MAX O'RELL

JOHN BULL, JUNIOR: OR, FRENCH AS SHE IS TRADUCED

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Содержание

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PREFACE

It must be that a too free association with American men of letters has moved the author of this book to add to his fine Gallic wit a touch of that preposterousness which is supposed to be characteristic of American humor.

For proof of this, I cite the fact that he has asked me to introduce him upon this occasion. Surely there could be no more grotesque idea than that any word of mine can serve to make Max O'Rell better known than he is to the great company of American readers.

Have not the pirate publishers already introduced him to all Americans who care for literature? Have not their translators done their best, not only to bring his writings to the attention of readers, but also to add to the sparkle and vivacity of his books by translating into them many things not to be found in the French originals? These generous folk, who have thus liberally supplemented his wit with flashes of their own stupidity, have treated his text after the manner of a celebrated Kentuckian of

whom it was written that his love of truth was so great that he gave his entire time and attention to the task of ornamenting and adding to it.

But with all their eagerness to render interested service to a distinguished man of letters who was not then here to look after his own affairs, the pirates missed this, the best of his books; and finding that no surreptitious edition of it has appeared in this country, the author has felt himself privileged to re-write it and make such changes in it and additions to it as his own judgment has suggested without the prompting of voluntary assistants, and even to negotiate with a publisher for the issue of an edition on his own account.

I have called this work the best of Max O'Rell's books, and I think the reader will approve the judgment. Here, as in all that this author has written, there is a biting wit, which saturates the serious substance as good, sharp vinegar pervades a pickle; but here, as elsewhere, the main purpose is earnest, and the wit is but an aid to its accomplishment. A very wise and distinguished educator has declared that "the whole theory of education is to be extracted from these humorous sketches," and the story goes – whether Max O'Rell will vouch for its accuracy or not, I do not venture to say – that the head boy of St. Paul's School in London, after hearing the sketches read in public, said: "We boys enjoyed the lecture immensely, but *that fellow knows too much about us*."

With a tremor of apprehension, we reflect that Max O'Rell's period of observation among ourselves will presently end, and

that when he comes to record the result in his peculiar fashion, we are likely to echo that school-boy's plaint. But at any rate we shall know our own features better after we have contemplated them in his mirror; and, meantime, those of us who have enjoyed his acquaintance are disposed earnestly to hope that a guest whom we have learned to esteem so warmly may not think quite so ill of the American character as the barbaric condition of our laws respecting literary property would warrant.

George Cary Eggleston.

New York, February, 1888.

INTRODUCTION

A Word to the Reader and another to the Critic

To write a book in a foreign tongue is risky, and I had better at once ask for indulgence.

The many scenes and reminiscences belong to England, and, if translated into French, the anecdotes and conversations would lose much of whatever flavour and interest there may be in them.

This is my reason for not having written this book in French. Let my reason be also my apology.

If any of my readers should feel inclined to think my review of British school-boys somewhat critical, let them take it for granted that when I was a boy I was everything that was good.

Now, gentle American Critic, whose magnanimity is proverbial, before thou abusest this little book, reflect how thou wouldst feel if thy Editor were to bid thee write thy criticism in French.

Max O'Rell.

I

I am Born. – I am Deeply in Love. – I wish to be an Artiste, but my Father uses Strong Argument against it. – I Produce a Dramatic Chef-d'œuvre. – Parisian Managers Fail to Appreciate it. – I put on a Beautiful Uniform. – The Consequence of it. – Two Episodes of the Franco-Prussian War. – The Commune Explained by a Communist. – A "Glorious" Career Cut Short. – I take a Resolution, and a Ticket to London.

I was born on the —
But this is scarcely a "recollection" of mine.

At twelve I was deeply in love with a little girl of my own age. Our servants were friends, and it was in occasional meetings of these girls in the public gardens of my little native town that my chief chance of making love to Marie lay. Looking back on this little episode in my life, I am inclined to think that it afforded much amusement to our attendants. My love was too deep for words; I never declared my flame aloud. But, oh, what a fluttering went on under my small waistcoat every time I had

the ineffable pleasure of a nod from her, and what volumes of love I put into my bow as I lifted my cap and returned her salute! We made our first communion on the same day. I was a pupil of the organist, and it was arranged that I should play a short piece during the Offertory on that occasion. I had readily acquiesced in the proposal. Here was my chance of declaring myself; through the medium of the music I could tell her all my lips refused to utter. She must be moved, she surely would understand.

