. If you come down to Tours from Paris your best economy is to spend a few days at Blois, where a clumsy but rather attractive little inn on the edge of the river will offer you a certain amount of that familiar and intermittent hospitality which a few weeks spent in the French provinces teaches you to regard as the highest attainable form of accommodation. Such an economy I was unable to practise. I could only go to Blois (from Tours) to spend the day;

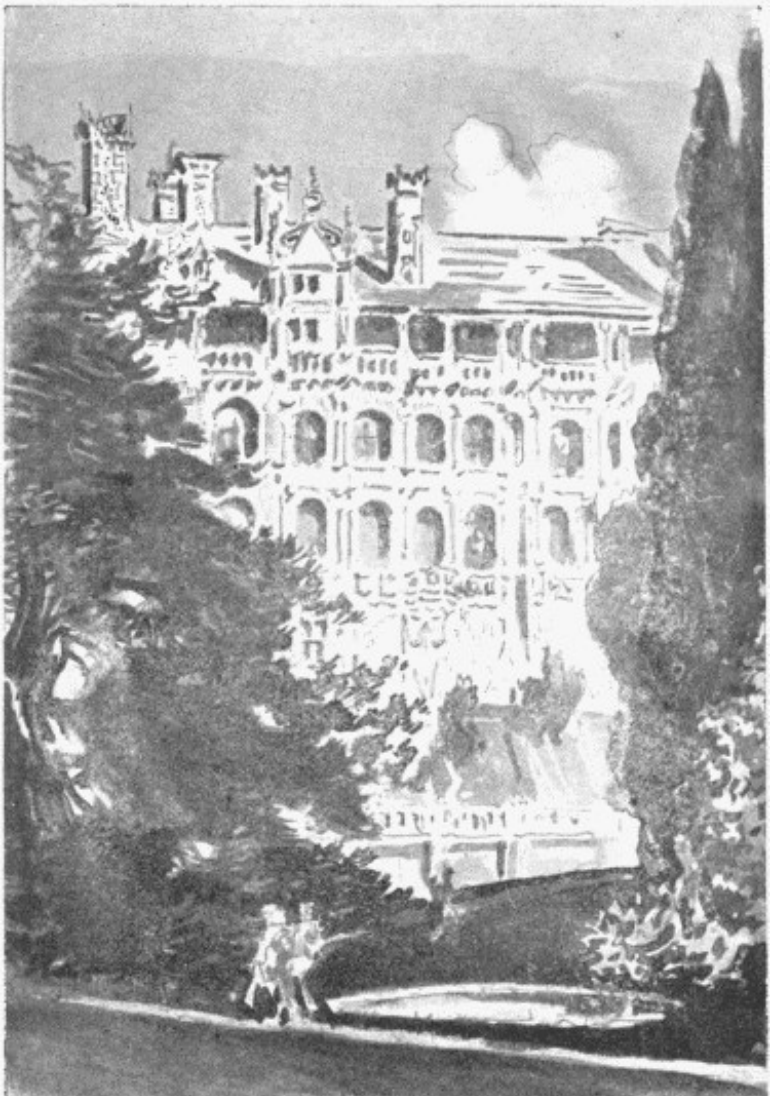
but this feat I accomplished twice over. It is a very sympathetic little town, as we say nowadays, and a week there would be sociable even without company. Seated on the north bank of the Loire, it presents a bright, clean face to the sun and has that aspect of cheerful leisure which belongs to all white towns that reflect themselves in shining waters. It is the water-front only of Blois, however, that exhibits this fresh complexion; the interior is of a proper brownness, as old sallow books are bound in vellum. The only disappointment is perforce the discovery that the castle, which is the special object of one's pilgrimage, does not overhang the river, as I had always allowed myself to understand. It overhangs the town, but is scarcely visible from the stream. That peculiar good fortune is reserved for Amboise and Chaumont.

BLOIS

The Château de Blois is one of the most beautiful and elaborate of all the old royal residences of this part of France, and I suppose it should have all the honours of my description. As you cross its threshold you step straight into the sunshine and storm of the French Renaissance. But it is too rich to describe—I can only pick out the high lights. It must be premised that in speaking of it as we see it to-day we speak of a monument unsparingly restored. The work of restoration has been as ingenious as it is profuse, but it rather chills the imagination. This is perhaps almost the first thing you feel as you approach the castle from the streets of the town. These little streets, as they leave the river, have pretensions to romantic steepness; one of them, indeed, which resolves itself into a high staircase with divergent wings (the *escalier monumental*), achieved this result so successfully as to remind me vaguely—I hardly know why—of the great slope of the Capitol, beside the Ara Cœli, at Rome. The view of that part of the castle which figures to-day as the back (it is the only aspect I had seen reproduced) exhibits the marks of restoration with the greatest assurance. The long façade, consisting only of balconied windows deeply recessed, erects itself on the summit of a considerable hill, which gives a fine, plunging movement to its foundations. The deep niches of the windows are all aglow with colour. They have been repainted with red and blue, relieved with gold figures; and each of them looks more like the royal

box at a theatre than like the aperture of a palace dark with memories. For all this, however, and in spite of the fact that, as in some others of the châteaux of Touraine (always excepting the colossal Chambord, which is not in Touraine), there is less vastness than one had expected, the least hospitable aspect of Blois is abundantly impressive. Here, as elsewhere, lightness and grace are the keynote; and the recesses of the windows, with their happy proportions, their sculpture and their colour, are the hollow sockets of the human ornament. They need the figure of a Francis I. to complete them, or of a Diane de Poitiers, or even of a Henry III. The stand of this empty gilt cage emerges from a bed of light verdure which has been allowed to mass itself there and which contributes to the springing look of the walls; while on the right it joins the most modern portion of the castle, the building erected, on foundations of enormous height and solidity, in 1635, by Gaston d'Orléans. This fine frigid mansion —the proper view of it is from the court within—is one of the masterpieces of François Mansard, whom a kind providence did not allow to make over the whole palace in the superior manner of his superior age. That had been a part of Gaston's plan—he was a blunderer born, and this precious project was worthy of him. This execution of it would surely have been one of the great misdeeds of history. Partially performed, the misdeed is not altogether to be regretted; for as one stands in the court of the castle and lets one's eye wander from the splendid wing of Francis I.—which is the last word of free and joyous invention

—to the ruled lines and blank spaces of the ponderous pavilion of Mansard, one makes one's reflections upon the advantage, in even the least personal of the arts, of having something to say, and upon the stupidity of a taste which had ended by becoming an aggregation of negatives. Gaston's wing, taken by itself, has much of the *bel air* which was to belong to the architecture of Louis XIV.; but, taken in contrast to its flowering, laughing, living neighbour, it marks the difference between inspiration and calculation. We scarcely grudge it its place, however, for it adds a price to the rest of the pile.



