

Letter Script.

CUS 417/129.4

NOTES FROM BOOKS July 1919

Rabelais W. F. Smith. 1895.

From: W. F. Smith.

2 rue Jeanne d'Albret,
La Rochelle,
France.

Dear Osler,

Our visit to Touraine was spoiled by the heat; it was impossible to get about, and all that we saw properly at Chinon was the Rue de la lamproye. Nos. 2 and 15 were dilapidated old places, No. 2 being ruinous old timbered house and no. 15 being indicated by a lamprey cut in steel iron over the street, and some stone blocks in the wall with an inscription to the effect that this house had once belonged to Rabelais (i.e. père). The whole country side seems to be of surprising fertility, and covered with growing crops, where it is not occupied by poplars and willows and undergrowth, with pastures where cows and goats feed, tended by girls or women. There is a railway station at Roche Clermaud, and another at L'Isle Bouchard; the first one brings you to Sinais, La Dernière, Seuilly, and other Rabelaisian spots, but I had sufficiently worked them in 1891. Our disappointment at Fontervault was very great, to find the Church and Abbey occupied as a prison and therefore closed.

La Rochelle is Lychnopolis, and we have seen the Tour de la Lanterne (V.33) but there is nothing of interest save the exterior. R. must have visited it from Maillezais or Fontenay le Comte; it seems surprising how he got about; between Portieres and La Rochelle there are many places that he visited (? on foot, as a friar?) but there is nothing to delay us save the geographical position.

As a modern seaside resort, La Rochelle has a small beach about 2 miles from the town on a road served by a very dirty train every 40 minutes, but there is a great advantage in the comparative coolness of the climate due to the Atlantic breezes and it has also an advantage in a large area of woods intersected by roads and paths, and liberally furnished with seats. Very few foreigners frequent the place, and the hotels are inferior and dirty and there are scarcely any lodgings where board is furnished. This house, poetically known as Le Reve is almost the only place which gives board and lodging. Like nearly all the towns in western France, we found it swarming with American soldiers, who had considerably raised the prices of everything; Tours was exceptional in the dearness of provisions; besides this, the heat of the last month has been very oppressive, La Rochelle being exceptionally cool. Last night (July 7) we experienced a tremendous storm, which interefered with the electric lights, and this morning

P. T. O.

we found the streets washed and in places chocked with the litter swept into the gutters and elsewhere.

Rabelais must have known the Arabian medicine through the Latin translations; I do not think his knowledge of Arabic was very profound, notwithstanding the mention of his preceptor in Arabic in the brève déclamation on IV. 34. Sainean (R.E.R. VI. 308) says that R. gives no indication of direct acquaintance with Arabic beyond a few terms in medicine and astronomy.

The remainder of my Rabelais (1893) were bought by Deightons and I expect they still have a good number on their hands. But then I did not know of debts to Erasmus, or Casilius Rhodigenus or to Tiraqueau's 1546 edition, or again to the Hypnerotomachia, except the Chess game, though I suspected it in the architecture at the end of the Fifth book. Tilley has at present with him, I believe, my new edition, almost ready for the press, but I suppose it will never see the light. It appeals to so small an audience.

I am fairly well but cannot throw off the difficulty of breathing sometimes.

Madame joins me in kindest regards.

Yours sincerely,

W. F. Smith.

P.S. We expect to remain here until the end of the month.