

THE PARIS OF THACKERAY AND DICKENS

BY ARTHUR BARTLETT MAURICE

A street there is in Paris famous,
 For which no rhyme our language yields.
 Rue Neuve des Petits Champs its name is,
 The New Street of the Little Fields.
 And there's an inn not rich and splendid,
 But still in comfortable case,
 The which in youth I oft attended
 To eat a plate of bouillabaisse.

The genial Laird, one of the Three Musketeers of the Brush of Mr. du Maurier's "Trilby", tossed on a bed of fever, while kindly French nurses in attendance wept as they listened to the reverential voice in which he mumbled over what they conceived to be his prayers. But these "prayers", strangely enough, always ended with allusion to,—

Red peppers, garlic, roach, and dace,
 All these you get in Terré's Tavern
 In that one dish of bouillabaisse.

Thousands of other Scotchmen, and tens of thousands of Britons and of Americans have thrilled, as Sandy McAllister of Cockpen did, over the verses into which Thackeray, writing in a vein of assumed lightness, poured so much of the feeling of his lost youth. As poetry, the "Ballad of the Bouillabaisse" is not to be ranked with Keats's "Ode on a German Urn". Neither is Kipling's "Mandalay". Thackeray himself wrote many better verses, but none which has so delighted the ear and the palate of posterity, and which is so likely to endure. Every now and then its vitality is attested by some new Columbus who discovers in a Paris restaurant to his liking the original of Terré's Tavern. For example there was the American, Julian Street, who, six or seven years ago in a little book called

"Paris à la Carte", wrote: "Those who remember Thackeray's 'Ballad of the Bouillabaisse' will find the restaurant therein celebrated a few blocks back of the Café Laperousse, near the Church of St. Germain des Prés. I do not know that bouillabaisse may still be had there, but I hope so. Perhaps you will find out."

Now as a matter of fact the restaurant of Mr. Street's discovery actually has certain Thackerayan associations. Thackeray dined there often when he was an art student, and to this day there hangs on the wall a portrait of the novelist at table, and an appended note setting forth the facts of his fame and his patronage. But it never was Terré's. The site of the lair of the bouillabaisse is not on the south side of the river at all, but is almost within a stone's throw of the great boulevards and the fashionable shops of the Rue de la Paix. Soon after Thackeray's Paris days the Rue Neuve des Petits Champs became the Rue des Petits Champs. It is that today, running from the Rue de la Paix, upon which its western end abuts, diagonally across the Avenue de l'Opéra, back of the gardens of the Palais Royal, and almost to the Place des Victoires. The number of the building occupied by Terré's Tavern was originally 16. The structure that now occupies the site is of conventional type and architecture, and may be identified by the sign of a banking-house that projects at right angles over the sidewalk.

The impression of one of the many

who came in contact with the personal Thackeray and afterward wrote about it, was that he spoke the most beautiful French that the visitor had ever heard from the lips of an Englishman. That encomium was qualified by Thackeray himself, when he confessed to a foreigner's limitations in judging the style of George Sand, whose sentences nevertheless impressed him with their charm, seeming to him like "the sound of country bells—provoking I don't know what vein of musing and meditation, and falling sweetly and sadly on the ear". Perhaps French was not quite a second mother language to him as it was to du Maurier and has been to half a dozen other English men of letters. But the Paris of his day was as familiar to him as was his own Pall Mall and Russell Square; and with that part of him which was not wholly belligerently British, he very much preferred it to the London of fogs and of the intolerant eyes of the Lord Farintoshes and the Sir Barnes Newcomes.

It was not exactly Thackeray's fault that his novels were not written from a detached point of view. He simply could not help being autobiographical. How much of himself he gave in the making of Arthur Pendennis is a matter of general knowledge. The Paris of his youth, and many of his aspirations and heartaches are reflected in the pages of "The Adventures of Philip". The first chapter of "The Paris Sketch Book" is entitled "A Caution to Travellers". The moral it conveys is one of the oldest of morals. The story was told two thousand years before Thackeray. Ten years ago one of the cleverest of American tale-spinners was retelling it with conspicuous success. A hundred years hence, and five hundred

years hence the same plot will probably again be presented with little or no variation. It is the innocent traveler who falls among gilded thieves. In the Thackerayan version the name of the victim happened to be Sam Pogson; the fascinating lady called herself for the time being la Baronne Florval-Derval, and her accomplices were a mythical baron, and a son of that Earl of Cinquars who was ubiquitous in Thackeray's pages; and the particular scene of the fleecing was an apartment in the Rue Taitbout. But the point of the matter is that the experience was one that Thackeray in his callow days—and he seems to have had quite a faculty for playing the fool—had shared with others equally guileless and impressionable. Even though he never dropped his *h's*, he had been Sam Pogson for a day.

