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THE POETRY AND POETIC CRITICISM
of
CHARLES LE GOFFIC

- by -

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Charles Le Goffic; his Poetry and
Poetic Criticism.

Charles Le Goffic was born at Lannion in Brittany in 1863. His father, a printer by trade, was purely Breton in origin but his mother came of Italian stock. His early youth was spent in Lannion and he began writing verse while still at school. After obtaining his Licence he taught for a few years but finally devoted himself entirely to writing. He produced not only poetry and novels but also war studies, critical works and articles. He became a member of the Academy in 1930 but died only a few months later in 1932.

From his critical articles we gain an excellent idea of his conception of poetry. These articles, written on the recommendation of Charles Maurras, appeared chiefly in the *Revue Hebdomadaire* from 1906-1914. They shew keen insight and appreciation and a spirit of independence. He discusses the works of Albert Samain, Francis Jammes, Frédéric Plessis, Henri de Régnier, Moréas, Claudel, the Comtesse de Noailles and many others, and he gives his views on Romanticism, the "Parnassiens" and the Symbolists. We feel that he prefers the "juste milieu" in poetry for his sympathies lie with those who do not innovate too freely.

Although three of his novels have earned praise, most critics are agreed that his poetry is his finest achievement. It is contained in two small volumes entitled "Amour Breton". Charles Le Goffic writes of the moorlands and sea, Breton sailors and Breton women, their legends, superstitions and

religion. He inherited from his father certain mystic tendencies which are revealed in his poetry and from his mother, perhaps, his classical leanings. Some of his finest poems are his love lyrics which recall the poems of Verlaine. Although he may be said to have created the Breton "lied" in French he frequented all the schools of poetry and remains therefore an eminent lyric poet in the purest French tradition.

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CHARLES LE GOFFIC

Chapter I

His Life

"L'homme meurt, l'oeuvre est immortelle,
Et tu peux mourir à son tour;
Sûre es-tu de revivre en elle
Bretagne, Bretagne éternelle,
Soeur de la Mort et de l'Amour."

C. Le Goffic à Anatole Le Braz.

Visitors to Lannion, a little port in le Trégor, situated on the Guer, a tidal river flowing down to a beautiful estuary, are shown with some pride by the inhabitants a monument which has been erected in a rather unusual position at an angle of the churchyard wall. It is a plaque given to the town by M. Jean Julien Lemordant to commemorate the works of Charles Le Goffic. It shews the head of the poet, a little pensive and tired as those who saw him a few months before his death remember him. Below is the allegorical figure of a woman and on either side are inscribed the names of his works.

On the 8th September 1935, an autumn day of brilliant sunshine, it seemed as if all the inhabitants of Charles Le

Goffic's native town as well as many others had come to do honour to the poet who had so often celebrated the Bretons in his works, for he had lived amongst them and loved them. When we had seen the gay decorations and the crowds in the market place we listened first to the Unveiling Ceremony at the church and heard all the praises his friends had come to utter (among them were M. Gaston Rageot, president of the Société des Gens de Lettres, and M. Georges Lecomte of the Académie as well as the Grand Druid Jaffrenou who spoke in Breton). Then we watched a historical procession which was the crowning event of a week of festivities held by the Union Régionaliste Bretonne, make its way through the town. I do not think that even in a Pardon could so many beautiful costumes have been seen. They are brought out/^{now} on rare occasions, for many of the young girls have renounced their picturesque skirts and corsages for modern dress. But that day the women were wearing their daintiest coiffes, some tall and pointed, others just tiny caps, their beautiful embroidered aprons and huge black or white shawls, and the men had put on their velvet waistcoats and their wide felt hats with ribbons. Many of these people had come from very long distances and had risen very early in order to be in time for Mass. Some were still arriving on foot, some in the little traps which one passes so often on the country roads, others by coach and car.

Neither were these people entirely bent on their own pleasure — on the festivities which were to take place during the rest of the day. We heard many tributes paid to the poet who had been so familiar a figure in the town and on the Breton roads where he used to ramble with his friends or quite often alone. For he is still remembered by many with gratitude. Yves Gérard Le Dantec, nephew of the biologist, Félix Le Dantec, who was a lifelong friend of Le Goffic, told me, when he was discussing Le Goffic's works, that he was very generous and could never refuse to help those who asked him. Too often, M. Le Dantec felt, this generosity had been exploited and Le Goffic had worn himself out in the service of others. He had always been in appearance "un vrai loup de mer", yet he was sensitive and easily moved and for that reason his health gave out sooner than anybody had expected and just when he had been accorded the honours which were due to him.

Charles Le Goffic was born at Lannion on the 14th July, 1863. He came, on his father's side, of a race purely Celtic in origin. It was composed in all probability partly of peasants and partly of sailors, as well as of priests, and differed very little, in fact, from many another old French family. The whole of his infancy and early youth were spent in Brittany and although, at twenty years of age, he left it to go to Paris, and later to teach in various places; when he

began to devote himself entirely to literature he could never stay away for very long from his native province and spent some months there every year. "Mon mari," says Madame Le Goffic in one of her letters, "pendant ses années de professorat, passait toutes ses vacances en Bretagne et ensuite au moins cinq mois tous les ans. Il était un fidèle de son pays natal qu'il aimait et admirait profondément."

He had often said to his friends and repeated in his works that he would be happier to die in Brittany than in any other place.

"Quand je mourrai, que ce soit chez vous, ma Bretagne", he says in "Amour Breton"¹ and this wish was granted, for it was to Lannion that he finally retired in 1932, during his last illness. M. Yves Gérard Le Dantec describes a meeting with him in Paris just before this illness.² His many duties following his election to the Academy had over-tired him and he himself felt that he had not long to live. Hence his hurried journey to Brittany at the beginning of the year. But there, in spite of the care of his wife and son, who is a doctor in Lannion, he died on the 13th February, 1932. His lines in "Feux d'Ecobue", seem almost prophetic:-

1. "Feux d'Ecobue".

2. "Le Correspondant", Mars, 1932. Visage de Charles Le Goffic.

"Le mal m'aura cloué peut-être dans ma chambre
 Et je ne pourrai plus m'accouder devant vous
 Au balcon de bois clair d'où j'aimais, en septembre,
 Voir monter dans le soir vos feux pâles et doux.

C'est assez que mes yeux vous devinent encore,
 Bretagne, et que je puisse, à travers les volets,
 Eterniser en eux, au moment de les clore,
 Un coin de lande jaune et des rocs violets.

It is not therefore surprising that Brittany, which Charles Le Goffic knew so well, should occupy so important a place in his works. "Nul, sauf son ami, Anatole le Braz," says Gabriel Audiat,¹ "n'est resté plus sincèrement, plus obstinément breton... La Bretagne ... voilà le leit-motiv qui passe et repasse à travers ses livres, et qui relie entre elles les créations d'une imagination aussi fertile que la mer."

Charles Le Goffic's surroundings at Lannion were to give him ample opportunity for the development of his literary and artistic tastes. His father, Jean François Le Goffic, was the son of a small farmer. His family had thought of making him a priest and of sending him to study at Tréguier; but feeling that he had no vocation for the priesthood he became instead a printer at Lannion, of a rather unusual kind. His son says of him,² "Every evening he received at his house ... some bard who went from door to door begging his bread and offering

1. G. Audiat, "Vie de Charles Le Goffic".

2. "Ame bretonne", IV.

songs in exchange; he would give him a bowl of cider and plate of soup and make him sing. Then he would print on loose leaves these scraps of popular poetry and give them to the bard who went later and sold them in the fairs".

Jean-François was passionately interested in folk-lore and collected legends, songs, breton-mystères and verses such as were sung round his fire by obscure artists and bards who were never to be recognised. Charles Le Goffic speaks of some of these in one of his prefaces as "les nostalgiques chansons bretonnes imprimées chez ma mère"¹. This intense interest in all things Celtic seems to have been inherited by him. "Le Goffic," says Marie-Paule Salonne, "c'était notre Bretagne tout entière. Il l'incarnait jusqu'à l'accent"².

Yet from his mother he inherited entirely different tastes for she seems to have come of Italian stock. Le Goffic himself described how, during the reign of Louis XIV, Colbert had asked the Venetian Republic to send some gondoliers to France to enter the king's service and to guide the boats on the canal at Versailles. From one of these, Giusti by name, the wife of Jean-François Le Goffic was descended. It is to this strain, he believes, that he owes his taste for culture, although it would seem that the Celtic influence was the stronger. In "Alésia" he says:-

1. Ibid.

2. "Charles Le Goffic est mort." (La Bretagne, 1932.)

"A lutter contre toi d'où vient que je m'obstine,
O sang celte qui bats en ma veine latine?"

and again in the Preface to "Poésies Complètes" he writes:-

"S'il a pu ça et là, comme l'en louait M. Charles Maurras, donner'à l'incertitude des choses une voix précise, une voix classique et latine'c'est peut-être que, du côté maternel, une lointaine ascendance italienne travaillait à discipliner en lui les élans du Celte; elle n'a pas supprimé le Celte, et il n'y paraît que trop. Qu'y faire? Il faut se résigner à être de sa race".

Charles Le Goffic, we must notice, did not undergo any direct influence from his father, for he was only eighteen months old when he died. The fact that he was the youngest member of the family, that he was a very puny and sickly child, and also that he was so young when his father died all help to account perhaps for those sensitive elements in his character which we have already mentioned. Gabriel Audiat says that the father was a mystic, haunted by "la vision de l'invisible", and undergoing, if he were left alone, strange fears. The son seems to have inherited this sensitiveness. In a very fine passage in his Preface to "L'Âme Bretonne", addressed to Maurice Barrès, he speaks of their lonely walks on foot on Breton moors when sudden silences would fall and the whole life of the universe seemed to be arrested. "Et tout à coup, quelque chose passait, un frémissement inexplicable des ajoncs, le cri bref

d'un de ces oiseaux de mer..." And he concludes: "Tout est symbole à qui sait voir et entendre".

His mother was well-balanced and much calmer, but she could give very little time to the child, for she was too much occupied in trying to save the business after her husband's death. He was therefore committed to the care of an old servant and then began his first expeditions to the sea, from which he seems to have derived so many sensations. It was the sea, at any rate, that was his earliest inspiration, if not his greatest. His expeditions became more and more frequent as he grew older, and extended much further. Already at Lannion there is the faintest tang of the sea, and no doubt Le Goffic and his friends would often have been tempted to walk by the bridle-path which leads to the Estuary, or to sail with a fisherman down to the open sea. In "La Maison Blanche" he speaks of this path:-

"Je reconnais la courbe amoureuse du fleuve,
Le bruit des avirons mourant vers Loguivy...
Enfant déjà pensif et marqué par l'épreuve,
Ce chemin, que de fois l'ai-je à pas lents suivi!"

The walk by the path is full of enchantment. The river winds in and out until it reaches the village of Le Yaudet built on a Roman site. On either side are huge stretches of gorse, broom, and bracken, which assume alternately a winning or menacing aspect as the sun shines or the mists descend. These mists creep in from the sea and often envelop the whole

countryside and the loneliness and stillness, broken only by the plaintive cry of the seagulls, must often have impressed the boy. Renan has managed to convey this atmosphere remarkably well in a description in "La Basse Bretagne":- "Des goëlands passent en criant; leurs ailes mouillées d'embrun battent lourdement le long des vagues. En haut courent de gros nuages de pluie. Et c'est le ciel de Bretagne".

In an unfinished poem entitled "Le Yaudet" Le Goffic describes this promontory:-

"Soir d'août. Sur un fond de cinabre
Aux lignes nettes, sans recul,
Un paysage chauve et glabre
Comme un masque de proconsul.

Le tien, César, fils de la Louve!
Ton sourcil, ta froide raison,
Ton dur vouloir, je les retrouve
Comme gravés sur l'horizon:

Dans ce roide et bref promontoire,
Pelé de la base au sommet,
Et dans ce grand mur péremptoire
Qui vers la terre le fermait..."

Charles Le Goffic's wanderings were sometimes coloured by romance. One of the small excitements of the inhabitants of Lannion is the arrival of a band of gypsies or a fair. The caravans are brought to a stand on the quayside and attract many idlers. Indeed it is almost impossible to move along the quay on these days. Sometimes a small drama unfolds. The gypsies are not above robbing and thieving and once I saw some arrested and actually taken in chains to the Palais de Justice

while their women in dirty though picturesque rags followed behind, uttering piercing lamentations. A Breton had been found murdered on a moor and the gypsies were suspected. It was an unhappy scene, and the onlookers were touched by the misery of the women. One day, we are told, Charles le Goffic was so attracted by one of the young gypsy girls that he followed the encampment as far as Plouaret, some ten miles away.

Poems written later show that he was attached to his native town and already looked upon it with the eye of a poet. It was still then, as Anatole France says, a mediaeval town, with its quaint old houses with sculptured beams and its steep and narrow streets. As the poet grew older his knowledge of Brittany grew more extensive and although naturally he retained his affection for Trégor he knew equally well Léon, Plougastel, Guérande, Morbihan, and Cornouaille du Sud.

Later he went to schools in Rennes and Nantes, (at the latter Aristide Briand was one of his school-fellows), and finally to the Lycée Charlemagne in Paris. By this time he had begun to read widely and he often learnt whole pages by heart. He used to read, says Audiat, a newspaper called "Gil Blas", "grand journal boulevardier de l'époque", and knew by heart all kinds of things from the now forgotten poetry of Louis Bouilhet to that of Baudelaire. He read voraciously every type of literature. At school, his masters were never struck by his accuracy, but they were full of praise when they

spoke of his French composition.

There is at Lannion a newspaper called "Le Lannionnais". It was published in Charles Le Goffic's youth by the firm of Le Goffic and thus before Le Goffic left his native town he and his brother Alphonse could quite easily get their writings into print. His brother, who also seems to have had some literary ability unfortunately died while he was quite young. It was he who first taught Charles the technique of verse-writing, and with this brother, too, he wrote his first play, a short comedy in two acts entitled "L'Huitre et la Marmotte".

Charles Le Goffic obtained his "Licence" at Caen in 1884 and became President of the Society of Students, one of the first of its kind to be founded. He spent the next few years teaching at the lycées of Gap, Nevers, Evreux and Le Havre. His years of teaching seem to have had little influence on his work and we find very few references to them. It seems ironical indeed that this man who was, as M. Audiat says, so brilliant at letters, should have spent his time teaching history and geography of which he knew nothing. But when he again returned to Paris to study for his Agrégation his two years at the Sorbonne incited him to further literary production. The years 1888-1898 were in reality a period of uncertainty. Charles Le Goffic was trying to find his bent and for the moment he had no desire to settle down. Once in Paris, although intensely homesick as all Bretons are, he quickly made friends.

