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Queries and Correspondence on Literary Matters Invited.

All Communications and Commissions must be addressed

THE BOOKMAN, Graphic Office, Auckland.

Trilby, the long expected, the almost de-spaired of, has arrived at last. So far as I am concerned I may say at once that I am not disappointed. This is the more agreeable, as I fully expected to be so. But Mr Du Maurier's sensational successful novel has a strange and potent fascination, to which one falls captive in the very first chapter, and whose sway endures long after the last page has been turned—turned with a sigh of regret. Yet if questioned, it would be difficult to mention any special excellence in *Trilby* which might justify the extraordinary reception it has met with in England and the United States, in which latter place, indeed, a *Trilby* fever of some acuteness is raging quite furiously. The book, if you pull it to pieces, is not a great book judged from any standpoint, but it is a book which will be read and remembered when many greater novels—modern novels—are long forgotten. The characters are, with a couple of exceptions, an extremely lovable set, and the reader is genuinely sorry to part with them. So natural, so simple is Mr Du Maurier's style that the *vraisemblance* of what is related is enormously increased. Greater novelists than the great *Punch* artist abound, but of the men who have come to the front during the past two years or so I cannot remember one whose characters are more naturally life-like, where the story has so little resembled a story, so to say, and where the hands of the man working the puppets and shifting the scenes have been less in evidence. Either Mr Du Maurier is a most consummate master of a very rare art—the art of making fiction appear history, or the great part of what he tells in *Trilby* is a description of scenes actually witnessed, and feelings actually suffered or enjoyed by him personally.

The following description of the hero's *début* at one of the ateliers or teaching studios for students is, of course, from life, and will be read with mingled pleasure and pain by those who can look back—

'CHEZ CARREL.'

Carrel's atelier (or painting-school) was in the Rue Notre Dame des Patrons St. Michel, at the end of a large courtyard, where there were many large dirty windows facing north, and each window let the light of heaven into a large dirty studio.

The largest of these studios, and the dirtiest, was Carrel's, where some thirty or forty art students drew and painted from the nude model every day but Sunday from eight till twelve, and for two hours in the afternoon except on Saturday, when the afternoon was devoted to much-needed Augean sweepings and cleanings.

One week the model was male, the next female, and so on, alternating throughout the year.

A stove, a model throne, stools, boxes, some fifty strongly-built low chairs with backs, a couple of score easels and many drawing-boards, completed the *mobilière*.

The bare walls were adorned with endless caricatures—*des caricatures* in charcoal and white chalk; and also the scrawlings of many poodles—a polychromatic decoration not unpleasant.

For the freedom of the studio and the use of the model each student paid ten francs a month to the *maître*, or senior student, the responsible bell-wether of the flock; besides this, it was expected of you, on your entrance or initiation, that you should pay for your footing—your *bienvenue*—some thirty, forty, or fifty francs, to be spent on cakes and rum punch all round.

Every Friday, Monsieur Carrel, a great artist, and also a stately, well-dressed, and most courteous gentleman (idly decorated with the red rosette of the Legion of Honour), came for two three hours, and went the round, spending a few minutes at each drawing-board or easel—ten or even twelve when the pupil was an industrious and promising one.

He did this for love, not money, and deserved all the reverence with which he inspired this somewhat irreverent and most un-ruly company, which was made up of all sorts.

(Graybeards who had been drawing and painting there for thirty years and more, and remembered other masters than Carrel, and who could draw and paint a *Toro* almost as well as a *Titan* or *Velaquez*—almost, but not quite, and who could never do anything else, and were fixtures at Carrel's for life.)

Younger men who in a year or two, or three or five, or ten or twenty, were bound to make their mark, and perhaps follow in the footsteps of the master; others as conspicuously singled out for failure and future mischance—for the hospital, the garret, the river, the *Morgue*, or, worse, the traveller's bag, the road, or even the paternal counter.

Irresponsible boys, more *rapins*, all laugh and chaff and mischief—*blague et bavard Parisien*; little lords of misrule—*wits*, *buts*, *bullets*; the idle and industrious apprentice, the good and the bad, the clean and the dirty (especially the latter)—all more or less animated by a certain *esprit de corps*, and working very happily and genially together, on the whole, and always willing

to help each other with sincere artistic counsel if it was asked for seriously, though it was not always couched in terms very flattering to one's self-love.

Before Little Billee became one of this band of brothers he had been working for three or four years in a London art school, drawing and painting from the life; he had also worked from the antique in the British Museum—so that he was no novice.

