

O'Rell Max

**English Pharisees French
Crocodiles, and Other
Anglo-French Typical...**



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French Typical Characters

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Max O'Rell

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To Jonathan

You have been kind enough to receive favorably two volumes of unpretentious impressions of your great and most hospitable country, published in 1889 and 1891.

You are a dear friend and a delightful fellow. You are on the road that will safely lead you to the discovery of everything that can insure the prosperity of the land of which you are so justly proud.

Yet the Old World can teach you something; not how to work, but how to live.

I have drawn a few sketches for you. Perhaps they will show you that people can be happy without rolling in wealth, or living in a furnace.

Take up this little book and, lighting a cigar, lie down quietly on the grass and read it under the shade of a tree.

CHAPTER I.

FOREIGNERS

People very often speak ill of their neighbors, not out of wickedness, but merely out of laziness; it is so much easier to do so than to study their qualities and all the circumstances that might oblige you to change your opinion.

For instance, some fifty years ago, a great English wit, Sydney Smith, said that it required a surgical operation to make a Scotchman understand a joke.

Well, an English joke, he probably meant.

However, the satire was neatly expressed. When the English get hold of a good joke, and see it, it lasts them a long time.

The Scotch are a hundred times more witty and humorous than the English; but John Bull still goes on affirming that "it requires a surgical operation to make a Scotchman understand a joke."



If such misunderstanding can exist between the English and the Scotch, just imagine what feelings the natives of a land can inspire in foreigners.

Oh! that word *foreigner*!

In some ears it sounds like bastards. In some people's minds, it is the synonym of bad. The English greengrocer, for instance, divides his asparagus into large and small heads. The fine large ones he binds together and sells at high prices under the name of English asparagus. The bundles of threads at one shilling figure in his shop window as *foreign*.

In England, the adjective *English* is synonymous with *excellent*. In France, we have an adjective that signifies *excellent*, too, and that is the adjective *French*. Do but make an observation to a French shopkeeper upon the price of his goods, and he will promptly answer: "I keep a cheaper article, but it is naturally of greatly inferior quality. Would *Monsieur* like to see my English stock?" In French commerce, *English* is synonymous with *worthless*.



Now, what is a foreigner?

No man was born a foreigner.

Once an American said to me, on board a steamer, sailing from Liverpool to New York: "You are a foreigner, I guess."

"Well," I replied, "not yet. I shall be, when I get to your country."



What is a foreigner?

As a rule, a foreigner is a good fellow, brought up by worthy parents, and belonging to a country quite as good as yours.



Nations may be well or badly governed. They may possess hot or cold climates, indifferent or beautiful scenery. The manners and customs of their inhabitants may be utterly different. But the most stupid statement that can possibly be made is that some nations are better or worse than others.



We French people ought not to be a closed letter to the foreigner, for Heaven knows we make no attempt to hide our defects, and I might even add that if we did study to hide them, instead of boasting of them, we might cut quite as good and moral a figure as the most proper inhabitant of the British Isles or of the State of Maine.

We offer ourselves to criticism so unreservedly, owning our shortcomings with such frankness, such *abandon*, that it ill

becomes our neighbors to find fault with us. Indeed, we are a nation that confesses with a gay candor that should disarm unkind criticism.

Yes, the foreigner ought to be able to read, as in an open book, that good, warm-hearted, France that he hardly looks at. For him, France is Paris; Paris that supplies him with pleasures for a fortnight, and that he despises when he is satiated. The real France, peaceful and laborious, he knows nothing about beyond what he has seen of it from the windows of a railroad car.

On arriving at home again, he writes to his friends:

"I have just returned from France. What a country it is! Ah! I have seen pretty sights, I can assure you! I will tell you all about it in private, when we meet. All I can say now is, that I thank God that I was born an Englishman."

Here is a good fellow who has undoubtedly visited the wrong places.

The Frenchman is no better. He comes to London for a week on business. (I say "on business," because nobody would think of coming to London on pleasure), and profits by his visit to go and see Madame Tussaud's Exhibition. Then he returns home, and exclaims, parodying Victor Hugo's celebrated lines: "How proud a man is to call himself a Frenchman when he has looked at England."

He has looked at England, it is true, but he has not seen it.

To *look* is an action of the body. To *see* is an action of the mind.



When people travel in foreign lands, they often make two kinds of mistakes.

Firstly, they are liable to visit the wrong places, like the Englishman who returned home "thanking God he was born an Englishman."

Secondly, they draw conclusions too quickly.

Let us illustrate this.

When English people alight at a French hotel and find no soap on the washstand, do you believe they conclude from this that the French carry their own soap in their trunks when they travel? Not they. They conclude that the French do not wash, or that, if they do, their ablutions are performed by means of a corner of a handkerchief dipped in water.

