

The Stones of Plouhinec

Plouhinec is a poor town just beyond Hennebont, towards the sea. One sees nothing all around but some lands of small groves of fir trees, and never does there seem to be enough grass to raise the cattle to slaughter nor enough of it to fatten the descendants of Rohan.¹

But if the people of the country lack wheat and beasts, they have more stone than it would take to rebuild Lorient, and one finds beyond the town a great field of heather in which the Korrigán planted two ranges of long stones that they can take for a road if they are driving somewhere.

It was near there, towards the bank of the river Intel where lived in another time a man named Marzinne: he was rich for the area, that is to say that he could salt a small pig every year, eat black bread at his discretion, and buy a pair of clogs for Easter Sunday.

Also, he passed for proud in the country and had refused his sister Rozenn to many young men who lived every day by their sweat.

Among those Bernèz found himself, a diligent worker and worthy Christian; but who had not brought anything of value, coming into the world, except good will. Bernèz had known Rozenn when she was very little, when he had arrived from Ponscorff-Bidré to work in the parish, and she had often followed him with the song that the children sing to those of his country:

Ponscorff-Bridé
Flesh of goat, Bee eee²

This song had made them get to know each other, and, little by little, as Rozen grew, the attachment of Bernèz grew equally, so well that one day he found himself in love, as the English are damned—that is to say, without remission.

You understand that the refusal of Marzinne was for him a great heart-breaking; nevertheless, he didn't lose courage because Rozenn continued to receive him well and to sing to him, laughing, the refrain composed for those of Ponscorff.

Now arrived the night before Christmas, and as the storm had prevented the church service, all the people of the farm came together and with them many neighborhood boys, among which was Bernèz. The master of the house, who

¹ In Brittany, one calls pigs *mab-rohan*, sons of Rohan; we do not know the origin of this name.

² This saying, repeated by the children to inhabitants of Ponscorff-Bidré, or low Ponscorff, comes from the fact that they raise a large number of goats, the which leads to the supposition that they eat many of them.

wished to show his great heart, had prepared a supper of black pudding and porridge of cheese and honey; also all eyes were turned towards the hearth, except those of Bernèz who looked at his dear little Rozenn.

But, see there! At the moment when the benches were pulled up to the table and the wooden spoons placed in a circle in the bowl, an old man brusquely pushed open the door and wished good appetite to everyone.

He was a beggar of Pluvigner who never entered into the churches, and of whom honest people were afraid. People accused him of casting spells on the beasts, blackening the ears of corn and of selling fighters magic herbs. He was even suspected of being able to transform into a gobelinn³ at will.

However, as he wore the clothing of the poor, the farmer permitted him to approach the hearth; he even gave the beggar a three legged stool and a portion of an invited guest.

When the sorcerer had finished eating, he asked to go to bed, and Bernèz went to open to him the stable where there was nothing but an old hairless donkey and a thin ox. The beggar laid himself down between them to keep warm, leaning his head on a sack of crushed heather.

But, as he was about to fall asleep, midnight sounded. The old donkey shook his long ears and turned himself towards the thin ox.

“Well, my cousin, how has it been for you since last Christmas when last we spoke?” he asked of his friend.

Instead of replying, the horned animal threw a glance at the side of the beggar.

“It was a great sorrow that the Trinity gave us words at Christmas eve,” he said in a surly tone, “and that she rewarded us so for that which our ancestors had helped with at the birth of Jesus, if we must have for a listener a good-for-nothing like this beggar.”

“You are truly proud, monsieur of Great-Lowing,” answered the donkey with gaiety; I will have much more right to complain, me whose head of the family carried once the Christ into Jerusalem, as proof of which the cross which is imprinted ever since between our two shoulders; but I know how to content myself about that which the Three Persons in One wish to grant me. Do you not see at all, moreover, that the sorcerer is asleep?”

“All the magic spells have not been able to enrich him yet,” responded the ox, “and he is damned for little enough. The devil had not even alerted him to the good fortune that will be near, in a few days.”

“What good fortune?” demanded the donkey.

³ The gobelinn is nothing other than the were-wolf, known among the Normans under the name “the wanderer.”

“How?” replied the ox. “Don’t you know that every hundred years, the stones of the heather of Plouhinec go to drink at the river Intel and that, during this time, the treasures that they have hidden rest discovered?”

“Ah! I remember now,” interrupted the donkey,” but the stones return so quickly to their places that it is impossible to avoid them and that they crush you if you fail to have, to preserve yourself, a branch of mistletoe⁴ entwined with 5 leafed clover.

“And also,” added the ox,” the treasures that you carry off fall into dust if you don’t give in exchange a baptized soul; the death of a Christian is necessary for the demon to allow you to enjoy in peace the riches of Plouhinec.”

The beggar had heard all of this conversation without daring to breathe.

“Ah, dear animals, my little hearts,” he thought to himself,” you are about to make me richer than all the bourgeois of Vannes and Lorient. Be at peace—from now on, the sorcerer of Pluvigner will not damn himself for nothing!”

He then slept, and the next day, at daybreak, he was in the fields seeking mistletoe and five-leafed clover.

He had to search a long time and go further into the countryside, there where the air is hotter and where the plants remain always green. Finally, the evening of New Year’s Eve, he reappeared in Plouhinec with the face of a weasel that had found the way into a dovecoat.

