

R E G N A R D .

SINCE, in modern literature, there are so few really good comedies that we may count them all upon our fingers, a man who has written two must be worth knowing. We ask permission to introduce Jean François Regnard to those who do not know him.

He comes recommended by the great critic Boileau, who liked him, quarrelled with him, and made up again. Forty years later, Voltaire wrote that the man who did not enjoy Regnard was not capable of appreciating Molière. Then came M. de La Harpe, the authority in such matters for two generations: he devotes a chapter to Regnard, and calls him the worthy successor of Molière. And Béranger, in his charming autobiography, an epilogue worthy of the noble part he had played upon the stage of the world, speaks of the unflagging gayety and abundant wit of Regnard's dialogue, and of his lively and graceful style. "In my opinion," he adds, "Regnard would be the first of modern comedians, if Molière had not been given to us."

In spite of the idle complainings into which authors are betrayed by the pleasure human nature takes in talking about self to attentive listeners, all who are familiar with the history of the brethren of the quill know, that, as a class, they have had a large share of the good things of the earth,—cheerful occupation, respected position, comfortable subsistence, and long life. France, in particular, has been the *Pays de Cognac* of book-makers for the last two hundred years. Neither praise, pay, nor rank has been wanting to those who deserved them. But in the long line of *littérateurs* who have flourished since Cardinal Richelieu founded the Academy, few were so fortunate as Regnard. He entered upon his career with wealth, health, and a jovial temperament: three supreme blessings he kept through life.

He was born in Paris in 1655, three

years before Molière brought his company from the provinces to the Hôtel de Bourbon, and opened the new theatre with the "Précieuses Ridicules." Regnard's father, a citizen of Paris and a shopkeeper, died when his son was a lad, leaving him one hundred and twenty thousand livres,—a fortune for a man of the middle class at that period. Like most independent young fellows, Regnard made use of his money to travel. He went to Italy, and spent a year in the famous cities of the Peninsula,—but returned home with thirty thousand additional livres in his pocket, won at play. He soon went back to the land of pleasure and of luck. At Bologna he fell in love with a lady from the South of France, whom he calls Elvire. The lady was married, the husband was with her; they were travellers like himself. Regnard joined the party, and sailed with them from Civita Vecchia in an English ship bound for Toulon. The vessel was captured, off Nice, by a Barbary corsair, and brought into Algiers; the crew and passengers were sold to the highest bidder. One Achmet Talem paid fifteen hundred livres for Regnard, and one thousand for the lady. This low price might lead us to imagine that the Moorish taste in beauty differed from that of Regnard; but the Algerine market may have been overstocked with women on the day of sale. Achmet took his new chattels to Constantinople. Perceiving Regnard's talent for *ragoûts* and sauces, he made a cook of him. What became of Elvire history has omitted, perhaps discreetly, to relate. After two years of toil and ill-treatment, Regnard received money from home to buy his freedom. He paid twelve thousand livres for himself and the fair Provençale. Achmet more than quadrupled his investment, and no doubt thought slavery a divine institution.

In Paris once more, Regnard hung his chains in his library and was pre-

paring to lead a comfortable life with Elvire, when the superfluous husband, whose death had been reported, most unseasonably reappeared. He had been ransomed by the Mathurins, a religious order, who believed it to be the duty of Christians to deliver their fellow-men from bondage,—Abolitionists of the seventeenth century, who, strange as some of us may think it, were honored by their countrymen and the Christian world. Regnard yielded gracefully the right he had acquired by purchase to the prior claim of the husband, and made preparations for another journey. With two compatriots, De Fercourt and De Corberon, he traversed the Low Countries and Denmark and crossed over to Stockholm. The King of Sweden received the travellers graciously and proposed a visit to Lapland. Furnished with the royal letters of recommendation, they sailed up the Gulf of Bothnia to Torneo, and thence pushed north by land until they came to Lake Tornœtrask. Eighteen miles from the lower end of the lake they ascended a high mountain which they named *Metavara*, “from the Latin word *meta* and the Finlandic word *vara*, which means rock: that is to say, the rock of limits.” “We were four hours in climbing to the top by paths which no mortal had as yet known. When we reached it, we perceived the whole extent of Lapland, and the Icy Ocean as far as the North Cape, on the side it turns to the west. This may, indeed, be called arriving at the end of the world and jostling the axle of the pole (*se frotter à l’essieu du pôle*).” Here they set up a tablet of stone they had brought with their luggage,—*monument éternel*, Regnard says. “It shall make known to posterity that three Frenchmen did not cease to travel northward until the earth failed them; that, in spite of the difficulties they encountered, which would have turned back most others, they reached the end of the world and planted their column; the ground was wanting, but not the courage to press on.” These sounding verses were cut upon the eternal monument:—

“Gallia nos genuit; vidit nos Africa; Gangem
Hausimus, Europamque oculis lustravimus omnem:
Casibus et variis acti terræque marique,
Hic tandem stetimus, nobis ubi defuit orbis.
De Fercourt, De Corberon, Regnard.
Anno 1681, die 22 Augusti.”

