

Sunday, May 20, 1917.—We started at 10:30, Osborne the Consul and the two O'Rells in the O'Rell car for Etretât to have some golf, but it rained and we were late in leaving, so Osborne suggested we turn off and go to Gonneville, where he said there was an excellent restaurant formerly frequented by artists and quite famous for "its old dishes." I had a vague memory of Marshall Sheppey having mentioned some such restaurant to me but when Osborne spoke about another at St.-Jouin kept by La Belle Ernestine I remembered that that was the place of which he had spoken.

We went to Gonneville and to the hotel, an old house, its façade hung with plates and curios and pictures, all in the worst possible taste.... We drove then to St.-Jouin and to the restaurant of La Belle Ernestine, a charming house tucked away in a beautiful

garden, the façade hung with the beautiful lavender color wistaria vines. The house inside was another museum, full of pictures and letters from Dumas Père et Fils, Gustave Flaubert, from de Maupassant, and pictures and little designs and sketches in crayon, one of them by Corot, and all dedicated with the homage of the author to La Belle Ernestine. La Belle Ernestine a little on the wane, a heavy fleshy woman in sabots, with white hair, who once may have been beautiful, her eyes indeed are charming still. She herself was interested when she found out I was a writer, and showed me all the letters, which she knows by heart, had much to say of de Maupassant, who was her great friend, some indeed intimate that he was something more. There was a photograph of him as a young man dedicated to La Belle Ernestine from her old and platonic friend, Guy de Maupassant. "He wrote *Pierre et Jean* here," she said to me. "He worked here a great deal. He would come and say to me: 'Tell me stories,' and I would tell him all I knew. Well, afterwards I saw them published in the journals, but not the way I had told them. All rearranged, you know." Oh yes, I could well imagine! ¹

She got down her album and asked me to write in it and I wrote: "And did you once see Shelley plain?"—Browning's poem. "And now," she said, "you will translate it for me into French," and so I translated it into French and she said "It is very lovely." She said that many people had come there trying to find out about her relations with de Maupassant, but that she would never tell. Once she had been asked to receive a woman journalist and she promised to do so. "But," she said, "the war had started, so she never came."—Like so many other things we were going to do if the war hadn't come!

She wanted me to come there and live awhile and I thought something of doing so; it is a charming place, one would be very quiet there. "You could write here," she said to me, "as much as you wish, and I would give you good things to eat, you know, ten francs a day all included; not the little dishes like the big hotels but as much as you wanted; you could tell me just what you desired."

But some discreet questioning elicited the fact that there were certain modern conveniences lacking. Pioneer life has no attraction for me even in such a romantic and charming spot, peopled by so many ghosts of the great who have gone....

¹ The scene of *Pierre et Jean* is laid in Havre. Part of the story takes place at La Belle Ernestine's, who in the novel is faithfully described under the name of La Belle Augustine. Her inn is also described, and its atmosphere well rendered. La Belle Ernestine died just before the end of the war.

She asked me then to go out and look at a house that belongs to her son, Besnard, the painter, whose father was the lover of La Belle Ernestine and who was also a painter. And so we went out in the rain to have a look at the house. It proved to be a great Norman hotel that the son evidently built with some view of accommodating the travelers from Etretât that the little grey house with the wistaria vines could not receive. There was a little grey church with a little Norman tower nearby. Inside they were singing the salutation, and I stood a long while there under the porch listening to the sweet music with emotions that are not to be described.

Then we went for a walk, crept down the strand along by the beach and then crept up again, across the fields with an excellent appetite for dinner to La Belle Ernestine. Nice white pieces of bread and real Norman butter and then we drove away and came home after a charming day even if we didn't have any golf.