

TOURAINÉ, PAST AND PRESENT

JAMES A. LINDSAY

THE ancient province of Touraine, almost identical with the present department of *Indre et Loire*, is by general consent one of the most charming regions in the fair land of France. Its charm is not primarily scenic. Part of the great central plain of France, Touraine is not rich in varied landscape or picturesque beauty. Yet its spacious expanses, its rich pasture lands, its orchards and vineyards, its forests—Amboise, Chinon, its rivers—the stately Loire, the soft-flowing Cher, Indre and Vienne, make up a picture which dwells agreeably in the memory. Its fertility and wealth of pasturage have earned for it as title “the Garden of France.” One of its most illustrious sons, Honoré de Balzac, with pardonable patriotism has extolled the charm of Touraine in one of his best known works “*Le Lys dans la Vallée.*” He writes of this valley, which extends from Montbazou to the Loire:

A magnificent emerald cup, with the Indre winding like a serpent at the bottom . . . to me infinite love is expressed by this long ribbon of water sparkling in the sunlight between two green banks, by these rows of poplars with their mobile lacework of leaves, by the oakwoods which jut out into the vineyards or hill-sides round which the river winds ever differently, and by the shaded horizons which fade into the distance. If you would see Nature as beautiful and as original as a bride, visit this valley on a spring day . . . Here and there are masses of gravel, against which the water breaks, forming fringes in which the sun sparkles. Daffodils, white and yellow water-lilies, rushes and phlox decorate the banks with their magnificent carpets . . . Frame the whole with ancient walnut trees and young poplars with pale, golden leaves; place a few graceful manufactories in the midst of those extensive fields which fade into the distance under a hot and vaporous sky,—and you will be able to form an idea of one of the thousand points of view in this beautiful district.

It was the fortune of the present writer to visit Touraine not in spring, but at the end of one of the hottest and driest summers on record. No rain had fallen for three months. The temperature had risen to almost unexampled heights. Forest fires had ravaged some of the beautiful woods of oak, beech, poplar, alder and willow. The desiccated plains were almost devoid of herbage. The Loire, often a rushing torrent, had shrunken within its channels, and crept haltingly between islets and sandbanks. But the vines looked healthy,

and there was promise of a successful *vendage*. Fruit was abundant. The southern lands, accustomed to sunshine and warmth, are tolerant of drought. They look forward to the autumn and winter rains.

The Loire is the outstanding physical feature of Touraine. Rising in the Gerbier de Jonc in the department of Ardèche at a height of 4,500 feet, it flows first north-west and then south-west to the Atlantic. It has the longest course of any river of France, and divides the country into two nearly equal halves. Its wide channel is studded with islands, and on its banks are found numerous rock caverns with their curious history—monastic and economic. The Loire has numerous affluents. Osiers and willows fringe its banks. It is only in a very slight degree navigable. It is subject to devastating floods, and some of its towns find it necessary to have the protection of dykes. It divides Touraine into two unequal parts, the larger being to the south.

The province owes its importance and its prominent place in French history not alone to its rich soil and fine climate, but also to its central position and its convenient situation as the gateway of the south. It lies on the natural route from Paris to Gascony and to Spain. In old days ambassadors and prelates found it a suitable halting place. It became the favourite residence of kings and queens. Monks found their refuge here, and scholars and learned men chose it as the seat of their labours. From the remotest times its connection with history is extraordinarily close. The Celtic tribe of the Turones, who gave their name to the city of Tours, joined Vercingetorix in his futile struggle with Julius Caesar. Chinon was first a Celtic and then a Roman fortress. Touraine was one of the earliest seats of western Christianity, and counted St. Gatien and St. Martin as its leading saints. It fell under the power of the Visigoths, and later of the Franks. It witnessed the rout of the Moslem armies in A. D. 732. It was ravaged by the Northmen. It was one of the favourite seats of the Plantagenet kings of England, and holds the bones of Henry II, Richard Coeur de Lion, and others of the dynasty. It witnessed the first exploits of Jeanne d'Arc. It was the dower of Mary Stuart as the widow of Francis II. It was the favourite residence of the French kings of the Valois and Valois-Orleans lines. Louis XI, Charles VIII, Francis I, and other kings of these houses left their mark upon Touraine. Catherine de Medici, Diana of Poitiers, Agnes Sorel, lived there. It saw some of the fiercest conflicts between Catholic and Huguenot, whose blood bedewed its pavements and stained its rivers. At the Revolution

