

## THE GLOZEL MYSTERY.

**H**OW it would have attracted and amused my late friend Andrew Lang! Just the thing for that great scholar and unraveller of intricacies! But, by the time I write, it also puzzles the man in the street, the lady in her boudoir.

Whom does it not puzzle?

A cartoonist recently figured two Parisian tramps having taken refuge from a shower under the arch of a bridge: "Why, old fellow, you look worried, what is the matter?" "Oh! that problem of Glozel," comes the answer.

Nobody knew of that little place before. A tiny hamlet of four houses, eighteen miles from Vichy, half a mile from a rivulet rich in trout, which soon runs into the Sichon, which flows into the Allier, a tributary of the Loire. It is a steep descent to the rivulet called Vareille. Dominating the stream is a small plateau, about twenty by sixty yards, which, until 1892, was covered with brushwood. When that was cleared, rumour says that much earthenware was found, but none preserved. Enriched, like so many French peasants, by the war, the Fradin family, formerly petty farmers, became the proprietors of Glozel and the adjoining land. In 1924, old Fradin, with his grandson Emile, then aged eighteen, began ploughing the small field. They hit on an obstacle and uncovered it (March 1st). It was an oval structure of which we know very little, because the early visitors destroyed it. But Emile, an intelligent fellow, picked up a brick with incisions and showed it to a school-mistress who was out for a walk. She reported to the inspector of the school, and the learned Society of the *chef-lieu*, Moulins, was duly informed. But the worthies whom that Society sent out, seeing bricks with strange signs, which Emile had meanwhile unearthed, decided it was all Roman. So the Society declined to spend money on Roman bricks, and here the matter would have ended if it had not been for Dr. Morlet, a physician of some standing in Vichy and member of the Society. He saw the earthenware, declared it was much older than the Romans, leased the field, made friends with the Fradin family and, with the sole help of his wife and Emile Fradin, began digging slowly and prudently in the spring of 1925.

Indeed, prudence was a requisite, the greater part of the finds being very fragile. Under a layer of earth, some thirty centimetres high, begins a layer of clay, the upper part of which, at the depth of sixty centimetres or thereabouts, contains the worked objects in stone and bone, the inscribed tablets, the vases, the strange clay idols with the emblems of both sexes (the so-called *idoles bisexuées*). Some of the stone and bone objects also bear incised inscriptions; a few vases are inscribed, the idols are not. The clay objects have not

been sufficiently baked, and must be taken out and dried with the utmost care; no progress is possible except with the point of a knife. Sometimes the things lay in hoards, but in other places nothing was found. Not a fragment of Celtic or Roman pottery, not an atom of copper or bronze, not a coin ever came to light.

During the summer and autumn of 1926 and 1927 the finds were exceedingly numerous, though less than half the field has as yet been explored. A great part of the objects remained, as exhibits, at the Fradin farm at Glozel; the remainder went to the house of Dr. Morlet, who published photographs and outlines, with a clever text, in four small illustrated pamphlets, and in numerous articles inserted in a well-known Parisian periodical, the *Mercure de France*, the editors of which were the first to believe in him.

Among the more recent and sensational discoveries were two oval tombs, which induced Dr. Morlet to believe that the first dilapidated structure was also a tomb. More than a hundred objects, with very few human bones—the site is unusually damp—were extracted from one of them, and opened in the presence of a Member of the French Institute, a professor at the University of Clermont, a geologist, and others.

As far as the actual facts admit of a conclusion, the field above the Vareilles, called Duranton, was a sacred spot in the early neolithic age, where offerings were deposited and some eminent priests or chiefs interred, with similar offerings to keep them company.

Three unforeseen and, *prima facie*, incredible novelties impress a mysterious character upon that site:

(1) While it has generally been admitted that the reindeer and the graphic arts of the cave-dwellers had somehow disappeared before the beginning of the later stone age, we can recognise at least two indisputable reindeer engraved on flat stones found at Glozel. The art of those engravings and many others is not of the best, but still naturalistic and with no tendency to stylisation, as in the neolithic rock-paintings of Spain.

(2) Contrary to the teaching of every handbook, rude pottery and sculptures in clay have been found, together with the images of reindeer, on the same archaeological level.

