

Chenonceux.

A SPRING RAMBLE IN FRANCE.

BY CONSTANCE COUNTESS DE LA WARR.

(Illustrated by Photographs taken by Lady de la Warr.)

HAVING spent a most delightful time myself on several occasions in wandering through Normandy, Brittany, and a part of Touraine, I thought it might interest any who are thinking of betaking themselves to France during the early spring season to have a brief sketch of a most charming tour they could make with interest to themselves and at a very moderate expense. It is quite warm there, with good weather, even in April.

Unless you are an out-and-out bad sailor, by all means take one of the comfortable boats from Newhaven to Caen, which steam you over in eight hours. During the last three you have the advantage of gliding through a pretty canal, so even if you have been ill there is time to recover your shore-legs before you land. Capital accommodation you will find at the *Hôtel d'Angleterre*. Several days can be most pleasantly spent at Caen, which in itself possesses many objects of interest (including its fine cathedral and several old churches), and has others in its surroundings. Do not omit to take the train to Dives, on the sea-shore, which possesses the most picturesque of old-fashioned inns. William the Conqueror sailed from Dives for England. Falaise—an hour from Caen—should also be visited. Here you see the castle—of which much is left—where William was born; and the fountain below the castle still remains, where Robert le Diable met and fell in love with William's mother.

Bidding farewell to Caen, you will stop at least a night at Bayeux (where Queen Matilda's tapestry, worked by herself and her maids, is preserved in the Library), then you will go on to St. Lô, Coutances, and so on to Avranches. In all these towns you will find good and comfortable hotels; and if primitive in some ways, notably in baths, which are remarkable for their smallness (I advise you to always take your own), you can with certainty depend on well-made beds and good but simple food. A little roughing it, to my mind, adds to the charm of travelling; and sometimes to get free from the trammels of civilisation is a relief.

From Avranches you will, of course, make an expedition to Mont St. Michel, where hours, if not days, can be spent wandering over its enchanted castle and in weaving a romance of all its walls might tell, could they but speak. The wide expanse of sand at low tide is most striking. But I think the castle looks at its best when surrounded by the sea, with the sun setting behind it; it looms in the horizon, seeming to spring out of the sea itself. On the drive back to Avranches you cannot tear your eyes away from gazing and gazing at it. A causeway has now been made, connecting the island with the mainland, which takes away some of the romance, as formerly you had to drive over the sands, and you could only, of course, do this when the tide was low. Even then great care was needed, as the sands were ever shifting, and a track practicable



FALAISE, NORMANDY.

the winding river Rance. Dear old houses you will see here, and the romantic ruins of the old Château de La Garaye, immortalised by Mrs. Norton in her poem, "The Lady of La Garaye," which should be read by all who visit Dinan.

Lannion and Morlaix will be your next resting-places, and here each step leads you more and more into the primitive wilds of Brittany, and the Breton costume and caps become prevalent.

There are two lovely expeditions to make from Lannion (which in itself

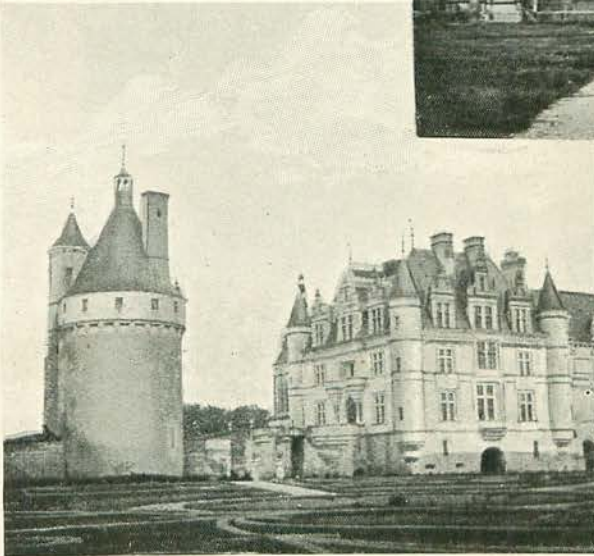
one day would not be so the next; and a guide was absolutely necessary.

Dol is a charming little place to visit from Avranches, and from the summit of a hill there one gets the most extensive of views.

And now you will quit Normandy,



ST. ANNE D'AURAY, BRITTANY.



CHÂTEAU DE CHENONCEUX, TOURAINE.

is the picture of an old town, quaint houses meeting you at every turn), one to the beautiful ruin of Tonquedec, a magnificent pile of buildings, in some parts very perfect; it is said to be haunted at night by the Huguenots who took shelter here during the religious wars. The other expedition is to Trégastel, on the sea-shore. The rocks on the coast here are very fine, and in the far distance you can see the mystic island of Avalon, well known to all readers of "The

and your first stopping-place in Brittany will be the quiet little town of Dinan, situated on

Idylls of the King." The whole of this district is redolent of the romance of King

Arthur's life, and is therefore of great poetic interest.