We find him frequenting the "salon" of Renan and meeting young men of his own age or a little older who were as eager as he — among them Anatole Le Braz, Jules Tellier, André Bellessort and Maurice Barrès. The latter spent a summer in Brittany with Le Goffic and one day visited Renan with him. The result of this visit was Barrès' "Huit Jours chez M. Renan", with which neither Renan nor his family were very well pleased.

In his Preface to "L'Âme Bretonne" (Quatrième Série), dedicated to Maurice Barrès, Charles Le Goffic shows us how the plan of a visit to Renan originated. He had little dreamt that it would nearly end in a duel between Barrès and Ary Renan, the son of the great man. Le Goffic and Maurice Barrès were at this time close friends. Barrès at the age of twenty-four, he says, was charming, although rather proud and sceptical, with a shy manner which Le Goffic imputes to the ridicule of "d'ignares pédants de collège", yet with "a full consciousness of his gifts, greedy for power and determined even at the cost of doing violence to his destiny, to shape the world to the rhythm of his own heart-beats". Differing greatly in character — for Le Goffic was modest and never violently stirred to ambition on his own account — these two young men were attracted to one another perhaps because of the love each was already manifesting for his own soil. Barrès, we can imagine, must have envied Le Goffic his acquaintance with Renan. Le Goffic's friendship with Renan, we learn from M. Audiat,

dated from the time when he sent an article to "Le Lannionnais" on "Souvenirs d'Enfance et de Jeunesse". This article, he says, "lui valut l'enveloppante amitié de Renan". Barrès yearned to meet the man who was to him almost a deity and yet who awakened in him at the same time, as Le Goffic puts it, "an itching to cudgel this master who delighted and aggravated him at one and the same time by his "phrases insidieuses à réticences, sa souriante hypocrisie, son impudence à faire accepter des âmes simples les plus parfaites immoralités!"

So, on a certain 14th of July, 1888, when Charles Le Goffic, Barrès, Jules Tellier and Charles Frémine had met together, Le Goffic promised his friend that he would take him to see Renan the following month. The rest of the story must be gleaned from Barrès' own account of it and from a description by Le Goffic in "La Bretagne Touristique". Le Goffic describes how they lodged in an inn at Landrellec-Bringuiller where they had bed, board and laundry for 1 fr.60 a day. "We explored the countryside," he says. We can imagine them walking, engrossed in discussions, over the moors to Perros-Guirec, where Renan spent, at Rosmaphamon, the hottest months of the year. In "M. Ernest Renan dans la Basse Bretagne", pages taken from a newspaper article written by Le Goffic when he was still a very young journalist, he tells us that Renan usually received his visitors in his library or on the terrace

in fine weather when the wind was not high. Anatole France, Edmond Haraucourt and Henry Houssaye were among those who visited him there. Le Goffic was impressed chiefly by his "sourire de Joconde", les "yeux fins" and the indulgence he invariably shewed even towards his most bitter adversaries.

Barrès made the most of the short interview accorded them — less than a quarter of an hour, according to Le Goffic. Certain words of Renan, pronounced either then or earlier must have wounded Barrès not a little. Everyone knows, he says, that M. Renan has very little opinion of young men of letters. "La France meurt des gens de lettres," me disait-il un jour. Again Renan is reported to have said: "Vous savez que je n'entends pas grand' chose à la littérature". Barrès' "Huit Jours" was probably a return for the uneasiness Renan inspired in him. Le Goffic and his friend waited in the library and Barrès declares in his book that the volume which showed the greatest signs of wear was the treatise of Victor Cousin, "Du Vrai, du Beau et du Bien". This treatise, it is interesting to notice, must have influenced Le Goffic to a certain extent for in his poetic criticism there are echoes of Cousin's thought. In the idea of the True, the Beautiful and the Good, says Cousin, there are two elements blended, the one concrete and particular, the other abstract and absolute. Art represents both these elements — The Real and The Ideal. When it produces only the living reality it is therefore incomplete.

Neither can it realise the ideal without life. Cousin considers, and here we shall see that Le Goffic has the same idea, that the loftiest aim in art is to arouse the sentiment of the infinite.

Of the interview itself Le Goffic simply says in "Rosmapamon", "The visit lasted ten minutes". These became the famous "Huit Jours chez M. Renan" which made such a stir and rather angered — quite unjustly — the great old man, disturbed in his twilight reveries by the turbulence of young men of twenty. Le Goffic was a little hurt since he felt that Renan must disapprove of the part he had played in introducing Barrès. But he was wrong in believing that Renan felt any grudge against him for Renan's later attitude continued to be friendly.

Sometimes dinners were given to Breton friends by Renan and Le Quellien and the discussions continued there. These young and ardent Bretons also joined the Association of Bretons in Paris. At the same time, at Quimper, yet another enthusiast was getting ready to arouse his compatriots — this was Anatole Le Braz: and at Saint-Brieuc the grammarian François Vallée, was filling his pupils with enthusiasm for their province.

M. Barracand, in the *Revue Bleue* of 1896, gives us some idea of the young man of twenty. He was serious, he says, too serious for his age, and he shewed that same prudence and that same austere wish to carry out his duty and the task he had set

himself which can be found besides only in the letters of young Renan to his sister Henriette. M. Barracand traces in these two men, indeed, many similarities, both physical and moral. They were both of middle height, with heavy features. Le Goffic's eyes were deep blue. They were both of the same race of fishermen and sailors who won their independence only by hard work.

Another writer emphasises the fact that beneath the Gallicism of Renan there lay a deep substratum of the Celtic spirit with its naïve intuition, its romanticism and its dreamy idealism. As in the case of Le Goffic, Brittany left a deep impression on his temperament. A passage from "Souvenirs d'Enfance" might almost have been written by Le Goffic: "Je pense à ma belle mer de Bretagne, à mes rochers de Bréhat, et j'ai presque envie de pleurer. Ah! que je conçois bien que ces lieux aient inspiré ces conceptions vagues, tristes, contemplatives, pleines d'espérance pour l'avenir d'au delà — La mer produit cet effect: on se demande: Qu'y a-t-il là-bas? Oh! Les reverrai-je, ces côtes où sont attachées mes plus belles pensées, ce rocher là-bas et Tréguier, son beau clocher et cette belle cathédrale..."

Charles Le Goffic also counted among his friends Léon Durocher, the song-writer, Giraud-Mangin, the critic, Yves Berthou and Pierre Laurent, Breton bards, and many others who were attracted by his personality. Charles Maurras in "La

Naissance du Poème" shows how much he, too, owed to these friendly meetings and discussions. "Au fur et à mesure que les vanités s'entassaient dans mes tiroirs," he says, "les rectifications que la vie apportait à l'esprit malheureux qui les inspirait, la haute idée que je me reformais de la poésie, la rencontre de Mistral, de Moréas, d'Anatole France, celle de La Tailhède et de Le Goffic, habités de vraies muses..... la réflexion et enfin l'âge faisaient une justice totale de ces pitoyables échos." Plans were drawn up by this group of friends in the various cafés of Montmartre where Le Goffic, a well-known figure, with his beard "en éventail" and his pipe, would talk unceasingly. Most often Brittany was the subject of his talks. A newspaper called "Les Chroniques" was founded by these friends. Le Goffic says that he and Barrès conceived the idea of this when together in Brittany and describes it as "une revue littéraire et fortement régionaliste". It lasted only a year but it contained articles by many young authors who were to become famous later on, among them Emile Legouis, Ary Renan, son of Renan, Leon Cladel, Paul Verlaine and Jules Lemaitre. Verlaine was already celebrated, Leon Cladel was to make his name as a novelist, Jules Lemaitre as critic, dramatist, and poet and later as a supporter of Nationalism, and Emile Legouis, the scholarly Sorbonne Professor, as a critic of English literature and a translator of English prose and verse.

Although Le Goffic himself was occupied with his examinations, this did not prevent his writing also for "Le Petit Parisien" and various political newspapers. His articles were later collected and published under the title of "L'Ame Bretonne". It is interesting to notice that his "Traité de Versification" belongs to this period and that he even meditated writing a thesis on "Le Vers Alexandrin".

It was on the 13th August, 1898, a great date for Brittany, that the "Union Régionaliste" was founded and from that moment until 1914 Charles Le Goffic played an active part in encouraging Breton poets and artists. He also encouraged the renaissance of the Breton language which he himself spoke and even attempted to write.

Later on, chiefly for political reasons, he felt obliged to give up his membership of the "Union Régionaliste" and also to abandon some of his ideas expressed in "Morgane", where he had advocated "Pan-Celtisme". He had no desire to see the spirit of revolt spreading in Brittany as it was in Ireland, and much as he desired to see Brittany taking a foremost position among the provinces in France, he did not wish to see her entirely separated from them. It was this "spectre du séparatisme", then being referred to by several newspapers, which probably decided Le Goffic, for he was by nature a prudent man who liked to live at peace with his neighbours.

In 1889 Charles Le Goffic married a young Breton girl who lived at Morlaix. She became not only his companion but also a trusted and faithful collaborator. Maurice Barrès was one of the witnesses for his friend at the wedding. Madame Le Goffic, who has survived her husband, shews unfailing interest in his works. Much of her time is spent at Rûn-Rouz, the little country house "mélancolique et sauvage domaine" so well described by her husband in his poem "Rûn-Rouz" and in his novel "Morgane". The house is only a few miles from Lannion and is surrounded by great stretches of moorland. Not far off is a glimpse of the sea and if we take a lane nearly opposite the house we can visit the "menhir" described by Le Goffic in "Morgane".

Madame Le Goffic, like her husband, loves "le grand air de la mer" and the door is wide open when she is there. In the simple living room there are Breton cupboards. A bénitier is on one wall and there are many photographs as well as the latest portrait of her husband, painted in Paris just before his death by Maurice Denis. Madame Le Goffic received me very graciously and seemed delighted to talk about her husband's works and the country he loved. When I saw her on another occasion she told me that she had just come back from Lannion where she had taken her grandchild to the Guai d'Aiguillon to see the fair which had just arrived. They had enjoyed it as much apparently, as her husband had done so often in his youth.

She pointed out his portraits and then discussed with me his last work — the Anthology of Sea Poetry. Afterwards she went in search of a copy and read me some of her husband's favourite poems.

In writing later of her husband's love of Brittany she summarises in a few words the outstanding characteristics of "cette race mystique — Sa fidélité aux traditions du passé, son loyalisme, son dévouement, son admiration et sa dévotion pour la grande, la France".

In the year of his marriage, 1889, his first collection of verse "Amour Breton" was published and his talent was immediately recognised. But it was between 1898-1914 that Charles Le Goffic produced the main body of his work.

With the opening of the Great War in 1914, we have the beginning of the third period of his life during which he became the historian of the Breton sailors and produced "Dixmude", "Bourguignottes et Pompons Rouges", "Steenstraate" and "Les Marais de Saint-Gond". With Le Goffic's political views and his merits as a historian we have here no concern for they deserve a detailed study. But we must notice in passing that while his war studies are remarkable for their exactitude they also contain passages which rank with some of the finest prose poetry; and that these war studies are distinguished by the same kindness and quiet humour that we find elsewhere in his works.

It was probably because Charles Le Goffic was so persistent in seeking his inspiration in Brittany alone that he was elected a member of the Académie, only after his third attempt, in 1930. His many activities had, however, told on his strength, for although he was sixty-eight years old he continued to lecture and write and it was after a series of lectures given in Belgium in 1931 that he became seriously ill. Hence, unhappily, he could not enjoy the height of his fame, for he was only sixty-eight years old when he died in 1932.

The Bretons, who are loyal to those who love them and whom they admire, had already paid him a tribute by offering him his "épée d'académicien" in 1930. Now they have erected to his memory a plaque at Lannion and another at Tregastel. From M. Lecomte's speech on the 8th of September, 1935, we can perhaps best gain an idea of the character of Charles Le Goffic: "Après une analyse pénétrante du talent de l'écrivain et spécialement celui du poète," says a reporter in L'Ouest-Eclair, the newspaper of the region, "M. G. Lecomte fit revivre, aux yeux des auditeurs, l'homme, avec sa tendresse filiale pour Lannion, avec sa parole ailée, joviale et rapide, son étonnante sensibilité, son don pénétrant d'observation saine, où n'entra jamais le moindre élément morbide, qui jamais ne consentit aux modes brèves la moindre concession".

M. Fernand Gregh has sketched a more intimate portrait in "Les Nouvelles Littéraires":

"I could not meet Le Goffic without thinking of those lines of Hugo (in the decasyllabic metre with the pause after the fifth syllable which was so rarely used by the old master and yet which was one of the Breton poet's favourite metres):

"Je ne sais plus quand, je ne sais plus où
Maître Yvon soufflait dans son biniou."

He was the Maître Yvon of our chorus of poets. One could easily have imagined him dressed in a black hat with a silver buckle, enormous "bragou-braz", and buttoned leggings, and holding under his arm the bagpipes which give forth a sad nasal melody. His kindly face, so like a sailor's, whose beard had an air of being constantly blown by ocean winds, his blue eyes, "those mermaid's eyes in a triton's face" as Madame de Noailles declared on the day of his reception at the Academy "... his rather thick-set frame which did not prevent his being light and swift in movement, all formed a figure which was well-known in assemblies of poets and men of letters. He came up to you with his hand outstretched cordially with his rather rolling gait, giving you a voluble welcome which often ended — for he was gay and kindly — in a hearty laugh...."

M. Gregh adds that although Le Goffic was primarily a Breton bard he was conversant with literature and life in

general, that he was very intelligent, an excellent talker and able to make a speech without hesitation even if suddenly called upon to do so.

M. Le Dantec, himself a poet and critic and a translator of some of Le Goffic's verse into English, has a great admiration both for the man and the poet. Le Goffic's encouragement evidently meant much to the young man. M. le Dantec has collected many books of poetry in his Paris flat but there is one he particularly treasures — the volume of poems of Le Goffic. In this book he has all his letters from the poet — and among them a slip of paper, typewritten because Le Goffic was too ill to write himself, enclosed with a copy of his last work which reached M. Le Dantec on the morning of Le Goffic's death. Here also he keeps photographs of his friend and in all of them there is the same kindly expression. One especially attracted me. It was the photograph of Le Goffic choosing the stuff for his academician's coat, which, said M. Le Dantec, the Breton's insisted on embroidering themselves.

