

PARIS CABS AND CABBIES.

BY PAUL FRÉMEAUX.

Illustrated by H. N. BROWNE.

“How monotonous the world is becoming! Wherever one goes it is the same thing; no trace of variety or originality anywhere.”

This is a universal complaint nowadays.



A PARIS COACHMAN.

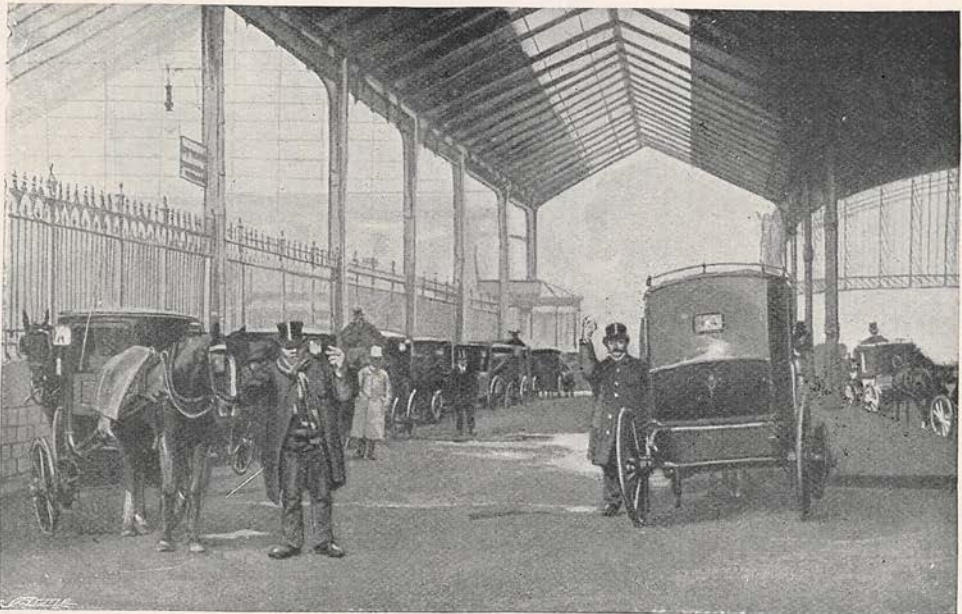
Yet, is it true that so dull a uniformity has enveloped the earth since the introduction of steam? And have all the five continents become devoid of picturesqueness and distinctiveness since the advent of the mighty iron horse?

Do not believe those shallow globe-trotters who, in the proud glory of their new pith helmets, rush across

the face of the globe at a lightning speed possible only to a “personally conducted.” These false explorers, with their Baedekers bound in red, plume themselves on seeing everything in their foreign expeditions, but they carefully abstain from looking at anything.

There always are, and there always will be, interesting contrasts to be noted between even the countries nearest to one another and between nations the most akin, and it is certain that these very contrasts are made more noticeable by the present rapidity of communication.

Yesterday, for instance, when the sun was setting we left London; this morning, as the sun is rising, we are in Paris. The journey was accomplished with wonderful speed during the dark hours, and without the numerous stoppages and the tedious changes of the good old diligence days. Without seeing them, we have run through country, villages and towns where our fathers used to stop to change horses, make a meal, or stay the night.



AT A PARIS TERMINUS.

In the old days they gradually acquired a knowledge as they proceeded of the foreign faces and fashions. But now, as if trans-

which we begin to examine people and things in detail.

Less busy than those we have only just left, the streets of Paris are decidedly brighter and gayer, with white stone buildings everywhere, and trees and many-coloured kiosks here and there. As we saunter along the pavement we meet women who, though they have not the freshness of the English-woman, are undeniably more graceful. Every ten yards there is a warrior of France in red and blue, his head adorned with a nondescript *képi*. Lost as he is in garments several sizes too big for him, "Pioupiou" would have no chance, so far as appearance goes, with swagger Tommy Atkins.