Persons fond of sketching will find plenty of occupation for their pencil at Lannion, as at every turn you come across the dearest of old houses. Morlaix is only a very little way from Lannion. The country all round here is very wild and picturesque. Morlaix is built on the slope of a hill, and from the upper part of the town you have a splendid view, extending over many miles. There is a dear old market-place at Lannion. We

were fortunate enough to arrive on a market day. It was most interesting and amusing to see all the peasants arriving from the country—the



BRITTANY PEASANTS.

men in their nice smocks, which are worn here; the women in short stuff petticoats, white aprons, and snow-white caps of every possible shape. In the covered part of the market the women all sit in rows, with chickens, ducks, and the most delicious pats of butter on their laps; the men keep outside, with their cows, pigs, and sheep. The jabbering that goes on is incessant—quite a Babel; but they all seem good-tempered and contented. Most of the women never fail to slip into the nearest church for a few moments during the day; they carry their wares in with them, without any false pride.

In this part of France there is much simple faith and reverent religion. On Sundays and festivals it is most impressive to attend the services and to see the church packed closely with men and women, all in costume, and to note their deep attention. I went into a church at Morlaix one Sunday evening, and was much impressed by finding it full of peasants. There was no service going on, and the church was just being lighted; but I shall never forget

how striking the effect was. There was just light sufficient to distinguish the kneeling forms in silent prayer, and one could not but think that such a sight would never be seen in any church in England. There was not even the excitement of a service going on—it was deepened religion by itself.

A beautiful old house where Queen Anne of Brittany lived should be visited, in which there is a curious corkscrew open staircase, and you can have many a stroll through the quaint and narrow streets of Morlaix. There are lovely drives in the neighbourhood, Huelgoat among them, where there are some fine rocks, one quite enormous, which is so poised that by a touch of the finger you can move it to and fro.

Roscoff, a pretty seaside place (on the way to which you can visit St. Pol de Léon and its fine church), and Brest, with its magnificent harbour, can be visited from here.

From Brest go to Quimper, and see its beautiful cathedral, and on to Auray, a dear little spot, with an excellent inn;



A PEASANT OF CAEN.

costume, with a large straw hat with long velvet streamers. We fell in with a Breton wedding-party one day during a drive. It was most picturesque. First came the band, then various friends and relatives, preceding the bride and bridegroom, and many following. All wore their smartest costume. They walked for some way, and finally sat down at two long tables laden with many Breton delicacies; and the bride's health was drunk, and glasses were brought to our carriage to do likewise. I took photographs of the groups. Another day we fell in with a First Communion procession, also very

and here you should spend a few days. In this part of Brittany the costumes become universal and much varied; the men all wear a velvet



CHÂTEAU DE BLOIS.

quaint. The priests, acolytes, and choir, singing, came first; then all the young girls, in their spotless white; and boys brought up the rear. All joined in the singing, and it was a pretty sight.

At Auray you will visit the Pilgrim Church of St. Anne, which is full of votive offerings; also the wood, a mile from the town, where nine hundred French *émigrés* were shot during the Revolution; and in a convent chapel close by you are shown all their bones.

Another day you must spend in driving to Carnac, there to see the large and wonderful extent of the *dolmens*—detached stones, or rather rocks—which cover at intervals a large tract of land. No one has any accurate idea as to what they are, but the general belief is that they were formerly tombs. They are of even shape, and are well worthy of a visit.

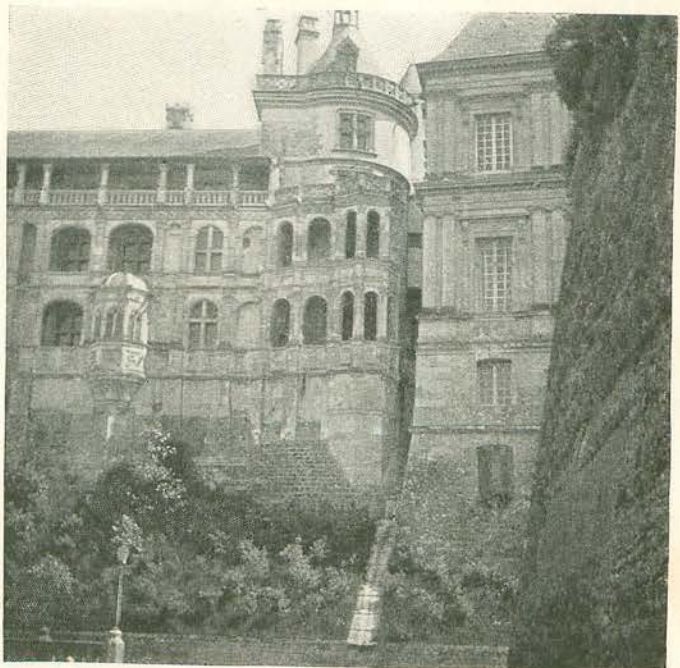
We went to a quaint performance of *Le Maître de Forges* in a most primitive theatre at Auray. It was most amusing. Auray does not attain to street lighting, so we had to grope our way back to the hotel as best

we could, stumbling along over the rugged pavement in pitch darkness.