“The inscription will never be read, except by the bears,” Regnard adds. A melancholy thought to the French mind! If nobody saw it or talked about it, half the pleasure of the exploit was gone. The Frenchmen had foreseen this difficulty, and had taken their precautions. Four days’ journey to the southward stood an ancient church, near which the Lapps held their annual fair. In this church, in a conspicuous position, they had already deposited the same verses, carved upon a board. In 1718, thirty-six years after, another French traveller, La Motraye, read the lines upon the stone tablet,—too late to gratify Regnard.

“Travellers’ stories,”—“*A beau mentir qui vient de loin*,”—these proverbs date from the seventeenth century. It was not expected of such adventurous gentlemen that they should tell the simple truth, any more than we expect veracity from sportsmen. We listen without surprise and disbelieve without a smile. Some exaggeration, too, was pardonable to help out the verse; but “*nobis ubi defuit orbis*” goes beyond a reasonable license. The mountain *Metavara* is in Lat. 68° 30’, the North Cape in 71° 10’. There were still one hundred and fifty miles of solid *orbis* before Regnard and his friends; and they had need of optics sharp to see the Cape from the spot they stood upon.

The 27th of September found the three Arctic explorers back again in Stockholm. Thence they took boat for Dantzic, travelled in Poland, Hungary, and Austria, and left Vienna for Paris a few months before the famous siege, when Sobieski, the “man sent from God whose name was John,” routed the Turks and delivered Christendom forever from the fear of the Ottoman arms.

Before this time Regnard must have heard that Duquesne had avenged his

African sufferings. In the autumn of 1681 the Huguenot Admiral shelled Algiers from bomb-ketches, then used for the first time. The Dey was forced to surrender. His lively conquerors treated him with the honors of wit as well as of war. They made a *mot* for him, of the kind they get up so cleverly in Paris. When the Turk is told how much it had cost the great monarch of France to fit out the fleet which had just reduced a part of his city to ashes, he exclaims, amazed at the useless extravagance, — "For half the money I would have burned the whole town."

Cervantes was a slave in Algiers a hundred years before Regnard, and no doubt used his experience in the story of the Captive in "Don Quixote." Regnard also worked his African materials up into a tale, — "La Provençale," — and varnished them with the sentimentality fashionable in his day. Zelmis (himself) is a conquering hero; women adore him. He is full of courage, resources, and devotion to one only, — Elvire, — who is beautiful as a dream, and dignified as the wife of a Roman Senator. The King of Algiers is on the quay when the captives are brought ashore. He falls in love with Elvire on the spot, and adds her to his collection. But his passion is respectful and pure. Aided by Zelmis, she escapes from the harem. They are retaken and brought back; but instead of the whipping usually bestowed upon returned runaways, the generous king, despairing of winning Elvire's affections, gives her her liberty. In the mean time Zelmis has had his troubles. His master has four wives, beautiful as hours. All four cast eyes of flame upon the well-favored infidel. Faithful to Elvire, Zelmis of course defends himself as heroically as Joseph. The ladies revenge the slight in the same way as the wife of Potiphar. The attractive Frenchman is condemned to impalement, when his consul interferes with a ransom, and he is released just in time to embark for France with Elvire.

Although Regnard often alludes with pride to his travels, the sketch he has

left of them is meagre and uninteresting, and written in a harsh and awkward style. Lapland was a *terra incognita*, — Poland, Hungary, and Bohemia not much better known; yet this clever young Parisian has little to relate beyond a few names, which he generally misspells or misplaces. No descriptions of town or country or scenery; no traits of manners, character, or customs, except a dull page on the sorcery and the funeral ceremonies of the Lapps. The only eminent man he notices is Evelius, the astronomer of Dantzic, — one of the foreign *savans* of distinction on whom Louis XIV. bestowed pensions in his grand manner, omitting to pay them after the second year. Regnard seems to have written to let his countrymen know where he had been, — not to tell them what he had seen. Had he made ever so good a book out of his really remarkable journey, little notice would have been taken of it. Voyages and travels were looked upon as a dull branch of fiction, — not nearly so amusing or improving as cockney excursions from one town of France to another in the neighborhood, described after the manner of Bachaumont and Chapelle: not sentimental journeys, by any means; eating, drinking, and sleeping are the points of interest: —

"Bon vin, bon gîte, bon lit,
Belle hôtesse, bon appétit."

Even Regnard, who had seen so much of the world, tried his hand at this kind of travel-writing and failed lamentably.