Whether she did or not, I never had the bliss of knowing. Shortly after that memorable day, my parents removed from the country to Paris. The thought of seeing her no more nearly broke my heart, and when the stage-coach reached the top of the last hill from which the town could be seen, my pent-up feelings gave way and a flood of tears came to my relief.

The last time I visited those haunts of my childhood, I heard that "little Marie" was the mamma of eight children. God bless that mamma and her dear little brood!

At fifteen I was passionately fond of music, and declared to my father that I had made up my mind to be an artiste.

My father was a man of great common sense and few words: he administered to me a sound thrashing, which had the desired

effect of restoring my attentions to Cicero and Thucydides.

It did not, however, altogether cure me of a certain yearning after literary glory.

For many months I devoted the leisure, left me by Greek version and Latin verse, to the production of a drama in five acts and twelve tableaux.

For that matter I was no exception to the rule. Every French school-boy has written, is writing, or will write a play.

My drama was a highly moral one of the sensational class. Blood-curdling, horrible, terrible, savage, weird, human, fiendish, fascinating, irresistible – it was all that. I showed how, even in this world, crime, treachery, and falsehood, though triumphant for a time, must in the long run have their day of reckoning. Never did a modern Drury Lane audience see virtue more triumphant and vice more utterly confounded than the Parisians would have in my play, if only the theatrical directors had not been so stupid as to refuse my *chef-d'œuvre*.

For it was refused, inconceivable as it seemed to me at the time.

The directors of French theatres are accustomed to send criticisms of the plays which "they regret to be unable to accept."

The criticism I received from the director of the Ambigu Theatre was, I thought, highly encouraging.

"My play," it appeared, "showed no experience of the stage; but it was full of well-conceived scenes and happy *mots*, and was written in excellent French. Horrors, however, were too piled up, and I seemed to have forgotten that spectators should be allowed time to take breath and wipe away their tears."

I was finally advised not to kill all my *dramatis personæ* in my next dramatic production, as it was customary for one of them to come forward and announce the name of the author at the end of the first performance.

Although this little bit of advice appeared to me not altogether free from satire, there was in the letter more praise than I had expected, and I felt proud and happy. The letter was passed round in the class-room, commented upon in the playground, and I was so excited that I can perfectly well remember how I forgot to learn my repetition that day, and how I got forty lines of the *Ars Poetica* to write out five times.

What a take-down, this imposition upon a budding dramatic author!

Examinations to prepare compelled me for some time to

postpone all idea of astonishing the Paris playgoers with a "new and original" drama.

I took my B.A. at the end of that year, and my B.Sc. at the end of the following one. Three years later I was leaving the military school with the rank of sub-lieutenant.

My uniform was lovely; and if I had only had as much gold in my pockets as on my shoulders, sleeves, and breast, I think I ought to have been the happiest being on earth.

The proudest day of a young French officer's life is the day on which he goes out in the street for the first time with all his ironmongery on, his moustache curled up, his cap on his right ear, his sabre in his left hand. The soldiers he meets salute him, the ladies seem to smile approvingly upon him; he feels like the conquering hero of the day; all is bright before him; battles only suggest to him victories and promotions.

On the first day, his mother generally asks to accompany him, and takes his arm. Which is the prouder of the two? the young warrior, full of confidence and hope, or the dear old lady who looks at the passers-by with an air that says: "This is my son, ladies and gentlemen. As for you, young ladies, he can't have all of you, you know."

Poor young officer! dear old mother! They little knew, in 1869, that in a few months one would be lying in a military hospital on a bed of torture, and the other would be wondering for five mortal months whether her dear and only child was dead, or prisoner in some German fortress.

On the 19th of July, 1870, my regiment left Versailles for the Eastern frontier.

As in these pages I simply intend to say how I came to make the acquaintance of English school-boys, it would be out of place, if not somewhat pretentious, to make use of my recollections of the Franco-Prussian War.

Yet I cannot pass over two episodes of those troublous times.

I was twelve years of age when I struck up a friendship with a young Pole, named Gajeski, who was in the same class with me. We became inseparable chums. Year after year we got promoted at the same time. We took our degrees on the same days, entered the military school in the same year, and received our commissions in the same regiment.

We took a small *appartement de garçon* at Versailles, and I shall never forget the delightful evenings we spent together while in garrison there. He was a splendid violinist, and I was a little of a pianist.