Rennes you should next stop at, though there are no specially old features about it. It boasts of a most lovely public garden and of a fine Palais de Justice, which at the present moment is the theatre of absorbing interest. There are fine paintings and oak panelling in the palais. There are pretty drives all round, and the farm of De la Haye should be visited, as it produces the most beautiful butter that can be seen anywhere. I wanted to transport some, but the price is prohibitive; even at Rennes it fetches two and a half francs in the market.

A couple of days will do for Rennes, and then I advise you to go straight to Tours, and make it your headquarters for a few days, in order to visit the deeply interesting châteaux all round—Chenonceux, Amboise, Chambord, Blois, and many others.

Amboise and Blois are of transcendent



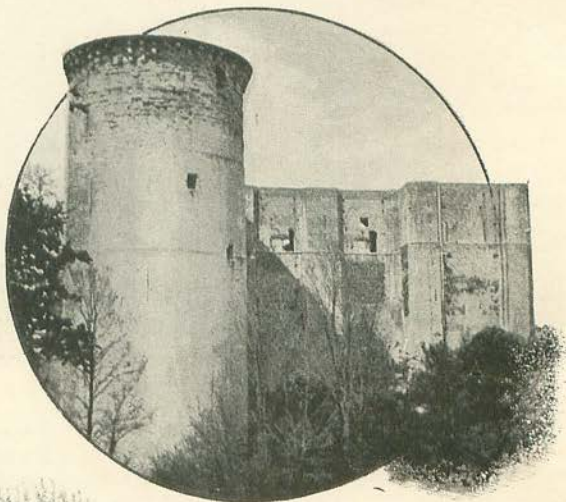
CHÂTEAU DE BLOIS.

interest, and days, not hours, can be spent there, as also at Chambord. François I., Henri IV., and Catherine de Médici have invested them all with their individuality, and, alas! have stained them with many a foul murder and with many cruelties. At Amboise you see the balcony from which the heads of tortured and executed Huguenots were hung by the cruel Catherine; also the magnificent, wide inside roadway winding up to the first floor of the castle, up which François I. and Charles V., followed by all their warriors, resplendent in armour and panoply of war, rode up slowly and sedately. A lovely chapel remains in the garden, also dating from that period, rich in colour and gilding.

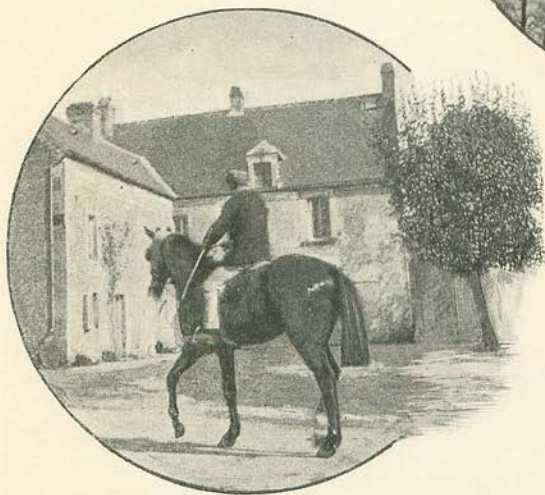
Blois Château is, if anything, of still greater interest, the earliest portion dating from the first King Louis, and the most modern portion from François I. and Henri IV. Here are the bedroom

Time and space fail me to tell of all the wonders of these far-famed châteaux—you must go there yourself and visit them.

I will now lead you to Paris; but of that city and its bright, restless life I need not tell you—you know it and all its delights as well as I do. Tarry here as long as you like, and then return to England *via* Rouen and Dieppe.



CHÂTEAU AMBOISE, TOURAINE.



OLD FARM NEAR CAEN.

and sitting-room of Catherine, the latter full of secret doors and cupboards, and panelled all round. Each panel, of which there are two hundred and fifty, is enriched with lovely arabesque paintings, and each design is different. Here you also see the secret room from which, through a sliding panel, unseen himself, Henri IV. witnessed the murder of the Duc de Guise, watching the dire tragedy till it was ended.

Rouen I love; there is so much to see in the dear old town, its beautiful churches and houses needing many days' study. Then there are the delights of steaming to various places on the Seine: Caudebec, whence you can drive to and wander among the ruins of the beautiful Abbey of Jumièges; La Bouille, a dear little village, where you land to have luncheon, and then climb a high, wooded hill, and get an extended view over the country and the winding Seine, which glides along the smiling valley like a serpent. The scenery on both sides as you steam

along is bright and fascinating, and full of repose. There is a lovely drive you can take all through the "Forêt Vert": in fact, many delightful days may be spent at Rouen.

It is always with deep regret that I end my tour in France; and I can but trust that in no way I may have misled you, but that, like me, you may return home with happy recollections of the past, and with hopes of a renewed tour in the future.

Geo. Haudebush