We have entered the court, by the way, by jumping over the walls. The more orthodox method is to follow a modern terrace which leads to the left, from the side of the edifice that I began by speaking of, and passes round, ascending, to a little square on a considerably higher level, a square not, like the rather prosaic space on which the back (as I have called it) looks out, a thoroughfare. This small empty *place*, oblong in form, at once bright and quiet, and which ought to be grass-grown, offers an excellent setting to the entrance-front of the palace—the wing of Louis XII. The restoration here has been lavish; but it was perhaps but an inevitable reaction against the injuries, still more lavish, by which the unfortunate building had long been overwhelmed. It had fallen into a state of ruinous neglect, relieved only by the misuse proceeding from successive generations of soldiers, for whom its charming chambers served as barrack-room. Whitewashed, mutilated, dishonoured, the castle of Blois may be said to have escaped simply with its life. This is the history of Amboise as well, and is to a certain extent the history of Chambord. Delightful, at any rate, was the refreshed façade of Louis XII. as I stood and looked at it one bright September morning. In that soft, clear, merry light of Touraine, everything shows, everything speaks. Charming are the taste, the happy proportions, the colour of this beautiful front, to which the new feeling for a purely domestic architecture—

an architecture of security and tranquillity, in which art could indulge itself—gave an air of youth and gladness. It is true that for a long time to come the castle of Blois was neither very safe nor very quiet; but its dangers came from within, from the evil passions of its inhabitants, and not from siege or invasion. The front of Louis XII. is of red brick, crossed here and there with purple; and the purple slate of the high roof, relieved with chimneys beautifully treated and with the embroidered caps of pinnacles and arches, with the porcupine of Louis, the ermine and the festooned rope which formed the devices of Anne of Brittany—the tone of this decorative roof carries out the mild glow of the wall. The wide, fair windows open as if they had expanded to let in the rosy dawn of the Renaissance. Charming, for that matter, are the windows of all the châteaux of Touraine, with their squareness corrected (as it is not in the Tudor architecture) by the curve of the upper corners, which gives this line the look, above the expressive aperture, of a pencilled eyebrow. The low door of this front is crowned by a high, deep niche, in which, under a splendid canopy, stiffly astride of a stiffly-draped charger, sits in profile an image of the good King Louis. Good as he had been—the father of his people, as he was called (I believe he remitted various taxes)—he was not good enough to pass muster at the Revolution; and the effigy I have just described is no more than a reproduction of the primitive statue demolished at that period.

Pass beneath it into the court, and the sixteenth century closes

round you. It is a pardonable flight of fancy to say that the expressive faces of an age in which human passions lay very near the surface seem to peep out at you from the windows, from the balconies, from the thick foliage of the sculpture. The portion of the wing of Louis XII. that fronts toward the court is supported on a deep arcade. On your right is the wing erected by Francis I., the reverse of the mass of building which you see on approaching the castle. This exquisite, this extravagant, this transcendent piece of architecture is the most joyous utterance of the French Renaissance. It is covered with an embroidery of sculpture in which every detail is worthy of the hand of a goldsmith. In the middle of it, or rather a little to the left, rises the famous winding staircase (plausibly, but I believe not religiously, restored), which even the ages which most misused it must vaguely have admired. It forms a kind of chiselled cylinder, with wide interstices, so that the stairs are open to the air. Every inch of this structure, of its balconies, its pillars, its great central columns, is wrought over with lovely images, strange and ingenious devices, prime among which is the great heraldic salamander of Francis I. The salamander is everywhere at Blois —over the chimneys, over the doors, on the walls. This whole quarter of the castle bears the stamp of that eminently pictorial prince. The running cornice along the top of the front is like an unfolded, an elongated bracelet. The windows of the attic are like shrines for saints. The gargoyles, the medallions, the statuettes, the festoons are like the elaboration of some precious cabinet

rather than the details of a building exposed to the weather and to the ages. In the interior there is a profusion of restoration, and it is all restoration in colour. This has been, evidently, a work of great energy and cost, but it will easily strike you as overdone. The universal freshness is a discord, a false note; it seems to light up the dusky past with an unnatural glare. Begun in the reign of Louis Philippe, this terrible process—the more terrible always the better case you conceive made out for it—has been carried so far that there is now scarcely a square inch of the interior that preserves the colour of the past. It is true that the place had been so coated over with modern abuse that something was needed to keep it alive; it is only perhaps a pity the clever doctors, not content with saving its life, should have undertaken to restore its bloom. The love of consistency, in such a business, is a dangerous lure. All the old apartments have been rechristened, as it were; the geography of the castle has been re-established. The guard-rooms, the bedrooms, the closets, the oratories have recovered their identity. Every spot connected with the murder of the Duke of Guise is pointed out by a small, shrill boy, who takes you from room to room and who has learned his lesson in perfection. The place is full of Catherine de'Medici, of Henry III., of memories, of ghosts, of echoes, of possible evocations and revivals. It is covered with crimson and gold. The fireplaces and the ceilings are magnificent; they look like expensive "sets" at the grand opera.

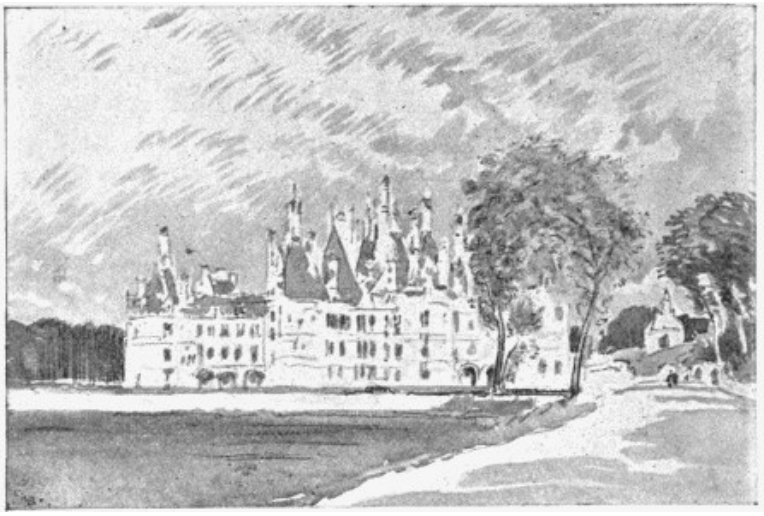
I should have mentioned that below, in the court, the front

of the wing of Gaston d'Orléans faces you as you enter, so that the place is a course of French history. Inferior in beauty and grace to the other portions of the castle, the wing is yet a nobler monument than the memory of Gaston deserves. The second of the sons of Henry IV.—who was no more fortunate as a father than as a husband—younger brother of Louis XIII. and father of the great Mademoiselle, the most celebrated, most ambitious, most self-complacent and most unsuccessful *fille à marier* in French history, passed in enforced retirement at the castle of Blois the close of a life of clumsy intrigues against Cardinal Richelieu, in which his rashness was only equalled by his pusillanimity and his ill-luck by his inaccessibility to correction, and which, after so many follies and shames, was properly summed up in the project—begun, but not completed—of demolishing the beautiful habitation of his exile in order to erect a better one. With Gaston d'Orléans, however, who lived there without dignity, the history of the Château de Blois declines. Its interesting period is that of the wars of religion. It was the chief residence of Henry III., and the scene of the principal events of his depraved and dramatic rule. It has been restored more than enough, as I have said, by architects and decorators; the visitor, as he moves through its empty rooms, which are at once brilliant and ill-lighted (they have not been refurnished), undertakes a little restoration of his own. His imagination helps itself from the things that remain; he tries to see the life of the sixteenth century in its form and dress—

its turbulence, its passions, its loves and hates, its treacheries, falsities, sincerities, faith, its latitude of personal development, its presentation of the whole nature, its nobleness of costume, charm of speech, splendour of taste, unequalled picturesqueness. The picture is full of movement, of contrasted light and darkness, full altogether of abominations. Mixed up with them all is the great theological motive, so that the drama wants little to make it complete. What episode was ever more perfect—looked at as a dramatic occurrence—than the murder of the Duke of Guise? The insolent prosperity of the victim; the weakness, the vices, the terrors, of the author of the deed; the perfect execution of the plot; the accumulation of horror in what followed it—render it, as a crime, one of the classic things.