M. Barracand has called Le Goffic "le bon Breton qui médite, qui pense et qui prie, nous voulons dire qui se scrute et qui s'observe", and these words very aptly sum up his character. All those who have had any connection with him testify to his geniality and good humour. He made many friends and kept them, for his manner was conciliatory. Yet when he felt the truth was needed he did not hesitate to pronounce it. His

straightforward simplicity is obvious in his works. Like most Bretons, too, he faithfully carried out his duties to the Church. Finally he had that sanity and absence of caprice which seems to be a characteristic of all those who have studied and loved the literature of the Classics.

Chapter II

The Critical Works of Charles Le Goffic

"Best of the delights of literature is, I think, after reading poetry, reading about it."

"The Study of Poetry." H.W. Garrod.

"I could wish that there were authors of this kind who, besides the mechanical rules ... would enter into the very spirit and soul of fine writing and show us the several sources of that pleasure which rises in the mind upon the perusal of a noble work..."

Addison.

Charles Le Goffic's early associations with printing, his connection with "Le Lannionnais", his opportunities for reading and his contact with interesting personalities at an impressionable period of his youth, all account perhaps for the remarkable diversity of his work. He wrote not only novels, but an Opera, a History of the Great War, critical works and probably hundreds of articles, many of which, fortunately, may still be traced. Quite a number of these articles were collected by Charles Le Goffic in his four volumes entitled "L'Ame Bretonne". Others

may be found in papers and periodicals of the time. A great deal has been said in praise of his novels, especially "La Double Confession", "L'Abbesse de Guérande", and "Le Crucifié de Keraliès", which was crowned by the Academy in 1892, but M. Maurras and other critics think that it is by his poetry that Le Goffic's name will live when his other works are forgotten. It is certain, from the testimony of Madame Le Goffic, that her husband felt this, too, and that he found his greatest happiness in writing poetry. But before we discuss his poetry it will perhaps be interesting to examine one aspect of his talent which is sometimes overlooked, that is, his literary criticism, and especially his own ideas on poetry.

Besides his "Tableau général de la littérature française", and "Les Romanciers d'Aujourd'hui", he has written a critical study of Racine, a "Treatise on French Versification", an introduction on sea poetry in his "Anthologie des Poètes de la Mer" and many critical articles.

His "Traité de Versification" (1890) written in collaboration with M. E. Thieulin, is a useful little manual and shows that he is well versed in the technique of poetry, for he gives all the essential points in the theory of French verse and deals very thoroughly with metre, rhyme and different verse forms. This work, he says, was intended in the first place for pupils, and for this reason he has added various exercises in metre.

He discusses the origins of French verse and defines versification as "L'Art d'apporter à l'expression de la pensée poétique une mesure, une cadence, une harmonie particulières, à l'aide de procédés qui varient suivant les langues". He shows that French versification is probably derived, not from Classical Latin verse in which quantity is all-important, but from popular Latin verse, for in this the rhythm is not marked by quantity but by a tonic accent, that is, by the accentuation of one of the syllables of a word. He traces the development of poetry, beginning with the eight-syllabled lines of the "Vie de St. Léger" and continuing up to modern times.

He then gives the rules of verse composition and its three necessary elements, first a fixed number of syllables to determine the length of the line, secondly, rhyme to mark the end of the line, thirdly, the caesura to make the rhythm of long lines more apparent to the ear.

He discusses at length the number of syllables in a line, showing that the line may vary from one to twelve syllables. Thirteen, he says, is an unusual number, but has been used by Moréas and Verlaine. Neither was this an innovation on their part, for Scarron has also written in thirteen-syllabled verse. Ten and eight syllables, he says, were favourites in the Middle Ages, but nine and eleven are rare. We find examples of eleven-syllabled verse for the first time in the sixteenth century. Both Molière and Malherbe have used these metres. The line of

seven syllables seems to have been quite frequently used in the Middle Ages and by the Pléiade. We find it also in La Fontaine, in the eighteenth century and in contemporary verse. He concludes his chapter with some "curiosités de versification", of one, two, three and four syllables.

He examines next the use of rhyme in French poetry. From the assonance of the Middle Ages we pass to the later exaggerated rhymes which the school of Marot abolished for more simple ones. Malherbe, he says, scarcely felt the necessity for rhyme but the Romantics needed it.

He considers the dislike of his country for the recent innovations in verse — innovations, that is, which were appearing at the end of the nineteenth century, and he attributes this dislike to the widespread use of the Alexandrine. French people are so used to this particular verse that they cannot consider any other with impartiality. The Alexandrine, he says, is used in every type of French literature, in comedy, epic, drama and odes. Finally he considers "enjambement" which, although condemned by the Classics, was tolerated by them, especially in verse that was considered inferior, that is, in fables, epistles and comedy. He concludes with illustrations of all the various forms which he has discussed.

His wide knowledge of French poetry induced him towards the end of his life to compile an "Anthologie des Poètes de la Mer". He says in his introduction that he was inspired to

do this by an Italian professor, Bertuccioli, who had made for his pupils a collection of French prose dealing with the sea. In his Anthology, Le Goffic has collected sea poems written by French poets, more or less renowned, from the Middle Ages to the present day. He discusses in his introduction the conception of the sea held by Romantic writers — "Une tristesse sans nom", he says, pervades their poems — and the realist conception of the sea shown by more modern poets, in whose works the melancholy of the Romantics has been replaced by a sincere love of the sea. He talks of the "Wanderlust" inspired by the sea and of its marvellous healing powers. His collection contains poems as early as "La Mort de Tristan" by Thomas de Bretagne, an interesting and unusual poem by Honoré d'Urfé called "Départ d'une Nef", verse of La Fontaine, of Chénier, of Romantic poets, and lastly of modern authors such as Madame de Noailles, Stuart Merrill, Marie-Paule Salonne and Anatole Le Braz. He has included his own "Novembre" which was his favourite. Here are all the many aspects of the sea which delighted him — tempests, shipwrecks, mermaids, rough seas and even the shipbuilders' yards and the captain's log-book. The anthology forms a huge collection since Charles Le Goffic has included as many poets as possible, and for this reason his own taste is not easy to discern, since there are few omissions. He does justice alike to poets of all ages, although Madame Le Goffic, when reading to me her husband's favourite poems, insisted that modern poetry had for him far less appeal

than that of earlier times. He had included in his collection, she said, only modern poetry which particularly pleased him.

We are able to gain a much better idea of his views on poetry, however, from his critical articles. From 1906 to 1914, he was writing articles about twice yearly in the "Revue Hebdomadaire" on all the new verse publications, and his criticisms often show keen insight and appreciation and a certain sense of humour. Before this, he had written for the "Revue Encyclopédique" and for the "Revue Universelle" as long as the latter continued, and later on he wrote on "Quelques Poètes" for the "Revue de la Semaine". It was upon the recommendation of Maurras, we are told, that Charles Le Goffic was invited to write these articles. In addition, he produced a considerable number of prefaces, speeches and articles of different kinds. The speeches were made chiefly while he was president of the Société des Gens de Lettres and were apparently greatly appreciated.

M. Auguste Dupouy, in an article entitled "Le Goffic, Critique des Poètes"¹ discusses whether it is possible for a poet to be at the same time a critic. Vigny once said, "La Muse sait ce qu'elle doit faire, et le poète ne le sait pas d'avance". M. Dupouy agrees that the poet cannot know beforehand what he is to produce but he decides that he can quite

1. "La Muse Française, le 10 janvier, 1928.

well criticise what others have written. Baudelaire declared that it was impossible for a poet not to become a critic, and many examples both in English and French literature confirm this opinion. Hugo, Coleridge, Wordsworth, Shelley, have all at one and the same time written excellent theories on poetry and excellent poetry also, and Charles Le Goffic is none the less a poet for being an able critic.

H.W. Garrod in "The Study of Poetry" has an interesting chapter on "Poetry and the Critical Art". He believes that the best critics, if they have not necessarily been poets, have been poetically-minded men. He declares, besides, that unless criticism is valueless, and unless any man's judgment in poetry is as good as another's (which nobody believes) great poetry and great poets do stand in need of the critic. Finally he suggests that, although neither poetry nor the criticism of it have anything to do with moral ideas, Dr. Johnson would have been a less good critic if he had been less virtuous and that the merits of Hazlitt's criticism proceed from a "consuming zeal for righteousness". This is an interesting point of view and Le Goffic, at any rate, would seem to fit in with Mr. Garrod's conception of a critic.

Poets could certainly find much to guide them in the pages of Le Goffic. M. Dupouy has given special praise to his criticisms because they are written, he thinks, without fear or favour. Le Goffic is not above praising humble efforts

nor condemning certain poems produced by "quelques superbes". M. P. Salonne in "La Bretagne" agrees with M. Dupouy. "Les jeunes de la génération railleuse et pleine d'irrévérence, les jeunes pour lesquels il représentait la perruque vénérable, c'est-à-dire périmée, des classiques, peuvent rendre hommage tous, à l'intégrité absolue de sa critique. Impeccable et incorruptible, impartial et intraitable, franc comme Alceste et comme Cyrano, Le Goffic est de ceux qui ont maintenu la probité de leur mission littéraire, non seulement par leur oeuvre, mais par leurs conseils aux débutants. La flatterie n'était pas son fait. Malgré toute sa bonté, décourager ne lui faisait pas peur. Aussi, chacun de ses 'bons-points' valait double..." It will, therefore, be as well to summarise some of his articles before seeing how he put his theories into practice.

Charles Le Goffic must have studied during these ten years almost more books of poems and anthologies than it is possible to count. He himself is sometimes lost in amazement¹ at the number of volumes of poetry produced every year and he has to acknowledge that they do not always reach a high standard. In the "Revue Hebdomadaire" of 1912 (May-June) he says: "Que voulez-vous que devienne un critique sous cette avalanche livresque? Tout le monde aujourd'hui veut écrire; personne ne

1. "Revue Hebdomadaire", 1906.

veut plus goûter. C'est comme si tous les gourmets se faisaient cuisiniers".

Let us first notice some of the names at the head of his chapters entitled "Nos Poètes" which were published in the "Revue Hebdomadaire". In 1906, there is a new volume by Madame de Noailles and in that year also appear the names of Abel Bonnard and Albert Samain. In May 1908, the whole article is devoted to François Coppée. In 1911, he is criticising Henri de Régnier, Louis Even and Francis Jammes and in 1912, he again writes a complete article on Tristan Corbière. In 1913, he discusses the recent works of Paul Fort, Eugène Le Mouel and Angellier. So much of his time is taken up with writers who have already made a name that he is often obliged to mention the less important ones in passing, but it is evident that he is able to detect talent in newcomers and his praise probably stood many a rising poet in good stead.

The subject matter of these anthologies gives rise to many and varied discussions but it is in the poet as versifier that Le Goffic is most interested and it is upon this part of his criticism that we shall dwell. Let us first see, however, what subjects appeal to him most. We might almost put regionalism before any other for Le Goffic who was a regionalist himself is naturally interested in the poets who try to express their love of their own province. Among these he counts

Parisians such as Coppée. "Chanter Paris, quand on est Parisien-né", he says, "c'est encore faire du régionalisme". And it is probably for this reason that he most appreciates what he calls the second Coppée, not the Coppée who was reacting against the over-sensibility of the last followers of Lamartine, nor the later Coppée whose Romanticism Le Goffic dislikes but the poet who wrote of life, his life, of the people he knew and whose existence he shared in childhood. Le Goffic finds something irresistible and touching in this love of one's native soil, which, he declares, it is the fashion at the moment to decry but which none of us can manage to uproot completely. Therefore he praises M. Foisil who writes of Le Mont St. Michel, M. de Kervilio who describes the Brittany of the Middle Ages, M. Maurer who celebrates Le Morvan, M. Georges Spetz whose poems are devoted to Alsace, and many others, and he cannot agree with Angellier who, in his thesis on Burns, has shewn himself to be the adversary of the theory of "milieu" and climate and who has gone almost so far as to say that there are no races.

M. Maurras, in "Barbarie et Poésie" upholds the theory of "milieu". In writing of M. Turquet, he says, "[Il] a su faire sentir combien la terre maternelle peut gouverner une âme après en avoir fourni les matériaux et presque donné le dessin..."

Le Goffic is always careful to distinguish, however, between true and false regionalism. In other words he is quick to detect writers on Brittany who, he declares, "sont venus en flâneurs sur la grève bretonne chercher des inspirations, 'croquer le motif'". Too many poets think they are Bretons when they might very well belong to any other part of France. M. Aubert very aptly describes Le Goffic's attitude when he says in "La Bretagne": "Il s'était voué à son pays. Il l'aimait de toute son âme. Mais il faut immédiatement ajouter qu'il l'aimait virilement .. et qu'il l'a trop étudié pour tomber dans les banales sentimentalités et le pittoresque truqué dont la Bretagne est souvent le prétexte". Therefore we feel that there is a touch of irony in his words when he says that every poet may be said to have two provinces, his own and then Brittany — and that it is the privilege of this country to be as it were "la terre d'élection du songe, le Chanaan de la mélancolie"¹. Yet for poets such as Le Mouël, Tristan Corbière and Louis Even he has nothing but praise. Of the latter he writes, "Mais la grande inspiratrice du livre, c'est la mer, la sirène aux yeux glauques qui hante les songes de tous les poètes et qui si peu peuvent se vanter d'avoir saisie vraiment. Hugo même y échoua, Corbière d'une poigne rude mais trop vite desserrée fut peut-être le seul chez nous qui parvient à l'étreindre"².

1. R.H., 1913, Sept.-Oct.

2. Ibid., 1911, Sept.-Oct.

In a fine passage in the "Revue Hebdomadaire" of September, 1908, he expresses his feelings on regionalism and his praise for all these poets: "Nous n'aurons jamais assez d'écrivains régionaux. O chanteurs de la terre berrichonne, normande, gasconne, bretonne, etc., vous ne fréquentez point sur le boulevard ni dans les coulisses des théâtres ni davantage dans les parlottes mondaines où se fabriquent les réputations; vous êtes les rustres, plus ou moins dégrossis, de la littérature, mais comme chez les rustres, aussi, c'est chez vous qu'on touche le vrai fonds, le tuf de la race. Et, pour un profit incertain, vous faites, mes compères, la plus louable des besognes. Cette province française si diverse, si prenante; cette jolie âme bigarrée qui fleurissait dans les moeurs et les parlars dialectaux, que fût-il resté d'elle, si vous n'aviez enclos aux pages de vos livres un peu de son parfum?"

