

A PASSAGE IN THE LIFE OF MONS. VICTOR JOLLIVET.

BY JOHN V. BRIDGEMAN.

DURING the period that King Smith—under the pseudonym of Louis Philippe—occupied the French throne, he once invited a number of Arab chiefs to dine with him at the Palace of the Tuileries. After dinner, the conversation happened to turn upon the Arab language, and one of the guests remarked that he had known several French officers in Algiers, who laboured under the delusion they could speak the said language, although their whole acquaintance with it was limited to the power of mispronouncing, mis-spelling, and misapplying a few common words and phrases; but, on the strength of this rather negative linguistic capability, they imagined themselves accomplished Arabic scholars, and were always correcting, as they fancied, the native officers. This anecdote is very characteristic of our gallant allies; for, as far as our own experience goes, they are the worst hands at learning any language, and the best at supposing they have done so, with whom it has been our fate to meet. Who is there among us who has not, in the course of his life, come in contact with an old French dancing-master, or professor of some description or other, established in London ten or, mayhap, twenty years, and yet unable to make himself understood in our vernacular, without the occasional use of expressive pantomime?

One reason, perhaps, for the little progress made by Frenchmen in foreign languages is, that they seldom study them, and although we have been informed that—

“Children pick up words as pigeons peas,”

and, certainly,

“Utter them again as God shall please,”

Frenchmen do not—with the exception of those of their own language, of course. Even the few natives of *la belle France*, who make a point of devoting their attention to the idioms of other countries, are particularly prone to Gallic *idiotismes*, as they would call it—and as we should, too, for the matter of that. A striking proof of this is afforded by the following episode in the life of Mons. Victor Jollivet.

Mons. Victor Jollivet was a Frenchman, and a Parisian to boot; but, unlike most of his countrymen, who, even at the period to which we refer, were very bitter and sarcastic in their allusions to this country, he was a great admirer of everything English. His admiration for us was, however, rather more enthusiastic than discriminating. At the time when English hats were made of beaver, of which

“Each particular hair *did* stand on end,
Like quills upon the fretful porcupine,”

he wore an English hat; when English trowsers were made particularly tight and gloomy, in a manner not at all calculated to hide any defects in the wearer's legs (and M. Victor Jollivet's legs were conspicuous for an absence of calf, and a protuberance of the knee-bones to

within), he wore English trowsers; and when English cooking was represented in Paris by dirty, dingy table-clothes, villanously-dressed meat, and repulsive puddings, at low eating-houses, frequented by a select circle of English journeymen tailors, with a half-sodden look, and extremely dirty linen, he used to dine always *à l'Anglaise*, as he fondly imagined. His infatuation even extended to a profound belief in the Lord Mayor; but this weakness was one he merely shared in common with the rest of his compatriots.

As a matter of course, Mons. Victor Jollivet studied our language. He attended the *cours* of a popular professor, and took part in the English theatricals got up by the professor's pupils, and of which the French portion of the audience did not understand one word—nor, as far as my own experience goes, the English portion either. But he was not satisfied with our classic diction; he was bent upon attaining a proficiency in the language of every-day life, and for this purpose associated a good deal with the journeymen tailors, aforesaid, although, from the frequent occasions he had to refer to his grammar—which he always carried with him—for the explanation of words and locutions which struck him as rather unusual—and probably were—the part he usually took in any argument was somewhat limited.

“He who has not seen Seville,” says the Spaniard, “has seen nothing.” In his own mind, Mons. Victor Jollivet substituted the capital of England for that of Andalusia, and agreed with the assertion. He had long sighed for an opportunity of visiting London; but, from pecuniary reasons, which we are at perfect liberty to suppose were also present to Horace's mind when he said,

“Non cuivis homini contingit adire Corinthum,”

his case seemed hopeless. It is not, therefore, surprising that, when the cheap trains, with return tickets, were advertised to run between London and Paris, at the time of the Great Exhibition, Mons. Victor Jollivet determined to seize the opportunity. Having secured all the money he could possibly raise from his own resources, and those of his friends, together with a slight sum advanced by a lady he designated as *ma tante*—although we had not previously been aware, nor do we now believe he possessed such a relative—he started from Paris, accompanied by his carpet bag and his wife, both of which articles he took with him.