At thirty, Regnard closed a chapter in his life, and turned over a new leaf. He gave up wandering and gambling, the ruling passions of his youth, and settled himself comfortably for the rest of his days. For occupation and official position, he bought an assistant-treasurership in the *Bureau des Finances*. His house in the Rue Richelieu became famous for good company and good things, intellectual as well as material. In the country his *Terre de Grillon* was planted with so much taste that the lively persons who liked to visit there called it a *Séjour enchanté*. In laying

out his grounds, his intimate, Dufresny, was doubtless of use to him. This spendthrift poet, reputed great-grandson of Henri Quatre and the *belle jardinière*, had great skill in landscape gardening, admitted even by those who found his verses tedious. He it was, probably, who introduced Regnard to the stage. For several years they supplied the Théâtre Italien with amusing trifles,—working together in one of those literary partnerships so common among French playwrights. The “Joueur” broke up this business connection. Dufresny accused Regnard of having stolen the plot from him, and brought out a “Joueur” of his own. Regnard insisted that Dufresny was the pirate. The public decided in favor of Regnard. Dufresny’s play was hopelessly damned, and no appeal ever taken from the first sentence. The verdict of the *bel-esprits* was recorded in an epigram, which ended thus :—

“Mais quiconque aujourd’hui voit l’un et l’autre ouvrage
Dit que Regnard a l’avantage
D’avoir été le ‘bon larron.’”*

Dufresny had more wit than dramatic talent. He will live in the memories of married men for his famous speech, —

“Comment, Monsieur ! Vous n’y étiez pas obligé.”

It was in 1696, twelve years after his return to Paris, that Regnard sent the “Joueur,” a comedy in five acts, and in verse, to the Théâtre Français. It was received with enthusiastic applause. Nothing equal to it had appeared in twenty-four years since the death of the great master; nor did the eighteenth century produce any comedy which can be compared with it for action, wit, and literary finish,—not excepting the “Turcaret” of Le Sage, and Beaumarchais’s “Barber of Seville,” which are both better known to-day.

Regnard sat to himself for the portrait of Valère. The wild and fascinating excitement of play, the gambler’s exultation when he is successful, his furious curses on his bad luck when he

loses, his superstitious veneration for his winnings, are drawn from the life. When Fortune smiles, Valère neglects Angélique, his rich *fiancée*; when he is penniless, his love revives, and he is at her feet until his valet devises some new plan of raising money. He swears, if she will forgive him, never again to touch dice or cards, and five minutes afterward pledges for a thousand crowns a miniature set in diamonds she has just given him to bind their reconciliation, and hurries back to the gaming-table. He wins, but thinks his gains too sacred to pay away, even to redeem the portrait of Angélique.

“Rien ne porte malheur comme de payer ses dettes,”

is his answer to the prudent Hector, — a maxim current among many who never play. At last comes a reverse of fortune so sweeping that he cannot conceal it. Angélique might have forgiven him his broken promises, but the pawnbroker enters with her picture and demands the thousand crowns. This is too much. She rejects him and gives her hand to his rival. His indignant father casts him off forever. But no feeling of regret or of repentance arises in the mind of the gambler. He turns coolly upon his heel, and calls to his valet, —

“Va ! va ! consolons-nous, Hector, — et quelque jour
Le Jeu m’acquittera des pertes de l’amour.”

Richard is the name of this prince of rascally and quick-witted valets; but he calls himself Hector, after the knave of spades, because he serves a gambler. He has good sense as well as ingenuity; for he gives his master the best advice, while he strains his invention and his impudence to help him on to destruction. Nérine, maid to Angélique, declares open war against Valère, and vows that her mistress shall not throw herself away upon a silly dandy, an insipid puppet, with nothing to recommend him but his fine clothes and his swagger.

“True enough,” laughs Hector, “but

“C’est le goût d’à présent; tes cris sont superflus,
Mon enfant.”

“And Valère is a spendthrift, an inveterate gambler, who will bring her to misery and want.”

* The proverbial French expression for the thief who rebuked his reviling comrade at the crucifixion.

"What of that?"

"Tant que tu voudras, parle, prêche, tempête,
Ta maîtresse est coiffée, . . .
Elle est dans nos filets."

"And such an outrageous *roué* that he cannot live in his father's house."

"We do not deny it," Hector answers.
"It is no fault of ours."

"Valère a déserté la maison paternelle,
Mais ce n'est point à lui qu'il faut faire querelle;
Et si Monsieur son père avait voulu sortir,
Nous y serions encore; . . .
Ces pères, bien souvent, sont obstinés en diable."

Nevertheless, the obdurate parent, in the hope of reforming his son, and of providing for him by the excellent match with Angélique, hunts up the prodigal and lectures him after the manner of fathers. Hector joins in, and expresses strongly his disapprobation of games of chance; "*les jeux innocents, où l'esprit se déploie,*" are the only safe pastime.

"But will our father pay our debts this time?"

"Not a crown."

"Will he lend us the money at one per cent a month? Once out of this pecuniary strait, we can marry Angélique, and be rich and virtuous. Besides, we have assets as well as debts: here is our schedule."

The elder softens a little and takes the paper. At the head of the list of debts he finds Hector's bill for wages and services rendered, leading off a long file of Aarons and Levys; and the assets consist of a debt of honor owing by an officer killed at the Battle of Fleurus, and the good-will of a match at *tric-trac* with a poor player who had already lost games enough to make his defeat certain.

The action of the comedy does not lag or limp from the opening scene to Valère's last words. The versification is easy and natural; the dialogue abounds in wit and comic humor; it is short and quick, with none of those tedious declamations which weary and unsettle the attention of an audience. Take it all in all, we may say, that, if Molière had chosen the same subject, he could hardly have handled it better.