Although, as we have seen, Charles Le Goffic does not hesitate to say what he thinks, there is a certain kindness in his attitude towards women writers and he seems on the whole to accord them gentler treatment when they are mediocre than he does to some of the lesser poets of his own sex. Yet he has not always a high opinion of their method of writing. He says in his criticism of the poetry of Mlle. Henrique, for example, that one feels that her poetry is like that of most women writers, "écrit de verve, non relu, non corrigé. La

première expression est bonne qui est souvent la pire!". The years 1906-1914 were prolific in women writers. Among those whose poetry Le Goffic reviews are Madame de Rohan, Madame de Noailles, Madame Jeanne Termier, Madame Desbordes-Valmore, Madame Lya Berger and many others. He esteems very highly the work of Madame de Noailles who, he believes, approaches nearer to Musset than any other poet. He calls her "l'amoureuse complète, née hamadryade, sylvaine et petite-fille de Pan"¹. "Ses vers," he says, "sont un chant, une caresse, un dictame, un parfum, autant qu'un éblouissement." Later, in 1913, he praises her use of apostrophe, in which he considers her incomparable, the balance and rhythm of her stanzas, and "cet air de nonchalance et de familiarité lyrique" which cannot be found in French literature since "Namouna" and "L'Ode à la Malibran". He ascribes to her example the dropping of the "tutoiement" in French verse and adds that her striking influence will probably be remarked upon by later generations. Her poetry, he says, has been enjoyed by writers as diverse as Anatole France, Maurice Barrès and Francis Jammes.

Certain of his judgments are interesting and unusual. Women, he considers, are easily able to enter into the spirit of antiquity, for they are all a little pagan by birth.² Another

1. R.H., 1907, July-August.

2. Ibid., 1913, Sept.-Oct.

time he agrees with Alphonse Séché that modern women are somewhat intoxicated by their recent successes. Formerly they had duties; now it has been recognised that they have rights. Therefore, in their new state of emancipation they are inclined to utter the most daring opinions simply to prove that they are free. "Elle raconte tout ce qu'elle sent, tout ce qu'elle désire."¹ In the light of modern novels, confessions and reminiscences, one is inclined to feel that Alphonse Séché's criticism is just. The modernists such as Madame Lya Berger and the Vicomtesse de Lautrec have therefore little appeal for Le Goffic, and we feel that he reads with much greater pleasure "L'Adolescence" of Mlle. de la Sauge where he finds "des vers sages et d'ailleurs exquis sur des pensées honnêtes".

Le Goffic shares with his great compatriot, Pasteur, a belief in the efficacy of hard work, and he appreciates the poetry of Mlle. Séguin chiefly because of her attitude towards work.² "To bless work at a time when it is the object of the universal execration of the proletariat, is no ordinary thing to do. And this is not so foolish after all, for we are always amply repaid for work which we do with a good heart," he declares. He would agree with Mr. Garrod, when he says in his

1. R.H., 1912, Jan.-Feb.

2. Ibid., 1911, Sept.-Oct.

study of poetry, "It is preposterous that any of us should expect to lounge into perfection or lounge about in it. It is not merely that some preliminary discipline in technique is required. The best poetry asks that we should come to it with something of spiritual discipline and preparation".

Another unusual trait wins his approbation in the poetry of Madame Couvreur, formerly professor at the Ecole Normale de Sèvres.¹ He finds in her work the tact and discretion which he vainly seeks elsewhere at a moment when all the modern verse-writers are pouring into the daily newspapers "leurs vieux fonds de tiroir". Of Le Goffic's dislike of verbiage and prolixity we shall have more to say later on.

Le Goffic is a Breton and a "pratiquant" and this attitude of a poet towards religion is not a very usual one. Therefore he appreciates in 1911 a spiritualist movement in poetry which he thinks the more astonishing considering the age. Youth, it seems to him, is showing a tendency to return to religion. Charles Guérin, Jean Lionnet, Adolphe Retté are all poets who have adhered without reserve to Catholicism and have been followed by Mauriac, Valléry-Radot, Maurice Brillant and many others. In looking back over the years 1865-1885 he says that then incredulity was quite general. He greatly admires poets who, like Frédéric Plessis, Louis Le Cardonnell and Adrien de

1. R.H., 1908, Sept.-Oct.

Carré have been able to harmonise in their poetry their faith in Christianity and their feeling for the beauty of the Classics, for this he thinks is a rare accomplishment.

¹
 In another article he discusses elegiac poetry and finds that there are very few elegiac poets in French literature. They are, he considers, Lamartine, Musset, Madame Desbordes-Valmore and perhaps Brizeux. Love, he says, is absent from the poetry of Hugo; and Vigny, Baudelaire and Leconte de Lisle have cursed it. It is absent, too, from contemporary poetry — "Où est-il chez les contemporains le pur, le jeune, le triomphant amour?" He even goes so far as to say that in French poetry it is "un commerce de galanterie que nous pratiquons sous le nom de l'amour".² It is only Plato's definition of love that satisfies him. "Aimer," disait Platon, "c'est s'élever au-dessus de l'humanité, c'est être possédé d'un dieu."

Charles Le Goffic, himself a mystic, does not believe that characteristic to be found among the French. The greatest century in French literature, and at the same time the most religious, he says, produced no mystics, except perhaps Fénelon.

We shall see later on that personal loss inspired some of Le Goffic's best poetry, and he notices in 1913 how many people since Hugo have confided to the public their grief at the loss of a child. But he considers that their sorrow has always

1. R.H., 1912, Nov.-Dec.

2. Ibid.

been somewhat selfish, for while inviting us to sympathise with an individual grief, they have not shewn us how our own suffering may be sublimated by acceptation. He believes that M. Zidler, the poet whose verse he has before him, or M. André Dumas, whose unpublished verse he has seen, are alone capable of this effort.

Le Goffic's comments are often stimulating and provocative. With a few words he can open whole realms of thought. They are given, too, with a touch of humour which makes them interesting to read. In his criticism of the poetry of M. d'Urville, for example, he says, "M. d'Urville's thoughts have this much in common with that planet [the moon] that they are subject to brief eclipses"¹. And later on, when praising the verse of M. Paul Sonniès, a magistrate, he asks who, after reading this, would dare to treat French magistrates as "fossiles et encroûtés" and adds: "La magistrature française a marché depuis d'Aguesseau". In another article he pokes fun at the Symbolistes. "A Symbolist poem," he declares, "always has two meanings, which is equivalent to having none." And again he says that the public will never appreciate Paul Fort because they do not understand him. "Mais le public a son siège fait: M. Paul Fort est un symboliste; il écrit les vers comme la prose et la prose comme les vers et avec lui on ne sait jamais. Et

1. R.H., 1907, July-August.

puis il porte les chapeaux Rembrandt, de longs cheveux couleur de jais, et il culotte des pipes à la terrasse des cafés..... Comment voulez-vous qu'on le prenne au sérieux?"

He himself has something to say about l'humour gaulois.¹ He thinks that French people do not make enough of it, for it is their best inheritance. "C'en est peut-être la partie la plus dégagée de toute influence étrangère." He defines it very well as "cette humeur gaillarde — cette verve narquoise, le don de tout dire sans appuyer, à demi-mot, à la française".

In 1911, he cannot resist a laugh at the expense of some of the modern users of "le vers libre".

"Car enfin les classiques, aussi," he says, "avaient connu le vers libre; un certain Jean de la Fontaine s'était même acquis quelque notoriété. Mais pour bien marquer que leur vers libre à eux n'avait rien de commun avec ce fossile, nos symbolistes s'étaient avisés d'adopter une disposition typographique qui dérangeait tous les usages reçus: qu'ils fussent de vingt ou d'une syllabe leurs vers partaient toujours du commencement de la ligne." He quotes from the verse of M. Xavier Reille:

"La protestation d'un gros voisin myriapode
Les arrête
Net."

In 1910, it is the turn of M. Deschamps to be teased, for he has declared that the discovery of France by the inhabitants

1. R.H., 1907, July-August.

of this marvellous country is one of the novelties of the beginning of the twentieth century. Le Goffic says that surely the discovery is not as recent as all that and mentions, about 1850, Brizeux, George Sand, Mistral and Pouvillon. Then he adds mischievously:

"But M. Deschamps is not perhaps thinking either of novelists or poets but of motorists. They are indeed a fairly recent race. As for believing that this race discovers anything as it devours up space, I will leave this gentle illusion to the writer of this preface."

Charles Le Goffic must have suffered, too, then, from an invasion of motorists in his own corner of Brittany. He, too, perhaps, while on one of his favourite rambles, must have been obliged to retreat to the grassy verge, especially on the Trébeurden road which passes Rûn-Rouz, at the warning sound of a horn, and perhaps sensed rather than saw the car which flashed by at his elbow.

Yet occasionally he can be bitter. His intense love of his own country perhaps, causes him to be prejudiced. When, for example, he is discussing the poetry of Verhaeren he says that the Germans think very highly of this poet because they are always in search of a culture which they themselves lack. They claim Verhaeren, indeed, as one of themselves because of his Flemish origin and because of "tout ce qu'il y a de fumeux, de brumeux et aussi de rude et même de rauque dans son génie".

It is in his criticism of style, however, that he is most severe and exacting and it is here, as we have seen, that he best reveals his own principles. Whenever a new poet comes before the public eye his critics seem intent upon establishing the connection of the writer with one or other school of thought, or upon seeing the influence of other poets upon his works. Some have tried to place Le Goffic among the "Parnassiens", others think he belongs to the "Symbolistes". Some have suggested that his poetry recalls that of Brizeux, some find in it the "divine cadence" of Racine, others can trace the influence of Coppée or of Verlaine. Others still see no reason why he should be classed with any particular group for his genius is composite and may be summed up in three words, "celte, latin, chrétien".

We have seen that Le Goffic himself has often spoken of his "lointaine ascendance italienne" and of his classical education. Yet he has equally often shown his Celtic leanings. He believed that his Italian blood and his early Greek and Latin readings both served to discipline "les élans du Celte" which apparently were none too easy to subdue, partly because he had no wish to subdue them. So that perhaps he is in complete accord with the sentiment of Le Cardonnel in a line which he quotes from one of his poems, "Puissé-je devenir classique sans abdiquer mon romantisme!". As he says of Le

Plessis in November 1912 — and we see from his foot-note that he is quite evidently thinking of his own poetry — he is trying to find a "Terrain d'entente" between his reason and his sensibility and in this he has succeeded. Like Charles Nodier, he has been able

"d'unir au romantique amour
 du moyen âge
 le sourire avisé d'un
 classique et d'un sage".

We must notice the words "sans abdiquer mon romantisme" for it is certain that Le Goffic's sympathies are not entirely with the classics. In his criticism of M. Ripert's poems, he says, "Ce talent est circonscrit, sans mystère, sans lointain prolongement. Il est parfaitement latin"¹. He has perhaps this idea of "un lointain prolongement" again in mind when he declares that M. de la Tailhède's definition of lyricism is the best he has yet discovered. M. de la Tailhède is discussing the poetry of Angellier and says that in true lyric poetry the words themselves should be transfigured "par une force profonde qui, traversant la résonance musicale suscite, prolonge, propage les idées"². He adds that the later poems of Sully Prudhomme are poor because he misunderstood the essence of lyricism and thought that science could take the place of feeling.

1. R.H., 1913, May-June.

2. Ibid., 1912, May-June.

extérieur...." And later he adds: "La formule romantique absout si elle ne les commande, tous les mélanges, tous les excès et n'exclut que le goût, l'ordre et la mesure".

He admires the words of M. Brémond who declares that the Classic resigns himself to being a Spartan and only tries to embellish as best he can his sparse country. The Romantic revolts against his natural limits, he is a misunderstood god tormented by an insatiable longing for the limitless sky and if he falls before this desire is satisfied at least he can be recognised by the splendour of his cries.

Yet again Le Goffic finds that the "Symbolists" have been at fault in believing that "il faut dire obscurément les choses obscures. La vérité est qu'il faut les dire plus clairement que les autres"¹. He is quite ready to agree that the beauty of a line does not depend on the number of syllables in it and that genius does not necessarily depend on the adherence to or disregarding of rules of versification, but, he adds "en les respectant, comme M. Rameau, on a l'air tout de même de savoir l'orthographe de son métier". And in these last words lies the whole of his poetic theory.

He has no patience with the exaggerated and outlandish in poetry. "Châtier sa langue, épurer son goût" are some of

1. R.H., 1912, May-June.

his constant recommendations. What he most appreciates is "un vers plein, bien frappé, sonnant clair, des métaphores qui se suivent, des rimes qui ne hurlent pas en s'accouplant". Therefore he regrets that M. Jean Bouchor, for example, will have none of prosody and its rules. He can do nothing about it, he says, but we feel that he has small opinion of his poetry in consequence. The "petit traité de versification" in rhyme incorporated by M. Jammes in his verse amuses him. He quotes it in full. Here are some of the verses:

"Comme l'oiseau répond à son tour à l'oiselle
 La rime mâle suit une rime femelle,
 Quoique les vers entre eux ainsi soient reliés,
 J'accepte qu'un pluriel rime à un singulier.

Alors que l'e muet s'échappe du langage.
 Je ne veux pas qu'il marque en mon vers davantage.

Les syllabes comptées sont celles seulement
 Que le lecteur prononce habituellement."

Le Goffic adds, "Je ne partage point son goût pour l'hiatus et je ne fais point fi des e muets qui sont une des grâces voilées et d'autant plus précieuses de notre langue poétique".

In 1909 he has a long article on Catulle Mendès and le Parnasse Contemporain — Coppée, Verlaine, Hérédia, Mendès and Lahor, all of them imitators of Gautier, Baudelaire and de Lisle.

"Pas de sanglots humains dans le chant du poète", he says, contains the whole aesthetics of the group. Le Goffic has very little regard for Catulle Mendès. He believes that he

lacked originality and all his life reflected somebody else, but above all there is in his poetry a "veine libertine", which he dislikes.

Naturally, since Le Goffic is criticising the verse productions of the early years of the twentieth century, he has a great deal to say about symbolism. Whilst discussing the poetry of Paul Fort, Moréas, Verhaeren, Régnier and others, he tried to show what the symbolist movement meant, what effect it had on versification and what were its results. To begin with, he points out that naturally all the greater poets have their lesser followers who have misunderstood the meaning of symbolism and "verslibrisme" and whose poetry is simply incoherent. With these he has no sympathy but he can see the worth of symbolism as exemplified in the works of its more famous disciples.

