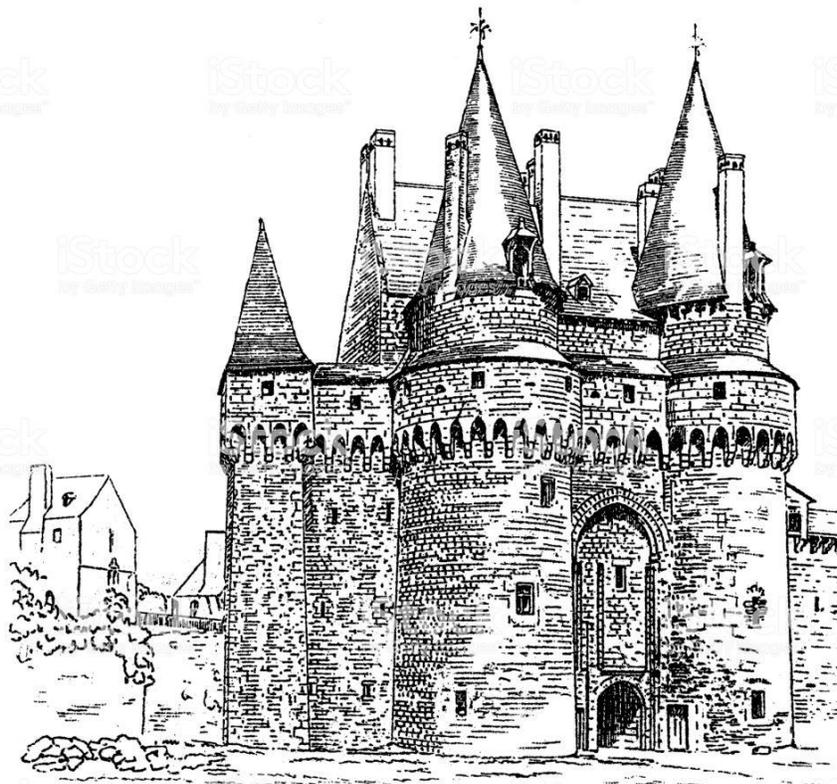


# BRO NEVEZ

INTERNATIONAL COMMITTEE FOR THE DEFENSE OF THE BRETON LANGUAGE  
NEWSLETTER OF THE U.S. BRANCH



Château de Vitré

**KUZUL ETREVROADEL EVIT KENDALC'H AR BREZHONEG**

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The U.S. Branch of the International Committee for the Defense of the Breton Language (U.S. ICDBL) was incorporated as a not-for-profit corporation on October 20, 1981. Bro Nevez ("new country" in the Breton language) is the newsletter produced by the U.S. ICDBL. It is published quarterly. Contributions, letters to the editor, corrections, and ideas are welcome from all readers and will be printed at the discretion of the Editor.

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Back issues of Bro Nevez can be found on the U.S. ICDBL website

*Ideas expressed within this newsletter are those of the individual authors, and do not necessarily represent ICDBL philosophy or policy.*



## Editorial

With this issue of Bro Nevez I send my best wishes for the holidays.

Nedeleg Laouen  
Bloavezh Mat 2019

As you will read in the following pages there are lots of new numbers out about the state of the Breton language and the presence of Breton in the schools of Brittany. It is not bad news, but the numbers show that there is much that needs to be done to increase (or even prevent a decrease) in the number of Breton speakers. And there is much to be done to build access to Breton – immersion or bilingual classes – in the schools.

Thank you to all the ICDBL supporters who show through your membership that the future of the Breton language is of importance not just of Bretons but to the world.

*Lois*

## A New Survey of Breton and Gallo Speakers

At the initiative of the Regional Council of Brittany this past summer TMO Régions, based in Rennes, undertook the most extensive survey to date on the state of the Breton and Gallo languages in Brittany. This involved a telephone interview with over sixty questions with some 8,162 individuals over the age of 15 in all five departments of Brittany.

Basic numbers to emerge:  
(from a press release by Bretagne Culture Diversité posted on Agence Bretagne Presse October 10, 2018)

Some 207,000 people (5.5% of the population of Brittany) speak Breton, with an average age of 70. 3.5% of those surveyed said they understood Breton well or rather well but did not speak it. 31% can use a few words or expressions and 40% have some knowledge of Breton.

Some 191,000 people (5% of the population) speak Gallo. 4% said they understand it very well or rather well but do not speak it. 15% can use a few words or expressions. 24% had some knowledge of Gallo.

Questions about learning languages brought the following results:

90% of those aged 15-24 and 53% of those 25-39 learned Breton in school. 7% of those over 39 learned

Breton through schooling. For Gallo, learning was primarily through the family or community for all ages.

#### Support for teaching and media presence.

73% of those surveyed wanted more Breton in the schools and 55% wanted more broadcasts in Breton on radio and television.

32% were favorable to more teaching of Gallo in the schools and 30% wanted more media presence for Gallo.

33% of those surveyed wanted their children to know Breton (43% for the 15-24 age group) and 10% wanted their children to know Gallo.

#### A bit more interpretation

A more nuanced analysis of the survey results for the Breton language are provided by Fañch Broudig on his blog [langue-bretonne.org](http://langue-bretonne.org). Broudig is a scholar of the history of the Breton language and has been engaged in past surveys. He led a technical committee overseeing this new survey. He delves into some more detail and rightfully urges some caution in interpreting numbers. The following is my synthesis of information he posted on his blog on October 16.

The survey was particularly useful in mapping the use of Breton and changes from the last major survey in 2007.

In Lower Brittany (roughly the western half of Brittany) the new survey reveals that 20% of the population said they could understand Breton with 2% in Upper Brittany – a very slight drop from 2007.

When it comes to using the Breton language, contrary to expectations, the survey showed a slight rise (2%) in the *number* of speakers. 90% of Breton speakers are from Lower Brittany where Breton has historically been spoken. From 172,000 Breton speakers in Lower Brittany estimated from the 2007 survey, the number rose to 176,000 in the 2018 survey, representing 12.5% of the population, a slight drop in *percentage* from 2007. The department of Finistère has 51% of Breton speakers, some 88,000 people. In Upper Brittany the number of Breton speakers is 23,500 or 1% of the population.

Within Lower Brittany the use of Breton was shown to be highest in the Tregor, spreading to Morlaix and Central Western Brittany, while it is weaker in the Vannetais area.

When one looks at how frequently people use Breton the survey gives cause for a bit more pessimism.

For the question “you speak Breton ...” the survey results were as follows:

Every day or nearly every day – 22%  
At least once a week – 20%  
Less often – 37%  
Never – 21%

The percentage of those who speak Breton at least once a week – 42% - has in fact diminished since 2007 when the survey showed 153,000 effective speakers instead of the 140,000 projected by the 2018 survey.

The change over time of those who say they speak some Breton and those that use Breton daily or at least once a week is reported in the following numbers:

Estimated number of those who say they speak Breton:

1997 – 246,000  
2007 – 172,000  
2018 – 176,000

Estimated number of those who use Breton effectively (daily or at least once a week)

1997 – 233,000  
2007 – 153,000  
2018 – 140,000

When it comes to age, the 2018 survey shows that it is the population 60 and up that has the highest percentage of Breton speakers and that this has gone up since the 2007 survey. In 2007, 70% of those who said they spoke Breton were 60 or older and in 2018 the percentage has gone up to 79%. Four of five Breton speakers are over the age of 60 – 140,000 individuals. 57% of these are over the age of 70 and 22% over the age of 60. Just 21% of those who said they speak Breton in the 2018 survey are 15 to 59 years old – 37,000.

