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## GLOZEL, A MYSTERY<sup>1</sup>

By Dr. DAVID RIESMAN

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THOSE who have read something about Glozel may wonder why I speak of it here. Is it not a dead issue? No, for as a study of human credulity and as a commentary on the hot-headedness or should I say pig-headedness of many men of science, it will always occupy a prominent place in the history of civilization.

Although many of the audience are probably familiar with the main facts, I want to give a brief synopsis of the involved story. I say "story" advisedly, for from the very outset the mystery of Glozel has formed a fascinating tale, very much in the genre of our best thrillers, with plot and counter-plot, gum-shoe detectives and all the pertinent paraphernalia.

Glozel is a small hamlet of four farmhouses, about fifteen miles from the famous spa of Vichy. Emile

Fradin, then a youth of eighteen and belonging to an old local family, was one day working in his grandfather's field when a cow suddenly slipped into an unsuspected hole. Fradin went to investigate and found that the hole led into an oval pit containing a variety of remarkable objects—bricks, tablets, vases—which he gathered and as soon as possible showed to the village schoolmistress, Mlle. Picandet. The latter in turn showed some of the tablets to M. Clément, a school teacher in la Guillerme. Eventually the news of the discoveries came to the ears of Dr. Albert Morlet, a surgeon of Vichy and an amateur archeologist. Thereafter Dr. Morlet and Emile Fradin together began to excavate at Glozel and brought to light more and more buried objects which they collected in grandfather Fradin's house and which Dr. Morlet described in detail in an endless series of articles in a literary journal, the *Mercur de France*. It was through this magazine—the *Atlantic Monthly*

<sup>1</sup> Read by invitation before the American Philosophical Society on April 24, 1930.

of France in more senses than one—that I became interested in the Glozelian discoveries. My interest was especially aroused by the claim of Morlet and others that an alphabet had been discovered at Glozel which antedated every other alphabet then known. I therefore decided while spending a vacation in the Auvergne to see Glozel for myself, but before doing so I determined to interview Dr. Morlet in Vichy. At first he suspected me of being an archeologist, but when in answer to a direct question I denied the soft impeachment and proclaimed myself merely a doctor, he became cordiality itself and showed me his collection of Gallo-Roman and Glozel antiquities. He told me that he as well as others had been inclined to consider Glozel as belonging to the Magdalenian age because of the presence of harpoons and of stones engraved with reindeer and other animals long extinct in France, but further studies had led to the conclusion that Glozel was Neolithic. Dr. Morlet kindly asked me to stay over until the following day and dig with him and Professor Björn, of Sweden, but I was unable to do so.

After leaving Morlet I motored, together with two American friends, to Glozel. Emile Fradin received us and at once offered to take us to the field of excavation. It was at the bottom of a deep ravine and was surrounded by a barbed-wire fence and scarred by trenches and holes. He showed us the original oval pit and the two tombs subsequently discovered. As it was raining hard and as the clayey ground was slippery, I declined his invitation to crawl into one of the tombs but asked instead to see the museum. After paying two francs each we entered through a low door above which was a crude sign with the pretentious words, *Musée de Glozel*, and found ourselves in a square low-ceilinged room with shelves on the walls and very primitive glass cases standing on the floor. The objects exhibited on shelves and in cases were astounding in number and variety—vases, tablets, engraved stones, ornaments especially pendants, some pieces of glass and harpoons, the last not nearly as artistic as those of Magdalenian age I had seen at Les Eyzies and at Laugerie-Basse. Three articles attracted my special attention—vases or vase-like pottery-ware having eyes, nose and ears but no mouth, which Morlet has called death masks, explaining the absence of the mouth by assuming that the primitive makers wanted to express the silence of the grave. Secondly, a squarish object suggesting the female figure with a cylindrical projection from the forehead interpreted as the phallus—this Fradin told me was a bisexual idol; and most striking of all, clay tablets with graven signs looking in every way like alphabetical characters. I was struck by the clean red color of these tablets. When I spoke of

this to Fradin, he explained it by saying that the soil in which the tablets had been found was such that it did not readily fuse with the clay and hence was easily brushed off. There were also some large casts of the human hand which differed from the imprints of the hands in the Spanish and French caves in having all the fingers present.