He shows, indeed, that "verslibrisme" which is considered a symbolist conquest has in reality nothing revolutionary about it. It is to be found in French literature up to the time of the Romantics, and herein lies the error of the earliest symbolists. They believe that they were innovating French verse internally ("dans le fond"), whereas they were merely innovating externals by replacing rhyme by assonance, by dispensing with the rule of the alternation of rhyme, by changing the

1. R.H., 1911, Jan.-Feb.

position of the caesura or by adopting a typographical arrangement which had not been used before. Of course, adds Le Goffic, they did bring about a considerable innovation in that they no longer paid attention to the number of syllables and that each line of poetry could be indefinitely prolonged. Yet even in that La Fontaine had shown them the way. "L'imprévu dans le rythme est une des qualités du vers libre en général, aussi bien chez La Fontaine que dans les nouvelles écoles." Yet the work of these early symbolists was not without effect for it had left its mark on the poetry of Verhaeren, Régnier and Moréas who are masters of the "genre".

When "verslibrisme" first appeared it was "aussi inorganique que possible". The writer chose words which defy rhythm and euphony. With Moréas the "vers-libre" had its anarchical instincts bridled although even he believed at the beginning that "to mingle all the syntaxes and vocabularies was to find the sovereign specific for renewing a language", a belief which Le Goffic considers a mere chimera. "Ah! nous sommes loin des temps héroïques!" he says in 1909. "Vous vous rappelez les débuts du vers libre, ces strophes amorphes où il n'y avait plus ni rimes, ni parité de syllabes, rien qu'un vague appel d'assonances intérieures et une distribution toute subjective d'accents rythmiques comme en pourrait marquer

1. R.H., 1910, May-June.

une prose un peu savante? Ce vers libre première manière fut assez long à se polir."¹ Still, this phase passed, fortunately, and Le Goffic wonders whether future generations will say, not "Enfin Malherbe vint" but "Enfin Moréas vint". It is interesting to find that in 1925, Charles Maurras upholds this opinion. "Moréas ... " he says, "sera le prince des poètes." ... "Since the appearance of the 'Pèlerin Passionné'," he continues, "and above all, since the improvements he has made on this fine book, Jean Moréas, my master and my friend, is to me the living sign of national poetry and we shall be grateful to him for the excellent influence he has had on his disciples of whom I must certainly name at least M. Raymond de la Tailhède. Jean Moréas takes us back to our very source. This happy Athenian, after having restored to us more than one lyric form — the ode, the song, the epigram, the epistle, even the satire and above all the elegy which he has made so beautiful, promises us a tragedy; the first representation of a new "Iphigenia", inspired by Euripides, of which a few finished scenes are already being handed round, will see all the classical instincts, forced back during the last sixty years into the very veins of France, take their revenge at last on the disaster of 'Hernani'."²

1. R.H., 1909, Nov.-Dec.

2. "Barbarie et Poésie." C. Maurras.

We notice, he says, that in the verse of Verhaeren and Régnier the rhymes appear and the line is rarely longer than twelve syllables, so that it would seem that the symbolists have gradually fallen into line. And, Le Goffic asks, is not this an implicit avowal that the "vers libre" can only be managed ["viable"] on condition that it approaches the classical formula so long repudiated by the symbolists?

Finally he sums up what he considers symbolism has done for French poetry in these words:

"J'aimerais montrer à quoi se réduit exactement l'apport du symbolisme dans la poésie française; l'alexandrin, durant cette période nuageuse et confuse est enfin parvenu au terme de son évolution organique; affranchi de la tyrannie des césures fixes il s'est encore assoupli, il a développé toutes ses puissances intérieures. Voilà l'unique mais la grande enquête prosodique de ce qu'on appelle le symbolisme."¹

We cannot help noticing how rarely the name of Paul Claudel appears in these articles and how inadequate the remarks of Le Goffic on his poetry would appear to those who admire Claudel's genius. In this he is in accord with Maurras who has said that rhythm and cadence are now neglected and yet are an essential element of poetry although the principal is "Le chant". Maurras thinks a verse of Raymond de la Tailhède much more lyrical than the poetry of Claudel. Le Goffic says of Claudel:

1. R.H., 1910, May-June.

2. "La Poésie dans nos Poètes". F. Lefèvre. Interview with C. Maurras.

"Mais je ne sais point comme on eût appelé les vers délicieusement inorganiques de M. Claudel qui, lui, pourtant, ça et là, s'amuse à rimer, tout en déclarant que 'Quand il n'y a pas de rime, il faut, ^à my foi, s'en passer'. Evidemment! Et M. Claudel ne se montre pas moins profond observateur quand il écrit la ligne suivante: 'Si mon vers ne va pas tout droit, ce n'est pas qu'il y manque des pieds'. Ce 'bref mais sûr art poétique' comme dit quelque part Francis Jammes, contient peut-être en un distique toute la théorie du 'claudelisme'; je doute que M. Paul Fort lui-même y reconnaisse la vraie pensée du symbolisme."

Later on, when he is talking about the alternation of prose and verse in the work of Paul Fort he says, "Tant il y a que ce procédé a heureusement servi M. Paul Fort et qu'il paraît réussir bien aussi à M. Claudel, bien que chez lui le vers soit l'accident".

Charles Le Goffic, as we have seen, is not an innovator. He believes that, while literature, necessarily, has to be renewed in order to remain living, it must be based on tradition, that is, it must be true to certain fundamental laws, otherwise it is not truly French. Yet it is evident that his attitude has made him unjust towards Paul Claudel. Claudel's intention is certainly to write in verse, but his verse is measured according to quite a new law of his own. Many critics have been unable to appreciate his invention, and have declared

that there is not true rhythm in his verse, and that the verse appeals only to the eye. Others, however, have tried to show that his great originality consists in the fact that it does not receive its laws from outside but from within — from the thought itself. In other words, each of his lines appears to be "a brief formula expressing the entire personage and his dream while speaking", and for that reason the words cannot be fitted to ordinary rhythms. The whole question of Claudel's claim to greatness as a poet is complicated by the fact that his poetry is bound up with his religion and inseparable from it.

In his later verse Claudel also conforms rather more to the recognised forms. This verse contains rhymes, although they are in the form of assonance, and there is metre, although it is dissimulated. But let us consider in the light of what we have already said about Charles Le Goffic's views, these lines of Claudel in "Réflexions et propositions sur le vers français". He finds the constant counting of syllables a wearisome business. They remind him of the counting of the metronome and the voice of the "vieille maîtresse de piano qui ne cesse de hurler à notre coude un ... deux ... trois quatre ... cinq six". They remind him, too, of his school days and the "lines" set as a punishment. "Elève Machin, vous me ferez cent vers!" He deplores all the regiments of would-be poets searching after rhymes and ending with "arbre" and "marbre".

And Le Goffic says:

"Christ est ressuscité: c'est la grande
nouvelle.
Deux pèlerins, à l'heure où décroît la
clarté,
Près d'Emmâus, avec sa forme habituelle,
L'ont vu surgir à leur côté."

What then does Le Goffic consider to be the qualities of a true poet? We know that he "thirsts for order" as he says in 1906. He would have clarity, clear rhythms and ordered harmonies, a return towards the eternal sources of the pure French tradition, towards Ronsard, the Pléiade, Malherbe, Racine and Chénier. Therefore he says in 1907:

"Good heavens, we have had enough 'symbolistes, vers-
libristes, évolutionnistes, instrumentalistes', etc., etc.,
and we can very well allow an author from time to time to
bring Pegasus back to earth and purge him of all these meta-
physics." He adds: "'Admirons, aimons le beau partout où il
est, dit quelque part Voltaire: détestons les vers visigoths
dont on nous assome depuis si longtemps et moquons-nous du
reste'. Magister dixit."

Yet he does seem gradually to be acquiring more sympathy with innovations when he says in 1908: "As regards versifica-
tion, everything is a matter of use and one day perhaps our
ears will grow accustomed to these unusual metres as they grew
accustomed to the Alexandrine which must have been in its time

time definitions which have appealed to him in the works of other writers. No definition of poetry, I suppose, will ever be completely satisfactory and each successive poet goes in search of his own. An English critic has said that Newbolt suggested that "the emotional source of poetry is found in the longing for 'a land of heart's desire', and this," says the writer, "seems to be at least a pointer to the truth". These words might almost be an echo of a sentence of Le Goffic: "Le propre de la Poésie, a écrit quelque part Sully Prudhomme, est d'aider l'espérance à dépasser l'horizon terrestre". They are also not very far from the idea expressed by Cousin when he is discussing the aim of art in that treatise on "Du Vrai du Beau et du Bien", which Barrès had noticed on Renan's shelves.

We have already seen how greatly Le Goffic admired Maurras and we might therefore see in conclusion what Maurras' definition of poetry is. In "La Poésie dans nos Poètes", M. Lefèvre attributes these words to him: Poetry is "quelque chose que l'on élance et que l'on arrête, coursier qu'on presse et qu'on retient". And like Le Goffic, he insists that great poetry is written only after long apprenticeship. "The effect of the masters, their true lesson is to teach one to become master of oneself, to keep the tumult of one's sensations in rein, to let out one's full speed and then to stop short. In this sense liberty comes at the end, not at the beginning. It is the end

of a long and difficult apprenticeship. One is not born free.
One can become so."

Chapter III

The Poetry of Charles Le Goffic

"L'Ame de la Bretagne a trouvé son chanteur."

E. Beaufils.

We realise, when we have read Charles Le Goffic's critical articles, that his standard of poetic achievement was high. It is in keeping with his rectitude of character that he should, in his own work, be dissatisfied with what fell below his ideals and it is for this reason, probably, that he produced so little. Yet the little that has been published, collected into two small volumes entitled "Poésies Complètes", might satisfy an even more exacting critic than himself.

One of the merits of his poetry lies in its sincerity. He writes of what is nearest and dearest to him, and next to his own family he loves his province, Brittany, which is not merely to him a "literary entity". He has gone for inspiration to his native moorlands and the sea, to his Breton home, Rûn-Rouz, to his daughter Hervine and to Breton men and women. One or two poems have been inspired by the War and by his travels,

and a few — and these are among the most beautiful — are simple love lyrics written with a sobriety that forms their greatest charm. His poems on Brittany are numerous, for his province remained for him "une muse réelle et vivante". Anatole France, in a very fine commentary on "Amour Breton" has given the essence of his poetry:

"En entendant le biniou de Le Goffic, je crois revoir le grève désolée, la fleur d'or de la lande, les chênes plantés dans le granit, la sombre verdure qui borde les rivières, et, sur les chemins bordés d'ajoncs, au pied des calvaires, des paysannes graves comme des religieuses."

In "Poésies Complètes" we see Brittany in all its aspects — its wide stretches of heath-land swept by the sea or veiled by mists, weird and menacing in autumn, but beautiful with its spring colouring; the sea itself — "cette mer sauvage", forever claiming its victims; the sailors and fishermen with their stoicism and endurance, their legends and superstitions, and finally, Breton men and women in their own country and in exile.

It is perhaps because Charles Le Goffic was so deeply attached to his native soil and its inhabitants that he is able to give such an impression of freshness, and that he is sometimes able to detect, as we have seen in his poetic criticism, what is not perfectly sincere in other poets.

Some of the finest poems and prose passages describe the Breton moorland he loved. In "Morgane" he says of it: "D'abord la lande est divine. C'est une autre mer qui roule des vagues d'or et qui a toute la variété, tout l'imprévu de la mer". One of the best of his purely descriptive poems is "Les Peupliers de Kéranroux":

"Le soir a tendu de sa brume
 Les peupliers de Kéranroux.
 La première étoile s'allume;
 Viens t'en voir les peupliers roux.

Fouettés des vents, battus des grêles,
 Et toujours sveltes cependant,
 Ils lèvent leurs colonnes grêles
 Sur le fond gris de l'occident.

Et dans ces brumes vespérales,
 Les longs et minces peupliers
 Font rêver à des cathédrales
 Qui n'auraient plus que leurs piliers."

The poem has the same vague quality as the misty Breton landscape he is describing. In the second verse the poet has conveyed very well the wind-swept appearance of the Breton coast with its slender trees struggling against the winds, and the beautiful image in the last verse has a faint resemblance to Shakespeare's

"Bare ruined choirs where late the sweet
 birds sang."

In contrast to this poem, "Printemps de Bretagne" shows us the beauty and colour of the Breton "landes" in spring:

"File, file l'argent des aubes aprilines!
 File pour les landiers ta quenouille d'or fin!
 De tes rubis, Charmeuse, habille les collines;
 Ne fais qu'une émeraude avec la mer sans fin."

The last line here recalls one of Hugo's:

"Une émeraude où semble errer toute la mer."

This verse contains more colour than is usual, for Le Goffic is not a colorist. He is fond of the subdued tones of evening and of the kind of scene that we find in "Paysage" which is again reminiscent of Hugo in the last verse:

"C'est un paysage
 Presque sans couleurs
 Et comme en veuvage
 Sous le ciel en pleurs.

Rien de romantique;
 Ni pins, ni donjons;
 Du sable, une crique,
 L'infini des joncs

Et la mer... Un pâtre
 Ramène à pas lent
 Du steppe roussâtre
 Son troupeau bêlant."

"All colourless
 This landscape lies
 A widow mourning
 Beneath weeping skies.

No romance here;
 No pines, no keep;
 An inlet, sands,
 Reeds growing deep.

The sea... A shepherd now
 With slow steps leads
 His bleating flock
 From the pale meads."

W.B.

Some of his poems are simple descriptions and nothing more. In "Sur la Route de l'Ile Grande" he makes us feel the loneliness of Brittany in October. "Sur la Dune" gives a fine description of an August sunset. In "Pleine Nuit" we find the peaceful, soothing opening that Charles Le Goffic seems to like:

"Tandis que la Nuit monte ainsi qu'une marée
 Sur les grèves du ciel silencieusement,
 Emplis tes yeux profonds de sa splendeur sacrée
 Et ton coeur orageux de son apaisement."

"Now whilst the night is rising like a tide
 Silently o'er the calm shore of the skies,
 Impress its peace upon thy stormy heart
 And let its sacred splendour fill thine eyes.

W.B.

"Novembre", too, is a descriptive poem and it is considered to be his finest, for not only does it give a remarkable picture of Brittany under winter skies — in its wildest and most lugubrious aspect — but it reveals another trait in Charles Le Goffic's character which is important, and which we must consider before we discuss the poem further.

As we have already seen, M. Audiat, in his life of Charles Le Goffic, called the poet's father a mystic "hanté par la vision de l'invisible". His son would seem to have inherited his mystic ^{at} tendencies. He himself declares that the French as a race are not inclined to mysticism, but quite evidently he is not here including the Bretons, who certainly have many

of the elements common to the mystic.