Not that Regnard can pretend to rank

with Molière in genius, or even near him. The "Gambler" is admirably done; but it is the only comedy in which Regnard attempted character. He drew from his experience. Molière was so skilful a moral anatomist that he required only a whim or a weakness to construct a consistent character. This wonderful man found the French comic stage occupied by a few stock personages, imported from Spain and Italy. The elders were fathers or uncles, rich, miserly, and perverse, instinctively disposed to keep a tight rein on the young people, of whose personal expenses and matrimonial projects they invariably disapproved. The persecuted juniors were all alike, colorless shadows, mere lay figures to hang a plot on: *Léandre, amant de Célimène; Célimène amante de Léandre*: helpless creatures, who would have been quite at the mercy of the old dragons of the story, were it not for the powerful assistance of the rascally valets, and their females the rascally soubrettes. These clever sinners abounded in cunning contrivances, disguises, and tricks, which resulted in the signal discomfiture of the parents and guardians. In the last act, they are forced to consent to all the marriages, and are cheated out of most of their property; they are even lucky to escape with their lives. There was no mercy for Age in those plays.

"Pluck the lined crutch from the old limping sire;
With it beat out his brains."

The theatre was the temple of youth, of love, and of feasting. Away with the dull old people! Providence created them only to pay the bills.

"Fuyez d'ici, sombre vieillesse, —
Car en amour les vieillards ne sont bons
Qu'à payer les violons."

Did gentlemen of a certain age go to the theatre in the seventeenth century? expend their money to see themselves abused and ridiculed? Did they laugh at these indignities and enjoy them? We might wonder, if we did not know that Frenchmen never grow old, so long as they have an eye left for ogling or a leg to caper with.

Molière took these old inhabitants of the stage into his service, and injected new life into their veins. He gave them the foibles, the follies, and the vices he saw about him, and made them speak in a new language of unrivalled wit, humor, and mirth. But his genius was shackled by the artificial conventions of the theatre, which did not allow him time or space to fully develop a character. A grand comic creation like Falstaff was impossible. He introduces a single propensity of mankind, exhibits it in all its relations to society, shows it to us on every side; but it remains only a trait of character, although we see it in half a dozen different lights. Tartuffe is the one exception; in him, hypocrisy hides covetousness and lust; and Tartuffe is Molière's masterpiece. But in most of his comedies he displays rather a knowledge of the world than a knowledge of human nature. In his walk he has no equal at home or abroad; but his walk is not the highest. We feel that something is wanting, and yet we can hardly extol him too highly. He brought comedy into close relation with every-day life; he is the father of the modern French stage, which has gradually cast off the old conventional personages. The French dramatists of today are not men of genius like Molière, but, in their airy, sparkling plays, they represent the freaks, follies, and fancies of society so exquisitely that nothing remains to be desired. They furnish the model and the materials for the theatre of all other nations.

When Regnard came before the public, the stage remained as Molière had left it. The only new personage was the Marquis, first introduced in the "Mère Coquette," by Quinault, the sweet and smooth writer of operas, — of whom it was said, that he had boned (*déossé*) the French language. The Marquis is the ancestor of our Fop, —

"Loose in morals and in manners vain,
In conversation frivolous, in dress extreme," —

who in turn has become antiquated and tiresome. Regnard's only original character is the Gambler; in his other com-

edies he made use of the old, familiar masks, and won success by his keen sense of the ridiculous, his wit, and his unceasing jollity and fun. His Crispins and Scapins are perfect. What impudent, worthless, amusing rogues! To keep inside of the law is their only rule of right. "Honesty is a fool, and Trust, his sworn brother, a very simple gentleman." They came of an ancient race, these Crispins and Scapins, that had flourished in Italy and in Spain since Plautus and Terence brought them over from Greece. They found their way to France, and even reached England in their migration, following in the train of Charles II. when he returned from exile, and during a short life on that side of the Channel added drunkenness and brutality to their gayer vices. The character was true to Nature in Athens or in Rome, where men of talent might often be bound to devote their brains to the service of those who owned their bodies, and by their condition as slaves were released from all obligations of honor or of honesty. In the seventeenth century it might pass in France; for the line between gentle and simple was so sharply drawn that ladies of rank saw no greater impropriety in disrobing before their footmen than before their dogs. But the progress of liberty or of *égalité* blotted out the valets of comedy. Even in Regnard's time the inconsistencies of the character were noticed. Jasmin, in the "Sérénade," utters revolutionary doctrine: — "How can an honorable valet devote himself to the interests of a penniless master? We grow tricky in waiting upon such fellows. They scold us; sometimes they beat us. We have more wit than they. We support them; we are obliged to invent, for their benefit, all sorts of knavery, in which they are always ready to take a share; and, withal, they are the masters, and we the servants. It is not just. Hereafter I mean to scheme for myself, and become a master in my turn."

Scapin has joined his brother pagans beyond the Styx; but Lisette blooms in evergreen youth. This young French

person's theory of woman's rights is different from the one which obtains in New England; nor does she trouble herself at all to seek for woman's mission. She found it years ago. It is to deceive a man. She is satisfied with her condition, and with the old mental and moral attributes of her sex. When Crispin disguises himself in her clothes, he exclaims, —

“L'adresse et l'artifice ont passé dans mon cœur ;
Qu'on a sous cet habit et d'esprit et de ruse —
Rien n'est si trompeur qu'un animal porte-jupe.”