I offered to buy some of the articles, especially a tablet, but Fradin resolutely refused to sell. During the whole of our stay in the museum, the grandfather stood silent and motionless in a doorway leading to an inner room.

The reputed discoveries of an alphabet dating back to Neolithic times of which I had now seen the alleged evidence in abundance created a tremendous sensation in informed circles. Altogether about 136 characters had been distinguished, representing every letter of the alphabet except the letter B.

Hitherto the credit for creating an alphabet had been given to the Phoenicians, but the oldest known Phoenician record found at Byblos a few years previously dated back only to about 1300 B. C.; Sir Arthur Evans's baffling Cretan inscriptions of ninety characters, to *ca.* 3000 B. C. If Morlet and those who agreed with him were right, then Glozel was truly what M. Reinach called it—one of the greatest archeological discoveries of all time.<sup>2</sup>

Almost immediately after the first appearance of Morlet's reports, doubts began to be voiced about the authenticity of Glozel, though in the early period of the controversy there were perhaps as many scientists who accepted the discoveries in good faith as there were doubters. Soon the pro- and anti-Glozelians became personal and attacked each other with a vituperative vehemence and a destructive sarcasm for which the French language appears to be the ideal medium. Reputations were shattered, old friendships broken, and—as one of the French dailies remarked—even butcher boys came to blows on the streets of Paris.<sup>3</sup> In fact Mrs. O'Leary's cow did no greater damage to Chicago than Fradin's to the reputation of some French savants.

Before long the leading French prehistorians with only an occasional exception began to deny altogether the authenticity of Glozel and to declare the excavated articles to be forgeries. A number of Englishmen were likewise unconvinced. However, Dr. Foat, a London scientist, makes the categorical statement that "if the finds of Glozel are not authentic, it is equally necessary to consider as false all that I have seen in

<sup>2</sup> Dr. Hackh in an exhaustive essay on the "History of the Alphabet" makes no reference to Glozel; if true, Glozel belongs at the very bottom of the linguistic tree.

<sup>3</sup> The Glozel affair has been made the subject of biting burlesque performances in Paris theaters and is the theme of a sarcastic novel by René Benjamin.

museums between London and Constantinople." Several Scandinavian, Belgian and Portuguese scientists also supported Dr. Morlet, and a German, Dr. Wilke, in a recent article enthusiastically upholds the standard of Glozel.

Are Dr. Morlet's supporters right or is Glozel but one more of the long series of frauds that history recounts since Jacob imposed upon his father Isaac? Many will come to your minds—Thomas Chatterton, our own Dr. Cook, Constantine Simonides, the pretended author of the Codex Sinaiticus, the forger of the Mecklenburg Declaration, the Lincoln love letters in the *Atlantic Monthly*, the Tiara of Saitapharnes, Ferrante Stocco, the Calabrian priest who created a saint, Giovanni Cala, and invented a life for him, and countless others. Two perhaps are germane and worth recounting. In the early eighteenth century George Psalmanazar, born in the south of France, came to England and with the connivance of a rascally clergyman, Alexander Innes, proclaimed himself a native of the Island of Formosa. He was lionized in London, wrote a description of the island which he had never seen and included in the book an alphabet and grammar of the Formosan language. Though many doubted his veracity, the book passed through two editions and was translated into French. Toward the end of his life he revealed himself in his own memoirs as a colossal faker and declared that all he had published including the language and the grammar was a hoax.

One of the most interesting cases and the one having the greatest analogy to Glozel, if Glozel be a fake, is that of the so-called "Figured Stones of Wurzburg."