As he made his *début* at Carrel's one Monday morning he felt somewhat shy and ill at ease. He had studied French most earnestly at home in England, and could read it pretty well, and even write it and speak it after a fashion; but he spoke it with much difficulty, and found studio French a different language altogether from the formal and polite language he had been at such pains to acquire. Ollendorff does not cater for the Quartier Latin. Acting on Taffy's advice— for Taffy had worked under Carrel—Little Billee handed fifty francs to the *maître* for his *bienvenue*—a lordly sum—and this liberality made a most favourable impression, and went far to destroy any little prejudice that might have been caused by the daintiness of his dress, the cleanliness of his person, and the politeness of his manners. A place was assigned to him, and an easel and a board; for he elected to stand at his work and begin with a chalk drawing. The model (a male) was posed and work began in silence. Monday morning is always rather sulky everywhere (except perhaps in Judea.) During the ten minutes' rest three or four students came and looked at Little Billee's beginnings, and saw at a glance that he thoroughly well knew what he was about, and respected him for it.

Nature had given him a singularly light hand—or rather two, for he was ambidextrous, and could use both with equal skill; and a few months' practice at a London life school had quite cured him of that purposeless indecision of touch which often characterises the apprentice hand for years of apprenticeship, and remains with the amateur for life. The lightest and most careless of his pencil strokes had a precision that was inimitable, and a charm that specially belonged to him, and was easy to recognise at a glance. His touch on either canvas or paper was like Svengali's on the keyboard—unique.

As the morning ripened little attempts at conversation were made—little breakings of the ice of silence. It was Lambert, a youth with a singularly facetious face, who first broke the stillness with the following uncalled-for remarks in English very badly pronounced:

'Av you seen my fazzer's o's shoes?'
'I av not seen your fazzer's o's shoes.'
Then, after a pause.
'Av you seen my fazzer's o's 'at?'
'I av not seen your fazzer's o's 'at.'
Presently another said, 'Je trouve qu'il a une jolie tête, l'Anglais.'

But I will put it all into English.
'I find that he has a pretty head—the Englishman! What say you, Barizel?'
'Yes; but why has he got eyes like brandy-balls, two a penny?'
'Because he's an Englishman!'

'Yes; but why has he got a mouth like a guinea-pig, with two big teeth in front like the double blank at dominoes?'
'Because he's an Englishman!'

'Yes; but why has he got a back without any bend in it, as if he'd swallowed the Colonne Vendôme as far up as the Battle of Austerlitz?'
'Because he's an Englishman!'

And so on till all the supposed characteristics of Little Billee's outer man were exhausted. Then:

'Papalard!'
'What?'
'I should like to know if the Englishman says his prayers before going to bed.'
'Ask him.'
'Ask him yourself.'
'I should like to know if the Englishman has sisters; and if so, how old and how many and what sex.'
'Ask him.'
'Ask him yourself.'

I should like to know the detailed and circumstantial history of the Englishman's first love, and how he lost his innocence!

'Ask him,' etc., etc., etc.
Little Billee, conscious that he was the subject of conversation, grew somewhat nervous. Soon he was addressed directly.

'Dites donc, l'Anglais?'
'Kwaw!' said Little Billee.
'Avez-vous une sœur?'
'Wee.'
'Est-ce qu'elle vous ressemble?'
'Nong.'
'C'est bon dommage! Est-ce qu'elle dit ses prières, le soir, en se couchant?'

A fierce look came into Little Billee's eyes and a readiness to his cheeks, and this particular form of overture to friendship was abandoned.

Presently Lambert said, 'Si nous mettions l'Anglais à l'échelle?' Little Billee, who had been warned, knew what this ordeal meant.

Thy tied you to a ladder, and carried you in procession up and down the courtyard, and if you were nasty about it they put you under the pump.

During the next rest it was explained to him that he must submit to this indignity, and the ladder (which was used for reaching the high shelves round the studio) was got ready.

Little Billee smiled a singularly winning smile, and suffered himself to be bound with such good humour that they voted it wasn't amusing, and unbound him, and he escaped the ordeal by ladder.

Taffy had also escaped, but in another way. When they tried to seize him he took up the first *rapin* that came to hand, and using him as a kind of club, he swung him about so freely and knocked down so many students and easels and drawing-boards with him and made such a terrific rumpus, that the whole studio had to cry for 'pax!' Then he performed feats of strength of such a surprising kind that the memory of him remained in Carrel's studio for years, and he became a legend, a tradition, a myth! It is now said (in what still remains of the Quartier Latin) that he was seven feet high, and used to juggle with the *maître* and model as with a pair of billiard balls, using only his left hand.

To return to Little Billee. When it struck twelve, the cakes and rum punch arrived—a very goodly sight that put everyone in a good temper.

The cakes were of three kinds—*Babas*, *Madeleines*, and *Savarines*—three sons apiece, fourpence halfpenny the set of three. No nicer cakes are made in France, and they are as good in the Quartier Latin as anywhere else; no nicer cakes are made in the

whole world, that I know of. You must begin with the *Madeleine* which is rich and rather heavy; then the *Babes*; and finish up with the *Savarin*, which is shaped like a ring, very light, and flavoured with rum. And then you must really leave off.

The rum punch was tepid, very sweet, and not a bit too strong. They dragged the model throne into the middle, and a chair was put on for Little Billee, who dispensed his hospitality in a very polite and attractive manner helping the *maître* first, and then the other graybeards in the order of their *graysness*, and so on down to the model.

