

*Jacques Bonhomme, John Bull on the Continent, and from my Letter-Box.* By MAX O'RELL. New York : Cassell & Co. (Limited.)

*Jacques Bonhomme*, which describes the Frenchman at home, occupies 127 out of 168 pages of this volume.

The first chapter contains an account of French school-boy life. It is very true, though it does not touch upon the darker side of that life which he rightly calls barrack or prison life. As to the spying system, which Wilfrid Ward tells us, in his recent biography, his father was inclined to condone, if not to admire. This is what our Frenchman says of it.

The ushers, or *pious*, are mere watch-dogs. They are ignorant, ill-bred outcasts, whom the boys detest from the bottom of their hearts. [p. 12.]

And again, on p. 40, "The Frenchman's Education does not Prepare Him for Manhood."

If Max O'Rell is not as witty when speaking of his own

country as when speaking of John Bull and his island, it is that he knows his subject better. His work in England was, in many cases, almost all wit, in this work his wit is more under control because he is forced to be accurate. To those who know France and his comic papers, his chapter on "The French at War," which ought rather to be called "The French Soldier in Peace," will appear rather tame. It is truthful as far as it goes, but it might go so much further! The French soldier takes the place of the policeman (in the comic English papers) and of the Irishman combined. Even his stupidity is always bright. We quite sympathise with his indignation, that French women should be called frivolous. An English or American woman is a hundred times more frivolous. A French woman is deft, cheerful, and always anxious to please. Superficial observers meeting such a woman in a tram-car, or in an omnibus, or in her *salon*, mistakes this readiness to adapt herself to frivolity. Any one who knows the *ménage* of a French house, knows very well that if any one is frivolous, it is much more likely to be the man than the woman, mother, or daughter. The good qualities of the French peasantry are sympathetically told us, but what of the terrible meanness and sordidness which accompany those virtues? O'Rell is, however, quite correct when he says the best critics France has had have been Frenchmen. One of the main reasons of that is, the exclusiveness of French society, owing to its passionate regard for home life. It is afraid to admit any one within the charmed circle, lest its sanctity be destroyed. His narrowness, insularity, if such a term may be used, and his *chauvinism*, is all caused by the belief of the Frenchman that there is nothing worth having *hors de chez lui*. As to the morality of the French, we believe O'Rell is again right when he declares it will bear comparison with that of any nation. Our belief is that it exceeds. Travel France through, and how rarely will you hear of cases of immorality on the part of married couples. Paris is not France, though unfortunately Paris has governed France in politics and literature of late. If Americans would get a good idea of French life, let them read Balzac, the greatest novelist, in our estimation, of any age or nation.

In these sketches Max O'Rell is pleasant and chatty, though not very deep; nor does he touch on matters which we should expect he would have done; however, he may give us some day some further chapters.

*John Bull on the Continent* is kindly written, though very superficial. The sample of letters given from *My Letter-Box* are amusing, and show what odd people there are in the world.

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