While the 2018 survey shows that the use of Breton has not declined as much as most predicted it would, Breton remains threatened and efforts need to continue to expand its use in schools and in the media – as the majority of those surveyed favored.

### **A New School Year for the Breton Language**

The following statistics for the school year 2018-19 are drawn from the report *Les Chiffres de la rentrée scolaire de l'enseignement bilingue en 2018*, prepared in October 2018 by the Ofis ar Brezhoneg, Pole Étude et développement, observatoire des pratiques linguistiques. You can find this report which includes much more information on [www.fr.brezhoneg.bzh/47-enseignement.htm](http://www.fr.brezhoneg.bzh/47-enseignement.htm)

Primary School level (pre-school and elementary school)

11 new sites were opened

8 in public schools (Lanollon and Plouagat in Côtes d'Armor, Brest 4 and Carhaix-Plouguer 2 in Finistère, Argentré-du-Plessis, Goven and Rennes 4 in Ille-et-Vilaine, and Allaire in Morbihan)

2 in Catholic schools (Lorient and Péaule in Morbihan); but several pre-schools (Bourbriac in Finistère and Bignan and Faouët in Morbihan) and one elementary program (Plumergat in Morbihan) were closed.

1 new site for Diwan was opened in Plouguerneau, Finistère.

Secondary level

5 new sites were opened at the middle school level

4 in public schools (Plouha in Côte d'Armor, Guipavas and Saint-Pol-de-Léon in Finistère, and Bruz in Ille-et-Vilaine)

1 bilingual track was opened at a new Catholic school in Landerneau, Finistère.

It is to be noted that only 5 public schools of 25 bilingual programs have Breton meeting half of the teaching medium (five non-linguistic subjects taught through Breton). None of the Catholic schools meet this level.

The high school level saw a slight progression for the first time in twelve years with Catholic schools opening a site in Brest.

Numbers of students

17,580 in the Rennes Academy (Finistère, Côtes d'Armor, Morbihan and Ille-et-Vilaine)

8,274 in public schools, 5,380 in Catholic schools and 3,926 in Diwan schools

757 in the Nantes Academy (Loire-Atlantique)

289 in public schools, 57 in Catholic schools, and 411 in Diwan schools.

This brings the total to 18,337 in bilingual and Diwan immersive schools in all five departments.

8,563 in public schools, 5,437 in Catholic schools and 4,337 in Diwan

Public schools account for the main growth this school year with a gain of 554 students. There was a gain of just 6 for Catholic schools and 19 for Diwan. Diwan continues to suffer from lack of teaching posts being opened and from increased challenges in engaging contracted non-teaching staff.

Numbers by School track and levels

	Diwan	Public	Catholic	Total
Pre-elem.	1422	3624	2171	7217
Elementary	1640	3700	2540	7880
Middle School	926	928	638	2562
High School	249	241	88	678
Total	4337	8563	5437	18,337
New students	19	554	6	579
% of growth	0.4%	6.9%	0.1%	3.3%

By School track and department

	Diwan	Public	Cath.	Total	New	% growth
Côtes d'Arm.	708	1461	424	2593	+1	0.0%
Finistère	2398	4037	2196	8631	+241	2.9%
Ille-et-Vilaine	223	991	408	1622	+132	8.9%
Morbihan	597	1785	2352	4734	+178	3.9%
Loire-Atlant.	441	289	57	757	+27	3.7%

Top Ten Cities

	Diwan	Public	Cath.	Total	New
Rennes (I-V)	151	510	157	818	+10
Quimper (Fin.)	407	199	126	732	+17
Brest (Fin.)	268	336	94	698	+49
Vannes (Morb.)	241	89	230	560	-12
Carhaix-Plouguer (Fin.)	426	74	47	547	-25
Lannion (C-d'A)	95	323	122	546	-5
Nantes (L-Atl.)	210	239	57	506	-33
Landerneau (Fin.)	82	290	105	477	+28
Plougastel -Daoulas (Fin.)	28	200	229	457	+14
Lannilis (Fin.)	0	211	141	352	-15

Top Ten Diwan Sites

Carhaix-Plouguer (Fin.)	426 (the Diwan h.s. located here)
Quimper (Fin)	407
Brest (Fin.)	268
Vannes (Morb.)	241
Plésidy (C-d'A)	236
Relecq-Kerhuon (Fin.)	218
Nantes (L-Atl.)	210
Rennes (I-V)	151
Lesneven (Fin.)	112
Guissény (Fin.)	100



As reported in the last issue of Bro Nevez (September 2018), fifteen Diwan high school students decided to take their math baccalaureate exams through the medium of Breton in defiance of rules by the Rectorate of the Rennes Academy that math exams must be completed in French. For the students it seemed only natural to take the math exam in Breton since their math classes were conducted through Breton. And, after all, Basque students in the Academy of Bordeaux have been able to take the math exam in Basque since 2012.

The Rectorate has remained firm in insisting on French for the math exam and was backed up this fall by the Minister of Education of France, Jean-Michel Blanquer, who confirmed that while students can take the baccalaureate exam for history/geography and an optional exam for the Breton language through Breton, all other exams must be completed in French.

The fight is not yet over for the high school students and Bak e Brezhoneg has taken on a lawyer to try to insure that students taking the Bac exams in the spring of 2019 have the right to pass the math exams in Breton.



**Fañch vs. Fanch**

Fañch was born in May 2017 but when his parents wanted to register his birth, the registrar of personal state records of Quimper refused the spelling with the ñ. The case was brought to the court of Quimper in September 2017 which judged that to accept this spelling would “break with the State and the maintenance of unity of the country and equality without discrimination as to origin.” The refusal to accept the ñ was justified by a Ministry of Justice document which established a list of sixteen signs recognized in the French language (such as ç, à, é, or ö). The tilde is not on this list.

The case was then taken to the Court of Appeals of Rennes where it was argued that words with ñ were indeed in French dictionaries and thus part of the French language. The court determined that the use of ñ does not negatively impact public records nor go against Article 2 of the French Constitution (the famous “French is the language of the Republic” used to block official recognition of Breton). On November 19, 2018, the Court of Appeals ruled that Fañch could keep his ñ.

But not so fast ... only several days later the General Prosecutor of the Rennes Court of Appeals filed an appeal to reverse the authorization of the tilde in official

records, citing again that the tilde was not recognized by the State as part of the French language and that the case must be reconsidered in view of potential repercussions.

But little Fañch is not the only Breton baby to threaten the unity of France. In August 2017 the same document listing acceptable signs was used to prevent parents from registering their son’s name Derc’hen – the apostrophe, like the tilde, does not figure on the list. While civil servants have not been consistent in approving or refusing names such as Fañch, or names with an apostrophe – common to Bretons as well as those of African origins in France – one hopes that more sanity will reign in the future to allow parents to respect their heritage in naming their children.



