

Life in Brittany.

THE GREAT attraction of Brittany is "the peasantry," and no wonder, for they are quite *à la generis*, quite different from all other populations. They combine the sombre, taciturn nature of the Spaniard with the droll, wild life of the Irish. It is difficult to understand how the same people can be silent and noisy—reserved and running over with jollity. Yet so it is. There must be a strain of tiger in a population which could amuse itself as lately as 1847 in cutting the life out of friends with a whip made after this fashion: Lash, eighteen feet long, swelling at a little distance from the handle to the thickness of a man's arm, from whence it tapered to a twisted and strongly knotted end, made more like a knife by the help of a mixture of glue. This plaything was fixed upon a strong, stiff stick, and often not only cut a man into steaks, but sometimes cut out the life of him at a single stroke. Yet a local historian gives an account of a fête which he attended in 1847, at which the chief attraction was a contest between twelve men, six on a side, with these deadly weapons. The smack of these whips made, he says, much more noise than a gunshot; they could be heard at the distance of two and a half miles, and when several smack their whips in concert, the noise is so terrible that one must either run away or stop up one's ears. These twelve men were ranged opposite one another at a distance almost corresponding to the length of the lashes of their whips. They stood up, having for protection in the shape of dress only short felt breeches, and shirts made of stout sail-cloth. Like all Breton peasants of the old style, their hair hung down their backs in long tresses, but was cut straight across the forehead, after the fashion of Gainsborough's "Blue Boy." They wore no hats or head-covering. The left arm was naked, but the right arm, which held the whip, was protected from the fist to the neck by an armet or shield of thick leather. The sides were distinguished by the color of the tuft of their whips, the one being white, the other red.

These men thus standing face to face were there to be wounded almost to death for the glory thereof, and also for the prize, which consisted of half a dozen striped pocket-handkerchiefs and a pound of tobacco. The signal given by an old peasant, the combatants put themselves into the attitude of defiance, the whip raised, while the lash was held in the left hand. "Strike," said the same voice, and the twelve cables were let loose in an instant, but no smack was heard, as they met twisted, and struggled in mid air.

Those most renowned quickly disengaged their lashes, and dealt the second and dreadful blow upon the persons of their antagonists, opening up long seams of livid or bleeding flesh; on the third stroke, all the faces except two were seamed and flowing with blood. These two were the leaders—one tall, the other short; one heavy, the other light; one all flesh, the other, although only five feet high, all nerves and sinews. An outsider would have backed the giant, but the boys of Pipriac knew too well the prowess of the dwarf to risk their money against him.

The combat now raged with fury; men disdained to parry, they were only eager to strike. The sound was that of a volley of musketry. The lashes softened into tow, but hardened again and glue themselves together with blood. The faces are no longer human; the long hair hangs down in front, bathed in perspiration and blood. But not one blow has fallen on either champion, they have reserved themselves; they have guarded and parried, knowing that upon them the issue of the fight did depend. But now the tall man has hit home. A long blue spiral mark, which here and there squirts blood, twists round the left arm of the little Joseph, and makes him stagger with pain. He recovers himself, launches his whip at his foe, and but six inches intervened between its deadly point and the face of Joseph the great. Animated by his first success, Kaer stepped forward and bent his whole strength to the blow which he aimed at Josille. The little man never parried the blow, but prouetted, as it were, while without any effort he threw out his lash softly. The blow of Kaer missed; but when Josille sharply drew back his lash, the whole face of Kaer was cut in half—a gigantic gap opened up the very bones. These two stood alone in the lists; the rest had made a truce, and were engaged in attending to their grievous wounds. Kaer, blinded by the shock, put his armet of leather before his face, and paused. Josille, so far from profiting by the occasion, and pressing his advantage, coolly took out his pocket-handkerchief and loudly blew his nose, to the great amusement of his backers, who thought it an excellent joke. The laughter made Kaer mad, threw him out of his *sang-froid*, and made him

wild. He struck, stamped, and made wonderful points; but Josille was calm; and at the end of ten minutes the giant, covered with wounds, his shirt cut into ribbons, his mouth foaming, his eyes blinded, fell heavily upon his knees. "Don't give in!" cried some voices still; but the effort to rise was vain. Josille, apparently incapable of pity, like a true Breton peasant, again blew his nose, and prepared to give the falling man his *coup de grace*.

A shiver ran through the crowd; put Josille was better than he seemed, for instead of cutting the poor flesh, he dextrously drew the whip out of the hands of the victim, and folded his arms upon his breast. Kaer shut his eyes, and laid his burning head upon the sand. The whites were proclaimed the victors. Each subaltern had a pocket-handkerchief worth six pence, and Josille the pound of tobacco. I know not whether any of these scenes are enacted now, but this account is so recent that it throws light upon the Breton peasant as I find him.

