Gustave Flaubert and Maxime du Camp

By Field and Shore: Brittany
(‘Par Les Champs et Par Les Grèves : Bretagne’, 1847)

Published with lithographs by Adolphe Bayot (French, 1810–1871), Félix Benoist (French, 1818–1896), Eugène Cicéri (French, 1813–1890), Léon Gaucherel (French, 1816–1886) and Auguste Mayer (French, 1805–1890), generously made available by the Musée de Bretagne



‘The Château de Vitré from the Road to Rennes’
Félix Benoist （French，1818–1896）

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Editor's Introduction

When the Atlantic Britons abandoned the south-west coast of Britain for Armorica amid the chaotic collapse of Roman rule, they arrived as much in homecoming as in flight.

What is now north-west France had long formed part of the ancient Celtic world. The broken granite coastline, with its pungent aroma of rock samphire, and windswept fields dotted with the dolmens of a departed people, would have seemed as familiar to them as their own Dumnonia, the kingdom once encompassing Devon and Cornwall.

With them they brought the nascent seeds of Arthurian legend, formed in the turbulent world of post-Roman Britain and its conflicts with the Anglo-Saxons. To this day you can visit Tintagel, legendary birthplace of Arthur, on the Cornish coastline, but may still find Merlin's enchanted forest of Brocéliande enfolding the Abbey of Paimpont near Rennes.

Brittany, with ancient Armorica still echoed in the name of its northern Côtes-d'Armor, remains a favourite destination for British exiles joining the continent, this editor included. It is hence with great pleasure that we present A. S. Kline's translation of Flaubert's and Du Camp's 1847 tour of mid-nineteenth-century Brittany, *Par Les Champs et Par Les Grèves*, 1847.

Whilst almost 180 years have now passed, many of the places visited remain remarkably unchanged. Roads are paved with tarmac, and a high-speed rail line bisects the fields travelled by the two authors, but present-day vistas would remain instantly familiar to them.

The Museum of Brittany at Les Champs Libres in Rennes has generously made available mid-nineteenth-century lithographs by the contemporary French artists Adolphe Bayot, Félix Benoist, Eugène Cicéri, Léon Gaucherel and Auguste Mayer. These have been used liberally to illustrate the work, so that Brittany may be seen much as it was through the eyes of Flaubert and Du Camp.

It will be evident to anyone familiar with Brittany that the intervening years have evolved the means of travel far more than they have the landscape travelled.



'Vitré: General View'
Eugène Cicéri (French, 1813–1890) - Recoloured



'Vitré: General View'
Photograph by A. D. Kline

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Part I, Chapters I-III

Translator's Introduction

In 1847 Gustave Flaubert undertook a walking trip, accompanied by his friend Maxime du Camp, which was partly a literary pilgrimage motivated by admiration for François-René de Châteaubriand, the father of French Romanticism. They travelled through north-west Brittany from May to July, taking in Saint-Malo, Châteaubriand's birthplace and the site of his tomb, and co-produced an account of the trip. They produced alternate chapters, with Du Camp 'developing' his contributions, from a combination perhaps of his own notes and those of Flaubert. The precise method, and the extent of Du Camp's personal contribution, is unclear. The result of their efforts is usually included in Flaubert's collected works.



'Map of Brittany'
Félix Benoist (French, 1818–1896)

Between 1849 and 1851, Du Camp and Flaubert, who maintained a close and lasting friendship, again travelled together, to North Africa, primarily Egypt. Du Camp returned with the first comprehensive photographic studies of Egyptian and other antiquities, and is regarded as a

major pioneer of travel photography. Flaubert's notes and correspondence from the trip are of literary and historical interest.

This enhanced translation has been designed to offer maximum compatibility with current search engines. Among other modifications, the proper names of people and places, and the titles given to works of art, have been fully researched, modernised, and expanded; comments in parentheses have been added here and there to provide a reference, or clarify meaning; and minor typographic or factual errors, for example incorrect attributions and dates, in the original text, have been eliminated from this new translation.

Since there has been occasional confusion as to the year of their trip, note that the year 1847 is directly mentioned in the text, while each day of the week attributed to a given date in the month always matches the correct day of the week for that date in 1847, and not the preceding or following year.

You may view a map of all locations on Flaubert and Du Camp's route, provided by uMap (open map).

Chapter I: (Flaubert: The Loire Valley, from Orléans to Tours

It was on May 1st, 1847, at eight-thirty in the morning, that we two 'monads' (*'individuals': in the philosophy of Leibniz; simple, indivisible entities*) who have in combination served, subsequently, to smear ink on paper, left Paris with the aim of breathing more freely amidst the heather and broom, or beside the waves on wide sandy shores.

We had no other ambition than to seek a corner of pure sky, flecked with swirling clouds, or to discover on the far side of some pale stony cliff, sited between river and hill, and hidden by holly and oak trees, one of those impoverished little villages such as one still encounters here and there, with its wooden houses, vines climbing the walls, laundry drying on the hedges, and cows drinking at the watering trough.

Later, perhaps, we might make lengthy journeys to far-off places, on camel-back astride Turkish saddles, or beneath canopies borne by elephants; later, perchance, we might hear the sound of Andalusian mule-bells, or pursue dreamy wanderings in the Marennes (*the coastal area opposite the Isle d'Oléron),* in melancholy regions rising, amidst the vapours of twilight, on the distant horizon, where those events occur that we read of in old books; but for now, without leaving for too long the corner of our hearth, abandoning our pipes and daydreams to be found later still warm, and without the poignant wrench involved in a major departure, with knapsack on back and iron-shod shoes on our feet, smoke still emerging from our lips, and fantasies in our heads, we were off to traverse the fields, sleep at inns in vast four-poster beds, listen to the birds beneath the trees in the rain, and gaze, on Sundays, at the peasant women in the church porches, issuing from Mass, dressed in large white bonnets and wide red skirts, and… what else?… To bronze our skin, that's certain, and acquire lice, possibly!

This project is what led two beings endowed with reason (the definition of a human being in all the books) to each spend seven months meditating on the form, design, colour, size, and

harmonious arrangement of the following objects, namely: a grey felt hat; a horse dealer's stick, obtained expressly from Lisieux (*in Normandy*); a pair of sturdy shoes (in white leather, with crocodile-tooth studs); *ditto* in patent leather, and varnished (in case of diplomatic visits, if any were to be made, or parading about in Paphos, if by chance the geese of divine Venus bore us there in that goddess's chariot); a pair of leather gaiters, suitable to accompany heavy shoes; *ditto* in canvas form, to protect our socks from dust on patent leather shoe days; a canvas jacket (that of a stylish stable boy); canvas trousers, disproportionately wide to be tucked into the gaiters; a canvas vest, whose elegant cut redeemed the vulgarity of the fabric, and a repetition of that same costume in cloth.

In addition, a pocket knife, two gourds, a wooden pipe, three headscarves, and whatever a European needs for his daily ablutions, and you have the accoutrements with which we approached Brittany, and by which we swore for a few weeks, in rain and sunlight. Never was a ball gown created with more tenderness, that is for certain, or worn with more aplomb.

The cannon thundered to celebrate King Louis-Philippe's name day, the National Guardsmen were preparing to raise their chins above their collars, and the lamplighters on the civil list were preparing their tallow for the evening's solemnities, when, after saying goodbye to our two friends 'Fritz' (*Gérard de Nerval*) and Louis (*Louis Bouilhet*), we boarded our railway-carriage; the door was closed, the iron beast snorted like a prancing horse, and we departed.

In past ages, when one travelled from one place to another, whether by carriage or boat, one had time to look about and undergo adventures; a journey from Rouen to Paris would provide enough material for a book. I know of people who, in their youth, took three days to complete the journey: they would spend the first night at Pont-de-l'Arche; the second, at Meulan-en-Yvelines; and considered themselves fortunate if, on the third day, they arrived in Paris in time for supper. One may read in an old itinerary of France published towards the end of Henry IV's reign: 'To travel from Rouen to Dieppe, there is a stagecoach which leaves three times a week; the journey takes a day; dinner is eaten at Tôtes, where there is a stay of three hours.'

The men, who are now playing at being policemen, and the women hosting dinner parties in the garden, will only know through the mouths of tradition what stagecoach travel was like, the driver in an astrakhan-trimmed jacket and the postilions, in their smocks, emitting loud cries from their perches; they will hear of the rotunda and the imperial, of post-houses where muddy, steaming horses were hitched, upon arrival, to iron rings in the wall, and feel free to imagine nights spent in old-fashioned inns, confusion as regards the beds, candles blown out in the corridors, the clamour of the maids, the innkeeper's oaths, and the cries of the hostess. Where are they now those carriages deep in the mud, those grand ladies in frills who tumbled into puddles on their way to their châteaux? Doesn't that single phrase, 'the Auxerre coach', make us think of Monsieur de Pourceaugnac (*see Molière's play of that name, a comedy-ballet, 1699*) arriving in Paris in his short breeches, his clothes from a bygone era, speaking in his Limousin accent? Would we have the charming pages of Chapelle and Bachaumont (*the17th-century French writers, Claude-Emmanuel Luillier, known as La Chapelle, and François Le Coigneux de Bachaumont. Their 1654 collaboration, the 'Voyage de Messieurs Bachaumont et La Chapelle', became a model for literary works of travel*) if, instead of travelling from province to province in heavy carriages owned by their friends, the governors and farmers, they had journeyed by rail or in a steamboat?

All we noted, therefore, between Paris and Blois, was that the journey, however brief it may have been, was still far too long, irritated as we were by the arid mode of transport and quite bored, moreover, by the company of two grain merchants, great talkers, loud in their laughter, men who were no doubt wealthy, and seemed very pleased with themselves. One, wearing a medal, who was jovial, stout, fat, with thick lips, a strong neck, and a coarse powerful voice, represented the bold hoarder, the wholesale speculator, the mayor of his town, who will be deputy of his city and later a minister just like any other, while his neighbour, a small, lean fellow with a wrinkled face, sunken mouth, and protruding nose, who tossed samples of wheat up and down in the palm of his hand with an unspeakable smile of satisfaction and malice, looked more like the rapacious, covert sort of merchant, the stubborn tradesman, who sucks the empty bag from which he has poured its coins, the ferocious fellow who loves money for money's sake and is enamoured of trade for trade's sake; a common breed today, folk who aspire to own vineyards but never drink the wine! Also, next to us, sat a poor, sick, lame Englishman, who seemed to me to be eaten away by a metal other than silver (*undergoing the mercury treatment*); his little girl, with an ugly face but already a mature expression like that of a child that lacks its mother, was reading a vaudeville book from the Palais-Royal, or the Gymnase, so as to achieve fluency in the French language, and learn all about French customs and good taste.

At Orléans we had sight of Monsieur Berryer (*Pierre Antoine Berryer, a prominent lawyer and politician who defended members of the House of Orléans*) who, seated at the refreshment stand, was filling his broad stomach, and who took us to be two pleasant young men belonging to some administration or other: the only difference between us being, in his eyes, that between an idiot and a fool, a null and a void.

The memory of Victor Hugo's youth, spent in Blois, occupied our thoughts as soon as we entered the town; walking through its silent, winding streets we reflected on the fact that he too had walked there some twenty years ago, gazing like us at the houses, seeking one in which to place his Marion de Lorme (*the seventeenth century courtesan, see Hugo's play of that name*, *1828*), and we questioned the atmosphere, the trees, the walls, seeking that indefinable something, individual and lasting, which defines a place, and constitutes its colour, and its soul, to explain the secret of that great man's first literary flowering, in the untitled pieces of his first poetry collections, where the stanzas overflow, like the tendrils of hanging vines, metaphors bloom like suns, and the verse quivers with multiple rhythms, and endless harmonies. How many ideas that became works of art, how many dreams that became marble sculptures, blossomed at the corner of a wall, on the banks of the Loire, beneath a tree, in the morning dew, in the drops of grass, or on summer evenings, those beautiful evenings ardent and sad like first love, when the sky is streaked with long bands of cloud, and swarms of midges whirl in the air like golden wheels!

Is that why Blois charmed me so? For that matter, is there not a wide avenue of elms, near the landing stage, with spreading, bushy foliage, the sturdy branches rising from below, as if designed expressly to hang bagpipes there? True eighteenth-century elms, broad-spreading enough for folk to dance beneath them, to the sound of the fiddle, the player, perched on a barrel, keeping time to the beat of his foot, while tunics fluttered in the wind, powdered curls came undone, and lads clutched at the waists of young girls who laughed in terror, and swooned with pleasure.

The streets of Blois are empty, grass grows between the paving stones; on both sides stretches of long grey wall enclose large gardens, pierced by a few small, discreet gates that seem designed

to open only at night to some mysterious visitor. One senses that each day must surely pass in the same way, that the streets must remain forever deserted, amidst this same calm monotony, gentle yet as sweet as the chimes of the church clock, filled with savoury melancholy and moving languor. Those peaceful dwellings tempt one to dream of some profound and intimate story, some morbid passion that lasts till ended by death, the ceaseless love of some devout spinster, or virtuous widow; one involuntarily places there, as if in her proper setting, a pale beauty with long delicate fingers, an aristocratic lady with cold manners, married to a boor, a miser, a jealous fellow dying of some chest ailment.

These reflections, which I recalled later, in Amboise, Chinon and other towns of Touraine, made me wonder if Honoré de Balzac, who is from the area, drew his heroines from there, whether it was here, in fact, that he discovered '*The Woman of Thirty*' (*see Balzac's novel, of 1842*), that immortal creation, unknown to antiquity like the Christianity to which it belongs; a creation which I value more than all the products of modern industry except for chemical matches, and the cold chicken fricassee at Tortoni's (*the Café Tortoni, on Boulevard des Italiens in Paris*).

To exhume, from what was discarded as unusable, new literary expressions of plasticity and feeling, to discover a new continent of Love's planet, and to summon to its exploitation thousands of beings who found themselves previously rejected, is this not a spiritual and sublime achievement? To extend the sphere of one sex, is that not almost to invent another? And what enthusiasm it evoked, akin to the discovery of America: instead of workless waggoners, and bankrupts, hastening there to make their fortune, a host of desperate feelings, and vigorous decadent impulses rushed ardently upon this great find: *The Woman of Thirty*; there was infatuation with the work initially, then an opposite reaction, but readers will return to it later as to everything that is true and good, as the world did to Galileo's science, and long vests; they will see what they have only glimpsed, they will probe what they have only touched upon, the mine is still new, the vein runs deep; introduced to a new world by this first work, there are others, which will follow, that only require a great moralist, a great artist to be brought to light, such as that of the *lyrical breast*, whose full importance and accuracy were so well revealed to me by my illustrious friend, the sculptor, James Pradier.

As for my earlier comment, the influence of places on books, and for that matter of books on places, is somewhat like asking which came first, the chicken or the egg? Did Balzac's books cause me to think about what happens in the streets of Blois, or did what happens there inspire the books? Who, whether mankind or some god, arranged things as we see them?

Venturing into one of those deserted streets, at the end of which, by an ironic twist of fate, hung a milliner's sign, painted in red, we stumbled into a narrow alley leading to a kind of dead end containing the apse of the Church of Saint-Nicolas. It was a gloomy, slightly-tainted corner, as if filled with bitumen; everything was black, the stone paving, the very colour of the air; it presented the harsh, austere aspect of a priest's robe, though beautiful in its nakedness, rawness, brutality. In the square, in front of the portal, in broad sunlight, masons were hewing stones; while the cheerful yellow hues of large wild roses, clinging to the corners of the Romanesque capitals, contrasted with the sombre colour of the old building, as they fluttering playfully in the air. They seemed to exist there simply to show how pretty they were.

The Château de Blois — To the north, the château, with its formidable walls, features a charming double-arched gallery; this was the chamber of Henry III. Next to it is his oratory, a

coincidence which is nothing unusual in itself, but is striking here, given his soul in which voluptuousness was sharpened by religion, and cruelty incited by fear. Having passed beneath a curved arch, and traversed a square, we entered the inner courtyard of the castle. All was joyous: the garrison had been granted a bottle of wine per man, and the soldiers bearing jugs full of a bluish liquid were preparing to drink it to the health of the monarch whose name day had caused this treat. The castle courtyard is a regular square. The inner façade beneath which one enters, dating from the reign of Louis XII, has only one story, with a gallery supported by short columns, covered with lozenges, and adorned throughout with the *cordelière* of Queen Anne and the ermines of Brittany; the left (*southern*) side, of slightly earlier date, is unfinished; it is more restrained in ornamentation, more austere, more reminiscent of the Middle Ages. Opposite, a foolish building, constructed by Louis XIV, of collegiate classicism and austere taste, that is, poor taste, clashes detestably; but beside it the beautiful architecture of the sixteenth century bursts forth in all its splendour, the architecture of that golden age before the invasion of the Attic pilaster, before the Renaissance lapsed into the debased Greek style espoused by Marie de Medici. Attached to this building is the most exquisite spiral staircase in the world, in open stonework, chiselled with a lively hand, pierced like the high ruffs of the grand ladies who, for three hundred years, ascended its steps. On the ground floor, we saw the hall in which the Estates General of 1588 were held. A certain Gascon gentleman attended the proceedings, sent there to represent the nobility of Bordeaux; I imagine he took little part in the discussions that resounded beneath those wooden vaults. Seated apart, in his elegant black suit, and toying with the cane he always carried, he was no doubt mulling over some passage from Sallust or some verse from Lucan that his present circumstance brought to mind. Passionless amidst all those howling passions, lacking belief amidst a crowd possessed by violent convictions, he was a symbol of what endures alongside all that passes: his name was Michel de Montaigne.

Outside the castle, on a platform which overlooks the entire town, the Loire River lined with poplars, and the surrounding countryside rising towards the skyline in slow, imperceptible stages, I viewed a turret used to store the garrison's gunpowder: this was where Cosimo Ruggieri, Henry III's astrologer, lived. Laundry hung above the esplanade, the lines on which the concierge's shirts were drying zigzagging in all directions; the sentry who was guarding the powder-magazine door had placed his rifle against it, he was balancing the weapon seeking equilibrium, and playing at snapping the spring that held the cover to the flash pan in place, while waiting to be relieved from duty.

Illustrious guests have slept beneath those walls: Valentina Visconti of Milan, Isabeau of Bavaria, Anne of Brittany, Charles VIII, Louis XII, François I, Claude of France, Henri III, Catherine and Marie de Medici, and the De Guise family who shed their blood there; it flowed in this very spot. In vain the eye still searches for it on the floor, among the Damascus plums (*damsons*) that 'Le Balafré' (*Henri I, Duc de Guise, nicknamed Le Balafré, or Scarface, assassinated there by the Royal Guards in 1588*) had scattered in the guardroom nearby, saying: 'Who wants some'; the staircase by which he descended to the king's chamber has been blocked, there is nothing to see, yet one still gazes.

After serving as the setting for the weddings of the Duke of Alençon and Marguerite of Anjou, for those of Henry IV and Marguerite de Valois, and for the bloody tragedies of the Guise family, the Château de Blois received yet other unfortunates: Marie de Medici was imprisoned there and

escaped through a window that is still shown to visitors; in 1716, Marie Casimir, Queen of Poland, resided there; in 1814, Marie-Louise (*of Austria, Napoleon's wife*) took refuge there after the capture of Paris; today the locals smoke their pipes and sing bawdy songs about her; the blood has been washed away, the sound of sarabands and minuets has vanished along with the laughter of the page-boys and the rustling of long-tailed coats. What remains of what history tells? And of all that it does not? What one desires to know, left unanswered by the ancient wainscoting, the silent old portraits that return one's gaze, and the empty, yawning tombs, are the secrets they keep to themselves, and whisper to each other in solitude. The beauty of history, like that of the sea, is in the way that it erases all in the flowing tide. The next wave erases from the sand all trace of its predecessor, leaving one with the knowledge that the last existed and another will follow; is that all the poetry, the only moral perhaps, that history can offer?

The next day we visited a château in even greater ruin: I speak of Chambord. After going astray in the dull countryside surrounding it, we finally arrived via a long, sandy path through a meagre stretch of woodland, the property of a penniless landowner who consequently fells his trees prematurely. The château has neither garden nor park, not a single shrub, nor flower to adorn it; its façade faces a large square of sparse grass, at the foot of which flows a little river (*the Cosson*). When we entered, a young dog began barking; the rain fell, water was running down the roofs and through the broken windows. We were shown into the gatekeeper's quarters, where, while waiting for his housekeeper who serves as caretaker to return from Mass, we perused the visitors' book.

It is filled with Legitimist grievances, lamentations over the master and the house, wishes for the return of that august exile, etc. A certain Abbot Sam…, chaplain of the presbytery of X…, has written this magnificent verse:

'One can be lame without ceasing to be upright'. A bolder, anonymous individual has produced this variant: 'One can be exiled without ceasing to be king.' Someone, no doubt full of indignation, has written in the middle of the book: 'Oh, madness!' But what struck us most were the names: 'Louise and Alfred,' lost among the Marquises, Counts, and Knights of Saint Louis, the sons of the victims of Quiberon (*the battle, in 1759*), the pilgrims of Belgrave Square (*in London, where Henri, Count of Chambord, the legitimist pretender to the throne held court in 1843*), and all that rabble of ersatz nobility who feed, like the Romanticism of the lawyer and historian Louis de Marchangy, on the eternal poetry of turrets, damsels, palfreys, the fleurs-de-lis on the oriflamme of Saint Louis, white plumes, divine right, and a host of other equally innocent nonsense. Amidst so many tearful grimaces, and arrogant pretensions, the names of those two unknown people struck us as possessing something about them which was simple, innocent, and in better taste than all the rest of the entries.

The Château de Chambord — We strolled the empty galleries, and through the abandoned rooms where spiders spread their webs over the salamanders, emblems of François I. It is not wholly ruined, despite its heaps of blackened and greenish debris, its adornment of coquettish wildflowers, and its curtains of vegetation undulating in the wind like shreds of damask. On the contrary, it merely exists in shameful poverty, a poverty that brushes its threadbare garments, and makes a decent attempt to repair the damage. The parquet floor is being repaired in this room, while being left to rot in that. Everywhere you sense a sterile effort to preserve what is dying, and recall what has fled. A strange idea! The result of the former is sad, the latter unsatisfactory.

And then, it seems as if everything has conspired to bring shame upon poor Chambord, which was designed by Francesco Primaticcio, and sculpted and chiselled by Germain Pilon and Jean Cousin. Built by François I, upon his return from Spain after the humiliating Treaty of Madrid (*1526*), it was a monument to Pride, seeking to stupefy itself, and atone for its defeats. Gaston d'Orléans, the vanquished pretender was exiled there (*in 1652*). Louis XIV increased the number of stories from one to three, thus spoiling the effect of the admirable double staircase that soared in a single sweep, like a spiral, from the ground to the top. And Molière first performed '*Le Bourgeois Gentilhomme*' there (*in 1670*), on the second floor of the side facing the façade, beneath the beautiful ceiling covered with salamanders and painted ornaments whose colours are fading. It was then given to Marshal Maurice de Saxe (*in 1745*); it was handed over to the Polignacs; it was granted to a simple soldier, Louis Berthier (*by Napoleon, in 1809*); it was bought back by subscription, and given to the Duke of Bordeaux. It was gifted to everyone, as if none wanted it nor could keep it. It seems never to have been fully-utilised, and always to have been too large. It is like an abandoned inn in which travellers have failed even to leave their names on the walls. I saw only one piece of furniture there, a child's toy: a model artillery park donated by Colonel Langlois (*Jean-Charles Langlois, the soldier and artist*) to the Duke of Bordeaux, and carefully preserved under linen covers.

Walking along an exterior gallery towards the Orleans staircase to examine the caryatids meant to represent François I, Madame de Châteaubriant (*Françoise de Foix, his mistress*), and Madame d'Étampes (*Anne de Pisseleu d'Heilly, also his mistress*), and circling the famous lantern at the top of the grand staircase, we repeatedly peered over the balustrade to look down: in the courtyard, a little donkey was being suckled by its mother, rubbing against her, shaking its ears, stretching its nose, and dancing about on its hooves. This was in what used to be the main courtyard of the Château de Chambord; these are the guests now: a dog rolling in the grass, and a donkey sucking, snorting, braying, defecating, and frolicking on the threshold of kings!

The weather had softened; the rain had stopped, and a gentle evening sun was shining when we arrived in Amboise. Here again, the streets are fine provincial streets, like those of Blois: people chat in their doorways, and work outdoors; the women, almost all dark-haired, with gentle and remarkably pretty features, display delightful feminine airs, full of a voluptuous benignity. One is indeed in the rich and gentle region of Touraine, a land of good white wines, and beautiful old châteaux, watered by the Loire, the most French of all French rivers. The attitudes and gaits of the people retain something of northern calm; while a southern vivacity animates their expressive features, and smiles; and yet, despite the bastardised character which commonly results from the fusion of opposing traits, Touraine seems to me to possess a distinct originality, not particularly forceful it is true, but fine and intimate, which is neither prosaic nor poetic and might be expressed, I believe, in the following phrase, if I did not fear that it would be taken in too exalted a sense: that of *poetic prose* .

We crossed the Amboise bridge. There are two, the town occupying both banks of the river and an island in the centre, but this was the second one and the more beautiful, one of those venerable bridges, one of those ancient hump-backed, narrow, grey bridges, abraded by sunlight and water, where a procession of horsemen, passing over it for some unknown reason, to the clashing of armour, and the sounding hooves of their horses moving at a walking pace, would make a good effect, and where one equally regrets not hearing, a blind beggar, seated on the parapet, turning his hurdy-gurdy, or a gypsy-girl barefoot in the dust, shaking her tambourine, the

brief, abrupt sounds borne away amidst the noise of the water passing beneath the arches. While we were on the bridge, we saw the local National Guard appear, emerging from the promenade at the foot of the castle, returning from a review. Of the thirty or so men, five or six were wearing the uniform worn only by officers; the rest were commoners, but rare commoners indeed, in full dress with tailcoats, yellow waistcoats, and black gloves. The local dandies, it appears, affect disdain for civilian attire. I must confess, to Amboise's credit, that nowhere in the ranks did I see (though I had anticipated as much) a single child dressed as an artilleryman grasping its father's hand. Is that monstrous affectation unknown in the town, which would be a blessing? Has the fashion for such simply passed? Or is the level of wealth of its private citizens not great enough to justify the ludicrous expense? In any case, it does Amboise honour, since a child dressed as an artilleryman, and reciting military tales, represents the ultimate degree of human infamy.

The Château d'Amboise. — The château, dominating the town, which is heaped at its foot, like a pile of pebbles at the base of a cliff, has a noble and imposing fortress-like appearance, with its large, massive towers pierced by long, narrow, round-arched windows; its arcaded gallery running from side to side; and the tawny colour of its walls darkened by the plants and flowers hanging from above, like a noble plume over the bronzed brow of an old soldier. We spent a good fifteen minutes admiring and cherishing the superb left-side tower, which is brownish-yellow in places, black in others, with a profusion of wild radishes hanging from its battlements, and is, in sum, one of those 'speaking' monuments that seem alive, and detain you, wide-eyed and dreamy, before them, like those portraits whose sitters are unknown to you, yet which you come to love without knowing why. Laugh if you wish, good people; in which case that sentence was not penned for you.

We climbed to the château via a gentle slope leading to a terraced garden, which gave an extensive view of the surrounding countryside, tender green in hue; rows of poplars extended along the riverbanks; meadows ran to the horizon, their grey boundaries blurring to a hazy, bluish line, composed in a vague manner, of hilly contours. The Loire flowed through the middle of the scene, bathing islands, moistening the edges of the meadows, flowing beneath bridges, turning mills, bearing large boats roped together side by side, gliding peacefully between its banks in silvery curves, to the slow creak of the broad rudders that directed their somnolent course, while, in the distance, two tall, broad sails gleamed white in the sunlight.

Birds took flight from the tops of the towers, from the corners of the machicolations, to nest elsewhere, soaring, uttering little cries in the air, and passing onwards. A hundred feet below, we could see the pointed roofs of the city, the deserted courtyards of old mansions, and the dark tops of smoking chimneys. Leaning against the stone, in a crevice of the battlements, we watched, listened, breathed all in, enjoying the warmth of the sun, the gentle breeze, and the pleasant scents of the plants clothing the ruins. And there, without meditating on anything in particular, without reflecting on any specific thing, my reverie was filled with chainmail, supple as a leather glove, buff baldrics soaked with sweat, closed visors beneath which red eyes gleamed; with night assaults, desperate howls and cries, blazing torches lighting the walls, and battle-axes slicing through bodies; with Louis XI, with the 'War of Lovers' (*the seventh War of Religion, 1579-80 was so-called, due to the frivolity that reigned at the court of Marguerite de Valois*), and Agrippa d'Aubigné (*poet of the Protestant cause*); with the wild radishes, the birds, the beautiful glossy strands of ivy, and the naked brambles, and savouring thus, in my dreamy and nonchalant recollections that which is greatest about human

beings: the memory of them. And that which is most beautiful in Nature: her ironic invasion of human affairs, and her eternal smile.

In the garden, amidst the lilacs and clumps of shrubs, is the chapel, a jewel of sixteenth-century stonework, carved even more intricately inside than out, its openwork resembling the handle of a Chinese parasol. Above the door, is a delightful bas-relief depicting the encounter between Saint Hubert and the mystical stag bearing a crucifix between its antlers. The saint is kneeling; above, an angel hovers, about to place a crown on his cap; beside him, his horse makes a fine figure of a creature; his hounds bark, and, on a hill whose slopes and facets resemble crystals, a serpent slowly advances its flat head, at the foot of a clump of trees resembling cauliflowers. They are examples of the 'king of trees' seen in old illustrated Bibles, bare of foliage, with thick trunk and branches, yielding timber and fruit, but possessing scant greenery; a symbolic tree, a biblical and devotional tree, almost fantastical in its impossible ugliness. Not far distant, Saint Christopher bears Jesus on his shoulders, and Saint Anthony is seen in his cell, built on a rock; his pig returns to its cave; only its rump and trumpet-shaped tail are visible, while near it a hare pokes its ears out of a cave in the hill.

This bas-relief is admittedly a bit heavy in style, nor is it entirely precise in its execution, but the work, with its animal portraits, is imbued with so much life and movement, so much kindliness and sound faith in the details, that one would give a great deal to take it home with one. It is worth more than those medieval-style statuettes found in barbershops, the equestrian figures by Alfred de Dreux that adorn the apartments of kept women, or Charles de Steuben's 'Joseph and Potiphar', which, thank goodness, is nowhere to be found.

Inside the castle, the insipid furnishings of the Empire period are reproduced in every room, mythological or historical clocks, and velvet armchairs with gilt studs. Almost all are adorned with busts of Louis-Philippe and Madame Adélaïde. The current family in residence has a mania for reproducing its existence in portraiture. It populates every wall with such images, every console table, and fireplace, where such things can stand; the bad taste of the upstart displayed, the mania of a grocer, enriched by trade, who is delighted to see himself portrayed in red, white and yellow, with trinkets adorning his belly, sideburns meeting on his chin, and his children at his side.

A glass rotunda, contrary to all common sense, has been added to one of the towers to serve as a dining room. The view from there is superb. But the building is so jarringly ugly that I think one would prefer to eat in the kitchen and have no view at all.

To return to town, we descended a tower that once served as a ramp for carriages ascending to the square. The gentle, sand-covered slope winds around a stone axis like the steps of a staircase, and the vault is occasionally illuminated by the sparse light filtering through the arrow slits. The corbels supporting the inner end of the vaulting bear grotesque or obscene sculptures. Dogmatic order seems to have guided their composition. One should 'read' the work from its base, beginning with the *Aristoteles Equitatus* (Aristotle being ridden by a woman, a subject already depicted on one of the misericords in the choir of Rouen Cathedral), and, following the levels upwards, arrive at a gentleman amusing himself with a lady in the posture recommended by Lucretius (*in 'De Rerum Natura: Book IV'*), and by *L'Amour Conjugale* (*'Conjugal Love', see 'Tableau de l'Amour Conjugale' by Nicolas Venette, revised by J.R.J. Dubuisson, 1810*). Most of the intermediate sculptures however have been removed, to the great despair of the seekers of droll fantasy; removed out of hand, expressly,

out of decency, and as His Majesty's servant told us, in a convincing tone, 'because there were many that were unsuitable for the ladies.'

None can accuse me of groaning over devastation, whatever ruin or heap of debris it might leave behind; I have never sighed about the ravages of Revolution, or the disasters of the day; I would barely be troubled if Paris were turned upside-down by an earthquake, or I woke one fine morning to find a volcano amidst the houses, like a gigantic incinerator, belching smoke: it might result in a few charming watercolours, or grandiose paintings in the style of John Martin. But I bear a fierce and perpetual hatred for anyone who prunes a tree to 'beautify' it, or castrates a horse to weaken it; as I do for all those who dock the ears or tails of dogs, those who clip yew-trees in the shape of peacocks, and spheres and pyramids out of boxwood; those who restore, whitewash, and correct; the editors of expurgata; the chaste folk who veil profane nudity; the compilers of abridgments and summaries; those who will shave anything and set a wig on it, and who, ferocious in their pedantry, merciless in their ineptitude, go around amputating Nature, the beautiful work of the divine; and ruining Art, that other nature that humanity bears within, as the divine bears the other, and which is a younger or elder form of it, who knows? That, at least, is Hegel's idea, which the Empirical school has always found quite ridiculous — and I? I, for one, feel remorse for having been cowardly enough not to have strangled the man who published that edition of Molière 'which honest families can safely place in the hands of their children'; I regret not having scatological tortures, and outrageous means of producing agony, at my disposal, to employ on the wretch who sullied '*Gil Blas*' (*the picaresque novel by Alain-René Lesage, published between 1715 and 1735*) with a similar gross display of his 'virtue'; and as for that brave idiot of a Belgian clergyman who 'purified' Rabelais, why should I not, in my desire for revenge, awaken the Colossus just to see the fellow breathe-in the Giant's breath, and hear the Titan's howl!

How excellent an age, when those poor sculptures, in which such lovely things were portrayed, were yet intact; they would have brought a blush to the brows of travellers, terrified aged Englishwomen in their boas, with chilblains on their fingers, and splayed feet, and scandalised the morals of many an honorary notary, a 'highly decorated' gentleman in blue glasses, in truth, a cuckold! One could at least have compared the depictions to what we know of ancient customs, Renaissance ideas, and modern *manners*, which are supposedly steeped in various traditions, fine traditions that have declined dramatically over the centuries. Is that not so, monsieur? What says madame?

Yet, one's mood is variable. The excellent dinner of which we partook at Amboise, and which we badly needed (having nourished the Muse more than the 'creature' all day), restored calm to our minds, and in the evening, trotting, briskly, along the road to Chenonceaux, we smoked our pipes, and inhaled the scent of the forest in a most satisfactory state of contentment.

Before retiring to bed, there, we indulged in the same pastime of pipe-smoking, beneath the trees surrounding the château. The rain was falling on the green leaves; sheltered beneath them, our backs leaning against the trunks of two large hornbeams, polishing the leather of our shoes with damp moss, we amused ourselves by listening to the sound of the raindrops dripping on our hats.

The Château of Chenonceaux. — An atmosphere of singular sweetness, and aristocratic serenity, emanates from the château. Situated at the end of a grand avenue of trees, some distance from the village, which keeps its distance, respectfully; built over the water, surrounded by woods;

in the midst of a vast park with beautiful lawns, its turrets, its square chimneys soar into the air. The river Cher murmurs below its arches, the sharp piers of which break the flow. Its elegance is robust and gentle, its calm melancholic, yet without tedium or bitterness.

One enters via a vaulted room that once served as an armoury, and in which, despite the awkwardness of accommodating them, the few suits of armour displayed fail to look out of place, seeming, in fact, perfectly at home. Elsewhere, moreover, the period tapestries and furnishings have been intelligently preserved throughout. The venerable sixteenth century fireplaces reveal, below their mantelpieces, ignoble but economical Prussian-style ones which seem hidden when beneath lesser mantlepieces.

In the kitchens, housed within an archway of the castle, a maid was peeling vegetables, a kitchen-boy washing dishes, and, standing at the stove, before a reasonable number of gleaming pots, stood the cook, boiling ingredients for lunch. It all seemed fine, and had a pleasant air about it, exuding the honest life of a château, the leisurely and intelligent existence of a well-born gentleman. I like the owners of Chenonceau.

Are there not, moreover, fine old portraits everywhere that occupy one for hours, prompting one to imagine the age their subjects inhabited, and those balletic dances in which the farthingales of beautiful pink-clad ladies twirled, and gentlemen delivered fine sword-strokes with their dress-rapiers? That is one of the temptations of history. One would like to know if these people loved as we do, and the differences between their passions and ours. One would like their lips to open, so as to reveal the stories of their hearts, what they did in that distant past, even the most trivial things, and convey the nature of their anxieties and pleasures. It is an irritating and seductive feeling of curiosity, a dreamy desire 'to know', like the desire one has to penetrate the unknown past of one's mistress, in order to be initiated into the many days she has lived without you, and share in them. But they remain oblivious to one's questioning gaze; they rest there, mute, motionless in their wooden frames; one passes by. Moths eat at their canvas, they are revarnished, they smile on as we decay and are forgotten. And other folk will come and gaze at them, before they crumble to dust, and dream in the same manner before portraits of ourselves, and will likewise wonder what people did back then, what life was like, and if the weather was not warmer.

There are, for example, two large equestrian portraits of members of the Beauvilliers family, one an admiral, the other a cavalry colonel; they are booted up to their thighs, dressed in large green coats whitened at the shoulders by the powdered corkscrews of their wigs, wear gauntlet gloves and little hats, and are seated upright, perched on their large Mecklenburg horses, which, gathered on their hind legs, rear up to display their spirited natures. Here before you, they present themselves like a memory of the carousels of Louis XIV and the great hunts: yellow greyhounds with white markings, a cloud of liveried huntsmen surrounded by the barking pack, and large hunting-horns, worn around the body, sounding long *hallalis* in the clearings.

Over a doorway, an easel-mounted canvas portrays the beautiful Gabrielle d'Estrées, naked to the waist, a large pearl necklace of the same blonde tone as her skin clinging to her breast; her blonde hair, tied up and frizzed; and an astonished and naively seductive look on her face. Next to her, her sister, seen from the rear, also naked to the waist, turns her brownish-toned face and glances at you with curiosity, while, in the background, a peasant woman in a red cape and a white cloak presents her breast to the little Duke of Vendôme, charming in his swaddling clothes, tied

up and stiff in his linen, who widens his eyes, and stretches out his arms, his little pink mouth wide with laughter at his good nurse's teasing.

We also noted, in the apartment that serves as a drawing room and in which the mace of François I rests on a table, a fine portrait of Rabelais: here, a swarthy, hilarious, sanguine, robust figure, with small, lively eyes, sparse hair, and a satyr-like beard and chin — clearly the original after which all the other portraits of the great man have been created. The portrait of Isabeau of Bavaria, below and a little to the left, is singularly expressive: she is not wearing the large pointed bonnet, which I have seen her in elsewhere, and is no longer the pale and sorrowful figure of the Versailles gallery; a kind of flat, Italian-style headdress covers the long blonde tresses, half undone, which surround her white face, both sympathetic and ardent, full of irresolution and thwarted impulses; she has protruding lips, a short chin, and large green eyes whose tearful expression is enhanced by the red rims of her lower eyelids.

There are many other paintings on the walls that one would have liked to look at longer, alone and at one's leisure, without a concierge on one's heels, gripping a key, and gesturing for one to hurry up and finish. I recall a full-length portrait of Louis XIII as Apollo, with his pointed chin, small, straight moustache, and a large black wig that falls over his shoulders and casts a shadow over his sad face. I have never thought of Louis XIII without a certain sorrow; it seems to me that he was the most bored individual on earth.

We were unable to enter the theatre where '*The Village Soothsayer*' ('*Le Devin du Village' a one-act French opera by Jean-Jacques Rousseau, who also wrote the libretto, 1752*) was performed, as it was being repaired; but we did see a fine portrait of Madame Dupin (*Louise Marie Madeleine Fontaine, the saloniste*) by Jean-Marc Nattier. She is dark-haired, her face alert, and coquettish, with a turned-up nose and rosy lips, a dark-eyed and direct gaze, and a frank, friendly, mischievous and good-natured air, and is far more intelligent-looking than the portrait of Mme d'Humières (*Françoise, Governess to the Royal children*), for example, with her pink heart-shaped mouth so moist and sensual.

I would move on from all these beautiful ladies, were it not for the large standing portrait of Madame Deshoulières (*Antoinette du Ligier de la Gard*), clad in a long white negligée. The picture offers one her noble face, (which like the much-maligned and neglected talent of that poetess, appears finer on second viewing than at first), which reminded me, due to the unmistakable character of the mouth — wide, prominent, fleshy, and sensual — of the starkness of the François Gérard portrait of Madame de Staël which I saw two years ago at Coppet (*Switzerland*). The window was open, the sun shining directly on it, and I could not help but be struck by those red, wine-coloured lips, those wide nostrils, sniffling, inhaling the air. George Sand's face has a similar aspect. In all such mannish women, spirituality begins only at eye level. The rest appeals to the realm of sexual instinct. They are, almost all, plump; and of masculine form: Madame Deshoulières, Madame de Sévigné (*Marie de Rabutin-Chantal, Marquise de Sévigné*), Madame de Staël, George Sand, and Madame Colet (*Louise Revoil de Servannes*). The only lean one I know of is Madame Annaïs Ségalas (*Anne Caroline Menard*).

In Diane de Poitiers' bedroom we viewed that royal concubine's large four-poster bed, upholstered entirely in blue and cherry-red damask. If I owned it, I would find it very difficult to resist sleeping in it now and then. To occupy Diane de Poitiers' bed, even when empty, would be finer than doing so with a multitude of more tangible realities. Has it not been said (*by De Sade, in particular*) that in these matters it is from imagination that the pleasure derives? Can you then

conceive, you who possess a modicum of imagination, the singular, historical, sixteenth-century delight of laying one's head on the pillow of François I's mistress, and tossing and turning about on her mattress? (Oh! How gladly I would exchange all the women in the world for the mummified body of Cleopatra!) But I would not dare to touch, for fear of breaking something, Catherine de Medici's porcelain in the dining-room, nor place my foot in François I' stirrup, for fear it would stick fast, nor set my lips to the mouthpiece of the enormous trumpet in the armoury, for fear that my chest would burst.

We said farewell to poor Chenonceaux, however, leaving behind its beautiful memories, its fine portraits, its excellent weapons and old furniture, as it slumbered to the sound of the cooing river, in the shade of its tall trees, amidst the green grass; and, full of good humour, and with our flasks filled, we inaugurated our new knapsacks by walking to Bléré, and travelling from there to Tours by carriage.

The route is not at all entertaining; it consists of a long, rather sparse stretch of meadowland with a few pale poplar trees.

At Bléré, while they were feeding the horse with oats, and dragging from the shed a cabriolet which was half eaten away by worms, like an ancient Roquefort cheese forgotten in some cupboard, we visited the church where the remarkable taste for Rococo ornamentation began, with its artificial flowers, ribbons, pompoms, and paper garlands, a few leagues away, in the towns of Anjou, a province which seems to have preserved the Italian predilections of its former masters.

As far as Tours, the road is truly beautiful, the countryside is ample and lush, fertile and healthy in appearance, with neither the sombre exuberance of Normandy nor the subtle light of the South. One passes under fine trees which cover the road like arbours, or amidst wide meadows enlivened here and there by towns and bell-towers, and, from Montlouis, one travels the banks of the Loire, encountering one after another, receding and forever returning, castles on the hilltops, vineyards beside wheat fields, and oblong islands each with a crown of poplars and a fringe of reeds. The wind is warm without voluptuousness, the sun gentle without ardour; The whole landscape, pretty everywhere, varies little in its monotony, being light, graceful, but with that beauty that caresses without captivating, charms without seducing and, in short, possesses a greater degree of commonsense than grandeur, and of intellect than poetry: such is France herself.

Chapter II: (Du Camp: The Loire, from Tours to Nantes)

Tours — The Abbey of Saint-Julien; the plain cover of a superb novel; three charming tall arched windows at the top; a dilapidated interior, used for storage; the left transept, coated in cobwebs, magnificent in tone; at the rear, through the doorway, one could see a Parisian travelling-bazaar.

Plessis-lès-Tours (*La Riche*); a high street in flat countryside; a large walled enclosure. — The house of Tristan l' Hermite (*provost and executioner, appointed by King Louis XI, who resided at the Château de Plessis*) a small, with a pointed open archway. — The late fifteenth century church (*Notre Dame*

de la Riche, substantially rebuilt 1860-66), is ornate, heavy, with a purer interior, and magnificent ironwork in the choir.

Chinon — On the left, descending the hill, the castle towers before one. — The view of the castle, in whose shadow the town is built. — Chinon, with a cramped air, compressed between the Vienne River and the castle, has been forced to spread out lengthwise. — From the river, the old town rises on the slope, a series of winding streets and silent arches, black shells like those of Carcassonne and Provins; donkeys graze in the streets, Gargantua's mounds (*'tertres', geological formations mentioned in Rabelais' 'Gargantua and Pantagruel'*) crumble beneath one's feet. — The castle, on the heights, is in the form of a rectangle with alternating round and square towers; trees grow in the moats and weeds on the walls. — On the side of the Agnes Sorel tower (*Agnès Sorel, known as La Dame de Beauté, was mistress to Charles VII*), opposite the town, is the cemetery, at the foot of the towers; there are two large walnut trees. — The tower with the iron cage (*La Tour de l'Horloge*) has three upper stories. — On the lower two (the cage is in the first) there was a fireplace, a ring in the ceiling, prisoners' inscriptions, rosaries, and holy ciboria. — Everywhere amidst the grassy ruins, there were lilacs in bloom. — In the room where Joan of Arc was received, there were daffodils in bloom and wild roses heaped one on another. — At the tower that serves as the entrance gateway, one can see the winding mechanism of the portcullis. — Everywhere in Chinon I searched for some trace of Rabelais, and found nothing; is Rabelais truly their native genius? (*Rabelais was born, between 1483 and 1494, in Seuilly, near Chinon*).

From Chinon to Fontevraud, the charming road winds through greenery; these are large trees with broad canopies. Night fell before we reached the town.

Fontevraud nestles, somewhat in the manner of Jumièges (*in Normandy*), around the abbey, with no sizeable hill in sight. — The most curious thing is the church, whose (exterior) apse is in a beautiful Romanesque style with surrounding rotundas. — The chapter house is in the early Gothic style; the cloister, Gothic in the manner of the Abbey of Saint-Wandrille (*Rives-en-Seine, Normandy*). — The warden (*Fontevraud Abbey was converted to a notorious prison by Napoleon, in 1804*) in a blue dressing gown was in his study, a stuttering, sharp-tongued, ignoramus. — Prisoners in the refectory, in the exercise yard, in single file, in enforced silence. — Poor Robert de Arbrissel (*founder of the Abbey*), soul of love, did you anticipate these shameful goings-on? — Gendarmes, and African troops.

From Fontevraud to Saumur. — Due to the sun that warms the rocks covered with verdure, a countryside notable for its gentleness. — Anjou (*Saumur in Maine-et-Loire, was historically part of the province of Anjou*), seemed to me like a kind of Normandy.

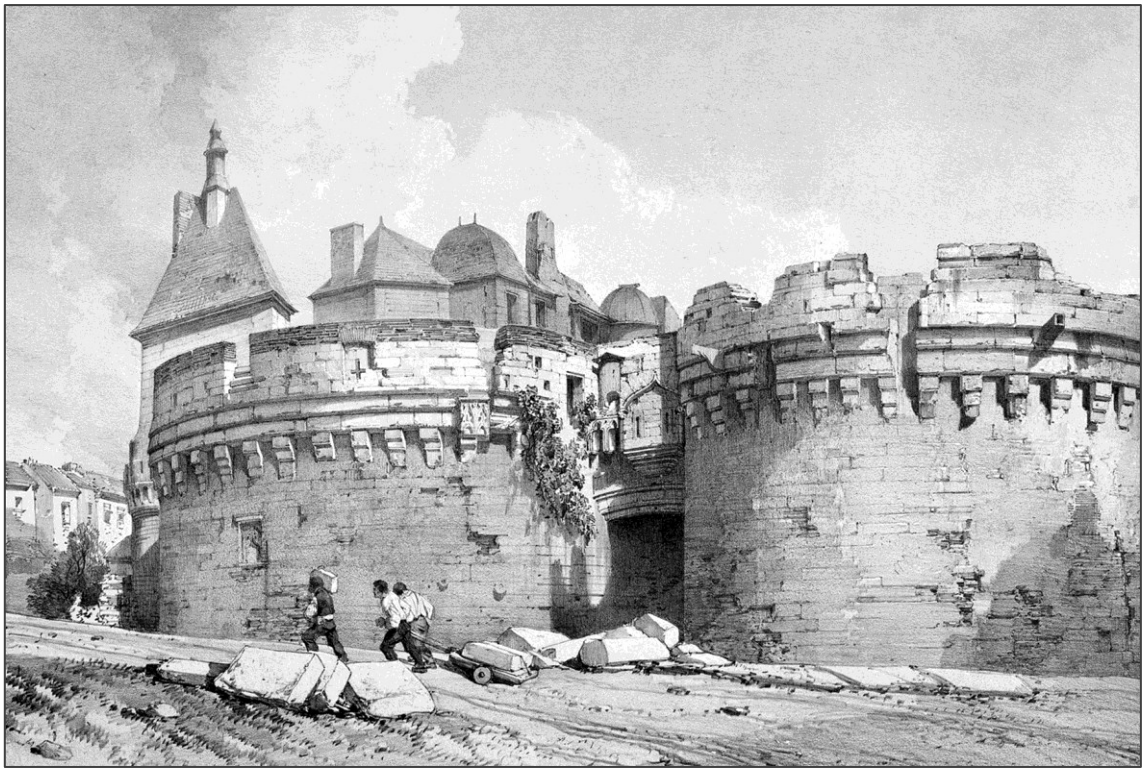
Saumur. — Cavalry officers in uniform. — The Church of Saint-Pierre. — Small, badly-paved, winding streets, flowers in the windows. — Notre-Dame-des-Ardilliers, a royal chapel with a dome, like the Pantheon of Agrippa in Rome. On the left upon entering, beneath a deep, dark arch of artificial rock, the statue of a woman in a white dress with leg-of-mutton sleeves; with two locks of her black hair, one hanging to the side, the other across her waist, she lies amidst stones, on the rock; the shadow of the arch contrasts with the white of her garment and the pallor of her face. Despite the ugliness of the invention, and the bad taste of it all, there is something striking and memorable about her. — A 'Saint Simeon' by Philippe de Champagne; a beautiful head of the saint, blond, luminous, gentle, and moved by emotion; a child walking past on the left. — Saint-Pierre, a charming side entrance, exquisitely Romantic, but what is most beautiful is the colour of

the stone, which is green, blue, etc.; the interior chapels are covered in flowers; in one a Passion, with rocks in relief made of painted canvas; everywhere the Gothic medieval element disappears beneath colour-wash and Italianate ornamentation. The emblems of faith are clearly evident in the chapels; they are where people go to pray; the religious engravings are intertwined with garlands of ivy (as at Bléré, on the small side altar). — Anjou has the fragrance of Italy. Is that a memory? A lingering influence? Or the effect of the gentle Loire, the most sensual of French rivers? — Notre-Dame-de-Nantilly (*Saumur*), is pure Romance, its semicircular portal arch is broad and strong; one ascends it via a slope, an old stone staircase; it is surrounded by tall trees. How beautiful it would be, were it not for its colour, a dreadful white!

The covered alley at Bagneux (*Saumur*) is about twelve paces wide, roughly thirty long, and eight feet high; monstrous stones; rain dripped through the cracks, creating puddles inside; two holes in the rear wall allowed bright, white light to enter; the leaves of the trees glistened in the streaming rain; the inner sides of the stones were green in places, whiter in others. — The inept driver of our American carriage. — We passed a herd of Vendée oxen. — The art of tree pruning as published by the Roads and Bridges Administration; their ideal of ineptitude and hatred towards Nature has been realised at Saumur, on the road to Poitiers, just outside the town. — Our hosts. — Veal again! — A provincial drawing room: red Utrecht velvet seems to be, like calfskin, one of the cornerstones of provincial life. — Among varieties of butcher's meat, veal is the chosen meat of universities and academies.

From Saumur to Ancenis along the Loire. — The river gentle, wide, and expansive, but the poplars lend a slender air to the landscape. — Round towers at Angers. — Saint-Florent-le-Viel on the left bank, perched on a hill. — Yet the Seine is more beautiful; I rank the Loire after the Seine and the Rhône; nowhere did I see anything to compare with Dieppedalle (*Le Havre*), La Mailleraye-sur-Seine, or Caudebec-en-Caux; the Loire is more French, gentler, more bourgeois, more prosaic. — The steamboat: a young girl and her mother; a cold, white face; a cavalry officer, his wife, and child; various gentlemen. The steamboat was, as ever, a steamboat.

Ancenis is what one might call a wretched little town, badly-paved, winding, with poor, grey houses, as in the small towns of Languedoc, but its state of destitution lends it a strange charm; no one in the streets. — The Hôtel de la Marine (*near the steamboat landing stage, long since converted to dwellings*): a plump, graceful woman of about forty; the grandmother, with two little girls; the gentlemen at the inn, bored to death with the countryside and longing for the delights of the capital. — A lovely view of the Loire, certainly one of the most beautiful stretches of the river. — The church (*Saint-Pierre*) is strikingly bare and curiously awkward: three pyramids at the foot of a mission cross, covered from top to bottom with hearts pierced by arrows; marble canopies; ornamentation in deplorable taste. — The château now consists only of the outer walls, adorned with crenelations, and the two large circular entrance towers, one of which still bears a stone cannonball. The interior is dilapidated, occupied by a vegetable garden; the caretaker took us for a walk there with her children. Wild radishes, brambles, beautiful perennials, lovely green leaves clinging everywhere, hanging in the corners; the view from the top of the keep is singularly marred by the suspension bridge. — Formidable mass of the Druidic stone (*Dolmen de la Pierre Couvretière, known as the Devil's Stone*) on the Druidic plain. — A perfectly apt joke from my honourable friend about the wobbly stone.



'The Château d'Ancenis'
Eugène Cicéri (French, 1813–1890)

From Ancenis to La Meilleraye-en-Bretagne, the landscape is bleak, though green and lush. Enclosures and hedges are everywhere; there is something sombre and mistrustful about the countryside. Few people seen, even though it is Sunday; the little girls wear large bonnets, as do the women, who are all quite plain; young girls sit in pairs or trios beside the ditches, their backs to the main road. The clumps of broom multiply as we travel further, the trees become stouter, smaller, and stockier. At Riaillé, there is a procession with white flags. Our driver, a Norman from Domfront, with almost white hair and dark eyes that remind me of Colonel Langlois. The driver detests the Chouans (*royalist insurgents in Brittany and Maine*); in 1832 (*the last 'Chouannerie' uprising*), he would not have taken us this way for a hundred thousand francs.

The Trappist monastery of La Meilleraye-en-Bretagne (*Melleray Abbey*) was exposed to view by the heavy felling of the surrounding woods. — As we emerged from beneath the gate, departing oxen were entering it. — We were ushered into a high-ceilinged reception room on the first floor, furnished with eighteenth century armchairs; the atmosphere was half monastic, half country château. A monk came to ask if we needed anything; then the one in charge of guests asked for our names. We were led to the chapel, then to the parlour. Two white-clad monks came and prostrated themselves at our feet; they escorted us back to the chapel to say an *Ave* and a *Credo*, and then returned us to the parlour so as to read a passage to us from the 'Imitation of Christ' (*by Thomas à Kempis*), from the third book, Chapter xx (*'Of confession of our infirmity, and of the miseries of this life'*) — Dinner in a large room, fairly clean tablecloth, iron cutlery. An old Breton abbot, with a small, open face, and white hair, served hard-boiled eggs with sorrel, and a kind of gluey porridge, that I mistook for curdled milk, with stewed prunes. — I thought of the grotesque, and biblical, virtues that Henri Estienne (*Henricus Stephanus*) attributes to monks in his '*Apology for Herodotus*'

(*1566, Book I: Chapter XX: 'To sum up the virtues of a monk, he should be filthy and gluttonous, lazy, lecherous, improper, foolish, fat, drunken, and unlearned: he should stuff himself at the table, drinking and eating like a pig'*).

Individuals: to my left, a former soldier, woollen skullcap, upturned nose, empire-style sideburns, the air of a paid-up Carlist, and a great lover of salted butter; on my right, a bankrupt peasant? Opposite, a tall young man, thick-lipped, a mystical air, strong hands; opposite, a priest of about forty, a man of powerful build and excellent manners, probably executing a penance; to my left, beside me, a vicar with white hair, the lower part of his face singularly fleshy and ignoble, a level and rather intelligent brow, knowledgeable as regards chemistry, according to the old Breton abbot who chatted with us in the garden after dinner. — Amidst the boarders, a dreadful little man in a black suit, with a cap over his black silk bonnet.

The chapel. — After the *Salve*, we descended from the gallery, the monks knelt, and we stood among them to recite litanies to the Virgin. The chapel of the Virgin was draped with a white curtain, open like a bed; the altar had a transparent rose covered with lace; artificial and real flowers surrounded the plaster statue of the Virgin; candles were lit, and their voices began to sound. There was something voluptuous, something conjugal, in the arrangement of it all; these humble men seemed to have prepared the bed of their heavenly bride, in a loving manner. The voices were strong, powerful; life's energies returned to them, dawned within them. When we entered the church, it was still daylight; the sun, with a touch of Nature's irony, coloured the chalk-white walls and ceiling pink. — The district-surveyor, a friend of the establishment. — The monks' novitiate (*period of training*) is exacting. — The abbot's wishes are humoured because of the inheritance taxes to be paid after his death, so he sleeps on a comfortable mattress. — A notice announcing the death of the mother of one of the monks, pinned up in the refectory. (Written Sunday, May 9, in the cell of Saint-Théodore, ten in the evening.)

In the parlour, among the items for sale, was an engraving entitled '*False Pleasures*'. In the foreground, one sees an adolescent dressed in a robe, holding a rosary and gazing upwards; in the heavens, angels with their pointed wings play violas; on Earth, on the contrary, one sees two young women with low necklines and leg-of-mutton sleeves, one is playing a guitar and the other dancing (the former is adorned with sabot sleeves, and bracelets), they seek to charm a young troubadour in a jacket and breeches, sporting sideburns, who glances at them sideways; in the background, there is a lake with poplar trees. Below is written:

Voluptuousness, that seeks to tempt,

Abjure, and never yield;

A joy that's wholly innocent,

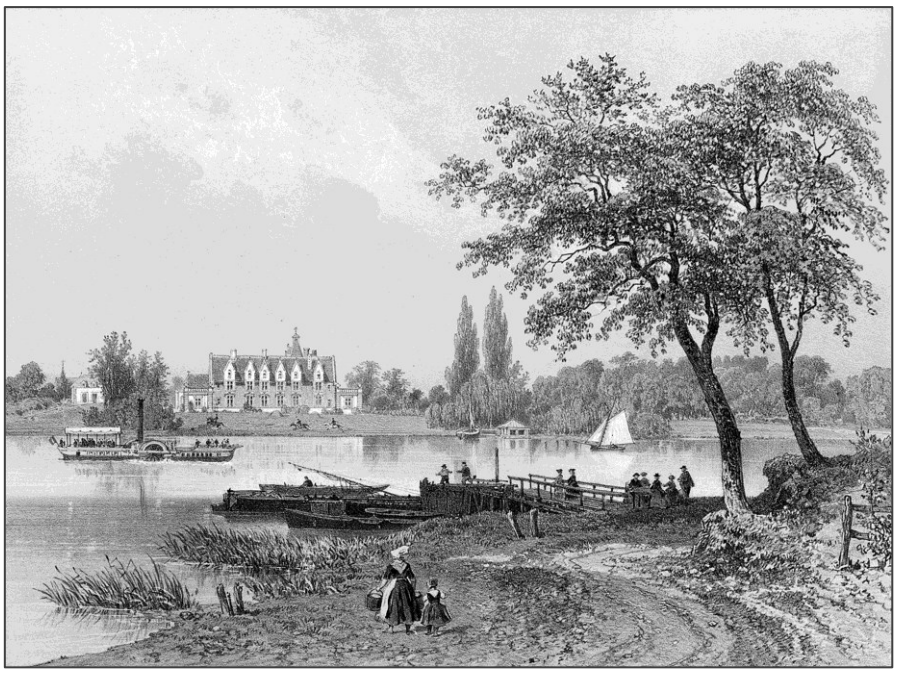
He gains who wins the field.

No one came to wake me at two a.m. for Matins; I passed the night rather badly in a bed stained with blood. In the morning, a grey and pale one, I took breakfast with the same intriguing set of boarders. There is great sadness involved in the necessity of rising early just so as to eat. — A tour of the establishment: in the workshops, no singing, only a stupid silence; taking the bull by the horns and greeting the monks in the corridors, in passing; they failed to speak, though they

saw we needed directions, but their expressions! Two monks performing their retreat in the chapter house; the pair were truly consumed in prayer; at the rear, the abbot's seat with the crozier. The refectory, wood-panelled, full of a damp, stale smell. — They stink to high heavens in this holy spot! — The refectory as well as the dormitory are places that are especially respected; not even strangers are permitted to speak there. — The dormitory is all one hue, giving it a handsome, if austere, appearance: a wood-grey; the ceiling and floor are both wooden, the dormitory has square four-poster beds as tall as the ceiling; between each bed there is a small curtain made of ticking (*the canvas used to cover mattresses*); the mattress is of straw; there's a chamber pot beneath each bed. — The cemetery: all the graves are identical surmounted by a black cross; the only difference is that the cross is raised at a monk's feet, and at an abbot's head. — The brother in charge of the guesthouse did not wear the prim and proper attire of the clergy; he walked over the graves casually. — Such were the most interesting features of La Meilleraye.

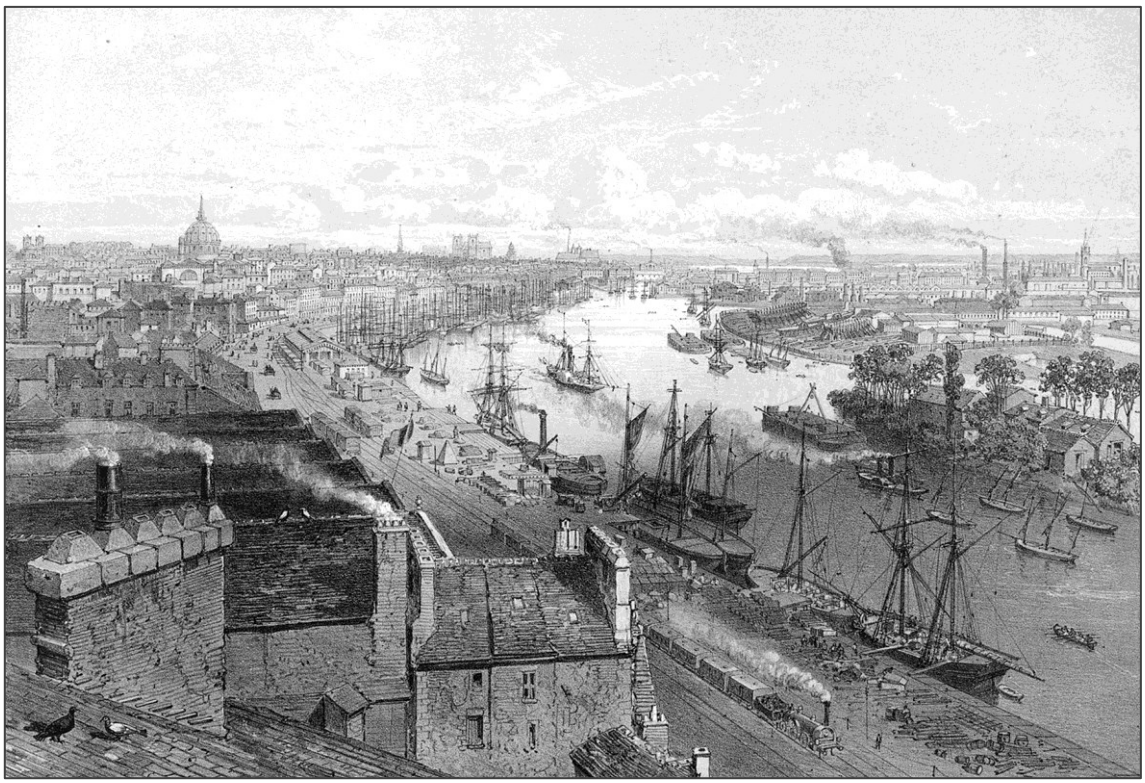
We were in such a hurry to leave that we chose not to wait and attend Mass. — Our joy revived in the fields, hoisting our knapsacks, finding freedom and sunlight once more. — In the village, after an omelette that, to us, seemed excellent, and delicious fried kidneys, we went off to a wood to smoke beneath the trees.

Nort-sur-Erdre, indescribable frescoes. Downstream the Erdre suddenly widens, a gentle river with pretty features, trees reminiscent of one of those old seventeenth-century engravings, in which a man is seen fishing in short breeches, wearing a puffed-out shirt that reaches his navel, while beside him a shepherdess arranges flowers in her apron, and a dog lies flat on its stomach in the hay. — We encounter the gentlemen from Meilleraye again on the boat, the portly fellow and the short, bespectacled one, whom we saw earlier on their knees in the church at Nort. — Boaters wearing pince-nez are unusual. — Verrières-en-Anjou — Entry to Nantes; we have been at work here since the morning of the day before yesterday. (May 13th, 10 a.m., Nantes.)



'The River Erdre and the Château de la Gascherie'
Félix Benoist (French, 1818–1896), Adolphe Jean-Baptiste Bayot (French, 1810–1871) and Eugène Cicéri (French, 1813–1890)

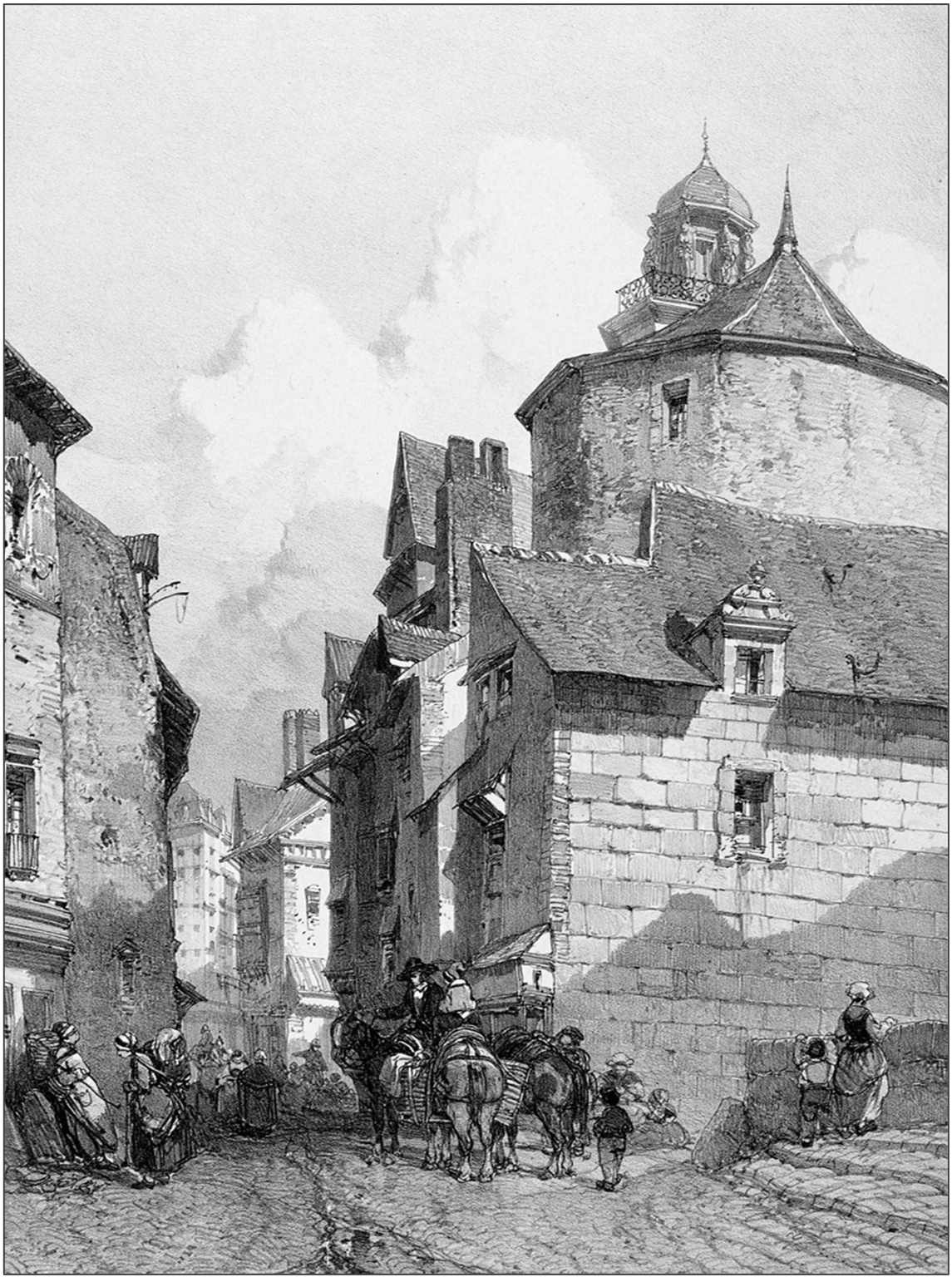
Chapter III: (Flaubert: Nantes)



'Nantes: General View of the Harbour'
Félix Benoist (French, 1818–1896)

On leaving the Trappist monastery, it was pleasant to see human faces again, and to view steaks with anchovy butter. Delighted still by the frescoes of Nort, though horrified by our memories of La Meilleraye, we possessed, on the evening of our arrival in Nantes, the finest appetite imaginable. Comfortably settled at the Hôtel de France (*then on Place Graslin*), we led a very pleasant life for eight days. We had at our service one of those lively and graceful rogues who appeal to the well-bred, a clever fellow, who sold excellent cigars and fine perfumes. We wrote in our cool room, we washed ourselves in large basins, we played, in the courtyard, with a little monkey who would tear our old white gloves to shreds with its teeth and nails as though they had been invented for his use, or else we would go to the Passage Pommeraye (*constructed in 1843*) to buy Chinese blinds, Turkish sandals or Nile baskets, examining at our leisure, while handling, all the trinkets, things from beyond the seas, idols, shoes, parasols and lanterns, splendid colourful trifles that prompt us to dream of other worlds, useless trifles that to us are serious things.

I think Nantes is a somewhat vacuous city, but I ate so many prawns there that I have fond memories of it. The proof that Nantes failed to bore us is that we were about to leave when we decided we ought to tour it anyway.



'The Rue de la Poissonnerie, Nantes'
Eugène Cicéri (French, 1813–1890)

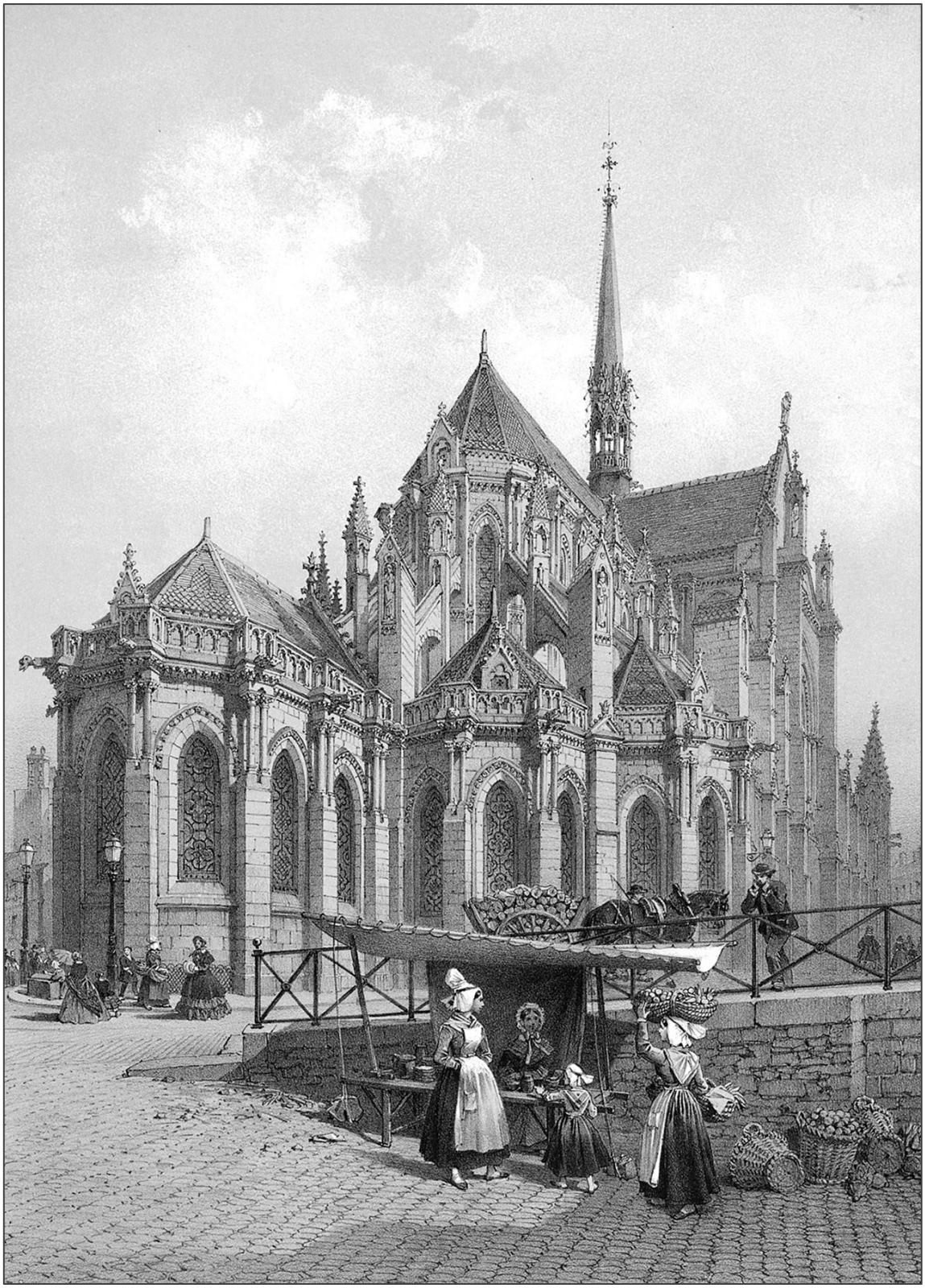
It lacks the sombre grime of Lyon, the bustle of Le Havre or Marseille, or the straight lines of Bordeaux, a city so beautifully built that it resembles a handsome gentleman in a bow-tie; nor is it the equal of Rouen, which would be beautiful if it were not so embellished, and which I would love if I had not been born there (*on December 12, 1821*). From the top of the cathedral (*Saint-Pierre-et-Saint Paul*), however, a view is revealed that rewards the effort of climbing the stairs: far below,

the houses huddle together, their roofs crammed together like the pointed hats of a crowd of folk pressed shoulder to shoulder; to the left, a wide meadow dips to the bank of the broad, grey Loire as it divides and curves, while the courses of the Erdre and the Sèvre, with multiplying branches and islands, carve the countryside into broad grey lines. That day, the sky shed a pale light, which gave the whole scene, its hue harmonising with the muddy tints of the water, a tranquil and melancholy aspect. The countryside is vast, expansive, greener and more vibrant if one ascends the Loire on the Touraine side, but monotonous, and almost numb as one descends the river towards the sands on the seaward side. All things considered, the horizon is wide and beautiful, but what horizon is not if it is vast, and are not all horizons vast when you view them from above? Climb, anywhere, provided you climb high enough, and you will discover boundless perspectives in the flattest of landscapes. What idea, too, is not extensive when pursued to its end; what heart does not seem immense when its depths are plumbed?

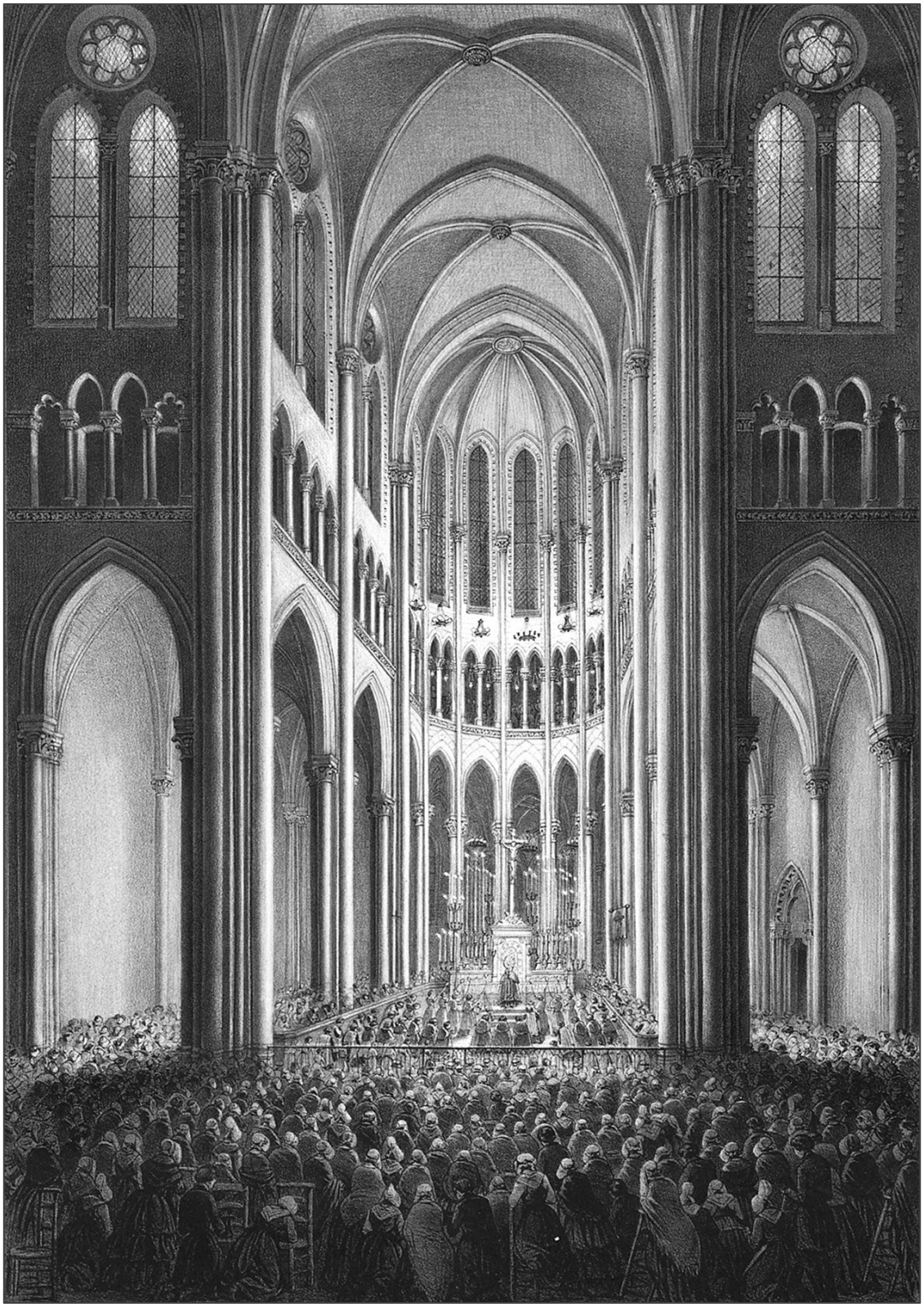


'A Bird's-Eye View of Nantes'
Félix Benoist (French, 1818–1896)

I used to spend many a happy hour on some church steeple; leaning on the parapet, I would watch the clouds roll across the sky and the crows, nesting in the gargoyles, take flight amidst raucous cries and powerful wingbeats. It was quite often, during my studies in rhetoric, my way of keeping up with the class; I missed a great deal, but was I not studying style too?



'The Church of Saint-Nicolas, Nantes'
Félix Benoist (French, 1818-1896)

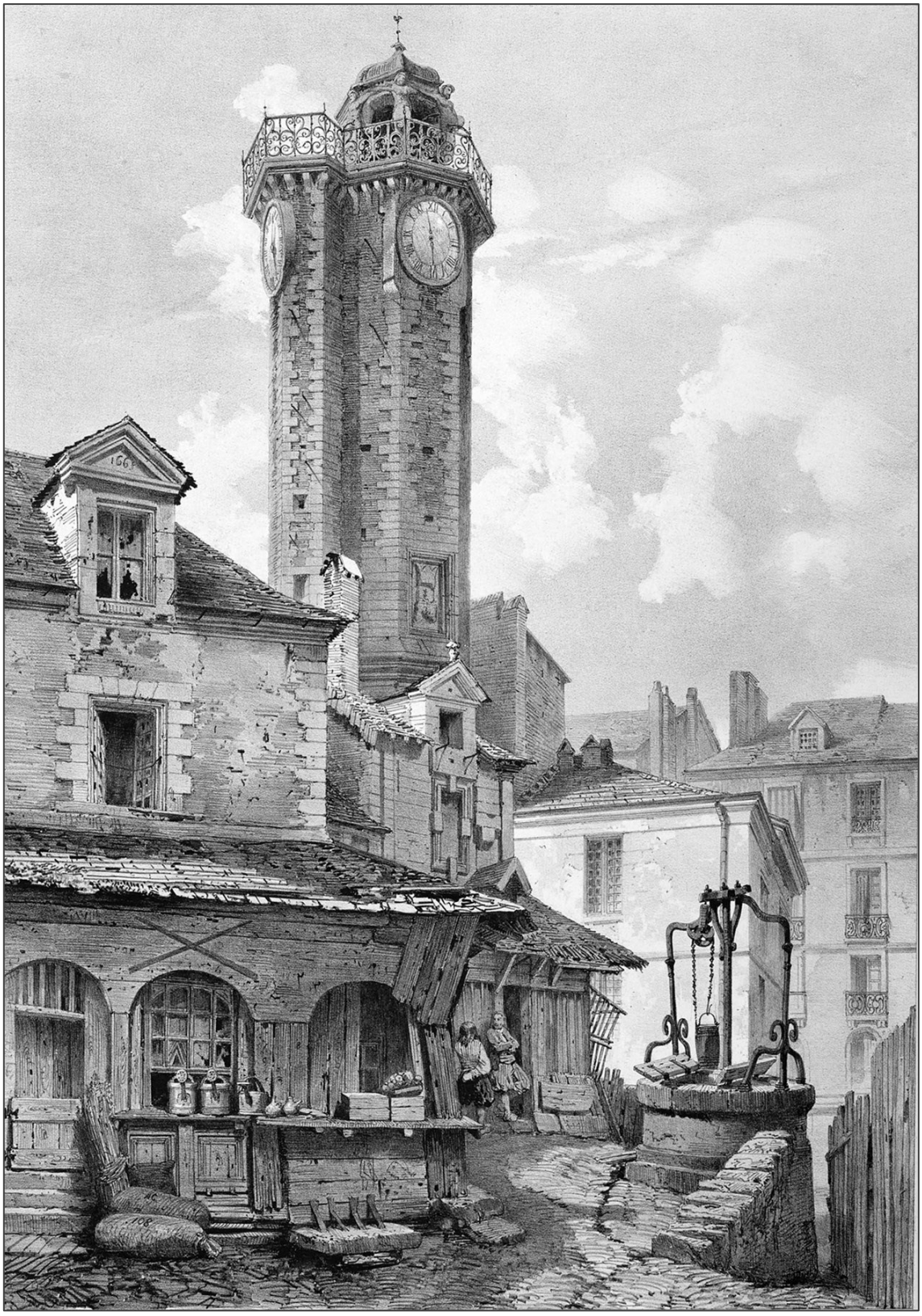


'The Church of Saint-Nicolas'
Félix Benoist (French, 1818-1896)

In Nantes, a commonplace thing both shocked and amused me: it was the telegraph station, on a tower opposite, that I suddenly saw, on turning round. The stiff arms of the mechanism were motionless, and on the ladder leading to its base a sparrow was hopping from rung to rung; set above everything around it, above the church and the cross that crowns it, that unsightly instrument seemed to me like a fantastic grimace shaped by the modern world.

What was traversing the air, between the clouds and the birds, in that pure region where the voice of the bells dies, and the perfumes of the earth below evaporate? The news that rents were falling, the price of tallow rising, or that the Queen of England had given birth?

What a strange life it is for the fellow in that little hut, working those two arms by pulling on their ropes, he who is an unintelligent cog in a machine which is mute as far as he is concerned! He may die without being aware of the contents of a single item of news he has transmitted, a single word of all those his station has uttered. The purpose? The meaning? Who knows? Is the sailor concerned to know to what land the sail he hoists is carrying him; or the postman with the contents of the letters he delivers, or the printer with the message intended by the book he prints? Is the soldier concerned with the cause for which he kills, and is killed? A degree more, a degree less; are we not all like this good man, speaking the words we have been taught, which we learn without understanding them? Ranged in a line, gazing at each other across the abysses that separate them, the centuries transmit, thus, from one to another the eternal enigma that comes to them from afar, to be passed on afar; they gesticulate, they wave their arms amidst the fog of history, and those who, posted on summits, cause them to gesticulate know no more than the poor devils below who raise their heads to try and divine the meaning.



'Details of the Portal Archivolts, Nantes Cathedral'
Léon Gaucherel (French, 1816–1886)

Where was I? Nantes, the cathedral. It is in the English style of the fifteenth century. Laden with heavy carvings, weighed down by the sterile embellishments of the Gothic style in its decadent period; ugly externally, too short in extent internally; the nave is well laid out, but the vaulting is rather ugly, the curve flattened. We noticed beneath the main portal, occupying the space between the pointed arches, a kind of stone shaft simulating a cluster of tree trunks, with the beginnings of severed branches, like a pruned holly stick. This feature is found in several churches in Brittany. Speaking of ugliness, and exceptional ugliness, one must mention, in one of the side chapels, a sort of wainscoting plastered on the walls, executed in a deplorable, medieval style and attaining the limits of imitative Rococo. But one truly beautiful thing is the tomb of Duke François II of Brittany and Margaret of Foix, his second wife. They are both in fine period costume, the ducal crowns on their heads, reclining on their marble slab, the duke with a lion at his feet, the duchess with a greyhound; three angels lift the cushion on which their heads rest, eyes closed; large symbolic figures stand at the four corners of the monument. The woman's face is plump and sad, with a turned-up nose and large eyelids; that of François, somewhat harsh, intelligent, cunning, a mixture of strength and weakness akin to his life itself, reveals Louis XI's old enemy, a man as adept as himself at concluding dubious treaties and forging clandestine alliances. Which were often wrong-headed. The Reconciliation of Arras, in 1477, stipulated that one might swear an oath of peace upon any relics one wished, except on the body of Jesus Christ and the True Cross, since perjury would infallibly result in death within a year. While François was negotiating with the king, he allied himself with England and imported arms from Italy; the king, for his part, promised Brittany to the Scots, a bribe to the Sire de Lescun (*Jean de Lescun d'Armagnac known as 'the bastard of Armagnac'*) his advisor. François made a noble gesture, in refusing the collar of the Order of Saint Michael in 1470; according to the statutes of the order, he would have been forced to serve the king against all odds and renounce any other alliance, but he rightly preferred to ally with the Count of Charolais and the Duke of Berry. He could easily have sworn, and then broken, the oath; one must commend him therefore for his honesty. Louis XI, who fought against him all his life, and hated him even before becoming king, died without having been able to defeat him, and yet four years later, as if to show how mediocre people may triumph over great men, only to then succumb to those weaker than themselves, François was forced to submit to the humiliating Treaty of Verger, in 1488, (*after his defeat at the Battle of Saint-Aubin-du-Cormier*) and died of grief.



'Saint-Aubin-du-Cormier'
Félix Benoist (French, 1818–1896), Adolphe Jean-Baptiste Bayot (French, 1810–1871) and Eugène Cicéri (French, 1813–1890)

Although he established silk manufactories in Vitré, and tapestry workshops in Rennes (a fact carefully noted in books portraying him as the devoted defender of Breton independence), I have always had little sympathy for this dull man, who pitted a lion against donkeys (the one he had been given, sometime before dying, Jean de Montauban) and who in so cowardly a manner abandoned in turn his advisor Guillaume Chauvin to his favourite Pierre Landois, then Landois to Chauvin's enemies; torn in all directions by a thousand liaisons which he untied, by a thousand influences in succession; he is indeed the 'father', in terms of lack of heart and dryness of character, of the cold and hypocritical Anne of Brittany (*wife to Charles VIII, then Louis XII*), who is to me one of the most unpleasant figures of the sixteenth century.

Since we are on the subject of history, just a hundred paces away, opposite the old castle, stands the house where the Duchess de Berry (*Marie-Caroline de Bourbon-Sicile*) was captured in 1832 (*after the failed Legitimist uprising*). One's heart sinks in that small, bare room, clad in soiled grey wallpaper, and barely lit by yellowed panes of glass. We saw the panel behind which the princess and her companions hid; it is hard to credit their survival. The whole house was silent and cold; not a murmur, no children playing, no dogs barking. Inhabited by two devout spinsters, it had something forlorn, ruined, and shameful about it, with its narrow, dark courtyard, damp alley, and wooden staircase rotting in the rain, as if it felt the bitterness of memories even in its stones.

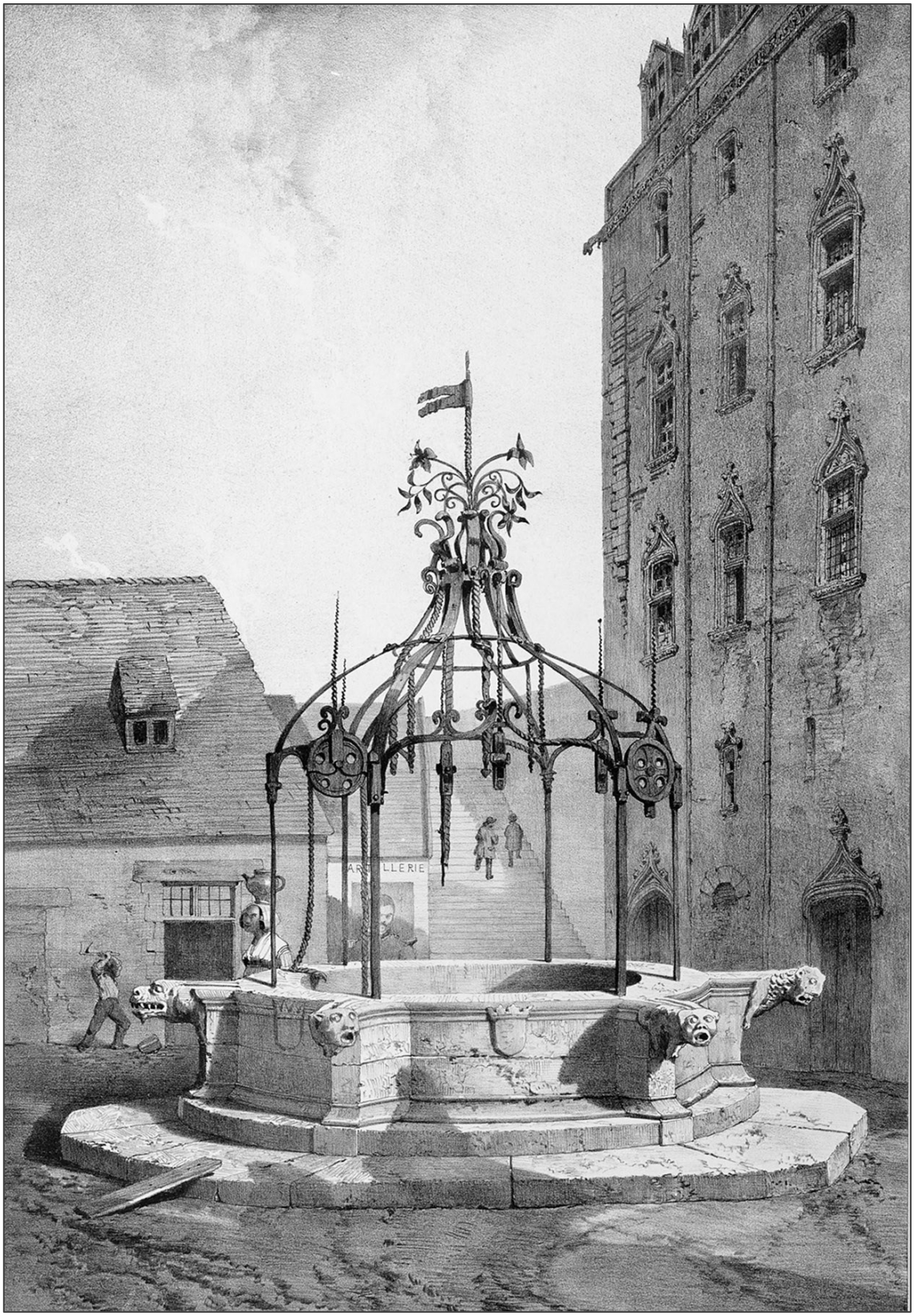


'The Old High Street, Nantes'
Eugène Cicéri (French, 1813–1890)

Of the old château (*the Château des Ducs de Bretagne, now substantially restored*), only the two entrance towers remain: the Pied de Biche (*Crowbar*) Tower to the left of the drawbridge, and the Boulangerie (*Bakery*) Tower to the right. Another building, pierced with late fifteen century windows is still almost intact, In the courtyard, is an old and beautiful well, adorned with an elegant iron crown from which pulleys were suspended. Cannons, polished like pairs of boots, are lined up on the grass next to cannonballs arranged neatly, according to their calibre, like heaps of gravel by the roadside; two or three soldiers, lying on their backs, were sleeping peacefully in the sun; what were they dreaming of? Probably not of the Duke of Mercœur (*Philippe Emmanuel de Lorraine*), who had the now dilapidated Lorraine Cross bastion built (*razed in 1853*), nor of Cardinal de Retz (*Jean François Paul de Gondi, agitator during the Fronde*), who escaped from the castle (*in 1654*), and certainly not of Anne of Brittany, who married Louis XII (*in 1499*) in the chapel within the *Tour du Fer* (*Horseshoe Tower*), now converted into a powder magazine. If they were dreaming, was it not rather of a fine game of boules, played on Sundays after Vespers; or of the day they would again view the weathervane on the church steeple, above the trees of their village; or of the country girl they had left behind? Only people whose occupation it is to think fill their brains with the passions of bygone eras; honest people have enough passion of their own; they make history — while we merely read that same.



'The Moat of the Château de Nantes'
Eugène Cicéri (French, 1813–1890)



'The Well in the Château de Nantes'
Léon Gaucherel (French, 1816–1886)

Two or three men, in shirts, were singing in the barracks, while brushing their clothes and polishing the copper buttons with chalk. On the second floor, on the sill of a fine square window, the legs of a pair of red trousers, spread wide open, hung down along the wall, brazenly displaying its large grey-lined fly.

On leaving the château, we visited the museum. The curator, busy scribbling away in a corner, interrupted his labours, and struck up an unofficial conversation with us about art, but shortly after observing us admiring a Eugène Delacroix, the good man set his cap on his head again, and turned on his heel, which made us suspect him of indulging in Jean-Victor Bertin landscapes, or in the Roman-history genre, complete with billiard-cue spears and chamber-pot helmets.

We stood for a long time before a painting in the old German style, representing an '*Adoration of the Magi*'. The design was almost ironically naive: a magus, dressed in a sort of bishop's cloak, prostrates himself at Christ's feet with such a stupid expression, and so low a brow, that one would readily believe it to be malice on the part of the artist; there are peculiar Black Africans, clad in red breeches and adorned with coral necklaces; men and women poke their heads out of a window, with astonished expressions. The whole thing is vibrant and amusing, a clash of reds and greens (somewhat like Pieter Bruegel the Elder's *'Temptation of Saint Anthony'*), intense in expression, playful in its details, original overall, and with an effect impossible to grasp without having seen it.

We also noticed a carnival scene by Nicolas Lancret (*entitled 'Before the Ball', currently located in the Musée des Beaux-Arts, Nantes*). In a large, wood-panelled room, a beautiful lady, in a yellow bodice with long elbow-length sleeves and a pink petticoat, is portrayed, between a dancer and a clown who invites them to join the minuet. Seated on either side, their friends smile and converse. In the foreground, a small child drags along a toy; this is a fine house where it is warm, a house where people have fun; one feels that outside it is raining and that maskers are running about in the mud; the weather is grey, true carnival weather; they will perform a comedy later, and will eat pastries this evening.

I also greatly admired a portrait of La Camargo (*the dancer, Marie-Anne de Cupis de Camargo; the painting dated c. 1730, is also currently in the Musée de Beaux Arts, Nantes*), by the same artist. She dances in the open air, on the grass, in a white satin dress with blue ribbons and garlands of roses; to her right, a drummer shakes his sticks and a fifer puffs out his cheeks; to her left, a violinist, a bassoonist, and a woman watching. La Camargo! What a name! Does it not resound with crimson bells? Does it not bring you, like some playful refrain on the gentle breeze raised by a twirling skirt, the scent of powdered iris or Spanish jasmine, and glimpses of tense white kneecaps on yellow silk quilts in a boudoir filled with Saxon porcelain, and entirely covered in pastels?

The antithesis, as painting, portrait, and idea is seen opposite, a portrait of a woman attributed to Bartolomé Murillo (*'Portrait of a Young Woman', currently in the same gallery*). She is dressed in a blue dress whitened by wear; her sooty, unkempt hair hangs lifelessly, on her right, over her pale face, while beneath her low, melancholic brow her upturned brown eyes grant you a placid, but deep, look that displeases yet attracts; in her hand she holds a small book, a prayer book; she spends her life in the side aisle of some church, in the damp shade of the pillars, dazzled by the illuminations of the altar, lost, endlessly, in the throes of mystical love, and in the evening returns to her bare attic where she sees apparitions of the Virgin and hears angelic voices calling her name.

There, also, is a rare and fine portrait, that of Elizabeth I of England, by Pellegrino Tibaldi. If it turned out not to be a good likeness, one would be forced to abandon forever the thought of forming any idea of people one has not seen, which would be sad considering that the people one ordinarily comes across are not at all as interesting. A prodigious ruff with thick, stiffened tubing, embroidered with black thread, frames her long, bony head, with its prominent cheekbones and red lips; her pale forehead is straight, high, and proudly intelligent. Beneath blond eyebrows, sparse at their juncture, her large, prominent blue eyes, open wide, roll and gaze with vivacity and thoughtfulness; Her pointed chin, the rounded tip of her nose, and her protruding mouth, where long teeth are visible, reveal a sensual ferocity, while her reddish-blond hair, styled in a high, flowing wave of successive half-circles and adorned with red carnations on the left side, gives her a stiff and noble air, a strange but imposing air of distinction (*the description suggests an 'Armada' portrait, of 1588, similar to that by an unknown hand in the National Portrait Gallery, London. Tibaldi is not known to have painted her portrait, nor is one known at Nantes*). She was called in her time 'the emerald of the seas, the pearl of the West,' and it was she for whom, while acting in *Richard III*, Shakespeare suddenly stopped speaking, in order to pick up her handkerchief (*both comments are inauthentic*).

I would gladly give away the book by Abel-François Villemain (*Cours de la Littérature Française 1828-9*) which I bought in my childhood, a foolish act which failed to lead to it being denied me, which proves my family's good nature; I would do the same with Monsieur Saint-Marc Girardin's course (*Cours de Littérature Dramatique, 1843*) that I keep, as *René* says (*see François-René de Chateaubriand's 1802 novella of that name),* 'to prevent my taking any joy in the future'. I would even add an old pair of Moroccan slippers that are very convenient to me in the summer, and in addition my rights as a citizen, the esteem of my compatriots, and the rest of a bottle of fine varnish that is beginning to thicken, yes, I would give all that, wholeheartedly and on the spot, to possess the name, age, address, profession, and likeness of the gentleman who invented tin vine-leaves to cover the private parts of the statues in the Nantes museum, which look uncommonly like devices to prohibit masturbation. The Apollo Belvedere, the Discobolus, and a flute-player, are harnessed in these shameful metal contraptions which gleam like saucepans. One can see, moreover, that they were long in the making, and the work has been executed with love; they are scalloped at the edges, and screwed to the limbs of the poor plaster casts, which have flaked from the pain of it all. In this era, when dull idiocy prevails, it is a joy if only as a diversion, to encounter, amidst all the normal stupidities that encumber mankind, at least one mad stupidity, one vast stupidity. Despite all my efforts, I have not succeeded in establishing who created this shameful nonsense. I tend to believe that the entire City Council took part, that the clergy requested it, and the ladies found it appropriate.