In the first half of the eighteenth century there lived in Wurzburg, in Bavaria, an ultra-pious physician named Johann Bartholomaeus Adam Beringer. He is not remembered for any great discovery or contribution to science, but for his share in a remarkable scientific hoax. At the time in which Beringer flourished an active discussion was going on as to the source and meaning of fossils. Although Leonardo da Vinci had understood their true nature—even Herodotus, 400 B. C., had a correct idea—the scientists of two hundred years ago accounted for them as the result of "stone-making forces" of "formative qualities" or as growths from seeds. We may be inclined to smile, but with Dayton in Tennessee to chasten us, we can not throw stones at the Wurzburg of two centuries ago or at the Sorbonne which a hundred years later deprived the great Buffon of his chair because of his heterodox views.

Beringer had committed himself publicly to the belief that fossils were the capricious fabrication of God, hidden by Him in the earth for some inscrutable

purpose. His zealous maintenance of this fundamentalist position led some of the students together with members of the faculty and wags of the town to make numerous fossils of clay which they buried in the side of a hill where they knew the professor was wont to search for specimens. Beringer chancing upon these objects was completely deceived. The jokers then became bolder and buried the most extraordinary and extravagant figures their whimsical imagination could suggest. They fashioned tablets bearing inscriptions in Hebrew, Babylonian, Syriac and Arabic and buried them not far from the original spot. Beringer was overjoyed to find such abundant confirmation of his doctrines, and forthwith in true German fashion proceeded to write an exhaustive treatise. The wags now began to realize that they had gone too far. They expostulated with him and revealed to him the whole truth. Instead of believing them Beringer became more than ever convinced that the story his frightened colleagues told was a ruse to rob him of the honor of his discoveries. No one could stop him. At great expense he published in 1728 the "*Lithographiae Wirceburgenses*."

Only too soon the shout of laughter with which the book was greeted brought the truth home to him. In chagrin and despair he exhausted nearly his entire fortune in a fruitless endeavor to suppress the edition and to buy up the copies already issued. He died soon afterwards, it is said, of a broken heart.

Is Dr. Morlet like Johann Beringer the victim of deception? Upon me personally he made the impression of an honest man. In certain quarters he was accused of fraud, for example, by the *Journal des Débats* and by the French Society of Prehistory. He promptly brought suit against these and won a verdict of 1,000 francs damages. The defendants carried the case to the Court of Appeals at Riom, the native town of Willa Cather's lovable archbishop. In confirming the verdict, the court gave expression to an amusing quibble. It held that Morlet, being a surgeon by profession and only by avocation a prehistorian, was not injured in the eyes of his real colleagues but only as an amateur archeologist. But as the defendants had not actually proved fraud, they were declared guilty of libel though the fine was reduced to one franc and costs.

Another humorous episode might be mentioned. Regnault, president of the French Society of Prehistory, sued a M. X—because he, Regnault, had been compelled to pay the sum of four francs to see a collection of fake objects. As part of this legal action, the police of Moulins broke into Fradin's premises and took away a number of objects which were afterwards submitted to the public expert, M. Bayle. The latter reported that the tablets were of

recent manufacture. Pieces of clay from a tablet crumbled readily in water; hence it was not conceivable that the tablets could have resisted the moisture in the ground had they been there for many years. Furthermore, a bit of grass picked out of a piece of earthenware showed under the microscope vegetable cells and chlorophyll,<sup>4</sup> and some of the bone instruments still contained marrow. Bayle was soon afterward shot to death by one Philopponet against whom he had testified in court.<sup>5</sup>

The Fradins themselves brought suit against M. Dussaud, member of the Institut, who in a trenchant brochure had called them fakers.