This animal is as clever and as cunning in Paris to-day as when Crispin felt the inspiration of the petticoats.

In 1708, after another period of twelve years, “Le Légataire Universel” was played at the same theatre. In this piece the author relied entirely upon the *vis comica* of his plot and dialogue. Géronte, a rich, miserly old bachelor, with as many ailments as years, —

“Vieux et cassé, févreux, épileptique,
Paralytique, étique, asthmatique, hydropique,” —

has for a nephew Ergaste, with well-grounded hopes of inheriting, and that shortly. These are suddenly dashed by the announcement that his uncle has resolved to marry Isabelle, a girl to whom Ergaste himself is attached. The nephew keeps his own secret, and judiciously commends the choice of his uncle. Géronte is delighted with him; even asks his advice about a present for the damsel, — something pretty, but cheap.

“Je voudrais inventer quelque petit cadeau,
Qui coûtât peu, mais qui parût nouveau.”

Meeting with no opposition, the old gentleman gradually loses his relish for matrimony; and Madame Argante, the mother, promises Ergaste to give Isabelle to him, instead of to his uncle, provided Géronte will declare his nephew heir to his estate. Unluckily, there are two other collaterals, country cousins, whom Géronte has never seen, but whom he wishes to remember. Crispin, valet to Ergaste, assisted by Lisette, the old man's housekeeper and nurse, personifies first the male and then the female relative from the rural

districts so well that Géronte orders them out of his house in disgust, swears that he will not leave them a sous, and sends for a notary to draw his will in favor of Ergaste. But the excitement of the last interview with Crispin, as a widow, is too much for his strength. He becomes unconscious, and apparently breathes his last just as the notary knocks at the door. In this moment of agonizing disappointment, the indomitable Crispin comes to the rescue. He puts on the dressing-gown and cap of Géronte, reclines in his easy-chair, counterfeits his voice, and dictates a will to the notary. Firstly, he bequeaths to Lisette two thousand crowns, on condition that she marry Crispin; secondly, he leaves to Crispin an annuity of fifteen hundred crowns, to reward his devotion to his master; the rest of the estate, real and personal, to go to Ergaste. The residuary legatee remonstrates warmly with the testator against his foolish generosity to Crispin and Lisette; but the sham Géronte insists, and Ergaste is obliged to submit. The notary withdraws to make the necessary copies of the will, and the plotters are chuckling over the success of their plans, when, to their dismay, Géronte enters, alive. He tells them that he feels his strength departing, and bids them send at once for the notary to settle his worldly affairs. The notary, who is ignorant of any deceit, assures him that he has made his will already, and shows him the document. The conspirators seize the chance of escape, confirm the notary's story, and relate all the circumstances of the conference. Géronte protests that he recollects nothing of it; he feels certain he could not have given more than twenty crowns to Lisette; as to Crispin, he had never heard of him. The answer is always, “*C'est votre léthargie.*” While perplexed and hesitating, the old man discovers that a large sum in notes has been abstracted from his hoard. Ergaste had secured them as an alleviation in case of the worst, and had placed them in the hands of Isabelle. She promises to return them, if Géronte will make Ergaste his

heir and her husband. In his anxiety for his money, G ronte consents to everything, and allows the will to stand.

Nothing, La Harpe tells us, ever made a French audience laugh so heartily as the scene of the will. Falbaire, one of the *po tes n glig s* of the eighteenth century, says, in a note to his drama, "The Monks of Japan," that the Jesuits furnished Regnard with the idea of this scene. In 1626, the reverend fathers, by precisely the same stratagem employed by Crispin, obtained possession of the estate of a M. d'Ancier of B san on, who died suddenly and intestate. It is proper to add that M. Falbaire's drama was written against the Jesuits.

There are two other plays, out of some twenty that Regnard published, which will repay a reader: "Les Menechmes," imitated from Plautus, like Shakspeare's Dromios, and "D mocrite,"* which reminds one a little of Moli re's "Amphitryon." Both are distinguished for that perpetual gayety, the most pleasing of all qualities, which is the characteristic of their author. It seems impossible for him to be dull; he never nods; his bow, such as it is, is always strung. It is remarkable that his comic scenes, although crammed with fun, never run down into farce; nor does he find it necessary to eke out his wit with buffoonery. He had an instinctive taste which preserved him from coarseness; although he wrote a century and a half ago, there is less of the low and indelicate than in the plays we see posted at the doors of our theatres. The French of the time of

Louis XIV. must have been a much more refined people than the contemporary English. At least, Thalia in Paris was a vestal, compared with her tawdry, indecent, and drunken London sister. One is ashamed to be seen reading the unblushing profligacy of Wycherley, Cibber, Vanbrugh, and Congreve.

We must admit that Regnard's mantle of decorum is not without a rent. In the "L gataire," as in the "Malade Imaginaire," may be found a good deal of pleasantry on the first of the three principal remedies of the physicians of the period, as mentioned by Moli re in his *burlesque Latin*:—

"Clysterium donare,
Postea purgare,
Ensuita seignare."