But we must not take the Château de Blois too hard: I went there, after all, by way of entertainment. If among these sinister memories your visit should threaten to prove a tragedy, there is an excellent way of removing the impression. You may treat yourself at Blois to a very cheerful afterpiece. There is a charming industry practised there, and practised in charming conditions. Follow the bright little quay down the river till you get quite out of the town and reach the point where the road beside the Loire becomes sinuous and attractive, turns the corner of diminutive headlands and makes you wonder what is beyond. Let not your curiosity induce you, however, to pass by a modest white villa which overlooks the stream, enclosed in a fresh little court; for here dwells an artist—an artist in faience. There is no

sort of sign, and the place looks peculiarly private. But if you ring at the gate you will not be turned away. You will, on the contrary, be ushered upstairs into a parlour—there is nothing resembling a shop—encumbered with specimens of remarkably handsome pottery. The ware is of the best, a careful reproduction of old forms, colours, devices; and the master of the establishment is one of those completely artistic types that are often found in France. His reception is as friendly as his work is ingenious; and I think it is not too much to say that you like the work better because he has produced it. His vases, cups and jars, lamps, platters, *plaques*, with their brilliant glaze, their innumerable figures, their family likeness and wide variations, are scattered through his occupied rooms; they serve at once as his stock-in-trade and as household ornament. As we all know, this is an age of prose, of machinery, of wholesale production, of coarse and hasty processes. But one brings away from the establishment of the very intelligent M. Ulysse the sense of a less eager activity and a greater search for perfection. He has but a few workmen and he gives them plenty of time. The place makes a little vignette, leaves an impression—the quiet white house in its garden on the road by the wide, clear river, without the smoke, the bustle, the ugliness, of so much of our modern industry. It struck me as an effort Mr. Ruskin might have inspired and Mr. William Morris —though that be much to say—have forgiven.



Chapter v

Chambord

THE second time I went to Blois I took a carriage for Chambord, and came back by the Château de Cheverny and the forest of Russy—a charming little expedition, to which the beauty of the afternoon (the finest in a rainy season that was spotted with bright days) contributed not a little. To go to Chambord you cross the Loire, leave it on one side and strike away through a country in which salient features become less and less numerous and which at last has no other quality than a look of intense and peculiar rurality—the characteristic, even when it be not the charm, of so much of the landscape of France. This is not the appearance of wildness, for it goes with great cultivation; it is simply the presence of the delving, drudging, economising peasant. But it is a deep, unrelieved rusticity. It is a peasant's landscape; not, as in England, a landlord's. On the way to Chambord you enter the flat and sandy Sologne. The wide horizon opens out like a great *potager*, without interruptions, without an eminence, with here and there a long, low stretch of wood. There is an absence of hedges, fences, signs of property; everything is absorbed in the general flatness—the patches

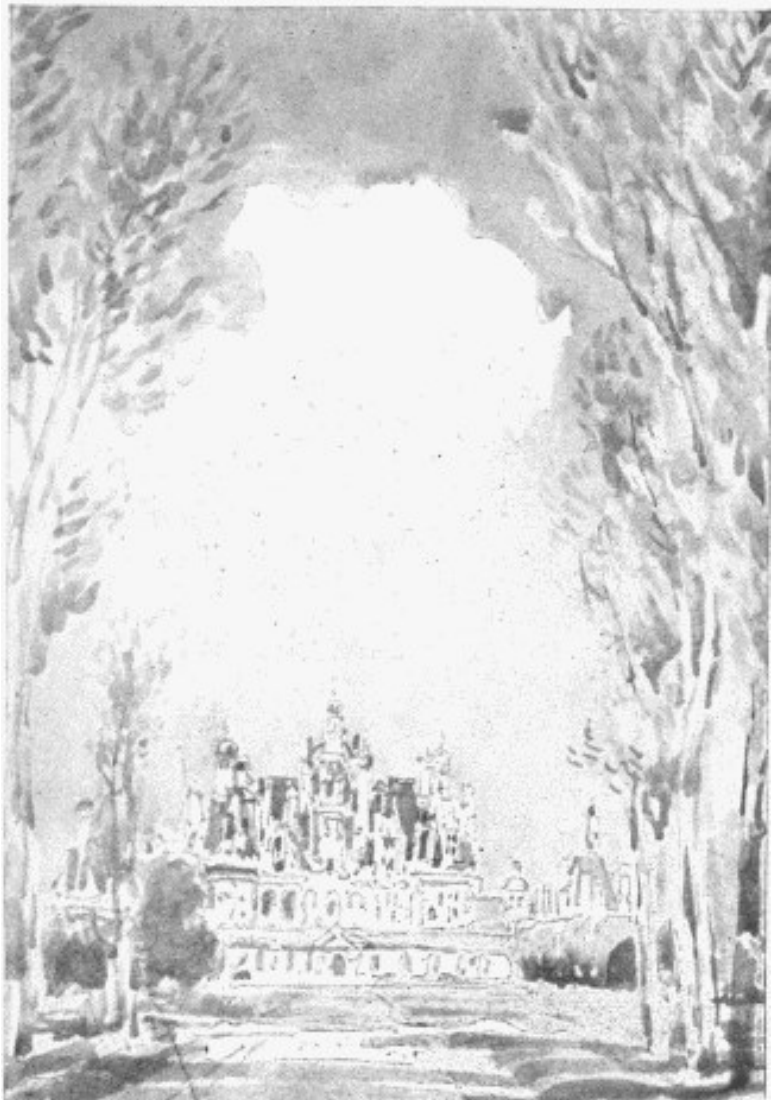
of vineyard, the scattered cottages, the villages, the children (planted and staring and almost always pretty), the women in the fields, the white caps, the faded blouses, the big sabots. At the end of an hour's drive (they assure you at Blois that even with two horses you will spend double that time), I passed through a sort of gap in a wall which does duty as the gateway of the domain of a proscribed pretender. I followed a straight avenue through a disfeatured park—the park of Chambord has twenty-one miles of circumference; a very sandy, scrubby, melancholy plantation, in which the timber must have been cut many times over and is to-day a mere tangle of brushwood. Here, as in so many spots in France, the traveller perceives that he is in a land of revolutions. Nevertheless its great extent and the long perspective of its avenues give this frugal shrubbery a certain state; just as its shabbiness places it in agreement with one of the strongest impressions awaiting you. You pursue one of these long perspectives a proportionate time, and at last you see the chimneys and pinnacles of Chambord rise apparently out of the ground. The filling-in of the wide moats that formerly surrounded it has, in vulgar parlance, let it down and given it a monstrous over-crowned air that is at the same time a magnificent Orientalism. The towers, the turrets, the cupolas, the gables, the lanterns, the chimneys look more like the spires of a city than the salient points of a single building. You emerge from the avenue and find yourself at the foot of an enormous fantastic mass. Chambord has a strange mixture of society and solitude.

A little village clusters within view of its liberal windows, and a couple of inns near by offer entertainment to pilgrims. These things of course are incidents of the political proscription which hangs its thick veil over the place. Chambord is truly royal—royal in its great scale, its grand air, its indifference to common considerations. If a cat may look at a king, a tavern may look at a palace. I enjoyed my visit to this extraordinary structure as much as if I had been a legitimist; and indeed there is something interesting in any monument of a great system, any bold presentation of a tradition.