Our duty, as faithful historians, imperatively demands we should inform our readers that he did not enjoy the first sight of the white cliffs of old England quite as much as he had imagined would be the case; and this may be accounted for, partly by the fact that, during nearly the entire passage, until the steamer was inside Dover harbour, his face was intently turned towards the bottom of an ordinary wash-hand-basin, and partly because, on the rare occasions he attempted to raise it from that domestic vessel, he was compelled to resume his contemplative attitude almost immediately.

On landing at Dover, Mons. Victor Jollivet had an opportunity of observing that, in one respect at least, national prejudice appeared to have been completely abolished, for he was treated exactly like the

truest Briton that ever trod. At the hotel where he made a temporary halt, he was charged sufficient for a sitting room, a sandwich, and some ale for self and wife to have kept them well in Paris—and every luxury—for a couple of days. Had he been of a sarcastic turn of mind, he might have applied to Englishmen the observation which was once made by some one, or, if it was not, might have been, “*Aux âmes bien nées que la patrie est chère.*” Not being of the turn of mind alluded to, he did no such thing, but hurried off as quickly as possible to the railway station, and took his place in one of the cattle-pens, dignified by the misnomer of third-class carriages. His object in this, as he informed his wife, being, to study the national character: and the result of his researches,—a confused recollection of smock-frocks, flannel-jackets, tobacco-smoke, and a strong odour of fustian.

At last, after being whirled through the labyrinth of squalid roofs and drunken-looking chimneys which form the immediate approach to the metropolis, he reached the terminus. Perhaps it is superfluous on our part to mention that the admirable arrangements made by the directors for enabling passengers to lose their luggage entirely, or, at the least, to experience the greatest difficulty in rescuing it from the hands of some one who has taken it under the notion it is his own, or even without that preliminary impression, were most successfully carried out. It was only by the greatest piece of luck that, after a fruitless search of half-an-hour, and a vast amount of bad blood on the part of the officials, and bad English on that of Mons. Victor Jollivet, that the latter caught sight of his carpet-bag, emerging from the station in the hands of a gentleman, who, however suspicious his appearance, had been actuated by the purest motives. He had simply found the bag, “a-kicking about the platform,” and was looking for the owner.

Mons. Victor Jollivet now engaged a cab, and directed the driver to take him to “Les-ses-tair Squar.” Every Frenchman first proceeds thither, even if he afterwards lodges in Camden-town or Hammersmith-broadway. To the demand of eight shillings as fare, our hero demurred, and proffered five, which were eventually accepted, after a series of remarks by the cabman which Mons. Victor Jollivet supposed, very correctly, were not of a flattering nature. They served to convince him, however, of the truth of his favourite maxim:—“*Pour bien apprécier toutes les beautés d’une langue, il ne suffit pas de comprendre à fond un auteur quelconque, tel que le grand Villyam,* ou Milton.*” Indeed, had the said remarks been conveyed in a course of six or seven private lessons, they would, as specimens of playful invective, have been worth far more than the sum at first demanded, and eventually refused.

Mons. Victor Jollivet, accompanied by his wife and carpet-bag, now commenced searching for lodgings. After two hours’ exertion he perceived, in the window of a house in Rupert-street, a bill announcing “Lodgings for a Single Gentleman.” In reply to what, we must conscientiously designate, from our personal experience of subsequent efforts in the same line, on the part of our hero, was a very ambiguous

* Mons. Jollivet alluded to his favourite author, Shakspeare.

attempt at a double knock, the door was opened—at the expiration of a period which allowed ample time for a minute inspection of the exterior of the mansion—by a slip-shod servant girl, who looked like a maypole, run violently to seed, and had evidently been the inmate of a workhouse in days not long since past; for the traces of such an institution still hung about her, as the odour of stale tobacco clings to a gentleman in the habit of frequenting Frees-and-easies, or Free-and-easies. We are not sure which is the correct expression, and therefore give both, in order that the reader may select which he pleases.