Short, fair, and almost beardless, Gajeski was called the "Petit Lieutenant" by the soldiers, who all idolized him.

At the battle of Wörth, after holding our ground from nine in the morning till five in the evening, against masses of Prussian troops six times as numerous as our own, we were ordered to charge the enemy, with some other cavalry regiments, in order to protect the retreat of the bulk of the army.

A glance at the hill opposite convinced us that we were ordered to go to certain death.

My dear friend grasped my hand, as he said with a sad smile: "We shall be lucky if we get our bones out of this, old fellow."

Down the hill we went like the wind, through a shower of bullets and *mitraille*. Two minutes later, about two-thirds of the regiment reached the opposite ascent. We were immediately engaged in a desperate hand-to-hand fight. A scene of hellish confusion it was. But there, amidst the awful din of battle, I heard Gajeski's death-cry, as he fell from his horse three or four yards from me, and I saw a horrible gash on his fair young head.

The poor boy had paid France for the hospitality she had extended to his father.

I fought like a madman, seeing nothing but that dear mutilated face before my eyes. I say "like a madman," for it was not through courage or bravery. In a *mêlée* you fight like a madman – like a savage.

I had no brother, but he had been more than a brother to me. I had had no other companion or friend, but he was a friend of

a thousand.

Poor fellow!

I had been in captivity in a stronghold on the Rhine for five months, when the preliminaries of peace were signed between France and Germany in January, 1871, and the French prisoners were sent back to their country.

About five hundred of us were embarked at Hamburg on board one of the steamers of the Compagnie Transatlantique, and landed at Cherbourg.

Finding myself near home, I immediately asked the general in command of the district for a few days' leave, to go and see my mother.

Since the day I had been taken prisoner at Sedan (2d of September, 1870), I had not received a single letter from her, as communications were cut off between the east and the west of France; and I learned later on that she had not received any of the numerous letters I had written to her from Germany.

This part of Normandy had been fortunate enough to escape the horrors of war, but, for months, the inhabitants had had to lodge soldiers and militia-men.

At five o'clock on a cold February morning, clothed, or rather

covered, in my dirty, half-ragged uniform, I rang the bell at my mother's house.

Our old servant appeared at the attic window, and inquired what I wanted.

"Open the door," I cried; "I am dying of cold."

"We can't lodge you here," she replied; "we have as many soldiers as we can accommodate – there is no room for you. Go to the Town Hall, they will tell you we are full."

"*Sapristi*, my good Fanchette," I shouted, "don't you know me? How is mother?"

"Ah! It is Monsieur!" she screamed. And she rushed down, filling the house with her cries: "Madame, madame, it is Monsieur; yes, I have seen him, he has spoken to me, it is Monsieur."

A minute after I was in my mother's arms.

Was it a dream?

She looked at me wildly, touching my head to make sure I was at her side, in reality, alive; when she realized the truth she burst into tears, and remained speechless for some time. Such scenes are more easily imagined than described, and I would rather leave it to the reader to supply all the exclamations and interrogations that followed.

I could only spend two days at home, as my regiment was being organized in Paris, and I had to join it.

On the 18th of March, 1871, the people of Paris, in possession of all the armament that had been placed in their hands to defend the French capital against the Prussians, proclaimed the Commune, and, probably out of a habit just lately got into by the French army, we retreated to Versailles, leaving Paris at the mercy of the Revolutionists.

This is not the place to account for this revolution.

An explanation of it, which always struck me as somewhat forcible, is the one given by a Communist prisoner to a captain, a friend of mine, who was at the time acting as *juge d'instruction* to one of the Versailles courts-martial.

"Why did you join the Commune?" he asked a young and intelligent-looking fellow who had been taken prisoner behind some barricade.

"Well, captain, I can hardly tell you. We were very excited in Paris; in fact, off our heads with rage at having been unable to save Paris. We had a considerable number of cannon and ammunition, which we were not allowed to use against the Prussians. We felt like a sportsman who, after a whole day's wandering through the country, has not had an opportunity of discharging his gun at any game, and who, out of spite, shoots his dog, just to be able to say on returning home that he had killed something."

On the 14th of April, 1871, my regiment received the order to attack the Neuilly bridge, a formidable position held by the Communists.

What the Prussians had not done some compatriot of mine succeeded in doing. I fell severely wounded.

