

# THE BATTLE OF THE ANTIQUARIES

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OF recent years, Frenchmen have experienced their own trials with German Big Berthas, flame-projectors, and poison-gas; American aeroplanes coming in continuous flight from beyond the Atlantic and landing unceremoniously in their midst; alliances and cross-alliances among their Latin rivals; with other manifestations of elements thoroughly modern and up to the minute. But very lately the ancient, even the prehistoric, world has been causing them no little disquietude. During a visit paid by the present writer to France in the summer of 1927, he found that the *intelligentsia*, and what some wag has rudely called the *unintelligentsia*, of the country were in a turmoil of agitation over a matter which can affect the practical side of the present-day world but slightly if at all. The disturbing element which has shaken the Grande République almost to its foundations lies in the discovery of certain humble artifacts which have been coming to light in the little village of Glozel. Are they genuine stone-age relics? Do they belong to the period of Rome's occupation of France? Are they simply the work of a very modern jester or perhaps profit-seeker? These are the questions that gentle and simple, learned and unlearned, are anxiously asking one of the other. At the present moment, it would seem that the term "Glozelian" bids fair to find its way into the dictionary as a word indicative of that which is mysterious or difficult of solution.

There is nothing remarkable about Glozel. It differs from the average French village in being a shade more untidy and dirty. It is situated a short distance from the town of Vichy, long celebrated for its medicinal waters. From it may be seen the beautiful and stately Auvergne Mountains in the distance. At present, however, it is more in the eye of humanity than Paris or the famous winter resorts of the Riviera.

The distinction of the place arose, in a small way, four years ago. Here a humble peasant unearthed in his field the remains of a wall which particularly attracted his attention by reason of its circular form. France has been inhabited by man continuously from the time of the Neanderthal sub-human species that flourished as long as 40,000 years ago, and even the most unlettered of her inhabitants is likely to display some sort of interest in her past.

As it chanced, then, the wall was shown to a local practitioner in medicine from Vichy, Dr. Morlet by name, who straightway purchased the farm and proceeded with a further examination of the soil. Dr. Morlet appears to be an honest and intelligent man, though with no particular training in the science of archaeology. Under his direction, further excavation revealed two other similar walls of brick, which were immediately declared to be Neolithic tombs. No human bones were found—which is not remarkable, in view of the boggy soil—but a miscellany of objects of ordinary use has come to light. These include pots in sherds or entire—stone rings and pendants, and terra-cotta tablets.

Were this a complete account of the Glazel finds, the matter would have aroused no more than local interest, or some statement of it might presently be inserted in some handbook of European prehistoric archaeology. But two most astounding features were also revealed: (1) Many of the stones and bricks bore respectably good drawings of the reindeer; (2) they also showed numerous inscribed characters which can be explained in no other way than on the basis of their being alphabetical signs. Two long-cherished theories seemed thus to have received their death-blow; for palaeontologists had declared that the reindeer had disappeared from southern and even central Europe before Neolithic times, while students of the alphabet had associated its mature form with the Phoenicians and its more primitive with the early Egyptians. It has long been known, to be sure, that men of the new stone-age possessed a sort of sign writing, such as was used by our own red men in pre-Columbian days; but to find a full-blown script nonchalantly displayed on humble Neolithic bricks and impudently flaunted on a variety of household utensils of this culture was a humiliating cut at academic pride.

The site of Glazel had apparently been a Neolithic "culture station", and the dead had been interred in tombs of somewhat the "beehive" shape which was favoured for the purpose by the ancient bronze-age Mycenaeans. Their form is also that of the Neolithic house found over a very wide area. The pottery which has as yet been published is of two styles: (1) a stout jar, with small mouth, burned a very little in the kiln, and having on one side what is described as a "mouthless face", with eyes in relief, a very small nose, and heavy supra-orbital ridges. Somewhat similar "owl-jars" were found long ago in the Neolithic stratum on the site of ancient Troy. (2) A very round jar, ornamented with a double row of depressions that might have been made by punching the soft clay of the unfired vase with the end of the finger.

The animal drawings show about the degree of skill attained in this art by Cro-magnon man of the Palaeolithic world. The artist shows a keener interest in the head than in the body of the creature, and many pebbles bear simply a sketch of the head of a reindeer or horse. A somewhat more pretentious drawing of two animals side by side has been described by Dr. Morlet as an attempt at portraying a pair of wolves. But the present writer fails to see why they are not intended for horses, as they display none of the leanness by which the former animal is distinguished.

What of this prehistoric alphabet? It must be confessed that it looks strangely like a combination of Greek and Roman letters. Thus, one recognizes at a glance the Hellenic *theta*, and what is more, in two varieties—with double cross-bar and with dotted centre, just as they may be found in lapidary inscriptions of the historical period. There is also the Greek minuscule *lambda*; the capital *gamma* and *delta*; another letter that looks suspiciously like an *omega*; and still another that might be an eccentric *mu* or a primitive *sigma*. Of Latin characters, we see *L*, *T*, *C*, *X*, *O*, and *I*. Indeed, of a total of about forty signs, only some half dozen seem strange. To an expert in this field, probably none would.