(3) Stranger still, about 150 inscriptions on clay, stone, or bone have been unearthed, the longest filling a tablet with more than a hundred signs. Put together, the signs hitherto ascertained make up an alphabet of about 110 signs, half of which are quite unknown, while the others bear an unmistakable resemblance—often amounting to identity—to the Phœnician, Greek, Latin, Cretan, Libyan and Iberian scripts, in fact, to all the scripts used on the shores of the Mediterranean except hieroglyphics. The closest analogy is

with Phœnician on the one hand, with proto-Iberic, as known from discoveries made at Alvão in Portugal (1893), on the other. Some signs, found on bones of the reindeer period as early as 1865, occur on the Glozel tablets; others are very like the Northern runes, certainly older than has been hitherto believed.

The only possible explanation of those queer facts is as follows: Writing, in its earliest linear form, was invented during the Pliocene age by the reindeer hunters (what archæologists call the Magdalenian period, from the famous cave of La Madeleine in Périgord), then developed, together with pottery, at the very beginning of the second stone age. That linear writing, first very complicated, somehow spread towards the East and was simplified much later (about 2000 B.C.) by Phœnician traders, who evolved the alphabet of twenty-two signs which we all use. Western Europe, not the East, invented the linear script. Now, the continual invasion of northern barbarians—Iberians, Ligurians, Germans, Celts—destroyed that promising culture in the West, while in the East it was tutored by Egypt and Babylonia, just as Greco-Roman culture was saved, to a certain extent, about 700 A.D., by the Christian Churches. Gaul and Spain having relapsed into barbarism, they were taught again to write and read by Eastern people; but what they then learned, after B.C. 1000, was the outcome of what they had invented at least twenty centuries before. That sounds like romance, but it is interesting to observe that a French explorer of caves, Edouard Piette, discovering pebbles on which letters were painted, had put forward that very hypothesis in 1896 and had, of course, been considered a dreamer by the professional teachers of pre-history.

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Vichy is only five hours by rail from Paris and Glozel is an hour by motor from Vichy. So Dr. Morlet thought that Parisian and other scholars, hearing of his discoveries and seeing photographs of them, would rush to Glozel. But none came and none believed; he was told politely that the whole matter must be a hoax, because it was *impossible* that clay vases and dolls were made when reindeer still roamed about France, and more impossible still that a developed linear script should have existed at that early period.

At last (June, 1926), an ethnologist, M. Arnold van Gennep, was sent by the *Mercure* to Glozel. He witnessed the excavations, returned quite sure that nothing was wrong about them, and expressed his absolute confidence. So I also went there (August, 1926), with the same result, and gave my opinion at a sitting of the French Institute (August 27th). M. Camille Jullian, the well-known historian of Gaul, did not go to Glozel (he has not even been there since), but contradicted me on September 3rd in the Institute,

asserting that the inscriptions were late Roman and related to witchcraft.\* Several other scholars of repute, Emile Espérandieu, Loth, Depéret—the latter a geologist—went to Glozel and, after having themselves found things on the spot, emphatically confirmed Dr. Morlet's opinion and mine.

But, meanwhile, a very clever book-lover, M. S. de Ricci, had declared that the Glozel objects were forgeries, in which perverted scepticism he was followed by many people who shook their heads but wrote nothing, and by others who both sneered and wrote. One of the latter was an Englishman, Mr. Crawford; three were Frenchmen, Count Begouen in Toulouse, Vayson and Dussaud in Paris. The last-named, who is an Oriental scholar and a Member of the French Institute, had not seen the excavations, but created a sensation when he declared (September 16th, 1927) that all the inscriptions and most of the other objects were "fakes." The quarrel then began in periodicals and dailies; Morlet's friends protested indignantly. The French Ministry, rather annoyed, forbade further digging and sent two men, one of them a good draughtsman, to compile a list of the objects discovered, whether genuine or not.