It seems to have been a good joke in France then; it is so now,—wonderfully fresh and new,—defying time and endless repetition. American eyes do not see much fun in it; they rather turn away in disgust. But on the risible organs of the French purgative medicines operate violently; and the favorite weapon of their medical service, primitive in shape and exaggerated in dimensions, is a property indispensable to every theatre. Regnard used it as a part of the stage machinery,—worked it in as a stock pleasantry, the effect of which was certain. Were he writing now, he would do the same thing. But in the "Joueur" nobody is ill; it may be read by that typical creature, the "most virtuous female," publicly and without a blush.

Gentlemen and ladies whose morals are not fully fledged are generally advised to beware of attempting to skim over the fiction of modern France. They may take up Regnard without risking a fall; for there is little danger of being led astray by the picaresque knaveries of Scapin and Lisette. In 1700 love for another man's wife had not come to be considered one of the fine arts. Nowadays the victims of this kind of misplaced affection are the heroes of French novels and plays. The husband, odious and tiresome *ex officio*,

* D mocrite, in an attack upon a heavy diner-out, says,—

"Il creuse son tombeau sans cesse avec ses dents,"—and thus anticipates Sir Astley Cooper by many years. It is lucky that these fellows, who took a mean advantage of seniority to get off our good things before us, have perished, or they might give us trouble. At least two Frenchmen could claim "the glorious Epicurean paradox" of one of the seven wise men of Boston, "Give us the luxuries of life, and we will dispense with its necessities,"—M. de Voltaire, and M. de Coulanges, a generation earlier. These "flashing moments" of the wise in Boston, as in other great places, are often, like heat-lightning, reflections of a previous flash.

has succeeded to the miserly father or tyrannical guardian. He is the giant of French romance, who keeps the lovely and uneasy lady locked up in Castle Matrimony. He cannot help himself, poor fellow!—he is compelled to fill that unenviable position, whenever Madame chooses. Sentimental young Arthurs and Ernests stand in the place of Ergaste and Cléante, and are always ready to make war upon the unlucky giant. They overcome him as of old, scale the walls, and carry off the capricious fair one. We have hardly changed for the better. Ergaste and Cléante were not sentimental, but they were marrying men and broke no commandments.

Regnard's life of fifty years covers the whole of the literary age of Louis XIV. Before 1660 the French had no literature worth preserving, except Rabelais, Montaigne, a few odes of Malherbe, a page or two of Marot, and the tragedies of Corneille. Pascal published the "Provincial Letters" in the year of Regnard's birth. La Fontaine had written a few indifferent verses; Molière was almost unknown. In 1686, when Regnard became an author, the Voitures, Balzacs, and Benserades, the men of fantastic conceits, the vanguard of the grand army of French wits, had marched away to Pluto and to Lethe. One or two stragglers, like *Ménage* and *Chapelle*, lingered to wonder at the complete change of taste. The age had ripened fast. Not many years before, Barbin the bookseller ordered his hacks to *faire du St. Évremond*. St. Évremond was still living in England, dirty and witty; and Barbin still kept his shop, but gave no more orders for wares of that description. Many of the greatest names of the era were already carved on tombs: La Rochefoucauld, Pascal, Corneille, Molière. Bossuet was a man of sixty; La Fontaine a few years older; Boileau and Racine close upon fifty. When Regnard died, in 1710, the eighteenth century had begun. Fontenelle, Le Sage, Bayle, men of nearly the same age as himself, belong to it.

In 1686 King Louis had reached the full meridian of his *Gloire, Grandeur,*

Éclat. No monarch in Europe was so powerful. He had conquered Flanders, driven the Dutch under water, seized Franche-Comté, annexed Lorraine, ravaged the Palatinate, bombarded Algiers and Genoa, and by a skillful disregard of treaties and of his royal word kept his neighbors at swords' points until he was ready to destroy them. The Emperor was afraid of him, Philip of Spain his most humble servant, Charles II. in his pay. He had bullied the Pope, and brought the Doge of Genoa to Paris to ask pardon for selling powder to the Algerines and ships to Spain. He was *Louis le Grand, le roi vraiment roi, le demi-dieu qui nous gouverne, Deodatus, Sol nec pluribus impar*. Regnard witnessed the cloudy setting of this splendid luminary. After the secret marriage with Mme. de Maintenon, in 1686, Fortune deserted the King. He was everywhere defeated, or his victories were Cadmean, as disastrous as defeats. The fleet that was to replace James II. on his throne was destroyed at La Hogue by Russell. The Camisards defied for years the army sent against them. Rooke took Gibraltar. Peterborough defeated the Bourbon forces in Spain. Blenheim, Oudenarde, Ramillies, Malplaquet, brought ruin upon France before Regnard was withdrawn from the scene.