Presently, just as he was about to help himself, he was asked to sing them an English song. After a little pressing he sang them a song about a gay cavalier who went to serenade his mistress (and a ladder of ropes, and a pair of masculine gloves that didn't belong to the gay cavalier, but which he found in his lady's bowers—a poor sort of song, but it was the nearest approach to a comic song he knew. There are four verses to it, and each verse is rather long. It does not sound at all funny to a French audience, and even with an English one Little Billee was not good at comic songs.

He was, however, much applauded at the end of each verse. When he had finished, he was asked if he were *quite* sure there wasn't any more of it, and they expressed a deep regret; and then each student, straddling on his little thick set chair as at a horse, and clasping the back of it in both hands, galloped round Little Billee's throne quite seriously—the strangest procession he had ever seen. It made him laugh till he cried, so that he could not eat or drink.

Then he served more punch and cake all round; and just as he was going to begin himself, Papalard said:

'Say, you others, I find that the Englishman has something of truly distinguished in the voice, something of sympathetic, of touching—something of *je ne sais quoi*?'
Bouchardy: 'Yes, yes—something of *je ne sais quoi*! That's the very phrase—*n'est-ce pas, vous autres*?—that is a good phrase that Papalard has just invented to describe the voice of the Englishman. He is very intelligent—Papalard.'

Chorus: 'Perfect, perfect; he has the genius of characterisation—Papalard. Dites donc, l'Anglais! once more that beautiful song—*hein*? Nous vous en prions tout.'

Little Billee willingly sang it again, with even greater applause, and again they galloped, but the other way round and faster, so that Little Billee became quite hysterical, and laughed till his sides ached.

Then Dubosc: 'I find there is something of very cautious and exciting in English music—of very stimulating. And you Bouchardy?'
Bouchardy: 'Oh, me! It is above all the words that I admire; they have something of passionate, of romantic—*z-ee-ee glia-avee, zee glia-avee zay* do not belong to me.' I don't know what that means, but I love that sort of—of—of—*of-je ne sais quoi*, in short! Just *one* more, l'Anglais; only *one*, the *four couplets*.'

So he sang it a third time, all four verses, while they leisurely ate and drank and smoked and looked at each other, nodding solemn commendation of certain phrases in the song: 'Tres bien! Tres bien! Ah! *voilà qui est bien réussi*! Epéant, ça! Tres fin! etc. etc. For, stimulated by success, and rising to the occasion, he did his very utmost to surpass himself in emphasis of gesture and accent and historic drollery—heedless of the fact that not one of his listeners had the slightest notion what his song was about.

It was a sorry performance.

And it was not till he had sung it four times that he discovered the whole thing was an elaborate impromptu farce, of which he was the butt, and that of all his royal spread not a crumb or a drop was left for himself.

It was the old tale of the fox and the crow, and to do him justice he laughed as heartily as anyone, as if he thoroughly enjoyed the joke—and when you take jokes in that way people soon leave off poking fun at you. It is almost as good as being very big, like Taffy, and having a choleric blue eye!

Such was Little Billee's first experience of Carrel's studio, where he spent many happy mornings and made many good friends.

No more popular student had ever worked there within the memory of the grayest graybeards; none more amiable, more genial, more cheerful, self-respecting, considerate, and polite, and certainly none with greater gifts for art.

Carrel would devote at least fifteen minutes to him, and invited him often to his own private studio. And often, on the fourth or fifth day of the week, a group of admiring students would be gathered by his easel watching him as he worked.

Trilby, Little Billee, his two friends Taffy, and the Laird have all that happy peculiarity, which Mr Du Maurier speaks of as 'charm.' And this is also true of the lesser characters in the book, Geeko Zouzou Dodor, even the Mephistolian Svengoli, marvellous musician, mesmerist, and villain of the book, has a fascination which exercises our mind strangely while he is before us. But Trilby is, of course, the figure round whom the interest settles most strongly. Her charm is the strongest, and it is she who will remain in our minds long after the others and the rest of the book are forgotten. Much of the history of this freshest and most charming of heroines cannot be touched on without discounting the interest of the book for those whose delightful duty it will be to read the novel during the next week or so.

Trilby is, it may be explained, a model—a *bonnêtieuse de façade* (a very superior sort of washerwoman, who has no counterpart in the English or colonial social scheme), and has at one time been 'heaven knows what besides,' as one of the characters put it. So far as the story is concerned she is, however, reformed, and respectable in the extreme. Used to posing for 'the altogether' (an artist's term for the nude), she gives this up, feeling the shame of it for the first time when she sees how it shocks and pains poor Little Billee, who is desperately in love with her, and whom she has begun to most passionately adore in return. The description of this is perhaps the most admirably artistic and truthful thing in this clever book.

This is how Trilby came to sit at Carrel's studio. Carrel had suddenly taken it into his head that he would spend