**The Loire-Atlantique Department to rejoin “official” Brittany?**

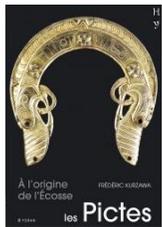
Ever since the department of Loire-Atlantique has been separated administratively from the rest of Brittany in 1941 by a Vichy government decree, Bretons have been petitioning to bring the department back into the officially recognized region of Brittany. See Bro Nevez 147 (September 2018) for the review of the book *Le Livre blanc de l’unité bretonne* for background and the compelling arguments for reunification.

In October 2018 a petition originated by Bretagne Réunie containing over 100,000 signatures in favor of reunification was presented to the President of the Department of Loire-Atlantique, Philippe Grosvalet. Representing 10% of the voting age population of Loire-Atlantique, this petition obligates the department to organize a referendum on this question. And a vote on the part of 62 elected representatives of the department is scheduled for December 17-19.

Such a huge show of support represented in the 100,000 plus signers of the petition is cause for encouragement, but reunification is a long shot. Even if the Department of Loire-Atlantique votes in favor of reunification, a 3/5 majority vote in favor is also required of both the Region of Brittany and the Pays de la Loire region to which the Loire-Atlantique Department now belongs. Since Loire-Atlantique is the most populated and economically strong of the departments in the Pays de la Loire, that region’s vote in favor of losing Loire-Atlantique is unlikely.

While Loire-Atlantique and its main city of Nantes have been administratively separated from the rest of Brittany, people of the Loire-Atlantique maintain a strong Breton identity and this department cannot be separated from its important place in the long history of Brittany.

## New Books from Brittany – On Scotland



**Frédéric Kurzawa. *Les Pictes – à l'origine de l'Écosse*.** Yoran Embanner. 2018. 505 pages. ISBN 978-2-36747-050-4.

If, like me, you have a fuzzy idea of who the Picts were and how they figure in Scottish history, this is the book for you. While rich in detail, the author, Frédéric Kurzawa, writes for a general public to clarify for us what is known about when the Picts lived, where they lived, and how they lived. Since the only written document left by the Picts is a list of their kings, what we know has ample room for more scholarship and discovery ... as the author encourages.

Writings about the Picts by Romans and later Irish chroniclers are valuable second-hand accounts, but it is in the wealth of archeological finds, and particularly the richly carved stone steles, that the life of the Picts is best told. The Pictish civilization lasted a little more than six centuries from the 4<sup>th</sup> to the 9<sup>th</sup> century when they were supplanted by the Scots of Dál Riata who had settled from Ireland in the western area of present day Scotland. Until this domination of the Scots, the Picts had fought to keep their independence – first against the Roman legions, then the Scots and Northumbrians as well as Scandinavian invaders. While early chronicles help to trace the history of their relations with their neighbors, it is the stone steles with their carved designs and images that seem most eloquent in showing how and where the Picts lived.

Kurzawa focuses a great deal of the book on these stones and their artwork – some hundreds discovered. Through both photos and detailed descriptions of the carvings he helps to paint a picture of the life of the Picts – not as savage warriors covered in tattoos and paint that have sometimes characterized them, but as a Celtic civilization with highly developed arts. The stones are carved in the complex interlaced designs and symbols that I had always associated with Ireland. Based on depictions of musical instruments and combs and mirrors on the stones which were funerary monuments, Picts had a love of music and personal appearance was important. Richly decorated brooches, rings and necklaces found in archeological discoveries also attest to a mastery of arts and appreciation for finery. The stones also reveal dress, weapons, hunting

gear, and livestock. Archeological finds of fortresses show that the Picts had impressive archeological skills.

One characteristic of the Picts was matrilinealism and the importance of women in their society. Kings' successors were chosen among brothers (sons of the king's mother) or nephews (sons of his sisters). Also revealed in chronicles as well as on the stone steles is the importance of religion to the Picts – Pagan and then Christian with Christianization by Saint Ninian in the south Pict area and Saint Columba in the north. Monasteries were important intellectual centers and it was in the Pictish monastery of Iona that the Book of Kells was produced and then moved to Kells in Ireland in 807 to protect it from Viking invaders. Just as I assumed that the interlaced designs and animals depicted on the steles were "Irish," I also assumed that the Book of Kells was uniquely Irish.

Besides dispelling a few misconceptions those less well-read among us – like me – might have, this book provides a clear history of the Picts as we currently know it. Kurzawa clearly identifies and discusses the source material for interpreting this history and both in the text and a lengthy bibliography identifies different scholarly interpretations. Not surprisingly, interpretation of Pictish art and symbols has varied! Interestingly, and importantly, Kurzawa's book is the first in French to be published on the Picts.

Besides a discussion of the source information on the Picts, the book's chapters present "Scotland before the Picts," "the formation of the Pict kingdom," "the conversion of Picts to Christianity," "Pictish society," "Pictish art," and "the end of the Pict kingdom." A "provisionary conclusion" neatly sums things up.

An additional 200 pages include annexes starting with a brief presentation of the Celtic languages and their history. While very little can be known about the Picts language, Kurzawa considers that it is in the Brittonic branch, along with Welsh, Breton and Cornish. The annexes also include discussion of the origins of Christianity in Britain, the list of Pictish kings, and twelve chapters focused on specific sites and the stone steles and archeological finds associated with them. Also helpful is a glossary of terms and information on places to visit and where to get more information.

While the style of this book is aimed for a general public, Frédéric Kurzawa is no amateur enthusiast. He has a doctorate in Catholic theology. He is a member of the Centre International de Recherche et Documentation sur le Monachisme Celtique, the Société Belge d'Études Celtiques, Pictish Arts Society, and Royal Society of Antiquaries of Ireland. He has written two major works on Saint Patrick and Saint Columba, as well as numerous articles. With some hundred illustrations, photos and maps to augment the

text, this book offers an interesting and well-researched history of the Picts and their place in Scottish history.



**Alex Salmond. *Notre rêve ne mourra jamais – L'Écosse sur la voie de l'indépendance.*** Yoran Embanner. 2017. 273 pages. ISBN 978-2-36747.

While we're on the subject of Scotland, it's worth presenting the publication in the summer of 2017 of a translation by Jacques-Yves Le Touze of Alex Salmond's 2015 book *The Dream Shall Never Die – 100 Days that Changed Scotland Forever*. Salmond was the First Minister of Scotland from 2007 to 2014 and leader of the Scottish National Party for over twenty years. This book presents his account of the organization of a referendum for Scottish independence in 2014. The result was 46% in favor of independence with 54% in favor of staying in the United Kingdom. In 2015 the Scottish National Party would win 56 of 59 legislative seats- an exceptional show of support – that would drop to a more “normal” level of 35 two years later. Alex Salmond has been a key player in Scotland's quest for independence, and this fight will continue in years to come.

While U.S. ICDBL members will most likely prefer the English language version of the book, its translation into French is certainly welcome to readers in Brittany who have long fostered inter-Celtic ties with Scotland and who have a strong interest in learning how other peoples of Europe democratically seek independence.



The Brittany-Scotland Association ([www.bretagne-ecosse.org](http://www.bretagne-ecosse.org)) was created in 2000 by Bretons who love Scotland wanted to learn more about their Celtic cousins. The organization's objective is to develop friendships, and educational, cultural, economic and institutional relations between Brittany and Scotland.