If ever there was a book made by a book review it was "Vanity Fair". The first numbers dragged, as "Pickwick" had dragged before Sam Weller came upon the scene. The British public was slow to recognize that a new star was beginning to glitter in the literary firmament. Then came Abraham Hayward's sweeping tribute in "The Edinburgh" for January, 1848; and with it the doors were opened, and Thackeray passed in to take his place among the accepted masters of English fiction. In introducing the man, Hayward recalled finding him, ten or twelve years before, day after day engaged in the Louvre copying pictures in order to qualify himself for his intended profession of artist. The gallery of the Louvre, as much as the Charterhouse, or Cambridge, was a school that played a conspicuous part in Thackeray's intellectual development. It was not that there he learned to draw

—he never did that—but there, under the influence of the mighty dead, he completed his education in the humanities.

It was in July, 1833, when he was twenty-two years old, and acting as Paris correspondent of "The National Standard and Journal of Literature, Science, Music, Theatricals, and the Fine Arts"—a little paper first edited and subsequently purchased by him—that he wrote to his mother, Mrs. Carmichael Smith: "I have been thinking very seriously of turning artist. I can draw better than I can do anything else, and certainly I should like it better than any other occupation, so why shouldn't I?" In answer to the question he trudged off to spend the pleasant and profitable days in a room,—

... half a mile long, with as many windows as Aladdin's palace, open from sunrise till evening, and free to all manners and varieties of study, where the brethren of the brush, though they sleep perhaps in a garret, and dine in a cellar, have a luxury which surpasses all others, and the enjoyment of a palace which all the money of all the Rothschilds could not buy.

Thackeray's first Paris was the city he had visited as a wide-eyed boy. His second Paris was the Louvre.

Then came the Paris of his marriage and his honeymoon. On August 20, 1836, he and Miss Isabella Gethen Creagh Shawe, a daughter of Colonel Matthew Shawe of a Bengal regiment, were united in the British Embassy, and went to live in the Rue Neuve St. Augustin, hard by Terré's Tavern. There is an echo of that period in certain lines of the "Ballad of the Bouillabaisse":

Ah, me! how quick the days are flitting!
I mind me of a time that's gone,
When here I'd sit, as now I'm sitting,
In this same place—but not alone.
A fair young form was nestled near me,
A dear, dear face looked fondly up,

And sweetly spoke and smiled to cheer me
—There's no one now to share my cup.

No. For many years there was no one to share his cup.

There is no need to dwell at length upon the tragedy of Thackeray's brief married life, or the long period during which he was practically a widower. It was the Paris of his youth that was associated with his first great affair of the heart; the Paris of his maturity played a part in his second journey into the realm of serious sentimental attachment. For when the lady in the case was exasperatingly friendly and exasperatingly discreet, it was to Paris that the great man repaired, there to brood over his infatuation, and to write letters in which the tone changed abruptly from assumed lightness to violent recrimination. Thackeray seems to have first met Jane Octavia Brookfield about 1839, three years after his marriage, and soon after the separation enforced by Mrs. Thackeray's mental trouble. The husband, Reverend William H. Brookfield, had been known to Thackeray in the undergraduate days at Cambridge. A chance meeting led to Brookfield's taking Thackeray home unexpectedly to dinner, when there happened to be nothing in the house but a shoulder of cold mutton, and the embarrassed hostess was obliged to send a maid to a neighboring pastry-cook's for a dozen tartlets. The first letter in what is known as the "Brookfield correspondence", which was kept so long a mystery and finally given to the public early in 1914, was one written by Thackeray to M. Cazati in Paris, asking the latter to do the honors in the French capital for Mr. Brookfield. Some years elapsed, however, before the novelist's attentions began to cause comment.

Brookfield himself seems to have been a complaisant husband, and Jane the "bread- and butter-cutting Charlotte" of "The Sorrows of Werther"; but in 1850 the lady's uncle, Henry Hallam, was moved to protest at the frequency of Thackeray's visits. So the greater part of 1850, Thackeray, who about the time was writing "Pendennis", spent in Paris. To indicate his affluence and extravagance, it is necessary merely to mention that he stayed at the Hotel Bristol, in the Place Vendôme.