Mark Twain, the prince of American humorists, exclaims upon entering the bedroom of a French hotel: "What, waiter, no soap! Don't you know that soap is indispensable to an Englishman or an American; and that only a Frenchman can do without it?"

It is true that you find soap on the washstands in English or American hotels; but the English and their American cousins may perhaps be astonished to hear that a true-born Frenchman would have as much repugnance to using hotel soap, as they would to using a toothbrush that they might find on a lodging-

house washstand. Some people like second-hand soap; some do not. We will even make bold to inform them that a great many French ladies are so particular as to carry about a supply of bedroom towels with them when they travel.

CHAPTER II.

JOHN BULL UP TO DATE

Would you know what an Englishman is – let him be a duke's son, officer in Her Majesty's service, student, schoolboy, clerk, shopboy, gentleman, or street rough?

Well, an Englishman is a lusty fellow, fearless, hardy, and strong-knit, iron-muscled, and mule-headed, who, rather than let go a ball that he holds firmly in his arms, will perform feats of valor; who, to pass this ball between two goals, will grovel in the dust, reckless of lacerated shoulders, a broken rib or jawbone, and will die on a bed of suffering with a smile upon his lips if he can only hear, before closing his eyes, that his side has won the game.

Multiply this Englishman by the number of the stars in the firmament, and you will arrive at a pretty correct idea of England's martial, if not military, force.

The Englishman does nothing by halves. His favorite adjective is *thorough*. The more difficulties he has to surmount the more he is in his element; he is a curious mixture of lion, mule, and octopus. Outdoing Milo of Crotona, he would manage to withdraw his wrist from the cleft of the oak.

Mr. Gladstone said one day (many years ago): "When I work, I work as hard as I can; when I run, I run as fast as I can; when

I jump, I jump as far as I can." He might add now: "When I get into a mess, I plunge into it over head and shoulders."



To three qualities I ascribe the success of John Bull: his tenacity, the coolness of his head, and the thickness of his skin.

Take an Englishman to visit the ruins of some old castle: he will not rest until he has thrust his nose into every nook and cranny of the place, and climbed the most crumbling walls, at the risk of breaking his neck over and over again. He has seen nothing if he has not seen all. You may think yourself lucky if he has not profited by your back being turned for a moment, to go and hoist the Union Jack on the summit of the highest tower. That is a little weakness of his that makes him a trifle inconvenient occasionally, I must say; but, you see, one cannot get on in this world without a certain aptitude for making one's self at home.

He conquers the world for the good of the world. When he goes after pastures new, he takes the Bible with him. It will not be long before the natives have the Bible, and he their land. On arriving upon his new field of operation, the missionary places the Bible in the hands of the natives, and thus addresses them: "My dear Brethren, lift your eyes to Heaven, and pray. Lift your eyes – higher – higher – still higher – that's it. Now close them, and do not open them until I tell you – that's it – pray – there – now open your eyes, you are saved."

When the worthy natives open their eyes, their territory is gone.

Truly, a strange being, but an interesting subject of study, is this same Englishman. Capable of combining a thousand different personages, of playing a thousand different parts, of doing in Rome (to use his own words) as the Romans do; extreme in each of his acts, presenting the most striking contrasts, but always guided by his reason. Fiery patriot, yet calmly bearing the greatest humiliations while awaiting the propitious moment for taking his innings. In the temple, a publican, crying aloud, "O Lord, I am but a miserable sinner!" Outside its door, a Pharisee, setting up for a marvel of virtue. Worshiper of Mammon and Jehovah, the man most concerned in the interests of the next world, and most wrapped up in the concerns of this.

In the singular, a man upon whose word you can rely as you would upon a trusty sword; in the plural, a people who have too often merited the epithet "perfidious." At home, preaching temperance, even to the forswearing of all drinks but water; abroad, not only encouraging, but enforcing the opium trade. At home, prosecuting the individual that ill-uses an animal, unless, indeed, the animal be a wife; abroad, setting a price upon the head of a recalcitrant foe. At home, punishing with imprisonment the people who obstruct the rowdy processions of the Salvation Army mountebanks; in India, sending to prison the same mountebanks, who, in their zeal, might create religious difficulties among a nation that he has subdued.

Opportunist *par excellence*, he never asks all or nothing. He accepts a little as being better than nothing; and thus it is that little by little, without shock or violence, without revolutions, he perfects the machinery of his constitution.

Everything John Bull does is perfect. When anything goes wrong, he knows where to lay the blame: he keeps Scotchmen, Irishmen, and Welshmen conveniently at hand for that purpose.

At prayer time, a man appearing somewhat uncomfortable. When he prays, he makes a grimace, or hides his face in his hat, and reminds one of Heinrich Heine's sayings, "that a blaspheming Frenchman must be a more pleasing object in the sight of God than a praying Englishman."