The association organizes and participates in gatherings, conferences, lectures, exhibits, and travel between Brittany and Scotland for artistic, cultural, economic and friendly exchanges. It fosters partnerships between towns and villages and associations in the two countries as well as relationships between academic institutions and their students (workshops and training).

The association puts businesses of Brittany and Scotland in contact who have or want to establish

commercial interests and share expertise, such as marketing with a common Celtic label. The association has created a network of correspondents in Scotland and serves as a resource for those who seek information about Scotland or Brittany. I also serves as a resource for those hoping to establishing twin cities, doing genealogical research, seeking jobs or training opportunities, and looking into travel or longer-term stays in Scotland.

The Bretagne-Ecosse website's presentation of monthly activities (“Actualités”) gives a very good idea of how active this organization is in fostering exchanges and an understanding for Bretons of Scottish history and culture. With Brexit negotiations underway there is great concern about the impact this will have on Bretons living or studying in Scotland (and the UK) and those from Scotland (and the UK) who have moved to Brittany. Starting in 2016 the Brittany-Scotland Association's President, Pierre Delignière and its Vice-President Rob Gibson have contacted Brexit negotiators, the French Prime Minister, and the Prime Ministers of the UK and Scotland to express their concerns about the impact Brexit will have on relations between Brittany and Scotland.

On a “lighter” note, the Brittany-Scotland Association has been active in organizing and promoting events in Brittany to celebrate and learn about Scotland. In mid-November the association participated in the three-day Salon Multilingue du Livre Jeunesse in Pluguffan (Multilingual fair for books for youth) which featured Scotland. This included Scottish singers, pipers and storytelling with lots of activities for children, including a contest to create a bilingual (Breton-French) text – this year on fantastic creatures. The event also featured exhibits, book displays, food, a fest noz and ceilidh.



At the end of November a celebration of St. Andrew's Day spread over a week when Ti ar Vro Kemper hosted an exhibit on Breton Scottish relations created by the Cultural Institute of Brittany. Events also included a preview of a film by Gérard Alle called “L'Or des Mac Crimmon” featuring Patrick Molard, a master of Breton piping but also piobaireachd

and the Mac Crimmon heritage. A second evening featured a tasting-visit to the Distillerie de Menhirs, with Scottish whiskey tasting led by Jean-Pierre Pichard. Participants also viewed the film “La part des anges/Lodenn an Aelez” by Ken Loach and the

evening was capped by aperitifs and piping by Patrick Molard and Andrew Hunter.

As part of a year-long series of lectures organized and led by the Brittany-Scotland Association in Quimper (at Chez Max) a December presentation was given by Pierre Delignière on the geology that has shaped the Scottish landscape, coasts and waves. In September Claire Sauvaget spoke on the evictions of Scottish peasants in the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> century in the wake of the quelling of Jacobite rebellions and changes in agriculture and industrialization.



## DEEP INSIDE A BRETON SKULL

### 58 – When our prophecy will be fulfilled

Jean Pierre LE MAT

Arthur, our king, will come back someday! From age to age, the prophecy was transmitted in hushed voices.

Confused voices, humble voices, hoarse voices ...

Who whispered to me the message, under the eye of the moon? I felt a breath in my chest, a heat, deep in my skull. Wise men told me that this unpredictable inheritance, which chooses for itself its heirs, is a supernatural error.

From generation to generation, the extravagant heritage infects the brain of a few young people. They experience exaltation. They can forget decency and become warriors, poets, entrepreneurs.

Old Merlin, who still lives in the forest of Broceliande, is related to the phenomenon. He has not lost his vitality. Whenever he meets Viviana, near the lake of Diana, he soon warms up. He is still in love, and this can be felt all over Brittany.

That very morning, the two lovers were meeting. From the old prophet, it was possible to see only a gleam over the water. The fairy girl can be perceived only through a perfume in the wind. Nevertheless, the talk was very lively.

The mysterious peacefulness of the lake was masked by a subtle haze. And if anyone could have grasped the words fluttering over the reeds, that's what he could have heard.

- Viviana, my Viviana ... Will you never pity your prisoner?

- Leave the pity to humans, Merlin. It distracts them. It enhances their worries. We are not like them. We are immortals. We know the art of waiting.

-Ah, Viviana, don't go too far from humans. It is their impatience and their hopes that gives us life. We would disappear if they would have no hope.

- Do you want to tie us to humans, Merlin? Will you implore them to save you? Do you want to cheat with your fate?

- Viviana, for a long time now, I am foreign to the world of mortals. But I share their dreams. Do you not dream of our embraces, of our races in the wind of Brittany? During the leisure you got through your pitiless patience, do you never dream?

- Oh, true! ... Merlin, I often dream of our laughter in the wind ... Clenched in your arms, I laughed loudly! At that time, you were a man, Merlin... Would there come back such a blessed time! I will sigh again for such a man, handsome, strong, inspired by the gods. I dream of wonderful races in the wind...

- Viviana, I feel in your words all the passion, and also all the cruelty of women. Should I pay for love in such a dreadful manner?

- Come on, don't be angry, Merlin! You alone are precious to me. Your penance in my paradise cut you off from the human adventure. You were predisposed to it.

- Viviana, my dear Viviana, you exasperate me! You are more than a fairy and more than a witch. You are too close to being an ideal woman, and too far from being a perfect one...

- I am an ideal woman, you said... I am therefore condemned to eternal youth, which suits me... It is not the same for you, Merlin. You are a prophet, you plunge into the bowels of time. A prophet is necessarily old. But tell me again, Merlin, my dear Merlin, my sweet friend! What about us when your prophecy will be fulfilled?



- Ah, my Viviana! Our forest of Broceliande will cool down. The boars will no longer have their strange gaze and the leaves of the oak trees will rustle like everywhere else. The hope of men will die, being fulfilled, and we will withdraw forever.

- Will I never know the Isle of Avallon, the Tir na n'Og? Oh, Merlin, it's unjust!

- If that would have been your fate, Viviana, you would have been there a long time ago. But you cannot escape from here. You are the soul of Brittany, you are bound to it. It is to you, and to this land, that I entrusted my enchantments and my knowledge.

King Arthur went alone to the paradise of the Celts. I am now a fish, a blast of wind, a rock, an oak tree in Broceliande. The sap I draw from this soil feeds me as splendidly as all the apples of Tir-na-n'Og. Birds carry me the rumor of the world and the winds that echo among the galaxies tell me the message of the universe. The ricochet of the sun on my trunk will penetrate the eyes of the heroes to be born. Thus, the memory of the past events will be transmitted. One day, a man will come.

Viviana, do you know his name?

## Heard of but not heard - 21 new CDs from Brittany

Information for the following notes was drawn from Musique Bretonne 257 (Cot-Nov-Dec 2018), Ar Men 226 (Sept-Oct 2018) as well as the Coop Breizh website and various web links to musicians noted.



### Ars'ys. *Navigation II*.

This CD of 11 selections has an “other worldly” feel in compositions by Hervé Lesnevan who also provides vocals, piano and organ. Marta Gliozzi plays the grand organ of the Cathedral of

Quimper where the CD was recorded, and Simon Marchésini adds electronics.