We next visited the Natural History museum, a meagre collection which a scholar would find of no great interest, I think, but which contains, nonetheless, an Egyptian mummy, standing upright beside its painted coffin; pieces of pink coral; mother-of-pearl shells; and crocodiles hanging from the ceiling. There are also, in a jar of spirits, two little piglets joined at the belly, which, rearing up on their hind legs, raising their tails and blinking, are, I must say, quite moving. Placed, thus, beside two human foetuses of similar monstrosity, they perhaps speak volumes, more so than many of our works of art. But who is equipped to see, in such irregular manifestations of life, multiple and graduated expressions of that unknown artistry, which in mysterious stillness, works away in the ocean depths, at the core of the planet, in the heart of light, modifying the successive generations, and perpetuating Being? For six thousand years, humankind has been

studying life, and perhaps it is beginning to spell the first letter of this alphabet that has no omega. When will it be able to read a phrase or a sentence?

If what we call the monstrosities of Nature possess anatomical relationships with each other, that is to say relationships of plastic form, and are subject to physiological laws, those laws which determine existence, why should they not (commencing with that assertion and so placing ourselves in a world which seems the negation of our own and which, perhaps, is indeed its corollary), why should they not also have their beauty, their ideal realisation? Did not the ancients believe this? And are their mythologies anything other than monstrous and fantastic universes, clothed in forms which we term unnatural, and yet beautiful, so true are they in themselves and harmonious one with another? Do we not adore the long, glaucous hair of the Naiads, and the voice of the Sirens, a melodious abyss that made ships whirl about? Who has not found the Chimera charming, loved its lion's mask, the flap of its eagle's wings, and its rump with greenish tints? — Do we not believe in the mocking Satyrs who prick their pointed ears behind the myrtle bushes, and whose goat's feet drum rhythmically at night on our garden lawns, as if they existed?

These dreams, no less than those of Nature, were not conceived in a single day, nor were they created by a single human being; like metals, rocks, rivers, gold-mines, and pearls, they arose slowly, little by little, forming in successive layers, arising 'of themselves' and emerging from nothingness through their own internal forces. We contemplate them in the same way, with a disquieted, retrospective astonishment, seeking perhaps in the depths of memory to recall whether, before our present existence, we existed as they did, our thoughts coexisting in some common matrix with those thoughts that became forms; whether the principles determining our own forms did not long ago exist in regard to the universal chrysalis, determining the origin of the oak-tree, and of the springs that flow to form the ocean.

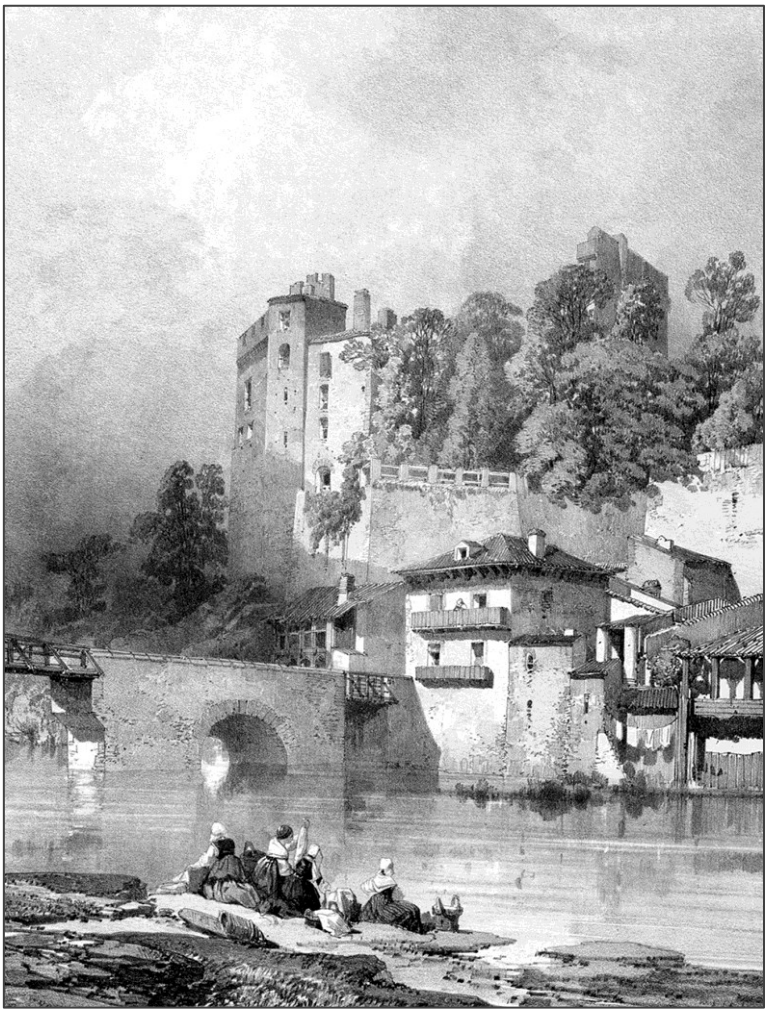
What a beautiful thing a savage's head is! I recall two, exhibited there, black and gleaming from being smoked, magnificent in their brown hues, with hints of steel, and old silver. The first (that of an inhabitant of the Amazon region) had teeth driven into its eye sockets. Adorned with ornaments of unparalleled taste, crowned with all sorts of plumage, and with its gums exposed, it grimaced in a way that was both horrible and charming; beside it hung colourful necklaces of bird-feathers that, long ago in the savanna, the man took, when he was alive and vigorous, from vanquished enemies; the necklaces are numerous, which suggests that he was brave, and had sent many souls to his equivalent of Areskoni (*an Iroquois war-god*), for these little things are the opposite of our medals awarded to rescuers. Nearby, was placed a male head from New Zealand, adorned only with the tattoos that etched it like hieroglyphs, and the solar-emblems still visible on the brown skin of his cheeks, his long, loose, black hair, seeming as moist as willow branches. With green feathers on his temples, long, downward-hanging eyelashes, and half-closed eyelids, the head possessed an exquisite air of ferocity, voluptuousness, and languor. Looking at it, one understands the whole life of the savage: his raw sensuality, his childlike tenderness for his wife, his war-cries, his love for his weapons, his sudden bursts of energy, his equally sudden laziness, and the melancholy that overtakes him on the shore as he gazes at the waves.

All this still exists, and is no fairy tale. There are still men who walk naked, who live among the trees, in a land where wedding nights have an entire forest for a bower, and the whole sky for a ceiling. But you must travel there soon if you wish to see them; they are already acquiring tortoiseshell combs, and English hair brushes, to brush and comb hair still moist with sweat and

stained by the clotted blood of wild creatures; bootstraps are being made for the trousers that are being prepared for them; laws are being penned for the cities to be built for them; they are being sent schoolmasters, missionaries, newspapers.

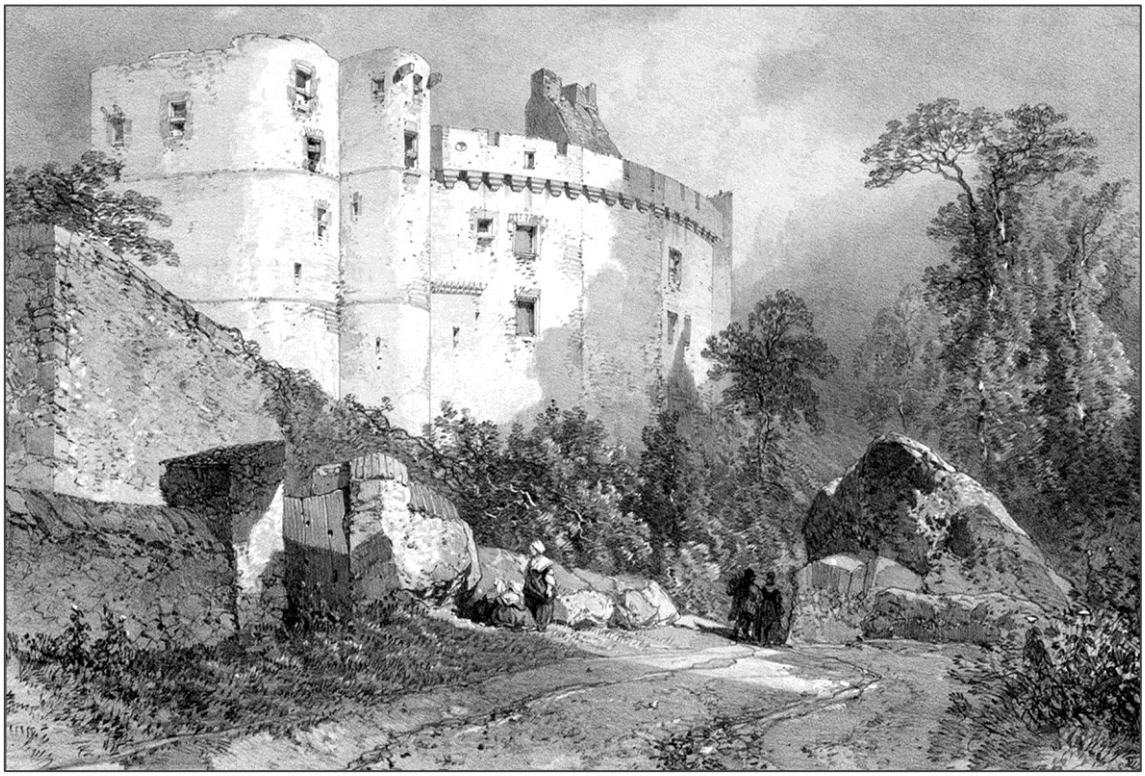
We generally avoid what is pointed out as curious and worthy of being seen, so we failed to visit the Mettray colony near Tours (*an open prison for juveniles, at Mettray*), and the madhouse in Nantes, and the forges of Indret, and Fort de Penthièvre, and the Belle-Isle lighthouse, and we have not yet entered any of the *excellent cafes* in the towns we passed through, but we did visit Clisson.

On a hillside, at the foot of which two rivers meet, in a cool landscape enlivened by the pastel colours of the low, Italianate, tiled roofs, grouped together as in Hubert Robert's sketches, near a long, low waterfall that powers a mill hidden amidst the foliage, the Château de Clisson's jagged top just rises above the tall trees. All around, the scene is calm and gentle. The cottages seem to smile as if beneath a warm sky; water murmurs, and mossy plants quiver to the flow in which soft tufts of greenery soak. The landscape extends, on the one side, to a vista of meadows, and on the other, rises suddenly, enclosed by a wooded valley whose greenish stream widens as it flows towards the foreground.



'The Château de Clisson'
Eugène Cicéri (French, 1813–1890)

Once over the bridge, at the foot of the steep path leading to the château, one sees, a large section of wall, crowned with breached machicolations, plumed with trees, and carpeted with ivy, standing boldly and sturdily above the moat towards which it leans. The lush and ample mass, etched against the grey stone in branches and spurs, shimmers in the wind along its entire length, and seems like an immense green veil, draped over the shoulders of the reclining giant, which the latter stirs, in dreaming. The grasses are tall and dark, the plants strong and prickly; the gnarled, rough, twisted ivy-trunks lift the walls as if with levers, or hold them fast in their branching web. A green tree has pierced the thickness of the wall and, emerging horizontally, suspended in the air, has extended its branches to the light. The ditches, whose slopes are softened by earth crumbling from the banks, and littered with stones falling from the battlements, have a steep curve, and the gateway, with its vigorous, slightly-pointed arch and its two openings through which the chains that raised the drawbridge passed, looks like a large helmet, whose occupant is peering through the holes in its visor.



'The Château de Clisson'
Eugène Cicéri （French, 1813–1890）

Once inside, you are surprised, amazed by the mass of ruins and trees, the ruins highlighting the trees' verdant youthfulness, and the greenery rendering the ruins' sorrowful atmosphere all the more poignant. This is truly the eternal and beautiful laughter, the resounding laughter, of Nature, echoing amidst the skeletons of things; with all the audacity of her abundance, the profound grace of her whims, and her encroaching silence. A profound enthusiasm seizes one's soul; one feels the sap flowing within the trees, and the grasses growing, even as the stones are crumbling, and the walls collapsing. A sublime artistry has aligned and juxtaposed, in a supreme harmony of secondary chords, the wandering forms of ivy with the sinuous curves of the ruins, the mass of brambles with the jumble of fallen stones, the transparent air with the resistant protrusions of stone, the hue

of the sky with the hue of the earth, and you tremble inwardly as if that dual life were operating within you, so brutal and immediate is one's perception of its harmonies, and one's awareness of its forms.

At the foot of two large trees whose trunks intertwine, a greenish light passes over the moss, and the dome of leaves reflects a clear light which, broadly illuminating all this debris, deepens the shadows and reveals all its subtleties.

We advance, we progress, wandering along the barbicans, passing beneath the crumbling arches from which long, quivering plants descend. Vaults, filled with the dead, resound beneath your feet; lizards scurry amidst the undergrowth, insects climb the walls, the sky gleams, and the sleeping ruin continues its slumbers.

With its triple enclosure, dungeons, inner courtyards, machicolations, underground passages, ramparts layered one upon another, like layers of bark on bark, or breastplates on breastplates, the old Clisson castle can be re-imagined as it once was. Memories of the harsh lives of yesteryear rise from it, as if of their own accord, along with the scent of nettles, and the coolness of ivy.

Long black streaks still ascend the walls, diagonally, as in the days when logs blazed in the eighteen-foot-wide fireplaces. Symmetrical holes, aligned in the masonry, mark the locations of the floors once reached by these staircases now partially-collapsed; empty doors open on the abyss. Sometimes a bird, emerging from its nest among the brambles in the depths of some dark corner, would soar, wings outstretched, pass through some window-arch, and fly off over the countryside.

At the top of a high, bare, grey, dry stretch of wall, square bays, unequal in size and alignment, allowed the bright blue of the sky to burst through their cross-bars, its alluring colour enticing the eye. Sparrows uttered their shrill, repeated cries among the trees. A cow grazed, as if in a pasture, its split horn striking the grass.

There is a window there which overlooks a meadow called the *Meadow of the Knights*. It was from its stone benches, hewn into the thickness of the wall, that the noble ladies of the time could watch the knights as the iron breastplates of their horses clashed, the maces descended upon their crests, their lances broke, and men fell to the ground.

On a fine summer's day, perhaps, when the mill, which sends its clatter echoing through the landscape, did not yet exist, when there were roofs atop these walls, Flemish leather covering the stone seats, grilles of horn in the windows, close-clipped grass, and the voices and whispers of living folk — yes, then, more than one heart, nestled in its sheath of red velvet, beat with anguish and love. Graceful white hands trembled with fear, above this stone now covered with nettles, and the embroidered veils of the tall high-coned head-dresses quivered in a breeze, like to that which now stirs the ends of my tie, which made the knights' plumes bow.

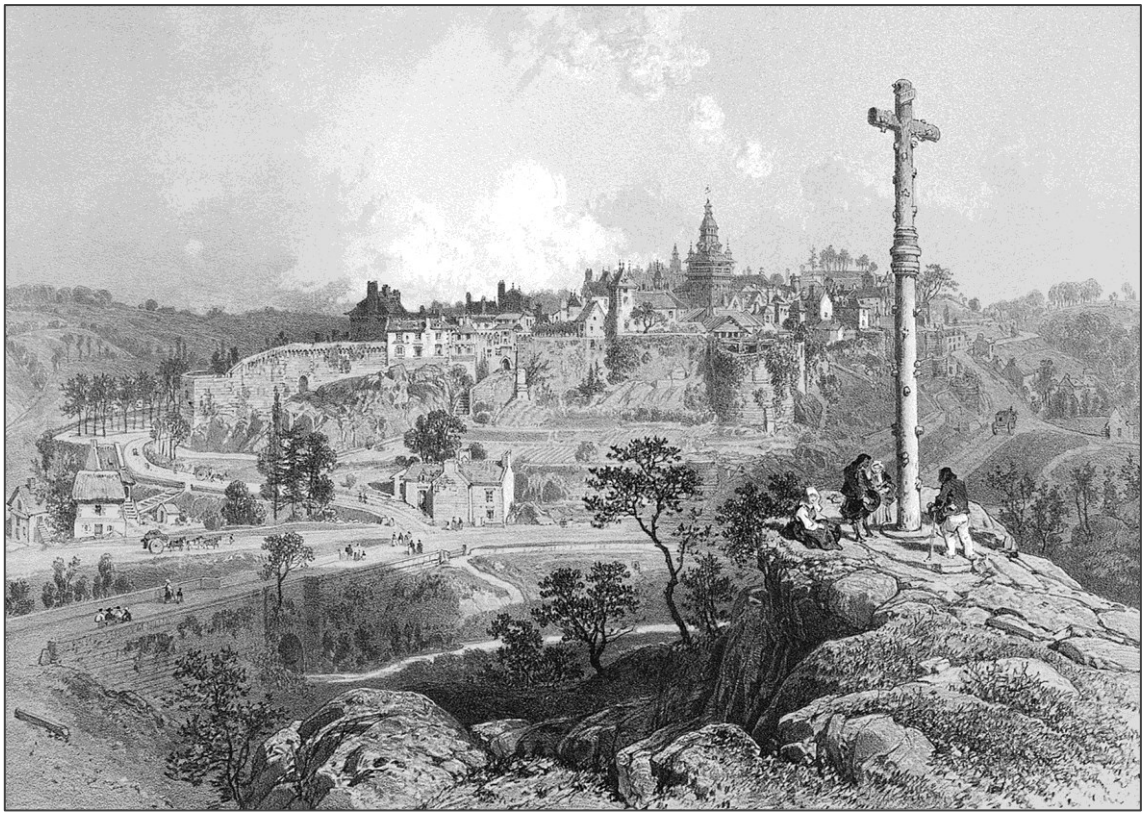
We descended to an underground chamber where John V, Duke of Brittany, was imprisoned (*in 1420*). In the men's prison, we still saw on the ceiling the large double hook used for execution by hanging; and curiosity led me to examine the door of the women's prison. It is about four inches thick, secured with bolts, reinforced with iron bands, plated, seemingly padded with iron. Through the small grille in the centre, whatever was needed to keep a condemned woman alive was thrown into the cell, for its door, the discreet harbourer of the most terrible secrets, was one that closed upon her, and was never re-opened while she lived. What an age of hatred, in which,

when you loathed someone, and abducted them in a surprise assault, or trapped them in some treacherous interview; when you finally had them in your possession, and held them tightly imprisoned; you could, at leisure, feel them dying hour by hour, minute by minute, counting their moments of anguish, drinking their tears. One could descend to their cell, speak to them, bargain over their torture, smile at their torments, debate their ransom; one profited from them, from their death in life, from the gold they represented. One's entire dwelling, from the summit of the towers to the depths of the moat, weighed heavily on the prisoner, crushed them, buried them; and family revenges were thus executed, within the family, by the château itself which constituted the family's strength, and symbolised its power.

Sometimes, however, when the poor wretch was a great lord, a rich man, when, on his deathbed, all having had their fill of him, the tears in his eyes had acted like a curative bloodletting for the master's hatred, they might talk of releasing him. The prisoner would promise all: that he would surrender his strongholds, hand over the keys to his finest cities, give his daughter in marriage, endow churches, walk barefoot to the Holy Sepulchre. And offer money! More and more! So, they would sign a treaty, countersign it, backdate it; bring out the sacred relics, and swear their oaths on them, and the prisoner would see the sun again. He would mount a horse, gallop away, return home, have the portcullis lowered, summon his men, and unhook his sword. His hatred erupted, once freed, in ferocious outbursts. It was an age of dreadful anger, and all-conquering rage. The oath? The Pope would release one from it, and as for the ransom, it would never be paid.

When Olivier V de Clisson was arrested (*by Duke John IV of Brittany*) in the Château de l'Hermine (*Vannes*), in 1387, he promised, in exchange for his release, one hundred thousand gold francs, the restitution of the properties possessed by Count John I of Penthièvre, and the cancellation of his daughter Marguerite's marriage to the said Count. As soon as he was released, he attacked Châtelaudren, Guingamp, Lamballe, and Saint-Malo, which were captured or forced to surrender. The Count of Penthièvre married his daughter, and the hundred thousand gold francs he had handed over were returned to him. But it was the people of Brittany who ultimately paid.

When John V, Duke of Brittany, was abducted at the bridge of Loroux by Count Olivier de Penthièvre, in 1420, he promised a ransom of one million livres; and his eldest daughter in marriage, though she was already betrothed to the King of Sicily (*Alfonso V of Aragon*). He promised Moncontour, Quessoy, and Jugon, but gave neither his daughter, nor the money, nor the strongholds. He vowed to go on pilgrimage to the Holy Sepulchre. He fulfilled the vow by means of a proxy. He swore never again to levy taxes or subsidies; the Pope released him from the obligation. He vowed to give his weight in gold to Notre-Dame de Nantes; but as he weighed some two hundred pounds, the vow remained unfulfilled. With all the towns he could gather or seize, he quickly formed a league, and forced the Penthièvre family to buy back the peace they had sold.



'Moncontour'
Félix Benoist (French, 1818–1896), Adolphe Jean-Baptiste Bayot (French, 1810–1871) and Eugène Cicéri (French, 1813–1890)

On the right bank of the Sèvre Nantaise, a little upstream from Clisson, where one can dip one's toes in the water, stretch the woods of 'La Garenne' climbing the hillside, a park (*Domaine de la Garenne Lemot*) beautiful in itself, despite its artificial adornments. François-Frédéric Lemot (the father of the current owner, Barthélémy Lemot), who was a painter of Empire, and a prize-winning artist, sought to the best of his ability to reproduce, there, the cold Italianate, Republican, Roman style, so fashionable in the days of the sculptor Antonio Canova, and of Madame de Staël. People were pompous, grandiose, and dignified. It was the era of sculptured urns on tombs, a time when one was painted in a coat, hair blowing in the wind, where Corinne sang on her lyre, next to Oswald who wore Russian leather boots, which led to a deal of wayward hair on many a head, and many a ruin dotting every view.

This kind of noble scene is not lacking at La Garenne. There is a Temple of Vesta and, opposite it, a Temple of Friendship, a large tomb containing the remains of two friends (François-Frédéric Lemot, and the diplomat and deputy François Cacault), which tends to make one forgive the ridiculousness of the name they chose for their shared tomb. Indeed, let us not deny pretentious sentiment and declamatory enthusiasm; one can weep in good faith while still bending one's elbow gracefully to draw forth a handkerchief, or write a poem about some joy or misfortune which conveys it as effectively as those who cannot, and as yet it is not proven, definitively, that it is impossible to love the woman one calls one's *goddess* or one's *angel of love*.

Inscriptions, arrangements of rocks, and artificial ruins, are displayed here with naiveté and conviction. On a piece of granite, one can read the well-known line by the poet Jacques Delille:

'Indestructible, its mass has withstood the test of time'.

(*'Les Jardins', 1782*)

Further on, there are twenty lines by the same Delille; elsewhere, on a stone carved in the shape of a tomb: '*In Arcadia ego*' (*'I too am in Arcadia': the inscription appears in paintings by Nicolas Poussin, Guercino and others, as a reminder of the presence of death*) a nonsense whose intention I could not discover.

But all the poetic riches are gathered in the Grotte d'Héloïse, a kind of natural dolmen on the bank of the Sèvre. 'What we experience in such places,' said Édouard Richer, author of a journey to the Lower Loire *('Voyage Pittoresque dans le Département de la Loire Inférieure', 1820*), 'Héloïse experienced, she felt, admired, and dreamed as we do.' Well, I confess, I am not like Monsieur Richer, nor indeed Héloïse; I felt little, and admired only the trees, noting that the grotto they shade would be very suitable for lunch in the summer, in the company of some friends and a few Héloïses, especially since the proximity of the water would allow us to chill the bottles there, and, alas, I failed to dream at all.

But there are happy people, gifted, sensitive, imaginative people, who always rise to the occasion, who never fail to weep during a funeral, laugh during a wedding, and find their memories aroused by viewing some broken tile or hut not built in the fashion of the day. These people will tell you that the sight of the sea inspires them with great thoughts, and that the contemplation of a forest raises their souls to heaven. They feel melancholy when they look at the moon, and cheerful when they look at a crowd of people. 'That consecrated name,' Monsieur Richer continues, 'is the only one this grotto could indeed have offered us. The inscription one reads there is perhaps unnecessary, for feeling is always swifter than words." Although I readily agree with Monsieur Richer, and think the inscription unneeded, I cannot, however, resist the pleasure of transcribing it.

Héloïse, perchance, wandered by this shore,
when, hiding herself from jealous eyes,
A son, a dear pledge, melancholy prize,
Within Le Pollet's walls, she bore.
Lost furtive pleasures, tender love, her sighs
Recalled perhaps, beneath wild skies,
When oft she came to sorrow here alone,
To taste the sweetest tears, and freely moan.
And seated on this rock, at ease,
Perhaps she dreamt here of her woe.
I too would dream; within my heart, would know,
Sweet memories of Héloïse.

Thereupon the naive visitor seeks to imagine Héloïse wandering the shore holding the hand of her little son Astrolabe; the visitor is full of pity as regards the result of such furtive pleasures and tender love. Though, if the idea of tender love arouses grief, the image of furtive pleasures yields him a degree of cheer. He seeks this wild and secluded spot — its existence unsuspected a moment ago — and finds it wild indeed. Finally, he imagines her weeping on the rock, dreaming of her misfortune, and seeks to dream too, to fill his heart with the sweet memory of Héloïse. Our visitor does so, or at least does everything he can to fill it. But no, his effort is insufficient, it is not filled to his liking. He would like to fill it completely, to feel it overflow, to stuff it full, to feel it break… whatever! He returns, writes his name in the concierge's album, hands over his twenty-sou coin, and leaves happily: he has felt emotion, he has evoked memories.

Why has the figure of Héloïse, so noble and lofty, been reduced to something so banal and foolish, the insipid archetype of thwarted love, and the narrow idea of 'the sentimental young girl'? She deserves better, that poor mistress of the great Abelard, she who loved him with such devoted admiration, despite his harshness, his sombreness, despite his unsparing infliction on her of bitter blows. She feared 'offending him more than God Himself, and sought to please him more than the latter.' She did not wish to marry him, finding that 'it was an unseemly and deplorable thing that a woman should appropriate and take for herself alone...one whom Nature had created for all', finding, she said, 'more sweetness in the name of mistress, and concubine, than in that of wife, or of empress', and, humbling herself before him, hoped to win more of his heart.

O sensitive creatures, O Romantic idiots who, on Sundays, cover her pretty mausoleum with immortelles, you are not required to study the theology, Greek, or Hebrew which she taught, but try to swell your little hearts and broaden your narrow minds, and admire her intellect, and the immense love involved in her sacrifice.

The park is nonetheless a pleasant place. Its paths wind through coppiced woods, the groves of trees dropping to the river. You can hear the water flowing, you can smell the pleasant scent of the leaves. If we were irritated by the bad taste we found there, well, we had just visited Clisson, which is of such solid and simple beauty, and then, the bad taste was not our own. What, after all, is bad taste? Is it not, invariably, the taste of the era that precedes ours? Do not all children find their fathers ridiculous? Bad taste in Pierre de Ronsard's time was symbolised by Clement Marot; in Nicolas Boileau's, by Ronsard; in Voltaire's, by Pierre Corneille; and Voltaire was a symbol of bad taste in the days of Châteaubriand, whom many people are, at this moment, beginning to find rather 'weak'. O people of taste, in future centuries, I commend to you the 'people of taste' of my day. You will no doubt smile at their stomach-aches, their superb disdain, their predilection for veal and dairy products, and the grimaces they make when served rare meat and overly-suggestive poetry.

How ugly what is beautiful will seem, how foolish what is graceful will appear, how poor what is rich will be, our delightful boudoirs, our charming salons, our ravishing costumes, our interesting serial novels, our thrilling dramas, our serious books! Oh, how quickly we will be condemned to the attic, how little they will regard our works! Mere stuff, paper, manure, fertiliser! O posterity! Do not forget above all our Gothic parlours, our Renaissance furnishings, the speeches of Monsieur Pasquier (*Étienne-Denis, Duc de Pasquier, Chancellor of France and President of the Chamber of Peers*), the shape of our hats, and the aesthetic predilections of the *Revue des Deux-Mondes*!

It was while indulging in these philosophical musings that the 'cart' dragged us to Tiffauges. Placed together in a sort of tin tub, our weight crushed the hapless horse swaying between the shafts: it was like the wriggling of an eel in the body of a Barbary rat. The down-slopes pushed it forward, the ascents pulled it backward, the swerves threw it sideways, and the wind buffeted it, while it suffered a hail of whip blows. Poor beast! I cannot think of it without a certain remorse.

The road, cut into the hillside, descends in a long curve, its sides covered by clumps of gorse, or broad banks of reddish moss. To the right, at the foot of the hill, on a rise in the terrain that ascends from the valley floor, large, uneven sections of wall extend their jagged peaks one above another.

We follow a hedge, take a track, and pass beneath a wide-open archway, two-thirds sunk up to its pointed arch in the ground. Those who once rode through it on horseback would now only be able to do so by stooping. When the Earth tires of bearing a structure for too long, she swells from beneath, climbs over it, overcomes it, and while the sky gnaws at its head, buries its feet. The courtyard is deserted, the enclosure is empty, the portcullises fail to stir, the still water of the ditches remains flat and motionless beneath the rounded water lilies.

The sky was white, without distinct clouds, but sunless. Its pale arc stretched far and wide, covering the countryside, which seemed cold and mournful in its monotony. There was no sound, silence reigned; the birds failed to sing, not a murmur as far as the horizon, and the empty furrows — it was a Sunday — emitted neither the squawks of crows taking flight, nor the soft thud of ploughshares. We descended through brambles to a deep moat, hidden at the foot of a tower bathed by the water, and hidden by patches of reeds. A single window opened, a shadowy square traversed by the grey line of its stone mullion. A playful clump of wild honeysuckle hung over the sill, its green, fragrant breath wafting forth. The large machicolations, when one raised one's head, revealed from below, through their gaping openings, only the sky or some small unknown flower nestling there, borne to the spot by the wind on a stormy day, the seed of which had flourished, sheltered by a crevice in the wall.

Suddenly there came a breath of wind, soft and long, like an exhaled sigh, and the trees in the ditches, the grass among the stones, the rushes and duckweed in the water, the plants among the ruins, and the gigantic ivy that, covered the tower, from base to summit, with a uniform layer of gleaming green, all trembled and their leaves rippled; long, golden waves rolled over the fields, as the heads of wheat were stirred. Ripples from the pool of water in the moat streamed over the foot of the tower; the ivy leaves shuddered together, and a blossoming apple tree dropped its pink petals.

Nothing else alive, only the passing wind, the burgeoning grass, the open sky. No ragged child, tending a cow grazing moss among the stones; not even, as elsewhere, a solitary goat poking its bearded head from a gap in the ramparts, then fleeing in fright, stirring the undergrowth; not a bird singing, not a cry from a nest, not a sound! This castle is like a ghost, mute, abandoned in a deserted countryside; it feels accursed, full of fierce memories. Yet it was once inhabited, this sad place that even the owls now seem to disdain. In the keep, between four walls as livid as the bottom of old watering troughs, we counted the remains of its five stories. Thirty feet in the air, still with its two rounded pillars and its blackened hearthstone, a chimney hangs suspended. Dust and dirt have fallen into it, and wildflowers have grown there, as if in a planter left behind and neglected.

Beyond the second enclosure, in a ploughed field, we recognised the remains of a chapel, with the broken shafts of a pointed-arch portal. Oats had grown there, and trees had replaced its pillars. The chapel was once filled with ornaments in gold and silk, censers, candlesticks, chalices, crosses, precious stones, silver-gilt dishes, and gold cruets; a choir of thirty singers, chaplains, musicians, and children sang hymns here to the sound of an organ that accompanied them on their travels. They were covered in scarlet robes lined with squirrel-fur and sheepskin. There was an archdeacon, and a bishop, and they had petitioned the Pope for permission to wear the mitre, like canons, because this chapel was the chapel, and this castle was one of the castles, of Gilles de Laval, Baron de Rais, Lord of Roucy, Montmorency, Retz (*Rais*) and Craon, Lieutenant-General of the Duke of Brittany, and Marshal of France, burned at Nantes, on October 26th, 1440, in the *Prée* de la Madeleine, as a counterfeiter, murderer, sorcerer, sodomite and atheist.

He possessed more than a hundred thousand gold crowns, receiving thirty thousand pounds of annual income, the profits from his fiefdoms, and the wages from his office as marshal; fifty magnificently dressed men escorted him on horseback. He kept an open table, where the rarest meats and the most exotic wines were served, and mystery-plays were performed at his home, as in cities at the entry of kings. When he lacked for money, he sold his land; when he had sold his land, he searched for gold; and when he had quenched his furnaces, he invoked the Devil. He wrote that he would yield the latter everything, except his soul, and his life. He made sacrifices, burnt offerings of incense, gave alms, and had solemnities conducted in his honour. It was here that this man lived. These vaults reddened at the unceasing breath of enchanted bellows, these walls were illuminated at night by the glow of torches, burning amidst goblets full of wine from the Isles, and among a host of Bohemian jugglers; they invoked Hell, they feasted on death, they slaughtered children, they experienced terrible joys and atrocious pleasures; blood flowed, instruments played, everything resounded with voluptuousness, horror, delirium.

After his execution, a handful of young ladies removed his corpse from the pyre, placed it in a coffin, and had it taken to the Carmelite monastery (*Notre-Dame des Carmes*) in Nantes, where after an honourable funeral, he was solemnly interred.

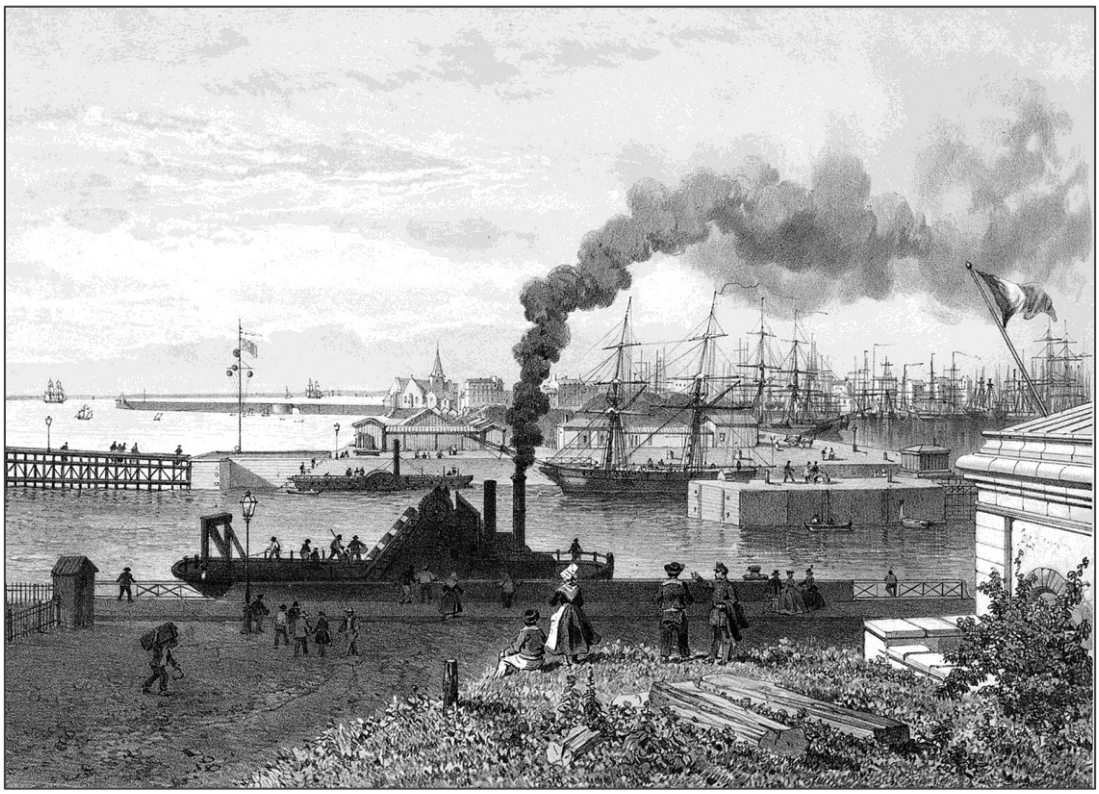
On one of the bridges over the Loire, opposite the Hôtel de la Boule-d'Or, an expiatory monument was erected to him; it was a niche containing the statue of the *Blessed Virgin of Crée-Lait*, who had the power to stimulate the breasts of wet-nurses to produce milk; butter and other local products were offered there. The niche is extant, but the statue is no longer present, just as the reliquary, in the town hall, that once contained Queen Anne of Brittany's heart is also empty (*the reliquary is now in Nantes cathedral*). We were not particularly interested in viewing the reliquary. We refused to even consider it. I would have preferred to contemplate the breeches of Marshal de Rais, rather than the heart of Anne of Brittany; there was more passion in the former than grandeur in the latter.

The End of 'By Field and Shore' Part I

Part II: Chapters IV-VI

Chapter IV: (Du Camp: The West Coast, from Nantes to Carnac)

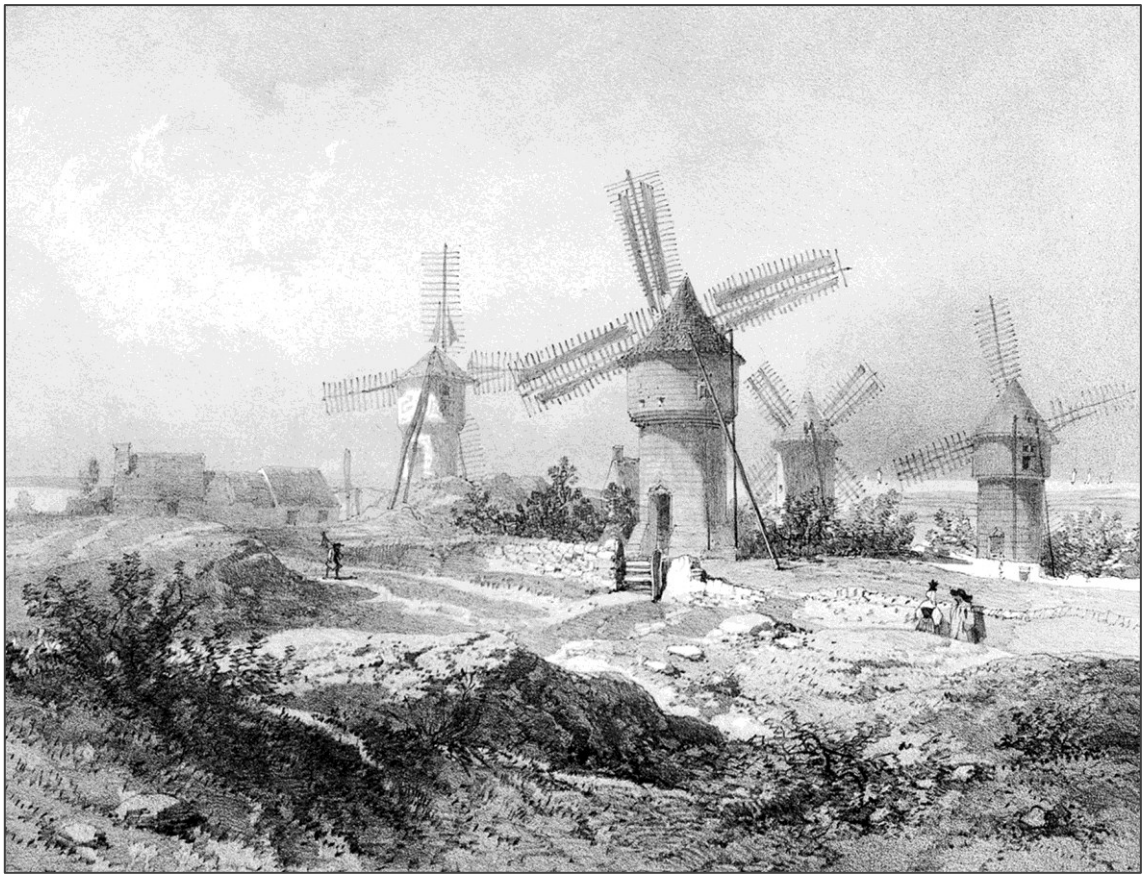
From Nantes to Saint-Nazaire, the Loire, is wide and flat. From Saint-Nazaire to Pornichet, hawthorns, and gorse. — Paths between the hedgerows from Pornichet to Le Pouliguen. — The deserted bay; at the water's edge, on the hard sand, pink and white shells; dunes covered with rushes. — The ferry. — Le Pouliguen.



'Saint-Nazaire: View from the Dock Entrance'
Félix Benoist (French, 1818–1896) and Adolphe Jean-Baptiste Bayot (French, 1810–1871)

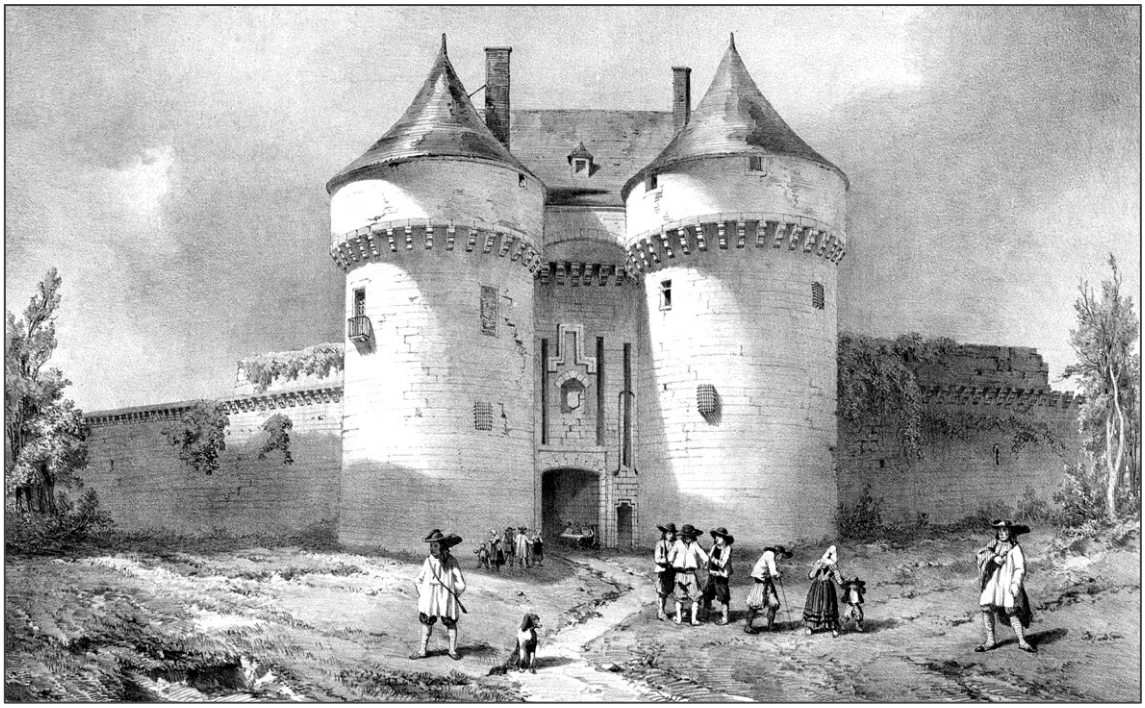
As far as Bourg-de-Batz (*Batz-sur-Mer*), salt marshes, never a tree; salt-workers. — The inn at Batz, barrels, two tall beds; on the mantelpiece, a Virgin in traditional dress; at a window, the husband, the bride, a man's red face. — Old chapel (*Chapelle du Mûrier*), a fine example of Gothic architecture, completely ruined. — Surprise and curiosity shown by the children at our appearance. — A woman plastering cow dung on the walls; it sets the stones and serves as mortar. — As far as Le Croisic, nothing but sandy flats covered with sparse grass; the sky pale blue with broad white streaks; the cows are small, the sheep black.

Le Croisic. — Fine weather. — Dunes; seaweed underwater at the end of the jetty. — Charlotte, her Egyptian bonnet.



'Sixteenth-Century Windmills, Guérande'
Léon Gaucherel (French, 1816–1886) and Eugène Cicéri (French, 1813–1890)

From Le Croisic to Guérande. — Along the seashore, and through the marshes. — Guérande is sited on a hill overlooking the countryside; the fortifications are surrounded by trees, small poplars; to the left of the north gateway, the water laps at the base of the towers; we found again what we saw at Clisson. — The gentle character of these ruins, these fortifications, made me think of Avignon. — A Moorish window (*moucharabieh*) gutted, ivy; but natural beauty lay at its foot, small green plants made a kind of wide painted layer on the water.



'The Town Gate, Guérande'
Léon Gaucherel (French, 1816–1886)



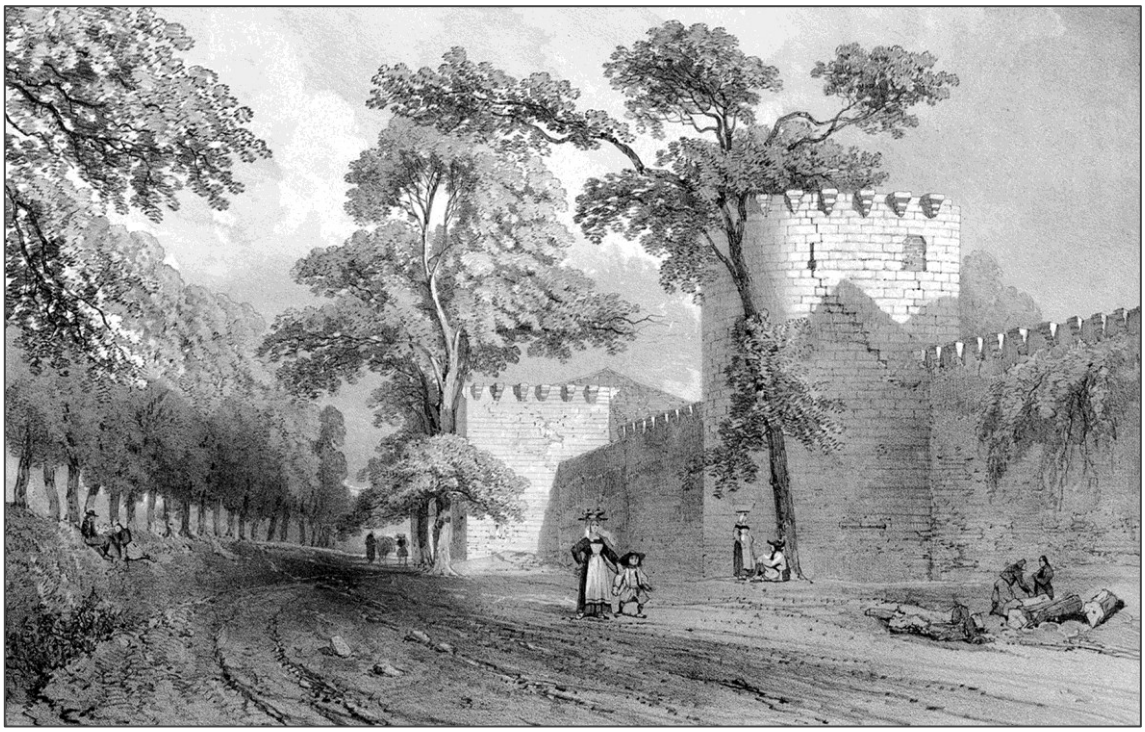
'The North Gate, Guérande'
Léon Gaucherel (French, 1816–1886)



‘The South Gate, Guérande’
Léon Gaucherel (French, 1816–1886)



‘The Ramparts of Guérande’
Léon Gaucherel （French, 1816–1886）



‘The Walls of Guérande’
Léon Gaucherel （French, 1816–1886） and Eugène Cicéri （French, 1813–1890）

An English-style church; a tall portal with a rather pure and unadorned pointed arch for its period (*Saint-Aubin*). The organ has been placed where the rose-window used to be. On a cartouche, there is this almost illegible inscription: 'The French people recognize a supreme God, and the immortality of the soul' (*The text is from the decree of May 1794, instigated by Robespierre*). The two side entrances have covered porticoes like the church at Louviers, which this one resembles. To the right of the entrance portal, on the external wall, is a covered stone pulpit. — Inside: a mediocre painting depicting members of Parliament in period costume; and one of various figures adoring Jesus Christ on the cross (their hairstyles indicate the beginning of the seventeenth century); at the foot of the dying Christ, a bishop with a crosier and mitre; in the air, flying angels (*the painting is inscribed 'Jacob Quatroulx, 1642'*).



'The Exterior Pulpit of the Church of Saint-Aubin, Guérande'
Léon Gaucherel (French, 1816–1886)

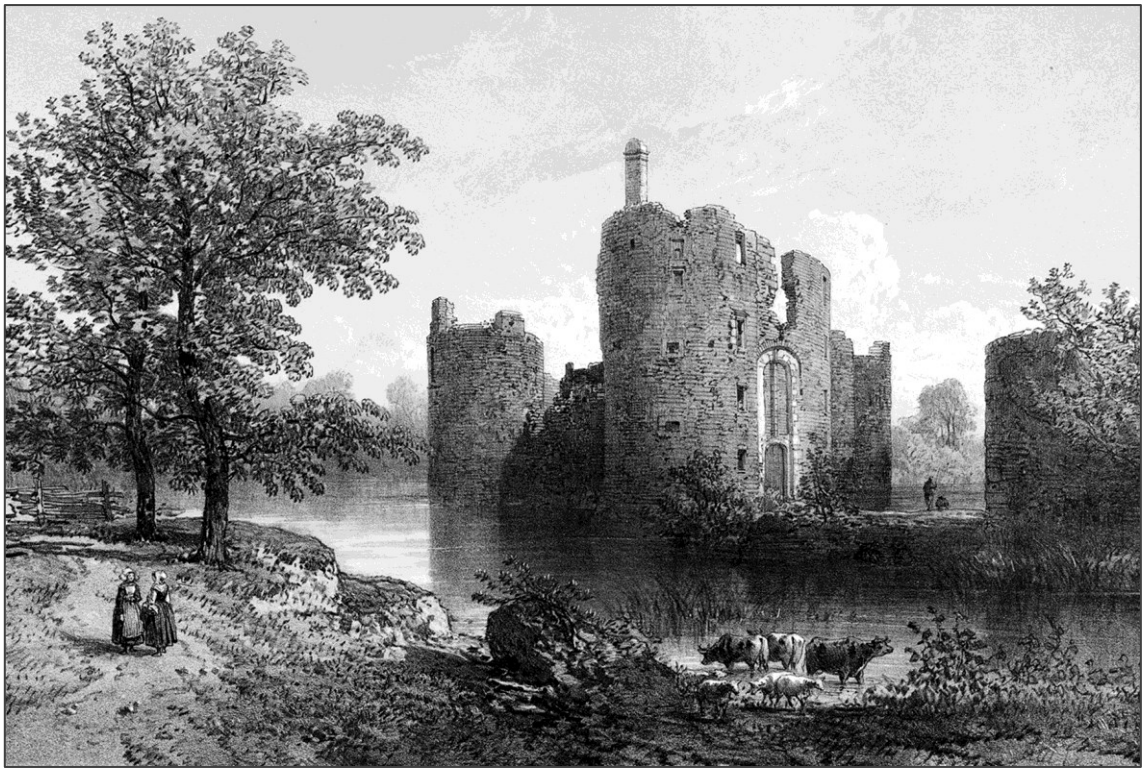
Beautiful stained-glass windows. — A showman advertising various curious phenomena; his sign was a large, animated, intelligent figure with white teeth; it lured the children into kneeling; like cows and sheep; we were disinclined to believe the thing real! As the rest would have been if they had recognised the trick, so true it is that one does not like to change one's preconceived ideas, and embrace the unexpected. — We toured the town a second time. — Its character mild; we found it a place suitable for amorous assignments because of its size, not to mention, that it was evening, at that hour. — The market crowded with peasants, and pairs of oxen yoked together.

We set off on Thursday the 20th of May at 6 a.m., with a glass of Madeira and a crust of bread for our breakfast, and headed briskly towards Piriac (*Piriac-sur-Mer*). The countryside is bare, the road rises and falls; to the left, a wide view of the sea; in the distance, stretching all the way to the shore, an immense plain dotted here and there with pools of a steely-brown hue. These are the salt marshes.

Piriac. — Deserted; fresh sea air and streets full of sand; not even fishing nets beside the doors; a pretty sandy bay; two or three boats, without masts or sails, beached on the shore. — An impossible inn: veal and eggs; veal and eggs for dinner! Always veal! Forever veal! — The mayor of the said place to whose house we were sent by Monsieur Mérès. He wore a fine dressing gown, plied a fine snuffbox, in a fine study for a solitary man; a collection of copies of the *Moniteur*, the Roret manuals (*a series of reference manuals on various topics produced by Nicolas-Edme Roret*), law books, Adolphe Thiers' history (*Thiers, later President of France, produced histories of the Revolution, Consulate, and Empire*), and a large book bound with copper nails on which was written 'Decrees and Deliberations'.

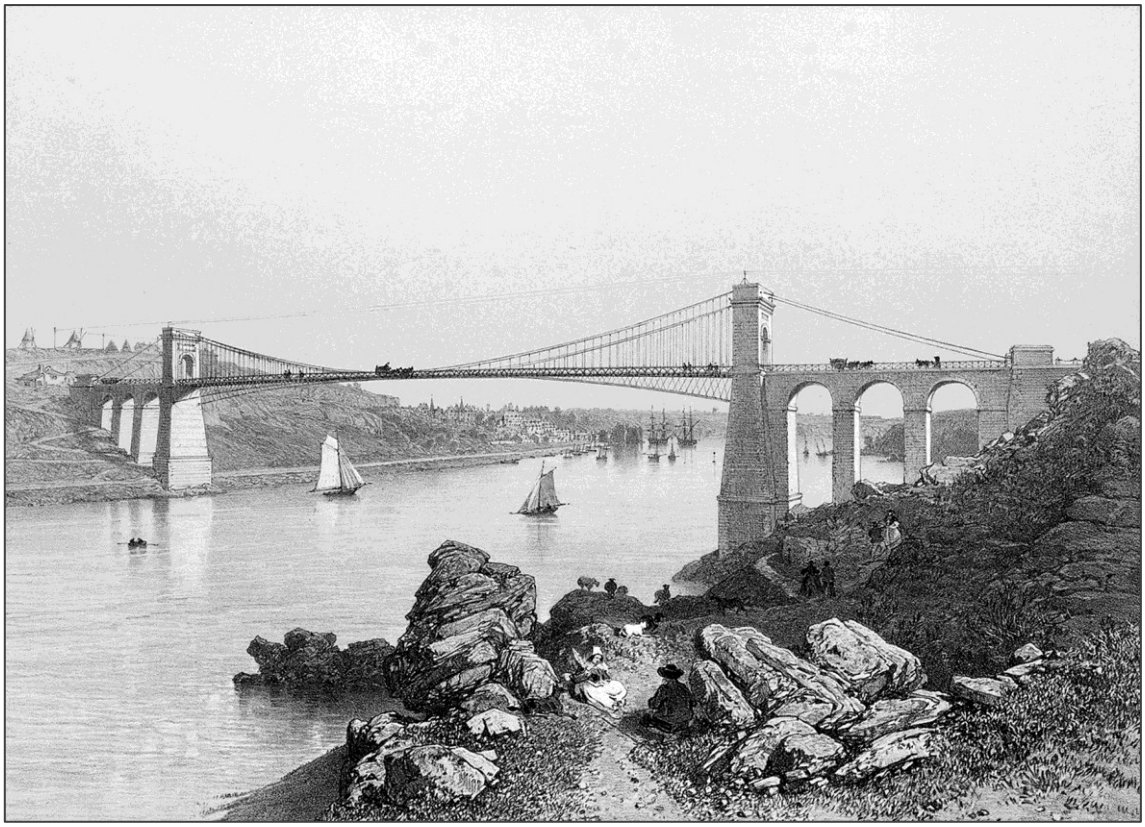
Excursion to the island (*Île Dumet*), by canoe; the pilot old and white-haired, with a long beard; the sailor, the cabin boy; a young man, the contractor's son, a singularly brutal figure, was at the helm, he had deserted; the work seems not to be progressing. — Beautiful rocks, almost all black and marbled. — I rejoice in the sea, I think back to Trouville and my holidays at the cottage there; how I used to smoke, in the sun, in a rocky hollow. — Arched rocks here, with small pink and white daisies, there was a pale green on the rocks like to that which affects marble, a velvety green tending towards yellow; beautiful seaweed that we caught up, and handled; frilled, jagged, swaying festoons. — We returned downwind. — An odour of tallow, and a mother singing, lulling her child to sleep, as I packed our bags. — An old paralysed beggar, halfway to Piriac, a crippled vagabond hoping to sleep in some farmhouse, begging for scraps of bread; he was at the Guérande market yesterday. — A nap in the sun, on the cliff, in the grass. — On a shaded path, a cart pulled by two oxen, with a child; they entered a large farmyard where one could see the remains of old buildings; a ruined gate.

From Mesquer to Herbignac, a rather ugly road, rising and falling; pale russet heathland beneath a blue-white sky. — Large masses of fir trees enclosing a park. The Herbignac cart. — A kilometre from Herbignac, the castle of Marshal de Rieux himself (*the Château du Ranroët, belonged to Jean IV de Rieux, Marshal of Brittany, and tutor to Anne of Brittany*). No ivy or trees on the walls, only dry, red moss; dismantled towers bathed by a pool; we entered through a window. — Inside, a large cabbage plant. The walls appear to have been dismantled over time; sections are still standing. The whole is a ruin. It has something bourgeois about it, like Marshal de Rieux himself. The lad who was driving our cart climbed up to find nests, and with a stick pitched them in the dust at our feet. — Lunch in Herbignac at the grocer's shop.



'The Ruins of the Château de Ranrouët'
Félix Benoist (French, 1818–1896) and Eugène Cicéri (French, 1813–1890)

La Roche-Bernard. — The Vilaine River, there, treeless on its banks, flows between pale green rocks covered in golden gorse. — The bridge spoils the simplicity of the view. — A dull underground tunnel. — At the entrance, a blind, one-armed beggar was reciting his rosary; a sign, addressing itself to the traveller's purse, indicated that he was a miner from the port, who had once made a living by working there. — Dinner. — Monsieur Poulman (Balzac), the collector of indirect taxes, a Montmorency!



'The Suspension Bridge, La Roche-Bernard'
Eugène Cicéri (French, 1813–1890), Félix Benoist (French, 1818–1896) and Adolphe Jean-Baptiste Bayot (French, 1810–1871)

Vannes. — Sarzeau; Lesage's house (*Alain-René Lesage, novelist and playwright, was born in Sarzeau*). Suscinio (*the Domaine de Suscinio, a late-medieval castle built by the Dukes of Brittany*), in the countryside, overlooking the sea, pierced with large windows, seems to have been more of a dwelling than a fortress. — Massive gatehouse towers. — It could easily be rebuilt; the steps of the staircases remain (*the castle has been substantially restored*). — The interior of the courtyard, with its machicolations, its sections of wall pierced with windows and openings, and the sun and the blue sky, gave it a Moorish air. — On the right-hand tower, looking at the facade (from the outside), a trefoil window in a square frame. — Animals entered while we were on the grass: small oxen, sheep, two goats.



‘The Ruins of the Château de Suscinio’
Adolphe Jean-Baptiste Bayot (French, 1810–1871), Félix Benoist (French, 1818–1896) and Eugène Cicéri (French, 1813–1890)



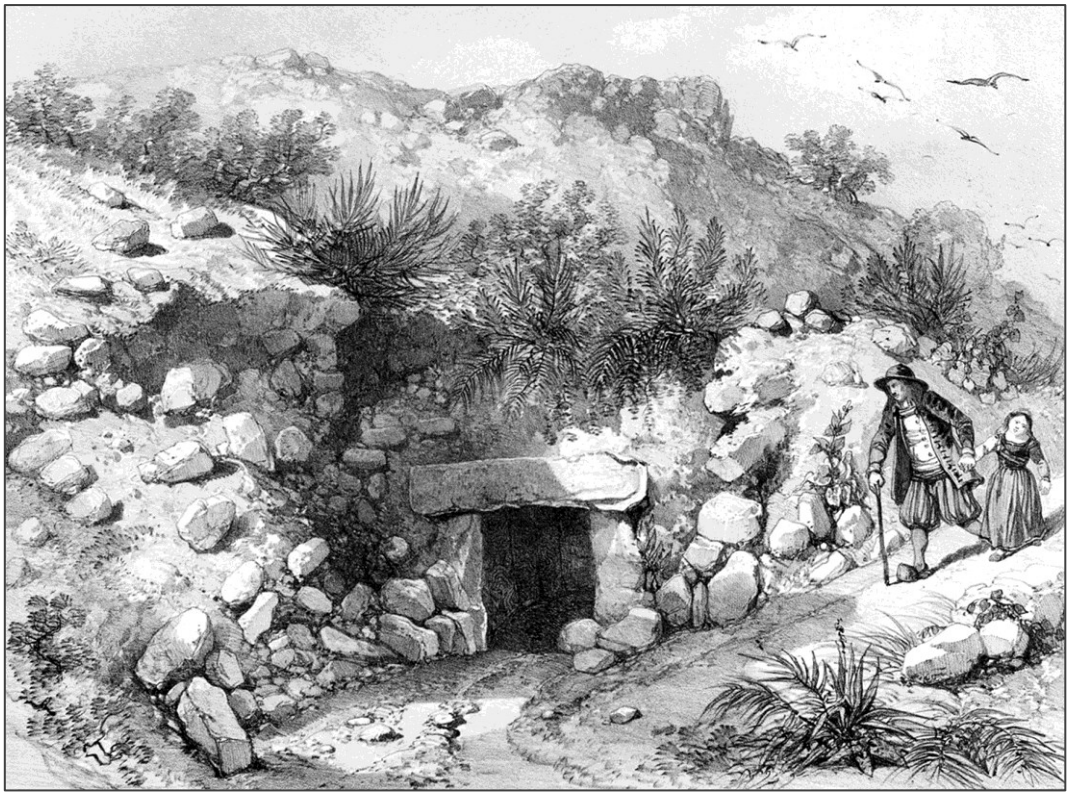
‘The Château de Suscinio’
Félix Benoist (French, 1818–1896)

Return to Sarzeau. — Walk in the countryside. — Monsieur... a staff captain. From Sarzeau to Logeo. — In the fields, country folk going to Mass, dressed in their black bibs; almost all in black; large aprons sometimes in dove-red silk. Logeo. — Execrable brutes; hatred of medals of honour.

The Île d'Arz. — The church (*Église de La Nativité*). — The cemetery; the graves with a flowerpot covered by a slate; an ossuary viewed through iron-bars, amidst barrels, and pieces of wood. — The course we pursued at sea. Gavrinis Island covered in long blue bell-shaped flowers on stems. A tumulus, with a covered passageway. The entrance to the underground passage is decorated with two large clumps of broom. The passageway itself is about thirty feet long. All the stones are covered with lines made with a stone tool, regularly spaced, representing countless ribs or branches radiating from a thorax or trunk, and at the base the lines rise upwards. However, one would have to be quite perceptive to see a reproduction of anything specific in them. — The passageway is deeper at the back than at the entrance, and the stones are also wider there; on the left, on one stone, are carved what look like the straps of a shield. As we embarked, once more, we admired, lovingly, some large water-plants which, starting from a single root, radiated out like hair and spread across the surface; in the depths, amidst blue-green light, we could see mosses and grasses.



'The Cairn on the Island of Gavrinis'
Léon Gaucherel (French, 1816–1886) and Eugène Cicéri (French, 1813–1890)

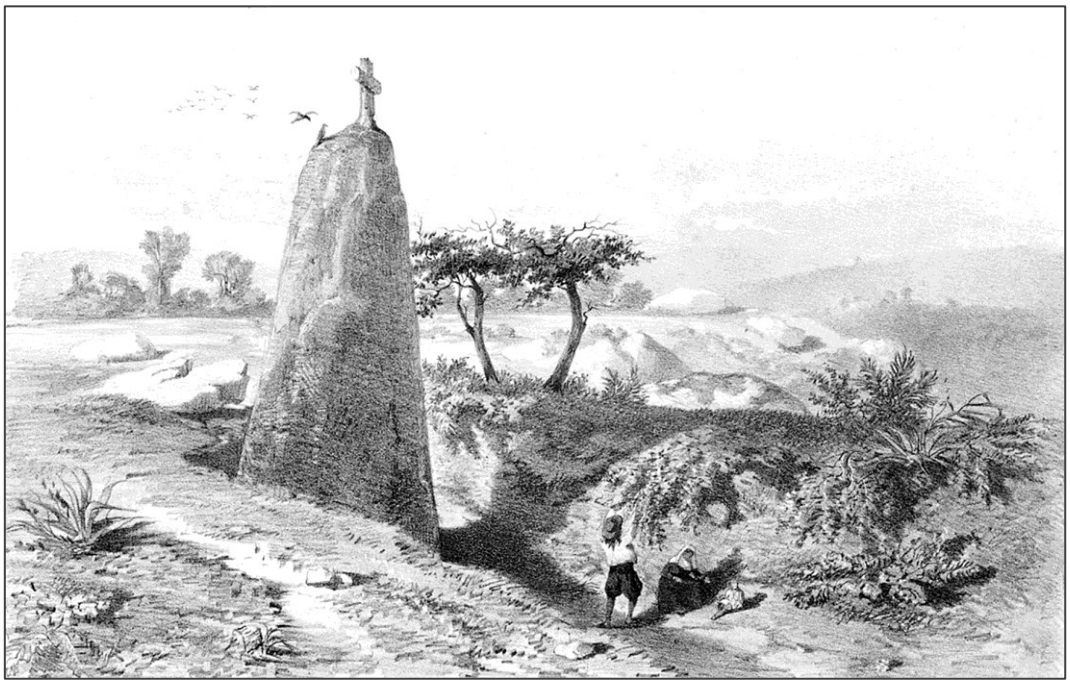


‘The Entrance to the Cairn of Gavrinis’
Léon Gaucherel
（French, 1816–1886） and Eugène Cicéri （French, 1813–1890）

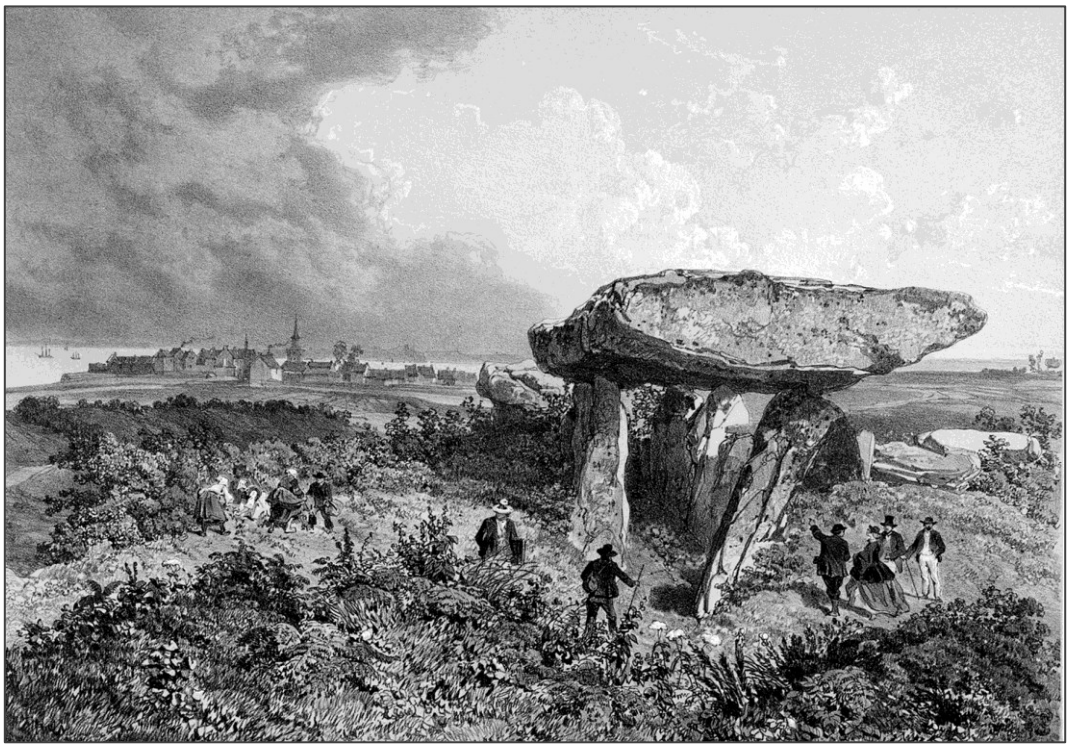


‘The Druidic Grotto on the Island of Gavrinis’
Félix Benoist
（French, 1818–1896） and Adolphe Jean-Baptiste Bayot （French, 1810–1871）

Locmariaquer. — A dolmen fallen, broken across its face (the width about seven feet), seventy-two feet long. — Two covered passages: in one, similar designs to, but more faded than, those of Gavrinis; in the other, a box for alms for the poor.



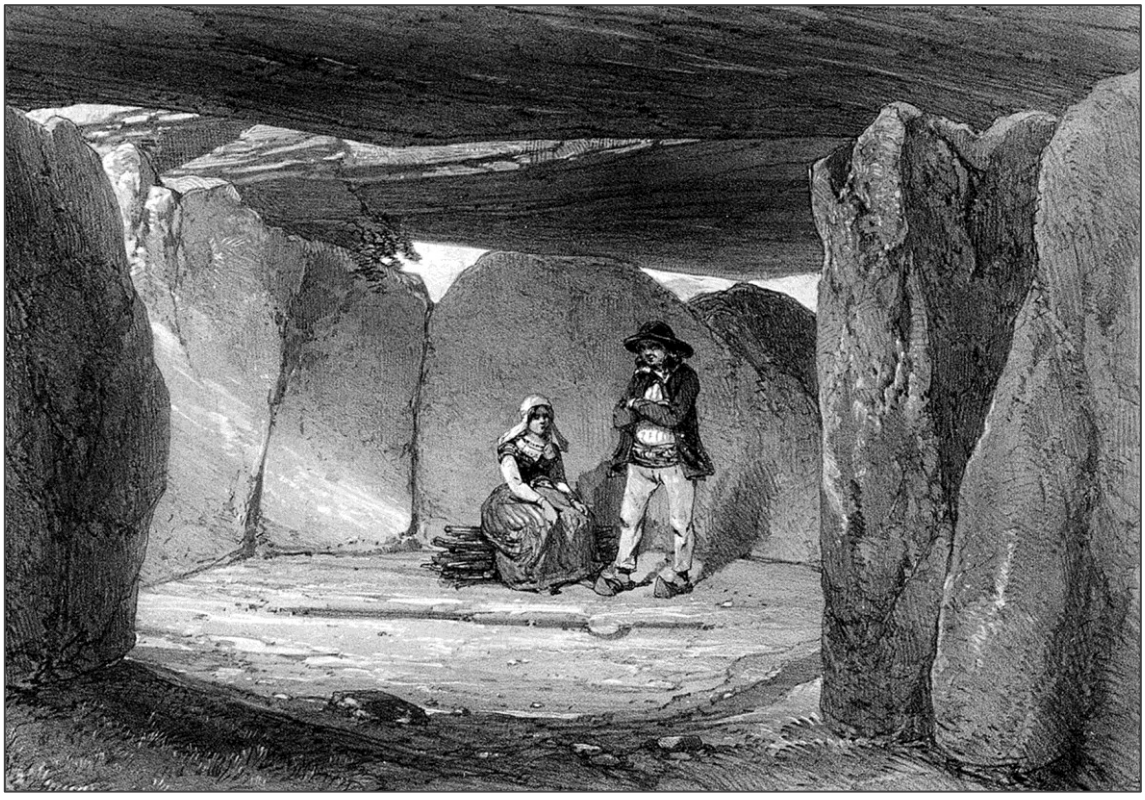
'Locmariaquer'
Léon Gaucherel (French, 1816–1886)



'The Dolmen known as the Table de César, near Locmariaquer'
Félix Benoist (French, 1818–1896) and Adolphe Jean-Baptiste Bayot (French, 1810–1871)



'The Interior of the Table de César, Locmariaquer'
Léon Gaucherel (French, 1816–1886)



'The Chamber of the Mont-Helleu Tumulus'
Léon Gaucherel (French, 1816–1886) and Eugène Cicéri (French, 1813–1890)

From Locmariaquer to Carnac, broom, more broom, gorse-hedges, with hawthorn here and there. — The road is up and down, then vanishes. — French is hardly spoken. We viewed the sea. — The ferry crossing at the tip of a peninsula. — A grave old man, thin faced, with an enormous hat.

The steeple of Carnac church (*Saint-Cornély*), from afar, seems perched on a hill, even though Carnac is by the shore. — Saint-Michel Chapel is built on a hill; one ascends by a staircase, descends by a slope. — The sea. — The green countryside, divided into brownish or greyish squares by hedges, and dry-stone walls. — A cross with a figure of Christ, so poorly sculpted that it possessed a certain character, and recalled the old Romanesque style, though more ponderous in manner. On our way here, we saw another cross of the same kind, erected on the spot where a certain René le Baron, the parish priest, was killed in 1800.

Chapter V: (Flaubert: The West Coast, Carnac, Belle-Isle, and Plouharnel)

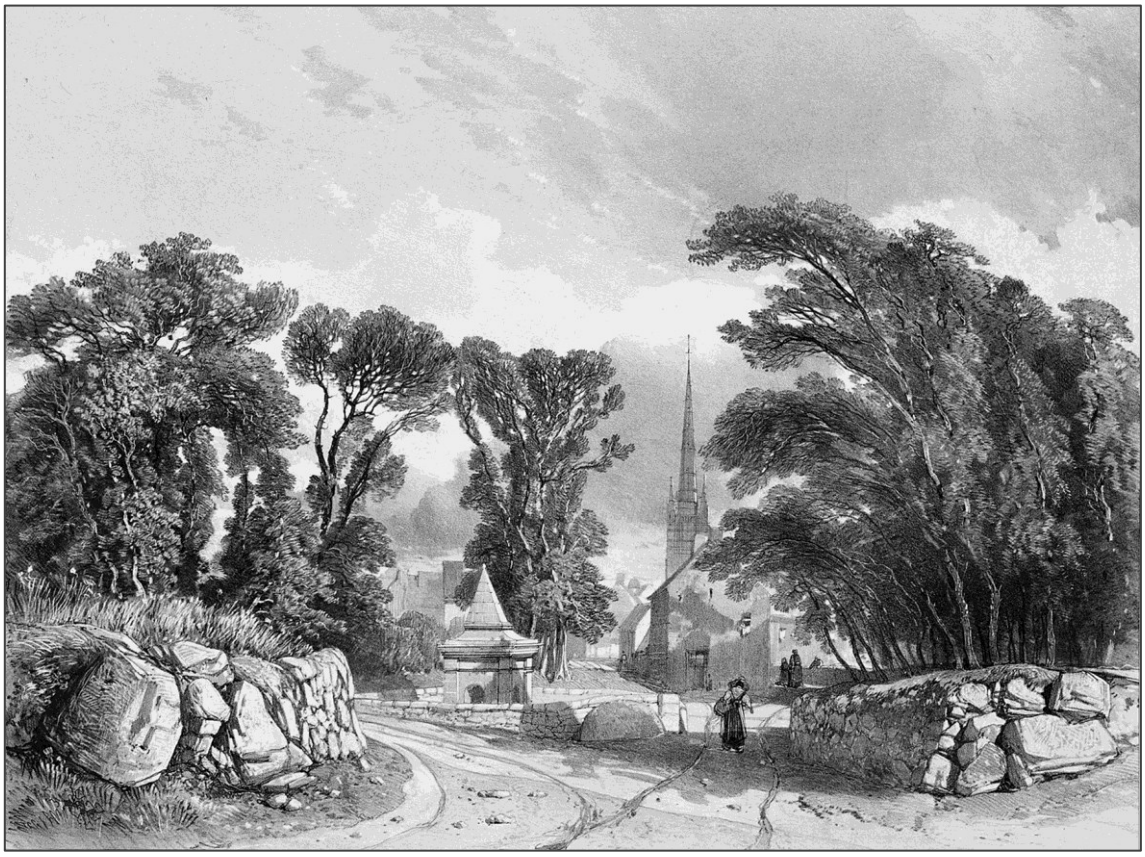
It was hot, a strong May sun was beating down on our necks, and our silk shirts were sticking to our backs. So, our first concern upon arriving in Carnac, at the home of the widow Gildas, our hostess, was to refresh ourselves with a bottle of pale ale which was followed by another, which made our bellies swell, an important point to mention.

Our lodgings were clean and decent. We were shown into a large room furnished with two four-poster beds covered in printed cotton, and a long table like one found in a college refectory. A touch of coquettish refinement had left the end of the beds unhemmed so that a wide red stripe edging the end of the blanket could be seen, and as a precautionary measure to ensure cleanliness a beautiful oilcloth, green as bronze, had been nailed to the table. On the walls, in dark wooden frames, were portrayals of the story of Joseph, including the scene with Potiphar's wife, a portrait of Saint Stanislaus, and one of Saint Aloysius Gonzaga, who is quite possibly the most foolish saint in the world, as well as First Communion certificates with vignettes depicting the interior of the church, and the communicants and attendants in their respective vestments. Coffee cups, decorated with the words 'Liberty' and 'Public Order' written in gold letters, were arranged along the mantelpiece in the space left by two decanters. Ah! What decanters! What a pity if one were to break! Where could one find a match? They were not Venetian glass, nor were they cut or engraved, but simply plain glass, like common decanters; they even lacked stoppers, but, inside the first one, six soldiers of different ranks stood majestically, each carrying oblong palm fronds like gherkins, around a figure of Napoleon, half an inch long, stiffly stretched out on his tomb, which was studded with pearls and bristling with feathers, while inside the second was a representation of the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass, with the priest, the chalice, the altar, and four columns made of pearls at the four corners of the sanctuary, plus two choirboys overloaded with enormous red sugar-loaf hats which were supposed to be the skullcaps of the young rascals.

The place was so honest, so benign, and exhaled such a scent of candour, such an innocent and sweet modesty, while the large wardrobe with copper fittings shone so brightly beneath the Russian chamber-pots that adorned its cornice, and the wicker baskets hooked to the bed-frame

looked, like everything else, so tranquil and good-natured, that we immediately decreed that we liked Carnac, and would stay there awhile.

Our windows overlooked the church square, where children were playing at marbles in the shade of a linden tree. That was the only sound in the village; no carts passed by, there were no shops, and all the bread eaten there was baked in the kitchen below, half of which was used as a bakery.



'The Village of Carnac'
Eugène Cicéri (French, 1813–1890)

Although the inhabitants speak no French, and decorate their homes in this manner, they still live, sleep, drink make love there, and die, just like us; these beings are human too. But they care little for the Salon, and even the Exhibition of Industry; are only moderately concerned with the Opéra which is about to reopen, and the restaurant Au Rocher de Cancale which has closed (*the famous restaurant, which is extant, founded by Alexis Balaine in 1804 at 59 Rue Montorgueil, closed due to bankruptcy in 1846, but was later reopened*); and talk little of what is being talked about in Paris: the Jockey-Club, the races at Chantilly, Alexandre Dumas' debts, Monsieur de Rambuteau's leathers (*Claude-Philibert Barthelot, Comte de Rambuteau, Prefect of the Seine*) or Hyacinthe's nose (*Louis Hyacinthe Duflost, known as 'Hyacinthe; was a comedian and singer*), etc.

One always feels a foolish and inescapable astonishment when one considers people who live elsewhere, and spend their time on matters other than our own. Think of passing through some village in the morning, at daybreak and catching sight of a shopkeeper raising the awning of his shop, or sweeping his doorway, stopping, mouth agape, to watch you pass by? He can barely make

out your face, nor you his, and yet in a flash, both of you, at the same instant, are filled with immense astonishment; he is thinking, as he watches you go by: 'Where is he off to, and why' and you, racing past: 'What is he about? Does he do that every morning?'

It takes considerable reflection, and mental fortitude, to grasp clearly that not everyone lives in the same city, buys their shoes from the same shoemaker, dresses at your tailor, dines at the same time you do, and shares your ideas. I still find it hard to comprehend how one exists as a notary, how it is possible to be employed in an office, how one can rise before ten in the morning, and go to bed before midnight, and I seriously wonder how human beings can possibly exist doing anything other than stringing sentences together, and searching for adjectives.

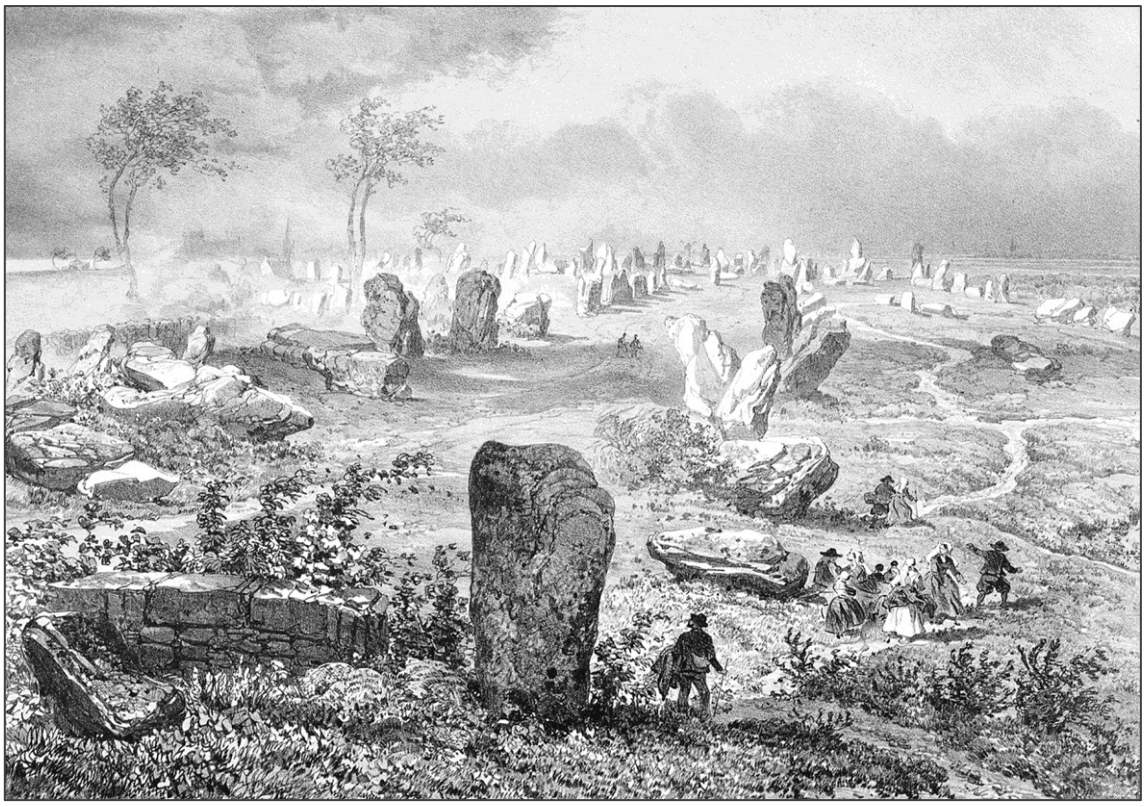
It would have been absurd, being in Carnac, not to go and see the famous prehistoric stones; so, we picked up our walking-sticks and headed towards the place where they stand. We were walking through the grass, heads down, conversing about who knows what, when a rustling noise made us raise our eyes, and we saw a woman coming down the path, barefoot, bare-legged, without a headscarf, her large bonnet flapping, her skirt snapping in the wind, one hand on her hip and the other gripping the enormous sheaf of hay she carried on her head; she walked with a sway of her waist, bold and beautiful, in her red bodice. She passed close to us. Her breathing was deep and strong, and sweat trickled down the brown skin of her rounded arms.

At last, we saw rows of black stones, aligned at equal intervals, in eleven parallel lines that decreased in size the further they were from the sea; the tallest were about twenty feet high, while the smallest were simple blocks of stone lying on the ground. Many appear to have been placed point downwards, the base being thinner than the top. The antiquarian Jacques Cambry claims there were four thousand, while Fréminville (*Christophe-Paulin de La Poix, Chevalier de Fréminville*) counted twelve hundred; what is certain is that there are a lot.



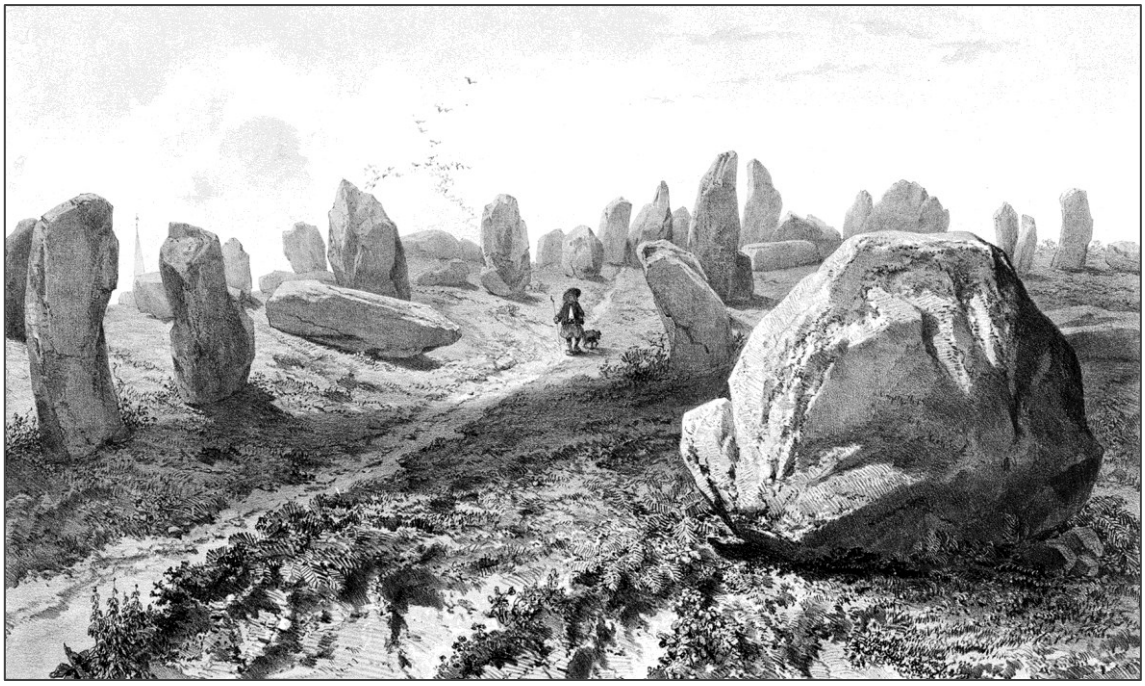
'General View of the Field of Carnac'
Eugène Cicéri (French, 1813–1890) and Léon Gaucherel (French, 1816–1886)

So, here was the famous Carnac field, which has inspired more nonsense than it has stones; though it is true that one fails to encounter such rock-filled walks every day. But, despite our natural inclination to admire everything, we consider it to be merely a robust jest, perpetrated by some unknown age to exercise the minds of antiquarians and astonish travellers. Before it, one opens naive eyes and, while finding it unusual, one nevertheless admits that it lacks beauty. We thus perfectly understand the irony inherent in these granite formations which, since the time of the Druids, seem to laugh in their green, lichened beards at all the fools who come to visit them. There are people who have spent their lives trying to decide what they were used for; one must admire, moreover, the eternal preoccupation of the featherless biped with seeking a use for everything? Not content with distilling the ocean to salt our stews, and hunting elephants to carve ivory tusks into napkin rings, our obsession extends even further when some scrap of debris is unearthed, the use of which we cannot guess.



'The Druidic Monuments of Carnac'
Félix Benoist (French, 1818–1896) and Adolphe Jean-Baptiste Bayot (French, 1810–1871)

What good was this? Were these tombs? Was this a temple? Saint Cornelius, it seems, pursued, on some occasion, by soldiers who wished to kill him, out of breath and about to plunge into the sea, had the idea, to prevent them from capturing him, of turning them all into stones. Immediately, the soldiers were petrified, which saved the saint from harm. But this explanation has only satisfied simpletons, little children, and poets; others were sought.



'The Stones of Carnac'
Léon Gaucherel (French, 1816–1886)

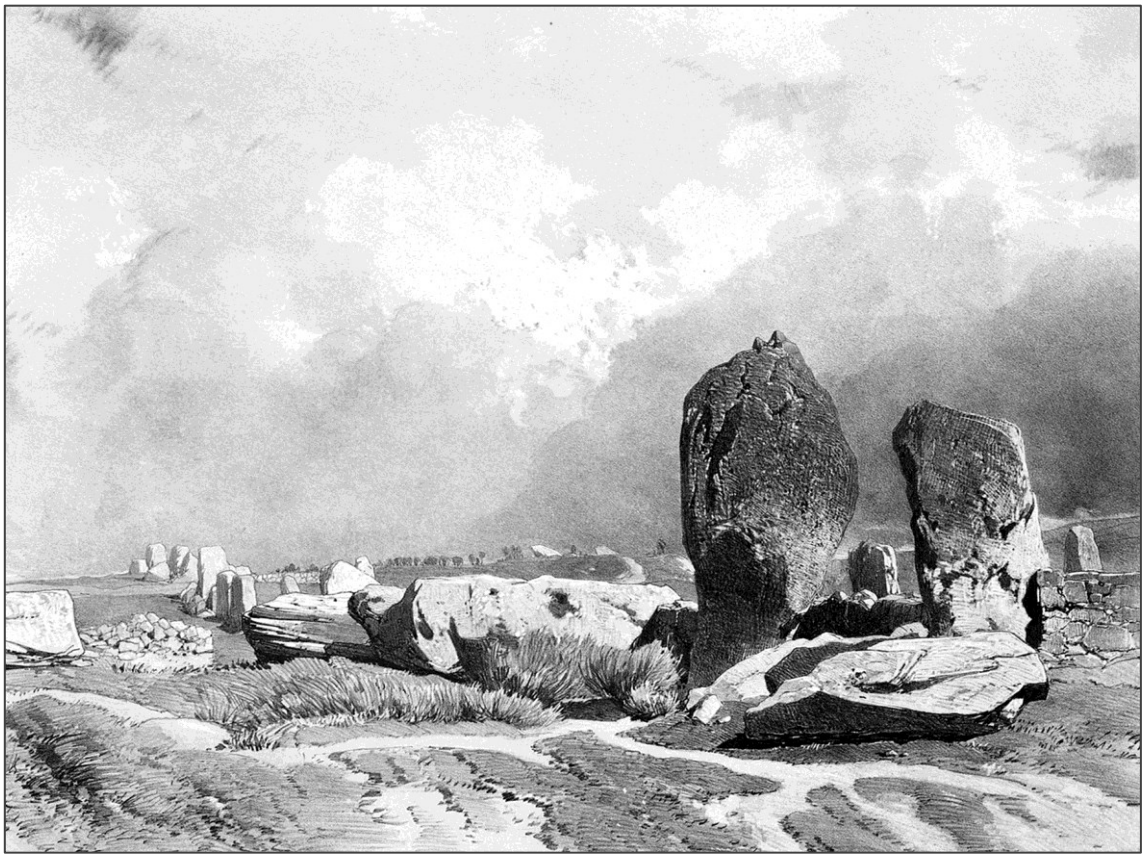
In the sixteenth century, Olaus Magnus, whose brother was Archbishop of Uppsala, when exiled in Rome, amused himself by writing a book (*'Historia de Gentibus Septentrionalibus'*: *'A Description of the Northern Peoples', 1555*), on the antiquities of his country, a book esteemed everywhere except in Sweden, where no one read it. He proposed that when two stones are placed in a single, extended, straight line, it means that beneath them lie warriors who died fighting a duel; that those arranged in a square are dedicated to those who perished in a melee; that those arranged in a circle are family tombs; and finally, that those placed at an angle or in a corner are the tombs of cavalrymen or even foot soldiers, especially those whose party had triumphed. This is clear, explicit, and satisfactory. But Olaus Magnus fails to tell us what kind of burial was granted to two first cousins, who scored victories in a mounted duel. The duel dictated that the stones be in a straight line, the family tomb required them to be circular, but since they were knights, they had to be arranged somehow in a corner. Though that was not absolutely required, it is true, since the latter only marked those whose party had triumphed. Oh, brave Olaus Magnus, you who were so fond of Montepulciano wine, how many glasses did it take to enable you to invent all these fine things?

A certain Dr. Borlase (*William Borlase, antiquarian and Rector of Ludgvan, Cornwall*), who commented on similar stones in Cornwall, also offered his thoughts on the matter. According to him, soldiers were buried on the very spot where they had fought. Where, on earth, did he get that idea from? He said their graves were arranged in straight lines, like the front ranks of an army, on plains that were the scene of great battles. The concept is so magnificently poetic that it sweeps me away, and I am somewhat inclined to agree with Dr. Borlase.

Then antiquarians were in search of the Greeks, Egyptians, and Cochin Chinese. 'There is a Karnak in Egypt,' they reasoned, 'there must be one in Lower Brittany.' I understand neither Coptic nor Breton, but obviously 'Carnac' here, descends from 'Karnak' there, since, the ancient Egyptians raised lines of sphinxes, though here they are mere blocks! From this it clearly follows

that the Egyptians (a people who did not travel) must have come to these shores (whose existence they were unaware of), founded a colony here (though they founded them nowhere else), and left these uncarved stones behind (they, who made such beautiful statues), a positive witness to their visit (which no one has ever mentioned)!

Those who love mythology saw the Pillars of Hercules here; those who love natural history saw a representation of the serpent Python, because, according to Pausanias (*see 'The Description of Greece', 9.19.2*), a similar group of stones placed on the road from Thebes to Glisas was called *the Snake's Head* and the alignments of Carnac present snake-like sinuosities. Those who love cosmography saw a zodiac, Jacques Cambry among others, who recognised, in these eleven rows of stones, the twelve signs of the zodiac, 'therefore it must be asserted,' he concludes, 'that the ancient Gauls had only eleven signs of the zodiac.'



'Carnac'
Eugène Cicéri (French, 1813–1890)

A gentleman who was a member of the Institute believed it to be a cemetery of the Veneti, who lived in Vannes, thirty miles away, and who, as everyone knows, founded Venice! Another thought that those good Veneti, having been defeated by Caesar, erected the stones afterwards, solely out of humility, and to honour him. But people had soon had enough of cemeteries, serpents, and the zodiac; they went in search of something else and found this to be a Druidic temple. The few authentic comments that exist from the relevant period, scattered throughout Pliny and Dio Cassius, agree that the Druids chose dark groves for their religious ceremonies, and the depths of the forests, with their 'vast silence' (*see Tacitus 'Germania', and Lucan's 'Pharsalia'*). Therefore, since Carnac is by the sea, in a barren countryside where naught but the conjectures of

these antiquarian gentlemen has ever flourished, the First Grenadier of France (*Théophile Malo de La Tour d'Auvergne-Corret, renowned for his bravery, was honoured by Napoleon with that title*), who does not seem to me to have been of the first intelligence, followed by Simon Pelloutier (*author of 'Histoire des Celtes', 1740-50*) and Joseph Mahé, canon of Vannes cathedral (*author of 'Essai sur les Antiquités du Département du Morbihan', 1825*), decided that it was a temple of the Druids in which political assemblies should be convened.

Everything had still not been said on the matter, and the facts, *according to science,* were complete as long as the purpose of the empty spaces in the alignment, those free of stones, remained unestablished. 'Let us discover the reason for this, a thing no one has yet thought to do,' Monsieur Mahé says to himself, relying on this phrase from Pomponius Mela: 'The Druids teach many things to the nobility, whom they instruct secretly in caves and remote forests.' (*'Chorographia', III, 14-15*). Mahé therefore established that the Druids not only served the sanctuaries, but also made their homes there, and passed on their learning. 'Since the Carnac Monument is a sanctuary like those of the Gallic forests' (Oh, the power of induction! Where are you leading us, Père Mahé, canon of Vannes, and Corresponding Member of the Academy of Agriculture of Poitiers?), '*there is reason to believe* that the empty spaces that intersect the lines of stones contained rows of houses in which the Druids lived with their families, and their *numerous* students, and where the leading figures of the nation resided, who visited the sanctuary on days of great solemnity, and found lodgings already prepared.' Good Druids! Excellent clergymen! How they have been slandered, those who lived there so honestly with their families and their many students, and who even went so far as to prepare accommodation for the leading figures of the nation!

But then, at last, came one who, imbued with the spirit of antiquity and disdaining conventional wisdom, dared to speak the truth to his own century. He recognised in this place the remains of a Roman camp, and specifically a camp of Caesar, who had erected these stones 'simply to support the tents of his soldiers and to prevent them from being blown away by the wind.' What fierce gales must once have been unleashed on the coasts of Armorica! The man who restored to Caesar the glory of this sublime precaution was Félix-François de La Sauvagère (*author of 'Recueil d'Antiquités dans les Gaules', 1770*) who was, by profession, Director of the Military Corps of Engineers.

The accumulation of all these delightful details constitutes what is termed 'Celtic archaeology', a science whose delights we cannot resist introducing to the reader. A stone placed upon others is called a *dolmen*, whether horizontal or vertical; a collection of standing stones covered by consecutive slabs, thus forming a series of *dolmens*, is a *fairy grotto, fairy rock, fairy table, devil's table,* or *giant's palace*, for, like those hosts who serve you a fine wine under different labels, the Celtomaniacs, who have almost nothing else to offer us, have decorated such things with various names. When these stones are arranged in an ellipse, without any caps on top, one is obliged to say: 'This is a *cromlech*'; when one sees a stone set horizontally on two vertical ones, we are dealing with a *lichaven* or *trilithon*, but I prefer *lichaven* as more scientific, more local, more essentially Celtic. Sometimes two enormous blocks are supported one on top of the other, seeming to touch only at a single point of contact, and one reads 'that they are balanced in such a way that the wind itself sometimes suffices to impart a marked oscillation to the upper block,' an assertion that I do not deny (while remaining somewhat wary of this Celtic wind), although these supposedly-wobbly stones never moved under all the kicks that folk have been naive enough to deal them; they are

then called *rolled* or *rolling* stones, *returned* or *transported* stones, stones that *dance* or *dancing* stones, stone that *spin* or *spinning* stones. It remains for me to explain to you what a *fichade*, a *fiche* stone, or 'fixed' stone is, and what is meant by a *tall boundary* stone*, a white* stone, or a *milk* stone; how a *fonte* stone differs from a *fiette stone,* and what relationship exists between a *devil's chair* and a *straight stone*; after which you will know as much as Simon Pelloutier; Gilles Deric (*author of 'Histoire Ecclesiastique de Bretagne', 1847*); Théophile Malo de La Tour d'Auvergne-Corret; Penhoët (*Armand-Louis-Bon Maudet de Penhoët*), and others; together with Joseph Mahé and reinforced by Fréminville, ever knew. Understand, then, that all this signifies a *peulvan*, in other words, a *menhir*, and represents nothing more than a boundary marker, large or small, set, all alone, in the middle of a field; the hollow columns of the boulevard, seen from the sidewalk, are therefore so many *peulvans* placed there by the paternal solicitude of the police for the relief of Parisians, who have little idea, on seeing themselves portrayed on posters advertising Franciosi Mothes' gelatin capsules (*patented 1834*), that they, poor wretches, are momentarily contained within a small menhir. I almost forgot the 'tumuli'! These, composed of both pebbles and earth, are styled *borrows*, and simple heaps of pebbles, *galgals*.

The excavations carried out beneath these various types of stones have led to no serious conclusions. It has been claimed that dolmens and trilithons were altars, or even tombs; that fairy rocks were meeting places or burial sites; and that the churchwardens of the time held assemblies in cromlechs. Jacques Cambry thought rocking stones symbols of the Earth suspended in space, but it has since been established that these were merely probative stones used to ascertain the guilt of some accused person, who was convicted of the alleged crime if they could not move the potentially movable rock!

The galgals and the borrows were undoubtedly tombs it seems and, as for the menhirs, some scholars have gone so far as to discover that they resemble phalluses! From this, they have inferred a flourishing ithyphallic cult throughout Lower Brittany. Oh, chaste indecency of science, you respect nothing, not even menhirs!

To return to the stones of Carnac, or rather to dispense with them, I, like anyone else, would have asked for nothing more than to have contemplated them when they were paler in hue, and when the lichens had not yet covered them. At night, when the moon swam amidst the clouds and the waves roared on the sand, the druidesses wandering among these stones (if indeed they did wander here) must have been beautiful indeed, carrying their golden sickles, wearing their vervain crowns, their trailing white robes reddened with human blood. As tall as their shadows, they walked without touching the ground, pale, with loosened hair, in the moonlight. Others before me have already suggested that these great, motionless blocks of stone may have witnessed their passage long ago; others, like myself, will come here without comprehending them, and the Father Mahés of generations yet unborn will bruise their noses, and waste their efforts here.



'Carnac'
Eugène Cicéri (French, 1813–1890)

Reverie can be fruitful, or at least give rise to a fertile melancholy, if, starting from a fixed point, the imagination, without abandoning that point, flies about within its luminous circle; but when, in clinging to an object devoid of form and history, it tries to extract meaning, and restore an entire lost society, it remains itself poorer and more sterile than the inert matter in which vain chatterers claim to find form, and from which they derive mere tales.