You leave your vehicle at one of the inns, which are very decent and tidy and in which every one is very civil, as if in this latter respect the neighbourhood of a Court veritably set the fashion, and you proceed across the grass and the gravel to a small door, a door infinitely subordinate and conferring no title of any kind on those who enter it. Here you ring a bell, which a highly respectable person answers (a person perceptibly affiliated, again, to the old regime), after which she ushers you over a vestibule into an inner court. Perhaps the strongest impression I got at Chambord came to me as I stood in this court. The woman who admitted me did not come with me; I was to find my guide somewhere else. The specialty of Chambord is its prodigious round towers. There are, I believe, no less than eight of them, placed at each angle of the inner and outer square of buildings; for the castle is in the form of a larger structure which encloses a smaller one. One of these towers stood before me in

the court; it seemed to fling its shadow over the place; while above, as I looked up, the pinnacles and gables, the enormous chimneys, soared into the bright blue air. The place was empty and silent; shadows of gargoyles, of extraordinary projections, were thrown across the clear grey surfaces. One felt that the whole thing was monstrous. A cicerone appeared, a languid young man in a rather shabby livery, and led me about with a mixture of the impatient and the desultory, of condescension and humility. I do not profess to understand the plan of Chambord, and I may add that I do not even desire to do so; for it is much more entertaining to think of it, as you can so easily, as an irresponsible, insoluble labyrinth. Within it is a wilderness of empty chambers, a royal and romantic barrack. The exiled prince to whom it gives its title has not the means to keep up four hundred rooms; he contents himself with preserving the huge outside. The repairs of the prodigious roof alone must absorb a large part of his revenue. The great feature of the interior is the celebrated double staircase, rising straight through the building, with two courses of steps, so that people may ascend and descend without meeting. This staircase is a truly majestic piece of humour; it gives you the note, as it were, of Chambord. It opens on each landing to a vast guard-room, in four arms, radiations of the winding shaft. My guide made me climb to the great open-work lantern which, springing from the roof at the termination of the rotund staircase (surmounted here by a smaller one), forms the pinnacle of the bristling crown of the

pile. This lantern is tipped with a huge *fleur-de-lis* in stone—the only one, I believe, that the Revolution did not succeed in pulling down. Here, from narrow windows, you look over the wide, flat country and the tangled, melancholy park, with the rotation of its straight avenues. Then you walk about the roof in a complication of galleries, terraces, balconies, through the multitude of chimneys and gables. This roof, which is in itself a sort of castle in the air, has an extravagant, fabulous quality, and with its profuse ornamentation—the salamander of Francis I. is a constant motive—its lonely pavements, its sunny niches, the balcony that looks down over the closed and grass-grown main entrance, a strange, half-sad, half-brilliant charm. The stonework is covered with fine mould. There are places that reminded me of some of those quiet mildewed corners of courts and terraces into which the traveller who wanders through the Vatican looks down from neglected windows. They show you two or three furnished rooms, with Bourbon portraits, hideous tapestries from the ladies of France, a collection of the toys of the *enfant du miracle*, all military and of the finest make. "Tout cela fonctionne," the guide said of these miniature weapons; and I wondered, if he should take it into his head to fire off his little cannon, how much harm the Comte de Chambord would do.



From below the castle would look crushed by the redundancy of its upper protuberances if it were not for the enormous girth of its round towers, which appear to give it a robust lateral development. These towers, however, fine as they are in their way, struck me as a little stupid; they are the exaggeration of an exaggeration. In a building erected after the days of defence and proclaiming its peaceful character from its hundred embroideries and cupolas, they seem to indicate a want of invention. I shall risk the accusation of bad taste if I say that, impressive as it is, the Château de Chambord seemed to me to have altogether a touch of that quality of stupidity. The trouble is that it stands for nothing very momentous; it has not happened, in spite of sundry vicissitudes, to have a strongly-marked career. Compared with that of Blois and Amboise its past is rather vacant; and one feels to a certain extent the contrast between its pompous appearance and its spacious but somewhat colourless annals. It had indeed the good fortune to be erected by Francis I., whose name by itself expresses a good deal of history. Why he should have built a palace in those sandy plains will ever remain an unanswered question, for kings have never been obliged to give reasons. In addition to the fact that the country was rich in game and that Francis was a passionate hunter, it is suggested by M. de la Saussaye, the author of the very complete little account of the place which you may buy at the bookseller's at Blois, that he was governed in his choice of the site by the chance that a

charming woman had previously lived there. The Comtesse de Thoury had a manor in the neighbourhood, and the Comtesse de Thoury had been the object of a youthful passion on the part of the most susceptible of princes before his accession to the throne. This great pile was reared, therefore, according to M. de la Saussaye, as a *souvenir de premières amours*! It is certainly a very massive memento; and if these tender passages were proportionate to the building that commemorates them, the flame blazed indeed. There has been much discussion as to the architect employed by Francis I., and the honour of having designed this splendid residence has been claimed for several of the Italian artists who early in the sixteenth century came to seek patronage in France. It seems well established to-day, however, that Chambord was the work neither of Primaticcio, of Vignola, nor of Il Rosso, all of whom have left some trace of their sojourn in France; but of an obscure yet very complete genius, Pierre Nepveu, known as Pierre Trinqueau, who is designated in the papers which preserve in some degree the history of the origin of the edifice, as the *maistre de l'œuvre de maçonnerie*. Behind this modest title, apparently, we must recognise one of the most original talents of the French Renaissance; and it is a proof of the vigour of the artistic life of that period that, brilliant production being everywhere abundant, an artist of so high a value should not have been treated by his contemporaries as a celebrity. We make our celebrities to-day at smaller cost.

The immediate successors of Francis I. continued to visit

Chambord; but it was neglected by Henry IV. and was never afterwards a favourite residence of any French king. Louis XIV. appeared there on several occasions, and the apparition was characteristically brilliant; but Chambord could not long detain a monarch who had gone to the expense of creating a Versailles ten miles from Paris. With Versailles, Fontainebleau, Saint-Germain and Saint-Cloud within easy reach of their capital, the later French sovereigns had little reason to take the air in the dreariest province of their kingdom. Chambord therefore suffered from royal indifference, though in the last century a use was found for its deserted halls. In 1725 it was occupied by the luckless Stanislaus Leczynski, who spent the greater part of his life in being elected King of Poland and being ousted from his throne, and who, at this time a refugee in France, had found a compensation for some of his misfortunes in marrying his daughter to Louis XV. He lived eight years at Chambord and filled up the moats of the castle. In 1748 it found an illustrious tenant in the person of Maurice de Saxe, the victor of Fontenoy, who, however, two years after he had taken possession of it, terminated a life which would have been longer had he been less determined to make it agreeable. The Revolution, of course, was not kind to Chambord. It despoiled it in so far as possible of every vestige of its royal origin, and swept like a whirlwind through apartments to which upwards of two centuries had contributed a treasure of decoration and furniture. In that wild blast these precious things were destroyed or for ever scattered. In 1791