Also watch John Bull as the collection is going on. Hear him sing at the top of his voice

Were the whole realm of nature mine,
That were an offering far too small
Love so amazing, so divine
Demands my life, my soul, my all.

And all the time see how carefully he feels his pockets to be quite sure that it is a three-penny bit that he has got hold of.



And what a diplomatist he is! Ask him for a reform, and he

will stare at you astonished, assuring you that all is for the best in the best of worlds. But shake your fist at him, and show him that you mean to have that reform, and he will smile, and say: "Oh, that's all right, I beg your pardon, I didn't know that you were in earnest."



To sum up:

Worshipping his old monarchy, devoted to his old institutions, but ravenous for justice and liberty, he would be ready again to-day to demolish both monarchy and constitution, as he did in the seventeenth century, if his liberty ran the least danger. In politics, possessing the virtues that are indispensable to the prosperity of a nation – respect of the law and respect of power clearly manifested – he always bows to the decision of a majority. Refusing to submit to despotism in any shape or form, he himself keeps in order and discipline all his paid guides and governors: his queen, his princes, his ministers, his generals, his judges, his priests.

Wise, industrious, and persevering, never doubting his strength, above all minding his own business, and imposing upon one and all their attributions and duties, from his sovereign down to the humblest citizen, he has chosen for his motto:

Fais bien ce que fais.

CHAPTER III.

JACQUES BONHOMME, THE LANDED PEASANT- PROPRIETOR OF FRANCE

Jacques Bonhomme is a small landowner, fond of his country, his cottage, his fields, his cow, and his *gros sous*. His great aim is to be independent of the world, and to this end he takes great care of his pence, and has no need of any French John Bright to tell him that if he does so, the pounds will take care of themselves; it is a sentiment inborn in him. If you wish to make him happy, when he brings you a load of wood or a cask of cider, pay him in silver five-franc pieces – his coin of predilection. He will take gold without repugnance, but will look askance at a banknote. If you were to tender him a check, the odds are ten to one that he would immediately go for a policeman.

He does not seek to imitate the dweller in cities, either in his habits, speech, or dress. All he has on his back is not worth more than four or five francs, but his blouse is new when he buys it, and it belongs to him, as my black coat belongs to me. His food costs him about fourpence or fivepence a day at the outside, but it is wholesome and abundant. He keeps early hours and saves his candles, he lives a healthy life and saves doctors' bills. When

he lies down to die, it is in his own bed, and his parish has not to pay for his funeral.

Every French village has its poor, but pauperism is unknown, for Jacques Bonhomme is charitable, and he always finds means to send a basin of soup to a neighbor whom he knows to be in want of one. It is only for the loafer that he has no pity; when he has called a fellow-creature *fainéant*, he has used the strongest invective in his vocabulary.

In politics, he takes very little interest, if any. All governments are acceptable to him, except perhaps the one that happens to be in power when he gets bad weather for the harvest. How else explain the fact that changes of government have always been made in Paris without his sanction, or even his opinion being asked for; and that the seven million five hundred thousand men who vote for the Republic to-day, are the seven million five hundred thousand who, when they were asked by the Emperor, in the year of the Plebiscite, whether they would still have him or not, answered almost to a man: "I will."

Jacques Bonhomme scarcely knew what a Plebiscite was; but he went to see his parish priest, who said to him:

"Are you married, Jacques?"

"Yes, *monsieur le curé*."

"Well, and what did they make you say on your wedding day?"

"*Ma foi, monsieur le curé*, they made me say, *I will*."

"Well, my good fellow, that is all the Emperor asks you to say; that is voting."

Whereupon Jacques went and threw his *oui* in the electoral box.

There is one form of government, however, of which he would dread the return: the government of the *curés*. He has not forgotten the tithe and the *corvée*, nor the days when the monks used to come and pay little visits to his wife and his cupboard, to bless his children, and relieve him of his superfluous butter and eggs.

He is no great churchgoer; yet, when he meets his parish priest, he touches his cap, but almost as he would touch it to an equal.

He is beginning to know how to hold a pen, but he rarely uses one except for the purpose of adding up his little accounts. As to letter-writing, he sees no fun in a frivolous pastime that would cost him three *sous*.

He has been placed by Nature on a fertile soil that yields him all he needs, and if you were to talk to him of emigration, he would stare and ask you what crime he had committed to deserve transportation. There is no more home-abiding creature upon the face of the earth.

You may tell him you are going round the world. He will let you go. He is not jealous.

On the wall of the village schoolroom he has seen a map of the world, but although he is willing to believe that it fairly represents the earth we live on, he would fain have seen the name of his dear village on it. He doubts not that the earth is round, since his

curé and his schoolmaster say so; but the only proof he has of it is the sight of the line of horizon that greets his eyes, when he climbs the hill-top.