Having set forth the opinions of all the scholars mentioned above, if I am asked, in turn, what my conjecture is regarding the Carnac stones, since everyone has their own, I will give my incontestable, irresistible and irrefutable, opinion, one that would have made Monsieur de la Sauvagère's tents retreat, and the 'Egyptian' Penhoet pale; an opinion that would have eclipsed Cambry's zodiac, and slashed the Python to pieces, and that opinion is as follows: the Carnac stones are simply large stones.

So, we returned to the inn where, served by our hostess — who possessed large blue eyes, hands of rare delicacy, and a gentle face well-nigh religious in its modesty — we dined with a hearty appetite, whetted by our five-hour walk. It was not dark enough yet to sleep, but too dark to do anything else, so we visited the church (*Saint-Cornély*). It is small, though it has a nave and aisles, like a large city church. Thick, squat stone pillars support its blue wooden vault, from which hang small ships, votive offerings promised during storms. Spiders scurry across their sails, and dust rots their rigging.

There were no offices being said, the choir lamp burned alone in its cup of yellow oil, and high above, in the solid vault, open windows let in broad beams of white light, accompanied by the sound of the wind bending the trees. A man appeared, who arranged the chairs, set candles in a

pair of tin candelabras hanging from a pillar, and dragged a kind of bier with feet, its dark wood flecked with large white marks, to the centre aisle. Other people entered; a priest in a surplice passed before us. We heard the peal of a little bell, pausing and ringing out again at intervals, and the church door swung wide open. No one entered; they were waiting for something. The staccato sound of the little bell was joined by another that answered, and both, sounding closer and rising in volume, redoubled their sharp, brassy tolling.

An ox-drawn cart appeared in the square, and stopped before the church gate. A dead man lay upon it. His pale, matte feet, the hue of clean alabaster, protruded from the edge of the white sheet which enveloped him and granted him that indistinct shape characteristic of all draped corpses. The crowd that had gathered fell silent. The men's heads were uncovered; the priest shook his aspergillum, muttering prayers, and the oxen's heavy leather yokes creaked as they gently tossed their heads. The great black shadow of the church, in the depths of which the light shone, parted, penetrated from outside by the greenish light of a rainy evening, and by the light of a candle borne by a child who held his hand in front of it to prevent the wind from extinguishing it, and which illuminated the threshold.

They lowered the dead man from the cart; his head caught the shaft. They brought him into the church and placed him on the bier. A stream of men and women followed. They knelt on the pavement, the men near the corpse, the women further away, nearer the door, and the service began.

It was of brief duration, at least for us, because the soft murmur of chanting soon began, occasionally broken by a faint sob rising from beneath the black cloaks at the foot of the nave. A hand brushed against me, and I stepped back to let a woman with bent back pass. Clenching her fists against her chest, her head bowed, advancing without seeming to move her feet, barely seeing her way, trembling from the effort, she advanced toward the line of lights burning beside the bier. Slowly raising her arm as if to hide behind it, she turned her head towards the corner of her shoulder, and fell onto a chair, slumping there, as lifeless and limp as her clothing. In the candlelight, I saw her eyes set in reddened eyelids, raw as if from intense heat, her mute, contorted mouth, trembling with despair, and her whole wretched face drenched in tears, from a storm of weeping. Her husband, had been lost at sea, and here was his corpse, which had recently been found on the shore, and would be buried shortly.

The cemetery adjoined the church. We traversed the latter. A side door opened, and everyone assumed their places, while in the sacristy they nailed the dead man into his coffin. A fine rain dampened the air; it was cold; the ground was soaked, and the gravediggers, who were completing their excavation, struggled to turn the soft, heavy soil that clung to their spades. In the distance, the women, kneeling on the grass, had released their hoods, and their large white bonnets, whose stiffened panels billowed in the wind, seemed from afar like a vast shroud rising from the earth, and undulating. The coffin appeared, the prayers began again; the sobbing resumed, which could be heard above the sound of the falling rain.

Near us, at regular intervals, a muffled sound arose, resembling laughter. Anywhere else, listening to it, one would have taken it for the repressed explosion of some violent joy, or a contained paroxysm of delirious happiness. It was the sound of the widow's weeping. Then, she approached the edge of the grave, scattered a handful of earth therein, as did the others, the ground gradually returned to its natural level, and everyone withdrew.

As we were descending the cemetery steps, a young man passing by said in French to another: 'The fellow stank! He was practically rotten! He'd been in the water for three weeks, so no wonder!' On our way back to our lodgings, we found our hostess breastfeeding her child, lulling him to sleep, rocking back and forth in a chair. For us, there was nothing of interest left to see in Carnac. We had admired at leisure the hideous canopy above the side portal of the church, the kind of decoration generally produced by pastry chefs — I mean the kind that adorns those odious creations known as 'montages' where slices of candied orange form the arches, and bits of chocolate the columns, with a pink sugar obelisk topped by a flower. Within, we had contemplated the statue of Saint Cornély, more entwined with ropes than a Lyon sausage is with string. Ropes that have touched it are said to have the power to cure sick animals, while, above the main door of the church, there is a kind of painted sign depicting two peasants, one presenting his cow and the other his ox to this good veterinarian saint. When the ropes have remained around the statue for a while, and have acquired virtue; they are taken away and stored at home, being lent by neighbour to neighbour, and village to village; a shameful remnant of that superstition of which enlightened France has purged itself, as *Le National* would say.

Nonetheless, we stayed a further three days in Carnac, doing nothing but walking along the seashore and lying about on the sand, in which we drew, with our sticks, arabesques that were erased by the rising tide, and on which, stretched out in the sun, we slumbered like lizards. Side by side, seated on the ground, we scooped up sand in our hands, watched it slip through our fingers, turned over the dried, hollowed-out carcase of some ancient crab, searched for curved pebbles to make inkwells, and gathered seashells, while time passed. The sun sank over the sea, the colours of which varied, as it continued its ceaseless roar, leaving long festoons of seaweed and foam on the sand. We widened our chests, and breathed in the scent of the waves, a sweet and acrid odour of water, wind, and seaweed, rushing towards us from the ocean deep, while breezy gusts of air reached us, flowing between the hollows in the dunes, whose thin rushes caught on the loops of our gaiters. When evening came, we returned to the cottage, gazing at the sky, great purple streaks stretched across its azure.

One morning, however, on setting out as on other days, and taking the same path, we walked past the elm hedge, and crossed the sloping meadow where the day before, we had seen a little girl driving her cattle towards the watering trough; it was our last day there, and perhaps the last time we would ever pass that way.

A muddy field, where we sank up to our ankles stretched from Carnac to the village of Le Pô. A boat was waiting there for us, we clambered in, an oar pushed us away from land, and the sail was hoisted.

Our pilot, a cheerful old man, seated himself at the stern, tied a fishing line to the gunwale, and let the boat slide peacefully onwards. There was scarcely any wind; the sea, a pure blue, was perfectly still, and our narrow wake stretched out behind. The old man conversed; he told us about the priests he disliked, about meat, which is a good thing to eat, even on lean days, about the hardships he endured while in service, and of the gunshots he received as a customs officer … we progressed slowly, the taut wake following, the end of the boom dipped in the water.

The remaining few miles we were obliged to walk from Saint-Pierre to Quiberon were quickly covered, despite the hilly road through the sands, despite the sun that made the straps of our bags

squeak on our shoulders, and notwithstanding the host of menhirs that loomed over the countryside.

In Quiberon, we had lunch at the Hôtel Penthièvre run by Monsieur Rohan Belle-Isle. This gentleman was barefoot in sandals, given the heat, and was drinking toasts with a stonemason, despite being a descendant of one of the oldest families in Europe. A nobleman of ancient lineage! A true nobleman, thanks be to God! He immediately cooked lobsters for us, and started pounding steaks.

My pride was immensely flattered, and even now, when I think of the honour he bestowed on us, I cannot help but give thanks! Providence showered me, in a single stroke, with blessings to last a lifetime. It was as if I had been kissed by princesses of royal blood, had dined with a Montmorency (he even offered me cider), had been served by a Rohan, toasted by Lord Louis Fessard (*who gave Flaubert swimming lessons, and saved a number of people from drowning*) and had patted cardinals on the belly!

The entire past of Quiberon is summed up in its graveyard. Its finest feature is the cemetery; it is full to overflowing, its walls straining, spilling out into the street. The packed stones crumble at the corners, pile up one on top of another, invade, submerge, and merge, as if the dead, hampered beneath the ground, are raising their shoulders to clamber from their tombs. It resembles a petrified ocean, where the graves form waves, and the crosses are the masts of lost ships.

In the centre a large, open ossuary receives the skeletons exhumed to make room for others. Whose idea was this: that life is an inn, and the coffin only a half-way house? These people have been ousted from their temporary homes; they are mere tenants, to be evicted at the end of their lease. All around this ossuary, where the pile of bones resembles a tangle of brushwood, are arranged a series of small black wooden boxes, at eye level, each six inches square, covered with a roof, surmounted by a cross, the fronts pierced by an openwork heart that reveals a skull within. Above the heart, one reads in painted letters: 'This is the head of ***, who died on such and such a day, in such and such a year.' The heads belonged only to people of a certain rank, and one would be considered a poor son or daughter if, after seven years, one did not grant one's parents' skull the luxury of this small coffin. As for the rest of the skeleton, it is cast into the ossuary; twenty-five years later, the skull is thrown in also. A few years ago, someone sought to abolish the custom. A riot broke out, and it survives.

It may seem wrong to toy like this with these orbs that once contained thought, with these spheres empty of the brains in which love was once active. All these boxes around the ossuary, on the graves, in the grass, on the wall, jumbled pell-mell, may seem horrible to some, ridiculous to others; but these black wooden boxes which rot as the bones they contain whiten and crumble; these heads staring at one from hollow eye-sockets, their noses gnawed, and their foreheads gleaming in places with the slimy tracks of snails; these femurs piled up like the great charnel houses of the Bible; these fragments of skulls that roll about full of soil, and in which sometimes, as in a porcelain pot, a wildflower has grown, which emerges from an eye-socket; the very coarseness of the inscriptions, all alike, as are the dead they designate; all these human relics, arranged in this way, seemed very beautiful to me, and provided a fine and solid spectacle.

If the mail from Auray had arrived, we would have sailed immediately for Belle-Isle; but we were still awaiting the post. Sitting in the kitchen, in their shirts, bare-armed, the sailors waited patiently, drinking their pints of beer.

— 'What time does the mail from Auray arrive?'

— 'It depends; usually at ten,' replied their leader.

— 'At noon,' said Monsieur de Rohan.

— 'At one'.

— 'At half past one'.

— 'It often arrives an hour or two later.'

— 'That's not often the case!

It seemed there must be three different couriers.

We were unable to leave until the unfortunate fellow arrived who bears the dispatches from the mainland to Belle-Isle. We were obliged to resign ourselves. We hovered at the front door, gazed at the street, retreated, sallied forth again. 'Oh! He won't come today.' 'He's delayed.' 'We must go.' 'No, let's wait.' 'If the gentlemen are too bored to wait…' 'Perhaps there are no letters for us?' 'No, wait another fifteen minutes.' 'Ah! He's here!' It was not him, and the dialogue began again.

At last, the trot of a tired horse, the sound like someone striking a flint, bells jingling, the crack of a whip, a man shouting: 'Hola! Hola! The Post!'

The horse halted, abruptly, at the gate, then entered...back arched, neck outstretched, muzzle extended while showing its teeth, hind legs spread, and then rose on its hocks.

The nag was tall, hunched, bony, lacking a mane, with worn hooves, and rattling horseshoes; the crupper tore at the base of her tail; a wound in her chest oozed. Lost in a saddle that swallowed him whole, his back against a trunk, and restrained in front by a large wallet full of mail tucked into the saddle-bow, the rider, perched there looked like a shrunken monkey. His small face, with sparse, blond hair, wrinkled and shrivelled like a pippin, almost vanished beneath a felt-lined oilcloth hat; a sort of grey overcoat of ticking reached down to his hips and encircled his belly in a ring of gathered folds, while his breeches without stirrup leathers which were rolled up to his knees revealed his calves, reddened by friction, and his blue stockings fallen over the top of his shoes. String was tied around the beast's harness; bits of black or red thread had been used in mending the rider's garment; patches of every colour, stains of every shape, tattered canvas, greasy leather, dried dung, fresh dust, dangling ropes, gleaming rags, dirt soiling the man, mange afflicting the beast, the former puny and sweating, the latter gaunt and panting, the first carrying his whip, the second bearing its bells; all made the one object, with the same hue and the same action, performing nigh-on the same gestures, and serving the one purpose, the whole being termed the Auray mail.

After another hour, when a sufficient number of packets and letters had been distributed, and a few more passengers had arrived, we finally left the inn, and embarked on our boat. At first, all was a jumble of luggage and people, oars in the way, sails falling over one's nose, everyone tangled with their neighbours, finding nowhere to seat themselves; but all took their place, found their

spot, the luggage was loaded at the back, the sailors mounted the benches, while the passengers lodged wherever they found a space.

There was no sign of a breeze, and the sails hung straight down the masts. The heavy longboat barely stirred on the almost motionless sea, the waves rising and falling with the gentle movements of a sleeper's chest.

Leaning against one of the gunwales, we gazed at the water, which was as blue as the sky and as calm; and listened to the sound of the long oars beating the waves, and clattering in their rowlocks. In the shadow of the sails, the six oarsmen, their oars ranged, raised them slowly, as one, and straightened their arms; the oars fell and rose again, scattering pearls from the ends of their blades.

Lying on their backs in the scattered straw, seated on the benches, legs dangling and chins in their hands, or leaning against the sides of the boat, between the solid jambs of the frame whose tar melted in the heat, the silent passengers bowed their heads, and closed their eyes to the glare of the sun striking the sea, which was flat as a mirror.

A white-haired fellow slept on the boards at my feet; the gendarme sweated beneath his tricorn hat, the two soldiers had taken off their packs, and lay on them. Near the bowsprit, the cabin boy looked at the jib-sail and whistled to call up the wind; standing at the stern, the captain turned the tiller.

The breeze failed to arrive. The sails were lowered, descending gently, making the iron of the pulleys ring, and their heavy canvas sagged over the benches; then each sailor undid his jacket, tucked it beneath the bow, and all began again, heaving with chests and arms, to move the immense oars which bent lengthwise.

The air was bluish and transparent, a harsh light enveloping everything, striking everything, penetrating the very pores of the old grey wooden boat, the thick sail-ropes, and the skin of the men shivering with sweat; they panted in unison, one could hear their breathing, and the oars striking the water, as one.

After each movement of their arms, as they straightened or bent, there was a dull thud. As we slid forward, one could hear the water lapping more noisily around the rudder while, after the jolt, the boat ran on in silence falling back into the wave.

The sandy beach of Quiberon, behind us, gradually receded; to the left, the blackish-green island masses of Houat and Hoëdic bulged on the surface of the pale azure; the sheer sides of Belle-Isle's grass-crowned rocks rose higher; and the citadel whose walls plunge into the sea, slowly lifted from the waves.



'Belle-Île-en-Mer: the Citadel and the Harbour Entrance, Le Palais'
Félix Benoist (French, 1818–1896)

The two soldiers, escorted by the gendarme, were led away to join the disciplinary regiment. A rifleman, summoned as a reinforcement to keep them in check, did his best to keep them in line. That morning, while we were having breakfast, one of them, accompanied by the gendarme, had entered the inn with a cocky air, his moustache curled, hands in his pockets, his *kepi* tilted to one side, demanding to eat and drink 'right now': anything, even arsenic. He called out, swore, and shouted, jingling his coins and damning the poor gendarme. Now, he was still smiling, but only externally, and his delight was fading, as the great white wall rose on the horizon, behind which he would dig the ground and drag a ball-and-chain about. His companion was calmer. He was a large, heavy, ugly brute, one of those people of such profound coarseness that one immediately understood the immense contempt those who lash this animated flesh over a canon barrel have for it, and the low price at which they value it. He had never seen the sea before, and gazed at it wide-eyed, as if saying to himself: 'It's a curious sight all the same, it gives one a better idea of what exists,' an appreciation which I considered profound, he appearing as moved by the feeling the ocean aroused as ever a lady was by the lyrical expressions which I have often heard offered.

He made no secret of his disdain for the other soldier and, though they were friends, he shrugged pityingly as he looked at him. When he had gained his fill of amusement, trying to make the surrounding crowd laugh at the latter, he left him to sleep in his corner, and turned towards us. He spoke then of himself, of the prison he was about to occupy, the regiment, which bored him, the war he longed for, and his life of which he was weary. Little by little, his studied aspect faded, his forced laughter vanished; he became simple, gentle, melancholic, almost tender. Finding an ear at last receptive to all that had long burdened his exasperated heart, the tedium of it all, he spoke at length about the miseries of a soldier's existence, the disgusting aura of the barracks, the teasing demands of military etiquette, the cruelties of being in uniform, the brutal arrogance of the

sergeants, the humiliation of owing a blind obedience, the constant suppression of one's natural instincts and will, bent beneath the hammer of duty.

He had been sentenced to a year of disciplinary action for selling a pair of trousers. 'For many,' he said, 'it is a matter of indifference, like him for example,' pointing to his companion, 'peasants are used to tilling the soil, but as for me, I'll be soiling my hands.'

O pride! Your taste of wormwood rises in every mouth, and every heart broods upon you! Who was he, this man who complained of his suffering in the company of others? A child of the people, a Parisian worker, a saddler's apprentice. I pitied the ardent and melancholy fellow, sick with need, consumed by long-established desires, impatient with the yoke, and tired of work. It is not only we, beside our fireplaces, in the stifling air of our homes, who feel tedium at heart, and a vague anger which we try to exorcise from ourselves, noisily, by seeking love, by trying to write; he did the same in his lesser circle, with his glasses of liquor and his women; he, also, longed for riches, freedom, fresh air; he would have liked to change his surroundings, flee elsewhere, anywhere; he felt ennui, he too waited without hope.

Advanced societies exude a stench like a crowd, a sickening miasma, and duchesses are not the only people who faint from the experience. Nor should one think that bare hands can endure more than others; one can be weary of everything without knowing anything, tired of weaving one's coat without having read 'Werther' (*Goethe's tale, 'The Sufferings of Young Werther'*) or 'René' (*Chateaubriand's equally potent example of the Romantic novella*), and a bachelor's degree is not a pre-requisite to blowing one's brains out.

We had been so late in leaving that there was hardly any water in the harbour, and we had great difficulty entering. Our keel scraped over rocks and pebbles on the sea-bed, and in order to disembark we were obliged to walk an oar as if on a tightrope.

Wedged between the citadel and its ramparts, transected in the middle by an almost empty harbour, Le Palais seemed to us a rather foolish little town, exuding the boredom of garrison life, and possessing something of the air of a yawning non-commissioned officer.

Here, you no longer see the black felt hats of Morbihan, low-cut, immense in their span, masking the shoulders. The women no longer wear those large white bonnets that jut out in front of their faces like those of nuns and, at the rear, descend to the middle of their backs, thus covering half the bodies of the little girls. Their dresses lack the wide velvet trim applied to the shoulder, which, outlining the contour of the shoulder blade, disappears beneath the armpits. Nor do their feet bear those open shoes, round at the toe, high-heeled, and adorned with long black ribbons that graze the ground. Here, as everywhere, the figures resemble one another, the costumes are not true costumes, and there are milestones, real houses, cobblestones, even pavements.

Was it worth exposing ourselves to seasickness, which, however, we avoided, though it might have rendered us a little more forgiving, only to be forced to contemplate a citadel which we cared very little for, a lighthouse, which interested us even less, and Vauban's ramparts, which we already found tedious? But we had been told about the cliffs of Belle-Isle. So, we exited the gate at once and, cutting straight across the fields, turned towards the shore.

We saw only one cave, just one (the daylight was fading), but it seemed so beautiful to us (it was lined with seaweed and shells, and adorned with drops of water falling from above), that we

resolved to spend the next day on Belle-Isle, so as to seek out similar ones, if there were any, and to feast at leisure on the delights of all their hues.

Next day, as soon as it was light, having filled a water-bottle, and stuffed some pieces of bread and slices of meat into one of our bags, we took to the open, and, without a guide or any information whatsoever (which is the right way to proceed), started walking, determined to end up anywhere, provided it was far distant, and to return at any hour, provided it was late.

We started on a path through the grass, following the summit of the cliff, climbing its peaks, descending into its troughs, and continued so, following the shores of the island.

If a landslide had caused a collapse, we climbed higher, traversed the countryside and, adjusting our bearings according to the seaward horizon whose blue line touched the sky, we regained the clifftop again, which, appearing unexpectedly, revealed an abyss before us. The sheer height of the summit on which we walked allowed us to view nothing of the cliffs' rocky flanks, hearing below us only the sound of that great, battering-ram of a sea.

Sometimes the cliffs, pierced and revealed in all their grandeur, would suddenly present two well-nigh perpendicular sides, streaked with layers of flint, and on which small yellow flowering clumps had grown. If one threw a stone, it seemed to hang suspended for a moment, then struck the rock, and tumbled down, ricocheting, shattering to pieces, sending earth and stones rolling, and finally coming to rest buried in gravel, as, above, one heard the cries of the cormorants taking flight.

The rain from thunderstorms, and thawing snow, had washed some of the upper slopes into many of these gorges, gradually eroding the latter and making them easier to descend. We ventured into one of them, and, sliding down on our backsides, scraping our feet, and holding on with our hands, we finally reached the foot, and landed on a stretch of beautiful, wet sand.

The tide was ebbing; to cross, we had to wait for the waves to recede. We watched them arriving. They foamed among the rocks, swirled in the hollows just below the surface, leapt like flying silk, fell back in cascades and pearls, and with a long, swaying motion retrieved their great green sheet. When a wave had retreated over the sand, the currents immediately criss-crossed as they fled to lower levels. Glutinous strips of seaweed stirred; water flowed amongst the pebbles, spilled out through the cracks in the stones, in a thousand splashes, a thousand jets. The soaking-wet sand absorbed water, and, dried in the sun, its yellow hue whitening.

As soon as there was sand to walk on, we jumped over the rocks, and ploughed ahead. The mass of boulders grew larger, forming disorderly heaps; upturned, jostled, piled in all directions, lodged one on top of another, and we clung to their slippery surfaces, our feet scrabbling wildly at their viscous asperities.

The cliff loomed high above; so high that one was awed when one raised one's head. It overwhelmed in its formidable placidity, and yet it charmed; for one contemplated it in spite of oneself, and one's eyes never tired of gazing.

A swallow flew by; we watched it pass. It came from seawards, rising gently, its feathers slicing through the fluid, luminous air in which its wings moved freely, revelling seemingly in their beating. It rose higher, traversed the cliff edge, rose ever higher, and vanished.

We however, were left behind to crawl over the rocks, each bend in the coast providing a fresh perspective. There were places free of boulders, where we trod on large, square sections, flat as flagstones, where clefts ran on in pairs, almost symmetrically. Their lines looked like the ruts of some road from another age. Here and there, as motionless as their greenish beds, lay large pools of water which were as clear, still, and unmoving as the purest watercress-filled pool in the depths of the woods, in the willow-trees' shade.

Then rocks appeared, once more, seemingly closer together, and piled higher. On one side lay the sea, its waves drenching the low-lying reefs; on the other loomed, the steep, arduous, impassable cliffs.

Tired and dazed, we sought an escape. But the cliff ever advanced before us, and the boulders, their dark masses clothed in seaweed extending to infinity, succeeded one another, raising their lumpy heads, growing in size and multiplying, like black phantoms emerging from beneath the sand.

We were ploughing along like this, when, suddenly, we saw, a little gulley, winding in a zigzag through the rocks, which allowed us to ascend, as if by a ladder, and regain the open countryside.

Once there, we found ourselves on a plateau overlooking the island's entire coastline, and extending, in the same direction as we had been walking, through treeless fields devoid of any greenery. It was nonetheless very pleasant to have nothing more to do but move our feet, and push on. A small grove of slender pine-trees appeared; we entered, and, having unbuckled the bag that had been bouncing around on my shoulders for the past four hours, we began to tear apart, with our fingernails, the slices of cold veal now stuck to the pieces of bread.

Lying on the ground, on the fallen pine-needles, we ate lunch, legs outspread; our socks and shoes, now soaked with seawater, hanging on the ends of branches to dry. Once refreshed, a filled pipe having revived us from our fatigue, we picked up our walking sticks, and set off again.

Wishing to cross the whole width of the island, we followed the sun, and walked ahead; but soon, lost in the countryside, we sought only to find the sea whose shores, if we followed them, should finally bring us back to Le Palais either in the evening, or that night, or the following morning, since we no longer knew where the town was, nor where we were ourselves.

No matter, it is always a pleasure, even when the countryside lacks beauty, to forge a route together, walking amidst the grasses, crossing hedges, jumping ditches, knocking down thistles with one's stick, tearing off leaves and ears of corn with one's hand, advancing, randomly, as the whim takes one, or as one's feet determine, singing, whistling, talking, dreaming, without another listening ear, without the sound of other footsteps behind, as free as one is in the desert!

Oh! Air! Air! More space! Since our tightly-bound souls, are suffocating, dying against the window panes, since the captive mind, like a bear in its den, is forever turned in on itself, constrained by the walls of its cave, at least let our nostrils scent the winds of the earth, let our eyes gaze towards vast horizons!

Not a single steeple, with its gleaming roof of slate, appeared in the distance, not a single hamlet, on the reverse of some fold in the land, its thatched roofs, and square courtyards enclosed by a cluster of trees; we met with no sign of life, not a passing labourer, nor a grazing sheep, nor a prowling dog.

The cultivated fields seemed uninhabited; people worked, rather than living, there. It was if those who owned them profited from what they yielded, but felt no love for them.

We saw a farm; we entered; a woman in ragged clothing served us ice-cold milk in stoneware cups. There was an odd silence. She gazed at us eagerly, and then we left.

We descended a valley, a narrow gorge that seemed to lead to the sea. Long grasses with yellow flowers climbed to our waists. We advanced with long strides. We could hear water flowing nearby, and sank deeper into the marshy ground. The hill-slopes on either side moved further apart, their arid surfaces still covered with short grass, or coated occasionally with large yellow patches of lichen. On the one side, a stream flowed at the foot of the slope among the low branches of stunted shrubs that had grown on its banks, only to lose itself, further on, in a still pool where long-legged insects trod the leaves of the water-lilies. The sun beat down. Dragonflies flickered above the rushes, the tips bending under the weight of their light bodies. We were alone, the two of us, in tranquil solitude.

At this point, the valley rounded, and widened, bending back upon itself. We climbed a hillock to see what lay beyond; but the horizon was obstructed by another hill, or stretched out above, in some fresh plateau. Nonetheless, we took heart and walked on, thinking of those sailors abandoned on desert islands who climb the headlands hoping to glimpse some distant sail approaching.

The ground became drier, the grass shorter, and suddenly the sea appeared before us, confined in a narrow cove, and soon its shore, formed of shells and fragments of coral, clinked beneath our feet. We collapsed to the ground and fell asleep, exhausted. An hour later, wakened by the cold, we set off again, certain this time of not getting lost; we were on the coast facing France, and had Le Palais to our left. It was here that, the day before, we had seen the cave that had so charmed us. We were not long in finding others, taller and deeper.

Their openings were always vast arches, straight-sided or curving, thrusting upwards like bold jets against enormous slabs of rock with regular contours. Black, veined with violet, red as fire, umber and streaked with white, they revealed to the observer, every variety of form and hue, every grace, every grandeur of fantasy. There was one, silver-coloured, traversed by veins of blood; in another, clumps of flowers resembling primroses had bloomed on the reddish granite slopes, and ever-renewed drops of water fell from the ceiling onto the fine sand. In the depths of a third, on an elongated arch, a bed of polished white gravel, which the tide doubtless turned and remade each day, seemed to be there to receive the body of some Naiad emerging from the waves; but her bed was empty, she having vanished forever! All that remained was the floor of damp seaweed where she had once stretched out her beautiful naked limbs, tired from swimming amidst the tide, and on which, until dawn, she had slept in the moonlight.

The sun was setting. The tide was rising over the rocks, which were fading in turn into the blue evening mist, whitened by the foam of the recoiling waves, while on the horizon, the sky, streaked with long orange lines, seemed as if swept by great gusts of wind. The dying light, reflected on the waves, gilded them with a shimmering moiré; extending over the sand, it turned the shoreline brown, with a scattering of points of gleaming steel.

A mile or so to the south, the coast stretched out to the sea in a line of rocks. To reach them, we would have to repeat the same march we had made that morning. We were tired; it was a long

way; but temptation drew us onward, towards that horizon. A breeze was rising, pools of water rippled in the hollows of the stones, the seaweed clinging to the bases of the cliffs trembled, and from the direction where the moon was about to rise, a pale light arose, seemingly from beneath the water. It was the hour when shadows are long. The rocks seemed larger, the waves greener. It was as if the sky was expanding and all of nature was altering its expression.

So, we set off into the distance, without worrying about the rising tide, or whether it would leave a path for us along the shore. We wanted to indulge our pleasure to the very end, and savour it, without missing a beat. Lighter than in the morning, we jumped and ran effortlessly, without hindrance; our energy carried us away despite ourselves, and we felt in our muscles a kind of tingling, a robust and singular delight. We shook our heads in the wind, and took delight in touching the grass with our hands. Inhaling the scent of the waves, we breathed in the scene, conjuring up all its colours, its rays of light, its murmurs: the pattern of the seaweed, the softness of the grains of sand, the hardness of the rock that rang beneath our feet, the height of the cliffs, the fringes of the waves, the contours of the shore, the voice of the horizon; and then, there was the passing breeze, like a host of invisible kisses flowing over our faces, there was the sky in which clouds were moving swiftly, scattering a dusting of gold, the rising moon, the ascending stars. We revelled in this profusion of splendours, we feasted our eyes, we opened our nostrils, we listened intently. Something of the life of the elements, prompted by our attentive gazing, reached us, and was assimilated, allowing us to comprehend that life in closer relationship, to feel it more deeply, thanks to a more complex union. By dint of it penetrating us, of our entering into it, we too became a part of Nature; we felt it gaining power over us, and we experienced immeasurable joy; we longed to lose ourselves there, to be seized by its strength, or to bear it away enclosed within us. Just as, in the transports of love, one wishes to be equipped with more hands to touch the beloved, more lips to kiss, more eyes to see, more soul with which to love, we, traversing Nature, in our frolic, full of delirium and joy, regretted that our eyes could not reach the heart of the earth, the depths of the sea, the ends of the sky, to understand how rocks form, how waves arise, how stars begin to shed their light; that our ears could not hear granite cooling in the depths, sap rising in the plants, coral massing in the ocean solitudes, and amidst this contemplative sympathetic effusion, would have wished our souls, radiating everywhere, to plunge living into all this ocean of life, take on all its forms, and endure like them, ever varying, ever revealing their metamorphoses beneath an eternal sun.

But human beings are born to sense only a little each day: of foods, colours, sounds, feelings, ideas; anything measureless tires or intoxicates us; it condemns us to the idiocy of the drunkard, the madness of the ecstatic. Ah! How small our glass is! How great our thirst! How weak our minds!

That evening, our gait was no longer perfectly steady; we returned agitated, moved, troubled, our hearts pounding, our nerves vibrating like the strings of a harp that has been plucked too hard; our bodies were tired, our heads spinning, while, on the contrary, our legs, propelled us forward, jerkily, of their own accord, almost in leaps and bounds. When we entered the town, whose gates were about to be closed, we had been walking for fourteen hours, our toes were sticking out of our shoes, and our shirts were still wringing wet two days later.

To return to Quiberon, we had to rise the next day before seven, which required courage. Still stiff with fatigue and staggering sleepily, we piled into the boat, accompanied by a white horse, two

travelling merchants, the same one-eyed gendarme, and the same rifleman who, this time, was not involved in lecturing anyone. Grey as a sheet and rolling about beneath the benches, he was having a hard time keeping his shako in place, which kept bobbing on his head, and defending himself against his rifle, which kept flying between his legs. I know not which was the bigger fool, him or the gendarme. The gendarme was sober, but stupid in the extreme. He complained about the soldier's bad manners, listed the punishments he was going to receive, was scandalised by his hiccups, and took offense at his behaviour. Seen from a three-quarter angle, from the side of the missing eye, with his tricorn hat, sabre, and yellow gloves, he cut one of the saddest figures a person could see. A gendarme is, moreover, a thing essentially clownish, one that I cannot regard without smiling; which is in itself a grotesque and inexplicable effect such pillars of public safety have upon me, along with king's prosecutors, magistrates, and literature professors.

Tilted over on its side, the boat cut through the water speeding along the hull and turning to foam as it did so. The trio of sails, filled by the breeze, swelled in gentle curves. The rigging creaked, the wind whistled through the pulleys. Leaning over the bow, his nose in the air, the cabin boy was singing; we were unable to make out the words, but the monotonous tune was slow, and tranquil; repeated endlessly, neither higher nor lower in pitch, the languid modulations were prolonged as they faded. His song floated away gently and sadly over the sea, like a confused, passing memory deep in the soul.

The horse stood on its four feet and nibbled its bale of hay as best it could. The sailors, arms crossed, smiled as they looked up at the sails.

At Quiberon, we saw Monsieur Rohan again, with his tall, ruddy-faced wife, and reacquainted ourselves with the game of '*trou madame*' (*'troll-my-dames', or 'trunkes', an ancestor of bagatelle*), which replaces the obligatory billiards in his establishment, and appears to be one of the local curiosities. Our two travellers were skilled at the game, and when, after having lunch with them, we left for Plouharnel, we left them more determined than ever to wipe the floor with one of their local acquaintances. Both were traders in bed-linen. The first was a rather handsome fellow of about twenty, blond, and ruddy-faced, with a broad chest, his cap pulled down over one ear, high heels, and a waistcoat down to his knees; he represented for us the very embodiment of the Vaudeville's Achard (*Pierre-Frédéric Achard was a renowned, and energetic, actor*), he possessed elegance, and style. As for the other, no doubt in his day he had shared his companion's amiable nonchalance; he too had perhaps once taken maids by the waist, playfully insulted the boys, been brilliant at billiard cannons, and eased the tedium of travel in his cabriolet by singing the songs of Béranger; but with age, the chill the grips the heart had extinguished his flame, and quietened his voice. The experience of a wise man, the moderation of a philosopher, could be read on his brow, wrinkled by worrying about sales volumes, and the endless anxiety of the journeyman. How many business letters must he have written in his life? How many houses had disdained his wares? How many times had he dined at the common table!

As we were on our way to Plouharnel that evening, these gentlemen offered to take our knapsacks in their carriage, which we accepted, and a good thing it was for us, because from Quiberon to Plouharnel the road is very sandy, and twenty-five pounds weight on our backs would scarcely have accelerated our progress.

Until we reached Fort Penthièvre, we saw nothing new, the route being known to us, but we noted again with a degree of boredom some fine menhirs casting their foolish shadows on the grass.

We passed by Fort Penthièvre, which greatly surprised the sentry who, seeing us approaching, granted us the courtesy of shouting from afar that we needed permission to visit, but instead we seated ourselves at the foot of the embankment, on the sloping side of a large grassy mound whose incline descended towards the sands. The sun shone, the sea sparkled, and a dry, harsh wind blew over the reeds embedded in the dunes, which bent simultaneously, as if a sheet of water had passed over them.

With Plouharnel visible on the opposite coast, its church steeple, facing the rise where we sat, certainly seemed within reach; one only had *to follow, in a straight line*, as countryfolk say. As if it were easy to follow anything in a straight line, with only a weathervane, or even a whole steeple, in front of one's eyes!

The peninsula, silhouetted against the sea, extended in a pale yellow mass, while the waves traced two long fringes of white foam along its twin shores. The sea was entirely blue, the sky wholly white; struck squarely by the sun, the sands shimmered before us, with great patches of umber light, that seemed to make them ripple, and their extent to increase. The rounded hillocks, formed by the winds, and dotted here and there with a few reeds as thin as needles, rising one after another, seemed endless; we were obliged to climb and descend, trails of dust rising slowly and drifting away, our eyes closed against the dazzling sun that blazed above the waves, and glowed over the sand. The wind reddened our faces, whipping them with great force, as we advanced slowly and sadly over this deserted shore.

Thus, we marched on, in silence, as best we could, without ever seeming any nearer the far point of the bay where Plouharnel was located. However, we reached the end eventually. But then we found ourselves walking towards the ocean again. We had turned right along the shore, when we should have turned left. We had to retreat, and cover part of the distance again.

We heard a muffled sound. A bell rang; a hat appeared. It was the Auray mail. The same postman, horse, and mailbag as before. He was progressing calmly towards Quiberon, from which he would return later, only to retrace the route on the morrow. He is an inhabitant of the shore; he crosses it in the morning, and again in the evening. His life is to traverse it; he alone animates it, he adds to the scene, I was about to say graces that same.

He stops; we talk to him for two minutes; he says his farewell, and departs. What a scene! What a man, what a horse! What a subject for a sketch! Jacques Callot, no doubt, would have etched it; only Cervantes could have evoked it fully with the pen.

After crossing large lines of boulders planted in the sea, so as to shorten the route which cut, thus, across the inner end of the bay, we finally arrived at Plouharnel.

The village was quiet, hens clucked in the streets, and in the gardens, enclosed by dry stone walls, nettles grew in the middle of squares of oats.

As we were sitting outside our host's house, breathing fresh air, an old ragged beggar passed by. He was hunched over, crawling with vermin, as red as wine, bristling, sweating, with a dishevelled front and a drooling mouth. The sun shone on his rags, and his purple, almost black,

skin seemed to exude blood. He bellowed in a dreadful voice, pounding repeatedly on the door of a neighbouring house.

We had the honour of dining with our two business travellers, whose politeness certainly warranted the offer of an inevitable bottle of champagne. They opened their hearts completely to ours, and poured out their most intimate confidences. We learned things of interest, for example that the younger man was travelling for a firm based in Lisieux, and that last year he had possessed a mistress named Josephine, who was quite well-endowed. He was, moreover, a fellow who had experienced the highest and lowest of Cytherean society; he often calmed his senses at little cost to himself, and had *slept with women who slept in black satin sheets*. 'Why,' said his companion, 'did you not steal some for a vest or two?'

The host, who is the local mayor, came to drink with us, during the dessert course. With elbows resting on the table, and his black silk cap pulled up behind his ears to hear more clearly, he remained gaping and silent throughout, savouring our friends' speeches, and our own which were no better. The dinner was in no way tedious though; sometimes one gains pleasure by conversing with imbeciles.

The next day was a Sunday, and the kitchen was already full of countryfolk, who came there to drink, when we descended to consume our onion soup before setting off for Auray.

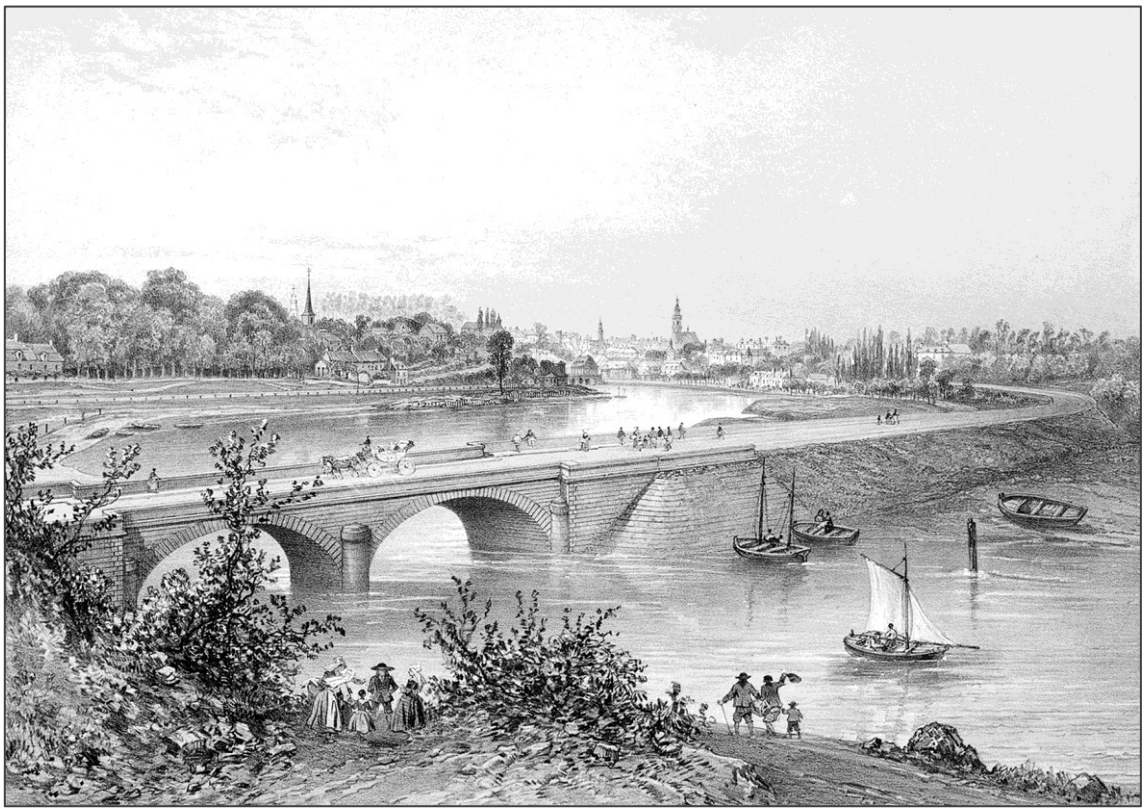
Above the voices, and the clatter of iron-shod clogs echoing amidst the tavern, one heard the cooing of a turtledove enclosed in a cage that hung from the wall. What a sweet sound that was! Do you not love old dovecotes where you can watch the birds walking on the tiled roof, puffing out their necks, spreading their wings, dipping their pink feet in the gutter-water, and all day long uttering their occasional plaintive cries?

We rose and were, about to leave, when we saw someone pass by, but only caught a glimpse from behind. What did he look like from the front? Who was he? His hat! What a hat! A vast, an immense hat that towered above the wearer's shoulders. And it was made of wicker — and what wicker! More like bronze, a hard, compact planisphere made to withstand hail, impervious to rain, and destined only to harden and strengthen with time. The man it covered was lost beneath it, as if he had entered it up to his midsection, and yet he bore it along (I saw him turn his head). What a temperament! What a constitution! What neck-muscles! What strength in those vertebrae! But also, its breadth! What a huge circle it made, that hat! It cast a shadow all around; its wearer was ever denied the sunlight. Oh! What a hat! Like the lid of a boiler topped by a pillar; it would have served well as an oven if one had but cut a door in it! There are things that are unshakeable: like the Simplon Pass, and the impudence of critics; things that are solid: like the Arc de Triomphe, and the moralist Jean de la Bruyère's French; things that are heavy: like lead, boiled meat, and the works of that literary historian Désiré Nisard; and things that are great: like my brother's nose, Shakespeare's '*Hamlet*', and the poet Louis Bouilhet's snuffbox, but I have seen nothing as unshakeable, as solid, as heavy, as great, as that hat from Plouharnel! And it possessed an oilcloth cover!

Chapter VI: (Du Camp: Plouharnel to Vannes; a trip to Hennebont; Vannes to Josselin)

From Plouharnel to Auray, deserted countryside; one encounters few houses, but beautiful features such as gorse and trees.

Auray has the charming allure of a fine little town with its ancient rooftops and houses; the women are prettier than those in the surrounding area. — A splendid view from the top of a stone belvedere in Auray, to the right and inland. — A few boats, high and dry on the bank due to the low tide; an old bridge with triangular piers and projecting sections within the piers.



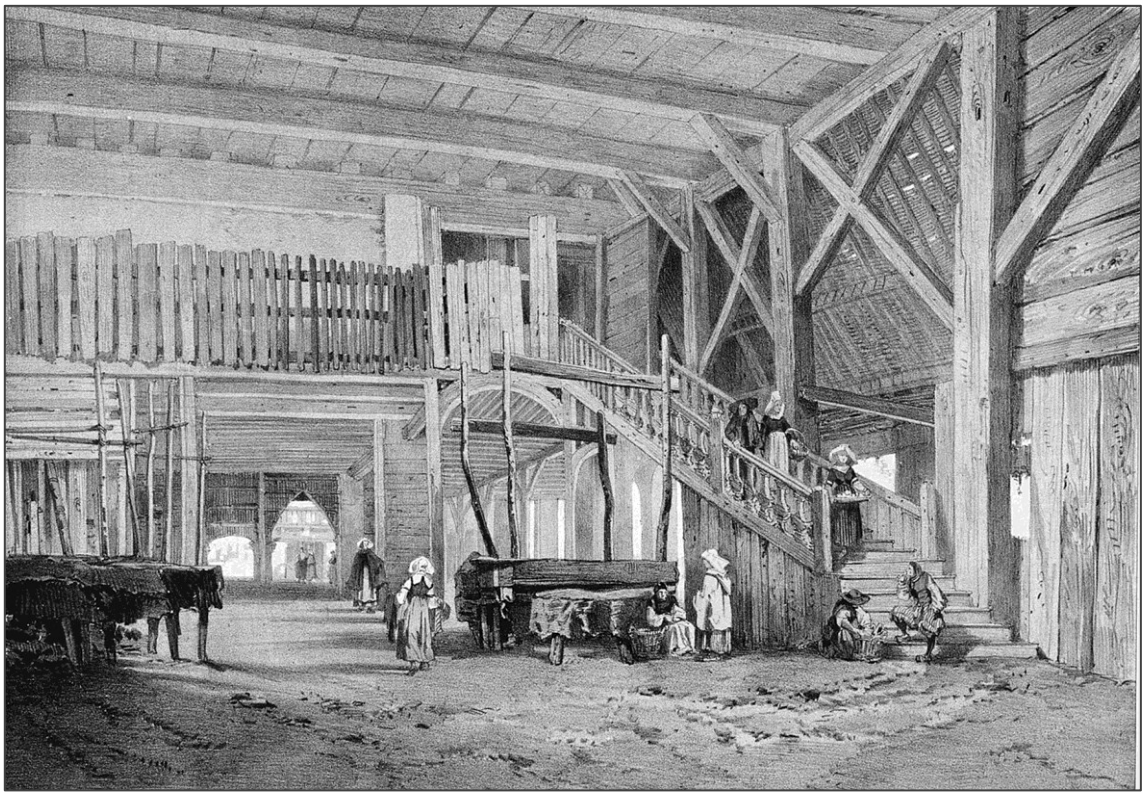
'Auray'
Félix Benoist (French, 1818–1896) and Adolphe Jean-Baptiste Bayot (French, 1810–1871)



'A Street in Auray'
Eugène Cicéri (French, 1813–1890)

The Carthusian Charterhouse (*Saint-Michel du Champ, in Brech*). — *Gallia Marens Posuit* (*'Grieving France erected this'*), a mausoleum, an ugly monument (*to the dead of the Battle of Quiberon Bay, 1759*) in the Restoration style; at the back, two bas-reliefs: one of the Duchess of Angoulême (*Marie-Thérèse*

Charlotte, Madame Royale, daughter of Louis XVI) laying the first stone (*in 1823*); the prefect posing as he presents her with the trowel on a cushion; the other of the Duke of Angoulême (*Louis-Antoine d'Artois*, *son of Charles X*) praying; his cloak; what boots! And the gentleman behind, holding a glove to his chest. — We descended by candlelight through a hole, and saw the bones. — A glass-roofed cloister, closed, adorned with copies of the Saint Bruno (*founder of the Carthusian Order*) cycle by Eustache Le Sueur. — The Grey Nuns. — The abbot strolling. — The Field of Martyrs (*a second monument to the dead of the Battle of Quiberon Bay*): a sort of utterly insignificant chapel; on one side, a small wood, an avenue of green trees, a long heath that the sea floods at each tide; the place was well chosen.



'The Market Hall, Auray'
Eugène Cicéri (French, 1813–1890)

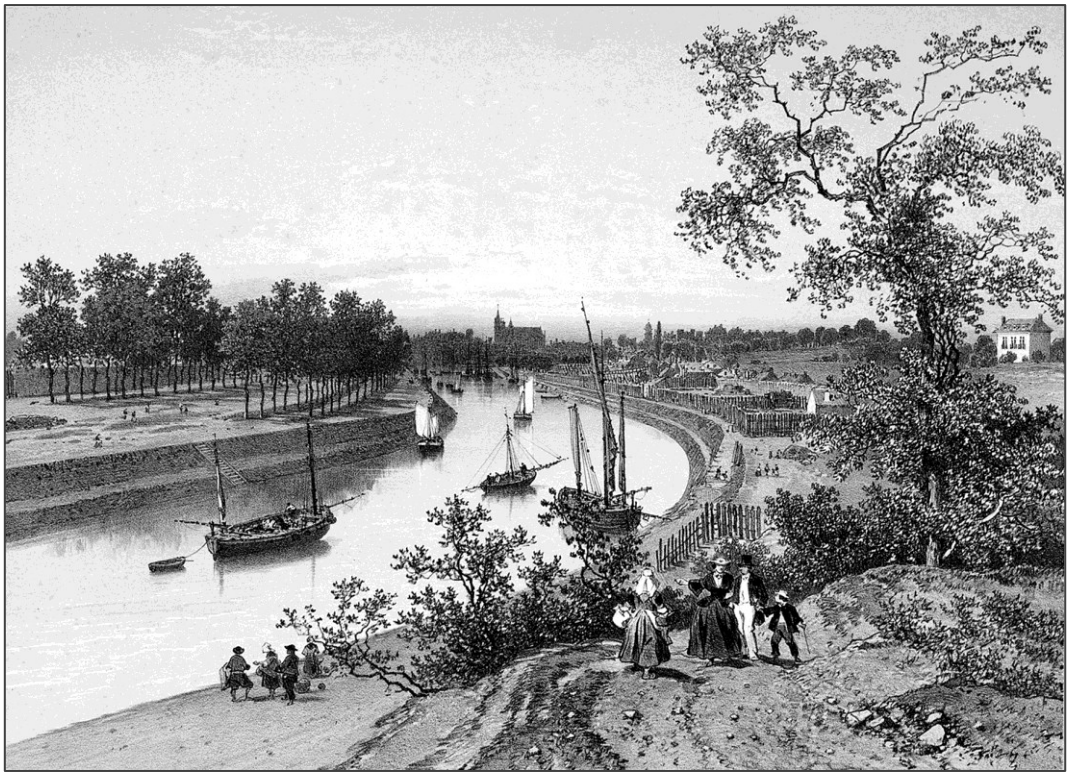
To reach Sainte Anne d'Auray, the road climbs. — Charming watering places (the Auray river flowing through), rocks, water lilies on the surface, gorse. — A little dog that ran and bathed everywhere. — The hedges are frightening in their sheer number when one considers their purpose. — Beneath a tree, a pallid old woman, kneeling, praying at the corner of a sunken lane; it was Vespers. We met two others, who were doubtless praying while walking, since one made the sign of the cross.

Sainte Anne d'Auray. — The church adorned with paintings, *votive offerings* from the mill and the children. — Axe blow. — Shops selling religious items. — Our devout, and Carlist, driver, a big, heavy, useless fellow.



'Sainte-Anne-d'Auray: a Pardon'
Félix Benoist (French, 1818–1896), Adolphe Jean-Baptiste Bayot (French, 1810–1871) and Eugène Cicéri (French, 1813–1890)

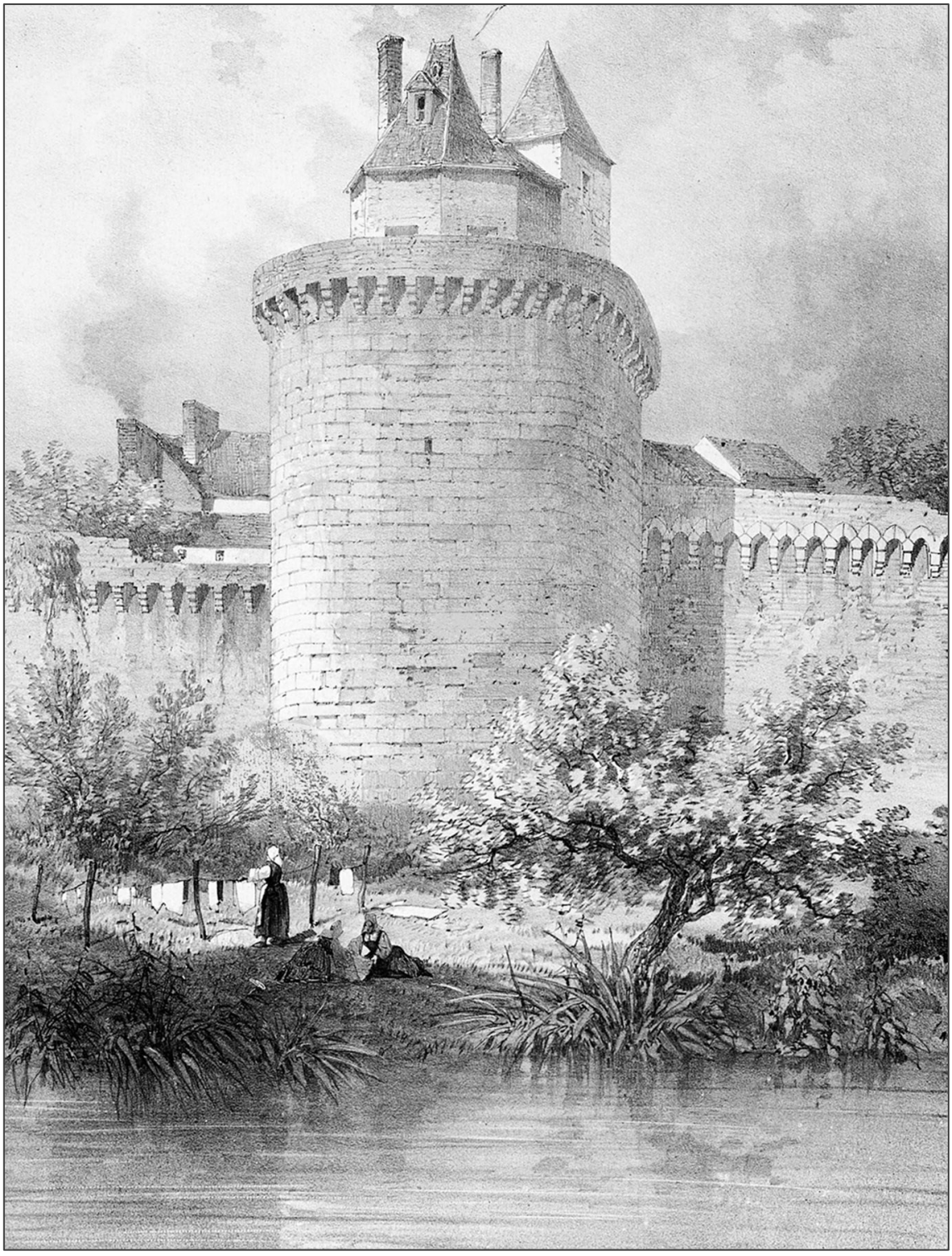
Vannes. — Gentlemen and ladies dressed in their Sunday best. — Young soldiers in bourgeois attire, moustaches, trousers pulled up; trousers with a pair of boots! — Monsieur Descormiers de Montmorency, set apart from everyone, though in the centre. — The officer, black wicker hat, black velvet frock-coat, white tie, a mouth and nose like those of Marat (*Jean-Paul Marat, the Revolutionary politician*). He should have been appointed warden of the promenade, with lodgings in the hospital, though he has no need of the position. — 'Vannes' and his wife. — The Constable's Tower (*Tour du Connétable*), occupied by a carpenter, and some dreadful riff-raff. — Churches without names. — The eastern corner; the way down from the hotel towards a small promenade by the water leads to a field bordered by a line of oak trees beneath which I am writing. — At the hotel, in a room that seems to be the drawing room, two engravings: the return and departure of Louis XVIII from the Tuileries in 1815 (*during The Hundred Days, see for example the 'Departure' painting of 1817, by Antoine-Jean Gros*). The Duc d'Angoulême in Spain, in full costume, and riding boots; his sword rests on a chained monster, which must represent 'the hydra of anarchy'; he stands beside the decapitated trunk. In the background, on a shield hanging from the wall, is written: *veni, vidi, vici.*



‘Vannes: the Harbour from the Left Bank’
Félix Benoist (French, 1818–1896), Adolphe Jean-Baptiste Bayot (French, 1810–1871) and Eugène Cicéri (French, 1813–1890)



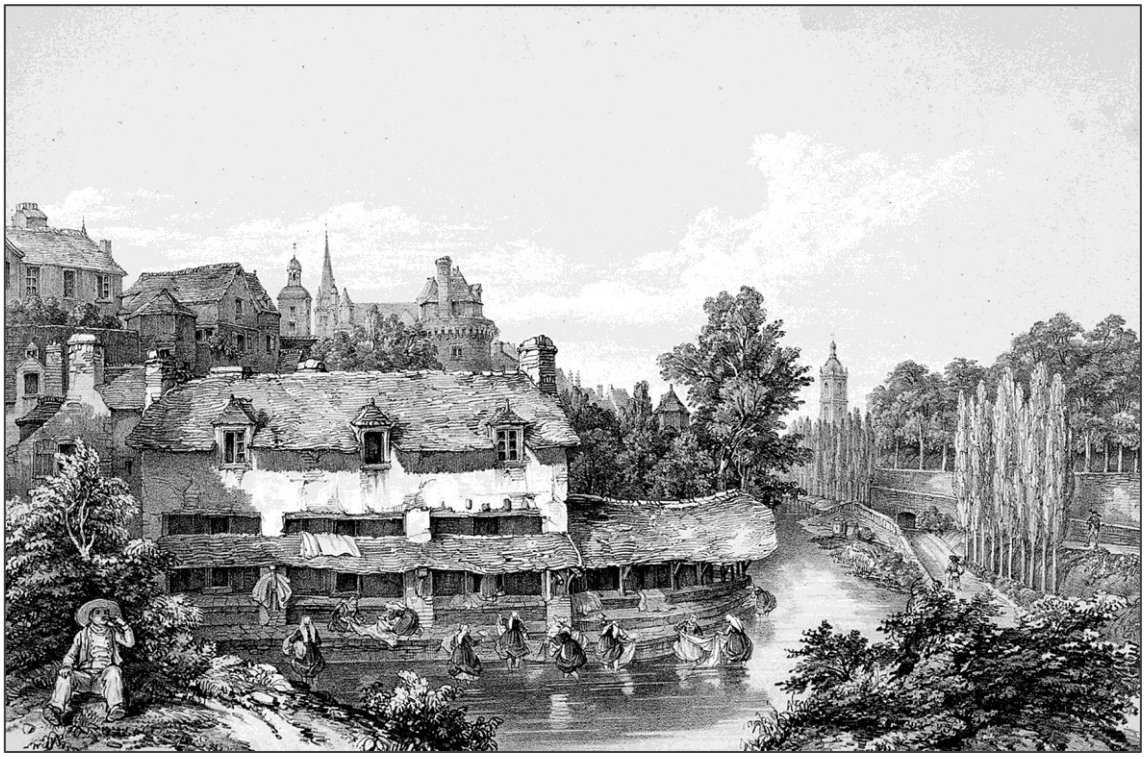
‘The Town Gate, Vannes’
Léon Gaucherel (French, 1816–1886)



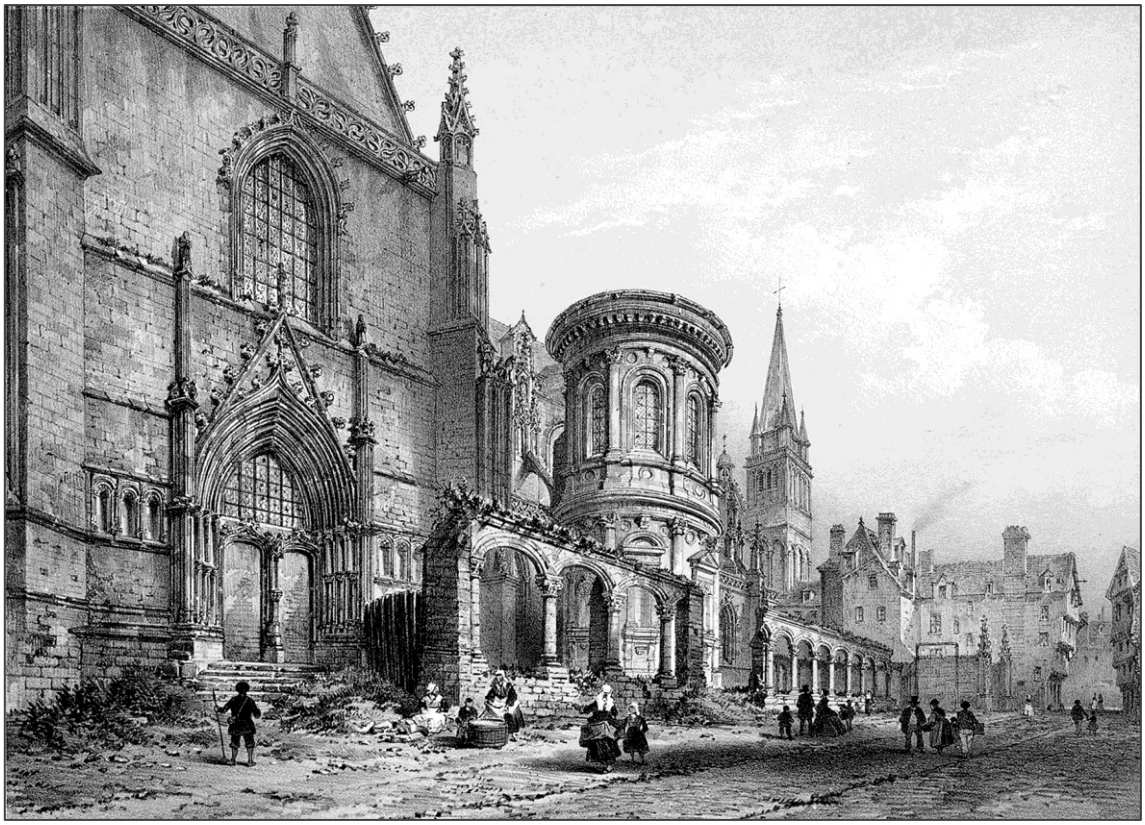
'The Tower where the Constable de Clisson was Imprisoned'
Léon Gaucherel (French, 1816–1886) and Eugène Cicéri (French, 1813–1890)



‘Houses in Vannes’
Léon Gaucherel （French, 1816–1886） and Eugène Cicéri （French, 1813–1890）



‘Vannes: the Riverside Washhouses’
Félix Benoist （French, 1818–1896）



'Vannes Cathedral'
Félix Benoist (French, 1818–1896) and Adolphe Jean-Baptiste Bayot (French, 1810–1871)

From Vannes to Hennebont the route is lovely; a fresh wind along the main road. — Woods that the road traverses.

Lorient. — Complete emptiness; low, straight streets. — The Hôtel de France, a tavern, a greenhouse in the garden. — 'A Musical Evening' beneath the trees in front of the theatre. — the playwright Eugène Scribe's slander (Monsieur de Sauvray-Raymond), it left me feeling sick. — The harbour impossible to see. — An evening stroll. — Nothing there. — Hennebont, on the slope of a hill.

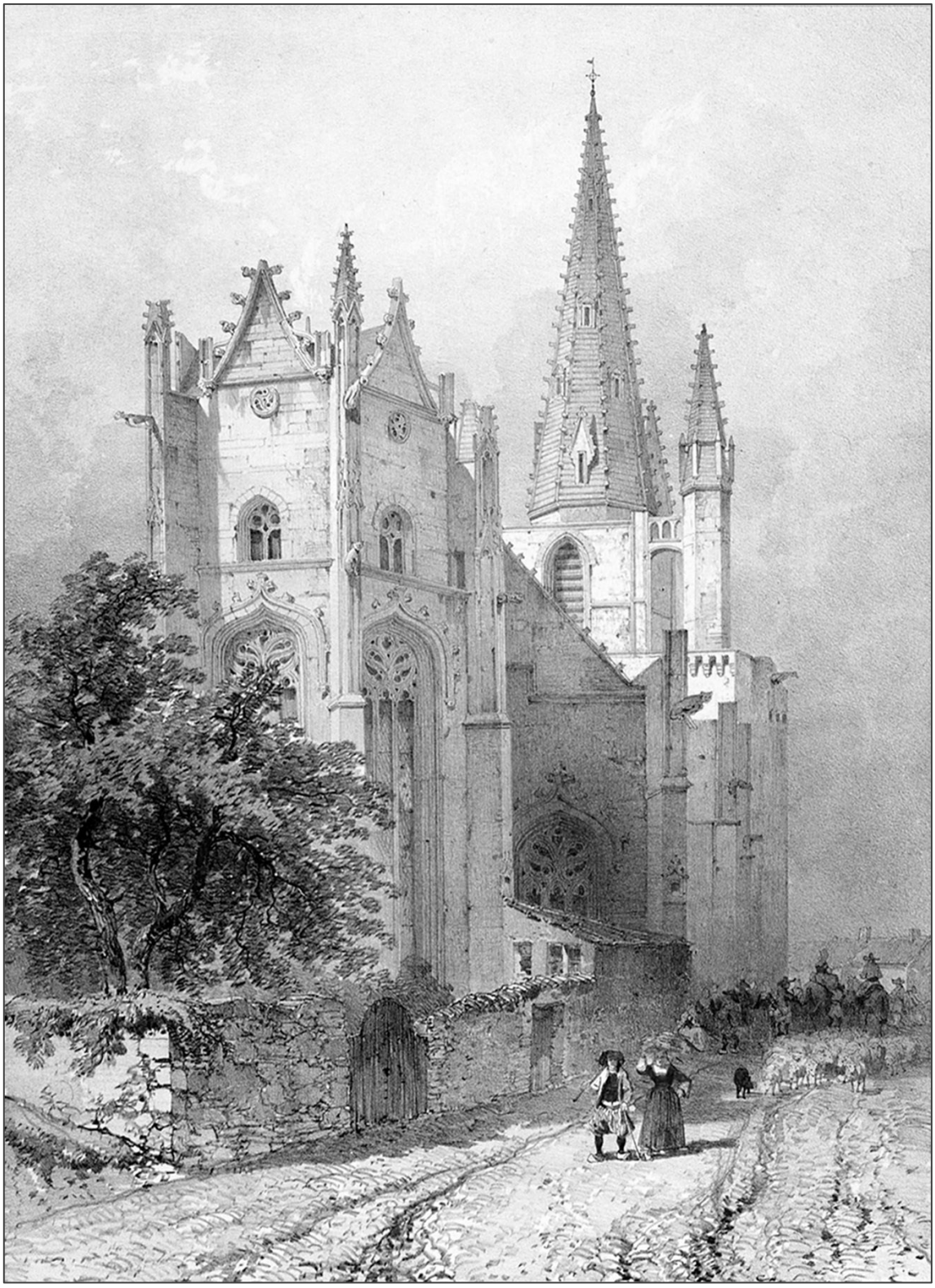
From Lorient to Hennebont on foot. — A Florentine singing a Genoese song, selling bags of plaster. — Violets among the ruins; two towers preserved with slate roofs. — Arriving from Lorient: a section of machicolated wall covered with earth. — In the upper part of the town, a promenade, a view of the river; opposite, the Hôtel du Commerce; a long avenue of elm trees. — At the relay station, a fierce idiot, a hard stare, a long green frock coat, canvas trousers too short, clogs, bare feet, straw hat; a woman, covered up....



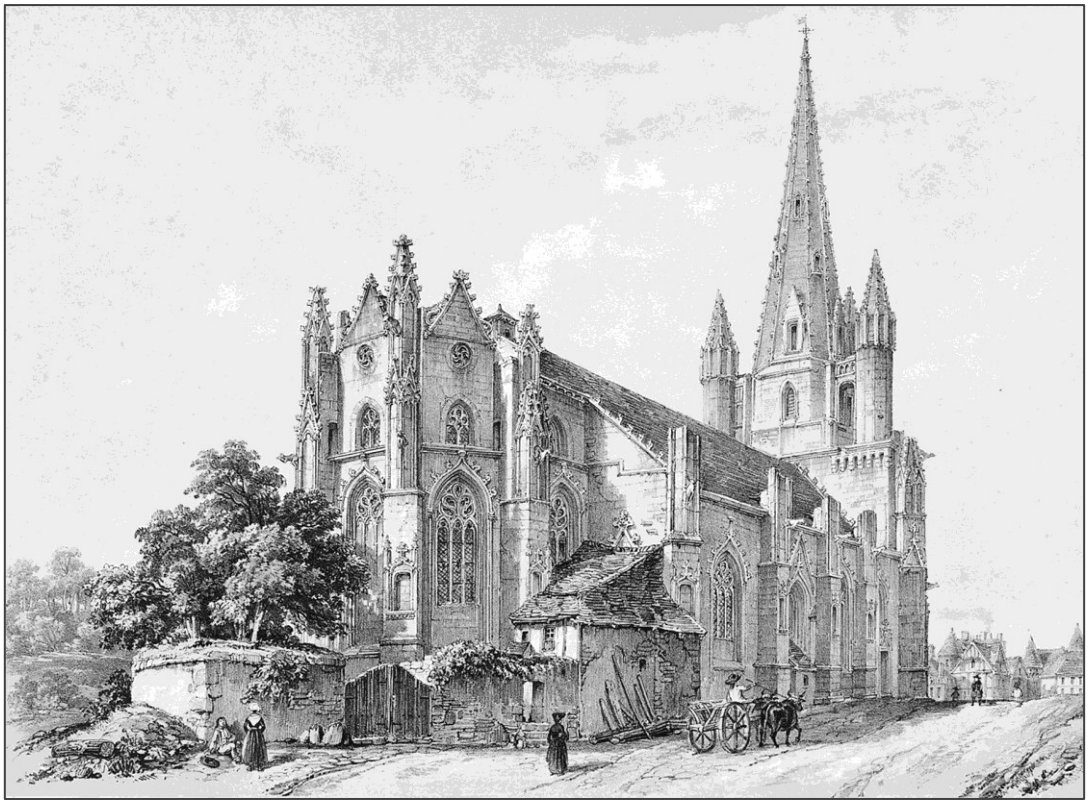
‘Hennebont Church’
Léon Gaucherel (French, 1816–1886) and Eugène Cicéri (French, 1813–1890)



‘Hennebont Church’
Félix Benoist (French, 1818–1896), Eugène Cicéri (French, 1813–1890) and Adolphe Jean-Baptiste Bayot (French, 1810–1871)



‘Hennebont Church’
Léon Gaucherel (French, 1816–1886) and Eugène Cicéri (French, 1813–1890)



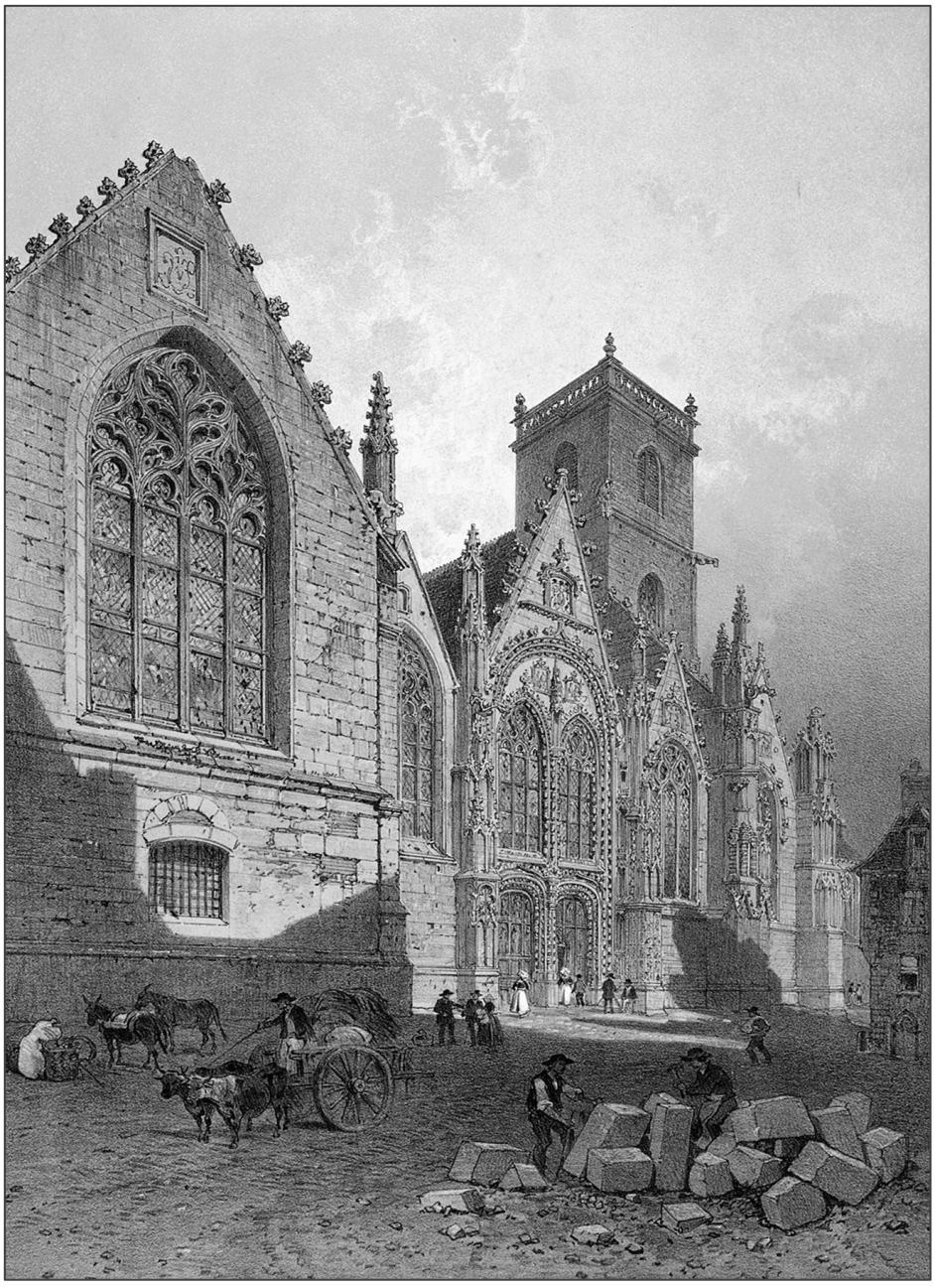
'Hennebont Church'
Félix Benoist (French, 1818–1896)



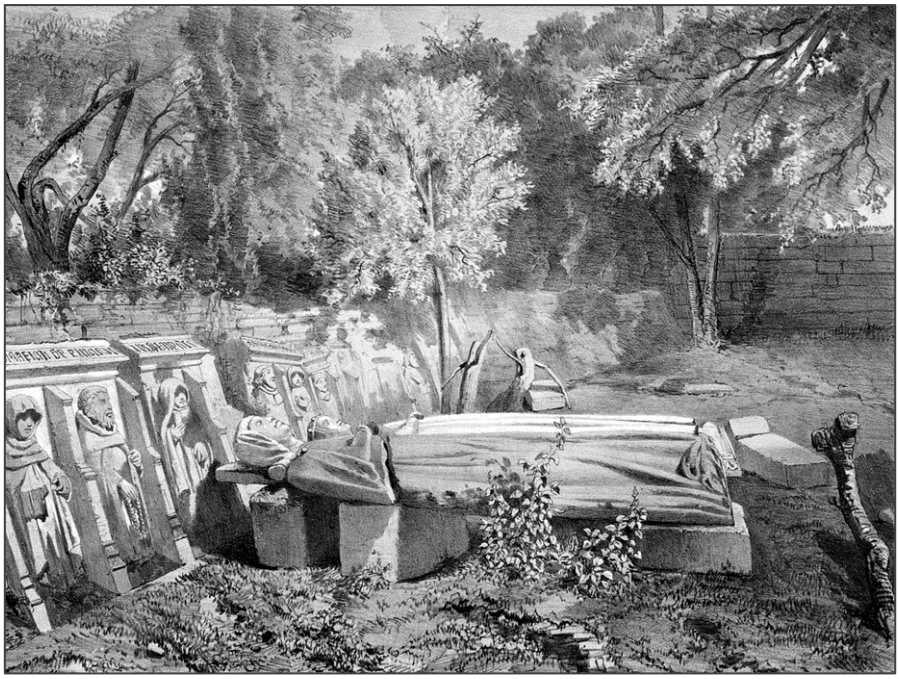
'The Prison, Hennebont'
Eugène Cicéri (French, 1813–1890)

From Hennebont to Ploërmel, under a tarpaulin. — The driver some kind of sailor. — Melancholy while gazing at the highway. — In Vannes, the classic democrat, desiring intimacy with us. — A procession, soldiers, young boys dressed in white, having been crowned with roses in Hennebont.

Ploërmel. — A Gothic church (*Saint-Armel*), from the good old days, with lovely stained-glass windows; the portal from the beginning of the fourteenth century; a sow carved on the left on a buttress, near the side portal. — Set in a long, flat valley; the countryside is dark in colour, and bluish on the horizon. — An idiot. — The father of twenty-six children recites verses about the emperor.

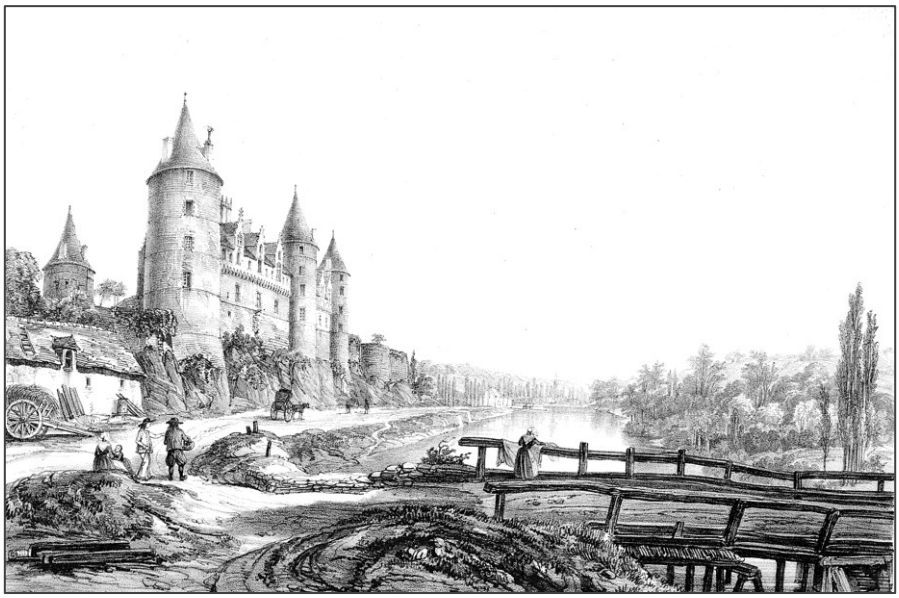


'Ploërmel Church: the Side Portal'
Félix Benoist (French, 1818–1896), Adolphe Jean-Baptiste Bayot (French, 1810–1871) and Eugène Cicéri (French, 1813–1890)

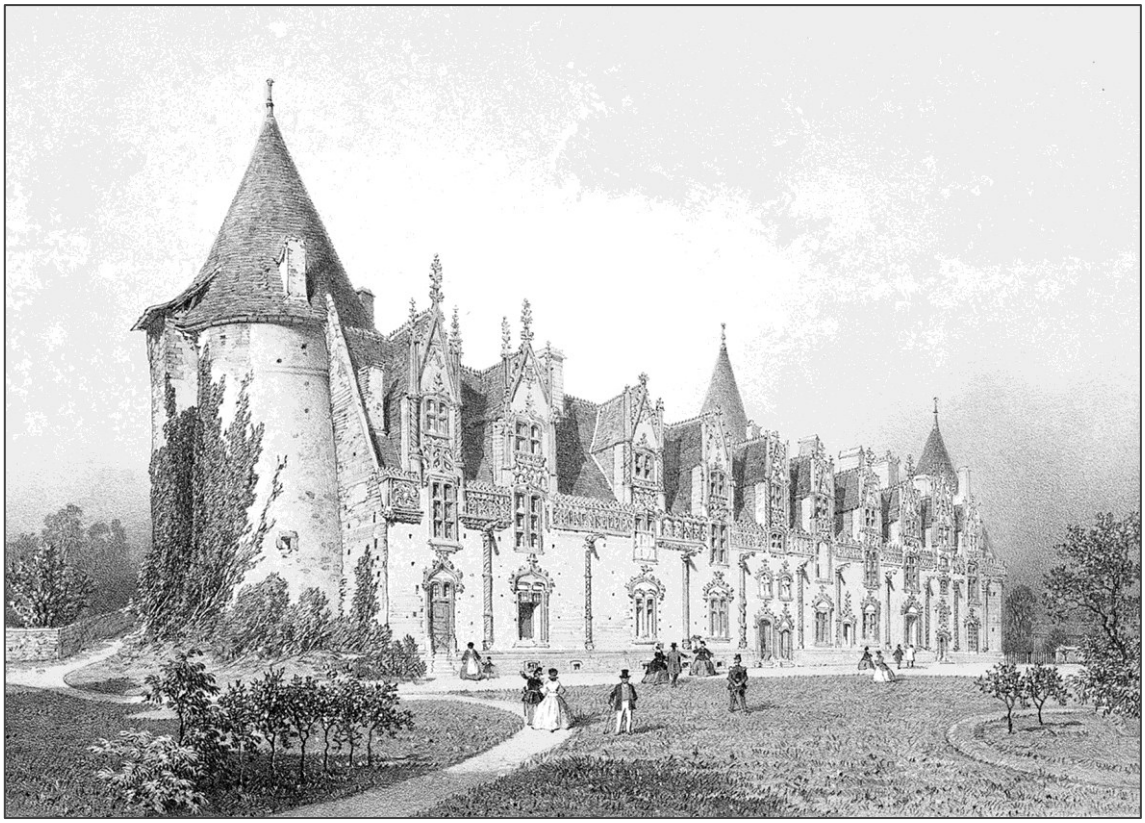


'Statues of the Princess Jehanne de Léon'
Léon Gaucherel (French, 1816–1886)

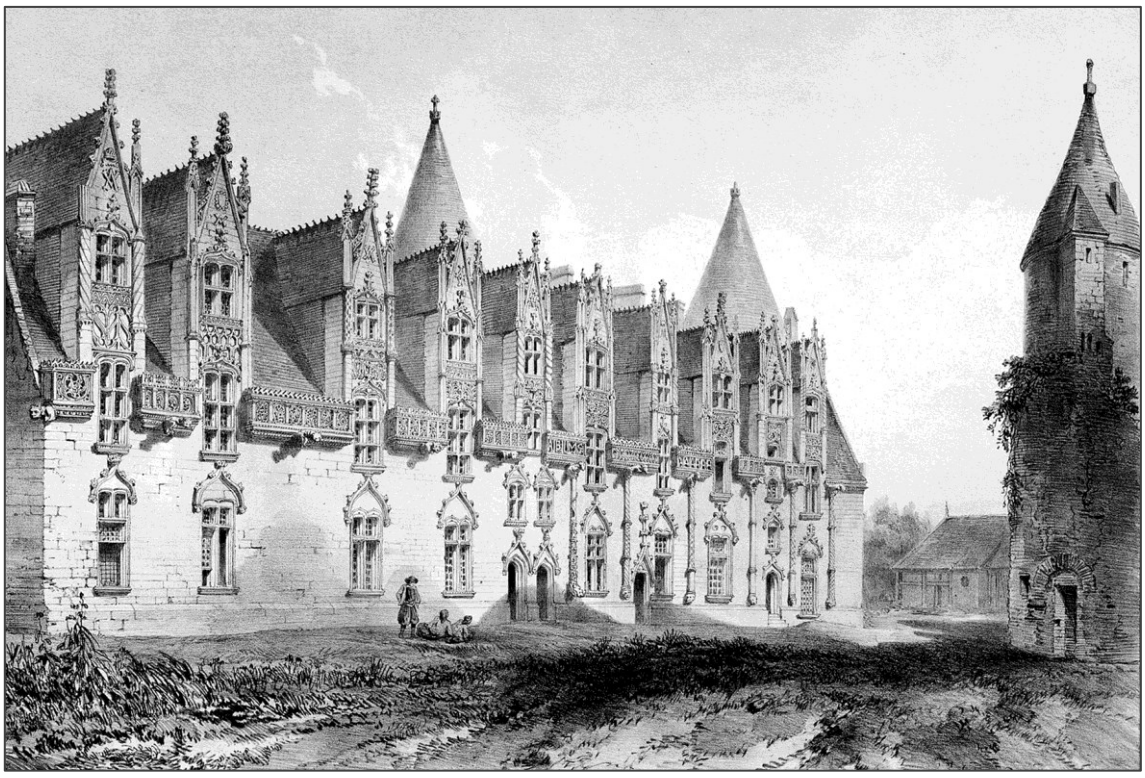
Josselin, the château seen from the angle of the bridge. — Three towers, square windows (from the beginning of the fifteenth century). — Built on a shelf of rock, over the river, a row of machicolations; ten windows facing, in the style of Queen Anne as at Blois, but in more austere taste. — Nothing comparable; the interlacing of the galleries also differs. — Enormous gargoyles: tuskless elephants, a sea-hound, a dragon; from beneath their bellies a stone gutter descends to a height of three feet from the ground; and ends in another gargoyle head of the same character. One, towards the middle, and a second at the corner, carved as crocodiles, the gutter forming the body, covered with bosses, as are the sides of the legs; a little higher, the tail coiled round a column.



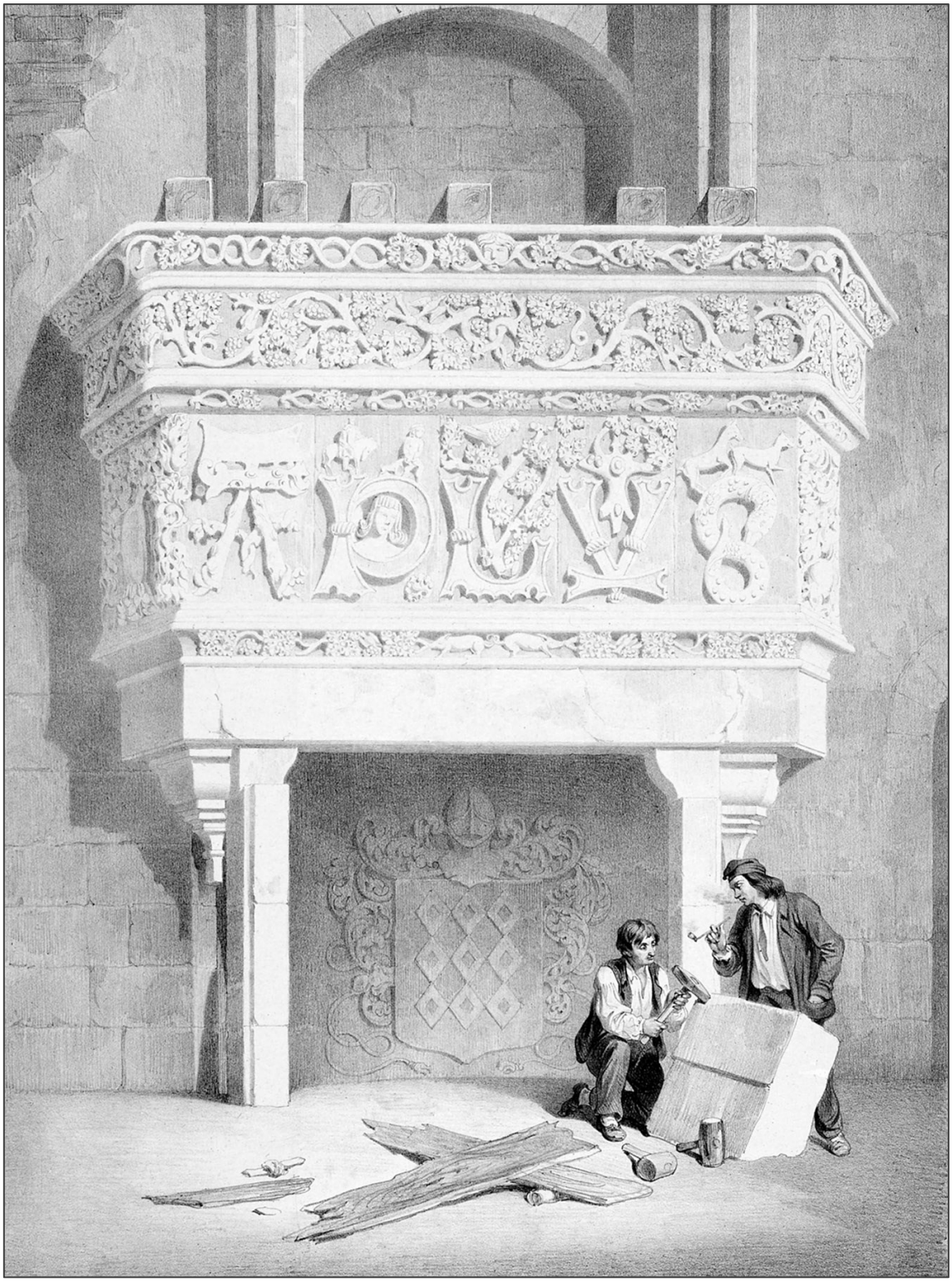
'The Château de Josselin'
Félix Benoist (French, 1818–1896)



'The Château de Josselin: the Inner Façade on the Courtyard'
Eugène Cicéri (French, 1813–1890), Félix Benoist (French, 1818–1896) and Adolphe Jean-Baptiste Bayot (French, 1810–1871)



'The Château de Josselin'
Léon Gaucherel (French, 1816–1886)



'A Fireplace in the Château de Josselin'
Léon Gaucherel (French, 1816–1886) and Adolphe Jean-Baptiste Bayot (French, 1810–1871)

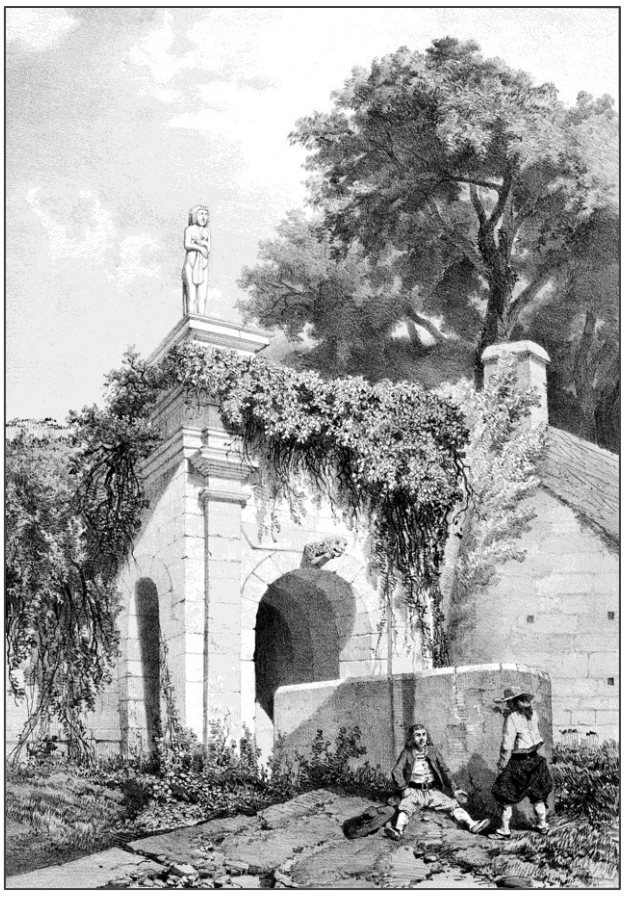
The basilica at Josselin. — Notre Dame de Roncier; her red robe spread in an inverted fan.

The End of 'By Field and Shore' Part II

Part III: Chapters VII-IX

Chapter VII: (Flaubert: The West Coast, Baud to Pont l'Abbé)

Half a league from the s mall village of Baud, hidden deep in a beech wood, stands the Venus of Quinipily. It is a six-foot-high granite statue of a nude woman with her hands on her breast; a kind of stole hangs around her neck. The stole extends down to her stomach, where it ends in a triangle like a Samoyed's loincloth; two bands holding her wavy hair are tucked under the stole, and cross at the rear, at the small of her back. Viewed in profile, with her fleshy thighs, her rounded buttocks, her bent knees, and her large head sunk deep into her shoulders, she possesses a sensuality that is both barbaric and refined. Her face is flat, her nose snub, her eyes set close to her head, and her mouth, as well as her fingers and toes, are indicated only by a simple line; the breasts have been deliberately outlined on her chest. At the base of her pedestal is a large vat, carved from the same granite, and shaped in a square elongated at one end into a semicircle; it can hold, it is said, sixteen barrels of water.



'The Fountain of the Vénus de Quinipily, with its Granite Basin'
Léon Gaucherel (French, 1816–1886)

She has been mistaken for an Egyptian Isis because of her bandages, or for a Roman Venus because of the inscriptions on the pedestal. But what if these inscriptions, as is claimed, were only added in the seventeenth century by Count Pierre de Lannion (*Governor of Vannes*)? Must we then return to the hypothesis that this is a statue of Isis? Or is it merely the enduring rage for things Egyptian, that sees, as Monsieur de Penhoet does, in this clumsy, overabundant, and languid work, the elevated, slender, rhythmic style of its sculptors? And is it not, on the other hand, too gross an act of irreverence to suppose that the Romans, who loved beautiful women, were ever capable of creating one so ugly?

All that is known is that, until the seventeenth century, this statue stood on the hill of Castannec (*in Bieuzy*), where Breton peasants worshipped it as an idol and brought it offerings. It was believed to heal the sick; women recovering from childbirth bathed in its vat, and young men eager for marriage flocked to plunge therein, thereafter, beneath the goddess's gaze, indulging in the solitary pastime of amorous melancholy. In 1661, the Bishop of Vannes, Charles de Rosmadec, apparently with predilections of a different nature, was scandalised by the statue and urged the Count of Lannion (*Claude*), then Governor of Vannes, to eradicate the idolatry by destroying the statue. The Count merely toppled it, rolling it from the top of the mountain into the river (*the Blavet*) that flows at its foot. A flood occurred, and the peasants attributed it to the goddess's wrath. They pulled the statue from the water, set it back in place, and resumed their worship, pursuing the same rituals that had outraged the *respectable folk*, as they were termed. So much so that Charles de Rosmadec begged the Count of Lannion (Pierre, the son of the previous governor) to finally destroy the wretched thing. The Count did nothing of the sort, but transported everything, vat and idol, to the courtyard of his castle at Quinipily (*in 1695*). This removal was not accomplished without difficulty; the governor's soldiers had to defend themselves against the peasants who wanted to keep it near them.

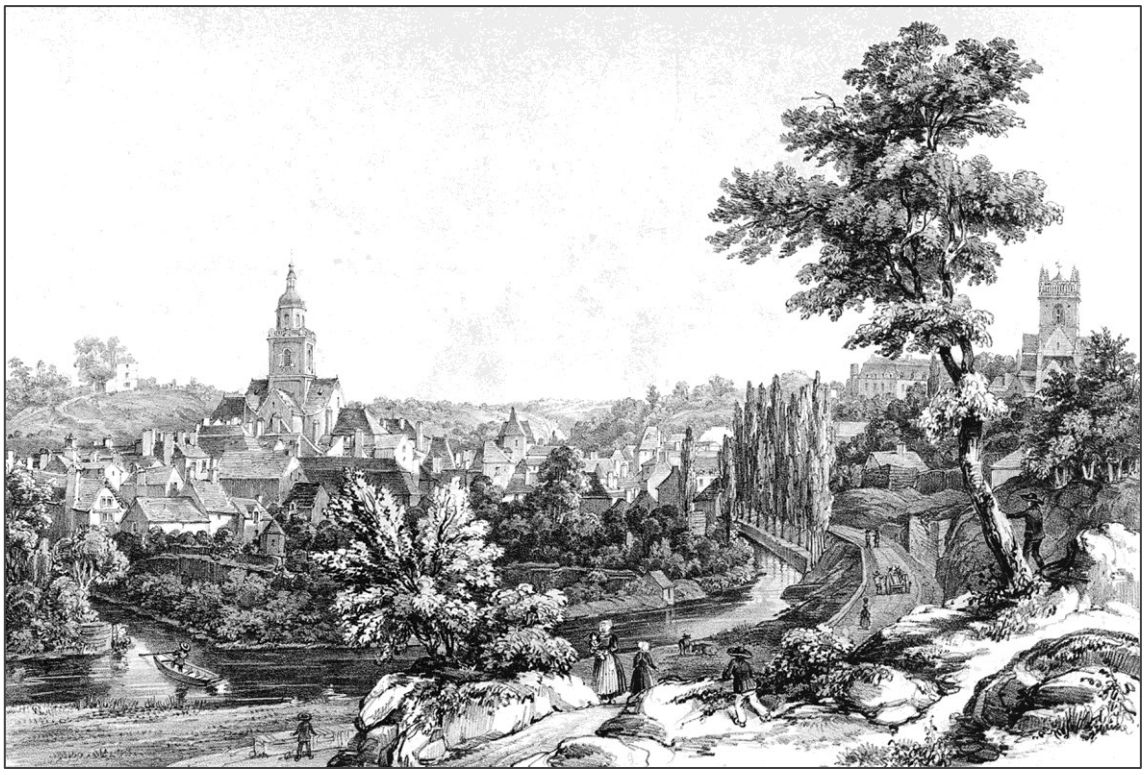
They felt the need. Was it not, this fertile and gentle idol, a fortifying, invigorating, healing embodiment of health and the flesh, for them, and the very symbol of desire, amidst a harsh and rugged countryside?

Whether it was the first attempt at an artistic awakening, or the rotten fruit of a lost civilisation, whatever cult it belongs to, whatever Olympus it descends from, is it not, in legend and in its very form, simply one of the thousand manifestations of that eternal religion concerning the sexual essence of humanity? I mean that which reconstitutes itself everywhere, beneath all other forms, revealed yesterday, hidden today, but which no more than humankind itself can perish; for this more permanent dream is but the individual dream of the heart, this cult the cult of being: the adoration of life itself, through the means that grants life.

The castle that housed the statue is ruined, razed, vanished; the Venus stands amidst the undergrowth beneath a dome of green leaves. No more sacred enclosure, no more ceremonies, no more adoration; all that remains is herself alone, that is to say, a deity without faith, which is little or nothing at all. Here, then, is the corpse of what was once perhaps a religion, and the last remains of the beliefs of several centuries! The idol, however, did not die without uttering a death rattle that can still be heard. Her name re-surfaces, almost as an affront to a memory from which one cannot free oneself, in that of the Christian chapel erected on the site where her temple once stood, this chapel is called the *Priory of La Couarde* (*Breton, for 'the good woman'*).

There were once two other statues at Quinipily, which were later moved to Locminé. They are of stocky, bearded, long-haired men, each wearing a truncated pyramid-shaped cap on the back of their head. A belt of foliage encircles the body, and each holds a club in his left hand. I refuse to believe that these two caryatids, carved by some village labourer, ever had much value or meaning; moreover, they have a certain shabby air about them that makes me suspect they are not very old. Let others see in them what they will — a pair of Gallic Hercules or Egyptian priests— 'as for the beard and hair,' says Monsieur de Penhoet, 'they are for me indications that the figures are priests of the Sun cult, or of Serapis' — they are nonetheless ugly, utterly ugly, and, what's worse, mediocre.