From Paris he wrote often to Mrs. Brookfield, and often to others about her, in the latter letters expressing freely his unfavorable opinion of the husband. It was the Paris of the presidency of Louis Napoleon, just before the *coup d'état*, and in one letter he tells of the President's ball and the people he met there:

When I tell you, ma'am, that there were *tradesmen* and their wives present! I saw one woman pull off a pair of list slippers and take a ticket for them at the greatcoat repository; and I rather liked her for being so bold. Confess now, would you have the courage to go to court in list slippers and ask the footman at the door to keep 'em till you came out? Well, there was Lady Castlereagh looking uncommonly 'andsome, and the Spanish Ambassador's wife blazing with new diamonds and looking like a picture by Velasquez, with daring red cheeks and bright eyes. And there was the Princess What-d'you-call-'em, the President's cousin, covered with diamonds too, superb and sulky. . . . The children went to church yesterday, and Minny sat next to Guizot, and Victor Hugo was there—a queer beathen. Did you read of his ordering his son to fight a duel the other day with the son of another literary man? Young Hugo wounded his adversary and I suppose his father embraced him and applauded him—and goes to church afterwards as if he was a Christian. . . . I am going to Gudin's tonight, being tempted by the promise of meeting Scribe, Dumas, Mery; and if none of them are there, what am I to do?

So much, in this limited narrative, for the Paris of Thackeray's life. There is the Paris of his books.

Henry Esmond went there to plan the great scheme that was to restore the Stuarts on the English throne, a gallant venture brought to naught by the Prince's pursuit of Beatrix. That eighteenth century Paris was the scene of various activities of the Beatrix of later years, the Baroness Bernstein of "The Virginians". After Waterloo the Rawdon Crawleys lived in Paris for a time—little Rawdon being put out to nurse in the suburbs, —and departing, left behind them innumerable debts. In "The Newcomes", from the Hotel de la Terrasse which was on the Rue de Rivoli, Clive wrote to his friend Pendennis, telling of his first walk in the Tuileries Gardens, "with the chestnuts out, the statues all shining, and all the windows of the palace in a blaze", and recording that the Palais Royal had changed much since Scott's time. It would hardly have been Thackeray's fist if the Louvre had not been brought in to play an early part in the narrative. There Clive fell in love with the most beautiful creature that the world has ever seen.

She was standing, silent and majestic, in the center of one of the rooms of the statue gallery, and the very first glimpse of her struck one breathless with the sense of her beauty. I could not see the color of her eyes and hair exactly, but the latter is light, and the eyes, I should think, are gray. She may be some two and thirty years old, and she was born about two thousand years ago. Her name is the Venus of Milo.

Then Clive and his father went to dine with the Vicomte de Florac at the Café de Paris, which was certainly not where the restaurant of that name is to be found today; and then, in a house in the Rue St. Dominique—the Thackerayan visitor of the present Anno Domini may select the edifice that best fits his own mental picture—"Tom" Newcome again saw his Leonore after all the years. To

Clive's eyes that tender and ceremonious meeting was like an elderly Sir Charles Grandison saluting a middle-aged Miss Byron. It is the most beautiful of all Thackeray's love stories. Later another love story ran part of its troubled course in the Hotel de Florac and the little garden behind. There, under the kindly chaperonage of the sweet French lady, Clive and Ethel were closer in communion of heart than ever before or after, save possibly in that fable-land at which Thackeray hinted as lying beyond the horizon of "Finis". About the Hotel de Florac there was an American flavor, for when Clive first saw it, the upper part was rented to "Major-General the Honorable Zeno F. Pokey, of Cincinnati, U. S."

Though his *métier* was not the melodramatic school, there are plenty of great moments in Thackeray. Anthony Trollope held Lady Rachel's disclosure of Henry's legitimacy to the Duke of Hamilton in "Esmond" to be the greatest scene in English fiction. What reader can forget the pursuit of the Prince to Castlewood, or George Osborne lying on his face, "dead, with a bullet through his heart", or Becky, admiring her husband, "strong, brave, and victorious"? Once Thackeray reached heights in a comic scene, in the battle between the Bayneses, the Bunches, and the MacWhirters, in the Champs Elysées *pension* of Madame Smolensk. The "Petit Château d'Espagne" was the sonorous name of the *pension* in question, and the full title of the proprietress, which Mrs. Baynes used in letters designed to impress her friends, was Madame la Générale Baronne de Smolensk. But save as indicating a general type of *pension* that flourished in the streets adjacent to that part of the Champs Elysées

that lies about the Rond Point in Thackeray's time, it is practically certain that the "Petit Château d'Espagne" was never more than an imaginary structure.

