FROM ROSCOFF TO THE 'PARDON' OF LAMBADER

THERE are several reasons why one should visit Roscoff, apart from the good and sufficient reason —for those who like to take their travelling individually—that nowadays one rarely does. I doubt if the real Brittany—the *Bretagne bretonnante* of speech, clothing and song—is anywhere less sophisticated; while for an Englishwoman who is one-half Welsh, Roscoff has old affinities, historical and domestic, romantic and homely, but all harmonious and affectionate.

A small granite fishing-haven on the northerly seaboard of Finistère, Roscoff owes the fig-trees and magnolias of its walled gardens to the Isle de Batz, some three miles of rocky island, surmounted by a tall white lighthouse, which lies *couchant* across the entrance to Roscoff's almost landlocked harbour. Only a mile or so of channel intervenes between Batz and the mainland; and you can sail across, if you will, and see the island's only treasure—the stole of St. Pol-de-Léon laid carefully by since the sixth century. It is said to be a Byzantine stole of blue silk tissue, cheerfully embroidered with huntsmen, dogs, horses and falcons; and its accredited owner, St. Pol, was one of those genuine but legend-bedizened evangelists between Wales (or Cornwall) and Armorica, whose antecedents and exploits were (as I have been informed and believe) the bane of the learned compilers of the Dictionary of National Biography. Being entirely incompetent to sift the views of the D.N.B., of the Bollandists, and of the Rev. Sabine Baring-Gould, all of whom have lavished themselves with different results

on St. Pol, I will only submit that Paulus Aurelianus of Pen-hoen in Glamorganshire (or Cornwall) seems to have fled from the *onus* and *honor* of a British bishopric, only to be tricked (by a sealed letter borne by himself) into accepting a French one. Among the ruins and brambles of what had been a Gallo-Roman town, he founded his see of Léon (the Lyonesse of Arthurian legend) some three miles inland from Roscoff, and after at least one unsuccessful attempt to end his days as a hermit, finally retired to Batz—so old and wasted that 'the sunlight passed through his hand as though it were dull glass.' Later legend, put forward by no less an amateur of the curious than Blessed Albertus Magnus, accredited St. Pol with a dragon, encountered somewhere between Landivisiau and Brest, which the saint reduced to docility by binding his stole round its neck and picketting it to his nephew's pastoral staff. Here the dragon stayed, says his historian, *quasi sicurum et mansuefactum*, until the neighbours complained that a baby dragon (*catulus*), recently born, was still at large and dangerous. Upon this St. Pol admonished his own dragon to fetch its cub, which it did with alacrity, laying it at the holy man's feet. The couple were established in a little wood between Lampaul and Guimiliu, and subsequently followed St. Pol to Léon, and finally to Batz, where they were tethered, still together, to a sapling. Here 'harming nobody and destitute of food,' both dragon and baby dragon 'gradually died,' and their bodies were cast into the sea. This, though melancholy, is a kinder legend than Baring-Gould's, which briefly makes St. Pol invest the dragon with his stole and bid him hurl himself into the ocean—a finale which fails to account for the reappearance of the stole. But the exploit in its more drastic form is the one revived allegorically by local ecclesiastical eloquence, whenever the faithful Breton is being (very rightly and ad-

mirably) urged to resist the depredations of French secularism. St. Pol's city, still called St. Pol de Léon, is no longer the head of a see; but if you trudge thither on a Tuesday market-day with all the rest of Roscoff, you will discover a noble cathedral, a chapel (the Kreisker) with a far-famed open-work spire, and the finest market (I suppose) of onions and artichokes in France.

Not content with the usual marine harvest and the architectural tokens of an eighteenth-century opulence due to piracy and smuggling, Roscoff has set to work to wrest something from the agricultural present, a something more remunerative (if also more arduous) than the pasturing of a few small cows on a hinterland of gorse and bracken. All the land between St. Pol and the coast—originally, I suppose, the stuff of which England makes golf-links—is transmuted into minutely cultivated closes; and almost every close is as full of artichokes as the hermit-haunted desert St. Teresa speaks of in the 'Foundations.' These, however, are highly civilised artichokes; and so closely intercropped with onions that cultivation is carried on by kneeling devotees. The sea-board, so propitiously at hand, provides all that is required in the way of fertilisers; and the conversion of sand-dune into market garden proceeds, day in day out, in the following manner. You plough up a small strip of dune, surround it with a sod bank and plant the top of your bank with gorse, *euonymus* or (if you have the modern mind) *cupressus macrocarpa*. You take a light cart down to the beach at low tide and you amass a load of seaweed which your women-folk pick over on the turf. They eliminate the long ribbons of brown weed, and the short tresses of spinach-green, and spread the precious tufty species to dry in the sun. Finally, they stack it, it rots, and is incorporated with the sand dune; with the result that field after field of *artichauts gros*