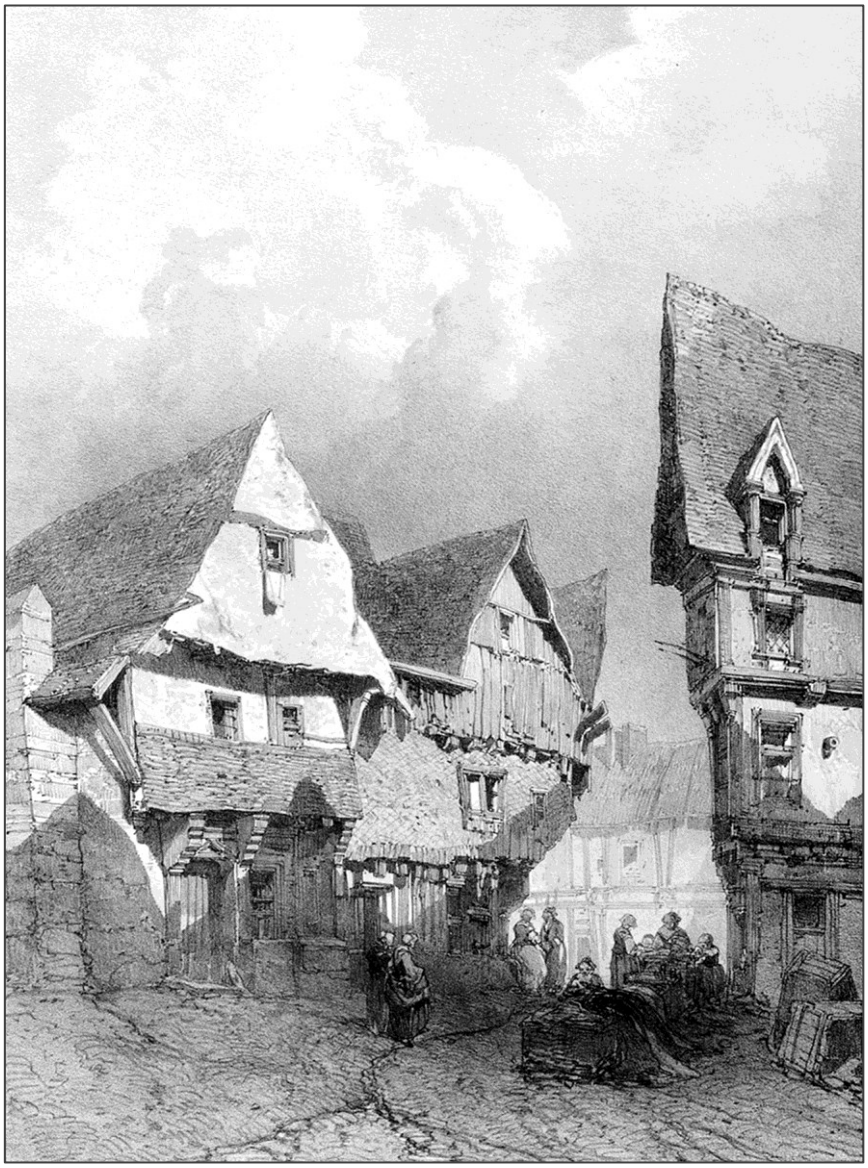
An hour after leaving the dreadful pair, we arrived at Quimperlé which, although it offers nothing Celtic, Roman, or Phoenician, represents nonetheless one of the most pleasant places that fate allowed us to encounter on our journey.



'Quimperlé'
Félix Benoist （French，1818–1896）

Here, there are no alignments, no pavements, no courthouse of any kind, as far as I know at least; no stock- exchange housed in a Greek temple, no barracks, not even a town hall displaying its dull facade, adorned with a tricolored rag. But there are little streets that wind like paths, between old walls from which bouquets of foliage and bunches of clematis cascade. The wooden houses have pointed roofs, and black balconies, and as you pass, you hear a spinning wheel whirring inside, or the sounds of a bird in a white wicker cage hanging from a window. Two rivers (*the Isole and the Ellé, which merge to form the Laïta*), at the foot of the mountains, encircle the town like a silver bracelet; they meet, intertwine, divide, disappear, and reappear without you being able to tell which way they flow, whether there are several or just one; They flow on between the houses and the streets, lapping at the last steps of the garden staircases, and gurgling over the green pebbles

of their beds where tall, slender grasses lean together. The stone quays, of a sort, that enclose them, are pierced by ivy roots, and crumbling away; the stones remain in the depths like boulders, and part the smooth surface of the current, as it strikes against them. Here and there, on that pale blue surface, the traces they leave on the water seem like the white tears of a wide, outspread veil that the wind seeks to raise. From one bank to the other, a single-arched bridge casts its flattened curve, whose reflection trembles in the water along with that of the grasses hanging from its vaulting; they cascade in flowing tresses, stretching to the very depths, their tips brushing the stream that flows through this arch of airy greenery. The bends of the combined river appear in the distance, in the meadows through which it meanders, interspersed with rows of poplars in the grass, clumps of other trees framing pools of water, and here and there, along the banks, two or three ramshackle cottages, their yellowed beams and blackened plaster daringly poised at an angle. Then, far, far away, in an ever-shrinking perspective, one gains vague glimpses of hills and woods fading into the mist.



'A Street in Quimperlé'
Eugène Cicéri (French, 1813–1890)

The town, rises in gradual tiers, on the slopes of a hill above the river. With its water and trees, the beams of its painted or worm-eaten houses, its lead gables, and its tiled roofs packed together, or separated, in regular lines, by the undulating lines of mossy walls, it seems that Quimperlé came into the world only to provide the subject for a watercolour.

The Church of Saint-Michel, above the town unfolding at its feet, reveals a tower with four pinnacles and an arcaded gallery, but one is quite surprised, upon approaching, to find only a rather ordinary church, the sole entrance being a side portal divided by twin doors whose form would be attractive were it not for the overly-heavy ornamentation. Two neighbouring houses have been built against the buttresses of the apse, their first floors creating, as one ascends from the town towards the church, the impression of a bridge spanning the street. The facade of one of them, black, gloomy, and riddled with woodworm, bears on its exterior beams some rather amusing sculpted figures with serious expressions; they wear round caps, and long robes gathered at the waist by belts with wide buckles. They are engaged in various seemingly important tasks. One of them, holding a pestle, is grinding something in a mortar. The house was probably the revered abode of a good apothecary-herbalist of olden times, back in the days of elixirs and juleps, when people came seeking oriental drugs, honeyed medicines, potable gold supposed to prolong life, or some mysterious remedy concocted at night in a rear room, behind the large green alembics and packets of balm: a potion to counter epilepsy, made from the scrapings of human skulls and the blood of a decapitated man, or a syrup for old husbands to foster progeny. The man who built the premises was, I imagine, a wealthy bourgeois of the time, with a stall in the choir, and a farm outside the town, who was doubtless a churchwarden and is surely buried here somewhere.



'Quimperlé: View from the Banks of the Ellé'
Félix Benoist (French, 1818–1896), Eugène Cicéri (French, 1813–1890) and Adolphe Jean-Baptiste Bayot (French, 1810–1871)

There was nothing to see inside Saint-Michel, and we were about to leave when we discovered a wooden statue and an oil painting. The statue is a *Pietà*, which I defy anyone to describe; the Virgin, in blue and red, resembles Paul Grassot, the actor; the Christ, yellow and green, the coiffeur at Small's (Palais-Royal, 7 Galerie de Montpensier).

But what to say of the painting, whose wondrous poetry (an exaggeration, true) recalls the more than sublime frescoes at Nort? A bishop lies in his bed, dying, the poor old fellow, but has nevertheless kept his red skullcap on, so that it is clearly visible that he is a bishop to the very end; his body is outlined beneath the sheets in charmingly gentle contours, and is reminiscent of the shape of a sausage seen through a wet cloth; at his side, a priest in a surplice presents him with the cross to kiss, while his maidservant, nearby, weeps, wiping her eyes on the hem of her apron. At the head of the bed, a winged angel leans over, and whispers righteous advice to His Lordship, who is hesitating somewhat, as at his feet a green devil, with a raven's beak, and disgustingly limp breasts, tries to mesmerise him with its contortions. The room is filled with rosaries, censers, holy ciboria, sacraments, relics, and Agnus Dei. Near the dying man, kneeling in the foreground and seen from behind, is a choirboy holding a candle; the yellow soles of his sturdy shoes are studded with nails as formidable as the devil's teeth, and he presents himself to the view with a pleasing naiveté, especially since a well-executed foreshortening of his legs raises them to his mid-back. Meanwhile, Hell rages, the pestilent breath of the green demon spills forth in dark gusts, sinister birds flutter above, snakes coil around the chair-legs, and beneath a table lurks a hideous dragon writhing, drooling, and roaring; fear grips the heart, and one trembles for the bishop's soul. What a pity if such a man were to descend to Hell! Will he? Won't he? While maintaining the composure of an altar boy, the spectator cannot help but share the vicar's anguish and the servant's grief. Fortunately, the Holy Trinity watches over the bishop's salvation. Above is the Eternal Father, dressed as the Pope; a little lower, at a respectful distance, Christ with his cross; and lower still, on a third cloud, the Virgin Mary. They send pretty angels to the bishop through the air, angels holding luminous lilies and who, walking worthily on putty-coloured clouds, reveal plump rounded calves to which the pink cords of their indigo buskins are attached.

O holy Catholic religion, if you have inspired masterpieces, how many omelettes, on the other hand, have you not produced!

Contemplating this dreadful canvas, and reflecting that many nonetheless must have looked at it without laughing, and that to others it has undoubtedly seemed beautiful, while still others have knelt before it, perhaps drawing supreme inspiration therefrom, we were seized, despite ourselves, by a sorrowful melancholy. What is it in the human heart that makes it constantly, and ceaselessly, throw itself at something, and cling on with such strength? An ardour as equally attracted to ugliness as to beauty; to the petty as to the sublime? Alas! Let us remember, so as to forgive the fellow who painted this, and even more so those who admire it, our own morbid predilections and foolish ecstasies! Let us recall from our own past all the naive love we once felt for some ugly woman, our candid enthusiasm for a simpleton, our devoted friendship towards a coward…

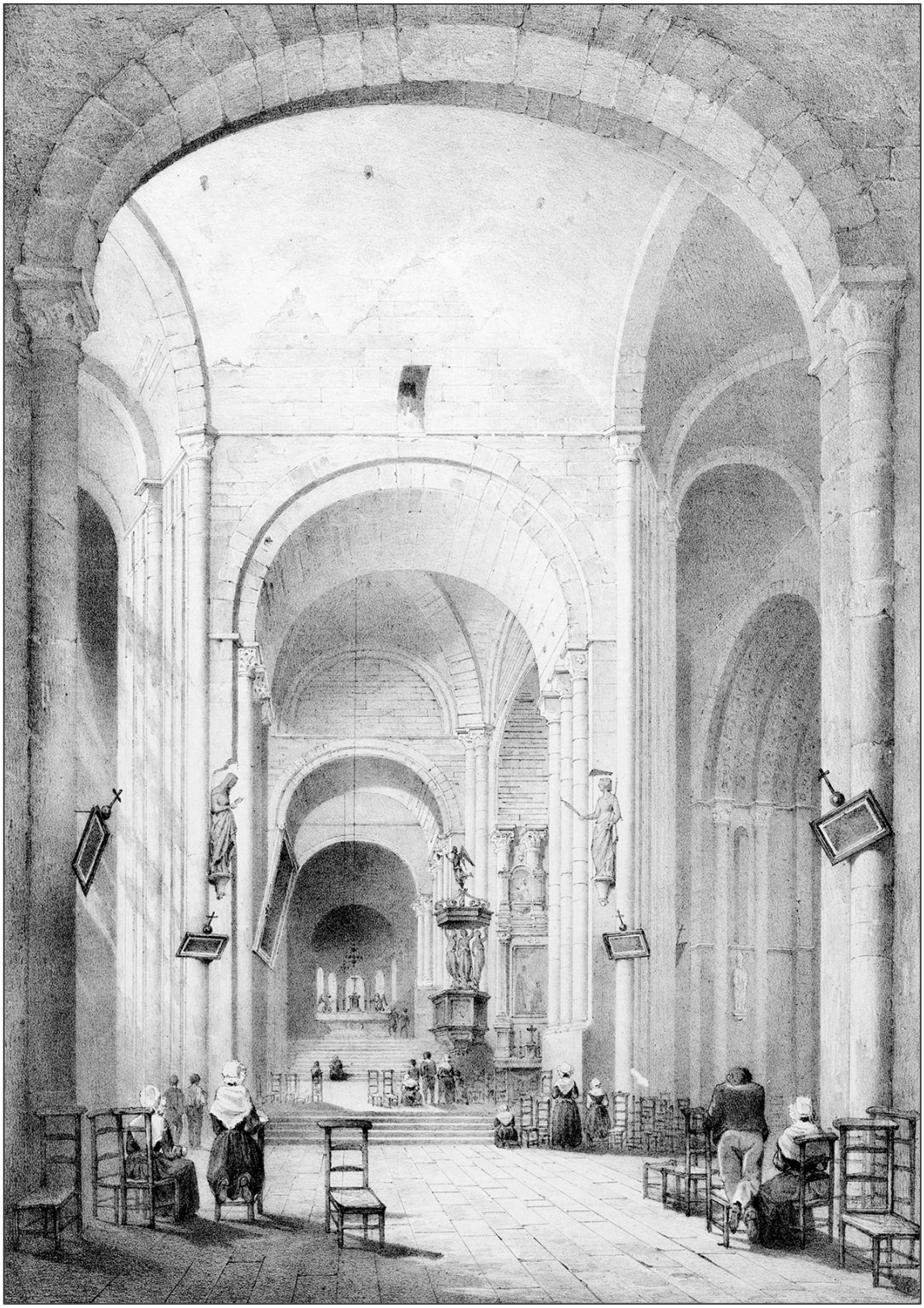
Having finally left the church, we found ourselves back in the sun, the sky, the air, the open spaces, and like a joyful bird taking flight, something rising from deep within the soul cried: 'This! This I need; God is here not elsewhere.'

Evening was upon us, and the bells rang from the church towers. We descended towards the town, via a long, narrow, wooden-stepped alleyway, overgrown with grass, and winding between

two high walls. The copings of these had vanished beneath the foliage; ivy clung to them everywhere, white nettles concealed their bases, and they seemed built solely to support this delightful vegetation, a torrent of greenery cascading between the houses, from the top of the hill to the foot of the town.

We were walking slowly, step by step, and turned to let a young lad pass by who was skipping along. He was handsome and robust, his brown hair, which was covered by a round black felt hat, half-covered his blue jacket and with each of his leaps flew upwards then fell back onto his shoulders; his narrow but supple waist arched boldly with the movement of his thighs, which swayed freely in his breeches of unbleached canvas; his solid calves, encased in white greaves, jutted out, quivering, while his feet, shod in heavy clogs, were as light as those of a chamois. He halted a few paces from us to retie the buckle of his garter; we saw his pale face in profile, over which, in that pose, his long hair flowed like drapery, and hung down to his elbows. When he had done, he straightened quickly, and we saw him race on, continuing to skip and bound at every step.

We came upon him again in the Abbey of the Holy Cross (*Abbaye Sainte-Croix*), on his knees, singing the Litany of the Virgin, his forehead raised to the heavens. He recognised us, and turned upon us his dark eyes, in a serious gaze, held for a moment, full of wary curiosity. Then he resumed his composure and continued the prayer. The abbey is a beautiful eleventh- century Romanesque church, whose circular plan, vault divided by arcades, columns set at their base on square pillars, raised semicircular arches, and centrally-placed chancel, which one ascends via several steps, grant it a certain late-Roman, Gallo-Roman air. The light, falling from long, narrow windows above, descends almost perpendicularly, like the daylight in workshops, a downpour of bright and peaceful serenity. This is not the dreamy Christianity of the pointed arch, imbued with the mystical breath of Gothic cathedrals; it is more remote, more Latin in feeling, the product of a more primitive theology, and imbued with a warmer poetry, that recalls the cloister at Arles (*Cathédrale Saint-Trophime*), and the great Carolingian councils.



'The Interior of the Church of Sainte-Croix, Quimperlé'
Léon Gaucherel (French, 1816-1886)

The abbey was full. All were praying; we alone looked on. The crowd sang with solemn joy, and from the side aisles, from beneath the porch, from every side, powerful voices joined in chorus, after each crescendo produced by thin-voiced priest at the altar. The sound seemed to

spring from a single breast, in an immense cry of love. The women, kneeling together, bowed their heads beneath their white bonnets; their faces were hidden; their backs were bent; their hands clasped in prayer.

The men were standing, sitting, or kneeling, everywhere, in every direction, wherever they could or the fancy took them; however, they seemed neither constrained nor distracted, on the contrary, one felt that they existed there as if at home, each isolated in the solitude of contemplation, or warming himself among his brother souls, while the attitudes of their bodies were nonchalant or majestic, in accord no doubt with their weariness or their inner disposition.

These were serious faces beneath long brown hair, with hard eyes tawnier than the moorland, and broad chests that breathed in powerful fashion; pensive faces, with a rustic and solemn air about them; but those bare, tanned, brows, solid, sloping shoulders, hands grey as plough handles resting idle, even the heavy shoes that reverence lightened — all that roughness turned to grace, that strength unwittingly rendered gentle — possessed a singularly sweet grandeur, almost touching in its naiveté. These men were handsome, because they were genuine, both in the simplicity of their tailored suits, fitted to their bodies, shaped by their work, and in the sincerity of their faith, which resonated freely in this church built to receive it; the last descendants of a nation fading without metamorphosis and vanishing without transition, as yew-tree needles fall without turning yellow. With their old-fashioned clothes, their ancient faces, and their ancestral religion, they embodied previous generations, seeming to represent an entire people. Perhaps that is why they appeared so full of life, and why each of them seemed to bear within more than is ordinarily found in human beings.

Beneath the Romanesque church lies a Romanesque crypt. The rectangular underground space, is covered by a flattish ceiling instead of a vault, flagged like the floor, and supported by four rows of colonnettes linked together, and arched at two-thirds of their height; they all have heavy capitals carved with elongated foliage, and the raised arches follow one another continuously.

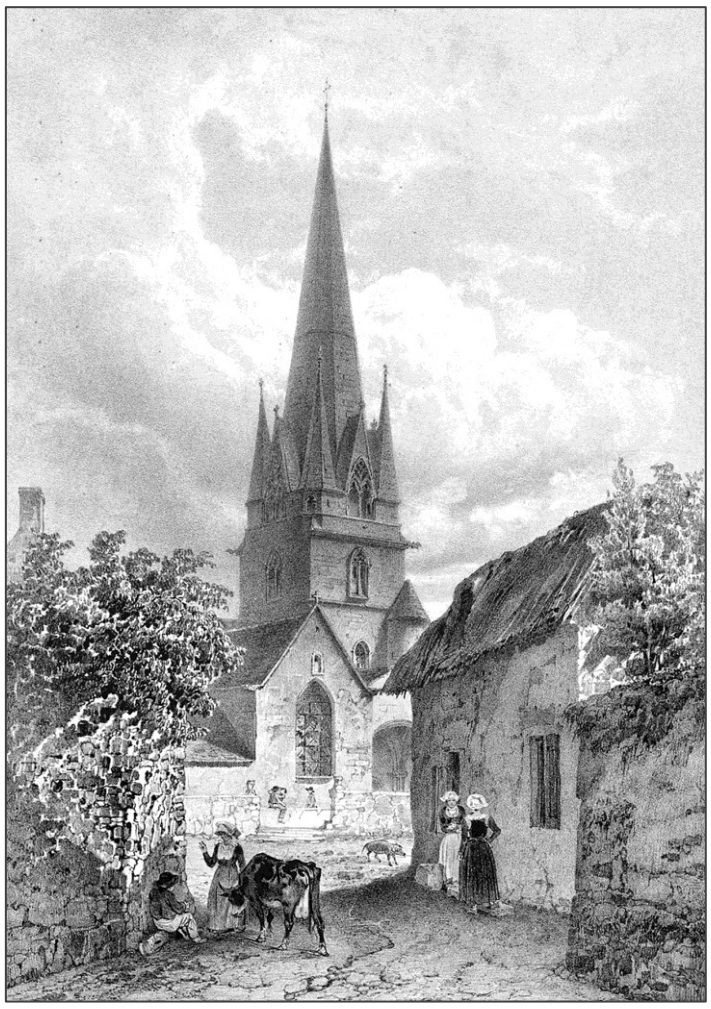
We groped in the shadows, and by the light of a single window at the far end glimpsed two dark, moist, greenish tombs; venerable tombs. The first bears the recumbent statue of a monk. We recognise him as such by the broad tonsure that lays bare his ancient stony skull; he holds a book in his hand; his face is eroded, as the nose disappears from the faces of the dead, and his thin body is enveloped in long draperies that flow down to his feet in large, straight folds.

Near him, on a slab of stone, is an abbot with his crozier, his arms crossed; two dogs support his plain, embossed shield; his feet, shod in pointed shoes, rest on nothing; a small square canopy shelters his head. The first is considered to be Saint Gurloës, martyred on this very spot, and his sarcophagus is pierced with a hole into which, on certain feast days, the sick plunge their arms for healing. But the second dead man left no name (*the tomb is that of Henry de Lespervez, Abbot of Quimperlé from 1409 to 1434, which was listed in 1840*). Passing our candle over him, we tried to recognise his face, as if we had known him long ago! Are we not always drawn to such things by a feeling of curious unease, as we are toward a traveller who comes from afar, or a sealed letter?

Thus passes a day on a journey; it takes little more to fill it: a river, bushes, a beautiful child's head, tombs; one savours the colour of the grasses, listens to the sound of the waters, contemplates faces, strolls among the stones, leans on the tombs, and the next day encounters other men, other

meadows, other ruins; one establishes antitheses, and draws parallels. It brings a pleasure worth as much as many another.

At Rosporden, for example, we saw a woman praying in the cemetery who reminded us of another we had seen in Nantes Cathedral. She was kneeling, stiff, motionless, her body straight, her head bowed, looking down at the ground with a searching stare full of rage and sorrow. That stare pierced the pale flagstone, as if it sought to enter, descend, and draw forth what lay beneath; the woman in Nantes, on the contrary, whose complexion was as white as candle-wax, lay sideways on a prie-dieu, her mouth open in ecstasy, her eyes raised to the heavens, or beyond the heavens, and higher still, her soul seeming to have already departed. Both prayed with an immoderate yearning, and certainly, for them, there was nothing left in all this world but their respective objects of despair and hope. The first struggled against nothingness, the second ascended to God; what seemed a regret in the one seemed a desire in the other; the despair of the former so bitter that she indulged in it as in some form of depraved pleasure; the desire of the latter so strong that she suffered from it as from torture. Thus both, tormented by their yearning, were seeking to escape: she who prayed at the tomb, to rejoin what she had lost; she who prayed before the Virgin, to unite herself with what she adored. Pain, longing, prayer, the same dream, yet what an abyss between them! One life revolved around a memory, the other gravitated towards eternity!



'Rosporden'
Adolphe Jean-Baptiste Bayot (French, 1810–1871)

In Rosporden we saw men who resembled those we had just seen in Quimperlé: the same looks; the same clothes, a large hat, an ample vest, a blue or white jacket, a wide leather belt, breeches, and boots; the same facial features, the same body shapes.

It was market day, the square was full of countryfolk, carts, and oxen; the harsh Celtic syllables rang out, mingled with the grunts of the animals, and the clatter of carts, but there was no confusion, no shouting, no laughter in groups, no chatter on the thresholds of the taverns, not a drunken man, no street vendors, no shops selling decorative linen for women, or trinkets for children — nothing joyful, boisterous, or lively. Those who wanted to sell something waited resignedly, motionless, for a customer to approach them. In the square, pairs of oxen lumbered about, a child holding them by the horns, or a scrawny nag trotted through the crowd, which parted without a curse or complaint. Buyer and seller would look at each other for a moment, signify agreement, and then depart without lingering. Indeed, for each, their village is far away, the moorland is vast. In the evening on arriving home, there is no one there; the wife has gone to the tamarisk grove to cut bundles of wood for winter, their child is on the coast gathering seaweed or tending sheep. As for the farmhand, usually there is none, each farmer typically having a small patch of land he cultivates himself as best he can, and of which he is the master — or rather, the slave, since he toils away there in vain. As the man cannot enrich the land, and the land cannot feed the man, why then does he not leave? Why does he not sell his labour like the Swiss? Or go into exile like the men of Alsace? Why does he remain here with such stubborn devotion? Who knows? Does he know himself?

Nowhere, here, does one find, as among ourselves, those fat, well-to-do farmers, pot-bellied, with their wine-stained faces, and satchels stuffed with money, who visit the country fairs, make a great fuss, haggle at length, argue loudly, slap each other's backs, and bellow in the cafes while playing dominoes, stuffing themselves with meat and brandy, drinking up to thirty half-pints in a day, and only returning home late at night, half-asleep on their nag, which trots slowly along the path until it halts, of its own accord, at the gate of its master's courtyard, recognising the excellent stable where the straw-bedding rises to its belly. The Breton countryman, instead, leaves on an empty stomach; it being too expensive to eat abroad; he goes home to his buckwheat pancake, and his bowl of corn-porridge simmered for a week, the food he eats all year round, beside the pigs that grunt under the table, and the cow that ruminates over its dung, in a corner of the room.

Why would he be cheerful? What has he brought from the village? If he sold his horse, he now has to carry burdens and pull the plough himself — wonderful! What good is the little pile of money he obtained? Will not some official arrive, sooner or later, even this week, to demand it from him, speaking a language he doesn't understand, in the name of a law unknown to him? Is it worth the effort? So, he works little, inadequately, in an indifferent manner, without concerning himself as to whether he could do better.

Suspicious, jealous, bewildered by everything he sees and fails to understand, he hastens to leave the town and then the village, and return to his cottage hidden beneath dense trees, behind a thick hedge. There, he retreats to the bosom of his family, his home, close to his parish priest, at the feet of the church's patron saint, and there he distils his emotions which, condensed upon themselves, are doubly intensified. He knows nothing of what is happening in the wider world, except that at twenty his son will go off to fight, that there is a city called Paris, and that the King

of France is Louis-Philippe, about whom he will ask, through an interpreter, whether he is still alive, whether you see him often, and whether you dine at his house.

Whoever he may be, a stranger is always something extraordinary, vague, and insubstantial to these folk, something they would like to comprehend; they admire one, contemplate one, ask the time to see one's beautiful watch, devour one with their eyes, with a curious, envious, perhaps inimical look, because one is rich, very rich, lives in Paris, the distant city, the enormous, resounding city.

As soon as you arrive at a place, the beggars rush at you, and cling to you with the obstinacy of a famished person. You give them something, they persist; you offer them more, their number increases, and soon you are surrounded by a mob. Empty your pocket to the last penny, but they will remain relentlessly at your side, busy reciting their prayers, which are unfortunately lengthy, though fortunately unintelligible. If you stay put, they fail to move; if you leave, they follow; nothing can remedy this, neither speech nor pantomime. It seems as if they are deliberately trying to enrage you; their tenacity is irritating, implacable. One cannot help but miss the good-natured, facetious humility of the Italian beggar, prancing about in front of your cart while calling you 'Excellency,' or the amiable, insolent rogue of a Parisian street urchin, who asks you for your cigar butt, calling you 'General,' and then picks it out of the mud, while laughing in your face!

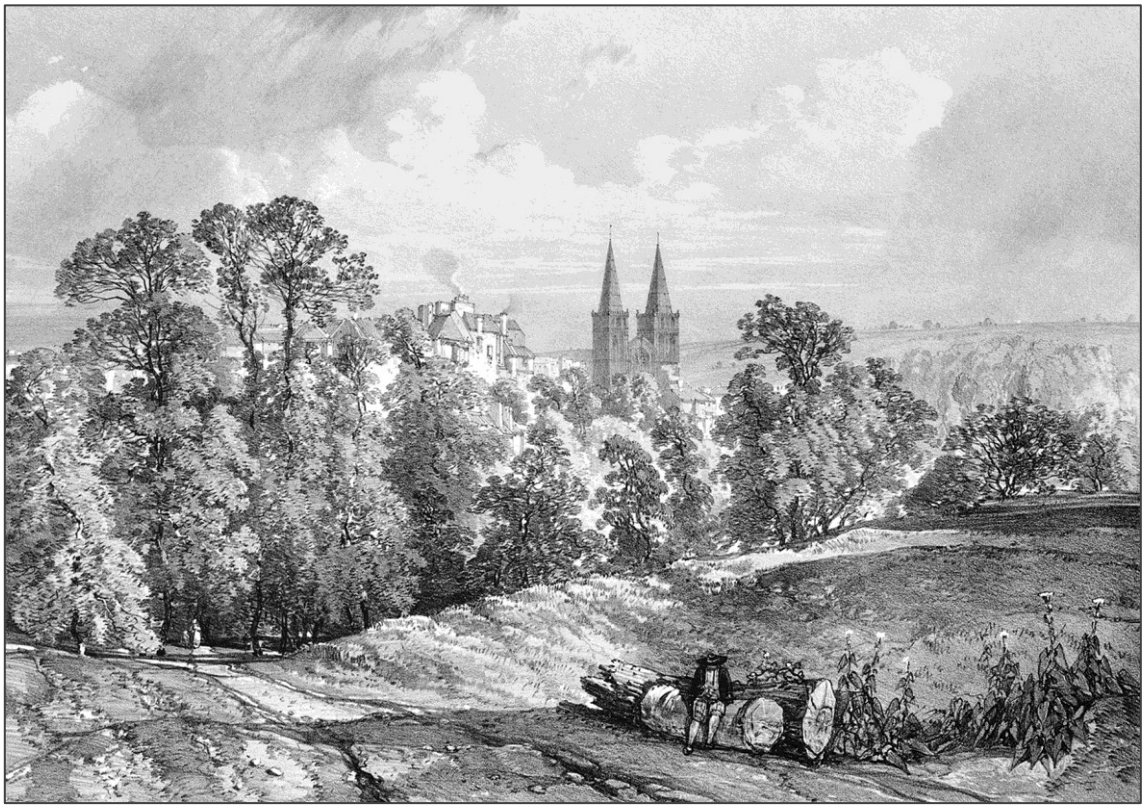
There is nothing sad about the poverty of the South, it presents itself as picturesque, colourful, laughter-filled, carefree, airing its lice in the warm breeze, and sleeping beneath the vines; but that of the North, is cold, it shivers in the fog, and wades barefoot through thick mud, always seemingly damp with tears, numb, sorrowful, and vicious like a sick animal. These people are so poor! Meat is a rare luxury here. One of our guides told us: 'It's my greatest joy; how I pounce on it when I can catch a morsel!' As for bread, they don't see that every day either. Our postilion from Locminé hadn't tasted a crust for eight months. Such an existence does not beautify the people; thus, one encounters a great many cripples, people who are one-armed, blind, hunchbacked, people with ringworm, or with rickets; like the oak-trees whose weak saplings wither in the sea wind while the robust ones, hardened against the frosts, thrive, those that have endured their misery, without it leaving its traces, are the healthier, straighter, and stronger. They are the folk you see passing before you, solid, austere, taciturn beneath their long hair, akin to their land beneath its sombre vegetation.

In the towns, though the language persists, the native characteristics fade, the local costume becomes rarer, rendered scarcer, even in the countryside, by the gradual encroachment of the tailor and the dressmaker, whose small ground-floor shops display splendid illustrations of fashionable wear in their windows, to arouse their customers' envy. The townspeople see the stagecoach stop every evening at the post office; they always obtain the latest news, either from the postilion who spoke with the driver, or the messenger carrying the packages; at nightfall, they converse at their doors with the bailiff, the town-hall clerk, or a sub-prefecture employee, who have read the newspapers and know what is happening in the world. Little by little, in this way, they lose their Breton identity, and distance themselves from the countryfolk whom they increasingly despise and who, in turn, distance themselves further, as the respective groups understand each other less and less.

What remains most Breton in nature, in the towns, are the poorer girls brought in to serve as maids. Confined to their tasks, with whom would they communicate enough to lose their native character? One sees them stop in the street to talk to the fellow who brings them eggs and butter

every week from the countryside. What does he speak of? He tells them about their village, their parents; their brother is sending a beautiful pair of silver earrings as a wedding gift — they must wear them; there will soon be a pardon (*religious festival*), they must go. So, they will, to immerse themselves once again in all that is most distinctive to their homeland, the language and the dress; and when they return to their employment, their hearts will remain behind, and they will talk of home together strolling, as they do, in groups of ten or twenty, about the squares and at the entrance to the main road, on Sunday after Vespers.

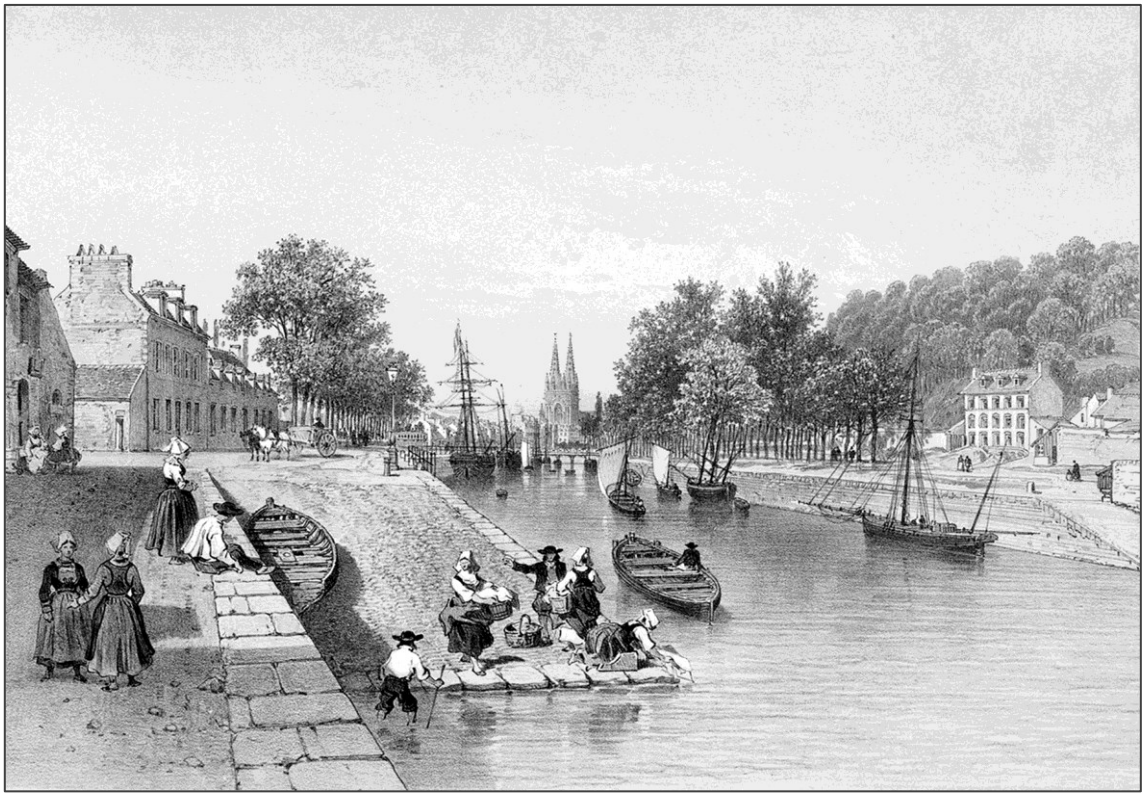
Thus, amidst an already hybrid population, this stubborn little nation is preserved, embraced by the other without losing its edge. In Quimper, at a communal table, watching the maid, a broad-shouldered girl with a harsh face and a rigid demeanour, dressed in her white cap, cuffed sleeves, and square bib, serving 'floating islands' (*oeufs à la neige*) to a stout gentleman with gold-rimmed glasses, an inspector of indirect taxes, I thought to myself: 'So here are the two societies face to face, embodying the ultimate relationship between one century and the next! The ancient portrait humbles itself before the modern caricature. From this I derived an axiom, '*the Present has its boots polished by the Past, while it fails to even say thank you*.'



'View of Quimper'
Eugène Cicéri (French, 1813–1890)

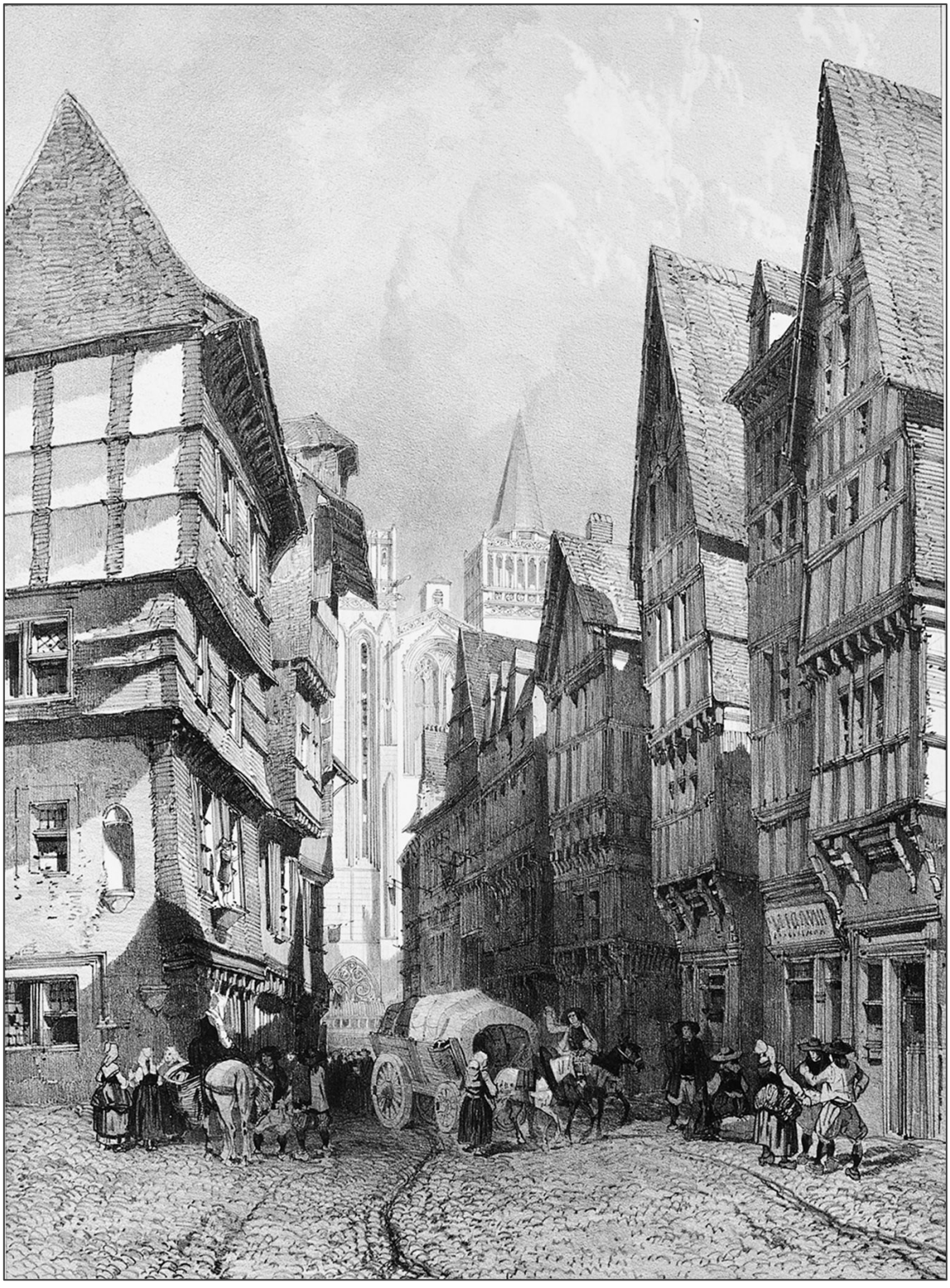
Quimper, though the heart of true Brittany, is distinct from it. Its lovely elm-lined promenade along the river (*Odet*) which flows between quays and docks renders it quite charming, and the Grand Prefecture building, which occupies the small western delta, gives it a distinctly French and administrative air. One realises one is in a departmental capital, which immediately brings to mind division into arrondissements, with their major, medium, and minor local roads, primary-education committees, savings banks, general councils, and other modern inventions that always deprive the

places endowed with them of some degree of local colour, as far as the naive traveller is concerned, who still dreams of such.



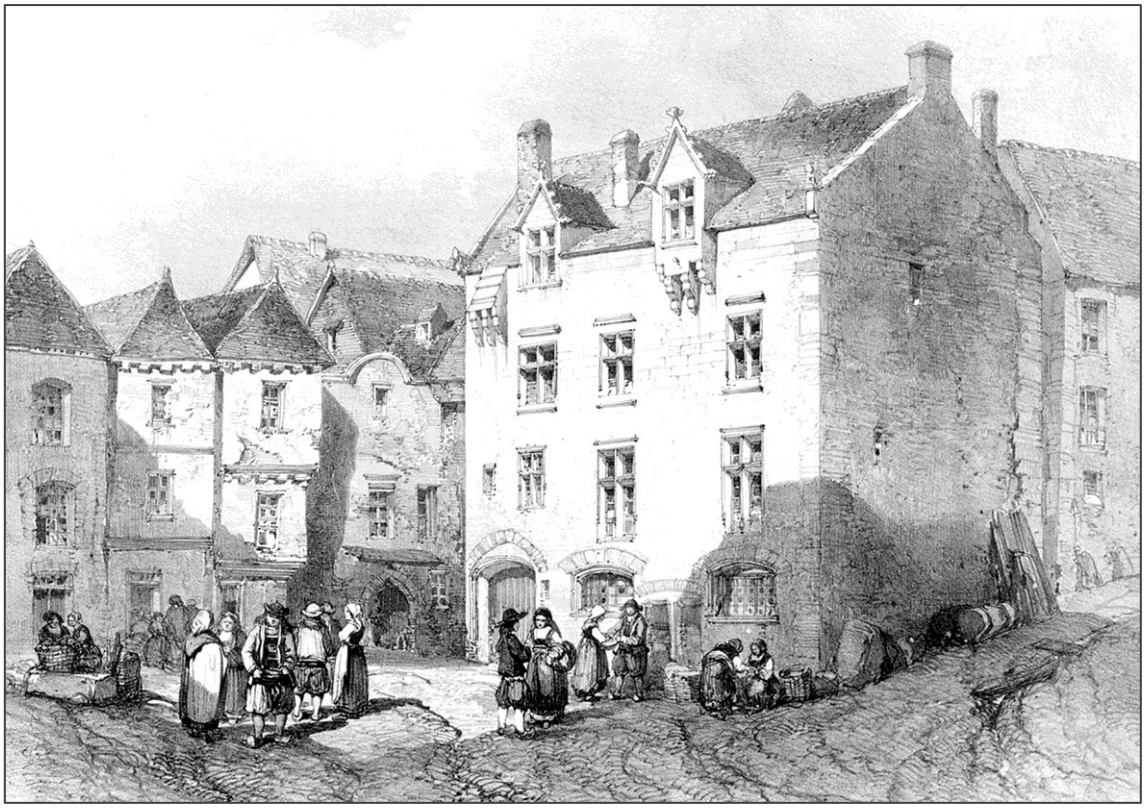
'Quimper: the Entrance to the Harbour'
Félix Benoist (French, 1818–1896), Eugène Cicéri (French, 1813–1890) and Adolphe Jean-Baptiste Bayot (French, 1810–1871)

Despite what those might say, who pronounce the name Quimper-Corentin as if it were the very epitome of provincial absurdity and stagnation, it is a charming little place, worth its weight in gold compared to many another more respected. True, it lacks the whimsy of Quimperlé, the lushness of its lawns, the riot of its colours, but I know of few things as pleasing as its beautiful avenue that stretches endlessly along the water's edge, upon which the almost sheer escarpment of a nearby hill casts a dark shadow of luxuriant greenery.



'The Rue de l'Église, Quimper'
Eugène Cicéri (French, 1813–1890)

It takes little time to explore such towns and know their most intimate corners, and sometimes one discovers places that stop one in one's tracks and fill the heart with joy. Small towns, though, are like small apartments; at first, they seem warmer, and more comfortable to live in. But cling not to that illusion. The former experience more draughts than a palace, while the latter are more tedious than the desert.



'A Fortified House, Quimper'
Léon Gaucherel (French, 1816–1886) and Eugène Cicéri (French, 1813–1890)

Returning to the hotel along one of those charming paths I love, that climb, descend, twist, and turn again, sometimes along a wall, sometimes through a field, then between thickets or over grass, alternately bordered by pebbles, daisies, and nettles — errant paths, made for leisurely thought and rambling conversation; returning, as I say, to the town, I heard plaintive moans and bleats rising from the slate roof of a square building. It was the slaughterhouse.

On the threshold, a large dog lapped at a pool of blood, slowly tugging at a steer's blue intestines which had just been thrown to it. The door to the stalls was open. The butchers were working inside, arms curved upwards. Suspended head down, its feet slung, by the tendons, through a pole hanging from the ceiling, a carcase, bloated and inflated like a wineskin, revealed its belly, the skin split in two. The layer of fat which lined it could be seen slowly separating from it, and successively appearing within, at the edge of the knife, was a mass of green, red, and black, magnificent in colour. The entrails steamed; life escaped from them in a warm, nauseating puff of air. Nearby, a calf lying on the ground stared with large, round, terrified eyes at the gutter of blood, and trembled convulsively despite the ropes binding its legs. Its flanks heaved, its nostrils flared. The other stalls were filled with prolonged rattles, quavering bleats, and hoarse bellows. One could distinguish the voices of those being killed, those dying, and those about to die. There were singular cries, intonations of profound distress that seemed to utter words one could almost understand. At that moment, my mind filled with images of some terrible city, some dreadful, boundless metropolis, a Babylon or a Babel of cannibals in which there were slaughterhouses for human beings; and I thought to find something of a human agony in these throat-cuttings, whose victims bellowed and sobbed. I thought of herds of slaves led there with ropes around their necks, bound

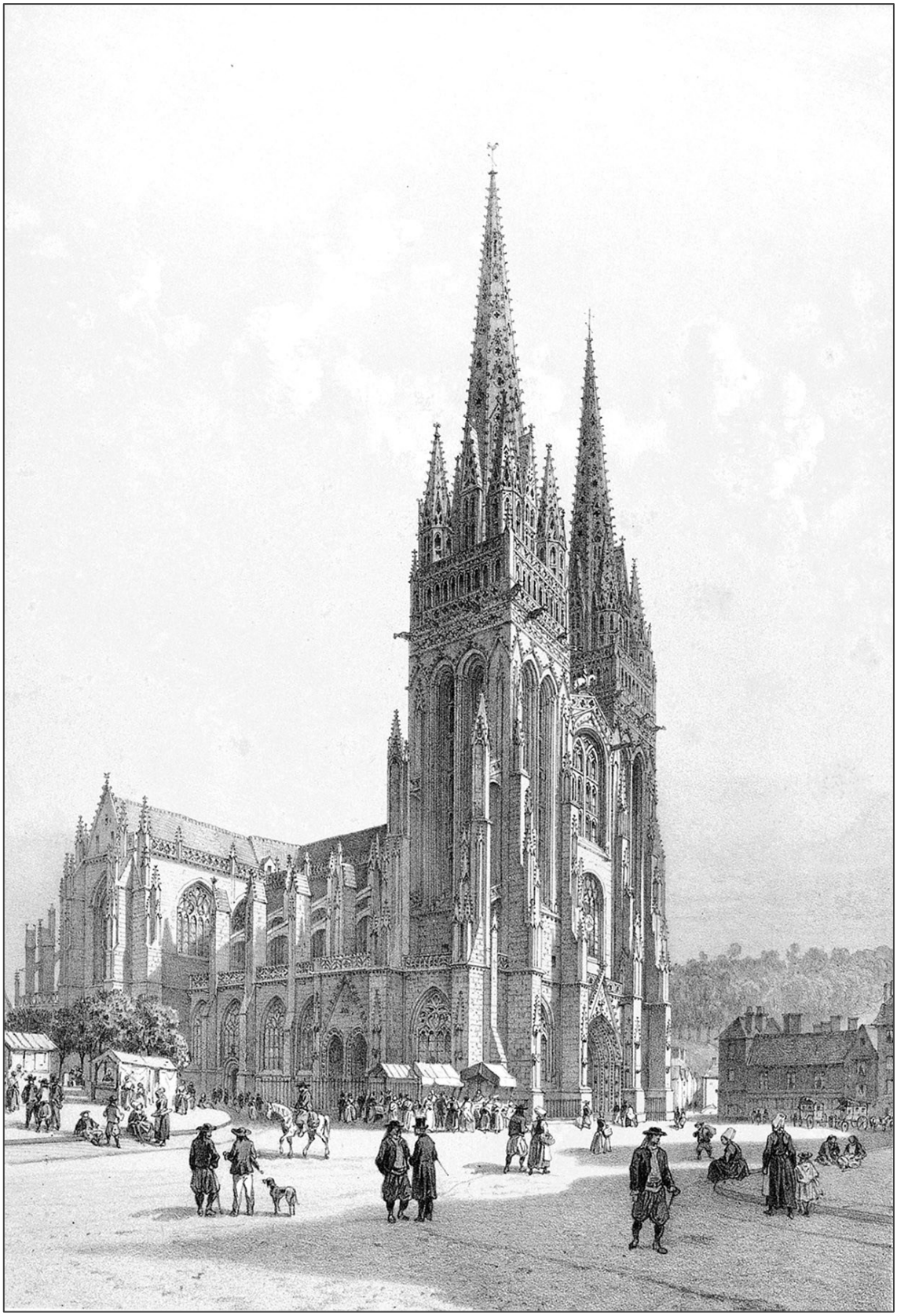
to rings, to feed masters who consumed them at ivory tables, wiping their lips on purple cloths. Could they exhibit more dejected poses, sadder looks, or more heart-rending prayers?

A boy picked up an iron mallet, the poor calf that had just been untied was pushed in front of him, he raised his instrument and struck it sharply on the skull between the eyes. It made a dull thud, the animal fell down dead with foam at its mouth, and its tongue clenched between its teeth; they grasped it, dragged at it, it failed to budge; they hoisted it onto the pulley, ready to butcher it.

At the first stab of the knife, the calf shuddered throughout its body, then seemed dead at last. Was it? Who knows? What do you know, you philosophers and physiologists? Are you quite certain what death means? How do you know that the soul, no longer manifest, is therefore no longer conscious? That it cannot feel, drop by drop, atom by atom, the successive decomposition of the body it once animated? How do you know that the corpse does not suffer with each bite of the worms that gnaw at it, until its integral parts, having passed elsewhere, are allowed to live another life, or continue the same one, so that only one half of its being would engage in its new existence, while the other would remain held in its previous state, a bit like the rabbit I saw devoured alive by a Newfoundland dog, the head in the process of being swallowed while the hind legs were still twitching?

On leaving, we saw the mastiff again, continuing his feast; he had almost finished his plate of raw tripe, he was licking his lips, and was served the peritoneum of a sheep for dessert; he is quite fat and looks fierce.

In Quimper we also viewed the cathedral (*Saint-Corentin*), a large fifteenth-century church which did not interest us greatly, although its square towers have two immense bays that are really very well constructed, even though its apse is tilted to the right, as is the head of the dying Christ onto his shoulder, and even though there is also a rather nice Virgin by Auguste Ottin (*of 1846*), a sculpture more graceful than elegant and more limp than tender.



'Quimper Cathedral'
Félix Benoist (French, 1818–1896)

We then saw, in the church of Saint-Mathieu, some very beautiful stained glass windows, but lacked the time to examine them at leisure, because we were expelled from the choir by a frenzied beadle who came upon us shouting in an exasperated voice: 'Leave the sanctuary! Would you please leave the sanctuary! Leave the sanctuary at once!' To remain there, it would have been necessary to fight or to bribe this ferocious beast, means which were equally repugnant to our character and dignity.



'Quimper Cathedral: the Interior'
Félix Benoist (French, 1818–1896) and Adolphe Jean-Baptiste Bayot (French, 1810–1871)

What more do you wish to learn as regards Quimper? What would you like to know? Is it the origin of its name, Quimper? Quimper means 'confluence', because of the confluence of the Odet and Steir rivers (note also Quimperlé, at the 'confluence' of the Ellé and Isole). Why was the appellation Corentin added? Because of Saint Corentin, its legendary first bishop, 'a man of great religion and integrity, living in the time of Gradlon (*Gradlon Meur or Mawr*), King of Brittany (*Cornouaille*).' Do we require a few dates? The first stone of the present cathedral was laid on July 26, 1424, by Bishop Bertrand de Rosmadec, and the last in 1501 (On I know not what date, sadly!). The town was captured in 1344 by Charles of Blois, then besieged once in 1345 by the Count of Montfort, and then twice in 1594 before surrendering to Marshal Jean VI d'Aumont. But you have no need, dear reader, of a description of the various sieges (I almost forget, I have no readers), so I will spare myself also an account of the various ridiculous entries to the town of the bishops of Cornouaille, who were obliged to leave their gloves and caps at the priory of Locmaria, and their boots and spurs at the cathedral door; and of the old custom involving a glass of wine, presented on the eve of Saint Cecilia's Day to the statue of King Gradlon, and which, after its contents had been drunk at a gulp by one of the bell-ringers, was tossed into the crowd, whoever returned it unbroken to the chapter being rewarded with a gold louis. All these facts, being indeed as tedious to recount as they were uninteresting to learn, you may find elsewhere, if you are curious, since we value such texts too little to wish to copy them, though we sometimes read them, and even presume to write them.



'General View of Quimper'
Eugène Cicéri (French, 1813–1890)

While in Quimper, we exited the town one day in one direction, and returned in the other, after walking about the countryside for some eight hours. Beneath the hotel porch, our guide awaited us. He immediately started racing ahead, and we followed. He was a small man with white

hair, wearing a canvas cap, shoes with holes in them, and an old, oversized brown frock-coat that hung loosely round his waist. He mumbled when he spoke, bumped his knees as he walked, and swayed about; nonetheless, he moved swiftly with a nervous, almost feverish, tenacity. Only occasionally did he pluck a leaf from a tree, and press it to his lips to cool himself. His job is to run around the area, delivering letters or running errands. He visits Douarnenez, Quimperlé, Brest, and even Rennes, which is a hundred and twenty miles as the crow flies (he once made the trip in four days, including the outward and return legs). 'My whole ambition in life,' he said, 'is to see Rennes once more.' And this, with no other aim than to return for the sake of returning, to make a long journey and then be able to boast of having done so. He knows all the roads, he knows the villages and their church steeples; he takes back roads, crosses fields, opens courtyard-gates and, passing by houses, greets the owners. From listening to the birds sing, he has learned to imitate their calls, and, while walking under the trees, he whistles as they do to ease his solitude.

We stopped half a mile or so from the town, at Locmaria, the former priory having been given to the Abbey of Fontevraud by Conan III, Duke of Brittany. The priory, unlike that abbey of poor Robert d'Arbriselle (*founder of Fontevraud*), has not been used in a base manner. It is abandoned, but unspoiled. Its Gothic portal does not resound to the voices of the guards, and if little remains, the mind, at least, feels neither revulsion nor disgust. The only curious detail in this small chapel, built in the austere old Romanesque style, is a large, pillarless holy water font, placed on the floor, its faceted granite almost black. Wide and deep, it represents the true Catholic holy-water font, made for immersing the entire body of a child, not one of those shallow basins as in our churches in which the priest merely dips the tips of his fingers. With its clear water rendered even clearer by a greenish coating within, which has amassed during the religious calm of centuries, and with its worn corners, and heavy bronze-coloured form, it resembles one of those rocks hollowed by the action of the waves.

When we had viewed it from all sides, we returned to the river, which we crossed by boat, and then plunged into the countryside, which was deserted and singularly empty. Trees, broom, gorse, tamarisks lining the ditches, stretches of heathland, but no sign of people anywhere. The sky was pale; a fine rain, dampening the air, cast a uniform veil over the land, enveloping it in a greyish hue. We walked along sunken paths that plunged beneath arbours of greenery, whose branches, drooping over our heads, barely allowed us to pass upright. The light, blocked by the foliage, was greenish and feeble, like that of a winter evening. Deeper inside, however, bright daylight burst through, playing over the edges of the leaves, and illuminating their contours. We would often find ourselves at the top of some barren slope, bare in its descent, without a blade of grass to break the uniformity of its yellow colour. Sometimes, on the contrary, a long avenue of beech trees rose before us, the large gleaming tree trunks mossy at the foot. Traces of ruts ran along these avenues, creating the expectation that they might lead to some unseen castle or other; but the avenue would end abruptly, and only open countryside was visible beyond. In the space between two valleys, lay that green expanse, furrowed with black gashes by the capricious lines of hedges, dotted here and there by a darker mass of woodland, illuminated by clumps of gorse, or whitened by some cultivated field at the edge of the meadows that rose gently toward the hills, and disappeared on the horizon. Above them, far away through the mist, in a break in the sky, a blue meander appeared: it was the sea.

There is an absence of birds, or they are silent; the leaves are dense, the grass muffles the sound of your footsteps, and the mute landscape gazes at you with a melancholy face. It seems created expressly to welcome lives in ruin, lives resigned to their sorrow; there, in solitude, one can nurture one's bitterness amidst the slow murmur of the trees and broom, beneath a sky that weeps. On winter nights, when foxes slip through the dry leaves, when tiles fall from dovecote roofs, when the rushes of the heath are whipped by the breeze, when the beeches bend, and wolves gallop across the snow in the moonlight, it is there, seated alone by the dying fire in the hearth, listening to the wind howling in the long, echoing corridors, it is there that it must be sweet to draw from the depths of one's heart one's most deeply-cherished despair, and most long-lost love.

We saw a ruined mansion, and entered through a Gothic gateway; further on stood an old section of wall pierced by a pointed-arch doorway; a bare arm of bramble swayed in the breeze. In the courtyard, the uneven ground was covered with heather, violets, and pebbles. We could vaguely make out the remains of an old moat; we entered a filled-in underground passage for a few yards; looked about, and departed. The place is called the *Temple of the False Gods*, and was, it is supposed, a Templar commandery.

Our guide walked ahead of us again, and we continued to follow him. A church steeple emerged from among the trees; we crossed a fallow field, climbed the high bank of a ditch; two or three houses appeared: it was the village of Plomelin. A path runs the length of the street; a few houses, separated by planted courtyards, make up the entire village. What peace! What abandonment, rather! The doorways are empty, the courtyards deserted.

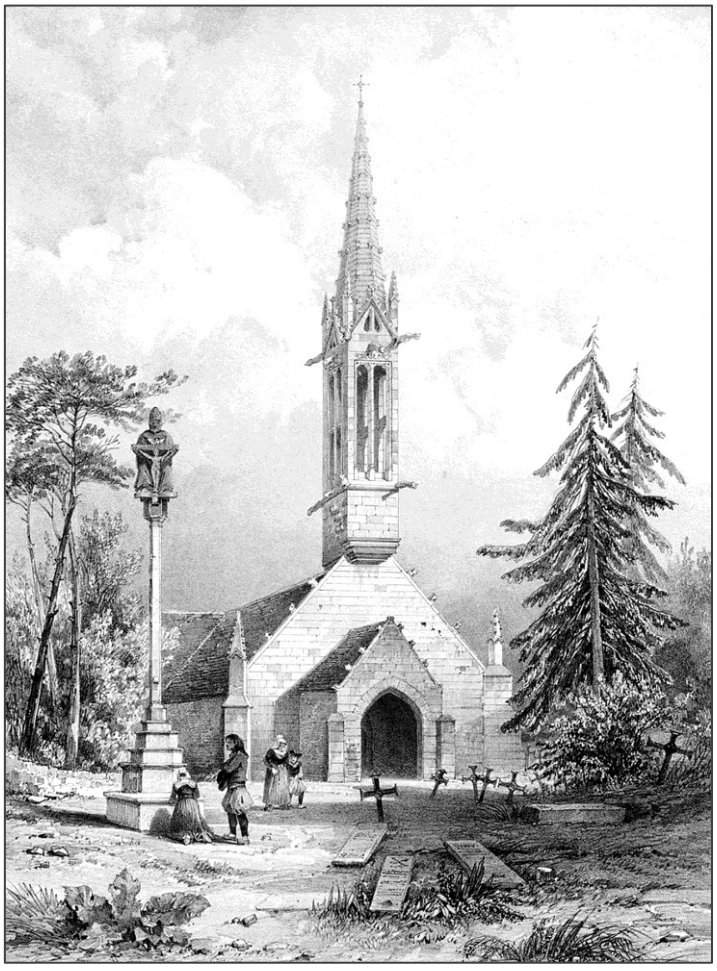
Where are the owners? They are doubtless crouching behind the broom bushes, on the lookout for the *Blues* (*The term dates to the Rebellion in the Vendée when the counter-revolutionary Whites called the troops of the revolutionary government 'the Blues' because of their uniforms*) who must pass through the ravine.

The church is poor and utterly bare. No painted saints, no hangings on the walls, no lamp swaying at the end of its long, straight cord hanging from the ceiling. In a corner of the chancel, on the floor, a wick burns in a glass filled with oil. Round pillars support the faded blue wooden vault. Shining through the stained-glass windows the bright daylight of the fields is rendered green by the foliage of the surrounding trees that clothes the church roof. The door (a small wooden affair closed with a latch) was open; a flock of birds entered, fluttering, chattering, calling, and bumping against the walls; they swirled beneath the vault, and played around the altar. Two or three landed on the edge of the holy water font, and dipped their beaks therein, and then, all of them left as they had come, as one. It is not uncommon in Brittany to see them in the churches; several live there, their nests suspended from the stones of the nave; they are left in peace there. When it rains, they return to the nest, but as soon as the sun appears through the stained glass, the gutters dripping, they return to the fields. So that during a storm two frail species often enter the sacred dwelling at the same time: human beings to say their prayers, and ease their fears, and the birds, to wait for the rain to pass, and warm the nascent feathers of their numb chicks.

A singular charm emanates from these humble churches. It is not their poverty that moves us, for even when empty, they seem inhabited. Is it not rather their very modesty that delights? For with their low steeples and roofs hidden beneath the trees, they seem to shrink and humble themselves beneath God's vast sky. Indeed, it was not pride that built them, nor the pious whim of some great worldly figure in their hour of agony. On the contrary, one senses that it is the simple expression of a need, a naive cry of longing, and that, like a shepherd's bed of dry leaves, simply a

place the soul has made for itself to rest comfortably in its weariness. More than those of the towns, these village churches seem to be bound to the character of the land that bears them, and to participate more fully in the life of the families who, generation after generation, come to the same place to kneel on the same flagstones. Every Sunday, every day indeed, entering and leaving, they see the graves of their ancestors, whom they thus have near them in prayer, as in a larger household from which those ancestors are not entirely absent. Their churches therefore possess a meaningful harmony, and therein, situated between the baptistery and the cemetery, the lives of the people are fulfilled. It is not so with us who, relegating eternity to a place beyond the city barriers, thereby exile our dead to the suburbs, to house them in the quarter occupied by knackers-yards and soda-factories, and next to the munition stores.

Around three in the afternoon, we arrived not far from the gates of Quimper, at the chapel in Kerfeunteun (*Church of the Trinity*). At the far end, there is a beautiful sixteenth century stained-glass window depicting the genealogical 'Tree of Jesse'. Jacob forms the base, and the cross of Christ the apex, which is itself surmounted by the Eternal Father wearing the papal tiara. The square bell-tower features on each face a quadrilateral pierced, like a lantern, by a long, straight bay. It does not rest directly on the roof, but is supported, rather, by a tapered base whose four sides narrow and almost touch, forming an obtuse angle at the ridge. In Brittany, almost all village churches have bell-towers of this type.



'The Church of Kerfeunteun'
Léon Gaucherel (French, 1816–1886)

Before returning to the town, we made a detour to visit the Chapel of Our Lady (*Chapel Ti Mamm Doué*) As usual, it was closed, so our guide found the caretaker who had the key; he accompanied us, leading his little niece by the hand, who stopped all along the way to gather bouquets. He walked ahead of us on the path. His slender, slightly languid, adolescent figure was encased in a sky-blue woollen jacket, and the three velvet ribbons of his small black hat fluttered at his back. Precisely perched on the back of his head, it held his hair, twisted into a bun.

Deep in a valley, or rather a ravine, the Church of Our Lady is veiled by beech trees. In this place, amidst the silence of the dense greenery, and perhaps because of its small Gothic portal, which one would think was from the thirteenth century but is actually from the sixteenth, it has a certain look reminiscent of those discreet chapels in old novels and romances, where the page is knighted one morning, to the song of the lark, before he departs for the Holy Land; and, passed through the grille, as the stars are fading, the white hand of the chatelaine, on which a parting kiss is deposited, is immediately soaked with a thousand loving tears.

We entered. The young man knelt, and removed his hat, the thick twist of his blond hair escaping and unfurling suddenly, to hang over his back. For an instant, still bearing the creases that had curled it just moments before, it clung to the rough fabric of his jacket, then gradually descended, parted, spread out, and flowed like a woman's. Parted down the middle, it cascaded in equal waves over both shoulders and covered his bare neck. This entire golden expanse shimmered with light that shifted and receded with every movement of his head as he prayed. Beside him, the little girl, also kneeling, had dropped her bouquet to the ground. Only there, and for the first time, did I understand the beauty of a man's hair, and the charm it can hold for bared arms immersed there. Strange progress indeed, to shorten Nature's grandiose superfluity everywhere, so that when we find it in all its pristine fullness, we marvel, as at a revealed wonder. O hairdressers, O curling irons, O vanilla or lemon-scented hair straighteners, wigmakers of all countries, brushes of every kind, ointments of all odours, adorn the hair with your corkscrews and twists, shave it in the manner of a malcontent, roll it in the style of Perrinet Leclerc (*who opened the Buci gate of Paris, at night, to the Burgundians, in 1418*), shape it into a pear, spread it like a weeping willow, pour on it your fish-glue, your quince-syrup, your pomatums, fixatives, and shiny encaustics; trim, cut, curl, stiffen and grease it; you will never produce a style of such high distinction, of such voluptuous grace as his, which was undoubtedly only combed with a large white comb made of horn, and which only the rain and dew moistened with their pure water.

Next day, at noon, the streets of Quimper were draped with calico, the bells rang, roses and sea-lavender were strewn across the cobblestones, and platforms decorated with columns of greenery, entwined with garlands of coloured paper flowers, were erected, at the crossroads. It was a Sunday and a feast-day, and the procession was about to pass. In front of the doorways, one could see the maids in their country attire, their heads framed by large bonnets, with colourful embroidery on the sleeves of jackets with upturned fronts, and stiff collars that, from behind, resembled ruffs with thick folds; their brown skirts fell in tight, straight pleats like those of *bragou-bras* culottes, and their open shoes bore large silver buckles on the insteps. At the windows, the upper classes, as if seated in the front row at the theatre, awaited the spectacle to be provided by the procession.

The bells rang out again, singing commenced, drums beat, gunshots rang out, and two lines of children poured out from either side of the street. In the middle, walked a priest in a surplice,

directing the procession with a wooden book, which he continually opened and then clapped shut with a sharp thud that sounded like a beater. The little boys wore trousers buttoned over their jackets, held an unlit candle in their right hands, and brayed like donkeys. After them came the little girls, all in white dresses with blue sashes, and among them some clergyman, similarly busying themselves going from line to line, directing them to advance, halt, start again, sing, or be silent. Finally came the choirboys and canons, all with their mouths open, their hats lowered, marching in step, with nonchalant dignity in their fine church vestments. I recall one surcoat made of purple velvet and embroidered with gold; it shone forth, alone, unique, splendid, eclipsing all the others; the fellow it covered was delighted to wear it, he revelled in it, and could scarcely stop smiling as he sang, swaying his shoulders to show off the back panel on which a holy ciborium surmounted by a sun was embroidered. If the chapter, in fact, possesses only the one, and if only sixty people are entitled to wear it, and only seven or eight processions are held a year, perhaps he had been waiting ten years, hoping, longing, yearning for the honour. He would have sighed at being forced to reckon with preferential treatment, the triumphal pettiness of rivals, and unjust favouritism. Thus, he grew older, thin with anxiety at the thought of it. Today, at last, he wears it on his back, in the street, it is seen; he is beneath, the surcoat above. How well it suits him! He breathes its odour, inhales its scent; he swells beneath its lining to fill it utterly, he runs his eyes over the cloth, contemplates its embroidery, feasts on the braid; it is heavy, he sweats, it crushes him, so much the better! He feels a greater joy, he feels it all the more present on his shoulders; and he flexes them on purpose to convince himself that it is there, that it remains, that he has not lost it somehow. Ah! If only it could cling to him so that it could not be taken from him, for soon he will have to return it, and when must he do so? Perhaps never, God willing; two such days come not again in a lifetime. How he loves it! How he adores it, this chasuble whose beauty fills his soul, and also the fine Catholic religion without which the chasuble would not exist, and which it was made to honour! And how he sings! With what heart! With what faith! With what pride!

It is fitting that a man thus clothed should have a resonant voice, but his dominated everything, it thundered with a priestly fullness, it was a continuous bellow above the cries of the children, the trampling of the crowd, and the deep buzzing, organ-like sound of the 'serpent' whose breathless musician was blue with fatigue.

Beneath a canopy of crimson velvet, yet another chasuble advanced. A man with a sunken forehead, blond as a Russian-leather cigar-case, with white eyelashes, red eyebrows, and hair curled into mushroom shapes — one of those people whose expression is base rather than stupid, and who seems even more scrofulous inside than out —bore, in the manner of a pilgrim, and with a smug, puffed-up air, the golden Blessed Sacrament, which trembled in his clenched hands encased in their white cotton gloves. Around him, the choirboys swung their censers, the singers squawked; he walked on flowers thrown before his feet, and when, at the various altars, he raised his shining symbol, everyone knelt, including the soldiers, the National Guardsmen, and the gendarmes who were escorting the procession. Four satin ribbons falling from the canopy were held by two toddlers dressed in yellow nankeen, embroidered all over, and by two very small girls in blue dresses strewn with silver stars, their bare arms adorned with bracelets, a crown on their heads and a pair of pink wings on their backs.

Next came various bourgeois of the town who played violins, cornets and bassoons, then a dozen gendarmes with their sabres drawn, then the National Guard in two lines, then a company of soldiers preceded by a drum-major who twirled his mace, his plume nodding.

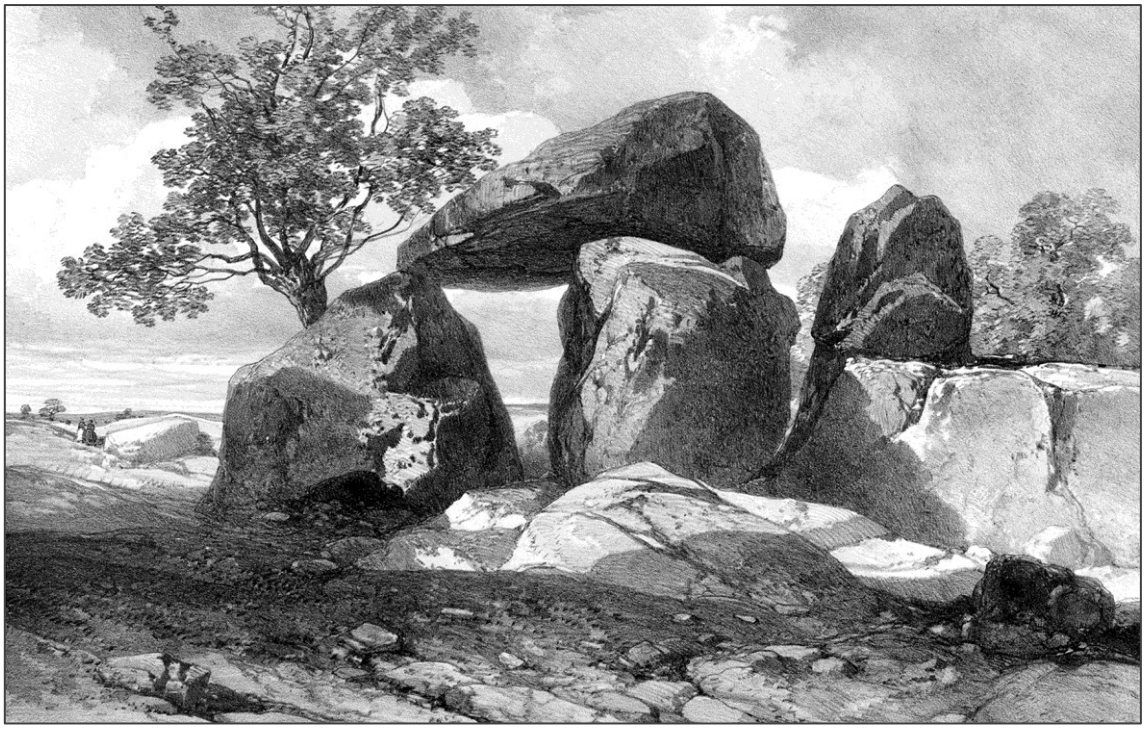
Having nothing more to see in Quimper or the surrounding area, we prepared for our expedition to Finistère, whose long coastline we were to follow on foot as far as Brest. It was a journey of more than two hundred miles. We had our shoes repaired and set off.

Our first stop was Concarneau, which we barely saw, since the rain was pounding down, yellow streams flowed at the foot of the houses and, rushing through the gaps in the harbour parapets, poured onto the mudbanks where empty boats lay on their sides. The water flowed over them, as they slumbered in the mud like weary travellers, the canvas of their sails soaking wet. At the next tide, however, they would right themselves, and drift about on their anchors, bearing with them the seaweed or small shellfish one sees clinging to the planks of the hulls, and which accompany them everywhere amidst the waves.

The sea was far off; an expanse of sand filled the near view but was soon lost in the dreary hue of the sky, smeared by a thousand streaks of rain.

The town is surrounded by walls whose base the waves cover at high tide; the machicolations are still intact from the days of Anne of Brittany, and the line of serrated stones, standing out against the mist, stretches low and straight along the ramparts.

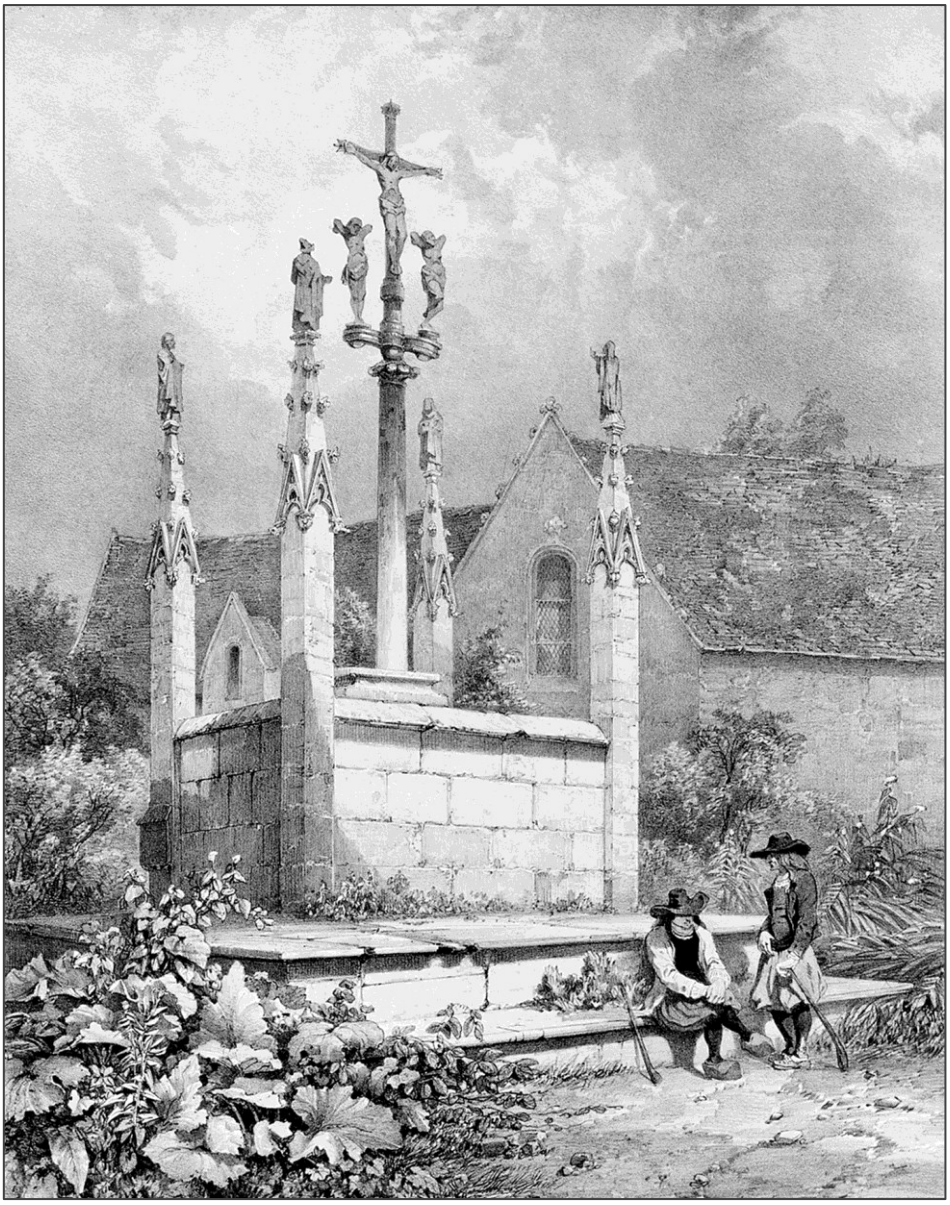
Between two showers, we passed the gates and over the drawbridge, so as to view the rocking stone of Trégunc. The verdant lane formed successive bends, its uneven surface wide and grassy. Like a free-roaming colt, one's gaze raced across the countryside, and rolled in the fresh grass. As we walked along, the stones scattered on the ground increased in size and number, their uneven shapes rising from clumps of yellow gorse. In the midst of them, rising eleven feet high, appeared an inverted granite cone, resting on a rocky outcrop almost flush with the ground. This is the famous rocking stone of Trégunc (*a 132-tonne granite boulder*), which husbands lean on, to test the chastity of their wives. If the stone moves, it means: she is chaste! And if it fails to do so: try again tomorrow! Some writers on the subject claim to have set it in motion, but as for we two single men it remained as unshaken by all our efforts as the Great Pyramid of Egypt would have been.



'The Great Dolmen of Trégunc'
Eugène Cicéri (French, 1813–1890) and Léon Gaucherel (French, 1816–1886)

Two hours later we were back in Concarneau. The rain had started up again with renewed vigour, and our hostess was making the most amiable pleas for us to stay. It was certainly enough to keep dogs at bay or subdue tigers, but we immediately inquired about any means of transport that could carry us that very evening to Fouesnant, a place of beautiful women. First, we found a carriage, then a man to drive us, then a horse, and finally a harness. After everything had been painstakingly arranged, we clambered into the carriage, already too small for the two of us and with no room for the driver. So, he, on foot, drew the sluggish nag by the halter, dragging it uphill, and hauling it back it downhill. When he was tired, he sat behind on the axle-tree, and the vehicle continued on its way without stopping. It zigzagged, caught on hedges, bumped against stones, fell back into ruts, stopped at drainage ditches, its curved hood always jolting before our eyes and obscuring the landscape. From time to time, leaning forward, we caught a glimpse of something: a clump of trees, a clearing in the woods, a bend in the road, a flowering thorn among the apple-trees, a sliver of sea visible through the branches; but then, because of an uphill slope, the shafts would rise into the air, and we could see nothing but the sky above our heads; or if we were descending we would plunge forward onto the horse's hocks, and receive no light except whatever shone through the gap between the hood and the mudguard, the pair of which tended to close about us, and clash together as we jostled.

At La Forêt (*La Forêt-Fouesnant*) we crossed a dike that extended the road above the water, and bisected one of the most charming bays imaginable. It runs inland between two wooded hillsides whose trees, reaching down to the bottom, dip the tips of their leaves into the water, where they hang in loose clumps, in gentle soft curves like willows over a river.



'La Forêt, near Quimper'
Auguste Étienne François Mayer (French, 1805–1890)

A church appeared (*Notre Dame d'Izel Vor*). We stopped the cart, and visited the building. Its bell-tower is carved like that of Kerfeunteun, and above its small portal flanked by pinnacles rises a third from which emerge the heads of a frog and a dog. Opposite, was one of those good old Breton calvaries, chiselled and sculpted, bearing finials and figures, turning green in the rain; one part depicts the Virgin Mary, the other Jesus and the apostles.

As for the interior of the church, I barely recall it, much like the one in Fouesnant. I only recall a low pillar carved as a large holy-water font, and wide slabs laid transversely to close off the entrance to the cemetery, like stiles.

Fouesnant, a place so praised for the delights it possesses, offered us only a detestable omelette, however, which we ate nonetheless, a dreadful bed in which we nevertheless slept, and incessant rain which did not prevent us from leaving again the next day, having turned down the brims of our hats and donned our waterproofs.



'Fouesnant: the Interior of the Church'
Auguste Étienne François Mayer (French, 1805–1890)

That day was the first of our brave days in Finistère. We were refreshed by the wind, warmed by the sun, the rain soaked us through, the sweat drenched our hair; we dined on raw artichokes, and took the wrong road. For a long time, without it seeming especially long, we walked through

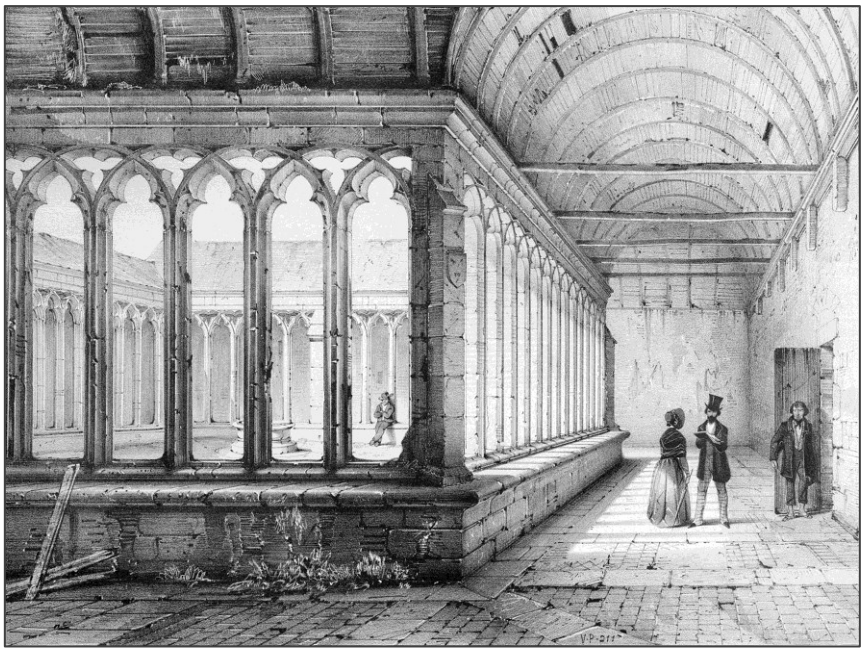
open countryside, beneath trees in sunken lanes, across moorland, through ploughed furrows, along paths, and even along a main road. When we were tired, we unbuckled our packs, and lay down at the foot of an oak-tree, on the bank of a ditch, smoking and talking; watching the clouds drift past, letting the hours slip by.

At Bénodet we crossed the river (*the mouth of the Odet*) on a ferry. At Combrit we lost our way, and would have headed back towards Quimper if a road-worker had not warned us.

At five in the evening, we arrived at Pont-l'Abbé; we were covered in a respectable layer of dust and mud, which spread from our clothes onto the floor of our inn-room, with such disastrous prodigality, that we were almost humiliated by the mess we made just by sitting down somewhere.

Pont-l'Abbé is a very peaceful little town, bisected lengthwise by a wide cobbled street. The lean citizens who live there could not have looked more pathetic, humble, or stupid.

For those who like to view something wherever they are, there are the insignificant remains of the castle (*Château des Barons du Pont*) and the church (*Notre-Dame des Carmes*); a church that would be passable, moreover, if it weren't encrusted with the thickest whitewash a church council could ever dream of. The Chapel of the Virgin was full of flowers. Bouquets of daffodils, sea-rocket, pansies, roses, honeysuckle, and jasmine, placed in white porcelain vases or blue glass jars, spread their colours across the altar, and rose between the tall candlesticks as high as the Virgin's face, even above her silver crown, from which fell a long-pleated muslin veil that clung to the golden star of the plaster baby suspended in her arms. The air was filled with the scent of holy water and flowers. It was a small, fragrant corner, mysterious and peaceful, set apart within the church, a hidden retreat, lovingly adorned, perfectly suited to stirrings of mystical longing, and lengthy outpourings of mournful prayer. Oppressed by the climate, dulled by poverty, humanity transfers all the sensuality of the heart to this place, laying it at the feet of Mary, beneath the gaze of celestial womanhood and, by arousing it, satisfies an unquenchable thirst for comfort and love.



'The Cloister, Pont-l'Abbé'
Auguste Étienne François Mayer (French, 1805–1890)

Let the rain fall through the roof, let there be neither pews nor chairs in the nave, yet everywhere you will find a chapel of the Virgin no less gleaming, polished, and charming, with fresh flowers and lit candles. Within, all the religious tenderness of Brittany seems to be concentrated; here are the tenderest depths of the heart, here is its humility, its passion, its treasure. There are no flowers in the countryside, but there are in the church; people are poor, but the Virgin is rich; ever-beautiful, she smiles for all, and aching souls go to warm themselves at her knees, as at a hearth that never grows cold. If one is astonished by a people's unwavering devotion to their beliefs, does one not comprehend the delight and pleasure they derive from them? Is not asceticism a superior form of epicureanism; fasting a refined form of indulgence? Religion itself contains sensations that are almost carnal; prayer has its excesses, mortification its frenzies, and those who come to kneel before this clothed statue in the evening also experience palpitations and vague intoxications, while, in the streets, children returning from school stop, dreamily and troubled, to gaze at the ardent woman over a window, gazing at them with tender eyes.

One must witness what are termed their festivals to be finally convinced of the sombre character of these people. They don't dance, they spin around; they don't sing, they whistle. This very evening, we went to a nearby village to see the inauguration of a threshing-floor. Two bagpipe players, perched on the courtyard wall, relentlessly elicited the shrill sound of their instruments, to the beat of which two long lines of participants trotted along, following each other in a wolf's tail, looping back on themselves, turning, crossing, and rejoining at unequal intervals. Heavy steps pounded the ground, heedless of rhythm, while the high-pitched notes of the music emerged one after another in yelping monotony. Those who no longer wished to dance dropped out. They left the line without disturbing its progress, and returned once they had caught their breath. For nearly an hour, as we watched this strange exercise, the crowd only stopped once, the musicians pausing to drink a glass of cider; then, the long lines stirred again, and began to turn about. At the entrance to the courtyard, at a table, walnuts were being sold; next to it was a jug of brandy, on the ground a barrel of cider; not far away stood a citizen in a leather cap and green frock coat; near him, a man in a jacket with a sabre suspended from a white baldric: the latter the Police Commissioner of Pont-l'Abbé, the former his rural constable.

Soon, the Commissioner took his watch out of his pocket, and signalled to the gendarme who went to speak to a group of people, and the assembly dispersed.

The four of us returned to town together and we had the opportunity, on the way, to admire yet another harmonious combination of Providence, one which had paired this police commissioner with his rural official, and vice versa. They fitted together perfectly, like interlocking parts. The same event prompted the same reflection from both; they drew parallel conclusions from the same idea. When the Commissioner laughed, the warden smiled; when the former assumed a serious expression, the other looked sombre; if the frock coat said: 'This must be done,' the jacket replied: 'I think so'; if he continued: 'It is most necessary,' then the other would add: 'It is indispensable.' Yet their relative ranks and authority remained, despite this close connection, quite distinct, and clearly established. Thus, the gendarme raised his voice less loudly than the Commissioner, was slightly shorter, and walked behind him. The Commissioner, polite, important, and eloquent, consulted his thoughts, pondered, talked to himself, and clicked his tongue; the gendarme was gentle, attentive, and solicitous, observing for his part, uttering interjections, and

scratching the tip of his nose. Along the way, he asked for news, sought advice, and obeyed orders, while the Commissioner questioned, deliberated, and issued commands.

We were approaching the edge of town when we heard shrill cries coming from one of the houses. The street was full of an agitated crowd, and people ran towards the Commissioner, saying, 'Come, sir, there's a fight! Two women have been killed!' 'By whom?' 'We don't know.' 'How?' 'They're bleeding.' 'Yes, but how?' 'With a rake.' 'Where's the murderer?' 'One has a head wound, the other is wounded in the arm. Come, we're waiting for you, they're in here.' The Commissioner entered, and we followed.

There was a hubbub of sobs, cries, and talk within, a wave of sound rising, and then stifling itself. People were stepping on each other's toes, jostling each other, swearing, able to see nothing.

The Commissioner began by getting angry. But since he did not speak Breton, the gendarme was angered on his behalf, and chased the public from the house, grasping them by the shoulders and pushing them out of the door.

When only about a dozen people remained in the room, we managed to make out, in a corner, an arm with a piece of flesh hanging from it, and a black mass of hair, dripping with blood. Here were the old woman and the young girl, both injured in the fight. The old woman, who was tall and thin, her brownish skin wrinkled like parchment, stood with her left arm clasped in her right hand, barely moaning, and seemingly unaffected; but the young girl was weeping. Seated with her lips apart, her head bowed, and her hands flat on her knees, she trembled convulsively, and sobbed quietly. To all the questions put to them, they responded only with complaints, and since the witnesses who had seen the blows could not even agree among themselves, it was impossible to know who had beaten the pair or why. Some said it was a husband who had caught his wife *in flagrante*; others, that the women had been arguing, and the master of the house had wanted to silence them. Nothing was known for sure; the Commissioner was most perplexed, and the gendarme speechless.

Since the local doctor was away, or these good people did not wish to disturb him because it cost too much, we were so bold as to offer 'the assistance of our meagre talents' and ran to retrieve our travel kits, containing a piece of adhesive tape, a bandage, and some lint that, in anticipation of an accident, we had buried at the bottom of our knapsacks.

It would have made a fine sight, indeed, for our friends, to see us displaying, in the manner of medical men, our scalpel, forceps, and three pairs of scissors, one with vermeil handles, which we set out on the table. The Commissioner admired our philanthropic urge; the local gossips watched us in silence, the yellow candle dripping in its iron candlestick, and its burnt wick lengthening which the gendarme trimmed with his fingers. The old woman's wound was dressed first. The blow had been delivered precisely; her bare arm revealed the bone, and a triangle of flesh about four inches long hung down like a cuff. We pushed the flap of skin back in place, adjusting it to the exact edges of the wound, then secured everything with a bandage. It is perfectly possible that the strict compression involved caused gangrene, and that the patient died as a result.

No one knew what was wrong with the girl. Blood was dripping from her hair, its source unknown; it congealed in sticky patches, and trickled down her neck. The gendarme, our interpreter, told her to remove her woollen headband; she untied it with a single movement, and all her hair, a deep, matte black, cascaded down, its bloodstained strands streaked red. Gently

parting her beautiful, moist hair, which was soft, thick, and abundant, we indeed saw, on the back of her head, a bump the size of a walnut, pierced by an oval hole. We shaved the skin all around it; and, after washing and sealing the wound, we melted some tallow onto a piece of lint and applied it to the injury with strips of adhesive bandage. A compress placed on top was held in place by the headband, which was itself covered by her cap.

Meanwhile, the Justice of the Peace arrived. The first thing he did was demand to see the rake, and the only thing he concerned himself with was examining the weapon from every angle. He took it by the handle, counted the tines, brandished it, and tested it, making the iron clang and the wood bend.

— 'Is this the actual instrument employed in the attack?' he asked. 'Jerome, are you convinced of it?'

— 'They say so, sir.'

— You were not there, Commissioner?'

— 'No, Monsieur.'

— 'I would like to know if the blows were indeed struck with a rake, or if it was rather with a blunt instrument. Who is the culprit? Does this rake belong to him? Or to someone else? Is it what was used to injure these women? Or was it, as I say, a blunt instrument? Do they intend to file a complaint? What should I say in my report? What do you think, Commissioner?'

The unfortunate women added nothing to the matter, except that they were still suffering; as for their seeking justice by legal means, they were given the night to consider the question. The young girl could barely speak, and the old woman's thoughts were also very confused, as she was still drunk, according to the neighbours; which explained the insensitivity she displayed while we were tending to her pain.

After scrutinising us as best they could to determine our identities, the authorities of Pont-l'Abbé wished us goodnight, thanking us 'for the services we had rendered the country.' We replaced our belongings in our rucksacks, and the Commissioner left with his gendarme, the gendarme with his sabre, and the Justice of the Peace with the rake.

No sooner had we retired to our rooms than we received a visit from another two gendarmes eager to learn our names, surnames, address and occupation from our passports, in order to report to the Police Commissioner and the Justice of the Peace who were undoubtedly waiting in a state of great anxiety for their swift return. But since we enjoy the singular good fortune of having no profession, no title, and no rank, they had to resign themselves to learning only two names as completely unknown in Pont-l'Abbé as elsewhere. They could not, however, believe that we were gentlemen walking for the purpose of personal recreation; that was unheard of, seemingly, and to them absurd. We were draughtsmen or surveyors traveling out of ambition, so as to outdo others, and thereby earn the Legion of Honour. We were paid by the government to inspect roads, or supervise the lighthouse keepers. We had a secret mission, some clandestine scheme that we refused to disclose in order to deceive people, and ensure our success. There was something incomprehensible, contradictory, and shadowy about us, such that we almost frightened them, so strange did we seem.

But no, thank the Lord! No such matters motivate us. We are merely humorous observers, and literary dreamers; we spend our lives observing the scene, and reading the great writers. If that doesn't fill our pockets in the way making tallow, boots, or laws would, if the police find it hard to comprehend, and the bourgeoisie laugh at us out of pity, then it is for us alone, and a thousand times better so, that the horizon extends, and field and shore weary our feet, and it is for us too, that you appear, magnificent poets, who delight our souls.

So, we retired to bed smiling at the perversity which renders human life an appendage to shops, offices, and banks, in the belief that it was invented by the deity to fill shelves and count the takings.

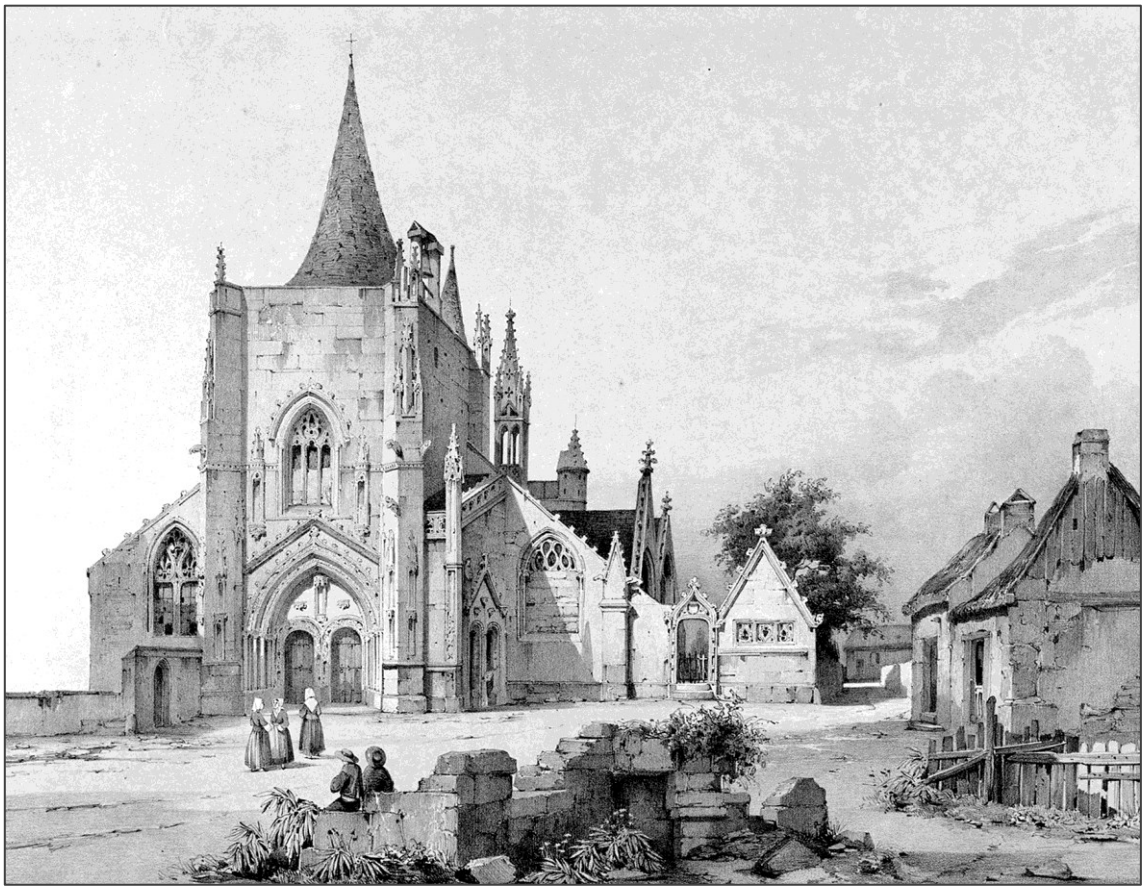
And we slept soundly despite our tiredness, and left for Penmarch at dawn, without enquiring as to the state of our patients.

Chapter VIII: (Du Camp: The West Coast, Penmarch to Crozon)

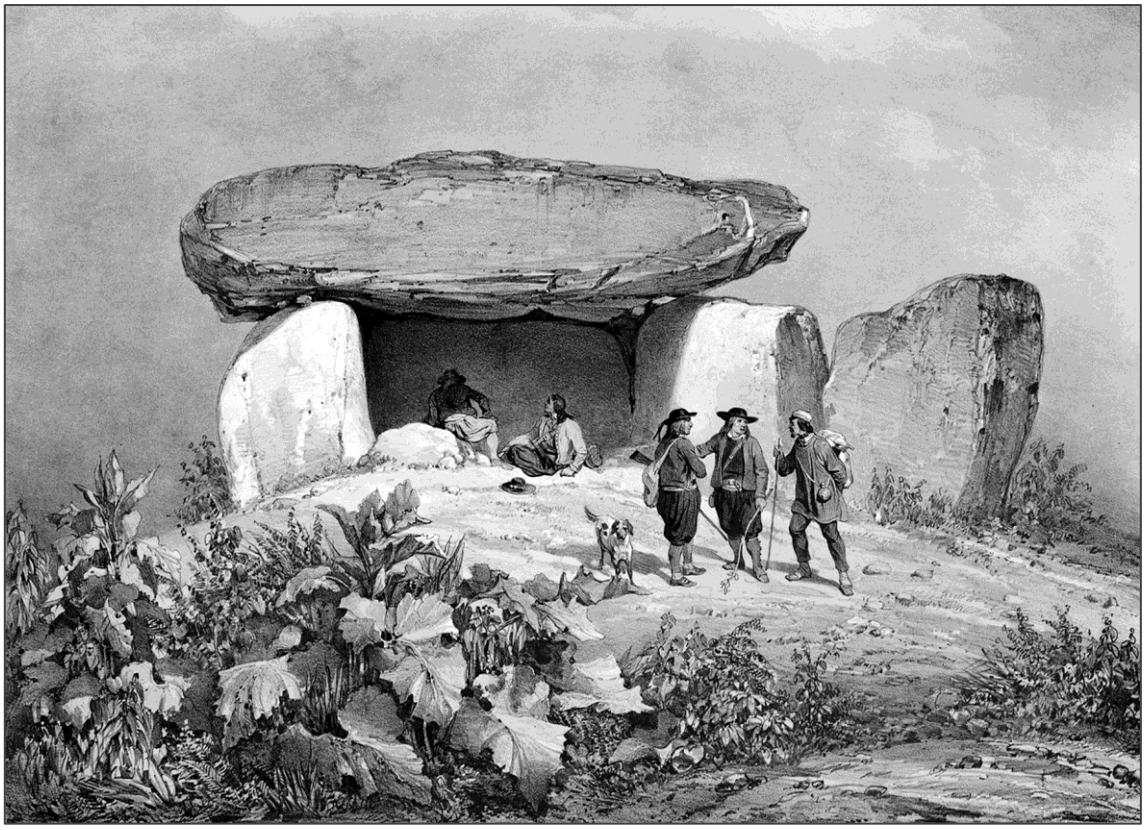


'The Church and Village of Penmarc'h'
Félix Benoist (French, 1818–1896) and Adolphe Jean-Baptiste Bayot (French, 1810–1871)

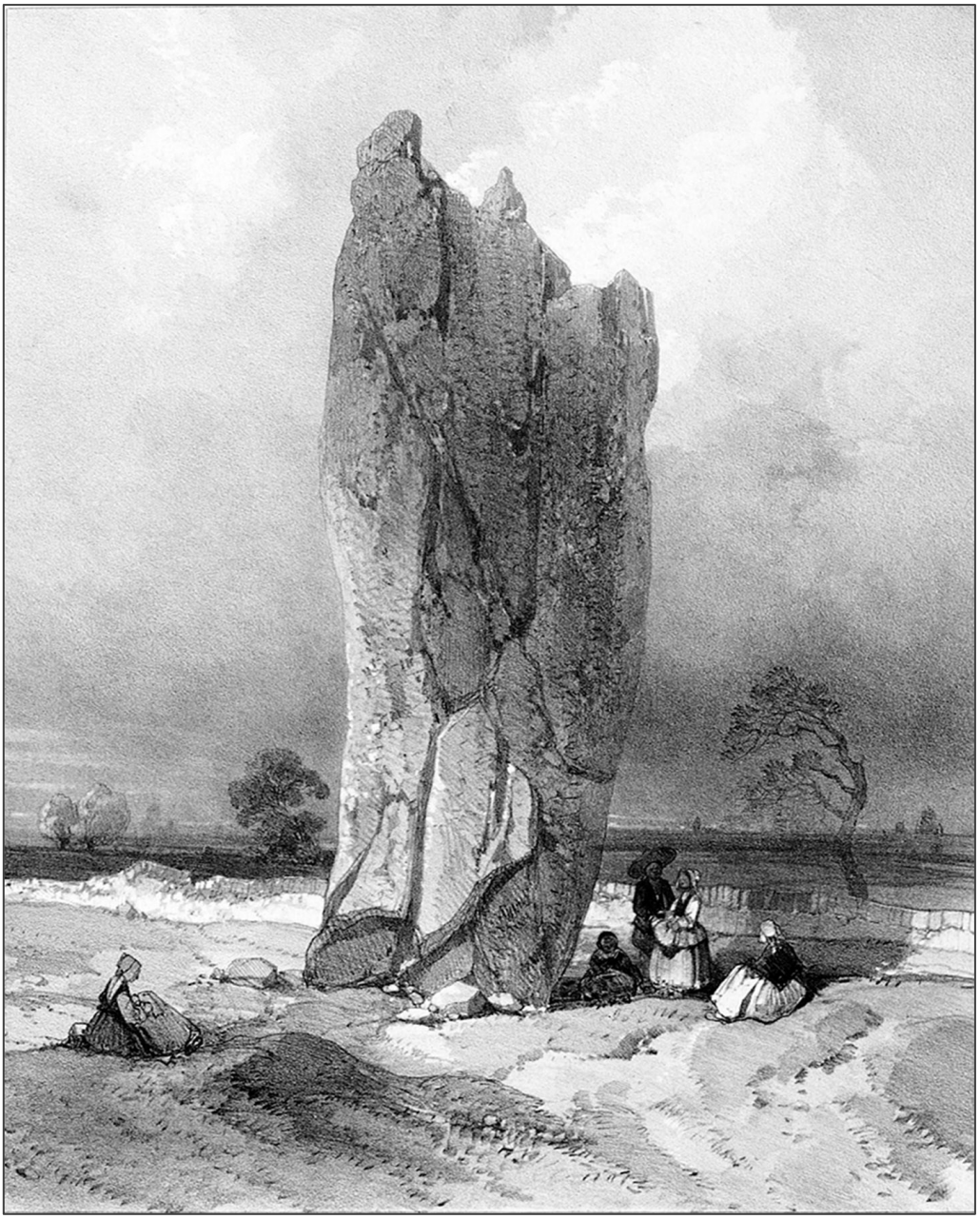
Penmarch. — The church (*Église Saint Nonna*) from the early sixteenth century; the original porch at the main entrance; two ornate, round-arched twin doorways; a long, elegant niche with a dentil cornice; a horse's head on the left; a man clinging to something. — A charming side entrance, with a hint of sixteenth -century style combined with local elements; two twin doorways of the same type, but even more graceful; on the left, a medallion depicting a man embracing a woman, who is defending herself. — The interior full of birdsong. On our second visit this morning, a bird flew through the middle of the nave. Pointed arches, medallions with robust sculptures, representing heads or figures. — In the chancel, a saint carved in wood and painted, raising his right arm; a carved mantelpiece, windows divided into flowers in the chapel behind the apse. — The remains of a stone ossuary in the cemetery, with two small sculpted skulls in an exterior corner.