After my spending five months in the Versailles military hospital, and three more at home in convalescence, the army surgeons declared that I should no longer be able to use my right arm for military purposes, and I was granted a lieutenant's pension, which would have been just sufficient to keep me in segars if I had been a smoker.

But of this I do not complain. Poor France! she had enough to pay!

At the end of the year of grace, 1871, my position was very much like that of my beloved country: all seemed lost, *fors l'honneur*.

Through my friends, however, I was soon offered a choice

between two "social positions."

The first was a colonel's commission in the Egyptian army (it seemed that the state of my right arm was no objection).

I was to draw a very good salary. My friends in Cairo, however, warned me that salaries were not always paid very regularly, but sometimes allowed to run on till cash came into the Treasury. It was during the good times of Ismail Pacha. This made me a little suspicious that my salary might run on so fast that I should not be able to catch it.

The other post offered me was that of London correspondent to an important Parisian newspaper.

I had had enough of military "glory" by this time. Yet the prospect of an adventurous life is always more or less fascinating at twenty-three years of age.

Being the only child of a good widowed mother, I thought I would take her valuable advice on the subject.

I am fortunate in having a mother full of common sense. With her French provincial ideas, she was rather startled to hear that a disabled lieutenant could all at once become an active colonel. She thought that somehow the promotion was too rapid.

Alas! she, too, had had enough of military "glory."

Her advice was to be followed, for it was formulated thus: "You speak English pretty well; we have a good many friends in England; accept the humbler offer, and go to England to earn an honest living."

This is how I was not with Arabi Pacha on the wrong side at Tel-el-Kebir, and how it became my lot to make one day the acquaintance of the British school-boy of whom I shall have more to say by-and-by.

On the 8th of July, 1872, I took the London train at the *Gare du Nord*, Paris.

Many relations and friends came to the station to see me off. Some had been in England, some had read books on England, but all seemed to know a great deal about it. Advice, cautions, suggestions, were poured into my ears.

"Be sure you go and see Madame Tussaud's to-morrow," said one.

"Now," said another, "when you get to Charing Cross, don't fail to try and catch hold of a fellow-passenger's coat, and hold fast till you get to your hotel. The fog is so thick in the evening that the lamp-lights are of no use, you know."

All information is valuable when you start for a foreign

country. But I could not listen to more. Time was up.

I shook hands with my friends and kissed my relations, including an uncle and two cousins of the sterner sex. This will sound strange to English or American ears. Well, it sounds just as strange to mine, now.

I do not know that a long residence in England has greatly improved me (though my English friends say it has), but what I do know is, that I could not now kiss a man, even if he were a bequeathing uncle ready to leave me all his money.

II

EXTRACTS FROM THE DIARY OF A FRENCHMAN IN SEARCH OF A SOCIAL POSITION IN ENGLAND

Arrival at Charing Cross. – I have Nothing to Declare to the Exciseman but Low Spirits. – Difficulty in Finding a Good Residence. – Board and Lodging. – A House with Creepers. – Things look Bad. – Things look Worse. – Things look Cheerful.

8th July, 1872

8.30 P.M. – Landed at Folkestone. The London train is ready. The fog is very thick. I expected as much. My English traveling companions remark on it, and exclaim that "this is most unusual weather." This makes me smile.

10.15 P.M. – The train crosses the Thames. We are in London. This is not my station, however, I am told. The train restarts almost immediately, and crosses the river again. Perhaps it takes me back to Paris. Hallo! how strange! the train crosses another river.

"This is a town very much like Amsterdam," I say to my neighbor.

He explains to me the round taken by the South-Eastern trains from Cannon Street to Charing Cross.

10.25 P.M. – Charing Cross! At last, here I am. The luggage is on the platform. I recognize my trunk and portmanteau.

A tall official addresses me in a solemn tone:

"Have you any thing to declare?"

"Not any thing."

"No segars, tobacco, spirits?"

"No segars, no tobacco."

My spirits were so low that I thought it was useless to mention them.

In France, in spite of this declaration of mine, my luggage would have been turned inside out. The sturdy Briton takes my word[1] and dismisses my luggage with:

"All right. Take it away."

11 P.M. – I alight at an hotel near the Strand. A porter comes to take my belongings.

"I want a bedroom for the night," I say.

"*Très bien, monsieur.*"

He speaks French. The hotel is French, too, I see.

After a wash and brush-up, I come down to the dining-room for a little supper.

I do not like the look of the company.

[1] Things have changed in England since the dynamite scare.