“Well, what’s your business?” inquired the girl.

Mons. Victor Jollivet thought the question rather strange, but he was naturally polite, and, therefore, with a gracious bow, replied,

“My buse—nace—*Je fais dans le vin*—I make in the vine—that is to say—I sell the ou-ine.”

“We don’t want none,” answered the servant. “We never buy it. Master gets his drink over the way at the public-house.”

“There is a mis-comprehension,” observed Mons. Victor Jollivet, beginning to fear his wife might suspect his knowledge of English. “I do demand not to you to take my ou-ine; I want a lojings.”

“Well, then, we ain’t got none, neither,” said the girl. “We don’t keep ’em.”

“Ya-as, but you do—your beel says, lojings”—

“My Bill says nothing of the kind,” replied the handmaiden, growing very red, and evincing a desire to close the door. By accident, a tender chord had been touched within her breast. “If you want lozenges you must go to the chemist,” she continued.

“Why will I go to that person?” inquired our hero, mildly. “Your beel says” (here the young lady winced again) “lojings for a single gentleman.”

“Lodgings! oh, you mean lodgings,” said the girl, highly gratified that her *penchant* for the young gentleman, who performed the duties of pot-boy at the public-house she had previously mentioned, was, after all, not suspected. “Oh, yes, we have got lodgings; I’ll call missus!” and so saying, she proceeded to the end of the passage, and suddenly disappeared through a dark opening, which much resembled a dust-hole, but which was the entrance to the kitchen stairs.

In a few minutes the mistress made her appearance; she looked as if she was born in a lodging-house, bred in a lodging-house, and, moreover, destined to die in a lodging-house. She seemed a woman, who, if suddenly surprised by the accession of immense wealth, or created a peeress in her own right, would pay some one to take rooms under her roof, in order that she might, as an amateur, still be enabled to indulge her propensities for surreptitious cuts off her lodger’s joint, and Eleusinian visits to his tea-caddy. She made a lodging-housekeeper’s curtsy to our hero, and informed him she had an excellent room at his disposal, on the third floor back which she should be happy to let him have at five-and-twenty shillings a-week, first week—down. “Dear? Oh, no, quite the contrary. Rents had gone up very high on account of the Exhibition. Lodgings were not to be had at all—leastwise, not at all reasonable. She never imposed on people herself,

and did not say Mrs. Gubbins at No. 17 round the corner did, but she only knew Mrs. Gubbins must have charged pretty heavy. In fact, she was aware she had. Five-and-twenty shillings was dirt cheap. You did not often get such a room for the money."

The last part of her discourse was founded on truth; for, as a rule, a person gets a respectable room for the sum aforesaid, while that for which Mons. Victor Jollivet was treating would, at a fair tariff, have been let for five shillings, hebdomadally. Situated, as we have already said, up three pairs of stairs, at the back of the house, it afforded the inmate a lively prospect of some leads and dirty brick walls, varied by still dirtier windows, which were apt, in the long run, to prove rather monotonous. It was, too, not bigger than a tolerably-sized cupboard. At last, however, Mons. Victor Jollivet agreed to take it; and, having called his wife, who had hitherto been standing outside, was about to ascend the stairs, when he was stopped by the landlady.

"Begging your pardin, sir, but we don't have ladies," she remarked. "We only let to single gentlemen."

"But I am a single gentleman," observed Mons. Victor Jollivet.

"Well, then, you can't take that lady with you. We don't premit it."

Whether our hero was puzzled by the sound of the word "premit," after it had been thus subjected to the operation, entitled by grammarians metathesis, and which, in this case, consisted in reversing the order of the letters *e* and *r*, we cannot, with certainty, say. All we know is, that he remained silent for an instant, and then asked—

"But, vhy—vhy—vhy can I not go up? Hein?"

"Because," replied the landlady, "as I have told you before, we can only take single gentlemen."