The roadway belongs to the cabs and the gigantic three-horse omnibuses. The former are of a type not unknown to us; still,

they seem old-fashioned. The reason is that the English capital no longer employs this kind of cab, except at the railway stations, for the exclusive use of luggage-laden travellers. The drivers are a type in themselves. Together with the women and the military, they constitute that which chiefly



THE DRIVER OF A PAIR.

ported by a magician's wand, here we are at Paris all in a moment, standing on the threshold of the Gare du Nord, our eyes still retaining the pictures of the London sights! This is an excellent condition in which to enter an unknown town, if we want to study it; its slightest peculiarity will immediately



TYPES OF PARIS COACHMEN.

arrest our attention. Houses here are taller than in London, men are shorter. This is our first impression—a general one—after

differentiates humanity here from that of London. They deserve to be described.

A dispute between a driver and his fare

is a very common occurrence in Paris. In September, 1855, a difference of this kind arose between a man named Collignon and a certain M. Juge. The gentleman, being roundly abused, lodged a complaint against the jehu. Much good it did him! His insulter, blind with rage, went to his hotel and shot him dead. Collignon was guillotined. His name has been inherited by all his confrères. The Parisians make use of it now and again to lash the knights of the whip-lash, with whom their relations are, as a rule, somewhat strained.

As a matter of fact, the Paris cabman is not a very engaging person. His 'corporation,' his rubicund face, his double chin and his apoplectic neck testify that he lives well, far too well, eating and drinking more than is good for him, and taking good care to save himself every unprofitable exertion.

He is a striking contrast to his emaciated horse, a poor starved and over-driven animal, harnessed to that enormous four-wheeled machine, that heavy square box, that veritable rolling house, the fiacre. I can never

look at "Cocotte" and "Collignon" without being seized with pity for the one and indignation against the other. Obviously if

there were the smallest glimmer of justice in this lower world Collignon would take his place between the shafts, there to perspire away his excess of fat, while Cocotte would be on the box, to rest there and fill out her sunken flanks.

The French love uniforms: Collignon has one. It is a long Newmarket, the cut of which is always the same, though its colour varies according to the company to which the cabman belongs. The cloth is gray, chestnut or dark blue; it is ornamented with metal buttons as large as five-franc pieces. As

a rule the right pocket contains a rat's-tail snuffbox, and presents to the view the end of an enormous check handkerchief; sometimes there issues thence a long muffler, which serves as a wrapper for its proprietor's neck in the coldest weather. There is a cape of the same shade as the overcoat, trousers of any colour, high hat of black or white oilskin, with cockade and ribbon. This



RESTING IN THE SUNSHINE.



IN FRONT OF THE GRAND OPERA, PARIS.

head-dress is not beautiful, but it has its advantages ; it can defy the elements.

Thus attired the French cabby is inferior in appearance to his English colleague, so spick and span as he sits upright upon his box. And he is equally inferior from a professional point of view. He charges by the hour or the journey. In the former case he never hurries, it being to his advantage to exceed the hour, if possible—and he does his best to exceed it. In the latter case he does hurry, if he has any distance to go, for the fare is the same for any distance whatever—a franc and a half for ten kilomètres or for one.

If, then, you arrange with Collignon by the hour he will go slowly, very slowly. No fear of accidents ! He keeps carefully to the right, and crawls past the dangerous cross-roads. But hire him by the journey and the pace is very different ; your position becomes perilous at once. Collignon casts prudence to the winds. He rouses Cocotte with whip and voice, especially with whip, zigzags all the way to get round and pass the vehicles in front, turns the corners sharply, shaving the pavement and sometimes driving over it, and finally gallops headlong into some block of the traffic. There he pulls up

now an opportunity of giving vent to all the national exuberance in a quarrel with his confrères. All of them fly into a rage at once—shouting, swearing and bandying insults. The clamour is deafening, but you have to endure it until the way is cleared, and that always takes some time in Paris.