verts de Léon edge—not picturesquely, perhaps, but with a certain thistle-like quaintness—the highway from Roscoff to St. Pol. As for the onions, they form not only a magnificent source of revenue, but Roscoff's most notable link with the world. The Breton onion-boy standing on the English doorstep with his bandoleer of onions—the Breton onion-boy who knows *Portsmooth* and *Sou-ton-ton*, even *Meedlesbro'* and *Invairness*—was ten to one born within earshot of the *clochers* of St. Pol. We encountered him everywhere we went—Herri, Perig, Gwilherm or Brieg—on his knees among the onions; with the old people, *Tad* and *Mam*, and the girls Gwenda, March'harid, Berch'het, and Mari. For it was still the tail-end of September, and both onions and artichokes were still a-gathering. Everywhere Herri, Perig *et Cie* aired their English in a friendly spirit; while *Mam* and the girls suspended work to admire and laugh, and *Tad* (whose English was rusty) put in a remembered phrase, just to keep his paternal end up. And we in return aired our fragments of Breton, which, as far as it went, was the best Breton—the first of the four great speeches of Léon, Tréguier, Cornuaille and Vannes. And we sang Welsh airs—which Brittany recognized and reinforced—and even paid our way, on occasion, with the Frenchified but popular ditties of M. Théodore Botrel. The pick of our repertory was the Morlaisien song of the *Cordelière* and the *Regent* who grappled and blew up together about 1513. This has the pleasantly pugnacious refrain:

> '*C'est la devise de Morlaix:*
> *Si Anglais te mordent, mords-les,*'

and coming from the mouths of three *Anglais* was everywhere an unqualified success. Finally, on board the St. Malo packet, we discovered a *Soeur Blanche* who knew '*An Hini-Goz*,' the '*Shan Van Vocht*' of

Brittany: the song of the old beauty who is Brittany, the pert damsel who is France, and the youth whose heart goes *tik-tak*, *tik-tak*, for the old woman with a face like withered bracken. The *Soeur* avowed that she had heard the song as a child, and that she still knew a Bard—a Count of South Brittany, not of our parts—who composed his own songs and sang them at weddings. Indeed, Brittany is still a poet's paradise, for life is still modest, elemental and devout; and half-submerged legends, as tantalising as sunken treasure-ships, await the enterprising diver into the past. My own fancy, I admit, played round the landing of Mary Queen of Scots, a child of five, in the Roscoff of 1548. The beautiful wave-lashed Renaissance house that sheltered the baby bride still stands between the granite street and the haven; though the sea-wind whistles through the ruined arches of the chapel of St. Ninian erected to commemorate her coming. An obscurer figure of British-Breton intercourse reposes under a granite obelisk of the early nineteenth century, close to one of the two great ossuaries of a tree-shaded churchyard signally destitute of graves. How an Englishwoman came by this place of honour, you learn from the obelisk: which tells how Dorothée Silburne harboured in England the *emigré* priests of the French Revolution; and, dying at Roscoff in 1820, was thus piously immortalised by the *clergé français reconnaissaint.*

It is a delightful story as far as it goes; but there is no more of it that I have succeeded in tracing. Here, however, Dorothée rests, within sound of Roscoff's Renaissance *clocher*, of the fountain spouting from the low church wall, of the women chattering as they fill their pitchers and of the French and Breton sightseers, slamming the doors of their modest little *autos bleus* as they embark or disembark from *marché* or *Pardon.* For the *place* in front of the Church is the

beginning and end of all adventure; and a series of blackboards with the proposed expeditions of the week enticingly chalked up, is leant against the churchyard wall for the greater convenience of subscribers.

We ourselves subscribed at the Grand Café (as requested on the blackboard) for the *Pardon* of Lambader. We are inveterate pedestrians; but this *Pardon* was to take place some twenty miles away on a Sunday; and we were not sufficiently versed in the ways of Breton festivals to know whether you could count on hearing Mass at a *Pardon* or not. Lambader, we knew, was a small pilgrimage chapel a mile apart from the village of Plouvorn. Very likely we should be crowded out. So we fulfilled our obligations early, demolished our *petit déjeuner*, and took our seats in the *auto bleu* of M. Yves Picard furnished with an impressive basket of lunch by a sympathetic *patronne*. The rest of the party was equally well provided. It was an all-Breton party (as the chauffeur remarked with satisfaction), save for his *trois Anglais*.

