

AR MOR* by Monique Fox

AR MOR! What a beautiful word the Breton people have created for the description of their ancient land, the mysterious Brittany! Ar Mor, the country of the sea. No part of France is more dominated by its influential power. I had to leave the country of my childhood to discover the encroachment the sea takes over men and land over there. The people, the elements, the earth share the same disconcerting attributes. When you describe one, you describe the others.

The sea around Brittany can be so extravagantly beautiful in shades of deep blue, or deep green for which the northern coast is called the Emerald Coast. In May or June, when the sky smiles softly, that sea can appear so peaceful, so serene, with just the murmur of gentle waves dying on the empty beaches. Sometimes it breaks up into a gayer mood, with lovely, playful waves watched by a Mediterranean sky of pure azure. Those divine moments should be enjoyed right then, for one never knows how capricious, how versatile that great lady can be. It does not take her long to flash into anger. The slightest change in the atmosphere irritates her and carries her to extremes. The sea becomes dark, tumultuous, shrieking its madness to all, beating stubbornly against all obstacles. It takes the Brittany granite rocks to resist such assaults.

How could the Bretons be different from the sea? They are in perpetual contact with it, for Brittany is small, and no place is really far from the coast. That is why, faithful to the leading element and following the steps of their Celtic ancestors, they display bursts of enthusiasm, quickly followed by periods of discouragement. When gay and extrovert, they can become the tellers of wonderful and nearly incredible stories, based on their own trials. For, in their love for variety, in their attachment to the sea, they look for adventures and distant lands from which they bring back glorious and tragic tales gathered in their experience as missionaries, sailors, or, until Napoleon's time, pirates.

This portrait is only one side of the Bretons. The other side carries the introvert aspect of their temperament. Maybe, when they reach those darker moods, they do not resemble exactly the sea, or if they do, it is in a reverse way: when a storm occurs, the surface of the sea might appear tumultuous, even vicious, but right

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into its impenetrable depth, it is quiet and restful. Men in Brittany, when moody, appear extremely still and detached; they will hardly talk. The turmoil is all inside, and more painful because it has no natural way to escape. It is little wonder that the Breton people have acquired a reputation for mysticism. Torn at times between the lashing tempests of the surrounding elements and the conflicts of their own captive souls, their only recourse is to abandon themselves to God, and make of Faith a terrible realism which governs simultaneously their souls and their bodies.

The coast and land of Brittany present also, like the sea, like the men, many faces. It displays long beaches of fine gold sand, invaded at times by masses of tortured rocks which stretch their ragged muzzle into the sea. Here, the land is turned barren by the ravaging ocean wind; there, farther from the sea, it yields in profusion. Dense, lovely forests compensate for the treeless areas. In this continual versatility, the mysterious beauty of Brittany has sparked much talent among poets and painters; still, its momentary roughness has repelled many tourists.

It takes, indeed, a special type of traveller to love Ar Mor, to appreciate its people, who, like their granite, those mysterious megaliths, and the menhirs and the dolmen, stand stubbornly erect, never defeated under the assaults of life and always so versatile in their moods as to defy any too definite an analysis.

If there was not night,
How could there be day?
If there were no low lands,
How could mountains be so high?
If there were not so many colors,
How could snow be so white?
If there was no death,
How could we love Life?

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