They may be French, and this is a testimonial in their favor, but I am afraid it is the only one.

Three facetious bagmen exercise their wit by puzzling the waiter with low French slang.

I think I will remove from here to-morrow.

I go to my bedroom, and try to open the window and have a look at the street. I discover the trick.

How like guillotines are these English windows!

I pull up the bottom part of mine, and look out. This threatening thing about my neck makes me uncomfortable. I withdraw.

English windows are useful, no doubt, but it is evident that the people of this country do not use them to look out in the street and have a quiet chat *à la française*.

Probably the climate would not allow it.

9th July, 1872

A friend comes to see me. He shares my opinion of the French hotel, and will look for a comfortable apartment in an English house for me. We breakfast together, and I ask him a thousand questions.

He knows every thing, it seems, and I gather valuable information rapidly.

He prepares a programme of sight-seeing which it will take me a good many days to work through.

The weather is glorious.

My boxes are packed and ready to be removed – to-night, I hope.

Will pay my first visit to the British Museum.

I hail a cab in Regent Circus.

"Is the British Museum far from here?" I cry to the man seated on a box behind.

"No, sir; I will take you there for a shilling," he replies.

"Oh! thank you; I think I will walk then."

Cabby retires muttering a few sentences unintelligible to me. Only one word constantly occurring in his harangue can I remember.

I open my pocket-dictionary.

Good heavens! What have I said to the man? What has he taken me for? Have I used words conveying to his mind any intention of mine to take his precious life? Do I look ferocious? Why did he repeatedly call me *sanguinaire*? Must have this mystery cleared up.

10th July, 1872

An English friend sets my mind at rest about the little event of

yesterday. He informs me that the adjective in question carries no meaning. It is simply a word that the lower classes have to place before each substantive they use in order to be able to understand each other.

11th July, 1872

Have taken apartments in the neighborhood of Baker Street. My landlady, *qui frise ses cheveux et la cinquantaine*, enjoys the name of Tribble. She is a plump, tidy, and active-looking little woman.

On the door there is a plate, with the inscription,

"J. Tribble, General Agent."

Mr. Tribble, it seems, is not very much engaged in business.

At home he makes himself useful.

It was this gentleman, more or less typical in London, whom I had in my mind's eye as I once wrote:

"The English social failure of the male sex not unfrequently entitles himself *General Agent*: this is the last straw he clutches at; if it should break, he sinks, and is heard of no more, unless

his wife come to the rescue, by setting up a lodging-house or a boarding-school for young ladies. There, once more in smooth water, he wields the blacking-brush, makes acquaintance with the knife-board, or gets in the provisions. In allowing himself to be kept by his wife, he feels he loses some dignity; but if she should adopt any airs of superiority over him, he can always bring her to a sense of duty by beating her."

12th July, 1872

Mr. Tribble helps take up my trunks. On my way to bed my landlady informs me that her room adjoins mine, and if I need any thing in the night I have only to ask for it.

This landlady will be a mother to me, I can see.

The bed reminds me of a night I passed in a cemetery, during the Commune, sleeping on a gravestone. I turn and toss, unable to get any rest.

Presently I had the misfortune to hit my elbow against the mattress.

A knock at the door.

"Who is there?" I cry.

"Can I get you any thing, sir? I hope you are not ill," says a

voice which I recognize as that of my landlady.

"No, why?"

"I thought you knocked, sir."

"No. Oh! I knocked my elbow against the mattress."

"Ah! that's it. I beg your pardon."

I shall be well attended here, at all events.

13th July, 1872

The table here is not *recherché*; but twelve months' campaigning have made me tolerably easy to please.

What would not the poor Parisians have given, during the Siege in 1870, for some of Mrs. Tribble's obdurate poultry and steaks!

19th July, 1872

I ask Mrs. Tribble for my bill.

I received it immediately; it is a short and comprehensive one:

	£	*s.*	*d.*
Board and Lodging	5	5	0
Sundries	1	13	6
Total	£6	18	6

I can understand "lodging"; but "board" is a new word to me. I like to know what it is I have to pay for, and I open my dictionary.

"Board (subst.), *planche*."

Planche! Why does the woman charge me for a *planche*? Oh! I have it – that's the bed, of course.

My dictionary does not enlighten me on the subject of "Sundries."