'Penmarc'h: the Church of Saint-Nonna'
Auguste Étienne François Mayer (French, 1805–1890)



‘Dolmen near Penmarc’h’
Adolphe Jean-Baptiste Bayot （French, 1810–1871） and Auguste Étienne François Mayer （French, 1805–1890）



'Dolmen at Penmarc'h'
Eugène Cicéri (French, 1813–1890) and Auguste Étienne François Mayer (French, 1805–1890)

Kérity. — Rocks in sight, marshes with creeks that the rising tide fills. — The remains of a beautiful 'Templar' church (*Saint-Thumette*), pure, simple, charming niches in the style of those at Penmarch. The nave has only one side, no transept. The stone altar. At the far end, a pointed arch, the window divided in three. — A tower still remaining on the right side of the portal; we climbed it. Flat countryside, the sea, the windmills turning in the wind. — A conversation with sailors. — An old man told us he had never heard Mass said at sea (another had told us the opposite) over the ruins of Ys, because the local people place Ys here (*Ys, or Kêr-Is, was a legendary city supposedly sunk beneath Douarnenez Bay*). People claimed that one could still see hewn stones as of a city. — Lobsters. — In the Penmarch cemetery, the shaft of a cross with truncated arms, which is a constant and remarkably characteristic native element.



‘Saint-Guénolé, near Kérity, Penmarc’h’
Auguste Étienne François Mayer （French, 1805–1890） and Eugène Cicéri （French, 1813–1890）



'The Tower of the Church of Saint-Guénolé'
Auguste Étienne François Mayer (French, 1805–1890) and Eugène Cicéri (French, 1813–1890)

La Torche. — A crevasse. A large rock like a bulwark, waves falling in cascades; flowing around it.

White Norse. — Wastes on the way to Plovan, an immense plain of pale green sands, undulations in the land. — A hut for wild-duck hunting in which we sat; black birds with white bellies circled and cried as they flew above our heads; complete solitude; the sea to the left. — A

flock of black sheep jumping over an enclosure. — We passed through courtyards where dogs were barking. — An inlet. — A marsh. — Monsieur Bataille was at Louviers, in India, and at Waterloo, went to war, was a Customs Officer and is now retired. History: for a quarter livre you get a whole book. The tale of ... despatched by a cannonball; it will easily take someone's head off. The retreat from Russia; the grenadier, to whom he had refused a place at his fire, who died by the fireside; he took his trousers. The lice were called 'the Napoleons of Poland'. — The primary school teacher disillusions us as regards the virtue of Breton women; the girls are pooling their money to buy drinks for the boys so they can have a dance partner. — Grog. — We strike up a conversation with a shoemaker. — The hostess suspects my friend of immorality.

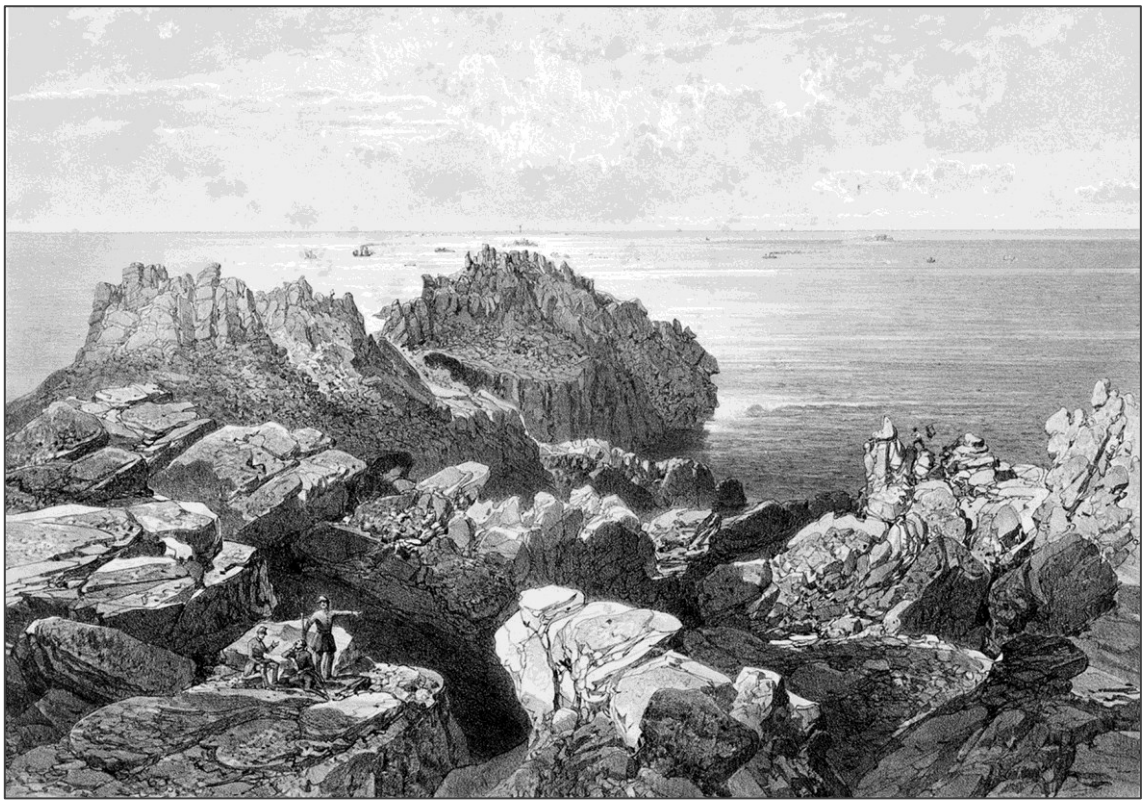
From Plovan to Audierne, along the shore, leaving a chapel on the right. — A path that winds along the curves of the coast. — Wasteland, the sea; the sea and the wind. — The doctor on horseback in gaiters. — Countryfolk gathering seaweed; their brown clothes against the green rocks. — To the right, mountains of sand and chalk; whiteness, the blue-green sea; the sky, with rolling clouds, deep blue in places; the path winding ahead of us in the distance following the undulation of the land, a white pattern on a pale green background; sands to cross; a mill.



'Dolmen near Audierne'
Auguste Étienne François Mayer (French, 1805–1890) and Eugène Cicéri (French, 1813–1890)

Audierne. — We were obliged to walk around the bay. — The church (*Église Saint-Raymond*): under a side porch, a sea monster, a grotesque figure; a boat carved on the facade, but modern and not sham like at Penmarch. — In the evening, we strolled on the sand, so beautiful that we regretted crossing it, talking about an income of seven million. The sea, dark green from the reflection of the green coast; closer to us, blue; clouds of mother-of-pearl and pale gold. In the more overcast direction, a black cloud, rising and widening over a clump of green trees, was advancing towards us.

From Audierne to Plogoff (Saturday, 19th June). — First, the main road uphill; trees on the right. — A gentleman on horseback, adorned with long hair, whom we stopped to ask for directions, advised us to go to the Pardon (*penitential ceremony*) of Saint Hugin (*Saint Tugen*) in Primelin. — A canvas hut. — While waiting for Vespers, we go and sit by the sea. — The church: decapitated statues; the side porch entirely painted. — In the hut, sitting on a plank set on two stones, we chat with some countrymen (the tall one, with grey, curly hair, a good forty-five years older than Gustave; the one next to me, dark-haired; the puffy effect of his *bragou-bras* culottes, seeing him sitting facing me; they admire our pipes, and our knives) and a sailor who ran the establishment. — We go astray. A deserted village, barking dogs; no one speaks French. — Sun on the manure heap, and on the collapsed, dried-out paths.



'Plogoff: the Pointe du Raz and the Île de Sein'
Félix Benoist (French, 1818–1896)

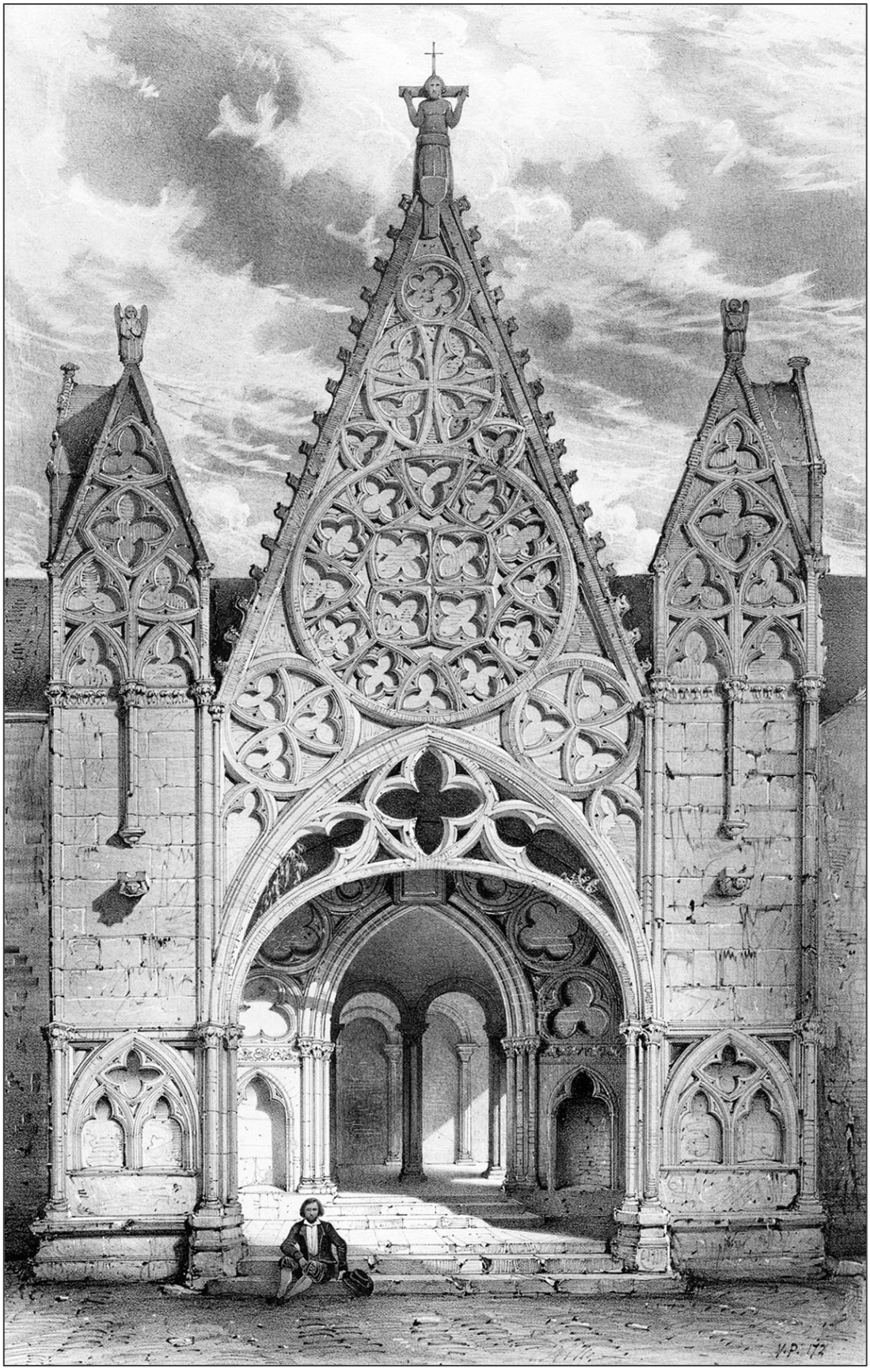
At the entrance to Plogoff, the doctor, the hotel! — Large, arid undulations, increasing in aridity as we approach the Pointe du Raz. Clumps of very short sea-rushes; the ground is bare in places. We pass through two villages black with filth. — A stone cross. — A mill. — A child born with one arm begs us for alms; he follows us. The customs officer explains to him that he is our guide. Mute, he goes ahead of us. — Blue sky, cormorants. — We clamber along the right hand side. A satanic hole, upheavals, folds, indescribable colour of the rocks underwater. Human beings are not made to live here, to endure such strong doses of Nature. It is not a slab of rock, but an agglomeration of rocks; the earth has crept in between, the grass short and slippery. The rock becomes increasingly dry, the sharp ridge slopes down towards the point. — We return along the left hand side; the slope is less steep, and the harshness of the precipice is somewhat softened by the weathering of the rocks that line it. The child has to raise his arm so I can cross over. — Back

at the top, we smoke sitting down. — To the right, at the entrance to the Bay of the Dead (*Baie des Tréspassés*), a standing rock, covered with gulls; they flutter, cry, soar, and criss-cross in flight; the child throws stones; the boat rocks to and fro. — Our hostess's religiosity. — Always milk, soup and eggs. — The night spent bivouacking.

From Plogoff inland to Pontcroix. — Country folk going to the Pardon of Saint-Hugin, which heals, and protects against rabies. — Near Pontcroix, we find our fellow from yesterday. — The gendarmes ask for our passports because of our savage appearance. — A barbarous lunch at Pontcroix. — The innkeeper, is the medical officer. — Costumes. — The fierceness of a tailor who takes us to Douarnenez; his horse-drawn carriage and Père Bataille's chicken are the two hardest things I have encountered so far.



'Pont-Croix'
Auguste Étienne François Mayer (French, 1805–1890)

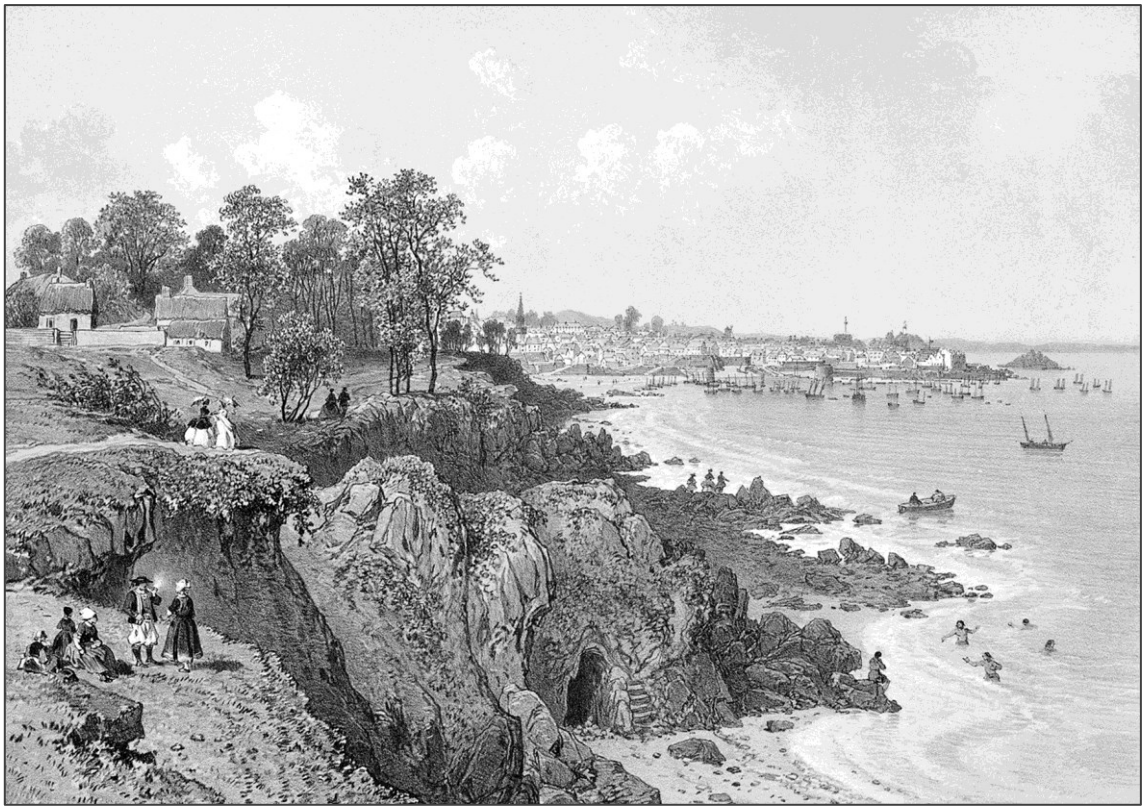


'The Portal of the Church, Pont-Croix'
Auguste Étienne François Mayer (French, 1805–1890)

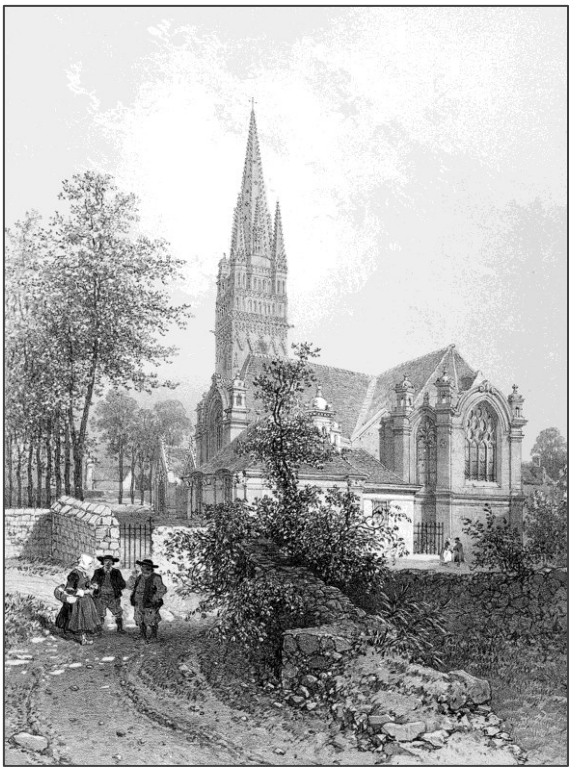


'The Interior of the Church, Pont-Croix'
Auguste Étienne François Mayer (French, 1805–1890)

Douarnenez. — Gray, cloudy, foggy weather, low houses, deserted streets, a poor and dreary place; to the right, on the shore, a section of cliff with greenery and hanging grasses. — L'Isle Tristan opposite; a tall white wall. Built by the farmer who lives there; a gloomy air about the whole area, out towards that ancient lair of La Fontenelle (*Guy Éder de Beaumanoir de la Haye, nicknamed La Fontenelle, or 'Ar Bleiz', the 'Wolf' in Breton, seigneur de Le Vieux-Bourg, de Saint-Gildas, et du Leslay, was a warlord active in the late sixteenth century*).



‘Douarnenez’
Félix Benoist (French, 1818–1896), Adolphe Jean-Baptiste Bayot (French, 1810–1871) and Eugène Cicéri (French, 1813–1890)



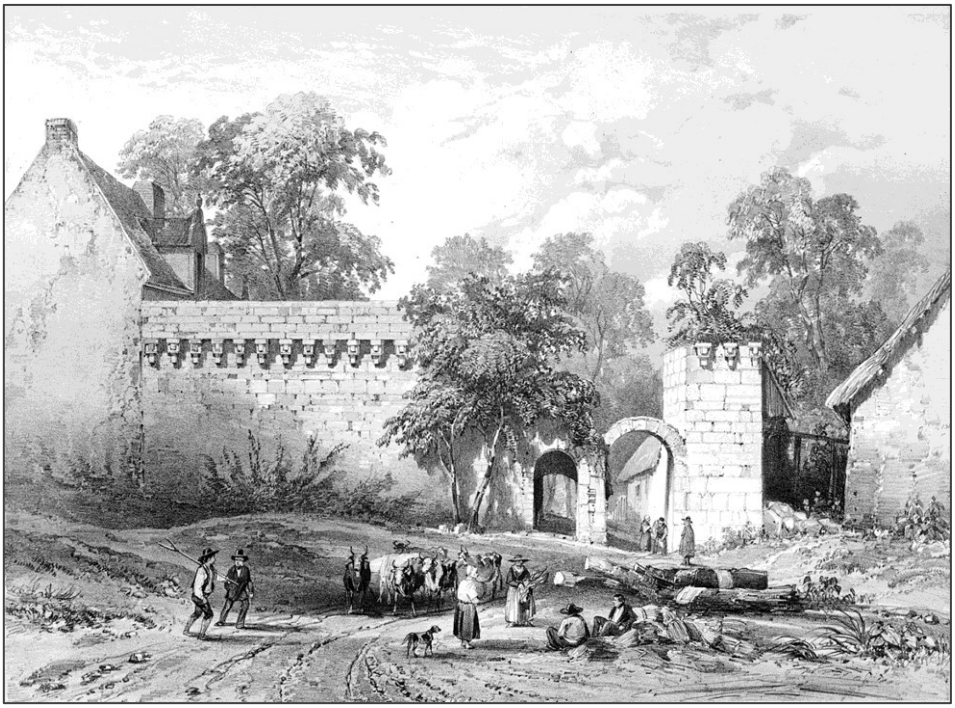
‘The Church of Ploaré, Douarnenez’
Félix Benoist (French, 1818–1896), Eugène Cicéri (French, 1813–1890) and Adolphe Jean-Baptiste Bayot (French, 1810–1871)

From Douarnenez to Crozon. — An endless journey by horse-drawn carriage, the length of which was lessened by almost continuous sleep.



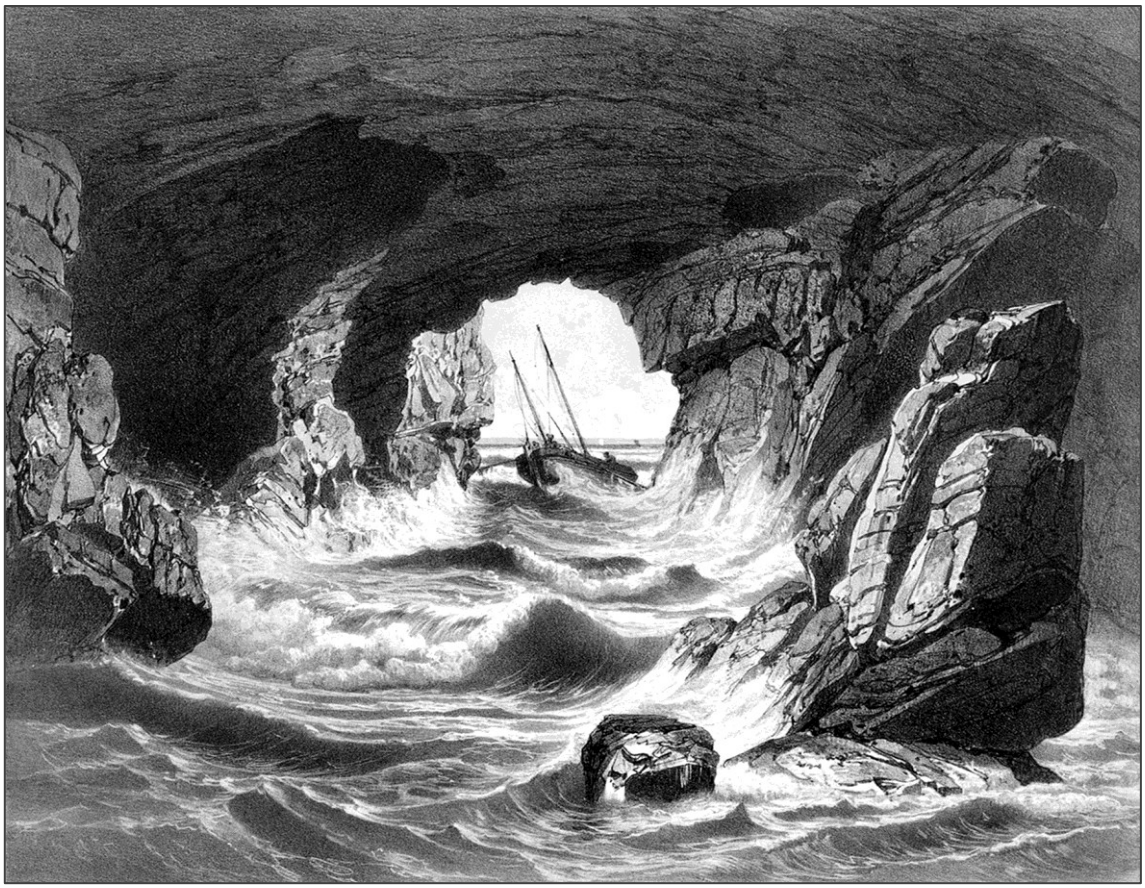
'Crozon'
Léon Gaucherel (French, 1816–1886) and Eugène Cicéri (French, 1813–1890)

Crozon. — Monsieur de Saint Amour, his niece. — Monsieur Grand. — The violence of Father Renoult's attire on his way to the wedding dinner hosted by the notary. — A naked boy getting dressed in a corridor. — In the evening, a visit to the cemetery.



'The Manoir de Kerioul, near Crozon'
Auguste Étienne François Mayer (French, 1805–1890)

Morgat. — The village to the right. — Boats pulled up on the pebbles as at Étretat. — Caves: the small ones you can see on foot, three of them, one with two arches, another with a kind of low alcove; the large cave, you reach by boat. At the entrance, water flows from above, the water is transparent, the cave wall (*Grotte de l'Autel*) isn't straight, but curves; a small rock in the middle. The rocks are yellow, iron grey, red, etc., all without break, following the layers of the stone. The boat ploughed along, sculling, one felt oneself being drawn into a strange, pearly realm, as if into an enchanted passage; the enchantment being that of Nature. The ceiling variously coloured.



'The Grotte de l'Autel, Morgat'
Félix Benoist (French, 1818–1896)

Landaoudec. — Ivy on sections of walls (*Fort de Landaoudec*). — Our excavations at the dolmen. — Anse de Dinan (*Dinan Bay*). — Corpses in the sand, bones calcined by the water: they were found with their arms straight along their sides, their faces to the sky, their feet towards the sea. — The sea, dark blue. — The sand, all white and dry under the sun. — Wide and bare countryside, a pale russet colour.



'The Pierced Rock in the Anse de Dinan, near Camaret'
Auguste Étienne François Mayer （French, 1805–1890）

Chapter IX: (Flaubert: The North-West Coast, Crozon to Saint-Pol-de-Léon)

From Crozon to Landévennec, the countryside is open, devoid of trees or houses; a russet moss, like worn velvet, stretches as far as the eye can see, clothing the flat ground. Occasionally, fields of ripe wheat rise amidst small, stunted gorse bushes. The gorse is no longer in bloom; it has returned to its pre-spring state.

Deep cart-ruts, bordered on their edges by ridges of dry mud, multiply irregularly near each other, appear before you, continue for a long time, then curve away and disappear from sight. Grass grows in large patches between these collapsing furrows. The wind whistles across the moor; we advance; the joyful breeze stirs the air, its gusts dry the sweat that beads our cheeks and, when we halt for a moment, despite the throb of our arteries, we hear the sound of its flow over the moss.

Every now and then, to point the way, a windmill appears, its large white sails turning rapidly in the air. Their wooden frames creak and groan; they descend, skim the ground, and ascend once more. Standing at the wide-open dormer window, the miller watches us pass.

We marched on. Walking alongside a hedge of elms that must have concealed a village, we glimpsed a man climbing a plum-tree planted in a courtyard; at its foot stood a woman catching the fruit he threw down to her in her blue apron. I remember a mass of black hair cascading over

her shoulders, two arms raised in the air, a backward movement of her neck, and a loud burst of laughter that reached me through the branches of the hedge.

The path we follow narrows. Suddenly, the heath disappears and we are on the crest of a promontory overlooking the sea. Stretching out towards Brest, the headland seems endless, while on the other side, carving through the land, it winds its way between steep hillsides covered with coppiced trees. Every bay is squeezed between two hills; every hill is flanked by twin gulfs, and there is nothing as beautiful as those great green slopes rising almost vertically from the blue expanse of sea. The hills swell at their summits, flatten at their bases, and curve towards the horizon in a widening sweep that link their plateaus. With the graceful curve of a Moorish arch, they connect to one another, thus extending, continuously, the colour of the vegetation and the undulation of the terrain, by dint of their repetition on every hill. At their feet, the waves, driven by an onshore wind, press against their folds. The rays of sunlight, striking the water, make the foam sparkle; the waves shimmer like silvery stars, and all the rest is an immense, smooth surface, whose azure one never tires of contemplating.

Sunlight could be seen passing over the valleys. One of them, already darkening, was a vague blurred mass of woodland, while a wide, black bar of shadow advanced upon another.

As we descended the path, and thus drew closer to the shoreline, the hills before us seemed to grow taller, the gulfs deeper; the sea expanded. Letting our gaze wander, we walked on, careless of what was to come, as pebbles flung up by our feet rolled away, and vanished amidst the clumps of brushwood that lined the edges of the path.

Arriving finally at Landévennec, we went into a very plain tavern to leave our knapsacks; there, we sat on barrels instead of benches. After each drinking a shot of cheap brandy, out of one of those large cups of local earthenware striped with pink and blue bands like the breeches worn at a masquerade ball, we went off to see the abbey.

All that remains of the portal are three arches; the middle one, lower than the other two, is the only one pierced. On each side of one of them, after a buttress, a long, small arched window flares outwards like the arrow slits of a fortress; inside the middle arch, short columns supporting mouldings bear capitals covered with complex interlacing patterns.



'Landévennec Abbey'
Auguste Étienne François Mayer (French, 1805–1890)

Once having crossed this section of the wall, either through the breach opening onto the courtyard or through the gate, whose entrance was blocked by a ladder placed askew, the ruins of the choir and apse appear in the distance, their whitish crenelations silhouetted against the blue sky. They form a circular apse flanked by rounded side chapels, and reinforced with exterior buttresses, the semicircular windows mostly supported by columns whose bases are set into square pillars. The courtyard undulates in bumps and hollows; it is a shifting jumble of uneven planes clothed with brambles and ivy, with their uneven greenery.

In the side chapels, through the window openings, one can glimpse the sea in the distance, beyond a meadow dotted with the green domed crowns of apple trees, each view of it framed like a painting by the eroded semicircular arch of a Romanesque window.



'Landévennec Abbey'
Auguste Étienne François Mayer (French, 1805–1890) and Eugène Cicéri (French, 1813–1890)

A statue of an abbot leans against the wall: a large ring on the middle finger of his right hand; he has a long chin, prominent cheekbones, protruding eyes, slightly frizzy hair, a cope with long fringes, and a shield of ermine with three bars, the chief (*top of the shield*) charged with a triple label surmounted by an abbot's crozier. Is this, and why should it not be, Saint Guenolé (*Winwalow*), the monastery's first abbot, who died in 532, the saint who is said to have advised King Gradlon to leave the city of Ys, before it was drowned, and who, as the king galloped away across the shore with his beautiful daughter Dahut, cried out to him, from the clouds, as the waves were already beating against his horse's hooves, to rid himself of the demon he was bearing behind him? Gradlon hurled her into the waves; the waves engulfed her, then retreated, and Gradlon continued on his way. To contemplate the statue more comfortably, we seated ourselves on another that was lying flat on the ground.



'The Abbey Church, Landévennec'
Félix Benoist (French, 1818–1896), Eugène Cicéri (French, 1813–1890) and Adolphe Jean-Baptiste Bayot (French, 1810–1871)

This latter depicts a bishop; he has a crozier, a cope bordered with roses and olives, a thumb-ring and, passing beneath the left arm, a shepherd's staff. A narrow sleeve, fastened with a large button, itself emerging from a very wide sleeve, encloses his arm; his hands are joined; two angels support the pillow on which he rests; his dog, lying at his feet, surmounts a shield which shows nine *mascles* (*pierced lozenges*) placed three by three on a label with three charges set in *chief* (*in a band at the top of the shield*), and supported on the right by a lion *lampassé* (*with protruding tongue*), and on the left by a greyhound.

While we were busy interpreting this nonsense, a yellow calf, marked with a spot on its head, wandered near to us. It staggered on its long, weak legs, and flies buzzed around its whitened nostrils, still moist with its mother's milk. Beyond the gate, at the foot of the hill they cover, tall beech trees swayed at the crown, the sun beat down on the old sections of wall, and a warm breeze drifted past; all sorts of plants and shrubs, nettles, daisies, angelica, elder, heather, and balsam mingled their sweet scents; something tender, arousing, and heart-sickening gripped one; one felt oneself overcome by languor, filled with obscure stirrings and languid desire. And as we lay there on the grass, a tall young girl, fair and white of skin, appeared before us, walking barefoot amidst the brambles, and dressed in a red cloth petticoat whose cord was tied tightly around her waist, and a thick, yellow linen shirt; she held a reed, broken at the top, in her hand and stood looking at us without saying a word.

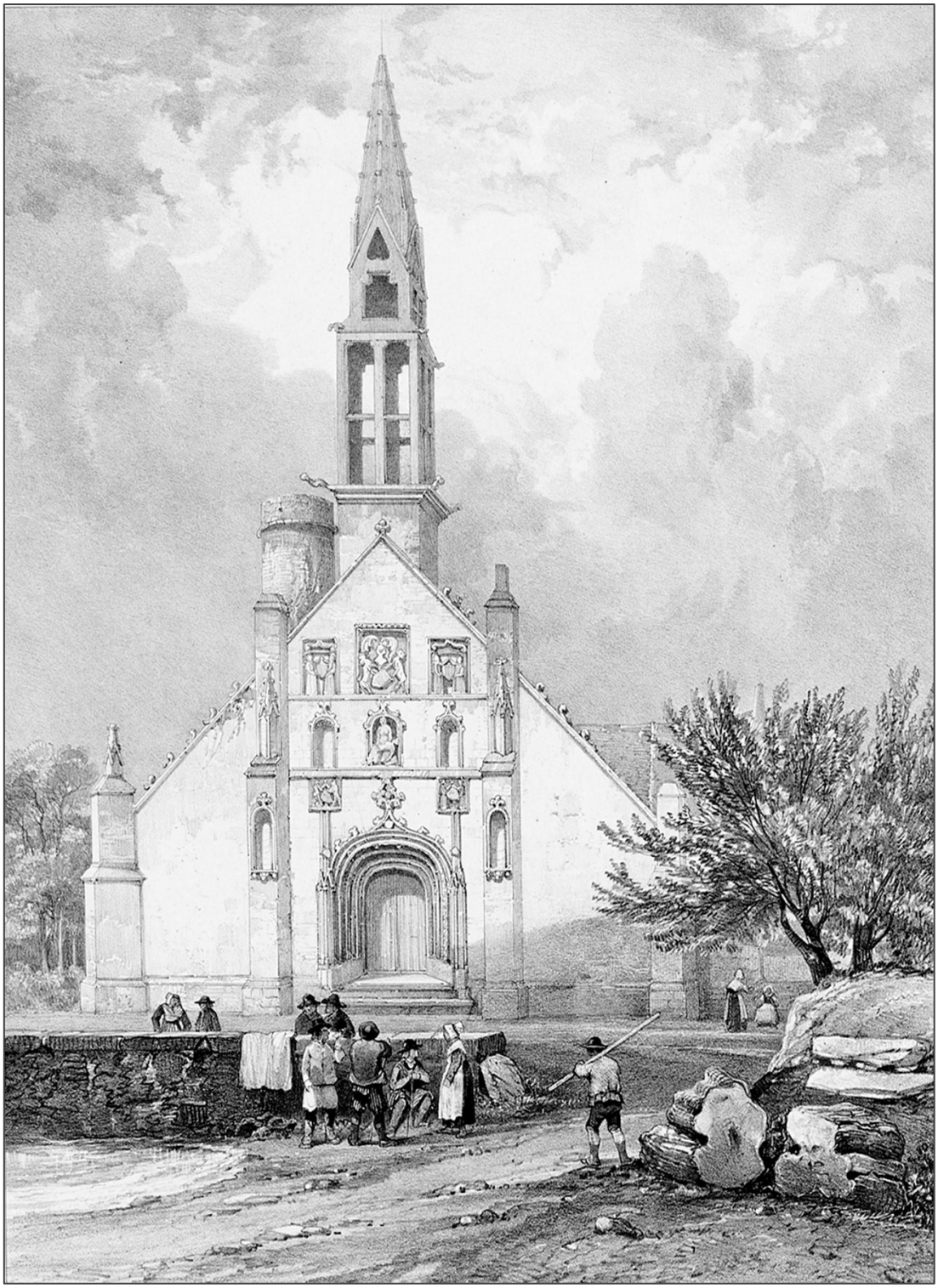
She departed, then returned, laughed when we spoke to her, and vanished immediately. Then, we rose, picked up our walking sticks, and departed ourselves. As we climbed over the wall, we

dislodged various stones, and the mortar crumbled beneath our hands. Had we, too, come only to destroy? What neither time, human beings, good taste, nor industry could destroy, naive travellers unwittingly accomplish in the very act of satisfying their curiosity.

In twenty minutes, a boat took us to the other side of the harbour. and deposited us in a crevice in the rocks, on large slabs of stone covered with seaweed, where we slithered about awhile before reaching land. Once in the countryside, our predicament began. We were to spend the night at Daoulas, but had no knowledge of the route. The paths wound between thick hedges, denser than walls. We ascended and descended; moreover, the paths full of shadow, and the countryside around were already falling asleep amidst the lovely silence of a summer night.

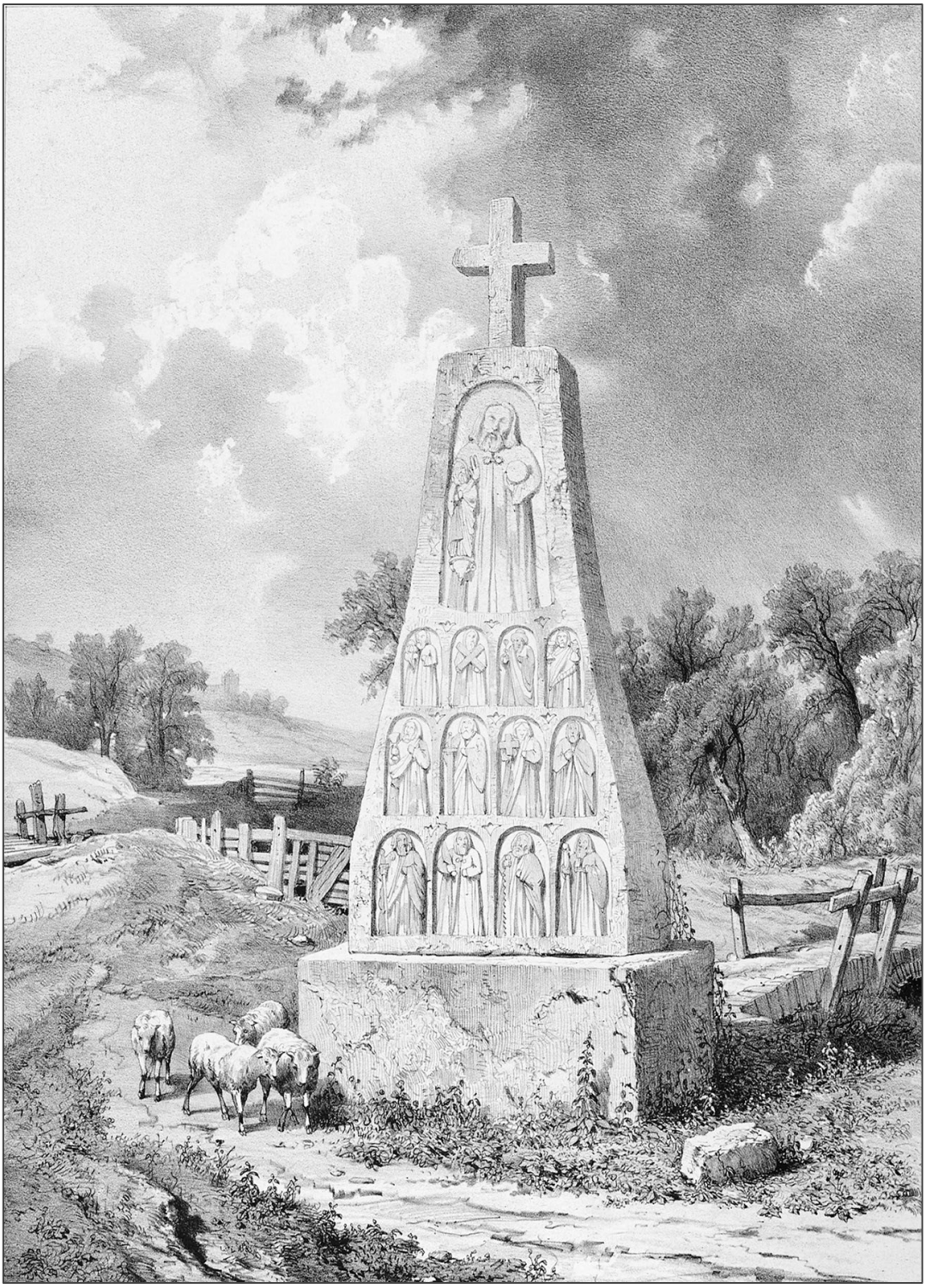
In the absence of anyone who could tell us the way, the two or three countryfolk we had approached responding only with unintelligible cries, we pulled out our map, reached for our compass, and, orienting ourselves by the sunset, resolved to head for Daoulas directly as the crow flies. So, we roused ourselves, and launched into the fields, through hedges, over ditches, felling obstacles, by overturning, pushing aside, or breaking everything in our path; without regard for gates left open or crops damaged.

At the top of a slope, we caught sight of the village of Hôpital (*Hôpital-Camfrout*), nestled in a meadow through which a river flowed. It was spanned by a bridge; on this bridge, was a mill its sail turning; beyond the meadow, a hill rose; while climbing it briskly, on the bank of a tall slope, in the light of a ray of sunlight, shining between the roots of the hedgerow, we saw a beautiful black and yellow salamander advancing on its serrated legs, dragging its long, thin tail in the dust, its speckled body undulating. It was the hour when it set out to forage; it was emerging from its burrow deep inside a large rock buried in moss, and was off to seek insects inside the rotting trunks of old oak trees.



'The Church at L'Hôpital-Camfrout'
Auguste Étienne François Mayer (French, 1805–1890)

Sharp and angular cobblestones soon rang out beneath our feet, a street rose before us; we were in Daoulas. It was still light enough to make out a square sign on one of the houses, hanging from an iron bar set into the wall. Even without the sign, we would have easily recognised the inn, all the houses, like the people, bearing the mark of their trades. So, we entered, extremely hungry, demanding above all not to be kept waiting.



'A Celtic Monument near the Chapel of Sainte-Marguerite, between Logonna and Daoulas'
Auguste Étienne François Mayer (French, 1805–1890)

While we sat on the doorstep waiting for our dinner, a little girl in rags entered the inn carrying a basket of strawberries on her head. She soon came out again, holding a large loaf of bread, in place of it, with both hands. She ran off with the quickness of a cat, letting out shrill cries. Her hair, bristling and grey with dust, rose in the wind around her thin face, and her small, bare feet, striking the ground firmly, twinkled, as she ran, beneath the tattered rags that beat against her knees.

After our meal, which, besides the inevitable omelette and the fatal veal, consisted largely of the little girl's strawberries, we retired to our apartment.

The winding staircase, with its worm-eaten wooden steps, groaned beneath our feet like the soul of a sensitive woman faced with fresh disillusionment. At the top was a room whose door, like that of a barn, was fastened with a hook inserted from outside. That's where we slept. The plaster on the walls, which had once been painted yellow, was peeling; the ceiling beams sagged under the weight of the roof tiles, and a greyish grime on the panes of the sash window dimmed the light as if it entered through frosted glass. The beds, made of four badly-joined walnut planks, had large, spherical feet, riddled with woodworm, and cracked from the dryness of the air. On each of them was a straw palliasse and a mattress covered with a green blanket riddled with holes where the mice had gnawed it and fringed with fraying threads. A dull piece of mirror, broken in its frame; a game bag hanging from a nail; and, nearby, an old silk cravat with the creases of its knots still recognisable, indicated that the bed was normally in use, doubtless every night.

From beneath one of the red cotton pillows, a hideous object half-revealed itself: a cap of the same colour as the bedclothes, but with a sort of thick glaze obscuring the weave; worn, stretched, sagging, oily, and cold to the touch. I had the feeling its owner cherished it and found it warmer than anything else. A man's life, the sweat of an entire existence, was embodied in the layer of rancid grease that covered it. How many nights must it have taken to produce one so dense? How many nightmares must have stirred beneath it, how many dreams must have traversed it! Fine ones too, perhaps. Why not?

Exaggerated delicacy prevented us from throwing the thing out of the window, and we contented ourselves with kicking it under the bed. What might have occurred if we'd found slippers there, meant to keep company with a woman's night-cap? What a fine report to be written for whoever might have had to perform our autopsies!

'O comforts of civilisation! I said to myself as I timidly slipped into bed, 'O ideal comforts, the source of modern happiness, how far you are from reaching Daoulas! How little they know your delights here! The folk here are as yet ignorant of your window-blinds, carpets, doors, shelves, and radiators! What contempt for *English chic*! What careless service! What filthy linen! What sad cutlery! What ugly silverware! One would surely be unable to find a single pumice-stone anywhere in the whole region; they have not a suspicion of how to make tea, and certainly none of these houses has a proper toilet.'

We slept for fourteen hours straight, and were still snoring the next day while visiting the church *(the Abbaye de Daoulas*). A beautiful legend is told about its foundation, featuring an avenging dragon with its young; two saints (*Tadec and Judulus*); and a furious pagan lord (*the Lord of Faou*); but I am tired of legends, and no less so of churches. Besides the fact that I simply lack a well-developed feel for architecture, is it not tedious, one must admit, to have to endure at least once a day a nave, a portal, aisles, capitals, arcades, arches, columns, pillars, and semicircular and pointed arches? The more pleasant things are, the more tedious they become. I shall never lose the hatred the Pyrenees aroused in me as regards waterfalls; I had admired them so much I came to hate them terribly. When I had to turn aside to admire a new one, I felt the onset of stomach-ache; the noise, the foam, the movement revolted me; I longed only for the driest of plains, I would have preferred to live in a marl pit.



'Daoulas: the Cloister of Notre-Dame Abbey'
Auguste Étienne François Mayer (French, 1805–1890)

Beneath the porch are twelve gaunt apostles, with rather naive expressions, while the interior, Romanesque (but more adorned with white, alas, than Pierrot's face), contains nothing but large ostrich-eggs suspended, as votive offerings, from the statue of the Virgin, reminiscent of those placed by Muslims in mosques. If this makes one halt for a moment, and raise a smile, inwardly,

at the poetic comparison, one is soon punished for it by the sight of an ossuary of the most horrifying taste imaginable.

Fearing we might lose our way, and wishing to arrive in Brest early, we enquired about a guide. 'Here's a gentleman who'll conduct you there without fail, he's returning there himself,' our hostess told us, pointing to a member of the bourgeoisie who was leaning on the kitchen table, drinking a toast with the blacksmith. When the glasses were empty, the gentleman rose, took a pinch from his tortoiseshell snuffbox, and turned to us:

— 'Are you bound for Brest, gentlemen?'

— 'Yes.'

— 'So am I. If we travel together, we can talk, and pass the time.'

He was short, and beginning to acquire a paunch; his black hair, cut close at the back, curled at his left temple in a ringlet that extended to the corner of his eye, and his hat, slipping down over his right ear, revealed a narrow brow that appeared to recede even more sharply because of his long jaw. Despite his drooping cheeks, his face was thin. He blinked often, and never stopped smiling. A woollen frock-coat, too short at the waist, covered his stooped back, and from the undersized sleeves protruded two large, red hands, lazy hands, plump rather than strong, whose skin seemed moist. Beneath a black satin waistcoat with a Schall collar (*after Madame Schall a Regency Parisian dressmaker*), embroidered with pale green bouquets, he wore a stiffly starched, extremely white cotton shirt, over which hung two blond cords made of hair, forming a safety-chain for the handsome gold watch stored in his wide waistcoat pocket. His neck, supported by a drooping cravat, turned freely, and his wide-legged trousers, frayed at the buttonholes and bulging at the knees, stopped halfway down the length of a sturdy boot whose hard leather was scarcely creased. He walked quickly, looking at the ground, his head lowered, his right shoulder raised, the arm beneath gripping a formidable club made of tropical hardwood, studded along its entire length with sharp spikes.

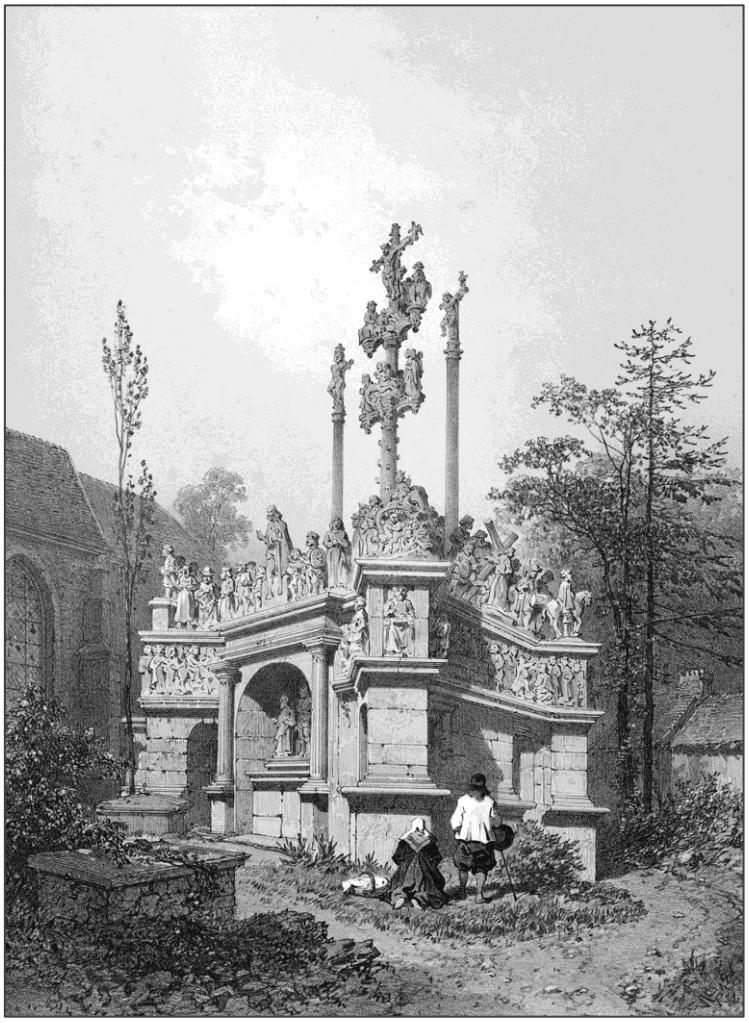
And how he could talk! He did so continuously, recounting anecdotes about people unknown to us, reporting entire dialogues, telling us about his political opinions, his culinary tastes, his health, his business, his relationships, the price of goods, his wife, his father-in-law, his little dog, and his stove which smoked. His name was Monsieur Genès, he lived in Brest, and did sixty thousand francs' worth of business a year. He had been successively a gunsmith, a soldier, an informer, a police-inspector, a caretaker of the dispensary, and was now settled, married, a property owner, and a business agent — that is to say, 'a mover of men', as they term such in Brittany.

One might assume that an existence of that kind would leave its mark on the man who lived it, and that it would be amusing to plumb its depths, but no! Nothing is flatter, more worthless, more colourless, more insipid than that of Monsieur Genès. He is as stupid as a judge, and as tedious as the biographies of social benefactors. Completely unaware of the dubiousness of his business dealings, he considers himself a most honest man, since he conducts all his transactions in the presence of a notary. He is chaste in his speech and orderly in his behaviour. His only passion is for money, his only predilection for wine, and no doubt he owes to his drinking habits the drowsy and dishevelled air the superficial affability of which softens the cunning of his little grey eyes, and the harshness of his thin lips.

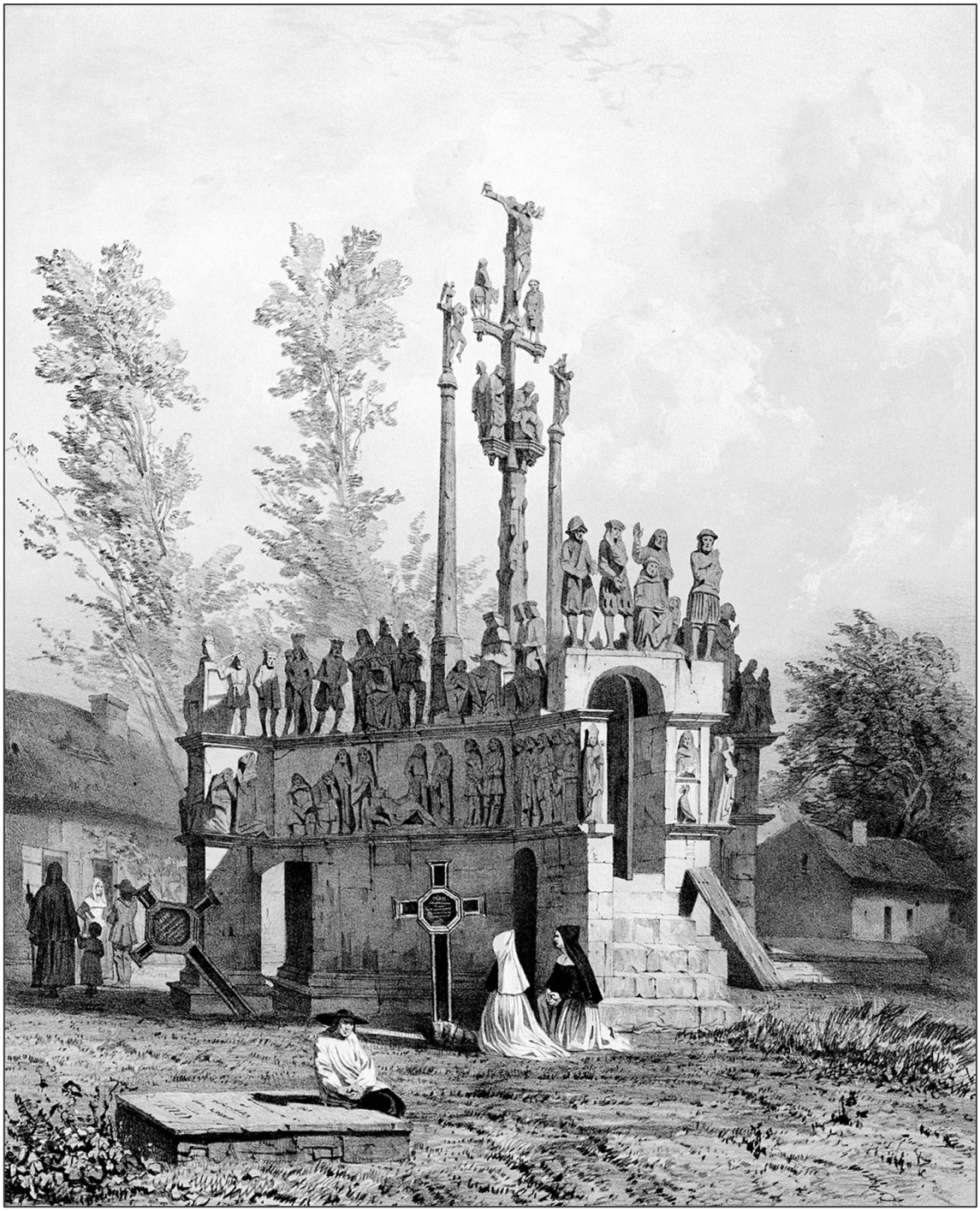
He has no vices; he sees gambling as dangerous, women as pernicious, 'not knowing what either will lead to, whereas with a good vintage you can stop whenever you wish.' He is an orderly, active, clever, and cautious man who is afraid of thieves. He seems flattered by the consideration shown him; he greatly respects the law and venerates legal professionals, notaries, lawyers, and bailiffs; he carries a blade and never removes his hat.

Along the way, he drafts young men, and offer them the chance to sell their souls. The raw recruit is for him the perfect type of soldier because he fears nothing, cares for nothing, gives his life for a few hundred francs, in short because 'the raw recruit is like a convict,' a definition that would hardly satisfy the defenders of our military honour.

Monsieur Genès dislikes the theatre; this is one of the reasons, among others, why he left the police force. He found it very tedious to be obliged to attend the theatre every night. Furthermore, people would tell him, 'Monsieur Genès, you are wrong! A man like yourself should never be attached to the police.' Neither does he frequent churches; he told us he hadn't set foot in one three times in his life. He is, in fact, a follower of Voltaire, and a friend of progress, but even more a friend of the government. He desires a war; 'it would boost business.'



'The Calvary, Plougastel-Daoulas'
Félix Benoist (French, 1818–1896), Eugène Cicéri (French, 1813–1890) and Adolphe Jean-Baptiste Bayot (French, 1810–1871)



'The Calvary, Plougastel-Daoulas'
Léon Gaucherel (French, 1816–1886)

At Plougastel (*Plougastel-Daoulas*), however, he halted, as we did, so that we could view the Calvary, a small, square granite monument, each face depicting a scene from the life of Jesus Christ, with the four corners occupied by the evangelists in their respective roles. The figures, though somewhat heavy-handed, are nonetheless dynamic, lively, and amusing: the men binding Christ exert all their strength, their muscles clearly aching; the one who grimaces in his face, sticking out his tongue, effects it so convincingly that one smiles; the donkey carrying Our Lord entering Jerusalem has a true donkey-like expression, good-natured and peaceful; the soldiers leading him to Calvary, blowing trumpets and beating drums, are preceded by an officer riding with his head

held high, displaying sublime arrogance; while, at the foot of the cross, Mary Magdalene, weeping, lets down her beautiful braided hair. Place all these characters in poses from a David Teniers' painting, the small rounded hats turned up, the doublets squeezing fat bellies, the large sleeves, the high breeches, the broad faces, the wide eyes, and you have a solid work of the imagination, something naive, noble, and of a wholly medieval poetic nature, though the monument was only carved in 1602 in fulfilment of a vow made four years earlier regarding an epidemic which ravaged Lower Brittany.



'Daoulas: the Cloister of Notre-Dame Abbey'
Félix Benoist (French, 1818–1896)

All of this, however, was completely lost on Monsieur Genès. He possessed not a suspicion of its meaning; looking at the Last Supper, he mistook the plates for cards, the cups for dice, and said, in astonishment: 'They're gambling.' What a farce.

From Plougastel, you reach the coast through the woods, down a steep slope from which you can see part of the harbour, at least the long stretch from Brest to Landerneau, which forms the mouth of the river (*the Elorn*). Beside you rises a perpendicular cliff of white rock, horizontally striped by layers of flint, and bare on the seaward side, though behind, on the plateau, it is covered with oak and beech trees laden with foliage, a plateau which, as you descend through the valley, cleaving its mass, gradually reveals its striking shape.

Here we embarked, thus avoiding, as in Landévennec, a circuit of the cove, the uneven borders of the roadstead cutting into the land, in a thousand capricious clefts, which it would take a whole day to traverse.

Before setting sail, Monsieur Genès, feeling a thirst coming on, invited us to join him at a tavern he knew. Finding the service slow, he descended to the cellar to fetch the wine himself, and took the glasses from the sideboard. As we greatly feared he would buy us drinks, since reciprocation would have been mandatory, we hastened to pay up, down our drinks, and leave as quickly as possible.

Monsieur Genès, on the contrary, wished to sit at a table for a while, and refresh himself; he asked for strawberries, and enquired if there was any coffee; however, the boatman was waiting, the tide was high, and we were obliged to depart.

The waves leapt onto the cobblestones of the slipway where the boat bounced about, its keel grating; foam splashed onto the passengers who were boarding; a cap fell into the water, and Monsieur Genès' boots were wetted. The sea was lively; the breeze was strong. Tossed about by the waves and buffeted by a north-westerly wind that pushed us to the far end of the bay, the heavy longboat made little progress. While the men were hauling on the oars, it would rise at the bow and pivot, caught on the crests of the waves. These were numerous, white at their summits, green in their troughs, murmuring, and jostling each other with playful frenzy. A brig ahead of us showed its sails, puffed out by the wind as it tacked, and the curved shape of its hull, then slid away gently, cutting through the water lapping against its keel.

On the horizon, Brest appeared as a grey dot. All around, within a fifty-mile wide amphitheatre of pale cliffs, stretched the sea. At my feet, on the boards of the longboat, was a birdcage containing a blackbird caught that morning being taken to the city; it called out in fear at the sound of the waves.



'The Château de Brest'
Eugène Cicéri (French, 1813–1890)

Next to the cage, also on the ground, hiding her face with her hands, a young woman sat in a desperate attitude; sobbing, praying, begging everyone to save her, swearing never to return to Plougastel, and crying out that she was going to die. She was a small, dark-haired woman, fat, dirty, unkempt, and poorly dressed, her broad splayed-out feet encased in blue stockings and shoes without laces, with a worn black apron covering her belly, who was at an advanced stage of pregnancy. As we moved further from the shore, her terror grew, and she drew ever closer to me, clinging to someone, grasping at anything. With the rise of a stronger wave, she threw herself at my feet and, embracing me by the hips, buried her face between my thighs, refusing to emerge; her earrings rubbing against my hands, I felt her breasts heaving against my knees, and her whole body, trembling with fear, pressed against mine.

I enjoyed the sensation, and why? Is it because we empathise with others more when we feel stronger than they? Or is male virility, complemented by female weakness, enhanced by vanity and sharpened by appetite? In that simple closeness lay the entire relationship between the sexes and, as it were, the communication of their natures. Whatever the reason, it was not without a tenderness of a kind, and I wished the journey longer. Though her eyes were clogged from crying!

We were waiting for the moment of disembarkation, so we could leap out before everyone else and escape Monsieur Genès, whose company had become utterly intolerable. Rather than spend another quarter of an hour in his company, we would have abandoned Brest, and slept beneath the stars; our intent was thwarted, we were stunned, dazed. He was the first to quit the boat, and as there was a tavern on shore, he wanted to return the favour and immediately offered us a bottle of wine, his eternal desire.

— 'Thank you, it's too hot.'

— 'A little beer, then.'

— 'It's too heavy, it makes walking harder.'

— 'A small glass?

— 'We never do.'

— 'A liqueur?

— 'Thank you very much, but we're in a hurry.'

— 'A coffee! Oh! A coffee!'

— 'No, no, no, definitely not; farewell.'

He stopped, hesitated for a moment, and then, with a sublime gesture, said: 'Well, I'll have some anyway; go on! I'll join you, later.'

How we sped along! Not running, but flying! Lighter than a feather; the fear of God, and the joy of being free of him, propelled us forward, with the speed of a wagon pulled by a pair of powerful locomotives. Every moment we seemed to hear him behind us, and dared not turn our heads for fear of catching a glimpse of his hat.

Brest, however, seemed to elude us. No matter how much we sweated, or how quickly we advanced, the road seemed to stretch on forever, the hill ascending endlessly. We encountered countless walkers, sailors, soldiers, children in the arms of their nannies, bourgeois folk, taking the

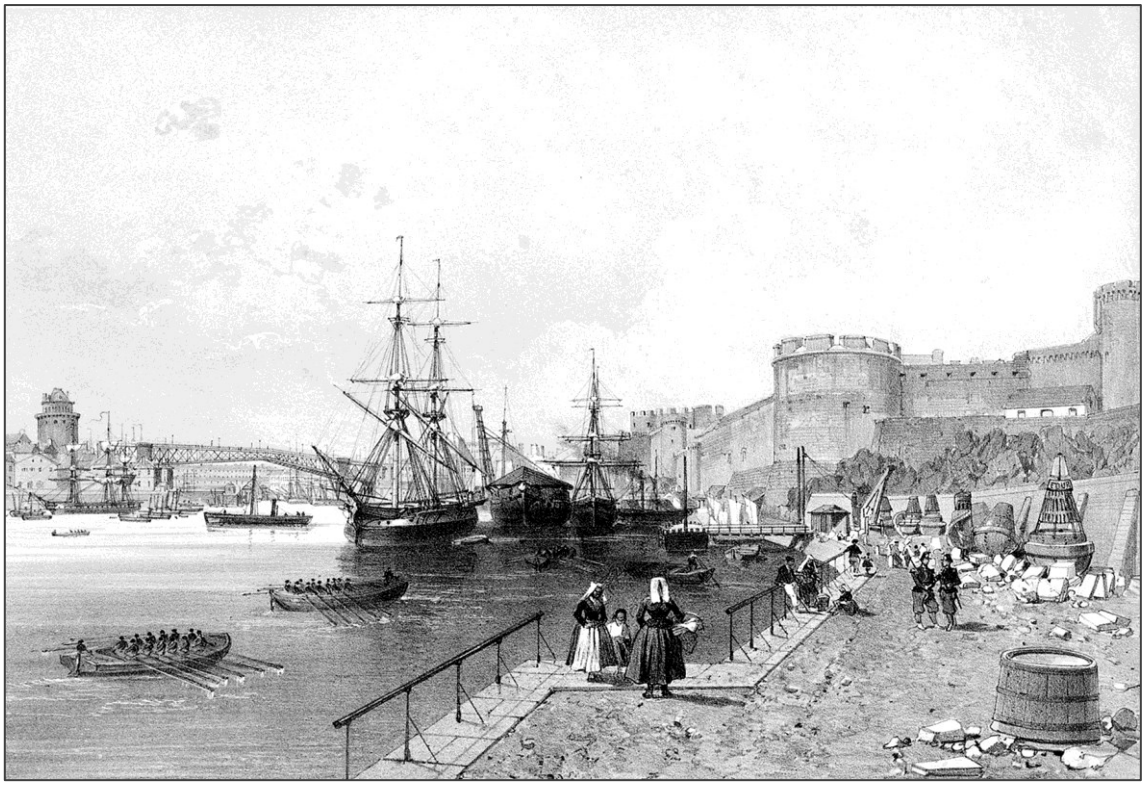
air or off to dine at their country houses, in little family carriages; everything seemed to indicate the approach of a town, yet the town seemed ever-receding. Finally, unable to bear it any longer, we entered a wheat field and collapsed to the ground, exhausted, panting like nags. A cloudburst overtook us, forcing us to pick up our knapsacks, and a quarter of an hour later, Brest, thank heavens, revealed its rooftops to us. The first person we saw on entering the town was Monsieur Genès. He had passed us by, doubtless when we were in the field, and was in conversation with a policeman, but we were now no longer afraid of him; we had arrived, more or less, since before reaching the gates of Brest one still has to traverse a suburb, via a long street, a continuation of the main road, lined here and there with butchers' shops and wine merchants, whose patriotic signs shine next to large dilapidated cabaret-restaurants possessing rooms for a hundred people, with garlands painted on all their floors.

People stopped to see us; we were worth the view. Bare-chested, shirts billowing in the breeze, cravats around our waists, bags over our shoulders, white with dust, tanned by the sun, our clothes torn, our shoes worn and patched, we had a handsome, vagabond air about us, insolent and proud; our shoes' iron studs rang on the cobblestones, our knapsacks kept time as we marched, our sticks rose and fell in harmony, and the smoke from our pipes escaping from beneath the edge of our hats curled upwards in plumes.

The officers, astonished by this attire, looked at us with a stunned expression; children followed us from a distance; and we were stopped and asked for our passports.

Nonetheless, on arriving at the hotel, we were glad to wash in hot water, sleep in a clean bed, and sit in an armchair. We immersed ourselves in the delights of civilisation, bathed, and ate no veal.

If you are neither an engineer, a builder, or a blacksmith, Brest holds little appeal. The port is beautiful, I will grant; magnificent, perhaps; gigantic, if one insists. '*Very imposing*', as they say, '*giving one the impression of a great nation*'. But all those piles of cannon, cannonballs, and anchors, the endless stretch of quays bordering a motionless, uneventful sea, a subjugated sea that has the air of a galley slave, and those vast, rectangular workshops in which machines groan amidst a constant clanking of chains, like the sound of rows of convicts marching, or work away effortlessly in silence — all that sombre, merciless, constrained power, that mass of organised effort, quickly fills your mind with ennui, and tires your eyes. We wandered endlessly over cobblestones, shells, and the rocks with which the port is bounded, over heaps of iron, hooped beams, and dry basins containing the naked carcasses of ships, forever meeting the grey walls of the prison, where a man leaning out of the windows tests the strength of the embedded bars by striking them with a hammer.

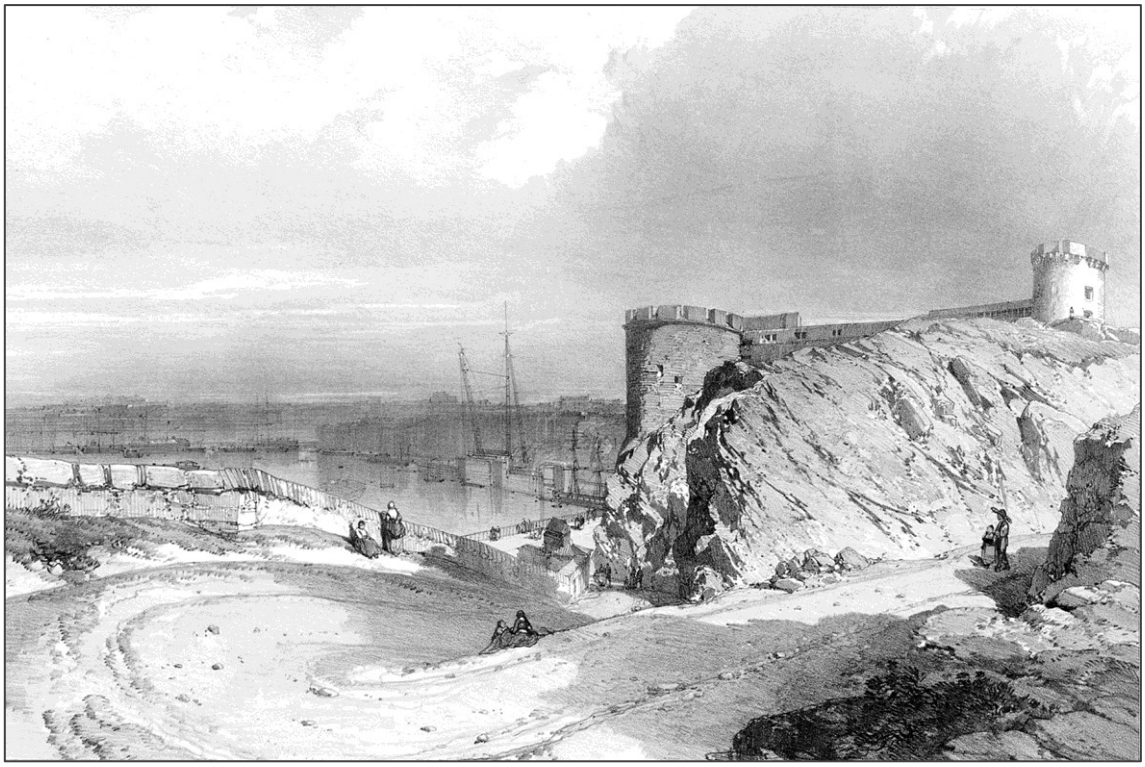


'Brest: the Château, the Bridge and the Harbour Entrance'
Félix Benoist (French, 1818–1896) and Adolphe Jean-Baptiste Bayot (French, 1810–1871)

Here Nature is absent, proscribed, as nowhere else on Earth, the place being Nature's negation, presenting itself as her stubborn enemy, both in the form of the iron levers that break the rock, and in the sword of the prison guard who harasses the galley slaves.



'The Old Château de Brest'
Eugène Cicéri (French, 1813–1890)



'The Château de Brest: the Tour César'
Eugène Cicéri (French, 1813–1890)

Apart from the arsenal and the prison, here are only barracks, guardhouses, fortifications, ditches, uniforms, bayonets, sabre, and drums. From morning till night, military music sounds beneath your windows; soldiers march through the streets, manoeuvring to and fro; the bugle is always sounding, and the troops always march in step. One understands, immediately, that the town is simply the arsenal, the rest exists only because of its presence, and that the arsenal overflows everywhere. In every form, in every place, at every corner, administration, discipline, lined-paper, the military framework, and military rule are evident. One appreciates the artificial symmetry, and the mindless cleanliness. At the naval hospital, for example, the floor of each ward is waxed in such a way that a convalescent trying to walk on a newly-healed leg is bound to break the other in slipping. But it is beautiful, it shines, one admires one's reflection. Between each room is a courtyard, but one into which the sun never shines and from which the grass is carefully weeded. The kitchens are superb, but so far away that in winter the meals reach the patients frozen solid. They indeed are the folk the place is for, but the pots and pans are gleaming are they not? We saw a man who had fractured his skull falling from a frigate and who, for eighteen hours, had still not received any help; but his sheets were pristine, since the linen room is well maintained.



'The Keep of the Château de Brest'
Auguste Étienne François Mayer (French, 1805–1890)

At the prison hospital, I was moved to tears, like a child, when I saw a litter of kittens playing on a convict's lap. He made balls of paper for them, and they chased them across his blanket, holding onto the edges with their sharp claws. Then he turned them onto their backs, stroked them, and kissed them, and tucked them into his shirt. Sent back to his workbench, as he had doubtless been more than once, he will dream, when he is truly sad and weary, of those quiet hours he spent alone with them, feeling the softness of their fur in his rough hands, and their warm little bodies nestling against his heart. I like to believe, however, that the regulations forbade such recreation and that it was, doubtless, an act of charity on the part of the nuns who act as nurses.

However, here as elsewhere, the rules are not without their exceptions, and distinctions of rank are retained, whatever they say (equality being a lie, even in a penal colony). For from the numbered cap a finely perfumed lock of hair sometimes emerges, just as a sleeve often rises from the end of a red shirt to grasp a white hand. There are special privileges reserved, it seems, for certain professions, for certain men. How could they, despite the rules and their comrades' jealousy, have attained this eccentric state that renders them almost feigned galley-slaves, a position they nevertheless take for granted, none challenging the fact? At the entrance to the boatyard, you will find a dentist's table equipped with all the tools of the trade. On the wall, in an attractive glass frame, are rows of yawning dentures, beside which the dentist stands, advertising his presence as you pass by. He remains there all day in his little establishment, busily polishing his tools, and assembling his rows of molars. There, far from any guard, he can chat comfortably with passers-by, obtain news of the medical world, and practice his craft like a licensed professional. At this very moment, he is no doubt applying the ether. A little more freedom, and he would acquire students and be teaching others. But the most level-headed man is Father Lacolonge. A mediator between the convicts and the church, he is utilised by the authorities in influencing the prisoners who, for their part, turn to him for favours. He lives apart, in a small, very clean room, has a servant, eats large bowls of Plougastel strawberries, drinks his coffee, and reads the newspapers.

The clergymen, moreover, enjoy special consideration; they meet, hold religious conferences among themselves, perform the Mass, hear confessions, and serve communion gladly; it is like a little seminary, a chaplaincy, only the costumes are missing for the illusion to be complete.

If Lacolonge is the head of the penal colony, Ambrose is its arm. Ambrose is a magnificent Black African, nearly six feet tall, who, in the sixteenth century, would have been a truly admirable front for some gentleman or other. Heliogabalus must have kept some such guardian at home, to amuse himself, at supper-time, watching the latter strangle a Numidian lion with his bare hands, or fell gladiators with his bare fists. He has lustrous, intensely black skin with a steely blue sheen, and a slender, powerfully built figure like a tiger's, his teeth so white they are almost frightening. King of the prison by right of strength, he is feared and admired; his reputation as a Hercules makes it his duty to test new arrivals, and, so far, these trials have all redounded to his glory. He bends iron bars on his knee, lifts three men on his arm, knocks eight over by merely stretching, and eats triple portions daily, for he has an insatiable appetite, in fact appetites of every kind, and a heroic constitution. His favourite is a young Arab of whom he is furiously jealous, and who remains faithful to him for fear of being slain.

We saw him in the botanical garden, tending the plants. You will find him there, in his heated greenhouse, behind the aloes and dwarf-palms, busily turning the soil in the beds, or cleaning the cold-frames. On a Thursday, the day of public visits, Ambrose receives, behind the orange crates,

one of his mistresses, for he has several; more indeed than he wants. He acquires them, either by means of his charm, strength, or cash of which he usually has a plentiful supply, and which he spends lavishly whenever it is a question of pleasure. As a result, he is very popular with a certain class of ladies, and perhaps his superior, who placed him there, has never been so loved.

In the centre of the garden, on the surface of a clear pond, its bank shaded by a weeping willow, rides a swan. It paddles about, gliding over the entire pond with a single motion of its feet, circling it a hundred times, and never thinking of leaving. To pass the time, it amuses itself by consuming the goldfish.

Further along the wall, a few cages had been built to house rare animals brought from overseas, destined for the Paris Zoological Gardens. Most of these were empty when we were there. In front of one of them, in a narrow, gated courtyard, a convict wearing thin boots was instructing a young wildcat, teaching it to obey his commands like a dog. Is his own slavery insufficient, that he must enslave another? The blows from a stick with which he himself is threatened he thus inflicts on the wildcat, which, one fine day, no doubt, will take its revenge by leaping over the fence and biting the swan in the neck.

One evening, when the moon gleamed on the cobblestones, and the respectable male citizens of Brest were asleep in the arms of their wives or maids, we decided to take a stroll through the *streets of infamy*, so-called. There are plenty of them. The regular army, the navy, and the artillery each have their own, not to mention the prison, which alone occupies an entire quarter of the city. Seven parallel alleyways, running from behind the walls, make up what is called Keravel, inhabited only by the mistresses of the military-men and the convicts. The old wooden houses are huddled together, their doors closed, their windows tightly shut, their awnings raised. No sound can be heard, no one is seen; not a single light shines from the dormer windows; at the end of each alley, only the long yellow beams cast by a lamp, swaying a little in the wind, oscillate on the cobblestones. The rest is rendered all the darker. In the moonlight, these silent houses, with their uneven roofs, are strangely silhouetted.

When do their doors open? At unknown hours, at the quietest moments, on the darkest nights. Then the prison guard slips from his post, and the convict escapes from his cell, often in company, helping and protecting each other; then, when day returns, the convict climbs the wall, the prison guard turns away his gaze, and no one is any the wiser.

In the naval quarter, on the contrary, everything is on display and flaunted. It blazes; it teems with life. Its cheerful houses greet you with their noisy hum and glaring light as you pass. People shout, dance, argue, and revel. In the large, low-ceilinged ground-floor rooms, women in nightgowns sit on benches along the whitewashed wall above which a lamp hangs; others, on the thresholds of doorways, call out to you, their animated faces dark against the backdrop of the illuminated 'dive', where the clinking of glasses, and the cries induced by rough caresses echo. One hears the sound of kisses on fleshy shoulders, and the pleasant laughter of some good-natured redhead, whose breasts spill from her chemise, as her hair does from beneath her cap, in the arms of a tanned sailor who holds her on his knee, The men outside peer through the windows or converse quietly with the half-naked flirtatious women who lean close to their faces. Groups linger; they wait. It is all enacted casually, as the mood takes them. As conscientious travellers who wish to study things closely, we entered. Enacted, yet the details are never described! 'How improper! Oh, what a disgusting book! Visiting prostitutes, and writing about doing so! What on earth is the

world coming to? What repulsive literature! Impudence can go no further. It's all so cynical, and immoral! How can one not blush…?'

We entered one of these establishments that Providence has placed in cities, which like the sewers are *unpleasant but necessary* as the economists say. It was neither among the worst nor was it the best.

In a drawing room draped with red wallpaper, three or four young ladies were seated around a circular table, while a gentleman in a cap, smoking his pipe on the sofa, greeted us politely as we entered. The women wore modest outfits, Parisian dresses.

The mahogany furniture was covered in red Utrecht fabric, the floor was waxed, and the walls adorned with images of Imperial battles. O virtue, you are beautiful, for vice is truly foolish!

With a woman whose hands would have been enough to abate the most robust satyriasis beside me, and not knowing what else to do, I bought drinks for the company.

I lit a cigar, and reclined in a corner, and there, very sad and heartbroken, while the hoarse voices of the women squealed and the little glasses were emptied, I said to myself: 'Where is She? Where is She? Is She dead to the world, and will men never see her again?

She was beautiful, long ago, standing at the edge of promontories, or traversing the peristyles of the temples, the golden fringe of her white tunic trailing over her pink feet, or, seated on Persian cushions, conversing with wise men while turning her cameo necklace about in her fingers.

She was beautiful, standing naked on the threshold of her *cella* in her street in Suburra (*a populous and notorious district of ancient Rome*), beneath the resin torch crackling in the night, singing her slow Campanian lament, heard sounding on the Tiber above the drifting orgiastic refrains.

She was beautiful in her ancient house in the city, behind leaded glass, between noisy students and debauched monks, where, without fear of the watch, they banged their large tin pots hard on the oak tables, and the worm-eaten beds broke under the weight of their bodies.

She was beautiful, reclining on a green carpet, eyeing the provincials and their purses, with her high heels, her wasp-thin waist, her frosted wig whose fragrant powder fell on her shoulders, a rose at her side, and a beauty mark on her cheek.

She was beautiful still, amidst the goatskins of the Cossacks, and the English uniforms, pushing through the crowds of men, showing her gleaming breast on the steps of gambling houses, beneath the goldsmiths' canopies, in the light of cafés, torn between hunger and the presence of cash.

What should one mourn? The monarchy? Nobility, faith, the priests? For myself, I mourn the *hetaerae*, the prostitutes.…On the boulevard again, one evening, I saw her pass by, beneath the gaslights, alert, silent, her eyes darting about, her feet dragging along the pavement. I saw her pale face at street corners, rain falling on the flowers in her hair, as her sweet voice called to the men, and her flesh shivered at the borders of her black satin dress. That was her last evening; she failed to reappear on the next.

None need fear her return, for she is dead, quite dead! Her dress is decent now, her manners good, she shies away from coarse words, and keeps whatever money she earns in the savings bank.

The street, swept of her presence, has lost the only poetry that remained to it; the gutter has been cleansed, the rubbish sifted.'

That's what I was thinking on that sofa, chewing my unlit cigar. I did no more than that, and as we retreated, we lamented, in our hearts, the lost soul whose empty caricature had chilled us with its tedium.

In ages past, when one went for a walk, one had the chance to meet bears, and street performers, Basque-drummers, and monkeys dressed in red coats dancing on the back of dromedaries, but all of that is done with, chased away, outlawed without hope of reprieve; the guillotine is outside the barrier now, and operates in secret, the convicts travel in closed carriages, and processions are forbidden!

In a little while, the acrobats too will have disappeared, giving way to séances involving magnetism, and Reformist banquets, while the tightrope-walker bounding through the air, in her sequinned dress, clasping her long balancing pole, will be as distant from us as the bayadère of the Ganges.

Of all that beautiful, colourful world, rustling and murmuring like fantasy itself, melancholy and sonorous, bitter and playful, full of intimate pathos and brilliant ironies, where misery was warm, where grace was saddened; of all that last cry of a lost age, of strange folk said to have come from the other end of the earth, recalled, like a vague memory or a dying echo of idolised joys, by the tinkling bells of some gypsy caravan departing on the highway, with rolled-up canvas tied below its roof, and muddy dogs beneath its frame; of it all, only a man in a yellow jacket smearing nutmeg into tin cups, the mediocre puppets of the Champs-Élysées, and the guitar players in the cabarets beyond the city limits, and they alone, remain.

It is true that we have, on the other hand, been treated to many a more sophisticated and comical antic. But is the new grotesquerie as good as the old? Do you prefer Tom Thumb, or the Palace of Versailles? On a wooden platform that served as a balcony to a square grey canvas tent, a man in a smock was playing a drum; behind him stood a large painted sign depicting a sheep, a cow, and various ladies, gentlemen, and soldiers. Here were two young prodigies from Guérande, *with one arm and four shoulders*. Their same showman or stage manager, shouting loud enough to burst, announced, among other things, various ferocious animal fights that were about to commence. Below the platform, a donkey could be seen; three bears were dozing nearby, and the barking of dogs, rising from inside the booth, mingled with the dull thud of the drum, the staccato shouts of the owner of the two young freaks, and those of another odd fellow, not as stocky, square-jawed, jovial, or robust as the former, but tall and thin, with a sinister face, and dressed in a tattered cloak: he was the other man's partner; they had met on the road and joined forces. One owned the bears, the donkey, and the dogs; the other had brought the two freaks, and a grey felt hat used in the performances.

The open-air theatre, exposed to the sky, was walled by grey canvas fluttering in the wind, ready to fly off, were it not for the stakes that held it down. A rail bordering and containing the spectators ran along the sides of the arena where in a secluded corner, nibbling at a loose bundle of hay, one could indeed recognise the two young prodigies, still clothed in their magnificent costumes. In the centre, a long pole had been driven into the ground, and here and there dogs, struggling, pulling, and barking, were tethered with rope to other, smaller pieces of wood. The drum continued to beat, shouts rose from the platform, the bears growled, and a crowd gathered.

The show began with them bringing in a poor bear, three-quarters paralyzed, who seemed to be utterly bored. He was muzzled, with a collar round his neck from which an iron chain hung, a cord passed through his nostrils to render him obedient, and a kind of leather hood on his head that protected the ears. He was tethered to the central pole; at which action arose a renewed outpouring of sharp, hoarse, furious barking. The dogs reared, bristled, and scratched the ground, their rumps high, mouths low, and legs spread, while, in two of the corners, facing each other, their masters shouted to further excite them. Three mastiffs were released at first; They rushed at the bear, which began to circle the post, while the dogs chased after it, jostling and yelping, sometimes being knocked down and half-crushed beneath its paws, then rising immediately and leaping up to hang from its head, which it shook in vain, unable to rid itself of that crown of frenzied bodies that writhed and bit. Their eyes fixed on the battle, the two masters waited for the precise moment when the bear was about to be strangled; then they would pounce, and tear the dogs away, dragging them off by the neck, and biting their tails to make them release their grip. The animals whimpered in pain, but refused to give way. The bear struggled beneath the dogs, the dogs bit the bear, the men bit the dogs. A young bulldog, among others, distinguished himself by his ferocity; Clinging by his teeth to the bear's spine, no matter how much the men chewed at his tail, bent him in two, squeezed his testicles, and tore his ears, he declined to loosen his grip, and they were obliged to fetch a spade to forcibly unclench his teeth. Once the melee was separated, each species rested, the bear lay down, the dogs panted, with their tongues hanging out, while the men, sweating, removed the strands of hair lodged between their teeth, and the dust, raised by the fight, that had scattered in the air and descended on the heads of the public all around.

Two more bears were brought in one after the other, one of which imitated a gardener, went hunting, waltzed, put on a hat, greeted the company, and played dead. After him came the donkey's turn. He defended himself well; his kicks sent the dogs, that clutched at his tail, flying like balloons; lowering his ears, and extending his muzzle, he sped about, always seeking to trample them beneath his front hooves, as they circled him and leapt at his jaw. He was nonetheless rendered breathless, shivering with fear, and covered in drops of blood, which ran down his legs, made scabby by the scars of his wounds, and moistened the worn surface of his hooves with sweat.

But the most spectacular event was a general dogfight; all participated, large and small, wolfhounds and bulldogs, black, white, spotted, and red. A good fifteen minutes was spent beforehand rousing them against each other. The owners, holding them by the legs, turned their heads to show them their adversaries while jeering violently at the latter. The lean fellow, in particular, laboured away with all his heart; he would expel from his throat, with a brutal jerk, a burst of hoarse, raspy, ferocious sound that inspired anger in the whole irritated gang. As serious as a conductor at his music stand, he absorbed the discordant clamour, directed it, and reinforced it; but once the mastiffs were unleashed, and began tearing each other apart and howling, enthusiasm seized him, he revelled in the contest, scarcely recognisable as he barked, applauded, writhed, stamped his feet, made gestures as of a dog attacking, threw his body forward as they did, and shook his head like them; he would have liked to bite too, to be bitten, to be a dog himself, to possess a muzzle, so as to roll about there, in the midst of the dust, cries, and blood; to feel his fangs in their hairy hides, in their warm flesh, swim at the heart of the whirlpool, and struggle there to his heart's content.

There was a crucial moment when all the dogs, piled one on top of the other, a teeming mass of paws, loins, tails, and ears, swayed across the arena without breaking apart, charged the railing, broke it, and threatened to injure the two young prodigies in their corner. Their master paled, jumped, and his partner rushed over. That's when tails were bitten again, punches were thrown, kicks were exchanged, and everyone hastened to separate them. The dogs seized haphazardly, extracted from the group, and tossed over someone's shoulder, flew through the air like bales of hay being gathered. I caught a glimpse, of the two young prodigies, about to be reduced, in a flash, to the state of lumps of meat, and I trembled for the arm they carried across their backs.

Doubtless stirred by the altercation, they made a show of being seen. The cow backed away, the sheep butted with its horns; finally, their green covers with yellow fringes were removed; their appendage was exhibited, and thus ended the performance.

This kind of 'literature' (as literary as many others, after all) is very popular in Brest. The second time we returned there, a citizen had brought his dog to fight, and an artilleryman was preparing to engage the three bears. Unfortunately, a sergeant happened to pass by and ordered him back to barracks; the public were outraged at this, and so were we.

What else is there to see in Brest? Some rather drab houses, a theatre where no plays are performed (imagine if they were!), deplorable churches, a square parade-ground, and a promenade, admittedly quite beautiful, which overlooks the sea and is lined with tall trees, beneath which the local high society gathers in the evenings. On the other side of the harbour lies the old Recouvrance district. We ascended a long, straight street, the middle of which was occupied by a row of stalls belonging to second-hand dealers, and scrap-metal merchants, and finally arrived at the esplanade on the last of the ramparts. That day the sky was cloudless, completely blue, as was the sea; at the entrance to the port, the sea breeze breaking against the reefs formed a long white line of foam stretching across that entire part of the horizon; the ships lay at anchor, motionless; near to us, leaning forward to look out of a loophole, a sailor was gazing through his telescope, a commoner in a shirt was pulling a small child along in a cart, other children were playing in the ditches, dark green nettles were growing at the foot of the walls, and the sun was shining on the sentries' copper armour.



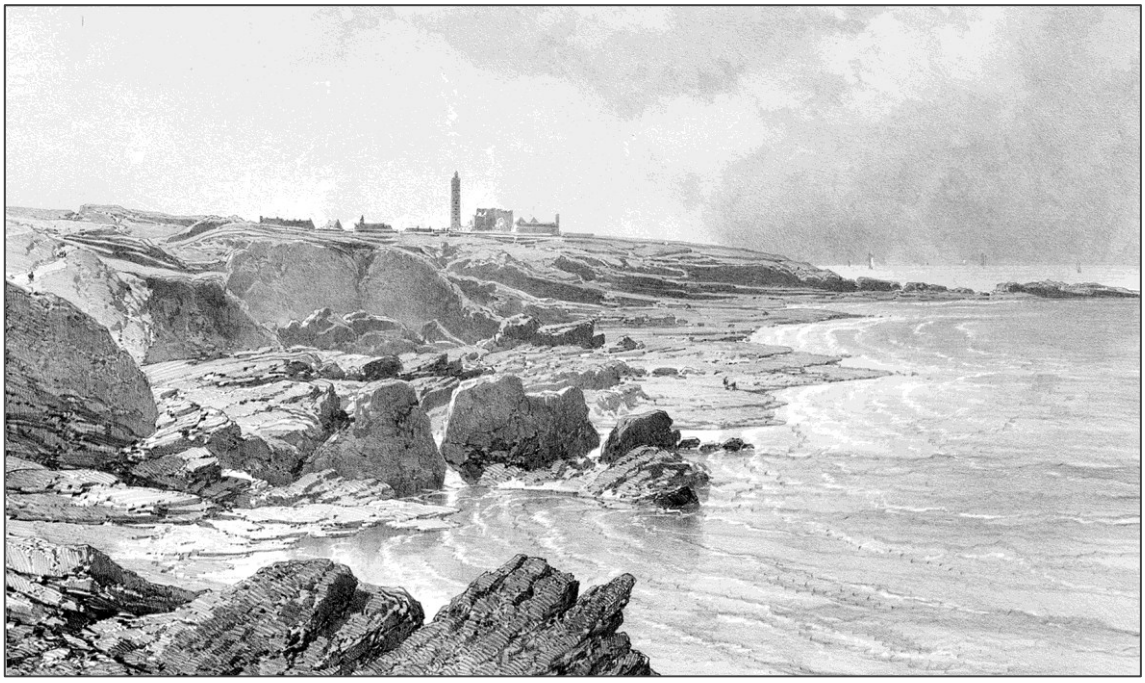
'Recouvrance, Brest'
Eugène Cicéri (French, 1813–1890)

The countryside surrounding Brest lacks the silence of the wild areas around Crozon and Landévennec, but the trees are more numerous, and greener, almost black. As far as Le Conquet, the road, swimming in greenery, rises and falls, winding along the hillsides, and cutting through meadows; one drives between tall broom bushes.

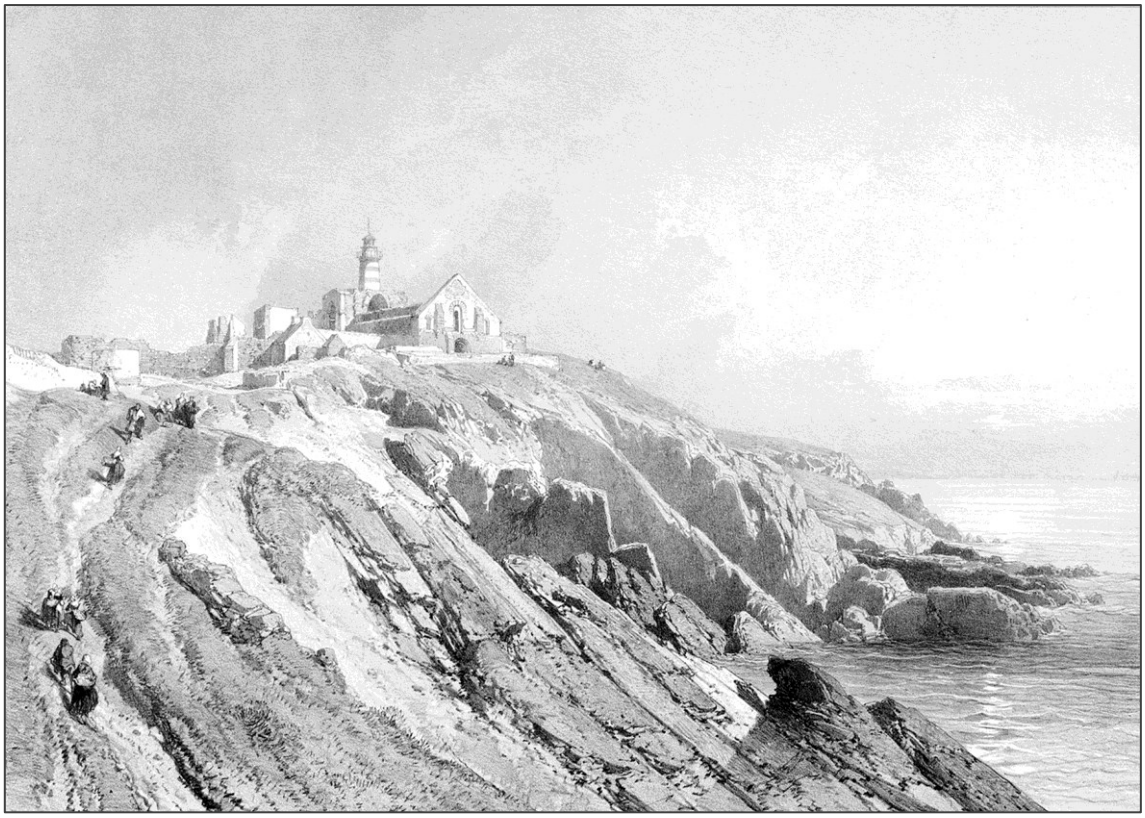
Don't bother to stop in Lochrist, to see the tomb of Michel Le Nobletz (*a Counter-Reformation missionary*), because the church (*Chapelle Saint-Michel*) is dreadful, the tomb is ridiculous, and Michel Le Nobletz resembles Saint Vincent de Paul, who was scarcely a handsome man. Le Conquet itself, a large, peaceful town whose inhabitants seem to have departed, would hardly be worth visiting if it were not for the ruined abbey of Saint-Mathieu (*de Fine Terre*) nearby. Open to the sky, the nave of the abandoned church receives every drop of rain, and in place of flagstones, between the columns where historiated torsos curl around the capitals, thick grass has grown; the bare walls are the colours of soot and bronze, the sharp tones blending into one another, stretching across the stone, capriciously, like uneven tatters of torn drapery. In other places, thin strands of grass hanging from the heights of the abbey seem to flow like great tears.



'The Coast of Finistère: Cap Saint-Mathieu'
Eugène Cicéri (French, 1813–1890)



'Cap Saint-Mathieu'
Eugène Cicéri (French, 1813–1890)



'Cap Saint-Mathieu'
Eugène Cicéri (French, 1813–1890)



'Cap Saint-Mathieu'
Eugène Cicéri (French, 1813–1890)



'Cap Saint-Mathieu'
Adolphe Jean-Baptiste Bayot (French, 1810–1871) and Auguste Étienne François Mayer (French, 1805–1890)

The wind from the sea, the waves of which beat against the base of the building, enters through the pointed arches of the windows, devoid of stained glass, where curlews perch on the ledges.



'Saint-Mathieu Abbey'
Auguste Étienne François Mayer (French, 1805–1890) and Eugène Cicéri (French, 1813–1890)

The building has only an aisle on the one side and, on the other, two lower counter-aisles; square pillars and round columns alternate, the main vault resting on clusters of colonnettes. Near the lighthouse built there (*in 1835*), inside a courtyard enclosed by a screen, there are cabbages, hemp, and leeks.



