

The Birth of Gargantua and his Voyages

There was once, in Plévenon, a very small woman; she was only three feet tall and was a *fille de bras*¹ on a farm where the herdsman was a *hossoué*², who had come from a place no one knew, and who was so small that no one wanted to wager that he could do anything but keep cows and sheep.

He was infatuated with the girl and wanted to marry her, but, when they were engaged, the mayor and the rector did not want to let them marry, because they were too small and they would, they said, give birth to dwarves. So the *hossoué* said to them:

“I am from a degenerate race, but my son will be the most powerful who ever appeared on this earth, and, as long as this world is this world, they will speak of him and of me.”

When the mayor and the rector heard him talk like that, they began to laugh, and they married the *hossoué* and his girlfriend, who were both very ugly.

The little woman became pregnant, but the pregnancy was very long, and, towards the end, you could see the child's head peeking out of the mother's mouth and eating at the same time. Word of this prodigy spread throughout the country; people came from far away in the world to see him, and each person brought him bits of food to eat.

After two years, the child came into the world, and they named him Gargantua. He was ten feet tall, but he was no fatter than an eel³. People came from all around to see this wonderful child. He ate a lot, and he grew visibly fatter, and, at six months old, he weighed more than four hundred pounds.

He became taller and stronger than a giant, and, when he was ten years old, he said to his mother and father that he wanted to travel and that he wished to see Dinan and Rennes, of which he often heard people speak. He went to the *château* of Ville-Roger⁴ and asked the lord to give him a cane.

“Oh, my poor Gargantua! Where do you want me to get one long enough for you?”

¹ In charge of the barnyard. (Literally “arm-girl.” – Trans.)

² Man from outside of the local district; said principally around Matignon of people from Quintin and the surrounding areas, or *pays de la hosse*, who carry sacks of rags or baskets (*hosses* in the local dialect).

³ *Ammodytes tobianus*, or the lesser sand eel.

⁴ Ville-Roger is a *château* situated in Pléhérel and surrounded by the woods.

“But my father said that I need a cane to make me look important and to defend myself on my voyage.”

“Where do you want to go, Gargantua?”

“I want to go on a tour of Brittany and make myself known to the world, and I’m thinking of going to Rennes.”

“You are right. They are already speaking of you. I give you permission to choose from my avenue the finest tree to make your cane. Hold on, here is an axe to cut it down with.”

“Thank you, *monsieur*, but I don’t need an axe to cut down the tree; I’m going to tear it out.”

He went to the avenue, and, having chosen a beautiful and straight oak tree, he ripped it out and broke off the branches with his hands, then he returned to the *château* carrying a cane like that of a jester and as thick as the pole on a ship.

“That is my most beautiful oak that you are taking,” said the lord.

“Yes, *monsieur*,” replied Gargantua. “For me who is a remarkable size, I must also have a remarkable cane.”

Then and there, Gargantua left. He passed by Matignon and by Plancoët, and everyone, big and small, ran after him to see him. They cried out to him:

“What’s your name, big child?”

“Don’t call me a child,” Gargantua replied, “or I will knock you out with my cane.”

When he arrived at Dinan, everyone ran out to see him. They cried:

“How big and fat he is!”

They gave him so many gold and silver pieces that it filled his bag, and he left it in Dinan to take it back upon returning from Plévenon.

He headed off for Rennes following the big roads, for he could only travel down them. At Rennes, all of the inhabitants went out of their houses to see him, and they gave him half as much gold and silver as he had at Dinan.

Gargantua said to himself:

“Because I am rich, I must take a trip to Paris. It seems that I’m a curiosity, and, without a doubt, the Parisians will be very happy to see me.”

With that, he left for Paris, and he did not lag in arriving. It was a year when there was an exposition. They wanted to show him as a curiosity, but he, who did not want to serve as the world’s laughingstock, revolted, and the police were even sent after him; they couldn’t fit him in prison, because it was not large enough for him. He remained two or three days more in Paris, and then he got bored and returned to Plévenon.

He left to return. While passing by Rennes, he took the bag of gold that he had left there and arrived at Dinan to take his other bag. Next to Dinan, at Languédias, they had found singing rocks that were all in a heap one next to the

others in a quarry; they did not know what they were and everyone was talking about them.

Gargantua went to see them and said to the Dinannais:

“If you want to give them to me, I will take them to Plévenon and I will make them sing for fun.”

“We would like that,” replied the Dinannais, “but on the condition that you take all of them.”

Gargantua went into the quarry, swallowed all of the stones, took his bag, and went back on the road.

When he was at Plancoët, he said:

“I must go to Plévenon by sea; I don’t want to put the singing rocks in a field, but on the beach, where they won’t bother anyone.”

He began walking in the river bed of Arguenon, but next to Guildo he found a Jaguen boat that was carrying stingrays to Plancoët; it smelled so bad that nausea overwhelmed him; he vomited the Héronnière⁵. Then, because his nausea had not passed, upon arriving at the Goule-d’Enfer, he had to vomit all of the singing rocks that can still be seen there⁶. All the while, he smelled the stench of stingrays, that the wind carried from Saint-Jacut; he left the river and went to travel back to Matignon, passing by the forest of Val, where he had to cut his way through by pulling out trees, and where he passed through no trees have grown since.

He passed again by Matignon, and, when he returned to Plévenon, he took his cane into the bay of Fresnaye, saying:

“As long as the world is the world, this will remain here.”

That was the rock of Calenfri, which one can still see.

When he returned to his country, he was rich and he treated his parents well. When his father and mother wanted to go to mass, he took them into his pockets and set them gently on the porch of the church, but he could not enter because he was too big.

At fifteen, he grew a beard; it was ten feet long and each strand was as thick as a finger. Everyone came to see him and to bring him money. But his father and mother died and he left Plévenon, and no one ever saw him again.

⁵ Rock at the mouth of the Arguenon.

⁶ Some hundreds of meters from Guildo, one can see a group of more than a hundred round blocks that are called the singing rocks and that, indeed, have a sound analogous to that of a bell. The most sonorous are two enormous stones placed next to one another, of which one is somewhat suspended; the part that sounds the best is caved in from having been hit by the locals and the tourists, who amuse themselves by making it sound.

Told in 1880 by Rose Renaud in Saint-Cast, who takes this story from Rachel
Quémat, wife of Durand, also from Saint-Cast.
Paul Sébillot. *Gargantua dans les traditions populaires*. Paris: Maisonneuve, 1883.
Translated by Michelle Collins.