Writers on mysticism declare that the way of the mystic is open to all and that it is possible for everybody to advance some distance along it. Evelyn Underhill, in her book on "Mysticism", says, "Most men in the course of their lives have known such Platonic hours of initiation, when the sense of beauty has risen from a pleasant feeling to a passion, and an element of strangeness and terror has been mingled with their joy. In those hours the world has seemed charged with a new vitality; with a splendour which does not belong to it, but is poured through it, as light through a coloured window, grace through a sacrament, from that perfect Beauty which "shines in company with the celestial forms" beyond the pale of appearance. In such moods of heightened consciousness each blade of grass seems fierce with meaning, and becomes a well of wondrous light, a "little emerald set in the City of God".

Nevertheless, as Miss Herman in her book on Mysticism insists, there are certain men who are born mystics, and although perhaps not a mystic in the highest sense of the word, as we shall see, Le Goffic was undoubtedly one of the former. Let us first see the definition of a true mystic. "Mystics," says Evelyn Underhill, "have succeeded in establishing immediate communication between the spirit of man, entangled as they declare among material things, and that 'only Reality' that

immaterial and final Being which some philosophers call the Absolute and most theologians call God." The mystic, she declares, has the "inextinguishable conviction that there are other planes of being than those which his senses report to him". But only in certain occult states, in orison, contemplation, ecstasy, and their allied conditions can the self discover these planes. The articulate mystic, she says, is often a literary artist as well, who in his writings reveals "a power of imparting to the reader the sense of exalted and extended life". Furthermore, religious feeling of some kind is a necessary characteristic of the mystic. "The Christian system, or some colourable imitation of it, has been found essential by almost all the great mystics of the West." Finally, the writer insists upon the absence of effort on the part of the mystic. The mystic state is only reached naturally and no striving can make us attain to it.

Now when we read Renan's "Poetry of the Celtic Races" and certain chapters of Le Goffic himself, we cannot help remarking that this race has certain unusual qualities, qualities indeed which seem also to be part of the make-up of the mystic. Renan shows that the Bretons are a solitary race, "capable of profound feeling and of an adorable delicacy in their religious instincts". They are quick to believe in destiny and to resign themselves to it. They have great imaginative powers because

of their concentration of feeling and their lack of external development of life. They are interested in the pursuit of the unknown and they have a profound sense of the future and eternal destinies of the race. In "L'Âme Bretonne" Charles Le Goffic bears out the words of Renan. "Que voilà bien cette race bretonne," he says, "la plus nostalgique peut-être qu'il y ait par le monde, et qui, partout en exil, portant en tous lieux sa soif d'infini, ne connaît d'autre refuge que le songe contre les platitudes ou les tristesses de la réalité." The past, he says, is ever living in Brittany, where one breathes an atmosphere of spirituality. "Renan," he declares, "prétendait qu'on ne secoue plus la hantise de ces 'voix d'un autre monde' pour peu qu'on ait prêté un moment l'oreille à leurs tremblantes vibrations." In another chapter he insists on "l'aspect essentiel de l'âme bretonne: la rêverie, l'inclination mystique"; in another still on their "naturalisme mystique" and their "tourment de l'absolu"; and in discussing all that has gone to make up the history of Brittany he says, "que la race qui habite une terre chargée d'un tel passé ne soit pas semblable aux races du reste de la France, qu'il y ait, en elle, quelque chose d'autre et comme un ressouvenir confus de la préhistoire, qui pourrait s'en étonner?".

Two characteristics mentioned by Le Goffic we notice are essentially mystic qualities, the power of meditation and

contemplation, and the thirst for the infinite. That Charles Le Goffic, himself a Breton, possessed these qualities is undoubted. Although a delicate and sensitive child, he appears to have had quite a normal boyhood and adolescence. Yet, as we have seen from M. Audiat's account, he was often left to his own resources, and solitude appealed to him even then. The long rambles he loved in his boyhood and adolescence were continued right up to the time of his death and he was never happier than when alone or in the company of a friend who could appreciate his feelings.

In "Le Manoir" he gives a curious but rather apt description of himself:

My heart is a lone manor-house decayed,
 Benighted in the mists of the far west,
 Let him who wishes enter unafraid
 The house that mists and secrets now infest.

It was most often in the course of these wanderings over Breton moorlands that mystic experiences came to Le Goffic. He declares in his preface to Maurice Barrès that contact with the spiritual world is a simple matter in Celtic countries such as Scotland, Ireland and Brittany. All that one needs is a certain delicacy of perception for "everything becomes a symbol to those who can see and hear". In a very interesting passage in her book Miss Underhill shews that in persons of mystical genius the desire to transcend the sense-world is often

heightened by the most ordinary objects. Running water had this effect on Ignatius Loyola and a burnished pewter dish aroused in Jacob Boehme mystic raptures. Miss Herman in "The Meaning and Value of Mysticism" also discusses mysticism and symbolism and gives a quotation from Blake which illustrates this point: "What! it will/^{be}questioned, when the sun rises do you not see a round disc of fire, somewhat like a guinea? Oh! no, no! I see an innumerable company of the heavenly host... I question not my corporal eye ... I look through it and not with it". Charles Le Goffic is stirred in much the same way as these mystics. But for him the objects which have a deeper significance are connected either with nature or with religion. Let us see his feelings, for instance, when he is visiting the Calvaires of Brittany. One in particular, the Calvaire of Plougonven, remains a vivid memory because of the experience that came to him:

"Le soir d'hiver où je le visitai en compagnie du pentyern, Léon Durocher, le soleil couchant dardait une oblique clarté sur le vieux calvaire, rosissait le granit et communiquait je ne sais quelle vie surnaturelle aux personnages de ces panathénées chrétiennes. Toute lourdeur s'en allait d'elles; gravitant dans l'air ambré, elles se spiritualisaient délicieusement en atteignant à ce degré de beauté immatérielle qui, plus qu'aucune perfection artistique, devait correspondre aux aspirations religieuses, au fervent idéalisme des imagers de la Renaissance bretonne."

Here the contemplation of the cross induces in the poet that mood of heightened sensibility which is proper to the mystic. On other occasions walks across the moors, either alone, or with his friend Barrès, induced the same sensitive mood. But again, although there are some fine prose passages which describe this mood, it is to his poems that we must turn to find the best expression of his feelings.

M. Barracand, in his excellent study of Le Goffic, finds in his poems "une fleur de rêverie et de mélancolie, un vieux fonds de mysticité ancestrale" for which we look in vain in the poetry of Gabriel Vicaire by whom he was to a certain extent inspired. It is this mystic element which makes "Novembre" a remarkable poem. Charles Le Goffic describes how he is returning home alone across the heath. There are low clouds with wind and mist and he is accompanied by the incessant roar of the sea. Suddenly he feels an uneasiness which the whole countryside seems to share with him:

"J'ai senti que mon mal n'était pas à moi seul
 Et que la lande avec ses peurs crépusculaires,
 Et qu'avec ses sanglots profonds et ses colères
 La mer, et que la nuit et la brume et le vent,
 Tout cela s'agitait, souffrait, était vivant,
 Et roulait, sous la nue immobile et sans flamme,
 Une peine pareille à la vôtre, mon âme."

"Such use of visible nature ... as the medium whereby the self reaches out to the Absolute," says Evelyn Underhill, "is

not rare in the history of mysticism. The mysterious, primordial vitality of trees and woods instinct with energy, yet standing, as it were, upon the borderland of dream, appears — we know not why — to be particularly adapted to it".

This feeling that the Breton moors are peopled by some unseen presence is again very vividly expressed in "La Vision Nocturne" of which the following lines have been translated by Ashley Audra:

"But here! The living are less living
Than the dead; the air bears taint of ashes
And the winds! What voice cries in the winds?"

One line of "La Sirène Morte" seems to hold a great appeal for all those who have read and appreciated Charles Le Goffic's poetry:

"Une sirène morte et qui chantait encor."

M. Le Dantec says that it is to him "prodigieusement évocateur", "le dernier accord d'une sonate mythique et mystique". Not only this line but the whole poem, it seems to me, might be taken as typical of his verse. It opens with a description of a wild district of le Léon, and Charles Le Goffic conveys with his usual force and concentration how wild such a scene can be. It closes on a mystic note, and in the last lines he has expressed all the legendary beauty and the mystery of Brittany in ancient times.

The poem is short and can only be quoted in full:

"Fuyons d'ici. Je sais, loin de cette Suburre
Un coin sauvage du Léon, tout sable et roc.
L'ajonc lui tisse un manteau rude comme un froc
Et les routes font des croix blanches sur sa bure.

L'air y fleure au printemps le miel, l'algue et le sel:
Quand le soir descend sur la lande
Tout se tait, et, dans l'ombre, il semble qu'on entende
Le battement profond du coeur universel.

C'est là que nous irons, s'il vous convient, mon âme,
Sur le menhir, gardien des antiques secrets,
Chercher ce que la nue en pleurs conte aux forêts,
Pourquoi, l'hiver, sur les garennes le vent brame

Et pour quel crime obscur, dans l'anse du Gador,
A l'heure où la lune se lève,
Les flots ont, l'autre nuit, rejeté sur le grève
Une sirène morte et qui chantait encor."

We have only to leave the Breton coast a little way behind and penetrate into the moorlands to find such a scene as this — tall rocks of curious shape springing up everywhere; wild gorse-clad stretches of heath with narrow white roads where we may walk undisturbed; and, pervading all, the warm peculiar perfume which arises on summer days. At twilight comes an extraordinary stillness, and it is small wonder that Charles Le Goffic in this silence seemed almost to hear Nature's heart-beats.

He describes this calm again in "L'Heure Trouble". Here, he is on the lonely road which runs from Rûn-Rouz, his Breton house, to the little beach of Fleumer. It is twilight. There is not a sound; not a soul is in sight. The carts have ceased

to rumble through the lanes, the bells no longer toll, and beneath the grey sky everything is perfectly still as if life were suspended. Then suddenly he feels that there is something beyond this that he must penetrate:

"Mon Dieu, l'on dirait
Que sur l'étendue
Pèse un grand secret."

And among all these motionless things it is the silent stubble, so absolutely still, that leaves him afraid. Here, as Evelyn Underhill says, "The seeing self is an initiate, thrust suddenly into the sanctuary of the mysteries, and feels the old awe and amazement with which man encounters the Real".

The same mystic atmosphere may be found in many other poems. In "Le Bandeau Noir" he describes the strange Breton country of Penmarc'h:

"Night falls; a distant sound of oars is heard.
The Christs bareheaded raise their tortured eyes;
And here, around them on the flowerless gorse,
Swoops sighing down a mournful band of Souls" ...

In "Le Calvaire", "Couchant Mystique" and "Soirs de Saint Jean", too, we feel that the poet is in the presence of mysterious powers. The ending of the last poem is very impressive:

"Un sel subtil se mêle à l'âcre odeur de foin.
 Maintenant c'est la nuit, la molle nuit de juin,
 Blonde comme un verger, tiède comme un alcôve.
 Vers l'ouest traîne un dernier lambeau de clarté mauve ...
 Hosanna! Car voici que sur les monts d'argent
 Pétillent, flambent, les bûchers de la Saint-Jean.
 Leurs feux jusqu'à Roscoff étoilent la campagne —
 Et, priant ou chantant autour d'eux, la Bretagne
 Sent, en ce premier soir de solstice d'été,
 S'épanouir la fleur de sa mysticité."

We have seen, then, that throughout his writings, whether in prose or in verse, Le Goffic shews mystic tendencies. More than this it would be difficult to say. Blake has been classed among the highest mystics because in him the mystic swallows up the poet. This is not the case with Le Goffic. Rather should we place him among those of whom Evelyn Underhill says: "Certain indications [show] that they too were acquainted, beyond most poets and seers with the phenomena of the illuminated life..... Where such a consciousness is permanent as it is in many poets, (for instance, Keats, Shelley, Wordsworth, Tennyson, Browning, Whitman) there results that partial yet often overpowering apprehension of the Infinite Life immanent in all living things which some modern writers have dignified by the name of 'nature-mysticism'". It is this definition of the nature-mystic which seems best to fit Charles Le Goffic.

"Le Treizain" is a small collection of poems dedicated to Charles Maurras. These poems deal more particularly with Charles Le Goffic's own corner of Brittany. In "Rûn-Rouz" he expresses his devotion to his small house almost buried in the

midst of the "landes". We notice in this poem particularly, and in others in the collection, his fondness for Breton names which are often as unusual as the places to which they belong.

"Est-ce vous, Landrellec, Guern,
Roc'h-Pic, Coztankous,
Vieux noms tout impregnés d'une
saveur bretonne? ..."

These strange names have a peculiar fascination of their own and we feel that the poet lingers over them. He quotes in "Ame Bretonne" a passage in which the name of the house of Renan is described as "Rosmapamon, cet assemblage de syllabes qui a quelque chose d'un peu féerique".

Yet although Charles Le Goffic is attached to his native moors and also to the little Breton towns which have a particular character of their own, he, like all true Bretons, loves the sea. "Pour les Bretons la mer est toujours une amie". (Noël Nouet.) It is impossible to think of Brittany without associating it with the sea for they are inseparable. We have seen that in his Anthology he calls the sea a benefactress and speaks of its healing virtues. For him it has infinite power to soothe and charm. In "Partance" he says:

"Ici j'ai le coeur rongé
D'un mal indéfinissable:
Je ne sais pas ce que j'ai.

O chants des flots sur le sable,
Vous m'aurez bientôt guéri,
Si mon coeur est guérissable;
Si mon coeur endoloré
Trouve au bord des eaux calmantes,
Si mon coeur trouve un abri."

The sea in all its moods gives him pleasure but he seems particularly fond of it at sunset and when evening has fallen. There is a very fine description of a sunset in "Sur la Dune":

"Couchants marins, orgueil des ciels occidentaux!
Pour mieux voir s'exalter leur lumière engloutie,
Viens sur la dune à l'heure où rentrent les bateaux
Et regarde le soleil d'août, sanglante hostie,
Descendre au large des Etaux.

De son orbe que ronge une invisible lime
Surnage à peine un pâle cône incarnadin.
Et la morsure gagne encore, atteint la cime.
Tout sombre. L'astre est mort, dirais-tu, quand soudain
Son reflet jaillit de l'abîme

Et, forçant les barreaux de l'humide prison,
S'éploie en éventail au fond de l'ombre chaude,
Comme si, par ces soirs de l'ardente saison,
Quelque grand oiseau d'or, de pourpre et d'émeraude
Faisait la roue à l'horizon."

"Sur les Bancs de Flandre" describes the coming of evening in winter and its sad tones. These, to Charles Le Goffic, are much more typical of Brittany than the bright hues of summer. His province, he says, is "grise incurablement, comme l'automne. The solitudes haunted only by the birds and winds have the same atmosphere of mystery as the deserted moorlands in "Novembre":

"Un ciel du Nord, un ciel d'hiver,
Que teinte d'améthyste
Le soir qui descend sur la mer
Comme un lent baiser triste.