'Plougonvelin: Saint-Mathieu Abbey'
Félix Benoist (French, 1818–1896) and Adolphe Jean-Baptiste Bayot (French, 1810–1871)

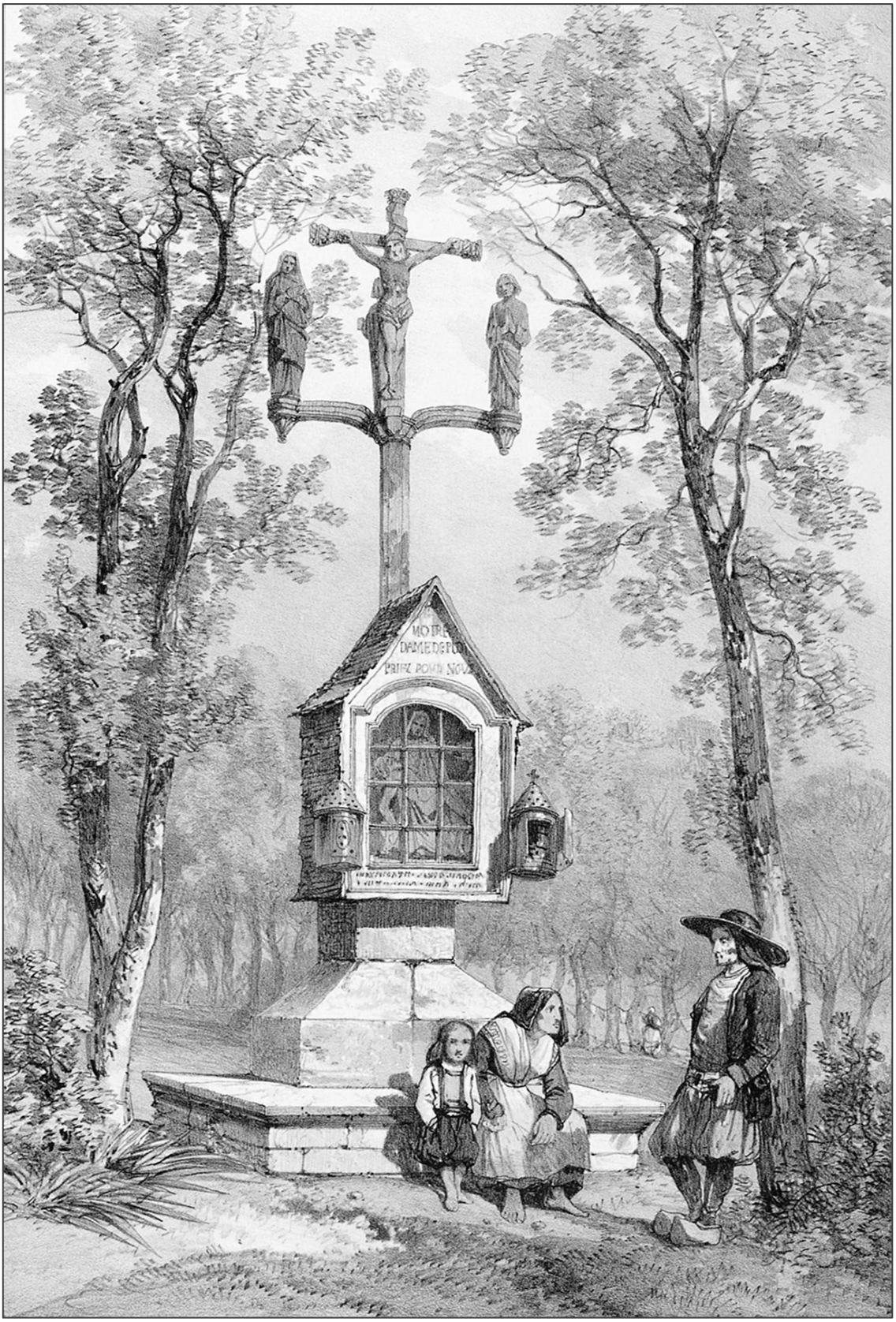
At the Lighthouse. — Here ends the old world; this is its furthest point, its 'extreme limit'. Behind you lies all of Europe, all of Asia; before you the sea, a whole ocean. However vast spaces may seem to us, are they not always bounded, as soon as we know their limits? Does one not see, from our beaches, the pavements of Brighton across the Channel, and, from the Provençal country houses, does one not embrace the entire Mediterranean, as if it were an immense azure basin in a

rocky cove, its edges sculpted by promontories covered in crumbling marble, yellow sands, drooping palm-trees, bare shores and widening gulfs? But here, nothing limits the imagination. Swift as the wind, thought can run, extending, wandering, losing itself, encountering only the waves as the wind and one's thoughts do; then, far beyond, profoundly far, there, on the horizon of our dreams, attaining the vague Americas, nameless islands perhaps, the lands of bright-red fruits, humming-birds, and savages; or the mind strays to the mute twilight of the poles, and spouting whales; or great cities lit with coloured glass, Japan with its porcelain roofs, China with its openwork staircases, adorning pagodas with golden bells.

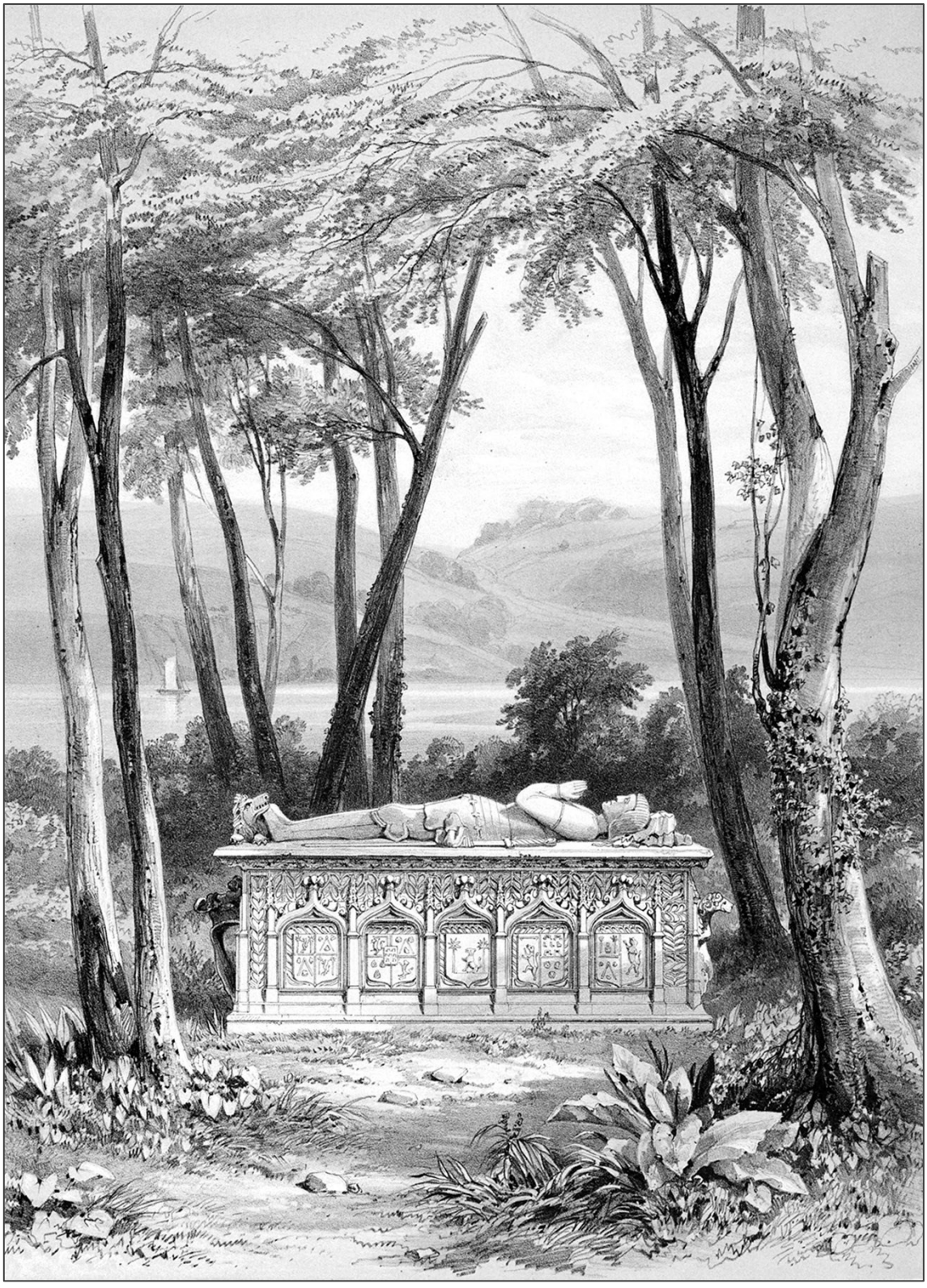
This is how the mind, in order to shrink an infinity which constantly wearies it, populates and animates that same. One cannot think of the desert without strings of camels, the Ocean without ships, the heart of the earth without the treasures one imagines it to hold.

We returned to Le Conquet along the cliff. Waves leapt at its base, racing in from the open sea; they crashed against the rocks, covering the large, motionless slabs with their swirling sheets of foam. Half an hour later, borne along in our carriage by two small, almost wild horses, we reached Brest, from which we departed with great pleasure two days later.

Moving away from the western coast, and towards the English Channel in the north, the region changes in appearance, it becomes less rugged, less Celtic, the dolmens rarer, the heath diminishing as the wheat spreads, and little by little one enters the fertile and flat country of Léon, which is as Monsieur Pitre-Chevalier (*Pierre-Michel-François Chevalier, author, historian and editor of Le Figaro)* so kindly said, 'the Attica of Brittany'.



‘A Stone Cross near Landerneau’
Léon Gaucherel (French, 1816–1886) and Eugène Cicéri (French, 1813–1890)



'The Tomb of Mondragon, Seigneur de la Palue, near Landerneau'
Léon Gaucherel (French, 1816–1886)

Landerneau is a town where there is a promenade of young elm trees by the river, and where we saw a frightened dog running through the streets with a saucepan attached to its tail.



‘The Belfry of Saint-Houardon, Landerneau’
Léon Gaucherel (French, 1816–1886) and Eugène Cicéri (French, 1813–1890)



'The Porch and Belfry of Saint-Houardon, Landerneau'
Félix Benoist (French, 1818–1896) and Adolphe Jean-Baptiste Bayot (French, 1810–1871)

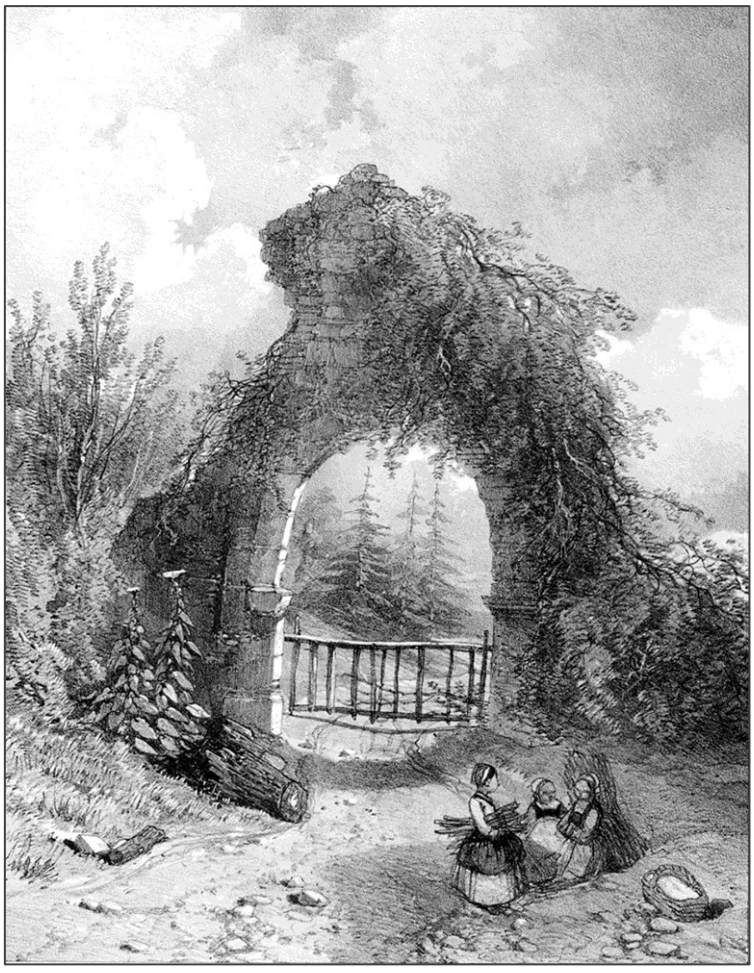


'The Old Place de la Halle, Landerneau'
Auguste Étienne François Mayer (French, 1805–1890) and Eugène Cicéri (French, 1813–1890)

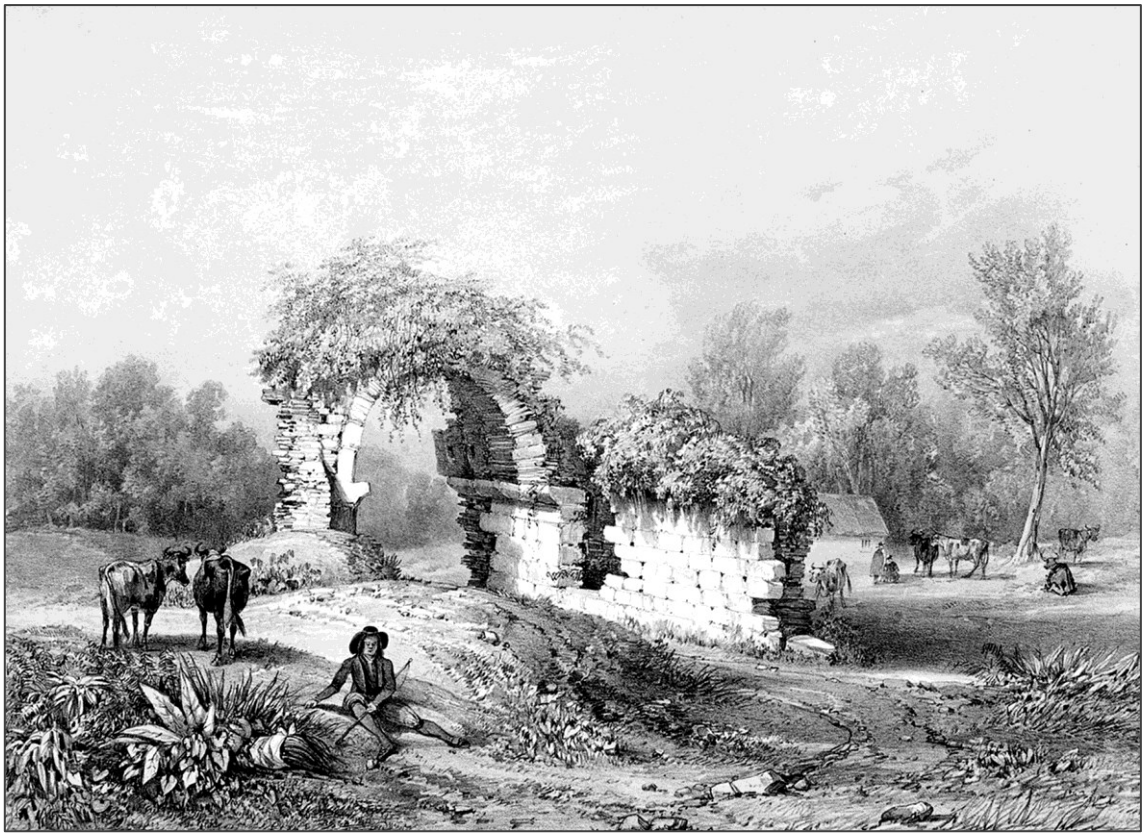
To reach Joyeuse-Garde (*the ruins of the sixth century château at La Forest-Landerneau, associated with the Arthurian legends*), one must first follow the banks of the Elorn, and then walk for a long time through a wood, along a sunken path, which no one ever uses. Sometimes the undergrowth thins out, and then, through the branches, a meadow appears, or perhaps the sail of a ship ascending the river. Our guide walked ahead of us, far off and apart. We two together trod that good woodland soil where purple clusters of heather grew in the soft grass, among the fallen leaves. We could smell strawberries, raspberries, and violets; on the tree trunks, long ferns spread their slender fronds. The air was heavy; the moss was warm. Hidden in the foliage, a cuckoo uttered its drawn-out call; in the clearings, midges buzzed, on invisible wings.



‘La Forest-Landerneau’
Auguste Étienne François Mayer （French, 1805–1890）



‘The Château de Joyeuse-Garde’
Auguste Étienne François Mayer （French, 1805–1890） and Eugène Cicéri （French, 1813–1890）



'La Forest-Landerneau: the Château de Joyeuse-Garde'
Auguste Étienne François Mayer (French, 1805–1890)

Peaceful in spirit, and swayed by the walk, freely indulging the idle fantasies which flowed from our open mouths, we discussed sounds, words, and colours; we spoke of the masters, their works, and the joy of ideas; we pondered stylistic approaches, the backgrounds to paintings, the angles of heads, techniques of drapery; we recited to each other noble and lengthy verses, their beauty unknown to others, which endlessly delighted us, and we rehearsed their rhythms, delved into the vocabulary, and spoke them aloud so musically that they almost became song. Then, it was as if far-off landscapes unfolded before us, some splendid figure appeared, we were seized by love for an Asian moonlit sky reflected on domes, we were moved by admiration for a word, or we savoured a simple, vivid phrase found in an old book.

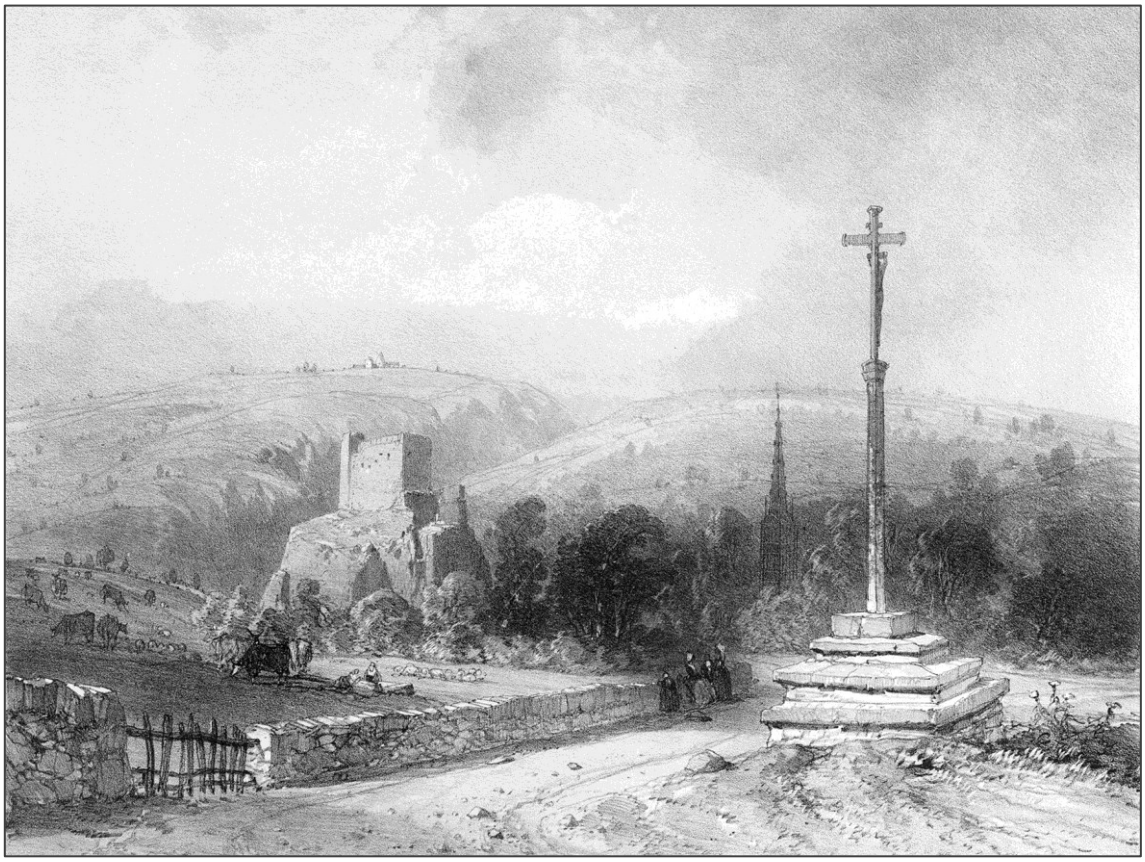
And reclining in the courtyard of Joyeuse-Garde, near the blocked underground passage, beneath the full arch of its single remaining portal covered with ivy, we talked about Shakespeare, and wondered if distant planets circling distant stars were inhabited

Then we left, having barely glanced at the ruined dwelling of Sir Lancelot, he whom a fairy snatched from his mother and nurtured at the bottom of a lake in a jewelled palace. The dwarves and their enchantments have vanished, the drawbridge departed, and lizards crawl where the beautiful Guinevere once walked, dreaming of her lover who had sailed to Trebizond (*a medieval city, now Trabzon in Turkey, and its empire, on the shores of the Black Sea*) to fight the giants.

We returned through the forest by the same paths; the shadows lengthened, bushes and flowers became indistinguishable, and the low mountains opposite showed their bluish peaks against the whitening sky. The river, is contained for a mile or so above the town by artificial banks, higher up it flows as it pleases and inundates the meadows it traverses; its long curve stretched ahead of

us into the distance, and the pools of water coloured by the setting sun looked like large golden platters, forgotten on the grass.

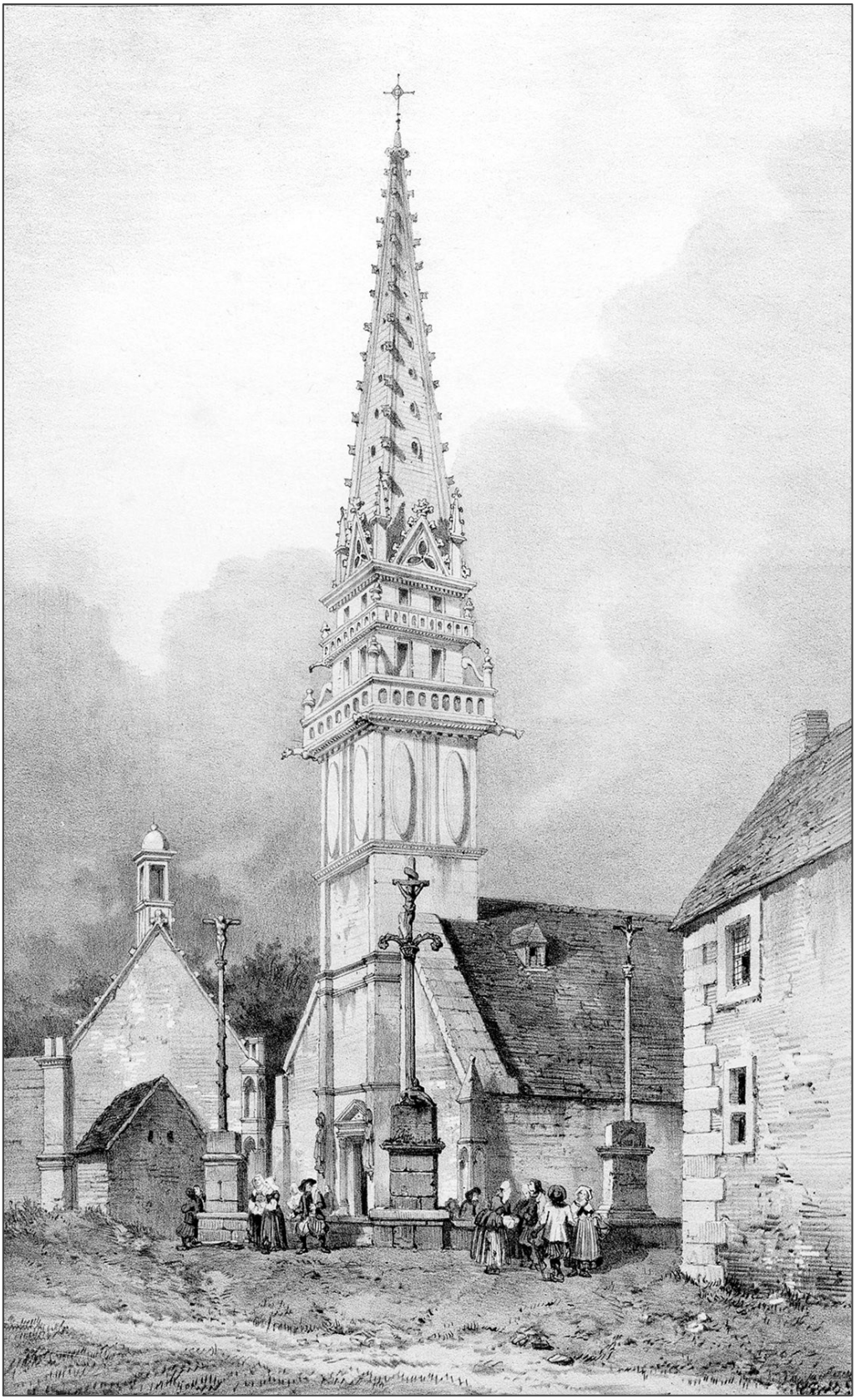
As far as La Roche-Maurice, the Elorn meanders alongside the road that skirts the base of the rocky hills whose uneven knolls jut out into the valley. We travelled along it at a gentle trot in a tranquil carriage driven by a child seated on the shaft. His hat, without ties, fluttered in the wind, and during the halts required to descend and retrieve it, we had ample time to admire the scenery.



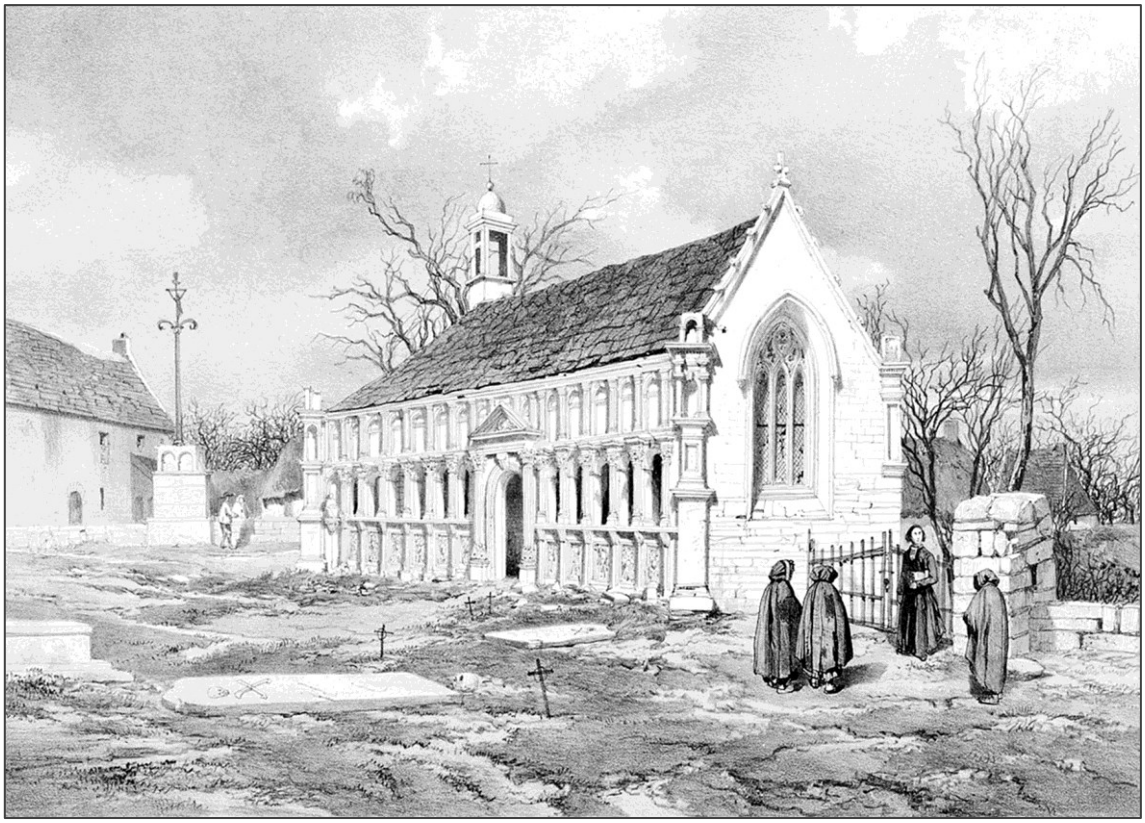
'From La Martyre to La Roche-Maurice'
Auguste Étienne François Mayer (French, 1805–1890) and Eugène Cicéri (French, 1813–1890)



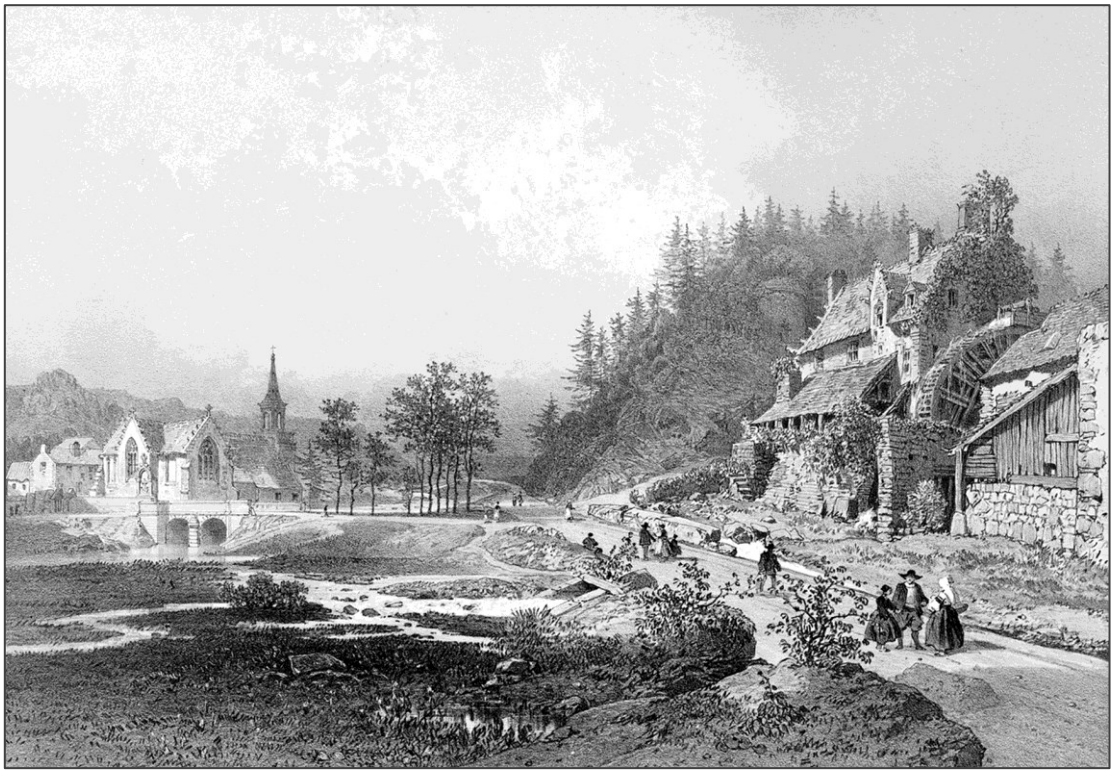
‘La Roche-Maurice, near Landerneau’
Adolphe Jean-Baptiste Bayot （French, 1810–1871） and Félix Benoist （French, 1818–1896）



'The Chapel, La Roche-Maurice'
Auguste Étienne François Mayer (French, 1805–1890)



'The Reliquary, La Roche-Maurice'
Auguste Étienne François Mayer (French, 1805–1890)



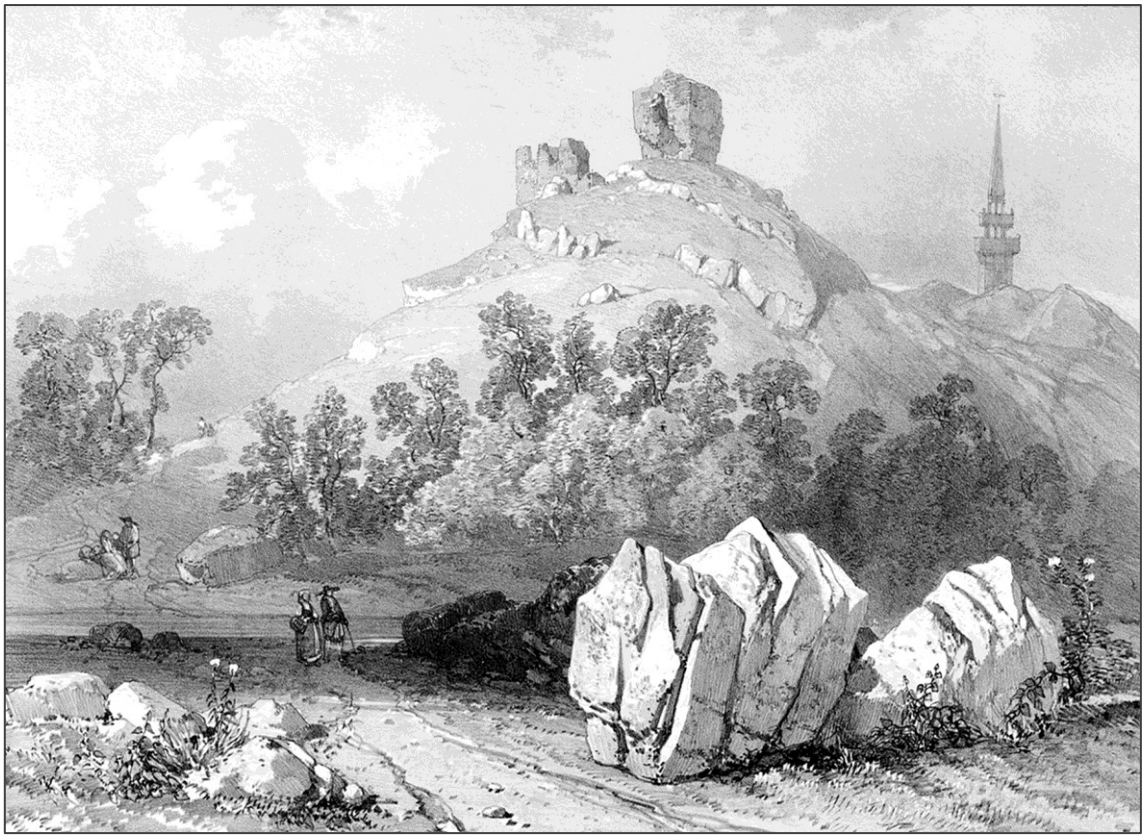
'La Roche-Maurice, the Mill and Church at Pont-Christ'
Félix Benoist (French, 1818–1896), Eugène Cicéri (French, 1813–1890) and Adolphe Jean-Baptiste Bayot (French, 1810–1871)

The Château de la Roche-Maurice was a true burgrave's castle, a vulture's nest on a hilltop. One ascends an almost sheer slope on which fallen blocks of masonry, here and there, serve as steps. From the very top, through a section of wall made of flat slabs laid one on top of the other, where wide window-arches still rise, one can view the countryside: woods, fields, the river flowing towards the sea, the white ribbon of the road stretching out, the jagged uneven crests of the hills, and the wide plain that separates them occupying the centre ground.



'The Château de la Roche-Maurice'
Léon Gaucherel (French, 1816–1886) and Eugène Cicéri (French, 1813–1890)

A fragment of a staircase still leads to a ruined tower. Here and there, cut stones emerge from among the grass, while the natural rock is apparent between the stones. The rock sometimes seemed as if it had taken on artificial forms of its own, while the ruin, on the contrary, seemed as if it had taken on a more natural appearance as it eroded, and returned to Nature.



'La Roche-Maurice'
Léon Gaucherel (French, 1816–1886) and Eugène Cicéri (French, 1813–1890)

From below, ivy clothes a large section of the wall; thin at its root, the plant widens into an inverted pyramid and, as it rises, its green colour darkens, so that it appears pale at the base and black at the top. Through an opening whose edges were hidden beneath the foliage, the sky shone, a deep blue.

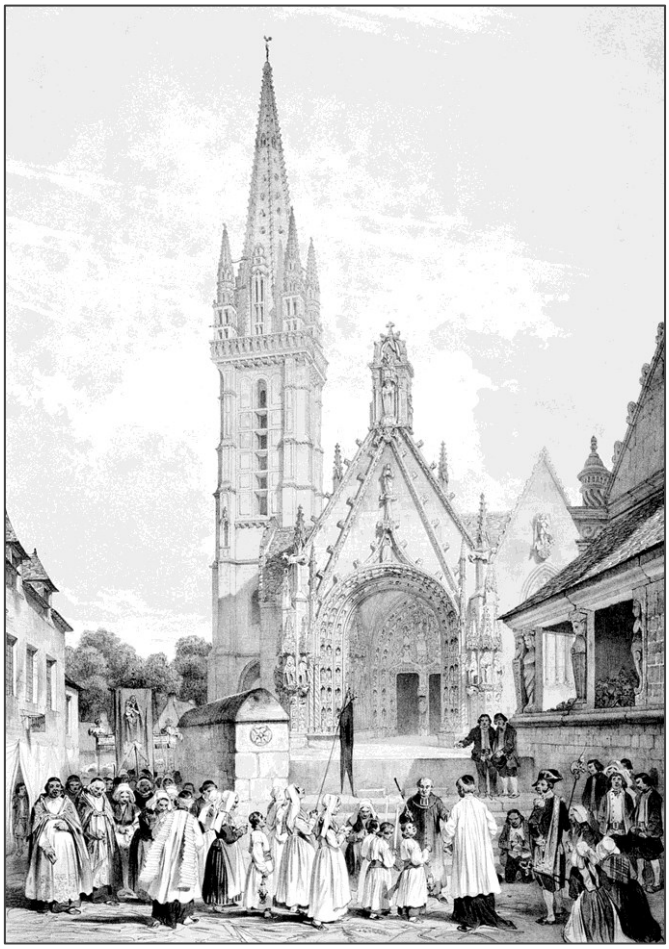
It was in these parts that the famous dragon lived, slain long ago by the knight Derrien on his return from the Holy Land. He attacked the creature as soon indeed as he had pulled the unfortunate Count Elorn from the water. Elorn had successively surrendered his slaves, vassals, and servants to the dragon (only his wife and his son Riok remained), and then thrown himself headfirst from the top of his tower into the river. The monster, mortally wounded, and bound by the scarf of its vanquisher, went, at Derrien's command, to drown itself in the sea at Poullbeuzaneval (*Pontusval*); as the dragon of the island of Batz is said to have done, at the command of Saint Pol de Léon, when bound by the stole of that Breton saint; and La Gargouille, the dragon of Rouen, when bound by the stole of Saint Romain (*which supposedly led to the tradition of mounting 'gargoyles' on cathedrals).*

How magnificent those ancient, and terrifying dragons were, the jaws savagely toothed front to back, the mouth spewing flames, the scaly form, consisting of a serpent's tail, bat's wings, lion's claws, a horse's body, and a rooster's head, ever rearing to strike like a basilisk! And any knight who fought one must have been a formidable lord! At first, as his horse snorted with fear and pawed the air, his lance would shatter against the beast's scales, and the smoke from its nostrils would blind him. He would finally dismount, and after a day-long battle, strike the dragon beneath its belly with a blow of his sword, which would remain embedded to the hilt. Black blood would

then gush forth in strong jets, and the people would escort the knight home in triumph, who then subsequently would become king of the land, and marry some beautiful lady.

But where did they come from, these dragons? What gave birth to them? Were they a confused memory of the monsters before the Flood? Were they dreams of long ago prompted by the fossilised remains of dinosaurs and pterosaurs, when terrified human beings imagined the sound of wings, or of feet treading the tall reeds, as the wind roared through their caves? Are we not moreover in the very land, here, of the Knights of the Round Table, the realm of faeries, the homeland of Merlin, the mythological cradle of lost epics that doubtless told of ancient kingdoms, that had become the subject of mere fantasy, and revealed details of sunken Breton cities: of Ys (*supposedly off Douarnenez*) and Herbadilla (*supposedly off Nantes*), splendid violent places, complete with royal enchantresses and their love affairs, kingdoms doubly erased, forever, by the sea that has passed over them, and the religion that has cursed their memory.

There is much one could write about this. What subject, is there, indeed, that one cannot write about? Except perhaps Landivisiau, for even the most verbose man is forced to be concise when material is lacking. I have noticed that the most admirable of places are generally the least appealing; they are like virtuous women — we praise them, but then move on to others. Here, certainly, is the most fertile corner of Brittany; the peasants seem less poor, the fields better cultivated, the rapeseed magnificent, the roads well-maintained, and yet it bores one to death.

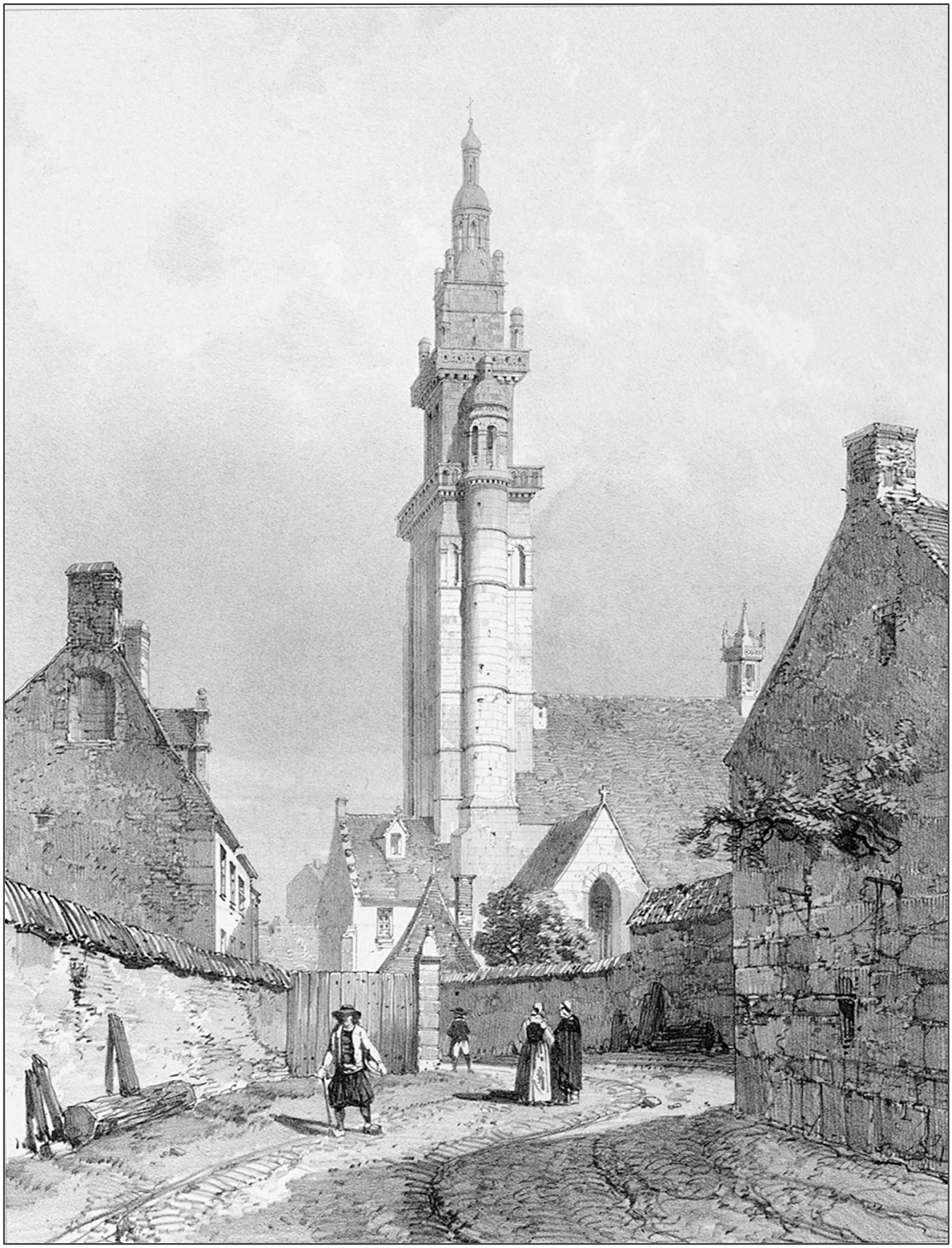


'The Church and Ossuary, Landivisiau'
Adolphe Jean-Baptiste Bayot (French, 1810–1871)

Cabbages, turnips, lots of beets, and an enormous quantity of potatoes, all neatly enclosed in ditches, cover the countryside from Saint-Pol-de-Léon to Roscoff. They are shipped to Brest, Rennes, even Le Havre; it's the region's main industry; a considerable trade is involved. But what does that matter to me? Does it interest me? At Roscoff you can see the sea, a muddy beach is revealed in front of the houses, which curves into a narrow gulf, speckled offshore with black islets domed like the backs of turtles.



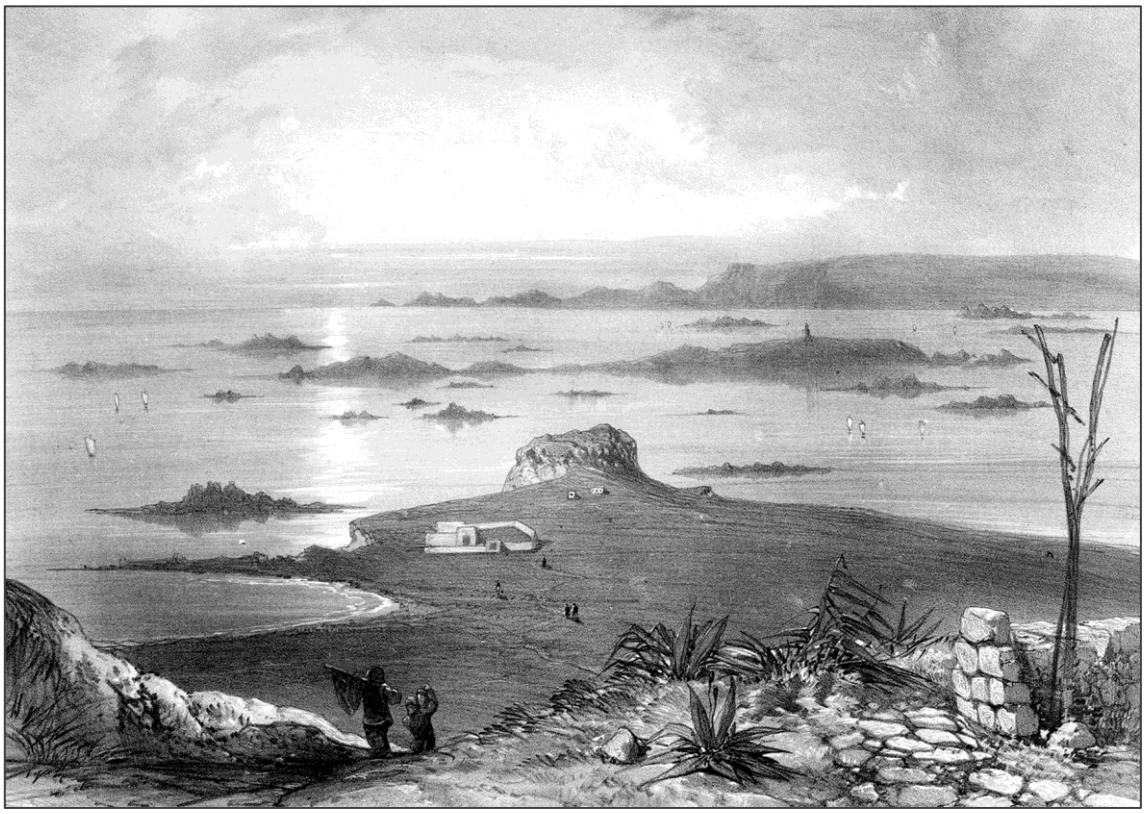
'Roscoff: View from the Little Jetty'
Félix Benoist (French, 1818–1896) and Adolphe Jean-Baptiste Bayot (French, 1810–1871)



'Roscoff Church'
Léon Gaucherel (French, 1816–1886) and Eugène Cicéri (French, 1813–1890)

The countryside around Saint-Pol (*Saint-Pol-de-Léon*) is cold and bleak. The dreary hue of the gently rolling land blends seamlessly into the pale sky, and the foreshortened vista lacks any sweeping lines as regards its profile and any change of colour at its edges. Here and there, as you walk through the fields, behind a wall of grey stone, you come across a silent farmhouse, an abandoned manor house, where not even martens venture to nest. In the courtyard, some neighbour's pigs sleep on a manure heap, and hens nibble at the oats between the uneven

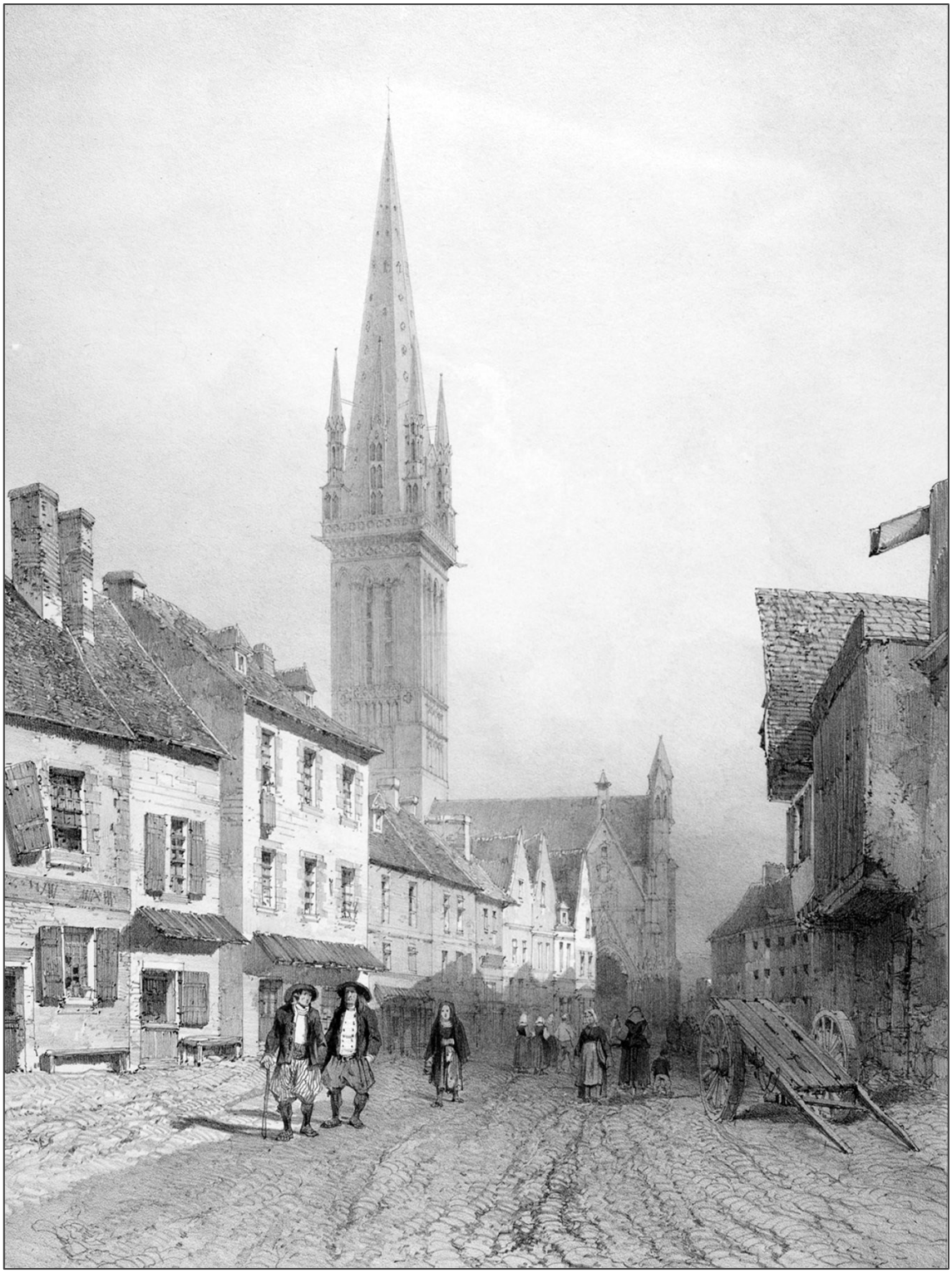
flagstones below an arched entrance whose carved coat of arms has been eroded by wind and rain. In the empty rooms that serve as attics, the plaster on the ceilings has crumbled, along with remnants of paint dulled by the grey webs of the spiders that can be seen scurrying along the joists.



'The Breton Coast at Saint-Pol-de-Léon'
Léon Gaucherel (French, 1816–1886) and Eugène Cicéri (French, 1813–1890)



'Dolmen near Saint-Pol-de-Léon'
Eugène Cicéri (French, 1813–1890) and Léon Gaucherel (French, 1816–1886)



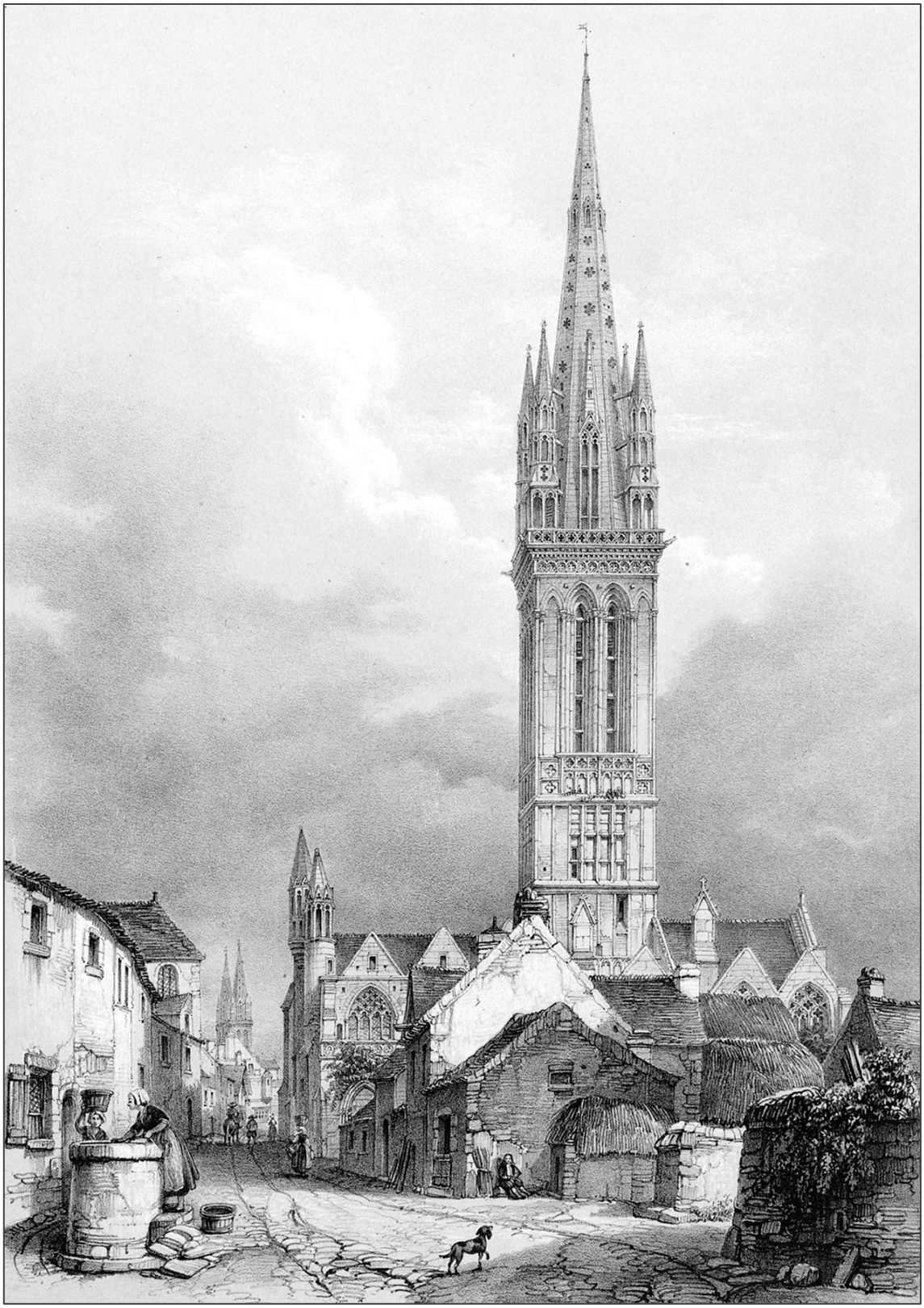
'The Church of Notre-Dame du Kreisker, Saint-Pol-de-Léon'
Léon Gaucherel (French, 1816-1886) and Eugène Cicéri (French, 1813-1890)



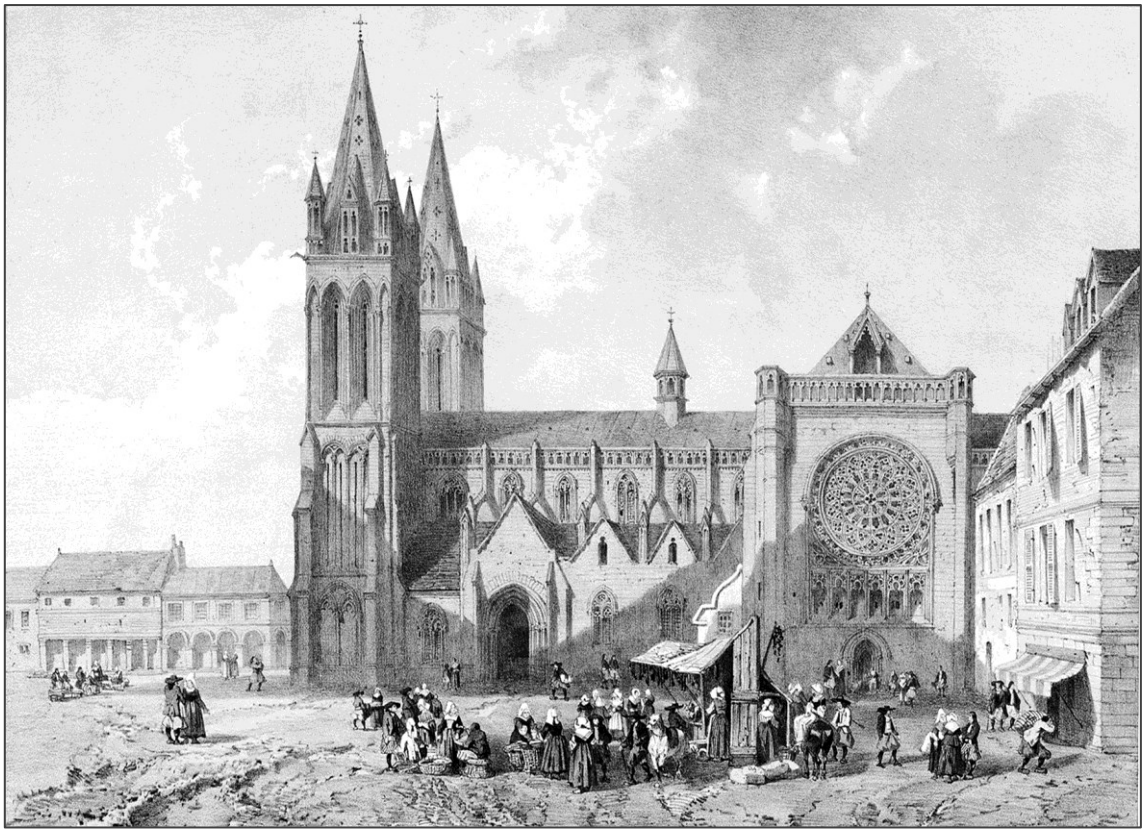
'Saint-Pol-de-Léon: the Chapel of Notre-Dame du Kreisker'
Félix Benoist (French, 1818-1896)



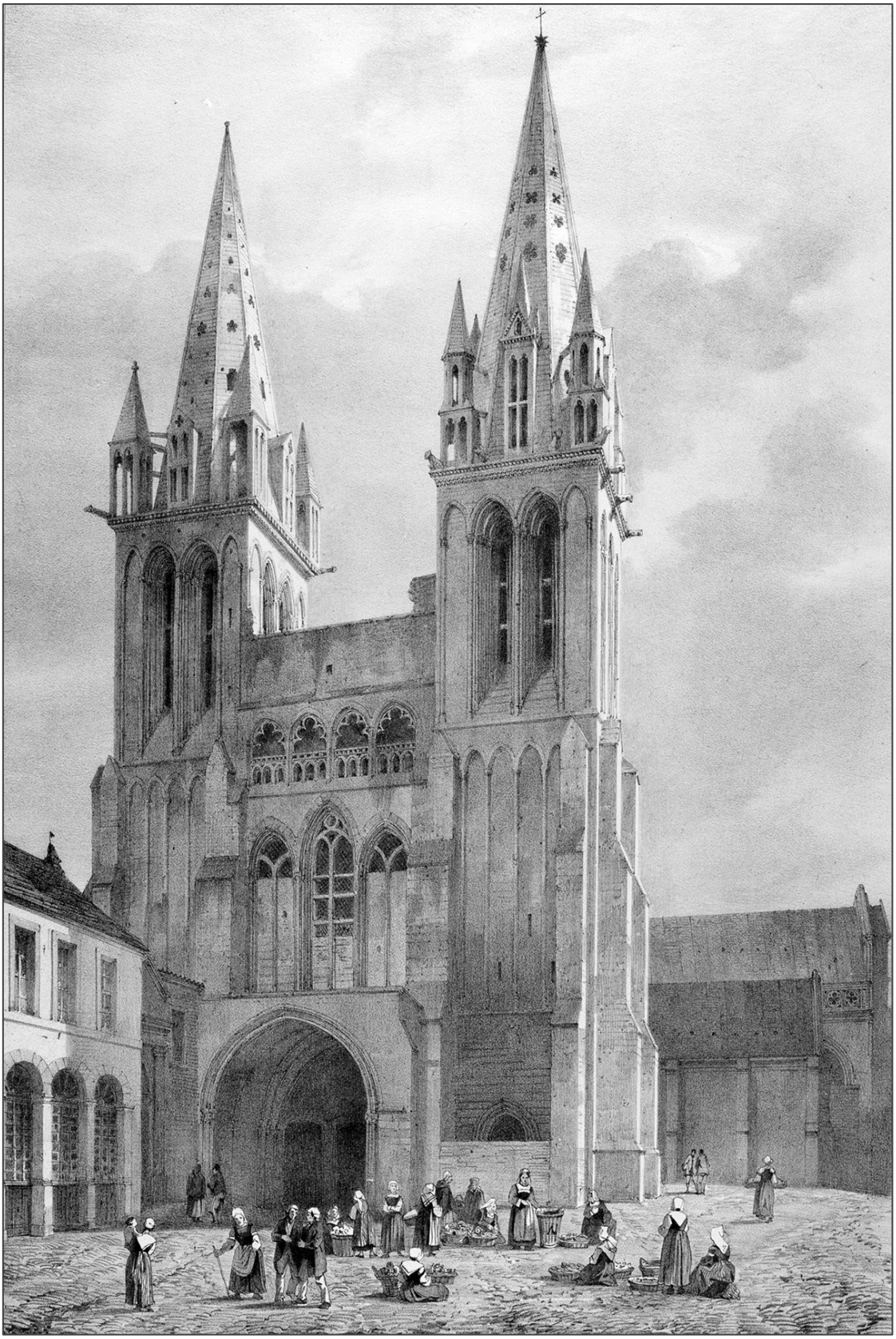
‘The Old Cathedral of Saint-Pol-de-Léon’
Félix Benoist (French, 1818–1896) and Adolphe Jean-Baptiste Bayot (French, 1810–1871)



'The Tower of Saint-Pol-de-Léon'
Félix Benoist (French, 1818-1896)



'Saint-Pol-de-Léon Cathedral'
Auguste Étienne François Mayer (French, 1805–1890)

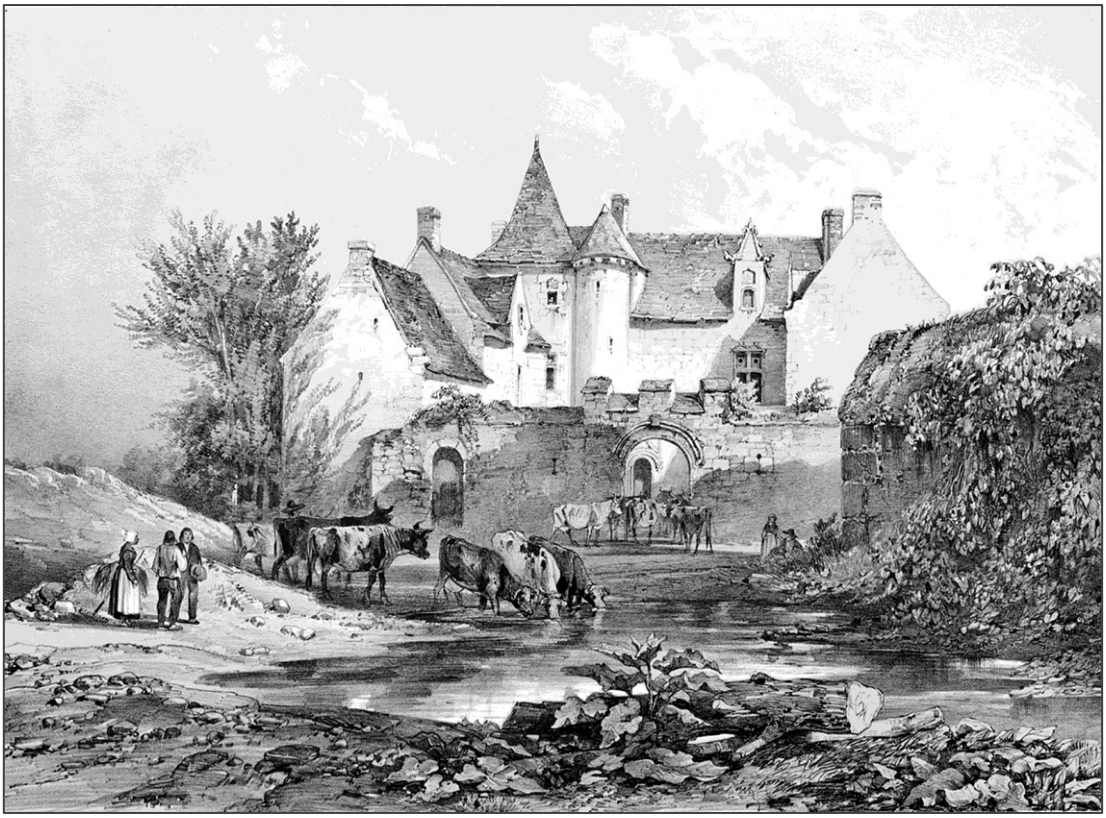


'Saint-Pol-de-Léon Cathedral'
Léon Gaucherel (French, 1816-1886)

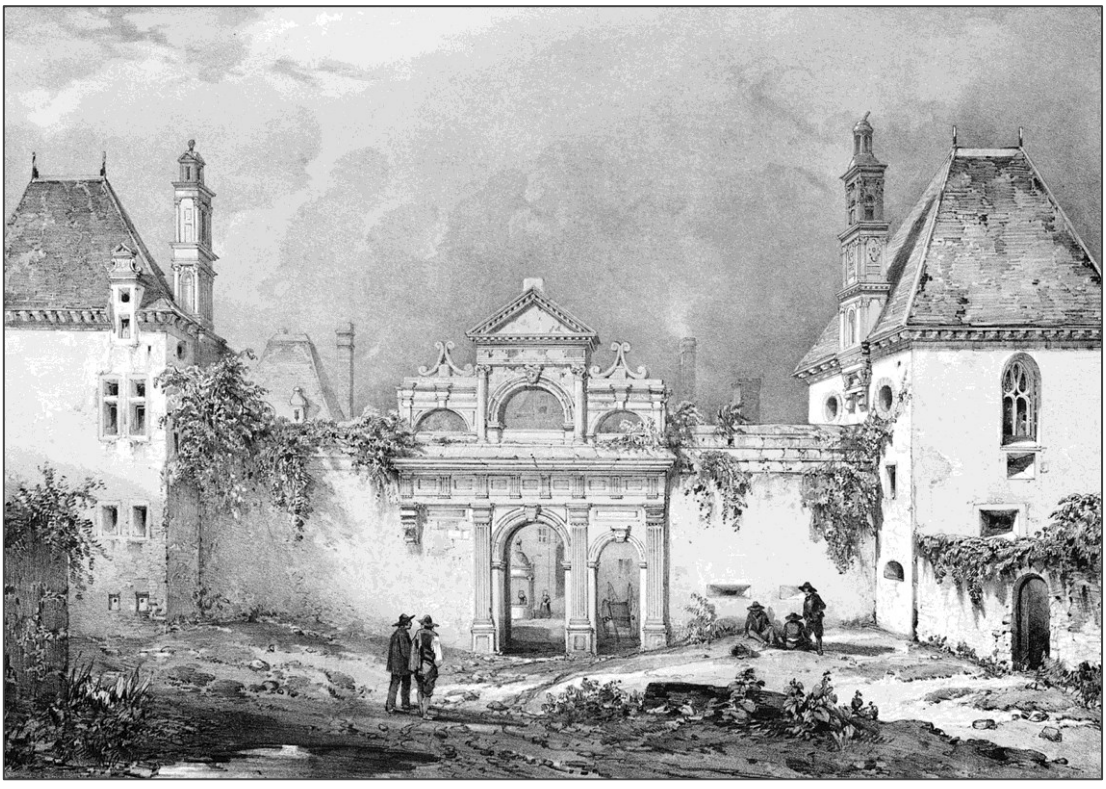


'The Ossuary in the Cemetery, Saint-Pol-de-Léon'
Auguste Étienne François Mayer (French, 1805–1890)

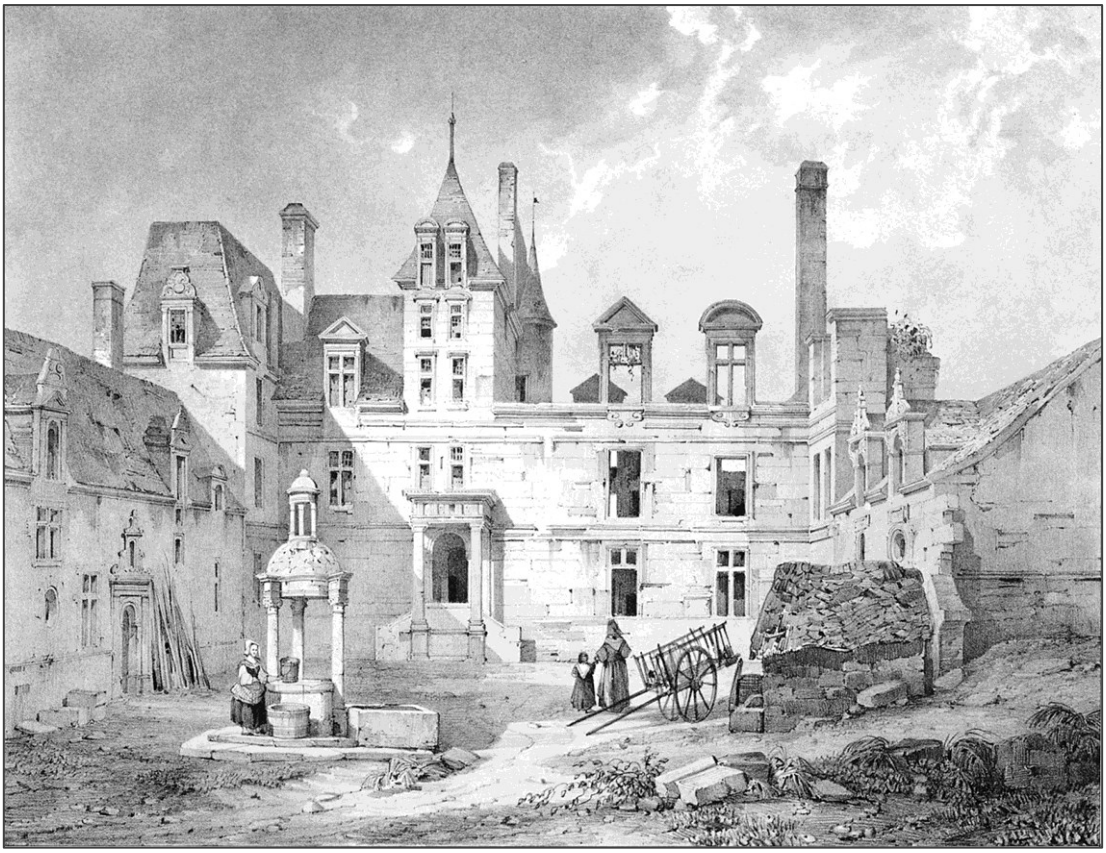
Wild mignonette has grown on the gate at Kersaliou (*the sixteenth-century Manoir de Kersaliou, at Saint-Pol-de-Léon, not the nineteenth-century château nearby*), where, near the turret, a window surmounted by a pinnacle still stands, flanked by a lion and a Hercules emerging from the walls like gargoyles. At Kerjean (*near Saint-Vougay, sixteenth-century, fully restored*), on the grand spiral staircase of the chateau, I stumbled over a wolf-trap. Ploughshares, rusty spade blades, and gourds full of dried seeds lay scattered about the bedroom floors, and cluttered the large stone seats in the window recesses.



‘The Manoir de Kersaliou’
Auguste Étienne François Mayer （French, 1805–1890）



‘The Château de Kerjean’
Auguste Étienne François Mayer （French, 1805–1890）



'The Château de Kerjean-Coatanscours'
Auguste Étienne François Mayer (French, 1805-1890)



'The Château de Kerjean-Coatanscours'
Auguste Étienne François Mayer (French, 1805-1890)

Kérouzéré (*at Sibiril, fifteenth-century, partially restored*), has retained its three machicolated turrets, and one can still recognize in the courtyard the wide furrow of the moat which, rising gradually, attains the level of its surroundings, like the wake of a boat that fades as it spreads. From the platform of one of the towers (the others have pointed roofs), the sea can be seen at the end of a field, between two low hills covered in woods. The first-floor windows, half-blocked to keep out the rain, overlook a garden enclosed by high walls. Thistles cover the lawn, and wheat has been sown in the flowerbeds, bordered by rose bushes.



'Sibiril: the Château de Kérouzéré'
Félix Benoist (French, 1818–1896), Eugène Cicéri (French, 1813–1890) and Adolphe Jean-Baptiste Bayot (French, 1810–1871)



'The Château de Kérouzéré'
Auguste Étienne François Mayer (French, 1805–1890)

Between a field, where the ripe heads of the ears of corn bent together, and a curtain of elms rose from the high bank of a ditch, a thin path stretched out amidst the undergrowth. Poppies flowered in the wheat; from the summit of the tall bank, wild-flowers and brambles escaped: nettles, dog-roses, their stems adorned with thorns and large glossy leaves, blackberries, and purple foxgloves, their colours intermingling, their stems and branches intertwining, exhibiting their diverse foliage, sending out arms and twigs of differing lengths, their shadows in the grey dust crisscrossing like the strands of a fishing net.

After traversing a meadow, where the wheel was turning on an old mill entangled in the reeds, the stream crossed by large stones placed in the water to serve as a bridge, we soon found ourselves on the main road to Saint-Pol. At the end of this road rises the spire of Kreisker's church steeple (*Notre-Dame du Kreisker, now within Saint-Pol itself*), with its jagged cornice. Slender, elegant, and supporting a tower topped with a balustrade, the church is striking from afar. It makes the finest impression in the world from a distance, but the closer one gets, the smaller and uglier it seems and, in the end, one finds only a church like any other, with an empty porch, from which the statues have departed. The cathedral, too (*Saint-Paul-Aurélien*), is in a heavy Gothic style, bloated with ornamentation, gaudy with decoration; but there was something even worse in Saint-Pol: our meal at the inn.

It was served, however, by a charming young woman who, with her earrings hanging above a white neck, her bonnet with its curled lapels like Molière's soubrettes, and especially her bright blue eyes, might have made one wish to ask her for something other than plates. But the guests! And what guests! The regulars! The head of the table was commanded by a fellow dressed in a

velvet jacket and a cashmere waistcoat, who liked to run his napkin over the half-empty bottles to identify the vintage. He was the one who served the soup. To his left, a gentleman in a light grey frock-coat, his cuffs and collar trimmed with black wool curled like fur, was eating away. He was a music teacher at the town's college. But music bored him; he'd had enough. He sought a position, any position, paying between eight hundred and twelve hundred francs no less. He cared little for money, more for the prestige. he simply desired a suitable post. Since he always arrived, it seems, after the meal had already begun, he had the dishes brought back then sent them away, sneezed loudly, spat far, shuffled on his chair, hummed softly, slumped against the table, and snapped his toothpick.

The whole gathering, there, showed him respect. The maid admires his speech and is, I'm sure, in love with him. The high opinion he has of himself is apparent in his smile, his words, his silences, his gestures, his hairstyle, and oozes like sweat from his entire, vile person.

Opposite us, a small, grizzled, curly-haired, plump, and stocky man with red paws, thick, salivating lips, and a yelping voice, looked at us, as he chewed his food, in such a way that we had to restrain ourselves from throwing a carafe at his head. However, he was part of the scene and contributed to the overall effect.

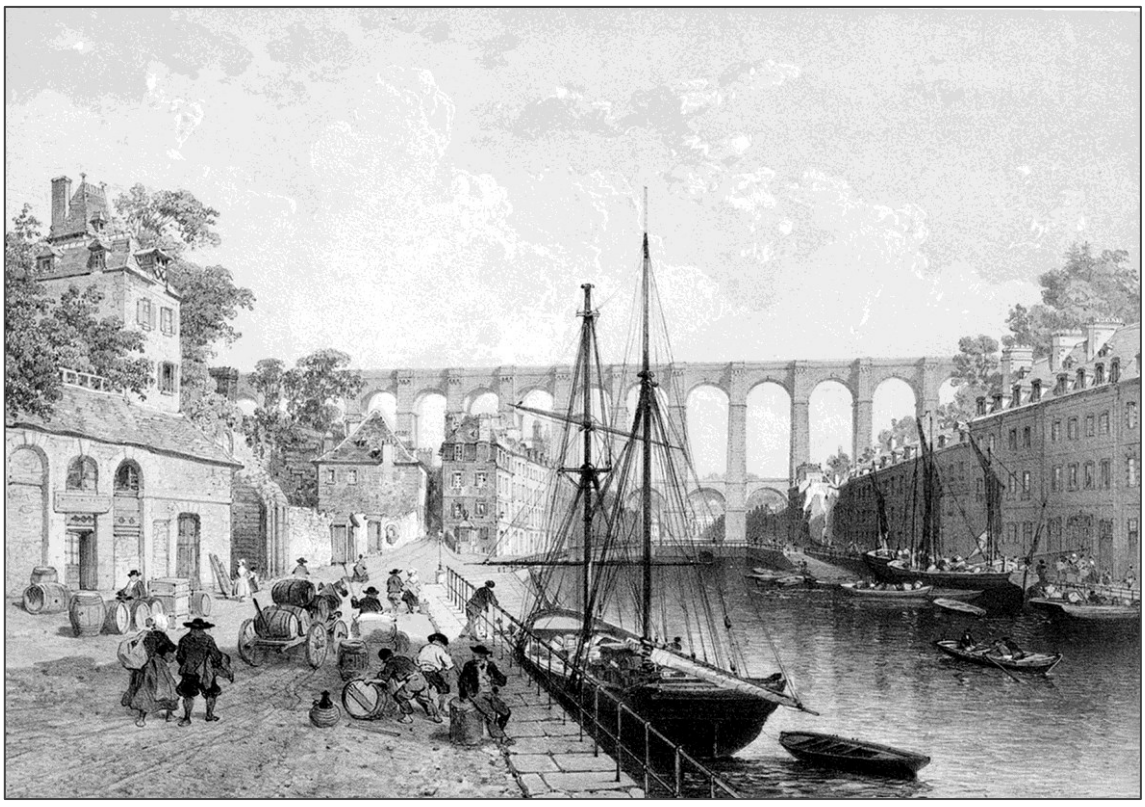
One evening, the conversation turned to a local woman who, having run away from home before, had fled to America with her lover, and who, the previous week, passing through Saint-Pol to reach her village, had stopped at the inn. They were still astonished by her audacity and her name was accompanied by all sorts of epithets. They recounted her entire life, laughed at her with contempt, and insulted her in her absence, their faces flushed. They wished she was there, so 'they could give her a piece of their mind, and see what she had to say'. Virtuous expressions condemning licence and scandal and exhibiting their hatred of finery, moral maxims, double entendres, vigorous shouts of agreement, and sundry shrugs were employed with equal gusto to pour scorn on the poor woman who, judging by the relentlessness of those boors, must be elegant, of refined character, of a delicate and nervous disposition, and, doubtless, possessed of a pretty face. Despite ourselves, our hearts were full of anger against them, and if we had been exposed to one more dinner at Saint-Pol-de-Léon, something would, unfailingly, have transpired.

The End of 'By Field and Shore' Part III

Part IV, Chapters X-XII

Chapter X (Du Camp: The North Coast, Morlaix to St. Malo)

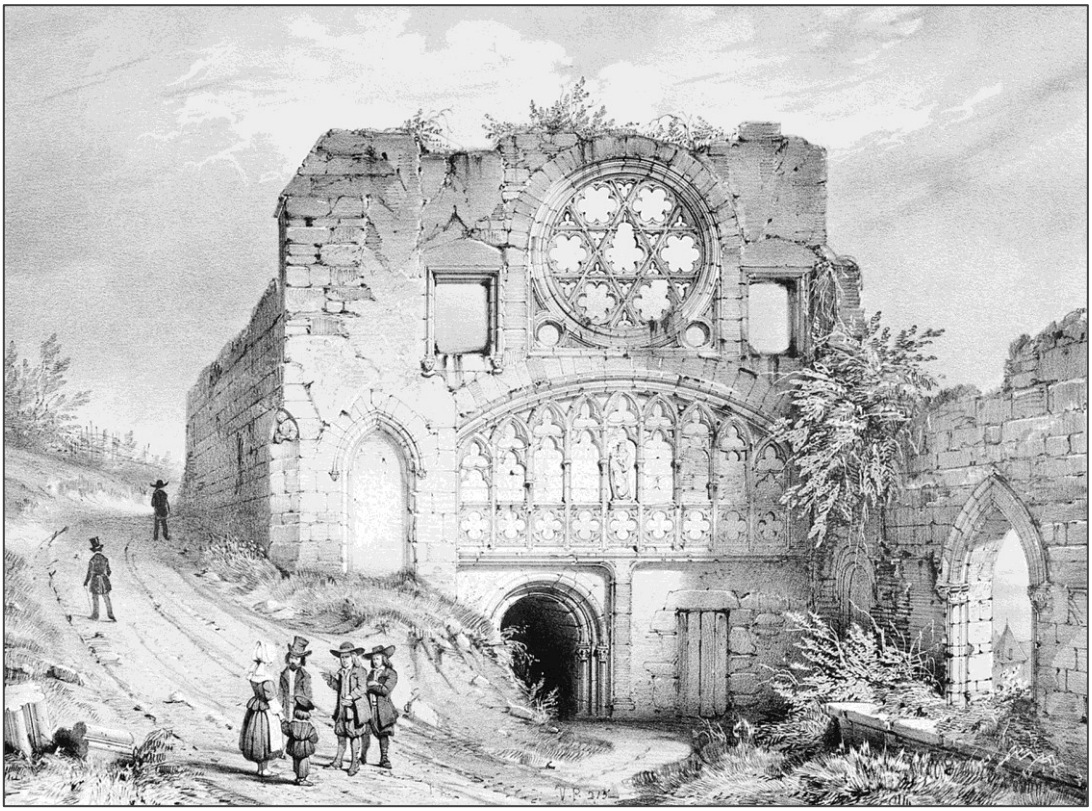
Morlaix. — The canal, a wooden gallery below the houses, the perspective comprised of houses in narrow streets, roofs, shopfronts, beams, black in colour, clothes hanging on the ground floor. — It was market day; the peculiar fabric of men's jackets, a yellowish background with uneven brown streaks, like chocolate stains; another material used for the trousers, a white background with blue and brown streaks. — Moutard firing a rifle using a billiard cue. — A tobacco factory; the piles of tobacco look like heaps of seaweed; tobacco; stupid machines; bins full of tobacco. One could go mad there, all the men who work there are pallid.



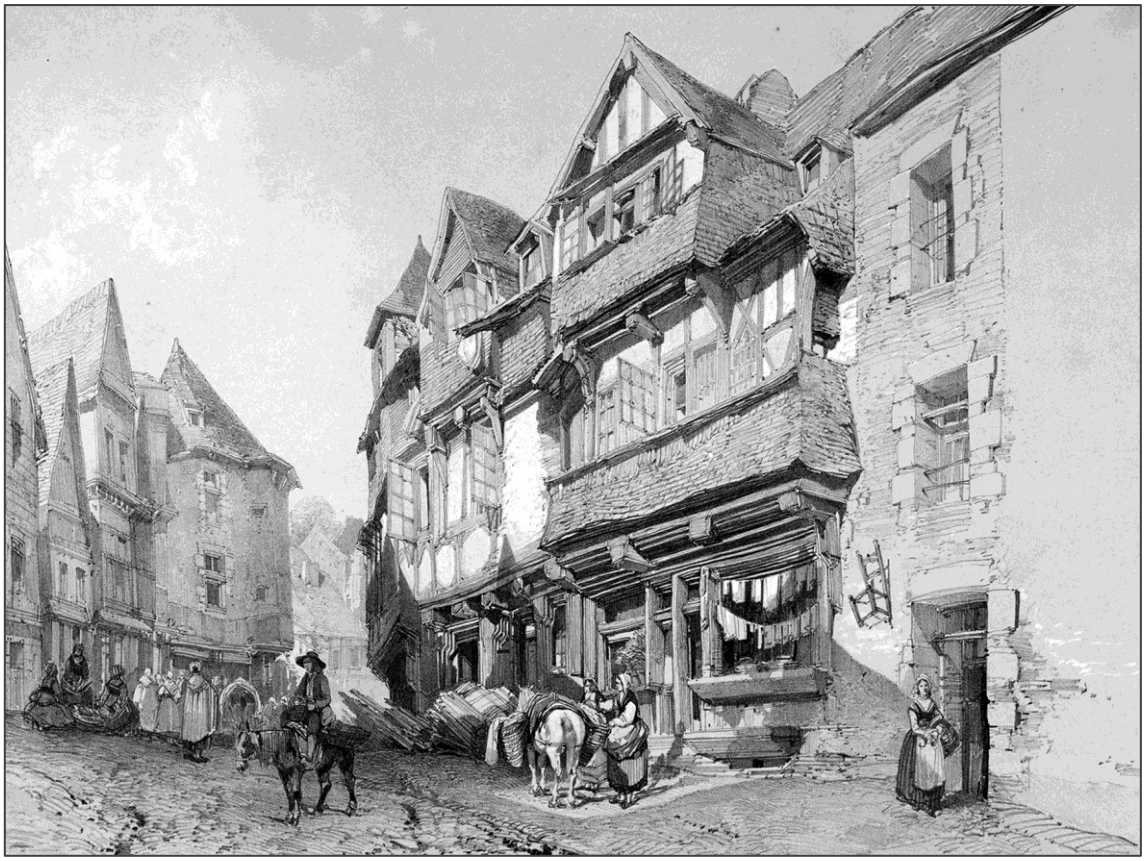
'Morlaix: the Railway Viaduct and the Head of the Harbour'
Félix Benoist (French, 1818–1896) and Adolphe Jean-Baptiste Bayot (French, 1810–1871)



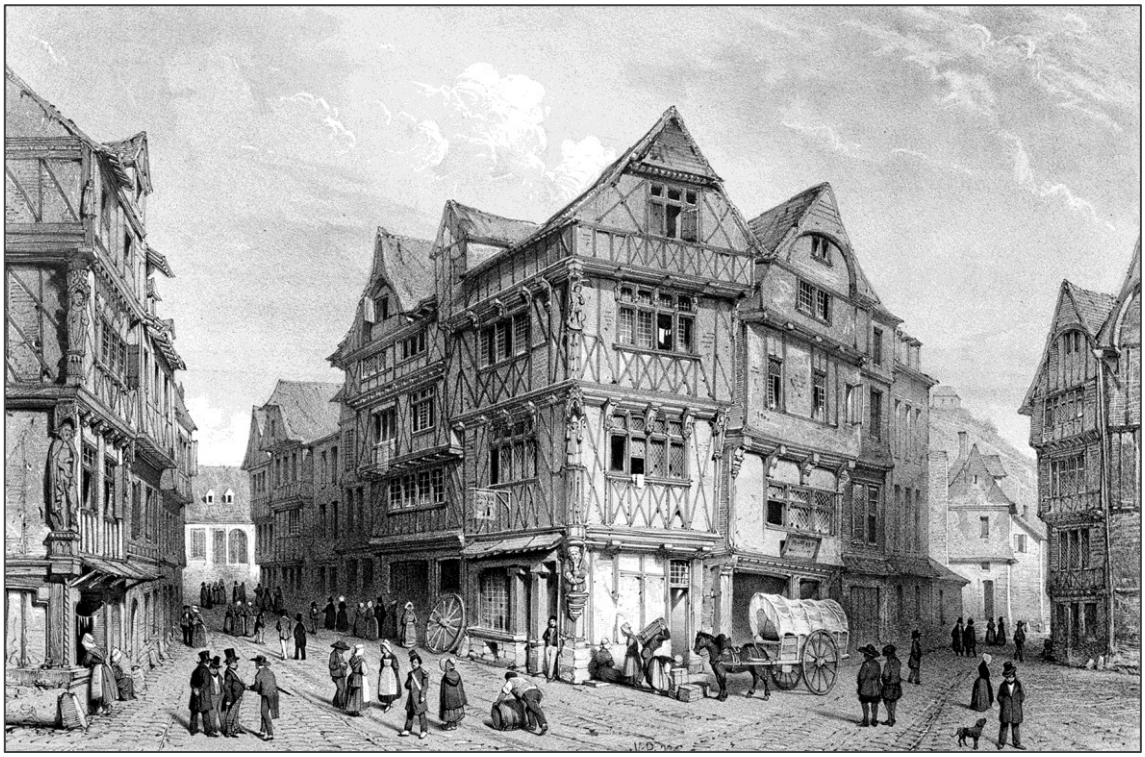
'The Hôtel de Ville, Morlaix'
Auguste Étienne François Mayer (French, 1805–1890)



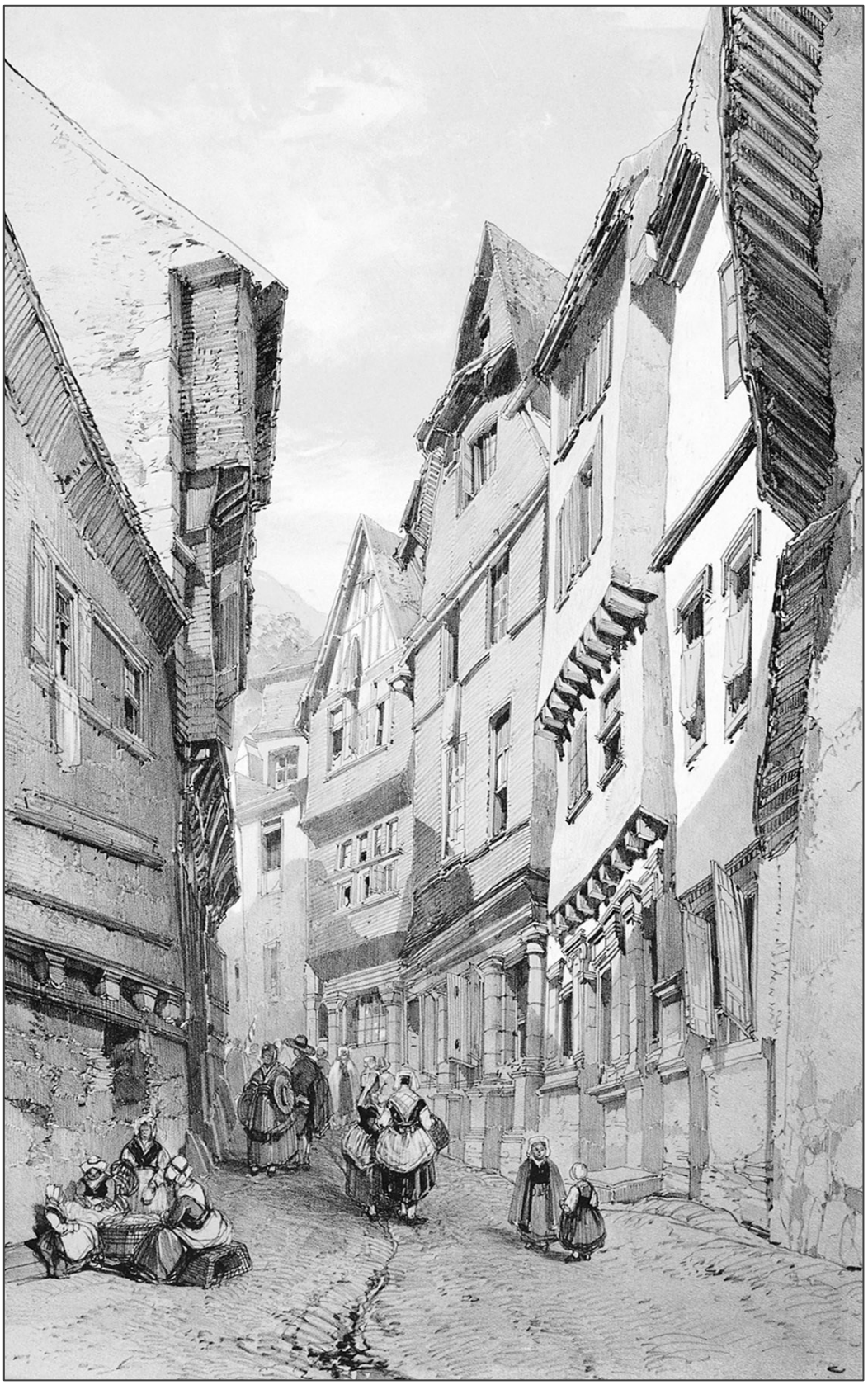
'The Carmelite Convent, Morlaix'
Auguste Étienne François Mayer (French, 1805–1890)



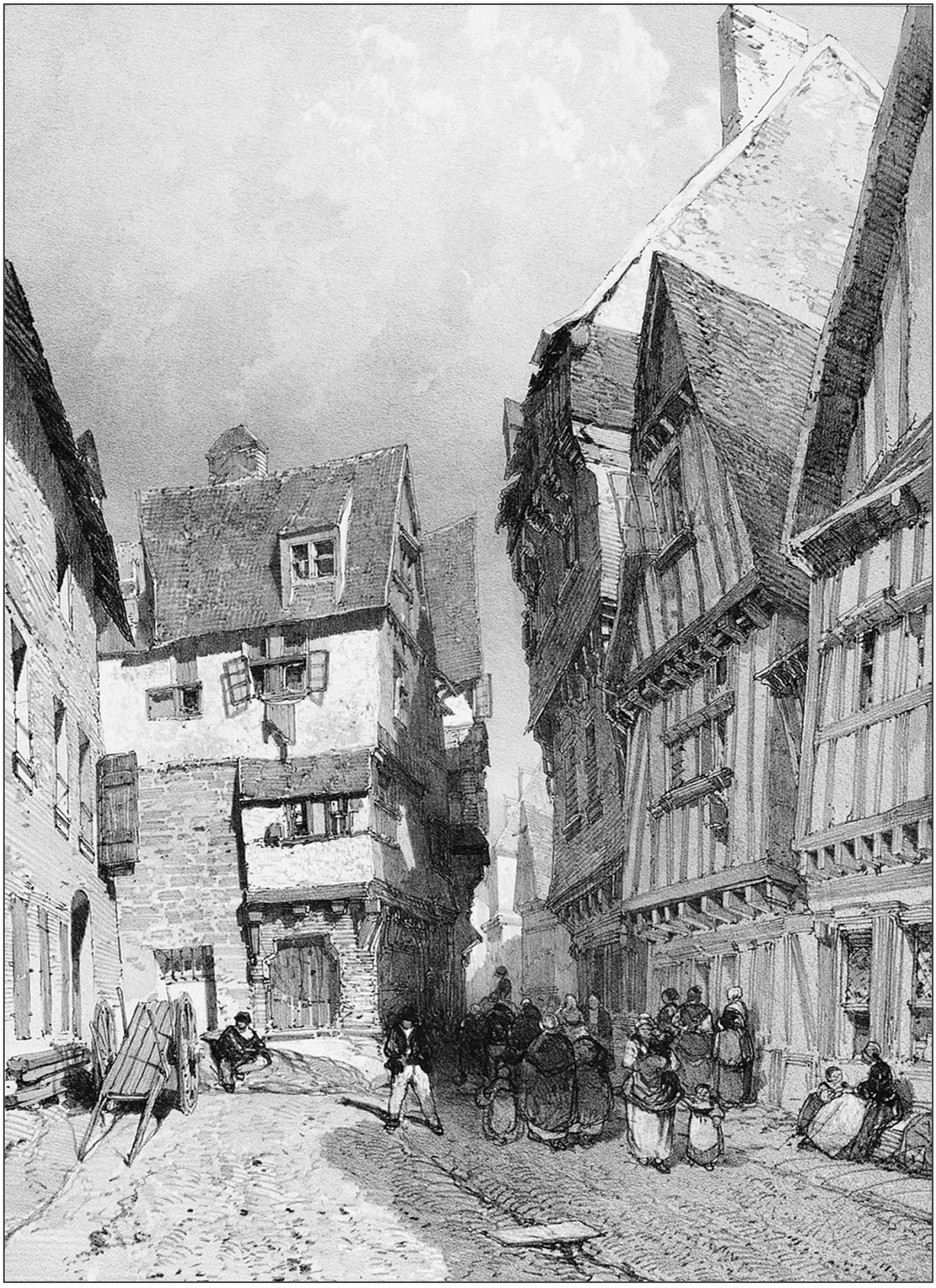
‘Morlaix’
Eugène Cicéri （French, 1813–1890）



‘Le Pavé, Morlaix’
Auguste Étienne François Mayer （French, 1805–1890）



'Morlaix'
Eugène Cicéri (French, 1813–1890)



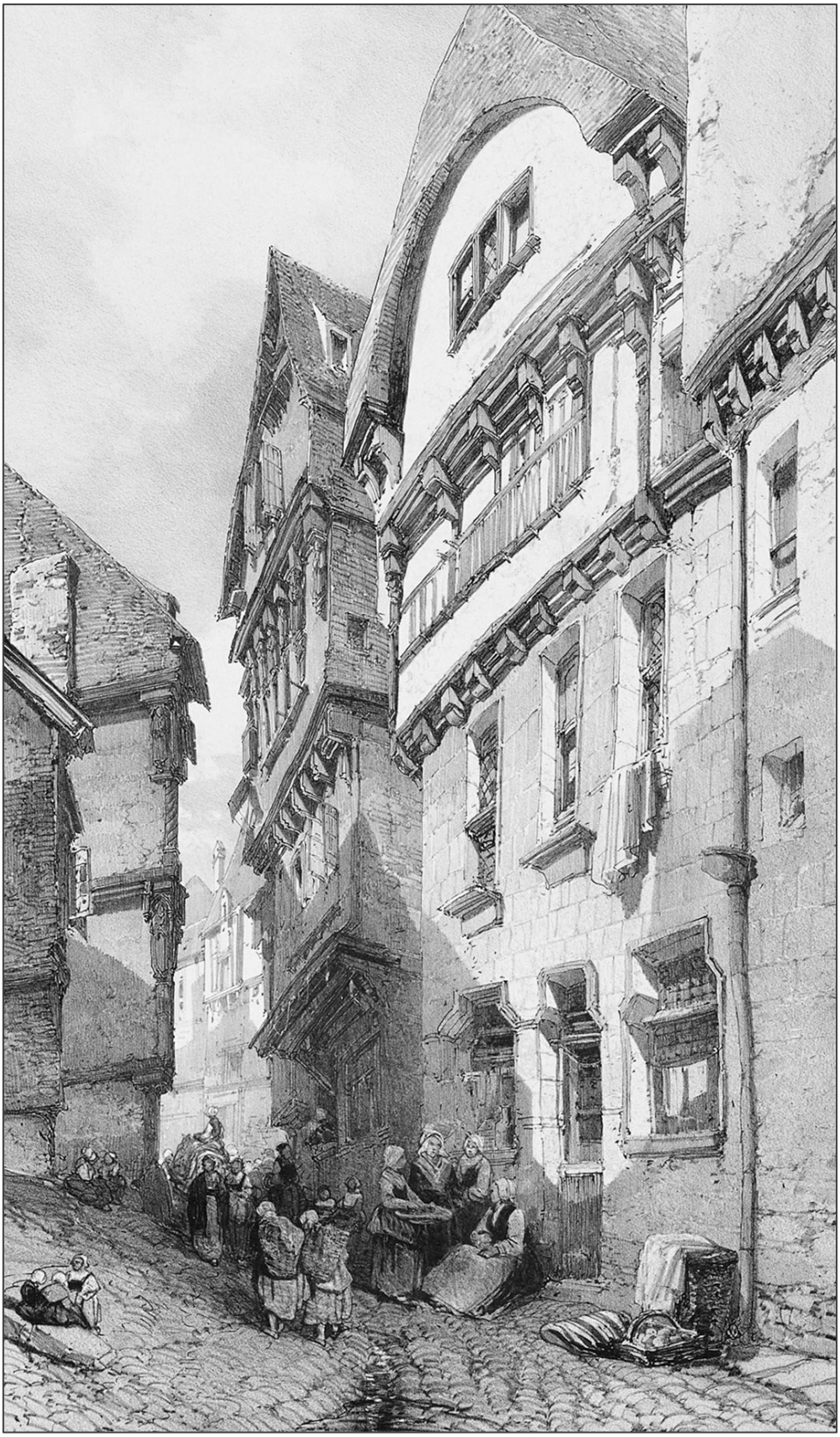
'A Street in Morlaix'
Eugène Cicéri (French, 1813–1890)



‘Morlaix’
Eugène Cicéri （French，1813–1890）



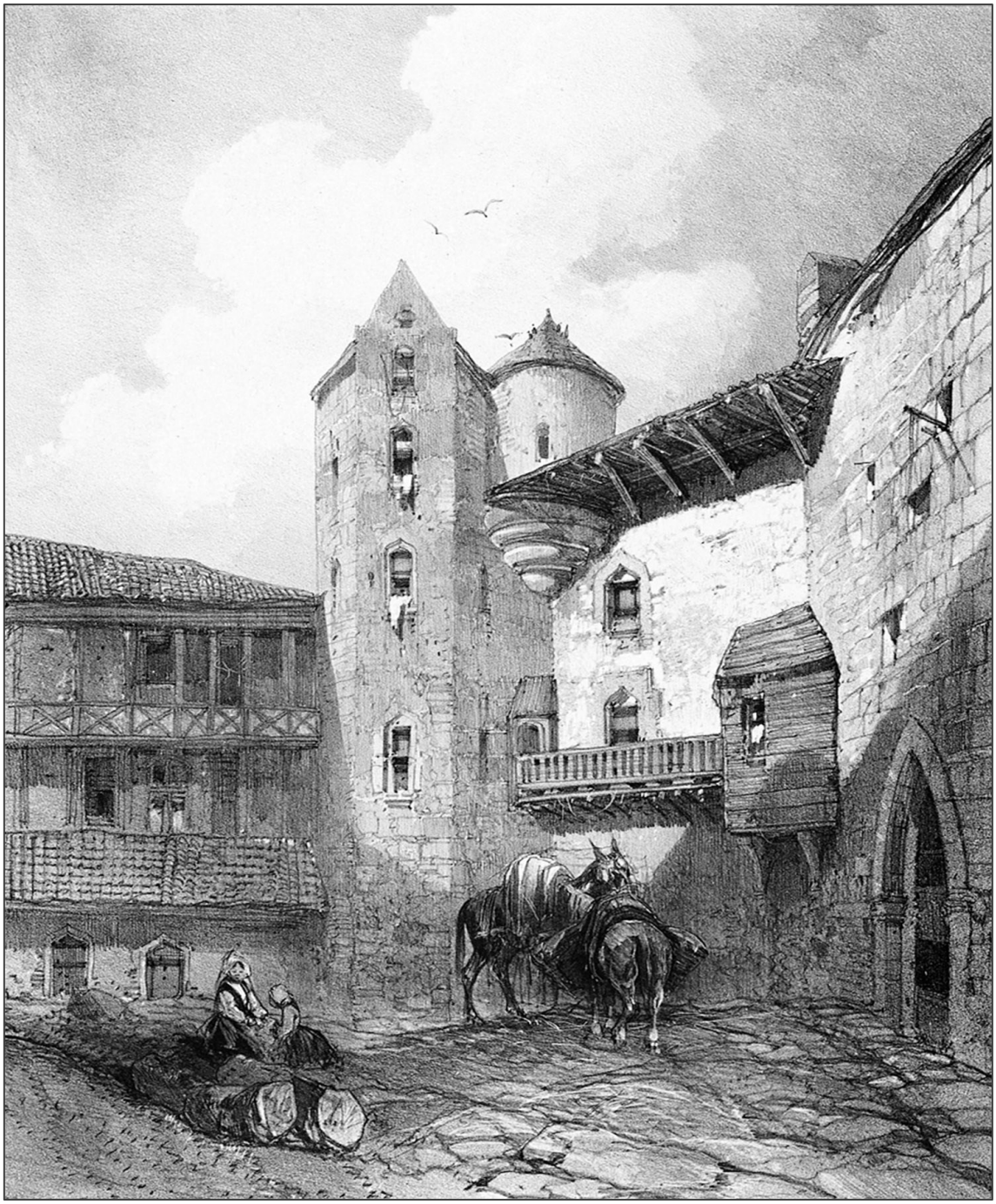
'A Street in Morlaix'
Eugène Cicéri (French, 1813–1890)



'A Street in Morlaix'
Eugène Cicéri (French, 1813–1890)



'The Porte Bourrette, Morlaix'
Auguste Étienne François Mayer (French, 1805–1890)



'The Tower of a House, Morlaix'
Eugène Cicéri (French, 1813–1890)



'The House where General Moreau was Born, Morlaix'
Eugène Cicéri (French, 1813–1890)



'Sous les Lances, Morlaix'
Eugène Cicéri (French, 1813–1890)

The whole region here seems richer, thus the clothes become uglier, the faces less vigorous; no more of the vigorous and intense expressions seen in Quimperlé or even Quimper. (Morlaix, July 4th, 10 a.m.)