I know two or three of these honest French workers, who were induced to go to Paris in 1878, to see the Universal Exhibition. Such was their suspicion of the gay capital that, before setting out, they sewed their golden louis in the lining of their coats, and had their wills made by the notary.



The French peasant is peaceful, sober, and laborious. He possesses in a remarkable degree that invaluable quality than which there is no higher intelligence for the solution of the great problem of existence, which consists in patiently accepting one's fate, however hard it may be, and making the best of it. His ideal of life is the independence which is the fruit of labor, and he is satisfied with very little in the days of his strength, because the prospect of eating his own bread when his strength is gone makes him happy. He is thrifty and self-denying, but he is not deficient in any of the generous sentiments. He befriends his poorer relatives, he can be hospitable and charitable, and a patriot, too, when occasion calls, as history has proved. But he is no fire-eater, no yearner after social regeneration by baptism of blood, no dreamer of new worlds to conquer, nor the revival of dying feuds in ghastly wars. The surging passions of the capital,

bred and fed by vice and improvidence, are horrible to him. He wishes the world to be at peace, so that he may be left alone, and be allowed to raise his flocks and grow his corn and wine in peace.

It is when he is making a purchase, at the fair or at the market, that Jacques is to be seen in his element.

Look at him as he takes a preliminary turn or two around the little rickety stall. He hesitates a long while before making up his mind; he knows that if he seems to have a fancy for any particular article, he will probably be asked a good price for it. So it is only cautiously, and with a look of indifference on his face, that he at length draws near. Next, taking up the coveted object with the limpest of fingers, he gives off sundry little grunts of disapprobation. He turns it over and over, looks at it well on all sides, shakes his head, and invariably finishes by dropping it back in its place again.

Then he turns, and makes as though he would go away, but after having taken a few steps, he brings up, comes back, and indicating the object of his maneuvers with a contemptuous finger, says to the vender:

"What do you want for *that*?"

And you should see the face he makes as he says "*that*."

He has scarcely heard the reply before he exclaims: "You mean that for a joke, I suppose."

Watch him a little later, as he goes off, carrying his purchase in triumph, and you will plainly see that he has made a bargain.

If Solomon had known Jacques Bonhomme, we might be inclined to think that it was he whom the Hebrew king had in his mind's eye, as he wrote: "It is naught, it is naught, saith the buyer; but when he has gone his way, then he boasteth."

Jacques' manner is no less remarkable when he has to part with the value in cash.

He seldom carries his money in his trousers' or waistcoat pocket. He confides it to the depths of a long purse, from which it is only to be extracted with difficulty, and this purse is hidden inside his blouse, and carefully attached to it by a strong leather string.

When the operation of paying has to be performed, Jacques gently lifts his blouse, and, making a rather wry face, draws forth his purse from its hiding-place. In the act of untying the leather string, he is as unhappy-looking a creature as you may well behold. He rarely faces the enemy on these occasions. He turns his back to you, and pretends to have great difficulty in getting his money out of his recalcitrant purse. Perhaps he hopes you will get tired of waiting, and say to him: "Never mind, Jacques, you can pay me another day."

When at last he has the money in his hand, he turns toward you, holds it out, draws it back, but eventually makes up his mind to the loss of this little portion of his patrimony.

Then he begins to wonder whether you have not taken him in; but, as it is too late to draw back, he resolves that he will be a match for you next time.

CHAPTER IV.

JACQUELINE, THE FORTUNE OF FRANCE

Jacques Bonhomme's wife is the fortune of France. Hard-working, thrifty, sober, you will always see her busy, either working in the field, selling her wares in the market-place of the nearest town, or engaged about her little household. She is the personification of industry, and when the winter of life comes on, you will find her by the chimney corner, or near the cottage door, keeping watch over the little ones, while she knits or spins; it is with her needles or her distaff in her hand that she peacefully passes away from earth. Not an hour in the life of the good Jacqueline has been spent in indolence.

It is she who hides the five-franc pieces in the corner of her linen cupboard, only to be taken out when there is an opportunity of rounding off the little family domain. Shares, bonds, and all such lottery tickets, she leaves for the small *bourgeois* of the town, who love to wait their turn at the door of the Treasury Office on the day of a national loan. No papers for her; what she likes is a field or a cow, something she is quite sure to find in its place in the morning, when she wakes up.

It is on market-day that you should see her! She makes light of a ten or twelve-mile walk to the chief town of her district,

carrying a basket loaded with fruit or vegetables on each arm. In the evening, you may meet her with baskets empty, but pockets full, trudging back to her peaceful cottage – the center of all her affections. Follow her along the road a little, and you will see that, as she goes, she manages to busy her fingers on a pair of stockings for the little ones.