It united with the Republic. It gave birth to François Rabelais, René Descartes, Honoré de Balzac, Alfred de Vigny. It was the first seat of Gambetta's heroic efforts to stem the German flood in the Franco-Prussian War. Few localities in Europe have had a more stirring history.

But the chief glory of Touraine is its châteaux. The traveller, prepared for much, is amazed by their number, the magnificence of their architecture, their historic associations, their treasures of art and of national memorials. In a relatively small area they dot the land with jewels of beauty and of pregnant suggestion. No other region of Europe is so rich. Their names unlock the past, opening up vistas of luxury, power, and aesthetic sensibility. They are survivors of periods when the human spirit attained levels which the modern world can hardly rival. Omitting castles which lie outside the territorial limits of Touraine, we may enumerate Chinon, Langeais, Villandry, Ussé, Luynes, Azay-le-Rideau, Amboise, Loches, Montbazou, Jallanges, Rochecotte, Roches, Chenonceaux, Montreuil. Some of these castles, such as Chinon, go back to prehistoric times. Some, such as Luynes, belong to the feudal period. Some, such as Chenonceaux and Azay-le-Rideau, are gems of the flowering period of the Renaissance. To describe them in detail would go beyond the scope of this article, but a selection may be made.

(a) CHINON—The castle of Chinon, now in ruins, occupies the most picturesque site in Touraine. The remains cover the summit of a platform of rock rising nearly 300 feet above the river Vienne. Its site constitutes a natural fortress, and was a seat of military power from a remote period. The view over the river Vienne and the rolling plains of Touraine is one of charming beauty, and no château is richer in historic associations. It was a favourite residence of our Plantagenet kings. Henry II and Richard Coeur de Lion died there. The French kings from Philip Augustus to Henry IV often resided there. At Chinon Jeanne d'Arc first appeared before Charles VII, and spurred that indolent and pleasure-loving monarch to efforts which finally drove the English from France. The room where the warrior maid first had an interview with her Sovereign, and the dark chamber which was her apartment while she lived in the castle, are still shown. At Chinon, Agnes Sorel first attracted the attention of the same monarch. In the neighborhood was born François Rabelais, whose statue overlooks the river Vienne, and he commenced his education in the school of an adjacent abbey, whose monks subsequently suffered from the lash of his satire.

(b) LOCHES—Loches is one of the most interesting towns in Touraine, and it has a special attraction for British travellers as being the cradle of our Plantagenet kings. Its castle has many notable and not a few grim memories. Here James V of Scotland was married to Madeleine of France. Here Francis I—that gay, cultivated, and pleasure-loving monarch—entertained his future foe, Charles V. Here Louis XI practised refined cruelties—wire cages, long confinement in dark and noisome dungeons, hunger and cold upon his enemies. Here Ludovico Sforza, erstwhile Duke of Milan, after ten years of imprisonment died of joy on hearing the news of his approaching release. Here the famous historian, Philippe de Comines, spent many unhappy days. The walls of these wretched *cachots* are scribbled over with lines expressive of anger, sorrow or despair. The following is a translation of a verse in Catalanian of the fifteenth century:

He who sighs hath never known—
 Come within these walls of stone!
 Here not only shall he sigh,
 He shall groan in misery.
 Sweeter far were it to die
 Than in torment thus to lie.
 Drear is death, yet far more drear
 Day by day to languish here.