I make a few observations to Mrs. Tribble on the week's bill. This lady explains to me that she has had great misfortunes, that Tribble hardly does any work, and does not contribute a penny toward the household expenses. When he has done a little stroke of business, he takes a holiday, and only reappears when his purse is empty.

I really cannot undertake to keep Tribble in *dolce far niente*, and I give Mrs. Tribble notice to leave.

20th July, 1872

9 A.M. – I read in this morning's paper the following advertisement:

> "Residence, with or without board, for a gentleman, in a healthy suburb of London. Charming house, with creepers, large garden; cheerful home. Use of piano, etc."

"Without board" is what I want. Must go and see the place.

6 P.M. – I have seen the house with creepers, and engaged a bedroom and sitting-room. Will go there to-night. My bed is provided with a spring mattress. Won't I sleep to-night, that's all!

21st July, 1872

I remove my goods and chattels from the charming house. I found the creepers were inside.

It will take me a long time to understand English, I am afraid.

8th August, 1872

I examine my financial position. I came to England with fifty pounds; have been here thirty days, and have lived at the rate of a pound a day. My money will last me only twenty days longer. This seems to be a simple application of the rule of three.

The thought that most Lord-Mayors have come to London with only half-a-crown in their pockets comforts me. Still I grow reflective.

25th September, 1872

I can see that the fee I receive for the weekly letter I send to my Parisian paper will not suffice to keep me. Good living is expensive in London. Why should I not reduce my expenses, and at the same time improve my English by teaching French in an English school as resident master? This would enable me to wait and see what turn events will take.

I have used my letters of recommendation as a means of obtaining introductions in society, and my pride will not let me make use of them again for business.

I will disappear for a time. When my English is more reliable, perhaps an examination will open the door of some good berth to me.

3rd October, 1872

Received this morning an invitation to be present at a meeting of the Teachers' Association.

Came with a friend to the Society of Arts, where the meeting is held in a beautiful hall, and presided over by Canon Barry.

What a graceful and witty speaker!

He addresses to private school-masters a few words on their duty.

"Yours," he says, "is not only a profession, it is a vocation, I had almost said a ministry" (hear, hear), "and the last object of yours should be to make money."

This last sentence is received with rapturous applause. The chairman has evidently expressed the feeling of the audience.

The Canon seems to enjoy himself immensely.

Beautiful sentiments! I say to myself. Who will henceforth dare say before me, in France, that England is not a disinterested nation? Yes, I will be a school-master; it is a noble profession.

A discussion takes place on the merits of private schools. A good deal of abuse is indulged in at the expense of the public schools.

I inquire of my friend the reason why.

My friend is a sceptic. He says that the public schools are overflowing with boys, and that if they did not exist, many of these private school-masters would make their fortune.

I bid him hold his wicked tongue. He ought to be ashamed of himself.

The meeting is over. The orators, with their speeches in their hands, besiege the press reporters' table. I again apply to my friend for the explanation of this.

He tells me that these gentlemen are trying to persuade the reporters to insert their speeches in their notes, in the hope that they will be reproduced in to-morrow's papers, and thus advertise their names and schools.

My friend is incorrigible. I will ask him no more questions.

4th October, 1872

There will be some people disappointed this morning, if I am to believe what my friend said yesterday. I have just read the papers. Under the heading "Meeting of the Teachers' Association," I see a long report of yesterday's proceedings at the Society of Arts. Canon Barry's speech alone is reproduced.

24th May, 1873

For many months past, M. Thiers has carried the Government with his resignation already signed in his frockcoat pocket.

"Gentlemen," he has been wont to say in the Houses of Parliament, "such is my policy. If you do not approve it, you know that I do not cling to power; my resignation is here in my pocket, and I am quite ready to lay it on the table if you refuse me a vote of confidence."

I always thought that he would use this weapon once too often.

A letter, just received from Paris, brings me the news of his overthrow and the proclamation of Marshal MacMahon as President of the Republic.

28th May, 1873

The editor of the French paper, of which I have been the

London correspondent for a few months, sends me a check, with the sad intelligence that one of the first acts of the new Government has been to suppress our paper.

Things are taking a gloomy aspect, and no mistake.

12th June, 1873

To return to France at once would be a retreat, a defeat. I will not leave England, at any rate, before I can speak English correctly and fluently. I could manage this when a child; it ought not to take me very long to be able to do the same now.

I pore over the *Times* educational advertisements every day.

Have left my name with two scholastic agents.

25th June, 1873

I have put my project into execution, and engaged myself in a school in Somersetshire.