Huelgoat. — On a rise, in a hollow, between wooded hillsides, among rocks similar to those seen in the Fontainebleau forest; a pond to the right as you arrive. — A conversation we had about

love and the meaning of the word 'curiosity' stirred a lot of sediment at the bottom of the barrel ... and then the sun, drying the mud and bringing out the insects that had been hidden there! — A little canal, a stroll along its bank. The steep bank was covered in brambles; foxgloves were mirrored in the water, charming woods, tall slender trees, slopes, gaps beneath the trunks; the water meandering. — Trou de Re-ahès (*the Witches' Hole*) about 25 feet deep, a rather sinister place indeed, our lengthy savouring of its calm and secluded nature. Huelgoat is a hole where one chooses to live when one is sad, sorrow there would doubtless turn to melancholy. — This morning, the mine; no way to visit! The mud from which silver is extracted. The evening before and this very morning, we had talked excessively about money! — At the Tour d'Argent Inn, engravings of the Tour de Nesle.

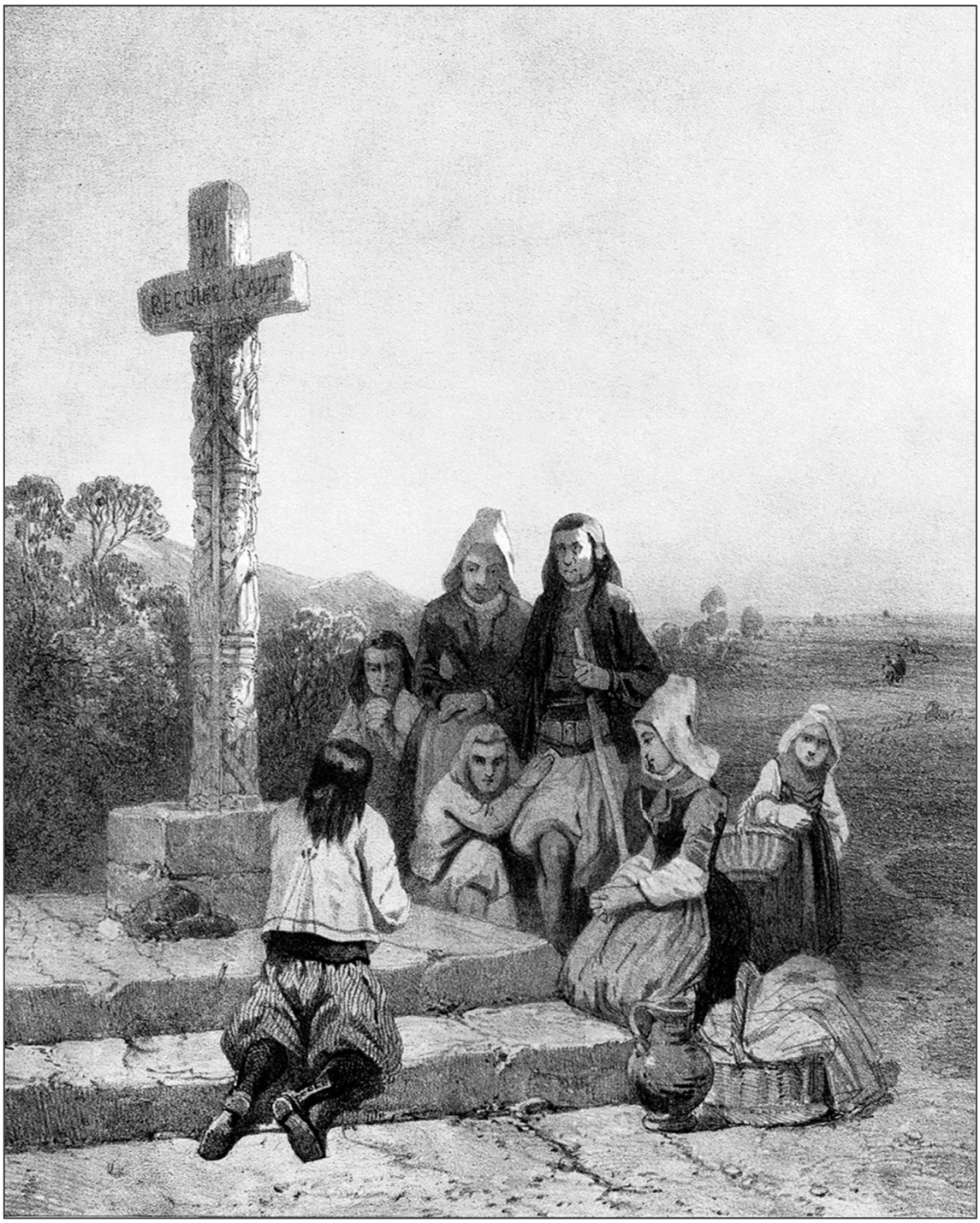


'Huelgoat: General View'
Félix Benoist (French, 1818–1896)

From Huelgoat to Carhaix (*Carhaix-Plouger*), the road climbs and descends endlessly; for three hundred yards it winds beneath tall trees. A vast landscape, its contoured lines superimposed on one another, black and dark blue; a wide open countryside. Before reaching Huelgoat, however, there are starkly arid sections, a jagged mountain peak; the heath is dry, the colour of old, dried moss, reminiscent of Spain. At the top of each climb today, a new landscape unfolded, the vista narrowing and vanishing as we descended.

Carhaix. — Deserted, sad, the plaster crumbling from the houses, the wooden beams turning to dust. The town hall with its saint would do well as a shabby cabaret-restaurant on the Rue Mouffetard (*Paris*). — In one street, a house of slate and red wood, its colour vibrant thanks to the russet and green moss that has clung to the slate walls. — A statue of La Tour d'Auvergne (*Théophile Malo Corret de la Tour d'Auvergne, named by Napoleon as the 'first grenadier of France', who was*

born in Carhaix) by Carlo Marochetti: a handsome head, heavy legs, the foolish look produced by a rifle leaning against a bearskin hat at the rear of the figure; the bas-reliefs are quite lively, but heavy. It's an apathetic form of sculpture. — The cemetery: boxes containing heads, like those at Quiberon, appear: 'Here lies the head of ...'; at Saint-Pol, moreover, we saw a few; only one notable one here, whose owner was unknown, completely surrounded by honeysuckle; the tombs of three notaries, and a box containing the head of another notary.

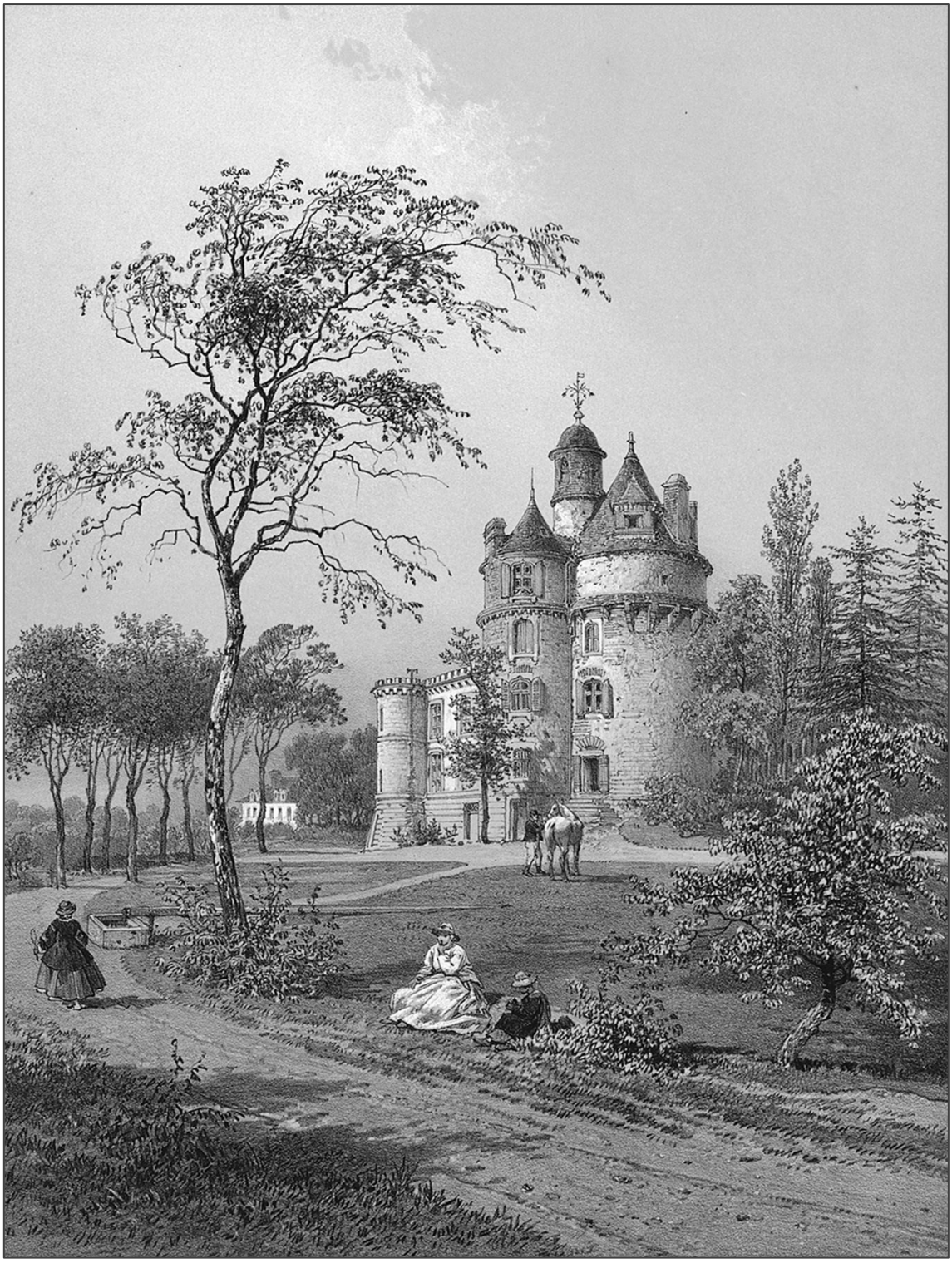


'The Cross of Saint Tromeur, Carhaix'
Eugène Cicéri (French, 1813–1890)

It is customary to paint funereal landscapes on the wood of crosses, showing a pyramid, a mausoleum, a column, or a tomb in the countryside. There was a beautiful black cross with gold orbs at the three ends which, at the point where the arms intersected, depicted a splendid tomb: Saint Helen, shaded by a weeping willow, a dishevelled mourner; the countryside desolate; in the background, mountains like waves; in the middle-ground, rows of grass and, above, pink clouds. Such is the rule moreover; everywhere the clouds are pink, the difference lying only in the degree of vividness of the hue. The good man is there with his wife. 'Pray for their rest'; they must be snoring loudly and rotting grossly not to be woken down there. Poor old notary, departed! — The cemetery is in front of the church (*Saint-Pierre*): a carved wooden door; the saint, inside the church, still has his head! A huge holy water font, a hideous Saint Michael, a very full-breasted virgin; another large crown, a truly pretty figure as if from a fashion plate; a wooden statuette, an Eskimo Magdalene; an enormous spread of hair, dense and puffed-up, covers her whole body down to her feet like a garment made of animal fur; it is of an unheard-of *vigour* and crudity, the woman beneath has the animal tepidity of the stables.

A dreadful carriage journey from Carhaix to Guingamp. — Our driver; a widowed woman who is a friend of the driver; they ate nuts and bread together…

Guingamp. — A Pardon had been performed: the saints in the church porch were all crowned with flowers, candles, grass and turf, ivy; their blackened heads had a strange animation. In the background, the Virgin with her bronzed face, all adorned, in a flowing white satin gown; in the square, shops; at the back, two traveling showmen's booths, one where feats of strength and horsemanship were performed, in which the torments of the persecution of 150 were represented, and the other which was of rope-dancers; on the left, in front, the musicians in military uniforms, all passive and obliging figures, and a clown in a blue coat with red lapels who played the drum; on the right, the actors lined up: a woman of forty, thin, the mother; a woman of thirty, with three children, standing in an arched pose, poised, one leg forward, in a velvet spencer and a white dress with gold sequins, a young girl of fourteen, Mariette, black hair in two braids behind, low forehead, raised black eyebrows, vigorous, darting eyes; the advance of the modern woman; P…, the father, a frock-coat over his shirt, a medal on his chest, skullcap on his head; An Italian from Venice, he spoke, played the trumpet, the violin, and did feats of strength: rope-dances, horse jumping, exercises with rings. A Cachucha (*Spanish dance),* Mariette returned dressed as a Spaniard; the national polka, a pantomime, Pierrot, Mariette as a man: white trousers, large black hat, small jacket, moustache.



‘The Château du Bois de la Roche, near Guingamp’
Félix Benoist （French, 1818–1896）, Eugène Cicéri （French, 1813–1890） and Adolphe Jean-Baptiste Bayot （French, 1810–1871）



‘At Guingamp’
Félix Benoist (French, 1818–1896)

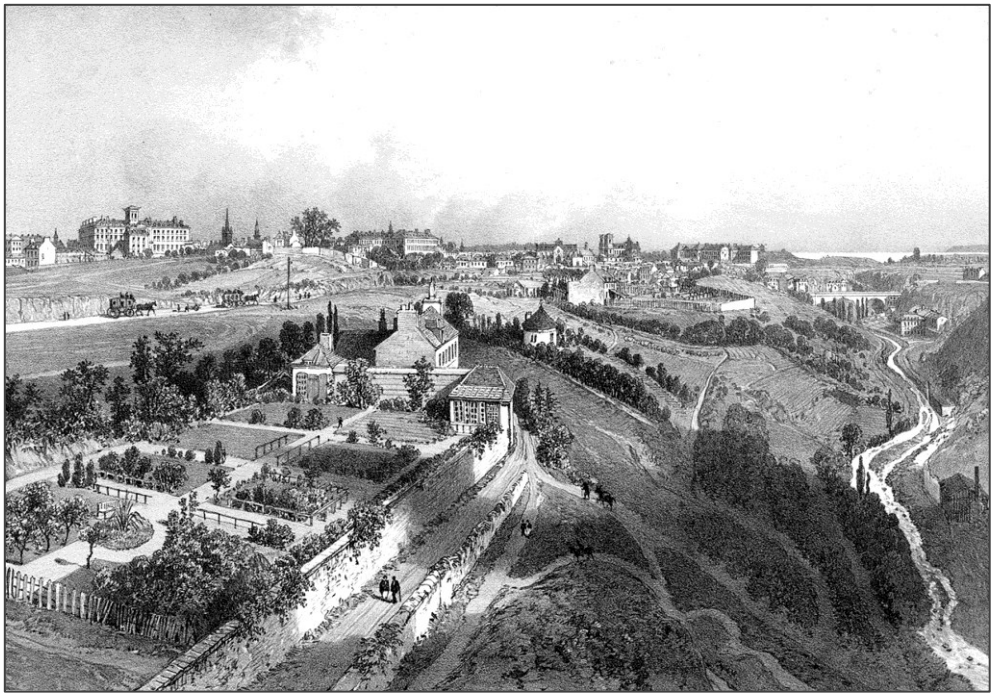


‘Sainte-Croix Abbey, near Guingamp’
Adolphe Jean-Baptiste Bayot (French, 1810–1871) and Félix Benoist (French, 1818–1896)

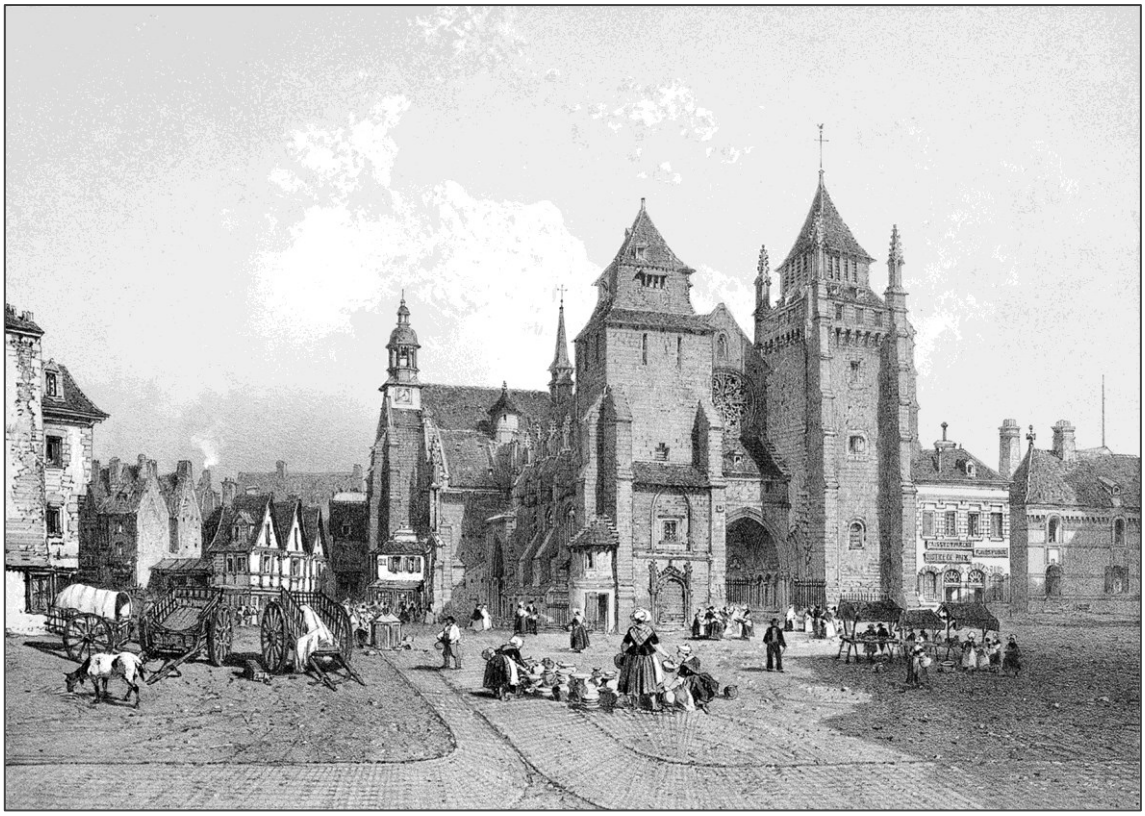
Saint-Brieuc. — Nothing. — The Tour de Cesson (*late fourteenth century, ruined*), a skull-like pile overlooking the sea; fragments of staircases and remains of windows are still visible. — A well-nigh vertical descent on slippery grass, a passage, sand, mudflats, a track over shells at the edge of the sea; it was low tide. — We re-ascended. — The wheat reached right up to the edge of the cliff.



'The Port du Légué, near Saint-Brieuc'
Félix Benoist (French, 1818–1896) and Adolphe Jean-Baptiste Bayot (French, 1810–1871)



'Saint-Brieuc: View from the Railway Viaduct'
Félix Benoist (French, 1818–1896) and Eugène Cicéri (French, 1813–1890)



'Saint-Brieuc Cathedral'
Félix Benoist (French, 1818–1896), Adolphe Jean-Baptiste Bayot (French, 1810–1871) and Eugène Cicéri (French, 1813–1890)



'The Race Fair, Saint-Brieuc'
Adolphe Jean-Baptiste Bayot (French, 1810–1871)



'Saint-Brieuc'
Adolphe Jean-Baptiste Bayot (French, 1810–1871)

Pléven. — Dreadful amount of noise from a child in a tavern where we went to drink beer. — In the cemetery, the old tomb of a heavily-armoured warrior; his curly hair looks like a bouquet of roses on his forehead and falls in two curls over his shoulders; at his feet, his dog, the head broken away. — Tall grass in this cemetery, they were mowing, the man passing his scythe over it was watching us. — Our guide's expression.

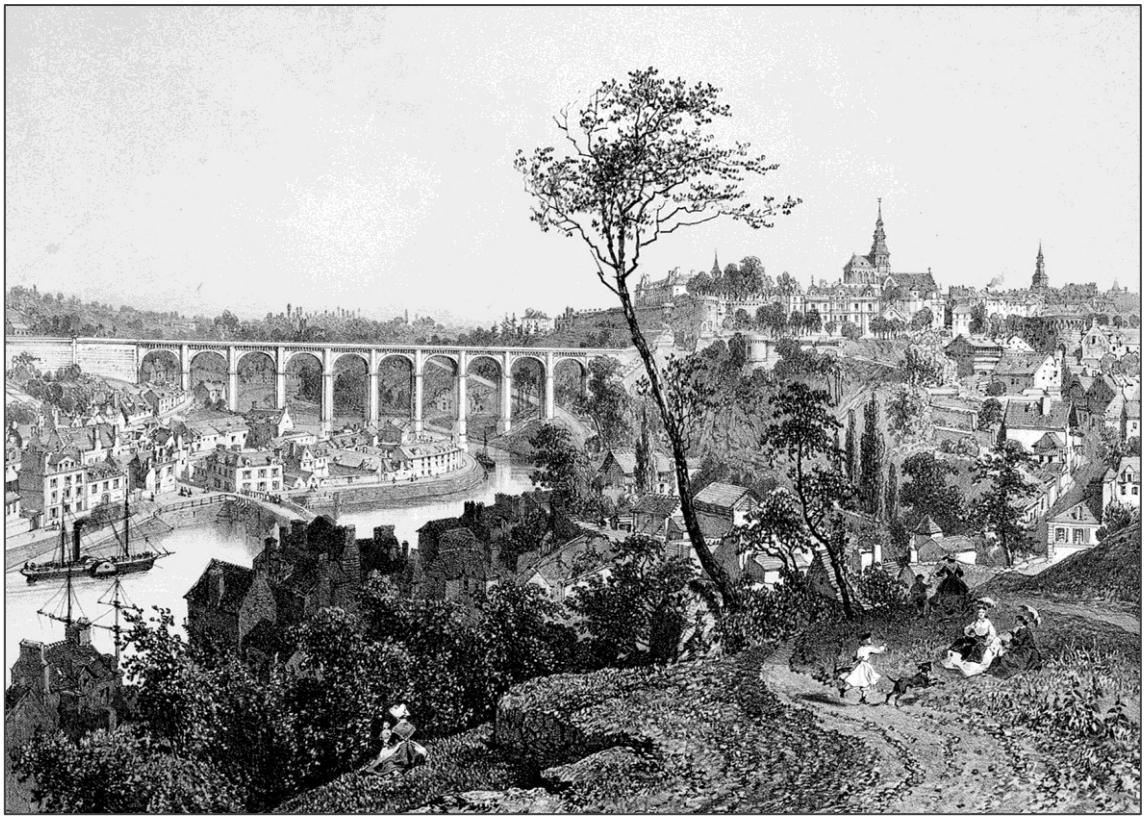
Lamballe (*Lamballe-Armor*). — The church on the hill (*Église Saint-Martin*); marred by hideous black paint obscuring a thousand fine details; two curious tombs. — A stud farm; the effect of human beings alongside animals; the entirely passive role of the mare who makes not a sound. 'The more a mare is in heat, the less she moves,' our old stable-boy used to tell us, it being the opposite with us. If a man is less handsome than that stallion, on the other hand, the human ensemble is superior; woman is more colourful in her movements than a mare. But what a weapon! Like a mushroom. Withdrawing it, slowly, with a movement full of melancholy, the stallion smears his legs. Well-nigh savage cries from the stable, scenting the mares. Red jackets of the boys, the agent, the country folk, the rest of us, it formed a ready-made picture. There are ready-made pictures everywhere, are there not? It's simply a matter of recognising them.



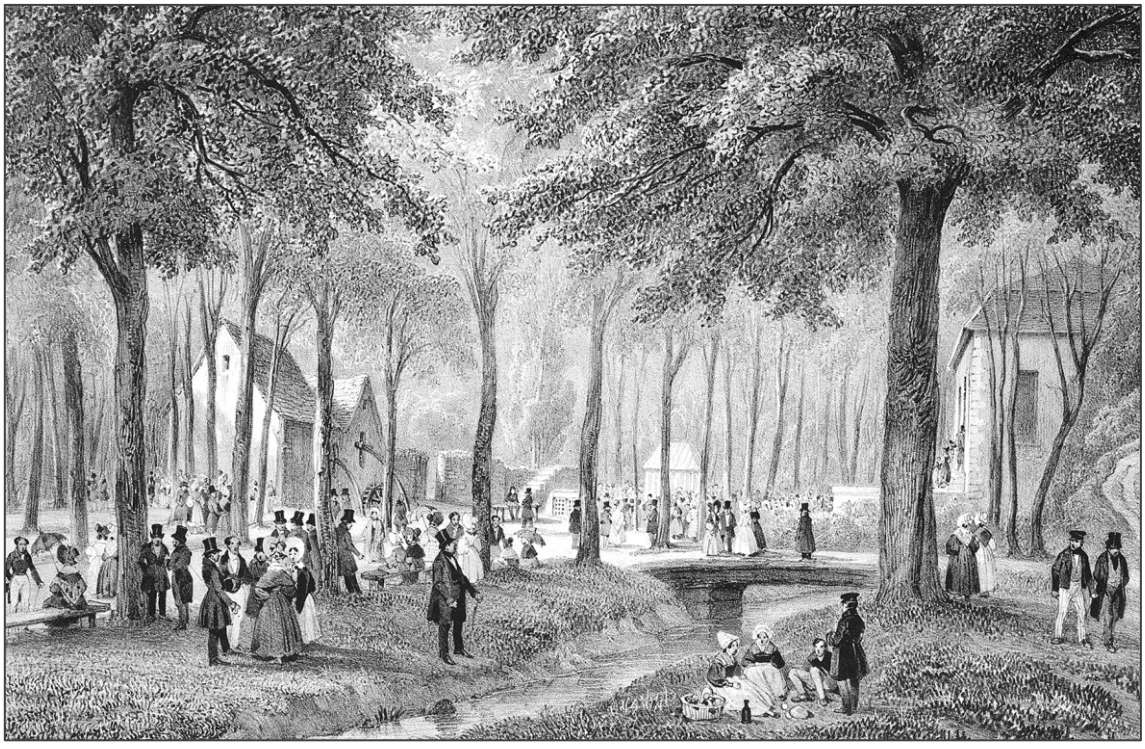
'Lamballe'
Félix Benoist (French, 1818–1896) and Eugène Cicéri (French, 1813–1890)

Dinan. — The basilica of Saint-Sauveur, the portal, a triple semicircular arch; the two side arcades each have a twisted column at the rear corner; in each of these arcades, two mutilated and unrecognisable statues, with large animals, lions or dogs, on which their feet rest; the crown above of one of these statues (on the right) represents a lamb carrying a cross. — The column capitals depict various subjects: a woman tormented by a toad and a devil, the toad below climbing up her

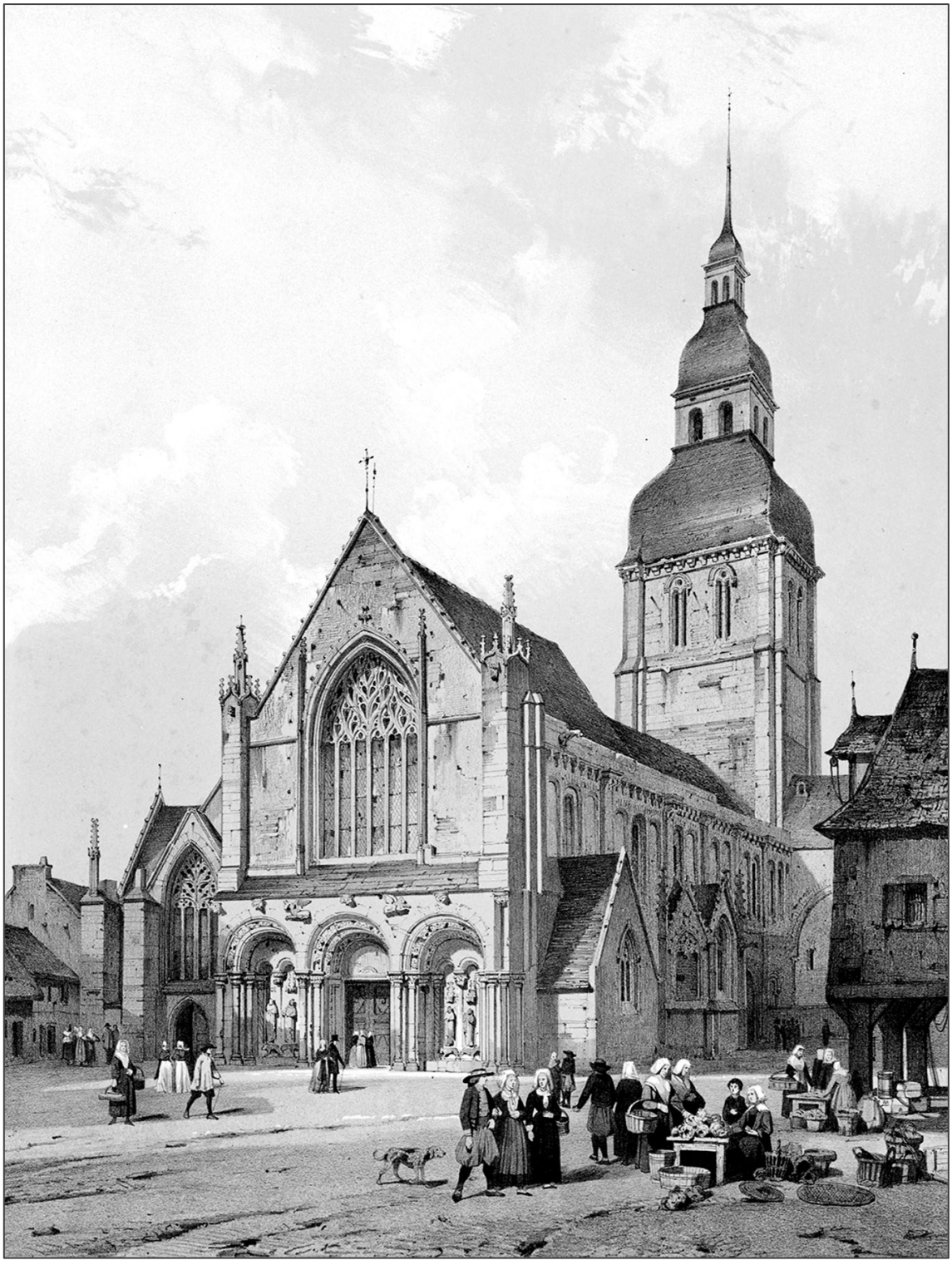
thighs and biting her breast; a stork drinking from a vase; a seated man with a chain around his neck from which hangs a ball and chain that falls between his thighs; devoured by two devils with bulls' heads. — At the base of the pinnacle above, a winged lion and a winged ox. — The heavy pinnacle, pierced by an enormous pointed window of ugly appearance. — On a capital, an old man with a long beard, carrying a staff from the end of which hangs a ball (a pot?), consulting a chimera. — The granite holy-water font more than three feet in diameter, two fish carved inside; on the outside, two men and two women: two hold the bowl on their stomachs, the two others are upside down; the heads are gone, the sexes are distinguishable only by the feet; the women's garments extend below, while the men's legs are visible; little water in the holy-water font. — A single aisle, in good Gothic style. The right side of the nave (the nave aisle is missing) is adorned with Romanesque windows with two columns crowned by flat volutes. A small pointed-arch chapel pierces the building on this side. — The nave of a remarkable purity; the colonnettes that terminate the spring of the vault's ribs, instead of being rounded as they continue from the gallery, are square. — The marble plaque of Bertrand du Guesclin (*the 'Eagle of Brittany', Constable of France under Charles V; the upright wall-tomb contains his heart*), called Dugucaquin — In one of the side chapels, a small carved stone painting has been set into the wall, depicting a tall, bearded, long-haired man standing (Saint Christopher?), wearing a robe with long sleeves and a wide, Judaic belt, walking on the waves, flanked on each side by small (biblical) trees on rocks; below, two children, one mounted on a lion, the other on an animal with the rump of a horse and the head of a dog, but a dog with what appeared to be a crocodile in its teeth. — On a Romanesque column capital, two camels meet; the one opposite (there are two columns at the entrance), coiled serpents and dragons.



'Dinan'
Félix Benoist (French, 1818–1896), Eugène Cicéri (French, 1813–1890) and Adolphe Jean-Baptiste Bayot (French, 1810–1871)



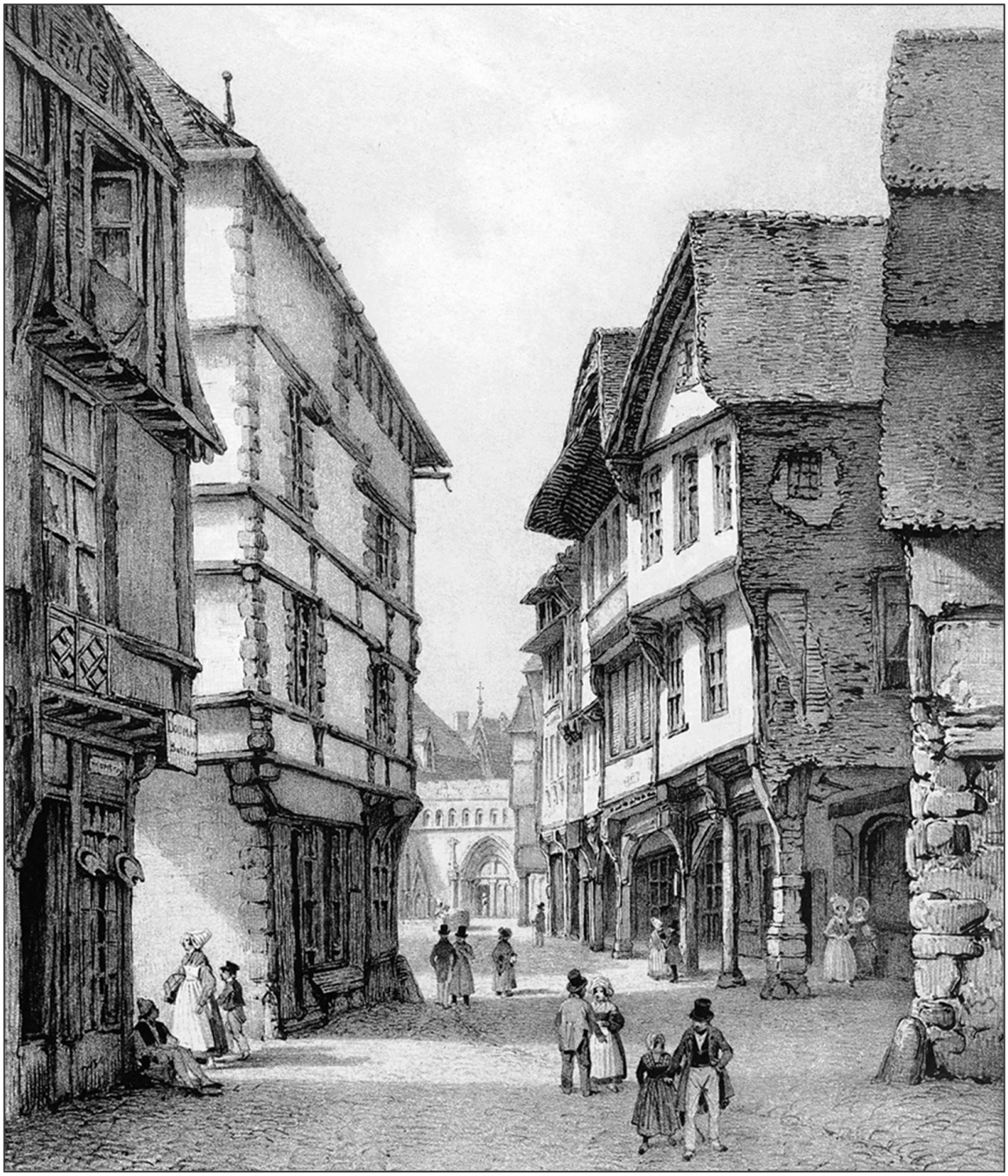
'The Mineral-Water Fountain, Dinan'
Adolphe Jean-Baptiste Bayot (French, 1810–1871)



'The Church of Saint-Sauveur, Dinan'
Léon Gaucherel (French, 1816–1886)

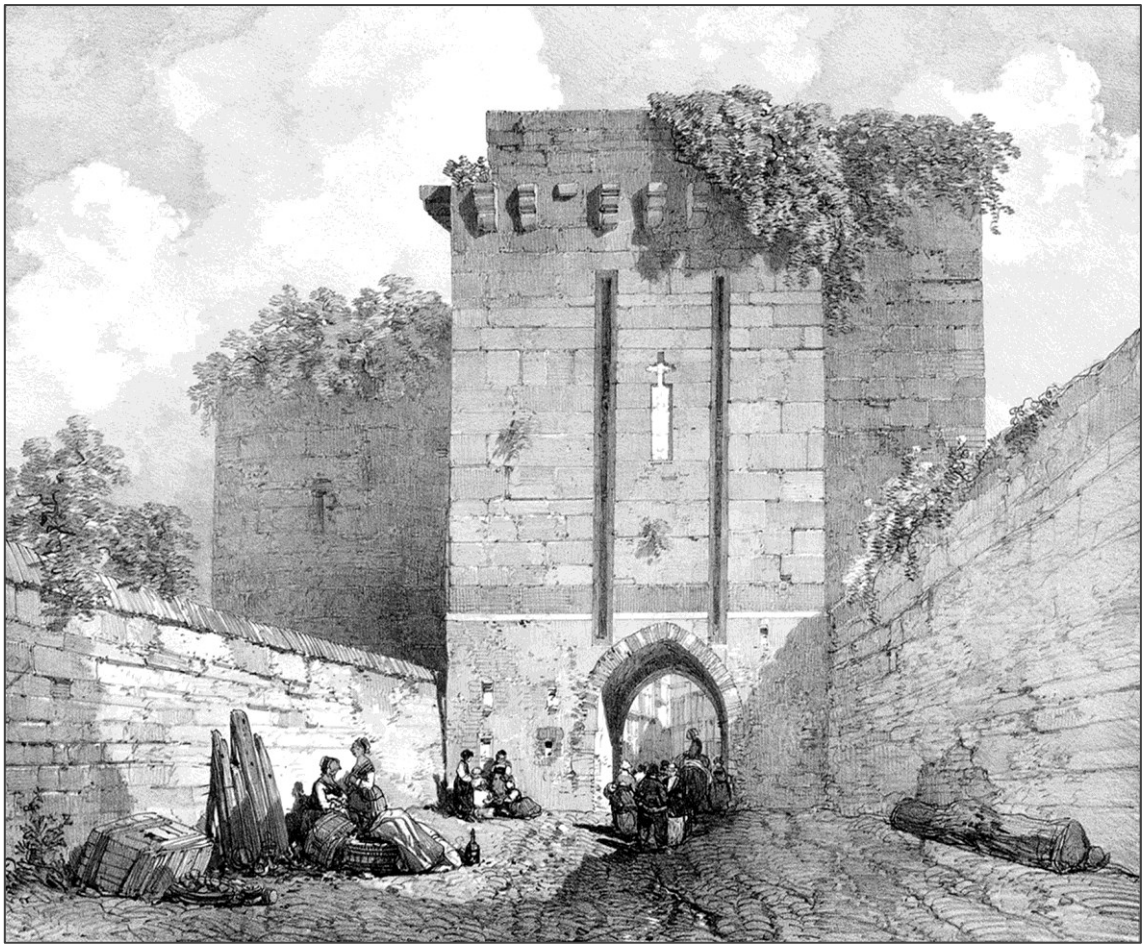


'The Church of Saint-Sauveur, Dinan'
Adolphe Jean-Baptiste Bayot (French, 1810-1871)



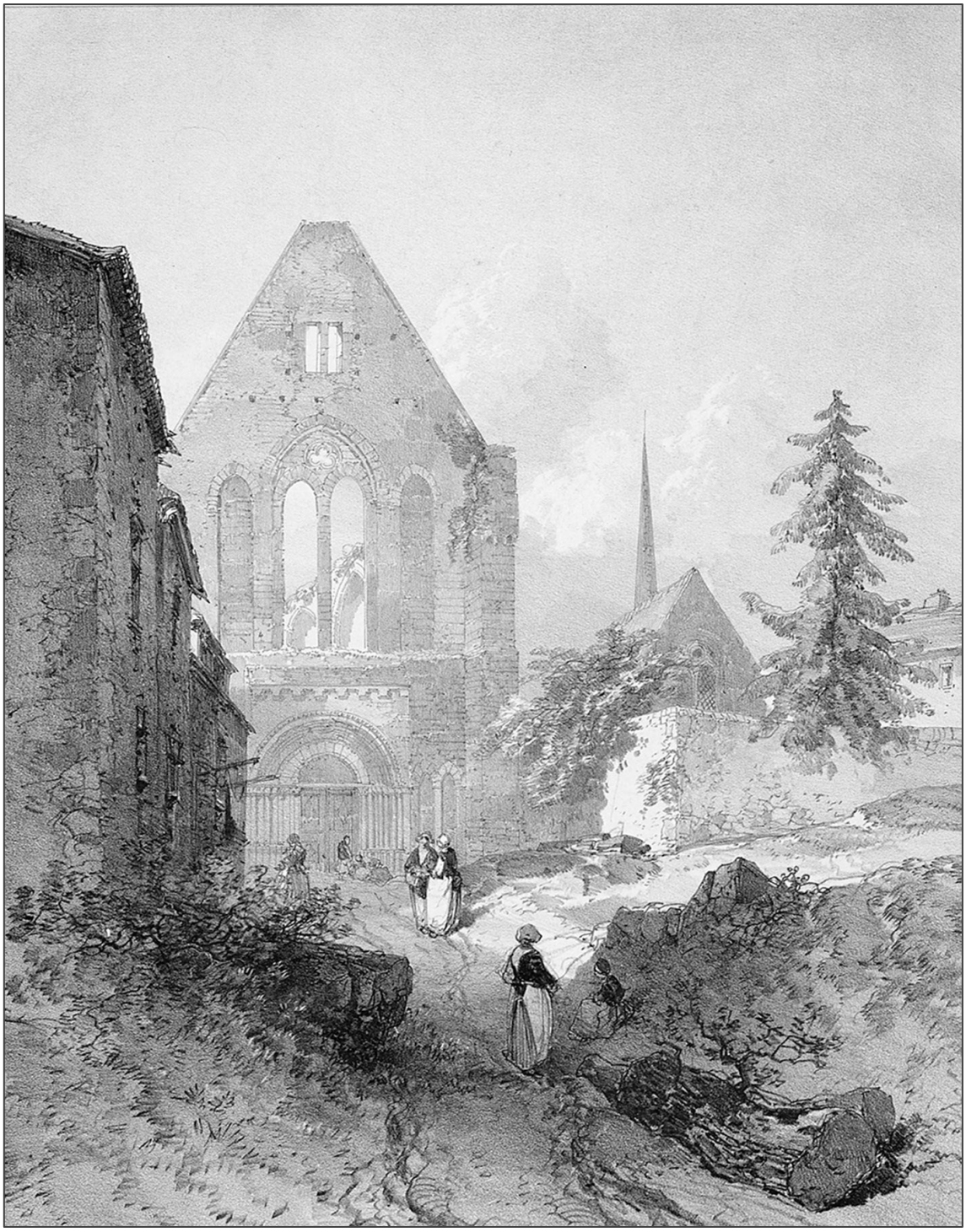
'A Square in Dinan'
Adolphe Jean-Baptiste Bayot (French, 1810–1871)

Prison towers, machicolations with trefoils and oblong squares at their base. — The view entirely wooded from the top of the tower. — Remains of ramparts. — Sloping streets, wooden houses with pointed roofs, receding perspective. — The Town Hall contains a museum.

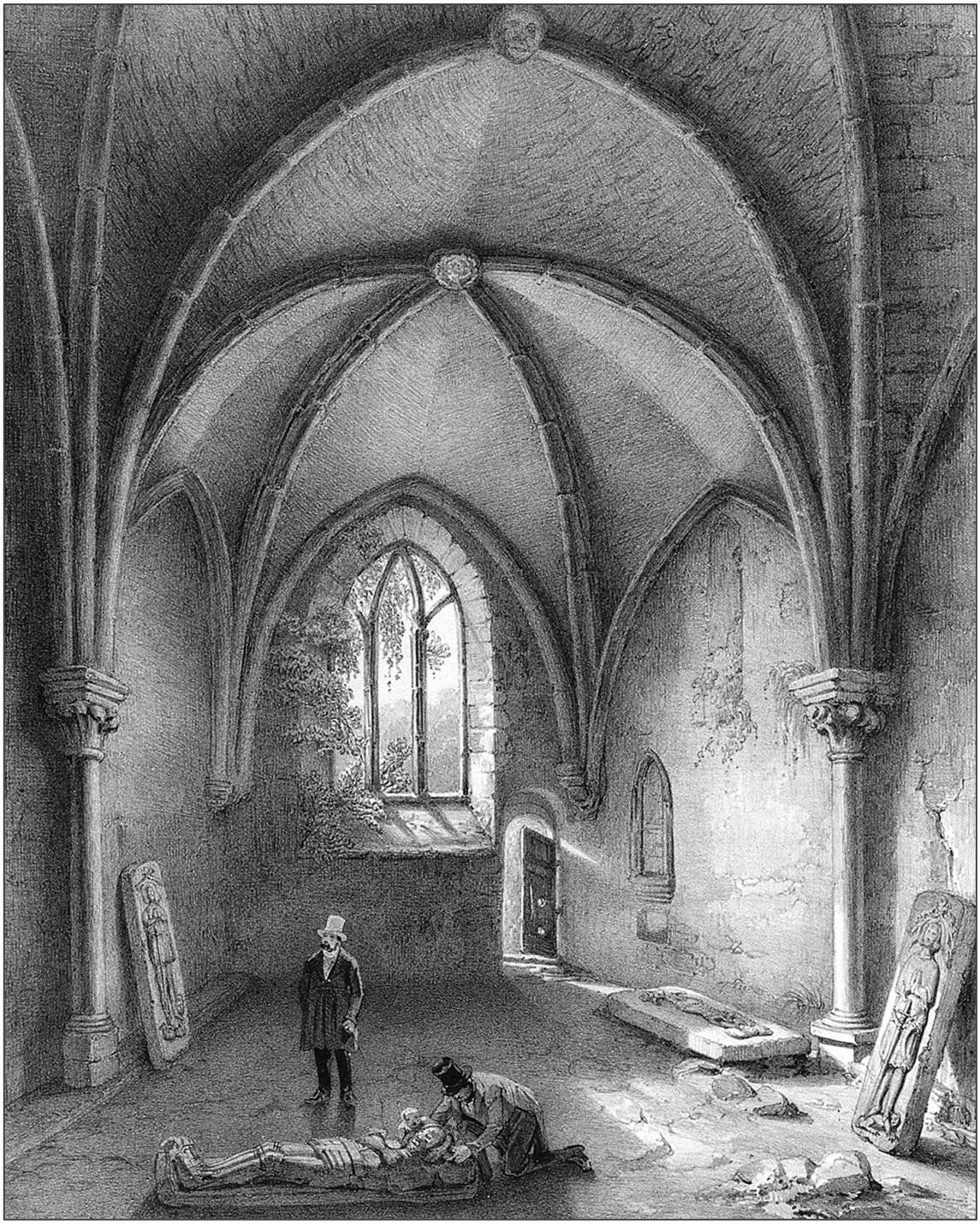


'The Porte Saint-Malo, Dinan'
Léon Gaucherel (French, 1816–1886) and Eugène Cicéri (French, 1813–1890)

Corseul. — A holy water font (*in Église Saint-Pierre*) similar to that of the Saint-Sauveur church, but smaller. — The upper tower. — The horse. — Stone facing aligned in the Roman style; conical construction, but the interior of the masonry does not appear to me to be Roman.



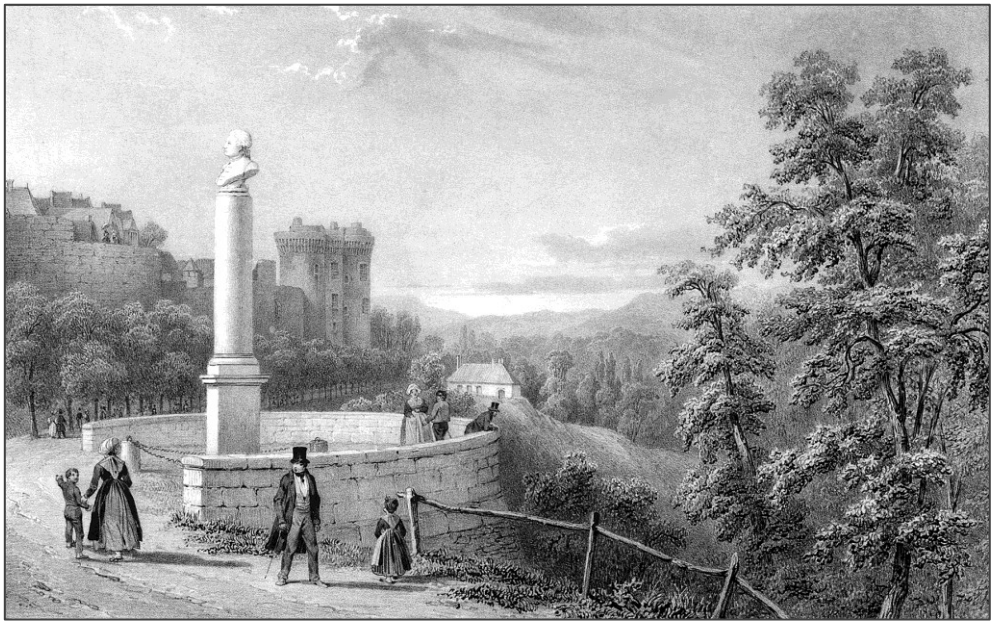
‘Léhon Abbey, near Dinan’
Eugène Cicéri （French, 1813–1890） and Léon Gaucherel （French, 1816–1886）



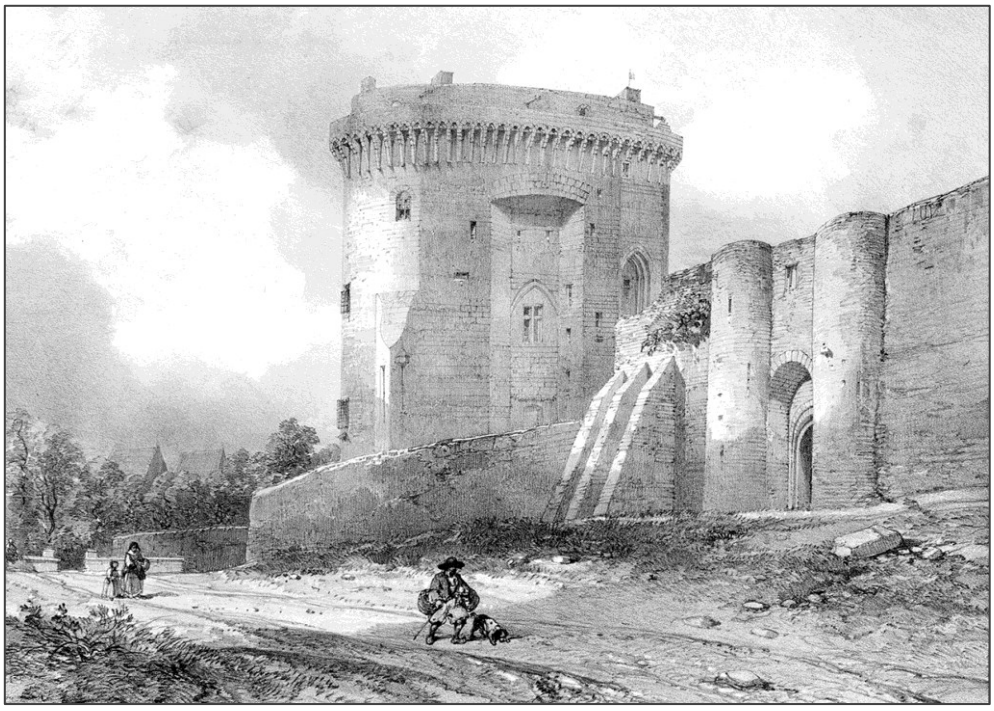
'The Beaumanoir Chapel, Léhon'
Adolphe Jean-Baptiste Bayot (French, 1810–1871)

Lehon (*Dinan*) — The old château, an enormous mound with a very steep path, entirely covered by beech trees; one can scarcely see the sparse fragments of masonry protruding from beneath the grass and undergrowth. — The Beaumanoir Chapel (*in Saint-Magloire Abbey Church, Dinan, now restored*), a large window at the far end through which one sees a completely wooded slope; a dark burial vault; a small column so green it resembled fine antique bronze. Through a pointed, half-ruined double window, a harsh, green light, a livid glow from the trees and leaves, especially on the left, the light entering at the right hand corner. — The cloister, roofless, square

columns; over the top of which vines climb, a yellow cow ruminating on the grass. — The refectory filled with looms; windows with leaded frames; a special structure in the wall for the pulpit used for reading during meals. — Shameless and impudent young girls at the foot of the castle, 'if you want to know, it's to buy bread.'



'The Château de Dinan'
Adolphe Jean-Baptiste Bayot (French, 1810–1871)



'The Tour du Connétable, the Keep of Dinan'
Léon Gaucherel (French, 1816–1886) and Eugène Cicéri (French, 1813–1890)

In the Town Hall Museum, a few tombs of the Beaumanoir family; but how things lose their impact when divorced from their natural context! Also a lock of Napoleon's hair, La Tour d'Auvergne's cartridge box, Louis XVI's key, full-length portraits of Broussais (*François-Joseph-Victor Broussais, the physician, born in St. Malo, who studied at the college in Dinan*) in the formal costume of the Institute, and Du Guesclin; even in one of the upstairs rooms a small portrait of Du Guesclin, then there's Du Guesclin Square with his statue, a Café Du Guesclin, the Hôtel Du Guesclin. Towns where great men were born either fail to recognise their worth, misuse their names deplorably, or completely forget them. —

The effect of the landscape from the top of the ramparts, spoiled, as at La Roche-Bernard, by the bridge being constructed. — The much-vaunted Rance is only beautiful at its mouth, where, suddenly widening as it joins the sea, one can see Saint-Servan and all the rocks surrounding Saint-Malo. On the banks, small rocks dot the landscape, but the overall effect is neither gentle nor rugged; lacking any distinctive character.

Chapter XI: (Flaubert: St. Malo to Rennes)



'Saint-Malo and the Grand Bé, from the Pointe de la Cité, Saint-Servan'
Félix Benoist (French, 1818–1896) and Adolphe Jean-Baptiste Bayot (French, 1810–1871)

Saint-Malo, built on the sea and enclosed by ramparts, appears, on arrival, like a crown of stone set above the waves, its crowning glory being its machicolations. The waves break against the walls or, at low tide, at their base on the sand. Small rocks clothed in seaweed emerge from the shore at ground level, like black spots on the blond surface. Larger ones, standing upright in

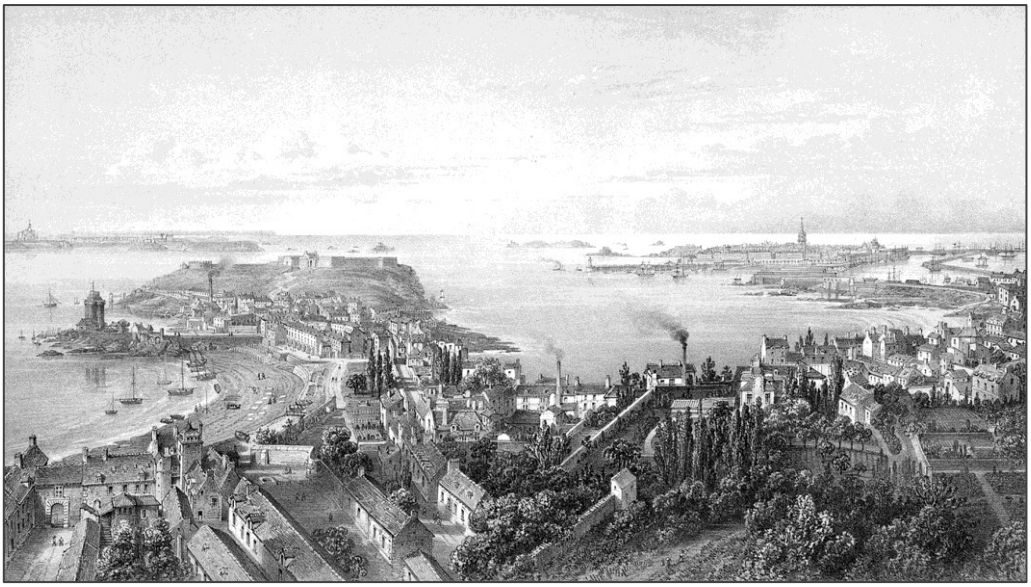
straight, perfectly uniform rows, support the base of the fortifications on their uneven summits, thus extending their grey colour and increasing the height.



'The Ramparts of Saint-Malo'
Eugène Cicéri (French, 1813–1890)

Above this uniform line of ramparts, punctuated here and there by towers, and pierced elsewhere by the sharp points of gates, one sees the roofs of the houses huddled close together, their tiles and slates, their small open dormer windows, their pierced weather-vanes turning, and their red pottery chimneys whose bluish smoke is lost to the air.

All around, on the surface of the sea islets rise, devoid of trees or grass, on which one can distinguish from afar various sections of wall pierced with loopholes and falling into ruin, large pieces of which each succeeding storm washes away.



'Saint-Malo and Saint-Servan'
Félix Benoist (French, 1818–1896)

Opposite the town, on the other side of the basin, and connected to the mainland by a long jetty that separates the port from the open sea, lies the Saint-Servan district, empty, spacious, almost deserted, nestling comfortably in a large muddy meadow. To the east stand the four towers of Solidor Castle, linked by curtain walls, black from top to bottom. These alone rewarded us for having made the long walk along the beach, in the full July sun, amidst the dockyards, among boiling pots of tar, and the fires of wood-shavings on which remnants of vessels were burned.



'The Tour Solidor, Saint-Malo'
Eugène Cicéri (French, 1813–1890)

A walk around the city, along the ramparts, is one of the most beautiful there could be. No one ever goes there. You sit in the gun-ports, your feet dangling over the precipice. Before you, lies the mouth of the Rance, opening like a valley between two green hills, and then the coast, the rocks, and everywhere the sea. Behind you, the sentry marches up and down, his steady step echoing on the resonant flagstones.

One evening we stayed there a long while. The night was mild, a beautiful summer night, moonless, but sparkling with the light of the sky, fragrant with the scented sea breeze. The town slept; the lamps, one after another, disappeared from the windows, the distant lighthouses shone like red patches in the shadowy sky, which above our heads, was blue and studded in a thousand places by flickering, radiant stars. We could no longer view the sea, but we could hear it, and feel it, while the waves crashing against the ramparts sent drops of foam through the wide openings in the machicolations.

In one place, between the houses and the city wall, in a grassless ditch, piles of cannonballs were lined up. From there one could see, inscribed on the second floor of one of the houses: 'Chateaubriand was born here.'

Further on, the wall abuts the belly of a large tower: the Quic-en-Groigne; its sister, the Tour Générale, is broad and tall, stout, formidable, swollen in the middle like a hyperbole, and still stands strong. Intact and almost new, no doubt they would appeal yet more if the stones of their battlements had begun to lapse into the waves, while dark foliage, the friend of ruins, rustled in the wind from their summits. Do not monuments, like men and passions, flourish more in memory? Are they not rounded-out by death?

The deserted courtyard, where stunted linden trees cast their rounded shadows on the ground, was as silent as a convent. The concierge's wife went to fetch the keys from the commandant; she returned with a pretty little girl who had come there to entertain herself by gazing at the strangers. Her arms were bare, and she held a large bouquet. Her naturally-curly black hair peeked out from under her pretty surcoat, and the lace of her trousers fluttered over her little goatskin shoes tied around her ankles with black cords. She ran ahead of us up the stairs, calling out to us.

The climb is long, as the tower is high. The bright rays of daylight from the arrow-slits passes through the wall like arrows themselves. If you poke your head through the openings, you can view the sea, receding further and further, and the raw colour of the sky ever-expanding, so much so that you fear losing yourself therein. The ships look like rowing boats, and their masts like sticks. Eagles must think us the size of ants. Do they even notice us? Do they know that it is we who build the cities, the triumphal arches, the bell-towers?

Once on the tower's platform, even though the wall reaches your chest, you can't help but be overcome by the same emotion that grips you on all high peaks: a voluptuous sense of unease, a mixture of fear and pleasure, pride and dread, a struggle between the mind revelling in the view, and one's strained nerves. You are singularly happy; you want to launch yourself, fling yourself skywards, soar higher, stretch out to the air, be carried by the wind; though your knees tremble, and your body refuses to approach the edge.

Yet men did ascend it, one night, by means of a rope, long ago, in the prodigious sixteenth century (*in 1590, the citizens seized the castle from the king's governor, and the town declared itself an independent republic, which existed till 1594*), an age of fierce convictions, and frenzied love. How the human

instrument vibrated then, sounding all its strings! How expansive, full, and fertile humanity was! May we not quote, with regard to that age, Fénelon's words (*see 'Les Aventures de Télémaque'*): 'wrought to perfection for the pleasure of one's eyes?' For, without even mentioning its foremost features: beliefs split to their foundations like ruined mountains, new worlds discovered, lost worlds unearthed, Michelangelo beneath his dome, Rabelais' laughter, Shakespeare observing, Montaigne dreaming, in what other period can one find deeper passion, more extreme courage, harsher examples of willpower, a more complete sense of freedom, at last, as humanity struggled and writhed to escape inborn fatality.

The period stands out, etched in high relief, from surrounding history, and yet how marvellous the manner in which the imagination returns there, brightening the colours, expanding its horizons! Figures pass before you, seemingly alive threefold; one encounters them once; yet for a long time one dreams of them, and strives to complete their profiles, so as to grasp them better. Were they not fine, among others as terrifying, those old mercenaries whose species vanished around 1598, with the Treaty of Vervins, men such as Lamouche, Heurtaud de Saint-Offange, the Lord of La Tremblaye (*René de Grézille*) who returned from battle gripping his enemies' heads by the hair, or La Fontenelle, 'the Wolf', of whom we have spoken; men of iron whose hearts wavered no more than their swords, and who, drawing to themselves a thousand divergent forces which they directed along with their own, roused the towns by galloping through their gates at night, equipped corsairs, and burned the countryside; men like kings to whom others capitulated! Who has thought of depicting those violent governors of provinces, trampling the crowd, raping the women, and plundering the gold, like D'Épernon (*Jean Louis de Nogaret de La Valette*), that atrocious tyrant in Provençe yet perfumed darling at the Louvre, like Blaise de Montluc (*Marshal of France*), strangling Huguenots with his hands, or his nephew Jean de Montluc, Seigneur de Balagny (*also a Marshal of France*), that 'Prince of Cambrai', who read Machiavelli to imitate the Duke of Valentinois (*Cesare Borgia; the duchy was centred on Valence*), and whose wife rode to the breach, helm on head and in full armour.

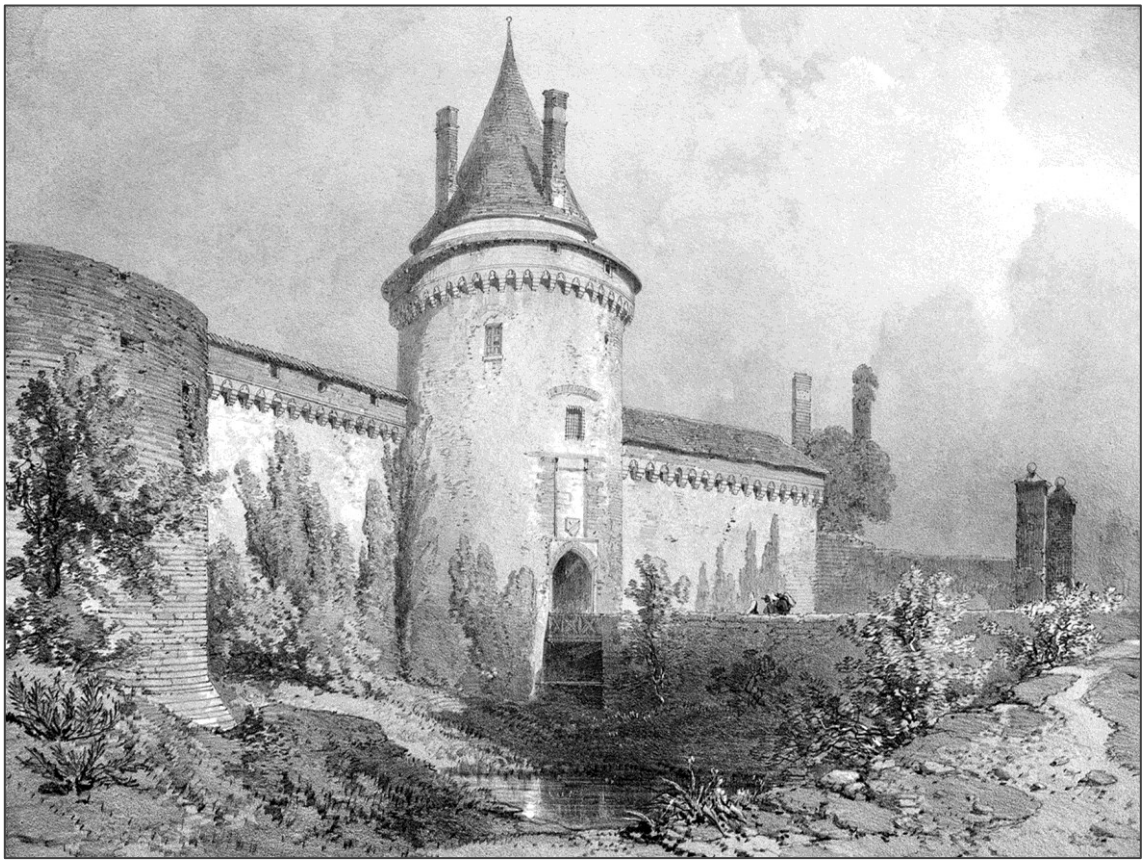
One of the most forgotten men of that time, one of those at least whom most historians are content merely to name, is the Duke of Mercoeur (*Philippe-Emmanuel de Lorraine*), the intrepid enemy of Henri IV, who resisted him longer than the Duke of Mayenne (*Charles de Lorraine*), longer than the League, and Philip II. Disarmed at the end, that is to say, won over, and appeased (in 1598, under such conditions that twenty-three articles of the treaty were kept secret) not knowing what to do, he went to serve in Hungary, fought the Turks, on one occasion attacking an entire army with five thousand men, then, setting out to return to France, died of fever at Nuremberg, in his bed, at the age of forty-three.

Saint-Malo reminded me of all this. Mercoeur always clashed with its citizens, and could tolerate them neither as subjects nor allies. They were determined to wage war on their own behalf, and conduct trade by their own means, and though fundamentally supporters of the Catholic League (*formed during the Wars of Religion, 1562-1598*), they rejected the duke, while simultaneously rejecting the Béarnais (*Henri IV and his party*).

When the Sieur de Fontaines (*Honorat du Bueil, Seigneur de Fontaines-Guérin*), governor of the city, informed them of the death of Henri III, they refused to recognise the King of Navarre (*Henri IV*). They took up arms and erected barricades. Fontaines shut himself up in the castle, and both sides remained on the defensive. Little by little, the people encroached. Firstly, they demanded that

Fontaines declare his intention to preserve their privileges. Fontaines yielded, hoping to buy time. The following year (1589), they chose four generals independent of the governor. The next year (1590) they obtained permission to stretch chains across the harbour; Fontaines yielded again. The king was at Laval, awaiting him. The moment was near when he could take revenge in one fell swoop for all the humiliations he had suffered, for all the concessions he had made. But he acted too hastily and revealed his true intentions. When the people of Saint-Malo reminded him of his promises, he replied that only if the king appeared would he open the gates. With this, their decision was made.

The château had four towers. They attempted to scale the highest one (the Tour Générale), the one Fontaines believed most secure. Such daring feats were not uncommon at the time, as evidenced by the ascent of the Fécamp cliff by Bois-Rozé (*Henri Charles de Goustimesnil; in 1592*), and the attack on the château at Blain (*Groulais Castle*) by the lord of Guébriant (*François Le Felle; in 1591*)



'The Château de Blain'
Léon Gaucherel (French, 1816–1886) and Eugène Cicéri (French, 1813–1890)

They consulted, they met several evenings in a row at the home of Josselin Frotet, Lord of La Landelle they solicited the aid of a Scottish gunner in the château, and one foggy night, fully armed, they gathered outside the city wall, having let themselves down on ropes, and approached the foot of the Générale tower. There they waited. A rope with a hook was lowered from the wall, to which they swiftly attached a rope ladder, which was hoisted to the top of the tower, and secured, by the gunner, to the end of a culverin in the embrasure of a crenel.

Michel Frotet was first, then Charles Anselin, La Blissais, and the rest. The night was dark; the wind was blowing strongly; they climbed slowly, daggers between their teeth, feeling their way up the rungs with their feet and groping with their hands. Suddenly (they were already halfway up), they felt themselves descending, the rope lowering. Not a cry; they remained motionless. The combined weight of their bodies had caused the culverin to move; it lodged on the embrasure; they resumed their climb and arrived in single file on the tower's platform.

The drowsy sentries failed to raise the alarm. The garrison was asleep, or playing dice on the drumheads. Terror seized them, and they took refuge in the keep. The conspirators pursued them there; fighting raged on the staircases, in the corridors, in the rooms; they crushed each other beneath the doors, killing, slitting throats. The townspeople arrived as reinforcements, others erected ladders against the Quic-en-Groigne Tower, entered without resistance, and began pillaging. La Péraudière, the castle's lieutenant, seeing La Blissais, said to him: 'Well, sir, a miserable night.' But La Blissais made him understand that it was no time for talk. The Sieur de Fontaines had not yet been seen. They went to his room, and found him dead on the threshold, pierced by an arquebus shot fired by one of the inhabitants as he was leaving, carrying a torch before him. 'Instead of hastening into danger,' said the author of the account, 'he had dressed slowly, as if going to a wedding, with not an aiguillette left unfastened.'

This surprise attack at Saint-Malo, which caused the king so much harm, did nothing to help the Duke of Mercoeur. He desperately wanted the people of Saint-Malo to accept a governor appointed by him, for example his son who was still a child — thereby, effectively, himself — but they stubbornly refused. He sent troops to protect them, but they denied them entry, and the troops were forced to quarter themselves outside the town.

However, they were no more royalist because of it; since, after their arrest of the Marquis de La Moussay (*Charles Gouyon, born in Vitré*) and the Viscount de Dénouai, it cost the Marquis twelve thousand écus to redeem his ransom, and the Viscount two thousand.

Then, fearing that Pontbriand might disrupt trade with Dinan and the other cities of the League, they seized the place.

Assuming that their bishop, the temporal lord of the city, might well deprive them of the freedom they had acquired, they clapped him in prison and only released him after a year.

We know the conditions under which they finally accepted Henri IV's rule; they had to pay for their own defence, nor would they receive a garrison, but were exempt from taxes for six years, etc.

Situated between Brittany and Normandy, this little community seems to possess the characteristics of both: the former's tenacity and granite-like resilience; the latter's, passion and drive. Sailors, writers, voyagers on every ocean, what distinguishes them above all is their audacious, intensely human natures, poetic in their brutality, often narrow-minded in their obstinacy. There is this resemblance between those two sons of Saint-Malo, Lamennais (*Félicité Robert de La Mennais, Catholic priest, philosopher and political theorist*) and Broussais (*François Joseph Victor Broussais, physician and surgeon*), that they were always equally extreme in their beliefs, and that they devoted, with the same fierce conviction, the latter part of their lives to fighting what they had supported during the first.

Within the town, you pass through narrow, winding streets, between tall houses, alongside grimy premises selling sailing boats or cod. No carriages, no luxuries; it is dark and stinking, like the hold of a ship. It smells of Newfoundland, and salted meat; the rancid smell of long journeys.

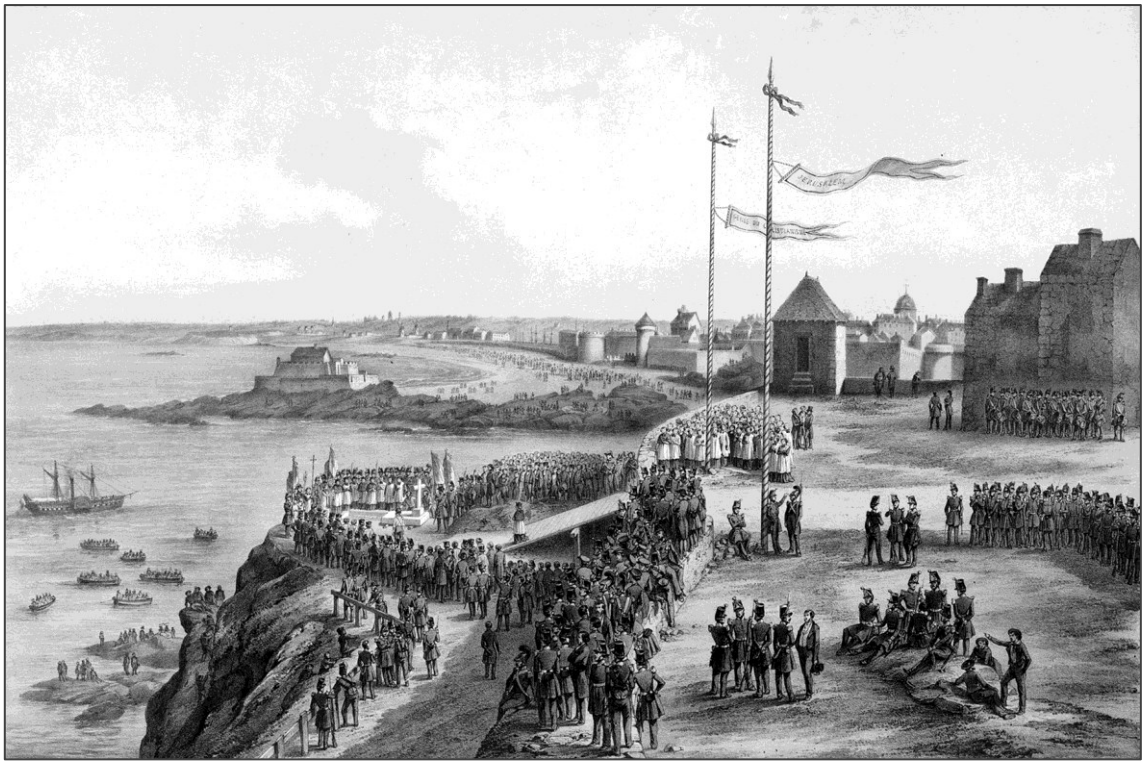
'The watch, executes its rounds every night accompanied by large English dogs, mastiffs, which are set free outside the city in the evening, with a master to control them, rendering it unsafe to be around. But, come the morning, they are led back to a certain place in the town where they rid themselves of all their fury which, at night, is strangely great.' (*See Bertrand d'Argentré, 'Histoire de Bretagne,' Chapter X: Saint Malo. D'Argentré, jurist and historian, was born in Vitré*)

Apart from the disappearance of that quadrupedal police-force, which once attacked a certain Monsieur Dumollet (*note the popular song of 1809, 'Bon Voyage Cher Dumollet', apparently based on a like incident involving a naval officer, Ansquer de Kerouarts, in 1770*) and whose existence is confirmed by a contemporary text, the external aspects of things have changed little, no doubt, and the civilised folk themselves who live in Saint-Malo claim that it is a very backward place.

The only painting we noticed in the church was a large canvas depicting the Battle of Lepanto, and dedicated to Our Lady of Victories. She hovers high above, among the clouds. In the foreground, all of Christendom is on its knees: parliaments, princesses, and kings, crowns on their heads. In the background, the two armies clash. The Turks are hurled into the waves, and the Christians raise their arms to heaven.

The church (*Cathédrale Saint-Vincent-de-Saragosse, rebuilt after the destruction of 1944, completed 1972*) is ugly, dry, unadorned, almost Protestant in appearance. I noticed few votive offerings, a strange thing here considering the perilous lives of sailors. There are neither flowers nor candles in the chapels, no Sacred Heart bleeding, no ornate Virgin, nothing, in short, of what so greatly outrages Monsieur Michelet (*Jules Michelet, the historian*).

Opposite the ramparts, a hundred paces from the city, the islet of Grand-Bé rises from the waves. There stands Chateaubriand's tomb; this white platform carved from the rock is the place he has designated for his body (*in July 1847, when Flaubert and Du Camp visited the islet, the tomb, completed in 1838, was as yet empty; Chateaubriand died the following year, in July 1848*)



'The Funeral of Monsieur de Chateaubriand'
Félix Benoist （French, 1818–1896）

We went there one evening, at low tide. The sun was setting. The water was still flowing over the sand. At the foot of the island, dripping seaweed spread like the hair of the women of ancient times over some grand sepulchre.

The island is deserted; sparse grass grows there, interspersed with small clumps of purple flowers and tall nettles. On the summit stands a dilapidated blockhouse with a courtyard, whose old walls are crumbling. Below this ruin, halfway up the slope, a level space of about ten square feet has been cut into the hillside, in the centre of which stands a granite slab surmounted by a Latin cross. The tomb consists of three sections: the base, the slab, and the cross itself.



'Chateaubriand's Tomb on the Grand Bé, Saint-Malo'
Félix Benoist (French, 1818–1896)

He will sleep beneath; his head turned to face the sea. Like that sepulchre built on a reef, his immortality will resemble his life, distinct from that of others, and encircled by storms. The waves, through the centuries, will endlessly murmur to him; amidst the tempests they will leap to his feet, while at dawn in summer, when white sails are unfurled, and the swallows arrive, they will bring him, expansively, gently, the melancholy voluptuousness of far horizons, and the embrace of a caressing breeze. Thus, as the days pass, while the waves of his native shore flow, without cease, between his cradle and his tomb, René's heart, grown cold, will slowly lapse into nothingness, to the endless rhythm of that eternal music.

We circled the tomb, we touched it, and gazed at it as if it already enclosed its future occupant, then we seated ourselves on the ground beside it.

The sky was pink, the sea calm, and the breeze quiet. Not a ripple disturbed the still surface, upon which the setting sun poured its golden hue. Bluish only near the shores, as if evaporating into the mist, the sea elsewhere was red, and even more fiery on the distant horizon, where a great bank of purple stretched the entire length of the view. The sun no longer sent out rays; its orb less bright, its light drowned in the water, seemed to float above it. It slowly descended, drawing from the sky the rosy tint it had bestowed, and as both sources of light faded, pale blue shadows advanced, spreading across the entire vault. Soon the orb touched the waves, touched its round disk to them, then sank to its very centre. For an instant, cut in two by the line of the horizon, one half showing, seemingly motionless, the other sunk below, its form trembled and lengthened, then vanished completely; and when, in the place where it had sunk, light no longer rippled, it seemed a great sadness had fallen, suddenly, upon the sea.

The beach appeared black. A windowpane in one of the town's houses, which a moment ago had shone like fire, was extinguished. The silence deepened; yet sounds could be heard: the waves crashed against the rocks and fell heavily over them; long-legged midges buzzed in our ears, disappearing amidst the swirl of their diaphanous flight, while the indistinct voices of young lads bathing at the foot of the ramparts reached us, accompanied by their cries and bursts of laughter. We could see them from afar, struggling to swim, racing into the waves, or running along the shore.

We descended to the sands from the isle, and crossed the beach on foot. The tide was advancing, rising quickly; the channels were filling; in the hollows of the rocks foam was trembling, or, borne from the rims of the waves, it flew in flakes, and skipped as it fled.

The naked youngsters, having emerged from their briny bath, went to dress on the pebbles where they had left their clothes and, with hesitant feet, advanced over the stones. While attempting to put on their shirts, the fabric clung to their wet shoulders, and one could see their white torsos, writhing with impatience, while their heads and arms remained trapped, the sleeves fluttering and flapping in the wind like banners.



'The Bathing Beach, Saint-Malo'
Félix Benoist (French, 1818–1896)

A man passed us, his wet hair hanging down around his neck. His wave-washed body glistened. Drops beaded on the curling strands of his black beard, as he shook the water from his brow. His broad chest, a hairy furrow running across his ribcage between solidly carved muscles, still heaved with the fatigue of swimming, and imparted a calm movement to his flat stomach, whose contour toward his sides was as smooth as ivory. His sinewy thighs, with their successive planes, moved

above slender knees that, in firm supple fashion, rested on slender but sturdy lower legs, each ending in an arched foot, with a short heel, and splayed toes. He walked softly over the sand.

Oh, how beautiful the human form is when it appears in a free and natural state, as in the first days of the world! What is it now, masked and condemned never to appear in the light? That concept 'Nature,' which humanity has repeated in idolatry or terror, alternately; which philosophers have plumbed; which poets have sung — is it not lost, forgotten? If, far from the platforms from which people shout, and the crowds in which they push and shove, there are still, here and there on Earth, yearning hearts endlessly tormented by an uneasy sense of beauty, who feel within themselves a ceaseless and desperate need to utter what cannot be said, and achieve what is only dreamed, it is there, to the home of the ideal that they must hasten, there that they must live. But how? By what path? Mankind has cut down the forests, ploughs the seas, and the sky above our cities is clouded with the smoke from his fires. Is it not his glory, his mission others say, to progress forever in this way, attacking the work of the deity, conquering it? Mankind denies it, shatters it, crushes it, even within himself, even in the flesh, of which he is ashamed, and which he conceals like a crime.

Mankind has thus become the rarest and most difficult thing to appreciate (it is not the heart I speak of, oh moralists!), and the result is that the artist is now ignorant of his own form, and the qualities that make it beautiful. What poet today, among the most learned, knows what a woman is? Where has he ever seen one, the poor wretch? What could he have learned of her in salons, hidden in her corset, her starched crinoline, even in his own bed, if he considered her there, during his intermissions of pleasure?

Sculpture, however, teaches the beholder more fully than all the rhetoric in the world, the gradation of proportions, the fusion of planes, and ultimately, the nature of harmony! Thus, the ancient peoples, by the mere fact of their existence, imbued the works of the masters with their nobility of bearing, and purity of features.

In Juvenal, I hear, vaguely, the groans of the naked gladiators; Tacitus has turns of phrase that resemble the senatorial tunic's broad purple stripe (*laticlave*), while certain verses of Horace evoking the loins of a Greek slave, and the sway of the hips, sound, in their short and long syllables, like castanets. But why concern ourselves with the past?

Let us look nearer home, and consider what is being created now. Is not what is in demand today the very opposite of the bare, the simple, the true? Fortune and success, these days, come to those who know how to clothe and dress the world! The tailor is the king of this century, the fig-leaf is his symbol; underwear everywhere in the law, arts, politics! False freedoms, veneered furniture, sentimental art, the public loves them. Give it to them, stuff them, let them gorge themselves, the fools!

They rush to admire engravings, and neglect the art of painting, they sing a romantic song, and sleep through Beethoven, they know all of Béranger by heart, and not a line of Hugo.

It's a revelation to see them dining, filling themselves with the heaviest food, intoxicated by the most adulterated liquids. Common dishes are served at speed, and as for tomorrow: more of the plays of Eugène Scribe, more of those landscapes by Claude-Joseph Vernet, more, more of the novels of Eugène Sue — whatever is easily digestible, whatever occupies least space in the stomach, so there's more room for such fodder.

Countryfolk, in particular, revel in these wares with edifying tenacity. Their tastes are more genuinely foolish, more savagely stupid; they display less finesse than the city-dwellers, who at least adopt new fashions even if their taste remains the same. How many thousands of copies of *Amour Conjugal ('Tableau de l'Amour Conjugale' Nicolas Venette's sexual treatise of 1686*), and *Faublas* (*'Les Amours du Chevalier de Faublas', the erotic serial novel by Jean-Baptiste Louvet de Couvray, of 1787-1790*) are sold annually in the countryside! Not to mention *Europe* and *Asia*, those saucy young ladies with their viscous gazes that adorn every cottage. But you must view the fine pictures in the inn at Cancale to see ugliness, silliness, and vulgarity depicted in all their fullness.

Imagine, in a low-ceilinged room, five black wooden frames hanging on the walls, and within these frames, reds, blues, yellows, a mosaic of bold colours highlighted, like a variegated stain, against the whiteness of the plaster wall.

One approaches the first frame and reads below the engraving: *The Marriage Proposal*. The scene is a richly-furnished drawing room, a green carpet, red wallpaper, handsome bell-pulls on either side of the fireplace, which is adorned with a clock representing Time with his scythe. A young man — and what a young man, the very picture of a young man: a blue coat with gleaming buttons, a pink cravat pulled straight between the two shawl lapels of a velvet waistcoat, and studded with a diamond pin, grey trousers of a very mythological air, handsome thighs, a small mouth, charming hair; a young man smiling and seemingly shy — is being presented by his father to a lady seated in an armchair, and a young woman standing on a stool. The mother, swathed in lace, looks a little ill, somewhat unwell, and smiles with the charming smile of indulgent old age contemplating young love; the father of the future husband is a perfectly respectable man, sporting a medal of honour and a white tie, with a superior air, and well-hung. As for the young woman's father, he is an old man, utterly decrepit yet venerable, with a considerable amount of white hair, wearing a fine egg-yellow frock coat with a very high collar, rounded like a gutter. Everyone is smiling in unison; their hearts share an access of emotion: love — paternal, maternal, and filial affection — joy, hope, and a pleasant sense of satisfaction, combined with the unease of the as yet unknown, which pierces, stirs, and charms their hearts.

The second engraving represents *The Wedding*. The scene is the church, with the priest, the altar, the bride in white, the ring being slipped onto her finger; the mother is crying, the young man's father in a corner is moved, but smiling; all the women have feathered hats; the groom, in black, his hair curled and as hard as iron, his trousers even tighter, wears very pointed boots: he is a cherub.

The third scene is *The Ball*. A gathering of high society, sumptuous luxury; a pair of chandeliers, glittering quadrilles, a seemingly endless line of feet in pointed shoes, watch-chains everywhere, a shower of scarves and turbans, utterly dazzling splendour. Meanwhile, the groom is drawing his companion aside, and saying to her, in a passionate voice: 'My love, how I long for you to share my home, and my bed! I possess you, come! Would you like to experience an even more delightful celebration than this one, which our guests attend for our pleasure? Marriage will teach you…' etc, etc.

The fourth scene, *The Bride Preparing for Bed*. She is being undressed; the bed is there, the sheets turned back, next to it a bedside table, candlestick, and matches. The mother whispers 'mysterious words' in her daughter's ear concerning the new duties she has to fulfil; through the half-open door, we see the groom, 'burning with love,' desperately wishing to enter, while the bridesmaids

push him away, and 'for a moment, thwart his wishes,' consumed as he is by 'the most legitimate, the purest, the most touching impatience.'

A fifth tableau, *The Bride on Waking*. The mysteries of Venus are accomplished; the bride's womb has received the procreative seed the product of which, in nine months' time, will 'fill the couple with fresh happiness'; the bed is unmade; on the marble bedside table are the remains of a pâté, and an open bottle of wine; below, one glimpses the chamber pot, while a maid throws dirty linen into a cupboard; the parents, who arrived at dawn, rush into their children's arms; the bride's features are drawn, her headbands untied, and her nightgown half-open. The caption, moreover, declares her 'a little weary perhaps of the renewed assaults of marriage, but happy, her heart filled with supreme bliss.' The radiant groom, in an azure dressing-gown adorned with red lapels and a gold cord, and extra-pointy purple velvet slippers, confides to his still-smiling father the detailed 'charms of the past night,' and the bride confides to her mother 'the intoxication she felt'; the latter urges her 'to that purity, and chastity which are the basis of the State and which guarantee the happiness of a family for centuries.'

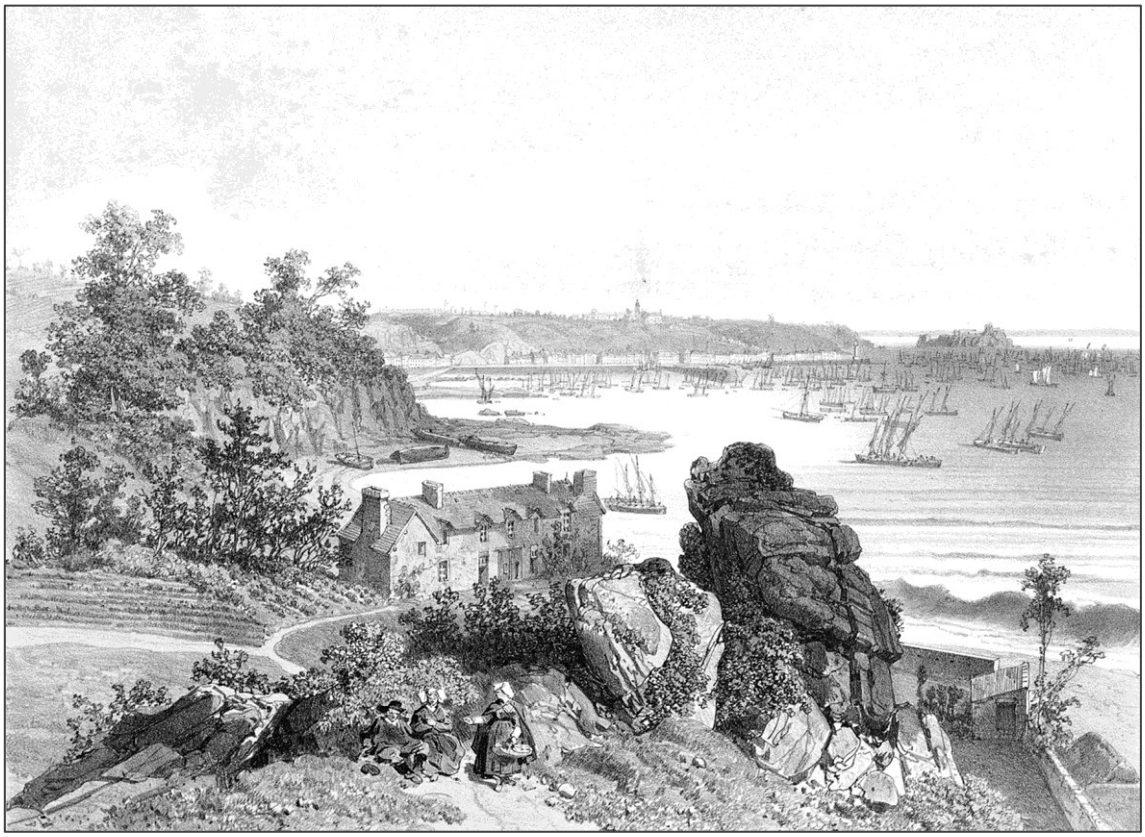
We emerged onto the quay seeking some fresh air, to find the sun shining brightly; the exposed shore was grey with the mud that covered it, and on its smooth, icy bed, empty boats were beached in every conceivable position, fishing-nets hanging from the mastheads to dry. The wooden planks of the boats, oozed black droplets. In the mist, penetrated by sunlight, alone amidst the sea, rose Mont Saint-Michel, a bluish dome with jagged peaks; to its right, the Normandy coast, continuing in an undulating line the immense sweep of the bay, and gradually reducing in height, the vagueness of its contours merging on the horizon into a whiteness of light cloud.



'Avranches: the Bay of Mont-Saint-Michel from the Promenade'
Félix Benoist (French, 1818–1896) and Adolphe Jean-Baptiste Bayot (French, 1810–1871)

We slithered over the warm mud in which our bare feet sank to the ankles; here and there, in pools of water enclosed by squares of pebbles, a few oysters slept in their green shells like people taking a nap with the blinds closed.

To reach the Cancale rocks (*Pointe du Grouin*) we boarded a rowing boat; the sail, hoisted to its full height, and covering us with shadow, was mirrored in the water; we progressed gently and slowly, without making a sound.



'Cancale and La Houle'
Félix Benoist (French, 1818–1896) and Adolphe Jean-Baptiste Bayot (French, 1810–1871)

The point is a pair of unequal summits, or rather, two piles of rock separated by a crevice that can be passed through at high tide; it is made of accumulated blocks; tamarisks, wild thyme, and heather grow there. The rabbits that live there flush from the undergrowth in fright when you throw pebbles. After climbing to the top, seating ourselves in various places, and wandering around, we returned to the boat, which dropped us a quarter of an hour later on the pebbles at the foot of the cliff.

The road ends abruptly at a corner, revealing the village of Cancale, its walls lined with dry-stone quays. There, lying flat on my back on the sand, hat pulled down over my eyes, arms outstretched, I spent a good hour and a half basking in the sun, like a lizard. One feels one's body inert, numb, lifeless, almost one with the ground on which it lies, while the soul, on the contrary, having departed far off, flutters about in the air like a stray feather.

When I looked up, the beach had vanished; the tide had covered it quite swiftly, and the boats, motionless a moment before, were now rising and re-floating. Amidst the long rolling waves,

arriving one upon another like successive manifestations of the Flood, and racing at full speed over the flat beach, where they spread endlessly, the boats, full of people, crossed courses, emptied, and returned to the quay. They were about to go fishing; the rudders were hooked on, the oars lashed, the sails hoisted; one saw boats tacking to catch the wind, and, each pursuing its course, and heading out to sea.

While the horses were being harnessed to the carriage which would return us to Saint-Malo, we thought it a good idea to eat some oysters, and take one last look at those picture-frames. The hostess, poor woman, was dressed in black having lost her husband the previous week, and her daughter three days ago. In a ragged-straw armchair by the window, she remained motionless, unconcerned with appearances, gazing through the panes at the sea where her husband's boat was no longer visible, and at the empty quay where other people's children were playing. She probably finds scant amusement now in the famous engravings, but the servant, I imagine, takes pleasure and finds sustenance in them. It is likely that she covets above all the jewellery there, and dreams of queenly happiness, of some sensual, opulent existence, shimmering with the colours of cashmere and as sweet as syrup, complete with a handsome, well-dressed lover; and of amorous ecstasies amidst Dutch-linen sheets. A drunken sailor entered the inn singing and demanding a drink; when no one answered him, he slammed his fist on the table, causing the stacks of plates to clatter. The woman in black turned and said:

— 'What do you want?'

He replied, continuing his song, that he needed a drink; she interrupted him with a wave of her hand and said:

— 'You know my heart is too full of grief, there is no singing here; go.'

And she repeated to him with a pleading expression, of disgust and entreaty:

— 'Oh! Please go; go!'

He halted, cast an idiotic gaze over the walls, then exited, bumping into the door, after which he immediately began yelling at the top of his lungs again.

In Saint-Malo, in the courtyard of our hotel, we found Madame Maillard (*or Maillar, owner of the Hôtel de France et de la Paix*) sitting as usual in her glass-enclosed hutch, her fingers swollen with rings, shelling green beans onto a kitchen apron over her yellow bathrobe.

When we first saw her, on the morning of our arrival (she was standing there, twirling her keys with her index finger), her admirably soft and beautiful black eyes slanting towards the temples beneath long eyebrows; her slender waist heavily adorned behind with all the deceptions of industry, emerald buttons on her batiste chemisette; earrings dangling against her thin neck, and a necklace jingling on her collarbones; with her watch-charms, gold lorgnette, brooches and cameos; her yellow dress, open, so loose about her body, so expressive; with pomade on her headbands, and a smile that rendered her mouth with blackened teeth almost pretty, we conceived, it must be admitted, an unfavourable view as regards her morals, but a very favourable view of her hotel. The green shrubs in the courtyard, the bouquets of flowers arranged in porcelain vases, the nasturtiums in bloom climbing about the windows, and the silver braid on our bed curtains, right down to the goldfish swimming in their tank, all of this created a sort of fine feminine, Spanish, Andalusian,

odalisque, and refreshing atmosphere, that was a pleasure to rediscover after the moorland wastes of Armorica.