An hour or so of far from heady transit, and we had left behind our granite setts, our artichokes and onions, the smell and sight of the sea—even the sky-storming *clochers* of St. Pol. We were in that curiously Welsh hinterland of bramble-hedges, bracken, and trout-streams, with here and there a dwarfish granite farmstead, white-washed or picked out with whitewash round its vaulted doors and windows. All the world was converging on the Pardon: *autos* (no private cars, but democratic little buses like our own), tall gigs, crowded with families from outlying farms, pedestrians in animated bands of all ages. Gala dresses began to appear among the peasant costumes of every day; though these latter in their most sublimated form were the commonest wear with both sexes. The women, whatever their age, wore nun-like dresses of heavily pleated black, and white coifs in a dozen modes

of embroidered net and exquisitely gauffered lawn. The older men were habited in coats of an eighteenth century cut, black, with many embroidered buttons, trousers of black corduroy, stiff or pleated white shirts and the quaint and characteristic headgear of masculine Brittany—a hat of sable beaver, low in the crown and broad in the brim, encircled by a black riband, nearly as deep as the crown, which passed through a chased silver buckle at the back and hung down in two foot-long streamers behind. As we approached Lambader, however, ancestral dresses of rare design and gorgeous colour began to diversify the magpie plumage of the crowd. Grandfathers paraded broad *cummerbunds* of light and dark indigo stripes; and groups of graceful, modest girls, kept well under the wing of impressive sable mothers, exhibited with natural pride and joyousness the heirloom raiment of the family. Shawls of Roman purple, rose *du Barri* or black cashmere, heavily embroidered, fringed or jewelled, draped their young shoulders. The caps that adorned without hiding their simple brown hair were of antique forms enriched with lace and cut-work. Sometimes their very skirts glistened with spangles; and almost invariably a plastron flourished with eighteenth-century sequins appeared above the short bib of the voluminous embroidered apron.

Into this merry and decorous throng we of Roscoff descended from our *auto bleu*. We found ourselves in a deep lane, with the chapel of Lambader in front of us and a cottage or two on our flanks—the cottages still in the process of being decorated with multicoloured paper garlands and strings of fluttering pennons. The chapel, a charming little piece of fifteenth-century stonework, its spire a small duplicate of the famous ' Kreisker,' stood on a rocky knoll surrounded by spindle-shanked beeches. Within it, a score or so of the Faithful sat or knelt on schoolroom benches

and rush-seated prie-dieus, an exquisite screen of black Flamboyant oak intervening between them and an altar, whose candles were in the act of being extinguished.

The crowd without could not, it was evident, hope to be accommodated here. We emerged into the sunlight and made the circuit of the church and the beech-grove. A gracious old fountain, with a *pieta* in stone above it, a washing pool below, and a series of stone steps curving to the chapel's turfy plateau, lay to the south. On the north another lane wound back to the parish of Plouvorn; and here were stalls with bread, *brioches*, fruit, wine and simple objects of piety. Beyond and above this lane, we perceived the actual scene of the *Pardon*, a vast stubble-field and the back of a white marquee; and following the crowd already surging up the cart-track that led to it, we took up our stations in what would prove—as we happily surmised—the nave of an improvised cathedral. Here we faced the marquee, a giant Crib of white canvas sheltering a timber platform some six feet from the ground, and an altar to which a bevy of *Sœurs Blanches* were engaged in giving the last flowery touches. A selection of forms and chairs already occupied the interspace between us and the marquee; and the worshippers of the chapel beyond, now began to emerge, carrying their benches and prie-dieus. Domestic chairs from the cottages were contributed by their owners, but we elected to stand—the ultimate portion of the majority of a crowd which swelled in the end to some two thousand people. The sky was shifty—lowering and bright by turns, both dark trees and white sky sharing a rough opacity that one associates in England with the landscapes of Constable. But the bells began to jangle from the Lambader tower, astream with red-and-blue-crossed pennons; the backcloth of the marquee, sown thickly with gold stars and crosses, glittered in the

wind; and up the lane we had come by, the banging, braying and shrilling of drums, brass and fifes foretold the precursors of the main procession of the day—the youth of the *Gymnasium* of Landivisiau in white *bérets* conducted by a sable *curé*. These ranged themselves in the position of an orchestra at the foot of the marquee and struck up an animated fanfare. A silver processional cross rose and dipped beyond the brambles of the cart-track. Banners and their bearers appeared, statues, reliquaries, the local clergy, a Colonial Bishop; and children, children, children—each carrying his or her own little banner of some child-loving or child-beloved saint.