The post is not a brilliant one, but I am told that the country is pretty, my duties light, and that I shall have plenty of time for reading.

I buy a provision of English books, and mean to work hard.

In the mean time, I write to my friends in France that I am getting on swimmingly.

I have always been of the opinion that you should run the risk of exciting the envy rather than the pity of your friends, when you have made up your mind not to apply to them for a five-pound note.

(M – , Somerset.) *2d August, 1873*

Arrived here yesterday. Find I am the only master, and expected to make myself generally useful. My object is to practice my English, and I am prepared to overlook many annoyances.

Woke up this (Sunday) morning feeling pains all over. Compared to this, my bed at Mrs. Tribble's was one of roses. I look round. In the corner I see a small washstand. A chair, a looking-glass six inches square hung on the wall, and my trunk, make up the furniture.

I open the window. It is raining a thick, drizzling rain. Not a soul in the road. A most solemn, awful solitude. Horrible! I make haste to dress. From a little cottage, on the other side of the road, the plaintive sounds of a harmonium reach me. I sit

on my bed and look at my watch. Half an hour to wait for my breakfast. The desolate room, this outlook from the window, the whole accompanied by the hymn on the harmonium, are enough to drive me mad. Upon my word, I believe I feel the corner of my eye wet. Cheer up, boy! No doubt this is awful, but better times will come. Good heavens! You are not banished from France. With what pleasure your friends will welcome you back in Paris! In nine hours, for a few shillings, you can be on the Boulevards.

Breakfast is ready. It consists of tea and bread and butter, the whole honored by the presence of Mr. and Mrs. R. I am told that I am to take the boys to church. I should have much preferred to go alone.

On the way to church we met three young ladies – the Squire's daughters, the boys tell me. They look at me with a kind of astonishment that seems to me mixed with scorn. This is probably my fancy. Every body I meet seems to be laughing at me.

20th August, 1873

Am still at M., teaching a little French and learning a good deal of English.

Mrs. R. expresses her admiration for my fine linen, and my wardrobe is a wonder to her. From her remarks, I can see she has taken a peep inside my trunk.

Received this morning a letter from a friend in Paris. The dear

fellow is very proud of his noble ancestors, and his notepaper and envelopes are ornamented with his crest and crown. The letter is handed to me by Mrs. R., who at the same time throws a significant glance at her husband. I am a mysterious person in her eyes, that is evident. She expresses her respect by discreetly placing a boiled egg on my plate at breakfast. This is an improvement, and I return thanks *in petto* to my noble friend in Paris.

22nd August, 1873

Whatever may be Mr. R.'s shortcomings, he knows how to construct a well-filled time-table.

I rise at six.

From half-past six to eight I am in the class-room seeing that the boys prepare their lessons.

At eight I partake of a frugal breakfast.

From half-past eight till half-past nine I take the boys for a walk.

From half-past nine till one I teach more subjects than I feel competent to do, but I give satisfaction.

At one I dine.

At five minutes to two I take a bell, and go in the fields, ringing as hard as I can to call the boys in.

From two to four I teach more subjects than – (I said that before).

After tea I take the boys for a second walk.

My evenings are mine, and I devote them to study.

23rd August, 1873

Mr. R. proposes that I should teach two or three new subjects. I am ready to comply with his wishes; but I sternly refuse to teach *la valse à trois temps*.

He advises me to cane the boys. This also I refuse to do.

15th September, 1873

I cannot stand this life any longer. I will return to France if things do not take a brighter turn.

I leave Mr. R. and his "Dotheboys Hall."

At the station I meet the clergyman. He had more than once spoken to me a few kind words. He asks me where I am going.

"To London, and to Paris next, I hope," I reply.

"Are you in a hurry to go back?"

"Not particularly; but – "

"Well, will you do my wife and myself the pleasure of spending a few days with us at the Vicarage? We shall be delighted if you will."

"With all my heart."

25th September, 1873

Have spent a charming week at the Vicarage – a lovely country-house, where for the first time I have seen what real English life is.

I have spoken to my English friend of my prospects, and he expresses his wonder that I do not make use of the letters of recommendation that I possess, as they would be sure to secure a good position for me.

"Are not important posts given by examination in this country?" I exclaimed.

But he informs me that such is not the case; that these posts are given, at elections, to the candidates who are bearers of the best testimonials.

The information is most valuable, and I will act upon my friend's advice.