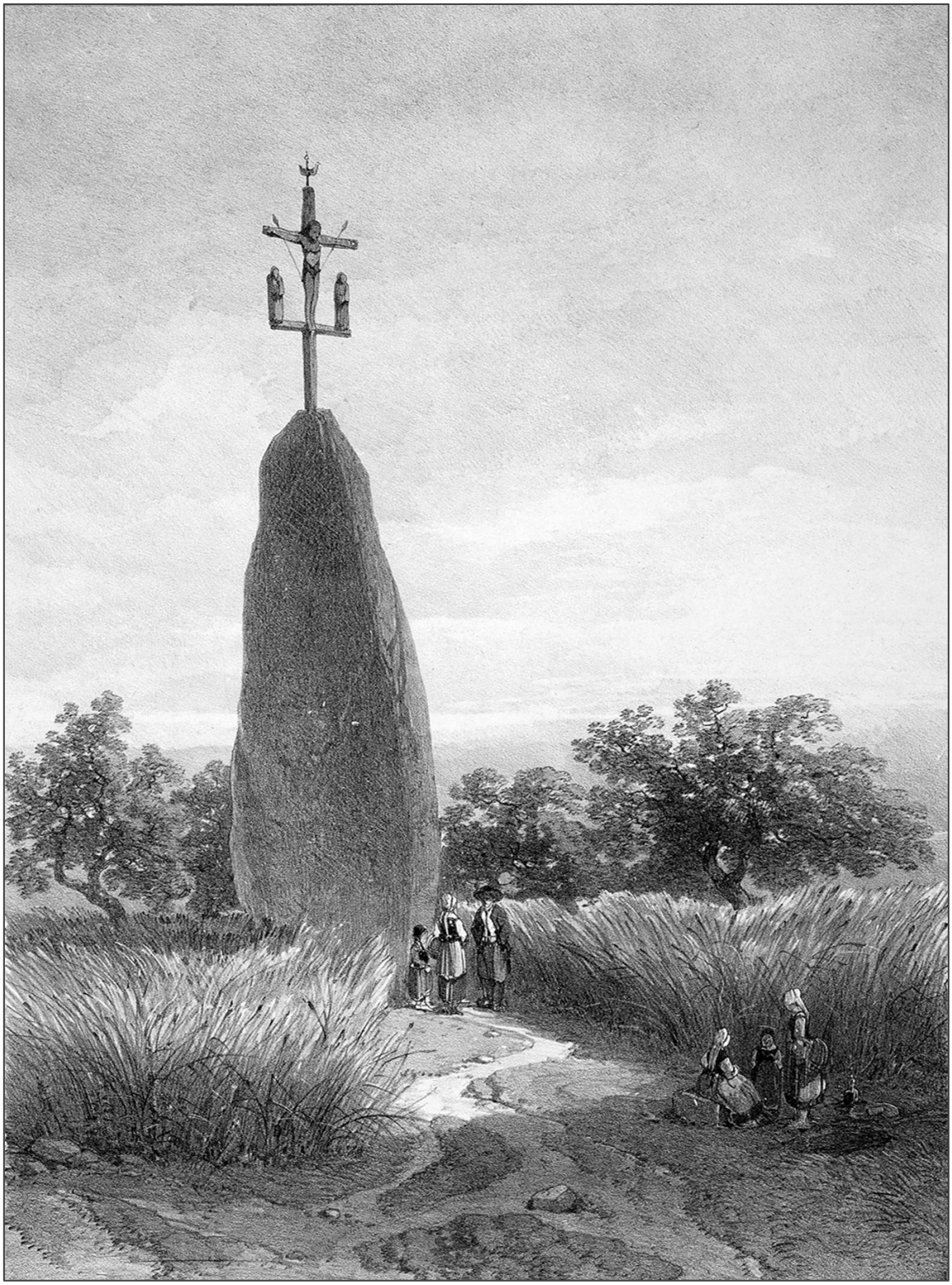
A foolish presumption of ours, as regards her morals! A total error of judgment! Madame Maillard is the best mother in all the world, and the most loving wife in the whole department, including all the islands off the coast; she has fourteen children whom she raises to be hard-working and principled; her eldest daughter makes the desserts, and her second son has gone to Jersey to learn English so that he can one day serve as an interpreter in the establishment.

She has added a curiosity shop, where she advertises, relentlessly, her Japanese plates, English lace, stuffed humming-birds, and large pieces of Faenza ware which she naively tries to pass off as Palissy porcelain (*produced by Bernard Palissy in the sixteen century*), to foreign customers. She also shows, tucked away in a cupboard, half a dozen mismatched books, including a second volume of Dom Morice (*Pierre-Hyacinthe Morice, eighteenth century Benedictine monk, and the author of works on Breton history*) which she was keeping for one of her sons should one of them later decide to study history, 'since it is a fine science, and an admirable thing for a man to study.'

From time to time, she leaves you when the doorbell, on the door that connects the hotel to her shop, sounds, but she soon returns; she spends her life there, selling, buying, re-selling, arranging, wiping, dusting, fiddling about; her husband knows nothing as regards the business, being a complete idiot when it comes to the arts.

The shop alone proved our assessment wrong; she wears the finest adornments herself, only to show them and offer them to collectors: a bracelet today, a collar this evening, a purse tomorrow. What one might mistake for the trimmings of vice are simply perfectly honest speculation; she adorns her body not to sell it, but to use it as a display shelf.

We had to part ways, though. One morning, after most amicable farewells, we left Saint-Malo to spend the night in Pontorson.

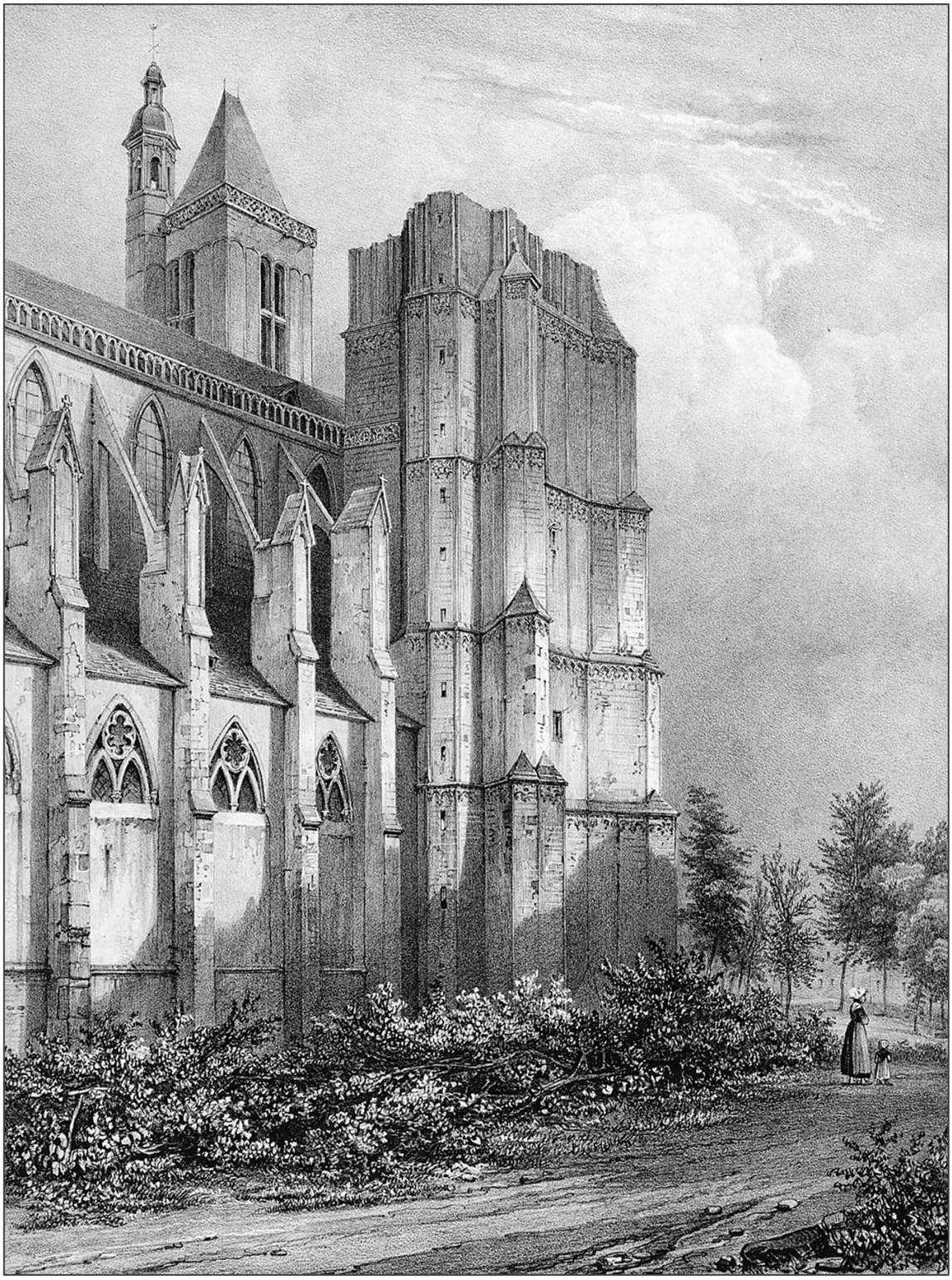


'The Menhir of Champ-Dolent, near Dol'
Léon Gaucherel (French, 1816–1886) and Eugène Cicéri (French, 1813–1890)

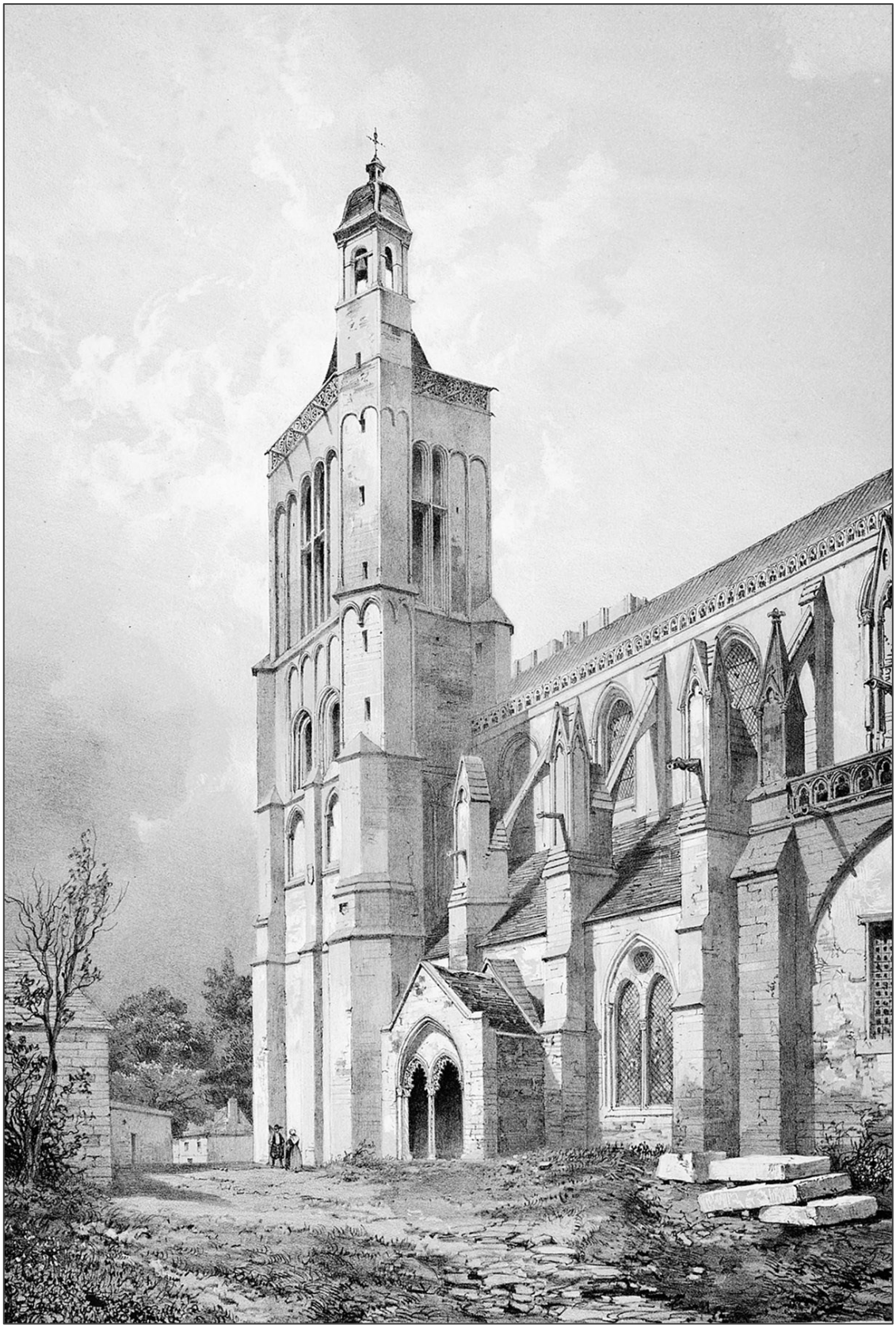
The cathedral of Dol (*Saint-Samson, Dol-de-Bretagne*), on the way there, is a church in a fine style, its trefoil-shaped narthex lending it a charming, unadorned grace, yet rich in its own right due to its lofty proportions. Its austere pointed arch aptly recalls the metropolitan pride of its bishops, whose descendants still display their curved croziers, gilded from top to bottom, in the choir.



'Dol Cathedral'
Félix Benoist (French, 1818–1896) and Eugène Cicéri (French, 1813–1890)



'Dol-de-Bretagne'
Félix Benoist (French, 1818-1896)



'Dol Cathedral'
Léon Gaucherel (French, 1816–1886)



'The Interior of Dol Cathedral'
Félix Benoist (French, 1818–1896)



'The Interior of Dol Cathedral'
Léon Gaucherel (French, 1816–1886)

Having arrived early in Pontorson, and immediately feeling bored, we walked, so as to occupy our time and nurse our ennui, along the poplar-lined promenade, beside a small river that flows among clumps of shrubs and slender marsh reeds. The view terminates at each bend in the shoreline, or floats, uncertainly, while providing little of interest, over the flat meadows regularly

intersected by long lines of trees. As a salmon had been caught the day before, three or four locals, positioned on the banks of the muddy waters, were splashing into the stream and hauling up a large square net, hoping at any moment to feel the mesh tear under the weight of the dreamed-of catch. When we had witnessed enough of their alternating hope and disappointment, we returned to the inn to dine.

The road from Pontorson to Mont Saint-Michel is treacherous because of the sands. Our post-chaise (for we did also travel by post-chaise) was constantly disturbed by a multitude of carts filled with the grey earth of the region which is exported somewhere to be used as fertiliser. These increased in number as we approached the sea, over several miles, until we finally reached the deserted shore from which they came. On this white expanse, where the mounds of earth, raised into cones, resembled huts, the carts, their long, undulating line receding into the distance, reminded us of some migrating barbarian horde, beginning to depart the plain.

The empty horizon extends, widens, and finally its chalky terrain merges with the yellow of the shore. The ground becomes firmer and a briny smell reaches you; it looks like a desert from which the sea has receded. Long tongues of sand, ranged one after another, continue endlessly, in indistinct planes like a wave's ripples, forming great curved lines, the wind delighting in tracing giant arabesques across their surfaces. The ocean waves are far away, so distant that they are no longer seen, their sound inaudible except for a vague murmur, elusive and ethereal, the very voice of solitude, which is perhaps nothing more than the stupefying effect of a vast silence.

Opposite, in front, the large, round rock rose, its base fortified with crenelated walls, its summit crowned by a church, its towers plunging into the sand and its spires reaching into the air. Enormous buttresses supporting the sides of the structure rest on a steep slope from which cascade outcrops of rock, and clumps of wild greenery. Halfway up the slope, terraced as best they can, rising above the white band of the wall and dominated by the brown mass of the church, a few houses, show their bright colours between those two broadly uniform hues.

The post chaise went ahead of us, we followed at a distance, following the rut-like furrows its wheels were ploughing; it sank into the distance, and its hood, which alone we could see as it fled, looked like a large crab dragging itself over the shore.

Here and there, streams of water flowed, one had to cross further upstream. Or else they were squares of mud that appeared unexpectedly, their uneven meanders framed by the sand.

Two priests, also visiting Mont Saint-Michel, accompanied us. Afraid of soiling their new robes, they drew them around themselves when stepping over the streams, and hopped across, leaning on their walking sticks. Their silver buckles were grey with mud which the sun dried, and their soaked shoes gaped and squelched at every step.

The mount, however, was growing in size. At a single glance one could view the whole thing, and we could count the roof tiles, the clumps of nettles in the rocks and, at the very top, the green slats of the shutter of a small window that overlooks the governor's garden.

The first gate, narrow and pointed in shape, surmounts a kind of causeway of pebbles leading up from the sea; on the eroded shield of the second, undulating lines carved in stone seem to represent waves; on the ground, on either side, lie enormous cannons made of iron bars joined

with similar hoops. One of them still has a granite cannonball in its mouth; captured from the English, in 1425, by Louis d'Estouteville, they have been there for four centuries.

A handful of houses facing each other form the whole street; the alignment ceases, though further houses appear along the steep paths and stairways that lead to the castle, succeeding each other at random, perched, piled, one on another.

To reach the castle, you first mount the curtain wall, whose ramparts hide the sea from the dwellings behind. Earth is visible between the cracked flagstones; grass grows amidst the battlements, and pools of urine spread over the collapsed ground, eroding the grey stones. The ramparts skirt the island and rise in successive tiers. Once past the watchtower at the angle between the two towers, a small, straight staircase appears; step by step, as you climb, the roofs of the houses gradually recede beneath you, till their dilapidated chimneys smoke a hundred feet below. One sees laundry hung out to dry, at the dormer window of the attics, at the ends of poles decorated with red rags sewn together; or, between the roof of one house and the ground floor of another, some small garden baking in the sun, the size of a table where the leaves of leeks, languishing with thirst, droop over the grey earth; but the far side of the mount, looking out over the open sea, is bare and deserted, and so steep that the shrubs grow there with difficulty, leaning over the abyss, and seemingly about to fall therein.

High above, climbing at ease, enjoying as expansive a view as human eyes can feast upon, gazing at the sea, at the coast unfolding in an immense bluish curve on the horizon, or, rising on its perpendicular slope, the wall of the Merveille (*the 'Marvel', a term for the Mount's spectacular Gothic buildings*), with its thirty-six giant buttresses, a smile of admiration tightening one's lips, one hears, suddenly, the sharp clatter of looms. Cloth is being woven. The shuttle advances, beats, strikes abrupt blows; everything is involved in the din.

Between two slender turrets representing two cannons on their breechblocks, the castle's entrance opens in a long archway, while within it a granite staircase rises. The centre remains perpetually in shadow, the rest barely illuminated by the two shafts of light, one from below, the other falling from above through a gap in the portcullis; it is like an underground passage rising beyond you.

On ascending to the summit of this grand staircase, one enters the guardhouse. The sound of rifle-butts echoed beneath the vaulted ceiling, along with the voices of the sergeants performing the roll-call. Drums were beating.

A guard returned our passports, which the Governor had wished to see; the guard beckoned us to follow, drawing the bolts and opening the doors, and led us through a labyrinth of corridors, vaults, and staircases. It is easy to go astray; a single visit is scarcely enough to grasp the complex layout of the combined buildings, where fortress, church, abbey, prisons, and dungeons — all are present, from the Romanesque style of the eleventh century to the flamboyant Gothic of the sixteenth. We could only view the Knights' Hall, which is now used as the weavers' workshop and therefore closed to the public, through a windowpane and by standing on tiptoe. We could barely make out its four rows of seats. Columns with trefoil capitals support a vault with projecting ribs. Two hundred feet above sea level, the cloister is built over this Knights' Hall. It consists of a quadrangular gallery formed by a triple row of small columns in granite, tufa, granite-like marble, or stucco made from crushed seashells. Acanthus, thistle, ivy, and oak forms twine around their

capitals; between each pointed arch, a trefoil rose-window is silhouetted against the light; the cloister has been converted into the prisoners' courtyard.

The prison guard's cap passes by walls which one once saw the tonsured skulls of the hardworking Benedictine monks, as they walked by dreaming, and the prisoner's clogs clatter on those flagstones that were brushed by the monks' robes rising above large leather sandals that creaked under the weight of their feet.

The church contains a Gothic chancel and a Romanesque nave, the two architectural styles vying for grandeur and elegance. In the chancel, the pointed arches of the windows are tall, sharp, and slender, like a yearning for love; in the nave, the rounded semicircular arches, open one row above another, and wall-columns rise like palm-tree trunks. Their bases rest on square pillars, their capitals are crowned with acanthus leaves, and powerful ribs continue beyond, curving beneath the vault, which they intersect, and support.

It was noon. Through the open door, bright daylight and a breath of fragrant air streamed across the dark walls of the building. The nave, separated from the choir by a large green, canvas curtain, is furnished with tables and benches, since it is used as a refectory.

When Mass is said, the curtain is drawn, and the prisoners hear divine service without moving their elbows from the place where they eat: which is most ingenious.

To extend the platform on the west side of the church by twelve meters, they simply shortened the church itself; but since some kind of entrance was needed, an architect conceived the idea of closing off the nave with a Greek-style façade; then, perhaps feeling remorse or, more likely, wishing to refine the work, added columns with capitals, 'effective imitations of those of the 11th century' according to the description. Let us be silent, let us bow our heads. Each of the arts has its own particular leprosy, its own ignominious mortal disease, that gnaws at its face. Painting has the 'family portrait', music the 'romance', literature 'criticism', while architecture has its architects.

Prisoners marched around the platform, all in a line, one behind the other, unspeaking, and with arms crossed, in that fine and regular order we had seen at Fontevrault. They were the sick from the infirmary, allowed out for fresh air, and distracted thus, in order to cure them.

One of them, lifting his feet higher than the others, and gripping the jacket of the comrade in line in front of him, stumbled along. He was blind, poor wretch! God prevents him seeing, Man forbids him from speaking! He looked gentle, however, and his shuttered face smiled in the warm rays of the sun.

After giving a coin to our guard, who made a wild-cat grimace in thanks, we descended the stairs, and five minutes later were back among the houses where women, seated in front of the doors, were weaving nets on their knees.

When crossing on foot to Tombelaine, which similarly is a rocky tidal isle, about two miles north of Mont Saint-Michel, and situated in the middle of the bay, one employs a guide so as to avoid the pools and streams of water. Even in seemingly safe spots, if you halt, you feel yourself sinking into the sand, which starts to bubble and rise around you; in ten minutes it would be up to your stomach, in half an hour up to your shoulders.

When you cross a stream, the swift current rushes between your legs with the force of a torrent; it is dizzying to stand and watch the flow. Everywhere around you, there is nothing but sand,

monotonous stretches that succeed one another, and vanish in flight; but on turning your head, the entire Mount seems so close, with its houses, its shrubs clinging to the slopes, and its church at the very top, that it appears to be pursuing you.

Tombelaine is a small, flattened granite islet, barely above the surface of the sand. In the grass, remnants of foundations are still visible, and two parallel tracks run like carriage ruts along the entire length of the rock. It was here, that Montgomery (*Gabriel de Lorges, Comte de Montgomery, Captain of Henri II's Scotch Guards, who mortally injured Henri in a jousting accident in 1559*) had the plunder from Catholic churches transported; he established a mint, and beautiful, brand-new gold coins leapt across these stones where weary cormorants come to rest their pink feet during storms. Until the Revolution, in a small chapel, of which nothing remains, a perpetual lamp burned.

Tombelaine! Where does the name come from? Is it that of the young girl, of legend, who, unable to follow her lover who accompanied William the Conqueror on campaign, remained on the isle awaiting him, finally dying of grief, and so buried there? Or is it that of King Hoël's mother who, abducted from her parents by a Spanish lord, was supposedly brought there, raped, and murdered? A vague tale, then, to do with a woman, still lingers on, with regard to this reef!

In the evening, while we were dining, a procession of children led by the priest passed by, singing, beneath our windows. They held candles in their hands and, walking two by two, climbed the steps leading from the street to the ramparts. We could see the white dresses of the little girls ascending amidst the lights, and hear their voices fading away.

As night fell, we climbed the towers to watch the sunset; there we talked with an old sailor who, leaning on the parapet, was smoking his pipe like us, while digesting his meal. He had made several long voyages, had been to Cochin China and India, visited Japan, and the White Sea (*an inlet of the Barent's Sea, the site of Arkhangelsk, or Archangel, the chief seaport of medieval and early modern Russia until 1703*); he told us about those countries and the sights he had seen, as the rising tide lapped against the base of the towers, the stars appeared, and from time to time the distant voices of the sentries, shouting: 'Garde à vous!' (*'Attention!'*), echoed in the shadows.

The next day, when the tide had receded, we left the Mount, beneath a blazing sun that heated the leather seats of the carriage. We advanced at walking pace; the axles creaking, the wheels sinking into the sand. At the end of the sands, on the grassy shore, I peered through the small window at the back of the carriage, and bade farewell to Mont Saint-Michel.

In order to visit Combourg (*the château in which Chateaubriand spent his early youth*), we were obliged to return to Dol; it was the portly postmaster of Pontorson who took us there himself. Seated on the apron of his carriage (we had abandoned our own), both feet on the shafts, in his shirt, and with a pipe in his mouth, he urged on his two dappled horses at a brisk trot and cracked his Perpignan whip (*Sorède, south of Perpignan was, and is, known for its whip and riding-crop manufacture*); from the furthest distance, he shouted at any vehicles to pull aside, cursing those who ignored him, as well as those who complied, the former in anger, the latter for the fun of it, shouting and swearing, furious or facetious by turns, a despot of the highway, which he treated as if it were his private property.

From Dol to Combourg, on the contrary, the poor fellow who drove our tilbury could barely keep hold of the reins, and dozed, overcome by the heat. As for ourselves, we spoke so little we scarcely thought to look at anything.

A letter from the Vicomte de Vezins was supposed to guarantee us entrance to the château. So, as soon as we arrived, we asked to see Monsieur Corvaisier, who is the steward.

We were made to wait in a large kitchen where a young woman dressed in black, badly scarred by smallpox and wearing tortoiseshell glasses over large, near-sighted eyes, was shelling currants into a bowl. The jam pot was on the stove, and sugar was being crushed with bottles. Clearly, we were *intruding*. After a few minutes, someone came downstairs to tell us that Monsieur Corvaisier, ill and shivering with fever in his bed, was very sorry he could not be of service, but that he sent us his regards. However, his assistant, *who had just returned from his errands* and was having a snack in the kitchen, drinking a glass of cider and eating a slice of bread and butter, offered to show us around the château instead. He put down his napkin, sucked his teeth, lit his pipe, took a packet of keys from a nail, and started off, walking in front of us through the village.

After advancing alongside a high wall, we entered a silent farmyard through an old arched gate. Flints jutted from the hard-packed earth, in which sparse grass grew, fed by the manure that was hauled over the ground. There was no one there; the stables were empty. In the sheds, hens, perched on the cart-shafts, slept with their heads tucked under their wings. At the foot of the buildings, the remnants of straw that had dispersed from the barns muffled the sound of our footsteps.

Four large circular towers, joined by curtain walls, revealed beneath their pointed roofs openings pierced in the battlements, like the gunports on a warship; while the arrow-slits in the towers, as well as the small, irregularly placed windows on the main body of the château, showed as uneven black bays against the grey stonework. A wide flight of about thirty steps led directly to the first floor, which has become the ground floor of the inner apartments since the moat was in-filled.



'The Château de Combourg'
Eugène Cicéri (French, 1813–1890)

The 'yellow wallflowers' (*see Chateaubriand's novella, 'René'*) no longer grew there, but mastic shrubs and nettles did, along with greenish moss and lichens. On the left, near the tower, a clump of horse-chestnut trees has reached the roof, and shelters it with its foliage.

When the key was turned in the lock, and the door, with a few blows of the foot, had scraped on the damp cobblestones for a while, we entered a dark corridor cluttered with planks, ladders, barrel-hoops, and wheelbarrows.

The passage leads to a small courtyard nestled between the inner walls of the castle, which enclose the space. Daylight enters only from above, as in a prison yard. In the corners, moisture trickled down the stones.

Another door was opened. It led to a vast, bare, echoing room; the stone paving was broken in a thousand places; the old panelling had been repainted.

The woods opposite cast a livid light through the large windows, and tinted the whitewashed walls with a green hue. At their feet, a lake extended, its rushes meeting the grass; beneath the windows, privet, acacia and lilac, growing randomly in the old flowerbeds, cover the embankment with a mass of wild undergrowth that descends to the main road; the latter passes along the bank of the lake, and then continues through the forest.

Nothing echoed in the deserted room where, at this very same hour of the day, the child René used to seat himself on the windowsill. The clerk smoked his pipe, and spat on the floor. His dog, which he had brought with him, wandered about, hunting for rats, its claws clicking on the pavement.

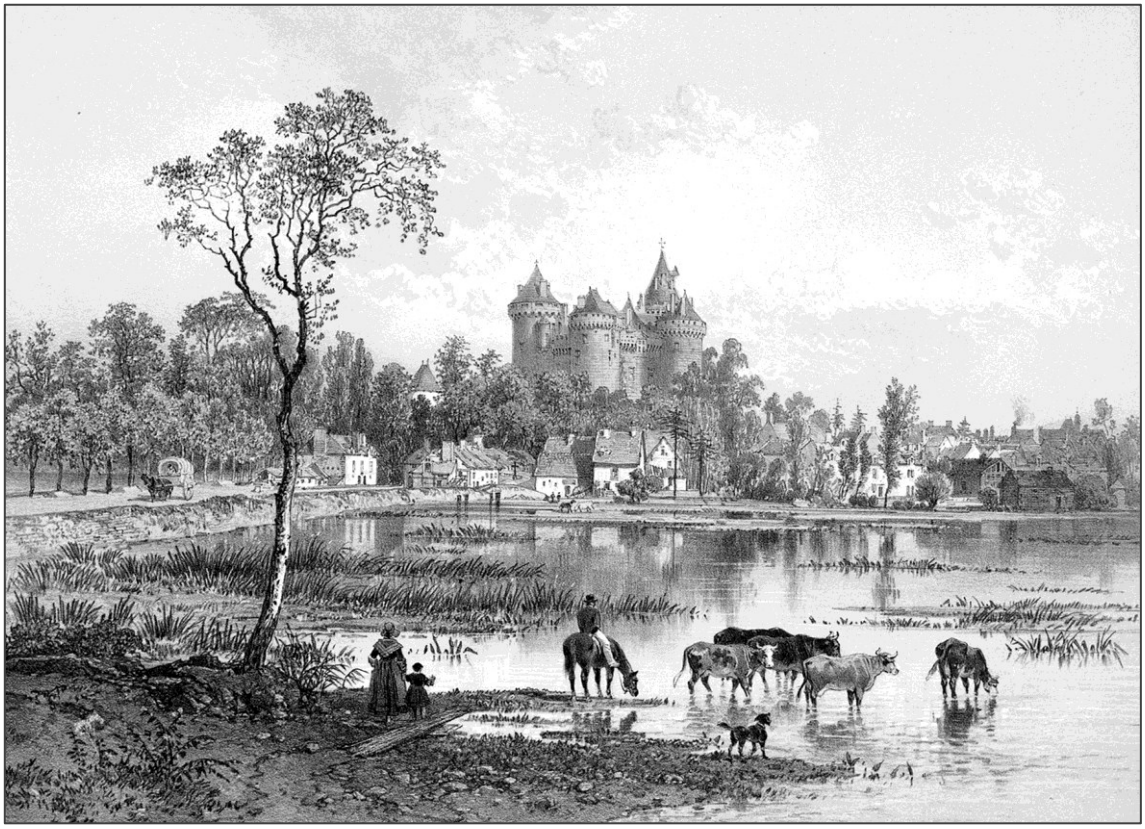
We climbed the winding staircase. Our feet stumbled, our hands groped. Moss had grown on the worn steps. Often a ray of light, passing through a crack in the walls, and slanting down from above, made some green sprig gleam brightly which, from afar, shone amidst the shadows, like a glittering star. We wandered everywhere: among the long corridors, up into the towers, and onto the narrow curtain wall, the gaps in the machicolations drawing the eye towards the abyss below.

Overlooking the inner courtyard, on the second floor, is a small, low-ceilinged room whose oak door, decorated with moulded grooves, opens with an iron latch. The ceiling beams, which one can reach and touch, are riddled with old woodworm holes; the laths are visible beneath the plaster of the walls, which show large, dirty stains; the windowpanes are darkened by cobwebs, and their frames encrusted with dust. This was his chamber. It faces west, towards the sunset.

We continued; we progressed; whenever we passed near a breach, a loophole, or a window, we warmed ourselves in the warm air entering from outside, and the sudden change of temperature made the decay seem even sadder and colder. In the rooms, the rotten parquet floors have collapsed, daylight enters via the chimneys, rain has left long green streaks on the blackened surfaces. The living room ceiling is shedding its golden finials, and the escutcheon above the doorframe is broken in pieces. As we were standing there, a flock of birds suddenly flew in, swirled around calling, and flew out through the chimney-hole. (*In 1876, Count Geoffroy de Chateaubriand, grandson of François-René's eldest brother, Jean-Baptiste de Chateaubriand, undertook the restoration of the château. The architect employed was Eugène Viollet-le-Duc, whose other restorations included the cathedral of Notre Dame de Paris, the abbey of Mont Saint-Michel, the medieval city of Carcassonne, and the castles of Pierrefonds and Vincennes.*)

In the evening, we walked along the edge of the lake, in the meadow on the far side. The soil and vegetation is encroaching upon it, it is gradually disappearing beneath them, and will soon vanish, and wheat will grow where water lilies now tremble. Night was falling. The castle, flanked

by its four turrets, framed by its greenery and towering over the village, extended its vast darkened mass. The setting sun, passing in front of it without reaching it, made it appear black, and the last rays, skimming the surface of the lake, would shortly be lost in the mist, among the violet treetops of the motionless woods.



'The Château de Combourg'
Félix Benoist (French, 1818–1896), Eugène Cicéri (French, 1813–1890) and Adolphe Jean-Baptiste Bayot (French, 1810–1871)

Sitting on the grass, at the foot of an oak tree, we were reading *René*. We were beside that lake where he had once pursued the swallows, that now skimmed the rushes, over the meadows; and were seated amidst the shade of those woods where he had chased rainbows over the rain-soaked hills; we listened to the rustling of leaves, the lake-sounds borne on the breeze, which had mingled their murmur with the mournful melody of his youthful sorrows. As the shadows fell on the pages of the book, the bitter-sweetness of the writing seeped into our hearts, and our delight in its phrasing dissolved into something expansive, gentle, and melancholic.

Near us, a cart passed, its axles rattling over the ruts. We could smell the cut hay. We could hear the croaking of frogs in the marsh. We returned to our lodgings.

The sky was heavy; there was a storm all night. Amidst the flashes of lightning, the plaster facade of a neighbouring house was illuminated and glowed as if it were ablaze. Panting, tired of tossing and turning on my mattress, I rose, lit my candle, opened the window, and gazed out at the night.

It was black, and as noiseless as sleep. My lit candle cast a monstrous, enlarged silhouette on the opposite wall. From time to time, a silent flash of light suddenly blinded my eyes.

I thought of the man, who spent ten years of his childhood and youth at Combourg, and filled half a century with the clamour of his melancholy. I saw him in those peaceful streets, wandering with the village children, seeking swallows in the church steeple or warblers in the woods. I pictured him in his narrow room, sad, his elbow on the table, watching the rain run down the windowpanes and, beyond the curtain, the clouds passing, while he drifted in reverie; I imagined the long, dreamy afternoons he spent there; I thought of the bitter solitudes of adolescence, with their dizziness, their nausea, their bursts of love that render one heartsick. Is it not then that our pain was incubated, on that same hill of Golgotha where that genius, whose works nourished us, sweated out his anguish?

Nothing can describe the gestation of ideas, the tremors their future works cause to those great writers who create them; but we are captivated to see the places where those works were conceived, and brought to life, as if they retain something of the unknown ideal that once vibrated there.

Oh, his room! The child's sad little room! Therein confused phantoms swirled, and called to him, tormenting his hours, demanding to be born: Atala, the magnolia flower quivering in her hair in the winds of Florida; Velléda (*the druidess in 'Les Martyrs'*) in the moonlight, running over the heather; Cymodocée (*the pagan Greek priestess in that same work*) veiling her bare breast against the claws of leopards, and Amélie all white, and pale René!

One day, however, he left, he tore himself away, he uttered his farewells and never returned to the old feudal home. There he is, lost in Paris, mingling with other men; then, seized by anxiety, he departs.

Leaning over the prow of his ship, I see him searching for a new world, weeping for the homeland he is abandoning. He arrives; he listens to the roar of the waterfalls, and the songs of the Natchez (*an indigenous people of Mississippi*); he watches the water flow by on the vast, sluggish rivers, and on their banks contemplates the gleaming scales of snakes with the eyes of savage women. He abandons his soul to the languor of the savannahs; they pour out their native melancholy to one another, and he exhausts the empty wastes, just as he has drained his heart of love. He returns, he utters, and we are held captive by the enchantment of his magnificent style, with its regal arcs and its undulating, plumed, draped, storm-filled sentences, like the winds in virgin forests, colourful as the feathers of hummingbirds, tender as the moonbeams amidst the clover of chapels.

He sets off on his travels again; he departs, to stir the ancient dust with his feet; he seats himself on a rock at Thermopylae and cries: 'Leonidas! Leonidas!'; he circles the tomb of Achilles, searches for Lacedaemon (*Sparta*), counts the carob trees of Carthage on his fingers, and, like the numbed shepherd who raises his head at the sound of a passing caravan, those mighty landscapes awaken as he traverses their solitudes.

Recalled, proscribed, then showered with honours, he will later dine at the table of kings, he who had once fainted from hunger in the street; he will be an ambassador, a minister, will try to hold the crumbling monarchy together in his hands, and, amidst the ruins of his beliefs, will finally witness his own glorification, as if he were already counted among the dead.

Born into a declining society, at the dawn of another, he became the transitional figure who, as it were, embodied both hopes and memories. He was the embalmer of Catholicism, and the champion of liberty. A man of the old traditions and old illusions, in politics he was nevertheless

a constitutionalist, and in literature a revolutionary. Religious by instinct and education, he was the one who, before all others, before Byron, uttered the wildest cry of pride, and expressed the most appalling despair.

As an artist, he shared with those of the eighteenth century the perpetual constraint of its narrow poetics, which, constantly overwhelmed by the breadth of his genius, nonetheless burst at the very seams. As a man, he shared the melancholy of the poetics of the nineteenth century; he pursued its turbulent preoccupations, its vain seriousness. Not content with being great, he sought to appear grandiose, and yet that futile mania failed to obscure his true greatness. He certainly does not belong to the breed of contemplators who never immerse themselves in life, those masters with serene brows who possess neither century, nor homeland, nor even family. He cannot be separated from the passions of his time; they formed him, and he formed others. Perhaps the future will neglect to take account of his heroic stubbornness; doubtless the events and characters in his books will be left to immortalise his works, and their titles, in the name of the causes those works sought to defend.

Thus, it was that, all alone, conversing to myself, I remained leaning on my elbow, savouring the gentle night and happily basking in the cool morning air that refreshed my eyelids. Little by little, day was dawning; the candle's black wick lengthened, its flame dying. The gable of the market hall was visible in the distance, a rooster crowed; the storm had passed; a few drops of water, however, fell on the dust of the street, leaving large round stains. As I was becoming drowsy with fatigue, I lay down again, and slept.

We left Combourg feeling saddened; the end of our journey was approaching. Soon this errant fantasy, which we had pursued with such delight for three months, would come to an end. One's return, like one's departure, has its sorrows, anticipated in advance, offering a last faint exhalation of the life one leaves behind.

Heads bowed, unspeaking, gazing half-heartedly at the empty road stretching out before us, we breathed the scent of green leaves, and swayed to the movement of the horse trotting in the shafts. On the uphill sections, when the wind picked up, we could hear a little bird or two chirping from beneath the foliage. We stopped at the village of Hédé (*Hédé-Bazouges*) to see the ruins of the castle, our guide to drink a glass of white wine, our horse to consume a peck of oats: to each their own sustenance.

All that remains of the castle is a part of the keep, and the razed outer wall, which still rises some seven feet above the ground and forms a kind of large amphitheatre that one circumambulates by walking on the ruins. From there, the unfolding landscape resembles a gigantic sheet of verdure, striped by the straight white lines of the roads, flat in the meadows, undulating elsewhere according to the rise and fall of the underlying hills. The sun shone, the trees were green, the air was blue; nearby a stream descended the slope, skipping from fall to fall over the pebbles.

We heard the sound of a passing carriage on the road; it was hidden by the trees, and we could only hear the hoarse squeal of its brake-shoe scraping the dust. At the bottom of the hill, it halted; I took out my lorgnette: it was a true travelling carriage, with a seat in the back, a maid at one end, a footman at the other, four horses, and two postilions, and was laden with leather trunks, boxes, cartons, and umbrellas hanging outside in their waxed leather cases. The yellow silk blinds were drawn; I failed to distinguish anyone inside. Who was it? Why were they travelling, passing by the

ruins so swiftly without setting foot in them, through the delightful shade of the trees without looking out at them, and close to the running water without sitting for a moment to listen to its melody?

The footman, having raised the brake-shoe, climbed up behind once more; the two postilions cracked their whips, the carriage set off, receding, shrinking in size, as it sped down the long ribbon of road. For a while the sound of galloping horses echoed on, then faded, and finally died.

We continued on our own way. It was about two in the afternoon when we arrived at Rennes; lunch was over at the table d'hôte and we were obliged to wait for our plate of chops.

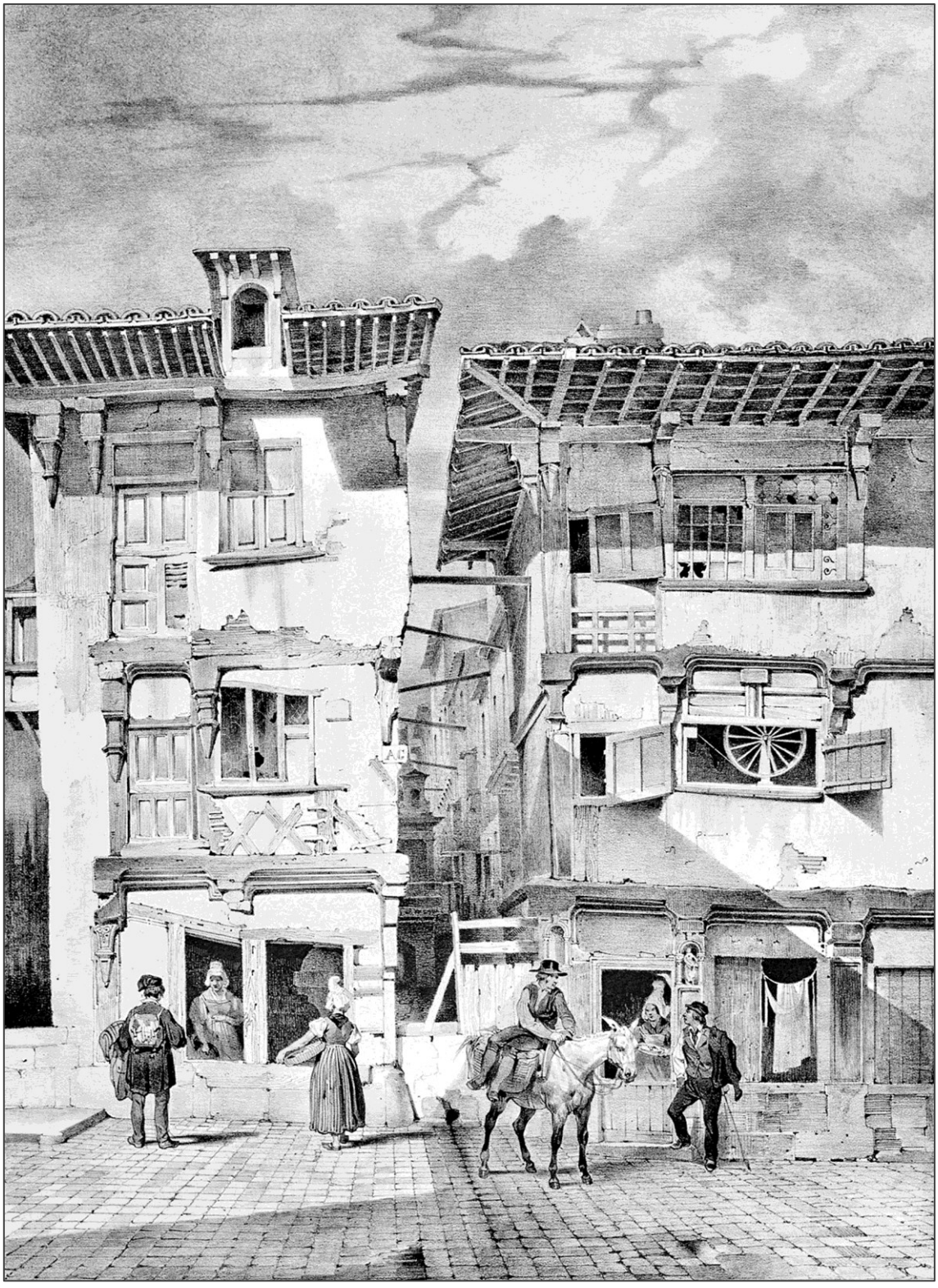
While strolling along the banks of the Vilaine in the evening, close to the bridges, we came across a kind of long caravan, entered by a double-railed stair, with small square windows with red cotton curtains along its body. The light from inside, passing through, reddened the heads of the crowd standing around; on the threshold of the van, a lean, youngish woman, scrupulously dressed, her forehead narrowed by black braids pulled back over her ears, holding a baguette in her hand, was yelping aloud, in a Provençal accent, recounting the dreadful struggle that had taken place on the Barbary Coast between a fearless sailor and a furious seal: he had, however, managed to capture the seal, had tamed it, and trained it; and it was there within, one could view it.



'Rennes: the Pont Bagoul'
Félix Benoist (French, 1818–1896)



'Rennes: Old Houses by the Pont du Cartage'
Adolphe Jean-Baptiste Bayot (French, 1810–1871)



'Rennes: Old Houses by the Pont du Cartage'
Adolphe Jean-Baptiste Bayot (French, 1810–1871)

We entered and lined up around a large oblong tub, its grey-painted interior heightened with garnet-coloured bands of cloth to form a curtain. A lamp with a sheet-metal shade, above the tub, cast its light onto the yellowish water in which something long and black lay motionless. The woman approached and tapped it lightly with a stick; it poked its wet head out, its nostrils, like two

symmetrical cuts in its skin, dilating and contracting noisily, and looked at us sadly out of two big black eyes. The seal wanted to move, but its tail struck the side; it turned on his back and showed us its white belly, still greasy with the viscous residues of seawater; it rose erect, rested its fins on the edge of the tub, touched its snout to its mistress's cheek, then fell back to the bottom, letting out a great puff of air. It had lost the waves where it lived at ease, the wide beaches where it lay on the green seaweed in the sun!

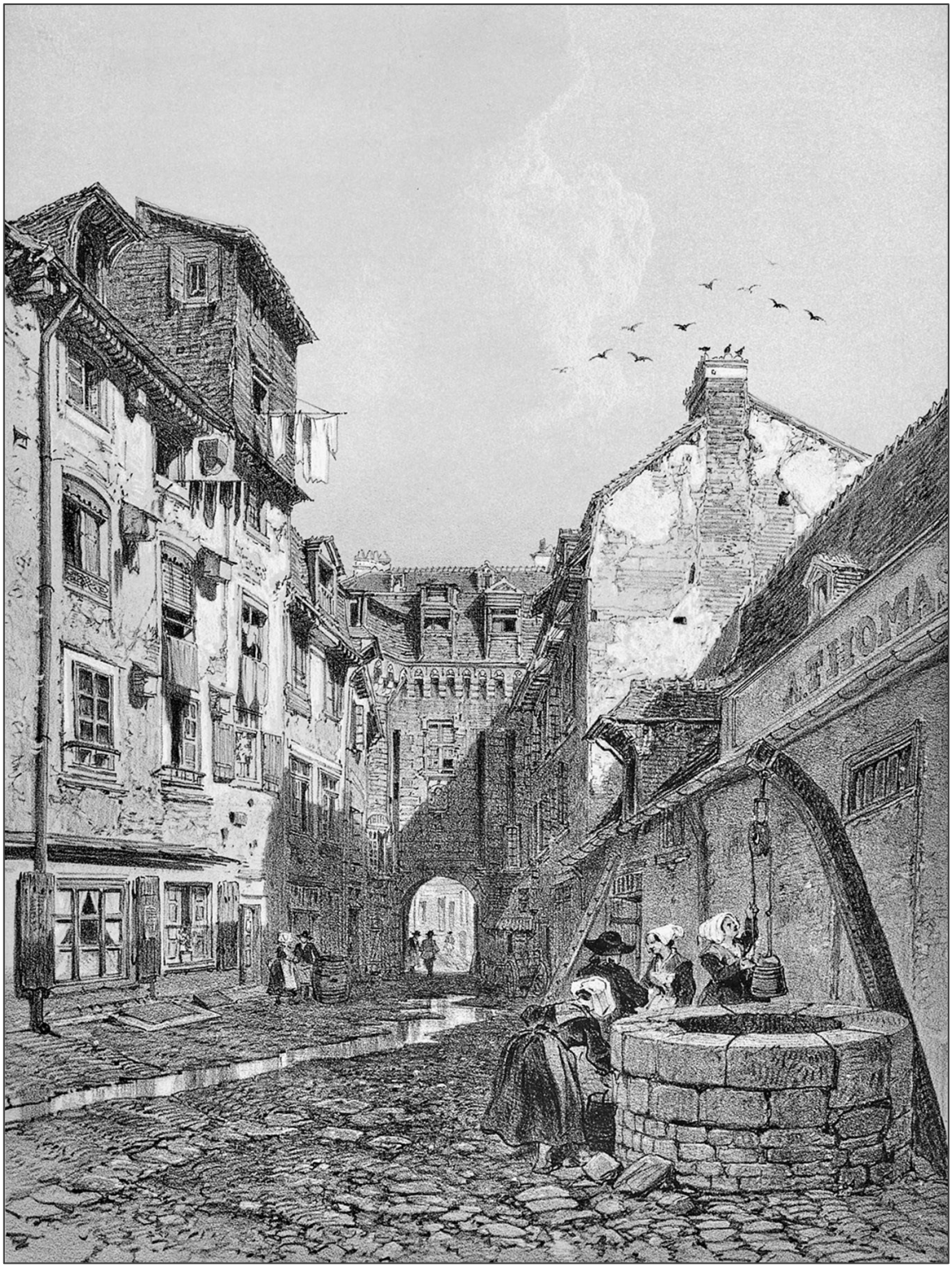
Because it had performed for us, it was rewarded with a few eels which it swallowed slowly, gripping each one in the middle of the body, the two ends sticking from its mouth like two long pale whiskers on either side of its snout.

A barrel organ in a corner immediately started playing a polka, the oil lamp was flickering, on the stairs the woman was attracting a fresh audience, the performance was over.

That is all we saw in Rennes. When the seal has gone, what will be left to see there?



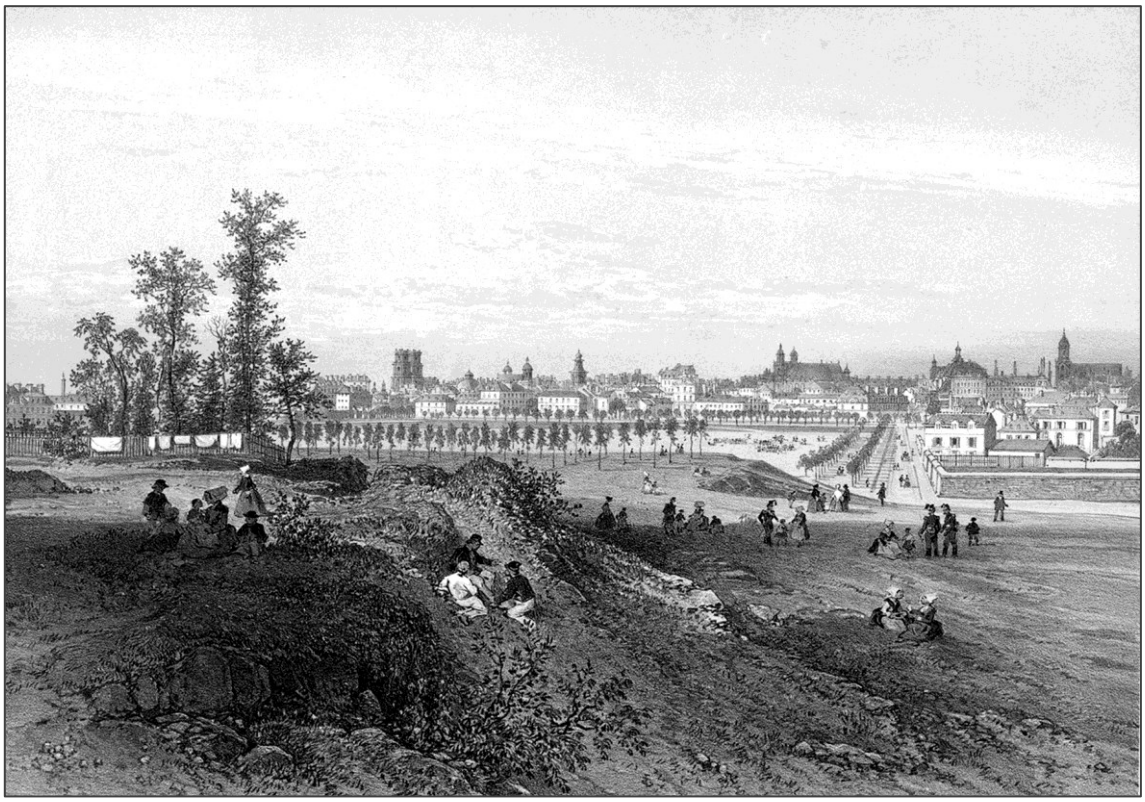
‘Rennes: Saint-Pierre Cathedral’
Félix Benoist （French，1818–1896）



'Rennes: the Porte Mordelaise'
Félix Benoist (French, 1818–1896), Eugène Cicéri (French, 1813–1890) and Adolphe Jean-Baptiste Bayot (French, 1810–1871)



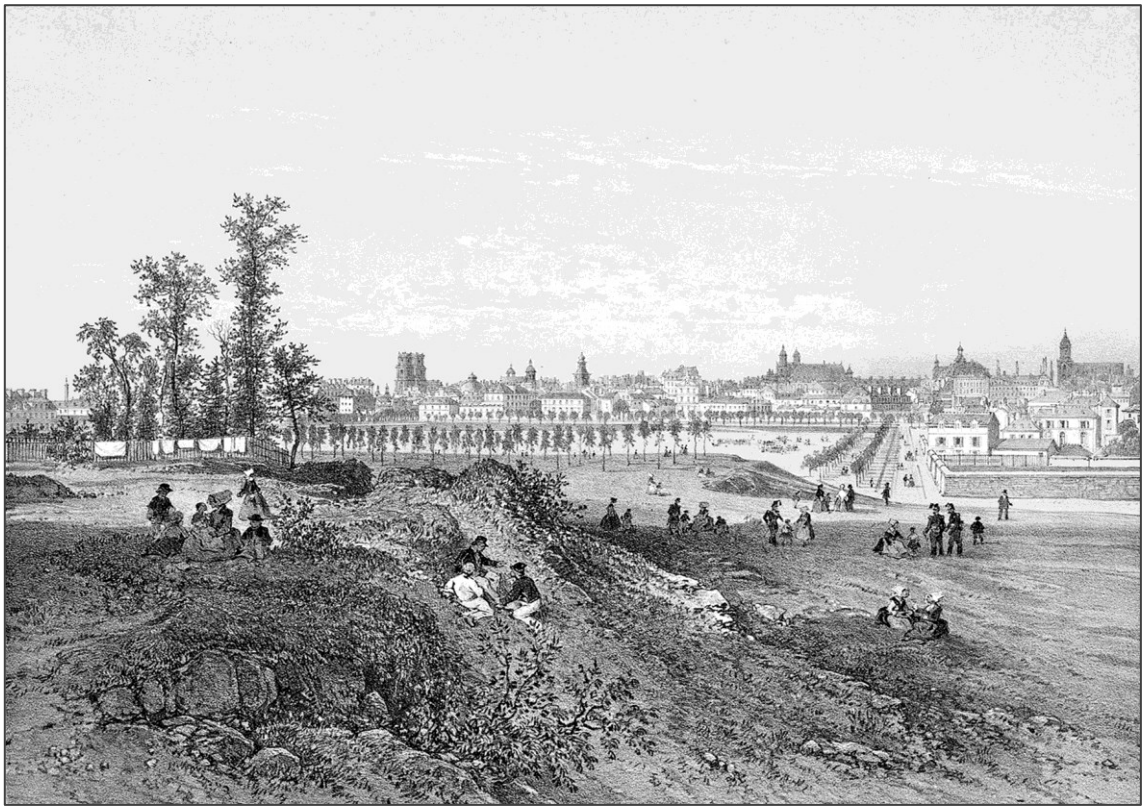
'The Palais de Justice, Rennes'
Félix Benoist (French, 1818–1896)



'View from the Far End of the Champ de Mars, opposite the Station'
Félix Benoist (French, 1818–1896), Eugène Cicéri (French, 1813–1890) and Adolphe Jean-Baptiste Bayot (French, 1810–1871)



‘Rennes: View from the Champ de Mars’
Félix Benoist (French, 1818–1896)



‘Rennes: View from the Champ de Mars’
Félix Benoist (French, 1818–1896), Eugène Cicéri (French, 1813–1890) and Adolphe Jean-Baptiste Bayot (French, 1810–1871)



'Rennes: the Château de la Prévalaye'
Félix Benoist (French, 1818–1896), Adolphe Jean-Baptiste Bayot (French, 1810–1871) and Eugène Cicéri (French, 1813–1890)

Chapter XII: (Du Camp and Flaubert: The Return, Rennes to La Bouille, near Rouen.)

From Rennes to Vitré. — The stagecoach. — A very frivolous young girl who was fleeing from Rennes; yet another misdiagnosis of the situation. — Mild jokes about lancers, lances, pistons.



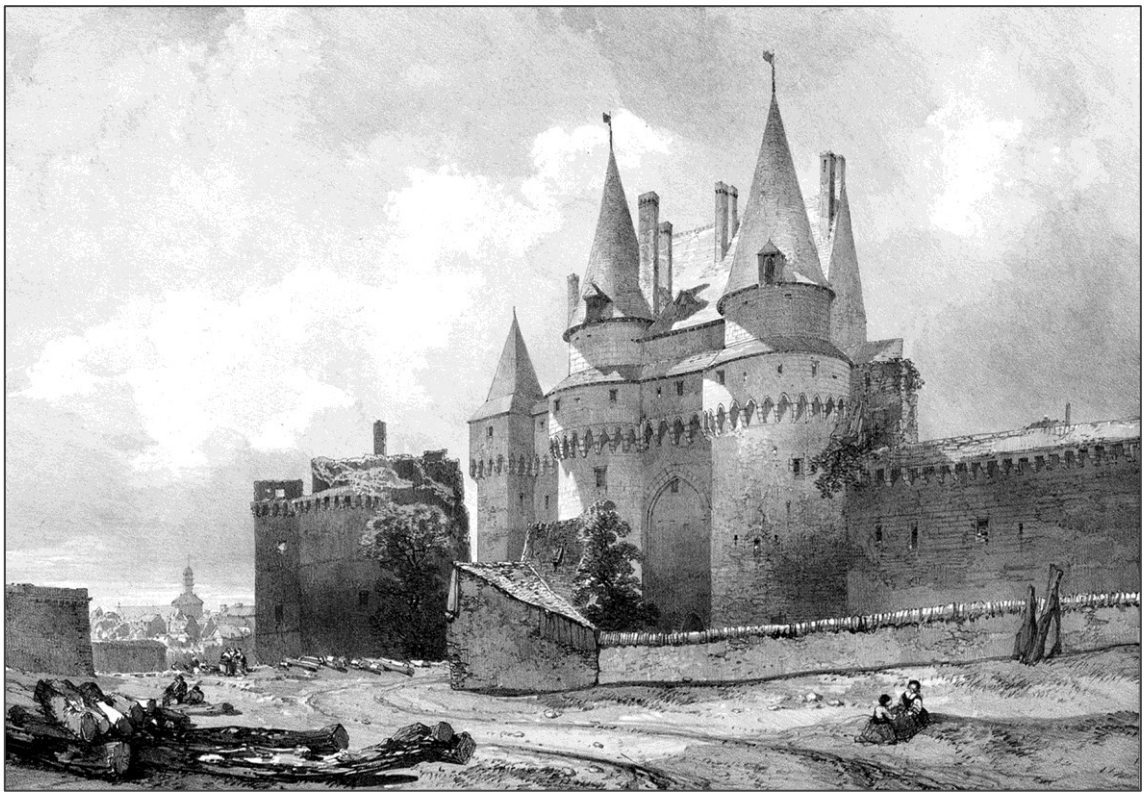
'Vitré: General View'
Félix Benoist (French, 1818–1896), Adolphe Jean-Baptiste Bayot (French, 1810–1871) and Eugène Cicéri (French, 1813–1890)



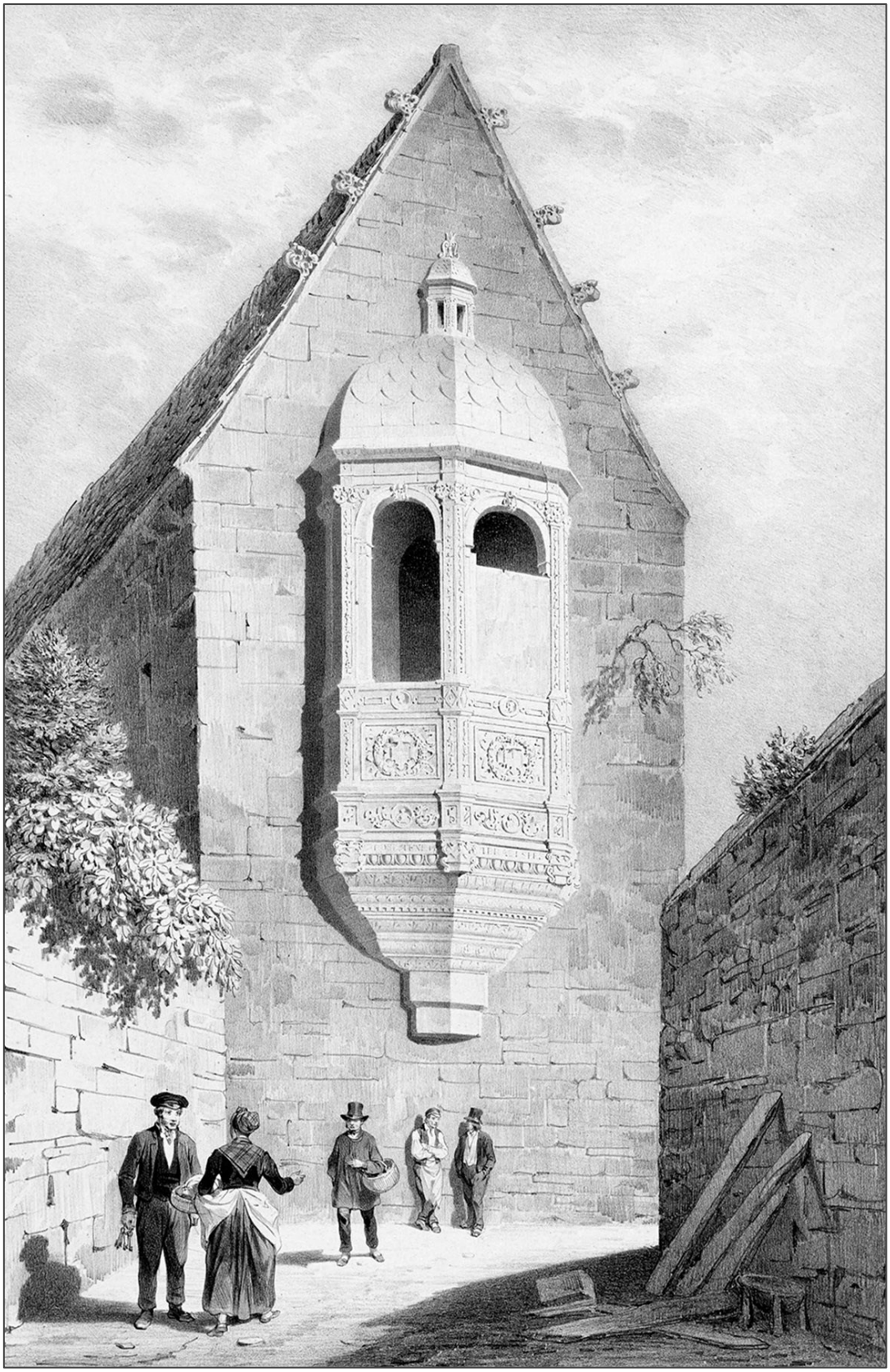
'The Château de Vitré'
Félix Benoist (French, 1818–1896)



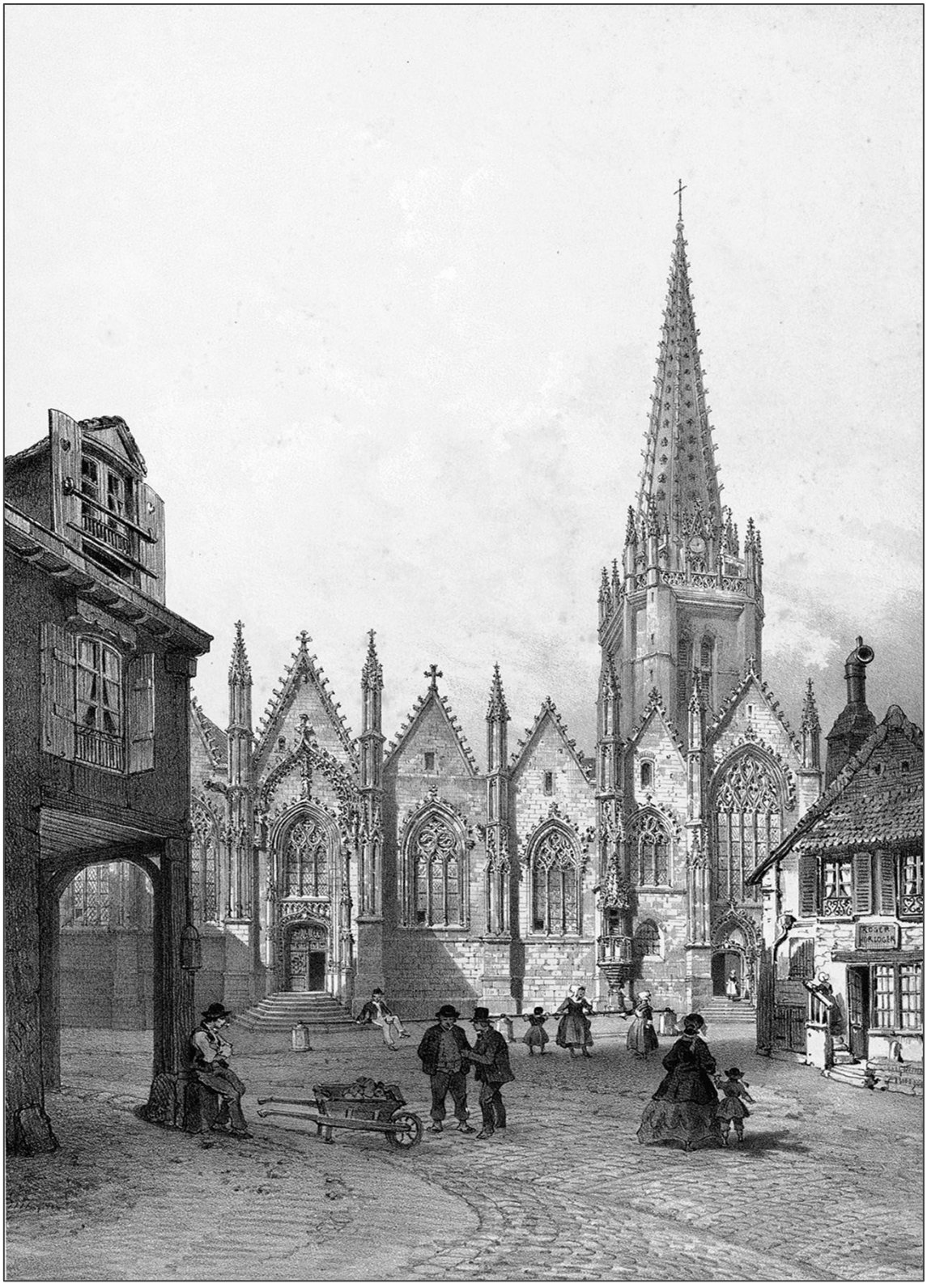
‘The Old Fortifications of Vitré’
Léon Gaucherel （French, 1816–1886） and Eugène Cicéri （French, 1813–1890）



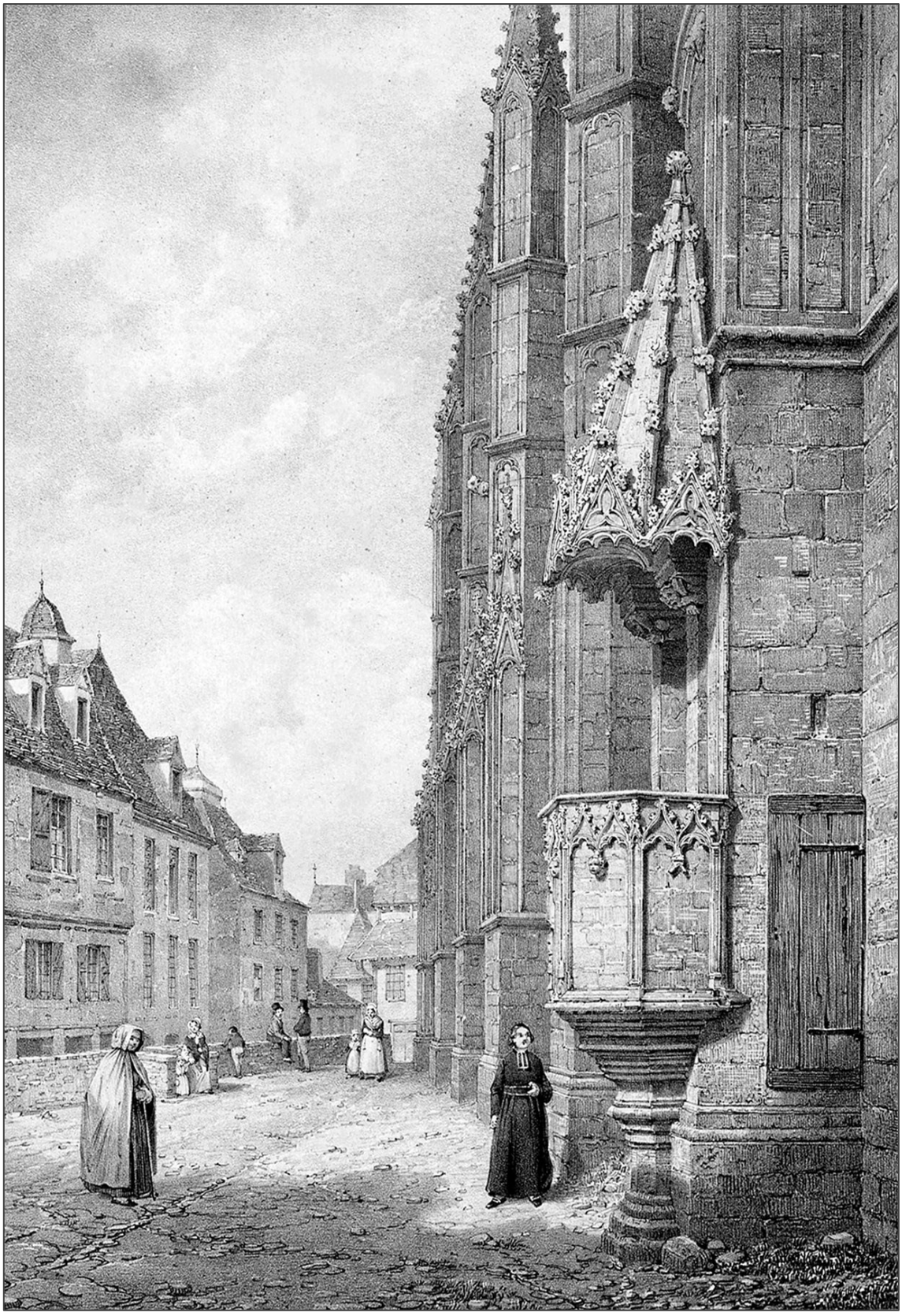
‘The Town Gate, Vitré’
Léon Gaucherel （French, 1816–1886） and Eugène Cicéri （French, 1813–1890）



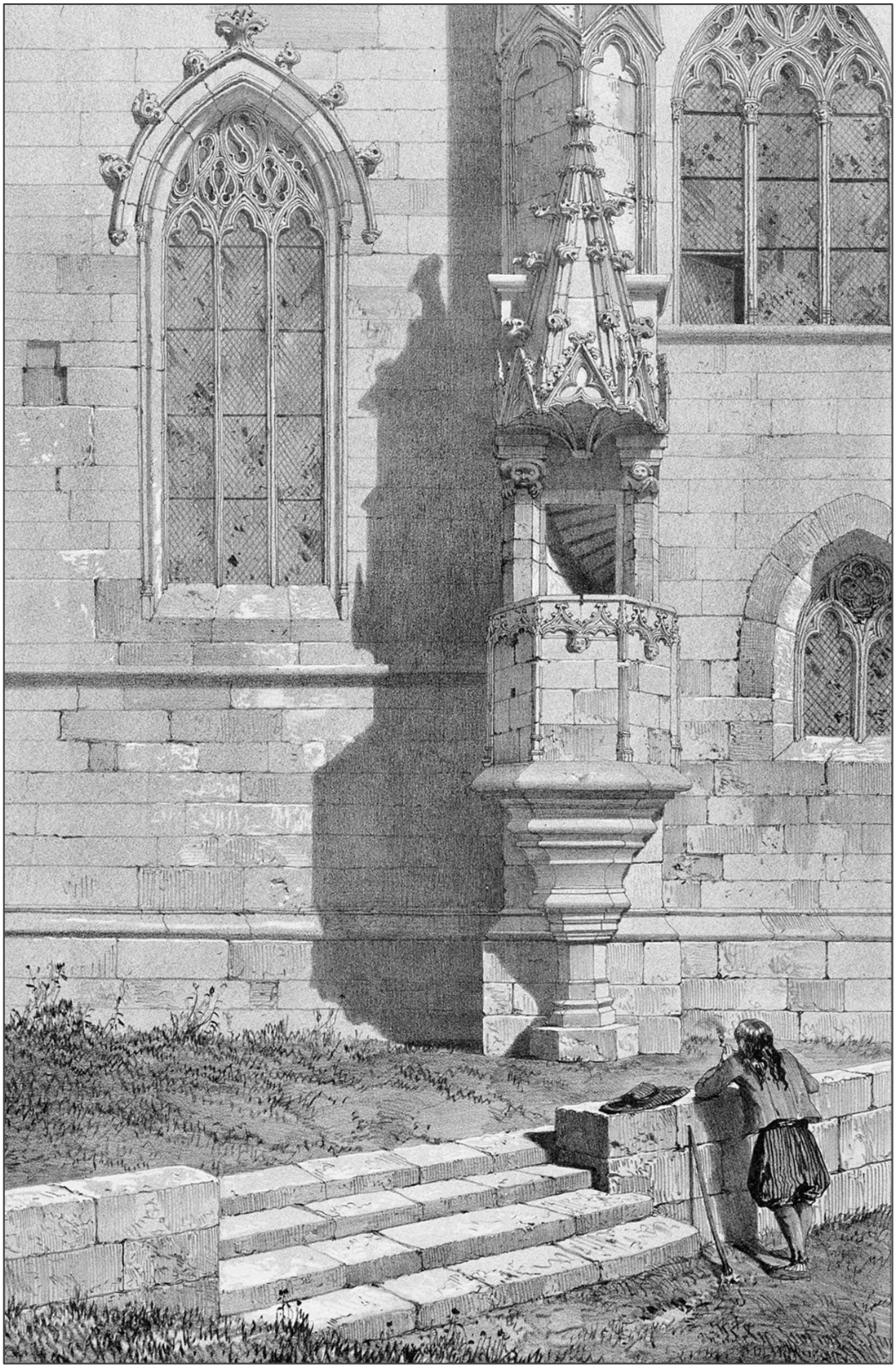
'The Tribune de la Trémoille, Château and Prison of Vitré'
Léon Gaucherel (French, 1816–1886) and Adolphe Jean-Baptiste Bayot (French, 1810–1871)



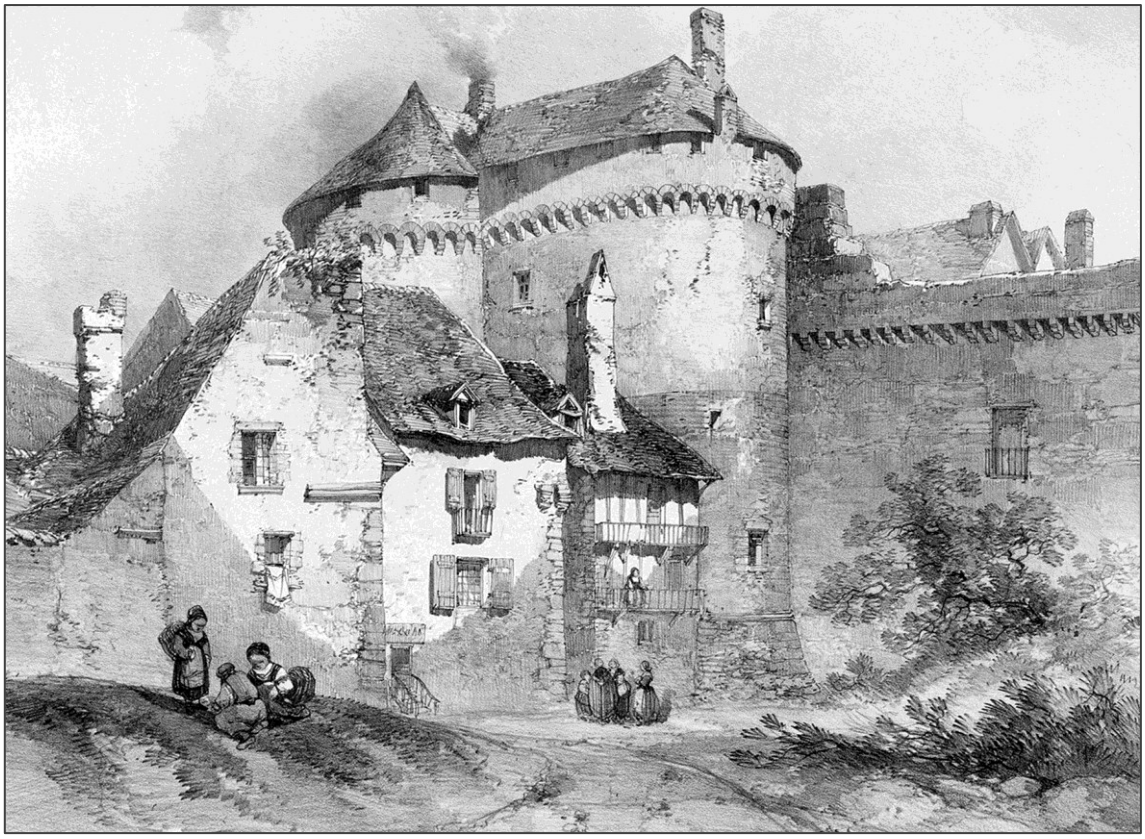
‘The Church of Notre-Dame, Vitré’
Félix Benoist (French, 1818–1896) and Adolphe Jean-Baptiste Bayot (French, 1810–1871)



'Notre-Dame de Vitré'
Félix Benoist (French, 1818-1896)



'The Outdoor Pulpit of the Church, Vitré'
Léon Gaucherel (French, 1816–1886)



'At Vitré'
Léon Gaucherel (French, 1816–1886) and Eugène Cicéri (French, 1813–1890)

Vitré. — The moat in front of the Hôtel Sévigné, a large white building in which we lodged (*built in 1750, between Rue Borderie and Rue Sévigné*). — The old château (*restored 1875 onwards*): two towers with pointed roofs; to the left, a cluster of trees and a square turret; inside, a very wide well. — The interiors of the houses receive light from above; wooden staircases, angled sharply, like those in Morlaix and Rennes. — A rare sight; numerous towers along the former ramparts, now within the town. — A pretty road to Les Rochers, through the woods: there are no rocks at Les Rochers, despite the name. — The house L-shaped (*the Château des Rochers-Sévigné, fifteenth century*): the chapel rotunda, a decent kitchen. — The drawing room on the ground floor. — A portrait of Madame de Sévigné (*Marie de Rabutin-Chantal, famed for her letters to her daughter Françoise-Marguerite de Sévigné*) is certainly not the original by Pierre Mignard; several other portraits from the period are damaged. — Madame de Sévigné's room: a gilded bed in red damask; the study, a painted porcelain dressing table, a low armchair covered in white and green tapestry cloth; a dressing table, red lacquer utensils, round boxes, a large white horsehair brush. — Rain, the lake, sheltering beneath the trees, and in the clog makers' hut, the scent of the woods. — Table d'hôte: Monsieur Menars, Monsieur Marin, Monsieur de Couesnon.



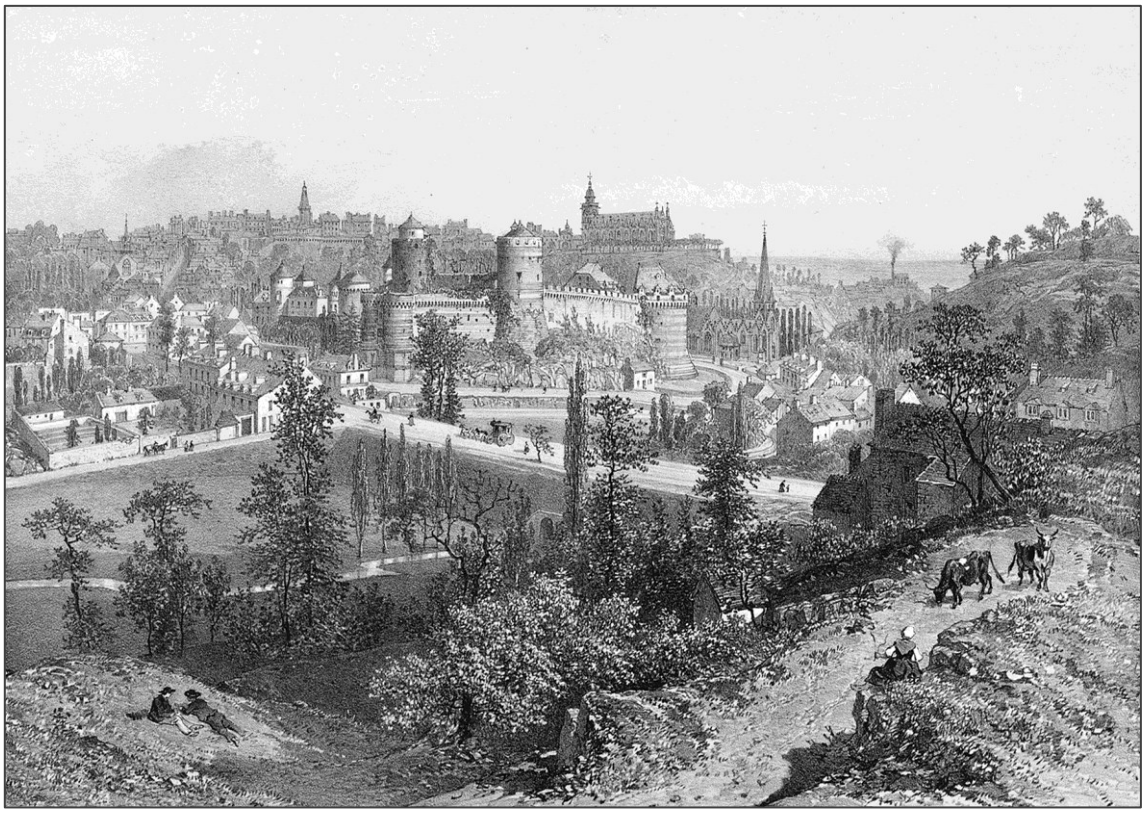
'The Château des Rochers, near Vitré'
Félix Benoist (French, 1818–1896), Adolphe Jean-Baptiste Bayot (French, 1810–1871) and Eugène Cicéri (French, 1813–1890)



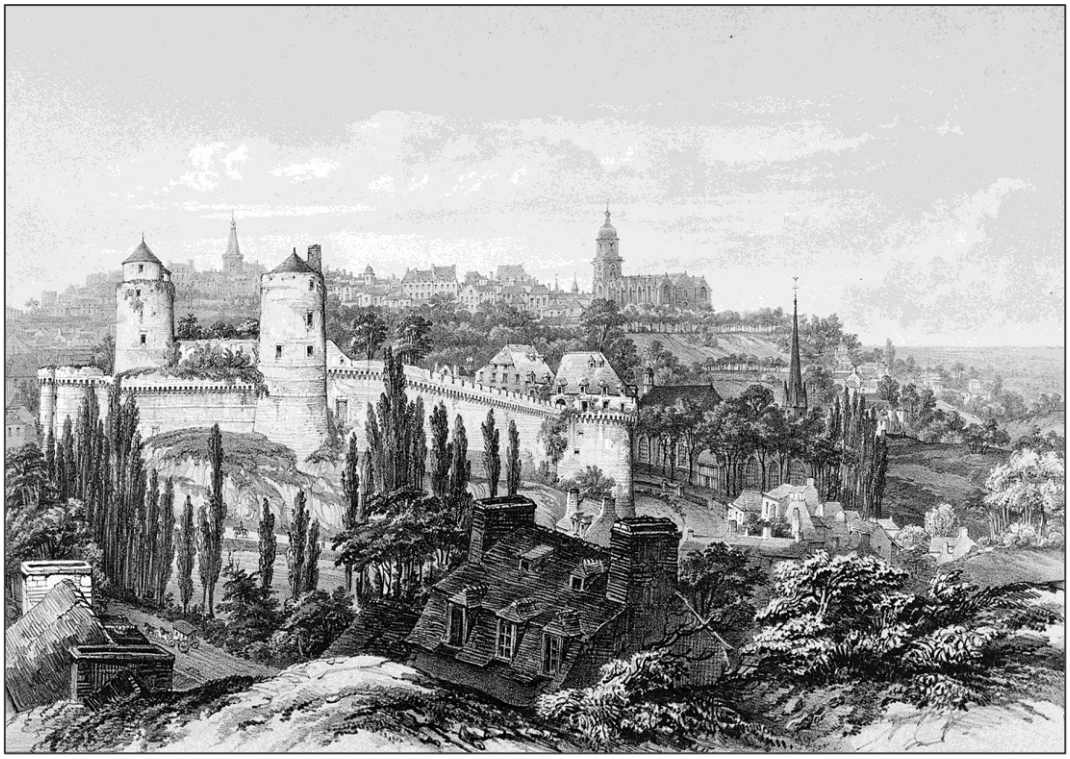
'Les Rochers, the Home of Madame de Sévigné'
Léon Gaucherel (French, 1816–1886)

From Vitré to Fougères. — On our way to Normandy. — Our driver tells us about the Marquis de Nétumières (*Marie-Paul Hay*), father of the current owners of Les Rochers, who threatened him with his pistol and ordered him to set the horses to the gallop, delighting in being overturned in his tin-plated carriage; he would dress up, among his friends, as a charcoal-burner. Vitré. — the outdoor pulpit (*fifteenth century, on the south face of the Notre-Dame de Vitré church*) as in Guérande.

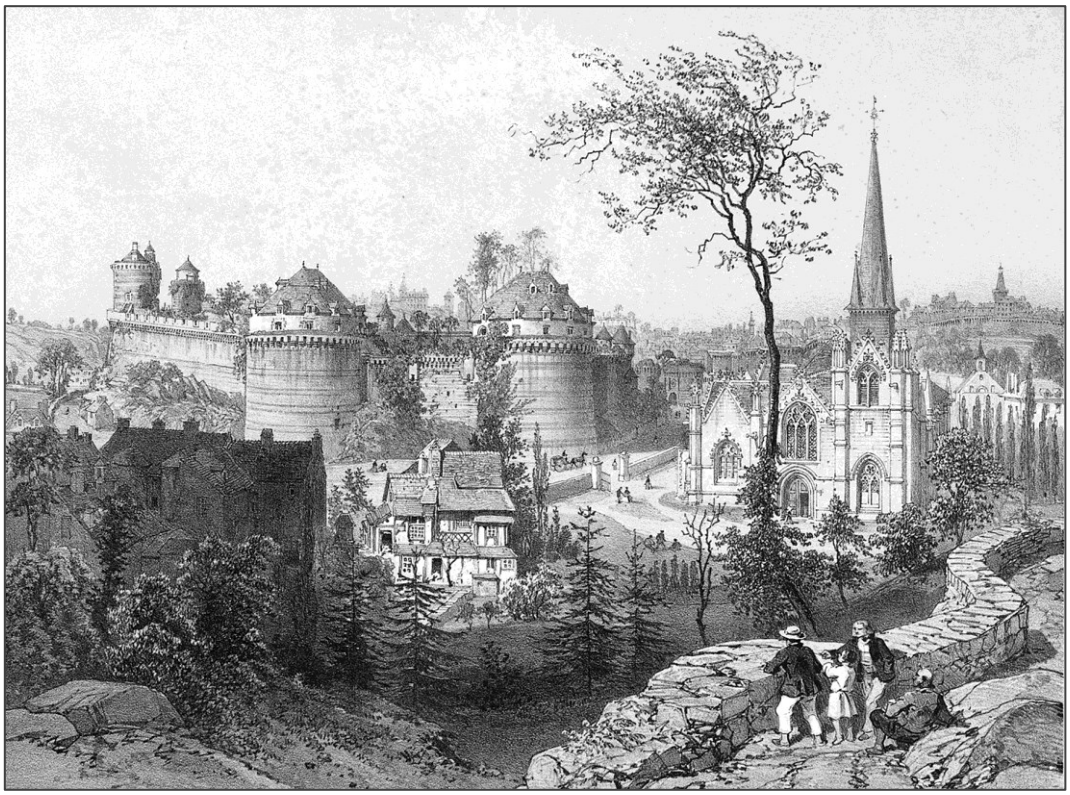
Fougères. — Solid aspect of the towers, the ramparts are covered in greenery. — Only the part of the fortifications that descended into the valley remains. — A pretty gate with two towers; a large acacia tree, the waterfall; the towers are horseshoe-shaped like those at Saint-Malo. — Wide view of the esplanade below the church. — Forest. — Glass factory.



'Fougères: General View'
Eugène Cicéri (French, 1813–1890), Félix Benoist (French, 1818–1896) and Adolphe Jean-Baptiste Bayot (French, 1810–1871)



‘Fougères’
Félix Benoist （French, 1818–1896）



‘Fougères: the Château and the Church of Saint-Sulpice’
Félix Benoist （French, 1818–1896）, Eugène Cicéri （French, 1813–1890） and Adolphe Jean-Baptiste Bayot （French, 1810–1871）



'The Château de Fougères'
Eugène Cicéri (French, 1813–1890)



'The Tour Pleguen and the Gate, Fougères'
Eugène Cicéri (French, 1813–1890)



'Fougères'
Eugène Cicéri (French, 1813–1890) and Léon Gaucherel (French, 1816–1886)

In Vire (*Vire-Normandie*), even in Mortain (*Mortain-Bocage*), cotton caps start to appear. — By stagecoach at night, the grey day breaks, patches of silver in the matte-blue sky, then banks of gold

pierced by the steeples of Caen. — A walk in the meadows; the racecourse. — The Abbey of Saint-Étienne (*Saint Stephen's, Caen*): superb Romanesque; the arches of the upper galleries very wide, pretty capitals on the nave's rounded columns; in the choir: archivolt, ornamentation of a staff passed through rings; a man (in one of the side aisles, on the right towards the middle) fouling himself (?). — Église Saint-Jean: Gothic, low, heavy, crystal chandeliers in the choir give animation to the church, which leans to the left, especially the entrance, supported by the neighbouring walls. — Église Saint-Pierre: an ugly vault because of the exaggerated interlacing of the ribs, especially at the apse where arabesques traverse it; The mix of square Renaissance shapes of the lamp bases with ogival shapes is jarring.

Nothing could be worse than the statue of Louis XIV in the Place Royale, stark naked, with a helmet and a sword. — The superb effect of the 'Palace of the University,' (*destroyed in 1944*) with its faculties of law, medicine, literature, etc. — Nothing of interest in the Natural History museum. Viewing provincial collections, one can't help but regret the waste of money. — A bust of Jules Dumont d'Urville (*naval officer, explorer and cartographer*); always the famous local man is celebrated! Here, because he was from the Condé-sur-Noireau region.

Caen Museum. — The Marquis d'Argenson (*the politician, Marc-René de Voyer de Paulmy*) who died in 1721: a large black wig, collar, markedly black eyes and eyebrows, a slightly hooked nose, strong nostrils, discreet mouth, cleft chin, and ironic look, though more cunning than mocking; all the gravity is in the lower part of the face.

The Second Revelation of Saint Catherine, said to be by Albrecht Dürer but it seems earlier to me, more colourful: the Virgin and the Saint, long hair, red, fine and wavy at the ends and falling to their waists; two other women in the foreground, redheads, of the latter the one on the right, seated, her large red dress spread out in heavy folds; the one on the left, a greenish dress, seated, a yellow bodice, a red mantle with ermine collar; in the background, landscape, a house, an old servant in a hood bringing fruit.

A Portrait of Madame de Parabère (*Marie Madeleine de La Vieuville, Marquise of Parabère, the official mistress of Philippe II, Duke of Orléans*) surrounded by a garland of flowers: a Black African below in yellow sleeves; Madame de Parabère, black hair, naturally curly at the front, loose, spread over the shoulders, her clear, round face, small mouth, small nose, jovial and mischievous air, blue eyes, blonde eyebrows; the portrait is by Antoine Coypel, the garland by Fontenay (*Jean-Baptiste Belin de Fontenay the Elder who specialised in flower-painting*).

A fine portrait of the Magistrate of Tournières: in a wig, animated, ugly, thin, narrow, red eyes, the soft flesh of an old man, the hair a false blond colour; the fellow must have been to the law what Nicolas Boileau was to literature; the animation of the narrow pupil with white sclera (of that eye on which the light falls) shining brightly, the iris blue.

Gustave's comments on our return now follow:

We left Caen after dinner at six p.m. in a tilbury. — A long walk along the water's edge under trees, very dreary because of the greenish light; through the populated countryside; a village. I (*Gustave*) sensed I was approaching Trouville-sur-Mer. Without knowing my surroundings, they felt familiar, and *iam redibant multa praeterita* (*many things of the past were returning*). — The ferry crossing; the little white horse, a bit skittish, was afraid.

Dives-sur-Mer. — The drunken veterinarian. — We filled our water-bottles and departed. The moon shone, far away, in the distance. Over the sea, the lighthouse of Le Havre; we climbed the Houlgate cliffs and lost our path; crossing a field, scrub, poor ground. The moon lit our way, and led us astray, unseen gullies soaked the ground, into which we sank; finally, after much trouble and effort, we reached the shore. — Low tide, the reddish-brown sand. The moon, low above the heights behind us, extended our shadows at our sides; it shone brightly. Phosphorescence in the puddles; they glittered round our shoes as we stepped in them. We were quieter than the night and darker, it being serene and gentle. For a moment, an overwhelming dread of Nature; we barely exchanged a 'Well, my friend' from time to time, the sound of which immediately faded. Sometimes the shadows grew longer; once a group of customs officers approached us with that peculiar look one gives others when meeting at night. We asked them if we were far from Trouville. — A boat containing fishing nets. Max was exhausted; I was thinking of those good November days of which the boat reminded me. Five years earlier, at the same time, on a similarly warm night, I had walked to Trouville all alone. Day was breaking, and I was in the process of returning; but this time not to join the family there, or seek to win back affection; but to memories only, feeling for the place itself only a kind of bitter hatred. (*Flaubert's father had died in Rouen the previous year, in January 1846; his sister Joséphine Caroline in March of that year*)

Lights on the quayside. — The customs officer conducting his inspection, his little dog prowling around. — Marshland. We travel amidst the rushes, finally reaching the light on a post, which had seemed ever receding. Max waited while I went to rouse the Touques ferryman, who woke, and reluctantly agreed to ferry us across; I had trouble recognising myself on the jetty. On entering the house, father and mother David failed to know me; they had to be reminded. Do we truly recognise one another? Do we know ourselves! We drank a bottle of wine; we ate some cheese from Pont-l'Eveque. — The kitchen! An armchair. — Enter a gentleman in a grey frock-coat and riding boots.

The next day, courtesy of L… on horseback to Bonneville-sur-Touques and Saint-Arnoult: at Bonneville they are demolishing the old house and building a new one; I used to take lovely rides there with Alfred (*Paul-Alfred Le Poittevin, the philosopher and early friend, who died the following year, in April 1848*). — Ladies, for whom I picked bouquets. — At Saint-Arnoult, carriages at the corner of a hedge. Many houses have been built there, a road laid; in the chapel, a vault was discovered containing many bones, and the chancel has been repaired! In the ruins of the church (*the priory chapel, stands next to the church which has been partially restored*), the same trees, the same pillars that were here when I used to visit to practise my drawing with Father Dumée; that, at least, hasn't changed. Returning to the road, I recognised the priest from Touques: 'You, young people from Paris, and your fancy suppers.' Opposite, the oyster beds, a fine horse-drawn carriage with a high seat, driven by some old general in a straw hat, adorned with his medals; a sideways flick of the whip. — All has changed, all, all; I am having trouble finding my bearings, and my memory is shaken by the changes in the very surroundings to which it has clung. The ground itself slides from beneath our feet; it's not just hearts that change, the ground too, the houses, the paving stones. Oh, my poor little chalet, and the other two houses, how you have altered, especially the one, the dearest one. In the dining-room, I recall other tables; the wallpaper now depicts scenes from *The Bride of Abydos* (*Byron's poem of 1813*). A strange thing: it seemed to me that, long ago, the setting sun shed its reddened rays into the far left corner; the memory is quite clear. Could the sun have altered its course too? No, it was the reflected light, then, from the sands at low tide, whose colour illuminated

the windowpanes. — A race to the chalet. — Our friend Ulric (*Ulric Guttinguer, the poet and novelist, born in Rouen*). Here's a man who, after having done ..., has returned to the respectable bourgeoisie; thus, the bourgeois life is at the end of all!

Criquebœuf, which we do not enter; Villerville, which we merely traverse. We lead our horses down the customs officers' path. — Dinner at Monsieur Guetier's; an evening stroll (with them!) along the beach; the next day, lunch where we drink because we are obliged to, and it is offered for the same reason. But how sad and foolish it all is! How little it means to me! And the rain that fell and lasted all day, how perfectly it resonated with my every feeling!

Honfleur. — Rain on the docks. — Dinner; I surpass myself in making a custard sauce. I recognise the faces of the servants I had forgotten, just as, next morning, I recognise the faces of two oarsmen in the rowing boat. To recognise someone whose image you have completely lost is always to rediscover something of yourself; you say to yourself: 'Ah, that's right, I possessed that once… I lost it; I've reclaimed it; ah!'

Aboard the Seine steamboat, the priest, with waxed paper on his hat, was chilled and unwell; I tried in vain to warm myself by the boiler. The image of the accountant from the 'Normandie' had also slipped my mind! Another then who has reappeared! — The harpist, and the guitar player: the former's ugliness was astounding and gripping; all I discerned in their songs was love, happiness, etc. Two nuns nearby had left, no doubt for fear of being disturbed, of libidinous images coming to mind. Ah! Those poor girls caused few to come to mine. — Lunch. — It's strange, but I wasn't bored on the steamboat.

Between Caudebec-en-Caux (*on the Seine*) and Duclair, I think, I recognise a spot, a hollow on the left bank, between two little wooded hills, and remember that, once, on an Easter trip in 1841, with Caroline (*Joséphine Caroline*), my mother, and Mademoiselle Jane, we were there on the port-side rail, chatting with the woman from the restaurant, and three young men who perished in the Meudon railway disaster (*the fatal accident, at Meudon Bellevue, Paris on 8th May 1842*, *the worst rail disaster of the nineteenth century*). It was cold and around six in the evening; in April there was almost no one on board; it was one of the first trips of the season.

I thought back to a steamboat trip downriver from Les Andelys to Rouen with Alfred: we were tired, dusty, and sad as I am now, but then without cause; the thin voices of the two women, the woody resonance of the guitar, the metallic sounds of the harp vanished, were drowned by the noise of the wheels, and that of the water split by the prow; the movement of the steamboat brought all back.

La Bouille. — In the evening, Maxime collects my notes, and the next day, farewell.

Written at Caumont (*downstream of La Bouille*), July 28th, 1847, Wednesday evening, 9:30 pm to 11 pm. — A year ago, in Paris, the July festivities and their fireworks, seen from the heights; I was carried away by emotion, I am experiencing the same feeling now; there is a harmony in this anniversary.

The End of Part IV, and of 'By Field and Shore'