### Arvest. *Diliamm*.

This is the fifth album from this group created in 2000. Yves Jego and Yann Raoul provide vocals and David er Porh and Nicolas Kevvazon play guitars for a

pop-rock electro sounds and a unique use of kan ha diskan style song for Breton dances. All but one of the 12 selections on the CD are sung in Breton.



### Filip Chrétien. *Devant*

Singer Filip Chrétien performs seven compositions (in French) supported by acoustic and electric instruments for a range of intensity and emotion.



### Guran Liard and Maude Madec. *Daw*.

This duo composes new music and arranges traditional Breton song and music, enhancing it with electronic and acoustic instruments. Maude Madec

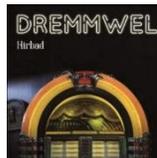
sings (in Breton) and also plays bombard. Guran

Liard plays vielle à roue (hurdy-gurdy) and adds percussion and electronic effects. They are joined by Michel Godard on serpent and tuba, Pierre-Yves Prothais on drums and Vincent Goubin with vocals.



### Detressen. *B-52*

Renaud Detressen is a singer known for his work with the rock band Soldat Louis. Here he presents 12 songs (in French) composed with an eye to the 1970s.



### Dremmwel. *Hirbad*.

To celebrate its 30 years of performance the group Dremmwel invited a number of musicians who have influenced them over the years for this CD featuring dances of

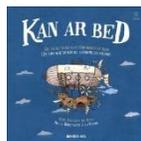
Brittany. Dremmwel itself is made up of Daniel Cadiou (guitar), Fabrice Carre (drums), Mauric Coince (bass), Marin L'Hopiteau (fiddle and harp), Dominique Le Guichaoua (accordion, binioù, vocals) and René Marchand (bombard, veuze and flute).



### Gwennyn. *New Andro*.

Gwennyn presents 18 songs – most in Breton, but some in French and English – she has composed and drawn from the traditional repertoire. This is her 6<sup>th</sup> album which is a “best of” including her

most loved performances but also two previously unrecorded songs.



### Kan ar Bed – *Ur veaj war gan tro-dro d'ar bed*. Bannioù Heol.

This is both a 50-page booklet and CD with 13 selections from 13 different countries (from Tahiti to China, Russia,

Corsican and Brittany) performed by over 100 singers and musicians. Each song has been translated into the Breton language, but original languages are also to be heard.



### Pascal Lamour. *Le souffle de l'Awen, la pierre qui parle*. BNC productions.

Pascal Lamour composes music evoking the world of druids, the four Celtic seasons, and animals related to the cardinal directions. This is his fifteenth album with 15 selections with titles including “Samain,” “Briganta,” “Tantad,” “Rituel” and “Eog Argant.”



### Les Frères Landreau. *Le secret de la civelle*.

Brothers Fañch and Youenn Landreau have grown up with musics of many kinds around them. Their father, Henri Landreau was a jazz guitarist, fan of Balkan music,

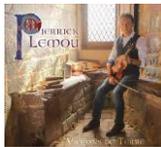
veuze player and co-founder of An Namnediz, an early Breton folk group. Their mother, Jacqueline, was a pianist and clavichord player. The brothers would take up fiddle and guitar (Chapman stick) and play with a number of Brittany's best groups before reuniting for this album which evokes their childhood in a variety of styles reflecting the varied musical influences and experiences each has had.



**Le Gall-Carré – Moal. *Touellwel.*** Paker Productions.

This is the second album by accordion player Tangi Le Gall-Carré and guitarists Erwan Moal. They present 13 compositions drawn from Breton and

Irish tradition, featuring dances with ridée, gavotte, kost ar c'hoad and plinn as well as reels, jigs and a hornpipe. Guest artists are Julien Stévenin on bass fiddle, Jacques Pellen on guitars, Jean-Michel Veillon on flutes and Typhaine Corre on vocals.



**Pierrick Lemou. *Violons de terre.*** TVB productions.

Master fiddle player Pierrick Lemou has been on the Breton scene for many years. For this CD he covers a much

longer span of years to retrace the history of the fiddle back to the 11<sup>th</sup> century. Playing the crwth, rebec, bowed viol, and the modern fiddle, he presents instruments as they develop through the centuries in Brittany and the British Isles. He is joined by Marc Anthony on hurdy-gurdy and Dimitri Bockhoorn on harp.



**Matzik. *Verbophonies.***

This is a group influenced by rock and jazz whose compositions on this CD evoke the world of radio. Claire Laurent carries the texts – sung and

“performed.” Matthieu Letournel composes, arranges and plays the tuba. Pierre-Yves Prothuns brings percussion inspired by musics of Africa and Asia. Benoit Bachus plays guitar and Jean-Baptiste Tarot plays sax.



**Pat O'May Band and Friends. *One night in Breizh land.***

This is a 2-CD set of the recording of an October 2017 concert featuring guitarist Pat O'May and his Celt rock and metal

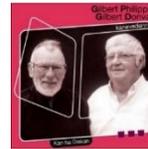
band. Long settled in Brittany O'May has recorded a number of albums drawing on his Irish roots and Breton tradition.



**Jacques Pellen. *A-hed an aber.*** Paker Productions.

This CD includes 11 selections by guitarist Jacques Pellen – five of his own compositions, two arrangements of

traditional Breton melodies, and arrangements of songs by Gershwin, Kristen Noguès, D. Goulder and H. Texier. This solo album features Pellen's mastery of the 6 and 12 string guitar (with programming, synthesizer and organ added by Patrick Péron).



**Gilbert Philippe and Gilbert Donval. *Kanevedenn.*** Kreizenn Sevenadurel Lannuon.

This CD features traditional singers Gilbert Philippe and Gilbert Donval who have sung kan ha diskan for some 50

years together. They are also masters of other Breton language song and have been active in organizing veillées for Dastum Bro Dreger. This CD includes a suite plinn and suite montagne (gavotte) as well as an an dro and six traditional and composed songs. This is the sixth in a series featuring traditional singers of the Tregor produced by Kreizenn Sevenadurel Lannuon (ksl.ccb.bzh)



**Ruz Reor. *Nouvelle cuvée.***

This fest noz band was created in 2003 and presents here a variety of Breton dances (12 in all) arranged in their unique jazzy/folk style. The group is

made up of Alain Le Grevellec on accordion, Richard Le Goc on saxophone, Alain Pensec on bombard and biniou koz, Dominique Le Pochat on guitar, Nicolas Cariou on percussions, and Jean-Charles Guillemot on bass guitar.



**SiiAn. *Péripes.***

This is the second album by the duo SiiAn with an eastern influence in selections drawn from music of Afghanistan, Rajasthan, Pakistan, Iran and Ireland. SiiAn sings in the

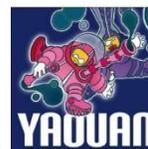
languages from which songs are drawn and plays the Afghan rubab as well as other stringed instruments. Erwan Tassel plays flute and provides percussion.



**Talskan. *Au carré.***

The Talskan quartet from Rennes compose and arrange traditional melodies and dances. The 14 selections on this CD favor dance (plinn, gavotte, Scottish, laridé ...).

The group is made up of Pablo Molard on guitar, Baptiste Barbier on flute, Florian Coic on guitars, and Thomas Besse on percussion.