Her daughter does not wear fringes on her forehead, feathers on her hat, fifty-cent diamonds in her ears, or flounces on a second-hand skirt; but, though she is dressed in a plain coarse serge gown, and a simple snowy cap, her round rosy cheeks tell you that she is healthy, and a pair of eyes, that stare at you like the daisies in her father's field, tell you that she is pure.

When she goes into service – which is often the case – every month, as she receives her wages, she quietly pays a little visit to the savings bank of the town.

When the English servant receives her monthly wages, she straightway goes to buy a new hat and get photographed in it.

I will refrain from speaking of the duchesses who condescend to act as "helps" to the American public.



And the patriotism of her! Ah, let me here pay my humble tribute of admiration and gratitude that she has so great a claim to! Who among us French has not kept, engraven on his memory, the *souvenir* of the devoted peasant women of

Normandy, Picardy, of Alsace and Lorraine, and all they did for us in that terrible year that would have seen the death of France, if France could die? Who among us has not admired and blessed them? With a sad smile on her face, how kindly the poor Jacqueline welcomed the weary soldier, worn out with fatigue and hunger! And, while the rich *bourgeois* too often received us with a frown, as he muttered, "More soldiers!" her greeting was always kindly. "Come in, my poor lads," she would cry; "you are tired and hungry. We have not much to offer here, but you shall have a bed to-night, if it is but a bed of straw, a good soup, and a rasher of bacon, or whatever there is in the cupboard. That will do you good. My own poor lad is fighting somewhere; it is many weeks ago now that I heard from him, but I hope some kind soul is doing for him to-night what I am doing for you." And the good creature would prepare her vegetables, put the soup on the fire, make up beds for us around the hearth, and give us old soft shoes for our poor blistered feet. And when, in the morning, we left her hospitable roof, we would say, "*Allons, maman, adieu et merci.* God bless you for all you have done for us." And as we went our way, she, standing on the threshold of her door, would wave her handkerchief, and watch the regiment out of sight. Then she would turn away, and the evening found her ready to do the same for the next weary band of men that halted at her door.

Oh! my good peasant folk of France, you are the fortune of your country, and you also, with your rustic simplicity, are its generous heart. It is among you that tired human nature drinks

deep draughts of pure life-giving air, and forgets the struggles of the city, its noisy pleasures, its ephemeral joys, its jealousies and burning hatreds; it is in your midst that the soul is tuned into harmony with mankind, and man feels at peace with all the world, as he looks at the bright spring blossoms, breathes the intoxicating perfume of the humid forest, and gazes at Nature, as she emerges from her bath of dew to robe herself in a raiment of light.

CHAPTER V.

JOSEPH PRUDHOMME, THE JOG-TROT MIDDLE- CLASS FRENCHMAN

Joseph Prudhomme, whom the Anglo-Saxon people are fond of representing as a fighting cock, sighing constantly after glory and conquest, is a modest proprietor, peaceful, home-loving, steady-going, whom his mother calls "*petit*," and his wife leads by the nose.

Glory and conquests! he has had enough of all that: it is peace that he asks for at the top of his voice. Like his social inferior, Jacques Bonhomme, the only conquest that he hankers after, is the conquest of that independence which is assured by a safe investment at three or three and a half per cent.

Joseph is not wealthy, but he is rich, rich like most of us, not in that which he possesses, but in that which he knows how to do without. He is rich, because the little he has got is always safe and stable.

It is stability in fortunes and the proper distribution of wealth over a nation which constitute real riches, and that is why France, who has now more than six millions of contented landed proprietors, is probably, in the proper sense of the word, the

richest nation in the world.

Joseph is by no means a great speculator. Economical and industrious, he quickly goes on his sober way, until he has amassed the snug little sum that will allow him to live at his ease.

To have from one to two thousand dollars a year, such is his aim. As soon as he has attained it, he knocks off work and takes life easily, devoting his time to his wife and family.

Economy is the very genius of France. The peasant buys a bit of land; the working classes put something in the savings bank, which, at the present moment, has more than \$450,000,000 in its coffers. The middle classes buy government securities. Very few people speculate.

In France, everybody runs after comfort, but few run after wealth. When an American has a million, he must have two, and then ten. He forgets that he can possess one million, but cannot possess ten, without losing his peace of mind and happiness. The Frenchman wants comfort; he wants enough to establish his children, educate his boys, portion his daughters, and spend his old days in quietness. He wants no more. In France, we have no Jay Goulds. If a Suez Canal was made, it did not owe its existence to a few capitalists, but to hundreds and thousands of workers who brought their savings.



When Joseph has retired from business, he begins to dream

of honors. The words Town Counselor, District Counselor, and Mayor, are pleasing to his ear, inasmuch as these honorable posts enable their holders to wear uniforms. And Joseph has a decided weakness for uniforms and gold braid. A sword specially; a sword adds an inch or two to his stature.