Meanwhile the Eighteenth Century, with its godlessness and its debauchery, was born. Hypocrisy watched over its infancy. When Louis reformed, and took a pious elderly second wife, it was the fashion to be religious; and whoever wished to stand well at court followed the fashion. "You who live in France have wonderful advantages for saving your souls," wrote St. Évremond from London. "Vice is quite out of date with you. It is in bad taste to sin,—as offensive to good manners as to morality. And those of you who might be forgetful of their hereafter are led to salvation by a becoming deference to the habits and observances of well-bred people." The monarch himself was utterly ignorant in matters of religion; the Duchess of Orleans wrote to her

German friends, that he had never even read the Bible. He was shocked to hear that Christ had demeaned himself to speak the language of the poor and the humble. "*Il avait la foi du charbonnier,*" Cardinal Fleury said, — the blind, unreasoning faith of the African in his fetich. He considered it due to his *gloire* to assist Divine Providence in its government of the souls of men. Was he not the greatest prince of the earth, the eldest son of the Church, standing nearer to the throne of grace than any insignificant pope? Of course he was responsible for the orthodoxy of his subjects, a *demi-dieu qui nous gouverne*. He came to think religion a part of his royal prerogative, and misbelief treason against his royal person. He was quite capable of going a step beyond Cardinal Wolsey, and of writing, "*Ego et Deus meus.*" He said to a prelate whose management of some ecclesiastical business particularly gratified him, — "*J'ignore si Dieu vous tiendra compte de la conduite que vous avez tenue; mais quant à moi, je vous assure que je ne l'oublierai jamais.*" The spiritual powers are never backward in taking advantage of favorable circumstances: Huguenots, Jansenists, and Quietists were sternly put down, and the girdle of superstition tightened until it began to crack. The skeptics were quiet, — asked but few questions, — pretended to be satisfied with the time-honored answers Mother Church keeps for her uneasy children, — and seemed to be busy with the "*Querelle des Anciens et des Modernes,*" and the "*Dispute sur les Cérémonies Chinoises.*" It was not yet the time for them to announce pompously their radical theories as new and true. A thin varnish of decorum and orthodoxy overspread everything; but one may see the shadow of the coming *Régence* in Regnard's works. He and gentlemen like him went to mass in the morning, and to pleasure for the rest of the day and night.

" Ils sont chrétiens à la messe,
Ils sont païens à l'opéra."

Regnard was almost as much of a pa-

gan as his favorite Horace, — called for wines, roses, and perfumes, and sang his Lydia and his Lalage almost in the same words. His creed and his philosophy were pagan. He adored three goddesses, — *la Comédie, la Musique, la bonne Chère*; his solution of the problem of life was enjoyment.

" Faire tout ce qu'on veut, vivre exempt de chagrin,
Ne se rien refuser, — Voilà tout mon système,
Et de mes jours ainsi j'attraperai la fin."

Wisdom was given to man to temper pleasure, — to avoid excess, which destroys pleasure. Regnard had agreeable recollections of the past; the present satisfied him; he was as careless of the unknown future as De Retz, whose *épouvantable tranquillité*, appalling ease of mind on that point, so shocked poor Mme. de Sévigné. All other speculations he put quietly aside with a doubt or a *cui bono*. It was a witty and refined selfishness, and nothing beyond. Spiritual light, faith, none; hope that to-morrow might pass as smoothly as to-day; love, only that particular affection which man feels for his female fellow-creature. Such a heathenish frame of mind will find little favor in this era of yearnings, seekings, teachings. It was, indeed, a lamentable condition of moral darkness; but the error, though grievous, has its attractive side.

" On court après la vérité;
Ah! croyez moi, l'erreur a son mérite."

It is a relief in these dyspeptic times to turn back to Regnard, the big, rosy, and jolly pagan, enjoying to the utmost the four blessings invoked upon the head of Argan by the chorus of Doctors: —

" Salus, honor et argentum,
Atque bonum appetitum."

Comfortable, contented with himself and with the world, he was free from the sadness, the misgivings, and the enervating doubts which overrun so many morbid minds, — symptoms of moral weakness, and of the want of healthy occupation. Hence lady poets, more than all others, love to indulge in these feeble repinings, and take the privilege of their sex to shed tears on paper.

In his bachelor establishment, Rue de Richelieu, there was, he tells us, —

“ Grande chère, vin délicieux,
Belle maison, liberté toute entière,
Bals, concerts, enfin tout ce qui peut satisfaire
Le goût, les oreilles, les yeux.”

The *Société choisie* was numerous ; for a good cook never fails to make friends for his master, and Regnard's cook dealt with fat capons, plover, and ortolans. His lettuce, mushrooms, and artichokes were grown under his own eyes. The choice vintages of France, in casks, lay in his cellar. He gave wine to nourish wit, not to furnish an opportunity for ostentatious gabble about age and price. How he revels in the description of good cheer ! There rises from his pages the *fumet* of game and the *bouquet d'un vin exquis*.