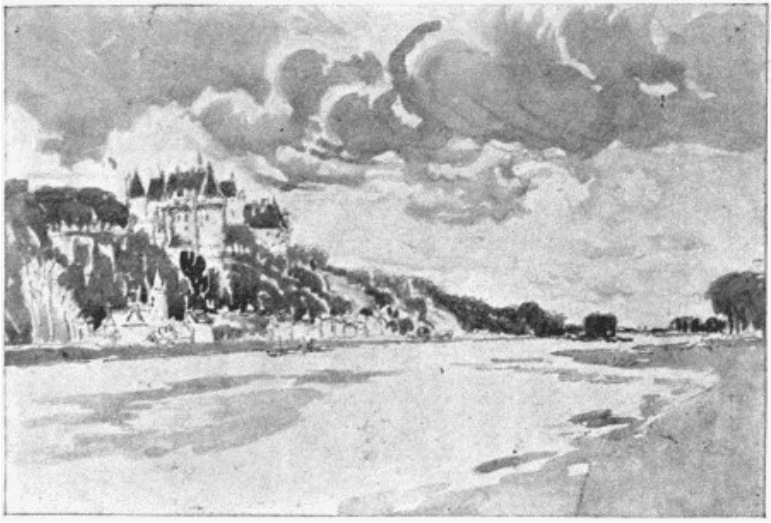
an odd proposal was made to the French Government by a company of English Quakers, who had conceived the bold idea of establishing in the palace a manufacture of some peaceful commodity not to-day recorded. Napoleon allotted Chambord, as a "dotation," to one of his marshals, Berthier, for whose benefit it was converted, in Napoleonic fashion, into the so-called principality of Wagram. By the Princess of Wagram, the marshal's widow, it was, after the Restoration, sold to the trustees of a national subscription which had been established for the purpose of presenting it to the infant Duke of Bordeaux, then prospective King of France. The presentation was duly made; but the Comte de Chambord, who had changed his title in recognition of the gift, was despoiled of his property by the government of Louis Philippe. He appealed for redress to the tribunals of his country; and the consequence of his appeal was an interminable litigation, by which, however, finally, after the lapse of twenty-five years, he was established in his rights. In 1871 he paid his first visit to the domain which had been offered him half a century before, a term of which he had spent forty years in exile. It was from Chambord that he dated his famous letter of the 5th of July of that year—the letter, directed to his so-called subjects, in which he waves aloft the white flag of the Bourbons. This rare miscalculation—virtually an invitation to the French people to repudiate, as their national ensign, that immortal tricolour, the flag of the Revolution and the Empire, under which they have won the glory which of all glories has

hitherto been dearest to them and which is associated with the most romantic, the most heroic, the epic, the consolatory, period of their history—this luckless manifesto, I say, appears to give the measure of the political wisdom of the excellent Henry V. The proposal should have had less simplicity or the people less irony.

On Chambord the whole Chambord makes a great impression; and the hour I was there, while the yellow afternoon light slanted upon the September woods, there was a dignity in its desolation. It spoke, with a muffled but audible voice, of the vanished monarchy, which had been so strong, so splendid, but to-day had become a vision almost as fantastic as the cupolas and chimneys that rose before me. I thought, while I lingered there, of all the fine things it takes to make up such a monarchy; and how one of them is a superfluity of mouldering, empty palaces. Chambord is touching—that is the best word for it; and if the hopes of another restoration are in the follies of the Republic, a little reflection on that eloquence of ruin ought to put the Republic on its guard. A sentimental tourist may venture to remark that in presence of all the haunted houses that appeal in this mystical manner to the retrospective imagination it cannot afford to be foolish. I thought of all this as I drove back to Blois by the way of the Château de Cheverny. The road took us out of the park of Chambord, but through a region of flat woodland, where the trees were not mighty, and again into the prosy plain of the Sologne—a thankless soil to sow, I believe, but lately much amended by

the magic of cheerful French industry and thrift. The light had already begun to fade, and my drive reminded me of a passage in some rural novel of Madame Sand. I passed a couple of timber and plaster churches, which looked very old, black and crooked, and had lumpish wooden porches and galleries encircling the base. By the time I reached Cheverny the clear twilight had approached. It was late to ask to be allowed to visit an inhabited house; but it was the hour at which I like best to visit almost anything. My coachman drew up before a gateway, in a high wall, which opened upon a short avenue, along which I took my way on foot; the coachmen in those parts being, for reasons best known to themselves, mortally averse to driving up to a house. I answered the challenge of a very tidy little portress who sat, in company with a couple of children, enjoying the evening air in front of her lodge, and who told me to walk a little farther and turn to the right. I obeyed her to the letter, and my turn brought me into sight of a house as charming as an old manor in a fairy tale. I had but a rapid and partial view of Cheverny; but that view was a glimpse of perfection. A light, sweet mansion stood looking over a wide green lawn, over banks of flowers and groups of trees. It had a striking character of elegance, produced partly by a series of Renaissance busts let into circular niches in the façade. The place looked so private, so reserved, that it seemed an act of violence to ring, a stranger and foreigner, at the graceful door. But if I had not rung I should be unable to express—as it is such a pleasure to do—my sense of the exceeding courtesy with

which this admirable house is shown. It was near the dinner-hour —the most sacred hour of the day; but I was freely conducted into the inhabited apartments. They are extremely beautiful. What I chiefly remember is the charming staircase of white embroidered stone, and the great *salle des gardes* and *chambre à coucher du roi* on the second floor. Cheverny, built in 1634, is of a much later date than the other royal residences of this part of France; it belongs to the end of the Renaissance and has a touch of the rococo. The guard-room is a superb apartment; and as it contains little save its magnificent ceiling and fireplace and certain dim tapestries on its walls, you the more easily take the measure of its noble proportions. The servant opened the shutters of a single window, and the last rays of the twilight slanted into the rich brown gloom. It was in the same picturesque fashion that I saw the bedroom (adjoining) of Henry IV., where a legendary-looking bed, draped in folds long unaltered, defined itself in the haunted dusk. Cheverny remains to me a very charming, a partly mysterious vision. I drove back to Blois in the dark, some nine miles, through the forest of Russy, which belongs to the State and which, though consisting apparently of small timber, looked under the stars sufficiently vast and primeval. There was a damp autumnal smell and the occasional sound of a stirring thing; and as I moved through the evening air I thought of Francis I. and Henry IV.



Chapter vi

Amboise

YOU may go to Amboise either from Blois or from Tours; it is about half-way between these towns. The great point is to go, especially if you have put it off repeatedly; and to go, if possible, on a day when the great view of the Loire, which you enjoy from the battlements and terraces, presents itself under a friendly sky. Three persons, of whom the author of these lines was one, spent the greater part of a perfect Sunday morning in looking at it. It was astonishing, in the course of the rainiest season in the memory of the oldest Tourangeau, how many perfect days we found to our hand. The town of Amboise lies, like Tours, on the left bank of the river—a little white-faced town staring across an admirable bridge and leaning, behind, as it were, against the pedestal of rock on which the dark castle masses itself. The town is so small, the pedestal so big and the castle so high and striking, that the clustered houses at the base of the rock are like the crumbs that have fallen from a well-laden table. You pass among them, however, to ascend by a circuit to the château, which you attack, obliquely, from behind. It is the property of the Comte de Paris, another pretender to the French throne; having come

to him remotely, by inheritance, from his ancestor, the Duc de Penthièvre, who toward the close of the last century bought it from the Crown, which had recovered it after a lapse. Like the castle of Blois, it has been injured and defaced by base uses, but, unlike the castle of Blois, it has not been completely restored. "It is very, very dirty, but very curious"—it is in these terms that I heard it described by an English lady who was generally to be found engaged upon a tattered Tauchnitz in the little *salon de lecture* of the hotel at Tours. The description is not inaccurate; but it should be said that if part of the dirtiness of Amboise is the result of its having served for years as a barrack and as a prison, part of it comes from the presence of restoring stonemasons, who have woven over a considerable portion of it a mask of scaffolding. There is a good deal of neatness as well, and the restoration of some of the parts seems finished. This process, at Amboise, consists for the most part simply of removing the vulgar excrescences of the last two centuries.