As to the dress of the agricultural people, it is picturesque—so picturesque, indeed, that when some foolish servant is penetrated with the Parisian mode, and adopts it, she looks like a crow among birds of plumage. Yet I am sorry to say that the dress is changing. The old men wear sabots, gaiters, large, loose, baggy breeches fastened under the knee, with jacket and vest; the hair is long like that of a woman, and a broad, felt hat completes the costume. The young men have taken to trousers, but still retain the vest embroidered round the neck, and the loose, flowing jacket, mostly made of cloth of a dark blue color, and embroidered behind with a representation of the Holy Sacrament; this back embroidery is dying out, as also the custom of wearing flowing locks. The women wear short skirts, made of very thick material, pleated round the waist, more like a Scotch kilt than anything else; over the skirt they wear an embroidered cloth jacket, or vest with sleeves, cut square and low in front to display their white, nicely starched chemisette; to the chemisette is attached an enormous collar which reaches beyond the shoulders, and is a marvel of the arts of starching and ironing. This, with the great coil of the country, differing in each commune, completes the costume. Of course there are varieties of head-dress, some loose and flowing, others close-fitting, some in colors, some embroidered, and this gives to any assemblage a very varied and pleasing appearance; but the description of these matters is beyond the reach of my pen.

The home of the Breton peasant is quite peculiar, and differs from anything I have seen elsewhere. An old stable, a cow-shed, any old out-house, does as well as any other building for his purposes, and is always used when it may be had; but whether the house be built of stone, or wood, or mud, its exterior is almost always the same. It has a central door, and two little windows about eighteen inches square; within, the floor is of mud—literally mud; for as Brittany is a very wet place, the mud floors are almost always damp, and often contain miniature lakes or pools of water.

I recollect one day, when out fishing, calling in at one of these shanties where they kept an *auberge*, and finding it difficult to place my feet on dry land. Being inclined for a chat, I asked mine host how he, who, from the valuable furniture he possessed, I took to be a man decently well off, could bear to live in such a pig-sty. He replied that he always wore sabots, which could not be wet through, and as to sleeping in such a place, what did it matter to him; when once safely shut up in his *lit clos* (or wonderful Breton cupboard arranged as a bed), he did not care if the sea were to come in to the floor. The poorest shanties have their bedstead and *armoire*, mostly of fine-grained wood, and beautifully carved. This particular *auberge* had its whole side filled up with the family sleeping arrangements, all constructed in one single piece of furniture. A sort of tall, beautifully carved cupboard extended the whole length of the wall, which contained a bed at either end, and an upright clock in the middle—a clock like the kitchen clock of our ancestors. During the daytime the bedding is invisible, as also, I suppose, during the night, for it is reached through two little sliding doors, having little dwarf pillars for the admission of air. The doors are only opened to admit or give egress to the tenants. Day and night they are kept shut, so that you may go into such a room (as I have done) at midnight without seeing man, woman, or child, until the little doors slide back, and a whole family of heads peep out from within what may be called a night parlor. Add to this *lit clos* or *armoire* (a cupboard with large folding-doors), a few pots and pans, a form or two, and a table, and you have a complete inventory of a Breton house, whether it be occupied by a farmer or a

laborer. A year ago I went to see a chateau which was to be let. It belonged to a rich peasant farmer who, when he bought the estate, moved straight into the stable, and I saw him there with cows, horses, pigs, and servants, only divided from his dwelling-room by a slight wooden partition. I put the servants with the cattle, because it was literally so arranged; one man slept in a little box bedstead in a stable with ten cows—an arrangement which my farmer said was necessary, in case they broke loose at night.

As the Breton peasant lives in a sort of a primitive way amidst the cattle, so he thinks and acts in a primitive way also. His ideas are few, and those few descend to him from his ancestors. I suppose that, with the exception of the crying abuses arising from priestly power, supported by the state in the Middle Ages, and priestly misconduct in accordance with the very rude life of those ages, the religion of Brittany remains much as it was in the days of St. Louis.

Betting a Shirt Off.

"I SAY, Captain Brown, tell us—is it true? They say you can win every bet you make."

"Yes, Colonel," said the Captain, smiling, "it is quite true."

"Nonsense!" chorused a dozen voices.

"It isn't nonsense," said the Colonel; "for I'm told on very good authority—namely, his old Colonel, a dear friend of mine—that it is true. He told it when it was first settled that Brown was to exchange; and now, you hear he attests to it himself."

"Proof, proof!" cried the others.

"Ah!" said the Colonel, "proof. Come, Brown, how is it you manage it? You won't mind telling, I suppose?"

"Oh, dear, no," said Brown, smiling, "I don't mind telling. You see, I study the countenance of the man I bet with, and know beforehand how matters will be. I can read a man's face enough for the purpose of the wager."

"You can read mine, then?" asked the Colonel, chuckling.

"Oh, yes," was the calm reply.

The officers around the table grew interested.

"What can you read there, then?" Captain Brown looked at him intently for a few moments, and then said:

"Well, for one thing, I can read that the old wound on your back has broken out afresh."

"Nonsense!" roared the Colonel. "I never had a wound on my back."

The younger officers exchanged glances, and the Colonel saw it, and it made him more angry.

"You do not like the subject touched," said Captain Brown gravely—"then we will pass it over. I beg your pardon for touching so tender a place."