Closer to reality were the bohemian haunts of Philip Firmin. Like some of the characters of Balzac, Firmin was in the habit of dining at Flicoteau's. Flicoteau's was an actual restaurant of the Paris of 1840, which stood on ground now occupied by one of the newer buildings of the Sorbonne. There, for an expenditure of seventeen sous, Philip sat down to the enjoyment of the soup, the beef, the rôti, the salad, the dessert, and the whitey-brown bread at discretion. He would have been poor in the Rue de la Paix; he was wealthy in the Luxembourg quarter. His habitation was the Hotel Poussin, in the Rue Poussin, where there was a little painted wicket that opened, ringing; and the passage and the stair led to Monsieur Philippe's room, which was on the first floor, as was that of Bouchard, the painter, who had his *atelier* over the way. Besides Bouchard, who was a bad painter but a worthy friend, the Hotel Poussin sheltered Laberge of the second floor, the poet from Carcassonne, who pretended to be studying law but whose heart was with the Muses and whose talk was of Victor Hugo and Alfred de Musset; and the suspiciously wealthy Escasse; and old Colonel Dujarret, who had been a prisoner of war in England; and Tymowski, sighing over his Poland. No such street as the Rue Poussin now exists in that part of Paris. It debouched, according to Philip, into the Rue de Seine, which winds in back of the Institute of France from the Quai Malaquais, and runs to the south, crossing the Boulevard St. Germain. The Rue Visconti,

where Balzac had the printing-press that ruined him, or the Rue des Beaux Arts, both little changed in the course of three-quarters of a century, will give the visitor the flavor of Philip Firmin's environment. To Thackeray the Hotel Poussin was more than a corner of the city he loved so well. It was Bohemia; it was the careless, light, laughing youth of which he had sung in his adaptation from Béranger's "Le Grenier".

With pensive eyes the little room I view
Where in my youth I weathered it so long,
With a wild mistress, a staunch friend or two.
And a light heart breaking into song.
Making a mock of life and all its cares,
Rich in the glory of my rising sun,
Lightly I vaulted up four pairs of stairs,
In the brave days when I was twenty-one.

France is in "Dombey and Son", and it is in "Little Dorrit". But for the Paris of the fiction of Dickens the natural and inevitable turning is to "A Tale of Two Cities", which was first in its author's mind as "One of These Days", then as "Buried Alive", then as "The Thread of Gold", and then as "The Doctor of Beauvais". "A Tale of Two Cities" (which Andrew Lang held to be one of the three most enthralling stories ever written, the other two being "Quentin Durward" and "Twenty Years After"), and "Barnaby Rudge" were Dickens's only ventures in the field of the historical novel, and the preparation of the scene of the former, especially, was a work of great care and elaboration. The Paris that he personally knew was the city of the 'forties and the 'fifties. To ensure topographical accuracy he spent days in poring over old maps and in laboriously consulting documents, essays, and chronicles. To Mercier's "Tableau de Paris", which had been printed in Amsterdam, he turned for the picture of his Marquis. Rousseau was his authority

for the peasant's shutting up his house when he had a bit of meat; in the tax tables of the period he studied the general wretched condition of the proletariat in the years when the storm of revolution was gathering. "These", records Forster, "are interesting intimations of the care with which Dickens worked; and there is no instance in his novels, excepting this, of a deliberate and planned departure from the method of treatment which had been preeminently the source of his popularity as a novelist." Also Carlyle's "French Revolution" had recently appeared, and Froude tells us of the tremendous hold it took on Dickens's mind. "He carried a copy of it with him wherever he went."

It was the St. Antoine quarter, seething into revolt, that was almost the protagonist of the early Paris chapters of the book. There, in a street the exact identity of which is a matter of no particular importance, was the wineshop of Monsieur and Madame Defarge. It was "haggard St. Antoine", "clamorous St. Antoine", "St. Antoine, a vast dusky mass of scarecrows heaving to and fro", "St. Antoine shouting and dancing his angry blood up", "St. Antoine writing his crimes on flaring sheets of paper", "St. Antoine sleeping and dreaming of the fresh vengeance of the morrow". Then the note changed. A new figure came to replace St. Antoine, a hideous figure that grew as familiar as if it had been before the general gaze from the foundations of the world—the figure of the sharp female called La Guillotine. "It was the popular theme for jests; it was the best cure for headache, it infallibly prevented the hair from turning gray, it imparted a peculiar delicacy to the complexion, it was the national

razor which shaved close; who kissed La Guillotine, looked through the little window and sneezed into the sack."