"*Eh, mon Dieu! je le sais,*" replied Mons. Victor Jollivet. "I know you are able but to do that, your beel has told it me."

"Well, then?" observed the landlady, rather sharply.

"Vell, then! *qu'est-ce-que cela fait?* That is not a matter. It imports not to the affair. How would it? I repeat you; I am a single gentleman, and that is my wife."

As this assertion struck the landlady as involving an impossibility, she became impressed with the idea that her visitor was turning her into ridicule. She immediately flew out into a paroxysm of rage, to the great astonishment of the innocent cause thereof, said, with a degree of force and muscular action which went far to disprove her words, that she was a poor weak woman, and ended by calling, in a voice that resembled shrill thunder, to her husband.

That worthy was in the kitchen, as most regular lodging-house-keepers usually are. By nature, he was a carpenter, but having, since the opening of the Great Exhibition, enjoyed a "run" in the way of "letting", had temporarily abandoned the hammer and chisel for the tobacco-pipe and gin-bottle. On hearing his wife's voice, he hastily ran up-stairs. Before gratifying her curiosity, by following his example, the servant-girl took advantage of his absence, and qualified herself for delivering an opinion as to the standard of strength he adopted for gin-and-water.

“Now, then, what’s all this here?” he enquired, as he slouched along to the door.

“Ah, what is this here?” repeated his helpmate, with a slight variation in the form of enquiry, seemingly only for the purpose of indulging an insane propensity for the style rendered so popular by Mr. Pinnock, since she instantly answered the interrogatory, by exclaiming “why, here’s this low, nasty for ineerer, a cowardly, mean—and my own husband a-sitting in the kitchen—which I have to speak to everyone, while he smokes and drinks, so that you could smell him a mile off,”—here the servant-girl retreated several yards, and made a gulp, as if endeavouring to give her throat an airing,—“and what does he care if a mounseer, or all the mounseers in the world, insulted his poor wife?”

“Who insulted you?” asked her husband.

“Why he did!” replied the landlady.

In vain Mons. Jollivet protested he was innocent of the intention of any such thing. In vain did he beg and pray to be informed how he had insulted the lady. His excuses and expressions of sorrow were nullified by his continually asserting: “Vell, *I am* a single gentlemen, and this is my wife.”

“I’m blessed if I stand this,” said the landlord, taking off his jacket, and throwing his brown-paper cap on the oil-cloth, “Oh! you’re a single gentleman, are you, and that is your wife; I’ll single gentleman you, that I will; a-coming and insulting honest, respectable people in this here way.”

Matters were drawing to a crisis; the carpenter had commenced that preliminary, rotatory motion of the arms, which unprofessional pugilists look upon as the essence of sparring, if properly accompanied with a reasonable amount of hopping from one spot to the other. This tribute of delay, offered upon the shrine of Science, in all probability saved what the Fancy would term our hero’s “dial” from serious disfigurement, for it afforded him the time and opportunity of exclaiming:

“*Mais, que me veut-il donc, cet animal-là! I am* a single gentleman, I ree-pit! I am not two gentlemen, am I!”

The mystery was solved, even for the mind of the pugnacious carpenter, who suddenly saw the cause of the misunderstanding. After mutual explanations had been given and received, the whole party—not excepting the *ci-devant* charity girl, whom the toasts, combined with what she had already taken from her master’s glass, rendered rather unsteady in her gait for the remainder of the evening—cemented the *entente cordiale*, by drinking each other’s healths in a bottle of “shin,” procured, at Mons. Victor Jollivet’s express wish and sole expense, from the neighbouring public-house. It is also a gratifying fact, that the landlady was so mollified as to consent to relax the severity of her ordinary rule, and admit Mad. Jollivet for ten shillings extra per week.