The Neolithic man in France seems thus to have learnt his letters early, and he was making steady progress in the estimation of the learned world when, about a year after the beginning of the drama, he met a very embarrassing stumbling-block in the person of M. Camille Jullian, a distinguished historian of Gallo-Roman civilization. This authority declared quite unexpectedly one day that the various inscriptions were as though of yesterday in comparison with the date of their supposed origin, inasmuch as the letters represented a degenerate form of Roman cursive script, and that the whole belonged to the early centuries of our era, or the time of the Roman occupation of Gaul. To strengthen his position, he began to interpret the inscriptions in the light of this understanding. Now, the early attempts of epigraphists in a task of this sort are usually wholly unsatisfactory; for, while their interpretations may be perfectly satisfactory to themselves, they convey little meaning and less satisfaction to the ordinary ear. Much more happy has been the attempt of M. Jullian. In a recent number of the French learned journal, *Review of Ancient Studies*, he has actually presented us with a full and entire text of the very first inscription which was discovered at Glozel. It is perfectly plain, if understood as popular Latin, and may be freely translated as follows: "A.X. gives you the following instruction to assist you in the art of love: go to Suxon, about the first of April when the

moon is new, and bathe in the water." Now Suxon was the Latin name for a local stream, and was apparently in ancient times also the name for the modern Vichy, the virtues of whose waters were well known to the Romans. The would-be lover seems thus to be directed to the mineral baths of the town, though the French journalists show too much exuberance in their claim of seeing here an early advertisement of Vichy Water! The letters "A.X." are thought by M. Jullian to represent the initials of a local sorceress who has composed this simple love-charm. Many more of the bricks are inscribed with these same letters. The whole, in the view of this scholar, may be regarded as the work of her hands.

Naturally enough, the friends of Neolithic man rallied to his support, among them the illustrious M. Salomon Reinach, who has forgotten more archaeology than many professional scholars have ever acquired. Their counter-attacks silenced their guns, but did not convince, the confrères of M. Jullian.

But the summer of 1927 saw a new phase of the warfare wherein Neolithite and Gallo-Roman alike were forced to whet their swords, stand on their defence, and in a measure make common cause against a new and terrifying foe. This was none other than a party headed by the learned and outspoken M. Dussaud, of the Louvre in Paris. After these had examined the remains at Glozel, they bluntly and even brutally announced that the Neolithic "tombs" had never so much as seen a corpse. They were merely the ruins of a number of blast-furnaces that had been in operation three or four hundred years ago. The charm of antiquity was thus cruelly snatched away in a moment. It is conceivable that a man may be interested even in a Gallo-Roman furnace; but who, particularly in a country which can boast of a past like that of France, cares one iota for a furnace, however well it may be preserved, that belongs to a period no more remote than the times of Louis XIV? As for the rest of the "finds", said M. Dussaud, they are impudent forgeries, foisted upon an innocent and all too credulous world by Dr. Morlet and his peasant accomplice.

These were harsh words indeed; but the iconoclasts were able to support their contentions with exceedingly vigorous arguments. Poorly-fired bricks, reposing in mud like that of Glozel, can hardly be expected to retain their form for five thousand, or even one thousand, years. In any event, their inscriptions, which appear in general deeply and cleanly incised, would have long since disappeared. Furthermore, as M. Dussaud has recently observed, "it is extraordinary how the sprite of Glozel always provides what occasion demands. As the new text-books have reached Glozel,

new discoveries have been made that are sheer imitations—drawings of reindeer that have clearly been traced from an existing popular book; Gallo-Roman script, when Camille Jullian's work reached Glozel; and finally, a year or so ago, imitations of archaic Phoenician script, when this script was discovered for the first time and plates of it published."

And finally, just as in stories of horror and death the villain invariably makes some slip which just as surely brings him to the gallows, in like manner the forger, waxing wanton it would seem through success, has had the impudence to inscribe on one brick quite legibly the name Glozel, a title which the village did not bear till comparatively modern times.

A series of hammer-like blows of this sort ought to have reduced the Neolithites, and equally the Gallo-Romans, to powder. But when the avalanche fell recently in the Academy, it was received by the old guard, not with cringing and humility, but rather with stout defiance and truculent rejoinder. There followed one of those stormy scenes which have not infrequently brought stigma upon the Chamber of Deputies. Left-handed compliments, strong epithets, and well nigh blows were exchanged, until, to make a long story short, so sharp did the contention between them wax that the Government found cause to intervene. Fortunately, Governments are able to do such things in France and Italy; Mussolini has done it more than once in somewhat similar circumstances. A curator for Glozel received an official appointment. A commission of experts from all over Europe was constituted to examine into the whole matter. And the Academicians themselves, feeling that things had gone too far, adopted a rule of secrecy regarding this particular session.