Collignon's attitude towards his fare depends on the weather. On fine days he is all smiles and civility. Do not go away with the idea that he feels the influence of a milder air and brighter sunshine, or that in the spring his heart is softened by the sight of the first tender buds upon the trees of the Boulevards, or by the perfume of the flowers which the flower-girl's barrows are bearing through the sunny streets.

AN ARISTOCRAT AMONG COACHMEN.



OFF THE BOX FOR A FEW MINUTES.

short with such a frightful jerk that knocks your head against the woodwork of the cab. A regular shindy follows ; your jehu has

that *rara avis*. Some of them are killing time at the wine shop opposite, drinking and playing cards, or talking politics. Do you

His soul is not so poetic as all that. It is not the gentleness of the elements which makes him gentle to you, poor luggage-laden foreigner in search of a cab ; it is not because Nature smiles that he himself is smiling. No, it is merely because it is just the weather for walking ; the air is pure, the atmosphere is bright and cheerful, and the pavement white and dry.

The cabs, now scorned, stand sadly in interminable files upon the cab-stands. By their side the drivers lounge about or beat the devil's tattoo while they wait for a fare—

want a cab? Make but a sign and you immediately have twenty drivers quarrelling for the honour of your custom. Happy is



DOWN AT THE HEELS.

the man of your choice. He drives off with the triumphant air of an odalisk to whom the Sultan has just flung his handkerchief. Let it but rain, however—the scene soon changes. Paris has no Metropolitan Railway; the omnibuses, fewer than in London, are immediately “full up.” Therefore there is no alternative for the belated pedestrian but a rush for a cab.

Then Collignon is in clover, and he grins upon the box.

For him

the downpour is a shower of gold, or at any rate silver. He eyes mockingly the supplicants who stand round him in a circle; he examines them, questions them, and only vouchsafes his favours after due deliberation to the one who has the shortest distance to go and the highest price to offer. If you climb craftily into his carriage he will not budge; he declares that he is engaged, or that he is going to change horses (*re-layer*). You may, by calling a policeman, compel him to drive you, but in that case you must expect to go at about the speed of a tortoise. He will grumble all the way, and at the end of the journey he will omit to thank you for your “tip,” were you even lavish enough to give him the value of his starveling horse.

Such is Collignon. Nevertheless, one must do him the justice to say that

with all these faults he has some good qualities.

He is not wanting in wit. Quarrels between Paris cabmen are sometimes regular verbal fireworks. Unfortunately the language in favour for these great festivals of the whip is not as choice as it might be; to reproduce it is hardly possible. In discussions with the public Collignon is more careful with his vocabulary; he is generally content to chaff you and be familiar without introducing vulgarity. In one of his sketches the celebrated caricaturist, Forain, represents him at loggerheads with an economical provincial couple, who, in Exhibition time, propose to pay him the ordinary fare for an unconscionably long drive.

The authors of this audacious proposal are taking refreshments on the terrace of a café. Collignon gets down from his seat, sits down at their table, rests his elbows on it, and says, “Drive you to the Champ de Mars for fifteenpence? Come, I’ll stand you a drink instead!”

But what does more credit to Collignon than even his wit, is his honesty. It is established by thousands of proofs. There is no instance of a Parisian cabman having omitted to bring to his employer a pocket-book left by mistake on the cushions of a cab, however tight it may be crammed with bank-notes.

Although he is always complaining of his small profits, and continually going on strike over this very matter, the French cabby appreciates his privileges.

He sometimes owns his horse and cab, or



IN THE WIND AND RAIN.

he may be a member of a co-operative society. But these two cases are rare. He is more usually employed in the service of private or public companies, such as the *Compagnie générale, l'Urbaine, etc.*, who make a charge of from twelve to fourteen francs a day for the use of the horse and vehicle. There is no doubt but that Collignon has double this sum in his pocket every evening, thanks to the many *pourboires* which people are in the habit of giving him.