Let us now delve a little more deeply into this mystery so that we may understand better the basis of the whole controversy. The first serious doubt as to the authenticity of Glozel was based on the heterogeneity of the articles in Fradin's museum. How could one explain the presence of so many dissimilar and unrelated objects in one small field of excavation—the two or three thousand at the time of my visit have now grown to five thousand? No other archeologic site offers a parallel. Morlet answered this by saying that Glozel was a *champ des morts*, a cemetery, and that, as among many primitive peoples of later times, everything belonging to the dead had been buried with him. C. Jullian, who considers Glozel a Gallo-Roman station, accounts for the multiplicity of objects on the assumption that Glozel was a sorcerer's sanctuary. He has added greatly to the gaiety of nations by attempting a full translation of the inscribed tablets from the published illustrations. Dr. Morlet showed me with much amusement a crack in one of the tablets which Jullian had translated as a character.

Aside from the puzzling complexity of the collection, it has been pointed out that the tablets first exhumed bore fewer and less perfect characters than the later ones. Further, as soon as some one had made a criticism, the objects next exhumed would often be free from the criticized defect. Quite frequently certain features appeared that could be traced directly to scientific articles published shortly before. These facts seem of course very significant. More-

<sup>4</sup> A report has just been made to the Académie des Sciences (*Mercure de France*, May 1, 1930; *La Dépêche de Vichy*, April 12, 1930) of the finding in Russia of chlorophyll in fossil plants of the Tertiary epoch, millions of years old.

<sup>5</sup> Bayle's reputation has been seriously tarnished through recent posthumous revelations. He suffered, as one writer puts it, from "mercantilitis," a post-war malady. A number of years ago he divorced his wife so as to consecrate himself solely and wholly to science. "I shall not remarry," he exclaimed. Nevertheless he took another wife soon afterwards. The first wife was unaware of this, for he continued to visit her every evening during a period of seven years.

over, the scratches on stones whether representing animal figures or alphabetic characters were without the patina covering other parts of the stones, suggesting a recent production. Much was made of the penetration of roots into vases or tablets; but upon examination these roots were not found to be properly fossilized, which would have to be the case had the objects been in the ground for long ages. The utensils—harpoons, hand-axes, scrapers—are far less artistic than those in other Neolithic stations. Vayson de Pradenne and Abbé Breuil indeed contend that none of them could ever have been used.

Dr. Morlet and his chief supporter Van Gennep did their best to answer all these objections. The former at the height of the verbal battle-royal made a request for a governmental commission which was speedily granted, but when he found that a bitter anti-Glozelian, the well-known archeologist Capitan, was a member, he objected and the commission was never sent. Eventually, at the International Anthropological Congress at Amsterdam an International Commission was formally appointed to investigate Glozel. The commission consisted of Absolon, director of the Archeological Museum of the State of Moravia; Bosc Gimpera, professor in the university and director of the archeological work of Barcelona; the Abbé Favret; Forrer, director of the Prehistoric and of the Gallo-Roman Museum at Strasbourg; Miss Dorothy Garrod, member of the Royal Anthropological Institute and of the French Prehistoric Society; Hamal-Nandrin, lecturer on prehistory in the Museum of Liège; Peyrony, director of the Museum of Les Eyzies, and Pittard, professor of anthropology in the University of Geneva. Absolon was prevented from taking part in the work of the commission.

After spending three days at the site the commission issued a unanimous report which was kindly sent to me by Miss Dorothy Garrod. This report states unequivocally that the articles are for the most part of recent manufacture and have undoubtedly been planted in the ground by some one whom the commission does not name, and that Glozel is neither prehistoric nor authentic. Vayson de Pradenne, in a devastating brochure in which he declared the Glozel finds fakes, also accused no one by name but put the blame upon the *esprit de Glozel*—in other words, upon a fairy.

One might think with the leading French, English and American scientists—Peyrony, Pradenne, Abbé Breuil, Sir Arthur Evans,<sup>6</sup> Dussaud and, I believe, Professor MacCurdy—arrayed against Glozel, and with the destructive judgment of the international commission, that Glozel would cease from troubling the scientific and the lay mind. Though all due

<sup>6</sup> Personal communication.

obsequies have been performed, Glozel refuses to remain in its sepulcher, and the literary battle continues. Dr. Morlet very kindly sends me newspapers and pamphlets, and a distinguished pro-Glozelian of Belgium, Professor Tricot-Royer, has just supplied me with his defense of Glozel which is particularly interesting because Professor Tricot-Royer was present during the visit of the international commission.