The interior is virtually a blank, the old apartments having been chopped up into small modern rooms; it will have to be completely reconstructed. A worthy woman with a military profile and that sharp, positive manner which the goodwives who show you through the châteaux of Touraine are rather apt to have, and in whose high respectability, to say nothing of the frill of her cap and the cut of her thick brown dress, my companions and I thought we discovered the particular note, or *nuance*, of Orleanism—a competent, appreciative, peremptory

person, I say—attended us through the particularly delightful hour we spent upon the ramparts of Amboise. Denuded and disfeatured within and bristling without with bricklayers' ladders, the place was yet extraordinarily impressive and interesting. I should mention that we spent a great deal of time in looking at the view. Sweet was the view, and magnificent; we preferred it so much to certain portions of the interior, and to occasional effusions of historical information, that the old lady with the profile sometimes lost patience with us. We laid ourselves open to the charge of preferring it even to the little chapel of Saint Hubert, which stands on the edge of the great terrace and has, over the portal, a wonderful sculpture of the miraculous hunt of that holy man. In the way of plastic art this elaborate scene is the gem of Amboise. It seemed to us that we had never been in a place where there are so many points of vantage to look down from. In the matter of position Amboise is certainly supreme in the list of perched places; and I say this with a proper recollection of the claims of Chaumont and of Loches—which latter, by the way (the afterthought is due), is not on the Loire. The platforms, the bastions, the terraces, the high-niched windows and balconies, the hanging gardens and dizzy crenellations, of this complicated structure, keep you in perpetual intercourse with an immense horizon. The great feature of the place is the obligatory round tower which occupies the northern end of it, and which has now been completely restored. It is of astounding size, a fortress in itself, and contains, instead of a staircase, a

wonderful inclined plane, so wide and gradual that a coach and four may be driven to the top. This colossal cylinder has to-day no visible use; but it corresponds, happily enough, with the great circle of the prospect. The gardens of Amboise, lifted high aloft, covering the irregular remnants of the platform on which the castle stands and making up in picturesqueness what they lack in extent, constitute of course but a scanty domain. But bathed, as we found them, in the autumn sunshine and doubly private from their aerial site, they offered irresistible opportunities for a stroll interrupted, as one leaned against their low parapets, by long contemplative pauses. I remember in particular a certain terrace planted with clipped limes upon which we looked down from the summit of the big tower. It seemed from that point to be absolutely necessary to one's happiness to go down and spend the rest of the morning there; it was an ideal place to walk to and fro and talk. Our venerable conductress, to whom our relation had gradually become more filial, permitted us to gratify this innocent wish—to the extent, that is, of taking a turn or two under the mossy *tilleuls*. At the end of this terrace is the low door, in a wall, against the top of which, in 1498, Charles VIII., according to an accepted tradition, knocked his head to such good purpose that he died. It was within the walls of Amboise that his widow, Anne of Brittany, already in mourning for three children, two of whom we have seen commemorated in sepulchral marble at Tours, spent the first violence of that grief which was presently dispelled by a union with her husband's

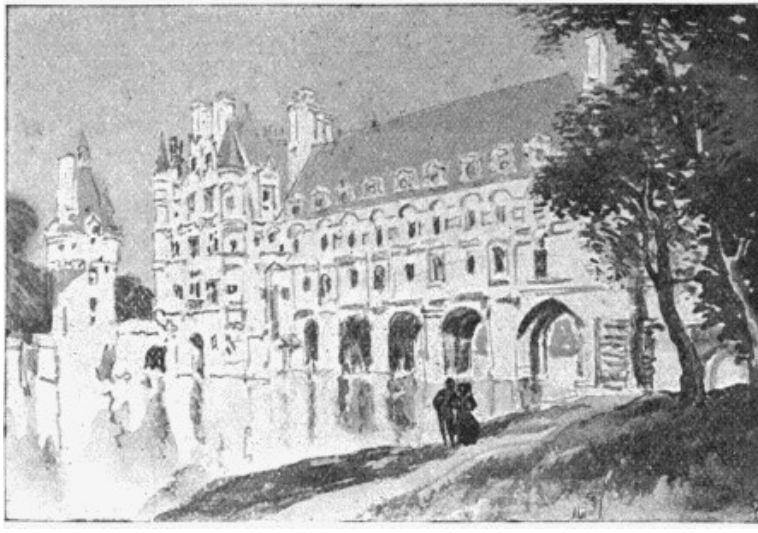
cousin and successor, Louis XII. Amboise was a frequent resort of the French Court during the sixteenth century; it was here that the young Mary Stuart spent sundry hours of her first marriage. The wars of religion have left here the ineffaceable stain which they left wherever they passed. An imaginative visitor at Amboise to-day may fancy that the traces of blood are mixed with the red rust on the crossed iron bars of the grim-looking balcony to which the heads of the Huguenots executed on the discovery of the conspiracy of La Renaudie are rumoured to have been suspended. There was room on the stout balustrade—an admirable piece of work—for a ghastly array. The same rumour represents Catherine de'Medici and the young queen as watching from this balcony the *noyades* of the captured Huguenots in the Loire. The facts of history are bad enough; the fictions are, if possible, worse; but there is little doubt that the future Queen of Scots learnt the first lessons of life at a horrible school. If in subsequent years she was a prodigy of innocence and virtue, it was not the fault of her whilom mother-in-law, of her uncles of the house of Guise, or of the examples presented to her either at the windows of the castle of Amboise or in its more private recesses.

Chaumont

It was difficult to believe in these dark deeds, however, as we looked through the golden morning at the placidity of the far-shining Loire. The ultimate consequence of this spectacle was a desire to follow the river as far as the castle of Chaumont. It is true that the cruelties practised of old at Amboise might have seemed less phantasmal to persons destined to suffer from a modern form of inhumanity. The mistress of the little inn at the base of the castle-rock—it stands very pleasantly beside the river, and we had breakfasted there—declared to us that the Château de Chaumont, which is often during the autumn closed to visitors, was at that particular moment standing so wide open to receive us that it was our duty to hire one of her carriages and drive thither with speed. This assurance was so satisfactory that we presently found ourselves seated in this wily woman's most commodious vehicle and rolling, neither too fast nor too slow, along the margin of the Loire. The drive of about an hour, beneath constant clumps of chestnuts, was charming enough to have been taken for itself; and indeed when we reached Chaumont we saw that our reward was to be simply the usual reward of virtue, the consciousness of having attempted the right. The Château de Chaumont was inexorably closed; so we learned from a talkative lodge-keeper, who gave what grace she could to her refusal. This good woman's dilemma was almost touching;