As he passed over the land, he saw Bernèz working at hitting with a pointed hammer against the tallest of the stones.

“So God me save,” cried out the sorcerer, laughing; do you want to hollow out a house in that huge pile?”

“No,” said Bernèz, peacefully; “but as I am without work for the moment, I thought that if I traced a cross on one of these cursed stones, I would be doing a thing agreeable to God who will reward me sooner or later.”

“You have something to ask of Him?” the old man observed.

“All Christians have to ask of Him health and their souls,” replied the young lad.

“And haven’t you also something to say to Him about Rozenn?” added, more quietly, the beggar.

Bernèz looked at him.

“Ah, you know something,” he responded. “After all, there is neither shame nor sin, and if I seek after the young lady, it’s to bring her before the curate. Unhappily, Marzinne wishes a brother-in-law who can count more coins than I possess nothings⁵.

⁴ Called, in Brittany, “herbe de la croix” or plant of the Cross.

⁵ *Qui puisse compter plus de réales que je ne possède de blancs marqués.*

“And if I would make you have more gold coins than Marzinne could possess of reals. .?” said the sorcerer in a whisper.

“You!” cried Bernèz.

“Me!”

“What would you ask of me for that?”

“Nothing but to be remembered in your prayers.”

“Also, it wouldn’t be necessary to compromise my health?”

“Nothing is necessary but courage.”

“Then, tell me what needs to be done!” cried Bernèz, letting fall his hammer. “When one must expose himself to thirty deaths, I am ready, because I have less taste to live than to marry.”

When the beggar saw that Bernèz was so well disposed, he recounted how on the next night the treasures of the land would be all laid open, but without warning him at the same time how to avoid the stones at the moment of their return. The young man believed that it would take nothing but hardiness and quickness, and he said, “True as there are three persons in God, I will profit from the opportunity, old man, and I will always have a pint of my blood at your service for the information that you have just given me.. Let me only finish the cross that I’ve started to carve on this rock; when it is time, I will rejoin you near the little grove of firs.”

Bernèz held his tongue and arrived at the meeting place one hour before midnight. He found the beggar who carried a double pouch⁶ in each hand and one hanging around his neck.

“Let’s go,” he said to the young man, “Sit there and think about what you will do when you have at your discretion silver, gold, and jewels.”

The young man sat on the ground and replied, “What I have silver at my discretion, I will give to my sweet little Rosenn all that she wishes and all that she has wished for, from toile to silk, from bread to oranges.”

“And when you have gold at your will?” added the sorcerer.

“When I have gold at my will,” replied the boy, “I will make rich all the relatives of little Rosenn and all the friends of her relatives unto the furthest limits of the parish.”

“And when you finally have jewels in plenty?” continued the old man.

“Truly,” cried Bernèz, “I will make all the men of the world rich and happy and I will tell them that it’s little Rosenn who wishes them so.”

As they chatted thus, the hour passed and midnight arrived.

At the same instant, there was a great noise in the land, and one saw in the clarity of the stars, all the great stones leave their places and throw themselves

⁶ A *bissac* is also a term used to describe pathologically swollen testicles. I don’t know if that’s relevant here or not.

towards the river Intel. They descended along the hillside shaking the ground and jumping like a troop of giants who had had too much to drink. They passed soon pell-mell past the two men, and disappeared in the night.

Then the beggar threw himself towards the heather followed by Bernèz, and, in the places where the great stones were raised just a little time earlier, they saw wells filled with gold, with silver, and with jewels that rose almost to the brim.

Bernèz gave a cry of wonder and made the sign of the cross; but the sorcerer devoted himself to filling the double sacks keeping an ear towards the bank of the river.

He finished filling the third sack just as the young man was filling the pockets of his vest of toile, when a voiceless murmur like that of an arriving storm was heard from afar.

The stones had finished drinking well and were returning to take their places.

They threw themselves, leaning forward like roadrunners, and shattered everything before them. When the young men saw them, he stood up and cried, "Virgin Mary, we are lost!"

"Not me," said the sorcerer, who took in his hand the mistletoe and five-leaved clover, "because I have my saving health; but it's necessary that a Christian lose his life to make my riches sure, and your bad angel put you in my path; renounce, then Rozenn, and think to die"

While he spoke thus, the army of stones had arrived, but he presented his magic bouquet and they separated to right and to left to rush at Bernèz!

He, understanding that all was finished, fell to his knees and had closed his eyes when the great stone that ran in the front suddenly stopped, and blocking the road, placed itself in front of him, like a barrier to protect him.

Bernèz, astonished, lifted his head and recognized the stone upon which he had engraved the cross! She was from then on a baptized stone, who had no power to kill a Christian.

She rested immobile before the young man until all her sisters had retaken their places; then she threw herself, like a bird of the sea, to retake her own place, and encountered on the way, the beggar whose three sacks of gold slowed him down.

In seeing her come, that one wished to present the magic plants; but the stone become Christian was not subject to the enchantments of the demon and she passed brusquely, crushing the sorcerer like a bug.

Bernèz had, besides what he had collected himself, the three double sacks of the beggar and became also rich enough to marry Rozenn and to raise as many children as the laouennanik⁷ has little ones in its clutch.

Émile Souvestre. *Le Foyer Breton*, t. II. Paris: Michel Lévy, 1853.
Translated by Susan Oldrieve.

⁷ Breton name for the wren; literally it means "little joyous one."