What keeps Glozel alive? First, we have the fact that when men take sides in print they are loath to recant, fearing ridicule—the more untenable their position, the more stubborn their resistance.

Secondly, six months after the international commission's visit Dr. Morlet called together a *comité d'études* of twelve men, consisting of Dr. Foat, Bayet and Tricot-Royer, of Belgium; Reinach, J. Loth, W. Loth, Van Gennep, Deperet, Ajeelin, Roman and Audollent, of France, and Soderman, of Sweden. At their meeting they pronounced unanimously in favor of the genuineness of Glozel.

Another reason is found in the attitude of a group of French and German scientists who are opposed to the traditional belief that *ex oriente lux*—that civilization is of oriental origin. The alleged Neolithic alphabet of Glozel and similar finds at Alvao in Portugal are grist to their mill.

In addition quasi-political factors have entered into the controversy—Fradin an obscure peasant, Morlet a provincial doctor without much influence have a definite appeal for the proletariat and for a large section of the press.

And finally, it must be remembered that the Academicians are not always right—that they ridiculed Pasteur and Boucher des Perthes, and that even Koch and Lister met a similar fate in the beginning.<sup>7</sup>

All these elements cooperate to keep the spark of life in Glozel. Within the past few weeks the publication of an exhaustive treatise by Dr. Morlet has been announced. This, however, I fear, can throw no new light upon the subject.

As a detective tale the story of Glozel remains unfinished and will remain so until a Sherlock Holmes discovers the supposed person or persons who manufactured the articles and put them in the ground. What was the motive? How are we to explain the extraordinary industry that has fashioned five thousand or more articles, and how is it that he, the *esprit de Glozel*, escaped detection in a community of twenty-nine souls where every one knows every one else's business? Or how, if there are witnesses to the dark deed, can we explain an unbroken neighborly silence extending over a period of six exciting years?

## PREPARATION OF SCIENTIFIC ARTICLES

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RECOLLECTIONS of many untrained efforts and of many changes in methods of writing scientific articles prompt me to set down some of the more profitable results of a rather long experience in that sort of work, in the hope that they may prove useful to others.

### THE ARTICLE

After the subject of an article has taken shape in the mind and the general sequence of its headings has been planned, cut some typewriter paper in half and write brief statements of the leading points on separate half pages. Never begin a second paragraph on the same page with the end of the preceding one. Do not hesitate too long over the precise wording of this first draft; set ideas down as they take form; revise, clarify and compress the wording afterwards. Arrange the pages in a logical order, number them 5, 10, 15, 20, and so on, and make out a provisional table of contents. Changes and additions which require the rewriting of paragraphs and the later insertion of afterthoughts with intermediate paging are thus much facilitated.

Carry a blank book with the growing manuscript—an examination blue-book will serve—and keep a record of work done on its first pages. Besides mention of whatever occurrences led up to the preparation of the article and notes on the incidents of its progress, the following dates should be entered: Beginning and ending of the rough draft; making first clean copy, and second also if a second prove necessary; sending copy to the publisher and acknowledgment of its receipt; arrival and return of galley proof and page proof; appearance of article; receipt and distribution of reprints. The more significant of these notes and dates should be later copied off in good form and pasted, with a list of correspondents to whom reprints are sent, in the reprint kept in one's own file. Much do I regret not having such a

<sup>7</sup> Recently the Geological Society of Normandy (*Mercur de France*, April 15, 1930) has formally proffered "ses plus vives félicitations" to Dr. Morlet for his science, his tenacity and above all for the magnificent energy with which he has faced the attacks and unjust calumnies to which he has been subjected and which the Court of Appeals at Riom has definitely condemned.