**Yaouank. *Le plus grand fest-noz de Bretagne.***

Ar Re Yaouank (“the young people”) was the name of a ground-breaking fest-noz band of the late 1980s but this CD is not a resurrection of the

band – even if it includes performances by Jean-

Charles and Fred Guichen who were core members of Ar Re Yaouank. Yaouank (“young”) is a festival held annually in the fall since 1999 featuring the largest fest noz with over 6,000 participants. This CD is a compilation of performances for Breton dances from that fest noz by a variety of groups and singers including the Guichen brothers, Les Ramoneurs de Menhirs, Plantec, Startijenn, Teir, ‘Ndia ..to name a few of the 17 total.



### Zoñj. Zoñj.

This is the first CD from the trio of young musicians of the fest noz band Zoñj with six dances (rond de Loudéac suite, waltz, Scottish, rond de Saint-Vincent) and two melodies. The group is composed of Babbiste Barbier on flutes, Elouan Le Couls on fiddle and vocals, and Liam Roudil on guitar. They are joined for one of the songs by Korentin Le Davay.

## Vitré and Some Associated Personalities

When a new member of the U.S. ICDBL noted in an e-mail to me that he had roots in the town of Vitré as the 11<sup>th</sup> great grandson through his mother’s side of Henri de Sévigné and Marie de Rabutin-Chantal, Marquise de Sévigné, I could not resist including some information about these illustrious ancestors. Who has not heard of the letters of Madame de Sévigné?

The following is my translation of profiles from Bernard and Jacqueline Le Nail’s book *Pays de Vitré – Hommes et Femmes Remarquables* (Les Portes du Large, 2004, 240 pages. ISBN 2-914612-16-8). Bernard and Jacqueline Le Nail are authors of a number of carefully researched biographical “dictionaries” of Bretons including *Explorateurs et Grand Voyageurs Bretons*, 1998, *Dictionnaire des*



*Romanciers de Bretagne*, 1999, and *Dictionnaire des Auteurs de Jeunesse de Bretagne*, 2001.

The Le Nail book *Pays de Vitré* includes some 210 entries – short and longer – presenting people of Vitré and the surrounding Pays de Vitré who have marked some 1,000 years of Breton history. Vitré is situated on the eastern Border area of Brittany in the Department of Ille-et-

Vilaine (35) to the east of Rennes – see the map.

## The Sévigné Family

The Sévigné family which takes its name from a land area situated in the commune of Cesson (today Cesson-Sévigné) east of Rennes, has been known in Brittany since the 12<sup>th</sup> century. Guillaume de Sévigné distinguished himself in 1228 in the Seventh Crusade. In 1379 Guy de Sévigné was part of an assembly of Breton nobles who mobilized to prevent a French seizure of Brittany and to bring Duke Jean IV back from exile. In 1380 Guillaume and Jehan de Sévigné were among the signers of the Treaty of Guérande. In 1402 Guillaume and Loys de Sévigné were chamberlains of the Duke of Brittany Jean. V. The Sévignéns have a funerary niche in the chancel of the Notre-Dame church of Vitré.

Marie de Rabutin-Chantal, Marquise de Sévigné (Paris 1626 – Grignan 1696)

Letter writer. Born in Paris on February 5, 1626, Marie de Rabutin-Chantal belonged to an old family of Burgundy. Having lost her parents when she was six years old, she was raised by her uncle Philippe II de Coulanges, had a happy childhood and received an excellent education. After her marriage in 1644 to a Breton gentleman, Henri de Sévigné, who was also of an old noble family, she was introduced to the [French] court and stayed at the Rambouillet hotel. Her husband who lived a profligate lifestyle was killed in a duel in 1651 leaving her a twenty-five-year-old widow with two young children: Marguerite Françoise (born in 1646) and Charles (born in 1648). For several years Madame de Sévigné continued to frequent high society while devoting herself to the education of her two children.

The marriage of her daughter to the Count de Grignan who came to be appointed Lieutenant General of Provence led to their separation in 1671, and on the mother’s part, a feeling of solitude that led her to undertake a regular correspondence which would come to constitute an entirely exceptional and original place in French literature. In fact, she addressed some 1,700 letters to her daughter, most during the first seven years of their separation. Written with a great deal of spirit and with spontaneity, these letters have only a modest interest for historians in that all the events she witnessed and told of are well known otherwise, but in turn they are very remarkable for their style and for the imagination and creativity that they show.

Beyond her marriage and the name she acquired from her husband, Madame de Sévigné had ties to Brittany and the Vitré area in particular. Her correspondence contains in fact 320 letters written in Brittany (nearly 19%), of which 289 are addressed to her daughter, Madame de Guignan. During her lifetime of 70 years,

she spent nearly five of them in Brittany, during a dozen stays of varying lengths. Her knowledge of Brittany remained, however, very limited geographically. She knew Nantes, Rennes and Dol, she made a trip with the de Chaulnes family to Vannes, Auray, Port-Louis and Hennebont in 1689, but most of her stays in Brittany were in Vitré and at her Château des Rochers. The Marquise de Sévigné died April 17, 1696, at the home of her daughter, the Château de Grignan, in Provence.

The relationship of Madame de Sévigné with Brittany has raised some passionate controversy, especially in the last century. If some have built a cult around her and if her memory is particularly maintained and venerated today at the Château des Rochers (where she wrote 267 of her 1,700 letters), others have strongly reproached her for her often very negative judgements of Brittany and Bretons and her insensitivity to the cruelty and repression of people after the great revolt of 1675. The inauguration of a marble statue by Dolivet of Madame de Sévigné on October 7, 1911, was the cause for grand festivities in Vitré and the writer Anatole Le Braz, professor at the Faculty of Rennes, spoke at a conference at the municipal theater on "Brittany and Madame de Sévigné." But public authorities who had received menaces judged it prudent to keep watch on the statue day and night for several weeks. Passions have calmed today and the memory of Madame de Sévigné has inspired, with the support of the Postal service, an annual literary event called "Les Sévignales" to promote letter-writing. Those promoting tourism in the Vitré Pays have sought to draw on her fame with the creation of a "tourist route" that bears her name.

In 1950 the French postal service issued a bright blue stamp with a face value of 15 francs representing Madame de Sévigné based on the portrait by Nanteuil. 3 million copies of the stamp were printed. Streets are named for her in numerous French cities, one of which being since 1867 the old Rue Saint-Catherine where the Hôtel Carnavalet is found which she rented in 1677 and in which she lived for nineteen years. A statue of Marie de Rabutin-Chantal, Marquise de Sévigné, by the sculptor Aizelin is found in Paris on the façade of the Hôtel de Ville along the Seine (Ref.: Marius Vachon, *Le Nouvel Hôtel de Ville de Paris, 1872-1900*. Paris, 1900)

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Henri de Sévigné  
(Vitré 1624 – 1651)

Husband of Madame de Sévigné. Born in 1624, no doubt in Vitré, Henri, Marquis de Sévigné was a strong and handsome young man when he asked for marriage with the young and pretty Marie de Rabutin-Chantal, but he was also a spendthrift and rake which his young bride would soon discover. The marriage took place in Paris and in 1645 he became the Lieutenant of Fougères. He sided with La Fronde, but was not really bothered during the repression which followed. \*

Preoccupied only by his pleasures, he quickly abandoned his young wife and multiplied his amorous conquests and liaisons. He was thus in 1650 the lover of the famous Ninon de Lenclos, ten years older than he. Even though separated from the wealth of his bride, he found the means to seriously cut into his wife's fortune after squandering a great part of his own. Seriously wounded in a duel on February 4, 1651, he died the next day.