He is fond of making sounding phrases, and his signature is a masterpiece of inimitable calligraphy.

His game of predilection is dominoes. When he plays at loto, he never fails to add, after announcing the number seven, *la pipe à Thomas*.

When he sends twenty francs to his boy, he scrupulously seals the envelope in five places, and stares incredulously, if you tell him that the English often stuff a bundle of banknotes into their letters, and do not take the trouble to register them.

He has the name of being a Republican. I am willing to believe him one, since he now votes for the Republic; but it is less from profound conviction than from the dread of hearing that barricades are being erected in Paris, that he votes for the government of the day. "*Beati possidentes!*" he cries, there is nothing like tranquillity.

He is administered to his heart's content.

He belongs to a little town, administered by a mayor, two deputy-mayors, and a municipal council; his little town forms part of an *arrondissement*, administered by a sub-prefect and a council of *arrondissement*; his *arrondissement* forms part of a department, administered by a prefect, a council of prefecture,

and a general council; his department forms part of France, administered by a President of the Republic, a ministerial council, a council of state, a Senate, and a Chamber of Deputies. Add to this, the general council of agriculture, the general council of commerce, the council of manufactures, the council of mines, the council of roads and bridges, the council general of prisons, the council of war, the council of finance, the council of the navy, the council of *prud'hommes*, the board of health, and a hundred others, and you will see that, if Joseph pays taxes, he has the satisfaction of knowing that he is counseled abundantly.



His accounts are kept by an administration that "all Europe envies," and carried to the fourth decimal, a luxury which costs him a good fourth of his revenue in *personnel* and red tape, but which on the other hand saves the Treasury at least one dollar per annum. The centimes column is guaranteed exact by every French clerk; this ought to console Joseph for the little errors which may exist in the column of the millions. In a ministerial office, a mistake of a centime puts the whole staff in commotion, from the ground floor to the roof, and if a clerk were to propose to replace the centime out of his own pocket, and thus set matters right, he would be looked upon as a dangerous man, and his career would be blasted, unless, indeed, the affair should make some noise, in which case he might see himself provided with a

seat in the Chamber of Deputies.



In business, Joseph's probity is almost proverbial, and his punctuality carried to a ridiculous point. On quarter day, he pays his rent at the stroke of noon. In England, the landlord can only demand his rent twenty-one days after it is due, and bills are only presented after three days' grace. His commerce is hindered by his exaggerated attention to trifles, but when he sells you a pair of boots, you can put them on, and walk in them.

He is jealous of his reputation, and a compliment paid to the quality of his merchandise gives him as much pleasure as the profit he gets out of it.

I do not hesitate to affirm that not only does the small French *bourgeois* not covet wealth, but that he is almost afraid of it. I might name many old provincial parents, who have written long letters to their sons, commencing with congratulations upon the literary, artistic, or other successes they had met with in Paris, and ending with lamentations over the financial ones which had resulted therefrom. These good people were full of fear lest money should raise a barrier between them and their dear son, and thus cloud the happiness of the family.



Joseph rarely renounces his bachelor's life before the age of thirty.

When he marries, woman is not exactly an enigma to him; but do you think he is any the worse husband for that? Not he. The purity of his wife becomes an object of worship for him; he recognizes in her a moral being so superior to himself that he soon abdicates all his prerogatives in her favor; and he consoles himself for the authority that he rarely knows how to maintain in his home, with the thought that the administration of his affairs is in safe hands. Taking life placidly, he grows round and rubicund; he is well cared for, petted, coddled; he lives in clover. His wife is his friend, his confidante. If from one cause or another the family revenue diminishes, she knows it as soon as her husband; with her economy and good management, she faces the danger; with her energy, she wards off ruin from her threshold. In important matters, as well as in the smallest, she has both a consultative and deliberative voice. Content with her supremacy in the home circle, she asks for no other rights; politics are not in her line. And yet a French woman is far from lacking patriotism. Those same timid girls and tender mothers who could not bear us out of their sight, are the women who said to us, not long since: "Do not think about us; your country claims you, do your duty."



Provincial life in France is narrow, limited in the highest degree, I must admit; but what wealth of love and happiness those little coquettish-looking white houses hold! They are so many nests!

The greatest charm about our provincials, who are constantly made the butt for Parisian witticisms, is that they do not change.

When you live that feverish Parisian life, that consumes you by overtaxing your intellectual powers, what a treat it is to go and see the old folks, in the old house that is standing there just as you remember it in your childhood! Every room, every piece of furniture, is linked in your memory with some event of bygone days. How you revive in that old place!