In London, Scotland Yard regulates and superintends the service of public vehicles; in Paris this is in the hands of the *Préfecture of Police*. It is from him that the cabby receives his licence; and this cannot be granted to him until he is at least eighteen years of age. He also has a small book which sets forth his identity; this he always carries with him. He is required to deliver up his card with his official number should his clients demand it. He must not carry more than a stipulated number of passengers, neither must he smoke on his box-seat. He ought to walk at foot-pace through crowded thoroughfares, and he is not allowed to tout for fares. These are some of a variety of rules which he more or less observes.

From a census taken in 1896, Paris has 99,293 horses, and 39,191 vehicles. There

is one rule instituted by the *Préfecture of Police* which might be imitated in London with advantage: the lights of the cab are either white, red, blue, yellow, or green, these colours indicating the districts to which the carriages belong. Thus, when it is late at night, persons coming, say from the theatre, and hiring a cab, naturally give the preference to those that are going to "put up" in that part of the town to which they desire to be conveyed.

Englishmen are often surprised that Paris does not substitute the London hansom, so light and rapid, for its heavy inelegant *fiacres*. The experiment has been tried several times without success.

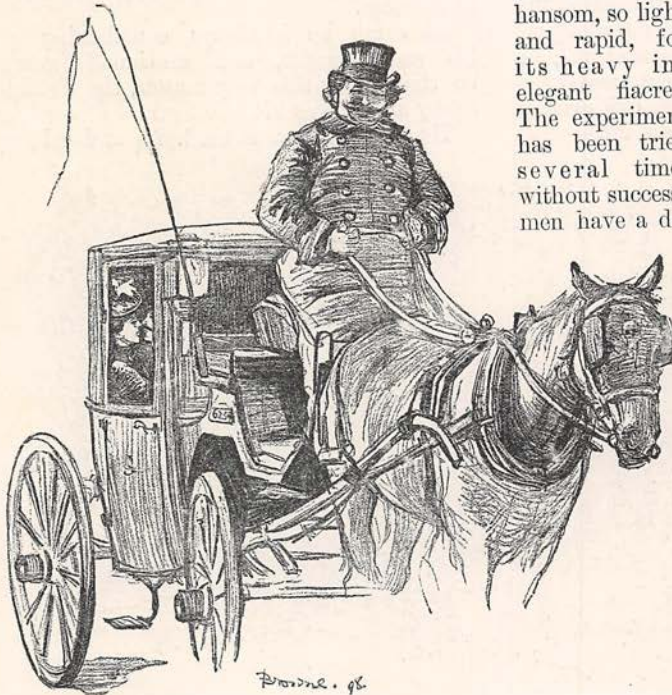
men have a dislike for a vehicle of foreign

importation? No; they have adopted more than one British fashion, and they would also adopt the hansom if they liked it; but they do not like it.

They are faithful to their *fiacre*. Doubtless it is heavier than the hansom, but in Paris, the town of pleasure and leisure, time is not so valuable as it is in London. And then the *fiacre* has its little advantages. It lends itself better than the hansom to the conveyance of luggage and parcels; it is more completely closed and more discreet; the old and shivery



PREPARED FOR COLD WEATHER.



ON THEIR HONEYMOON IN PARIS.

find it warmer; lovers who use it have less reason to fear impertinent glances. Even in summer, when it has to face the competition of the open carriages, the fiacre keeps its band of faithful admirers, and a large *clientèle* remains obstinately attached to it.

Moreover, the fiacre, like everything else in this age, is progressing. It is only in the out-of-the-way districts of Paris, and in the railway stations of the suburbs, that it still affects the antediluvian appearance

described by Dickens in the "Sketches": "A great, lumbering, square concern, of a dingy yellow colour, with small glasses, but very large frames. The axle-tree is red, and the majority of the wheels are green."

To-day the fiacre is generally clean, varnished, resplendent. It is daily being built lighter; it is mounted on wheels with india-rubber tyres; and some Paris cab-keepers—would you believe it?—push their scorn of old traditions so far as to harness to it a young and mettlesome horse!