The best of remedy in all our ill—
 Is, seek the good within, which none may kill.

To the traveller at Loches it is a relief to escape from these miserable dungeons and view the beautiful monument to Agnes Sorel, who was born in 1400 in the neighbouring *château* of Fromonteau. The effigy in white marble, the hands uplifted in prayer, two angels bending over the figure and shielding it with their wings, two lambs lying at the feet—the whole is pathetic and touching. The frailties of the mistress of Charles VII are forgotten as we gaze upon this monument to her beauty and her sorrows.

(c) AMBOISE—The *château* of Amboise, picturesquely situated on the banks of the Loire, dates from the fifteenth century, and was completed in the reign of Francis I. It does not contain much of note, but is rich in historic memories, some of them profoundly tragic. Here, in the year 1560, the plot of La Renaudie and his Huguenot followers to rescue the young King, Francis II, from the influence of the Guises had its disastrous consummation. The plot was betrayed, and 1,200 of the conspirators were butchered—hanged from the balcony, stabbed, or thrown into the Loire—

in the presence of the French Court, which included Francis II, his wife Mary Stuart, Catherine de Medici, and her two sons, afterwards Charles IX and Henry III. It is recorded that such was the stench of the carnage that the Court was driven from Amboise.

Amboise has happier memories. Within the chapel of St. Hubert, an exquisite gem of Gothic art, are interred the remains of Leonardo da Vinci, who was summoned to Amboise by Francis I. His statue stands in the adjacent park. The great Italian—painter, sculptor, architect, engineer—spent the last two years of his life at Amboise, where he died in 1519. One wonders whether he found at Amboise that solitude and privacy for which he longed. "*Quousvis tu sarai solo,*" he says in one place, "*tu sarai tuito suo.*"

② LANGEAIS—This beautiful château, so admirably placed, dates from the fifteenth century. It was the scene of the marriage of Charles VIII to Anne of Brittany in 1491—an event which united Brittany to the French crown. In subsequent centuries it fell into complete neglect, but it has been skilfully restored by its present proprietor, M. Siegfried, who has devoted his wealth, energy, and good taste to restoring the fabric, and filling its thirty halls and rooms with memorials of the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries. The walls have been covered with beautiful decorative paintings, done by the encaustic process, and inspired by fifteenth century tapestries and designs. In the guardroom there is a frieze composed of the arms of Anne of Brittany interwoven with her motto—*Potius mori quam foedari*. Furniture of the fifteenth century, tiled floors, cabinets, chests, antique beds, tapestries, panels—either originals, or in some cases carefully executed copies—are among the glories of Langeais. There are some good pictures, much beautiful wrought-iron work, fire-dogs, candelabra. It is a fortunate circumstance that the present owner has arranged that these treasures can never be dispersed. At his decease they are to revert to the French nation. Langeais is to remain a priceless monument of feudal taste and magnificence. Happily, it has no tragic memories.

③ AZAY-LE-RIDEAU—This charming château dates from the reign of Francis I, and over its chief portal is the emblem of that monarch—the Salamander with the motto "*Nutrio et extinguo.*" It is an almost perfect specimen of Renaissance architecture. It is placed on an island, surrounded by two branches of the river Loire, and no more picturesque site can be conceived. Around are beautiful woods, seen at their best in autumn. The château has not much historic interest. No great events have occurred

within its walls. No tragedies have marred its exquisite beauty. For a period it fell into neglect, but in recent times it has been purchased by the French Government, and it will be preserved as a national memorial.

(f) CHENONCEAUX—The château of Chenonceaux is one of the most beautiful in Touraine. It is the only château built upon a river, and connected with each bank by a bridge. It was founded in the year 1515 by Thomas Bohier, receiver-general of taxes, and represents the transition from the Gothic to the style of the Italian Renaissance. Bohier spent vast sums in the construction of the château, and seems to have had a premonition, afterwards fulfilled, that he would not live to witness its completion, as he inscribed on doors, mantelpieces, and walls, the motto "S'il vient à point, m'en souviendra." Chenonceaux contains several superbly furnished and decorated rooms. The gardens are extensive and beautiful. Its graceful outlines are reflected in the calm waters of the river Cher.