Next came a prehistoric Congress at Amsterdam, organised by French sceptics; the Portuguese scholar Mendes Correa appeared there and, to the general dismay, proclaimed that the finds of Glozel were as authentic as those of Alvão, having himself visited both places. So it was decided that an international Commission should be sent to investigate Glozel, the French Government allowing that excavations should be resumed by the Commission for a few days. But instead of being nominated by the members of the Congress, the experts were chosen by the secretary, who is a staunch unbeliever, and selected among his personal friends. No Dane, no Swede, no Norwegian, no Italian was included, and England was represented by Miss Garrod. That young lady is the pupil and follower of Abbé Breuil, one of the first French authorities on the art of the Pleistocene period. Now, M. Breuil went to Glozel in October, 1926, with M. Loth, and wrote an article in *L'Anthropologie* to state that everything was genuine; but, later on—irritated, as some people think, by the fame of discoveries which outdid his own—he declared that it was all a hoax (October 2nd). So the choice of Miss Garrod by the Secretary of the Congress, Count Begouen, is easily accounted for. The same line of argument may be applied to M. Forrer, an early enemy of Glozel, and to M. Bosch Gimpera, M. Begouen's correspondent in Barcelona, and so forth. I myself, as Vice-President of the Institute, which met at Amsterdam, protested against the choice of the members of the Commission; but no notice was taken of what

\* Any Latin scholar may admire his readings in the *Revue des Études Anciennes* for 1927. Not one Latinist has approved of them.

I urged; i.e., that no scholar who had hitherto declared for or against Glozel was to be elected, and that the British Museum and the Cinquantenaire in Brussels should be approached in order to secure proper delegates.

The Commission worked at Glozel from November 5th during three days, and discovered many important objects, including an inscribed tablet. The public was, however, much surprised that the members left Vichy without having stated their opinion. Everyone went back to their respective countries; then they met again in Paris (December 12th). What influences were brought to bear on the Commission I do not exactly know; one thing, however, I can guarantee. Dr. Morlet had given a part of a bone to Professor Correa of Porto, in order to have it analysed, because a chemical analysis can always detect whether a bone is ancient or not. While Correa's analysis was going on, a *forged* telegram from Porto appeared in the French papers, to the effect that the bone was modern. Correa protested, and the final analysis has shown that the bone in question was very ancient! But the Commission, to which Morlet offered other fragments of bones for analysis, only insisting that a parallel analysis of the same bones should be performed at the University of Lyons, flatly refused them. Till further light has been shed on that incident, the *bona fides* of the President of the Commission must remain in doubt.

On December 23rd appeared the long-expected report, to the effect that "all the finds were non-ancient." The French word used is *non-ancien*, which is no French, but literally translated from the German *unantik*, and betraying the pen of M. Forrer, the most ardent enemy of Glozel.

So the war began afresh and is still raging. M. Dussaud now openly declared, in defiance of our laws against libel, that if Dr. Morlet was the innocent victim of an enormous fraud, the two or three thousand finds were fakes *made by the young peasant boy, Emile Fradin*. Immediately, three Members of the French Institute, Loth, Espérandieu, and myself, protested that it was the very acme of absurdity to suspect an almost illiterate young ploughman of so stupendous an achievement. One argument, repeatedly stated by myself, suffices to prove that the inscriptions, against which M. Dussaud specially revolts, are no forgeries: almost all the signs of the known alphabets figure therein, *excepting* B, which is missing in the Iberian and Etruscan scripts. What forger could have been aware of that? Not even a specialised graduate of a University. M. Dussaud never answered my argument; M. Vayson tried to discard it by supposing that I myself had instructed young Fradin. A little more, and I may be accused of being the forger, to which I

would answer : *Domine, non sum dignus*. Such a feat is too clever for me.

So here is a dispute which has conferred a world-fame on Glozel, in which neither politics, nor religion, nor money is involved, but recalling to elderly French people the Dreyfus affair, so ardent are the upholders and the would-be demolishers of Glozel. If the public only enjoyed the fun of seeing scholars at daggers with each other and professors' caps changed into fools' caps, that reason would not be adequate. In truth, all learned or even semi-learned people feel that a very great stake is involved : *East or West, Asia or Europe?* Our education, still founded on the Bible (not read in France, but replaced by the teaching of the Catechism), implies that all culture originated in the East, and even scholars have never ceased to repeat the old saying : *Ex oriente lux*. Whether that unproven maxim is to be maintained or not is the true subject of the quarrel about Glozel. What personal grudges, conceit, rivalry or *invidia doctorum* may add to it, is of minor importance.

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