A Royal Commission usually accomplishes little; a Republican Commission may well be expected to accomplish less. In the investigation which followed, the party of Jullian seems to have scored not at all. The conservative element came away flushed with triumph. Sceptics remained as unconvinced as ever. The proceedings of the first day of activities went somewhat in favour of the railing Rabshakehs; the next day the scale-beam inclined strongly the other way. In the morning, after a few hours had been spent in removing the clay, an eminent Strasbourg professor happened upon a smooth rounded stone deep in the marl. The various tests which are the stock in trade of the expert excavator were at once made; but there was nothing found to indicate that the pebble had not lain there for ages and gradually become covered with the detritus of centuries. When washed—*mirabile dictu*—there appear-



ed on the side of the stone a fine reindeer head and letters recalling the Roman X, T, V and Z. Shortly afterwards, and under similar circumstances, a bone pendent and a red clay model bearing a death-mask were also unearthed.

But, say the doubters, what else was to be expected? The Commission has found nothing new, nothing confirmatory of the Neolithic theory. What it has discovered is nothing more than a series of replicas of what is already stored in abundance in the Glozel Museum. It would have been a bold "faker" indeed who would try to improve his case by "planting" objects of a type not hitherto found at Glozel. The work, then, of this or of any Commission must be, in all cases, fruitless. The searchers will always find that which will tend to confirm the discoveries of the past.

But a number of Europe's greatest authorities have returned from their expedition with their faith not only unshaken, but rather strengthened and confirmed by their outing at Glozel. Among them is Dr. Bjorn, the famous Norwegian archaeologist, a member of a race seldom carried off its feet by enthusiasm or sentiment. He emphatically pronounces: "One must be either blinded by prejudice or simply dishonest to deny the authenticity of Glozel." The veteran M. Salomon Reinach regards the genuineness of Glozel as already far beyond question. "What need was there for the Commission?" he asks; "the whole thing was as plain as noon-day!"

But, seemingly, the final challenge of the anti-Glozelians is a reasonable one. Their attitude towards the believers is that of Elijah on Mount Carmel towards the priests of Baal. Let there be a test by fire, they clamour. Let some, or better all, of the objects discovered in the hamlet be brought to the scientific laboratories of Paris, and there subjected to the most rigid tests that physics and chemistry can supply. This action, and this alone, will set the matter outside the field of speculation. The microscope and the test-tube will tell their own story. As yet (Dec. 1927), all this has fallen upon deaf ears.

Once already, however, as it would appear from a recent article in the *Temps*, this test has been applied to one of the finds. As far back as 1925, Dr. Morlet brought an inscribed stone for examination to Professor Boule, France's greatest expert in human palaeontology. After some demur on the part of the physician, a small area of the stone was carefully washed and examined under the microscope. In the bottom of one of the incised lines which formed the design on the stone was seen a viscous fluid which the professor readily identified as fresh glycerine, a substance with which the most precocious of Neolithites could hardly have been familiar.

Another very suspicious circumstance was revealed in the fact that the bottom of the scratches was lighter in colour than the surface of the stone; and it was found that the same effect could be produced by scratching the surface with the point of an ordinary needle. The whole drawing, the savant declared, was a complete hoax. Although Dr. Morlet was greatly agitated at the time, and declared that in that event all the other articles must unquestionably be false, he seems since to have rejected the professor's decision and recovered his equanimity, as the tell-tale stone still occupies a place in the Glozel Museum.

This bit of intelligence, but recently revealed through the press, appears to confirm the belief held for many months by M. Dussaud and his followers that the incised lines of all the drawings and letters are much too clear and distinct to be anything but modern. This party of extremists stand alone in their condemning of Dr. Morlet as an impudent impostor. All others—even Professor Boule—who are skeptical of the whole affair, regard him as honest but misled—the dupe, not the villain, of the drama.

For the present, then, the momentous question remains unanswered. If it should happen that the Jullian circle wins the day, the matter will be speedily forgotten. The wise and the foolish alike hope and pray that the final settlement may be as between Neolithic and Neo-modern. Is the cradle of human culture to be transferred from the valleys of the Nile or Euphrates to central Europe? Or can it be that at Glozel we have to do with what is destined to be a recurrence of the Pickwickian fiasco, and that the part of Mr. Blotton will be played all too well by M. Dussaud, and the obscure writing turn out to be of no more consequence than "Bill Stumps, His Mark"? And have we here—to introduce a humbler parallel—a repetition of the Jack Harkaway episode as touching the supposed Runic inscription which read, DRUN KASAF OOL?