The memories of Chenonceaux are calm and pacific. It has been a pleasure house and a place of retreat. No crimes have stained its walls. Francis I paid an occasional visit for hunting purposes. Henry II made a present of the château to Diana of Poitiers, who was subsequently ejected by Catherine de Medici. Francis II and Mary Stuart spent their honeymoon here. Catherine de Medici resided here for many years, and her splendid apartments are still preserved in their original state. In the eighteenth century the château passed into the possession of Fermier-General Dupin, whose wife entertained many illustrious visitors—Fontenelle, Buffon, Voltaire, Montesquieu, Mably, Marivaux, and Rousseau. The last named speaks of his pleasure in visiting Chenonceaux:

Que je me plais sous ces ombrages!
Que j'aime ces flots argentes!

George Sand was a frequent visitor at Chenonceaux.

The city of Tours is one of the most ancient and interesting of French cities. It was a place of importance under the Celts and the Romans. It was one of the earliest seats of Western Christianity. It was a favourite residence of the French kings, especially of Louis XI, who spent much time at Plessis-les-Tours, familiar to British visitors from *Quentin Durward*. Of this château there are to-day only scanty remains. The curious visitors can still find traces of antiquity in many parts of the city, but it has been modernized and is a pleasant and prosperous place, with a

superb cathedral, many imposing public buildings, handsome squares, and pretty gardens. While Balzac regarded it in his day as "one of the least literary towns in France," it is now a centre of culture and education, and attracts many foreign visitors. Close by are the curious rock shelters where the monks of the fourth and fifth centuries found refuge from the storms of the times. St. Martin dwelt there and founded the Abbey of Marmoutier, of which there are still some remains. The visitor from Ireland can hardly repress a smile when he is shown the cave where St. Patrick lived in the fifth century, having found refuge there, as the guide explains, from "les troubles en Irlande." The hermit instinct is not confined to Christianity. Buddhism has an ample share of it. Tibet, Sikkim, Bhutan, and many other places where the influence of Gautama has penetrated, are full of hermitages—whether mere refuge from a troublesome world or true seats of sanctity, who shall say?

To the majority of travellers the charm of Touraine resides in its fertile plains, its vineyards and orchards, its rivers and forests, above all in its châteaux. To other travellers it has a more subtle attraction as the breeding place of great men, and of these four stand out prominently—François Rabelais, René Descartes, Honoré de Balzac, and Alfred de Vigny, whose statues stand as a perpetual monument in the streets and squares of Chinon, Tours, and Loches. The kings and queens, the warriors and statesmen, the monks, the pretty women who have flitted across the stage of Touraine, will be forgotten before the world forgets its poets, philosophers, and thinkers. Others pass, but they remain. They have built more enduringly than in marble, bricks, paint, or mortar.

François Rabelais is one of the great figures of literature. Squired priest, physician, scholar, traveller (not to say vagrant), humorist, gourmet—he occupies a secure niche in the temple of fame. His works, disfigured though they are by grossness and obscenity, will be read so long as good literature is prized. Born about the year 1590, his early history is obscure. He became a Franciscan and then a Benedictine, tired of the cloister, travelled, studied medicine, taught at Montpellier and Lyons, read and reflected, observed life in many of its phases, took a disgust at the manners and thought of his time, and then sharpened his pen to some purpose. Much controversy has hinged upon the problem of the pure inwardness of the works of Rabelais—how far they are merely extravagant, satirical, and gross, how far they conceal serious purpose and moral earnestness under a veil of satire and