“ Et des perdrix ! Morbleu ! d'un fumet admirable
Sentez plutôt. Quel baume ! Mon Dieu ! ”

Why are American authors so commonly wan and gaunt, with none of the external marks of healthy gayety ? Is it the climate, or the lack of out-door exercise, or hot-air furnaces, or rascally cooks ? They look as if, like Burns's man, they “ were made to mourn.” If they conceive a joke, their sad, sharp voices and angular gesticulations make it miscarry. Now and then they rebel against their constitutions, poor fellows, and try to imitate the jovial ancestors they have read of ; babble shrilly of *noces carnæque Deùm*, *petits soupers*, and what not. It is mostly idle talk. They know too well that digestion does not wait upon appetite in the evening, — and that they will feel better for the next week, if they restrict their debauch to dandelion coffee and Graham bread. Moreover, the age of conviviality is gone, as much as the age of chivalry. *Petits soupers* are impossible in this part of the world. Let us manfully confess one reason : they cost too much. And we have not the wit, nor the wicked women, nor the same jolly paganism. Juno Lucina reigns here in the stead of Venus ; and Bacchus is two dollars a bottle.

But these and other good things Regnard had in abundance, and so lived

smoothly and happily on, defying time, — for he held, with Mme. de Thianges, “ *On ne vieillit point à table,*” until one day he overheated himself in shooting, drank abundantly of cold water, and fell dead, — Euthanasia. He died a bachelor, and, if we may judge from many of his verses, seems, like Thackeray, to have wondered why Frenchmen ever married. But he had a keen eye for “ the fair defect of Nature.” Strabon's description of young Criseis before her glass could have been written only by an amateur : —

“ Je la voyais tantôt devant une toilette
D'une mouche assassine irriter ses attraits.”

Neither Molière, Regnard, nor Le Sage was a member of the Academy.

Béranger thinks it remarkable that the *improvisations folles et charmantes* of Regnard should now be neglected in France. We do not recollect to have met with him even in the “ *Causeries* ” of Ste. Beuve, who has ransacked the French Temple of Fame from garret to cellar for *feuilleton* materials ; yet the “ *Légataire* ” kept a foothold on the stage for a hundred and twenty years. But the Temple of Fame is overcrowded. Every day some worthy fellow is turned out to make room for a new-comer. Our libraries are not large enough to hold the mob of authors who press in. What with newspapers, magazines, and the last new novel, few persons have time to read more than the titles on the backs of their books. They are familiar with the great names, take their excellence on trust, and allow them to stand neglected and dusty on their shelves. But with another generation the great names will become mere shadows of a name ; and so on to oblivion. Father Time has a good taste in literature, it is true. He mows down with his critical scythe the tares which spring up in such daily abundance ; but, unfortunately, he cannot stop there : after a lapse of years, he sweeps away also the fruit of the good seed to make room for the productions of his younger children.

“ For he 's their parent and he is their grave.”

The doom is universal ; it cannot be avoided. There must be an end to all temporal things, and why not to books ? The same endless night awaits a Plato and a penny-a-liner. Our Eternities of Fame, like all else appertaining to humanity, will some day pass away. Even Milton and Shakspeare, our great staple international poets, who have been brought out whenever the American ambassador to England dined in public, are travelling the same downward path. How many of us, man or

woman, on the sunny side of thirty, have gone through the "Paradise Lost" ? And Shakspeare, in spite of new editions and of new commentators, is not half as much read as fifty years since. Perhaps the time will come when English speaking people will not know to whom they owe so many of the proverbs, metaphors, and eloquent words which enrich their daily talk.

Will none escape this inexorable fate ? Homer and Robinson Crusoe seem to us to have the most tenacity of life.

JOHN BROWN'S RAID:

HOW I GOT INTO IT, AND HOW I GOT OUT OF IT.

IT was a wet Monday in October, on my return from a journey, with a large party of friends and acquaintances, as far north as Chicago and as far south as St. Louis and the Iron Mountain. We were gradually nearing home, and the fun and jollity grew apace as we got closer to the end of our holiday and to the beginning of our every-day work. Our day's ride was intended to be from Cumberland (on the Baltimore and Ohio Railroad) to Baltimore. The murky drizzle made our comfortable car all the more cozy, and the picturesque glories of that part of Western Virginia, through which we had come very leisurely and enjoyably, were heightened by the contrast of the dull cloud that hung over the valley of the Potomac. At Martinsburg the train was stopped for an unusually long time ; and in spite of close questioning, we were obliged to satisfy our curiosity with a confused story of an outbreak and a strike among the workmen at the armory, with a consequent detention of trains, at Harper's Ferry. The train pushed on slowly, and at last came to a dead halt at a station called The Old Furnace. There a squad of half a dozen lazy Virginia farmers — we should call them a picket

just now, in our day of military experiences — told us half a dozen stories about the troubles ahead, and finally the people in charge of our train determined to send it back to wait for further news from below. A young engineer who was employed on the railroad was directed to go along the track to examine it, and see what, if any, damage had been done. As I had brushed up an acquaintance with him, I volunteered to accompany him, and then was joined by a young Englishman, a Guardsman on his travels, one of the Welsh Wynns, just returning from a shooting-tour over the Prairies. We started off in the rain and mud, and kept together till we came to a bridle-path crossing the railroad and climbing up the hills. Here we met a country doctor, who offered to guide us to Bolivar, whence we could come down to the Ferry, and as the trains would be detained there for several hours, there would be time enough to see all the armory workshops and wonders. So off we started up the muddy hillside, leaving our engineer to his task on the railroad ; for what pedestrian would not prefer the worst dirt road to the best railroad for an hour's walking ? Our Englishman was ailing