My visit has been as pleasant as it has been useful.

12th January, 1874

A vacancy occurred lately in one of the great public schools. I sent in my application, accompanied by my testimonials.

Have just received an official intimation that I am elected head-master of the French school at St. Paul's.

14th January, 1874

One piece of good luck never comes alone.

I am again appointed London correspondent to one of the

principal Paris papers.

Allons, me voilà sauvé!

III

I Make the Acquaintance of Public School Boys. – "When I Was a Little Boy." – An Awful Moment. – A Simple Theory. – I Score a Success.

I am not quite sure that the best qualification for a schoolmaster is to have been a very good boy.

I never had great admiration for very good boys. I always suspected, when they were too good, that there was something wrong.

When I was at school, and my master would go in for the recitation of the litany of all the qualities and virtues he possessed when a boy – how good, how dutiful, how obedient, how industrious he was – I would stare at him, and think to myself: How glad that man must be he is no longer a boy!

"No, my dear little fellows, your master was just like you when he was mamma's little boy. He shirked his work whenever he could; he used to romp and tear his clothes if he had a chance, and was far from being too good for this world; and if he was not all that, well, I am only sorry for him, that's all."

I believe that the man who thoroughly knows all the resources of the mischievous little army he has to fight and rule is better qualified and prepared for the struggle.

We have in French an old proverb that says: "It's no use trying to teach an old monkey how to make faces."

The best testimonial in favor of a school-master is that the boys should be able to say of him: "It's no use trying this or that with him; he always knows what we are up to."

How is he to know what his pupils are "up to" if he has not himself been "up to" the same tricks and games?

The base of all strategy is the perfect knowledge of all the roads of the country in which you wage war.

To be well up in all the ways and tricks of boys is to be aware of all the moves of the enemy.

It is an awful moment when, for the first time, you take your seat in front of forty pairs of bright eyes that are fixed upon you, and seem to say:

"Well, what shall it be? Do you think you can keep us in order, or are we going to let you have a lively time of it?"

All depends on this terrible moment. Your life will be one of comfort, and even happiness, or one of utter wretchedness.

Strike the first blow and win, or you will soon learn that if you do not get the better of the lively crew they will surely get the better of you.

I was prepared for the baptism of fire.

I even had a little theory that had once obtained for me the good graces of a head-master.

This gentleman informed me that the poor fellow I was going to replace had shot himself in despair of being ever able to keep his boys in order, and he asked me what I thought of it.

"Well," I unhesitatingly answered, "I would have shot the boys."

"Right!" he exclaimed; "you are my man."

If, as I strongly suspected from certain early reminiscences, to have been a mischievous boy was a qualification for being a good school-master, I thought I ought to make a splendid one.

The result of my first interview with British boys was that we understood each other perfectly. We were to make a happy family. That was settled in a minute by a few glances at each other.

IV

The "Genus" Boy. – The Only One I Object To. – What Boys Work For.

Boys lose their charm when they get fifteen or sixteen years of age. The clever ones, no doubt, become more interesting to the teacher, but they no longer belong to the *genus* boy that you love for his very defects as much as for his good qualities.

I call "boys" that delightful, lovable race of young scamps from eleven to fourteen years old. At that age all have redeeming points, and all are lovable. I never objected to any, except perhaps to those who aimed at perfection, especially the ones who were successful in their efforts.

For my part, I like a boy with a redeeming fault or two.

By "boys" I mean little fellows who manage, after a game of football, to get their right arm out of order, that they may be excused writing their exercises for a week or so; who do not work because they have an examination to prepare, but because you offer them an inducement to do so, whether in the shape of rewards, or maybe something less pleasant you may keep in your cupboard.

V

School Boys I have Met. – Promising Britons. – Sly-Boots. – Too Good for this World. – "No, Thanks, We Makes It." – French Dictionaries. – A Naughty Boy. – Mothers' Pets. – Dirty but Beautiful. – John Bully. – High Collars and Brains. – Dictation and its Trials. – Not to be Taken In. – Unlucky Boys. – The Use of Two Ears. – A Boy with One Idea. – Master Whirligig. – The Influence of Athletics. – A Good Situation. – A Shrewd Boy of Business. – Master Algernon Cadwaladr Smyth, and Other Typical Schoolboys.

Master Johnny Bull is a good little boy who sometimes makes slips in his exercises, but mistakes – never.

Конец ознакомительного фрагмента.