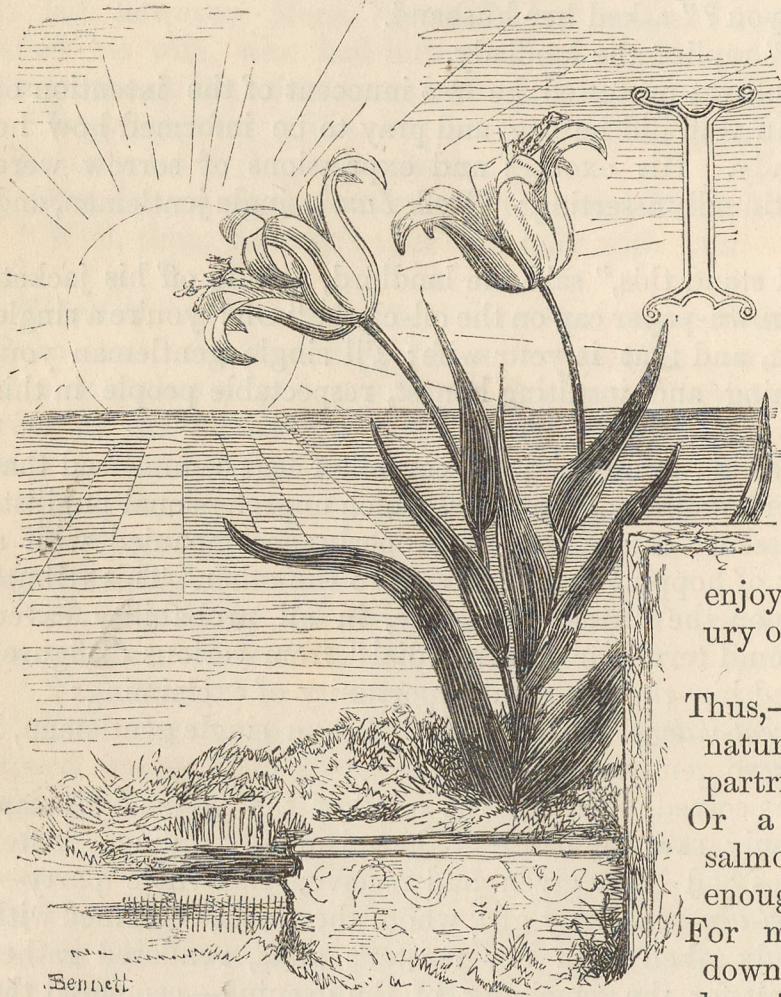
Whenever the English language forms the topic of conversation, Mons. Victor Jollivet—whose friends believe he speaks it like a native; which he really does, only like a native of Paris, and not of London—always recounts the above anecdote with great glee. But, owing no doubt to a defect of memory, which sometimes affects distinguished individuals—as we perceive from his *Wahrheit und Dichtung* that it

affected Goethe—he states the adventure as happening to an acquaintance of his, of the name of Prévôt, adding, with the air of a man who knows what he is about, “*C’était bien drôle tout de même. Il aurait dû savoir, cependant, que single man veut dire un homme non marié—un garçon.*”

By a strange chance, he never relates the anecdote in the presence of Mad. Victor Jollivet.

A STORY FROM BOCCACCIO.

BY ROBERT B. BROUGH.



HAVE got a certain habit that approaches to a merit,

Yet is something of a weakness, and a trifle of a bore ;

'Tis that when I meet a pleasure, I must call a friend to share it, Or I miss, of its enjoyment, half the luxury or more.

Thus,—when some good-natured crony sends a partridge or a pheasant, Or a trout, or river-salmon, that is not enough for two, For my life I can't sit down to dine alone, howe'er unpleasant

Comes the mutton anti-climax that must eke the dinner through.

Or, again,—I've got a garden, rather famous for its roses,

But still more so for its artichokes, its beans, and early peas ;

Well, when any of these favourites begin to show their noses,

I approach the garden-wall and cry, “Step here, sir, if you please.”

'Tis to Mr. Jones, my neighbour, to partake my exultation ;

But, if Mr. Jones be absent from his rake and pruning-hook,

I must press the nearest biped in the cause of admiration,

If it's only Tom the stable boy, or Margery the cook.