\* Editor's note: La Fronde was a series of civil wars held between 1648 and 1653 in which nobles of France challenged the supremacy of the French monarchy.

Charles de Sévigné  
(Étrelles, 1648 – Port Royal, 1713)

Son of Madame de Sévigné. Born at the beginning of March 1648 at the Château des Rochers, part of the parish of Étrelles in which church he was baptized, Charles de Sévigné did not know his father who was deceased when Charles was not yet three years old. He was raised by his mother from the beginning in Port-Royal [Paris] and quickly proved himself to be a gallant and audacious boy. At the age of twenty he decided to go to combat the Turks who had been trying for twenty-five years to take possession of Crete and who had laid siege to Candie for eight years. He participated in an expedition which left from Toulon on September 25, 1668, and which returned March 6, 1669, with heavy casualties and without succeeding in

freeing the hold of the Turks (who in the same year took possession of the entire island).

He then divided his time between Paris and the Château de Rochers, leading a disorderly life like that led by his father, using his charm to multiply amorous conquests. He had for a time as mistress la Champmeslé (who would console Racine in his older years) and also Ninon de Lenclos, who had been a mistress of his father and was at the time fifty-one years old. In 1672 he left to join the army to battle Holland. He distinguished himself in battle several times, notably on August 11, 1674 when he was severely wounded, then again in 1675 and 1678.

On February 8, 1684 he married Jeanne Marguerite de Bréhant-Mauron, a pious young Breton, simple but educated, with whom he was sincerely and deeply in love, and who led to his complete conversion. As much as his previous life had been careless and troubled, so he henceforth led a life that was drawn in, humble and pious. The couple, who were unable to have children, stayed at Rochers and lived there for many years, then returned to Paris where he died at Port-Royal on March 24, 1713.

### **Vitré and Madame de Sévigné Viewed by an American Traveler to Brittany in 1920**

The following description of Vitré and the legacy of Madame de Sévigné is drawn from Ange Mosher's *The Spell of Brittany* (New York, Duffield and Company, 1920), pages 14-24. Mosher seems to be one of those intent on building a cult around Madame de Sévigné with what seems like veneration of her memory ... until you get to the very last paragraph where the less charming side of de Sévigné is noted. But, American Ange Mosher's fascination with Madame de Sévigné is not unlike that of current day Americans who give celebrity status to and follow every marriage and birth in the English Royal family.

Ange Mosher recounts ...

It is sunset when our train arrives at Vitré. The hour when the walls and towers of this fine old feudal town, golden in the evening glow, are seen at their finest.

In all France there remain but three medieval towns which have preserved their feudal aspect – Avignon in the South of France, for many years the Papal Seat – Guérande and Vitré, both in Brittany.

There is a certain little inn near the station called the "Hôtel des Voyageurs," reasonably comfortable. It has a rival over the way which bears the high-sounding title of "The Steward of Madame de Sévigné" writ large upon its front. Whether the virtues of this personage of

two centuries ago have been transmitted to his descendants we cannot say.

Vitré has but one church – old and interesting, but not important. It was formerly a priory. The façade is formed of seven gables. An exterior pulpit of the fourteenth century of pure Gothic style, placed there, tradition has it, in order to oppose the public sermons of the Calvinists uttered from an exterior pulpit of the Château near by, is worth noting, it being one of the finest examples of its kind of which there are very few in existence. The Colignys introduced Calvinism into Vitré and during the wars of the League the castle served as one of the armories of the Huguenots.

We stroll about the narrow streets. Ancient houses built upon pillared galleries, each story projecting beyond the one below, almost meeting at the summit its neighbor over the way, making a pell-mell of dormer-windows, sculptured cornices and chimneypots – such are numerous in medieval Vitré. And there are several interesting antiquity shops – an attractive feature to many of us!

But Vitré, interesting in itself, is not the chief object of this visit, which is to see the château of Les Rochers, the home of Madame de Sévigné, and next morning we secure a good horse, carriage and driver for the modest sum of six francs and make the excursion thither three miles from Vitré.

Madame de Sévigné

Although Madame de Sévigné was born in Paris (you know the little house in the Place des Vosges), most of her short married life and her long widowhood were passed at the Château Les Rochers. It is chiefly with her associations with Brittany that we have to do. Through the vivid records in the "Letters" we see her making the journeys from Paris to Vitré, an affair of eight or nine days and thus described: "It was a veritable cavalcade," she writes, "two open carriages, seven carriage horses, two men on horseback and upon a pack-horse the bed is carried to serve at the inns en route." She took measures against dullness by choosing agreeable friends for fellow travelers and she carried along the favorite books. They talked; they read Racine and Corneille and Nicole; they enjoyed the scenery. The good uncle, the "*bien bon*" of the "Letters" always made one of the party and often her son Charles, who appears to have been a most agreeable companion.

And we note other journeys – those from Vitré back to Paris where at the court of Louis XIV at Versailles a welcome always awaited this clever and charming woman. And we accompany her on the occasional visits to her daughter in Provence and to the waters of Vichy for her recurrent rheumatism. Many an author is

seen at his best in his travel notes; our chatelaine of Les Rochers is no exception. When she travels in these "Letters," the reader vividly accompanies her.

The late Gaston Boissier of the Collège de France in his delightful sketch of the famous letter-writer says: "It is doubtless true of the 'Letters' of Madame de Sévigné that the most interesting thing in them is Herself." She wrote with frankness. Most of her secrets she let slip sooner or later from the point of her pen. Her gossip charms, her frivolities enchant, her airy nothings passed around among the court circle at Versailles crystallized into *bon mots* and were held worthy to be adopted and repeated by the great Louis himself.

When the brilliant Marie de Rabutin-Chantal married the flippant Chevalier de Sévigné, of a Breton family allied to the Du Guesclins and Clissons, he was possessed of more estates than money. We learn that he esteemed but did not love his wife and that she loved but did not esteem him, most people agreeing with her in respect to the latter. We find the husband squandering his dowry in gambling. We see him at the feet of Ninon de l'Enclos as was his father before and his son after him. For a quarter of a century later in a letter to her daughter dated 1671 the mother writes: "Your brother is under the spell of Ninon. She ruined his father." When a duel fought over a disreputable love affair takes the Chevalier off we feel little regret. During the following years she is at Les Rochers with her two children practicing economies to repair the deficiencies caused by the follies of the young husband.

From time to time she flits to Paris where in 1650 she made re-entry into society. And now we associate her with that famous Hôtel de Carnavalet, still redolent with associations and souvenirs of this witty woman. And we note the more serious turn in her tastes for we find her at the Hotel Rambouillet, a Salon then at its highest point of distinction, where she met Racine, Corneille, Voiture, La Fontaine, Molière and the two tutors of her girlhood, Chapelain and Ménage. Among all these we see her the *precieuse* she indeed was, but with a precocity free from the extravagancies of her pedantic tutors who thereby suffered ridicule in the comedy of Molière: "Les Précieuses Ridicules."