In the thickest darkness you could find everything. Your dear old mother is there in her chair by the window, in her favorite place, which has not altered so much as an inch. The old servant, who danced you on her knee, watches at the door for the first glimpse of the carriage that brings you. And the cries of joy, and the clapping of hands! What welcome awaits you! Everyone speaks at the same time, you are taken by storm, nobody thinks of checking his delight (in France, joy is allowed free outlet). You go up to the room that used to be yours to shake off the dust of your journey. Nothing is altered, everything is there, just where it always was in the old days; you feel as if you had

grown twenty years younger. You go down, and in the dining room you see the large fireplace that has undergone no stupid modernizing. Will you ever forget the bloodcurdling ghost stories that you listened to so breathlessly in the twilight, as you roasted chestnuts in the embers? What shivers of horror would run through you as you nestled close up in that chimney corner! And so all the past revives again: the April walks in quest of dewy primroses, the scamper over the daisy-strewn fields in the glorious summer sunshine; the clandestine raids on the pear trees, and the scoldings from mother, who was sure to read the history of the afternoon in the meek faces and torn raiment.

The Frenchman of the provinces wraps himself up in his family, almost to the exclusion of the outer world. In the streets he salutes his acquaintances with a profound bow; on New Year's Day he pays them a visit of ceremony, offers the ladies a packet of *marrons glacés*, or a couple of oranges; but his hospitable table is only open to his children, who, as long as he lives, are at home in the house. One or two intimate friends at most are allowed to penetrate freely into the little circle; the time is killed, even killed by inches. A garden, chickens, ducks, the Saturday *pot-au-feu*, such is the extent of his ambition. All this luxury can be obtained for about a hundred dollars a month. When his three per cent. *rentes* secure him this sum, he retires from business, and gives his younger fellow-creatures a chance.

His family being generally small, he has all his dear ones around him, under his roof.

He idolizes children, and makes the most charming father in the world.

To give a good education to his sons, and a good *dot* to his daughters, to see them happily married, and keep them near him after their marriage, to bring up his grandchildren, guide their first tottering steps, make companions of them, launch them in life, and see them all assembled around his death-bed, such is the life of the good Joseph Prudhomme.

CHAPTER VI.

ENTERTAINING NEIGHBORS

To an impartial observer, who goes on his way philosophizing, and keeping his eyes open to what passes on either side of the English Channel, it is really a very amusing sight to see how the two countries seem to make it their aim, each to do the contrary of what the other does.

Will you have a few rather diverting illustrations, taken right and left?

When we are in difficulties, we take our watch to our *aunt*; the English take theirs to their *uncle*.

In France, the *curé* has a certain number of *vicaires* under his orders; in England, it is the *curate* who is the *vicar's* subaltern. On this point, there is no doubt about our being in the right, since a curate is a priest, ordained to take charge of a *cure* (the responsible care of souls), whereas a vicar (*vicarius*) is a priest who takes the place of another.

So, you see, that is one to us!

In France, coachmen keep to the right; in England, they keep to the left. The drivers of hansom cabs are seated far from their horses, and are obliged to use very long whips; but, as they keep to the left, the action of the whip takes place in the middle of the road, and thus peaceful promenaders of the pavement are spared

many a disagreeable cut.

Well done, John, one to you this time!

The French language possesses the two words *éditer* and *publier*; the English language has to *edit* and to *publish*. But it must be well understood that it is to *publish* which means *éditer*, and to *edit* which means *publier*. These Chinese puzzles, so constantly met with, are not useless, however; they are the delight of French examiners in England, and, of course, the despair of candidates, which is easy to understand, if one considers how much easier it is to be examiner than examined.

In England, you "get wet to the skin," in France, we "get wet to the bones," and you know that, when the English go as far as the backbone, the French, not to be outdone, go as far as the marrow of the bone.

In England, people are witty "to their fingers' end"; in France, "to the end of their finger-nails."

The index is placed at the beginning of English books, but at the end of French ones.

Both the French and English languages have aspirate *h*'s, but, whereas in English it is vulgar to drop them, in French it is vulgar to sound them.

In France, it is considered very bad form to call people by their names directly after being introduced to them. We simply address them as Monsieur, Madame, Mademoiselle. In England, only shopmen address ladies as Madam, or Miss. When you have been introduced, you must add a person's surname to the title, to

Mr., Mrs., or Miss, in speaking to them.

In England, they "take French leave"; but in France we "take English leave," and we are quits.

The pound sterling contains twenty shillings, the shilling twelve pence, the penny four farthings; and if you want to find out, for instance, how much the sum of 356 pounds, 18 shillings, and 9 pence 3 farthings, has brought in, at compound interest, in four years, five months, and eight days, at the rate of 37/19 per cent., I would advise you to procure a ream of foolscap paper and set to work. When you have waded through the sum, you will wonder how it is that the English, practical as they are, have not adopted the decimal system. But then, you see, they have adopted it in France.