she wished to reconcile two impossibles. The castle was not to be visited, for the family of its master was staying there; and yet she was loath to turn away a party of which she was good enough to say that it had a *grand genre*; for, as she also remarked, she had her living to earn. She tried to arrange a compromise, one of the elements of which was that we should descend from our carriage and trudge up a hill which would bring us to a designated point where, over the paling of the garden, we might obtain an oblique and surreptitious view of a small portion of the castle walls. This suggestion led us to inquire (of each other) to what degree of baseness it is lawful for an enlightened lover of the picturesque to resort in order not to have a blank page in his collection. One of our trio decided characteristically against any form of derogation; so she sat in the carriage and sketched some object that was public property while her two companions, who were not so proud, trudged up a muddy ascent which formed a kind of back-stairs. It is perhaps no more than they deserved that they were disappointed. Chaumont is feudal, if you please; but the modern spirit is in possession. It forms a vast clean-scraped mass, with big round towers, ungarnished with a leaf of ivy or a patch of moss, surrounded by gardens of moderate extent (save where the muddy lane of which I speak passes near it), and looking rather like an enormously magnified villa. The great merit of Chaumont is its position, which almost exactly resembles that of Amboise; it sweeps the river up and down and seems to look over half the province. This, however, was better appreciated as, after coming

down the hill and re-entering the carriage, we drove across the long suspension-bridge which crosses the Loire just beyond the village and over which we made our way to the small station of Onzain, at the farther end, to take the train back to Tours. Look back from the middle of this bridge; the whole picture composes, as the painters say. The towers, the pinnacles, the fair front of the château, perched above its fringe of garden and the rusty roofs of the village and facing the afternoon sky, which is reflected also in the great stream that sweeps below, all this makes a contribution to your happiest memories of Touraine.



Chapter vii

Chenonceaux

WE never went to Chinon; it was a fatality. We planned it a dozen times; but the weather interfered, or the trains didn't suit, or one of the party was fatigued with the adventures of the day before. This excursion was so much postponed that it was finally postponed to everything. Besides, we had to go to Chenonceaux, to Azay-le-Rideau, to Langeais, to Loches. So I have not the memory of Chinon; I have only the regret. But regret, as well as memory, has its visions; especially when, like memory, it is assisted by photographs. The castle of Chinon in this form appears to me as an enormous ruin, a mediæval fortress of the extent almost of a city. It covers a hill above the Vienne, and after being impregnable in its time is indestructible to-day. (I risk this phrase in the face of the prosaic truth. Chinon, in the days when it was a prize, more than once suffered capture, and at present it is crumbling inch by inch. It is apparent, however, I believe, that these inches encroach little upon acres of masonry.) It was in the castle that Jeanne Dare had her first interview with Charles VII., and it is in the town that François Rabelais is supposed to have been born. To the castle, moreover, the lover of

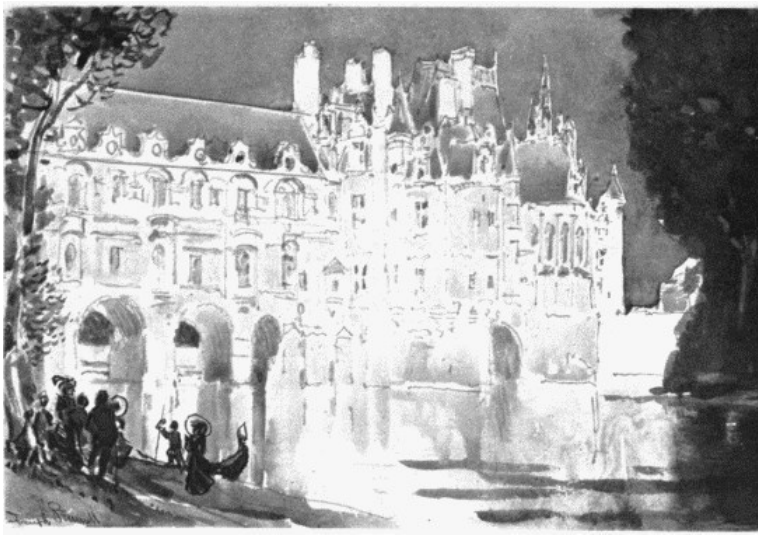
the picturesque is earnestly recommended to direct his steps. But one always misses something, and I would rather have missed Chinon than Chenonceaux. Fortunate exceedingly were the few hours we passed on the spot on which we missed nothing.

"In 1747," says Jean-Jacques Rousseau in his "Confessions," "we went to spend the autumn in Touraine, at the Château of Chenonceaux, a royal residence upon the Cher, built by Henry II. for Diana of Poitiers, whose initials are still to be seen there, and now in possession of M. Dupin, the farmer-general. We amused ourselves greatly at this fine place; the living was of the best, and I became as fat as a monk. We made a great deal of music and acted comedies."

This is the only description that Rousseau gives of one of the most romantic houses in France and of an episode that must have counted as one of the most agreeable in his uncomfortable career. The eighteenth century contented itself with general epithets; and when Jean-Jacques has said that Chenonceaux was a "beau lieu," he thinks himself absolved from further characterisation. We later sons of time have, both for our pleasure and our pain, invented the fashion of special terms, and I am afraid that even common decency obliges me to pay some larger tribute than this to the architectural gem of Touraine. Fortunately I can discharge my debt with gratitude. In going from Tours you leave the valley of the Loire and enter that of the Cher, and at the end of about an hour you see the turrets of the castle on your right, among the trees, down in the meadows, beside the quiet little river.

The station and the village are about ten minutes' walk from the château, and the village contains a very tidy inn, where, if you are not in too great a hurry to commune with the shades of the royal favourite and the jealous queen, you will perhaps stop and order a dinner to be ready for you in the evening. A straight, tall avenue leads to the grounds of the castle; what I owe to exactitude compels me to add that it is crossed by the railway-line. The place is so arranged, however, that the château need know nothing of passing trains—which pass, indeed, though the grounds are not large, at a very sufficient distance. I may add that the trains throughout this part of France have a noiseless, desultory, dawdling, almost stationary quality, which makes them less of an offence than usual. It was a Sunday afternoon and the light was yellow save under the trees of the avenue, where, in spite of the waning of September, it was duskily green. Three or four peasants, in festal attire, were strolling about. On a bench at the beginning of the avenue sat a man with two women. As I advanced with my companions he rose, after a sudden stare, and approached me with a smile in which (to be Johnsonian for a moment) certitude was mitigated by modesty and eagerness was embellished with respect. He came toward me with a salutation that I had seen before, and I am happy to say that after an instant I ceased to be guilty of the brutality of not knowing where. There was only one place in the world where people smile like that, only one place where the art of salutation has that perfect grace. This excellent creature used to crook his arm, in Venice,

when I stepped into my gondola; and I now laid my hand on that member with the familiarity of glad recognition; for it was only surprise that had kept me even for a moment from accepting the genial Francesco as an ornament of the landscape of Touraine. What on earth—the phrase is the right one—was a Venetian gondolier doing at Chenonceaux? He had been brought from Venice, gondola and all, by the mistress of the charming house, to paddle about on the Cher. Our meeting was affectionate, though there was a kind of violence in seeing him so far from home. He was too well dressed, too well fed; he had grown stout, and his nose had the tinge of good claret. He remarked that the life of the household to which he had the honour to belong was that of a *casa regia*; which must have been a great change for poor Checco, whose habits in Venice were not regal. However, he was the sympathetic Checco still; and for five minutes after I left him I thought less about the little pleasure-house by the Cher than about the palaces of the Adriatic.