Pas une voile à l'horizon.
Rien sur les Bancs de Flandre,
Rien qu'une grise floraison
D'oiseau couleur de cendre.

.....

Un feu vert cligne au ras des Bancs.
 Est-ce une ondine? un phare?
 Le vent siffle dans nos haubans
 Une étrange fanfare..."

The touch of colour in the first verse is particularly well chosen for it seems to make the sombre hues of the winter sky and sea even more pronounced.

Yet Le Goffic, while rejoicing in the beauty of the sea and its pleasures, could not forget that it has a sinister side. All those who have lived in Brittany even for a short time realise what a heavy toll the sea takes every year of the fishermen who spend their lives on it. Charles Le Goffic's tender heart sorrows both for these and for Breton sailors. He reminds us in "Ame Bretonne" that all contemporary Breton writers have, as Chateaubriand had, a melancholy conception of the sea, even Renan, who, in certain respects, had so little of the Romantic, Baudelaire, who had not the excuse of having been born in Brittany and Lotfi whose first impression when confronted with the sea was "an indescribable sadness, an impression of desolate loneliness, abandonment, exile".

Here, in "Là-Bas" is a picture of Breton women anxiously awaiting the home-coming of their husbands and sons:

"Les Bretonnes au coeur tendre
 Pleurent au bord de la mer;
 Les Bretons au coeur amer
 Sont trop loin pour les entendre."

And here is a very fine description of the women again when they come to the harbour in the evening to look out to sea and pray for the safe return of their husbands:

"Vos femmes ici prieront à genoux.
Elles vous seront constamment fidèles.
Nous voudrions bien partir avec vous,
S'il ne valait mieux rester auprès d'elles.

Nous leur parlerons de votre retour:
Nous dirons les gains d'une pêche heureuse,
Et comment la nuit, et comment le jour,
Comment votre coeur bat sous la vareuse.

Et nous les ferons renaître à l'espoir,
Tandis que, les yeux tournés vers le pôle,
Elles s'en viendront, au tomber du soir,
Pleurer deux à deux sur les bancs du môle.

"Matelots" gives a remarkable picture of the life of a sailor and is one of Le Goffic's finest poems. For him sailors are:

"Pauvres gens qui n'ont pas d'histoire,
Pas même de foyer souvent,
Dont la vie est une purgatoire
Dans l'embrun, la houle et le vent!"

There are the days at sea, sometimes calm and beautiful:

"J'ai comme eux sur des mers amies,
En de nonchalants Hellesponts,
Connu les longues accalmies,
Les sommeils lourds des entreponts:

Les mêmes vents gonflaient mes voiles
Du même souffle âpre ou joyeux
Et la paix blanche des étoiles
Coulait pareille dans mes yeux..."

Then, in a very striking verse, there is the sudden sighting of land:

"Et voilà que l'on criait: 'Terre!'
Voilà qu'à ce cri fascinant
Sortaient tout à coup du mystère
Les villes chaudes du Ponant:"

and the arrival on shore with its ignominies:

"Et ce fut la grande bordée,
La ronde ivre qui chaque soir,
Avec des cris de possédée,
Roule de comptoir en comptoir."

Charles Le Goffic, like Renan, pities these unhappy men.

"J'aurais beau dire le contraire,
Chère femme aux yeux indulgents,
Tu sens bien que je suis leur frère
Malgré tout, à ces pauvres gens."

Like Renan, too, he believes that their weakness is often simply due to their invincible need of illusion.

It is possible to trace in the sea poems of Le Goffic the influence of Tristan Corbière, who like himself, wrote little but wrote well. Le Goffic had a great admiration for his poetry and shews in his preface to Tristan Corbière's "Amours Jaunes" that they had certain traits in common and that his appreciation is also partly due to the poet's Breton origin.

Tristan Corbière who had been an invalid from the age of sixteen and who was so deformed by rheumatism that the sailors

had christened him "an Ankou" (La Mort) was, perhaps by nature, perhaps on account of his illness, an eccentric. He lived alone in the autumn and winter in an old sixteenth-century house owned by his family at Roscoff. The "salon" became his living-room and his bedroom for he had his canoe brought into it and slept there with his dog in the bows in a fish-basket. This dog, whom he called by his own assumed name Tristan was a veritable mongrel and very dirty but he never left his master's side. Yet these eccentricities, says Le Goffic, interested very few people except his immediate neighbours and when his book was published in 1873 it remained unnoticed. Soon after this he himself died and it was not until 1883 that Verlaine discovered his work, was filled with enthusiasm by it and wrote his famous study on it in "Poètes Maudits".

Verlaine, says Le Goffic, rightly prefers the Breton and sailor to the Parisian. By the year 1891, Corbière was beginning to be recognised. Catulle Mendès, it is true, had small opinion of him, but Jules Laforgue, Gustave Geffroy, Charles Morice, and Jean Ajalbert were speaking of him with sincere admiration. Some of them at least were ready to recognise what Le Goffic, it is interesting to notice, calls the essential of poetry — "la spontanéité, l'énergie, la beauté du cri". For him it is a "Poésie de clair — obscur, chuchotée plus que chantée, si musicale cependant, pleine de lointaines resonances, de prolongements mystérieux, expression d'un état d'âme inconnu de

la génération parnassienne et qui allait devenir celui de la génération de 1884". We remember that these are the lyrical qualities which M. de la Tailhède requires of poets in an article¹ praised by Charles Le Goffic.

Corbière, says Le Goffic, could not resist the attraction of the "Viviane Armoricaïne" any more than other Bretons could and even the poets who will not submit to her charm and languor resist her "rudesse". The Brittany that Corbière knows and loves best is Léon, very aptly described by Le Goffic in "Ame Bretonne". It is a flat, barren land bristling with "calvaires" where neither trees nor crops will grow and where the moorlands shrink beneath the ocean winds.

Le Goffic believes that Corbière was the first poet to understand sailors, and to make them think and speak as they really do, and with him they make their entrance into poetry. He quotes from "La Fin" which, Verlaine declared, contains the sea in its entirety. Le Goffic thinks that it contains at least "the whole proud homesick spirit of Breton mariners". The first verse recalls his own "Matelots" but the rest only Corbière himself could have written:

1. R.H., 1913, May-June.

"Eh bien, tous ces marins, matelots, capitaines,
 Dans leur grand océan à jamais engloutis,
 Partis insoucieux pour leurs courses lointaines,
 Sont morts - absolument comme ils étaient partis...

Pas de fond de six pieds, ni rats de cimetière:
 Eux, ils vont aux requins! L'âme d'un matelot,
 Au lieu de suinter dans vos pommes de terre,
 Respire à chaque flot...

Ecoutez, écoutez la tourmente qui beugle! ...
 C'est leur anniversaire. Il revient bien souvent.
 O poète, gardez pour vous vos chants d'aveugle;
 - Eux, le De Profundis que leur corne le vent.

... Qu'ils roulent infinis dans les espaces vierges!
 Qu'ils roulent, verts et nus,
 Sans clous et sans sapin, sans couvercle, sans cierges..
 - Laissez-les donc rouler, terriens parvenus! ...

This bitter poem, we are told, was an answer to Victor Hugo's
 "Oceano Nox".

Le Goffic realises, as much as Corbière, the sufferings
 these seafarers endure but he can sympathise with them without
 becoming embittered and therein lies the difference between
 the two.

It would perhaps be interesting to compare the attitude
 of poets such as Le Goffic and Corbière towards sea and sailors
 with that of modern English poets. It is only possible here
 to say a few words and therefore no better summary of English
 sea poetry could perhaps be found than that of Masefield in
 his Introduction to "A Sailor's Garland" where he has made a
 collection of English sea poems similar to the French Anthology
 of Le Goffic. Masefield has made a curious discovery — that

English people have written little poetry of a high quality about the sea until comparatively recent times and that English poets from Chaucer to Keats dwelt chiefly on its terror and rarely on its beauty and had small opinion of sailors. He considers this fault rather racial than personal. Just as we feared the sea and turned it to use and yet could not glory in its splendour, so, in the same way we have, he says, accepted our great men but not gloried in them. Evidently, he thinks, we are best at narrative and characterisation for we have had unmatched sea characters in our poetry and fiction. His criticisms, however, do not apply to the poetry of the last three generations and such poets as Arnold, Bridges, Newbolt and Swinburne; for one of the great triumphs of modern poetry is that it has shewn the majesty of the dominion of water. So that the later English poets and Le Goffic have not a little in common.

In some of his poems Le Goffic has sketched Breton women. "Vision" gives a charming description of a young Breton girl with her "Coiffe blanche" and her "justin lamé d'or" worn by the women of Trégor on Sundays. In "Lever d'Aube" there is a little sketch of

"les filles de Pont-Croix
Qui caquettent à leurs croisées".

He has given a fine description of a Breton woman in "La Bretonne" who has "des candeurs d'avril jusque dans son déclin".

In Brittany the faces of the old women, especially, look serene and beautiful under their lace caps. Angélique Auffret, in his poem to Louis Boivin, is to him a typical Bretonne:

"Ce sont ses yeux que je viens voir,
 Ses yeux d'aube, restés auroraux dans le soir.
 Sous l'arceau délabré de sa cape de veuve,
 Ils ont gardé, malgré le temps, malgré l'épreuve,
 Je ne sais quoi de virginal et d'enfantin,
 La divine fraîcheur de leur premier matin.
 Le visage est rugueux; le teint brouillé d'ictère,
 Et, comme pour donner sa mesure à la terre,
 Le corps, à chaque pas, se voûte un peu plus: eux,
 Dans ce désastre universel, demeurent bleus! ...

O candide regard de la vieille Angélique!
 Mais n'est-ce pas, Boivin, qu'elle est bien symbolique
 De la Bretagne, cette aïeule aux yeux d'enfant?

Charles Le Goffic believes that Bretons, more than any other race, keep their individuality and remain, even when they have been obliged to settle in other parts of France, a distinctive race which can easily be singled out and which never loses its nostalgia. He compares them in one of his poems to the "algeiras", a plant which grows in Brittany and which he has found unchanged in the south of France:

"Mais c'est bien la même plante,
 Le même air déshérité,
 Et, fût-ce au coeur de l'été,
 La même âme violente.

Rien en elle n'a changé,
 Sauf la couleur des pétales,
 Et loin des landes natales
 L'ajonc reste un insurgé."

He comments on the homesickness of seafaring races in his anthology and he has even made the same comment as Rudyard Kipling once made, that it is amazing, considering how homesick Englishmen always are that they have succeeded in founding colonies all over the world.

In "Bretonne de Paris" Le Goffic describes a Breton woman who has left her native village:

"Tu peux aller," he says, "de Paimpol à Vanne,
Les gens du pays te reconnaîtront."

He develops this theme at greater length in "Le Pardon de la reine Anne" written for Bretons living in Paris. The title, he explains, refers to the name given to the annual fête of the Bretons held at Montfort l'Amaury, which used to belong to the Dukes of Brittany. Numbers of Bretons tired of labouring on their own land where "le grain qu'on sème est un grain de colère", leave to work in the big towns and especially in Paris. Yet all of them, at some time or another

"Sentaient par moments la même nostalgie
Monter en eux comme une mer!"

Le Goffic, in his many walks, must often have seen Breton women working in the fields and have felt how little the "thankless soil" yielded to their labours. A Breton peasant digging up potatoes in a field once told us about his work when we stopped to ask him the way and it was a story of labour

unrewarded although he related it cheerfully enough. The lot of Breton people and especially of women, declared the French-woman with me, is the hardest of any, and yet they are intolerably unhappy when they leave their country behind.

In his studies of Breton people Le Goffic has shewn another trait — their love of legend and their superstition. As we have seen, he himself, like Anatole Le Braz, was intensely interested in folk-lore and must have gathered a whole storehouse of Breton tales from his father and from the Bretons to whom he talked both at home and during his wanderings. "Morgane" and "Le Crucifié de Kéraliès" as well as many articles in "Ame Bretonne" contain all kinds of legends, but again it is to his poetry that we turn in order to find a legend most strikingly told. Yann-ar-Gwenn, the blind Homer of Brittany in whom Le Goffic was greatly interested, may sometimes have inspired him, but he seems to have been chiefly inspired by Marc'harit Phulup, a Breton woman who, travelling from place to place, was able to collect all kinds of legends and superstitions. She had a remarkable memory and knew by heart at least two hundred songs and nearly as many legends. She seems to have been for Le Goffic what Lise Bellec was for Anatole le Braz. He says of her in "Amour Breton":

"En elle, comme au fond d'une ruche sonore,
S'élaborait le miel d'un sublime folklore:
Mythes et chants s'élevaient d'elle par essaims."

For Le Goffic, as for most Bretons, the Arthurian legend is full of enchantment, and he has tried in his poetry to recapture some of its romance. In a poem dedicated to Le Braz he calls Brittany

"vaporeuse péninsule
Seul royaume où l'on peut encor
Voir sur les monts, au crépuscule,
Passer Arthur sonnante du cor."

Viviane "aux yeux pers", Merlin and the Roi d'Ys are magic names for him.

In some of his articles in "Ame Bretonne" he seeks to discover why Brittany has come to be a land of mystery and legend, a land apart. Probably, he says, the Celts did not differ from their "cousins" in Greece and Italy before the invasion of the barbarians who forced them to seek refuge in the extremities of their land and made of them "that twilight people" spoken of by Yeats. But by the end of the fifth century they were banished to the limits of the world with the misty sea as their perpetual horizon. Not until the Middle Ages did this "poor relation" begin to have some influence on the rest of France. "From the moors and strands of Brittany", he says, "came the stifled sighs of Tristan and Yseult, the melancholy echo of Arthur's horn, the watery voices of the bells of Ys, but the Renaissance soon muffled the call of the Siren. Tristan, Yseult, Arthur, King Marc, Gradlon-Meur slipped back into their

enchanted sleep, only to reappear with Chateaubriand, under different names, it is true, but with the same sensitiveness, the same dreamy imagination, the same incurable homesickness, against the restless melancholy background of the sea."

In "Ame Bretonne" he says: "Un charme singulier émane ici des choses, qui persiste et qui agit sur les âmes à la façon d'un subtil envoûtement. D'où vient ce charme étrange? Est-ce du passé, toujours vivant en Bretagne? De l'atmosphère de spiritualité qu'on y respire ou de l'ambiguïté d'une terre à moitié marine, sirène et fée à la fois, qui mêle au bruissement des feuilles dans le soir la rumeur lointaine des cloches d'Is englouties sous les eaux? Renan prétendait qu'on ne secoue plus la hantise de ces 'voix d'un autre monde' pour peu qu'on ait prêté un moment l'oreille à leurs tremblantes vibrations....."

