

## RECOLLECTIONS OF A PARISIAN POET.\*

INTENSELY readable, full of the intimate wit and clever audacities of the cultivated Parisian, M. de Bauville's *Souvenirs* are "slight things, perhaps, but roses"; and they will be relished by every one who is not so preoccupied with the hard realities of life as to disdain the flowers that bloom by the wayside. M. de Bauville is always the poet; his prose has the limpidity and music of a mountain brook; trifles when dissolved in that subtle transforming medium take on new aspects; the matter is rarely of the greatest moment, but the manner is wholly delightful. In this volume the author chats pleasantly of his youth, of his ancestors; he points out among the family portraits that of a grandfather to whose inherited *esprit* he maintains with infinite jest that the world owes his most characteristic production—the *Odes Funambulesque*. And then we are regaled with the adventures of the gallant fellow, a sort of Marquis de Carabas, whose wild schemes and curious caprices found abundant satisfaction. A semi-pathetic story of a schoolboy's experience at a dreary *pension*, pleasant and unpleasant recollections of early attendance at the theater, fill up the time till the eventful day when M. de Bauville, a "blond lad of nineteen," made his way timidly to the door of Alfred de Vigny, delivered his first volume of rhymes to a valet, and turned and fled, horrified at his own boldness, to wander about the country with feverish haste, till the pangs of hunger drove him homeward, and he stole into his father's house like a thief, there to find a card bearing the name of his chosen patron, with a written message.

This precious card [says M. de Bauville] I still have; and it is often a source of comfort to me in moments of weariness and sorrow. Since then, like all men who have acquired a little celebrity, I have been cradled in flattery, but this, coming from so lofty a source and at the first hour, is the one meed of praise that I dwell upon with pride.

But a greater surprise was still in store; for the card was followed by an invitation, and the budding poet was ushered up to a little table where lay that first volume "annotated from beginning to end" by the author of *Cinq-Mars*. Then his cup of joy was indeed full! The whole thing is delightfully told, with an artlessness that is irresistible.

But it must not be thought that M. de Bauville is wholly occupied with himself. He gives us exquisite vignettes of a score or more of famous Parisians, all from the *vie intime*—Baudelaire, Heine, Gautier, Dumas père. He shows us Jules Janin in his aerial apartments, and sketches his surroundings with the perception of an artist (M. de Bauville has an eye for "meubles," and evidently considers furniture as an infallible index of character); pauses now and then to let drop a piquant anecdote, or to illustrate a personal trait; describes a dinner with Victor Hugo in the Conciergerie where he was imprisoned just before the *coup d'état*; tells us of the Duc d'Abrantes, pupil of Carême, who had reduced gastronomy to a fine art; who

knew how to prepare the menu for the dinner which an unfaithful student should offer an offended parent, which a nephew out of favor should have served to an uncle whose pocket-book must once more be opened. By making people eat of such or such a dish, he was able to obtain any desired mental condition, just as our thoughts are affected by sunlight passing through different tints of colored glass—blue or orange, violet or rose.

The account of a visit to Baudelaire in his wonderful lodgings is of interest. There was the great oval table with its sinuous outline. "I do not venture to say that every one sitting at that table would have found the *Fleurs-du-Mal*," M. de Bauville confesses; "but it would have been difficult indeed to write anything common or vulgar there." Nothing resembling a library was to be seen.

"Have you no books?" I asked. "Certainly I have," was the reply. And he opened by my side the door of a deep and vulgar cupboard where reposed some thirty volumes, not standing upright in lines, but lying one upon another; old French and Latin poets, particularly those of the decadence, mostly in ancient or rare editions, magnificently bound by famous artists. In the same cupboard were several bottles of Rhine wine of select vintage, and a number of emerald colored glasses. Of the lexicons, dictionaries, encyclopædias and lumber of that sort with which tradition is wont to surround Baudelaire, there was not a trace. Like Théophile Gautier, Baudelaire carried his lexicons in his *robinet*, brain, and they did not encumber his apartments. But when he translated Poe's works he used atlas, charts and mathematical instruments indefatigably, for with his love of exactitude he verified all the nautical calculations of Gordon Pym. When the task was accomplished books and instruments disappeared, and the poet returned to a life of elegant simplicity.

\* Théodore de Bauville: *Mes Souvenirs*. Paris: Charpentier. Boston: C. Schönhof. 3f. 50c.