"But confound it all, sir!" roared the Colonel. "I have no wound on my back to break out afresh."

The Captain smiled.

"Come, then," said the Colonel, fighting hard to keep down his anger, "you are a betting man; I'll bet you two ten pound notes to one that I have not got a wound, nor yet even a scar of a wound—even a scratch upon my back. Will you bet?"

"With pleasure, if it pleases you, Colonel."

"Damme, sir, it does please me! I want this cleared up. A wound on my back! Damme, sir, I never turned my back to the enemy in my life! Now, sir, will you bet?"

"I will," said the Captain, speaking reluctantly, as if he were forced into it; while the Colonel was growing purple from suppressed rage.

"Good, then," said the Colonel; "twenty pounds to ten. The mess here are witnesses. Smith, lock the door."

A young Cornet obeyed; and, heated by wine, the Colonel, in his rage and desire to prove his new Captain to be what he mentally called a humbug, proceeded to divest himself of all his upper garments, revealing several bullet-scars and sword-cuts upon his chest and arms; but there was not the vestige of a scratch upon his back.

"Come, look all of you!" cried the Colonel; "I'm not ashamed. You'll find no old wound upon my back."

One and all inspected the old gentleman, and declared there was not a scar.

"Now, Captain Brown," said the Colonel, "perhaps you will come and look, sir, and satisfy yourself?"

"I'll take the word of these gentlemen, Colonel," said Brown. "I have lost. I was mistaken."

"Humph! I'm glad of that," said the Colonel, snatching himself back into his clothes, and at last buttoning up his coat, "I'm afraid, sir, you could not read my countenance."

"No, sir. I confess I could not; I am beaten. Here are your ten pounds."

The Colonel chuckled and looked delighted as he pocketed the money, for this, and the feeling that he had been too much for the new captain, put him

in the best of humors. So jolly was he that he patted Brown affectionately on the back when they parted.

"You couldn't read me, my lad, eh? No, no; rather too deep for you, eh?"

"Much too deep, Colonel. I was beaten," said Brown.

And from that day, for a whole fortnight, Brown's glory as a better was under eclipse. At the end of that fortnight there was a change.

The reason was this: Colonel Rollins was so delighted at having, as he said, beaten the better man, that he wrote to his friend, the Colonel of the Lancers regiment.

DEAR WARREN:—That was all gammon about Brown's luck at betting. He said he could read people's faces, and so won in that way; and, hang me, if the first night he was here he didn't bet that I had a reopened wound on my back. I bet him, of course—two to one—proved to him I had not, and pocketed his £10. It will be a lesson for him. He is a nice fellow, though, and we will like him very much.

Yours very truly,
JOHN ROLLINS.

An answer came back in the course of a post or two.

DEAR ROLLINS:—Glad you like Brown. Hang him! we don't. He has bitten us too often, and has just bitten us again. Confound him! The night before he left us I was talking about what a sharp officer you were—quite a Tartar—and he laid a wager with me, that was taken, too, by half of the officers in the mess, that he'd do as he liked with you; in fact, that the very first time you dined together he'd make you take off your shirt before the whole mess, and that you would write and tell me. You may keep Brown. We don't want him back.

Faithfully yours,
FRANK WARREN.

A Wonderful Organ.

It is said that the organ which is now being built in London for the Stewart Memorial Cathedral at Garden City will be the largest and most wonderful in the world. It will cost about \$40,000, and will probably have nearly one hundred and twenty stops. The following description gives some idea of this great organ, or rather the method of performing upon it: "At one end of the cathedral there is a room in a tower behind a large painted window, which will be connected with the key-board in the choir by electricity. The window will be opened and closed by an electric apparatus, which will produce the effect of an ordinary swell organ. Above the ceiling, in the centre of the building, will be the echo organ, and beneath the choir, in a chapel, still another part, each of which will be played from the choir. And finally, the great chime of bells in the tower will be connected with the choir, so that the organist can use it in connection with the organ. The bellows will be worked by five hydraulic machines."

How They Caught Her.

John Nevins was a fireman on the Ewart and Osceola Railroad in Michigan. A log was chained to the track one night, and his locomotive wrecked, killing him instantly. His widow sued the company for \$5,000 damages. While the suit was pending a good looking young fellow made her acquaintance, professed to fall in love with her, and made a marriage engagement. Having confidence in him, Mrs. Nevins told him that the log was placed on the track at her request, she desiring to get rid of her husband, while they were to have all the money that could be gained by a lawsuit. The wooer induced her to repeat the story in the hearing of concealed witnesses, and then had her arrested. He was a detective in the company's employ.

Buried Oak Timber.

In deepening a river in the neighborhood of Norrköping, says the "Timber Trades Journal," in order to make it accessible for ships of heavier draught, among several objects of interest brought up from the bottom, eight oak trees were found at a depth of seven feet under the old bottom. The bark was almost decayed, and when it was taken off the wood was found to be black, resembling ebony. The trees are supposed to have been lying in the earth 900 years. The trees have been sold to a firm of joiners, who intend using them for cabinet work.

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