Mass is Mass all the world over. To what of our Breton High Mass was peculiar to the *Pardon* of Lambader both crowd and clergy contributed. Bretons, for all their sweet voices and docile memorising, are not at home in plain-chant. They take it far too slowly and the plaintive cadence in which men and women in turn sang the people's allotment of the Liturgy would have been far more effectively devoted to music of a more Celtic cast. The organist at the harmonium in the marquee enlivened propitious intervals with more characteristic melodies; but devotion reigned supreme during the Mass and rose to fervour during the very long sermon. This was preached in Breton by a parish priest with a magnificent delivery; so magnificent, in fact, that the voice 'came out' louder than the loud speaker designed to distribute his eloquence to the throng. From our point of vantage, the voice came first and the loud speaker afterwards, with an effect at once discordant and harassing. Brittany, one imagines (and the world at large, for that matter), was probably happier, and certainly more dignified, before the loud speaker was invented.

The sermon dealt with devotion to Our Blessed Lady; and we followed it with an intermittent under-

standing begotten of intensive application to the catechism of the diocese of Quimper—the sole product of Breton theology obtainable at the Roscoff *Librairie*. We were to have a French sermon at Benediction; and thus, to make amends for its linguistic lack of patriotism, was superbly Armorican in sentiment. For I must press on to Benediction—with a glance at our lunch on the turf by the fountain, with *gwin ruz*[1] from the nearest stall and a score of other banquetting parties distributed from middle-distance to horizon.

A spare hour or so was spent at Plouvorn, whither the boys with the white *bérets*, and their *curé*, had withdrawn to play in the *place*; and Benediction reassembled us all for a second sermon, a sermon as finely delivered as the last under similar mechanical handicaps. St. Pol and his dragon (but not, I regret to say, the cub) entered with the felicity of old favourites into this notable harangue; but the dragon stood for all the powers of evil—French secularism in particular—and we were exhorted to emulate St. Pol in bringing him to a bad end. The sun came out strongly in the course of the sermon, and the seated women, protected only by their picturesque but diaphanous headgear, promptly put up a series of black umbrellas. The men, lined up in close formation on each flank, held their broad-brimmed hats between their eyes and the light; and the effect of brown aquiline features against hat-linings of Roman purple and carnation red, recalled the haloed *beati* of a particularly sumptuous fresco. Our ranks, during the sermon, were swelled by a magnificent *Suisse*, attired, like the Frog Footman of *Alice in Wonderland*, in navy blue and red with gold epaulettes, a large gold and blue cocked hat fringed with swansdown, red breeches, white stockings and red knotted garters. He bore an immense halberd whose silver spear-*cum*-battle-axe emerged

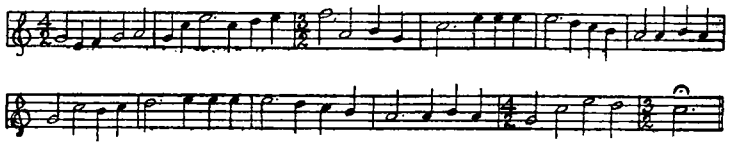
[1] Red wine.

from a faded tomato tassel worthy of Cinderella's coach-board. But he was an amiable *Suisse*, in spite of his portentious equipment; for he deposited his halberd in the hedge and busied himself, towards the end of the sermon, assisting into their scarlet cassocks the small boys who were to figure in the procession.

The procession took place between the sermon and Benediction. Admirably marshalled and exquisitely well-mannered, the crowd filed down its stubble-field into the lane, singing to a slow tune that rose and fell with all the grace and refreshment of a fountain, the *Kantik Itroun Varia Lambader*,[2] the traditional canticle of the *Pardon*. There are twenty-four verses of this and a *Diskan*[3] to every verse, the *diskan* and the verse repeating the last two lines of their quatrains.

Diskan.[4]

Kanomp, kanomp gant levenez
Henor ha gloâr ha karentez
D'ar Werc'hez santel, hor mam ger,
Itroun Varia Lambader—
D'ar Werc'hez santel, hor mam ger,
Itroun Varia Lambader.



[2] Canticle of Lady Mary of Lambader.

[3] Refrain.

[4] Refrain.

Let us sing, let us sing with joy
Honour and glory and love
To the Holy Virgin, the Mother of our Village.
Lady Mary of Lambader.
To the Holy Virgin, the Mother of our Village.
Lady Mary of Lambader.

Slowly round the fern-tufted and bramble-topped lanes wound the singing multitude, and the strongest light of the day had vanished when the candles were lit for Benediction. Once again we filled our old places before the spangled Crib in the stubble-field. Then blessed and happy we went our several ways, marvelling, like the old Latin commentator of the Epiphany, at the greatness of the mysteries of our religion and the faith of their pastoral witnesses.

Nec solum mirantur de incarnationis mysterio sed etiam de tanta pastorum attestatione.

Settling to sleep at Roscoff, with the great lighthouse of the Isle de Batz flooding our quiet rooms with its intermittent summer lightning, we heard, mingled with the wash of the sea, the rise and fall of the *Diskan* of Lambader.

HELEN PARRY EDEN.