But there were material scenes. Miss Pross "threaded her way along the narrow streets and crossed the river by the bridge of the Pont Neuf"; from the Prison of the Abbaye, Gabelle wrote the letter beginning "Mon-sieur heretofore the Marquis"; Charles Darnay, journeying from England in response, and making his way in bad equipages drawn by bad horses over bad roads, was consigned to La Force. Tellson's Bank was in the Saint-Germain quarter, "in the wing of a large house, approached by a courtyard and shut off from the street by a high wall and a strong gate"; Alexandre Manette wrote his story while in a doleful cell in the Bastille; part of the Palais de Justice as we see it today is the Conciergerie, where Evrémonte awaited execution; it was on a spot which is now part of the beautiful Place de la Concorde that Sidney Carton made the supreme sacrifice. "He has described London", wrote one of his earliest critics, "like a special correspondent for posterity". The same might be said of his Paris of the *sans-culottes*, and the awakening of the Greater Jacquerie.

Dickens first saw Paris to know it in November, 1846. With his family he had left England the end of the preceding May, crossing to Belgium, and traveling by way of the Rhine to Switzerland, where a stay of several months was made. Then the party made its way from Geneva, journeying in three carriages and stopping between six and seven each evening. The arrival was a day later than expected, and the stop was at the Hotel Brighton in the Rue de Rivoli. Two years earlier Dickens

had passed through the city on his way to Italy. This time he was there for a stay of three months. His first experience was a "colossal" walk about the streets, half frightened by the brightness and brilliance, in the course of which his notice was attracted by a book in a shop window announced as "Les Mystères de Londres par Sir Trollope". In frequent letters to Forster he practised his French, which was apparently very good, though one suspects references to the text-book or dictionary convenient to hand. Then Forster crossed the Channel to join him, and the Parisian education began in earnest. Together they passed through every variety of sightseeing—prisons, palaces, theatres, hospitals, the Morgue and St. Lazare, as well as the Louvre, Versailles, St. Cloud, and all the spots made memorable by the first revolution. The comedian Régnier made them free of the green-room of the Français. They supped with Alexandre Dumas, and with Eugène Sue—then at the height of his fame,—and met Théophile Gautier, and Alphonse Karr. Forster relates:

We saw Lamartine also, and had much friendly intercourse with Scribe, and with the good-natured Amédée Pichot. One day we visited in the Rue du Bac the sick and ailing Chateaubriand, whom we thought like Basil Montagu; found ourselves at the other extreme of opinion, in the sculpture-room of David d'Angers; and closed that day at the house of Victor Hugo, by whom Dickens was received with infinite courtesy and grace. The great writer then occupied a floor in a noble corner house in the Place Royale, the old quarter of Ninon l'Enclos, and the people of the Regency. . . . I never saw upon any features so keenly intellectual such a soft and sweet gentility, and certainly never heard the French language spoken with the picturesque distinctness given to it by Victor Hugo.

Even more pronounced in literary flavor was Dickens's second Paris

residence of 1855-56. Then his social life was passed almost exclusively among writers, painters, actors, and musicians. His apartment was in the Avenue des Champs Elysées, within a door or two of the Jardin d'Hiver. The painter, Ary Scheffer, brought many distinguished Frenchmen there. Besides he had the society of fellow craftsmen of his own nation. Wilkie Collins was in Paris, and the Brownings, and Thackeray—the estrangement between the two men over the Yates-Garrick Club case had not yet taken place—ran over from London to pay visits to his daughters, who, like the Dickenses, were living in the

Champs Elysées. At Scribe's table Dickens dined frequently, and found the dinners and the company to his liking. At the house of Madame Viardot, the sister of Malibran, he met George Sand, and was not greatly impressed. In his honor Emile de Girardin gave two banquets the descriptions of which read like pages from the Arabian Nights or from Dumas's "The Count of Monte Cristo". This life ended late in April, 1856, when Dickens returned to London. In January, 1863, he visited Paris for the last time for the purpose of reading at the Embassy in behalf of the British Charitable Fund.

GIFTS

BY AMELIA JOSEPHINE BURR

Many have given me songs,
Others have given me power,
Joy like a cleaving sword,
Pain like a rain-sweet flower,
Vision of worlds unfound,
Dreams that burn in the breast.
With a smile in your quiet eyes
You give me—rest.

Friends have clasped my hand,
Lovers my lips have kissed,
Priests have lifted my soul
As the incense rises in mist,
Prophets have called me like trumpets
Where the work of the world is done.
You open the door of my heart
To God's dear sun.