cynicism. The reader must make his choice, and answer according to his temper and insight. No one will question the fertility, abounding life, piquant satire, and shrewd penetration of Rabelais. He was a leaven in a dull mass, a stimulant to an organism that was largely ossified. He despised the learning and education of his day, and pointed the way to a broader culture and wider horizons. He lived in an age when free speech was dangerous, and it is not a matter for surprise if he often cloaked serious thought and pregnant suggestion under cover of humorous exaggeration and ribald laughter. He wore motley, but in this case the motley was not the garb of a fool. How far the sculptors who fashioned his statues at Chinon and Tours interpreted correctly the psychology of their subject, must remain doubtful. Both statues suggest the jester rather than the thinker—the superficial aspect rather than the deeper reality. Stories and legends have gathered round the name of Rabelais. The famous tale of how on one occasion, finding himself far from Paris and penniless, he secured free transit to the capital as a prisoner by labelling his jars "Poison for the King," "Poison for the Dauphin," is of doubtful authenticity. Tradition has it that he joked to the end, and that his last Will and Testament ran "I have no money and many debts. The rest I leave to the poor."

Nearly half a century after the death of Rabelais there was born the second of the famous sons of Touraine—René Descartes—whose statue, with its inclined head and brooding face, occupies one of the gardens of Tours. He was early drawn to philosophical reflection. In the "Discours de la Méthode" he tells us that he "always had an intense desire to learn how to distinguish truth from falsehood, in order to be clear about my actions, and to walk sure-footedly in this life." He decided that it was his duty to give unqualified assent to no propositions but those the truth of which is so clear and distinct that they cannot be doubted. He found that the primary truth was the fact of his own thought,—hence his famous formula *Cogito ergo sum*. Though it has been pointed out that this formula really involves a tautology—"I am" being assumed in "I think"—it remains true that by this line of argument Descartes gave a new turn to philosophy and founded modern Idealism, afterwards elaborated by Kant. He arrived at another fundamental conclusion, viz., that all the phenomena of the universe can be resolved into matter and motion—thus founding the doctrine of the invariability of natural law. He avoided the pitfall of Materialism by his theory of the soul, whose seat he fancied was

located in the pineal gland—a view that long confused physiology and hampered philosophy.

Descartes's thought has the following essential notes:—

We must set aside preconceived ideas and mere conjecture, and follow truth alone, with reason for our guide; we must doubt everything which cannot be clearly proved; subjective things are the most certain. These contentions marked a new era in thought and were a real contribution to philosophy, which had been too long held bound by tradition and authority. But they are only partially true. The standpoint is too individualistic. The individual "ego" is not the final court of appeal. The conflict between Idealism and Realism is still proceeding, and neither side can claim the final victory.

Of Descartes's eminence as a mathematician and his not too fortunate incursions into the fields of physiology and medicine, there is not room to speak. His life was one long pursuit of truth, and his thought has profoundly influenced modern philosophy. His end came prematurely. Driven from Holland by vexatious controversies, he accepted an invitation to Sweden from Queen Christina, and did not long survive the rigors of the Scandinavian climate. His last words were: "My Soul, thou hast long been held captive; the hour has now come for thee to quit thy prison, to leave the trammels of this body; suffer, then, this separation with joy and courage."

It is, perhaps, futile to enquire whose was the greatest mind which ever devoted itself to the production of fiction. Comparisons are difficult, and there is no definite standard of values. But if the question were raised, a strong case could be made out for another son of Touraine—Honoré de Balzac. In copiousness, fertility of invention, comprehensive survey of life, searching analysis, pungency of style, subtle psychology, *flair* for motive and character, he has few equals and certainly no superior. His works are a comprehensive picture of contemporary French life, of which he is a hostile critic. He was a reactionary in Church and State, looking back to the Restoration period, and holding in low esteem the world of Louis Philippe. In that world he saw little but intrigue and cupidity. The *sacra auri famas* seemed to him its fundamental note—hence the dominance of the money motive in his works, where the jingle of coin is so frequent as to constitute a literary leitmotif; hence his fondness for depicting the career of the adventurer and the sharper; hence his comparative poverty in characters of

real elevation and nobility. His outlook is largely pessimistic, as shown in the following passage:—

Savez-vous qu'il existe dans notre société trois hommes, le prêtre, le médecin, et l'homme de justice qui ne peuvent pas estimer le monde? Ils ont la robe noire peut-être parce qu'ils portent le deuil de toutes les vertus et de toutes les illusions.