But attention was not long in coming round to the charming structure that presently rose before us. The pale yellow front of the château, the small scale of which is at first a surprise, rises beyond a considerable court, at the entrance of which a massive and detached round tower, with a turret on its brow (a relic of the building that preceded the actual villa), appears to keep guard. This court is not enclosed—or is enclosed at least only by the gardens, portions of which are at present in process of radical readjustment. Therefore, though Chenonceaux has no great height, its delicate façade stands up boldly enough. This façade, one of the most finished things in Touraine, consists of two

storeys, surmounted by an attic which, as so often in the buildings of the French Renaissance, is the richest part of the house. The high-pitched roof contains three windows of beautiful design, covered with embroidered caps and flowering into crocketed spires. The window above the door is deeply niched; it opens upon a balcony made in the form of a double pulpit—one of the most charming features of the front. Chenonceaux is not large, as I say, but into its delicate compass is packed a great deal of history—history which differs from that of Amboise and Blois in being of the private and sentimental kind. The echoes of the place, faint and far as they are to-day, are not political, but personal. Chenonceaux dates, as a residence, from the year 1515, when the shrewd Thomas Bohier, a public functionary who had grown rich in handling the finances of Normandy and had acquired the estate from a family which, after giving it many feudal lords, had fallen into poverty, erected the present structure on the foundations of an old mill. The design is attributed, with I know not what justice, to Pierre Nepveu, *alias* Trinqueau, the audacious architect of Chambord. On the death of Bohier the house passed to his son, who, however, was forced, under cruel pressure, to surrender it to the Crown in compensation for a so-called deficit in the official accounts of this rash parent and predecessor. Francis I. held the place till his death; but Henry II., on ascending the throne, presented it out of hand to that mature charmer, the admired of two generations, Diana of Poitiers. Diana enjoyed it till the death of her protector; but when this

event occurred the widow of the monarch, who had been obliged to submit in silence, for years, to the ascendency of a rival, took the most pardonable of all the revenges with which the name of Catherine de'Medici is associated and turned her out of doors. Diana was not in want of refuges, Catherine went through the form of giving her Chaumont in exchange; but there was only one Chenonceaux. Catherine devoted herself to making the place more completely unique. The feature that renders it sole of its kind is not appreciated till you wander round to either side of the house. If a certain springing lightness is the characteristic of Chenonceaux, if it bears in every line the aspect of a place of recreation—a place intended for delicate, chosen pleasures—nothing can confirm this expression better than the strange, unexpected movement with which, from behind, it carries itself across the river. The earlier building stands in the water; it had inherited the foundations of the mill destroyed by Thomas Bohier. The first step therefore had been taken upon solid piles of masonry; and the ingenious Catherine—she was a *raffinée*—simply proceeded to take the others. She continued the piles to the opposite bank of the Cher, and over them she threw a long, straight gallery of two tiers. This part of the château, which mainly resembles a house built upon a bridge and occupying its entire length, is of course the great curiosity of Chenonceaux. It forms on each floor a charming corridor, which, within, is illuminated from either side by the flickering river-light. The architecture of these galleries, seen from without, is less elegant

than that of the main building, but the aspect of the whole thing is delightful. I have spoken of Chenonceaux as a "villa," using the word advisedly, for the place is neither a castle nor a palace. It is a very exceptional villa, but it has the villa-quality—the look of being intended for life in common. This look is not at all contradicted by the wing across the Cher, which only suggests indoor perspectives and intimate pleasures—walks in pairs on rainy days; games and dances on autumn nights; together with as much as may be of moonlighted dialogue (or silence) in the course of evenings more genial still, in the well-marked recesses of windows.

It Chenonceaux is safe to say that such things took place there in the last century, during the kindly reign of Monsieur and Madame Dupin. This period presents itself as the happiest in the annals of Chenonceaux. I know not what festive train the great Diana may have led, and my imagination, I am afraid, is only feebly kindled by the records of the luxurious pastimes organised on the banks of the Cher by that terrible daughter of the Medici whose appreciation of the good things of life was perfectly consistent with a failure to perceive why others should live to enjoy them. The best society that ever assembled there was collected at Chenonceaux during the middle of the eighteenth century. This was surely, in France at least, the age of good society, the period when the "right people" made every haste to be born in time. Such people must of course have belonged to the fortunate few—not to the miserable many; for

if a society be large enough to be good, it must also be small enough. The sixty years that preceded the Revolution were the golden age of fireside talk and of those amenities that proceed from the presence of women in whom the social art is both instinctive and acquired. The women of that period were, above all, good company; the fact is attested in a thousand documents. Chenonceaux offered a perfect setting to free conversation; and infinite joyous discourse must have mingled with the liquid murmur of the Cher. Claude Dupin was not only a great man of business, but a man of honour and a patron of knowledge; and his wife was gracious, clever, and wise. They had acquired this famous property by purchase (from one of the Bourbons, as Chenonceaux, for two centuries after the death of Catherine de'Medici, remained constantly in princely hands), and it was transmitted to their son, Dupin de Francueil, grandfather of Madame George Sand. This lady, in her Correspondence, lately published, describes a visit that she paid more than thirty years ago to those members of her family who were still in possession. The owner of Chenonceaux to-day[1] is the daughter of an Englishman naturalised in France. But I have wandered far from my story, which is simply a sketch of the surface of the place. Seen obliquely, from either side, in combination with its bridge and gallery, the structure is singular and fantastic, a striking example of a wilful and capricious conception. Unfortunately all caprices are not so graceful and successful, and I grudge the

[1] 1884.

honour of this one to the false and blood-polluted Catherine. (To be exact, I believe the arches of the bridge were laid by the elderly Diana. It was Catherine, however, who completed the monument.) Within, the house has been, as usual, restored. The staircases and ceilings, in all the old royal residences of this part of France, are the parts that have suffered least; many of them have still much of the life of the old time about them. Some of the chambers of Chenonceaux, however, encumbered as they are with modern detail, derive a sufficiently haunted and suggestive look from the deep setting of their beautiful windows, which thickens the shadows and makes dark corners. There is a charming little Gothic chapel, with its apse hanging over the water, fastened to the left flank of the house. Some of the upper balconies, which look along the outer face of the gallery and either up or down the river, are delightful protected nooks. We walked through the lower gallery to the other bank of the Cher; this fine apartment appeared to be for the moment a purgatory of ancient furniture. It terminates rather abruptly; it simply stops, with a blank wall. There ought, of course, to have been a pavilion here, though I prefer very much the old defect to any modern remedy. The wall is not so blank, however, but that it contains a door which opens on a rusty drawbridge. This drawbridge traverses the small gap which divides the end of the gallery from the bank of the stream. The house, therefore, does not literally rest on opposite edges of the Cher, but rests on one and just fails to rest on the other. The pavilion would have made that up;

but after a moment we ceased to miss this imaginary feature. We passed the little drawbridge, and wandered awhile beside the river. From this opposite bank the mass of the château looked more charming than ever; and the little peaceful, lazy Cher, where two or three men were fishing in the eventide, flowed under the clear arches and between the solid pedestals of the part that spanned it, with the softest, vaguest light on its bosom. This was the right perspective; we were looking across the river of time. The whole scene was deliciously mild. The moon came up; we passed back through the gallery and strolled about a little longer in the gardens. It was very still. I met my old gondolier in the twilight. He showed me his gondola, but I hated, somehow, to see it there. I don't like, as the French say, to *mêler les genres*

Конец ознакомительного фрагмента.