The legends centre round Paimpont, or, as it was once called "Brocéliande", sanctuary of the Celtic race. "Marvellous tales of the Val-sans-Retour and of the Quest of the Holy Grail", says Le Goffic, "the wonderful fountain of Baranton, of which a few drops sprinkled round the margin, brought about an abrupt atmospheric change; adorable spirit of Vivien gliding through the undergrowth; ghost of Merlin, beneath a hawthorn bush, overwhelmed by the charm of which he himself had revealed the secret; such is the fidelity of this land, its power of conservation, that their prestige remains for ever fresh".

The legend of Merlin and Vivien naturally attracted Tennyson, too. In "Vivien" he describes the forest of Brocéliande which held so much magic for Le Goffic that just before he died he devoted a whole book to it. Here are Tennyson's lines:

"And touching Breton sands, they disembark'd.
And then she follow'd Merlin all the way,
Ev'n to the wild woods of Brocéliande."

Tennyson gives no very attractive picture of the enchantress. Beautiful she is, but perfidious, spiteful and slander-loving. But Le Goffic in his "Prière à Viviane" finds in her one of his chief inspirations.

"Quand tu m'es apparue au seuil de mon enfance,
Avec tes cheveux d'or et ton geste ingénu,
Déesse, il m'eût semblé que c'était une offense
D'effleurer du regard le bout de ton pied nu.

Mais ta voix m'appelait et ta voix est si douce
Qu'elle apaisa ma crainte et que je te suivis.
O les âpres sentiers qui couraient dans la brousse!
O les longs plateaux noirs que nous avons gravis!

Je ne voyais que toi, Déesse..

.....

Hélas! J'ai trop dormi sous ces tristes étoiles!
J'ai trop aimé ce ciel traversé de longs glas!
Depuis que ton beau front m'est apparu sans voiles,
Toujours le même rêve habite mes yeux las.

Les pleurs ont tant meurtri mes paupières brûlantes!
J'ai tant levé vers toi mes bras appesantis!
Tant de nuits ont passé, solitaires et lentes,
Depuis l'aube lointaine où nous sommes partis!

Souviens-toi! La campagne était pleine de brousses..
 Ah! si c'est toi vraiment dont les mains m'ont guidé,
 Donne-moi de mourir en touchant tes mains douces,
 Les douces mains par qui mon coeur est possédé.

Et si j'ai pris pour toi quelque forme éphémère,
 Je ne sais quel vain songe élève sous mes pas,
 Donne-moi de mourir en gardant ma chimère
 Et de t'aimer encor, quand tu ne serais pas! ...

Morgane is another legendary figure who attracts him and to her he has devoted a novel though she appears rarely in his poetry. She was the half-sister of Arthur and had been unfortunate in love and she was therefore believed to attract to the Val Sans Retour all faithless lovers.

"Huelgoat", one of the wildest parts of Brittany, evokes for Le Goffic many visions of the past:

"Huelgoat! ... Je vois un grand cheval blanc qui s'effare
 Sur la crête d'un mené chauve, en plein azur,
 Et dont le chevalier aux yeux de songe, Arthur,
 Brenin de Galle et pentyern des Armoriques
 Tout l'infini dans ses prunelles chimériques,
 S'époumone à sonner du cor par vaux et monts..."

Le Goffic's descriptions are often as fine as those of Vigny in "La Chanson de Roland". There is, indeed, a certain resemblance between the poems now and then:

"Huelgoat! Sources, ruisseaux, torrents, forêts, sacrés,
 Rumeur des pins pareille aux rumeurs des marées..."

In "Feux d'Ecobue", Le Goffic, whilst praising Brittany for remaining faithful to tradition, yet fears that the ancient

gods are in danger of leaving their last stronghold:

"Je ne veux point vous voir, comme on vous représente,
Prête à vous détourner de son dernier autel,
Mais fidèle à son culte et pâle et frémissante
Pressant sur votre coeur fantôme immortel."

This upholding of national usages and faiths has been and still is a religion in Brittany for the Bretons and especially the Trégorrois are essentially a religious people. Renan says that his country is of an adorable delicacy in its religious instincts and this delicacy is shown by Le Goffic when in his poetry he touches on religious beliefs. In many of his sea poems he shews the simple faith of the sailors. When in difficulty they call upon the Virgin to come to their aid and their wives pray to her to save their absent husbands. In "Notre Dame de Penmarc'h" and "Noel à Bord" he shews how Bretons feel the presence of the Virgin and of the souls of the dead:

"Chaque année, à Noel, on prétend que la Vierge
Mystérieusement quitte son beau ciel d'or,
Et, pour rendre visite aux chrétiens de l'Arvor,
Troque son manteau bleu contre un surcot de serge." ...

Yet, beautiful as many of his Breton poems are, his love lyrics remain perhaps his finest. In these he best shews that restraint he so admires in the poetry of others and which he often finds lacking in Romantic poetry. They have a dignity and lyrical music which is worthy of the classical tradition and at the same time there is something in their quiet

concentration which recalls the shorter lyrics of Wordsworth, "She dwelt among the untrodden ways" or "Three years she grew in sun and shade".

Here, for instance, are the opening lines of "Rondes":

"Tes pieds sont las de leurs courses,
Voici le temps des regrets,
L'automne a troublé les sources
Et dévêtu les forêts."

"Your feet are weary of their wanderings,
The season of regrets draws near,
Drear Autumn days have sullied all the springs
And laid the forests bare."

W.B.

The whole poem conveys remarkably well the melancholy atmosphere which is peculiar to Autumn.

"Romance sans Paroles" must be quoted in full for here again we see that "mélange de douceur et de force, de tristesse et d'espoir" which distinguishes his poems.

"Fraîche et riieuse et virginale,
Vous m'apparûtes à Coatmer,
Blanche dans la pourpre automnale
Du soleil couchant sur la mer.

Et la mer chantait à voix tendre
Et, des terrasses du ciel gris,
Le soir penchait ses yeux de cendre
Sur les palus endoloris.

Et je crois que nous n'échangeâmes
Ni baiser vain, ni vain serment.
Le soir descendait en nos âmes,
Et nous pleurâmes seulement."

Romance without words

"Laughing and fresh and virginal
At Coatmer you seemed to me,
Pale in the rich Autumnal glow
That sunset cast upon the sea.

The waves were softly murmuring,
The grey clouds formed a balcony,
When o'er the dreary waste of marsh
Sad evening gazed with leaden eye.

I think we did not then exchange
One single kiss or promise vain
The night upon our spirits fell
And tears revealed our pain."

W.B.

We find the same quiet beauty in "Confidence", "Le Premier Soir", and "Les Violiers".

Perhaps Charles Le Goffic's words in describing the poetry of Coppée best suit his own lyric poetry: "Elle est belle et parfaite, belle de fierté contenue et de sincérité dans l'émotion, parfaite de rythme et de langue". There is, indeed, a quality about these poems which is difficult to describe. They are extremely personal. Some have seen in them resemblances to the poetry of Verlaine. They have not perhaps "le grand souffle" of great lyric poetry, yet they are not far from greatness.

M. Audiat wonders why this gay comrade, full of humour, as was Le Goffic, should have written poems in which there is such a depth of real sorrow, and he concludes that "deux ou trois amours s'emmêlaient dans 'Amour breton' à celui des accordailles. Et, devenus souvenirs, ils avaient été, ils étaient

souffrance encore". Hence his epigraph at the beginning:

"Je dis ce que mon coeur, ce que mon mal me dit."

We have seen Charles Le Goffic's comments in the "Revue Hebdomadaire" on poems inspired by personal loss. He himself has dedicated some beautiful poems to the memory of Hervine, his daughter, who died suddenly at the age of nineteen. Many critics, indeed, consider that here Le Goffic is at his best. M. Le Dantec has said how difficult it is to judge the work of a contemporary and friend. He, who remembers playing on the beach of Pleumeur with the young girl, never reads the opening line of "Paucissima Meae" without tears:

"Voici le noir bouquet de pins, voici la grille
Et l'enclos. Tout ici te rappelle, ma fille."

All the poems written about Rûn-Rouz seem to him beautiful but this feeling, he says, may be entirely personal. Yet we, too, feel their beauty. In "Paucissima Meae" there is the same quiet concentration we have already noticed in other poems and it seems to make us feel even more poignantly the depth of his sorrow. Here again we notice the influence of Victor Hugo for "Pauca Meae" is the title of the chapter of "Les Contemplations" inspired by his daughter's death. "Colloque avec l'Avril" is perhaps the most beautiful of these poems because it is unusual. April tries to bewitch the poet but he remains unmoved by her

for it was she who took away his daughter:

"Qui frappe si tôt à ma porte?
 - Ami, c'est moi, l'Avril chantant.
 - Assassin de ma fille morte,
 Je ne te connais plus: va-t'en.

 - Ouvre: les alisiers sont roses;
 J'ai coiffé d'or tous les talus.
 - Que me fait la beauté des choses,
 Puisque ses yeux ne la voient plus?

 - L'aube, furtive tourterelle,
 S'éveille. Viens: l'hiver a fui.
 - Maintenant qu'il fait nuit pour elle,
 Je voudrais qu'il fit toujours nuit."

April Talks with the Poet

"Who knocks so early at my door?
 - 'Tis songful April, my friend.
 - O thou who killed my child. Away!
 I cannot greet thee more.

 - Open! The hillside's capp'd with gold,
 The blushing lotus blooms,
 - What matter if these things have charm
 Since she now lies so cold?

 - The dawn, a furtive turtle-dove
 Awakes! Come: winter's fled
 I wish that it were always night
 For night now holds my love."

W.B.

In "Le Cimetière où tu dormiras" he describes the little cemetery in Tregastel town to which the road winds up from the coast and from which on summer days we can look upon the dark rocks and the blue sea far below. There Charles Le Goffic lies now beside his daughter:

"Au rythme du flux, au chant de la houle,
C'est ici, mon coeur, que tu dormiras."

Like her, he is surrounded by all the things he loved — the sea, "féerie éternelle", lies, with its perpetual murmurings, at their feet. Far off the lighthouses of Batz and Triagoz keep watch, and the great ray of light from the Sept Iles swings across the sky. Only those who have seen that light flashing on sea and island, constantly disappearing and returning, can appreciate all that Le Goffic says in a fine image in one line when he calls it — "Chauve-souris d'or des ciels trégorrois".

The originality of Le Goffic lies then first in the fact that he has been able to make Brittany live in his poetry and that his portrayal of his own province is neither the literary one of Brizeux nor the picture-postcard one which has sometimes given such a mistaken idea of this land of legend. And secondly, Charles Le Goffic's poetry is original because he has been able to express the Celtic spirit in classical verse. More than once he says in his poetic criticism that the Celts are essentially Romantic and that it was Brittany that inspired the Romantic poets. Yet, strangely enough, he finds in Bretons certain traits that seem to reconcile them with the Classics. Clarity, he says, is the essential quality of the Celtic genius. Simplicity is another quality he praises. Le Gonidec de

Traissan is to him typically Breton for "il détestait l'emphase dans le style comme dans la vie". These are the two qualities, moreover, that other writers perpetually praise in Le Goffic.

Charles Le Goffic's poems are short — sometimes only three stanzas in length — and his own simplicity is reflected in his verse for his expression is always clear, never involved. One of his favourite metres is the octosyllable. He rarely takes liberties with metre or with rhyme. Now and then he amuses himself with unusual rhymes as in "Sur la Beigne":

"J'en étais moi-même effaré,
Tant la route avait un air e-
ffroyable!"

But he is not serious here and this kind of experiment is rare.

We have seen that Le Goffic admires fine metaphors and his own figures are often particularly well chosen whether he talks of autumn

"aux doigts de rouille
Tisseurs de silence et d'oubli",

or the Breton mist which gives to the sky

"Ce ton mourant des fleurs de lin",

or the rocks

"là-bas, couchés dans l'embrun
Sous leur fourrure d'algues lisses,
Les lourds rochers de granit brun!"

Charles Le Goffic, we know, frequented all the schools of poetry. M. des Cognets, in an article in "La Muse française" shews that his earlier verse contains more classical rhythms

and "rimes riches" than his later poems and that his language is purer. Here, evidently, he has not yet shaken off the influence of the Parnassiens. Later on, he says, Le Goffic obviously undergoes the influence of other movements and in consequence his inspiration widens and deepens and in fact develops towards symbolism.

Certain of his poems contain echoes of Hugo, his description, for instance, of the shepherd in "Paysage"; and M. des Cognets considers that "Novembre" was inspired by "J'ai cueilli cette fleur pour toi sur la colline". He owes something, too, to Brizeux who unfortunately wrote about his native Brittany at the height of the Romantic movement and in consequence passed almost unnoticed. Le Goffic's subject matter sometimes bears certain resemblances to that of Brizeux. "Sur une Inscription" recalls in parts "La Maison du Moustoir", but Brizeux' verse is often stiff and academic and his poems are too long. Le Goffic owes even more, probably, to Gabriel Vicaire, who, M. des Cognets thinks, "more completely revealed him to himself and helped him to realise in full his mission as poet". M. Charles Maurras, too, holds this opinion. "Il doit quelque leçon à Gabriel Vicaire", he says.

Most critics, at any rate, and among them M. Maurras, seem to agree that he owes something to Verlaine. M. Guéguen thinks that the prelude of "Amour Breton" is younger sister to "Sagesse", but a younger sister who is melancholy rather than

tragic and both wiser and happier than her elder sister.

Here are the opening lines of "Sagesse":

"Écoutez la chanson bien douce
 Qui ne pleure que pour vous plaire.
 Elle est discrète, elle est légère:
 Un frisson d'eau sur la mousse."

And we notice how alike in tone "Prelude" of Le Goffic sounds:

... "C'est ici la chanson d'amour
 Qu'on chante au coin des cheminées,
 L'hiver, sur le déclin du jour
 Dans les maisons abandonnées."

Again M. André Dumas says, "Joignant l'imprécis au précis, suivant le conseil de Verlaine, il nous invite aux rêveries insaisissables. Quelques mots, très simples, très clairs et qui sont ceux de tout le monde, quelques mots lui suffisent pour éveiller de longues résonances dans nos coeurs, et voilà, me semble-t-il, son originalité véritable".

Yet indebted though he may be, and as all poets are, to predecessors and contemporaries, Le Goffic has evolved a form which is his own and he will always be remembered as the creator of the Breton "lied" in French.

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