We note that in the days of the Fronde, which brought about great changes in her circle, she plays her rôle of *Frondeuse* gaily and with her accustomed success.

Through these "Letters" we meet her at the house of the Scarrons. And at the La Fayette's where she with her hostess and Rochefoucauld made a frequent and admirable trio. She is at the Saturdays of Madame Scudéry and often at the theatre. We note the episodes, so-called love affairs, in which the great Turenne and the Comte de Lude failed to win her

hand. And the Prince de Conti and Fouquet were in the procession. But she turns all her lovers into staunch friends.

Then she marries her daughter, "the prettiest girl in France" (according to the mother), to a Count of Provence, and we read the wonderful mother letters that follow.

But the most attractive experiences of her life are associated with Brittany. Through the "Letters" we follow her day by day at Les Rochers. We watch her planting the avenues of trees through which we walk to-day. On October 28, 1671, she writes to her daughter: "I don't know what you have done this morning, but as for myself I have been half knee deep in the dew taking measurements. I am laying out winding avenues all around the park which will be very beautiful. If my son loves the woods and walking he will bless my memory." It is to be feared that the rather flippant Charles failed in this respect, but her memory is blessed by the visitor who rambles through these lovely avenues to-day.

And she reads. She reads all sorts of books, grave and gay – Tasso in his own language, and Roman History (Plutarch and Josephus) and Nicole's "Treaty on Morals." Oh, how often she seems to be reading that dull book! And Pascal and Fénelon and others of the Port-Royalist group, and Virgil ("in all the majesty of the Latin," she writes), although it has been said of her Latin that it went limpingly sometimes. And with so much that is serious we welcome the arrival of the son who promptly infuses somewhat of gaiety into the group. For on these visits we catch the laugh over chapters of "Rabelais" and the "Comedies of Molière," of which the mother writes: "My son reads us many a bagatelle of which he is prince – comedies which he acts like Molière himself, poems and novels. He is most witty and amusing. He has kept us from taking up any serious reading as we had intended. When he leaves we shall resume our Nicole." And again: "Charles reads us chapters of 'Rabelais' enough to make us die of laughter."

We follow her to Vitré to the assembling of the Breton Parliament when she tells us: "The dinners are so magnificent that one dies of hunger," and she flits back to Les Rochers whence she writes: "I need to sleep, to eat, to refresh myself, to be silent." And again: "At last, my daughter, I have come back to by '*bien bon*,' my masons and carpenters, and I am transported with joy." And she rejoices like any child over the luxury of eating the huge slices of Breton bread and butter. "How much better to be here all alone than in the fracas of Vitré," she writes. One smiles at the term "fracas" applied to the dear, dead, old Vitré that one finds to-day.

From time to time occur the visits of the daughter – visits always shadowed with clouds of misunderstanding, to be followed – once separated – by repentances and self-reproaches on the part of the daughter, who seems to have been a person of strong character and little tenderness.

And we follow our chatelaine in many of those lonely walks through the avenues of the park – “All alone tête-a-tête,” she puts it so characteristically. The “Letters” admit the reader to a certain intimacy. Indeed the visitor of Les Rochers today has the impression of having known the place before.

Within the château we see the bedroom of Madame de Sévigné, in which he portrait hangs- that painted by Mignard, coiffed à la Grècque – very décolleté – a mantle hanging in may folds from the shoulder. And the canopied bed, the book of accounts with the faithful gardener Pilois, which we find more interesting that the transcription of Virgil in her own handwriting, the powder puff, brushes and other toilet articles – all impart an intimate air to the apartment.

We find the garden as prim as when first laid out after the plans of Le Nôtre and the veritable orange trees of two centuries ago stand in their original plan. The little chapel is quite intact with its altar, pictures, sofas, chairs and other furnishings of the period. This is the chapel so often mentioned in the “Letters,” built by the “*bien bon*,” the Abbé de Coulanges whose economies in the affairs of his niece seem not to have interfered with a little mania of his own for building.

But it is the park with its avenues planted by the faithful Pilois under her own eye that bring the charming proprietor of Les Rochers nearest us. These still retain the names she gave them: “The Infinite,” “The Solitary,” “The House of My Daughter,” etc. The motto carved over the entrance of the château suggests the spirit in which the hospitalities of Les Rochers were offered by its mistress: “Blessed Liberty. Do whatever you like.”

Through the “Letters” not only the château but its chatelaine becomes very real to the readers. We come to know how everyday life went on. It was in a simple quiet fashion thus described in a letter to her daughter: “We rise at eight. I often spend the hour until nine in the park breathing the fresh air of the forest. At nine the bell rings for mass. After mass we make our toilette and say good morning to one another. We gather flowers; we dine. Between dinner and five we read and write. When I go to my avenues I have my books. I plant myself wherever I like. I change places and I change books – for one a book of devotion, for another history, and so on. At eight I hear a bell. It is for supper. After which we sit in the garden listening to the

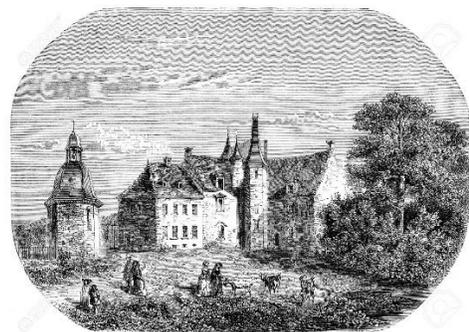
nightingales and breathing the perfume of the orange blossoms.”

Setting out for Paris she writes: “Adieu, my poor Rochers, adieu my books, my *prie Dieu*, my dreams, my air castles, my lonely avenues, and our gay little after-suppers! Adieu! Happy domain of the ‘*fa'niente*.’”

We find ourselves equally loath to leave this lovely spot, attractive not only through its own charm, but so deliciously pervaded with the atmosphere and souvenirs of one of the most fascinating women of France.

As an illustration of the influence of heredity Madame de Sévigné furnishes a notable instance, we note her two contrasting sides – the serious, the religious, and that other in which piquancy, satire, gaiety, elegance, and social charm are combined. On the one side we trace the mysticism of the grandmother, Madame de Chantal. On the other the bubbles and sparkling red blood of the Rabutins. Two more opposing elements never met in the veins of mortal woman. In this conjunction we find the varied traits of Madame de Sévigné – grave and gay – tender and satirical – charming and cruel – enjoying alike “Rabelais” and “The Lives of the Saints” – *devoté* at the altar of the little chapel of Les Rochers and at Versailles gaily leading the dance as partner of the Sun King. *Voilà notre Châtelaine!*

As a matter of fact many Bretons, while always appreciating her genius as letter-writer and her charm as mistress of Les Rochers, do not love Madame de Sévigné. One is not surprised at this recalling that in more than one of the “Letters” she recounts the acts of de Chaulnes, the Governor-General of Brittany, appointed by Louis XIV, who erected gibbets all over the Province and hung many hundreds of Bretons because they resisted gross injustice and held to their traditions. And these events were recorded by our letter-writer of Les Rochers without a trace of sorrow, pity or tenderness. For this reason at the recent inauguration of a statue at Vitré in honour of Madame de Sévigné, many Bretons were conspicuous by their absence.



Les Rochers

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