Or again in the following passage:—

Afreuse condition de l'homme! Il n'y a pas un de ses bonheurs qui ne vienne d'une ignorance quelconque... sa douleur est une lumière qui nous éclaire la vie. "Sentir, aimer, souffrir, se devouer, sera toujours le texte de la vie des femmes."

Balzac has been called a realist, because he is so penetrating an observer, but the true view of his genius is that expressed by Baudelaire:—"I have been many a time astonished that to pass for an observer should be Balzac's great title to fame. To me it has always seemed that it was his chief merit to be a visionary, and a passionate visionary. All his characters are gifted with the ardour of life which animated himself. All his fictions are as deeply coloured as dreams... In a word, everyone in Balzac, down to the very scullions, has genius." E. Faguet calls Balzac the "*roi de Paris*." His criminals, who are numerous, are not ordinary criminals—they are artists in crime. The motive passion of his young men is ambition. His "amorists" are chiefly women. Pathos was not one of his strongest points, but he has at times great pathetic power, as, for example, in "Eugenie Grandet," "Le Lys dans la Vallée," and "Une Episode sous la Terreur." He was faithful to the monarchy and to religion as he conceived it. "J'écris," he says, "à la lumière de deux flambeaux, la monarchie et la religion." He was not of a metaphysical turn of mind, and his works, though full of penetrating insight into life and character, are relatively weak in general ideas. He did not worry about the ultimate mysteries.

Balzac was not a stylist in the sense that Flaubert was a stylist. He shows no meticulous care in the choice of words or in the rhythm of sentences. The rush of ideas is so overpowering that the language flows like a torrent, and like a torrent it is sometimes overcharged, confused, and turgid. His taste was not fine, and his works contain much sickly sentiment, melodrama, and glaring exaggeration. Love plays only a minor rôle in his novels, and he is not, like some of his countrymen, obsessed by sex problems. He is not a flawless artist, and has something of the splendid

carelessness, the disregard for mere form of Shakespeare. We know that he wrote very rapidly, and chiefly at night, like George Sand. After a light dinner and a short sleep, he began work at a late hour and wrote six or seven hours without a break. He was a very impatient, but sedulous corrector of proofs. He was constantly involved in money troubles, which may be partly the explanation of the predominance of the money interest in his works. It is easy to point out Balzac's defects of taste and style, but he remains a prodigy of genius, and the greatest figure in the great roll of French novelists.

The statue of Alfred de Vigny adorns one of the open places of Larches, where he was born in the year 1797. After serving for a time in the army he turned to literature, produced poetry of fine quality, a famous novel *Cinq Mars*, and much miscellaneous writing. It must suffice here to quote a few of his most characteristic sayings:—

Qu'est ce qu'une grande vie? Une pensée de la jeunesse écartée par l'âge mur. "Honour is the poesy of duty." "Let us find comfort for everything in the thought that we are enjoying our very thought—a joy which nothing can take from us." "The contemplation of suffering itself is for the soul the source of a secret joy, which comes from the soul's activity in the idea of suffering."

Most travellers, perhaps all travellers, feel regret in bidding adieu to Touraine, and would be glad to return. It leaves an impression on the mind which can never fade. It is a crowded picture of light and shade, of great men and great deeds, and of tragedy and suffering, of mingled strands in the complex web of life. Let us hope that its days of strife are over, and that its present peace and prosperity will be abiding.