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A Glimpse of the Chateau Country of France

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OF the many chateaux that dot the Loire Valley and the Touraine, that garden spot of France, the one at Blois is the most popular among tourists, who, during the summer months, are seen in droves of the "personally conducted" or in detached couples, very often of the honeymoon class, staring up open-mouthed at the beautiful spiral staircase of Francis I., or the hideous monstrosity of the latest addition perpetrated by Mansard. The city itself possesses a great deal of sentimental interest, but probably more than that it is here that the traveller meets the first chateau of state, and there is something about this one that makes the memory of it more vivid than that of others, perhaps more lovable.

The position of this great chateau of the Counts of Blois is a very commanding and picturesque one, being upon an inclined rock, where it towers above the roof-tops of the lower town. It is composed of four parts erected at as many different times; the original chateau of the Counts, the edifice of

Louis XII., the palace of Francis I., and the wing of Gaston of Orleans. In these four parts, architecturally distinct from one another, and all, with one exception, beautiful in their own way, is depicted as legibly as on written pages of history, the story of the aspirations and emotions of the builders, from the rough manners of the feudal times in which the structure was begun, through the delicate Renaissance details in which the imaginative brain of Francis I. delighted, down to the hideous concoction of Mansard, produced at the commands of Gaston of Orleans.

The emblems of the various occupants are seen lavishly displayed on every hand, delicately carved in stone; the swan pierced by an arrow of the Counts of Blois, the ermine of Anne of Bretagne, the porcupine of Louis XII., and the salamander of Francis; while in the grand and sumptuous apartment of Catherine de Medici, her device, a crowned "C" and her monogram in gold, often appears on the rich, dark decorations of the walls.

Entering by the central doorway over which is an equestrian statue of