Even down to the manner of holding a fork or an umbrella, the two nations seem to be saying to each other: "You do it that way? very well, then, I shall do it this way."

In making an inventory of the contrasts in the two nations, it would be difficult to say which is oftener in the right. The balance is probably pretty even.

The last I will mention is the difference in the manner of keeping Good Friday, and in this, I think, the good mark ought to be for us.

Good Friday, being the anniversary of the death of our Savior, the French keep it in fasting and prayer. On the following Sunday, the day of His Resurrection, they rejoice. Easter day, being Sunday, finds the English people plunged in solemn silence; but,

on Good Friday, they take their holiday, and the lower orders celebrate their Redeemer's death by knocking down cocoanuts.

CHAPTER VII.

FRENCH IMPULSIVENESS AND BRITISH SANGFROID

ILLUSTRATED BY TWO REMINISCENCES

Two incidents that took place lately, in Paris and London respectively, may serve to illustrate French impulsiveness and English *sangfroid*.

The other evening the opera "Les Huguenots" was played at the Grand Opera. The singer who took the part of *Marcel* was out of sorts, and sang flat. An old gentleman, seated in an orchestra stall, was observed to be restless and uncomfortable during the performance. At the end of the last act, *Marcel* passes before the church, just at the moment when the *Duke of Nevers* and his partisans come out of it.

"*Qui vive?*" cries the *Duke*.

"Huguenot," answers *Marcel*, and he falls, shot dead by the followers of the *Duke*.

This part of the opera had no sooner been acted, than the old gentleman, who now looked radiant, rose from his seat, put on his hat, and, shaking his fist at the dead hero, to the great amusement of the public, cried at the top of his voice:

"You donkey, it serves you right, you have been singing out of tune the whole evening."

And indignantly he left the theater.



In a beautifully appointed English house, afternoon tea, served in costly china, had just been brought to the drawing-room, when the mistress of the house inadvertently overturned the tea-table. Without the slightest show of vexation, without *oh!* or *ah!* Lady R – calmly touched the bell, and, on the appearance of the domestic, merely said:

"Take this away, and bring more tea."

"My dear," whispered Lady P – to a friend, "she won't match that china for \$500."



Another illustration of the latter:

A fearful railway accident has taken place. The first car, with its human contents, is reduced to atoms.

An Englishman, who was in one of the first-class cars at the rear, examines the *débris*.

"Oh!" he says to an official, pointing to a piece of flesh wrapped up in a piece of tweed cloth. "Pick that up, that's the

piece of my butler that has got the keys of my trunks."

CHAPTER VIII.

ENGLISH PHARISEES AND FRENCH CROCODILES

The French and the English have this very characteristic feature in common: they can stand any amount of incense; you may burn all the perfumes of Arabia under their noses, without incommoding them in the slightest degree.

With this difference, however, in the extremes.

The French boaster is noisy and talkative. With his mustache twirled defiantly upward, his hat on one side, he will shout at you, at the top of his voice that,¹ "*La France, Monsieur, sera toujours la Fr-r-rance, les Français seront toujours les Fr-r-rançais.*" As you listen to him, you are almost tempted to believe, with Thackeray, "that the poor fellow has a lurking doubt in his own mind that he is not the wonder he professes to be."

¹ If my memory serves me, it was one of our wittiest vaudevillists who once laid a wager that he would get an encore, at one of our popular theaters on the Boulevard, for the following patriotic quatrain: "La lâcheté ne vaut pas la vaillance, Mille revers ne font pas un succès; La France, amis, sera toujours la France, Les Français seront toujours les Français." He won the bet. The London *badauds* are at present nightly applauding, at the Empire Theater, a patriotic song which begins by the following words: "What though the powers the world doth hold Were all against us met, We have the might they felt of old, And England's England yet." Is it not strange that music-hall jingoism and *chauvinisme* should not only be expressed in the same manner, but by the very same words?

But allow me to say that the British specimen is far more provoking. He is so sure that all his geese are swans; so thoroughly persuaded of his superiority over the rest of the human race; it is, in his eyes, such an incontestable and incontestable fact, that he does not think it worth his while to raise his voice in asserting it, and that is what makes him so awfully irritating, "don't you know?" He has not a doubt that the whole world was made for him; not only this one, but the next. In the meantime – for he is in no hurry to put on the angel plumage that awaits him – he congratulates himself on his position here below. Everything is done to add to his comfort and happiness: the Italians give him concerts, the French dig the Suez Canal for him, the Germans sweep out his offices and do his errands in the City of London for \$200 a year, the Greeks grow the principal ingredient in his plum pudding. The Americans supply his aristocracy with rich heiresses, so that they may get their coats of arms out of pawn. His face beams with gratitude and complacency, as he quietly rubs his hands together, and calmly thanks Heaven that he is not as other men are. And it is true enough; he is not.

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